

Edmund J. Prorok, M.D.

THE SPLIT ARROW SQUADRON

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PREFACE

This is a true account of the crew of a B17 in the 429th - Split Arrow Squadron of the Second Bomb Group in the great 15th Air Force. These ten men flew half way across the world and flew missions during 1943 and 1944 out of a base in Italy near the town of Foggia, during the the time when the German Luftwaffe was at its height. These ten men who came from many backgrounds and different parts of the country created a bomber team that was credited with fighting the enemy and being part of the total Victory of wining the war.

It's been 50 years since the end of the war and this book became a reality following a 1995 reunion in Denver, Colorado with the crew and a copy of my diary which I kept a record of every mission we flew. Every night by the light of the stove, notes were put down of the days action.

I wish to thank Dr. Paul Sharick a long time friend and great hunter for his help in writing this book.

I dedicate this book to my wife Lori who has always lifted me up with her encouragement and never ending love.

A book by Edmund J Prorok, M. D. on World War II

CHAPTER ONE

The loss of our Pilot

Bill Doyle, an American, was shot down. Second Lieutenant Doyle was our first pilot who never had a chance to fly combat with his own crew. Bill was being checked out with a veteran crew under 1st Pilot Griffin, who had many missions to his name. Bill Doyle only son of a Doctor in Greenwich Pennsylvania, was happy-go-lucky type who lived for today and presented himself as "look at me" I'm the greatest. The day was March 18, 1944. We were flying mission number 21 a raid on the town of Villaroba Air Drome in central Italy, a town South of Rome. Second Lieutenant Bill Doyle was the only member of our crew that confessed that he was afraid that he would get killed in this war. Ed, he said," I cannot see myself ever living through this."

My answer was, " Bill, you have the wrong attitude; do you know that we have the power to plan our future by simply setting ourselves goals and visualizing ourselves doing something in the future." By setting up goals we continue to live and be productive. Also by using our imagination things become a reality. Everything we see today before us was once in someones imagination. A saying which comes to mind is; Napoleon said " Imagination

will rule the world." I was afraid that Bill Doyle was not impressed by my words.

" I know that I will be back in Chicago driving on Augusta Blvd., Sunday morning with my girl Dottie." I continued, but Bill wasn't convinced.



Dottie

We really sweated this one out. There was more flak then we ever saw before. We flew at 10,000 feet, the enemy threw everything they had at us. We watched as one of our B-17's ahead of us caught on fire and exploded. No chutes came out. Bill Doyle was on that plane.

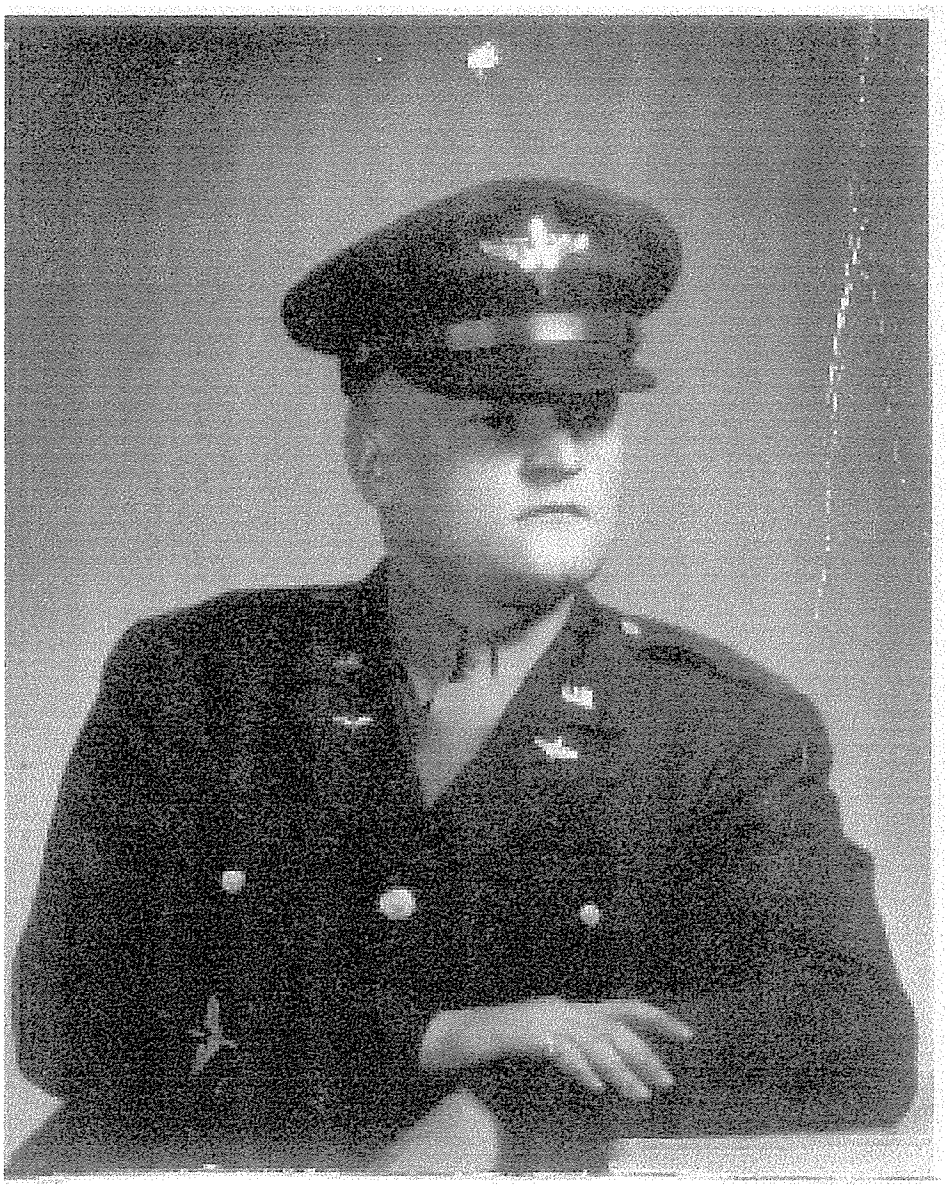
Flak came through the Astro-Dome (a plastic bubble in the roof of the nose of the B-17 that the navigator uses to do celestial shooting of stars) and hit my helmet. I don't know what would have happened if not for the infantry helmet we wore in combat. That helmet was one of the most versatile pieces of equipment the army ever devised. Not only for protection, but for use as a sink to wash or shave. Our use of it was absolutely the most important.

We landed at noon that same day and were scheduled to fly another

mission in the afternoon. We didn't take off thought due to bad weather persisting over the target area. As we drove to our tents in an Olive Orchard, we saw a dead tail gunner on a stretcher. That day we were assigned a new Pilot, Second Lieutenant Tom Fredrickson. Tom was about 5 feet 4 inches tall and was trained as a fighter pilot. He turned out be Top Gun as a pilot for he could handle the B-17 as if he was born in one, we also were assigned a new airplane number 490. The B-17 was built for combat with a crew of 10, each an expert at his position, there was no one any better for the job they had to do. Never a discouraging word ever crossed any ears by any member as to who was better. ALL MEMBERS WERE EQUAL. A mission could not be accomplished without the working force of everyone on the B-17. Amen. As the planet or star moves a degree every four minutes one has to be mighty fast and accurate or could be a hundred miles off course. The Plane is going a 160 miles per hour too which makes it even faster for a fix. On a ocean going ship the Navigator has hours to get a fix due to the slow speed.



Second Lt. Tom Fredrickson



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CHAPTER TWO

The Pre-war days

On a freezing day in Chicago February 9, 1920 I (the navigator) was born, Edmund Prorok. My parents, Joe and Helen were immigrants from Poland who were proud and never accepted welfare. They earned their way one way or another. During the 20's when prohibition provided gangsters a free hand in raking in millions and paying off the police and politicians, Chicago was a place where craft and money could get one anything. There was a price one could pay to be a Principal of a school or any other job or position.

The house we lived in on Erie and Wood street was a framed two story wooden box type structure with a large back yard and two car garage plus a shed. The yard and garage was cluttered with junk. Behind the garage was the alley, a stinken alley always scattered with garbage and millions of rats (the saying is there were more rats then people). The neighborhood I came from was and is a ghetto. In the winter we sealed off all the rooms except the kitchen, bedroom and bathroom to conserve heat. The family upstairs paid the grand sum of $9.00 a month for rent.

Next to the alley going south was the large school yard and the public school we attended. The early days of grammar school were good

memories, the teachers as I remember were wonderful. I was only able to speak Polish as this was used at home and in the neighborhood. We lived in a all Polish environment. How I and my brother got by is hard to say. We got by with what we had.

My Dad was for education, no matter what, the most important thing was education. He lived in Poland as a youth, his education was only a couple of years of the most basic kind. The Catholic Priests ran the show and they knew that if the people were educated they would begin to question the absolute teaching of the church. The church would dictate the policy and that was told to us by my father, "all they (the children) needed to know was, " Hale Mary full of Grace and Our Father who art in heaven." One can see why my Dad was that way. Education is Power and no one can ever take that way from you. Therefore he enrolled me in a Catholic High School, for he thought this was a better education where the Religion was constantly forced on us (of this my father was not informed). To make thing worse the lies the priests told us; were beyond imagination. A lot of this most of us didn't realize until we were much older and educated.

Joe and Helen were bootleggers on Erie Street. On a very cold Christmas Eve our house was on fire. In the garage were twenty or more 5 gallon cans of bootleg booze. The firemen had to go three blocks to get water as most water outlets were frozen. The police were more

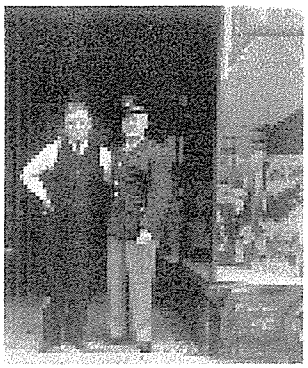
concerned about the booze in the garage, so all the cans were moved across the alley to the middle of the school yard. A policeman was stationed to guard the booze which they had covered over with heavy tarps.

The neighborhood was in the toughest part of Chicago but the residents were honest and friendly toward each other. Many nights there would be police captains and other law men at our home, drinking the better stuff from Canada. The booze was transported by milk wagons then driven by horses or dog catchers trucks. My uncle whom we called " Uncle Stryk" (Stryk in Polish means uncle) at this time was a milk man and he fitted in great as a liaison. Uncle Stryk lived with us most of his life as his wife died early of unknown causes. He was a wonderful person even when he was drunk. He was always working and never stopped drinking from morning till night. One of his unusual habits was to warm his can of beer in hot water before drinking it. He claimed that nothing cold should enter the stomach. His life ended in a hospital bed after an operation for stomach cancer. The great surgeon tied off a main artery in the abdomen which caused severe peritonitis due to the death of the bowel. A malpractice suit was never filed against the Doctor.

This was Al Capones territory and we were all under his protection. We never locked our doors, in fact we never had any keys. One of the members of our group was a driver for bank robbers, he was many times

chased by the police and could never be caught. He could drive faster backwards through alleys then the cops could drive forward. He was so good that finally the police put him on a salary so that he wouldn't have to drive for the outlaws.

When Prohibition ended in 1933 we went legit and opened a tavern, "Joe's". Joe was not a good business man, and if it were not for my mother Helen he would have gone belly-up. As the saying goes, "Good old Joe". Well that's what he was, "When Joe drinks everybody drinks". Those were my Pa's words. He was always having a good time drinking with a bunch of friends who followed him around but never picked up the check or offered to buy a round of drinks. Joe was the big shot.



Joe & Ed
in front of Joe's Tavern

Sunday mornings were fun times it was when the boys got together and talked about cars, girls and screwing. I would get up at 4 am to get together with my girl. I would then take my fathers car out and we would drive around for 2 or 3 hours kissing and necking. Adeline and I were in love but after 5 or 6 years being together I never even put my hands on her breasts or any other part of her body. That reflected my sex education. Sex was bad in every way shape or form. Sex was o.k. only after marriage and then you only screw for screwing not as a act of love. You only screw the bad girls, never the good ones. A horrible way to grow up. Strict

Polish culture sex was a revenge or "there take that you bitch".

Our gang (it was really not) were loose family type groups. We all had rubbers which we called cun-dromes with hopes of meeting some bad girls. The war was far away and we never dreamed of ever being in it, but as time went on we all ended up in the service. One of our boys in the group was awarded the Congressional Metal of Honor. His mother was given the metal.

Helen died of heart failure in her 30's due to her never ending hard work. She was called "Lady" by everyone. We all loved her. When she baked pies (what a wonderful cook) she baked enough for the whole neighborhood. She was really a Lady. Hundreds of people came to her funeral. On the way to the cemetery the cars were lined up for miles. Everyone was feeling the great lose. Evelyn and Emily my two sisters were very young when our mother left us.



Edmund & Ma (Helen)

Well the War in Europe was in full swing. I registered for the draft,

but my Pa had the draft board give me a deferred number to keep me out. I tended bar at "JOE'S TAVERN" and worked at Liska's bottling company as a book keeper. I already had all my premed college in. I wanted to serve my country in the Air Force and I took the examination for Cadet training and passed. As I waited to be called, I volunteered to go in as a Private and help in the examinations of the draft in down town Chicago. I enjoyed this very much as I stayed at home and received all the privileges of a Soldier in uniform. Free street car rides and USO lunches with free cigarettes. I was one of 1200 that were taking the Oath into the Air Force at Soldiers Field in Chicago on June 26, 1942.

I worked at the draft board all this time from October 26, 1941 until January 5, 1942. There was an examination done by the company doctor called, short arm inspection (due to the high rate of V.D.), the G.I.s would line up in a single file holding their dicks in their hand and as the medic walked pass, you would milk your penis. As cadets we didn't have this kind of examination. This was only for the G.I.s

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CHAPTER THREE

Classification and survival of lower class cadets

My orders to report for classification in Nashville Tennessee came through on January 6,1942. We were transported from Chicago to Nashville by train which was very crowed and uncomfortable to say the least. Trying to get some sleep, lying on the floor of the train was impossible, then lying on the baggage which was stacked on the platform at the doors. It was a wonder that one didn't fall out and get killed. The trip took 18 hours. No food for 24 hours and then we ate weaners and sauerkraut. This was to me very Interesting as we only went maybe 50 miles from home.

We were placed in the Casual Squad Area. The barracks were old, decrepit and cold, heated only by a wooden stove in the center of the room. The beds were a single size with wire holding a mattress and pillow both of which were uncovered and an army woolen blanket. There were no bed sheets. The woolen blanket was at first very uncomfortable but soon it felt good against your body during the long cold night. At night we all moved our beds close around the pot belly stove to keep from freezing. We wondered if this was the way the Army's made men out of boys, or was this survival training. When the upper class cadets came

home after a night on the town, at 3 A.M. they would come into the barracks and in a loud voice yell, "O.K. get up and line up for piss call, on the double." We would line up outside in our shorts in freezing weather. If one were to go out side he would have to cover his nose and mouth with his handkerchief, tied around his neck. This was either a way to prevent spreading some disease or hiding our faces from the upper class men, you see an upper class man doesn't care a hoot how you look you're simply a dog face G.I. It seemed as if the residents were afraid we'd contaminate them. Or what the natives of the regular army said in a loud voice, "We don't want to see your ugly G.I. faces" and even louder would say, "You'll be sorry." In the early morning our house Sargent would awaken us by yelling "drop your cocks, pick up you soaks and get out of your fart sacks". He was a very interesting person. We called him the elephant boy because when he went to the shower with a towel wrapped around his waist his cock would hang down below the towel edge. He could sweep everything off the table with his hard-on. He could put 9 silver dollars in a row on his erected dick.

Some of the finest men in my life that I met there, some I have never seen again. I wonder often what became of them, if they are still around or were they killed in the great war.

For the next two weeks we went through the most grueling and exhausting tests and examinations imaginable. Many Cadets washed-out

and headed for reclassification in Biloxi Mississippi. To us the mere mention of the word Biloxi would send sweats and chills down our backs, as Biloxi was the place the washed out cadets were sent for reclassification. If these Cadets still wanted to be in the Air Force, they chose Gunnery school. During these days we were called Mister and were subject to the upper class cadets. As a lower class cadet we were very much under the their wishes and demands. We were never to be seen walking, but always on the double (in other words running). We saluted them, if one approached you, you were to pop up like a spring or a tight violin string, and in as loud voice as we could we shouted, name, rank and serial number until the upper class man left. The upper class cadets would always carry out inspections of our sleeping areas and our foot lockers. If there was anything not right. One would get demerits which had to be completed before one could get a week end pass. One demerit would mean marching in a military manner around a large building so one hundred demerits meant marching around one hundred times. It had to be done marching in a military manner and not in just a civilian type walk. One of the cadets had a picture of his girl friend on his wall. This being a non G.I. issue he was given demerits but the problem was how many ? Being an ass-hole he volunteered to one hundred demerits for his great love (she who ever she was knew nothing of this) and besides she's probably out screwing some other guy. So this jerk was out every night

doing his commitment. Who knows if he's still out there now. The bed was made every day and the blanket was to be so snug that a quarter that was dropped on it could jump ten feet. We pulled guard duty and K.P, while awaiting final classification. Hoping to become a Pilot, I was classified as a Navigator. Later I learned the truth that my barracks were washed out Pilots who returned for reclassification. I was told that I scored too high in my tests therefore they made me a Navigator. I tried all possible means to appeal. I was told to see the Chaplin with my T.S., ticket, knowing it stands for Tough Shit Ticket.

Then for the next week until the 31st of January 1943 I spent a very lonely life except for K.P, duty as all my friends were shipped out to there assigned bases. Finally I received my shipping orders to leave for Monroe Louisiana. On the 5th of February, 1943 I boarded a train which appeared to be a relic from the Civil War. The cars were uncomfortable and over crowded and sleep was impossible. We were doubled up or tripled up in Pullman berths. Some guy that I didn't know slept next to me. The son of a bitch either was a bed wetter or he had a wet dream, for there was a large wet spot near my back. I was much relieved when morning came. The trip to Monroe took 21 hours and I arrived at Selman Field on the 6th of February.

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CHAPTER FOUR

Could this be the army

The first impression was bad but this soon changed. The meals were like Officer meals. The barracks were portioned and I had suite #3. There was gas, heat and bed sheets. The class rooms were conducive to study and were in every way as if we were sitting in the finest college. The staff referred to us as "Captains of the Ship." I FELT LIKE A REAL CADET and nothing could stop me now. We even had open post on week ends.

On February 8,1943, the day before my 23rd birthday, after chow the entire class of 43-11 marched down to the Post Theater where our Commanding Officer, Major Perkins made a magnificent speech. We sat with our mouths open, as he told us that we were the selected men, junior Officers, and future Officers of the United States Air Force.

I congratulate you. He said that before this war is over we will have 16 million men under arms and about 4 million casualties. After this is all over, we'll be broke.

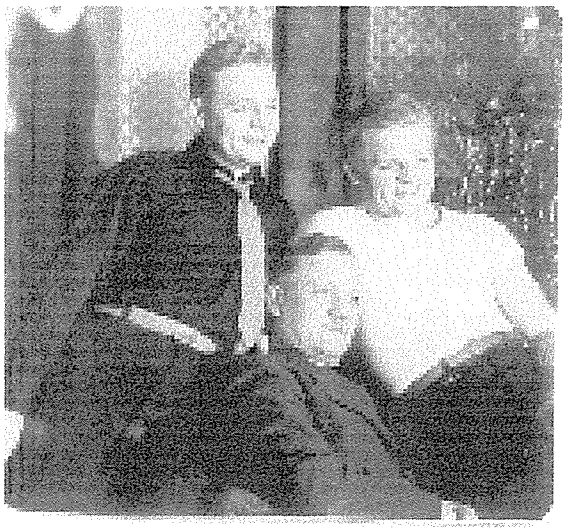
Monroe Louisiana was a typical southern city, all the people were very friendly and we had no problem getting an apartment for ourselves for we were allowed to have our wives with us. My wife Dottie and I had the front part of the apartment as we won the coin toss and our dear

friends Len and Trudie got the rear. Well all was great. Our landlady was on the weird side. She kept saying "why do the airplanes have such long wings, they sure take up so much space." Maybe she was ahead of her time.

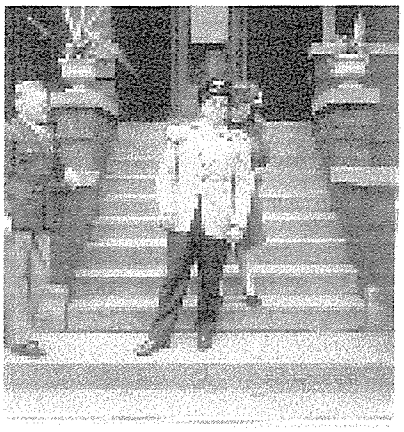
The days were full and very interesting with classes starting early and the third period as calisthenics and I mean a real workout. The Burma road was a course that required the cadets to have a body equal to a gladiator and it took about an hour to complete. It was all done on the double and there was every known obstacle one can image and more mud, water and barbed wire with live machine gun bullets. I dreaded this obstacle course, the obstacles were most of the things I could not do. The eight foot wall had to be done at full tilt and if you slipped there was nothing to do but to go back and do it again. We were shown a movie on sex which was to tell us "She looks good, but." The star of the movie was a G.I. called "Sad Sack" who before shaking a girl's hand he would put on a rubber suit. Each period was about an hour, then a shower and chow. The subjects and classes grew more and more interesting, the Instructors were well informed and knew the material. Many of them were return combat men. All through February and March we did Classes and Physical training in the most complete Preflight courses one can imagine.

On April 1, 1943, I requested a furlough and what do you know, I got it. The leave was to start after Graduation on the 9th of April.

Ah. . . back in Chicago on leave and I don't need to tell you, the great time I had seeing my family and friends. Chicago is probably the worst place as far as weather is concerned, too hot in the summer and goddamn freezing in the winter. The season of Spring can be said to be about as good as the weather is comfortable. The coming of spring in Chicago was known by everyone because the snow began to melt and the air filled with the smell of dog shit, which sometimes was overpowered by the smell of rotting cantaloupe in the alley garbage. When there was a day worth mentioning the radio came on with, "it's a beautiful day in Chicago." If you have never been to the Great city of Chicago you would want to see only the down town area and the lake shore drive area which is beautiful.



Edward (Edu) Joe & Edmund



Ed, Edu & Emily on Dickens St.

I began my Flight training on return to Selman Field. My first flight I was off my ETA by 30 seconds. ETA is the navigators code of being a good navigator. It stands for Estimated Time of Arrival, and what every navigator strives for is a ETO of 0-0 which means he was over target at the right time and at the target. The Old Air Force saying is, "Give your

wife away but never your computer." (the navigators computer was a instrument which computed the speed of the aircraft, rate of fuel consumption, wind direction and many other functions of an airplane in the air. It is simply a circular slide ruler made of light metal and the size of a paper back novel but very light. In the air we dealt with two different speeds. Now if the air was perfectly calm the two speeds would be equal, the air speed and the ground speed would be the same. If the wind was blowing lets say at ten miles per hour and it was a head wind the ground speed would be ten miles per hour slower then air speed or if the wind was a tail wind it would be ten miles per hour faster. The training continued May through September. On September 4, 1943, I received my Wings and Commission as 2nd Lieutenant. My sweetheart Dottie pinned on my wings. We were married in the chapel by the Chaplin and my best men were two of my best friends. Our honeymoon was a trip to a hotel in Monroe. Dottie kept my hopes up with the



letters she wrote to me during all my over seas days. Many times her letters were all there was to survival. She helped and gave me courage through the war and all the hard times during medical school, all this time living in a basement flat with no refrigerator and an oil stove that didn't heat worth a shit. These were trying and difficult times. She gave all she could plus three lovely kids .A son E.Laddie, a genius by no exaggeration, and two beautiful daughters; Claudia Susan and Julie Helene. All this and now with eleven (11) gorgeous grandchildren .

That afternoon we boarded a plane for Chicago. The reception we got was too much to describe in words. Everyone treated us as if we were royalty.

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CHAPTER FIVE

The crew of a B-17

THE MAGNIFICENT CREW OF THE SPLIT ARROW SQUADRON



Top row left to right.

Sgt. Joseph L. Hooper, T sgt. Yates K. Rollins, Sgt. George F. Silver, Sgt. James C. Adams,
Sgt. Donald G. Gardner, Sgt. Clayton H. Hildebrandt

Bottom row left to right.

2nd Lt. William C. Doyle, 2nd Lt. Donald L. Lawrenson, 2nd Lt. Edmund J Prorok, 2nd Lt. Lorin E. Thieman

On September 14, 1943 I left Chicago for Pyote, Texas. Here was the meeting place of the crews, and this is where my crew was formed. Ten of the finest Air Force men ever assembled. There was never a moment that I or any other crew member wanted it any other way. Thank

God for my crew. As I remember Pyote it was a small town set in the desert with the wind blowing sand all day long. But the T-bone steaks were out of this world and they hung over the sides of a twelve inch plate. We didn't need catsup for this. On September 17 I left Pyote for Alexandria, Louisiana and arrived there on the 18th. Pete and I were sent to San Antonio for a few days for some deep training. In the evenings we celebrated and tried our luck at picking up some girls at a Night Club, there were two beautiful girls very young that seemed interested. Sure enough they joined us. My little one couldn't have been 15 or 16 yet she held me close while dancing. Later we drove to a place on the river under a bridge, we took off our clothes and laid on the ground. She was so soft and cuddly I was on cloud nine. We made love which I for the first time realized what it was. We drove them home that night and I didn't even know her name. On September 25, 1943 I had my first flight in a B-17. During our Phase training we were also practicing shooting our machine guns which took place over the gulf of Mexico. A B-17 would tow a target behind it and we would fire at it, we never learned if we hit the target or not. On November 15, 1943 I finished Phase training. On November 22, I left for Kearney, Nebraska by train and arrived Thanksgiving Day in Kearney on the 25th of November. I remember it well as we stepped off the train it was cold and there were pheasants all over the place. I thought, I'm coming back here after the war and hunt. My tail gunner, Don

Gardner had a farm there loaded with birds. I think he would allow me the pleasure without a fee.



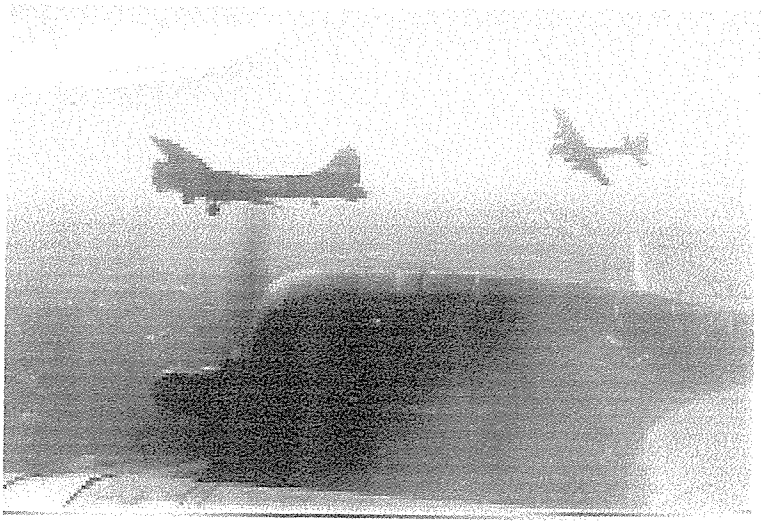
Sgt Donald G Gardner

On December 1,1943 we received our own B-17 G with my own Crew. That day we had to calibrate the compass. Because the compass is a magnetic calibrated instrument which tells were magnetic north is we had to calibrate it in our airplane as it was placed in an area that was different than were it was assembled. The metallic parts of the B -17 were new to the compass so the need for calibration. The needle had to know the effect of the influence the plane had. How does one calibrate a compass? After referring to a road map we found one that ran north and south, while the plane flys up and down this road the navigator carefully notes the needle deviation and marks it on the tab of the compass. After this calibration which took about two hours our pilot Doyle decided to buzz our tail gunners farm which was near by. As Doyle headed down toward the barn I was about to sit down with my right leg under me when he pull up with 9 G's. I felt my ankle strain under me. That night Pete my bombardier took me to the hospital with a swollen foot the size of a

basketball. The M.D., on call took X-rays and said if there is a fracture you'll be taken off your crew. I said "Not on your life", so he taped it for support and I limped half way around the world. That night Pete and I sat at the Officers Club bar and ate 20 or more liverwurst sandwiches but how many drinks - we didn't remember. What a night with Pete we had, never to be forgotten.



Officers Club

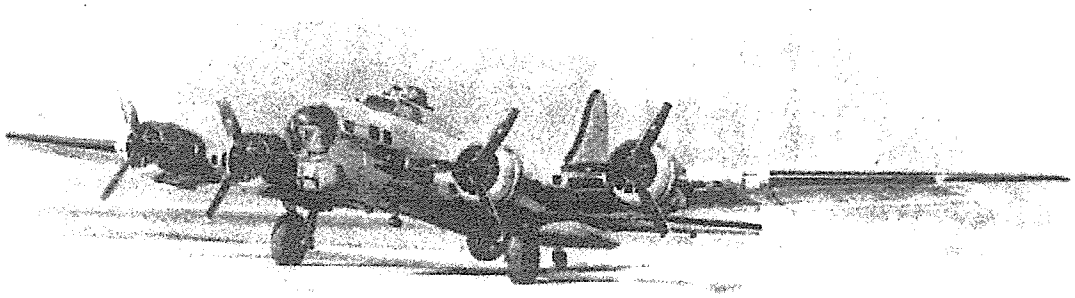


Bombing Raid

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CHAPTER SIX

Ten experts welded into a team



On December 3, 1943, we took off for Morrison Field in Florida. Total time was 9:32 hours and 1325 nautical miles. Here was our last place in the good USA, we were issued a 45 caliber pistol, a large machete knife and enough K-rations (these are packages of food mostly concentrated; there was a can of eggs or meat, some dried bread, some very strong chocolate, instant powder coffee, dried milk, and a couple of cigarettes) to feed an army and what else I don't remember except for a ton of Navigation aids. December the 5th we left Morrison Field to Waller Field, Trinidad but landed at Boringquera Field Puerto Rico 970 nautical miles. I had severe ear pain which forced me to seek sick call. The Medical Officer examined me and began treatment for an Air Otitis which I had. I was treated for about 10 days. The treatment required daily putting a medicated probe into my nose and pushing it as far as it would go, to where the Eustachian Tube was. In this way hoping that this would shrink

the swelling and equalize the pressure in the middle ear. All this time my crew was having a hell of a time enjoying the freedom as I sacrificed my self and besides all this my right ankle caused me great pain with every step. In town one could buy Canadian Club Whiskey for one dollar a bottle. As you walked down the street the little kids 6 to 10 years old would approach you and say, "Do you want to fuck my sister ." These were probably one of the few words they put to memory. We wondered how much he would charge but never found out.

On December 13,1943 we took off for Atkinson Field Trinidad, a total of 970 nautical miles, (in Navigation we use Nautical miles instead of statute miles). A nautical mile is a unite of length used in air and sea navigation, based on the length of one minute of arc of a great circle, or about 6,076 feet. Where a statute mile is 5,280 feet. In Trinidad we had good accommodations the barracks were named after famous hotels in the states, like Hotel Aster, the Hilton, or the Sheraton. The mess halls were huge with long tables covered with bowls of bananas which were little in size as compared to what we were used to but as to taste they were out of this world. The waiter was a tall black man who to our amazement spoke with an English accent as if this was in the British Isles.

We left Atkinson Field on the 14th of December 1943 and headed for Belem, Brazil. We crossed the famous Amazon River which was many miles wide as it emptied into the ocean. As we looked at this spectacular

area we wondered how the people in South America were. They say that their standard of living is far below ours. But what is the price of happiness in this world. We seem to gauge our type to every one else in the world. Why? Their ways may be much better. I rest my case. The trip to Atkinson Field took 8 hours and 35 minutes and was 760 nautical miles. On December 15 we left Belem for Fortalaza total time 4 hours and 20 minutes for a total of 620 nautical miles. On December 20, we went into the Jungle to look for monkeys. Pete and I took our 45 pistols with us and thank God we did. We were sitting on a stump and a large snake showed its head not 10 feet from us and came toward us, not knowing what kind it was we both opened fire at it. After a long wait we got up and dragged the dead snake out. You could not believe the size of it. Pete got up on a large rock at least 8 feet high and held the snake up and it still reach the ground. It must have been 15 feet long. We brought it to our tent when one of the natives saw it, he wanted to have it for dinner. He also told us that the snakes mate can come looking for it and to be on the alert for it. We didn't feel good about this so we spent a restless night. As we were coming back to our tent from the jungle carrying the dead snake a number of vultures came over head and were coming close so again we shot at them. The son of bitches vomited and shit on us. We ducked and ran full speed to avoid being hit. We had American beer that evening and this was to be our last day in the Western Hemisphere. By the way

Sergeant Adams came out of the jungle with a monkey.



Sgt James C. Adams



Lt. Cravat

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CHAPTER SEVEN

The unknown ocean before us

As we faced our last day of the Western Hemisphere, wondering if the next flight over the ocean would prove successful. The lives of my crew of 10 were entirely in my hands, here is where my training will prove my worth.

Extra gas tanks were placed in the bomb bay for the trip over the ocean, while we checked with operations as to what to expect in the way of weather over the Atlantic. To our luck, the weather was to be perfect. Our final orders as to where we were to end up with our crew was unknown until the sealed orders were opened over the middle of the ocean Every one had his idea as to where we were headed. I was hoping that it would be India as my kid brother was there with the O.S.S., (Office of Strategic Services), a cloak-and-dagger outfit. He would be required to bail out of an airplane at night into enemy territory and work under ground against the enemy. It would certainly be



Edmund & La Chuisa

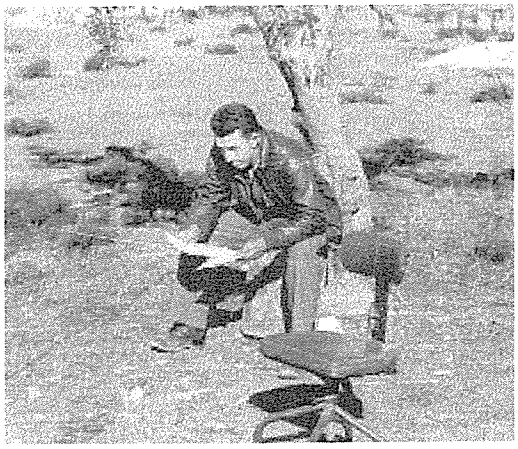
great. But as we opened the envelope. Our orders read that we were to get to the ETO operations, the European Theater of Operations. When we left Brazil with all the above items we also got a pigeon to be released at mid Atlantic.

So as per orders we put the pigeon in a paper bag and threw it out, the paper bag served as a protective shield and the pigeon flew out in perfect condition, headed back to the good USA. The crew slept most of the way while the navigator sweated. The B-17 was the most magnificent ship it was the largest bomber at the time. Powered by four 1,000 horse power motors, it could carry 2,000 pound of bombs, and cruise at 160 mph and up to 200 going down hill. It carried twelve 50 caliber machine-guns. The engines burned 50 gallons of fuel per hour equal to 200 gallons per hour and carried 1100 gallons on board normally.

Now the longest and most dangerous journey was before us, over the ocean in the dark of night. The crew all in silence about the accuracy in their navigator. Sergeant Adams, the ball-turret gunner said kiddingly, "why don't you shoot the Star of Bethlehem, after all it's Christmas night the 25th of December 1943." I kept shooting stars to insure our course was true. We finally arrived in Elmes Field, Dakar West Africa on the 26th of December. Total time was 11 hours 30 minutes and the distance was 1700 nautical miles. My navigation was right on 0/0. Couldn't be more perfect. The crew congratulated me. They each shook my hand and gave

me a hug and said how much I meant to them. I was almost in tears. On crossing the Atlantic Ocean, one would become an automatic "Short Snorter" member. It was an exclusive club but no one knows where it's located or how many members it has or who the officers are or anything else about it. But as a member you get a dollar bill signed by the pilot and crew. You carry the dollar bill with you and get other service personal to sign it or famous persons.

On December 27 we took off from Elmes Field for Merrikech. We flew over the Sahara Desert at 7,000 feet in freezing weather. We were to fly through the Pass which was closed in by weather. So I took an emergency route down a valley to Agadu. We landed in Agadu and stayed in a hotel in town. On returning to our B-17 after checking into Operations, we were warned that we should be prepared with our guns ready because we were flying over enemy territory. After our guns were clear of the rapping and loaded with a belt of 50 caliber bullets, we sat around waiting for take off. Pete and I were sitting under the left wing of the B- 17 as it was in the shade out of the hot sun. I was sitting and leaning on my left arm with Pete right next to me when a shot rang out, the bullet passed by me and my arm and threw up dust not 6 inches from my body. That was close. On looking



2nd Lt Lorin (Pete) Thieman

up and getting to our feet, we saw Don Gardner our Co-Pilot with his 45 and a very, "Oh Shit what happened" look on his face. Well that was the end of his having his 45. We took his pistol away from him. We never brought up this episode again. The total time was 8 hours and the distance was 920 nautical miles for the trip from Dakar to Merrikech.

In town was a place called the Bull Pen. There was only one opening which served as an entrance and exit. There were two guards at the opening, both were uniformed Foreign Legion soldiers with rifles and bayonets. We learned that the, place was sort of a prison for women prostitutes. Prostitution is legal here as in most foreign countries and the women were street walking for business which is not allowed. Their trade is legal when done inside. So if they are picked up street walking, they were arrested by the police and fined. If they lack the money they are placed in the Bull Pen. Here they practice they're trade for money in order to pay the fine. This is the way they earn a living its the only thing the women have to offer. We decided to go in and immediately we were stormed with hundreds of very beautiful and very young females all squabling for one to serve.

On looking around the interior of the place, it presented a large court yard and around it were what you would call apartments for lack of a better term. More like openings in the walls which looked more like caves. The girls had their own place which consisted of a spread on the

floor which was supposed to be the bed and a small oil lamp. I stayed in the yard and talked with a young girl who spoke perfect English. She said that she was Jewish and she came from a good family and was well educated. She chose her profession because she said that it was the only thing to do as a women. She was to practice her art for maybe 5 or 6 years to make enough money and plan then for the future. She regarded herself as lucky and happy in what she was doing. I gave her several francs and like an ass hole I didn't accept her for a piece of ass. When I think about this now I could kick myself in the ass. Here was an opportunity that knocks once, and I blew it. Which probable covered her fine. In the meantime Pete had disappeared where to look for him. I got the girl I was talking to to help me find him for she knew the girl he went with. We went up some narrow stairs to a small room. After adjusting to the darkness there was this black undressed female pulling Pete down towards the blanket on the floor. I grabbed Pete by the arm saying, " lets get out of here, you don't know what VD you could catch here." Pete under protest came with me while trying to put on his pants. He didn't talk to me for the rest of the day. I was sure they didn't serve any condoms in those places nor did they know about them.

On December 28,1943 we left Merrikick. On take off the Tower sent us to Casablanca. Our guns were loaded and ready for use. We spotted four unidentified air craft and prepared for defense. The aircraft turned and

fled in a hurry. We landed in Casablanca Total time 2.00 hours and a distance of 300 nautical miles. We ran into some buddies that we hadn't seen since Morrison Field.

On the 29th of December went to see the town of Casablanca. We joined the Allied Officers club. You see all this time we were paid our regular salary plus perdiem. As for money when we left the states our co-pilot was advanced $500 in twenty dollar bills. This was for emergency use. Everything was in cash always and in denominations in the country's currencies we were at While in the town of Casablanca my Bombardier lost his wallet to kid pickpockets. It was a fact that everyone was either a con or robber, it seems that with armies in foreign land everyone was out to take what ever he could. After all who ever saw the amount of money the G.I. had. Well after this we never went to town without our 45's and always with more than two guys. We heard that if an American was ever caught in the Casbah or have sex with an Arab female, he would be found dead with his testicles in his mouth. We were overjoyed to get away from the Arabs.

1944

On January 5, 1944 we left Casablanca for Algiers with three passengers who were French Officers. A distance of 580 nautical miles. total time was 4 hours.

The next day we were on our way to Tunis and we saw our first German aircraft on a junk pile apparently shot down by Americans. The town of Tunis was pretty well shot up and bombed by conquering United States Air Force. The fight took 3 hours and the total distance of 500 nautical miles. While in Algiers we talked to a German Captain who was a prisoner of war from the African campaign under the great Desert Fox, Field Marshall, Rommel. We tried to get him to talk but he was not very talkative except to say he was in Yale University in the U.S.A. He was a handsome fine Nazis officer educated in America. He bragged about a great Luftwaffe's pilot who was the top gunner in France. This pilot was credited for shooting down 61 planes, including 11 Bombers. His name was elite Major Josef Priller. One can see the respect the Germans showed about their soldiers.

On the 8th of January 1944 we left Tunis for our final place from which we were to fight the Germans. The place Foggia Italy just 70 miles from the front lines. We landed at Gioria by mistake. Finally we arrived at Foggia. The airmen lived in tents in a olive orchard. That night there was no tent for us so I slept with four other guys. The total flight from Tunis was 3 hours, a distance of 500 nautical miles

Since we left Kearney Nebraska it was 9295 nautical miles equal to 10,700 statute miles.

Our flight over the ocean took 2300 gallons of fuel, as for the

B-17 G, its performance was excellent in every respect, a marvelous Flying Fortress.

Figures show that 100,799 Navigators, 20,086 Bombardiers, 555,891 ground and air technicians graduated from January 1,1939 to December 30, 1943. In 1939 only 696 pilots graduated from two schools. In the 12 months of 1943 the command trained 61,730 pilots of all types. One notices the marked difference in the number of Navigators to the number of Bombardiers. The difference was because in the medium bombers a navigator was both for the number of crew members was less.

We learned from Allied Headquarters that the American Thunderbolt fighters had been in action in Italy for six weeks and had destroyed 20 enemy planes while escorting Flying Fortresses and Liberator bombers on missions from Italian bases.

The British flew they're bombers at night to targets and if they didn't drop the bombs they were to bring them back. Our orders were if we didn't drop our bombs we were never to bring them back but to drop them somewhere.

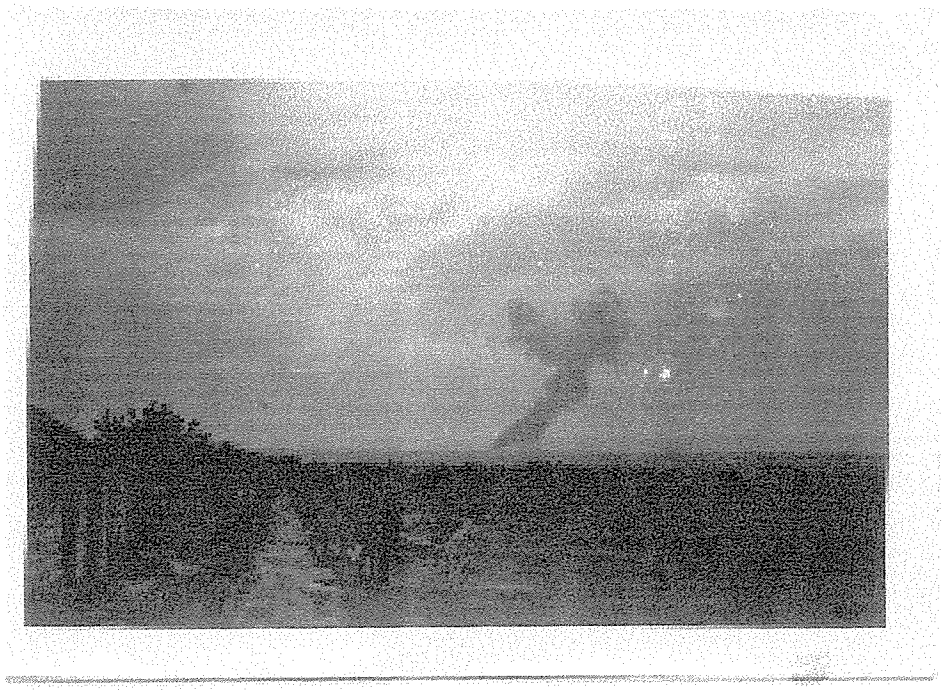
We learned that one of the greatest German Aces was killed, a Major Prince Zu Sayer Wettlenstein who had 83 night planes to his credit. He was awarded the highest Iron Cross by Hitler himself.

We lost 119 planes in January 1944 and 61 planes in February. On January 10,1944 we drove into the town of Foggia after it was bombed

by our planes. Some 40 to 50,000 civilians were killed, others were still looking for the dead.



Ruins in Foggia Italy



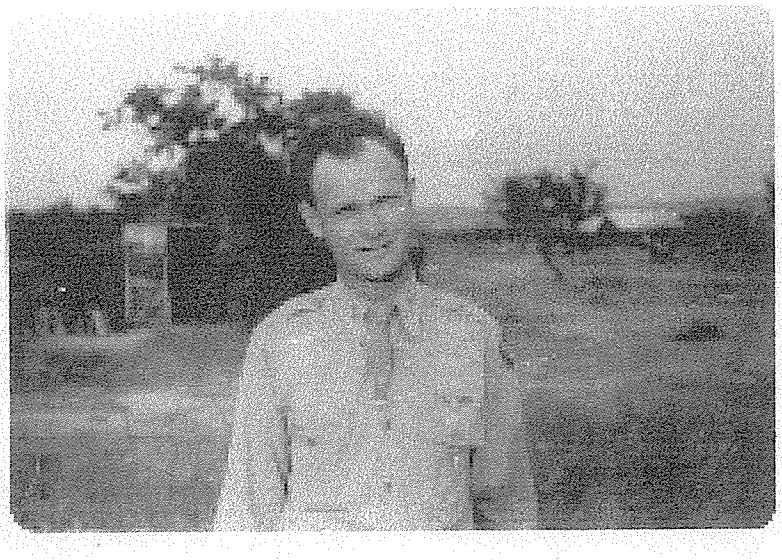
Smoke seen off in the distance from the bombing raids.

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CHAPTER EIGHT

At our base a place to live or die

One good structure was the public showers which miraculously were saved from total destruction. We took a shower and drove back to the base. The boys came in from a raid on Sofia, Bulgaria, and lost one B-17. Lt. Miller, the pilot had his Engineer killed in the top turret. His plane was shot up badly and was greatly damaged. His crew shot down 4 enemy fighters. To hear Miller talk about the rough raid, no one was seen to bail out of the B-17 that was shot down. It seemed that Lt. Miller had that black cloud always over his head as he seemed to be pick out for the flak and fighters. We were keeping our fingers crossed and praying that we wouldn't fly with him. We were scheduled to fly tomorrow. Usually the new crews were split up to fly the first missions with crews that had some experience. As the new crews



Lt. Miller, Pilot

always flew ass end in the formation; the must vulnerable place as most fighters attack from the rear and the flak has a better chance at hitting. Therefore experience was important for survival but more important was how long a crew lasted for it moved up in the formation. The nearer to the front the more protection you have and you are over the target and flak sooner. It was a rare mission if the lead plane got shot down.

The Boeing B-17 was the greatest bomber ever built. As cadets we were told that the upper 10% of the class was elected to be a crew member in the Fortress. Stories were told how B-17's came back on a few instances on only one engine. The B-9 was considered the grandfather of the B-17. The Second Bombardment Group then based at Langley Field, Virginia was assigned the task of teaching the men to fly the B-17. The B-17G was the final improved model a total of 8,680 rolled off the line at the end of production. (B-17 F 3,400, B-17E 400, were also used in combat). The 15th Air Force B-17 consisted of three Groups -the Second, the 97th, the 99th, and the 301st. The 15th also had many Groups of B-24's and fighters. The 15th Air Force was activated in November 1943 with headquarters in Tunis and the Commanding Office was General Doolittle.

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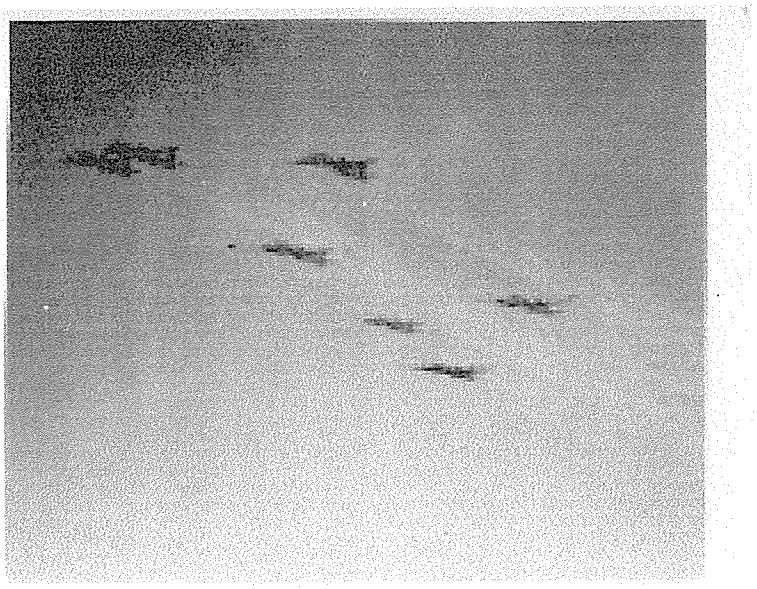
CHAPTER NINE

Here's what we were trained for

On January 16, 1944 We were awakened at 0500, walked over to the mess hall for our breakfast of hot cakes and coffee. Then back to our tents to put on our heavy flight clothes, they were heavy sheep lined leather pants and jackets. I always wore my best uniform under this. Then we walked to a tent that resembled a class room lined with chairs and at the front a platform with Officers to give us the days mission. On the wall was a large map of the area we were to fly over. The C.O. (commanding Officer and lead pilot of our group) gave the target we were to hit. The G-2 Officer (an Intelligence Officer for headquarters) gave us the amount of fighters to expect and how much flak there was, also the distance to the target and the time to get there. The weather man gave us the amount of visibility and what to expect of the weather. We flew our 1st mission a raid in northern Italy on an airdrome near Villaorba. "Good luck and God be with you," his final words. The briefing was attended by the four Officers of the crew. I believe this was because of the space in the room and it was the responsibility of the navigator to brief the six members of the crew. "Well men the target is an air drome in northern Italy that is heavily guarded by flak guns etc etc etc ." But as luck would have it as

there was no flak and we didn't run into any fighters. Total time in flight was 5 hours and 15 minutes.

We were to fly a total of 50 sorties. The raids if completed meaning the target was hit, this was counted as a sortie. If by chance the target was not reached either by weather or some other reason we were not credited with a sortie. But we still had to be in the airplane, take off and join the formation, fly in enemy territory, and land the ship all of which was dangerous to say the least. We felt that anytime we to off it should be counted toward the tour of duty. As it turned out many of us flew well over 50 missions.



Joining Formation

The glorified 8th Air Force that got all the publicity would need only to fly 25 missions. In our first mission we destroyed our target mission complete.

The routine of daily activities if scheduled to fly was; awake at 0400 in the morning, eat chow, then back to the tent to dress. We usually wore out best uniform in case of being shot down and living through it. Over this we wore our flying clothes which were heavy leather wool lined

pants and jacket. On the ground before take off we were very hot dressed like this but as we climbed to altitude it became colder and colder at times to 80 below zero. We were glad for the heavy clothes. We then went for the briefing as to where we're going, how many fighters to expect, the amount of flak, and what's the weather like. Only the Officers were allowed out to the planes where the remainder of the crew waited. It was up to the navigator to brief the crew. We all had 45 caliber guns which we chose not to take along. The reason was if you had to bail out and you were in possession of a gun the enemy was allowed to kill you. Over water we test fired our machine guns. We were in formation. The top wing consisting of 18 planes and the bottom wing consisting of 18 planes. We stayed in formation all the way to the target. The bombardier than took over and piloted the plane with his Bomb sight. He maneuvered the plane from the I.P. (Initial Point) which was usually 2 to 5 minutes to the target. At this time the bomb bay doors opened and the deadly load went down exactly were he wanted it. Then everyone yield, "Lets get the hell out of here." We barreled out of there as fast as we could go, which sometimes was not fast enough. On landing we were given coffee and donuts by the Red Cross and 2 ounces of 100 proof whiskey. After this we gave all the details of the mission to Intelligence known as G-2 and every detail of the mission was recorded. Whether we saw any fighters was the target hit, and bad weather or did we notice anything unusual. Some of

the boys saved the two ounces of booze until they finished their tour of missions.

On January 17th, we flew our 2nd mission a raid on the Marshellan Yards (Railroad Yards) a at Prato which was north west of Florence Italy. Again we lucked out for there was no flak or fighters. We did a beautiful job on the target. The total time of the mission was 5 hours and 30 minutes. We enjoyed the next day being off .

We flew mission number 3 on the 20th of January, a raid on an Airdrome south east of Rome near the town of Ciampiano. We flew with our own bombardier. He was checked out with a veteran crew. It was good having him back. Pete Thieman was a great guy and a wonderful bombardier, if his Norden bomb sight was malfunctioning he could use his big toe (after removing his boot) to sight off of it and drop the the bombs right on the target every time. He was credited with destroying 2 enemy aircraft and damaging one. The bombardier's job was to see that the bombs were properly place in the bomb-bay, he would have to fuse them in flight before getting to the target. He would then maneuver the airplane from the I.P, to the target and drop the bombs. Each man had his specific job to do and the entire success of the mission depended on every one in the crew. The pilots had a tough job flying the airplane, keeping formation and getting us to the target and getting us home. The Navigator was to see to it that we were going in the right direction and pointing out the target,

then he was to route the plane back home. The Radio operator was to keep alert to any and all messages. He also had a machine gun to use. The Engineer also the top turret gun handler was to see that the ship was functioning properly. The gunners were there to protect us from enemy planes. The navigator and bombardier also had guns in the nose of the B-17. On our way to the target we saw Rome over to our right, it looked beautiful as it did in the movies back home. Over the intercom one of the waist gunners stated, "There are two or three fighter planes at 3 o'clock high, I can't tell if the are friendly or not." Immediately everyone was at their guns. Apparently they kept away from us and headed north. Ciampiano, like every other town in Italy from our view point was a dream of landscaping. As we approached our target, the bomb bay doors opened and the bombardier took over the plane from the I.P. We watched the bombs drop and then turned off to our left, not in to big a hurry for no flack or fighters were around. On the ground the bombs did their job destroying the parked planes and buildings. One could not describe the feeling in your gut to see the enemy air drome destroyed. The blast, the fire, the smoke coming from the target. The mission lasted 4 hours and 10 minutes.

On January 21st we didn't fly and moved into our new tent as the former owners were shot down. The tent was a four man tent with cots and an air mattress. The tent was equipped with a stove which really was

an old 55 gallon oil drum. The fuel to the stove was stored in another 55 gallon container out side the tent and a copper tubing brought the aviation gas to the stove. When ignited the gas vaporized and burned causing the entire drum to glow red hot. We didn't worry of the danger this could do in the way of a fire or explosion. It did keep us warm and furnished us with enough light for letter writing. The nights and mornings were usually cold. As we were only miles away from the front lines, we could hear the guns and bombs and see the flashes of light coming from the artillery etc. Because of this proximity we had a fox hole dug next to the tents for use in case of air attack. The first time or two





when the sirens blew a warning of an air attack we jump out of bed and dove into the fox hole. After this when the warning sounded we stayed in bed. Something worth mentioning was the daring stunts our fighter pilots did, flying at top speed through our tent area just over tent height. The pilots flying this way were usually guys in borrowed British fighter aircraft the Spitfires. They were coming back from Yugoslavia on a fun strafing self made mission. To break the boredom.

On January 22nd, we flew number 4 which proved to be another milk run A raid on a railroad junction and bridge. We destroyed the target without encountering any flak or fighters. Total time 4 hours. We began to feel as if there were no enemies out there--but were not disappointed for long.

On January 23rd we were scheduled to fly in 527 but was scratched the night before due to the fact that the ship was not in condition. So we worked around the tent. The fields and land in Italy at that time were infested with large swarms of grasshoppers. They were in such huge numbers that it was dangerous to do any form of travel. We spent hours trying to burn the insects out with gasoline. It helped very little. When these



Burning Grasshoppers

pests flew they blacked out the sun. Around this time, I was happy to receive a letter from my brother who was with the OSS in India.

On January 25th we were to fly a search mission with my crew in 845 (these numbers are numbers assigned to the B-17's). We were to search the Adriatic Sea for planes that had to ditch the past night coming from a raid that had 18 planes missing, and 8 were still unaccounted for this morning. This means that 10 were shot down. I believe that there were only our plane and one another making a careful search. There was a Major from Headquarters as Intelligence observer. This Major became a key to what happened at the end of my tour. I planned a calibrated flight in order to cover every foot of the ocean. After many hours and getting low on fuel we terminated our search. All we saw was water, nothing else.

On January 26th the weather took on a vengeance, the wind blew and the icy rain almost blew our tent away. But for the good part we were grounded. The raid was over Salon de Province, France. So we were scheduled for tomorrow.

January 27th we got up at some ungodly hour to fly number 5 a raid in France. The Salon de Province Airdrome which was about 10 miles north of Marseilles. We ran into flak which was thick and heavy. There were enemy fighters, beaucoup and they came at us even going though their own flak. They would come in with their guns firing as they came

through our formation. We approached the I.P. the bombs were already fused by Pete and he took control of the B-17 with his bomb sight and kept the B-17 on a steady course toward the target. This is an especially dangerous time for us as the flak gunners and the fighters knew that we could not very our course. The crew would be more on the alert and holding their breath. The bomb bay doors were open and two tons of bombs were released at the precise time. The plane got its sudden lift and the bomb bay doors were closed and over the intercom came "Let's get the hell out of here." As the pilot turned the plane almost side ways and descended at warp speed. The German pilots were extremely brave and excellent flyers. Our 50 caliber bullets were we thought small compared to the German 20 mm caliber cannon. The General Staff of the 15th Air Force made a decision to remove the tracer bullets from our ammo. Their idea was that this would make the enemy fighters come in closer so that we would have a better shot at them. This move was not only foolish but also deadly. The gunners were very unhappy, normally the tracer bullets were placed in the 5th position in the belt. Seeing the tracers as they were headed towards the enemy planes gave a gunner a wonderful feeling. Besides the gunner could correct his aim better. The German fighters were still as brave as ever, to them the tracers didn't make any difference. The boys bitched so much that the practice was eliminated. The mission took 8 hours and 55 minutes. Our bombardier, Pete wasn't

back yet as he flew with another crew. He landed in Corsica for fuel. After landing we stood around our B-17 waiting for our ride back to our tents.

I turned to the crew; "saying to Sergeant Adams, will you ever learn to speak English ? As I have a hell of a time to understand what you're saying." His reply was; "I can't he'p it I'm from Alabama you know." The rest of the crew roared with laughter. Adams was the comedian in our crew and he was always giving us something to laugh about. Just to hear him talk was amusement enough.

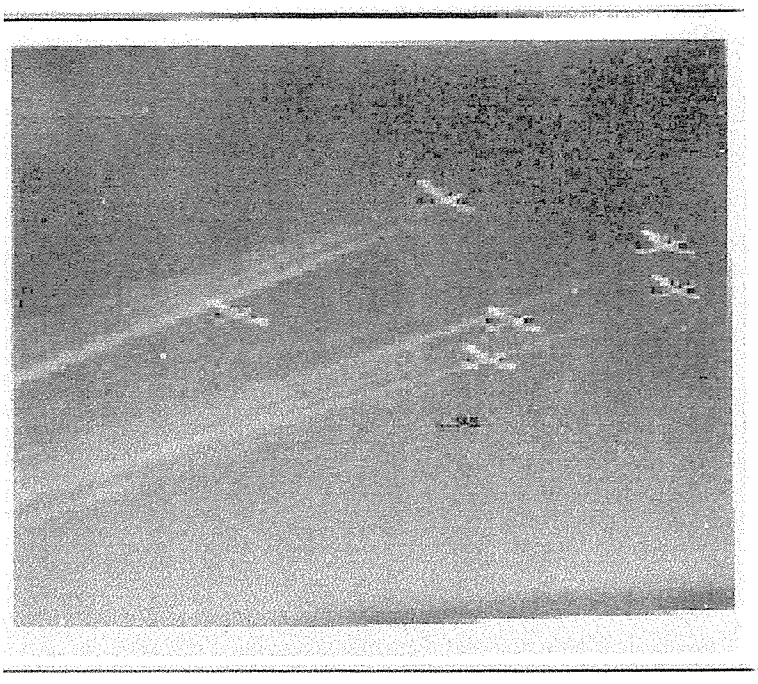
On January 28th, we flew on a raid to Aviano Airdrome in northern Italy. We did a good job of setting many things on fire. There was plenty of flak. This was Number 6. It took 5 hours and 30 minutes. As the flak in many raids was only over the target we were in it for only a few minutes. But with the fighters they pounded us for many hours going to the target which is the time the bombers are going straight to the target without veering. and coming off the target. That afternoon we were treated to a great show given by Joe E. Brown the actor. Not flying tomorrow. Before we finished our tour of duty



Joe E. Brown & Sgt. Adams

we learned that we went through the worst and most fearsome air war of World War II. It was to destroy the German Luftwaffe. The cost was heavy in loss of men and planes.

On January 30th we flew number 7, a raid on Lavoriano Landing Ground in northern Italy. There were plenty of German fighters but the P-38's kept them away Flak came up after we turned off the target. One B-17 went down. Total time was 5 hours and 45 minutes. One of our top Commanders a man by the name of Colonel Curtis C. LeMay devised the plan for us to fly in formation for maximum protection and fire power. He called it the "COMBAT BOX." He was in charge of a group of B-29s that operated in the Pacific. The combat-box was a formation of bombers usually 18 in number, that formed 6 V's, 3 planes in each V and 3 of these V's in a large V with 9 planes in the upper wing and 9 planes in the lower wing.

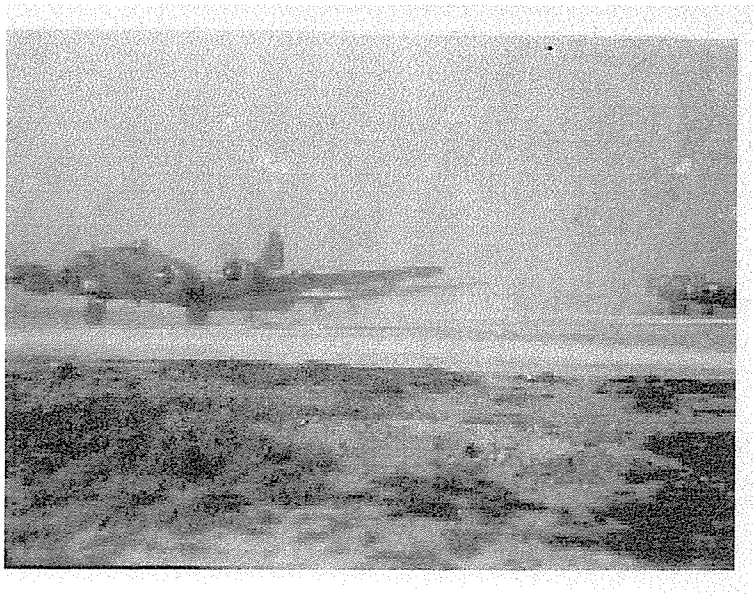


On January 31st we conducted a raid on an Airdrome south west of Udine, this was mission number 8 with 1000# bombs. We blow the hell

out of the place. Plenty of fighters. We lost one B-17, chances are the crew was O.K., as they were seen to bail out. No flak, something had to be done to screw up the flak. So someone in Operations suggested a great plan. The plan was to throw out tinsel the kind we put on Christmas trees. We loaded boxes and boxes of the stuff into the airplane and told the boys to throw the stuff out as we approached the target. Sure enough the flak was all screwed up and exploded way below our formation. As we were using the chaff. One of the gunners said in a load voice "Hey, damn it I keep throwing out this stuff and the fighters are still coming at it." Someone forgot to tell him it was for the flak. This was beautiful now we won't have to worry about the flak. But this was short lived as the fucking Jerries caught on in a hurry and it was no longer used. Germans soon figured out every trick we had. Mission took 5 hours and 45 minutes

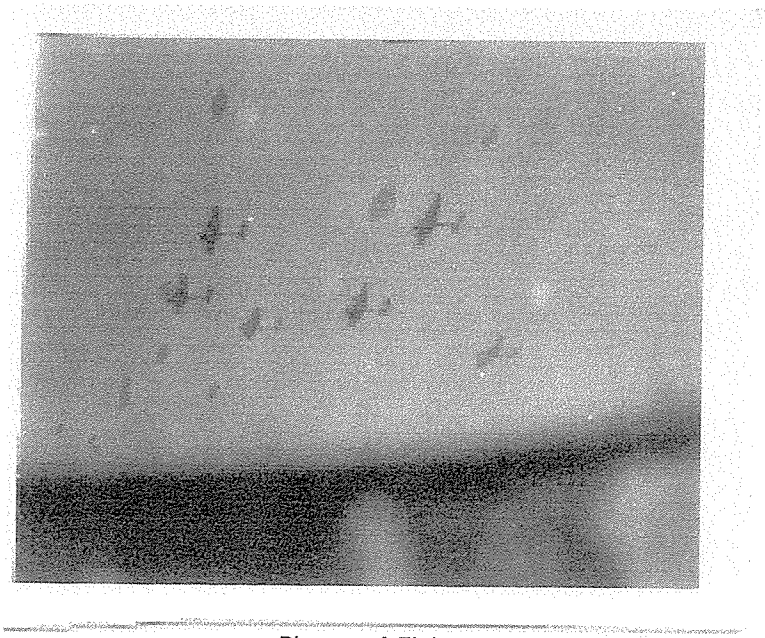
February 1944

On February 1st,1944, we got up at 0400 and went to briefing, then to our planes and waited until 10:00 o'clock in our hot suits in the nose of our B-17. Due to the fog we were unable to take off.



Eventually the mission was canceled. The raid was to be over France. As officers, we never associated with our enlisted men which I felt was very unjust. After all we were fighting a war and suffered the same experiences and were exposed to the same dangers. I almost didn't know my crew as well as I should have. It seems that a crew flying together in a plane, whether officers or enlisted men should also be together out of the plane. This is different from the men fighting on the ground. There maybe the difference of rank seems necessary. Here in the forces fighting on the ground, there is need of leadership. This is not so in the air.

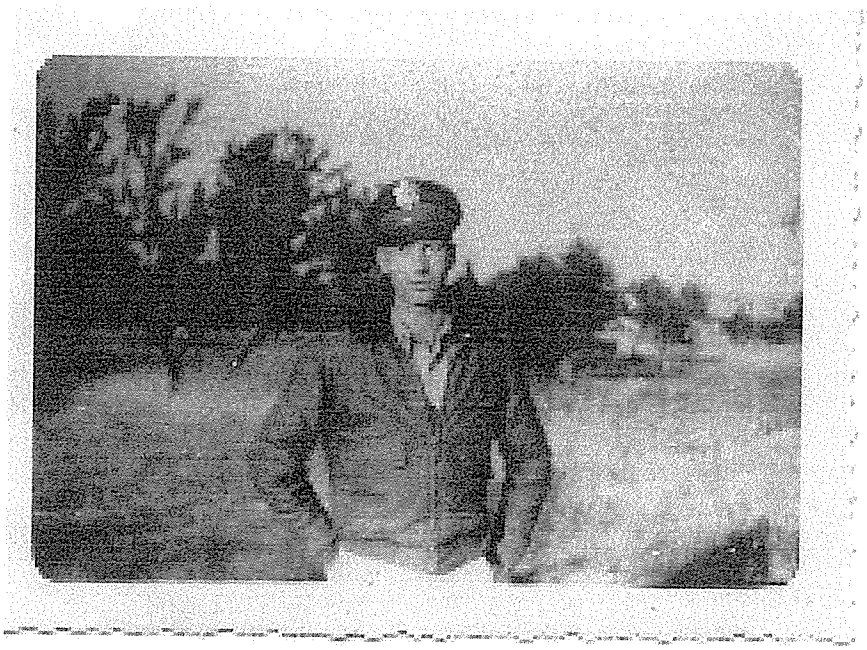
We paid for our day off with the next mission. On February 2nd we were up in the A.M., for a briefing on a raid to Messerschmitts factory south of Budapest, Hungry. We were told that 120 fighters protected the plant. Plenty of flak in the area. Everyone was sweating this raid out. We thought that they are sending us on a suicide mission. We took off and before joining our formation our ball turret caught fire and we had to return to base and land. At Operations we learned that the mission was canceled. And the



Plenty of Flak

formation was called back. Why? No one knew why.

There was this Axis Sally who was on the German radio who gave us a hard time. Saying things like "You G.I.s should be home with your girl friends instead of here, someone has been making love to your sweethearts while you're over getting your ass shot at." Our C.O., a great guy was Colonel Rice, who led us on raids. Axis Sally knew him well and always addressed him over the radio. We couldn't help but hear her on the radio as we flew to our targets. She would address Colonel Rice by name and tell him where he was headed. How she got her information no one knew, except for some informer in our unit. Who knows. But she was always right on. She was on the air every day and she always knew where we were going. How she knew our Colonel Rice we never found out. Except that the Second Bomb Group was active in the first world war. As we knew Colonel Rice, he was a gray haired old man who was fearless in combat and a great pilot to boot.



Pilot, Syverson

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CHAPTER TEN

Things begin to narrow the line between life and death

On the 4th of February mission number 9 raid on Toulon Harbor, France (wow). Target time was 12:45 and our bombs dropped at 14:00 what a mission to be still here and write about it. Lt. Miller was the pilot in 845. We were the last ship to go over. On the way to the target which was covered by a space of flak a mile high and a mile wide, it looked like an eminent black area of no return. There must have been hundreds of guns down there. We could see three B-17 groups going over, we dropped our bombs into the harbor west of Toulon. A B-17 to our right exploded causing most of our formation to scatter. For a moment we thought we were in a hell of a mess. But before long after bombs away we turned 180 degrees and high tailed it toward home. But here come the fighters from every direction. We had 6 B-17's in our formation when the fighters came in there were 3 B-17's left. They came after us all the way to Corsica where we landed for fuel. Many B-17's were there for the same reason. We were standing near our plane when every one started to run. Looking up we saw a B-17 that over shot the field the number 2 engine was on fire. He was no more than a 100 feet above the parked airplanes as he headed strait for the mountains. He finally got control and came in O.K. We spent

a sleepless night in heavy winds that almost blew our ship over. We each took our turn guarding during the windy night. The mission took 10 hours and 10 minutes.

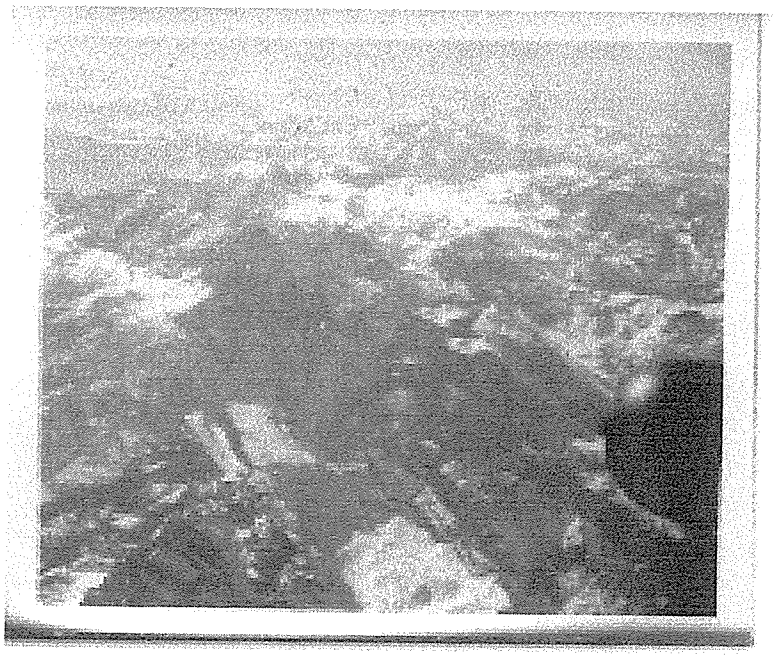
The next day February the 5th we ate chow in Gluconaccia, Corsica, and planned to take off for our base. Flying home by ourselves was very frighting and for the first time we realized how safe it felt in formation We went up to 26,000 feet because the overcast was 23,000 feet thick. The temperature was 46 degrees below zero. We came in safely; thank GOD. The lead B-17 went down over Marseilles, France, what happened to the crew was unknown. As we flew over the Ligurian Sea we could see Mt. Vesuvius to our left erupting thick black smoke. Wasn't this the same volcano that buried that famous Roman city of Pompeii? The place where anything goes where the people party all the time, eating peacock tongues and having great orgies. There is has still evidence of this on the walls.

Not flying tomorrow. When the weather permitted we would play baseball or go into town for a shower. Sometimes we spent time just getting sack time. Now each and every time we flew on a mission the guns were always test



Playing baseball with the crew

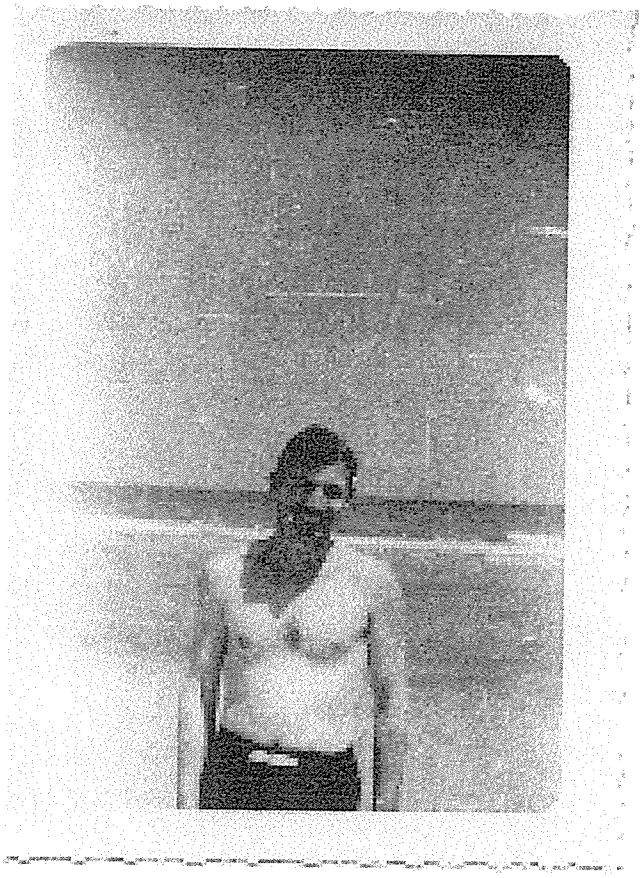
fired. It seemed as if the guns the navigator had on each side of the nose were always jamming after a few rounds were fired. On these long missions we needed to take a piss. The piss tube was located in the bomb bay which was much to far to go so the tail gunner devised a special tube in the tail. I really don't know what the ball turret did. He had a problem getting in and out of his place. Now as for the two guys in the nose. They had the problem solved. When they had to piss they used the G.I. helmet,



when it was filled it was carefully placed on the floor in the nose of the B - 17, the piss soon froze solid then it was than removed from the helmet and laid on the floor, one solid piece of ice. It remained solid until we landed and then threw it out of the plane. Thank God for the helmets.

It was windy as hell for the next two days. The tent was shot to hell. We were scheduled to fly tomorrow, but on the 9th of February, my 24th birthday, the mission was canceled due to bad weather. Non operational tomorrow and had a navigators meeting at the 97th Group. Lectures and movies on new R.A.F. navigational aids. Next to our tent area

there was large cave that must of been cut out by the farmers for keeping their produce cool in the summer, we used it to view motion pictures that were old. Also there was a stone building which was used as our hospital. It was under the care of our Flight Surgeon, Captain Hall, a Doctor First Class from Shreveport, Louisiana. He would fly with us on many mission. He was not required to do so, what a guy. Once a week an Italian lad would come by to pick up our laundry but we had to furnish the soap. He charged a few Lire can't remember how much.



Flight Surgeon, Captain Hall

On February 10th we flew number 10 a raid on the town of Albano north of Rome. At briefing we were told that the target was heavily protected. Boy and they were not kidding. We ran into more flak then we ever saw. They fired everything at us. We flew at 10,000 feet. We saw a B-17 ahead of us catch fire and then explode. No chutes came out. This was the B-17 that Lt. Bill Doyle was in. Flak came through the Astro-

Dome and hit my helmet. Scheduled to fly tomorrow with our new pilot Lt. Fredrickson who was not over 5'4" but he sure knew how to fly a B-17.

On the 11th of February, we stood by our planes but didn't take off, reason unknown.

February 12th, not scheduled to fly, we put up a new tent, then suddenly we were alerted for a mission at 1300 hours. Brief in a hurry and quickly drove to our planes. We took off and flew around in dense clouds. B-17's were all over the place. Finally came in and landed. The big boys must of had their heads up there asses. Scheduled for tomorrow, no doubt the same target.

On February 13th, we got up at 0745 hours went to briefing on a target that was the railroad yards in Verona. The weather was bad but we stood by our planes until noon. The mission was canceled.

On February 14th, we were flying number 11 with my entire crew, plus our new radio operator Sergeant Palmer who replaced our radio operator, a sergeant Yates Rollins for some reason, we didn't seem to know him very well. We understood that he was a high member of a church in the south and a school teacher who was very much against the war and the killing. The raid was on the Marshellan Yards at Verona Italy. As we approached the target it was completely covered over by thick clouds. Bombs were dropped everywhere. We turned back and blew up the Marshellan yards at Vicenza. When we ran into light flak, our fighters

were all around us. Now at briefing we were always given a secondary target should the primary one be not available. The mission took 7 hours and 30 minutes.

On February 15th we were to fly a raid on the Benedictine Monastery of Montecassino on Abbey Hill 3/4 of a mile west of the town of Cassino, which was previously not to be bombed, but because the Germans were using it as artillery and machine-gun setting they could and did kill many of our boys. It was now a target. The young eagle eyed Germans were able for months to direct artillery and machine gun fire on everything that moved in the two wide valleys. Finally we turned off toward home after dropping our bombs on the Abbey only one small part of a wall was left standing, mission a complete success.

I took my 45 pistol this time because for some reason our bombardier Pete on our last mission refused to work the bomb sight or get near it. He simply salvoed the bombs with the release switch. That didn't impress me one bit. So the reason of my taking the 45. This time we were leading the second wave and as Pete tried to repeat his action, I took the pistol and but it to his head, saying; " Pete we have flown all this way for the purpose of you to drop the bombs on the target. The rest of the crew and I depend on you doing this right plus all the rest of the planes who will drop on your timing. So you have a choice either you do the right thing or I'll blow your brains out." Pete, knew that I was serious. After

this everything went off perfectly. Time of mission 3 hours and 40 minutes. After the Monks were given due warning,142 B-17's in several waves dropped 353 tons of bombs on the monastery, but the stalemate of opposing ground forces at Cassino continued.

Hitler ordered a Death Stand at Cassino. Cassino was a market town of 25,000 inhabitants, sited between the Rapido river valley and the steep massive mountains behind. It stood between Naples and Rome. It was the most perfect defensive positions in Europe a natural barrier between northern and southern Italy. Hitler forecast wrong and moved his forces to the Balkans. Kesselring read his history books and kept his strength up in Italy. He made no mistake in Cassino the allies had no room to maneuver. All key positions were reinforced with steel and concrete. Tunnels were created and the town of Cassino heavily fortified. The lives of 12,000 of our boys were accounted for from the guns at the monastery. That entire mission to the Abbey took only 1 hour and 15 minutes. The town was about half held by the allies and half by the enemy. So headquarters decided to send in the heavies. The allies were moved out so that the Air force could do its bombing. After the raids were over the enemy occupied all of the town.

On February 17th, we flew our number 13th raid on the Marshellan Yards at Compleona, Italy. Pete and I were asked to write a detailed account of this mission and maybe have it published. We were in more

flak. A B-17 exploded behind us. No one came out. As we approached our first turn point a formation of B-24's at our level blocked our turn and we had to make a 360 degree turn to give them room and time to pass. We straighten out again and headed for the I.P. The crew put on their flak vests. Over the I.P, the bombardier and I looked toward the target area and saw a few bursts of flak. A group of B-17's were headed home. As we headed down the bomb run our pilot started evasive action then leveled off and the bombardier hollered out "BOMBS AWAY." We rolled to the left and the flak really started to come and more evasive action was done. The ship that blew up the tail gunner said he noticed what seemed to him like three boys jumped out on fire. The flak kept bursting around us until we were about a half mile over water. What a relief. The crew checked in and every one was O.K. We could see smoke over the target. Another group of B-17's was headed for the target and there was flak galore. As we proceeded on course still another group was on its way in. We were 50 miles away from the area and still the flak could be seen. It was rough but not too bad. Then before you know it we were having coffee and donuts and laughing over our rough mission. The mission took 4 hours and 35 minutes of a flight to hell. Then we sat down with the boys from G-2 to give our account of the mission.

On February 18th, We were briefed at 0500 for a mission to Regensburg, Germany. We stood by our plane until 0830 mission canceled.

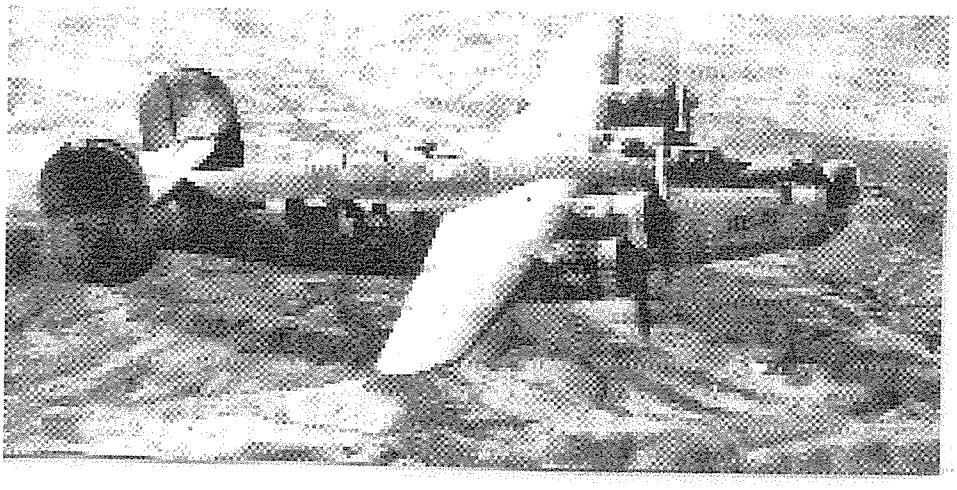
The mission on the next day also canceled.

Then on the 20th of February, we were again briefed for the raid to Regensburg as our primary target with a secondary target at Augsburg's aircraft factory. And so that this suicide mission wasn't wasted we were also given another which was the aircraft factory at Munich #3 and to be sure not to go out of Germany without destroying some target also Innsbruck's Marshellan Yards. We took off and set course but had to turn back due to very heavy clouds. This mission would have counted for two sorties. Lets not forget that ever time we took off in our B-17 and landed we were in danger.

On the 21st of February, we were again briefed for Regensburg but the weather over Italy was so bad that not even missions to Italian targets could be undertaken.

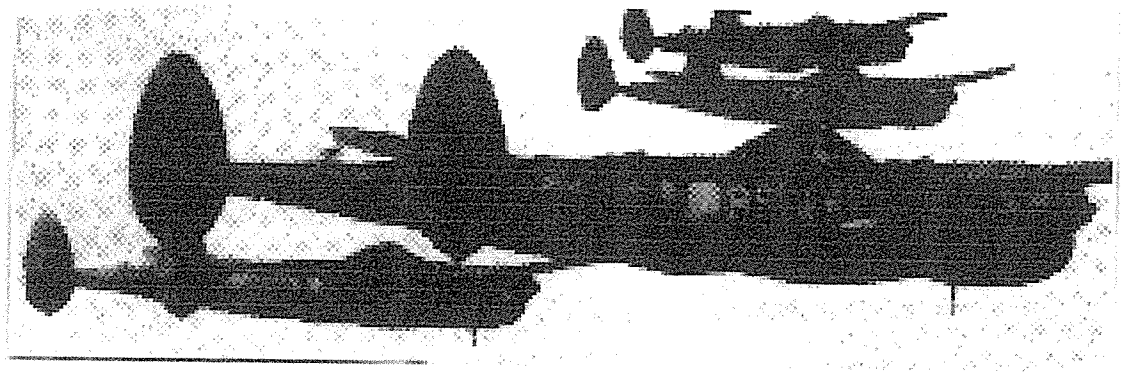
On February 22nd, we were again briefed for the German target. About 70 miles out over the Adriatic Sea we were forced to leave the formation which we didn't want to do and landed because engine one was acting up. We learned later that Milgers crew went down about 5 or 10 minutes after we left the formation, 8 chutes were seen. They made two runs over Regensburg but it was covered over by clouds, so they were unable to drop their bombs. They hit the number 2 target Augsburg. It never fails a milk run because we didn't make it. They then had an escort of 122 P-38's and 63 P-47's. We learned later that the B-24's, 118 of

them bombed Obertraubing assembly plant with good results, but ran into 120 enemy fighters and it



B-24

cost them 14 Liberators. The B-17's dropped 153 tons of bombs and lost 5



P-38

aircraft, there was also one P-47 and one P-38 lost. Our aborted flight took 2 hours and 20 minutes.

On February 23rd, we were briefed for a raid on Styer, Austria an aircraft factory and with Klagenfurt aircraft as alternate, second target was Trieste oil refinery, 3rd was Fiume oil refinery, and 4th was Pola Harbor. Turned back over the Adriatic because of bad weather. Remember what I said about not bringing back the bombs. Well there was this small town on the spur of Italy called Ancona that we would salvo our bombs on. It got bombed more times then any other place. The inhabitants of the

town tried desperately to hid even setting up a smoke screen over the town. But we would drop the bombs into the smoke. We logged 3 hours and 30 minutes.

On February 24th, I was happy to be able to write about this day. The briefing was for none other then the aircraft factory at Styer Austria, actually it was a ball bearing factory. We were flying at the ass end of the formation, our fighter escort had to withdraw for fuel shortage. The 97th Bomb Group led the formation with 37 B-17's and the Second Bomb Group bringing up the rear. The entire 49th squadron and all but the first ship of the 96th were shot down. On the way to the target about 40 minutes at 22,000 feet all we could hear over the intercom was fighters coming in. Fighters hit from every direction and hitting us for over an hour. Two B-17's ahead of us on fire and there were chutes all over the place. From the I.P. to the target there was beaucoup flak. The bombardier had already fused the bombs. The bomb bay doors were open and now the worse part of any mission when the bombardier put the plane on the strait and level path to the target. The crew held their breath until the bombs were released and the ship gave its jump and in the intercom came a loud "Bombs away and lets get the hell out of here." The ship made a steep turn to the left and the pilot rammed the throttles as far as they would go in order to get as much speed as possible. The ball turret gunner watched and over the intercom said "Perfect hit on target we blew the s'n - o-

bitch off the planet." The fighters were still coming in. Four minutes after bomb away we saw a enemy 109 blow up. There were 120 fighters and were not driven off until the P-38's met the heavies at the Alps. A P-38 fighter with one engine out came in close to us and asked through the radio, if he could come in under us for protection which you can see the reason. We immediately replied, "Come on, yes we're with ya." Now a word of explanation as earlier you were told we can't use the open air radio but after the target that rule doesn't go. The P-38 stayed under us until we got near his base and he left us with a few bursts of his machine guns and a wide barrel roll toward the ground. The Second Bomb Group lost 14 aircraft. We heard the the B-24's lost 17. Scheduled to fly tomorrow. We logged 7 hours and 29 minutes.

The pilots were in a tough position and had to sit and control the airplane, stay in formation which took a great deal of concentration and do evasive action without running into each other. Do all this without guns to fight back. When we flew over 10,000 feet we put oxygen masks on. In a rarefied oxygen atmosphere a person does strange things without knowing why. We learned this from our training in the pressure chamber. Here I tell you the danger of flying with oxygen in altitude over 10,000 feet. I happened to stand up and look through my plastic dome and behold the pilot was sitting there with his oxygen mask off smoking a cigarette. He looked a little blue. Thank God we have a co-pilot

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CHAPTER ELEVEN

We know there is a Guardian Angel now

On February 25th, we all thanked God we were here tonight, the raid number 16 and 17 (sorties) was on an aircraft factory at Regensburg, Germany. My ETA for the I.P, was 12:45 and at 11:45 the fighters came in. They shot the hell out of us for an hour and 15 minutes. We must have burned out ever gun on the ship. B-17's were going down everywhere and still the fighters were coming in. Everyone of us felt this was it, we'll never make it today. It seemed like we will never drop our bombs. The flak was galore over the target but for a few minutes the fighters stopped. Pete reloaded my left gun, his chin guns were empty. Bombs away came over the intercom. As we turned off the target a group of B-24's were headed into the target and the fighters left us and attacked the B-24's. As we headed home sighing in relief that we were still in one piece. Looking out to our left and up at about 13:20 hours two B-17's ran into each other and Tom our pilot swerved away to avoid cracking up too. Down they went props and parts all over the sky. The entire front of the lower B-17 was smashed, the navigator and bombardier also the top turret gunner were certainly killed. We saw three men jump out of the lower plane. The top plane looped over our heads so we didn't know what

happened to it. Our tail gunner and the top turret gunner saw a boy hanging out of the bomb bay slapping and banging against the bottom of the airplane. We were hit in many places. Our number 3 and 4 engines were spitting oil all the way home. There was a big hole in the glass nose near Pete's Norden bomb sight The B-24's must have caught plenty too as many landed in our field. A B-17 in number 8 position peeled off before the target with number 2 engine on fire. It kept sliding all the way down-no chutes came out. Of our formation 24 B-17's were lost. This devastating mission took 7 hours and 45 minutes.

February 26th, a raid on Sofia Bulgaria which we knew was one of the most dangerous of all raids more crew members were killed or injured on these raids into Bulgaria. Over the intercom; "Bomb bay doors coming open". As we approached the I.P. we were attacked by a large number of enemy fighters like a swarm of angry bees. One of the B-17's to our left was severely damaged with two engines on fire and the tail badly damaged. The B-17 pilot was in serious trouble so he lowered his landing gear . This was a sign that he was finished and could not fight any more . "We quit we're finished." But the Me 109s and 210s kept on shooting at it all the way down. My crew were horrified. There are rules even in war. This was a terrible disappointment to me about how the Nazis disregarding the rules of war. Now in the air war the lowering of landing gear is equivalent to a soldier on the ground with his hands up. This meant

I give up. The enemy would take him as a prisoner of war.

Non-operational went into town for a much needed shower. The schooling for formation and day time bombing was carried out in California where the weather is mostly clear. They didn't take into account that the weather in Europe was not like California. In order to do day time bombing you need good visibility but that means that the enemy also have good visibility. Therefore we were loosing many planes and crews until we were provided with fighter escort.

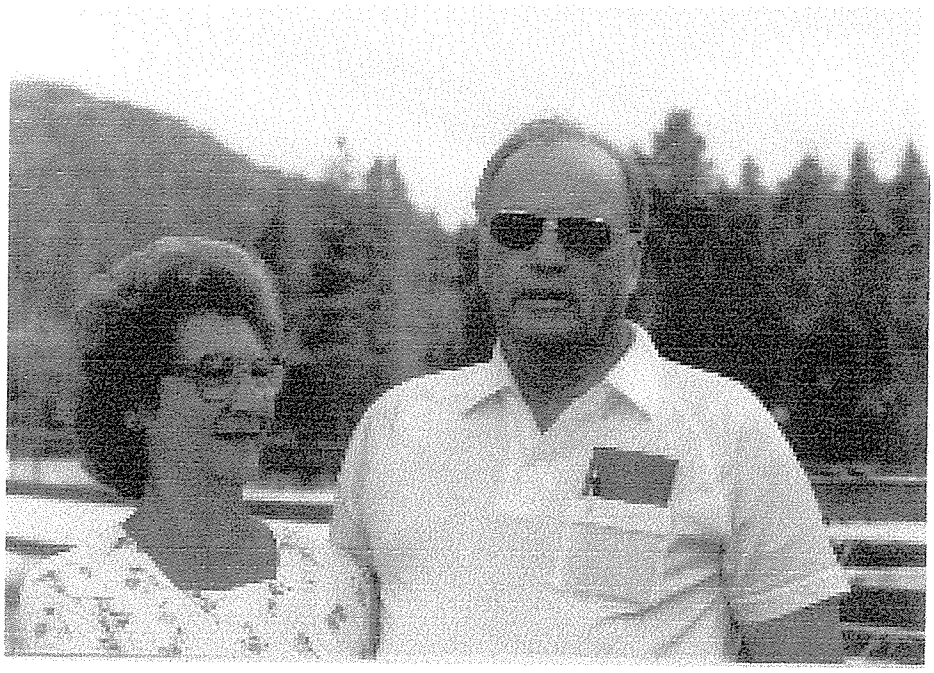
Now to mention a little about the crew's co-pilot a tall handsome Iowa boy who goes by the name of Don Lawrenson. Don was known never to ever say a bad word, he didn't smoke, chew or ever veer off the straight and narrow. His worse habit was eating chocolates. We would trade for his cigarettes which were rationed. Each person was allowed to purchase one carton of cigarettes per week. We all smoked a lot, I for one smoked five packs a day. Don' s greatest



2nd Lt Donald L. Lawrenson

subject in conversation was "My girl, Virginia." In fact he was so lets say pure; that when we were in Puerto Rico on a visit to a Hotel and there were bidet~s in each room. His comment was, "They sure don't know much around here to put the drinking fountain so low to the ground." A bidet~ is a bathroom appliance used by women as a quickie douche, it has a water spout that shoots water up and can be adjusted as to the force. He lived through the war I'm sure because of his love for his wife and to be with her.

Don Was born on a farm in Moorhead, Iowa. He was their first child and his dad was a WW1 veteran. He moved to Sioux City, Iowa in 1927. In time Don Finished high school and went to work at Swift and Co. In May of 1942 he married Virginia Nagel. This is without a doubt a great love story. Marrying his high school sweetheart. They celebrated their 53rd wedding anniversary in May,1995. Don was drafted in June 1942 and succeeded into pilots



training. He was assigned to a field at Pyote, Texas where he was introduced to the B-17. This is where he met Lt. Bill Doyle. Then to Alexandria. He was joined with his crew. He kept his cool in combat and finished his tour with fine colors. Many times he thought that if he comes out of this alive and back on the ground he'd never go up again. After being discharged, Don got involved with local politics and held many positions in the city of Sioux City. He was elected as Mayor in 1978. He served 12 years as County Supervisor, at present he's still involved on two boards.

On February 27th, Colonel Rice called a meeting and complimented the 2nd Bomb Group on the splendid work done on the last two targets. He said "The work was done magnificently even though the enemy put all its pressure on us four of the highest priority targets we wiped out. 75% of Germany's air craft manufacturing was destroyed, but we have a lot to do and I know no matter what the job calls for , we'll do it." As long as we don't have to go back to Regensburg or that vicinity again, it will be to soon - lets hope not. The Group received a Presidential Citation for this raid. Which was our first award, latter we got two more .

On March 1st we were briefed for a raid over the Anzio Beach Head but bad weather turned us back. At noon we rushed out to our planes but the weather continued and we didn't take off. The turn back flight was one hour and 15 minutes.

March 2nd we flew number 18, a raid on Anzio Beach Head. The flak

was thick and heavy as we flew over 400 feet in order to give our boys down on the beach a shot in the arm. We gave the Infantry a big morale boost. They shot everything at us including the small arms, flak and bullets were coming through the nose. One of the B-17's began to lose altitude and as it made a great circle, four of the crew bailed out. They appeared to land behind enemy lines. Then as the plane continued its wide circle more men bailed out and some of them hit American lines. The Fortress finally crashed in German territory and threw up a great black cloud of smoke as it hit the ground. A B-26 Marauder was seen limping towards the beachhead landing strip, loosing altitude ever minute and foot it traveled. An American officer who saw it land said the pilot brought the ship in alone after telling the the crew to bail out. One man parachuted into the sea from the plane. A Piper Cub went out and circled him then went back to the landing strip and got a rubber boat. He took off and dropped the rubber boat to the man in the water but a rescue boat had already arrived to pick him up. A top enlisted man coming from the front lines said the sight of the Allied Bombers was "the greatest shot in the arm" the boys at the front could have had. The Nazis lost 25 planes in beachhead battle. All the planes shot down were Fucke-Wulfs and Messerschmitts. The Allied pilots protecting the beachhead reported most of their victories were gained as they chased the enemy northward. The Germans showed no inclination to fight. The raid took 3 hours and 55

minutes. The longest 3 hours and 55 minutes ever spent, felt like being on the wrong end of a shooting range. The crew checked in all were O.K.

On March the 3rd, mission number 19, a raid on Lottorio Marshellan Yards near Rome, we didn't get any flak nor any fighters. Pete did a beautiful job on hitting the target. We were the lead ship, that usually means that the other ships drop their bombs when the lead does. We were in the air 5 hours and 15 minutes.

Lieutenant, Loran (Pete) Thieman a hell of a bombardier and a person who loved life, loved his crew and all mankind especially the women. He preferred to be called Pete and very seldom would he talk about himself. He was born and raised in Missouri, he loved sports and in college his major was physical education. If the military had not taken him maybe he would have become a great baseball player. He graduated at the top of his class as a bombardier. After the war he married and lived in Texas where he recently passed away.

On the 4th of March we were briefed to go into Germany a place where the German Headquarters of the German General Staff was located. The place was Breslow a town deep in and close to the Polish border. What do they think that a few B-17's can do in Germany? S-2 reported no flak over target --Ha! Whose pulling our leg. As we were flying north a huge weather front, a solid wall of clouds engulfed us, unable to see even our own wing tips and in a formation which could not in anyway be

altered for fear of running into one another. We held our breaths then suddenly a formation of B -24's came right through our formation only a few feet apart going the other way. Sgt. Hooper, our top turret gunner said - "I could have reached up and touched the B -24's". How we got through, God only knows but He was sure with us that day. Many unbelievable stories came out of World War II and we felt that they all were from our experience. Amen.

The weather continued to be bad giving us another day on the planet. All this time and during every mission Axis Sally, would be on the radio with messages telling us that wouldn't we be better off being home with our girls instead of here. She always knew where we were going. How she got the information was a mystery. She especially had it in for the Second Bomb Group and Colonel. Rice She would come on like this, "Hi, my darlings in the Second Bomb Group and Colonel Rice, how was your breakfast which could be your last one. Your sweethearts back in the good old U.S.A., are out having a ball with some other guys, while you are here breaking your ass. Signing off till tomorrow love you all." We look forward every day to listen to her. The music was to our liking.

The next two days March the 5th and 6th were non-operational due to bad weather. Pete and I decided to go out shooting, so we got two Army 30 caliber rifles and drove out to a place far enough away from people. We could not fined any thing except some lizards. Then we realized that

there were no wild animals or birds around. The Italians didn't eat lizards



Pete & I Target Shooting

Pete and I were close friends being together during all the missions in the front of the B-17 through the war. It was a friendship equal to none, we couldn't be closer. It was a closeness that was felt without words. Pete was the silent type but he did tell me of all the fucking that went on in Missouri. Pete's grandfather was a lawman in Saint Joe, Missouri and presumably had the pistol that killed Jesse James.

On the 7th of March we were briefed for Toulon Harbor, France. After flying all the way to the I.P., the target was covered by heavy clouds and two fighters jumped us. My recollection about this mission was almost a complete blank. As we started our return, one of our crew members observed another B-17 off our right wing being attacked by two fighters. The bomber was apparently disabled, I suppose it had an engine out. Our pilot, Lt. Fredrickson, decided to give them cover at which time the fighters turned their attack against us. As they came in, Lt. Fredrickson turned our B-17 head on at them. This must have been the surprise of their lives. I'm sure our fifty calibers weren't silent. The

attack was broken off and we continued the escort of the disabled B-17 to safety. We learned later that there was also a wounded crew member aboard. It was a great act of courage and support showed by one flying crew to another. Here we have a mission that was not counted as a sortie, can you beat that. I wonder if we were unfortunate enough to be shot down, what then would the mission be counted as? Now we still have our bombs left and no second target to drop them on, they were dropped into the sea.

On March 11th we flew mission number 20 a raid over Padua Marshellan Yards. Made two runs over target which gave the Jerries plenty of time to get up to us. Boy when they came, 20 mm shells and rockets bursting all around us we got plenty of holes. We never touched the target and there was no flak. Ship number 429 was missing. Over the intercom we could hear the crew shouting, "their coming in from every direction and coming right through our formation." We logged 5 hours and 5 minutes credited to combat time. While B-17's were attacking the Marshellan yards the P-47 escort mixed it up with a swarm of enemy fighters, as the Germans again began to contest the skies in northern Italy. The Thunderbolts downed 9 Me 109's and one Me 202 while losing 3 of their own number.

On March 12th, briefed for a raid on Udine air drome the area where the Luftwaffe boys hang out. But bad weather canceled the mission.

On March 15th, Briefed on a raid on the town of Cassino in support of ground forces. We blew out a tire on taxing. That was the end of our mission to Cassino which was to be one of two missions over Cassino that day. But as it turned out the second run over Cassino was canceled due to bad weather. We learned later that the Germans now had control of the whole town. Seems our bombing only helped the enemy. Even though the town was reduced to rubble, the Germans were not dislodged. The stalemate on the ground continued, 263 Fortresses and Liberators dropped 800 tons of bombs on the town. The bombing included an additional 300 tons by 12th Mediums. Sgt. Adams - "those fuckin' Germans sure have a great General to lead them." "Ya this guy Kesselring sure knows his business" uttered Sgt. Gardner. "The guy disregarded Hitler's orders and proved to be 100% right" the Bombardier stated. We much later wondered what became of good old Field Marshall Kesselring. He was a Staff Member of the Prussian Military Staff Who believed the peace between wars was a time to plan the next war.

On March 16th, we were briefed for Budapest, Hungry but this raid was canceled due to bad weather over Hungry. Then at 1:15 in the afternoon we took off on a raid to Giorgio, Italy in support of the 6th Army. A large layer of clouds prevented us from bombing. Returned home with all the crew angry we couldn't complete the mission. We clocked 3 hours and 45 minutes, credited to combat time.

March 17th, we were briefed for raid on an aircraft factory at Klagenfort, Austria on course and 70 miles from home we turned back because the guns in the ball turret, left tail gun and radio gun were out. The entire formation finally returned. The target was covered with heavy clouds. Our new Officers Club was open. It was built by local Italians and it is still standing today. We invited all the top Staff to a dinner party

On March 18th, we were briefed and flew Number 21 a raid on Villaroba, Air Drome. Target time was 1015 Fighters hit us at 0940 and kept attacking us until the I.P. Our tail gunner Sgt. Gardner did a beautiful job calling out the fighters as they came in. "Here come 4 fighters at 2 o'clock and from 4 o'clock and 2 from 8 o'clock and I could see their 20 mm guns throwing fire.". All attacks were from behind and we were without escort. "I see a B-17 pull up and then spiral down in flame watching for any parachutes to come out, there is one chute coming out the bomb bay there is second chute coming out the bomb bay." Pete saw another B-17 spin out of sight and counted 2 chutes out the nose. Later we saw two of the crew in town who jumped out of plane # 2. They had casts on their legs and were headed for the good U.S.A. Lieutenant Doyle was in one of those ships with Lieutenant Griffin.

Lieutenant Griffin was a huge man in fact he was to big for his parachute harness, and he had the snaps that didn't reach tied with shoe laces. If he were to jump out of his ship the harness would tear off his

body. Why he never thought of this. We lost 3 B-17s. Total time was 6 hours and 35 minutes.

March 19th, we were briefed for a raid on Klagenfurt Austria which was our second target. Our primary target was Styer but the weather was bad. The fighters hit us at 1250 near Zegrab. We were the last plane and the last group. The P-38's did a beautiful job of keeping the enemy in check. The bastards kept lining up and shooting rockets at us staying at a range too far for our guns to reach. We lost 3 planes. Yates Rollins our radio operator was on one of the three planes we lost. Time was 6 hours and 5 minutes. That night Pete and I drank Conyac.

On March 20th, we got up, still drunk and sick. We didn't go to briefing and how we got dressed no one knows. We were to go on a raid to Sofia. We managed to climb into the nose with the help of the crew and once inside we laid on the floor of the nose. The gods were good that day for the mission was canceled. We would never have lived through this day. The rest of the day spent in bed not eating, sick as the devil.

On the 22nd of March, we were briefed on a raid to Verona Marshellan Yards in northern Italy. We were told that the yards were heavily protected by flak guns and baby they didn't under estimate the amount. The P-38 escort kept the fighters away.

"Thank god for the P-38's came the voices over the intercom." It seemed to take forever from the I.P. to the target. The bombardier voice came over

the intercom, "bomb bay doors open." And then the long wait for "bombs away, lets get the hell out of here." As the plane turned and dived away for home. As with every mission after the target was hit and we headed for home, each member of the crew would check in on the intercom to the navigator to be sure everything was A.O.K.

Tail gunner- "I'm O.K."

Ball turret gunner - "Still here."

Right waist gunner - "Believe it I'm still in one piece."

Top turret gunner - "Sure was plenty of flak but no fighters to shoot at."

"Are you complaining." came someone on the intercom.

"Left waist gunner - Every things O.K.with me - thank the lord."

"Happy to know every one is O.K." remarks the pilot.

"Great flying by the pilot and perfect bombing by our dear Lieutenant Pete Theiman," reported the navigator.

Boys from all over the country and every kind of back ground were forged into a bomber team. Every member of the team has a function to perform which must come out of him. No one position in the B-17 can claim to be more important than another. It took 6 hours and 25 minutes for this mission.

On March 23rd. we were awaken at 2 A.M. for a briefing at 03:15 on a raid to Styer. It was to god dam dark to take off and we waited until daybreak to take off. The weather turned bad and mission was canceled.

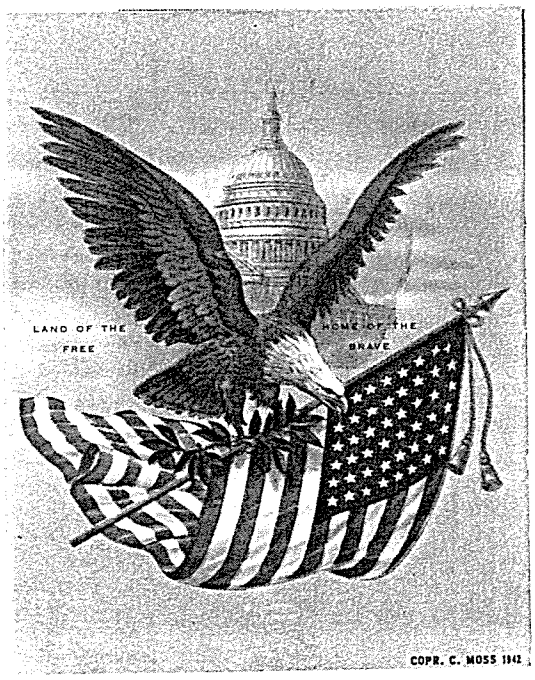
Even though we flew 6 hours no credit was given because the weather was bad. One can see why missions were not credited therefore most of us flew a lot more missions not counted as sorties. Who the hell ever thought of this kind of credit. The 8th Air Force only had to fly 25 missions. After all they got all the publicity in all the newspapers. It amazed me of how little there was in the papers about the 15th Air Force. And still we were the ones that turned the outlook of the war around. On every flight we test fired our guns. We were given an escape kit which was a plastic case, water proof the size of one half the size of a cigar box which contained a map of the area we were to fly over, plus British gold, currency of the country and 10mg of amphetamine tablets. In our ship was a first aid kit that had 20 or more ampules of one quarter grain of morphine. No one that I know of ever took these for self use.

On March 24th we were briefed again for Styer but turned back after 4 hours and 15 minutes. Now just imagine the feelings of the crew being in enemy territory for hours. At any time to be shot at and more important the anxiety and fear of enemy attack. And all you get is combat time not any credit.

On march 25th, we were briefed for Turin Marshellan Yards but the mission was canceled. Now at a briefing on a raid all the Officers were present and they were given detailed information on first of all weather and how long a flight they felt it would take, the amount of flak to expect

and how many fighters there would be. Where and when we would meet with our fighter escort if any. Thank you and good luck.

Sgt. Adams would say as he did several times, " Lieutenant Prorok why don't you chart a course to Switzerland and we could spend the rest of the #@*& war having fun". My answer, " when the raid is somewhere in Germany and we have good reason to leave the formation, like a disabled plane we'll do just that."





A PRAYER AND 3 MOTORS

COMING IN with a burning engine from a raid on Toulon, this B-17 Flying Fortress made a successful landing. At the controls was Maj. Bradford A. Evans, Palo Alto, Calif. Major Evans said his No. 1 engine "blew up and caught fire" but he managed to bring the Fort back to complete his 46th mission.

(15th Air Force Photo)

See chapter 10

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CHAPTER TWELVE

Raids on Styre, Regensburg and Ploesti Never Forgotten

March 26th, briefed again for Styer and after flying some 3 or 4 hours, we were forced to turn back because of bad weather. We dropped bombs over secondary targets with poor results. We were simply credited with combat time after being over enemy territory. The crew expressed their disheartening feeling about the situation. Total time 5 hours and 20 minutes.

We were happy to admit a new Major into our squadron whose name leaves my memory. After a mission the Officers rode back in a jeep and the new Major was the driver, how he stayed on the road baffled us. He drove the jeep side saddle facing toward his left and never looking ahead. Another peculiar act was the way he wiped his ass after a B.M. He would put the roll of toilet paper on the ground and like a adding machine (for a better term) would advance the paper in rapid motion up his ass hole. After about a yard of paper he was finished. A great achievement to say the least.

While we're on the subject the story of one crew member, as Sergeant Adams tells it, he had a severe case of the G.I. shits one night and as he ran to the latrine as fast as he could go he suddenly ran into a

clothes line and it caught him right across the neck, flipping him over on his back. " Oh hell I couldn't have made it anyway."

On March 28th, we flew number 28 a raid on the Marshellan yards in Verona and this time we really smashed the goddamn place. Beaucoup flak but nowhere near us. An enemy air craft fired rockets at us rapidly and barreled ass away from us. The P -47's saved the day for us. We all looked for 22 more like this. Total time of mission was 5 hours and 30 minutes.

On March 29th, we were briefed on a raid Turin Marshellan yards in northern Italy. We were in number 3 position in the first squadron in the first group. The flak was heavy but not at us. Some enemy aircraft made a few passes at us. Two of them came right through our formation, we could see the fire coming out of the wings as it's guns reported. One B-17 went down in flames and we could hear the tail gunner call out the chutes, "There is one chute, there is two, now 2 more as the plane spiraled down." We approached the I.P. and the bombardier took over- " bomb bay doors coming open, steady ,steady - bombs away ,lets get the hell out of here." The crew checked in one by one. All present and accounted for. This one took 7 hours and 29 minutes. For the two days of 28th and the 29th, 974 heavies and 344 fighters of the Fifteenth loaded with 2,218 tons of bombs were airborne, mainly against enemy communications. On the 28th, 1,061 tons were dropped, this was a first 1,000 ton day. At

Turin on the 29th, 105 B-17's dropped 125 tons at noon.

On the 30th of March we were briefed on a raid on Sofia, Bulgaria, which is the Capital of the country. Our leader of number 4 squadron was horse shit (as I wrote it in my diary that night). He was never in formation, we dropped our bombs and found ourselves alone, after we were in formation of six ships. The flak was so heavy you could walk on it. Two Me 109's came at us right through our (Combat Box) formation. And as you know it, my right gun jammed. Those two fighters were really after us and they were determined to shoot us down. Our tail gunner , Sergeant Don Gardner's voice came over the intercom, "I've been shot in the arm." I went back into the belly to give him first aid. He was hit with a 20 mm in the right arm. To keep Don from going into shock he was covered with someone's jacket and I gave him the shot of morphine. At our altitude the temperature was about 40 below zero and shock comes quickly at that temperature. He was bleeding quit heavily but due to the cold, the blood froze. For the first time I was scared stiff. I was in the belly of the B-17 with my parachute in the nose and the two sons a bitches Me 109s kept coming in time and time again. I could feel and hear the fighters machine guns firing. The felling of eminent death was real. The vibration of our side gunners could be felt. This was my most shall I say harrowing experience, to say the least. If ever I doubted my having a guardian angel, I take back all my doubts. I think this was as close to

meeting my maker as can be. But instead He was with me. The mission took 5 hours and 45 minutes but it must have taken forever.

The 31st of March it was non operational, so it was a day for a shower in the town of Foggia. We would meet with boys of the medium bombs, the B-25 and then A-20's. They had stories to tell us. One incredible story was almost too horrible to relate. The B-25's are a medium bomber that fly fast and at a low level. The B-25's would cross over the France coast and each day they would fly over a bridge where a little boy would wave to them as they flew over. One day their mission was to bomb that bridge with the little boy. The mission was carried out as ordered and the bridge was destroyed. War is really hell. Can you even think of all the people we killed but because we didn't see this, it was O.K. When we dropped those incendiary bombs on Sofia on a Sunday morning when the people were going to church, we'll never know how many lives we destroyed and how many children. We flew a total of 5 hours and 35 minutes.

Sergeant Donald George Gardner was born on July 28,1923 on a farm in Nebraska. His dream was always to be a farmer .He volunteered for the Air Force. After his physical and tests he was sent to gunnery school at Tymndell field Florida. After training he was sent to Kearney Nebraska where he met with his combat crew. After finishing his missions he came back with some of his crew. Since then Don has fulfilled his dream of

being a farmer. He is now one of the most prosperous farmers in Nebraska. He has a beautiful family and a producing farm.

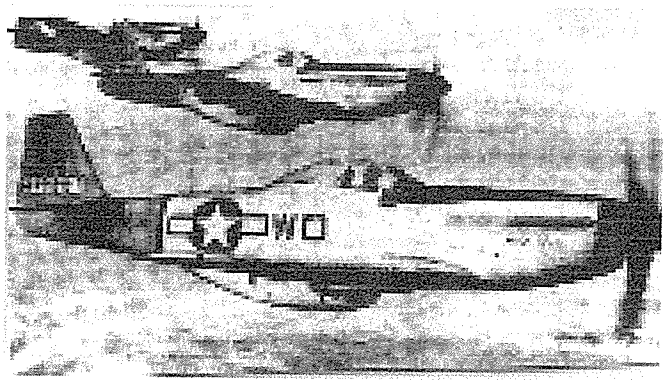
April 1,1944, after standing by our B-17 the mission was canceled. When we stood by we were in full heavy wool lined leather clothes and we sweltered in them.

On April 2nd, we were briefed for Styer a ball bearing factory. Good old P-38 escort kept the enemy fighters away from us. But four Me, 109's came at us from 11 o'clock as we flew over the Alps firing their 20mm canons at us. The air was full of dog fights. At the I.P. with bomb bay doors coming open and Pete at the Northern Bomb sight, we could feel the plane jump as the bombs were dropped. Bombs away and lets get the hell out of here. There was one Ju- 88 who kept firing rockets at us. There was every bit of 50 enemy planes waiting for us in the mountains. The enemy figured that our escort would have to leave us for lack of fuel. But the escort didn't leave, and the dog fights continued. The 97th lost a B-17, a first time navigator was killed and a co-pilot and bombardier were injured in our group. All our crew checked in O.K., looking forward to landing and getting some of the hot coffee and donuts from the Red Cross gal. A total of 7 hours and 25 minutes was put down for this ride into hell.

On April 3rd, we were briefed on a raid on an Aircraft factory in Toled, Budapest Hungry. Our escort the P-38's gave us beautiful cover,

but two Me 109's managed to come at us head on through our formation. We were breaking in a new bombardier which was his first flight. He failed to see the enemy planes attack wherefore he didn't use his chin machine guns. The fighters came in so close that I could see the pilots faces. The target really got hell. All crew members checked in o. k. time of mission 8 hours and 55 minutes.

On the 4th of April, our 31st mission we were briefed for the Marshellan yards in Bucharest, Rumania. We were told the the target was protected by 250 enemy airplanes and 90 flak guns. We were expecting the worse and when I briefed the crew before take off they all said, "Oh shit have they no mercy for us poor guys." Well it turned out to be milk run. There was flak beaucoup but we are veterans now and flak was taken with a pinch of salt. It bothered us only slightly. No fighters were encountered. We Couldn't believe this. The mission took 8 hours without much happening. We learned that the new P-51B and C Mustangs were to be our escort and this was fabulous as this plane was faster and was long range, what we needed for our long missions. Three hundred and fifty heavies with an escort of 119 P-38's were sent to Bucharest. For the day 220 Liberators and 93 Fortress



P-51

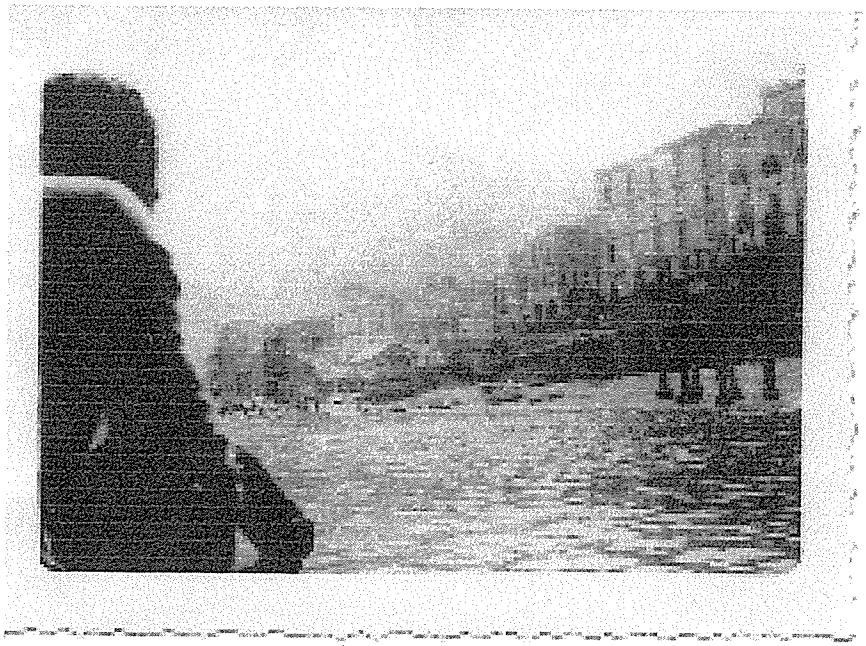
dropped 863 tons of bombs, with excellent results. We later heard that the B-24's were swarmed by enemy fighters and were attacked for 45 minutes. Three of the B-24's were shot down. A second wave of 24's came in another 40 or 50 enemy fighters attacked them, for 30 more minutes. Four more bombers were lost. We could see why we didn't see any fighters, they were all spent on the 24.

On April 5th for our 32nd mission we were briefed for a raid on Ploesti Marshellan yards and oil refineries in Rumania. A Wing Observer, Major Hilliard, flew with us in the nose of the B-17 (Hot Stuff). He was prepared to take pictures with a huge camera the likes of which I've never seen. The lens was 8 inches across and it had a film advance lever that looked like one they have on one arm bandits in Nevada. He took exposures continuously, of the flak, of the fighters of the area before and after the bombs were dropped. There were 142 flak guns. We had flak from the I.P., to the target and after bombs away we had flak for miles after. Flak guns were on railroad cars which come along with us. The first raid by the B-24's on the oil fields of Ploesti were at very low level some at 10 feet the details are more then we have time for, but it is a fabulous story and one to never be forgotten. The Ploesti oil fields were protected by 142 flak guns. Mission took 8 hours and 5 minutes of sheer hell.

April 6th and 7th were non operational.

On April 9th, Pete and I went to the Capri, for a needed rest before

going back to complete our missions. The most memorable experience on the island was when a beautiful lady in a bikini came walking down to the beach. This was 1944 and a first for my eyes. We met a Captain on the way to the Capri, he was from the demolition squadron that worked on bombs that didn't go off. He was a bag of nerves. He shook as if he had Parkinsons disease. He told us, "I don't mind the big ones but the little one are the bitch."



Isle of Capri

On April 21st, we were briefed for a raid on Ploesti but turned back because of weather. We got 3 hours and 30 minutes of combat time.

On April 23rd, we were briefed for a raid on Wiener Neustadt about 25 minutes to the target. We had to turn back because of clouds. Other heavies made it to the target dropping 1292 tons of bombs with good to excellent results. Two B-17's and eleven B-24's were lost, including three escort fighters. Combat time credit 5 hours and 5 minutes no sortie credit.

On April 24th, we were briefed for Ploesti again and were in heavy

flak of 12 minutes. Several fighters made passes at us but the P-51's kept most of them away. The Mustangs of the 31st Fighter Group had started to operate some 10 days before. We dropped our bombs and made good hits on the target. We tore ass out of there for home as the crew checked in all O.K., flying through Yugoslavia to our left was the great Blue Danube river which wasn't blue but dark brown. There was a barge with some covered material on the river and our ball turret gunner shot at it for practice. We wondered what the guy in the boat was thinking. But whatever it was, he was in enemy territory and might have been carrying something for the enemy. We logged 7 hours and 35 minutes, which seemed like an eternity.

On April 25th, we were briefed for a raid on Marshellan yards at Vicenza Italy. We had to turn back as we ran into a front. We received 4 hours and fifteen minutes of combat time. Our Engineer Hooper was promoted to Tc/Sgt.

T/S Joe Hooper was born on May 26, 1923 on a farm on the outskirts of Temple Oklahoma. His father was one of the first to settle in the area. Joe was on the wrestling team at school. He enlisted in the Air Corps and was sent to aircraft mechanics school. Then he was sent to gunnery school in Florida. He was assigned to our crew at Pyote, Texas. We were ecstatic for his being a member of the crew. After training in the B-17's he went with the rest of the crew to fight the Germans. After the war he

reenlisted in the Air Force. He is married has two beautiful daughters and five grandchildren. Now completely retired, he lives with his lovely wife, Joannine, in Hot Spring, Ark.

On April 26th, briefing for Wiener Neustadt aircraft factory but the weather kept us on the ground.

On April 27th, we were briefed for Piombino Harbor, Italy. This turned out to be a milk run. No flak and no fighters. Even thought a mission is a milk run this doesn't mean it is without worry and fear. The target was completely demolished.



Hooper & Adams hamming it up.

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CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Fighter escort saved our lives

On April 28th, we were on our way to Toulon Harbor, France and we could see from a far the heavy flak which was a mile high and a mile wide. But as we came through the flak it was inaccurate and we flew without any damage. Bomb bay doors were open and the bombardier "screamed out bombs away and let's get the hell out of here." We could feel the ship make a sudden lift. Check in by crew all ok. The escort kept the fighters away. Total time was 7 hours and 55 minutes.

On April 30th, we were briefed on a raid over Reygio Emilia air drome in northern Italy. We didn't get any flak or see any fighters our escort proved to be excellent protection. Pete must have destroyed 10 of 15 aircraft on the ground. Axis Sally failed some how to alert the enemy of our coming at all other times she seemed to know where we were going. We logged 5 hours and 35 minutes.

On May 1st, we were briefed for a raid on Monfalione Harbor Italy. We stood by our planes and got the call that the raid was canceled due to weather. Spent the day in town after a shower.

On May 2nd briefed for a raid on Bolzano in northern Italy ran into a front. When a formation a bombers fly into a front the visibility becomes

zero even the wings of the plane can't be seen. The pilots must keep it steady and straight for fear of running into the other ships. Everyone is under severe stress. As the front opened up in front of us, we climbed through a hole. The rest of the formation turned and headed for home. But not the Second Bomb group kept on going. We ran into another front and this time we turned around. Our new C.O. had his head up his ass as we could of bombed something but no we returned home after dropping our bombs into the Adriatic Sea After all the hair raising flight we got 6 hours of combat time. Big deal.

On May 3rd, briefed for good old Ploesti oil pumping station In Rumania. Weather bad mission canceled. Two of the boys returned from Yugoslavia after having bailed out of the B-17 that they lost.

On May 4th, again to Ploesti but got as far the Adriatic where everyone salvoed their bombs. Many of the boys were awarded the Purple Heart in a ceremony today. We got combat time of 3 hours and 5 minutes.

On May - We were briefed for Ploesti with all the gruesome details. I didn't feel good giving the crew the name of the target. "Well boys guess what - it's the fucking oil refinery again." "The odds are certainly against us each time we go there" replied Don the tail gunner. "Shit how many time does this make it" returned the ball turret gunner. "well maybe this will be the last one, I hope" says Pete the bombardier. The flak seemed even heavier and was with us for a longer time. We saw a B-

17 go down in smoke behind us. The tail gunner calling off the number of parachutes he saw; " There goes one, and two, two more out the nose" as the ship disappeared. The smoke from the refinery rose to 29,000 feet we could still see it from as far as the Danube River 170 miles away. We logged 8 hours an d 15 minutes. This was our 41st mission.
485 heavies dropped 1257 tons of bombs on the Marshaling yards and pumping station, the damage was heavy,19 bombers were lost,18 enemy fighters were claimed destroyed.

On May 7th, we were briefed on a raid on Bucharest Marshellan yards in Rumania. Very little flak about 10 enemy aircraft attacked us our escort P-51's shot the shit out of them. The P-51 looks so much like the Me-109 from a distant that it became difficult to tell them apart. The 51's have a square vertical tail where as the 109 has a round one. To make it easier to tell them apart the P-51s painted their tails yellow. What do you know the enemy, they painted their tails yellow also. The gunners in the B-17's after so many nerve racking missions began at times to mistake who the planes were and many times shot at our P-51's. After that our escort stayed far away from the bombers. Mission took 7 hours and 55 minutes.

On May 8th a raid on Ploesti was canceled .

On May 9th, we flew two raids both were on the headquarters of Field Marshall Kesselring. We were told by G-2 that the General's

quarters were on a mountain near Cassino. We dropped 500 pound bombs on the east side of the mountain were the roads entered a cave. The entire side of the mountain was completely demolished, and the roads were buried under tons of rock and debris. When we got over that mountain the second time all the damage from the morning raid was completely removed and cleared away. Imagine all that rock, ground and debris from the first bombing was already cleaned up. How in hell did the Germans do this in so short a time. The first raid destroyed half of the mountain and the second raid finished the other half. Later we learned the the General was not there. He was in Berlin with Hitler. Total time both missions 3 hours 50 minutes.

May 10th, a nonoperational day. The letters from home were always most welcome, and as were the packages. Here in Italy we were able to purchase cherries and walnuts from the natives. We had walnuts up to our ears. A large package arrived for me. Hurriedly I opened it and what do you know it was full of walnuts.



Mail day what a joy

On May 11th, we were briefed on a raid in the German General staff head quarters in deep Germany but the target was covered with clouds. Our secondary target was Civitavecchia Marshellan yards. The temperature was minus 35 degrees at the level we were flying at. The bombardier suddenly got some stomach cramps and diarrhea bad, he emptied his ammo box and put the 50 caliber shells on the floor and quickly took his heavy flying clothes off to relieve himself into the empty ammo box. I thought he was going to crap his guts out. The freezing weather took care of the matter and smell. He put on his clothes quickly or he would have frozen. With no toilet paper his ass hole burned until we got home. We logged 4 hours and 45 minutes.

On May 12th, we awoke very early, had as usual a pancake breakfast and coffee, then off to the briefing tent. This time we carried our flight clothes to the plane and dressed before boarding. The roar of the starting engines gave us a tight kind of feeling, we sat in silence. Then one of the gunners over the intercom asked, "Where to this time?" I replied with a laugh, "The reason I kept from telling you was I wanted to be sure we were all up in the plane. So that no one would find some reason not to go. I'm kidding, we're going to Wiener Neustadt." Then like a choir," Oh shit not again." By this time the ship rolled out to line up for take off. The motors revved up, becoming louder and louder, the ship began to vibrate, and then the speed picking up until the ship began to rise. Once in the air

we turned to our right and climbed up to about 2,000 feet where we joined the formation. Every ship had its place in the formation. The navigator gave the heading in degrees. Once over the ocean the pilot said, "O.K. to test fire your guns now." This everyone enjoyed.

We heard Axis Sally that morning telling us that we will get the heli beat out of us today. She knew where we were going. She said, "The flak guns will be there and the fighters will shoot you down. Wouldn't you sooner be home." In the background the music was playing, "Lily Marlene." The flak over the target was the most accurate we've ever been in, and there was plenty of it. Thank God no enemy fighters attacked us. There was no reason why we weren't attacked.

On May 13th, a raid on Bolzano railroad Bridge in northern Italy. The bridge was naturally set down in a valley which was probably at sea level so in order to get on the I.P., we were flying below the mountains and after the target and bombs away. We were getting shot at from the sides of the mountains. Imagine flying thought the valley with soldiers shooting at us from the side. Like flying at the second story windows. A few aircraft made passes at us and the flak was mild. Total time 6 hours and 30 minutes. At this time we kept our fingers crossed only two more missions to go.

On May 14th, we flew number 49 a raid on the Marshelian yards in Ferrara Italy, very little flak and inaccurate at that. 5 hours and 45

minutes.

My last mission on the 17th of May was a milk run over Bihac, Yugoslavia, which was a rest camp for the German pilots. Total time 4 hours and 45 minutes. Total combat hours that I logged was 634 hours and 10 minutes.



Ed Prorok cleaning up to go home

B-17



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CHAPTER FOURTEEN

To breath normally again

The boys that finished went home by boat. What a horrible way to go after fighting a war. Being on a troupe transport boat with thousands of passengers. Everything is overcrowded, waiting in line for meals, which were served only twice a day. Sleeping in tight rooms, and showering once every few days in salt water. Not me, I had a better idea, which I had in mind from my early missions, when flying with the boys from headquarters. I knew that I could get a B-17 to go back home in. I managed to get a war weary B-17 to fly back to the good old USA.

The crew members had been awarded one hundred Air Medals, five Distinguish Flying Crosses, plus three Presidential Citations, and two Purple Hearts.

Remember the G-2 staff that flew with me, well as they were at headquarters I knew that one of them could get me a war weary B -17 to fly back. Sure enough on June 1st, I received notification that I would get my B-17. I picked my crew as my own crew either had some missions to complete or they were going by boat. Our ship was 409, it had been in over 300 missions, the entire sides were covered with painted bombs, each one signifying a mission. We loaded it and took off. We flew back the same

route the way we came. Since the first world war the Germans were stock piling American dollars in preparation of this war, they must of had billions. Now these were "BLUE SEAL" dollars that the Germans had. Something had to be done to make these worthless. So, very clever, the U.S. Government printed new Dollars with a GOLD seal, this made the enemy's money worthless. So some guys made thousands of dollars exchanging GOLD seal for Blue seal. The enemy was willing to pay 10 or 20 times the price. I didn't keep a log nor did I chart the course. I just gave the pilot a heading and sat back. The pilot and I played Gin as we headed for home. We landed in Homestead, Florida after our electrical system failed.

Some strange things were happening in some of our flights. For one we had a waist gunner get killed in our group and it was learned that he died of a 50 caliber wound. We were the only ones with 50 caliber ammo. How could this happen ? We began to notice that after flying over enemy territory a B-17 from nowhere joined our formation and after a short time would leave us. Later we learned that the Germans had captured two of our B-17's. They would join our formations and shoot at us without any problem. This was now known and our escort was alerted to this and we didn't see that captured airplane again. The heavy bombers were shooting ducks before our escort was available.

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CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Miracles happen all the time

Arrival to the states we were given a furlough and then to Miami Beach, Florida for some R and R. This was a dream of a vacation. I developed a relationship with a wonderful couple, a Captain Cramer and his wife, they would do anything for us. As gasoline was rationed and we had only A basic coupons which was very little. Dr. Cramer gave us some of his B coupons which allowed unlimited gas. While we were here the air force reclassified us. I didn't care to fly any more so I took an examination for a desk job and was classified for Statistical Control duty and was sent to Boston to Harvard University. Being a return Combat Officer the world was at my feet but this I didn't realize until much later. Our C.O. was a Prince of a man. I started to look for a car in Boston. The search was not only disappointment but a reality. There were no cars built after 1942. I found



Miami, Distribution Station #2

out that there were two new 1942 Nash's at the dealer, I talked to the manager about getting one of them. He laughed in my face; "Do you have any idea what it would take to get a new car in this day and age." "How would I know," was my reply. "Well" he went on, "besides some money under the table and a number one priority, which you have to be a ViP or someone big like a Doctor." And the used cars were priced out of line. So I was prepared to get me a new car. I went to the C.O. and told him what I wanted. "Go to my Secretary and dictate a letter which I will sign." he said. This was unbelievable. This is what I did and he signed it. "How could I thank you,Sir." " No need " was his reply.

Taking the letter to the Rationing Board I was give a number one priority. The manager of the car company almost fell over, he had seen the impossible. He delivered my new car after the protective cover was washed away on a new Nash black deluxe white wall tires and only $1,100

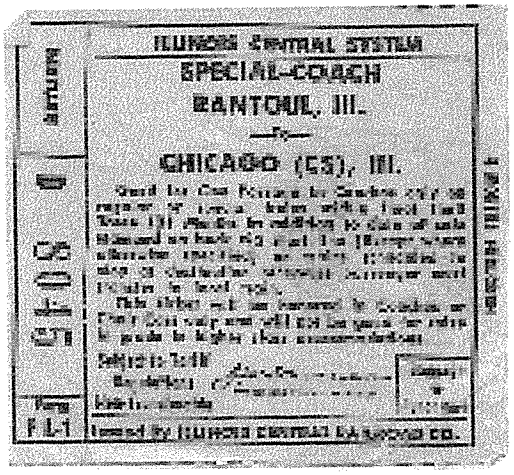
After graduation I received orders to report in Fort Worth, Texas. I drove my new car and arrived in Fort Worth on the 26th of November 1944. These were the VIP's of the Air Force with no over seas or combat experience. They didn't want me around, for I was a threat to them. So what do you know I received orders to report to Bryan Texas. A place believe me was a dust prairie that had more buzzards than people. It was a great place for their college because the students had nothing to do but study. When the General heard that the combat returnees were

mistreated, he gave an order that as combat men we were not to be in any way given anything unacceptable. So I wrote my our orders to return to the nearest base to Chicago. The next day I was leaving for Chanute Field about 60 miles from my home. The Sergeant in charge at Bryan, said "in all his days in the Army he's never see this" he was a career army man.

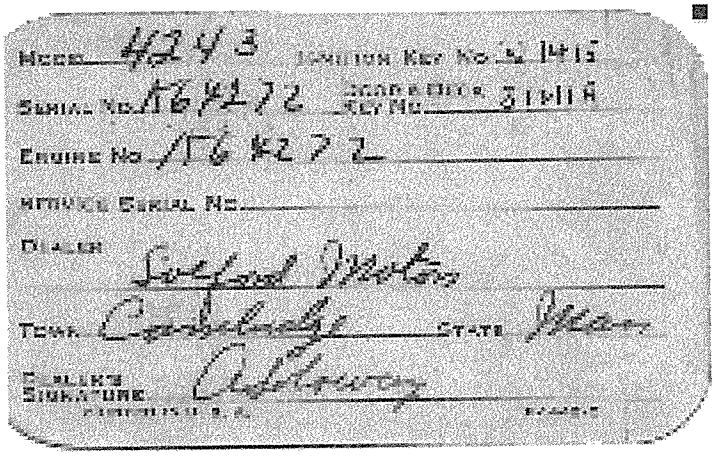
On June 22nd my son was born. The flight to Chicago on a B-24 took a few minutes and the cab to the hospital took hours. At this time I checked with the registrar of the University of Illinois about my entering Medical School. He checked my file from 1942 and said, "Prorok you need to come back for your interviews with the heads of the departments ," "I have to report to the base tomorrow and don't know when I'll be back." So to say the least I ran through my interviews with the department heads that afternoon. When I returned to the Registrars office, he shook my hand and said, "Lieutenant you have been accepted. You are set to start with classes in October." I was besides myself. And shouted out, "I want to kiss every girl in the office."

Now I was still in the Air Force and with my two MOS's even though I had more then enough points to get out, my position was frozen. This was July of 1945, I had to work fast in order to get in school by October. What to do? Well I got out of Texas by breaking the rules, so why not now. So I wrote a letter to the Adjutant General in Washington D.C. right to the top. He wrote back saying; " you go ahead and start school in October even

though you will be on terminal leave." It worked again. You have to go through Army channels and slowly work your way up. I was sitting in class at the University of Illinois, Medical School on October 1, 1945. Graduated in June 1949 as a M.D. Practiced Medicine in Sacramento, California for 35 years. Now retired and living with my 3rd wife (20 years) and wouldn't want it any other way.


ILLINOIS CENTRAL SYSTEM
SPECIAL-COACH
BANTOUL, Ill.
—To—
CHICAGO (CS), Ill.

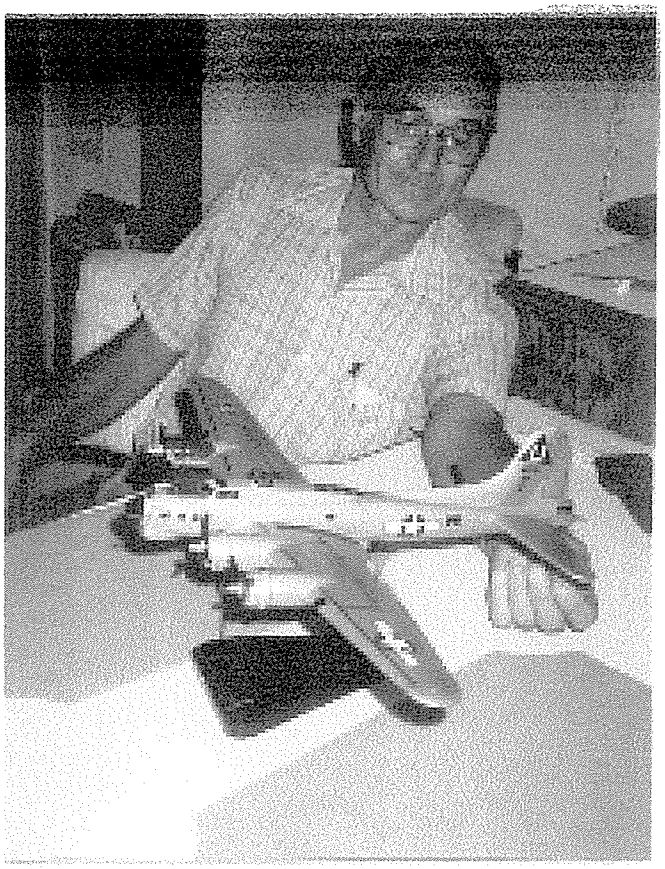
Flight to Chicago for Laddie's birth.

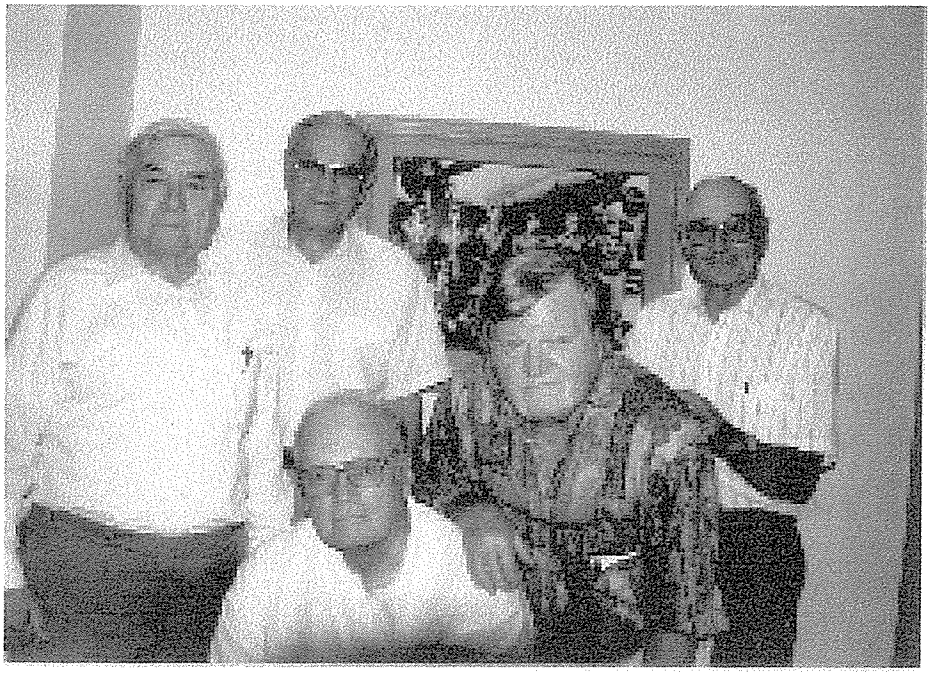

Receipt for my NEW 1942 NASH



Back end of NASH in 1949 Registered in Illinois

Donald G. Gardner with a modle of a B-17 taken in 1995 at our reunion.





1995 Reunion
In Denver Colorado

Left to Right

James Adams,
Joseph L. Hooper
Edmund J. Prorok
Donald G. Gardner

Bottom Middle

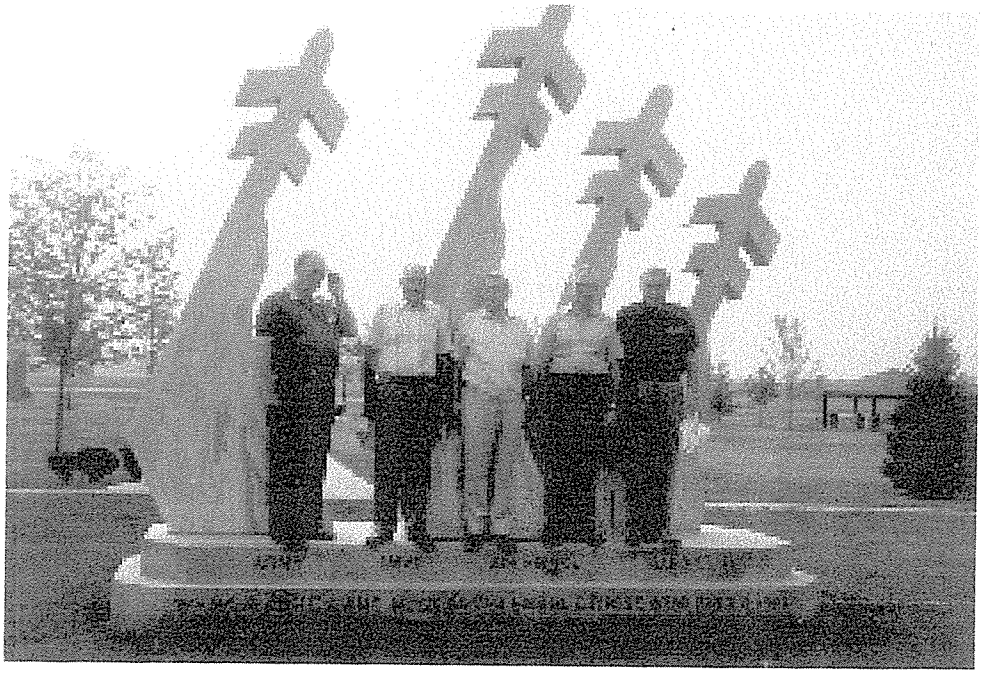
Donald L. Lawrenson



George & Pearl Silver
1992

1989 Dayton Ohio
Reunion

Left to Right
Don Lawrenson
Don Gardner
James Adams
George Silver
Joseph Hooper



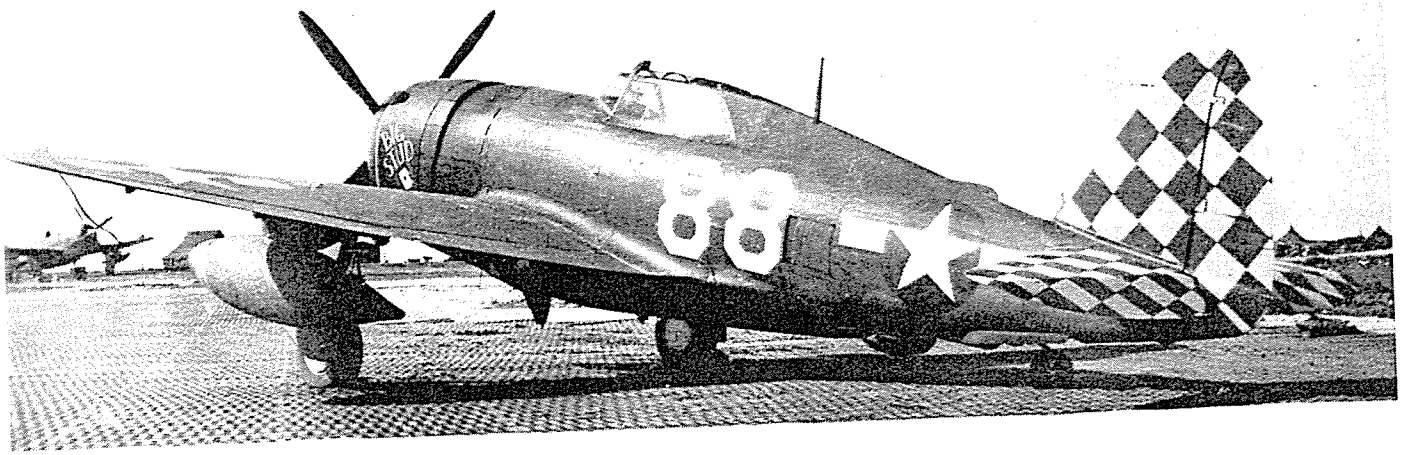


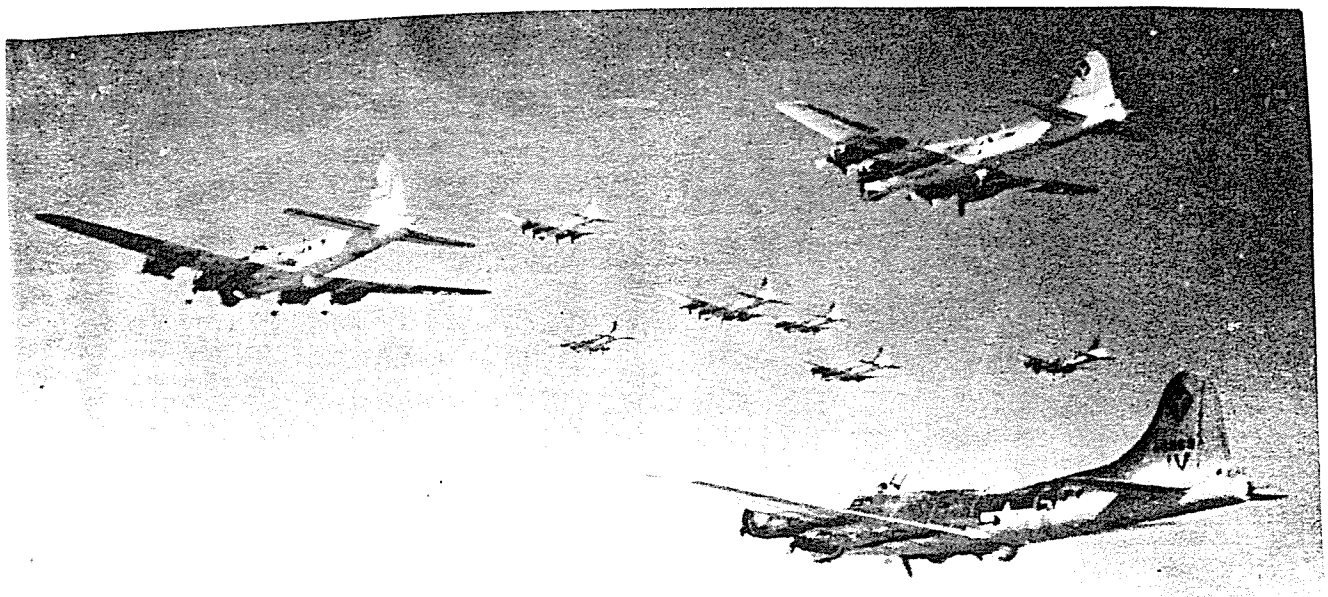


Foggia - Piazza Cavour - Palazzo Acquedotto Pugliese.

Thunderbolts Get 20 Axis Planes in Italy

ALLIED HEADQUARTERS, Algiers, Jan. 25 (U.P.)—American Thunderbolt fighters have been in action in Italy for six weeks and have destroyed 20 enemy planes while escorting Flying Fortresses and Liberator bombers on missions from Italian bases, it was disclosed officially tonight.





Por. Edmund J. Prorok Pozdrawia Swych Znajomych

Porucznik Edmund J. Prorok, który przed wstąpieniem do Lotnictwa Stanów Zjednoczonych zamieszkiwał w Chicago i brał żywy udział w pra-



Porucznik Edmund J. Prorok

cy związkowej, będąc sekretarzem Gr. 1828 Z.N.P. i delegatem do Gminy 91 Z.N.P., obecnie służy w Lotnictwie Amerykańskim i jest nawigatorem wielkiej Fortecy Powietrznej. Porucznik Prorok zasyła z miejsca postoju wszystkim znajomym w Chicago serdeczne pozdrowienia, jak również życzenia Wesołych Świąt i Szczęśliwego Nowego Roku. Ojciec porucznika Edmunda J. Proroka, p. Józef P. Prorok, zamieszkuje pod nr. 3430 W. Dickens ave.

THERE WAS A LOT OF COMBAT SEEN IN THE "DIZZY DOTTY"

After completing 50 missions with the 15th Air Force in Italy, Lt. Edmund J. Prorok, 3430 W. Dickens, returned home to visit his wife, Dorothy, and parents, Mr. [redacted] Joseph P. Prorok. He was across for nine months.

As a navigator on a B-17 he flew over France, Italy, Germany, Austria, Yugoslavia, Rumania, Bulgaria and Hungary, bombing railroad yards, munitions factories, oil fields, and many other like targets. Lt. Prorok is a veteran of two missions over Rome, three over the Ploesti oil fields, and over Regensburg, a German air field.

He was recommended for the Distinguished Flying Cross for a mission over the Marshalling Yards in Sofia, Bulgaria, where when separated from the formation, the squadron, led by "Dizzy Dotty," Lt. Prorok's ship, proceeded to the target alone, dropped their bombs and then, in the face of flak filled skies, a heavy undercast and high clouds, together with enemy fighters swarming all around, the ship turned to return to base. After 35 minutes of tense fighting, the fighters left and the bomber, with one motor gone, proceeded home. The tail gunner has been hit by a 20 mm shell, and the waist gunner with a piece of flak. Lt. Prorok went back to the tail to administer first aid, after which he returned to the nose of the ship to try to locate their position. With the skill of an expert navigator he was able to locate their position and guide them home safely.

He has received the Air Medal and Seven Leaf Cluster and a Presidential Citation, after flying from Africa and Italy.

With a war weary crew of men, Lt. Prorok flew to the States in an old B-17, the "War Weary," which has been returned for overhauling and so on. His combat plane, the "Dizzy Dotty," was named for his wife whom he has been married to for 15 months.

The army has given the couple a honeymoon in Florida where Lt. Prorok reports in two or three weeks for a physical examination and more tests by which the army will then reclassify him.

With blue eyes and blonde hair, Edmund is a typical American flyer and soldier as well as a typical American boy. He is 24 years old and has been in the army for two and a half years. He received his commission in September, 1943, at Monroe, Louisiana.

A younger brother, Edward, is with the Army Signal Corps in China, where he has been for eight months. Before going overseas Edward took a course under the Army at Northwestern university in radar electronics.

Lt. Loring G. Peede, 26, 6 Jackson blvd., Oak Park, son of Mrs. J. M. Peede.
2d Lt. John G. Weller, 4029 N. Richmond st.

"Meritorious achievement in aerial participation against the enemy" has won the Air Medal for eight Chicagoans serving with the 15th AAF, it was announced yesterday. Winers of the award were:

1st Lt. Robert E. Carlson, son of Mr. and Mrs. Ernest O. Carlson, 6614 N. Campbell av.

2d Lt. Charles C. Hasely Jr., 23, son of Mr. and Mrs. Charles C. Hasely, 9908 S. Hoyne av.

Lt. Thomas R. Kelly, 25, husband of Mrs. Thomas R. Kelly, 1234 Loyola av.

2d Lt. John M. Morin, 24, son of Mr. and Mrs. E. H. Morin, 8109 Drexel av.

S/Sgt. Ralph A. Manning, son of Mr. and Mrs. E. Manning, 4627 S. Trumbull avenue.

Lt. Edmund Joseph Prorok, 24, husband of Dorothy L. Prorok, 3430 Dickens av.

2d Lt. Robert E. Riddle, 21, son of S. E. Riddle, 1523 E. 66th place.

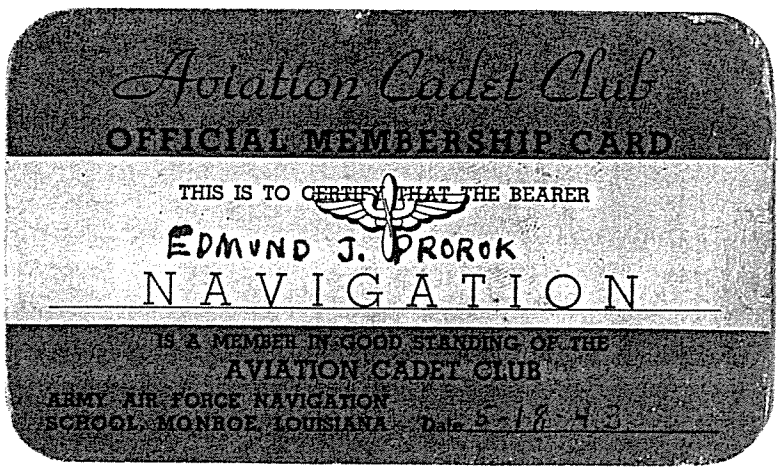
2d Lt. Louis E. Sugarman, 3318 Lake Shore drive.

Five other men from the Chicago area serving with the 15th AAF were awarded Oak Leaf [illegible]ters in lieu of additional Air

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Carnpleon My Thirteenth Raid Febr. 17, 1944

My Thirteenth Combat Raid

As I strolled down towards the briefing room this morning trying to forget that this one was number 13, I turned toward my Bombardier and said, "Well, Pete what will this one be like?" This being his 13th also. He answered, "Hope, it's a milk run." But it didn't exactly turn out to be one.

The target was a Marshalling Yard about 15 miles south of Rome where German troops were supposedly making their appearance.

After Getting out to the ships and briefing the crew, we waited for the engines to start. The ships taxied out in order of their positions in the formation. We fall in and taxied to the run way. The engines roared and off we went at 0827. On course at 0944. As we approached our first turn point a formation of B-24's at our level blocked our turn and we 360ed to give them time to pass. We straighted out again and started our approach to the I.P. The crew put on their flak vests and grimly awaited to climax which was to follow shortly.

Over our I.P. the Bombardier & I looked out toward the target area and saw a few bursts of flak. A group of 17's were heading home as we started down the bomb run. The pilot started evasive action then leveled off and the Bombadier hollered "Bombs Away". We rallyed to the left and the flak really started to come and more evasive action is done. The tail gunner called over interphone and described a fortress pulling off and going down with #2 on fire and then exploded, ~~no chutes were seen~~ but three of the crew

He said he noticed what seemed to him like three boys jumps out on fire; no chutes were seen.

The flak kept bursting around us until we were about a half mile over water. Wow what a relief. The crew checked in and everyone was safet & sound.

As we set course home we could see the smoke over the target. Another group of 17's was heading for the same area and as we looked over and above the target area there was flak galore. More, maybe 3 times more flak was over the target when that group came in. I guess everyone in our ship kind of ~~breathed~~ stopped breathing and wondered about the boys in those ships. As we proceeded on course still another group was on its way and into the flak hell. We must have been 50 miles away from the area and still the flak could be seen ~~covering a large area~~ bursting amongst the bombers.

It was rough but not too bad. No enemy fighters were encountered.

Then before you knew it we were (having) doughnuts coffee and donuts and laughing over our ride. Whether it was #13 or not I'm here to talk about it and that's my wish for the rest of them.



Edmund J. Prorok was born in Chicago February 9, 1920 and graduated from the University of Illinois in 1949 as an M.D. He practiced in Sacramento California from 1949 to 1975. He tried his hand at ranching in Oregon from 1976 until 1982 then returned to Sacramento to practice medicine and to work for the State of California, as a Medical Consultant. He retired in 1992. He's happy with three grown children and eleven grandchildren.