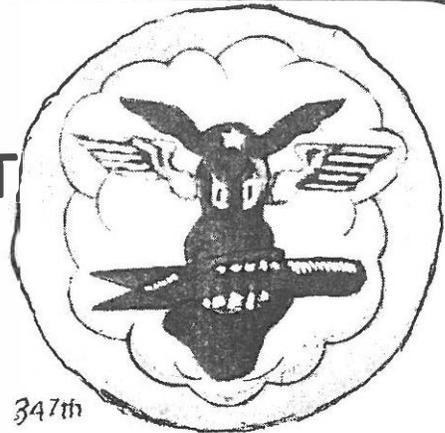


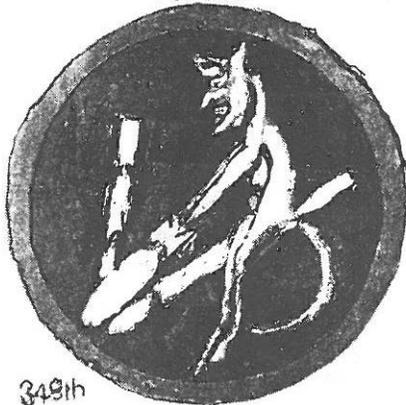
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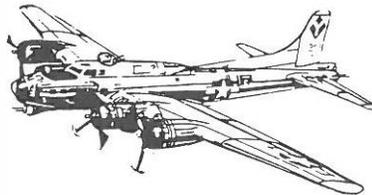
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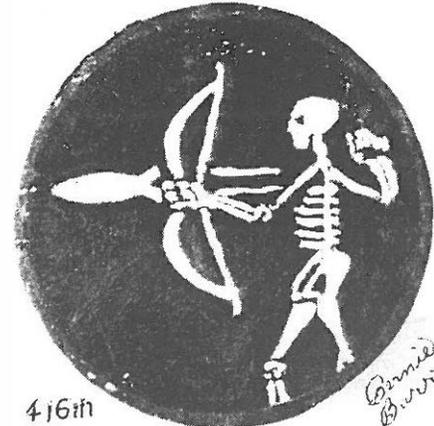
347th



349th



B-17 FLYING FORTRESS
395 COMBAT MISSIONS
1943 AFRICA - EUROPE 1945



416th

Bernie Barr

THE 99th BOMB GROUP HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

Vol. 15, No. 3

AUGUST 1995

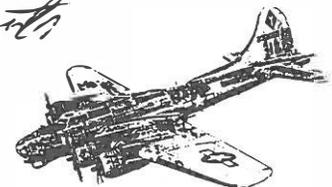
PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Marge and I spent the morning at the Kansas City Area Memorial Day services at the Liberty Memorial. On the way home we drove through the Floral Hill Cemetery. What a sight to see! Twenty seven hundred and sixty (2760) 5'x 9' American Flags, each atop a 20' pole. The poles are spaced about 12' apart and line both sides of almost 5 miles of roadways throughout the grounds. A veteran's name tag is on each pole and the location of each veteran's flag is listed in a directory given to each vehicle entering the cemetery. The terrain is slightly rolling which adds to the overall beauty. . . . When you reads this message VJ Day plus 50 years will be near at hand. Who among us thought we would see this day? . . . Joe Chance and Jules Horowitz are the Nominating Committee for the coming year. If you have anyone you would like to see on the Board of Directors of our Society please send them your choice. . . . Len Smith, Fran Grantz, and Bob Bacher are the Site Selection Committee and are looking at Tucson, Arizona for our 1996 reunion. . . . OUR THANKS GO TO FRAN AND NEL GRANTZ FOR A SUPER REUNION in St. Louis! What a Crowd! 325 plus.. . . You are the greatest group of people in the World. Best wishes to all of you and may God Bless you and the United States of America. . . . Jim Smith

1995-1996 OFFICERS AND DIRECTORS

President: Jim Smith; Vice President: Fran Grantz; Secretary: Chris Christiansen
Treasurer: Walter Butler; Historian: Dick Drain; Chaplain: Fran Grantz
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Julius Horowitz, Art Knipp, Don Lawhorn, Al Schroeder, Leonard Smith, and
Frank Pearce

Jim Smith



PAST PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

My last function as outgoing President will be to give a resume of our '95 St Louis reunion. . . . To the 99ers who could not attend I can only say that a great reunion was missed. Accolades and bouquets must be extended to our hosts, FRAN AND NEL GRANTZ for a superb job very well done. We had more than 300 members in attendance and all I kept hearing were comments about the terrific job being done by Fran and Nel. We stayed at the Sheraton Westport, an excellent choice. The food served at the dinners was quite good and the hospitality room was roomy and comfortable. The adjacent Plaza had a good selection of restaurants for anyone wishing to eat away from the hotel. . . . I would be remiss if I didn't mention the usual good job done by Bob Bacher, Arkie Clark and a helpful John Repka in dispensing spirits and snacks. . . . Tuesday evening we went to a river boat casino on the Illinois side of the river. Those wishing to gamble had ample opportunity. One couple I know stashed away some \$100 bills ! Unfortunately the boat wasn't able to cruise as advertised due to the high level of the river. . . . Wednesday many members were on a tour of St Louis to Grants Farm, the Hill and the new Cathedral. . . . Wednesday evening a scheduled river boat cruise, dinner and dance was canceled due to the Mississippi at flood level. We had a fine dinner and dance at the hotel instead. . . . On Thursday a trip to the Arch was awesome. Visitors could go to the top or see a movie about the construction. Next stop was the Union Railroad Station which was most interesting. The train entry section has become a souvenir shopping and food court center. After a good lunch at the Union Station we visited the Anheuser Busch brewery. After seeing the assembly line with all the bottles and cans flying by we were able to sample some of the fine brews for which the company is noted. We finished the tour with a visit to the Cathedral which is a small replica of St. Peters. . . . Friday saw us at Scott Air Force Base, IL for a short business meeting and delightful lunch. We were greeted by the Base Commander and given a briefing on the Air Force mission at Scott. Friday evening we had a very adequate barbecue dinner at the hotel. The highlight of the evening was an address by Don Sachs, Aviation Heritage consultant for the Boeing Co. Don is a retiree who was an 8th Air Force pilot and 9 when shot down after 20 plus missions. His address with the help of slides and tapes was most illuminating and interesting. His talk was spiced with a good sense of humor. Fran managed to shanghai Oliver Boileau who is a St. Louis resident to also address the members. He was the former President of five aerospace companies, among them Boeing and Northrop. (I ask him why he couldn't hold onto a job.) His short address was most interesting and enjoyed by all. . . . When Saturday rolled around we welcomed a day of rest since Fran and Nel had so many interesting activities planned for us on previous days. We had our annual dress up dinner and dance Saturday night. At reunions for the past twelve years I've noticed that the men are getting older, but surprisingly the ladies seem to get younger and more attractive, especially when you see them decked out in their finery. . . . Among the speakers who addressed the members was a Lt. Colonel in Operations of the Air Refueling section of the Air Mobility Command at Scott AFB. Our members were then welcomed to St. Louis by a well spoken gentlemen in the City Administration. We were again entertained by more of Don Sachs experiences and his great sense of humor. . . . During and after dinner we enjoyed dancing to a great band playing our Forties music. . . . Sunday morning the lobby and restaurant were filled with people hugging and saying their goodbyes until they meet again. . . . I close by telling our members how much I've enjoyed the honor and distinction of serving as President the past two years. I had much help from the membership and I hope I left the chairmanship a little better than before. . . . Jules Horowitz

ELDERHOSTEL

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THE CHAPLAIN'S CORNER



I came across a poem the other day, looking through the files. I'd seen it before, and have used it several times. Seeing it again, reminded me of Psalm 139:1-2 from The Good News Bible:

"O Lord, you have examined me, and you know me. You know everything I do; from far away you understand all my thoughts"

The Holy Scriptures tell us that the Lord God knows all about us...from outside in and inside out. There is nothing that escapes His eye or His interest or His attention.

Words are floating all around us. We hear them; some seem to come having been coined recently, while others evoke memories from our training years ago or perhaps from days of grade school. Words like "honesty", "integrity", "character", "personal responsibility", "honor", "our word - our bond", "loyalty", "patriotism" and even, "love". Some would try to tell us these are new words...coined in recent times. The truth is they are as old as Abraham...older than even the pyramids of Egypt! They have passed the test of time! These are the values a society must live by; the integrity by which our lives are ordered. This is the challenge facing us as the "carriers of peace through strength from another generation". These are ideas we live by and ideas which will never die at our passing.

This poem talks about us as carriers of the values...from the inside, where no one else can be, but we ourselves. It was written in a time when the written word was not concerned with equality among persons, so that "man" meant all people, both men and women.

Nevertheless, my comrades and wives, read about "The Man in the Glass".

"When you get what you want in your struggle for self
And the world makes you 'King for a Day',
Just go to a mirror and look at yourself
And see what that man has to say.
For it isn't your father or mother or wife
Whose judgment upon you must pass,
The fellow whose verdict counts most in your life
Is the one staring back from the glass.

Some people might think you're a straight-shooting chum
And call you a wonderful guy.
But the man in the glass says you're only a bum
If you can't look him straight in the eye.
He's the fellow to please, never mind all the rest
For he's with you clear to the end,
And you've passed your most dangerous test
If the guy in the glass is your friend.

You may fool the whole world down the pathway of years
And get pats on the back as you pass,
But your final reward will be only heartache and tears
If you've cheated the man in the glass."



God bless you and yours!



Francis W. Grantz
Francis W. Grantz

Four Chaplains

Introduction

Many stories have been written about the heroic acts of four Army Chaplains on a troop transport ship on its way to Greenland. One such story follows. It was written by Victor M. Parachin who is an ordained minister, counselor and free-lance writer.

Four Brave Chaplains

It was the evening of Feb. 2, 1943, and the *U.S.A.T. Dorchester* was crowded to capacity, carrying 902 servicemen, merchant seamen and civilian workers.

Once a luxury coastal liner, the 5,649-ton vessel had been converted into an Army transport ship. The *Dorchester*, one of three ships in the SG-19 convoy, was moving steadily across the icy waters from Newfoundland toward an American base in Greenland. S-G 19 was escorted by Coast Guard Cutters, *Tampa*, *Escanaba* and *Comanche*.

Hans J. Danielsen, the ship's captain, was concerned and cautious. Earlier the *Tampa* had detected a submarine with its sonar. Danielsen knew he was in dangerous waters even before he got the alarming information. German U boats were constantly prowling these vital sea lanes, and several ships had already been blasted and sunk.

The *Dorchester* was now only 15 miles from its destination, but the captain ordered the men to sleep in their clothing and keep life jackets on. Many soldiers sleeping deep in the ship's hold disregarded the order because of the engine's heat. Others ignored it because the life jackets were uncomfortable.

On Feb. 3, at 12:55 a.m., a periscope broke the chilly Atlantic waters. Through the cross hairs, an officer aboard the German submarine U-2 spotted the *Dorchester*. After identifying and targeting the ship, he gave orders to fire the torpedoes. The hit was decisive--and deadly--striking the starboard side, amid ship, far below the water line.

Danielsen, alerted that the *Dorchester* was taking water rapidly and sinking, gave the order to abandon ship. In less than 27 minutes, the *Dorchester* would slip beneath the Atlantic's icy waters.

Tragically, the hit had knocked out power and radio contact with the three escort ships. The *CGC Tampa*,



This stain glass window is located in the Pentagon on the third floor, between corridors 9 and 10 on the A Ring.

however, saw the flash of the explosion. It responded and then rescued 97 survivors. The *CGC Escanaba* circled the *Dorchester* rescuing an additional 132 survivors. The third cutter, *CGC Comanche* continued on, escorting the remaining two ships.

Aboard the *Dorchester*, panic and chaos had set in. The blast had killed scores of men and many more were seriously wounded. Others, stunned by the explosion, were groping in darkness. Those sleeping without clothing rushed topside where they were confronted first by a blast of icy Arctic air and then by

50th Anniversary of World War II
Commemoration Committee
HQDA, SACC; Pentagon, Room 3E524
Washington, D.C. 20310-0101 (703) 692-2111

the knowledge that death awaited.

Men jumped from the ship into lifeboats, overcrowding them to the point of capsizing, according to eyewitnesses. Other rafts, tossed into the Atlantic, drifted away before soldiers could get in them.

Through the pandemonium, according to those present, four Army chaplains brought hope in despair and light in darkness. Those chaplains were Lt. George L. Fox, Methodist; Lt. Alexander D. Goode, Jewish; Lt. John P. Washington, Roman Catholic; and Lt. Clark V. Poling, Reformed.

Quickly and quietly the four chaplains spread out among the soldiers. There they tried to calm the frightened, tend the wounded and guide the disoriented toward safety.

Witnesses of that terrible night remember hearing the four men offer prayers for the dying and encouragement for those who would live," says Wyatt R. Fox, son of Reverend Fox.

One witness, Private William B. Bednar, found himself floating in oil-smeared water surrounded by dead bodies and debris. "I could hear men crying, pleading, praying," Bednar recalls. "I could also hear the chaplains preaching courage. Their voices were the only thing that kept me going."

Another sailor, Petty Officer John J. Mahoney, tried to re-enter his cabin but was stopped by Rabbi Goode. Mahoney, concerned about the cold Arctic air, explained he had forgotten his gloves.

"Never mind," Goode responded. "I have two pairs." The rabbi then gave the petty officer his own gloves. In retrospect, Mahoney realized that Rabbi Goode was not conveniently carrying two pairs of gloves, and that the rabbi had decided not to leave the *Dorchester*.

By this time, most of the men were topside, and the chaplains opened a storage locker and began distributing life jackets. It was then that Engineer Grady Clark witnessed an astonishing sight.

When there were no more life jackets in the storage room, the chaplains removed theirs and gave them to four frightened young men.

It was the finest thing I have ever seen or hope to see this side of heaven," said John Ladd, another survivor who saw the chaplains' selfless act.

Ladd's response is understandable. The altruistic action of the four chaplains constitutes one of the purest spiritual and ethical acts a person can make. When giving their life jackets, Rabbi Goode did not call out for a Jew; Father Washington did not call out for a Catholic; nor did the Reverends Fox and Poling call out for a Protestant. They simply gave their life jackets to the next man in line.

As the ship went down, survivors in nearby rafts could see the four chaplains—arms linked and braced against the slanting deck. Their voices could also be heard offering prayers.

Of the 902 men aboard the *U.S.A.T. Dorchester*, 672 died, leaving 230 survivors. When the news reached American shores, the nation was stunned by the magnitude of the tragedy and heroic conduct of the four chaplains.

"Valor is a gift," Carl Sandburg once said. "Those having it

Sources

The Retired Officer Magazine, Volume XLVIII, No. 12, December 1992.
The U.S. Army Chaplaincy, 1920-1945, Chaplain Robert Gushwa, Government Printing Office 1985



This mural, depicting the four chaplains assisting in the evacuation of the *Dorchester*, was painted by Nils Hogner.

never know for sure whether they have it until the test comes."

That night Reverend Fox, Rabbi Goode, Reverend Poling and Father Washington passed life's ultimate test. In doing so, they became an enduring example of extraordinary faith, courage and selflessness.

The Distinguished Service Cross and Purple Heart were awarded posthumously Dec. 19, 1944, to the next of kin by Lt. Gen. Brehon B. Somervell, commanding general of the Army Service Forces, in a ceremony at the post chapel at Fort Myer, Va.

A posthumous Special Medal for Heroism, never before given and never to be given again, was authorized by Congress and awarded by the President Jan. 18, 1961. Congress wished to confer the Medal of Honor but was blocked by the stringent requirements which required heroism performed under fire. The special medal was intended to have the same weight and importance as the Medal of Honor.

Four Chaplains Honored

In February 1951, the Chapel of the Four Chaplains, an inter-faith memorial chapel, was dedicated in Philadelphia. Reverend Daniel A. Poling, Chaplain Clark Poling's father, presided over the ceremony, which was attended by former President Harry S. Truman.

A new chapel is currently being built in Valley Forge, Pa.

PASSING IN REVIEW - The Host's Report

"Rain, rain, stay away! Come back some other day!" I never thought the reality of this ditty would have been part of the 1995 Reunion of the 99th Bomb Group here in St. Louis. But it was! And I am proud of all those who came to enjoy St. Louis [and we did!] and for whom the rain was only a momentary interruption. "The show must go on" and it did with even more gusto. The spirits of the "reunion-ers" was "never quit"; the smiles and "go for it" spirit meant we were in for the long haul! And stay we did!

The week began early with arrivals on Monday, May 15th. The Sheraton West Port Inn was prepared for us. Laura Teasdale, the Concierge, Vickie Hughes, the Catering honcho, and Kelly Karmmerer with Sales, and their staffs, had all done their work well; now the 99th began to show up. By early Tuesday everything was in full swing, people were arriving, meeting new people, with hugs and greetings for all.

The Blue of the 99th logos were seen everywhere. Our activities took us to the Alton Belle Casino on Tuesday evening. The buses loaded early - some of us even had our plastic cups ready! Didn't hear of any million dollar winners...but did hear of a million dollars worth of fun!

Wednesday's tour to Grant's Farm and the New Cathedral brought some interesting reports about seeing a "whole herd of Catholic clergy...from priests and on up" awaiting the investiture of a bishop at the Cathedral. The report was there was almost as many cops as clergy!

Wednesday evening's Dinner Cruise was awash...the river's floodstage cancelled the evening. The folks at the Sheraton made that evening memorable for us all: Laura, and Vickie and her staff went to work at 2 p.m. and at 6:30 p.m. we were welcomed for a sumptuous spread that included Chicken Wellington! The hotel even put their management team behind our bar to serve our liquor at no cost to us! And the band scheduled for the Riverboat was brought along! A memorable evening indeed!

Thursday's tour to the Arch and the Anheiser Busch Brewery had some interesting interplay as the group took its lunch break at the Union Station. a severe rain storm passed through. Both of the scenic stops had been closed during that period, but was opened after lunch when the storm had passed.

Friday's visit to Scott Air Force Base, the luncheon and the C-9 Nightingale tour were outstanding. The pride and morale of our Air Force team, hosts and guides was impressive.

If the Reunion had a highlight, it had to be the Barbeque on Friday evening. After dinner Don Sachs, Aviation Heritage Consultant for Boeing Company, presented his program "The B-17 - a Legend in Its Time". Don welcomed Ollie Boileau, former president of Boeing Aerospace to join him following the presentation. Ollie had moved on to Northrup Aviation, where he worked with the B-2 bomber and addressed some questions. The evening together was a knock-out and we are grateful to our guests for their willingness to enter in and be part of our 99th family!

Saturday's Banquet in the Ballroom of the Sheraton West Port Inn saw everyone dressed for the festive occasion as the Blue Knights entertained us. To honor the anniversary of World War II's ending, Vincent Bell, Frank English and Vincent Schauler each spoke in a "Memorial Moments 50 years". We heard from Lt. Col. Dale Ostrowski, from the 375th Airlift Tanker Command at Scott Air Force Base, who is a nephew of our Ellsworth Swingen. Don Sachs shared some of the humorous experiences involved as a consultant with Boeing. A crowded dance floor reminded us again of the "Big Band Sound" in memory.

It has been our privilege, Nel and mine, to be your hosts for the 1995 Reunion. Thanks to Len Smith and Bob Bacher who helped "site St. Louis". Thanks to YOU who came to make the family complete!

NEWS, NOTES AND LETTERS

Albuquerque
June 18, 1995

Dear Comrades:

Frank English visited here on his return from St Louis and we had a delightful gabfest. I have been confined to quarters because of Martha's surgery, but we both hope to recover soon. A bear got into the Coen's bird feeder and ate the sunflower seeds. He was not dainty. All as usual.

Best



HI Walter:

It was a real pleasure to be with you, Christine and all the other high class 99ers. I thought our reunion was well attended & a terrific job done by Fran and Nel and the Pharmacists Bob and Arky. I only had my prescriptions filled and refilled for medical purposes only! OK so I lied again.

I left our hotel at 5 AM Monday and ran into an awful storm that same night in the lower part of Oklahoma out in the boon docks. Chunks of ice bombarded my car continuously putting many dents all. Large pieces went into the front of my grill and mangled the AC condenser in front of the radiator. Haven't been that scared for a long time! I've gotten 2 estimated for the damage the 1st from a body shop-\$4700 another from the Ford dealer where I bought my Mustang-\$4100. I will get another and see the claims adjuster for approval. Outside of this, it was a good trip. Walt, I know this is not your regular time for renewal but as my memory is not what it used to be, please go along with me on this. Here is my check for \$30.00 for another couple of years.

Thanks again for all your hard work on our behalf!! As I told you before I know what you do and I truly appreciate it! For now all the best to you both and all the Albuquerque Gang. Take care and the Good Lord willing. I'll see you folks in Tucson next year, Thanks again

Yours in Comradeship. frank english

Dear Bernie:

A large number of members asked me if I could set up a fall get-together. I know that some people think that this interefers with the main reunion. I found out that 99% attend all get-togethers. That if the good Lord is willing and the creek don't rise. As you see this is going to be like a family get-together NO FRILLS and tours, if any kept to a minimum. I am like you these things are a lot of work. Sorry we didn't get to talk together more but was pretty busy with tending the bar. I thought that the poem Nancy Jones wrote to her father was very appropriate for an Airman. Well take care of your hand, I am going to try the herb I told you about and if it helps i'll let you know.

Your Ex Tail Gunner


Robert J. Bacher

Richard H. Dempsey would like for anyone who knows the whereabouts of Major Frank Dunnington CO of 346th and 347th at Watertown, SD-Let him know. Dick has also Informed us that Jim and Laurel Sopp are living in the WALNUT CREEK NURSING CENTER 5070 Lamb Road Kettering, Ohio 45434 and would like for you to write them.

Dennis Fennessey 97 Ormont Rd. , Chatham, N.J.07928 ph 201-635-0242 wants to hear from you if you knew his father Jim Fennessey a pilot in the 346th in Africa. Jim was killed in a C-54 crash in 1950. Nikki Smith, Jim's daughter, 45 Avalon Road Garden City, NY 11530 ph 516-742-9110 would like to hear from you. Please!

Ronnie David 75-40 Austin St. Forest Hills, NY 11325 (New Member) wants to hear from you if you knew ^{his} father Eugene David.

ATTENTION!!!

From Bob Bacher

I've been ask if I would sponsor a Group get-together in the fall. It seems our ranks are thinning our fast, so they would like to meet more often. This will be like a family gathering - No Frills.

PLACE

NEW TOWER INN, 7764 Dodge Street, Omaha, NE 68114-3691

COST

\$51.29 with taxes. Phone: 1-800-475-5511
Dates: September 27, 28, 29, 30, 1995

Please get you room RESERVATION in early to insure a room. If for any reason you can't make it the INN will refund your deposit up to the day before September 27th.

Reservations must be made before September 13 to get our \$51.29 rate. Our rate is solid for 3 days before and 3 days after the September 27 thru 30, '95 reunion dates.

REUNION REGISTRATION

\$15.00 per person

BANQUET: \$15 per person

Very informal banquet - No ties

If enough members want to visit SAC Headquarters and Museum I believe I can arrange for a Bus at \$10.00 per person. If enough members sign up, of course.

FREE INN SHUTTLE FROM EPLEY AIR PORT, OMAHA

Please send me the Registration & Banquet FEE BEFORE September 13, '95

ROBERT J. BACHER
692 North Abbe Road
ELYRIA, OHIO 44035-3044

Phone: 1-216-365-3023 if any questions.
THANK YOU!

Nancy B. Jones

(Poem to her Father, JOHN DUARWARD BAGLEY
- 1/25/23 - 4/20/95)

TRANSCENDING THE VALLEY

Do not, Daddy, go gently slipping that good night
Fight is like in the war. Remember how scared you were then ?
When your B-17 was airborne, you look out with hope
And saw God's love best in the hearts of your fellow corpsmen
Bravely flying a P-38 alongside you.
You are scared now. The way seems long ahead for all of us.
You are in a bomber on a one-way mission to home.
Home far away from the one we share on this earth together.
Your co-pilot is still holding you in His guiding hand.
Look outside, Daddy. Do you see us, your P-38 ?
I Have never been in an air battle for life and death.
But I will fight alongside you with arms to keep you safe.
To fill your days with loving care. You will never be left alone.
Even if I am lost in the clouds of your mind, Daddy.
I will be there at your side patiently holding your hand.
Always capable and strong despite the steady losses.
Softly, I will comb and smooth your thick, tousled head of hair.
Always black to me no matter how gray it has become.
Known or unknown, I will look into your trusting blue eyes.
Startlingly clear and intelligent in your handsome face.
Lit by a Vulnerability that dominates now.
Whispering, I will tell you over and over again:
God is your co-pilot, Daddy, Do you see his love light ?
Wherever your mission is going, I'll be alongside. (NBJ)
John D. Badgley, 99th Bomb Group, 347th Sq, 15th Army Air Corps. If anyone knew him please write to his daughter, Nancy B Jones, 9206 Hampton Oaks Lane, Charlotte, NC 28207

NEWS, NOTES AND LETTERS

OVER THE BACK FENCE

May 17

Al Henke suffered a heart attack May 5th while visiting his Daughter at Griffith, Indiana. He was rushed to the Munster Community Hospital and three angio plasty procedures were tried but all collapsed, so the next morning they did a one by-pass surgery on him, which went well. However, then his kidneys failed so when all else failed they put him in a Dialysis Machine for about four days. His kidneys finally came around on the 11th. No permanent damage to anything so far.

By the 12th he was improved enough to get out of ICU and was walking by the 14th. Hopes to be able to go back to his Daughters house by Thursday or Friday, May 18 or 19th.

Betty and I are on our way up to see him and see when he can come home. So sorry we had to miss the reunion.

s/Harold Henke

Dear Bernie:

The 1995 Reunion of the 99th Bomb Group is now history - and we had a great time together!

The great time was only possible because YOU came. You brought the excitement of being together again... You brought the memories... You met new friends... You renewed acquaintances from those years. now so long ago, but like yesterday... in short. it was You who made the St. Louis 1995 Reunion of the 99th Bomb Group a success. And I just wanted to write you personally to say "THANK YOU"!

Some thoughts that can make this camaraderie even more meaningful:

1. As has been suggested by Jules Horowitz publicly, take advantage of the pages of our newsletter to write your story, or the questions you have or ideas that come through your correspondence with other crew members. The camaraderie is built through the sharing. Jules Horowitz' idea of "OTBF", ie. "Over the Back Fence" provides an arena for such sharing! Maybe if the title OTBF sounds too much like some "gabbing folks", perhaps ATEOTR might be better. Oh, "ATEOTR" means "At the End of the Runway!". That was when we had to check with the Tower, right? Perhaps "Demps" could enlighten us on that subject further! By the way, The newsletter copy deadline is the 15th of March, June, September and December. Send your material to Bernie Barr, 7408 Vista Del Arroyo, Albuquerque, NM 87109-21941.

2. We had a number of new folks come in for the first time, and it was great to have them come along! I'd like to say a Warm Welcome to the 99th family! Thanks for coming with us here in St. Louis!

3. Has any one got a roster of the POWs from the 99th? One reason this letter is about a week later than I planned is because I just finished reading Bill Smallwood's "Tomlin's Crew". Some of the things that happened on my journey as a POW were brought back to light with vivid clarity. I just wonder how many of us were there? and who are they all? Who remembers the Tuesday evening of the Rapid City Reunion when the POW question arose, and many stood. Fascinating stories, all of them!

Maybe this is the start of "ATEOTR"...but anyway, thanks for your part in helping make the St. Louis Reunion a fun Time Together in the 99th family!! I enjoyed being your host!

Cordially
Francis W. Grantz
Francis W. Grantz

Dear Bernie:

Reference: Information for THE 99TH BOMB GROUP
HISTORICAL SOCIETY

In reviewing my diary I have the following information that I believe would be of interest and I hope that you might be able to find space for publication in your next newsletter.

Crew 62 was one of the first replacement crews for the 348th Squadron of the 99th Bomb Group (H).

On July 13, 1943 the 99th Bomb Group was stationed at Navrin, North Africa. At this time the group was a member of the 12th Air Force. This crew was made up of Lt. Don Frye, who was Pilot. Lt. William Sheehey was Co-Pilot. Lt. Harold Harris was Navigator. Lt. Earl Cork* was Bombardier. T/Sgt. Raymond Van Horn was Engineer. S/Sgt. Walter Bricker was Radio-man. S/Sgt. Leonard K. Kirsh and S/Sgt. George Vint* were Waist-gunners. S/gt. Francis Dolan was Tail-Gunner, and S/Sgt. ^{Walter Kern} was Ball Turret.

S/Sgt. Walter Bricker*, Radio-man was killed over Foggia on August 25, 1943, and was replaced by S/Sgt. George McConkey.

On August 8, 1943 the 99th Bomb Group moved to an air field outside of Tunis, North Africa.

On December 11, 1943 the 348th Bomb Squadron moved to Foggia, Italy.

On January 30, 1944, Lt. Earl Cork left for home so he had finished his 50 missions.

On March 3, 1944 Lt. Don Frye had completed his 50 missions.

On March 17, 1944 S/Sgt. Leonard K. Kirsh had completed his 50 missions.

On March 19, 1944 S/Sgt. Marvin Kern had completed his 50 missions.

On December 1, 1943, the 348th Squadron started out for Turin, Italy. This was Mission #26 for S/Sgt. Leonard K. Kirsh. H Hour was 6:00. We took off at 8:05. As I stated before we had started to Turin, but due to falling fuel pressure to eight on one engine and the other engine kept cutting out it was decided we would have to turn back. Just off the coast of Italy there was an airfield so we decided to bomb it rather than do nothing at all. We bombed from 22,000 feet, hit and destroyed three (3) hangars, three planes, destroyed a part of the runway which just about wiped out the airfield. We landed in Sardegna, an island, to get gas after seven hours and the mission was completed. Flight in 378 by Lt. Don Frye, Pilot, won the Distinguished Flying Cross for this mission. The rest of the crew got no recognition. The mission was initiated by Lt. Harold Harris and Lt. Earl Cork. The name of the airfield was Villa Novia. P-38's Reconnaissance planes were sent out the next day to take pictures to confirm that the damages we reported were true. The Group was given credit as a completed combat mission as a result of this one airplane doing an outstanding job. Since Lt. Harold Harris, who was the Navigator, and Lt. Earl Cork was the Bombardier, they got no credit for their actions.

*George Vint and *Earl Cork are deceased.

Sincerely yours,

Leonard K. Kirsh
Leonard K. Kirsh

LIFETIME MEMBERSHIPS are now available to members. Instead of paying annual dues you may make one payment of \$150.00 for LIFE MEMBERSHIP with no more payments. several of the Board Members signed up while at St Louis. You may act now!

Chris Christiansen 130 Lake Shore Drive Madison, AL 35758-7907 has made arrangements to order a permanent name tag for you for about \$4.50. He will order as a group and bring to next year's reunion in Tucson. To order give your NAME SWADRON DATES WITH 99th to Chris. With \$'s.

The Board of Directors has approved the publishing of the History of the 99th BOMB GROUP. Dick Drain is in charge of the details of coordinating and approving the contents. Please read his letter included in this issue for details. PLEASE GIVE HIM YOUR SUPPORT!!!!!!

Dennis R. Loyd 2323 E. Menlo Ave Fresno, CA would like for you to contact him if you trained in the 2nd Air Force training program. Zip 63011-2363

FUTURE REUNIONS- will be held in TUCSON, AZ in 1996; BALTIMORE, MA area in 1997; and SAN DIEGO, CA area in 1998. Details will be included in future newsletters.

A SPECIAL THANKS TO FRAN AND NEL GRANTZ FOR BEING GREAT HOSTS FOR THE SAINT LOUIS REUNION. A GREAT GET-TOGETHER ENJOYED BY ALL ATTENDEES!!!!

Items for NOV newsletter should be sent to Bernie by Sept 15. Please type-single space.

Willian S. Dronberger-117 Feather Falls Circle, Folsom, CA 95630 wants information, pictures about B-17 SWAMP GAL that flew in the 347th or the crew. Please.

Dear Bernie:

May 25, 1995

It felt just great being with 99rs last week. I think the Grantz did a fine job as our hosts.

My brother, Frank, was in London over the 50th Anniversary of V-E Day celebrations. He visited the Imperial War Museum while there at my request. The authorities were able to confirm that Major Walter Dahl was leader of a Luftwaffe fighter unit (JG-3) which attacked our group on 2/25/44 at Regensburg. Their planes were specially designed FW-109s. They were equipped to take on 4 engine daylight bombers. The engine cowlings were armor plated, as was the oil cooler. The pilot's cockpit glass was one inch thick and hardened.

I have been able to learn from an ex-Air Force intelligence officer that this same plane had 20 mm cannon mounted in the wings, and 30 mm cannon mounted in the fuselage. Thus, the effective range and firepower of the enemy exceeded that of our 50 cal. machine guns.

I doubt whether I learn if Dahl shot down #858 or not. It's too late to meet him face to FACE ANYHOW.

Best to you, Walter and the gang in Albuquerque.

BILL SMALLWOOD

Vero Beach Press Journal "Lifestyle" - 4/9/95

Vermont author BILL SMALLWOOD spends each winter in Vero Beach, in The Moorings.

Published in 1993, his memoir "Tomlin's Crew" was named in honor of Dale Tomlin, pilot of a Flying Fortress on which Smallwood was the crew's bombardier. Tomlin was killed in action on the bomber's last mission over Germany in Feb. 1944.

In late 1943, the Tomlin crew had spent two months in their final training at the Avon Park Bombing Range. Then, on Jan. 1, 1944, they left West Palm Beach's Morrison Field to ferry their B-17 bomber across the Atlantic to an air base in southern Italy.

A German author, PETER SCHMOLL, recently obtained a copy of Smallwood's book. Upon reading it, he realized that the crew's combat experience included a mission to bomb a military target near Regensburg, Germany, which is Scholl's hometown.

Actually, it was over this city on Feb. 25, 1944, that the Tomlin bomber was brought down and members of the crew who survived were made prisoners.

Taking information from the book, Schmoll contacted veteran German Air Force sources and was able to identify the Luftwaffe fighter group which had attacked the U.S. Air Force Squadron including Tomlin's plane.

Digging further, Schmoll determined that two B-17s from the squadron, including Tomlin's plane, had been recorded as having been shot down by a Maj. Walter Dahl, flying in a FE-190 fighter.

Schmoll passed on this information to Smallwood, adding that Dahl had died in Heidelberg in 1985 at age 69. Dahl, a fighter ace, was credited with shooting down a total of 129 allied planes, half of which had been downed on the Russian Front. Included in the total were 30 four engine bombers.

Now, after 50 years, a final chapter to "Tomlin's Crew" can be written.

But Smallwood says he wonders how it would have felt meeting Dahl face to face.

(See Newspaper story Re. Charles Bilharz in this issue for information on a second 99th BG plane shot down on Feb. 25, 1944 by the German Ace Dahl)

Citrus County Chronicle

Crystal River, FL 34429

February 23, 1995

Brush with history



Robt Cornet/The Chronicle

Surrounded by the efforts of his research, retired Lt. Col. Charles Bilharz learned 50 years later that his World War II bomber was shot down by a famous German ace.

The crossroads of war

C.R. man learns his plane was downed by German flying ace

By Bob Pacitti
Staff writer

Charles Bilharz recently found out that he's just one of 129 notches that could have been painted on the fuselage of a German war ace's airplane.

Saturday will mark the 51st year since Walther Dahl took aim at Bilharz's B-17 and shot the American bomber out of the very unfriendly skies over Regensburg, Germany.

Through a unique set of circumstances, Crystal River's Bilharz found out he's become part of a history book by a German author.

Peter Schmoll is in the process of research to write a book about all the air raids made on Regensburg attempting to destroy aircraft manufacturing plants.

During his research Schmoll wrote to the bomb group of which Bilharz is a member and said he found the remains of two planes.

"One of which was ours," Bilharz said. "They wrote to me and I wrote to this fellow Schmoll."

In the correspondence that followed between the World War II navigator and author, both parties learned how the war treated hunter and hunted.

For Bilharz, Feb. 25, 1944 would be his final combat mission. For Dahl the downing of a B-17 brought him one step closer to an Iron Cross and being acknowledged a German war hero.

Lt. Bilharz left Foggia, Italy that day as part of a crew of 10 of which he was the navigator. Two of them would die due to the attack by a Messerschmitt 109-G.

"It was called Big Week, an all out offensive from Italy and England to knock out German fighter plane production and destroy the German Luftwaffe," Bilharz said.

Bilharz recorded 35 missions, but B-17s didn't have long-range fighter escort and the bombers depended on a bristling array of automatic weapons to fend off the enemy after crossing the Alps.

"We had a new plane and we were flying long range that day," Bilharz said. "Earlier some of the planes went short range and bombed targets in Italy."

"Us lucky ones, we went to Germany."

The bomber crew never reached its target, coming under heavy fighter attack as soon as it cleared the Alps. Bilharz's plane was just one of 183 headed for Regensburg that day.

"They just kept coming at you, coming at you," Bilharz recalled while sitting in the safety of his Florida room 51 years later. "The copilot was killed before we got shot down. The top turret gunner was still in the plane when the rest of us went out."

Due to Walther Dahl's skill as a pilot, the B-17 had its oxygen system shot out, as well as the intercom. The aircraft's controls were shot up and two engines were shot out.

Bilharz was busy trying to breathe as he was flying above 20,000 feet. With the oxygen system gone he was using portable oxygen to keep breathing.

"We had what we called 'walkaround' bottles that you had to keep filling," he said. "I spent half my time filling the bottle and the other half trying to shoot the gun."

But the B-17 was a blind, lumbering warrior about to fall out of the sky.

"The plane was going off on its own," Bilharz said. "We figured it was going into a spin and it was time to get out."

The eight survivors were taken prisoner right away and transported to Frankfurt for a couple of days of interrogation.

"They knew more about us than we knew about ourselves," Bilharz said. "They told me the chaplain's name and I didn't even know that."

The officers in the crew's next trip was in a railroad car called a 40 by 8.

"It was built for 40 men or eight horses," he said. "It was three or four days before we arrived in northern Germany on the Baltic Coast south of Sweden."

Bilharz spent the next 15 months a prisoner of war in Stalag Luft No. 1 at Barth, Germany. He was one of 10,000 American flying officers at the POW camp.

Meanwhile, Dahl, who would go on to become an Oberst (colonel), was busy knocking allied aircraft out of the sky.

Dahl flew 678 missions during the war and was just 29 years old when it ended.

He was credited with 129 aircraft shot down. Thirty of them were four-engine bombers, like Bilharz's. He also downed four P-38s, eight P-51s, two P-47s and a British Spitfire over Malta.

On the Russian front he flew most of his 300-plus strafing missions and downed 64 planes.

On Feb. 23, 1944 he had 62 kills and received the Iron Cross after his 67th.

"I figure we were in this time frame and were probably his 65th kill," Bilharz said.

The war ace's most unusual kill was Sept. 31, 1944 when he rammed a B-17

to bring it down. As the war wound down Dahl began to fly the ME-262, Germany's jet plane. His final kill was April 26, 1945, just five days before the war ended.

"It's amazing to me to find out who actually did it and to find out his life history," Bilharz said. "If he were still alive I'd be going over there this year to meet him."

Dahl died in Heidelberg, Germany at the age of 69 in 1985 as a celebrated hero of the war.

Lt. Col. Charles Bilharz retired after serving 29 years in the Air Force. He doesn't consider himself a hero, although he was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross and six air medals. The DFC was awarded for his action on what Bilharz describes as "the last day."

And he holds no animosity toward the man who tried to kill him that day.

"He was just doing his job and I was doing mine," Bilharz said. "It was war."



HIGHER POWER, GREAT SPIRIT, GREAT MYSTERY AND THAT I AM A VALUABLE PART OF ALL LIFE.

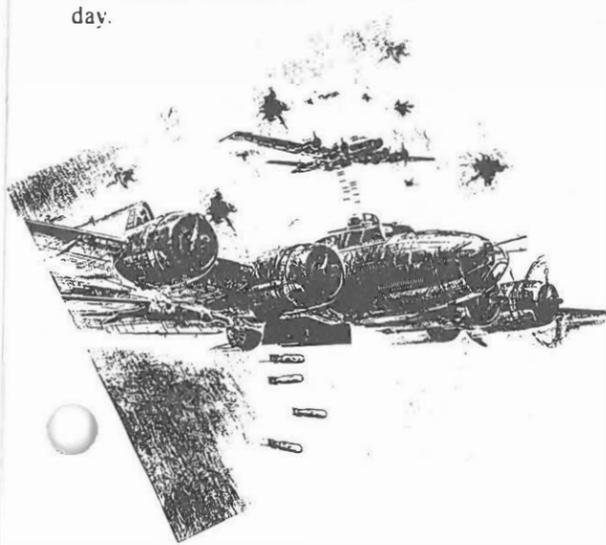
LET ME WALK, THIS DAY, IN THE BEAUTY OF KNOWING THAT I AM LOVED.

LET ME REMEMBER THAT LIFE IS LIKE A WEAVING WITH MANY COLORS AND TEXTURES. NONE BEING LESSOR OR MORE VALUABLE THAN OTHERS.

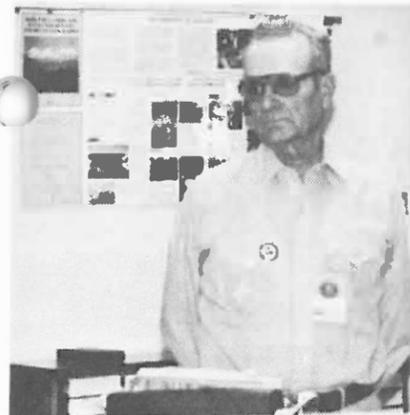
LET ME NOT CRITICIZE ANOTHER UNTIL I HAVE WALKED A MILE IN THAT PERSONS MOCASSINS.

GIVE ME HEALTH AND HELP TO WALK IN A GOOD WAY, THIS DAY, SO THAT I WILL NOT BE ASHAMED TO MEET YOU IN THE SPIRIT WORLD.

THANK YOU FOR MY LIFE. I WILL HONOR THE LIFE YOU HAVE GIVEN ME. MITAKUYE (WE ARE ALL RELATED)



Tipton, Missouri



Koerkenmeier and Arthur Knipp talked to the seventh and eighth graders at St. Andrew's about their experiences during World War II on Monday, V-E Day.

The pair visited the class during the hour before the bells at nearby St. Andrew's rang out more than five minutes, commemorating the Allied victory in Europe 50 years ago. The bell at First Christian Church was also sounded in response to Mayor Joe Lutz's request that bells be rang and flags flown in remembrance of the day.

The two veterans gave the students V-E Day bookmarks and buttons, and the seventh grade teacher, Patsy Reed, presented Koerkenmeier with a gift of appreciation for his service, a medal commemorating the Battle of the Bulge. The medal was picked up by Knipp at V-E Day anniversary ceremonies he attended in Kansas City over the weekend. He also secured one for himself, a European Air Offensive medal.

After their presentation, both veterans stood outside St. Andrew's Church as the bells clanged overhead, reminding all who heard them of the sacrifices made by men and women and families 50 years ago that freedom would remain ours today.

Pages of Camillus woman's scrapbook are tribute to veterans

by Kate Smith

Martha McKinney of Camillus opens the pages of her scrapbooks to an era when young men fought for freedom while those at home watched and waited. Many scanned the newspapers not only to track the second world war's progress, but also in hopes of finding news of loved ones.

The wives and girlfriends did not sit idle; however, but worked diligently toward the war effort.

Life during the war years was exciting, McKinney said, but also busy. A Syracuse native, she was in her 20s when the war began. She worked days at a bank and volunteered evenings watching for enemy airplanes. Volunteers would report to the observation place and keep watch for any sign of an attack, she said.

She also attended business classes, and spent Sunday evenings at the American Legion in Syracuse entertaining soldiers with the GSO (girls service organization -- a division of the USO).

A news clipping she saved dated October, 1942 states that 300 soldiers and sailors were entertained by GSO girls at the legion the previous Sunday night.

The war years had its shortages of food and other materials, McKinney said, but added "... somehow you live through it. You wonder now how we did it but everything was working toward the war effort."

Citizens collected scrap metal for the defense industry. They waited in line for food and did without stockings. They practiced holding blackouts, where everyone in the city would distinguish their lights when the siren sounded.

And McKinney collected news of the war.

Recording history

It was something to do while her boyfriend was away, she said. She had started dating Ross McKinney, who served as a radio



Martha McKinney looks over one of the World War II scrapbooks she put together while dating Ross McKinney.

operator in the Air Force, during the war years. They had been neighbors in Syracuse, and later married and built their home on what was then farmland in Camillus.

McKinney's scrapbooks start with a cartoon depicting the unprepared U.S. soldiers at Pearl Harbor, and follow the war through to reports of the bombing of Japan and the victorious soldier's return home to the states.

She continues to add to her scrapbooks, including information she receives from the National Warplane Museum newsletter.

Also included are personal accounts of battles written by veterans printed in the 99th Bomber Group newsletter. Her husband belonged to the 99th, and visited the warplane museum in Genesee numerous times before his death.

Ross McKinney

A native of Malone, N.Y., Ross had moved to Syracuse to find work. He enlisted in the Air Force in 1941, and was stationed in Bangor, Maine. After the Dec. 7, 1941 Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, he was transferred to Idaho.

He went overseas to England in September of 1942, McKinney remembers. He could not tell her where he was stationed, but she knew he'd been transferred by the change in his APO address, she said.

Later Ross was transferred to Algiers in northern Africa, then to Italy where he finished his 50th mission and was able to return to the states.

"Actually he flew more than 50 missions," McKinney said, explaining that in the summer of 1943 he had transferred from a photographic reconnaissance position on a B-17 to that of a radio operator in a bomber group.

Her husband was wounded while on a photo mapping mission over Tunisia Dec. 7, 1942. He later received a purple heart.

Although Ross returned from the war in the spring of 1945, he still had to serve, and was sent to Oklahoma to train new radio operators.

Returning home

He was discharged June 7, 1945, and married Martha Smith a month later on July 7. Following their wedding at Ervin Methodist Church in Syracuse, they travelled to New York City for a honeymoon.

The cost for their five night stay at the Hotel Piccadilly was \$25.22, McKinney said, adding that she still has a copy of the hotel bill.

McKinney lives in their home on Hinsdale Avenue, but these days the building is surrounded by hundreds of other Camillus homes.



This photograph of Ross and Martha was taken in the mid-1940s.

March 6, 1995

Dick Drain
3307 Glouster Street
Springfield OH 45503

Dear Dick,

In response to your letter of 1 February, I am the co-pilot Robert Johnson referred to in the crew of the "Stardust" reported missing on 27 January 1944. To the best of my memory, I will try to recount the circumstances.

Having arrived in Foggia from Tunis a month earlier, this was my 22nd mission. "Stardust" was one of the few "F" models left in the group. This was her eighty-fifth mission, but she was still in good shape.

The take-off and join-up went smoothly. Approaching the target, the 347th Squadron was to separate itself to the left from the group, by about a mile, to pick up a target on the opposite side of the airport the main group had targeted. That seemed the start of our undoing. About this time, we were attacked by ME-109's, singularly, from 11:30 high. The 109's kept firing to a point two or three hundred yards away, and then did a half roll as they passed under the squadron. Number two engine was shot out and the prop feathered on the first pass. Each successive pass compounded the problems to the point that after the second and third pass, it was impossible to maintain airspeed and altitude. The bombardier has previously salvaged the bombs and closed the bomb bay doors, but this had minimal effect on remaining airborne. Number one engine was lost and on fire, number three engine had lost its supercharger, leaving number four as the only good engine. A shallow descending left turn was begun and an order was given to bail out, along with the alarm bell. The flight engineer left the cockpit area for the rear of the aircraft at this time. I was among those that left via the forward hatch and remember looking back thru the aircraft and seeing no one. We were later informed that the flight engineer was on board when the aircraft crashed.

I don't remember pulling the rip cord, but remember the pilot and main chute coming out in a long string between my feet before popping open. A ME-109 with one landing gear extended lined up on me but didn't shoot, then veered off and circled a couple of times, presumably trying to determine where I was going to land. It was difficult to determine drift in the chute, and I ended up landing backwards and was temporarily knocked out. By the time I regained consciousness, I was surrounded by a French farm family who lived just beyond a knoll that was not visible from where I was located. They gathered up my chute, harness, and Mae West, and took off to hide the gear in the woods or underbrush. One member of the group had run down the road to act as a look out. After a short time, he whistled a warning and the family hurried back to the farmhouse. I went back a little further from the road and hid in the underbrush. A squad of German soldiers marched by, so close that I could hear them talking, as they made their way toward the farmhouse. After they had disappeared over the knoll, I started running, bent over behind a hedgerow, until I ran out of breath and sat down to rest.

At this time the bombardier and I encountered one another. A few days later we joined up with two other crew members - the pilot and the waist gunner. We spent a month evading, with the help of French civilians, who assisted us at great risk to their own lives and personal safety.

The pilot and waist gunner managed to escape into Spain, and were returned to the United States. The bombardier and I were captured in Perpignan and taken to Stalag Luft #1 on the Baltic Sea near Barth, Germany, where we remained until the war's end.

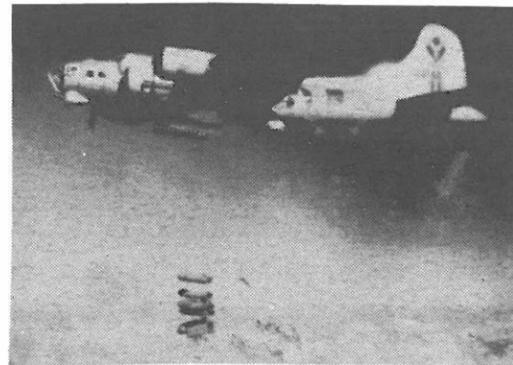
The remainder of the crew had been captured soon after being shot down. The navigator was also at Stalag Luft #1. The others were POWs elsewhere.

I hope you will find some of this information useful in your research.

Sincerely,

Bob Johnson

Lt. Wesley G Coss crew, Lt. Robert W Johnson, Lt. Walter M Amundson, Lt. Ernest R Jenkins, Sgt Edward T Madigan, S/Sgt Joseph Finnane, S/Sgt Oscanie Najarin, Sgt Harold B Rice, Sgt James P Hoskins, and Sgt Clifford E Henderson.



[Note: *Stardust*, 25746, was assigned to the 347th as a replacement aircraft on 2 February 1943. It suffered battle damage on the 14 April 43 mission to Monserrato but managed to crash land at base. It was then repaired and returned to duty.

History of the 99th Bomb Group

The Board has approved publication of a history of the 99th BG. Turner Publishing in Paducah KY will do the printing. I was appointed editor of the project and am anxious to begin work.

I urge you to send me stories for inclusion in the book. Send your combat experiences, humorous incidents, and inputs from the ground personnel who made flying combat missions possible. This also includes all who did not fly combat, clerks, personnel, engineering, ordnance, medics, chaplain, etc. I want to have a diversified history to show this was a total team effort by the 99th.

I also need pictures of planes, crews, ground personnel, area shots, and any others that might merit publication. Any pictures you want to keep will be copied and the originals returned. Please specify if you want the picture returned. In any case, all pictures will be copied and prints retained in our files until everything is turned over to Maxwell at the appropriate time. If anyone has any good shots of the memorials at the USAF Museum and at the USAF Academy please send them to me.

Turner Publishing Company will be contacting all members in the future and request you submit biographical information and "then" and "now" pictures. This does not require you to purchase the book when it is published. If you don't have "then" and "now" pictures, submit your bio data anyway. Or if you have only one picture, submit that.

I have also contacted an artist who will do the art work for the cover at no cost. I need your cooperation. So let's all pitch in and make this effort a big success.

Dick Drain



What Better Reason to Celebrate . . .
After 50 Years!!!

WE ARE SURVIVORS!! Consider the changes we have witnessed:

We were born before television, before penicillin, before polio shots, frozen foods, Xerox, plastic, contact lenses, Frisbies, and the PILL.

We were born before radar, credit cards, split atoms, laser beams, and ballpoint pens: before pantyhose, dishwashers, clothes dryers, electric blankets, air conditioners, drip-dry clothes and before man walked on the moon.

We got married first and *then* lived together. How quaint can you be?

In our time, closets were for clothes, not for "coming out of." Buns were small rabbits and rabbits were not Volkswagens. Designer Jeans were scheming girls named Jean or Jeannie, and having a

meaningful relationship meant getting along well with your cousins.

We thought fast food was what you ate during lent, and Outer Space was the back of the upper balcony at the Mikado (Victory) Theatre.

We were before house-husbands, gay rights, computer dating, dual careers and computer marriages. We were before day-care centers, group therapy and nursing homes. We never heard of FM radio, CDs, Electric typewriters, artificial hearts, word processors, yogurt, and guys wearing earrings. For us time sharing means togetherness--not computers or condominiums: a 'chip' meant a piece of wood: Hardware meant hardware: and software wasn't even a word!

In 1940, "made in Japan" meant JUNK and the term 'making out' referred to how you did on your exam. Pizzas, "MacDonalds" and Instant coffee were unheard of.

We hit the scene when there were 5 and 10 Cent stores, where you bought things for five and ten cents. Velvet Freeze and Katz Drugs sold ice cream cones for a nickel or a dime. For a dime you could ride a streetcar. For a nickel you could make a phone call, buy a Pepsi, or enough stamps to mail one letter and two postcards. You could buy a new Chevy Coupe for \$600.00, but who could afford one; a pity too, because gas was 11 cents a gallon!

In our day, cigarette smoking was fashionable. GRASS was mowed,

COKE was a cold drink and POT was something you cooked in. ROCK MUSIC was Grandma's lullaby and AIDS were helpers in the Principal's office.

We were certainly not before the differences between the sexes was discovered, but we were surely before the sex change: we made do with what we had. And we were the last generation that was so dumb as to think you needed a husband to have a baby!

No wonder we are so confused and there is such a generation gap today!

BUT WE SURVIVED!!! What better reason to celebrate?

Marge Smith [Jim Smith's wife] gave me the following for the newsletter:

"HELL IN ITALY"

"I'm sitting here a thinkin' of what I left behind,
So I'll put it down in writin', what's runnin' through my mind.
We've dropped so many bloomin' bombs an' done so many flights,
An' froze our feet an' han's an' things while ridin' at sub-zero heights.
But there is one consolation, now you listen while I tell
When we die we'll go to heaven, 'cause we've done our hitch in HELL.

We've taken a million atabrine, those dirty yellow pills,
To fortify our systems a-gin the fever an' the chills.
We've seen a million Ack-Ack bursts around us in the sky,
Fear's gripped our hearts and chilled our blood when flak began to fly.
"Put on those loving' dirty flak suits', we hear our Pilot yell,
'Cause this ain't a bloomin' picnic, it's another hitch in HELL.

But when taps have sounded, and we leave our earthly cares,
We'll stage our best parade of all, upon the Golden Stairs,
Angels will be there to meet us an' harps will softly play
We'll draw a million dollars an' we'll spend it in a day.
Old Gabriel will be there to meet us, an' St. Peter will proudly yell,
'Front seats, you guys from Italy, you've done your hitch in HELL."

Lt. Harry Hathaway, 348th Squadron, 99th Bomb Group, was killed in action on February 22, 1945.

NEW MEMBERS

WILLIAM C. DRABOT, RFD#1, Box 87, Orangeville, PA 17859 • 348th Sq.
JOHN S. FARNHAM, 35 Fairholm Drive, Rochester, NY 14624 • Associate
MELVIN E. HALL, 8975 E. 200 N. Marion, IN 46925-8722 • 347th Sq.
DELOS A. ROCKWELL, RR#2, Box 176A, Ten Mile Rd., Irons, MI 49644 • Associate
RONNIE DAVID, 75-40 Austin Street, Forest Hills, NY 11375 • Associate
J. L. SIDWELL, P.O. Box 3873, Kingman, AZ 86402 • Associate

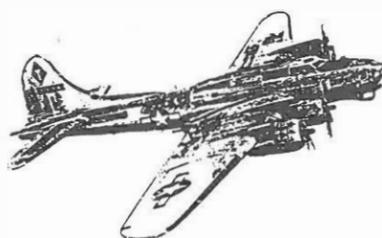
CHANGE OF ADDRESS

ROBERT G. MACK, 161 Casseekee Trail, Melbourne, FL 32951 • 348th Sq.

TAPS • TAPS • TAPS • TAPS • TAPS

EUGENE DAVID • EDITH GREATHOUSE • JOHN DURWARD BADGLEY
PAUL RASNER

FRED C. HUEGLIN, Jr., former Historical Society Director and Vice President, passed away February 15, 1995 at his Brooksville, FL home. Fred was the Radio Operator on Bert Twamley's crew in the 346th Sq. He is survived by a son and two daughters and five grandchildren.



Valor

By John L. Frisbee, Contributing Editor

Operation Gunn

Lt. Col. James A. Gunn gambled his life to ensure that POWs in Romania would be repatriated as the Germans withdrew.

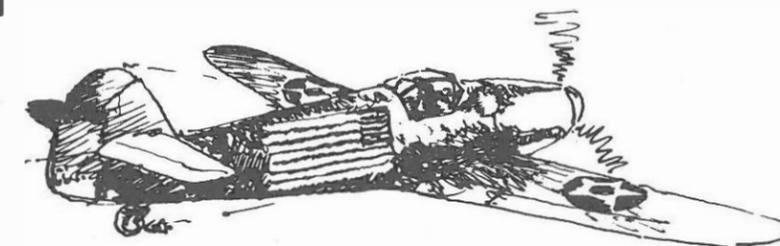
AFTER the famous August 1943 low-level bombing of oil refineries at Ploesti, Romania, it was several months before Fifteenth Air Force in Italy attained a strength adequate for a sustained campaign against Ploesti while meeting its other commitments in southern and central Europe. Between April 5 and August 19, 1944, Fifteenth Air Force's heavy bombers hit Ploesti nineteen times. Oil production in that complex was reduced by an estimated eighty percent, but enemy defenses remained strong, downing 223 bombers and many fighters. Some 1,100 captured bomber and fighter crews became POWs in Romania.

On August 23, 1944, King Michael of Romania, whose country had joined Germany in 1940, surrendered to Soviet forces that had advanced into the country. In the next few days, one of the most unusual adventures of World War II took place.

It all began on August 17, when Fifteenth Air Force sent 248 bombers to Ploesti. Lt. Col. James A. Gunn, commander of the 454th Bomb Group, led his B-24s on that strike. Before bombs away, four of the eight planes in his lead squadron were shot down by flak. Gunn and all but one of his crew parachuted safely and were captured immediately by the Romanians.

After interrogation, Colonel Gunn was sent to the officers' prison in Bucharest, where he was the senior Allied officer. Although the POWs were not harmed physically, living conditions in the prison were appalling.

As news of the surrender spread, Romanian prison guards vanished, leaving the gates open. Gunn's first task was to keep the POWs from vanishing into the city and surrounding countryside until arrangements for their repatriation could be made.



It was some time before he could find anyone with authority. The retreating Germans had begun reprisal bombing of Bucharest, which added to the general terror at the prospect of Soviet occupation.

Colonel Gunn finally located several senior Romanian officials who agreed to move the POWs to a safer location and to fly him to Italy (there were no functioning radio or wire facilities in Romania) so he could contact Fifteenth Air Force about evacuating the POWs. In return, Gunn agreed to arrange for Fifteenth Air Force to attack the fields from which the Germans were bombing the city and to convey a request that Romania be occupied by either the British or the Americans.

True to their word, the Romanians arranged a flight to Italy in an ancient twin-engine aircraft. Twenty minutes out, the Romanian pilot turned back, claiming engine trouble. On landing, Gunn was approached by Capt. Constantine Cantacuzino, who offered to fly him to Italy in the belly of a Bf-109. Captain Cantacuzino was commander of a Romanian fighter group that had been flying for the Luftwaffe. He also was Romania's leading ace and a member of the royal family. The risk of this venture was not slight.

If they were downed by German or American fighters or by flak, or had engine failure, it would be curtains for Gunn, locked in the aft fuselage of the Bf-109.

There were no maps of Italy available, so Gunn drew from memory a map of the southeast coast of the country and an approach chart for his home base at San Giovanni Airfield. He wanted Captain Cantacuzino to fly on the deck to avoid German radar, but the Romanian, who did

not have complete confidence in his engine, held out for 19,000 feet, which would test Gunn's tolerance to cold and lack of oxygen.

As an added precaution, they had a large American flag painted on both sides of the fuselage. While that was being done, Cantacuzino drew Gunn aside and told him their plan to take off early the next morning had become widely known and might be compromised. As soon as the painting was finished, Cantacuzino produced heavy flying gear for Gunn, stuffed him through an eighteen-inch-square access door into the fuselage (from which the radio had been removed), locked the door, and took off at 5:20 p.m. on August 27. The two-hour flight was completed without incident, though the Bf-109's engine began to run rough over the Adriatic.

The two men were immediately driven to Fifteenth Air Force headquarters at Bari. Planning began that night for strikes on the German airfield near Bucharest and for evacuation of the POWs in quickly modified B-17s. The plan was designated Operation Gunn. By September 3, 1,161 Allied prisoners of war had been flown out of Romania. Colonel Gunn had gambled his life and won—as had the POWs. Sadly, Romania was to remain under brutal Soviet control for the next forty-five years.

Jim Gunn retired from the Air Force as a colonel in 1967 and now lives in San Antonio, Tex., where he heads a real estate business and is active in civic affairs. ■

Thanks to Lt. Col. Bob Goebel, USAF (Ret.), who told us about this story, and to Colonel Gunn for providing many details.

Dear Bernie,

My wife, Merlyn and I enjoyed the St. Louis reunion made memorable by our great hosts, Fancis and Nel Grantz. I was able to get ten good pictures of members to include under the caption of the 1995 St. Louis reunion.

The two stories I gave to you in St. Louis are from the book that I began writing 25 years ago. "The Oran Training Base" is about how I almost became a casualty before we got to combat. Our navigator, Joe Boyle, was continually picking on me. He had "Washed out" of Primary when he ground-looped a Stearman and chased his instructor into the hangar. After a few drinks, the rivalry got worse.

The chapter in the "Gerbini Mission" was very important to the book as our crew would have been shot down on July 4, 1943 had Major Warren Whitmore's navigator not missed the rendezvous with the British Spitfires out of Malta. The next day, Bankhead and I were removed from the last element over the target. We were then up front with the 416th. The 348th. was relegated to be the last squadron over the target with Colonel Upthegrove deciding to lead the mission on July 5th. The last three B-17's of the 348th were shot down that day.

James F. Bruno, 347th

Available August 1995 —

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From: Lee J. Riordan

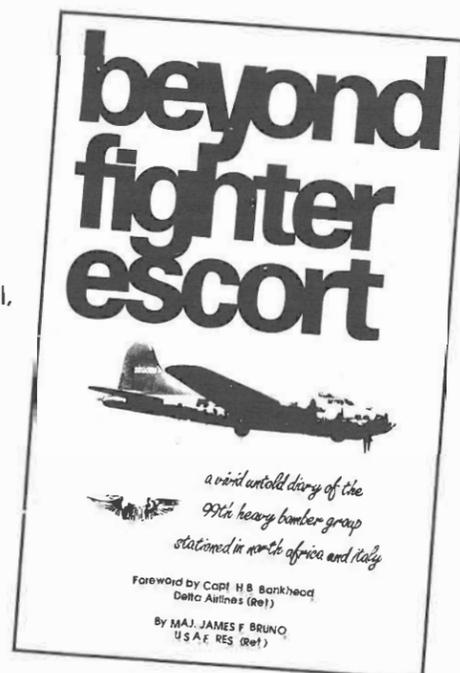
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THE ORAN TRAINING BASE

On March 5, 1943, we left the resort city of Marrakech and the fine accommodations of the Hotel de La Mammounia. Our next stop was the French air base at Oran in French Morocco. We were housed in barracks, reminiscent of the French Foreign Legion, with the parade grounds occupying the center of the complex. We saw many of our army tents set up around the grounds also.

The first night Bankhead, Fronefield and I decided to play cards, while Joe decided to slip into town and catch a beer or two. Sometime after midnight we were rudely awakened by Joe as he came singing loudly down the halls and into the bedroom. Through my half open eyes, I found myself looking into the barrel of Joe's .45 pistol. "Bruno", he bellowed, "I'm going to blow your head off." As he stood there weaving at the foot of my bed, I taunted him, "go ahead, Joe, I'll bet a dollar you'll miss."

Bankhead, getting very upset with Joe's antics shouted at him, "Damn it Joe, put down that gun before someone gets hurt!" Joe only laughed and stroked the barrel of the gun. Suddenly Joe tossed the gun, with the safety off onto my bed. Bankhead made one leap from his bed across Fronefield's bed and picked up the loaded gun, put the safety on and unloaded the magazine.

Joe then became melancholy and told us how sorry he was and promised not shoot anyone. He was given his gun back and quietly reloaded it and walked out the french doors of the bedroom onto the balcony overlooking the parade grounds. The next thing we knew he fired seven shots into the parade grounds from the story bedroom. He came laughing back into the room saying, "Bruno, I just killed five gooks."

By this time the barracks was coming to life and lights were going on in most of the rooms. Joe calmly hid the gun under his mattress, straightened up like a 30 year top sergeant and announced he was going downstairs to the latrine. On the way down he met a colonel who had been jarred out of bed by the shooting. He asked Joe if he knew who was doing the shooting. "No", said Joe, "but I would like to get hold of the bastard too, he woke me up".

Joe then came back to the room and soon was off in a sound sleep. The following morning he broke out laughing when we told him what he had done the night before. "I really did that", he said.

By March 27th, we had practiced our gunnery, high altitude missions, formation, navigation and practice bombing missions, and got ready to leave Oran. During our stay we had accumulated a variety of extra supplies and equipment that we loaded into the plane. Among the goods was a French bicycle one of the men came upon and I picked up a good sized load of lumber for flooring to use in our tent. That African mud was not to my liking, so I intended to have some of the comforts of home. The twelve foot long pile of lumber extended from the radio room door to the rear entrance door of the plane. There was no question the weight was going to give us a problem getting off the ground. The night before take-off Captain Burrell stopped by the plane and looked into the waist compartment. He was shocked at all the things we had picked up to bring to the front and asked me how the weight and balance checked out? He didn't know it, but at this stage of the game, I had long forgotten the slide rule and if I had used it, we would have had to unload half the plane. So I told him we estimated that we could make it off in the 5,000 feet of runway.

Somehow, the Captain must not have slept that night, as the next morning he came to the plane and told us he had decided to fly to the next base in our plane and would rather take it off himself. I gave up my co-pilot seat to Bankhead and stood behind hoping the plane would get off and clear the fence and trees at the end of the runway.

We watched the advance planes lift off the runway with ease and climb out with plenty of runway to spare. Then came our turn. The Captain taxied into position, revved up the engines almost to full throttle while holding the brakes on. The brakes were then released and the heavy plane began to roll. Over half the runway was used up before the heavy tail came off the ground. We began to worry. In the nose section Joe and David were sweating out the take-off run and wondering if those trees at the end of the runway would be our final resting place. We had about 500 feet of runway left when the plane finally became air-borne with much coaxing from the captain.

He called Bankhead to retract the wheels and change the propeller pitch. The engines strained to keep us climbing as we all started to breath again. It was a close call, but Captain Harry Burrell never chided me for overloading the tail section of our plane.

The Allies were preparing for the invasion of Italy when they decided on a 4th of July celebration by destroying one of Sicily's largest fighter bases. This mission was also beyond the range of our American fighters. The British Spitfires based on the island of Malta were to meet us over a predetermined area over the Mediterranean and south of Sicily. Some sixty Spitfires were to be our escort. Major Whitmore of the 348th Squadron was to lead our group. The 98th Bomb Group and the 301st were also on this mission.

Bankhead and I were in the last element of the twenty four planes of our group. With a total of some 75 planes for this mission we felt secure in returning from the important raid about to be accomplished. With the gallant record of the British Spitfires, we felt doubly secure. Captain Burrell was leading our 347th Squadron.

Little did we know that orders had come down from Nazi General Goering that their fighters were to shoot down the last three B-17's of the formation. Somehow the navigator in Major Whitmore's lead plane miscalculated the rendezvous point and the Spitfires were not sighted. Major Whitmore wisely decided not to chance the formation to go it alone, and decided to return to the base in Africa and in doing so the mission was aborted. That navigation error probably saved our lives as we found out the next day.

On July 5th the mission was rescheduled. This time Col. Upthegrove decided to lead the mission. Captain Bob Elliott was to lead the 348th Squadron. Bankhead and I were also reshuffled to be up front and to the right of Colonel's squadron. I guess he figured our gunners would protect his plane by pouring plenty of their lead into the enemy fighters. The last squadron over the target fell to Captain Elliott. He too was unaware of the orders to shoot down the last three B-17's.

The rendezvous was accomplished at the agreed position and altitude over the Mediterranean and all planes proceeded on a northerly course into the central part of Sicily. Little did we know that the toughest battle with the enemy was about to begin.

Long before the target was in sight, swarms of Messerschmitts were up high to defend their base. They tried aerial bombs that exploded in front of us. They came diving through our formation in frontal attacks in pairs with the Spitfires right on their tail. They tried to split up the squadron and cripple as many planes as they could.

Over the intercom there was continuous excited bits of chatter as to what was happening. They even complained that the Spitfires were coming through the formation and shooting at us. With some one hundred Messerschmitts and sixty Spitfires, who could keep track in that inferno of blazing machine guns. In the heat of the attack, our colonel calmly lead us down the bomb run and bombs were accurately dropped on our section of the field and hangars.

After bombs away, the diving turn off the target was always a welcome relief. Soon we were to hear over the radio that our planes at the rear squadron were under heavy fighter attack. They were sustaining damage to engines and control cables. We heard that men were being instructed to bail out when the plane could no longer be maneuvered. Of the twenty four planes that Colonel Upthegrove brought over the target, he was ^{not} returning to the base in Africa with twenty one. We were all hoping that the thirty who were not so lucky had bailed out and were not injured.

Back at our base, the debriefing with the gunners and pilots was conducted. A total of 36 enemy planes were confirmed to have been shot down. Who knows the number that were shot down by the gunners who did not make it back?

Several days later, we got word that the German pilots had visited our wounded airmen they had captured. They were visited at the hospital. The German pilots admitted they had lost 51 planes. Those were surprising statistics, but what about the ones out of the 51 that should have been credited to the spitfires? Just because an enemy plane was seen going down in smoke, a gunner firing in that direction could claim it as well as others in the same formation. We did not learn how many Spits were lost nor the number they had destroyed. Those spits put up one gallant fight to protect us that day.

Authors note. (I read several years after the war that the island of Malta was one of the most highly bombed islands by the Nazis. It sustained over two thousand air strikes as it lay across the route of supplies being shipped to North Africa.)

The account of the fate of the last three B-17's and their crews is vividly written here by Intelligence Officer Captain Hutchison of our group. General Upthegrove sent me this in our correspondence in 1970.

HEADQUARTERS
NINETY-NINTH BOMBARDMENT GROUP (H) ARMY AIR FORCES
Office of the Intelligence Officer

19 July, 1943

PRESS RELEASE: By Captain G.E. Hutchison

The heavy bombardment crew members were sprawled across their cots today in a North African hospital pinching themselves to see if it was all true and that they were really alive and back in a building over which flew the Stars and Stripes. They were receiving plaudits of privates and colonels from their group alike as if they had arisen from the dead to bring back word of a fortnight's nightmarish episode in which they and members of three entire crews had been practically given up for dead after having been shot down over Sicily at the outbreak of the Allied invasion of the island at the toe of Italy's boot.

Today the boot was on the other foot for Staff Sergeant, Allen B. Huckabee, at 42 believed to be the oldest gunner in the North African theater (770 North Seventh St., Temple, Texas) and flak-riddled Technical Sergeant, David Flemming, 1405 South Milwaukee St., Jackson, Michigan, radio operator.

With four men already killed in their B-17 after an attack by more than 100 enemy pursuit ships during a raid over the main airdrome at Gerbini, Sicily, at noon on July 5, and their guns shot out by flak and 20 m shells, Huckabee, Flemming and five others bailed out to be captured only a few minutes later by Italian troops.

But let me tell the story:

"We were about five minutes after the target when a swarm of Italian and German planes jumped us. They were coming at us from all directions in groups of two, three and four. We were riding in the lead plane of the second element. At about this time the flak began popping around us like a belated Fourth of July celebration and we knew we were in for a battle. Finally our number four engine caught fire and we couldn't feather the props which slowed us down to about 110 miles an hour. The entire formation slowed down to cover us but soon our second engine was shot out and were slowed to a stalling speed. The plane on the right wing pulled in close to us but it seemed like his motors were running away.?"

"Just at this time our tail gunner came crawling through the fuselage. He was bleeding and we could see that he was shot in the stomach. We couldn't do a thing for him because we were all so busy. The boy stood up and helped our left waist gunner feed the shells and all of a sudden he toppled over dead."

"The ball turret gunner came crawling out, his left leg below the knee gone, and a deep wound in his left chest. It was only a matter of seconds and he was gone."

Huckabee told how he looked through to the front of the ship and saw the co-pilot leaning against the pilot. He said he left his guns long enough to go up and pull him away only to find him dead too, a deep ugly hole in his right chest.

Huckabee said he kept firing at the seemingly endless rush of fighter planes when he looked around and saw his fellow waist gunner lying dead with a hole in his head and a deep gash on one of his shoulders.

"The noise was terrific," they said.

"The bullets and shells sounded like rice in a tin can. We were losing altitude and finally our pilot, who incidentally did the greatest job we ever saw told us to jump." About this time a 20mm shell came through the fuselage and lodged in the lower part of Huckabee's back.

"Just then there was an explosion in the bomb bay sector which knocked us out. We came to and hurriedly buckling on our parachute equipment we made for the door only to find it wedged shut. We managed to make for the windows and climbed out. We were down to about 5,000 feet when we took to the silk."

"As we were going down all the pursuit except three seemed to disappear. These three kept circling around us all the time we were going down. We did see more parachutes in the air and we are sure they were from the ship on our right wing which was giving engine trouble back early in the battle. We later saw the plane crash land in flames on a beach."

"When we hit, some farmers ran out and came to a halt at a distance until we motioned them to come on over. Reluctantly they came over and finally they picked us



Our Home Away From Home. Send Bernie Some Names And A Story If Your Recognize These Folks.



up and carried us over to their farmyard. The five others who had bailed out of our plane rejoined us. The Sicilians gave us water and blankets, but after about 10 minutes, soldiers in civilian clothing leaped over the fence and with guns drawn made us prisoners. They searched us and pretty soon an Italian Red Cross ambulance came along and took us to a Catholic hospital about five miles away and 15 miles from Ragusa. There they gave us first aid and dressed our wounds. It was not about two o'clock in the afternoon."

"The first thing they did was to put the two of us in a ward. We were the only ones injured. The five others, who didn't get a scratch, were taken to another part of the building. That was the last we saw them but we later learned from a pilot they had been flown to a prisoner of war camp near Venice, Italy."

"Next they tried to interrogate us. We were first asked our names, rank and serial numbers. We replied we were not troopers and they asked us if we had been on any of the Plermo or Messian raids. They were plenty mad about these two raids, claiming 200,000 had been killed in Plaermo alone from raids by heavy bombardment groups."

"First a colonel interrogated us. We found out later that he was the first to surrender when Ragusa was captured by the Americans. He asked us where our group was located and to the question "how many planes are the Americans turning out every day" we answered, "30,000." That made him plenty mad and he called us liars. Finally he stormed: "Don't you ignorant Americans know better than to try to conquer Italy and Germany."

"We just laughed and snickered and he got real mad and brushed out of the room in a huff. Next a civilian interrogated us and bout every other question was: "Did you bomb Plaermo?"

"They took everything away from us, even our dog tags. We were like two monkeys in a cage. Everyone tried to take a look at us. They even climbed up on the outside wall to peer through the foot-square iron-barred window. That afternoon the Colonel brought a lot of his friends down to show us off, even to his little daughter."

"They kept pounding us with questions. "How many men have you in Africa? How many planes have you three? Where is your base? How many raids have you been on?" These were only a few."

"We had an orderly 24 hours a day who was instructed to get us anything we wanted within reason. Two guards were at our bedside. We stayed there all that night and the next day they moved us to the International Red Cross Hospital at Ragusa. Two miles from the hospital, American bombers came over and we "sweated it out" under a cliff for an hour until the raiders were gone."

"There was a lot of red tape getting us in the hospital, but once we got in, they treated us royally. They took us to the operating room and dressed our wounds. They started asking us more questions but we feigned great pain so they laid off. We had a guard placed around us, but we learned later the guard wasn't placed there to keep us from escaping. We were being guarded from fanatics who carried the grudge of the Palermo raid."

"Then came the day when the Americans took Ragusa. The city had a population of 50,000. It was all done by 17 G.I.'s and three jeeps and you can put that down as official. The night before the invasion they told us the Americans were coming. You should have seen the two guards clear out. Then all the Italian wounded and sick came to us and asked us to have the Americans spare them. They had been told they would be slaughtered when and if the Americans came."

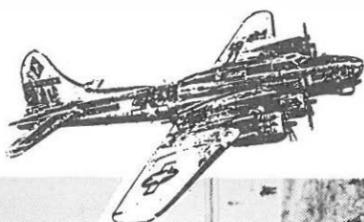
"The first we knew the Americans were there was shortly before daybreak when a sergeant came in swaggering with tommy-gun. He "took" the hospital single handedly."

"It was not long that the Italians were really glad the Yankees had come. But the next morning about 9:30 they started shelling the city and we had to run for cover. We all went down into the basement."

"Finally we worked up enough nerve to go out and steal a jeep. We drove tow blocks to the post office where the American headquarters were located. Mind you, all this time we had on pajamas and had them on to this very day."



99th BG Fabric Shop Folks. Do You Have A Story ?



99th BG Weather Folks. Do You Have A Story ?

DESIDERATA

Go placidly amid the noise and haste and remember what peace there may be in silence. As far as possible, without surrender, be on good terms with all persons. Speak your truth quietly and clearly and listen to others-even the dull and ignorant-they too have their story. Avoid loud and aggressive persons, they are vexations to the spirit.

If you compare yourself with others you may become vain and bitter, for there will always be greater and lesser persons than yourself.

Enjoy your achievements as well as your plans.

Keep interested in your own career, however humble. It is a real possession in the changing fortunes of time. Exercise caution in your business affairs for the world is full of trickery. But let this not blind you to what virtue there is. Many persons strive for high ideals, and everywhere life is full of heroism.

Be yourself. Especially do not feign affection. Neither be cynical about love; for in the face of all aridity and disenchantment it is perennial as the grass.

Take kindly the counsel of the years, gracefully surrendering the things of youth. Nurture strength of spirit to shield you in sudden misfortune. But do not distress yourself with imaginings. Many fears are borne of fatigue and loneliness.

Beyond a wholesome discipline, be gentle with yourself.

You are a child of the universe, no less than the trees and the stars and you have a right to be here. And whether or not it is clear to you, no doubt the universe is unfolding as it should.

Therefore, be at peace with God, whatever you conceive him to be. And whatever your labors and aspirations in the noisy confusion of life, keep peace with your soul.

With all its sham, drudgery and broken dreams, it is still a beautiful world.

Be careful. Strive to be happy.

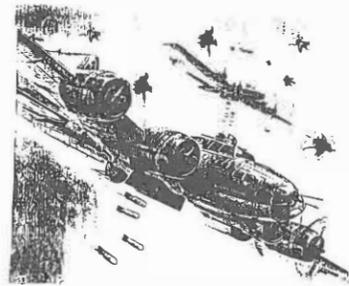
Found in Old St. Paul's Church, Baltimore, dated 1692

WAR DIARY OF THE 99TH BOMBARDMENT GROUP (H) 347TH BOMB SQ

MONTH OF MARCH 1944

1 MARCH -- Eight of our A/C took off on combat mission but were shortly after called back due to weather. Little out of our ordinary day has occurred. The enlisted men's mess hall is being walled in on the one side formerly covered by spare sides of a portable hanger. The long wall built of typical blocks of rough quarried stone will contain doorways at either end and several openings for windows. In addition to this alteration, a doorway is being put into the wall at one of the narrower ends of the brick and stucco shed which will be the entrance to a walled-in space, about 10 ft by 10 ft, to be used as a storage space for supplies of the kitchen instead of the pyramidal tent now used. Italian labor, under the supervision of one of our men, are doing the work. A meeting of all enlisted men was held in the enlisted men's mess hall after chow this evening. One of the purposes was to set up a committee which will act as a board of governors for the EM Day Room now being erected. An auction of some 50 - 50 parcels of cigarettes, food, fountain pens, etc. collected from personnel not returned from missions yielded some four hundred odd dollars. This is to be used for the purchase of furnishings for the government-paid E/M Day Room. The following men are on the committee and will serve until voted out by the EM of the squadron:

M/Sgt Joseph G. Celline - Line Chief
T/Sgt Vincent A. Paltanavage - Crew Chief
S/Sgt Harold E. Grassel - Sergeant Major
Sgt John T. Curley, Jr. - Armorer
Sgt Carrol P. Gray - Combat Personnel
Sgt Meno A. Malaguti - Communications
Sgt Joseph F. McGettigan - Combat Personnel
Sgt Harry R. Ormer - Cook



The boys knew that the proceeds of the auction were going to be put to a good cause so they bid heavily for the articles auctions. Prices varied from \$2.00 to \$25.00 the highest bid of the evening for 16 cartons of cigarettes.

3 MARCH -- Today was operational for our squadron. A new combat crew was assigned to us today. They crossed the Atlantic on a large American vessel unescorted. A C-47 flew them from Oran, Algeria to nearby Foggia Main. The chow was very good this evening, the main dish being fried pork chops. We are promised a 20-ounce bottle of beer each tomorrow evening, but this sounds almost too good to be true. "It's a Date" with a cast of 60 at the Flagella Theater in town under the auspices of the American Red Cross is drawing a good attendance and the fellows are all bringing back good reports on it.

4 MARCH -- Five of our A/C and a sixth and seventh crew of our squadron flying 301st Bomb Gp fortresses (all "Tokyo" ships) took off for a mission this morning after a couple hours delay due to the uncertainty of the weather and were recalled when they had reached zero visibility in the curtain of cold rain spread across certain sections of southern Europe this morning. Special orders posted this morning, dated 1 march 1944, promoting five of our squadron personnel. There was fresh meat for chow tonight and beer for us from 1900 hours to 2030 hours. Each enlisted man was given a 20-ounce bottle of beer by presenting his PX ration card. The beer was very good and some of the drinking men managed to get more than one bottle by gifts from some of the nondrinkers. It was made in Foggia out of British hops by one of the corps of American breweries back home. It is hoped that the institution of beer at least weekly will come about. The quart size Italian bottles with plunger caps of rubber and porcelain wired to the neck are rare commodities in these parts and we have been requested to return them as soon as they are emptied lest our beer ration be cut for lack of containers. The officers are having a party of their own across the road in the Officers Club where their mess and Commanding Officer's quarters are also located. There are American girls at their party from the overseas women's services and their presence is known though unseen, strangely makes the business for which we are here seem more natural and the "homeward urge" though still strong, is somewhat allayed in a redirection toward their presence.

5 MARCH -- The mission scheduled for today was canceled because of weather. It was raining and chilly all day and work was stopped on the construction of the enlisted men's mess and enlisted men's club. It was a very gloomy Sunday and transportation to and from church services at Group Hq. in the morning and evening as usual. There are also a few games of chance being conducted in some of the tents as "leftovers" from pay day.

6 MARCH -- Today's mission was canceled because of weather. The formation scheduled this morning for the awarding of medals had a very small representation because of take-off time on the scheduled mission. Several of our men were awarded Air Medals and Purple Hearts. The presentation of the medals was made by Colonel Lawrence, our former commanding officer. It has been a very nasty day. Raining and a cold wind blowing. Work was canceled again on our new buildings and some of us are wondering if the EM club is going to be completed in time for our scheduled dance in May. We are hearing an ugly rumor that there may be compulsory close order drill periods to begin in the near future. We had fresh meat stew for supper tonight. "Gentleman Jim" starring Errol Flynn played at the movie here on the base tonight.

7 MARCH -- Eight of our A/C took off on mission to bomb the submarine pens at Toulon, France but were unable to get over the target due to complete overcast. Two A/C landed for gas at fields on the return route and have not come in to home base. The remaining 6 A/C brought all their bombs back home the early part of the afternoon. today was completely uneventful in the squadron. There was baked ham, raw scallions, potato salad and not sweet potatoes, bread with fresh butter, and raisin pie for supper. A large number of the men came back off the mission today or returned from town to find that their tents had been rifled and a lot of articles were missing. Cigarettes were the chief attraction for the meddlers.

8 MARCH -- Today was scheduled to be nonoperational for us. At 0030 hours, part of us were awakened by a distant siren which was very hard to hear. A few minutes later, the rest were awakened by the Charge of Quarters who had been notified of the red alert by telephone. The alert lasted for approximately ten minutes. We had a meeting of all enlisted men this morning at 1030 hours. First to be reprimanded by Lt Stusser for not having enough representatives at the formation for issuing awards day before yesterday at Group Hqs. The squadron is now divided into six platoons for the purpose of some form of exercise each day. To start this off, we had thirty minutes of close order drill this morning. Then everyone broke for the mess hall to eat. Afterwards, when the men returned to their tents, they found that they had again been the victims of thieves. It was announced at the formation that five guards would be on duty in the bivouac area each day from now on and that no Italian peddlers would be allowed anywhere in the area. A/C #143 and A/C #230 returned to their home field today after stopping to refuel from yesterday's mission.

9 MARCH -- This morning things started to get under way pretty early. First the cooks were up at 0230 hour. Then at 0440 hours the combat crews were awakened together with that part of the ground echelon needing to get up. While most of us were eating breakfast about 0515, the mission scheduled for today was canceled, so we jumped back in bed for a few minutes more sleep. Shortly after getting up at the early hour, we were notified that there was a red alert on. There were no lights and we were eating and working in the dark. The weather today has been of the worst sort. Raining and a strong wind blowing. It looked like X-mas time this morning by the number of packages that came into the squadron. There was also a large number of letters. Most of the men probably spent a very profitable afternoon writing letters home because it was too miserable to even go to town. At 1030 hours there was a formation called in the mess hall for all enlisted personnel and the Articles of War were read by Lt Stusser, our adjutant. We had fried chicken for supper tonight. "Lady Be Good" starring Eleanor Powell and Ann Southern played at our local movie tonight.

10 MARCH -- Today started out very early for most of the men. It was raining at H hour and continued on through most of the day. The mission was canceled soon after briefing. There was relatively few passes taken today because the weather was so bad. The men have a lot of time for letter writing and there was a lot of outgoing mail today. Only a few letters and packages came in. Work is still at a standstill on the EM mess hall and day room. An amusing incident occurred this morning in reference to the meeting a few days ago when it was agreed by all that peddlers would be kept out of the bivouac area. An Italian boy came down through the area toward the Orderly Room crying as if his heart would break. Someone had taken his eggs from him and then kicked him out. It turned out that he was severely warned to keep out of the area in the future. The enlisted men had some very good steak for supper tonight while the officers had fried chicken which the EM had the night before.

11 MARCH -- Today was operational and the mission was not canceled for a change. The weather was extremely nice all day and some of the mud dried up. There was a formation this morning at 1030 hours and we had close order drill for 45 minutes. A notice was posted today that there will be a rifle inspection tomorrow. Work was resumed on the enlisted men's club. A good lot of mail came in today. Tonight "This Gun For Hire" starring Veronica Lake played at our show here on the base. We had fresh meat stew for supper tonight.

12 MARCH -- The mission scheduled for today was canceled due to bad weather. It rained continually all day long and the area turned from mud to water. Some of the roads in the area have some pretty deep holes in them and water would almost come up inside of a jeep. Transportation was furnished to church services as usual. Late in the evening, Special Services called up and informed us that there would be a show at Group Hqs at 8 o'clock for everyone. "The Nazis Strike" played and also some sport shorts. We had fresh meat stew for supper tonight.

13 MARCH -- Today's mission was again canceled. The weather however, turned out to be almost perfect. Clear sunshine, with just enough wind to help dry the ground. The rifle inspection scheduled to have taken place yesterday was made at squadron formation in the area this morning. Everyone had been informed in plenty of time that there was to be an inspection and practically all of the guns were perfect. It was still muddy and work could not

be resumed on the enlisted men's mess hall and day room. "Love and Fantasy" played at our local theater starring Betty Fields, Edward G. Robinson, Robert Cummings, Anna Lee, and Barbara Stanwyck. We had fresh scrambled eggs for breakfast this morning and fresh hamburgers for supper tonight.

14 MARCH -- We were awakened at 0245 hours this morning by the charge of quarters calling out a red alert. The alert lasted for two hours and was still on at H-hour. The mission scheduled was canceled right after briefing. We had some more rain this morning. Our transportation section dumped some gravel in some of the deeper ruts in the road and they were almost impassable. We had one new man join our squadron today. We had fresh steak for supper tonight. We received word from Group S-2 today that the German's are expected down in force either tonight or tomorrow night. All of the men have been advised to take the proper precautions in case there is an alert and for everyone to get out of bed. The squadron Officer of the Day is to make a tour of the area to see that everyone is up in the event of an alert.

15 MARCH -- Today was a beautiful one. We were awakened this morning at 0230 hours by the C.Q. that there was a red alert on. We had been notified the previous afternoon that the Germans might try to bomb us last night. Everything was buzzing for awhile but the men did a wonderful job of blacking out the area with not even a stove on as cold as it was. The alert lasted for only fifteen minutes. It wasn't long until H-hour rolled around and a lot of the men had to get back up again. We had fresh fried eggs and pan cakes for breakfast. The mission this morning was very successful but the weather closed in on the second mission and they were unable to drop their bombs. The weather here is also pretty gloomy this evening. Three of our A/C did not return from the second mission, but have been heard from after landing safely at Naples. Four new ships and their crews just over from the States were temporarily assigned to us this afternoon. We had a very good supper tonight. Fresh steak, gravy, fresh butter and bread, glazed fresh carrots, lettuce salad, and coffee.

16 MARCH -- The mission scheduled for today was canceled after a two-hour standby because of weather. It rained until the middle of the day and there was a lot of mud again. Work, however, was resumed this afternoon on the EM mess hall and day room after the sun came out. Two of our A/C returned to our base today and the crew of the 3rd A/C returned with them. The 3rd A/C was left at Naples because of a hole in one of the gas tanks. No mail came in today. The chow lines were a little longer than usual because of the new men that came yesterday. We had fried pork chops for supper tonight. "Du Barry Was a Lady" starring Fred _____ was the show on the base tonight.

17 MARCH -- Today came up bright and shining. About the nicest day we have had since arriving in Italy. We had two fresh fried eggs a piece for breakfast this morning. A large bunch of mail came in right after dinner. The first in several days. Work is progressing on the EM Day Room and it should be completed sometime in April. We had fresh hamburgers for supper tonight.

18 MARCH -- Today started out very early and the weather was _____ clear. One of our A/C _____ failed to return from today's mission. There was some mail came in [sic] today. We had fresh steak for supper tonight. "The Man From Down Under" starring Charles Laughton, Binnie Barnes, and Richard _____ played here on the base at our local theater.

19 MARCH -- Today was operational for us. Seven of our B-17Gs took off on mission this morning and completed _____. There were no casualties. The weather was exceptionally good all day. Nothing of importance happened around the squadron area. Church services were conducted as usual at Group Headquarters and transportation was furnished to and from there by the _____. A tent occupied by enlisted men of one of the new crews that [is] assigned to us on DS burned today, destroying a lot of their equipment and personal belongings. The gas line to the stove had been leaking and gasoline had accumulated under the floor of the tent. We had fresh meat stew for supper tonight. At 2115 hours the siren sounded a red alert but nothing happened and the all clear sounded at 2130 hours.

20 MARCH -- The mission scheduled for today was canceled. The weather here, however, was very good. A practice mission was flown this morning. A good deal of mail came in today. Nothing much happened around the squadron. We had fried pork chops for supper tonight. "Shadow of a Doubt" starring Theresa Wright and Joseph Cotton played here

on the base. The stage play of "Hey Rookie" playing at the Flagella Theater in town put on its last performance tonight. The men are bringing back very good reports on it.

21 MARCH -- The mission scheduled for today was canceled. The weather _____ ILLEGIBLE _____ There was a red alert _____ on in this area this morning about 1030 hours but only lasted for a short while. A new combat crew was assigned to us this afternoon. We had fresh hamburgers, onions, potatoes and butter this evening for chow. Also fresh sliced carrots and _____ coffee with sugar and cream. A large amount of mail came in today. There being no show tonight, the men will no doubt spend a quiet evening writing letters. We had a change in mess Sergeant today. Sgt Harry Orner, one of the cooks, succeeded S/Sgt Clifford W. Wilson in this job.

22 MARCH -- The mission scheduled for today did not take place until after a two-hour standby. It was pretty bad weather this morning early but improved as the day went by. Nothing of particular importance happened around the squadron. Administrative officers of the squadron are interrogating _____ at the ships now and it was quite late when the mission was finally completed. Some mail came in today and a lot of packages. We had fresh steak for supper tonight.

23 MARCH -- Today began bright and early with an H-hour of 0210. This was the earliest _____ since we came overseas. The ships were recalled after taking off. All work was stopped on construction going on in the squadron. _____ it rained off and on all day. We had fresh meat stew for supper tonight. "Little Old New York" starring Alice Faye and Tyrone Power played at the theater here on the base.

24 MARCH -- The mission today was recalled shortly after taking off because of the weather. This is getting to be a daily affair now and the men are getting a little disgusted. The weather was fairly good in this vicinity however. Quite a bit of mail came in this afternoon and that helped out some. _____ ILLEGIBLE _____

25 MARCH -- The mission scheduled for today was canceled. The weather was windy and raining all day. We had toast and scrambled eggs for breakfast this morning. Captain John H. Hough, our squadron S-2, returned from the 26th General hospital this morning. Nothing much happened around the squadron area. We had fresh potatoes and pork chops or supper tonight. After chow, "Lost Angels" starring Margaret O'Day played here on the base.

26 MARCH -- Seven of our ships took off on mission this morning but were recalled and the formation returned to the field about noon. The crews of the B-17Gs were notified on landing to remove their personal equipment for the ships because the A/C were being transferred to another bomb group and that we were getting B-17Fs in exchange. We had roast beef and fresh potatoes for chow tonight. After chow, "Caramelle Carnival" the 99th Bomb Gp show played at our local theater here on the base.

27 MARCH -- The mission scheduled for today was canceled before the crews were awakened which was really a break for them. The weather was nice all day today. The duty Sergeant with the help of some of the Italian laborers moved the squadron latrine to a new location. A memorandum from our executive officer came down to the departments on instructions about answering and talking over the telephone. The medical department has a good many customers today with head colds and slight touches of influenza. Nothing of particular interest happened around the area today. "Princess O'Rourke" starring Olivia DeHaviland and Robert Cummings played at the local movies tonight. We had fresh hamburgers for supper tonight.

28 MARCH -- Today was operational for us and the men completed a very successful mission. The weather has been very nice all day again. The four crews and their B-17Gs that had been with us on Detached Service pulled out today. All of the men had to turn in one of their mattress covers to squadron supply. We had fresh steak and potatoes for supper tonight.

29 MARCH -- We completed another highly successful mission today. The weather is continuing to be very nice. The men who did not turn in the serial number of their guns and have them inspected last week, had to report to the orderly room to have this done today. A notice was posted on the bulletin board today announcing that there would be a salvage of all GI clothing on Sunday 9 April 1944. Four of our A/C landed at another friendly field for refueling and did not return today. Fourteen new B-17Gs with complete crews came in late this evening and are assigned to us on Detached Service.

30 MARCH -- Today was operational for us and another successful mission was accomplished. The chow lines were extremely long but the rations were extremely short as a result of the new crews coming in yesterday. Most of the enlisted men of the new Group are quartered in our new Enlisted Men's Day Room even though it is not quite completed. Two of our A/C returned to their base today after landing in Corsica yesterday for gas. We had fresh steak and gravy for supper tonight. Part of the new B-17Gs were taken up for test hops this afternoon and a good number of the ground personnel went along for the ride. "Slightly Dangerous" starring Lana Turner played at the local theater here on the base.

31 MARCH -- Today was scheduled to be nonoperational for us and all of the men that could were off to town early. A good number of our Pilots and Co-pilots however had to test hop those ships that did not go up on flight the previous day. The weather is absolutely the nicest we have had here in the Foggia area. Pay call for the enlisted men was at 1030 hours and the usual monthly games began right away. Not much of importance happened around the area today. We had some very good fried pork chops for supper tonight. We have adopted a new black and white coffee system now. Instead of holding up the chow line by serving coffee on the line, two fifteen gallon boilers with faucets on them are placed inside the dining room. One contains coffee with sugar and cream labeled white, and the other contains black coffee labeled black.

Excerpts from
THE GREAT AMERICAN BULL SESSION
by Frank Purdy

June 1945

Foggia, Italy

The Laws of Physics

When the great war ended I was assigned to the 99th Bombardment Group, the 347th Bombardment Squadron located in Foggia, Italy. We were a B-17, "Flying Fortress", Heavy Group. Our group was to be retained for the present as an occupational force in Europe. But we were larger in numbers than required, thus, they came up with a system that assigned credits to everyone based on the number of combat missions and the number of months overseas. To my surprise, my thirteen missions plus four months of overseas time made me an old-timer. I was thus declared surplus. Since our squadron had been short of navigators, I had flown ten out of my thirteen missions with crews other than my own, while in the same period my rightful crew had only flown nine to eleven total. We were all overjoyed, of course, that the hostilities were over, and that we had made it. Surprisingly, those extra missions had made me surplus but not so for my crew. They had to stay and I got to go home - or at least so we all thought.

Well, all of us surplus fly-boys, about 1,000 in all, packed up from all of the surrounding Bomb Groups and assembled in a large empty field near the 2nd Bomb Group, several miles down the road. We even brought our own tents, cots, and bedding. A large tent city was erected in this cow pasture, or maybe more correctly for Italy, a sheep pasture, parallel to one of the main roads. Some old farm buildings were set up as mess halls. Naturally two of each, since officers and enlisted men had to be separated. I'll never forget the "latrines". Some wizard of a carpenter erected this superb "john or outhouse" that was about a dozen "holer". The enlisted men had one also. There were also crude wash basins and mirrors for washing and shaving, and functional showers, meaning that maybe the water wasn't hot but it was at least wet. Drinking water was supplied from G.I. "Lister Bags". The washing water was questionable for human consumption. The interesting fact was that since we were not to be here for very long and since it was summer, there were no walls around these facilities. You could set there on the hole of your choice and watch the trucks go down the road. As I remember there were "tarps" overhead to keep off the sun and rain. The tent city was really quite nice if you didn't mind the heat, the dust, and complete boredom. The mess-hall did provide all the almonds in the shell that you could eat, plus the usual poor chow. They were really very good, the almonds I mean.

Well, we just hung around, talking about the rumors that we were all going to fly the surplus planes back home. June arrived and we just sat, talked, smoked, and became more bored.

Flying personnel were paid an extra fifty percent over normal base military rank pay as "flying pay", but to be entitled to this extra, one had to fly at least four hours per month. As June arrived, we all needed our four hours. None of us had been off the ground except in our dreams, since leaving our old squadron in May. The answer of course was to go back to our home squadron and borrow a B-17. We would assemble a gang and hitch a ride back to the old squadron. Our normal crew of ten (Pilot, Co-pilot, Navigator, Flight Engineer, Bombardier, Radio Operator, Tail Gunner, Ball Turret Gunner, and two Waist Gunners) were not important as

long as we had one each of the first four. So we would just get about twenty needy fly-boys, decide amongst ourselves who the four essential ones would be and jam the gang into the borrowed "Flying Fortress", and take a four-hour sightseeing trip of Italy. The remaining sixteen would be logged in as "observers", or whatever. Anything counted. I just looked at my old flight record. There were four of us Navigators on this one flight for June. Maybe they did log us all by our rating. At least we didn't get lost. Now for the real story. The preceding was just the introduction, to set the stage, so to speak.

Whenever a tent city group took to the air, one checkpoint on their four-hour sightseeing jaunt was to take a look at their temporary home, generally from as close a position as physically possible. You can imagine how much prop-wash our tents received. Buzz-jobs were the order of the day.

One afternoon, a temporary buddy - can't remember who - and myself were standing in front of a row of tents, smoking and talking, about fifty yards back from the road. We happened to look left, up the road, and saw a "Fort" right down on the deck coming towards our tent city. Man, he was going to give us a real good "buzz-job". The city was about the size of a football field, if my mind does me right, and the plane was coming parallel to the road, the long way of the tent layout. He was so low that it looked as if the ball turret would drag the tent poles. He had to be about that low for what happened next. In his concentration to avoid the tents (M*A*S*H type pyramidal), he ignored the cross-wind blowing towards the roadway. Well, I learned in physics class that two objects cannot occupy the same space at the same time. The plane had drifted leftward such that the wing slid under the lines on the high wooden electric poles that ran along our side of the road. When the wing came to the next pole, the pole was cut in two, at the middle, like a razor through a straw, and on the plane's behalf, eight feet of the left wing plus the whole left aileron was torn off quite cleanly. Power was applied and up the plane climbed, with electric wires trailing from the ragged wing edge. The severed tip and miscellaneous, now scrap, metal fell down amongst the tents, surprisingly without hitting any tents or personnel. The 100-octane gasoline from the mangled wing tip tank - think it was called a "Tokyo Tank" - dispersed in a mist without further problems.

There was one tragedy, however. When the electric wires broke they lashed out and snagged a G.I. off the back of a truck passing down the road and threw him to the roadway. He was instantly killed. The pilot was able to return the B-17 to his field and land safely.

Had the senseless death not occurred, this would have been a great event to have beheld. We later heard that the pilot was never prosecuted for manslaughter, because technically it was argued that the plane was out of control when the soldier was killed. Regardless of the legalities, this was an event that demonstrated the greatness of the B-17 - the "Queen" as we called her. Of course, for those of us that flew in her, we didn't need this tragedy to tell us that. We already knew it.

March 1945

Somewhere Over Austria

The Glider

The B-17 "Flying Fortress" had four 1200 HP Wright Cyclone engines which were fine power plants except for one fault. On occasions they would "run-away". No, they did not fall off easily or anything like that, but something in the propeller pitch control mechanism would go haywire and the blades would flatten out, biting less air, causing the engine to over-speed. Naturally when the bite was more shallow, the effectiveness was diminished. Less power was being transmitted. In this condition they were less than worthless.

The procedure when this occurrence took place was to feather the engine. This shut down the engine and rotated the three blades with their edges facing forward. Thus, very little drag resulted and the propeller would stop spinning. Normally this feathering operation was interrupted as soon as the engine slowed down into the normal operating range, providing the problem was merely one of these operating quirks, and the power plant was unfeathered - restarted. If it was obviously damaged and inoperable, for example by flak, etc, the shutdown would remain.

The "Queen" flew quite well on only three. One pilot one day had an engine that "ran-away", and would not feather, even though fuel and the ignition were shut down. It just went faster and faster. Shortly, the engine was unable to keep up with the propeller, and everything tore up internally. The pilots saw that the shaft was getting very hot and the prop was starting to wobble. They put the plane on auto-pilot and got out of the cockpit, since the propellers were just opposite them. They were fearful that if it took off, it might come their way, and could slice them in pieces. They were lucky. The prop did fly off, but missed the plane in its departure. Upon return to their base, the maintenance officer jokingly wanted to take the price of a prop out of their pay.

I do not mean to imply that this "run-away" business happened very frequently. During my

navigation and crew training and in getting overseas, no plane I rode in as a navigator ever experienced this phenomena. I had heard of it and our pilots, Bob Rochelle and Joe Munroe, I am sure, had been frained for it to happen, but it never did.

Well, on this particular day we were on a mission somewhere over Austria at about 24,000 feet. I can't remember where we were heading that day. I do recall that it was on the way to the target. Being up in the nose with our bombardier, Don Hoffman, ahead and below the pilots, much of our time was spent with little to do. Just lots of time to look, listen, sweat (it was only about zero degrees F inside the plane and -40 degrees F outside), and worry. The pilots had more to do, in fact a lot to do, since we were in tight formation. That was one of the things I worried about a lot - crashing into the plane we were flying off of. They were constantly jockeying the throttles to keep us in a tight pattern. If you really want to think about being scared, imagine standing in the nose watching the planes we were in formation with, with very little to do since we were climbing up through 20,000 feet worth of "soupy" weather. Flak was almost preferable to lousy weather.

Back to the story - before we knew what was happening, we heard an entirely different sound from the engines, and we just plain fell out of formation. Hoffman and I could only worry about ourselves, and the pilots were, of course, too busy to even tell the rest of the crew what was going on. I'm sure the rest of the crew were doing the same as we were up in the nose - snapping our parachutes onto our harnesses. About the time this was completed - not too many seconds or a lifetime, depending on your point of view - the engines began sounding relatively normal although in a climbing mode, and Rochelle informed us all that everything was O.K. and that we would try to catch back up with our squadron. He also then told us that all four engines had "run-away" simultaneously and that he had feathered all four, to get them under control. Fortunately they all had started the feathering procedure, slowed down properly, and were unfeathered before we dropped too far. We were able to get back to our squadron fairly rapidly, and completed the mission without further mishap. I doubt that too many B-17 crewmen have ever gone "gliding" in the "Queen", or in any engined airplane, for that matter.

February-May 1945

Northern Italy & Austria

How Cold Was It?

When we arrived at our Bomb Group early in February, we were immediately put to work training further for war. This involved, amongst other things, practice in formation flying and simulating missions. One of these was scheduled and planned for only 20,000 feet, and for some strange reason in retrospect, I didn't take my heavy flying boots, and the electrically heated suit and slippers. It was a beautiful, warm, early spring-like day. I was wearing a pair of "warm" combat boots. By the time this few-hour flight was over, I had learned my lesson. I was plenty cold, especially my feet. In the future I took the complete flight bag of "goodies".

The B-17 had heaters that brought the air up to somewhere around zero degrees Fahrenheit. I'm not sure exactly what it was but it was plenty cold. Outside the plane when at, say, 28,000-30,000 feet the air temperature was minus 40-45 degrees F. We continually had to keep squeezing our oxygen masks because moisture from our breath would freeze and affect the proper automatic mix of pure oxygen with the thin air. No pressurized cabins in those days. The equipment would adjust for altitude. At 30,000 feet you would get 100 percent oxygen. Left alone, ice would somehow restrict the mixture and one could get less than the required oxygen. This condition of "oxygen want" is called "anoxia" and could cause unconsciousness in a very short time. A navigator in a neighboring squadron died on a mission because of this situation. It never should have happened. How the bombardier did not see him collapse was never understood. Procedure was also to have an inter-com check of everyone every five to ten minutes by the radioman, whenever you were above 10,000 feet, the point where we went on oxygen. On a typical flight the moisture from one's breath would exit the mask and condense as frost on the roof of the fuselage. On coming down it would snow (lightly) in the plane once above the freezing point. The oxygen mask also contained the inter-com, or radio microphone. Speakers for hearing were built into the soft leather helmet that the oxygen mask snapped onto. It was a neat arrangement and quite comfortable, all considered. The only nuisance was that you had two inter-com cords plus the flexible hose for oxygen to the mask hanging from you at all times.

The above fairly describes how our head was clothed against the cold while providing the utility of breathing and communicating. Now for the body. I started out by wearing a tee-shirt and boxer shorts. Next came the top and bottom of a G.I. issue pair of wool long-johns. Over the underwear I wore an army wool shirt and pants with insignia, wings, and patches, etc., to show rank and to be complete if we were unfortunately forced to visit the bad guys. Next came an electrically heated suit. It was like a light jump suit coverall imbedded with heating wires. It had an extension cord for plugging into the plane's electrical system. A rheostat was there for temperature control, although it seemed that "maximum" was all we ever had it set at. Already with the

mask's two cords and a hose, I now had four umbilicals hanging from me. Then I wore a wool coverall flying jump-type suit. It had lots of large pockets. Next came the 45 caliber automatic pistol in a shoulder holster. The nylon flight jacket came next. These were nylon fleece-lined and with a furry-like collar. You think I'm done, don't you? The deflated "May West" came next, in case we would have to come down on the water. Then, over this whole mess came the parachute harness. Those of us that could move around, somewhat, had the chest pack type, where the actual chute could be unsnapped from the harness and laid aside. Pilots and the ball turret gunner had back or seat chutes that they had to sit against or on all the time. On my feet I wore two pair of wool socks, then they went into heated slippers that plugged onto the main electrical suit legs. Over them I wore a pair of fleece-lined leather flying boots. On my hands were a pair of thin, sturdy nylon gloves and a pair of electrically heated mittens, again that plugged onto the main electric suit sleeves. The light nylon gloves would protect you if you had to take off the mittens for a short while. Frostbite was especially feared. Bare hands against cold metal like a jammed gun was a no-no. We are now getting close to being fully dressed. If one had to bail out, the fleece boots were likely to be lost on the jar of the chute opening, or if not lost, they weren't too good for walking anyway. Thus, we took along a pair of combat boots connected and snapped onto the parachute harness. There were sturdy rings at the bottom for this purpose. On the opposite side ring, we would snap on a strong sack full of survival gear (knife, rations, fish hooks, first-aid kit, money, etc). The chute, kit and boots were left detached except when things looked like they might become "dicey", as the British would say.

On the bomb run, we always snapped everything on, and in addition we put on a flak suit and a steel helmet with ear flaps, plus goggles. The flak suits were like a catcher's chest protector except they also had a back section and were longer. They were filled with hardened steel plates and were quite heavy. There were snaps at the shoulders so the heavy contraption could be dropped off in a hurry. It went over everything I have already described. The goggles were intended to protect against very small or dusty particles of plexiglass that could be created by flak or shell fragments piercing the windows. I flew one mission with a bombardier who didn't wear his flak suit as intended. Instead, he sat on both halves of it with it kind of wrapped around his crotch between his legs. He argued that if he were to get his "balls" shot off, the rest of him wasn't too important anyway. The "family jewels" must be protected at all costs.

Well, you can see that I was quite burdened, to protect the old body (it was actually quite young at that time). In fact, with the flak suit on I could hardly stand, I weighed so much. The planes were originally equipped with a navigator's chair for the small work table in the nose of the B-17. By unanimous agreement of the navigators and bombardiers, all of the chairs were gotten rid of. We didn't want them in our way. We chose to stand, kneel on the floor, or sit on the table. With all the weight plus tension of a mission, one could be quite tired at the end of the day. We would be roused out of bed at about 0400 hours, eat, be briefed, and then fly for about 7 hours on the average. Oxygen use seemed to tire one also.

Every time I have described the amount of clothing worn, some thinking person always asks, "What did you do if you had to go?" This was quite a dilemma. The "Fort" had a relief tube (a rubber hose with a small funnel on the end) in the bomb bay. Now, three real problems existed. One: Could you afford to stop doing what you were supposed to be doing to go back to the bomb bay? Two: If you could go back there, one had the task of connecting up to a portable walk-around oxygen bottle and then deciding whether or not to take your chest chute and other escape gear with you in case it was needed in a hurry. Three: If you made it to the relief tube standing on the dark narrow catwalk with the bombs as onlookers, would you be able to locate your apparatus beneath all these layers of clothing. The solution to this important problem was solved by us navigators, of course. We even cut the bombardiers in on our invention. We carried a 12-inch long piece of 1-inch stiff rubber hose with us, a piece scrounged from the wrecked plane dump at the base. By sliding the navigator's drift meter off its mount, we thus exposed a 2-inch hole through the skin of the fuselage, and the hose acted as an aspirator when slightly extended through the hole. One could let rip several inches away from the inside end, and the vacuum created did the rest. It still was a problem getting through all of those layers of clothing. Don't ask me what you would do if you had the two-finger problem, as we referred to it in grade school. Go before you took off?

One more quick story about the cold. We were supplied with cheese sandwiches to eat on the way back once low enough to go off oxygen. The sandwiches were merely two thick slices of army bread with a thick slab of canned army cheese - no condiments. When we reached eating time these sandwiches were frozen so hard one had to gnaw away at the sections separately. It was like eating a eskimo pie that had been on dry ice. I have never tasted anything better.

A discovery I have made in later years: To keep warm in the winter weather, "Don't Smoke". When I finally did quit after about 35 years of reasonably heavy consumption, I found it so much easier to have warm hands and feet when outside in cold weather. Nicotine cuts circulation.

When our crew finished training as a unit in mid-January, at Avon Park, Florida, we were put on a train which ended up at Hunter Field outside of Savannah, Georgia. This base was a staging area to assign trained crews their new flying clothes and equipment, a new airplane, and then to send them on their way, wherever needed. The place was crawling with newly trained fly-boys.

The first thing that happened was the issuance of our personal flying gear and clothing. Everything was brand-spanking new. Two items were especially prized by everyone - the greenish-olive-drab colored flying suit (a jump suit like) and a 45 caliber automatic pistol with shoulder holster. Thank goodness they didn't give anyone ammunition at this time. It was so funny to see - in retrospect that is - all of us hot-shots running around in our macho looking flying suits with a "45" in a shoulder holster.

Each crew was then assigned a beautiful, new B-17G "Flying Fortress" bomber. This was on January 27, 1945. The next day we were allowed to fly it for two hours, to calibrate the air speed indicator and the magnetic "Fluxgate" compass. This was primarily my job. We used a perfectly straight section of railroad track outside of Savannah with a known "true" heading plus a marked section for distance. If one aligned the plane with the track (at about a 200-foot altitude) and zeroed the gyro compass, then a 360-degree swing in 15-degree increments could be made. The "Fluxgate" gyro stabilized magnetic compass was adjusted as we went around. The compass had cams for adjustments that could be made that corrected for the airplane-induced magnetic deviations, that then made it read true heading (magnetic variation was also set into the compass). This was a neat compass, for its time. As one flew, you only had to remember to periodically reset the magnetic variation for the area of the earth you were flying over. The air speed indicator was calibrated by timing runs over the measured course, in both directions, to cancel out any wind effect.

On January 30 we were briefed, after a fashion, and we were on our way to the war, where we did not know. Our briefing and clearance only covered the weather for a bearing that roughly paralleled the east coast, basically north-northeast. We were told that, en route, we would be told by radio where we were to proceed to. It turned out, subsequently, that we were told to land at McGuire Airfield at Fort Dix, New Jersey. Incidentally, when we left Savannah, our gasoline tanks (100 octane) were topped-off such that on refill we could calculate the plane's fuel consumption.

They put us up for the night at Fort Dix and oriented us for the mess hall and PX, movie, etc.. We were ordered to be at Operations for briefing at such and such time the next morning. The next morning I had breakfast in the officers' mess with my pilot (Bob Rochelle), co-pilot (Joe Munroe) and bombardier (Don Hoffman). We were wearing our flying suits (the new coveralls) and our flying jackets. We had just completed a lovely breakfast when a "ground-pounder" of a "Bird Colonel" came in and threw all of us out of the mess because "we weren't wearing Class A uniforms". Some of the fellows hadn't eaten yet. The popular expression, "Chicken S__t", certainly was rather appropriate to describe certain situations.

We were briefed again, and again took off for a northerly point, yet unknown. This take-off was very short lived. We were no sooner in the air when the plane filled with very strong gasoline vapors and you could see liquid gasoline running off the trailing edge of the wings. Rochelle, by word of mouth, had us refrain from using anything electrical. He did use the radio to the tower, however, and we went in for an emergency landing, well overloaded with fuel. Anyway, we did not blow up and landed safely. In retrospect he later said that he wasn't sure if he should have used the radio to contact the tower. Anyway, it all ended well, and our good luck held again. It was determined that the tanks were overflowing because they were overfilled during the topping exercise and a syphoning action commenced out the vents once airborne. We probably didn't blow up because the vapors in the plane were too rich for combustion.

After our pilots and "maintenance" resolved that there was really nothing wrong with the plane, we took off again and ended up at Grenier Field, in southern New Hampshire. A jeep met us as we left the runway and escorted us to a parking "hard stand". We had never seen so many B-17's and B-24's at one field before. "There must be a big back-log going overseas", we all thought. We were sure of this when the "parking sergeant" gave Rochelle orders to get the engine and gun turret canvas covers out of the rear of the fuselage and to cover everything up. We would be picked up and taken to our quarters upon completion. I forgot to mention that there was a couple of feet of snow over everything except the "hard stand", it was getting dark, we had never covered engines and turrets before, and it was about zero degrees Fahrenheit. After completing this task, climbing all over that frozen bird, we were taken to our quarters and shown where the mess hall was. At least we had guessed right - some of the crews we ran into said they had been there three weeks already and that the ice skating and skiing were super, the base was crawling with WAAF's and other women, and that so far it was more like a country club. To be continued----

As the offensive started south of Bologna, Italy that was part of the overall push that terminated the war in Europe, the Air Corp was up there doing its part to make things easier for the dog-faces on the ground. I pulled missions for two days in a row (April 9 and 10) that bombed just across an eastern section of the lines that separated our guys from the Germans. We went over at only 20,000 feet which was lower than our normal 26,000-28,000 feet. Our infantry below laid down large cloth panels on the ground to help show our bombardiers where the line was, and our artillery shot up shells to burst at about 18,000 feet, almost vertically over the line. We were to drop personnel fragmentation bombs and didn't want any to fall short. We were too close to our guys for comfort. Sure glad I was up instead of down. On one of these first two missions an extra B-17 pulled into our formation flying off the plane I was in and dropped its load with us. It was the 15th Air Force Commander, Major General Nathan Twining. He had a B-17 with no guns, but it did have a bomb load. Gen. Twining rose to become the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff after the war. He was well liked.

The bombs we carried were, as I have already said, fragmentation devices and designed to reap maximum damage to personnel on the ground. Each bomb consisted of a cluster of smaller fragmentation or shrapnel bombs which upon detonation would shoot iron pieces all over. They acted like hand grenades but were considerably larger. As I remember, each composite bomb was made up of about 20 of these little 20 pound "buggers". We carried something like 10-12 of the larger ones. Within each 400 pound cluster was a length of pipe with an internal diameter that would accept a 45 caliber bullet. The cluster was held together with bailing wire which threaded through holes in the pipe. At the end of the pipe was an arming device and trigger which would fire the bullet down the pipe and cut the wires, so that the individual 20 pound bombs would separate and spread out during their fall. A propeller-driven arming arrangement at the end of the pipe fired the bullet after the cluster had fallen about 500 feet. Each 20 pound bomb also had its own propeller for arming itself after it fell so far. It was a nice simple arrangement just as long you weren't on the receiving end.

The same crews - I was again not flying with my own crew - were used the second day also since we all performed this delicate bombing operation real well, and there is nothing like experience. They were also "milk runs" since we were receiving virtually no return flak or other opposition. We didn't complain.

There was a slight change for the third of these ground support missions on April 15. Again the same crews. It had been discovered that these wired up clusters sometimes fell apart in the bomb bay due to turbulence, etc., and landed on the bomb bay doors. Nothing to worry about since they were not armed until they fell at least 500 feet. The concern was that, since we had to open the bomb doors while still over our side of the lines, we wanted to be sure and not drop any of them on our own guys. So this time we went across Italy below Rome and opened our bomb doors over the water. Any loose ones would fall into the Mediterranean.

Anytime you state a fact, along comes an exception. We had a different bombardier on this third flight. I can't remember his name. Think his name was "Ralph ??????". We also had a different target, a little farther from our lines. We were going to bomb German troop concentrations on the outskirts of Bologna. This bombardier was about to fly his 34th mission. He had not flown for about a month, since upon his 33rd he had been hit in the left forearm with a piece of flak coming through the nose skin when he reached out to close the bomb doors. The wound was not too bad since the fragment missed bone and nerve. The Flight Surgeon insisted that he fly two more before going home. A mission tour was at 35 at this time. Earlier in the war it was only 25 when the odds of making even 25 was pretty sad. I think the Squadron C.O. put "Ralph" on this one because it was a "milk run".

After "Ralph" opened the bomb doors over the water, and after I told him we were still 40 minutes away from the enemy lines, he made a mad dash to put on all his survival gear, parachute, flak suit, and helmet. He just sat there in his bombardiers chair, making himself as small as possible. I was afraid that, his being as fearful as he seemed to be, he might not want to extend his left arm to release the bombs when required, off the lead plane's drop. Well I watched him carefully. When the time came he did his job. He didn't keep his arm out from his side any longer than necessary, but he did everything expected of him.

The bombs had barely cleared the bomb bay when the radioman started hollering over the inter-com. "There's one of them 'little bastards' back here that jumped in the cat walk structure - with it's propeller spinning." Radiomen always had the job to open the door into the bomb bay and watch the drop. Like a shot "Ralph" came out of his little ball, threw off helmet, flak suit, and parachute, plugged into an oxygen walk-around bottle, and headed back to the bomb bay. He did flick the bomb bay doors closed first. He later said he wanted to stop the wind which was turning and possibly arming the loose bomb.

The next couple of minutes were suspenseful, to say the least. I had my chute on and was ready

to unplug and leave, if the plane blew up. In a short while the radioman informed us that the emergency was over. "Ralph" had gently picked the bomb from its perch in the catwalk structure, while holding the propeller to prevent any further spinning and arming if it was not already done, carried it gingerly into the radio room, and with the aid of the radioman very carefully dropped it out through the camera hatch.

I have always remembered this act as an example of true heroism. He was as scared as hell, and yet he did his job. "Ralph" flew the next and fourth day of these special raids on April 17 with us and completed his tour, then returned to the U.S.

Our tent in Foggia was heated by a homemade vented stove made from a round five gallon can. A hinged door was cut into the end for lighting access. A five gallon "Jerry" gasoline can was elevated outside with aluminum tubing running to the stove. 100 octane aviation gasoline was burned by regulating a drip of the fuel onto a brick inside the stove. Efficient but dangerous. I lit the stove one day when none of the others were there. A piece of dirt evidently was in the petcock valve and had restricted the flow. When no one was there the obstruction cleared. Too much gasoline flowed into the stove and ran out, burning, onto the brick floor. One of the guys returned just in time and caught it before it burned the tent down. What a sooty mess all over everything we owned, however. The others could have killed me, although I'm not sure what I could have done to have prevented it. Froze, I guess.

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Speaking earlier of chickens and eggs, reminds me of how good eggs tasted when they were scarce. While at the bomb group at Foggia, we used to trade cigarettes for fresh eggs with the local Italian farmers. We were allowed to buy cigarettes for 5 cents a pack - a carton per week. They were in big demand by the civilians. We would fry the eggs on top of the gasoline stove in the tent. We would bring some bread and butter back from the mess and have a nice evening snack. Another feature of the tents that made them a little more homey was the plumbing. We had a wash basin made from a hemispherical head of an airplane oxygen tank. It had a tubing drain that carried the water down and outside between the floor bricks. Supply water came likewise through tubing from an elevated fighter plane fuel drop tank that was set up outside the tent. The squadron had a water tank-truck that made the rounds and kept the tanks filled. All the comforts of home. The wrecked airplane scrap pile at the field provided most of our hardware.

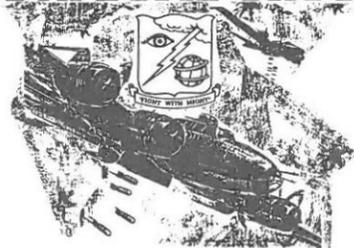
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Another egg story: Some of the foods we were fed for breakfast before leaving on a mission were scrambled powdered eggs, heavy pancakes and S.O.S. These were pretty bad. We had a squadron operations officer (John Plummer), a Captain and pilot, who one day that he wasn't on a mission, went to a late breakfast and found all the non-flying officers of the unit having a great fried egg and bacon feast. It was said that he gave the cook orders, in no uncertain terms, that there were to be no fresh eggs eaten in that mess hall, ever again, unless the mission crews were served the same. He also threatened to bodily throw out any officer he caught violating this rule. It was funny that fresh eggs were found somewhere to feed the next day's mission crews.

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99TH BOMB GROUP



DOES ANYONE OTHER THAN BERNIE KNOW WHAT THIS GROUP HQ BUILDING HOUSED ?



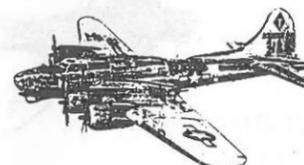
L. to R. Top Row: Stanley Marks, Nav., Wm. Scott, Pilot, ? Peters, Bom., Don Wanser, BT Gunner, Bill Brinker, Waist Gunner
Kneeling: Ray Sutherland, Co-Pilot, John Trapuzzano, Flt. Engr., Ed Fillos, Waist Gunner, Julius Cermak, Radio Opr., Carl Bloss, Tail Gunner
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Exit Patches. Can Anyone Send Bernie A Story For Our Next Newsletter ?



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RUSSIAN LADIES SERVING OUR GROUP A MEAL DURING A SHUTTLE MISSION VISIT.

