



FOR THE MEN WHO FLY 'EM • FOR THE MEN WHO KEEP 'EM FLYING

Issue 37

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Fall/Winter 2003

FAIRMONT AAF COMES ALIVE

The old Fairmont Army Air Field once again came alive on June 14 and 15, 2003. On this occasion the Fillmore County Development Corporation planned and put on this two day event entitled "100 Years of Aviation at Historic Fairmont Airfield." Not that it was THERE that aviation first began, (well, maybe for some of you it began there), but it was significant to aviation in that it was THERE that aviation warfare was advanced to the point that the United States, along with our Allies, took on the Axis Powers and won WW-II. And the 451st Bomb Group played a large part in that victory.

The 451st was the first combat Group to occupy and advance our training there before heading overseas. Crews, mechanics and support personnel became familiar



OUR LEGACY INSCRIBED ON HISTORICAL MARKER AT ROUTE 6 AND 81

with their duties and learned to work as a team. From 9 September 1943 to 26 November 1943, Fairmont Army Air Field was a 'buzz' with B-24 Liberators readying for what lay ahead. From Fairmont AFB we went on to Italy for our combat duties, and garnering three Distinguish Unit Citations in the process. But, getting back to the subject at hand ...

The weather, though having rained heavily earlier in the month, turned out to be excellent. We had a full weekend of beautiful sunny weather, which allowed some of the scheduled participating aircraft to arrive on the 13th and readied themselves for what was to come. It also allowed time for the 'vendors' to set up their

tents and equipment in anticipation for the onslaught of expected visitors.

Some of the first aircraft to arrive were the B-17, B-25, AC-47 [we remember is at a C-47], and, although not considered a WW-II aircraft, there was a 'Constellation' [Connie] on display. This type aircraft was what our former President Dwight D. Eisenhower flew in, while in office. And not to be outdone, there was a German Junkers Ju-52 trimotor transport flown in from the Commemorative Air Force [formerly, the Confederate Air Force] out of Chicago's Great Lakes Wing .

Also present were numerous smaller aircraft that were to be used for acrobatic, precision, parachute jumping and just plain stunt flying. One stunt, of an unusual nature was that of a young lady, flying a small Piper Cub, landing on top of a moving vehicle [with small platform atop] while barreling down the main runway. This she accomplished several time during the two day event.

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"AD-LIB"

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*We reserve the right to edit, shorten, clarify any article
submitted to the Ad Lib. We may choose not to include
an article due to length, content or negative implications
..... Editor*

From a Speakers Stand, State Senator Ben Nelson
spoke to the gathered crowd. He recognized that the
Base was recently placed on the National Register
of Historic Places. He also reiterated the importance
of the history of flight and how Fairmont Army Air
Field contributed to that history.

Not to be outdone, the 451st was represented by
Editor-In-Chief Sedge Hill, who, for those two days
sold and signed copies of our "Fight'n 451st Bomb
Group (H)" book. I was privileged to sit at the
same table and share some of the stories that were
exchanged between the local population and Sedge.
Sedge had been one of the early EM's to occupy
the Base when the Group was moved from Wendo-
ver, Utah to Fairmont. Many of the 'locals' were
people that were involved with our gathering in
1990 when we bused some 13 busloads of our folk,
out of Omaha, to the airfield for our [and the
'local's' first] ground breaking reunion event. As
always, it was a pleasure to meet them again.

FAIRMONT AAF A/C PHOTOS, N'SUCH



"CONNIE" IN FOREGROUND - C-47 IN BACKGROUND



B-17 IN FOREGROUND - C-47 IN BACKGROUND



B-25 MITCHELL - MEDIUM BOMBER



**"FOLLOW-ME" VEHICLE??
Hardly, Just a gasoline powered 'Red Ryder Wagon' being
directed by Doug Rung, Field Coordinator**



BARRACKS ... AS THEY WERE BACK IN 1943

I must admit, our Group was not all that well represented. I only counted some 4 or 5 of our people that dropped by to see us. I was hoping to see more involvement by our members.

But to overcome my remorse at not seeing all that many of our comrades, I was given the honor to be among the passengers for the first flight on Sunday morning of the B-25. I was sponsored by an acquaintance from the night before while dining at one of York's finer restaurants; Chances 'R'. A young gentleman, Craig Bair, pilot/operator of a crop dusting company in York told me emphatically - "You're flying tomorrow in the B-25!!" This was after we [Craig, his wife, and the pilot and ground crew of the B-25] got involved in conversation about aviation.

True to his word, the next morning he sought me out at the book signing table and herded me out to the aircraft. After a briefing on escape procedures, they loaded me onboard [kicking and screaming - like back in the '40's] for the flight of my life.

I once again got to hear [from the inside of the waist section] the roar of those Pratt and Whitney



SEDGE HILL - BOOK SELLER

engines. Although there were only two, compared to the four of the B-24, the noise was horrific.

Here was my chance to witness what many of you guys saw while in training at Fairmont AFB during September, October and November of 1943. The landscape, including the Air Field, was as flat as the proverbial pancake. It was somewhat emotional to see the hangers, taxi strips and runway fall away behind as we climbed up and out of the pattern. I thought to myself, "This is what you earlier members saw in training and gave little thought that anyone would, or could, have this kind of a feeling for the old Base." To you guys it was just another stepping stone to the war. To me, at that moment, it was an emotional encounter from our wartime past.

Not that these takeoffs and landings were new to me, but after nearly 60 years I guess it doesn't hurt to be refreshed - emotionally. My thanks to Craig Bair for this chance to relive a memory.

Pyrotechnics filled the air above the runway at the closing of the event on Sunday evening. I, for one, left the field with a feeling of having reviewed the past in a more pleasurable atmosphere.

EICHHORN'S DILEMMA SOLVED

After publication of the Issue 36 Ad-Lib, and the follow-ups to some of the articles, none has garnered more interest and attention than Harold Bennett's story of the Lt. William Slater's "Crew 49." What starts out as an overview of a tour of combat duty, suddenly awakens a lot of memories among those that weren't necessarily a part of Bennett's experience, but recall, or at least fortify, some of their own memories.

Point in fact, the case of the "Strawberry Bitch." I made a special point in the story line to bring that fact forward, since I knew from early on in my research that Bill Slater had flown that aircraft back to the States.

What I didn't expect, was to hear from Karl Eichhorn that he had photographed the 'buzz job' that Slater did over the 726th Squadron area. Upon further probing, Karl consented to give me a written report of his 'mystery solved.' What follows are Karl's memories and follow-up. (Editor - Bob K.)

HOW PHOTOS OF "SLATER'S BUZZ JOB" WERE TAKEN

It is hard to remember some things which happened 60 years ago, but my memory of this event is



CORPORAL KARL F. EICHHORN - ASN 35602859
726th ARMORER

still very clear. I did not write a date on my negatives, but based on Harold Bennett's article in Ad-Lib, Issue 36, it is clear the photos were taken the first week of July '44. Although it was summer, the forenoon must have been rather chilly as the guys in the photo were wearing their Field Jackets and I know that I was wearing mine. I had finished breakfast and decided to stop by the mess hall to scrounge a cup of coffee before walking to the flight line where I had work to do. I left my tent and was on my way there, when on an impulse, I returned and grabbed my camera and put it in my jacket pocket. I really had no plans to take any photos, so it was just happenstance. As I reached the 726th perimeter road I glanced over the bank towards the valley and was startled to see a B-24 on a climbing turn, apparently headed directly towards me. Equally astounding, I saw immediately that it was an old "D" model dressed in desert camouflage!

In that split second I recall the following thoughts flashing through my mind: What the hell is this guy doing? He's headed 90 degrees to the runway, so it is not on landing approach! Then I thought to myself, cripes, he's going to buzz our tent area!

Without really thinking, I reached for my camera, unfolded it (a folding bellows camera), set the shutter to its fastest speed (1/200th second), cocked the shutter, set the focus to infinity, guesstimated the exposure (in those days only rich folks owned exposure meters, and even if I had one there wouldn't have been time to use it), and adjusted the diaphragm (there was nothing auto-anything on cameras of that period).

As I brought the camera to my eye I had no idea what to expect -- all I could see in the finder was this plane climbing and turning in my direction. By instinct, I guess, I released the shutter, grabbed the film advance knob to roll the film to the next exposure, re-cocked the shutter and brought it to my eye

again. It seemed the plane was almost on the deck, directly in front of the Enlisted Men's Chow Hall. I fired off the second shot and the plane roared overhead and disappeared beyond the runway.

It is strange how reactions differed, I think my hands trembled because I was concentrating on the 'picture of a lifetime.' The fellow standing on the road seems completely oblivious of the plane, while the two fellows in front of the Mess Hall crouched down and one of them dropped his coffee cup. (An enlargement of this area clearly shows the cup on the ground amid a puddle of coffee.)

For the next 59 years two questions plagued me: Who was this pilot and why did he buzz the 726th area? And why was he flying an ancient B-24 with a desert paint job just like the planes of the 376th B.G., with whom we had shared the same field at San Pancrazio in March?

Fast forward to our reunion in Dayton in '84. As I toured the Air Force Museum, photographing planes, I was startled to come upon a B-24D with desert camouflage paint named "Strawberry Bitch." One look at the insignia on the nose and I knew she was the same aircraft I had photographed that July morning at Castelluccio. It was mind-boggling!

I dashed upstairs and located the Museum Curator to whom I showed my photos. Surely he would know the history of "Strawberry Bitch." But all he could tell me was that the plane had been operated by the 376th Bomb Group in Africa and Italy and that it had been donated by the Air Force to the Museum. He thought it possibly might have been flown on the first Ploesti mission, but he was not sure. No real help!

Fast forward again to our reunion in Kansas City in '94. There I met Bill Barnes, President of the 376th Bomb Group. Naturally, I cornered him, drug out my "Buzz Job" photos and asked my questions, thinking at long last all the answers would be



KARL'S CLASSIC PHOTOS OF 'SLATER'S BUZZ JOB'

forthcoming. No Way! Barnes had no idea who might have flown the plane that July day, much less why a 376th pilot would have buzzed our 726th Squadron area. Perhaps the unknown pilot had a friend in our Squadron? Then Bill conned me out of both my photos, saying he would show them to some of his friends and quite likely be able to answer my questions. He took my photos with him and never contacted me again. Another strikeout!

Sometime in the late 90's I received a call from a gentleman named Larry Hofmann who told me he was an artist who had been commissioned by the 376th BG to do a painting of one of their planes. Barnes had told him I had a couple good photos to work from. He wanted to borrow my original negatives to have them scanned and enlarged for his use. I was most reluctant to part with the original negatives, but finally, after some discussion, I agreed to send them to him via registered mail. True to his word he returned them to me after having them scanned. Later on he also sent me, via Email, a copy of his preliminary painting. He said he understood that the final painting would be put on display at the Dayton Museum beside the "Strawberry Bitch." I have not returned to the Museum since our reunion, so I don't know if this has happened. If anyone has been to the Air Force Museum recently I would surely like to know if the painting is on display.

And now to the final chapter: When I received Ad-Lib (Issue 36) and read Harold Bennett's story, I finally had my answers after those 59 years. So now we know the pilot who scared the b'jesus out of those fellows in front of the Mess Hall It was Lt. William Slater, who, with his full crew, buzzed our area to celebrate the first day of their return trip home.

[TECH NOTES -- For anyone who is a camera nut: The photos were taken with an inexpensive (about 25 bucks in 1943) Kodak folding Vigilant 620 camera, having a modest f 4.5 lens and a maximum shutter speed of 1/200th second. It took eight pictures 2 1/4" X 3 1/4" on 620 roll film. The film I used was Verichrome, which had a speed of, as I recall, about 25 ASA.]

(Editor ... As an addendum to Karl's query about the final painting being displayed beside the "Strawberry Bitch" at the Air Force Museum in Dayton. As of late May 2003, when I visited the Museum, the painting was not yet on display. I asked some of the volunteer attendants if they were aware that this may be forthcoming. No one seemed to know anything about it. Since their Research and Operational Offices are now located some distance from the Museum, and access is limited only to prior reservations, I could not find anyone that could give me answers.)

LIEUTENANT W.C. OWENS' 18th MISSION EXPERIENCE

PRELUDE

The 726th Heavy Bomb Squadron was part of the 451st Bomb Group based at Castelluccia, Italy during World War II. All of this was operational under the 15th Air Force.

Each plane carried a crew, on average, ten air-men; Pilot, Copilot, Navigator, Bombardier and six Gunners, which included Flight Engineer and Radio Operator. Each Gunner trained to man the 10 heavy 50-caliber machine guns.

The B-24 Liberator, Heavy Bomber, was used in WW-II to fly high and deep over enemy held territory in Germany and Southern Europe and destroy military targets.

I was a Pilot on one of



LIEUTENANT WILLIAM C. OWENS USAAF

these bombers. This is a short, story about one of my 32 missions flown during 1944 and 1945.

FEBRUARY 28, 1945

With a bright flashlight in my face, I heard an all too familiar voice saying, "Wake up, Lieutenant Owens, it's 5 o'clock. They want you to fly as 1st Pilot on a different crew. Lieutenant Landis will be flying as Copilot. You will be flying plane number 44-49539." This was good news as Bud Landis was an experienced combat Pilot and would be capable of taking over the controls to complete the mission in any kind of emergency.

Struggling to climb OUT of the cots and groping around the tent

for warm flight clothing, all those assigned for this mission, got dressed and jumped on the truck that took us to Group Headquarters for briefing.

THE BRIEFING

After taking seats in the Briefing Room, (Order was called), all eyes were staring at the large battle map on the wall. You could feel the tension building up.

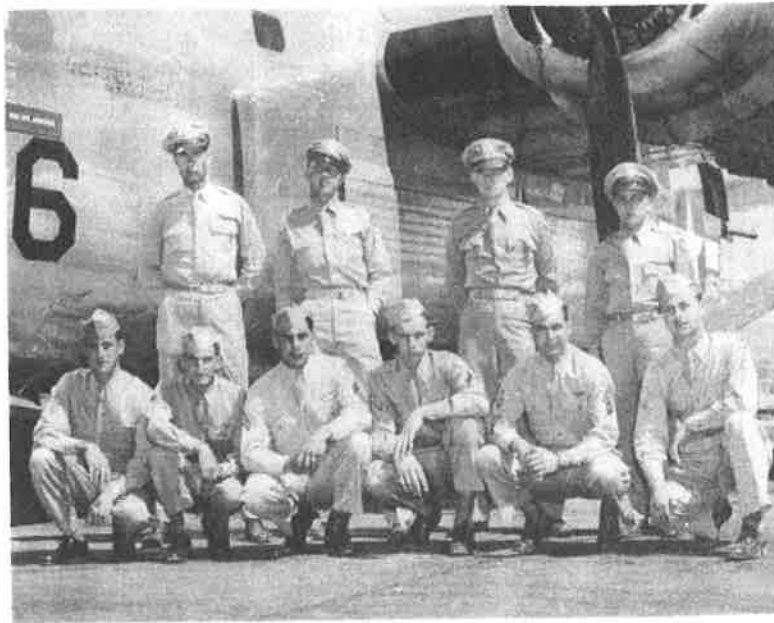
“GENTLEMEN, THE TARGET FOR TODAY WILL BE THE BRENNER PASS NEAR THE TOWN OF BALZANO, ITALY.”

This was a big relief, since Italian targets were less defended than the German-held targets further north. However, flying the Brenner Pass was a killer.

BALZANO was a town in the Alps, down in a deep valley where the rail lines in the pass came down from AUSTRIA. It's the only rail line coming into Italy. In the past, our Group had previously dropped bombs on the rail lines and tunnels to disrupt the German supply buildup in this area. This was a different target because the mountains rise up on each side of the valley, reaching up to 15,000 feet, and the German Army had anti-aircraft guns stationed almost to the top of these mountains. The Intelligence Officer pointed out that the Island of Krk might be a safe place to seek refuge in an emergency, since there were only a few Germans on the island. This avenue of escape was used by Lieutenant Harvey Clapp on 23 August 1944 with excellent results.

After the briefing we returned to the Squadron. Stopping off at our tent we hid our booze and cookies. From there we were off to the Mess Hall for a gourmet breakfast of powdered eggs and Spam. I found the Mess Sergeant and gave him my wallet and a letter to my wife for him to mail if I didn't return from the mission. Then, on to the Crew Equipment Shack to pick up our parachutes, escape kits, and practice looking brave. (If we didn't do this, the brave part, and were late coming back from the mission, other crew members would hold a wake for us while drinking our booze and eating our cookies.)

Bud Landis, the Copilot, and the rest of the crew



OWENS' ORIGINAL CREW

Standing: Wallace A. Harris, Pilot; William C. Owens, Copilot; John A. Bielefeldt, Navigator; Earl Rivenberg, Bombardier

Kneeling: Robert W. Finkle, N Gunner; William Ershler, B Gunner; Delbert Unger, AEG; Allen Diveley, W Gunner; Richard Olson, ROG; Melvin Schwulst, T Gunner

were waiting at the plane. Together we rotated the props, did the outside inspection, checked parachutes and counted the flak vests and steel helmets, then boarded the plane. The Gunners had already checked the turrets, and accounted for the 50-caliber ammunition, along with checking for proper bomb loading.

THE TAKE OFF

Here I was, sitting in the Pilot's seat of a huge four engine bomber loaded with twelve high explosive 500-pound bombs, 3,000 gallons of high test gasoline, and a combat-ready crew

determined to destroy the German rail lines at Balzano. All the time knowing the German gunners were on top of the Alps, presumably drinking coffee and eating donuts, patiently waiting for us to show up.

After the Engineer started the Auxiliary Power Unit (APU), I cranked all four of the 1,250 horsepower engines to life, and taxied to a take-off position. Exactly at 7:00 AM the Control Tower shot up a flare, signaling 'Proceed with take-off.'

Seven 65,000 pound armed B-24 heavy bombers from the 726th, each pulling almost 5,000 horsepower, roared down the runway with throttles wide open and straining for enough speed to be airborne at the end of the runway (which was a good idea, since each plane was loaded with highly volatile 100 octane gasoline that could blow up if the plane didn't get airborne).

All of the planes had a smooth take-off and joined the Group formation.

TO THE TARGET

We, as Pilot and Copilot, were busy keeping the plane in formation, while the rest of the crew were busy checking their main duties; Navigator - plotting our position, Bombardier - final arming of the bomb load, Flight Engineer - transferring of fuel to balance the weight, Gunners - test firing their weapons over the Adriatic to make sure they were okay. And with a final 'oxygen check' we were on our way.

I noticed Lieutenant Bud Landis had a grin on his face, meaning he was ready to do battle.

The sky above the clouds was sunny and clear as



ENROUTE TO TARGET
(Circled A/C #44-49538 - Owens' A/C)

we headed northwest to Northern Italy. We turned sharply southwest to the border of Switzerland (a neutral country). The Copilot alerted the crew to continue watching for enemy fighter planes.

AT THE TARGET

So far, no fighters, no flak, and no problems. Then it happened. Seems like every German 88 anti-aircraft gun on the ground was shooting at our formation. Flak came bursting up through the belly of the plane, bouncing off the oxygen bottles and tearing a hole in Sergeant Upham's parachute, leaving him with only the 'spare' chute kept in a spare equipment bag. The flak also shot out our Number 3 fuel tank and the Number 1 engine. The plane went completely out of control and shot up in the air with the myself and Copilot yanking on the controls trying to bring the plane to level flight.

The Copilot, Bud Landis, signaled he was feathering the Number 1 engine to keep the propeller from flying off and adding further damage to the plane.

Sergeant Upham was calling the Flight Deck on the intercom to report that two American fighter Pilots had been flying along, beside our plane, before they took off after a German ME-109 that had appeared at 1 o'clock level.

No one could tell exactly what was happening, so we called to have the bomb bay doors opened so they would not be locked shut on the bomb run.

Then another engine went wild, and again the Copilot had his finger on the feathering button to stop it from spinning.

The plane was finally brought under control, as we continued to follow the formation on the bomb run to the target. All the bombs were dropped on the target, but the plane was flying too slow to stay with the formation.

We were getting concerned about German fighter planes, because a single (damaged) slow flying bomber is easy to shoot out of the sky. We contacted Fighter Command asking for fighter escort, but they showed no interest in our problem and said,

"You'll be okay; there's no enemy fighters close to you."

TRYING TO GET BACK TO BASE

The bomber was now trying to stay in the air on two engines, flying at a minimum airspeed and was all alone in the skies over Yugoslavia. We checked with our Navigator, Lieutenant Harold A. Ginsberg, to get our exact position and give us a direct course over the Adriatic Sea to home base at Castelluccia, Italy.

One of the crew members shouted over the intercom, "It's only a few minutes to Switzerland. Let's fly there and bail out. Then we can sit out the war in a neutral country and learn to ski." We swung the plane around and pointed it towards Switzerland. The first thing we saw was a dense wall of flak, so thick that the sky was almost black. The anti-aircraft being shot up in front of us was making it unwise to continue, so the plane was turned back to the original heading. Again we asked Lieutenant Ginsberg for a heading, directly back to home base. Lieutenant Ginsberg politely reminded me, if we took that course, we would be a long time over water, and if we had to ditch, most of us would drown or freeze to death in the cold water. Plus, making good target practice for the German fighter pilots, should they be in the area. He further suggested that we could fly down the coast of Yugoslavia and land at Zara (an emergency airfield). Then, if the plane could be repaired, we could cross the Adriatic and take the short way home.

JUST TRYING TO SURVIVE

The crippled plane was heading toward the Zara Base, flying on automatic pilot to have better control, also giving us time to make some kind of decision. Then it happened! Another engine started faltering. I picked up the mike, roared out that this damned war was getting on my nerves. Now we had no choice but to start looking for a safe place to bail out.

The plane was heading west toward Yugoslavia, as we continued looking for a safe place to bail out. As stated before, we had been briefed that in case of emergency we could use the Isle of Krk to bail out over. Now we had another problem. The plane was filling with gas fumes from leaky fuel tanks. One spark could blow us out of the sky. The Engineer opened all the hatches and bomb Bay doors for any fresh air that would lessen the danger.

With only one engine running and one faltering, and flying near 5,000 feet at just above stalling speed, the plane was reset on automatic pilot and into a slow descending glide to keep it from stalling. Suddenly someone shouted, "There's the island of Krk at 1 o'clock." By then we were almost on top of the island. The crew was alerted to prepare for bailout. The automatic pilot was again reset to a more descending glide to clear the moun-

tains and crash into the Adriatic Sea. The plane could cause a lot of damage by crashing on land, perhaps unnecessarily killing some innocent people. Now the crew had been alerted and were prepared for bailout. All the doors and hatches had been opened to give the crew numerous escape exits.

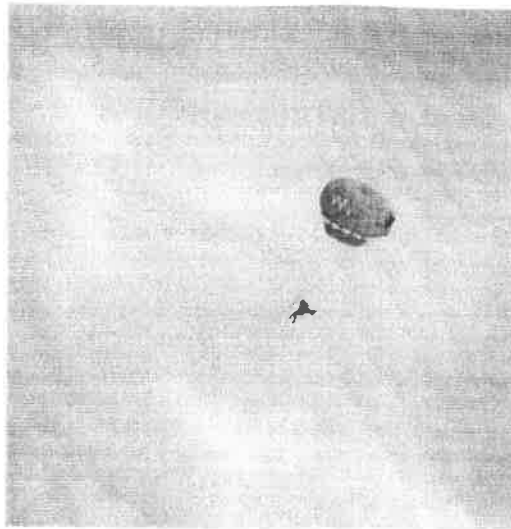
Now was the time - I activated the emergency alarm for all crew members to bail out. Then after waiting about one minute to be sure they had all cleared the plane, it was my time to go. Looking around the plane I spotted my baby boy's first pair of baby shoes swinging on the throttle handles. They had been my good luck charm since leaving my home in South Carolina to join the Air Force.

For a second, I began to reach for the shoes, but paused. This would be pushing my luck too far. The plane could very well explode and fall out of the sky at any moment. So, not to push my luck, I slid down from the flight deck to the bomb bay hatch and went headfirst out of the plane into the skies over Yugoslavia.

It was at this time that I decided, if I did survive, I would never join the Airborne Infantry.

What I didn't know was that Staff Sergeant Fred Blackburn (for whatever reason) had not bailed out of the plane with the rest of us. Some people later said a parachute left the plane just before it crashed into the Adriatic Sea. Also, Sergeant Gil Upham later reported that when he got ready to leave the plane, he saw Sergeant Albert Berkey, without a chute on, saying, "He was not jumping." So, both he and Sergeant Mike Westrich wrestled him down, put a chute on him, then dumped him out of the rear camera hatch while holding the rip cord to make sure it would open. Then Sergeant Westrich and Sergeant Upham jumped from the plane. Sergeant Upham also said that when he pulled his rip cord, the pilot chute did not activate to pull the main chute out. The flap holding the pilot chute was caught on the pins. After freeing the flap, the pilot chute popped out, taking the main chute with it. He said his head seemed to go into his shoulders like a turtle, but he never lost control.

In my case, I counted to ten and pulled the rip cord. This was an experience in itself. When the main chute opened it jerked so hard that my flight helmet, which was fastened to my head, flew off like a rocket. I was told later that a free falling body travels at about 110 miles per hour before the parachute opens.



OWENS' DESCENT
(Caught on film by Sgt Uebelher)

Just then, one of the free falling bodies went free falling passed me shouting, "WHAT'S UP DOC?" At that time I couldn't identify this airman to tell him, "You scared the hell out of me." I later learned that it was Sergeant Upham.

Descending slowly to the ground gave me a chance to evaluate the problem facing me after landing on the Island of Krk. Here, 5,000 feet in the air and 7,000 miles from home, about to drop in on a part of the world I never knew existed before the war. This is what I could have been thinking, "WHAT THE HELL HAVE I GOTTEN MYSELF INTO?"

Nearing the ground I spotted some of the crew looking up at me, so I decided to show my crew how a trained warrior from the United States Army Air Force drops in from the skies to do battle.

Closer to the ground, I made an attempt to swing the chute around with the wind at my back. The entire crew had been pre-warned -- never land on the ground with the wind blowing in your face. Falling backwards, when you hit the ground, can put you out of the flying business.

Waiting to long, in correcting the wind drift, I landed flat on my back knocking me unconscious. When I came to, a Partisan woman was running towards me with a hunting type knife in her hand.

Not knowing her intentions, I jerked out my 45-caliber pistol and took aim to stop her. She stopped in her tracks and pointed to the parachute on the ground. While talking in her native language she pointed to the nearby woods. When I nodded my head, 'okay,' she cut the chute loose and ran into the woods and disappeared. Everybody learned later that these people wanted the material from the chutes to make clothes.

ON THE MOUNTAIN TOP

Sergeant Upham's left foot was severely injured landing fairly close to me on the rocky surface of the mountain. Laying there in agony, he spotted Sergeant Uebelher and a Partisan running toward him. They gathered up his parachute and brought him over to where I was laying on the ground. Rudy Uebelher took out his camera and made a shot of the group around me.

Seeing my head wound, Rudy applied a healthy dose of Sulfa powder (taken from his escape kit) on the wound and then applied a bandage.

Knowing German fighter planes would be looking for us, it was suggested we had better hide in

the nearby woods and wait for the rest of the crew to show up. The minute we all sat down in the woods, a German ME-109 flew over at tree top level. (We could see the pilot scanning the ground looking for us).



AFTER SUCCESSFUL BAIL-OUT
(5, plus Cameraman, Sgt Uebelher on mountain top)

After a while, a large group of Marshall Tito's Partisans walked into our location. They were heavily armed with machine guns and bullet belts crossed over their shoulders. The fur hats on their heads had red stars on the front, since they were fighting for Russia.

The leader asked to speak to the American Commander, which had to be me, the pilot of the plane. He welcomed us in good English and politely asked if we had any Hershey chocolate candy for his children. It seems they were under the impression that all Americans always carried chocolates. Thank God we all had some concentrated chocolates in our escape kits. The Partisan leader had lived in Chicago prior to the war but came back home to fight the Germans when they invaded his home land.

Sergeant Uebelher spoke some German, so he and several Partisans went to see if any German soldier were located in this area. They returned saying, "We shot a sniper from a tree." To prove it, they had his ID and a family photo.

I laughed and said, "Now we have started our own war with the Germans stationed on the island."

We all settled down in the woods and waited for the rest of the crew to show up. About dark, the Partisans brought in some food (fish heads and eggs cooked in olive oil). They explained that the best part of the fish went to the front line soldiers.

We were all afraid NOT to eat, but as General Sherman had said, "WAR IS HELL." So were fish heads! But we all sat down on the mountain top for supper with that fish smelling olive oil on our hands and faces, trying to wipe it off with tree

leaves.

After supper, all of us just laid back on the ground discussing the crew members that had not shown up. It seemed reasonable that they should have shown up by now.

We knew Sergeant Fred Blackburn would have a problem finding us. He was on the other side of the mountain. Sergeant Albert Berkey had landed in the middle of a small town and might have been captured as a prisoner of war. We learned later that Lieutenant Landis, the Copilot and Lieutenant Ginsberg, the Navigator, were hiding in a small house waiting for a safe time to join the rest of the crew. Nobody knew anything about Sergeant Robert Mills. There were only five crew members together for the first night we spent on the Island of Krk mountain top. Myself, Lieutenant Kling, Sergeants Upham, Westrich and Uebelher.

Just before we lay on the ground to sleep, a young Partisan woman brought a small donkey for me to ride down to the beach. She would lead the donkey because of the small trail we would be traveling. That didn't sound too bad to me, but my curiosity was tested when she lay on the ground beside me, pulling a dirty blanket over the two of us. "Well, so much for protocol," I thought, "Let's all get some sleep." Everything got quiet. I later said that she smelled worse than the fish heads we had for supper, but protocol prevailed and I stuck it out all night.

The Squadron Intelligence Officer had warned all combat crews -- Never lay a hand on any Partisan female. Most all Partisans were denying themselves sex for the duration of the war because of severe food shortage (basically to control the population). If a female Partisan got pregnant, she could not fight with the resistance group. The penalty was death to the female and castration to the male (no exceptions).

I was not too worried about myself. I would never do anything to cause me to lose my male identity.

About daylight the Partisans had more news on the missing airmen. Sergeant Berkey did land in the middle of a small town. The underground found him and hid him in the attic of one of their homes. Then German soldiers searched the house and beat up the family members, but they never told them a thing. A short while later he was brought to our group on top of the mountain. That brought our count up to six.

Suddenly, two ME-109 German fighter planes came roaring over our hideout at tree top level and began to circle. We could see the pilots eyes looking right and left. Everybody froze and waited. "Were they gonna fire on us?," someone asked. Then, just as they had showed up, they left. The Partisans just took it in stride and lit their pipes.

Harold Ginsberg and Bud Landis landed in the

same area. Harold had landed on a stone fence and had severely injured his leg, so was unable to walk. Bud had hurt his head landing on the rocks. A Yugo Partisan put Harold on his back and carried him to a small village. He and Landis were put in a small attic room with a large feather bed. Later they were put on a donkey cart covered with hay. Eventually Harold was put on a donkey and traveled about ten hours with Landis, walking in the direction of the beach, hoping to rendezvous with our group at the boat.

Lieutenant Landis was concerned about somebody having stolen his escape kit back at the house. His medicine, gun, ammunition and food were missing. Now he and Lieutenant Ginsberg were at the mercy, and whim, of the Partisan escort.

Back on the mountain, my group and I were getting restless about the other crew members scattered all over the mountain. I thought it best to stay where we were until later in the day. The plan was to start moving toward the beach at dark, hoping the Partisans would have the same plan in mind. Then we would all get together at some safe location on the beach and wait for the escape boat to show up. It was now up to the Partisans to get us on a boat.

Promptly at dark the Partisans were ready to start moving. Here we were, one crippled pilot and gunner mounted on two donkeys, being led by a lady Partisan, followed by six exhausted airmen, with no one knowing exactly what was waiting for us as we moved down the narrow mountain trail. The donkeys were the only one who knew how to walk on the narrow paths.

Were they, the Partisan's, going to sell us to the Germans? Up to now this did not seem to be their intent. If the Germans caught up with us, the Partisans would be shot and we would be put in a POW camp for the rest of the war. Having no choice, we just trusted the Partisans and made our way down the mountain to the coast. Me, on this mini-jackass, dragging my crippled leg on the rocky mountain trail. I must mention, this animal had no manners. He was breaking wind about every ten steps and smelled worse than the lady leading him. One of the crew members was laughing and said that the jackass and I should be awarded the Purple Heart for courage and sheer determination.

Traveling most of the night, we came to a fog-covered beach. It was totally dark. You couldn't see ten feet ahead, but could hear the waves. Lieutenant's Landis and Ginsberg had gotten there ear-

lier and were waiting for us. Now we were all together again, except for Sergeant Blackburn. It was too risky waiting any longer for him to show up. Walking to the beach we watched as two British Gun boats (lashed together) came out of the darkness. They appeared, with muffled engines, by coming in stern first to a small stone jetty that protruded out from shore. The boat crew started unloading supplies for the Partisans. We boarded the boats, with some of the Partisans staying onboard. When everything was complete onboard, the Skipper hit the throttles and we roared out into the open waters. About that time the Germans realized something was afoot and started firing with small arms in our direction. But, by time they were alerted we were out of range.

I was glad we were now in Allied hands, but in reflecting on what the Partisans did for us ... During our ordeal I wanted to believe we were in the same hands as the other 451st crew who got out before, and that everything would be okay. I also knew, for those that got us back into Allied hands, the American Officers were worth \$500.00 and the Enlisted Men were worth \$200.00, in gold. They might not have cared for us, personally, but I'm sure they would care for the \$3000.00. This was a fortune to these people. The Partisans were taking chances. If the Germans caught them -- Automatic Execution.

Before we left the Partisans, we gave our guns and other items to them and said a thankful good-bye. I thought to myself, "Now, I would never again have to smell that Partisan female, nor that jackass."

The British crew had breakfast waiting for us in the mess. Some of our crew had not eaten since leaving the base in Italy.

Lieutenant Ginsberg said the breakfast was two slices of French Toast with a 'sunny-side-up egg' on each piece. He said it was the best breakfast he ever ate. (One up for the British!)

The Gun boat took us to a British port on the Yugoslav Coast for medical treatment. We were all examined by a Medical Officer who got excited about the large amount of Sulfa Powder on my head, saying, "When you get to where you can take a shower, why don't you wash that damned dander from your scalp." I stood up and said, "When the war is over, why don't you go to Medical School; it is evident you need it." I then walked out of the tent, wishing I had had the son-of-a-bitch with me on that mountain.

The next day we were trucked to Zara, the



GUNBOAT CAPTAIN
(Name Unknown)

American emergency Air Base that was used by our planes for emergency landing when returning from bombing missions. This base was also used to bring

in supplies for the Partisans who helped American Airmen get back to their bases. We were loaded on an old C-47 transport for the

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MISSING AIR CREW REPORT

2349 12717

1. ORGANIZATION, Location Castelluocia, Italy Command or Air Force 15th Air Force
Group 451st Bombardment Group (H) Squadron 726th Bombardment Sq (H)
 2. SPECIFY: Place of departure Castelluocia, Italy Course -----
Target Bolzano, Italy Type of mission Bombing
 3. WEATHER CONDITIONS AND VISIBILITY AT TIME OF CRASH OR WHEN LAST REPORTED:
Weather: Clear. Visibility: Fair
 4. GIVE: (a) Date 28 Feb 1945 Time 1225 Last known position 45° 06' N - 12° 36' E
(b) Specify whether: Last sighted, Forced down, Seen to crash,
 Last contacted by radio, No information.
 5. AIRCRAFT [LOST] [BELIEVED LOST] AS A RESULT OF: [Check one only]
 Enemy aircraft, Enemy anti-aircraft, Other
 6. AIRCRAFT: Type, model & series B-24 L AAF Serial Number 44-49589
 7. NICKNAME OF AIRCRAFT -----
 8. ENGINES: Type, model & series B-24 L AAF Serial Number (a) CP 31762
(b) CP 317481 (c) CP 317607 (d) CP 318124
 9. INSTALLED WEAPONS: [Make, type and serial number]
(a) _____ (c) _____ (i) _____
(b) _____ (l) _____ (j) _____
(c) _____ (g) _____ (k) _____
(d) _____ (h) _____ (l) _____
 10. PERSONNEL LISTED BELOW REPORTED AS: Battle Casualty, Non Battle Casualty.
 11. NUMBER OF PERSONS ABOARD AIRCRAFT: Crew 10; Passengers ---; Total 10
[If more than 12 persons aboard aircraft, use separate sheet]
- | CREW POSITION | FULL NAME (Last, first, initial) | RANK, SERIAL NUMBER | CURRENT NEXT OF KIN, RELATIONSHIP AND ADDRESS |
|-----------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--|
| 1 Pilot | <u>Owens, William C.</u> | <u>1st Lt</u>
<u>O-1110166</u> | <u>RTD</u> |
| 2 Co-Pilot | <u>Landis III, Wilson A.</u> | <u>1st Lt</u>
<u>O-720395</u> | <u>RTD</u> |
| 3 Bombardier | <u>Kling, Harry C.</u> | <u>2nd Lt</u>
<u>O-2063250</u> | <u>RTD</u> |
| 4 Navigator | <u>Ginsberg, Harold A.</u> | <u>2nd Lt</u>
<u>O-2001873</u> | <u>RTD</u> |
| 5 Top Turret Gunner | <u>Uebelher, Rudolph F.</u> | <u>Sgt</u>
<u>16049699</u> | <u>RTD</u> |
| 6 Lower Turret Gunner | <u>Westrich, Mike E.</u> | <u>Sgt</u>
<u>35709831</u> | <u>RTD</u> |
| 7 R-Waist Gunner | <u>Berkey, Albert J.</u> | <u>Sgt</u>
<u>42083286</u> | <u>RTD</u> |
| 8 L-Waist Gunner | <u>Mills, Robert J.</u> | <u>Cpl</u>
<u>15108981</u> | <u>RTD</u> |
| 9 Tail Gunner | <u>Upham, Gilbert L.</u> | <u>Sgt</u>
<u>11140962</u> | <u>RTD</u> |
| 10 Nose Gunner | <u>Blackburn, Frederick D.</u> | <u>Sgt</u>
<u>34761681</u> | <u>MIA</u>
<u>Mrs. Maggie M. Blackburn (Mother)</u>
<u>Rt #6, Garden City, Savannah, Ga.</u> |
| [11] | | | |
| [12] | | | |
12. IDENTIFY BELOW THOSE PERSONS WHO ARE BELIEVED TO HAVE LAST KNOWLEDGE OF AIRCRAFT AND CHECK APPROPRIATE [one only] COLUMN TO INDICATE BASIS FOR SAME:

NAME IN FULL	RANK	SERIAL No.	CONTACTED LAST BY RADIO	SAW	FORCED
[1] <u>Owens, William C.</u>	<u>1st Lt</u>	<u>O-1110166</u>	<u>Parachutes were used</u>		
[2]					
[3]					
 13. IF PERSONNEL ARE BELIEVED TO HAVE SURVIVED, CHECK ONE OF THE FOLLOWING:
 Parachutes were used. Persons were seen walking away from the scene of the crash.
 Other reasons [specify] _____
 14. ATTACH PHOTOGRAPH, MAP OR SKETCH SHOWING LAST KNOWN LOCATION OF AIRCRAFT.
 15. ATTACH EYEWITNESS DESCRIPTIONS OF CRASH, FORCED LANDING, OR OTHER CIRCUMSTANCES.
 16. ATTACH A DESCRIPTION OF EXTENT OF SEARCH, IF ANY, AND GIVE NAME, RANK AND SERIAL NUMBER OF OFFICER IN CHARGE OF SEARCH HERE. No search made. Plane last sighted over enemy territory.

3- Inclosures.
Incl 1-Sketch Date 4 March 1945.
Incl 2- Eyewitness Statement
Incl 3- Statement of S-2 Officer

Albert F. O'Connell
ALBERT F. O'CONNEL
Captain, Air Corps,
Adjutant.

DECLASSIFIED
 NND 783072
 By SP-6 JRM/MSB, Date 12/14/83

1912

CONFIDENTIAL

trip back to Bari, Italy. With us were some other downed crews and some pine boxes of dead Air-men. No one spoke on the way back. We all must have been deep in thought, since we were going back to fight again, and the men in the pine boxes were finished. They had done their duty and lost.

We spent two days in Bari being debriefed, deloused (whether we needed it or not) and issued new clothes.

We still didn't know anything about Sergeant Blackburn. Lieutenants Landis and Ginsberg were sent to the hospital for treatment before returning to flight duty. During our last interview, the Officer in Charge sat across from me with a large pile of telegrams. Thumbing through them and finding the one he wanted, he smiled and said, "Guess I don't have to send this one to your family." It read: "Dear Mrs. Owens, We regret to inform you that Lieutenant. William C. Owens was reported missing on February 26, 1945."

We both smiled as he tore up the telegram. I should have asked him for it.

The next day our base sent a plane to Bari for us and we arrived back on duty on March 5, 1945. Three days later I flew my 19th Mission into Austria with no problems, and then flew twelve more missions before the war ended in Europe.

All totaled, I flew thirty one combat missions and considered myself lucky to get home alive, but would have done it again to preserve our nations freedom.

ADDENDUM TO 18th MISSION STORY (As recalled by Navigator Harold Ginsberg)

Before every mission I give my pilot, whoever he may be, an emergency heading from the target. On the pilot's compass there is an arrow that is set on that desired heading. The pilot, in such emergencies, then keeps his compass needle lined up with that arrow. I had set that arrow on a heading from the target at Balzano to Switzerland before we took off.

Having been hit and damaged by flak at Balzano, we were trying to make it back to Italy alone on three engines. As we approached the Adriatic Sea from the Yugo mainland, we encountered trouble with the remaining engines and Owens said that we would have to bail out. I told him that this was a bad place. It was Ustachi territory. I told him that there was a large island in the Adriatic just off the coast that he could see at two o'clock. I reminded him that Harvey Clapp's crew had bailed out on Krk several months earlier and they were rescued by the Partisans. Owens then turned toward Krk and I told him that this was a German held island and that it was advisable to stay away from the major roads, if possible. As soon as we crossed the coastline of Krk, Owens hit the bail out alarm button and we all bailed out immediately, except for the nose gunner, who for some reason delayed

jumping for a little while. He was hurt landing in the mountains and was picked up almost immediately by the Partisans.

They (the Partisans) said that they would take us into the woods, with the exception of me. I had landed on a stone fence and could not walk. I was to be taken to a home in a village and be hidden there. Bud Landis, whose head was injured on landing, said that he would come with me to make sure I got out okay. A Partisan soldier carried me on his back to a home in the village where Bud and I were hidden in the attic. (I weighed a lot less than I do now).

When I tried to express my gratitude to the woman of the house who hid us in her attic, despite the danger, she told that they hated the Germans and when planes flew overhead heading north, the women crossed themselves and said a prayer for us. To be chosen to hide us was a great honor and gave her an opportunity to fight back.

During the evening of the next day, we were taken out in a donkey cart covered by hay. When we rejoined the rest of the crew, I was put on the back of a donkey and we walked for what seemed many hours before we reached the beach. When the rest of the crew arrived, we sat down on the sand and waited for what seemed like several hours. It was a moon less, cloudy, foggy, pitch black night. Suddenly two British Gun boats broke through the fog, drifting silently, stern first onto the beach. They unloaded considerable supplies for the Partisans, after which we boarded. The two boats started their engines simultaneously and we took off at full speed. The hills around the beach then exploded with tracer machine gun fire, but we were out of range in a few seconds. Until then I was not aware, because of the darkness, of the presence of those hills or the danger hidden up there. A little while later the British sailors served us the best breakfast I have ever had in my life -- Two slices of French toast with a FRESH sunny side up egg on each, and hot coffee with FRESH milk. In the morning we arrived at the British Naval Base at Zara, and the 15th Air Force sent a C-47 to take us to Bari.

STILL MORE DOCUMENTATION BY CAPTAIN ALBERT L. ROEMER, 726th INTELLIGENCE OFFICER.

4 March 1945

STATEMENT OF CIRCUMSTANCES

First Lieutenant William C. Owens, 0-1110166, was pilot of a B-24, AAF serial number 44-49539, on a combat mission to bomb the Balzano, Italy Marshalling Yards on 28 February 1945. Over the target, Lieutenant Owens was forced to feather an engine as a result of severe flak damages to his plane. Later, on the return route, more trouble with two other engines made it impossible for Lieutenant Owens to keep the damaged plane in the air any longer, and he gave the signal for his crew to bail

out. They were at an altitude of 7,000 feet over the island of Krk, Yugoslavia. Lieutenant Owens waited for a minute after the warning had been given to bail out, and then seeing no other person in the plane except himself, he also left the ship. On reaching the ground, he collected his crew and they all said that each of them had seen only nine parachutes come out of the plane. The man unaccounted for was Staff Sergeant Fredrick D. Blackburn, who had flown as the nose-gunner. None of them had seen the plane crash, although Lieutenant Owens had set the controls so it would crash in the sea. The next day, people on the island who said they had witnessed the incident, reported that after the plane had gone over the mountains, another chute had come out of it and the person had broken his leg on landing. The source said that he was in medical care of the friendly Allies and he would be placed in the hands of proper authorities as soon as he could be evacuated. Since the reliability of the

source could not be determined, the crew members could not accept this as being the authentic truth, but each thought from the description given, it was very possible that it might have been Sergeant Blackburn.

Since their return to this base, Lieutenant Owens and the others of his crew have been thoroughly interrogated and the convictions are same for each member. Nothing further has been heard from the missing man, and the undersigned has no other comment of any opinion as to his fate.

(Editor -- The circumstances of how, and when, Staff Sergeant Frederick Blackburn got off the island of Krk remains a mystery. But get off he did. And to add to the mystery I find that Sergeant Blackburn was originally from the 724th Squadron, having arrived overseas with the crew of Werner F. Sieber. Sadly we shall never hear, directly from Blackburn, what transpired as to how, and when he left Krk, for he passed away in June of 1964.)



Sgt Mike Westrich With Liberating Partisans



Sgt Rudolph Uebelher With Liberating Partisans

A SONG WE USE TO SING

Oh, it's whisky, whisky,
That makes you feel so frisky;
In the Corps,
In the Army Air Corps.

(Chorus)

***My eyes grow dim, I cannot see,
I have not brought my specks with me;
I - have - not - brought my specks with me,***

For it's rum, rum, rum,
That makes you feel so numb'
In the Corps,
In the Army Air Corps.
(Chorus)

Oh, it's wine, wine, wine,
That makes you feel so fine;
In the Corps,
In the Army Air Corps.
(Chorus)

Oh, it's beer, beer beer,
That makes you want to cheer;
In the Corps,
In the Army Air Corps.
(Chorus)

Oh, it's gin, gin, gin,
That makes you want to sin;
In the Corps,
In the Army Air Corps.
(Chorus)

Oh, it's sherry, sherry, sherry,
That makes you feel so merry
In the Corps,
In the Army Air Corps.
(Chorus)

FAMOUS FLYING SAYINGS

- * Never trade luck for skill.
- * The three most common expressions in aviation are: "Why is it doing that?", "Where are we?", and "Damned!"
- * Weather forecasts are horoscopes with numbers.
- * Progress in airline flying .. Now a flight attendant can get a pilot pregnant.
- * Airspeed, Altitude or Brains .. Two are always needed to successfully complete a flight.
- * A smooth landing is mostly luck .. Two in a row is all luck .. Three in a row is prevarication.
- * I remember when sex was safe and flying was dangerous.
- * Will Rogers never met a fighter pilot.
- * We have a perfect record in aviation .. We never left one up there!
- * If the wings are traveling faster than the fuselage, its probably a helicopter - and unsafe.
- * Flashlight is a tubular metal containers kept in a flight bag for the purpose of storing dead batteries.
- * Navy carrier pilots to Air Force pilots .. "'Flaring' is like squatting to pee."
- * Flying the airplane is more important than radioing your plight to a person on the ground incapable of understanding it.
- * When a flight is proceeding incredibly well, something was forgotten.
- * Robert Livingston, "Flying The Aeronca:" "Just remember if you crash because of weather, your funeral will be held on a sunny day."
- * Layton A. Bennett: "Never fly the 'A' model of anything.
- * Ed Thompson: " When a prang seems inevitable, endeavor to strike the softest, cheapest object in the vicinity, and as slowly and gently as possible. (Advice given to RAF pilots during WW-II.)
- * The Cub is the safest airplane in the world .. It can just barely kill you.
- * Max Stanley, Northrop test pilot .. "A pilot who doesn't have any fear probably isn't flying his plane to its maximum."
- * Jon McBride, Astronaut .. "If you're faced with a forced landing, fly the thing as far into the crash as possible."
- * Bob Hoover .. "If an airplane is still in one piece, don't cheat on it; ride the bastard down."
- * Ernest K. Gann, advice from the 'Old Pelican' .. "Though I Fly Through the Valley of Death I Shall Fear No Evil for I Am At 80,000 Feet and Climbing."
- * Sign over the entrance to the SR-71 operating location on Kadena AB, Okinawa .. "You've never been lost until you've been lost at Mach 3."
- * Paul F. Crickmore .. "Never fly in the same cockpit with someone braver than you."
- * Richard Herman, Jr. .. "There is no reason to fly through a thunderstorm in peacetime."
- * Sign over the Squadron Ops desk at Davis-Monthan AFB, AZ (Was still there in 1972 .. "The three best things in life are a good landing, a good orgasm and a good bowel movement; A night carrier landing is one of the few opportunities in life when you can experience all three at the same time."
- * What is the similarity between Air Traffic Controllers and pilots? .. If a pilot screws up, the pilot dies; If Air Traffic Controller screws up, the pilot dies."
- * Without ammunition the USAF would be just another expensive flying club.
- * If something hasn't broken on your helicopter, it's about to.



Basic Flying Rules:

- 1.) Try to stay in the middle of the air.
- 2.) Do not go near the edges of it.
- 3.) The edges of the air can be recognized by the appearance of ground, buildings, sea, trees, and at the other extreme, interstellar space. It is much more difficult to fly there.

ERNIE CUMMINS' 60th AIR SERVICE SQUADRON JOURNAL

(When The Hair Was Short And The Dollar Was Long)

(Continuing from Ernie's recall of the alc crash on 14 November 1944, as reported in the last Ad Lib (Issue 36), and in some degree researched by this office ... Ernie writes:)

*****COMMENT*****

Well, it took a couple of days for all this information to get back to Cornelius [Rabbit] Sanford, and he gave me quite a dressing down.

"Ain't NEVER gonna listen to YOU again! That could have been us getting roasted out there! My mother was right, nothing is safe that gets higher than a stepladder, and even them is risky."

After the Engineering Officers looked over the flight records of the plane they wrote a report that pinpointed the failure. About six months earlier, when the ship was almost new, a German anti-aircraft shell had passed clear through the main wing spar. It did not explode, but left a large hole that weakened the structure of the wing. When the plane landed, it was turned over to the 60th for repair work and Captain Watson (our own head guy) had the boys splice a heavy section of aluminum plate across the hole. This was held in place by hundreds of rivets. From examination of those remaining on the fractured wing, they found the alloy of metal used in the wing spar, the reinforcing plate and rivets themselves, were all different. That meant the expansion and contraction from temperature changes varied, and high altitude flight at sub zero temperature, followed by sitting on the deck in warm sunlight eventually loosened the rivets in their confining holes. Thus allowing them to shear when the jolt of the hard landing the night before was delivered. That ship had flown 42 missions after being repaired and had many hours aloft. You never know, do you?

CONTINUING WITH ERNIE'S LETTERS



ERNEST R. CUMMINS
B. 25 December 1916 / D. 20 December 2000

TO MABEL

16 November 1944

So .. You got the car stuck in the mud of our driveway, HUH? Well, where our camp is we have miles of that stuff to plow through before reaching a paved road. Luckily our vehicles don't bog as easily as a passenger car, hi. Even so, one time I saw six trucks needed to pull one guy out of a soft ditch.

Tomorrow we tackle a sort of muddy job. I hope it holds off rain tonight, which would make it worse. We get the damndest places to work. Remind me to tell you (after I get home) how quickly a guy can change his mind about some things. -- This story involves Cornelius "Rabbit" Sanford, the guy I was with on my

pass and how my salesmanship persuaded him to try something new. With very satisfying results at first, but eventual developments have ruined all my arguments. There is this one boy (Rabbit) who will never use the word "Never," if anyone else tries to talk him into doing what I did. In face, today I even apologized to him, and Peanut, that proves he convinced me I was too free with my advice. All this must sound crazy to you, the censor would pin my ears back if I wrote what really happened. That will be mystery number one for our "bedtime story: just you and Ern together.

The P.X. gave out some Christmas cards to the fellows. They included pen and ink etchings of Olde England, Sailing Ships, Snow Covered Houses, Decorated Trees, etc.. The verses were pretty corny, but I tried to spread 'em out where they will fit the best.

Well, I'm sleeping in the office tonight. So I'd better go and haul my blankets down from my tent before the lights go out. Good night sweetheart, You are always in my dreams. How about sending me another real love story, hon .. my number one

**REMEMBER: YOUR \$\$\$ DONATIONS HELPS OUR
CAUSE**

request -- Luff and snuggles, Ernie

20 November 1944

Dear Mabel: It's somewhere between 9 and 10 PM and the little stove is keeping the tent quite warm. Funny about me being in this early tonight, with enough work outside to keep me busy for hours. I expect to keep going until daybreak. I even got my name removed from the guard list so I can take care of several of those outside jobs. But before I'd gotten into these jobs, and before a half hour had gone by, I jumped down from the back of my wrecker onto what I expected to find as level ground. Needless to say I accidentally twisted my ankle when my foot went into a hole. This will make it rough on Ray and the rest of the crew because we are shorthanded as it is. But the Medic said to stay off it, so I'll have to loaf while they freeze and slave away.

You can put me in Crooks' class for a day or two - excused from hard work but not too bad off not enjoy myself ..yippie! Harold will probably try to charge me a royalty for using his private system.

"Cripple" Crooks is sure laughing now because Ernie always claimed HIS ailments were mostly faked. He says I was jealous of his easy life and I had decided to sample his system, hi. The other guy who was on pass with me (Cornelius 'Rabbit' Sanford) had an accident too, only the poor fellow really broke his leg and is scheduled for a long rest. Funny how everyone gets laid up at one time. Ray is tearing his hair trying to find enough men to do the jobs we are called on to do.

Several days ago, I think it was Sunday, Ray and I drove to a hospital down the line to visit Rabbit, took Harold along too. We stopped at Gabe's office, but he was out with a Major making a tour of inspection, so we didn't see him.

We found Rabbit just as happy as if he had good sense. He was laying in the ward listening to an Italian accordion player who did request numbers for the patients. A Red Cross girl was passing out gum and smokes while we were there. So it seems that he is being well taken care of. His one worry was that when payday comes, we should see that the fellows he owes were paid off. That included me (for twenty five bucks). I kidded him about leaving camp before settling up his debts. I claimed that was the real reason I had to "track him down!"

25 November 1944

Dear Mabel: Hi darling .. how are things at our San Anselmo mansion? The home we Cummins' folks maintain in Italy is doing fine .. Thank you. Even the servant problem is well in hand. This morning, for instance, my man Roberto fetched a steaming cup of coffee to my bedside, when I elected to remain at ease. To complete my breakfast, there was toast and butter, with a delicious turkey leg! I salvaged this fine morsel from my Thanksgiving dinner, which was the best ever. That is, of

course, excluding the home cooked kind.

To think of Mabel working on holidays while the rest of the family gathers together and enjoys a feast makes me mad! Gosh Honey, your saying you hate the holidays when you are alone may be true enough, but I want you to try to have as much fun as you can.

Today I had the tape removed from my ankle and it looks fair. The swelling is down and it doesn't bother me as much as I expected. A beautiful black and blue spot remains, and even my toes are colored from blood seeping downhill, hi. The Captain wrapped it with soft elastic type bandage that is secured on the end by small metal clips and I can readjust it now to suit myself. This life of ease is quite the thing. Spent most of the morning washing from a helmet (Doc says no showers) and cleaning up the tent. Got the water truck to fill our cans. I can't carry the stuff on one good leg. Then I wrote letters, one to George Klein. Also aired my blankets and refilled my mattress with fresh straw. The cot looks more like it now has springs.

A lot of mail came in today, but none for my tentmates or me, boo hoo! I wrote a silly letter to the Caterpillar manufacturing people; my "once a year" report. They have so many guys in the service that their service page is full of news from all over the world.

We had two nights of outdoor movies (overcoats are a MUST) because the Mess Hall was having a cement floor installed, which took a while to harden. The newsreels showed the liberation of Paris, with pretty girls rushing out into the streets to kiss the soldiers.

4 December 1944 (written while on duty as CQ in the 60th Squadron Office)

Dear Mabel: A cold night, but Ernie is sitting in a corner of this snug office, practically on top of the stove, in fact. I'm having a try at the typewriter once again, hi. The rest of the occupants consist of one drunk, passed out on my bunk, one guard trying to keep out of the chilling wind, and little Willie running around in his undershirt. So if this seems to wander around, blame it on the distractions, hi.

The heat from the big stove sure feels fine. My sore ankle is having, what you might call a treatment, being so close to the fire. The ankle is much better now. No limp at all, but I still don't jump on it in any old way. While I was visiting the Medics daily for bandages, I got to reading a book in the 'waiting room' that one of the fellow's wife had sent over called "Disputed Passage" by Lloyd C. Douglas. Another of his case history type of book. This is the story of a doctor's life; love (or the lack of it), and I thought it was very interesting. But now someone has taken it out of the dispensary and I don't get to waste an hour per day up there, anyway. So now my problem is to find the guy that

owns it and finish the story.

"Barney Oldfield," what we call the old guy, just came into the shack from a job. I talked him into dragging the drunk home with him as they sleep in the same tent. Dripping water in his face failed to have any effect on the drunk, so we stood him up and between us, and Barney staggered away into the night. Hope he finds his tent okay, hi.

Here is a story about Robert Bricker, the tentmate of mine who formerly was a truck driver but who switched to cooking in our Mess Hall. That was only because the MP's were continually following him and catching him 'Out Of Bounds,' etc.. Working on the Base he figured his chances of falling 'afoul of the law' were less, and maybe his stripes would last longer, hi.

The cooks work one day and then have two days off. But that isn't as easy as it sounds because their day starts at four A.M. and ends around nine P.M. During those two days off, Robert use to visit a nearby town where he had a girlfriend, and he generally had himself a high old time. But what do you think, being a real old timer with more time overseas than most of us, he now finds his name at the top of the list for Stateside furloughs. Now he is so afraid of getting into some kind of trouble. at the last moment, that now we can't pry him out of the tent when he isn't working. Not that I blame him one bit. If I knew I had a chance of sailing home to my Mabel, you would find me just a eager to play it safe, hi. Bob lives in Ohio and already has a list of names a mile long to call or write from the guys that live in the East. I don't think I'll bother him about sending any message to you because we know we will be together soon, anyway.

Time for 'lights out,' Darling. Off I go to dream of my Peanut that loves me like the dickens and knows just how to show her hubby that she means it, too. All my kissed, Honey, from the guy that misses you more than he can tell you. Good Night Love.

11 December 1944

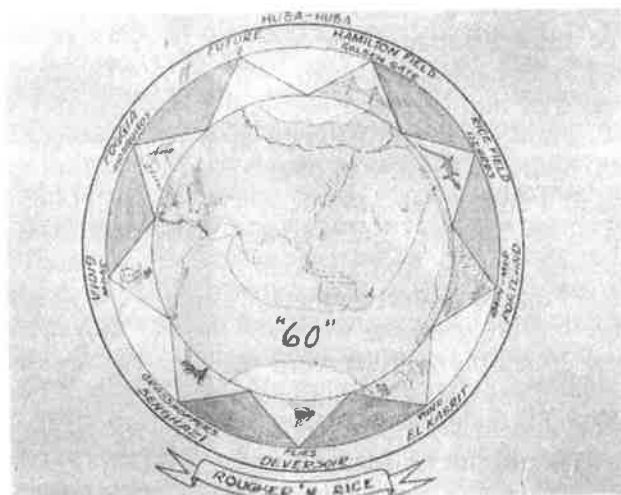
There is some high rank visiting soon for inspecting the area, so today was devoted to cleaning up and making the camp appear neat and orderly.



Rained off and on all day and is pouring hard this minute. Little Willie had a pleasant visit with his younger brother who just got over here from the States. He's stationed within a few hours from us. He is a Second Lieutenant and is bigger and heavier than Willie. A very nice sort of fellow. The Corporal had a big time taking the Looey around and introducing him to his pals, hi.

In the opposite corner of my tent lives an odd species of G.I. soldier. He hails from Pennsylvania and is a curly haired joker with a chubby face. He goes in for snappy dressing, in ways of possible of altering his clothing issue (i.e. shortening blouses, adding leather tops on shoes, making them into 'paratrooper boots, and sporting white silk scarfs to frame his gleaming freshly shaved face. The care he lavishes on his black wavy hair reminds me of an actress in front of a dressing table. He's always shining his boots, running to the tailor shop for his pressed uniform, then this Casanova leaps upon a greasy, beat up motorcycle and skids away on muddy roads to call upon his best prospect of the moment. More often than not, his return is in the wee small hours and the noise of his "popping" bike wakes us up. The next morning we take a gander at his splattered uniform, which appears to have been dragged through a sewer (they are not underground in our surrounding towns). But Albert assures us he only upset his vehicle three times enroute. Al's name is distinctly a Polish moniker - Kondraski. But long ago, at Hamilton Field, we shortened it to two syllables, with a 't' substituted for the 'd' and ended it right there. But when the Red Cross girls are close we are forced to check ourselves. That nickname might be misunderstood for a vulgar one. Al, the sheik of the "Stumble Inn," nevertheless is a lucky gambler, speaks fair Italian and is always washing, or combing his locks .. That's Al himself.

Well, enough nonsense honey. I'll knock off for tonight and send my love by the bushel to my very best girl friend, social secretary, cook, housekeeper, business manager and future mother of our kids. Be seeing you Love .. Ernie



"LITTLE FRIENDS:" THE 49th FIGHTER SQUADRON (Continued 12 Installment by Dr. Royal C. Gilkey)

(Editor ... Due to the vast amount of dedicated 451st material/stories for the last Ad Lib [Issue 36], we had to temporarily omit our ongoing story of the 49th Fighter Squadron as offered by Dr. R.C. Gilkey, 49th FS Intelligence Officer. With approval and concerned interest of our members, we continue from where we left off.)

On September 8, 1944, the railway bridge over the Sava River at Beograd (Belgrade) was targeted. Three 304th Wing Bomb Groups were to destroy it while under close escort by P-38s. The fighters had the job of covering the bombers' penetration over the target and their withdrawal from it after the attack. For this purpose, 11 Squadron "Lightnings" left base at 0805 hours (9:05 a.m.) while flying 17,000 feet over Gruj. From that point, they escorted a scattered formation of bombers to the target area. Time of arrival was 0955 hours (9:55 a.m.), their altitude being 25,000 feet. The bombers looked as if they were on dry runs, while circling to gain optimum altitude for an attack. In this maneuver, they split up, one Group of Bombers proceeding from the I.P. and the other two Groups approaching from the south. In flight, they appeared to be describing full (360-degree) circles as a dry-run prelude to bombing. The bombers were scattered as they came in on target. Staying with the bombers for a time, the P-38s took their departure at 1110 hours at 20,000 feet over Yugoslavia's coast (4248N 1740E), heading home from there. Clear weather with some haze covered the entire route on this 700-mile mission. In the target area, the flak was heavy but inaccurate. The bombers did a job on the south bridge (indicated on the target chart), their bombs plastering the structure. In fact, the area of the bridge was covered with bomb bursts that could hardly have missed a span. Observations by our pilots included patches of burning oil at 4457N 2042E & 4510N 2032E, been at 1000 hours (10 a.m.). smoke rose in a column at 4443N 2033E not far from Zuce, being observed at 1005 hours (10:05 a.m.). Pointed out on a target chart was an airdrome where some 25 enemy aircraft were visible. They included single-engine and twin-engine planes, which could not be identified

because of our fighters' altitude. There were no aerial encounters on the mission. The 49ers flew last in the Group and were over the target area from 0955-1015 hours (9:55 to 10:15 a.m.) at 25,000 feet. All 11 got back safely from this 700-mile mission at 1209 hours (12:09 p.m.), having sustained no losses.

Several pilots who were not on the 8 Sept. 1944 mission to Belgrade returned on that date flying new "Lightnings" picked up in England. These fliers were happy to ferry in additional P-38s for the 49th Fighter Squadron, which could profitably use more combat aircraft.

The ferrying pilots included 2Lts. John David Anderson (Maumee, Ohio), Lloyd J. Fried (Chicago, Ill.) Robert Hauser (Arlington, Mass.), Jerome W. Kostrewa (Milwaukee, Wis.) Donald Allen Luttrell (Dallas, TX), and Roger D. Weatherbee (Lincoln, Maine). Perhaps it should be pointed out that "Don" Luttrell had just three days earlier (5 Sept. 1944) been awarded a fifth Oak Leaf Cluster to his Air Medal (per General Order 3132). Curiously, the last sentence of the entry for 8 Sept. 1944 in the Squadron diary included one of these pilots as having just returned from the Soviet Union, witness this: Lt. Jerome Kostrewa returned to Squadron from Russia.

(It should be noted that the 451st did not fly combat on 8 September 1944 as they [Ground Crews and Staff Personnel] were preparing for eight (8) days of flying Supply Missions to Lyon, France. These missions started on September 10, 1944 and ending on the 22nd. The days, before the Supply Missions, were spent by the Ground Crews to lighten the planes and readying the aircraft to carry

full tanks of gasoline (with fuel barrels for off-loading), oil, bombs and ammunition. These items were to re-supply General Patton's air support as he moved rapidly north towards the heart of Germany.)

No operations were conducted on 9 Sept. 1944. Still, things of importance happened. Capt. Louis Kundrath (San Pedro, Cal.) found himself relieved of his command and transferred to a replacement depot for transshipment to the United States. That was hardly an unwelcome fate for Number 14 in a series of 49 Fighter Squadron Command-



Wartime Insigne of the 49th Fighter Squadron

ing Officers. "Going home" is a dream come true for most soldiers. His successor, Number 15, turned out to be Capt. William H. Edwards (Ironton, Ohio), who assumed command of all "Hangmen" on the very same day.

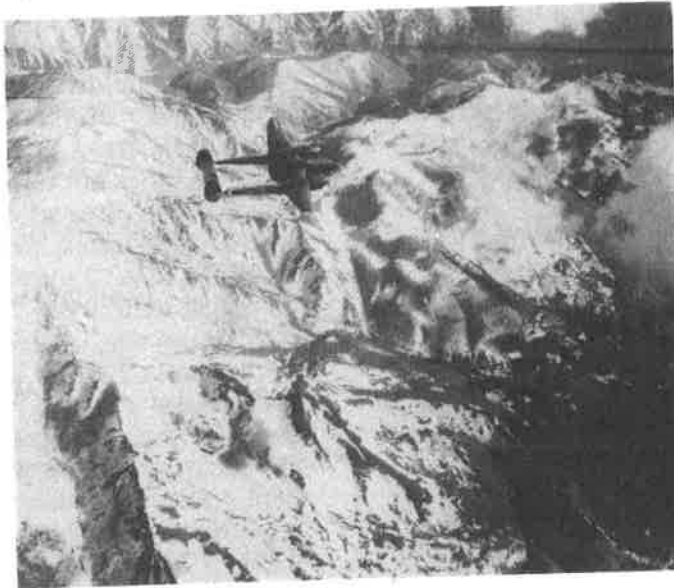
On September 10, 1944, the Squadron was assigned a close escort mission going to Vienna, Austria. Heavy bombers of the 55th Wing were to attack the Sauerwerke Engine Works in the Austrian capital. Flying second in the Group, 11 of our Squadron P-38s took off at 0805 hours (8:05 a.m.), making early rendezvous with the bombers. This took place at 0940 hours (9:40 a.m.) 17-18,000 feet over 4523N 1447E. From there, the bombers were escorted to the target. The fighters reached the target area at 1034 hours, their altitude being 25-26,000 feet. At 1050 hours (10:50 a.m.), they withdrew from the target area. By then, their altitude had dropped to 24,000 feet. All 11 Squadron P-38s got back to base at 1307 hours (1:07 p.m.). The pilots had much to report about their 1050-mile mission. The bomber formation seemed to them strung out, leaving the impression of being scattered.

As to the bombing results, much smoke from burning oil was seen in Vienna's eastern section across the Danube River. Bomb bursts were scattered over the main part of the city. Whether bombs struck the target was unobserved. Enemy aircraft put in an appearance. Two of them, both FW-190s, were seen coming up from behind the bombers. At that time, the "Lightnings," flying at 26,000 feet, were above the bomber formation and a little behind it. The menacing enemy planes, however, disappeared from view, apparently to avoid an encounter with the "Gabelschwanzteufel" ("Fork-tailed Devils"). So no aerial battle occurred. The pair of Luftwaffe pilots vanished before the P-38s could attack either of them. It was a case of discretion being the better part of valor? A lot of target-flak was encountered. It was accurate, intense and tracking in type. In fact, the enemy's anti-aircraft guns fired tracking-flak all along the flight path as far as Parndorf (4800N 1653E). Whit flak was dispersed with it. At 1040 hours (10:40 a.m.), a "Liberator" bomber blew up over Vienna (Wien) without any parachutes leaving it--at least none

could be observed. Our pilots also saw another bomber on the way down smoking as it went at 4634N 1708E, the estimated time being 1100 hours (11 a.m.), chutes for eight of the crew being observed to open. The 11 "HANGMEN" who started out on this 1050-mile mission got safely back to base at 1307 hours (1:07 p.m.). Flying the second slot with the Group, they had fulfilled their assignment without loss.

The next day, September 11, 1944, they could relax because the Squadron was non-operational. On September 12, 1944, aerial operations were to resume in earnest. Another long mission to provide

close escort for 55th Wing heavy bombers. They met them over the coastal town of Caorle at the outlet of the Livenzo River into the Gulf of Venice. Time of rendezvous was 1130 hours (11:30 a.m.) and the altitude, 24,000 feet. At 1310 hours (1:10 p.m.), our fighters flew 26,000 feet over the target area where they remained for five minutes, leaving at 1315 hours (1:15 p.m.). They stuck with the bombers until 1340 hours (1:40 p.m.). Their point of departure was 4716N 1106E (a little west of Innsbruck in Austria) at an altitude of 24,000 feet. Both bomber



ONE OF OUR "LITTLE FRIENDS"

and fighter formations were good at the time of departure. All 12 of our fighters then headed for home, returning to base at 1520 hours (3:20 p.m.). The pilots then reported on their 1200-mile mission. They called the bombing results "poor," having observed no bomb bursts on target. Some bombs struck east of an airdrome in the area. The weather was CAVU over the target. Surprisingly, neither flak nor enemy aircraft hindered operations in the target area. Over Innsbruck, however, flak was encountered. It was also present in the Munich (Munich) area, being intense and heavy, but inaccurate. Both the Austrian and south German cities quickly reacted to the presence of our formations. Two "Hangmen" said they saw what seemed to be a flame of a rocket, or maybe of a jet-propelled plane, shooting upward to at least 30,000 feet above their very eyes in the target area. An airdrome was seen from 24,000 feet near Venezia (Venice) at 1355 hours (1:55 p.m.), the coordinates being 4532N 1236E. A single-engine plane stood on the field, while a seaplane was seen not far away. Other

planes were observed on the mission. About 30 enemy aircraft were seen near Neuberg and near Donau (4844N 1122E) from an altitude of 26,000 feet, the time of sighting them being 1300 hours (1 p.m.). Also, 40 single-engine enemy planes were spotted on an airdrome in south Germany near Memmigen (4759N 1013E) at 1320 hours (1:20 p.m.) from an altitude of 25,000 feet. Col. Daniel S. Campbell (San Antonio, Texas) led the Squadron and Group on the mission. Each of the 12 fliers on the lengthy mission received well-deserved sortie credit.

On September 13, 1944, the Squadron's mission was to provide escort for the 5th Wing out to bomb the synthetic petroleum refinery at Blechhammer, Germany. Our P-38s were to escort the heavy bombers on their withdrawal from the target, doing so to prudent range. In this instance, the "Lightnings" did not penetrate as far as the target but effected a rendezvous so as to provide close escort upon withdrawal, from a point 20 miles beyond Vrutky in Czechoslovakia.

The mission started with a dozen Squadron P-38s taking off at 0857 hours (8:57 a.m.) and flying in third position within the Group. One "Hangman" returned early because of mechanical difficulties. The route taken was a briefed. Eleven of our fighters made rendezvous approximately 20 miles beyond Vrutky at 4926N 1854E. Their altitude was 23,000 feet; and the time, 1144 hours (11:44 a.m.). Close escort was then provided the returning bombers all the way to the Adriatic coast near Yugoslavia's Dalmatian port of Split. At that point (4333N 1622E), they left the bombers. The time of departure was 1345 hours (1:45 p.m.); and their altitude, 29,000 feet. Both bomber and fighter formations were reported good. The fliers ran into flak in the Veszprem area north of northeast Lake Balaton (4706N 1752E) at approximately 1215 hours (12:15 p.m.), causing the P-38s to take evasive action. All 11 Squadron planes returned to base at 1429 hours (2:29 p.m.). Several observations were made during the long 1150-mile trip. One pilot told of seeing three long black-&-white striped buildings not far from the briefed rendezvous point at Vrutky, Czech. (4906N 1856E). From an altitude of 26,000 feet, he observed the bombing of this factory, resulting in its destruction at 1149 hours (11:49 a.m.). The mission was regarded as successful in affording withdrawal protection for the B-17s bombing Blechhammer in Germany.

The Squadron stayed put and was non-operational on September 14, 1944; but on the 15th, it conduc-

ted a fighter sweep at mid altitude over Athens and Salonika, Greece. A dozen Squadron "Lightnings" got off at 0710 hours (7:10 a.m.), flying second in the Group. Our pilots patrolled the target area from 0920-1040 hours (9:20-10:40 a.m.). Unavoidably, a couple of "Hangmen" over the target returned early, one of them having noticed oil streaming along his wing tip, apparently caused by flak hits during passage through a field of enemy fire. Squadron pilots dropped their belly tanks in order to check out reported "bogies" in the sky. These didn't materialize, however. Heavy tracking-type flak was encountered over Salonika. Additional flak emanated from a canal pinpointed at 3757N 2257E. Observations made by returning pilots included the sighting of 10 medium military vehicles in the vicinity of strategically-located Khalkis (3828N 2338E). An unidentified aircraft was spotted on an airdrome near Florina (4048N 2125E), a Greek town not far from Yugoslavia to the north. Surprisingly, no other aircraft were to be seen on any of the airdromes around Athens (Athinia) or Salonika. Weather conditions were not conducive to good visibility. A 9/10 overcast covered the skies over the entire route from Yugoslav-Albanian coasts. Ten "Hangmen" landed at 1230 hours (12:30 p.m.), minus the pair of early returns; but all 12, having been over the target area, received sortie credit for their approximately 1100-mile mission. The next day, September 16, 1944, would give them a chance to relax because of the Squadron being non-operational then.

On 17 September 1944, a mission to Hungary was in the works. Squadron pilots were to escort four groups of 47th Wing heavy bombers to Ferencvaros Marshalling Yards at Budapest, Hungary. Our P-38s had the assignment of providing close cover for the bombers during penetration to the target, time over it, and withdrawal. After briefing, 14 Squadron P-38s took off at 0833 hours (8:33 a.m.) and headed for rendezvous at Suhopolje, which they saw from 21,000 feet at 1031 hours (10:31 a.m.). Prior to rendezvous-time, they had contacted the "Liberator" bombers (B-24s), flying at 20,000 feet over Petrovac, at 1000 hours (10 a.m.). From 1135-1140 hours (11:35-11:40 a.m.), the "Lightnings" were over the target. Our pilots saw two bomb-caused columns of smoke rising above the target area, but were unable to pinpoint them accurately by point of flying too high. The formation, flying at 20,000 feet, took its departure from the bombers over Yugoslavia's coast (4248N 1740E), the time being 1300 hours (1 p.m.). One "Lightning" low

**AGAIN, REMEMBER: YOUR \$\$\$ DONATIONS TO CONTINUE
OUR CAUSE**

on fuel landed at Vis island off the Dalmation coast, resuming the flight homeward when refueled. With that exception, our fighters touched down at 1345 hours (1:45 p.m.). Later, the remaining pilots on the 1100-mile mission landed. No aerial resistance was encountered, but flak troubled the bombers over the target. Our pilots reported seeing 5-6 aircraft parked on an airdrome north of the Hungarian town of Ceglád (Czegled) at 4712N 1936E. The pilot who refueled on Vis island told of a handful of other "Lightnings" there -- five in all.

One had been wrecked, but its pilot was safe. The other P-38s belonged to the 1st and 82nd Fighter Groups. Weather wise, the target was generally clear (CAVU), with a few cumulus clouds scattered about; but over Yugoslavia's mountains, the overcast ranged from 7-8/10s. Thunder squalls ruffled the surface of the Adriatic Sea off the Spur of Italy's boot. Fortunately, no bombers were seen going down, but one "Liberator" was flying with three of its engines smoking. Sortie credit went to all 14 "Hangmen" on the mission.

OUR DIMINISHING RANKS -- THEIR FINAL FLY-BY

REPORTED SINCE OUR LAST NEWSLETTER

Altvater, Julius A., 727th - 10 June 2003
 Baker, Claude C., 724th - 13 December 2002
 Beasley, Frederic G., 725th - 24 August 1993
 Boese, Arthur L., 726th - 3 June 2003
 Carter, John D., 725th - 9 July 2002
 Chapoton, Tom E., 725th - 30 March 2003
 Czamecki, Mitchell S., 724th - 10 December 2002
 Gaspard, Widly J., 725th - 19 November 2002
 Hill, Chester L., 726th - 13 November 2001
 Mattes III, William, 725th - 10 November 2002
 Murray, Michael C., 725th - 6 November 2003
 Russell, Edwin F., 725th - 12 May 2003
 Scarlata, Joseph P., 727th - 3 August 2003
 Slater, William C., 726th - 14 August 2003
 Stevens, Eugene P., 726th - 15 April 2003
 Taylor, Robert L., 726th - 2 May 2003
 Villella, Vincent F., 724th - 15 August 2002
 Waite, Oakley, Jr., 726th - 21 May 2003
 White, Robert J., 724th - 24 October 2002

SPECIAL MEMORIAL TRIBUTE OFFERED IN THE NAME OF:

Julius A. Altvater, 727th - From wife, Heidi
 A/c & Crew of 'My Gal' - From Chuck Paddock
 Claude C. Baker, 724th - From wife, Elaine
 Hugh E. Balfanz, 725th KIA - From John Burton
 Lauren A. Balzer, 726th - From Achilles Kozakis
 Arthur L. Boese, 726th - From Wife, Ruth
 Joseph C. Eschbaugh - From wife, Fern
 James R. Gore, 727th - From Ora 'Pete' Arnold
 William N. Heath, 724th - From Walter Cutchin
 Oswald Hjellum, 725th - From Darvin Friedland
 John S. Hoppock, 727th - From Harold Sellers
 Robert G. Keup, 726th - From William Thackara
 Robert G. Keup, 726th - From Karl Eichhorn
 Michael L. Lombardi, 727th - From Arthur Morin
 William Mattes, 725th - From Frank McNerney
 Haskell T. Michael, 727th - From wife, Evelyn
 Lindley G. Miller, 725th - From George Tudor
 Jack Reichenbach, 726th - From Sherman Shields
 Edwin F. Russell, 725th - Funeral Donations
 Harry A. Shehan, 725th - From Damian Cihwsky
 Leroy L. Stufen, Hdqs - From Robert Henbest
 Edward H. Stresky, 727th - From Frank Lather
 Claude U. Vail, 724th - From brother, Jim Vail
 Oakley Waite, Jr., 726th - From wife, Nita
 Robert J. White, 724th - From Walter Cutchin
 Marshall D. Word, 727th - From Ora Arnold
 Marshall D. Word, 727th - From Rory Hicks

---x--x--0--x--x---

REMEMBER

A donation of \$50 or more to the 451st Bomb Group in the memory of a deceased comrade (or family member), as an alternative to flowers and other memorials, is an option for all members to consider

POW BENEFIT INFORMATION

(Offered by Dick Hayford)

While at the Salt Lake City reunion in September, I was standing around talking to some of guys when one of them asked me how much compensation I was getting monthly as a former POW. I said "compensation," what's that? I'd never heard of it. So he told me that I'd better get in touch with the Veterans Administration when I got back home. He said that as a married ex-POW, he was receiving \$2,400 monthly, and it would continue for the rest of his life .. And that it was TAX FREE!

So I checked in with the VA when I got back home. They verified my service records and now I'm getting my drug prescriptions from the VA hospital, periodic medical check-ups, etc., all free.

But as to this compensation thing, I am in the process of finding out what percentage of disability they will rate me at, and that will determine if I get compensation, and if yes, to what amount. The \$2,400 that I previously mentioned, is for 100% disability. At the VA I had to go to a regular MD, then a Psychiatrist, then a Social Worker to become fully involved in applying for disability.

VA claims they notified all former POW's when the legislation was passed by Congress. But I was never notified, probably because some people's records were burned in a fire at the St. Louis Records Center. The Records Center fire happened on 12 July 1973, wiping out most all records, alphabetically, after the name Hubbard. When I first went to the VA to register, they sent my forms to St. Louis for service verification. The reply was that they had no record of me, or my having been in the military. They asked me to send copies of any orders, etc. that I had in my possession, which I did. It took me until March 2003 to get this records thing straightened out, and it will take another 8 to 10 months for them to determine if I am eligible for compensation.

Once you have eligibility established, then your compensation is retroactive to the date you first made

the application. There are a whole bunch of so called 'presumptions' that a former POW is assumed to have, as medical problems. So it probably wouldn't be too hard to get qualified.

In the process I learned of a group called "American Ex-POW's," and they will go to bat for a guy in helping him get compensation qualification. I've joined this American Ex-POW's group, so we'll see how it all works out.

My reason for writing is that we probably have some former 451st POW's whose records may have been destroyed in that St. Louis Records Center fire, and then weren't notified when the legislation was passed by Congress. I thought that maybe you, Bob, would want to publish something about this in the Ad-Lib.

Also, the VA has been really helpful and interested in me and my service in the Air Force. There are many things which veterans are entitled to, including a pension for retired former service people, if their income is below a certain level, burial expenses and grave markers. Every veteran should check-in with the VA, because the VA is very interested in all its former service people.

(Well said, Dick. I hope everything works out well for you.)

But, in the process of wanting to know more about the benefits that you former POWs are entitled to, I dug into the Internet and found the EX-POW site that gave me even more information. Not having been a POW myself, and not giving much attention to this aspect of warfare in our newsletter, I felt that your introduction of this subject has some importance to our members, and, if having passed on, to their widows.

This is what I gleaned from the Internet:

"Former American Prisoners of War are eligible for special veterans benefits, including medical care in VA hospitals and disability compensation for injuries and diseases caused by inter-



Lt Richard Hayford (circa 1943)

ment. These benefits are in addition to regular veterans benefits and services to which they, as veterans, are entitled.

As a prisoner of war the starvation, exposure to the elements and other things encountered by the Prisoner of War have been proven to cause long term damage, of which you may not be aware, to vital organs. Now, many years later many common conditions that you may now have (like arthritis, heart disease, post traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, etc.) can be directly traced back to your incarceration as a prisoner of war and as such you are entitled to receive VA disability compensation for them. The American Ex-Prisoners of War would like to help you apply for your benefits or get your rating increased to the full 100%. We have National Service Officers throughout the country that have been trained to help you present your claim to the VA as former POW. There is no charge and you do not have to be a member of AXPOW to receive this assistance. The amount that is paid to former POW who has qualified to the full 100% rating is \$2,287.00 (tax-free) per month.

We (American Ex-Prisoner of War organization) are trying to find all of our former POWs and their widows so we can help them!! Please contact one of our National Service Officers if you are a former POW or the widow of a former POW not currently receiving your benefits, or you are not at the 100% rating. A listing of National Service Officers can be found at your nearest EX-POW chapter."

Of special note: There were 130,000 US soldiers captured from all theaters of operations during WW-II. Of the 130,000 -116,129 were returned to US Military control. 14,072 died while a POW. It is believed that some 46,418 were alive as of the year 2000. There may be some in the ranks of the 451st that have yet to declare themselves to the VA for their just dues.

But so our readers will know a bit more about you, Richard, and your POW status, I'll add this:

Lt. Richard H. Hayford, Copilot (724th) with the Nathaniel Wiersema Crew, downed by fighters and flak while approaching Regensburg, Germany on 25 February 1944. Alc #42-7765 went down, according to eye-witness S/Sgt Israel Willig's statement:

"On 25 February 1944, I was flying as Tail Gunner on a mission over Southern Germany. As we neared the target our formation was attacked by a large number of enemy fighters and was subjected to ack-ack fire at the same time. Lt. Wiersema's ship was flying just behind and above us, and I saw his ship receive a hit on the right wing which tore off that part of the wing extending beyond the outboard engine, sending the ship into a steep dive. It immediately passed out of sight below, and I did not see it again. Due to the intensity of the action I failed to notice any landmarks which might serve to identify the location."

Those that made up the crew on that mission were:

Nathaniel Wiersema, Pilot - POW'd Richard H. Hayford, Copilot - POW'd Charles W. Huff, Navigator - POW'd Clifford J. Bender, Bombardier - POW'd; Sidney E. Hawkins, AEG - POW'd; Charles W. Pientka, ROG - POW'd; Marvin B. Leibovitz, Gunner - POW'd; Joe Hainsworth, Gunner - POW'd; John M. Beysselance, Gunner - POW'd; Alfonso O. Duran, Gunner - KIA.

As to the previously mentioned crew, we have accounted for eight, not including Alfonso Duran who was KIA'd on the mission. Two members that still elude us are; Sidney Hawkins and Marvin Leibovitz. Wiersema died in 2001, Bender in 1982, Huff in 2001, Pientka in 1998, Beysselance in 1986 and Hainsworth in 2002. As a matter of curiosity, I wonder if these former POW's ever followed through with POW compensation from our government, as described here by Dick Hayford?)

NEW WORDS PUT TO MUSIC

(Sung In The Day Room, On Parade & Elsewhere)

I think that I shall never see,
The day I get my DFC;
I know that I will never rest,
Until they pin it on my chest.

Curley's got one, so has Joe,
And even Cargill, but me . . . Nooo!

On all Eighth pilots you will see,
The ETO and DFC;
But in the 15th, Air Medals thrive,
Christ! I've got cluster thrity-five!

It must be the Fifteenth AF's policy;
Oh what the hell's a DFC?

Into the air, Junior Airmen,
Into the air, pilots true;
Into the air, Junior Airmen,
Keep your nose up in the blue!
Up in the blue.

And when you hear those engines roaring,
And those steel props start to whine;
You can bet the Junior Airmen,
Are along the firing line.



CHATTER FROM THE FLIGHT DECK

Bob Karstensen

U.S. Postal Service has made some drastic changes in their bulk mailing procedures. Since our previous Ad Lib [Issue 35] was mailed out, the destination Post Office makes no attempt to forward the recent Issue 36, should that person have moved or taken up temporary residency elsewhere. Rather they make a Xerox copy of the address page, and for a fee of \$0.70, returns the Xerox copy that tells me that the item is undeliverable.

Now, "undeliverable" falls under the three categories:

1.) Not Deliverable As Addressed, Unable To Forward (meaning that without intense searching on my part, this person is lost):

2.) Temporarily Away (indicating that said addressee is away and that no 3rd or 4th Class Mail is to be, or will be, forwarded):

3.) A new address is placed on the returned 70¢ - PS FORM 3547. Then the Post Office discards the newsletter.

Only the last two of these afore mentioned options are open to me to get the newsletter to those members that haven't kept me up to speed on their whereabouts. In each case, 43 with Change Of Address, and 24 that are Temporarily Away, it cost the organization \$1.29 to re-send the newsletter. That comes to a tidy sum of some \$133.00. That doesn't include the annual Bulk Mailing Permit of \$150.00. As a side note; when we first got our Non-Profit mailing permit, back in the early 80's, it cost us only \$60.00 annually.

The initially mail-out cost, to our 1,427 members and associates, comes to some \$390.00. Tack that onto the printing cost of close to \$2900.00 for some 1,600 copies (48 pages per last Ad Lib) and you have a tidy drain on the 451st treasury.

I started this write-up, not to give you the 'nuts n' bolts' of the newsletter operation, but to alert you to your obligation of offering me any 'Change of Address' that may come your way. And should a buddy contact you and wonder why he never got the recent Ad Lib (Issue 36), you could pass along what I just 'yammered' about.

As to those 51 'totally' lost members, I do a search process whenever I get a free moment on the Internet. I also do a search process on the Social Security Death Index when I have a suspicion that that person may have joined the 'High Flight.'

Ebay

I'm not sure how many members are familiar

with the Internet Website called 'ebay.' Ebay, to the computer savvy, is a renown Internet Website that deals in auctioning all kinds of stuff; new, old, recycled and reconditioned. Within its framework it has a category for WW-II memorabilia.

Early in July of 2003 I was informed by Brian Linder [Associate Member] that something of interest was being auctioned off, via ebay. Brian told me to 'pull up' the ebay home page and insert the numbers '2182124413' in the appropriate box and take a look at something unique.

What came up, was not only a verbal description of what was for auction, but some accompanying proof of what the seller was offering. The description went like this:

Historic WW-II USAAF 451st Bomb Group scrapbook/photo album. This album was kept by B-24 crewman "Sgt Ralph H. Lyle," who was an amateur photographer and took some outstanding shots of bombing missions, etc. There are approximately 190 original and unpublished photos. Many are of Consolidated B-24 Liberators in action. There are shots of "bombs away," heavy flak, targets from the air, several outstanding shots of Liberators which have been hit and are in flames. One chilling shot of a Liberator going down without one of its wings, photos of crashed and battle damaged aircraft, up close shots of "nose art," photos of air crews, aerial recon photos and a few shots of 'leave' in Rome, and even one of GI's meeting the Pope! This is an outstanding "bird's eye view" photo record of the life and times of a WW-II USAAF bomber crewman. I am limited by space as to how many photos I can show here. There are many more great shots in this album. This is fresh from the family and has never been in a collection before. Overall condition is excellent. Guaranteed 100% original. Payment must be received within 10 days from the close of auction. (Please be sure to scroll all the way down, as there are many photos to view.)

[Since writing on this subject, the photos have been removed from the Site. Now only the written description remains.]

And scroll down I did! The photos I saw were photos that Major Dwyer had offered freely from his inventory of black and white photos taken by his combat photographers. Major Dwyer was the Officer in Charge of the 451st Photo Section and

made it a policy to offer extra copied to those that wanted them.



MAJOR WILLIAM DWYER - OIC PHOTO SECTION



**ONE OF THE PHOTOS SHOWN
BELIEVED TO BE THE CREW OF LT. ALBERT D. SHERMAN**

Delving deeper into this interesting aspect of the 451st history, I looked up the name of Ralph H. Lyle in my database. I found that he was attached to the 725th Squadron and was listed as a 'photographer.' But whereas most of the 'shown' photos were taken prior to his involvement as a photographer, Sgt Lyle didn't start flying until November of 1944. So I dispute the idea that he took the photos

himself. Sgt Lyle flew as photographer until the end of hostilities and probably came home with the Group. I could not find if he came overseas with, or was assigned originally, to a crew and then transferred to photography. Perhaps someone out there can enlighten me.

Now comes the KICKER! At the close of the auction, in mid July, the photo album sold for a tidy sum of \$5,839.00 to a buyer that went by the screen name of 'rosenbach.'

As far back as 1997 I have done searches for Ralph H. Lyle. Relying on the second digit of his serial number [7], showing that he may have been inducted from one of the upper Mid-West States [ND, SD, MN, NE, KS, IA or MO], but to no avail. Nor do I find him listed in the Social Security Death Indexes on the Internet.

It would seem, from the 'description,' that the 'family' was offering this album, rather than its original owner. Would any of you 725th members know about Ralph Lyle; past or present?

LE PETIT FLEUR

It all started with an interesting phone call from the "U.S. - Russia Joint Commission on POW/MIA" out of Arlington, VA. The caller introduced himself as Chief Petty Officer Dennis Friedbauer, US Navy. Purpose of his call was to establish connections with the 451st Bomb Group for the purpose of passing along and gaining information about one of our lost aircraft.

In a follow-up written statement he captured the essence of both our interest: "I was recently involved in the conduct of site surveys of two separate WW-II losses in Hungary earlier in June of this year. Nandor Mohos (an Hungarian amateur WW-II historian, well known to the 451st Bomb Group Organization) notified me during my stay in Budapest that Laszlo Czako, a Hungarian scuba diver had found the wreckage of LE PETIT FLEUR (42-51874) in 46 meters of water off the island of Hvar, Croatia. During the videoing of the dive Mr Czoka holds up an object, which he claims to be a human skull. Fortunately was we all well know, and I verified through research, no American airmen lost their lives on 20 November 1944, during the water landing of your aircraft."

Between the phone conversations, the e-mails and this letter, I was compelled to research the facts of the case. This is my findings:

On that day, 20 November 1944, on a mission to Bleckhammer, Germany, the aircraft "Le Petite Fleur" (727th BS) was damaged by flak over the target and fell behind the formation as it tried to get back to Base. The crew was made up of:

2LT Eddie Doherty, Pilot; 2LT James T. Casper-son, Copilot; 2LT Arthur H. Sercombe, Navigator; 1LT John F. Murray, Bombardier; S/Sgt Raymond E. Hughey, AEG; Sgt Charles F. Shuster, ROG;



Ed Doherty's 727th Crew

Top L-R: C. Shuster, ROG; W. Gill, Gunner; R. Caldwell, Gunner; R. Hughey, AEG; A. Fazio, Gunner Kneeling, Ed Doherty, Pilot; J. Casperson Copilot; A. Sercombe, Navigator; W. Kennedy, Bombardier (Missing from Photo; S. Plummer, Gunner)

S/Sgt Robert L. Caldwell, Gunner; Sgt Willard C. Gill, Gunner; Sgt Samuel P. Plummer, Gunner; Sgt Armando A. Fazio, Gunner.

Apparently worried that the a/c could not make it back to Castelluccio Air Field, the command to bail out was ordered over the island of Hvar (near the island of Vis) Yugoslavia.

Eight of the crew bailed out, with the exception of the Pilot, Doherty and Flight Engineer,

Hughey. It seemed that Hughey's parachute had opened within the a/c and was unusable for an emergency descent. As an act of extreme heroism, Lt. Doherty elected to ditch the a/c with only he and the Engineer aboard. With Hughey in the Copilot's seat, Doherty settled the 'Le Petite Fleur' on the surface of the Adriatic for a perfect ditching. Both evacuated the a/c and were picked up and returned to Italy, along with the others that had parachuted previously.

Now, after nearly 60 years the 'Le Petite Fleur' has been found and examined by historians in scuba gear. Certainly a part of our 451st history.

Of the Doherty Crew that took part in that mission, we have located or accounted for eight.

Eddie Doherty, Pilot (dec. 1998); James Casperson, Copilot (Memb. 1417); Arthur Sercombe, Navigator (dec. 2002); John Murray, Bombardier (Not yet located); Raymond Hughey, AEG (dec. 1983); Charles Shuster, ROG (Memb. 0745); Armand Fazio, Gunner (dec. 2001); Robert Caldwell, Gunner (dec. 1983); Willard Gill, Gunner (Memb. 0677); Samuel Plummer, Gunner (Not yet located)

CONVERSATION WITH A MULE

Now, Mule, you say you work too hard,
That you have a life of pain,
You never seem to get a rest
Through ice and sleet or rain.
You climb the highest mountains,
But remember I do, too.
You have four legs to take you home,
But me - I've only two.
And when our journey's over
A generous hand brings food to you
While you rest your weary feet.
I carry mine for miles and miles,
Have C rations every day,
Unless my luck's against me
And the cook throws me a "K."
And when it's time for us to sleep
There's one thing I can say,
I have to sleep on mountain tops
While you bed down on hay.
Now, Mule, would you take my place,
Even though you know you couldn't?
Would you be content with a life like mine?
You know darn well you wouldn't!

From Puptent Poets

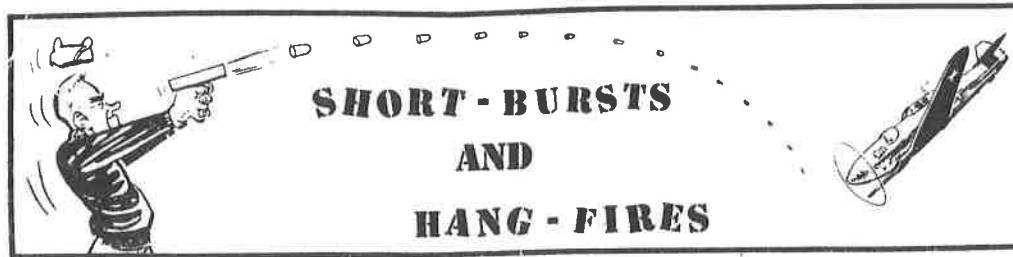
--Pvt Richard Hiorns

THE MULE REPLIES

Dear Dick, you wrote and asked me,
If I'd trade my place with you
Because you think my life is free
And I've so little work to do.
Well, brother, for your information
I work like hell to the very last,
And no matter what the situation
I still end up a sad, old ass.
Look at me in this same old hide.
Wouldst thou wear this ugly skin?
Would you daily drink from riversides
And forsake your whiskey - and your gin?
And I can't get a small promotion
No matter if I work both hard and fast,
But you at the very slightest notion
Rise up to rank of private -- yes -- first class.
Now, Dick, after all I've told you,
If you still wanna be a mule,
Your request will not be considered,
For we won't accept so big a fool.

From Puptent Poets

--Lt Bernard Knighten



Lloyd M. Ryan, 725th [PILOT: OPERATIONS OFFICER]

I am continuously amazed at the success you have had with the 451st Ad-Lib. You have done an outstanding job!

But now I think it is time you took my name off the mailing list - my health is not too good and I will not be able to participate.

A little history, if I may - I enlisted in November 1940, finished advanced flight training in July 1942 (was 25 years old) and immediately ordered to report to San Angelo, TX as an instructor in Basic Flying. In April 1943 was sent to Carswell, AFB to be a B-24 instructor. I had just finished soloing my first B-24 crew when I received orders to Boise, ID - apparently since I had a little over 1,000 hours of instructions time I had been selected to join the 451st, since we were going to do our own training. Went directly to Wendover, where we got organized and then to Fairmont and then overseas to wait at an airbase near Telergma until the Army Engineers finished our part of the base at Gioia.

I led the Group on one of the Anzio close support missions with my crew, except for Colonel Eaton in the right seat. As I recall we went in at 13,000 feet and my bombardier, Pat Collins called me and said he had a good target in sight (a very large building) but it had a Red Cross on the side. I gave the order to 'hit it' (Col. Eaton did not say a word) and it really blew up. Obviously they were using the hospital as an ammunition dump.

I retired January 1, 1965, had a heart attack in 1973, bypass surgery in 1980 and again in 2000. I am now moving more slowly with a pacemaker and seeing the medics once a month, or oftener.

(Editor ... Nice Resume, Lloyd. But in no way are we going to take you off the mailing list. You were an important part of the 451st back then and you still remain an important part of it, yet. So stop arguing!!)

Sid Winski, 726th [PILOT: OPERATIONS OFFICER]

Just rec'd the Issue 36 of the Ad Lib. I was the original pilot of the 'THREE FEATHERS' (page 33), and enjoyed reading about the further adventures of THREE FEATHERS with the Salter's crew. It seems maybe the plane was destined to keep on flying despite every adverse condition.

I didn't keep a diary, but luckily with the aid of

'The Fight'n 451st' book and the record of my Form 5, I was able to determine which missions I had flown. Some incidents impressed me so much that I am still able to remember them.

Starting at Wendover when we taxied for take off for a practice bombing mission, checking the controls, the aileron stuck in the right wing - down position. We taxied back to the ramp and the Flight Engineer (Sgt Charles Walks, I believe) said they found a screwdriver jammed in the control pulley. If it had happened a minute later, I wouldn't be writing this letter.

Then over the Caribbean, props ran away on three of the engines. We prepared to ditch but managed to make the island of St. Lucia. This incident is aptly described in our 451st book.

On the Group's 4th mission, February 8, 1944, Colonel Eaton was in the right seat. I believe it was on this mission, at take-off, the wings were iced up pretty badly. Colonel Eaton said, "Winski, look at our wings through the top hatch and tell me if we can take-off." I saw the ice was pretty thick but we still had an airfoil shape. I came down and said, "I think we can get it in the air." The Colonel said, "Let's go." We took off okay, but Lt. Hunt, behind us, either had too much ice, combined with the slip stream of the plane in front of him, went down and his plane blew up at the end of the runway. Lt. Hunt and most of his crew died. Although, I remember Lt. Niederkorn (Copilot) and Meryl Frost (Gunner) were badly burned, but survived. Sometime later we drove to Bari to visit Niederkorn in the hospital - he looked real bad.

During this mission, over Piombino, Italy, we hit some accurate flak where the nose gunner Sgt Leo F. Doring got his head blown off in the nose turret. I believe it was the Groups first casualty due to enemy action.

Then on the Group's 5th mission, February 10, 1944, the copilot, Lt Morfit, got flak in his right ankle. We were flying Squadron Deputy Lead. It was a ground support mission over Anzio. We were at about 12,000 (low altitude), suddenly I felt



someone grabbing my shoulder. I looked to the right and was a big hole in the copilots side window blister. I thought that the copilot had lost his head, actually he was bent over clutching his ankle. I called the top turret, Sgt Walks, to give the copilot a shot of morphine, but Morfit said he didn't want any. On the way back we overflew our base, shot a red flare, and continued to Bari where Morfit was hospitalized.

Later, on July 22nd, Morfit was pilot of Crew 40 (I was Squadron Operations Officer by then, so had no crew). The plane (GOOSEY LUCY) cracked up on take-off. All of Crew 40 were killed except Morfit (Pilot), and Robert P. Gumbert (Gunner) and Edward F. McGoldrick (Tail Gunner). I think Morfit said it seemed it was like an elevator stall that caused it.

On the 10th mission, February 25, 1944, we were flying Group lead to Regensburg. Major Charles Haltom (Squadron Commander) was in the right seat. The ME-109's escorted us from the north side of the Alps to the IP. I remember glancing to the left and seeing tracers which seemed to be just outside of the blister. The ME-109's broke off at the IP and the flak picked us up. It was a double credit mission. Our Group got a Unit Citation for this one. In the end my crew (Crew 40) was credited with 13 German fighters. The tail turret gunner, Sgt Edward F. McGoldrick, was credited with 5 kills, making him an ACE.

The Group's 24th mission was the first high altitude mission to Ploesti. The thing I remember of this mission is the very heavy flak, and the number of B-24's spinning down. I was surprised at how fast they spun, like a Taylor Cub, or a Primary Trainer. I had in mind that a big plane like a B-24 would spin like maybe a second or two per revolution, but these were spinning like maybe two revolutions per second. This also was a double credit mission and the Group got its second Unit Citation.

And, if I may add, about Three Feathers: In Issue 30 of the Ad-Lib, Al Haggerty, Crew chief of the aircraft, gives a good account of its life. It was finally scrapped in Italy. I would have thought, with 135 flak hole patches, it would have been flown to the U.S. and used to promote War Bond sales.

(Editor ... Thanks Sid for adding some of your recollections of your tour of duty with the 451st. It goes without saying, you did your part in those hectic days, and by adding your comments now, continue to add prestige of our Group.)

Sherman O. Shields, 726th [CLERK: INTELLIGENCE S-2]

..... The reason I mentioned Jack Reichenbach is because of an incident when he was the 726th C.O. I always remember him with fondness.

For some reason I had to go to Naples, I can't recall the reason, anyway, somehow I was schedu-

led on a B-24 that was going to Naples by way of Bari. When I boarded the plane I noticed that the pilot was a Flight Officer. He was the first and only one, up to then, that I ever met.

He made a very sloppy landing at Bari. When we got off the plane we saw that he had muddied it up pretty good. He, the pilot, pulled rank and had all of us scrape and clean the mud off the plane. Nobody was very happy. We all got pretty dirty and there was no way for us to clean ourselves. He was not popular at all, but he got us off and we headed for Naples.

When we got there it was pretty well socked-in, but he took us out over the bay and found an opening and started in. Down in the bay we could see some Navy vessels beneath us that looked like they were tracking us with their deck guns. I'm sure they recognized us as friendly (but stupid).

Previously, when we had left Bari, I had noticed another 1st Lt. Pilot had positioned himself behind our F/O Pilot. About that time Capri loomed up ahead out of the fog and the Lt. leaned over, took the yoke and told the F/O that he was relieved of command. The 1st Lt. flew us back to Castelluccia.

Later, when I had reported back to the Squadron, the C.O. offered me a flight to Naples in a B-25 the Group had somehow came by. I accepted and sat in the right hand seat. I remember it as a very pleasant incident and had a special feeling towards Jack Reichenbach ever since.

(Editor ... Good, bad and funny things happened to all of us 'over there.' The feedback I get after publishing the Ad-Lib takes in the whole spectrum of events. The donation you made towards 'the cause,' fits the post-war category of 'GOOD.' Thanks Sherm.)

Frank R. Skilton, 724th [RADAR MECHANIC]

Here's my donation. How about some news from the 724th Ground Crews? I never see a familiar name, except in the deceased notices.

(Editor ... Sorry for the lack of news about your buddies from the 724th ground personnel, or, in fact, from any Squadron's ground personnel. But until I get some input from them, in the form of journals or newsy letters, I'm at a loss to come up with anything. In-as-much as the 724th was my home Squadron, as well, I'd dearly love to record some 'in fact' memories.)

Charles C. Haltom, 726th [SQUADRON COMMANDER]

To add a bit to Harold Bennett's story (Issue 36 - Page 29) about the naming of "Three Feathers," That happened to be the ship I flew over in, with Winski and his crew. In fact, I think I sent you my version several years ago, so I will not go into all the details.

We took off from Florida heading for Waller Field, which was the correct destination of all the crews for the first day out. I think Winski and I were the only ones that didn't land at San Juan on the way over! We were about seven and a half hours out when all the trouble started happening. We were flying above a cloud deck when we started calling "Mayday" - and started throwing stuff overboard. That was when we got a call from Beane Field, St. Lucia Island, directing us to their field. It was a B-25 Base - Sub Patrol Operation. The tower told us to turn east and come straight to the only runway they had. They said, if you overshoot, just hit the water on the other side - they would pick us up in powerboats they used for B-25 rescues. So when we got under the clouds we turned east and sure enough there was the field straight ahead! So on the final approach Winski started up the 3 dead engines, but left them in idle and made a nice smooth landing, after which we all piled out and kissed the ramp!

It just so happened that the Commanding General of the Caribbean Command was there on an inspection tour and came out and congratulated Winski on the landing.

But wouldn't you know it, not all the hand bags and personal equipment bags were thrown out. It seems that all MY luggage was put on top of everything else, so it was among the items that were thrown overboard first in the effort to lighten the load. All I had left was what I was wearing. I didn't get new clothing until we got to Marrakech. So, although we didn't get to San Juan, we had 3 very nice days on St. Lucia Island.

Bennett has written a very nice story and it brought back a lot of memories. But I have wracked my memory cells - in all the time I was with the 451st, I never saw a USO show. Where could I have been when they were scheduled?

(Editor ... Thanks Charles for the more detailed accounting of the experience encountered on the way over in 1943 in the, then unnamed, "Three Feathers.")

Harold D. Graham, 725th [GUNNER: GEORGE TUDOR'S CREW]

I would like to add my memory to the "Hey Moe" story.

The day that loss happened, T/Sgt Lin Miller, S/ Sgt Clinton E Cross and another guy and I were talking in our little hut when an Officer came in and asked for a volunteer to be an instructor with a new crew on a practice gunnery mission. No one volunteered, so he said, "If no one would volunteer, I'm picking one of you." Clint Cross then volunteered and that's why he was on the fatal flight of 14 November 1944.

When I was inducted the first thing they told us, "Don't ever volunteer," and that bit of advice

saved my life that day.

I have always wondered if someone ever mentioned the most unusual thing that I was that happened in combat? On a mission in late 1944, a German fighter came up and parked inside the front four bombers in our formation and he had positioned himself right above my line of fire from my position in the Ball Turret. He was right on our left wing tip as we were flying #2 position [Deputy Lead]. The profile interrupter prevented me getting my guns up to his plane, but when he dropped his right wing to get out, I let go a deadly burst right into his cockpit. He went straight down to a cross-road south of Vienna.

I would not tell this story, but Nathan Firestone, our Navigator, was doing a running account of the whole deal.

At that time there were two other German fighters coming in from 3 o'clock high and getting everyone's attention. My Ball Turret was late, but was on the way down when he went under us and I saw his wing with a Swastika on it. He was close enough that he almost hit my guns, which were in the straight down position.

He seemed to know where to park so we might accidentally shoot each other, bomber to bomber. But #3 bomber was up a little high and I assumed the #1 and #4 would have had trouble not hitting each other if they had fired. My line of fire was completely okay when he flipped his left wing up and he dropped right in line for me. I didn't even have to use my automatic computing sight. What a strange feeling that was.

Being in the Air Force, I always believed I would never have to shoot people. But this incident changed all that.

(Editor ... Again another link in the chain of events that placed Clint Cross in the "Hey Moe." And thanks Harold for giving us your version of what it feels like to 'work' that Sperry Ball Turret in combat.)

Ernest J. Louvar, 724th [COPILOT: CLAUDE U. VAIL'S CREW]

While purging some old files, I did find a picture that would be of interest to all of us; namely Claude Vail and his crew. It shows all of us in front of the combat plane we flew overseas. It shows the nose art to be the name "Piecemaker," not "Adolph & Tojo," as I had informed you when the book was first published. "Adolph & Tojo" was our State-side training plane. Sorry to have given you bum info. The picture I have is of rather poor quality and has faded over the years. So I had a local print shop make a copy, increasing the contrast and got the enclosed results.

(Editor ... I, and the rest of the Group, thanks to you for bring the picture of Vail's crew to light. Your identifying the aircraft that you brought over-

seas; "Piecemaker," caused me to purge "Adolph & Tojo" from any of my files that bore that name.)



LT. CLAUDE U. VAIL AND CREW

Lloyd E. Knight, 724th [MECHANIC]

Enclosed are a few bucks for you to carry on. I enjoy reading the Ad-Lib, even though I don't always know who the subjects are.

As a memorable experience, another mechanic and I were across the taxi way when "Gashouse" blew up. We were on top of the plane doing whatever we were to do. We immediately got down as chunks of the plane were flying in the air. The runway was littered with this debris and had to be cleaned up before the planes returned from their mission.

I remember flying with the Squadron C.O. to an emergency field to pick up a crew. I helped fuel the B-24 that had landed on this emergency strip. That was how I got acquainted with the 'Imperial Gallon.' (Every four gallons Imperial was equal to five gallons U.S.) After checking the oil in the engines, I pre-flighted the plane. Since there wasn't an auxiliary generating plant and one generator was out, two were weak and only one working as it should. I reported to the C.O. and he decided to fly the plane back anyway. Our main concern was when the landing lights were used. We landed with no difficulties and took the plane to the 725th. We only had one working generator. I flew with the C.O. on different occasions. He was a real nice guy.

I remember many times when I was on the flight line charging the planes with oxygen at 3:00 in the morning. Now they are just memorable moments from my past.

(Editor ... Thanks Lloyd, both for your donation and those memorable moments. By the way, "Gashouse" blew up on the 8th of May 1944.)

George Lawson (aka Levine), 726th [PHOTO INTERPRETER/GUNNER]

I was reading your newsletter from the Salt Lake City Reunion and I came upon the incident in Ernie's Journal on page 19, where a bunch of P-38s buzzed the 451st at Castelluccio. I remember the buzz job by the P-38's very well. This is my best recollection of the event.

The buzzing indeed marked a special event! One of the original 726th crews (I think it was Lt. Olds, but I'm not sure) had just completed his tour of duty. His brother, who was a P-38 pilot, marked the occasion by buzzing the 726th with his Squadron mates. They really did a job on us. They came up out of the valley and maneuvered around us as though it was a strafing attack.

Later, the 726th pilots returned the favor and buzzed his brother's airfield with a Squadron of B-24s flying in formation. The aftermath of this event was a memorandum from Group Headquarters that said - "Flying under an altitude of 20 feet, except on landing or takeoff was forbidden and would result in a letter of reprimand in the Pilot's personnel Record." Some of the guys in Operations may have more information on this.

The buzz job must have occurred in late spring or summer of 1944, when most of the original crews were finishing up their tours of duty.

I remember this event because I worked in Squadron S-2 office at the time. Our office was adjacent to Operations Office and this was a big deal. My understanding is that the backwash from the B-24s really knocked the hell out of the P-38s Squadron area.

(Editor ... Another verification of an almost obscure incident that we've reported through the Ad-Lib. It's nice to know that we still have members that remember and will come forward with their remembrances. We're all coming to that point in our lives where memories dim and fantasy, and diminishing recall, takes over.)

Santo "Sonny" Magliocca, 727th [GUNNER: PHILIP K. POHL'S CREW]

While in Florida this past winter, I met up with my Copilot, John B. Miller. First time we met after 57 years. We had dinner at Patrick Air Force Base. After dinner we met up with a bunch of Tuskegee Airmen at the Convention Hall. We talked about the old times and took some pictures.

(Editor ... That's what it's all about now. Trying to meet with old buddies and recount our joys and frustrations. I've been getting accounts, similar to your, about finding someone that you haven't seen since the war. It's a pleasure on my part to be in the middle of these mini-reunions - even only as a corresponding intermediary.)

Sallie (Eaton) Elliott [DAUGHTER OF COLONEL ROBERT E.L. EATON]

Your "Ad-Lib" is just wonderful and we look

forward to receiving it during the year! We hope our check will help you in keeping this publication going as it is truly fascinating reading. Especially to those of us in the "post world war II" generation. As I've said before, Dad NEVER talked about the war, so the "Ad-Lib" has proven to be VERY educational and enlightening to all of his family.

(Editor ... Sallie, your words are very encouraging to this ol' gunner. It's always, with your dad in the back of my mind, that I get the nerve to continue. I always felt proud that I had the good fortune that my pilot, Captain H.G. Rollins, was of the caliber that your dad felt comfortable to fly 'lead' with. Thus, I was lucky to have flown several missions, along with your father.)

Louie Lopez, 724th [GUNNER: GORDON P. DEMERS' CREW]

I'm sending you a few bucks for our great Group. You're doing a great job, Bob. Sorry I missed some reunions. My wife hasn't been feeling too well. Keep the old boys going! The enclosed photo shows Jim Ortega and myself. We only live a couple miles apart. I married his sister. Jimmy and I finished our missions about the same time. In this picture, I'm the tall one.



(Editor ... Thanks Louie for the kind remarks, bucks and picture of you and Jimmy. Way back then, - Jimmy spent time at our tent because of his close friendship with our Radio Operator, Tony Paonessa. I believe they went through Radio School at Scott Field, IL at the same time.)

James L. Ivey, 727th [COPILOT: CLARENCE A. ROACH'S CREW]

I wish to thank you for the good time we had at the Salt Lake City Reunion. Our daughter, Rosemary, was surprised at the loud and active spirit of these men after 60 years. Hope to make it in 2004.

(Editor ... Tell Rosemary "She ain't seen nothing yet." We'll really "Let 'er roar in 04.")

A. Jay Woods, 725th [NAVIGATOR: JOHN P. JANENSCH'S CREW]

Dena and I thoroughly enjoyed the Salt Lake City reunion. We met a number of people from the 725th Squadron that we had not known before. The hotel was fine, the programs were good and the music and food were great.

Following the reunion we spent a week in Park City where the previous Winter Olympics were held. It is a beautiful mountainous area and we were well treated during our stay there. It made for a relaxing wind-down.

This last April we met John and Kaye Sirney (725th Pilot) in New Orleans for a 5 day trip on the Delta Queen steamboat on the muddy Mississippi River. It was a big party with very good music and lots of camaraderie from New Orleans to Baton Rouge and back.

I hope you are well and will continue to publish the Ad-Lib. Even if there is only you and I left to have another reunion, you can count on us.

(Editor ... That 'little bit' that you included, in the form of a check, was more than a 'little bit!' And it's deeply appreciated. Appreciated, too, was that you extended our 451st reunion and saw a bit more of the countryside in Utah. Getting together with Jack Sirney on that streamboat excursion must have been a 'blast,' too. Five days of you and Jack together, must have put the Delta Queen's crew into some form of trauma.)

Ruth E. Boese, (COMPLIMENTARY MEMBER - 726TH)

A short note to let you know that Art passed away on June 3, 2003, two days short of his 90th birthday

Thank you for all the 451st newsletters we've received over the years. They were much appreciated by Art and his family.

Please accept the enclosed check in memory of Arthur. (signed - Ruth; wife of 62 years)

(Editor ... Golly, Ruth, these short notes telling us of the passing of one of our comrades is getting to be an altogether too common occurrence. But I guess it's unavoidable. We deeply regret your loss and extend our deepest condolences to you and your family.

In doing these newsletters, I try to interject historical data, a bit of humor and something that will bring a memory back to some that have forgotten what it was like to be over there. But the loss of a comrade, such as Art, is something that is hard to accept. Those from the 726th will remember Art as that guy from Supply. He will be missed.)

SHE WAS A LADY

(by Wes Nelson)

She was the 'Lady.' And a lady she was.
 She held nine men who fought for the cause.
 Lieutenant Hatton sat on the left
 At flying the plane, he felt very deft.
 His copilot, Toner, sat on the right,
 He trimmed the controls all through the flight.
 The navigator, Hays, their position did track.
 Lieutenant Worovka dropped bombs from the rack.
 Rupslinger, Shelly, Adams and Moore,
 And LaMotte were the gunners, their aim was sure.
 These were the men of the 'Lady Be Good.'
 The crew of this bomber, they knew that they could
 Bring the battle to Germ'ny with missions on high,
 With dozens of others far up on the sky.
 On April the fourth, nineteen forty three,
 They left on a mission out over the sea.
 Mission one-oh-nine, Naples Harbor they sought.
 They'd bomb ships and docks with precision they thought.
 It was dark at the target, so late in the day,
 They chose to abort so their bombs wouldn't stray,
 And hit targets of innocence in Naples town.
 They turned their Lib'rator bomber around.
 They headed back south toward Soluch, their home base.
 They'd stay with the others, this wasn't a race.
 As the B-24s engines droned on and on,
 Other planes lost track of them, soon they were gone.
 They were all by themselves in the blackness up there,
 Nine men and the 'Lady,' alone in the air.
 On the ocean below, not one single light.
 All around them they looked, not a thing was in sight.
 Through the darkness they peered for the lights of their field,
 But the solid black darkness was not to reveal,
 The dimly lit base where their cots did await.
 They were not aware they were sealing their fate.
 The 'Lady Be Good' on southward did fly.
 The crew didn't know that they'd already gone by,

The base where they wanted to land and debrief.
 They were out o'er the desert, headed for grief.
 A couple of hours and their fuel tanks went dry.
 They had to bail out, parachutes in the sky.
 Eight of the nine made their landings okay.
 Woravka's chute didn't open. He died on that day.
 The rest of the men through the desert did trek,
 They soon found the 'Lady,' she was quite a wreck.
 They found some supplies and salvaged some things,
 Then a bitter sweet farewell to those crumpled wings.
 Off through the desert the party then struck,
 They walked many miles without having much luck.
 The desert's formidable both day and night.
 The heat is unbearable when there is light.
 When darkness sets in, it becomes very cold,
 No one would do this, except for the bold.
 Hatton, Hays, Toner, Adams, LaMotte,
 Made it eighty five miles from that very spot,
 Where the 'Lady' had crashed on that dark April night.
 It was there that they perished. They had lost the fight.
 Ripslinger, Shelly and Moore did still go on,
 Northward for help. Their pace must have been slow.
 One by one they dropped in the hot desert sand.
 Rescue hopes faded for this small band.
 Sergeant Ripslinger was the last to be beat,
 One hundred and nine miles he walked in the heat.
 This brave group of men proved the experts were wrong.
 They last much longer, they kept going on.
 Seven days on the desert. An amazing feat!
 Brave soldiers they were, that died in the heat.
 Brave soldiers, indeed, brave airmen all,
 America's finest, we're all walking tall.
 Because of these nine men, for what they stood,
 These airmen so brave from the 'Lady Be Good.'



FORMER MEMBERS OF THE
45ST Bombardment Group (H) WW II. LTD.

49th Wing

15th Air Force



GROUP HEADQUARTERS 724th 725th 726th 727th Squadrons

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