

continued our flight, keeping a watchful eye on that oil pressure gauge. Suddenly the pressure began dropping faster and was about to reach the critical point where we wouldn't be able to feather the propeller. If the pressure drops below 40 p.s.i. the propeller can't be feathered. It will continue to windmill until it spins so fast that it causes vibration problems and can even break off under some conditions. I cut that engine. We were already past the continental coastline but not yet at bombing altitude.

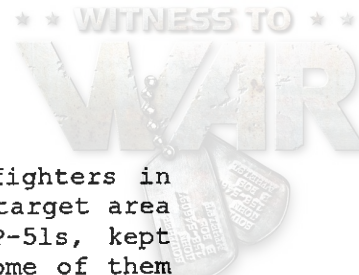
Climbing and staying in formation with both a full bomb and fuel load is hard to do on three engines, especially with some of our older planes, so we left the formation and headed for home base. After landing at the base I was a little embarrassed when the ground crew checked the engine and found it was fine - it was the oil pressure indicator that had malfunctioned.

We had also landed with a full bomb load. It was always the discretion of the pilot to evaluate any problem that arose on a mission and to decide whether to proceed or return. I had decided to turn back, but I also had to decide what to do about our bomb load. We could either bring them home or drop them, unarmed, in the North Sea. For obvious reasons, it was risky landing with bombs on board, but I made the decision based on the fact that I had always felt I would have no problem landing with my bombs, even on three engines. Plus, I hated the thought of wasting them in the North Sea. Even though we had to abort, we learned that we had been far enough over occupied territory to get credit for the mission. This, of course, was always good news.

November 3rd we were briefed for a mission that was scrubbed because of bad weather. We had just missed a mission to Mersburg the day before, which was always a rough place to go. It was an oil target and the Germans attempted to protect them at all costs. Maybe our luck will hold and we will never have to go there, we hoped.

Late Saturday afternoon, November 4th, we saw the red flag go up on the squadron flagpole. This meant another Sunday mission and I hoped my name wouldn't be on the list. If it was I would miss the dance at the Officers Club that night. Every other Saturday night we had a big dance at the club but if we were scheduled to fly the next day we couldn't go. We had to be in bed early since we would have to get up long before daylight. Chet and I went to check the list and, sure enough, there was my name. Another Sunday mission - the dance would just have to go on without us.

Early Sunday morning we were briefed for our ninth mission, this time returning to a familiar target: Ludwigshaven. The weather recently had been very bad; all foggy and rainy, but today seemed to be a good day for flying. Our take-off and assembly of the three squadrons of our Group went well and we headed out across the North Sea toward our target. On this day, just like the second trip we made to Cologne, the Germans were waiting for us. Some of the German flak batteries (a group of anti-aircraft guns) were installed on railroad flat cars and could be moved around the country overnight. They always seemed to know exactly where we were going, and this day they had moved many gun batteries to Ludwigshaven. The German anti-aircraft guns were the best in the world at that time.



Over the target we had an excellent view of German ME-109 fighters in the air (which we could do without). They were all over the target area but our fighter escort, those beautiful little friends the P-51s, kept them off us, however I don't know about the other Groups. Some of them were certainly hit for we could see the fighters attacking the Groups ahead of us. The flak was extremely heavy and accurate. We picked up quite a number of flak hits but no one was injured and all four engines were performing perfectly. Wright's plane was so badly damaged they were losing control. All had bailed out except his wounded Navigator and his Copilot. Somehow they managed to keep control long enough to get back to Belgium and crash land. The rest of us managed to keep the formation together long enough to get home. We learned that seventeen planes had heavy battle damage. One was so badly damaged that it was salvaged for parts and never flew again. What a way to have to spend a Sunday, but I knew we were so blessed, and thanked God for continually watching over us. Wright and most of his crew would spend the rest of the war in a POW Camp if they were lucky enough to land safely.

On November 6th I lost a good friend and fellow pilot from Georgia. He was flying a night navigational practice mission and the weather was terrible. On some practice missions only a skeleton crew would go along and this was the case that night. The radio static was so bad they lost contact with our base. The base radio had only a short range so any German planes that might fly over couldn't "home in" on the signal, or hear transmissions made to our aircraft. The winds that night were over 100 M.P.H. at altitude and blowing, as always, toward the continent. After a long search they finally found enough clearance to descend below the clouds and continue flying beneath the cloud cover, hoping to be able to get a fix on their exact location. They spotted an airfield and began a landing approach immediately, even though they were unable to contact the tower. Much to their surprise they had landed at a German airfield in Holland. For several weeks we had thought they might have been lost somewhere in the North Sea but we later learned through the Red Cross what had happened. They were now in a POW camp and their war was over. It was many years after the war and we met again at home that I learned from him just what had happened that night.

November 7th we were flying another practice mission and my electrically heated boots malfunctioned. We were out 5½ hours and by the time we got back to the base my feet were so cold that I couldn't tell they were on the ground when I tried to stand. They were completely numb from the cold. I was taken to the hospital and examined to be sure I had no frostbite but I was O.K., just very cold.

After this practice mission we returned to London on pass. I had made contact with one of my brothers-in-law, Arthur Poor, who had recently come to Europe with a field artillery unit. We had made arrangements to meet at the Grosvenor House. We were lucky to have this chance to meet because his outfit soon moved across the channel to France.

After this London pass we returned to our base and continued with our practice missions, flying two more before we flew another combat mission. Then on the afternoon of November 15th my name was on our squadron list for tomorrow's mission.

The early morning of November 16th we were briefed to fly our tenth mission to the freight marshalling railroad yards at Langerwehe/Duren.



I suppose you could say that day we really learned the meaning of a "milk run" for we saw no enemy fighters and the anti-aircraft fire was light and inaccurate. I wished they could all be this easy. But the early morning preparation and briefing were always nerve racking.

As we approached the winter months the weather began to turn much colder and we were having more fog and rain, sometimes snow or freezing rain. More missions were being canceled because of the bad weather, but we continued to fly both combat and practice missions whenever the weather permitted.

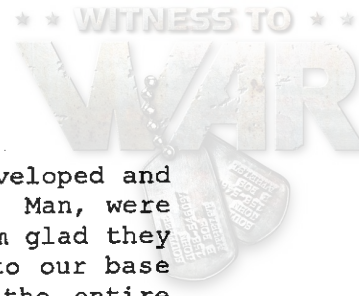
November 21st we flew our eleventh mission, this one to a target at Giessen, Germany. This was another easy mission with only small amounts of flak, though we would have picked up heavy flak had we strayed just a little off course. We did have one crew who failed to return. They had left the formation because of heavy flak damage and we learned some time later they were all in a POW Camp. They had been unable to continue in the air and were forced to bail out. I guess this mission was not so easy for them.

We flew our twelfth mission on November 29th to Hamm, Germany. This mission also went well with no fighter sightings and inaccurate flak. We sustained only light damage to some of our planes and all returned safely. The weather these last few weeks was causing more trouble for us than the enemy resistance. We knew these easy missions couldn't continue but we prayed they would.

November 30th our Group flew another mission to Mersburg and again fate seemed to be with my crew. We were not on the schedule to fly that day. It turned out to be another rough one, just as all earlier missions to this target had been. Chuck Payne and his crew were shot down. His co-pilot and top-turret gunner were killed and the rest of the crew were taken prisoner. One other crew was shot down. Of the total number of young men flying that day, seven were killed and eleven were now in a POW Camp in Germany. After any rough mission it was always a somber night at home base. Too many were not there and many of us had lost close friends.

We didn't fly another mission until December 5th when we were briefed to strike targets at "Big B". For the first time we were on our way to Berlin! This would be our thirteenth mission and we all said a prayer that my "lucky 13" would continue to hold. Sometimes the responsibility I felt for the fate of my crew really became awesome but they always made me feel they had complete confidence in me. I certainly had confidence in all of them. I had come to know that my crew (my family now) had worked together so long that we had become one of the best.

Take-off and assembly of our formation went very well and we headed out over the North Sea toward Berlin. As we approached the I.P. (Initial Point where we begin our bomb run) we encountered German fighters. This was only the second time we had run into them up so close. Fortunately there weren't very many of them and we were well into our bomb run before they attacked. They made only one pass at our plane and didn't do too much damage. Our bombs were away and we weren't hit again, but some of the other Groups were hit very hard. The fighters left us alone since we were already through our bomb run and they went after the planes that hadn't dropped their bombs. We saw our first jet fighter on



this mission, an ME-262. We had been told the Germans had developed and manufactured jet fighters but until today we hadn't seen any. Man, were they ever fast! They were so much faster than our P-51s. I'm glad they didn't attack us. My "lucky 13" still held and we returned to our base with only light battle damage and only one man wounded in the entire Group.

The cold, rainy weather let up some and we took advantage of the good flying conditions by flying four consecutive days, two practice and two combat missions. December 9th and 10th we flew formation and navigation practice missions. On December 11th we were briefed to fly our 14th combat mission, this one sending us to Giessen again. When we returned to a target for a second time we always ran into new problems. Still, we prayed this would be as easy as the first mission to Giessen. Our prayers were answered; the mission was as easy as before with all planes returning safely with very little flak damage.

December 12th we flew mission fifteen to Darmstadt. This mission and the previous day's mission to Giessen kept us in the air for 7½ hours each day but both were relatively easy. We continued to have no resistance by German fighters. Thank goodness for our fighter escort!

When our fighters had finished escorting us to targets they would leave us and would head back to their base. On the way they would "hit the deck" and shoot up any military targets they could find on the ground. Our P-51 escort planes, plus the other fighters that had been sent over to destroy planes and other ground targets, had depleted the German Air Force. Also, we had bombed so much of their oil production facilities they sometimes couldn't fly the planes they had left for lack of fuel.

One of our planes on this mission did have to make a forced landing in Belgium. The mission was relatively easy for us, but not so, I'm sure, for the crew who failed to get back home safely.

December 16th we flew our sixteenth mission, this one to Stuttgart. There always seemed to be one difficult mission to make up for any easy ones we flew. That morning the weather was so bad I didn't expect to get off the ground but we did. We were briefed to assemble our Group over a certain point in France. For two hours each plane flew alone with the fog so thick we sometimes had problems seeing our own wingtips. You tend to get more tense when you know there are hundreds of B-17s, each with a full fuel and bomb load, all in this soup with you, and all heading for the same point in France. We had had mid-air collisions before, and we all were very aware of the extreme danger involved with a flight like this.

Our plane reached the rendezvous point, which luckily was in a clear area. We began circling and searching for other members of our Group. One by one all appeared and our squadrons were assembled. We headed toward our target, still flying in and out of heavy cloud coverage. We flew into another weather front soon after we left our assembly area with our formation intact but we knew it would be extremely difficult to keep it that way. Each of the three squadrons had twelve B-17s trying to stay together in clouds so thick we were lucky to be able to see more than three or four planes in our own squadron. We just hoped that everyone kept alert and was capable of holding his position. I was in the low element of the low squadron so I backed off just a bit since I



knew no one was behind me. This was a mistake for suddenly everyone disappeared in the thick clouds. I had lost sight of our Squadron but we continued on alone toward Stuttgart. I was afraid to slow even a little for someone might hit us from behind. I just hoped we didn't overtake and collide with a member of our own Squadron. We finally broke into a small clearing but our Group was nowhere in sight.

After several minutes we located a B-17 Group from the First Division and we joined them. The First Division planes were recognizable by their vertical stabilizer markings. All First Division planes had a large letter in a triangle while the Third Division (ours) had a large letter in a square. The Second Division flew the B-24. This Group we were now joining had been flying in the same weather conditions we had been in and evidently had lost members of their Group for they had several empty slots. We quickly filled one of these, being careful to keep our new position so they wouldn't think we were Germans flying a B-17. We knew this was a precarious situation to be in because the Germans had some B-17s and P-51s they had been able to restore for flight. Supposedly they would join a formation and fly with it, while reporting its airspeed, heading, and altitude to their own fighters and anti-aircraft batteries. We had been told if a plane like that joined our formation and attempted to leave as we began our bomb run, shoot him down. Now we couldn't contact this Group or our own because radio use was forbidden except in extreme emergencies.

We were able to keep our position with this Group and make our bomb run, running into some very heavy flak. Even though we were bombing through a heavy cloud cover, the Germans could hit us very well with their radar controlled gun batteries, We could also hit them pretty well with our own "Pathfinder" Radar planes, which were the only planes in our squadrons with radar.

We were only a short distance from Stuttgart when we were right back in all that bad weather. Again we lost all visual contact with the other planes and were alone again, flying in heavy clouds, with too many other planes near us, and none visible. If our luck continued to hold, as it had done in getting us to the target, maybe we could make it back to our home base.

John Lurtz, our Navigator, gave me a heading for home, and once again I realized how fortunate we were that he had been assigned to our crew back in Kearney, Nebraska. On previous flights he had proven just how good he was at his job, but today he became a genius as far as I was concerned. All the way out of Germany and across France he continually gave me heading corrections to make so we would avoid flak areas. He must have missed them all for we never flew over a point where we received any flak. Even though I couldn't see a thing, he told me when we were leaving the Continental Coastline and a little later reported we were approaching the English Coast. He gave me a heading to fly to the base. Finally, even though I hadn't seen the ground or sky since we left the target, John's voice came over the inter-phone telling me we were directly over our base. This seemed incredible to me. I began a slow, circling descent until we broke out of the clouds with the base in sight.

We landed without any problem and learned at debriefing that two of our planes had failed to return. Later we learned that Coffman and his

entire crew had been killed but I never learned how it happened. Another crew had landed at a base at Framlingham because of the bad weather. Still another had made a forced landing at Leiston, England. After this mission we were dead tired and I wished for some time off for the crew to relax, but the very next day we were scheduled to fly again.

Next morning we got up early, went to breakfast, then learned the mission for today was scrubbed. Missions scheduled for the next several days were canceled because of the very bad weather. Some mornings after briefing we sat in our planes waiting for the weather to clear up enough for us to take off. Sometimes the fog was so thick we couldn't see the plane parked right next to us.

We were anxious to get in the air to fly front-line support for our troops at the front because they were getting pounded by the Germans. The Germans had chosen this time to make an effort to drive the Allies off the Continent. They knew the weather was so bad we couldn't give our ground forces the air support they had enjoyed since we had invaded the Continent. From rumors we were hearing, we were afraid our fighting forces were going to be driven back into the sea as had happened at Dunkirk after France had fallen. We were never able to get off the ground on these days.

It was not long before Christmas, but our forces held their ground after some fierce fighting and turned the Germans back. The Germans had made a deep bulge in our lines. They had taken advantage of the bad weather to attempt to drive through the Ardennes and continue on to Antwerp, cutting the Allied Forces, dividing them into two groups, which they hoped to destroy. They had moved the majority of their forces to this battle, intending to drive through the Allied lines. Our troops fought one of the fiercest battles of the war there and stopped the Germans at Bastogne. This battle of the Ardennes was later to be known as the Battle of the Bulge and was one of the war's most costly.

These days were very tense and we continually watched for the weather to clear enough for us to give our ground forces some help. We were hearing all sorts of rumors about the battle going on and the fact we couldn't help was causing great concern at our Group.

Again on a Saturday afternoon my name was posted for the next day's flight. I would not only be required to fly on Sunday but tomorrow was Christmas Eve. I wondered what in the world I could ever have done to deserve this. This would be our seventeenth mission. We had already surpassed the number of missions that we had been told was the average number flown by a crew before they were lost. We were also reaching the halfway point for thirty-five missions. Since the German Air Force had been almost completely destroyed we just hoped our luck would continue through the last half of our tour of duty.

The morning of December 24th at briefing we learned the mission today would keep us in the air for 8½ hours. We would be going to Biblas Airfield to bomb the field and the many planes the Germans had there. The flight to the target was a routine one but the flak was very accurate. The Germans were desperate to protect those planes. The Group picked up considerable battle damage though the flak wasn't real heavy. Two planes failed to return. One that did was damaged beyond repair and salvaged for parts. One pilot, Deshazo, was wounded and



Taylor's Bombardier was wounded. One plane crash-landed in France. Griffin and Richardson both had to land in France but were able to make it home later. After the mission we thought surely we wouldn't be on the schedule for tomorrow, Christmas Day. Maybe a mission wouldn't be scheduled since it was Christmas, but if it is maybe we won't be on it.

After debriefing and dinner, which was very late in the day, I returned to my squadron area and was surprised to see the red flag already flying on the flagpole at Headquarters. We would have a mission on Christmas. I went in to check the flight list and there my name was again. This was somewhat upsetting - Christmas Eve and Christmas Day! I had so hoped I wouldn't be flying tomorrow. I knew the war never took a holiday, but I had hoped we would get lucky.

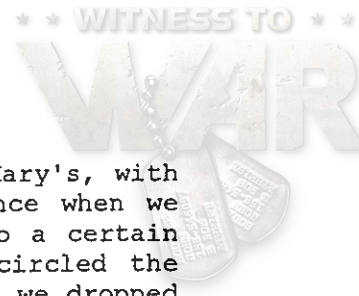
After a night's sleep the orderly awakened me. As I dressed I couldn't help wondering what plans my family and Marian had for this Christmas Day. I couldn't keep my mind off the fact that this was Christmas and I have to be flying combat. It would be our eighteenth mission and the beginning of the last half of our tour.

We ate our breakfast, silently for the most part, and proceeded to the briefing room. We anxiously waited for the briefing officer. He began by saying, "Today you will be delivering Hitler a Christmas present". I thought, I would just as soon leave Hitler off my Christmas list and stay at home. The officer continued, explaining that the 8th Air Force was sending 2,200 heavy bombers over Germany along with several hundred P-51 escort planes, and the 15th Air Force in Italy was sending more than 1,500 heavy bombers with their fighter escorts.

The massive air traffic over Germany that day was hard to believe. I had often wondered how the German people could survive all the bombing we had been doing lately. Most of our missions these days always included more than a thousand bombers and several hundred fighters. We would bomb by day and England's Royal Air Force would bomb every night. Often as we left England in the morning we would meet the R.A.F. returning from their night raids. At one time during the latter part of 1944 the R.A.F. bombed Berlin forty-three consecutive nights.

Our mission was to Kreuznach and Badmunster. Other Groups had other targets. The flight to the target, our bomb run, and the flight home were fairly uneventful, though we had all picked up some pretty heavy damage from the flak guns. This mission may have been easy but when we arrived home the "fun" began.

As we approached the base we could see a dense fog moving toward the landing field. The base was easily visible now in the bright sunlight but that fog bank was thick as milk and it was moving in rapidly. We were to be the last of the three squadrons to land that day, which meant that twenty-four planes would have to land before we had our chance. We entered the landing pattern and every ten seconds a plane peeled off to land. Finally it was our squadron's turn, but it was too late. The fog had completely covered the base. We had noticed that if we stayed above the fog we could actually see right down through it, so we requested and received permission to attempt a landing. We had no ground control approach or any of the modern landing aids that are commonly used today. Our approach and landing would have to be done visually.



In the small village of Horham there is a small church, St. Mary's, with a high bell tower that we often used as a point of reference when we were landing. If we circled that church tower and turned to a certain direction we would be heading right down the runway. We circled the church and lined up to begin our descent. We were fine until we dropped into the fog, then everything turned milky white. I couldn't see the ground at all. Chet, our Bombardier, was sitting up in the nose of the plane and was to tell me when we reached the end of the runway. On the first pass we made none of us saw anything, so I figured we must be high. I circled and tried again. Suddenly Chet yelled, "Set her down, set her down, we're right over the runway!" But I couldn't see a thing, and since I had no idea how far down the runway we were I decided to pull up and try again. On the third attempt the same thing happened again. Chet was up front and could see straight down but I had much more fog to look through and I could not see the runway. Out of the corner of my eye I saw one of our hangars go by - and the roof was higher than we were! Thank goodness we were over the runway or we could have easily crashed into a building or the tower. I was surprised the tower hadn't told us to get out of there after the second pass. I pulled up and out of there immediately. I had no intention of trying that stunt again. As we climbed out through the fog I vividly recalled the crash we had watched last fall after a plane had run off the end of the runway.

I was instructed by the tower to attempt an emergency landing at Woodbridge since the fog had not yet reached there. Woodbridge had gas jets at the end of the runway that could be used to burn off the fog if it got there before we did. We were to land at Woodbridge and a truck would be sent for us. We landed there O.K., taxied to the parking area, cut our engines and secured the plane, then stepped out into about eight inches of snow. It was almost dark and we hadn't eaten since 5 A.M. that morning. We opened some boxes of rations that we always kept on board, sat on the boxes under a wing, and had a Christmas Dinner of canned rations sitting there in the snow. It would be hard for anyone to imagine that we sat there laughing and joking and kidding each other, but we did. This was just our way of relieving some of the tension we all felt after a mission.

We weren't the only ones who failed to get into our base that day. Three more of our squadron had landed at Woodbridge and another other eight at Framlingham, which was the home base of the 390th B-17 Group, also in our 13th Combat Wing.

As we waited for the trucks to come for us we inspected our plane for battle damage. We found quite a number of flak holes. Normally when we landed at our base, battle damage was checked out and patched up by the ground crew, so it was a sobering surprise to us to see all the holes in the fuselage. Not long after dark the trucks finally came to take us home to Horham. What a way to have to spend Christmas, but we were grateful that our entire Group had made it safely back to England.

We did get some time to celebrate Christmas later. In America, we celebrate the birth of Christ on December 25th. So do the English, but they also celebrate about as much on the 26th (Boxing Day). This tradition started back in the Victorian era when the lower classes who had to work on Christmas Day were rewarded by their employers with gifts and a holiday on the 26th. We were able to celebrate the Christmas



season even longer because we didn't have to fly again until the 30th. On that day we would fly our nineteenth mission, which would take us to Kassel.

After our experience on Christmas Day this mission was fairly easy for us. Pearson, who had to make a forced landing in France, suffered the only mishap in our Group. I never learned if he landed there because he was low on fuel or had wounded on board that needed attention. The rest of the Group returned home safely, and the luck of my crew continued to hold.

As we reached our Squadron quarters following debriefing we noticed that the red flag was already flying on the flagpole, announcing that we could be flying a mission on New Year's Eve instead of celebrating. We checked the list and, sure enough, found my name there. After the so-called "Christmas present" we had delivered to Hitler we had hoped he would surrender. But no such luck - we fly tomorrow.

We ate an early breakfast, dressed for our flight, and attended our briefing. Today, when we thought we would be celebrating the coming New Year, we would instead be bombing the submarine pens at Hamburg, where the German Navy brought their submarines in for servicing. This would be mission twenty for us and it turned out to be one we would never forget.

The sun rose in a sky almost free of clouds, a good day for flying. Most of this flight would be over the North Sea and we wouldn't be over enemy occupied territory very long. Group assembly after take-off went well with no problems and soon we were over the North Sea, climbing to bombing altitude.

As we approached the Continent we looked for our P-51 escort, but there was no sign of them. We thought that surely they would join us soon. They usually did long before we reached the target. We continued on our way and were approaching the Initial Point to begin our bomb run, but there was still no fighter escort to be seen. We couldn't understand how this could happen.

Earlier 8th Air Force flights had been made without fighter escort and we knew how treacherous those missions had been and how many crews had been lost. Surely we will never have to go that route again, we thought. Only later did we learn that our fighter escort had been intercepted back at the coast, and were engaged in fierce dogfights with the Luftwaffe.

Feeling awfully alone, we turned down the bomb run toward the submarine pens and docks of Hamburg. Suddenly, right out of the sun so we couldn't see them, a swarm of German ME-109s attacked from the rear of our formation. They were on us and firing before we even knew they were there. The sky lit up all around with tiny flashes, caused by 20mm shells that didn't hit, but exploded in the proximity of our planes. I could hear the jackhammer roar and feel the vibration of our own .50-caliber machine guns firing as the crew fought back. I felt my frustration rising as I tried to hold steady on the bomb run. We couldn't take any evasive action, because once we were lined up on the bomb run we had to fly straight and level in order to give the Bombardiers enough time to sight in the target. It's tough for them

too, because they have to ignore everything taking place around them and concentrate on their bombsights. I felt like a "sitting duck" ready to be knocked off, but there was nothing I could do until our bombs were away. Of course the Germans knew this too - they always attempted to strike during a bomb run when our planes were most vulnerable.

As soon as the first wave of enemy fighters passed through our formation a second wave came in right behind them. They were really hitting us hard. Two of our planes were already knocked out of our formation. John tapped my hand, which was glued to the throttles, and pointed straight up. A plane was almost directly above us with its waist door open. Men were visible at the door and so close we could have identified every one. I backed off the throttles a little to allow them enough room to abandon their plane. Immediately three figures sailed past our nose. The crippled plane then began to veer off to the right as the rest of her crew tried to bail out. I tore my eyes away and turned my attention back to regaining our position in what was left of our formation. I was having trouble catching up because the first fighter wave had shot out one of our engines and we were now flying with only three.

As the next squadron of fighters attacked, an ME-109 pilot jettisoned his canopy and bailed out as he passed in front of us. Doan and Keck had hit him pretty good because he had made his pass in a spot where they could both bring their turrets around and catch him in their sights. Chet had probably hit him too with the chin turret he operated. On the second pass Harold had also shot down an enemy plane from his tail turret. Before the battle was over the fellows got one more German fighter, giving them three confirmed kills. Today they earned their keep and I was extremely proud of them all.

We were feeling pretty good about fighting off the enemy fighters when suddenly I felt a severe jolt and a large hole appeared in our left wing outboard number one engine. A large round, probably an 88mm anti-aircraft shell, had passed through it without exploding. Had it done so it probably would have blown our plane up with it and we would have joined the long list of war casualties. It was just another example of our incredible luck, and I wondered how much we had left.

After what seemed like an eternity, our bombs were finally away on target and we began a slow descending left turn. We always did this when leaving the target area so that any planes straggling behind could cut the turn short and catch up. As we made the turn I could see that half our squadron was missing. The missions of the past several days had been so rough that we couldn't put thirty-six planes in the air from our Group. We had borrowed three planes with crews from the 100th Bomb Group and all three of those were missing. One of those had been the one whose crew had bailed out in front of us. Mike Ryan, flying on our squadron leader's left wing, was on fire. Flames were streaming back so far from his wing that they were hitting his horizontal stabilizer. We were flying on the leader's right wing anxiously hoping Mike's crew would get the fire extinguished or move out of the formation. If his plane exploded there was a possibility they would take the other two of us with them.

When we reached the coastline and headed out over the sea, Mike turned back. He must have decided to get back over land so they could bail



out, because his plane continued to burn. I will forever be grateful the German fighters didn't pursue us after our bombs were away for now we were only five struggling planes trying to keep some sort of formation. We would later learn the extent of our casualties.

Two other planes from our Group were on fire when we left the target, one being Reed's plane. Some of his crew had managed to bail out but his Ball-Turret Gunner, Waist Gunner and Tail Gunner were killed. His Navigator had bailed out and was later reported missing in action. I never learned whether or not he was ever found. The other plane on fire was O'Reilly's. O'Reilly, his Copilot, Radio Operator, and Ball-Turret Gunner were all killed in action. The rest of his crew bailed out over the target. We later learned from the Red Cross that they were POWs. Of the twelve planes in our Squadron that had begun this mission there were now only five and we were all heavily damaged.

We made it to the continental coast and began a slow descent from our bombing altitude as we headed home over the North Sea. We were getting vibration from our damaged wing and I prayed it would hold until we reached our home base. I didn't care to spend one minute of New Year's Eve down in that icy, cold water of the North Sea.

When we were down to 20,000 feet I pulled away from our small formation and held this altitude. If that wing broke off I wanted us to have plenty of time to bail out. It's very hard to move about in a spinning plane and we needed all the time we could get. When we finally spotted the English coast I began a slow descent to 12,000 feet.

John and I had already decided to take the plane in for a landing but we gave the rest of the crew a choice. If they were afraid the wing might come off in the rougher air at a lower altitude, we would circle the base and let them bail out. Otherwise they could stay with us as we attempted to land. They all wanted to stay. Chet said, "Since we've all been together through everything else, we'll go through this together too". Our good luck continued to hold and we made our approach and landing with no problem. The wing held fast.

We sure were happy to be back home on the ground after this mission. Out of our Group of thirty-six planes, twenty-two returned with heavy battle damage, but the saddest thing was the seven young men that were killed, four more wounded, and ten somewhere in Germany in a POW Camp. As we reviewed the mission back at home base, I couldn't help thinking of those lost young men, most of them younger than I was. I thought of all the fighting and destruction over Hamburg and us being on the lead ship's right wing in the middle of everything. Yet we had made it through again without a single scratch. Some day maybe I will learn why we always seem to be spared. It surely must be answered prayer for I have many at home praying for my safety.

We stayed with our plane for a little while trying to calm down some before going to debriefing. I was relaxing and gazing at the sky when I spotted a plane coming in. The pilot had both left engines feathered and there was lots of "skin" missing from the left wing and left horizontal stabilizer. It was Mike Ryan! They had made it home after all. The fire had gone out after they had turned back to bail out. Mike had immediately turned back around and headed for home on their two



good engines. To reduce the plane's weight they had thrown everything they could overboard, including all their guns and ammunition.

As they got closer we could see that the fire had burned and melted a large section of "skin" from his plane. It looked a lot worse than ours did.

Our plane that had taken such a beating that day wasn't the new one we had been flying. That one had gone in for major repairs, so today we had flown my roommate Johnny Corbin's new plane that he had just received. I thought, he is going to die when he sees what I did to his new plane!

The Group Engineering Officer came out to check our plane and immediately remarked to us how fortunate we were to be home. He said that so much structural damage had been done to our left wing that it was too weak to support the plane and should have broken off. Yet we had just completed a 400-mile flight, mostly over water, and the wing had held fast. Now we were sure we were being watched over and protected in all we did. This had been another Sunday mission and I prayed we would be forgiven for the destruction we had caused and the terrible harm to the people on the ground. The fact that it had to be done sometimes didn't give any relief.

Now that we were safely home I was so tired that the only New Year's celebrating I wanted to do was to fall into bed and sleep for about a week. I was always grateful that I could sleep soundly, even after a mission as rough as the one we had flown today. So many of the fellows weren't able to, and would wake up in the middle of the night with their nightmares. I often thought, how long can a man last, going from the security of the base into absolute terror, then from safety into terror all over, again and again, week after week?

In fact by that time some men had broken under the strain. Recently one of our pilots had just refused to fly again and was transferred. One pilot's wings were taken away because his flying had become so unsafe he was not only a risk to his crew but to the entire Squadron. We had another pilot who, when he returned from a mission, would sit at his locker crying and swearing he would never fly another combat mission. But when his turn came again he would be there ready to go, then he would go through the same thing all over again. This seemed to be, for him, a way of releasing the tension and emotion we all had to cope with. He had a brother who had already been killed in the war, but since he never mentioned this, neither did we. I always remembered him in my prayers and hoped he was going to be O.K.

Before our next mission we were given a three-day pass and we headed into London. After getting settled in our hotel we went to the Grosvenor House for dinner. Here I ran into a pilot that had been with us in the cadets. He hadn't made it to B-17 transition school but had been assigned to my old buddy Ken Buzza's crew as Ken's Copilot. Sadly, he told me that Ken had been flying with another crew and had been shot down just before Christmas. He was now in a German POW camp.

We didn't fly again for a week but then on a Saturday afternoon my name appeared on the list for Sunday's mission. I thought, maybe I'm always



on these Sunday missions to keep me away from the Saturday night dances at the Officer's Club.

We were up long before dawn and after breakfast were briefed for the mission. This would be our twenty-first mission and would take us back to Cologne for the third time. This time everything went fairly well - nothing compared to the last time we were there. However, one crew did fail to return. The mission wasn't an easy one for them.

As we got deeper into the winter the weather got worse. We were having lots of snow and all the roads were covered with several inches of ice. Twice we were briefed for missions that had to be scrubbed because of the bad weather.

When a crew neared the middle of their tour of duty they were given a week's leave and sent to a very nice facility operated by the Red Cross. This was designed to give them time to relax and forget about flying. We called it "flak leave" and the Army knew it was necessary for us to get this time off. Finally it was my crew's turn and we were given orders sending us to a hotel at Bournemouth, a city on the south coast of England.

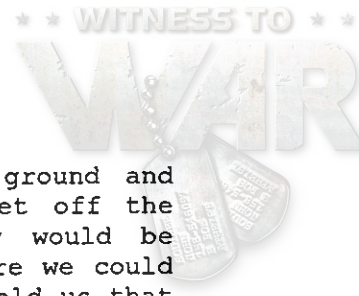
We boarded an early train on January 10th, then in London we transferred to another train to Bournemouth. After a few hours we arrived at this very nice, quiet hotel and were assigned our rooms. We lounged around at the hotel that afternoon and on into the night. As bedtime neared we discussed our being there and decided that a week of complete rest might get awfully boring. We weren't so certain this was for us. London beckoned, so instead of turning in for the night we called the railroad station to inquire about trains to London. One would leave Bournemouth about 2 A.M. and after a quick discussion the four of us officers decided to go.

The enlisted men were assigned to a different hotel and we wondered if we should tell the other crew members we were leaving. It was getting so late we decided against this. Since the itinerary at Bournemouth was planned ahead of time, they could either stay here and relax, which I knew some would, or leave as we were now planning to do.

We took a taxi to the station and found three of our crew members standing there waiting for the London train. Apparently we weren't the only ones who thought London would be a better place to spend our "flak leave". They were more considerate than we had been for they told me they had left a note taped to my door at the hotel telling us where they were going. They just thought we were asleep and would get the note in the morning. I never learned what happened to that note.

We spent an enjoyable week in London, returned to our base and were scheduled to fly our twenty-second mission on Saturday, January 20th. By being away from the base on leave, I had missed flying on my birthday, which was the 18th. You wouldn't believe how superstitious some of the fellows were about flying on birthdays, anniversaries, holidays, and anything else they could think of. Flying so many Sundays was beginning to get to me too.

The weather on the morning of the mission was terrible. A heavy, thick fog covered all of southern England and the temperature was almost down



to freezing. The cloud coverage was almost down to the ground and visibility was such a short distance I doubted we could get off the ground. At briefing we learned our target for the day would be Heilbron. We would have to climb several thousand feet before we could break out on top of the cloud coverage. Our weather people told us that all this weather would move out before we returned and I hoped they were right because there was no way a pilot could get back into the base in these conditions.

Although I had hoped differently, the mission was not canceled. Since we flew on the lead ship's right wing as deputy squadron leader, ours would be the second ship off the ground. We taxied out to the end of the runway and prepared for take-off. The procedure was that when the lead ship began his run we began counting the seconds. The lead plane began his take-off run and disappeared into the fog only a short distance down the runway. After twelve seconds we began our run, hoping he was off the ground and not stopped somewhere down the runway. He must have become airborne because we didn't hit him.

We were soon off the ground and in the clouds. We began circling and climbing, keeping as close to our base as possible for we knew other Groups, as well as our own, were in this soup with us. You certainly didn't want to be overlapping another field's flight pattern and meet someone in this soup head on. We continued to climb until at about 7,000 feet altitude we almost collided with another plane. We passed so close behind him it seemed as though I could have reached out and touched him. I could see the shocked expression on the face of the tail gunner as he came into view for a few seconds, then he disappeared and we were alone again. We knew hundreds of planes were in here with us - how close we couldn't tell.

We had reached an altitude of about 12,000 feet when I began to notice our rate of climb was slowly decreasing even though we had all engines set at full climb power. We were picking up so much ice on our wings and control surfaces we were slowly losing our lift. If the ice builds up enough to distort the airflow over the wings the plane loses its ability to fly. This concerned me greatly since I didn't know how much higher we needed to climb to break out of the clouds. If it became necessary to return to base I was certain it would be impossible to get into the field.

Several agonizing minutes passed and our rate of climb was down to a critical point. If we didn't break out soon we weren't going to make it. Suddenly we were skimming along the tops of the clouds. How beautiful all this bright sunlight was! As we cleared the top of the clouds the ice began coming off our plane, and once again all was O.K. I always wondered how you could pick up so much ice, break out on top into much colder air, and the ice would break off immediately. I guess it just becomes too brittle.

We assembled our three squadrons of the 95th without further problems and headed out toward our target. We were now flying in bright sunlight above a blanket of smooth, white clouds. This is a beautiful scene as long as you can forget that down below the enemy is waiting for you at Heilbron. We ran off these clouds before we reached the target, which meant we would be able to make a visual bomb run. As we flew down our bomb run we ran into some very accurate flak. One of our planes was



badly damaged but made it back to France before crash landing. The crew was later able to return to duty. Another landed somewhere on the continent so badly damaged it never flew again and was salvaged for parts. Another crew, Conover's, was still in the formation when we left the target but after entering some clouds we never saw him again. Later we learned that Conover, his Navigator, Bombardier, and Top Turret Gunner were all killed and the other crew members were in a POW camp. Four more of our Group were killed that day and one wounded, but the rest of us made it home O.K. We arrived at home base and found the weather had cleared just as we were told that morning. We landed without incident. Six planes, including ours, landed with heavy battle damage.

After this flight we were so tired we ate our dinner after debriefing, then went to bed without checking the names scheduled to fly the next day's mission. I should have checked because, much to my dismay, I was awakened about 4 A.M. and told I was to fly again that day. It was Sunday - I should have known I would be on the list.

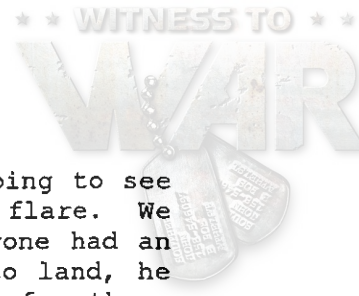
The weather appeared to be just as bad as the day before, but we were told the cloud coverage was not as heavy and should be long gone before we returned eight hours later. We were briefed to go to Mannheim for our twenty-third mission. We taxied out for take-off and just like the day before each plane disappeared from view before it left the runway. Soon after we lifted off we were into the heavy cloud coverage. Our weather people had been right; the clouds weren't nearly as thick as the day before. We broke out on top at about 5,000 feet altitude.

Our Group assembly and flight to the target went without any problems. We saw no German fighters and the flak over the target was not as heavy as we had expected. We did have one plane crash-land on return, but all the crew members survived and were returned to duty. One plane returned to base with so much damage that it had to be salvaged. These B-17 Flying Fortresses continue to amaze me in that they are able to fly home with so much damage that they have to be scrapped.

Two days later we were off on our twenty-fourth, which would take us to Dusseldorf. Thankfully the weather fronts we had been experiencing had passed on through and on this mission we would have fairly good weather. Just as on the previous mission, the flak over the target was less than we had expected. We continued to hope the Germans would decide further fighting was useless and they were ready to quit. How wonderful that would be. The entire flight on this mission went well and all planes returned safely to home base. Only four planes of the entire Group had very much battle damage.

January 31st we were briefed to fly our twenty-fifth mission but the weather had returned to terrible. The clouds and fog completely covered everything, right down to the ground. Visibility was so bad we all felt the mission would be canceled. The 334th (my squadron) was scheduled to fly lead that day which meant we would be the first squadron off. Since I was now deputy squadron leader I would be the second plane off the ground and fly the lead plane's right wing.

If a mission was canceled after we boarded our planes, the tower would fire a red flare into the air rather than contact us by radio. The Germans could hear a radio transmission and know the mission was



canceled. So we sat in our planes and watched the tower, hoping to see that red flare. Engine start and taxi time came and still no flare. We had thought, surely we wouldn't fly in this weather. If anyone had an emergency after he got off the ground that forced him back to land, he would be in trouble. The crew would just have to bail out for there would be no way to get back to base in this soup.

We taxied out to the end of the runway but there was still no flare. The lead plane began his run and disappeared in the fog a few hundred feet down the runway, as we had seen him do twice before. Twelve seconds later we began our take-off run. I listened as John called out our speed, "70 - 80 - 90", when out of the corner of my eye as we passed the tower I saw that red flare fired. It was much too late to stop. We were at take-off speed with a fully loaded plane approaching the end of the runway. All I could do was continue my run and take off. As soon as we lifted off everything on the ground disappeared. We were in the air with no place to go since our base was completely socked in with this weather.

I climbed out to a safe altitude and called the tower for instructions. We were told to drop our bombs in the North Sea and proceed to a Royal Air Force Base near Land's End at the southwestern tip of England. All England was covered in low clouds except a small portion of the southernmost part. Maybe we could get in there. I didn't like the sound of that "maybe" after the bad weather we had been flying in.

We flew out over the North Sea and dropped our bomb load. The pins that armed the bombs had not been removed so they wouldn't explode on impact. Normally Keck removed these pins after we were in the air. After dropping the bombs we flew all the way across England, past Land's End, and over the Atlantic before we finally found a hole in the cloud coverage. We descended back towards Land's End through heavy rainfall (which helped to wash away some of the fog) and managed to land safely at the local R.A.F. base. We were there for three days before the weather was clear enough to return to our home base.

The morning of February 3rd we were awakened earlier than usual. On the way to breakfast I could hear the engines being put through a test run to prepare them for the flight. The fuel trucks then moved in after the engine run and replaced the fuel the maintenance people had used. When they did this I knew we were in for a long and tiring flight. Every drop of fuel is precious and they made sure we had all 2,800 gallons the plane would hold.

At briefing the curtain was pulled back revealing the information for that day's flight. There were a few groans when we saw that our twenty-fifth mission would take us back to Berlin. Presently we learned this mission would be quite different from previous ones we had flown.

Normally we carried high-explosive, anti-personnel, or incendiary bombs. Sometimes the first two squadrons carried high-explosive demolition and then the third squadron would follow up with incendiary bombs to set the target on fire. Today the lead squadron would drop 500-lb. high-explosive bombs to explode on impact, the second squadron would drop 500-lb. high-explosive bombs with a two-hour, delayed-action fuse, and the third squadron would drop 500-lb. high-explosive bombs with a six-hour, delayed-action fuse. The purpose of this plan was simply to



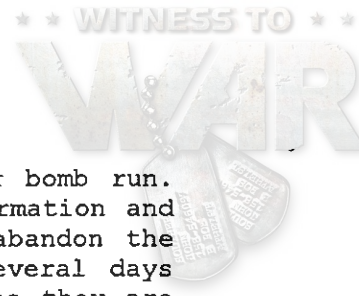
destroy more people. During the raid the people would take refuge in their air raid shelters. After our planes were gone and the "all clear" sounded, people would leave the shelters and the two-hour delay bombs would begin exploding. They would then return to the shelters but wait longer to come out next time, probably an hour or so, but when they did the six-hour bombs would explode. This action was designed to kill as many people as possible, to destroy the German people's morale and their will to continue to fight. Of course, at that time we didn't know they had no choice, but continued to fight because their leaders forced them to fight on.

On all previous missions we had a definite military target to hit. We never had bombed just to kill as many people as possible. I couldn't help being concerned for all those civilians who would be down there. Certainly many weren't there by choice, and probably wanted nothing to do with this war. This was my first time being briefed for a mission I had rather not fly. We had never given much thought to the people involved when we bombed an oil refinery, a rail marshaling yard, an airfield, or any other military target, but this time we had no such target. But we had to go ahead and perform to the best of our ability. We were not given a choice about which missions we wanted to fly. I just prayed that we would be forgiven for what we were about to do.

Shortly after take-off we noticed the oil pressure on #2 engine was lower than the other three. As we assembled our 95th Group we watched the oil pressure drop slightly, then fall off to zero. The engine was performing flawlessly and all other indicators for that engine were normal. I remembered the problem with a faulty indicator we had several missions ago and decided to let this one run for awhile. We were still over England and not far from our base, so we could easily get home if any problem arose. I decided to watch our #2 engine closely and continue on our flight.

We held our position in the formation as we flew out over the North Sea and headed toward our target. The engine was still performing just fine so we assumed the indicator must be faulty. We arrived at the I.P. and turned to our bomb-run heading. We knew from experience that Berlin was a well-defended city and this day was no exception. The flak batteries were putting up huge amounts of flak right in our path. I knew we were going to pick up a number of hits, but we held our position and flew directly into it.

That day our Squadron happened to be far back in the line of 8th Air Force planes. Many Groups had already dropped their bombs before we arrived, and the city was almost obscured by thick, black smoke rising several thousand feet. This wasn't surprising since every minute for the past two hours a squadron of twelve planes had dropped 72 tons of high-explosive and incendiary bombs on the city. As we flew down our bomb run we received a bad hit in our #3 engine. Oil spewed out over the cowling and engine housing. We managed to get the engine cut and the propeller feathered before losing all the oil pressure on that engine. Now we were several hundred miles from home with only three engines running and we still weren't too sure about #2. I just prayed we had made the correct decision about the indicator on #2 and it would continue to run on the flight home.



We were taking a beating from the flak all the way down our bomb run. Jim Taylor's plane was on fire. He pulled away from the formation and then they all bailed out. They were lucky to be able to abandon the plane so quickly for it went into a dive and exploded. Several days later we learned they were all in a POW Camp. Thank goodness they are alive but their war is over. I could see that my old plane, number 2951, that had carried us on so many previous missions, was on fire and had a runaway propeller. Today Richard Morris (the brother of Chester Morris of Hollywood fame) was piloting it. Morris left the formation under control but we lost sight of him. He later failed to return and we didn't know what happened to him for several days. Then the Red Cross informed us that Morris was a POW but all the other members of his crew had been killed. Another of our planes left the formation over the target but was able to get all the way back to Belgium to land. The crew eventually made it back home and were returned to duty.

What was left of our Squadron was scattered all over after bombs away, but we did manage to get our remaining planes into a fairly good formation. We ran our three remaining engines as hard as we dared in order to keep up. I was just thankful no German fighters had been around while we were so scattered. We headed home with an eye on that #2 engine but it never failed. This was yet another sad homecoming. Seven of our friends had been killed, one was missing, and ten more were in a German POW Camp.

Several days after we flew this Berlin mission an article appeared in an English language paper we received from Sweden. A reporter that had been in Berlin during our raid reported that more than 35,000 people had been killed. This didn't seem to bother some of the fellows. They knew from experience that the German people, especially the Hitler Youth, would kill you before you were captured by the military if they could get to you first after you bailed out. For this reason we now carried our .45 caliber pistols. Earlier we had left our pistols at home because you were usually killed if you were armed when you landed on the ground. But we later learned that our men who bailed out were being killed anyway, so our guns were given back to us for our own protection. As General Sherman said, "War is Hell". How right he was.

January 26th we were briefed to fly our twenty-sixth mission. The weather was awful again but we were already off the ground when the mission was recalled. Everyone safely returned to base.

For the past several days the weather had been too bad to fly. Some days, missions were scheduled but later canceled. On the only days our Group flew my name was not on the list. This gave us some much-needed down time for a little rest.

We didn't fly again until February 14th, Valentine's Day. For our twenty-sixth mission we would be flying another long one, this time to Chinnitz. We would be in the air for more than 8½ hours. This was a long and tiring mission but proved to be an easy one for us. The anti-aircraft fire at the target was rather light and we saw no enemy fighters. The Germans still had many fighters left but couldn't get them into the air because of their lack of fuel. We figured our raids on oil targets were the reason for this. Our planes returned home with only three having noticeable flak damage.



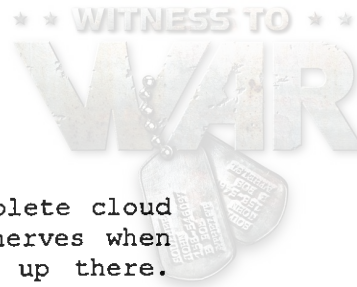
The very next morning we were up early and had completed breakfast long before daylight. At briefing we learned we were going on another long one. For our twenty-seventh mission we would fly all the way across Germany to Cottbus. We now seem to be able to fly anywhere over Germany we like without any fighter opposition. Of course this relieves some of the tension we usually felt during these long missions. This day we were out there more than nine hours. The flak at the target seemed light to me but it must have been pretty accurate. One of our planes was damaged and spun out of control but we thought we counted enough parachutes to account for all crew members. They did in fact manage to get out for several days later we learned they were all POWs. Another plane was damaged badly but managed to get to Belgium and land safely. One more plane left the formation at the target and failed to make it home after the mission. He must have gone down somewhere over Germany. We never learned what happened to him. All the rest of us made it safely home.

February 19th we were briefed to fly our twenty-eighth mission, this time going to Osnabruck. This would be a much shorter flight than the last two. Once again I prayed it would be an easy one. We were getting too close to completing our tour.

We reached our I.P. without any problems and turned on our bomb run. The Germans put up the usual flak dead ahead and we flew directly into it to reach our dropping point. The flak over the target wasn't too bad and after bombs away we turned toward home thinking all was well. We had seen no German fighters and should be back in Horham before long.

Shortly after leaving the target Keck, our Ball-Turret Gunner, told me something was running out of the wing behind #3 engine. He said he didn't think it was oil or hydraulic fluid. Since we don't carry any water out there, it must be fuel. There's a white-hot supercharger fan running back of that engine and 100-octane aviation fuel is highly explosive. We couldn't let the fuel hit that hot fan so we cut the engine immediately. There was also a large self-sealing fuel tank behind #3 engine. There must have been a flak hole in it so large it couldn't seal. We began transferring the fuel from this tank to the other tanks to keep from losing it or taking a chance it might start a fire or explode. There must have been at least 200 gallons of fuel still in that tank. The supercharger cooled enough after we cut the engine that the fuel that did run out of the wing didn't cause any other problem. We made it safely home on our other three engines.

We were flying every day now when the weather allowed. February 20th we were briefed to fly our twenty-ninth mission, this one to Nuremburg. We thought, we must be going after Hitler and his Commanding Officers for we had recently heard that the German Army Headquarters had been moved from Berlin to Nuremburg. We continued to have very bad weather and that day was no exception. We took off in the fog and climbed through thick clouds to a clearing to assemble the squadrons. After take-off and assembly we continued to run in and out of clouds as we climbed toward our bombing altitude. Sometimes we were in clouds so thick we could hardly see the number three plane flying on our leader's left wing. I could see the three-ship high element leader but that, plus our lead plane, was about all. I just prayed everyone kept a sharp eye on the planes they could see and held their positions to avoid any collisions.



We continued on toward our target and were now flying in complete cloud coverage with no breaks anywhere. This could wear on your nerves when you considered the fact that you weren't the only squadron up there. More than a thousand planes must be in this soup and you aren't able to see any of them. The Groups, each consisting of three 12-plane squadrons, are only about three minutes apart, all flying in the same direction, and all going to the same place.

That day our Guardian Angel was surely working overtime. John and I usually took fifteen-minute turns flying the plane when we were in formation. In weather like this we stayed as close to the lead plane as possible. You didn't want to take your eyes off him for even a second. I was flying the plane and for some reason (probably answered prayer) I looked over to the right away from the formation. Just as I did we broke through a tiny hole in the clouds. Another squadron broke in from our right at that exact time, heading on a collision course with us. I pulled back on the control column as hard as I could and our plane almost jumped straight up. Although I couldn't see anything, I'm sure we barely missed some of our other squadron members. Tragically, the squadrons did collide. We heard the explosions as planes ran together. Harold could see planes crashing into each other from his tail-gunner position. Two of our planes and three of the other squadron planes went down in balls of fire. We were back in the clouds so quickly we couldn't see all that happened, but we knew it was terrible. We only learned after returning to base that five planes had been destroyed. Here again, I was flying in a position right in the center of the collision, yet miraculously we escaped without a scratch!

After the collision we lost all sight of our Group. We continued on alone toward our target, considerably shaken but determined to complete our mission. Before we reached Nuremburg we broke through the frontal weather and saw a group of B-17s directly in front of us. We thought it might be our 95th Group but it wasn't. We overtook them quickly and filled an open position in their low element vacated somewhere along the way for some reason, probably the weather.

The weather continued to be a problem but we managed to stay with this squadron. We reached the I.P. and began our bombing run. Though we were flying above complete cloud coverage, the Germans must have had their best anti-aircraft batteries down there. The flak was extremely accurate and we received considerable damage to our plane. We were sure the others did also. After bombs away we turned toward home and that awful weather that we knew lay ahead.

We hadn't gotten very far away from Nuremburg when we were back in that weather front and again the weather broke up the formation. Since we were not with our squadron we didn't mind this too much. We stayed at our bombing altitude hoping this would keep us above the other planes heading home. We knew they usually made a slow turn after leaving a target and dropped one thousand feet below bombing altitude. Maybe we were a thousand feet above them. We certainly didn't want to risk another mid-air collision.

We made the entire flight home flying on instruments and depending on John Lurtz, our Navigator, to keep us out of any flak areas. We had no more problems but learned after we landed that five of our planes had failed to return. Two that did had been so badly damaged they had to be



salvaged, and ten others, including ours, had heavy battle damage. Al Weiss' copilot was wounded and the Bombardier on another crew was wounded. One plane that failed to return had landed safely in Belgium. Thank goodness our ground forces had liberated a large part of Belgium because that had given us a safe place to land if we couldn't make it all the way home.

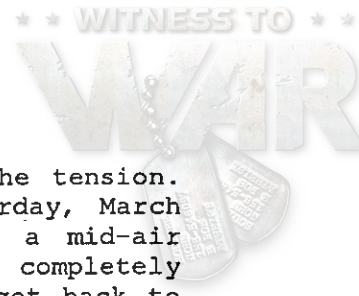
After debriefing and dinner we stopped by our squadron to check the list for tomorrow for we had seen the red flag flying. My name was there and since we were so tired we hit the sack early to get as much sleep as possible. We were up about 3 A.M. the next morning, ate a quick breakfast, then went to mission briefing. When the curtain was removed showing the mission, it looked just like yesterday's. For our thirtieth mission we would be going back to Nuremburg. We had failed to get the desired results yesterday so here we go again.

That day, February 21st, the weather was much better. The front had passed through the target area so we had good flying weather all the way to the target. We reached Nuremburg and found that either the Germans had moved many of their flak batteries or they weren't expecting us to be back so soon. The flak was light and not nearly as accurate as the day before, even though the weather conditions were clearer. We made a visual bomb run that was much more accurate than our first one. Only one plane returned with significant battle damage. We all returned safely.

After debriefing and dinner we learned we were not on the list for the next day's mission. That was a relief, since we had flown missions on three consecutive days. We certainly needed a rest and slept almost until lunch the next day. After lunch we stayed at the Officer's Club until the day's flight was due to return, then went down to the tower to watch. We counted the planes in each squadron as they landed and saw that all had returned. We figured this must have been a "milk run" and wished we could have gone along. At debriefing we found we were mistaken. They had run into heavy and accurate anti-aircraft fire over the target and were very lucky that all were able to return. Twenty-four of the thirty-six planes returned with battle damage, some much worse than others, yet fortunately no one had been wounded. We had been just as well staying home.

My tour of duty wasn't all bad. We next had a three-day stand down with Glenn Miller's Band to entertain us on Saturday night and Sunday afternoon. Two days later, February 24th, we were briefed to fly our thirty-first mission. This mission would take us to Bremen. It proved to be much like the one we had missed three days before. The flight to Bremen went very well and the weather was good, but the mission proved to be a very rough one. The Germans were trying to make up for their lack of fighters with very heavy anti-aircraft fire. Everyone made it through but we returned to base with twenty-seven planes, including ours, incurring heavy flak damage. Yet in the entire Group only two crewmen were wounded. I was happy neither of these were in my crew but sorry none the less for the two who were wounded.

It was hard to believe we had flown thirty-one missions since arriving in England. The fact that we only needed to fly four more safely became our main topic of conversation. The closer we got to that magic number thirty-five, the tenser we became. Happily, we were off for another



three-day pass. I hoped the break would relieve some of the tension. We spent the time in London then returned to base on Saturday, March 3rd, only to hear the terrible news that there had been a mid-air collision between two planes in our group. One had been completely destroyed killing all aboard, but the other had managed to get back to the field and land safely. We had had mid-air collisions before and fortunately had also avoided many others. On reflection, I'm surprised we didn't have even more. The terrible weather conditions we were sometimes forced to fly in combined with the close proximity of the bases left little margin for pilot error.

March 4th was Sunday and (of course!) we were scheduled to fly our thirty-second mission. We were briefed to go to Ulm. The weather was not too bad, just some broken clouds. As we left briefing to go to our planes two German V-1 "Buzz Bombs" passed directly overhead, less than a thousand feet high. This caused a mad scramble for cover but their engines kept running and they continued on their way toward London.

The V-1s were not very accurate but the Germans could hit a city large as London with them. They would fly until their fuel was exhausted then glide to the ground and explode on impact. We could see and hear the V-1s coming, unlike the V-2 rockets that come in so fast and noiseless. One early morning while I was on leave in London I heard several V-2 rockets come in and explode. I was always amazed that the people of London paid so little attention to them. When I was close enough to hear the explosions so loud, I knew they were striking somewhere very near. That made me a little nervous!

The flight to Ulm wasn't bad. The German Air Force was still unable to send up fighters to intercept us, but we still had our P-51 escorts just in case. The flak at the target wasn't so heavy but we did have seven planes return to base with flak damage.

Our Group didn't fly again for the next two days. This gave us some time to rest up and sleep but I'm not sure this was best for us. I could see some of the crew getting tenser and I'm sure they saw the same in me. I just prayed it wouldn't affect my ability to do my best. You would think the idea of having only three more missions to go would provide some relief but the opposite was true. You just couldn't help thinking of the friends you had seen killed or wounded or bail out over a target to be captured by the enemy. You know it would take only one well-placed 88mm anti-aircraft shell and you wouldn't even know what happened. You remember Bromberg's last mission. Your nerves begin to play tricks on you and interrupt your sleep. Then you realize you have been out there thirty-two times - surely your luck will hold for three more. You stop and say a prayer.

March 7th we were briefed to fly our thirty-third mission. This one would take us to Dortmund and we were cautioned that the flak could be very heavy. Our take-off, Group assembly, and flight to the target went very well. The weather was clearing but we remained on instruments for about an hour before we were able to assemble the Group. As we left the I.P. and headed down our bomb run, we had a rather pleasant surprise. The flak wasn't nearly as heavy as we had expected but it still did considerable damage. Nine of our planes returned to base with some flak damage.



I was always thankful for our ground maintenance crews. Amazingly, they would have every damaged plane ready to fly the next day - even if it meant working all night in the damp, cold English weather.

The very next morning, March 8th, we were up early to fly our thirty-fourth mission. We hadn't done much damage the day before at Dortmund so we had to go back and finish the job. The day was clear and beautiful. These cold clear days made for good flying but the clear sky meant we wouldn't have any cloud cover under us over Germany. Our good luck continued to hold. We made a good bomb run, destroyed the target, and only eight hours after take-off were all back safe at our base at Horham. After debriefing we checked the list for tomorrow's flight and found my name there.

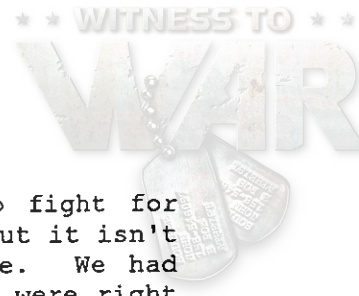
Flying missions on three or four consecutive days was very stressful; much more so than flying consecutive practice missions. Combat missions (obviously) took so much more out of us. When a crew got close to the end of their tour the Group leaders deliberately scheduled them to fly every day so they wouldn't have time to think. We would fly a mission, come home and sleep, fly again, and sleep again with no time to sit around and worry. This was extremely tiring but I suppose it was for the best; at least the powers above thought so.

Friday, March 9th, we were briefed to go to Frankfort for our thirty-fifth and last mission. Frankfort could be a very rough mission and I didn't like the idea of going there on my last mission. If we could make it through just this one more time we would be on our way back to the good old U.S.A.! We would then have six months in the States before Army policy would allow us to be assigned to any more combat (unless we volunteered). This didn't seem likely for any of my crew. They were all too anxious to get home, especially Doan, who had a new son that he had never seen.

As we went through our pre-flight checks I couldn't help noticing how quiet everyone was. There was none of the joking and kidding around that usually went on. I just hoped we weren't too tense to perform at the level we must.

This was our first mission to Frankfort and we were told at briefing that we would come within range of more than a thousand anti-aircraft guns; it could get very rough. I couldn't help thinking of things that could happen and what a terrible day to have to fly combat. Tomorrow is Marian's birthday. If our luck runs out today she is going to get one awful birthday present. I tried to dismiss all this from my mind and concentrate on what I must do.

The weather that day was excellent and we wouldn't have to contend with the instrument flying we had been doing so much of recently. Our plane, which we had flown for the past fifteen missions, was an exceptional one, so that was one thing in our favor. It could take an awful lot of punishment and keep on flying. Before boarding the plane and taking my seat in the cockpit I stood, as usual, under the wing for awhile, but this time I was close to tears. It wasn't from fear but from the thanks I felt to God that He had brought us this far, and how blessed we were to be heading out to our last mission with the same crew members with whom we had begun our tour. Many crews who had come over with us were no longer here; so many wounded, so many killed, and so many in Prisoner of War Camps.



Hollywood movies always portray men charging into combat to fight for home and country. This was our motivation also, of course, but it isn't what most men are thinking about when they head into battle. We had learned all too quickly what to fight for - our comrades who were right there with us. We had all become family and we did our very best to protect each other. We really fought for one thing - SURVIVAL.

I must have lingered under the wing a little too long because Doan, my Flight Engineer/Top Turret Gunner, came over to ask me if I was O.K. I assured him I was fine and thought to myself, "Here is another reason I can continue. I couldn't have found a better man for this job anywhere than Doan". He could have been grounded long ago because of serious sinus problems he had; problems that were aggravated by high-altitude flying in cold, un-pressurized planes. He came home from every mission in pain and headed straight to the Flight Surgeon's Office for relief; however he chose to stay with us and for his sacrifice I will always be grateful. Four of my crew members had children to go home to if we made it back from this final mission. Doan had only one, a son born after we had left the States whom he had never seen. We must complete this mission safely. I boarded my plane for my last mission.

Take-off and assembly of the Group went well and we were soon on our way to Frankfort. We had no problems on the way and the weather was beautiful - no clouds at all. As we approached the I.P. I heard someone ahead reporting, "Bandits at twelve o'clock!" and also desperate calls for our "little friends". Enemy planes were always called "bandits". I knew one of the squadrons ahead was under attack and braced for an attack on us.

When we reached the I.P. and turned to our bomb run heading, I could see the German ME-109s attacking the squadron ahead of us. They were taking an awful beating and being worked over all the way down to bombs away. Since we were only thirty seconds behind them I knew we were next. The squadron ahead dropped their bombs and the German fighters turned toward us, but instead of attacking they passed a few hundred feet underneath us and struck at the squadron behind us. They must have figured our squadron was too far down the bomb run and they would be unable to hit us before our bombs were away. Once more our prayers had been answered.

Even though the fighters didn't engage us we were still not out of the woods yet. The anti-aircraft flak was heavy and deadly. One plane left the formation on fire. All the crew bailed out O.K. and we learned later they were all taken prisoner. Our lead plane had one wounded and another crew had a wounded Bombardier. Another plane was badly damaged and forced to land in Belgium. Still another made it back to England but had to make a forced landing at the emergency field at Woodbridge.

Chet, our Bombardier, had decided that since this was our last mission he would sit right up in the Plexiglas nose so he could get a good view of everything. Usually he would kneel behind his bombsight and John Lurtz, our Navigator, would kneel right behind him. They would then cover their backsides with flak jackets for protection. In this position they also felt the chin turret gave them some protection in front and underneath since they were almost on top of it. Today, however, Chet was up front with his feet propped against the Plexiglas nose. Suddenly I heard him on the inter-phone yell, "I'm hit, I'm



hit!". A few seconds later I heard Lurtz say, "Aw, shut up. It didn't even go through your boot". A piece of shrapnel had penetrated the Plexiglas and struck him hard on the heavy sole of his boot. If it had hit him anywhere else it could have done a lot more damage. Fortunately all he sustained was a bad bruise on the bottom of his foot which made walking difficult for several days.

As we banked away from the target we noticed the plane's hydraulic pumps running constantly. This concerned me because they shouldn't have been running at all. Doan cut them off until we could determine what the problem was. A few minutes later Keck said something was running out of the bomb bay and coating his turret so badly he couldn't see. It didn't take long to figure out that what he was seeing had to be hydraulic fluid. We would have to make certain the pumps stayed off until we reached home to land. If we lost all hydraulic fluid we wouldn't have any brakes. I had landed without brakes before on the long runway at Woodbridge but sometimes no brakes can cause real trouble. We would just have to wait and see. Since this was our last mission we definitely wanted to land at our home base. Luckily the landing gear was electrically operated and would come down without hydraulics.

Other than the problem with the hydraulic pumps, the trip home went very well indeed. It had been a long time since I had heard so much joking and kidding among the crew. When we reached the Coast of England we left the formation and beaded straight home. The fellows began celebrating by throwing lighted flares out the waist door. I wasn't aware they had them on board and I'm sure they hadn't told me because they knew I would never have carried them into combat. They were much too flammable. I just hoped nothing got set on fire on the ground, but they probably burned out before they hit.

We reached the base before the rest of the formation arrived and buzzed the field. We only had time for one pass. Normally this was never allowed but the brass overlooked some things on a last mission. Since we were ahead of the formation we had to stay aloft until the entire Group landed. That was O.K. We needed everyone else out of the way because we might not be able to stop before we ran out of runway. The alternative was to divert to the emergency field at Woodbridge. If I had reported our problem we would have been sent there, but I knew we just couldn't celebrate properly at Woodbridge.

After the rest of the Group landed I began my approach. The plan was for Doan to switch on the hydraulic pumps the instant the gear touched the runway and hope we got up enough pressure to help us stop. We touched down and Doan switched on the pumps. I hit the brakes - and nothing happened! All the fluid must have leaked out long before we reached home.

I had made the approach as slow as I dared and touched down right at the end of the runway. We cut the inboard engines but halfway down the runway we were still going too fast. We had no reversible propellers as today's planes do. I headed off the runway into the soft grass that bordered it hoping that would help us stop. This was risky because if the ground was too soft the landing gear could sink in and stand the plane up on its nose. Fortunately the ploy worked and we lumbered to a halt before we ran out of field. We cut the two outboard engines and left our plane for good sitting peacefully in the grass.



At debriefing we learned that four of our planes had failed to return and seventeen, including ours had sustained heavy flak damage. When we left debriefing we quickly changed our uniforms and headed for the combat crew mess hall. Usually ten or more hours pass between breakfast and the end of a day's mission, so we were always hungry, but this day was a special one for us. This was brought home to us when at the mess hall we saw a large table in the center of the room, covered with a tablecloth, and set with silverware and china; things we never normally had. This special table was only used by the "Lucky Bastard Club" and today, March 9, 1945, we had become members of that envied group. We were to be served a special meal at this table of honor, and it would be brought to us. No waiting in the chow line today. It's our special day and we are going to enjoy every second of it. The food was special too - a lot better than what the other guys were getting in the regular chow line - and complemented with two fifths of good blended whiskey. Of course being the good fellows we were, we never touched that.

We lingered for a long while, still seated around the table when we noticed we were alone. Everyone else had finished their meal and gone. As we laughed and celebrated, I pondered for a moment just how fortunate we were. Here we all were, together just as we had been back at Dyersburg in the States. Ours was the only crew I knew of, of all who had come over with us, that had no wounded, no one killed, and was still flying together. What a load had been lifted from us that day! And how many prayers had been answered. No more losing friends forever. No more watching a plane explode and knowing nine or ten young men will never go home.

We left the mess hall together to send cablegrams home with the good news. All we were allowed to say was, "Missions completed. Be home soon". That wasn't much but it was enough.

We knew we would now be going home soon but we didn't know when. We were put on three weeks leave, over our objections, for we didn't want to use any leave time until we were back in the States. I guess it was necessary since we had to wait until the next available ship convoy was ready to go. We could do whatever we wanted for the next three weeks so we became tourists. Some of us stayed on base, some in London, but Chet and I visited parts of northern England where we hadn't been before. We even made it all the way to Scotland.

Almost a month passed before we were sent to Liverpool to board a troop transport. The ship then moved out into the harbor and dropped anchor. We stayed out there for a couple of days, unable to go ashore while the convoy was being assembled. Finally late one afternoon we moved out and joined a large number of other ships. With a destroyer escort we headed westward toward America. It was hard to believe we were on our way home.

The first morning at sea we were up early for breakfast. We were told that we would have only two meals per day while we were at sea. That was O.K. with us because on mission days we only had two meals and they were usually more than ten hours apart. We could also have some fresh fruit at lunch if we desired. We hadn't seen fresh fruit for several months so we made certain we got ours every day.



We sailed in a convoy of about thirty-five ships, including several destroyers to escort us across the Atlantic. The Germans still had submarines in the Atlantic so this escort was necessary. It also gave us some feeling of security. These troop transport ships, known during the war as Victory Ships, were not the most comfortable luxury liners. We were assigned bunks for our voyage home. Most of these were four bunks high and seemed to be below the water line because we could hear the ship's propellers beating against the water, and even feel some vibration. We didn't mind this too much since they were beating us a path home. We weren't crowded at all. The ship was capable of carrying six thousand troops and we only had about fifteen hundred on board.

Our first two days out passed uneventfully, but the third night out we were awakened by loud thumps and could feel the vibrations. Chet and I went up on deck to see what was happening. We were told that signals, thought to be German submarines, had been detected. What we were hearing was the explosion of depth charges being dropped by our destroyers. I thought, let's get those submarines if they are down there. I certainly didn't want to fly thirty-five missions over Germany and then be lost at sea on my way home. How ironic that would be.

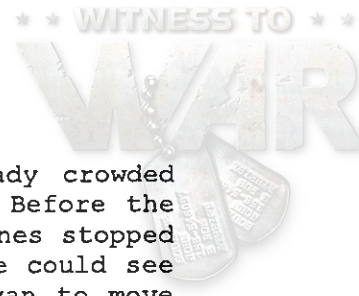
The North Atlantic can be very rough during this time of the year. Some days it was so rough that we couldn't go up on deck because the ship's tossing and rolling, plus a very wet deck, could wash you overboard. At the beginning of the voyage we were told that the convoy would not stop to pick up anyone who went overboard. He would have to swim the rest of the way home. The wind was blowing so hard it could blow you right off the slick deck.

Some days Chet and I spent time as far up on the bow as we could get. As the ship tossed up and down it seemed we would almost go into the water, then rise until we could see the 18- and 20-foot markers on the side of the ship's bow. We watched the stern of the ship just ahead. As he tossed up and down his propellers would come all the way out of the water, then go down again until the stern almost went under. Trying to walk anywhere on deck in these conditions was very hard to do, but nobody went overboard and none of us was ever even seasick. That was a miracle in itself.

In order to pass time some days we played cards from just after breakfast until dinner in the evening. The tables were bolted to the deck but the chairs weren't. As the ship tossed about we held tight to the table so we wouldn't slide all the way across the room. We solved this problem by tying our chairs to the table post.

One day while we were at sea, busy with our card game, it was announced over the ship's speakers that President Roosevelt had died. This put a damper on everything.

We had been at sea for ten days when late one afternoon the announcement was made that we would dock in New York harbor next morning about 7 A.M. All our activity ceased immediately and the conversation for the remainder of the day was about being home. The excitement and anticipation of the troops on board was even greater than when we had boarded at Liverpool. I don't know about the others but I got very little sleep that night. I was just too excited.



Next morning, long before daylight, we went up to an already crowded deck. Everyone was eagerly looking for some sign of land. Before the sun rose we began to see lights on the horizon, then the engines stopped and we stopped moving through the water. As daylight came we could see that we were already well into New York Harbor. Soon we began to move again, passing right by the Statue of Liberty. What a beautiful sight! We docked about 9 A.M. and thankfully were not kept on board very long. We boarded a troop train right at the dock and were soon on our way somewhere. No one knew or even cared where we were going. We were home so it didn't matter. After a fairly short ride we arrived at Camp Kilmer, New Jersey. We were taken directly to the mess hall for it was already early afternoon and we hadn't eaten anything all day. To us the food was excellent. We had fresh fruit and milk with our meal. I must have downed at least a quart of milk for I hadn't seen any milk since we left the States last year.

Early that evening I made two phone calls, one to my Mother and Dad, and one to Marian, telling them where I was and that I should be home in a few days.

We were at Camp Kilmer for only two nights taking the necessary physical exams; then on April 19th, 1945, I was once again boarding a troop train. Our destination was Fort McPherson, Georgia. This train was very different from any troop train I had ever ridden before. All the cars were Pullman and we had our own beds. Normally on troop trains we slept in our seats or on the floor or wherever we could find space to lie down.

This was a happy day for me but it also had a touch of sadness. I was leaving the last members of my crew. We had been separated from our enlisted crew members when we left England. We had all come home in the same convoy but were not on the same ship. They hadn't docked at the same dock we had so now I didn't know where they are. Now I was leaving the three officers on the crew. We said our good-byes and promised to keep in touch.

Early Saturday morning, April 21st, we pulled into the rail yards of Atlanta. We stopped and waited, then moved forward a mile or so, and waited again. We couldn't interfere with the regularly scheduled trains passing through. I knew we had to wait for them but we were all becoming impatient. We were just too close to home to be wasting so much time. It was after 9 P.M. when our train pulled into Fort McPherson. We underwent a quick physical examination, then were given our orders for our new assignments and released. I was to report to Miami Beach Replacement Center but I had three weeks before my date to report. One question we were asked before we left was if we would be reporting to Miami Beach with our wives. Three of us who in fact weren't married yet said yes. So many weddings had been planned by Victory Mail. I was back home at last and left Fort McPherson as soon as I was dismissed.

* * * * *

Marian and I were married the next Saturday, April 28th, 1945 in the Chapel at Fort McPherson. We had planned this day for the past year. The War had postponed this happy day for us, as I am certain it had for many young couples, but here it was at last. We spent one week's



honeymoon in New Orleans, then back to Atlanta for a few days before boarding a train for Miami Beach. All the married Officers were permitted to take their wives to Miami Beach. We were assigned a room in the Atlantic Towers Hotel right on the Atlantic Beach. We spent three weeks there which Marian and I treated as another honeymoon since I had nothing to do except wait for my next station assignment. During this time I ran into my Copilot, John Sachtjen, and Bombardier, Chet Wilcoxson who also had their wives with them. We had a nice mini-reunion but John Lurtz, our Navigator, had been sent to the West Coast so we missed him.

Because I had been in England for almost a year with hardly any exposure to bright sunlight, I had become fairly light-skinned. I was not accustomed to the scorching Miami sun. And although I had never blistered before in my life, after spending only a couple of hours on the beach I was cooked. It was miserable. What a way to spend a honeymoon!

Finally, I received my new assignment. My orders were to report to Hendricks Field, Sebring, Florida, as a B-17 flight instructor. We remained in Sebring, with weekends in St. Petersburg and Clearwater, until November. The War finally ended and Hendricks Field was gradually closed. We were receiving no more pilots for flight training in the B-17. Men were being discharged on a point system and I had more than enough points to be discharged. I asked to be relieved from active duty to be effective November 1, 1945. I was transferred to Maxwell Field where I was discharged.

I returned home to Marietta and continued flying with the Air Force Reserve at Dobbins Air Force Base at Marietta. During the summer of 1950, while on fifteen-day active duty, I began having trouble with my eyes and was grounded until I could get this corrected. I was replaced in our Squadron at Dobbins and told to return when I could pass my physical. Shortly afterward the war in Korea broke out. The unit at Dobbins was called to active duty but I was omitted. Individual pilots with combat experience were being recalled and every day I expected to receive my orders but they never came. Many WWII pilots had volunteered for active duty. Had I been called I felt certain I would be sent to Korea because I had been flying the Douglas B-26 at Dobbins and that bomber was being used in Korea.

The war years of my life seem to me now to have occurred in another lifetime. Sometimes it feels like ages ago, sometimes like only yesterday. It was a time I never forget, not even for a minute. I can recall instantly every plane I witnessed going down. And I never forget how fortunate I was. Our Squadron leader was shot down twice while we flew on his right wing, requiring us to take over as lead ship, yet I nor none of my crew were ever injured. Mike Ryan flew the lead plane's left wing and I flew the lead's right. During the course of our tour Mike had nineteen engines shot out, three times two on a mission. Twice he was set on fire. We flew only a few feet from him and yet we lost only five engines during our entire tour. How lucky can you get?

I am very proud to have served as one of the pilots of the 95th Bomb Group of the Mighty Eighth Air Force. Our 95th flew 321 combat missions, dropping 19,769 tons of bombs, flew a total of 8,625 plane missions, utilized a total of 359 B-17 Flying Fortresses in combat

action, of which 156 were lost in combat, with 36 lost in other operations. 61 were forced down on the Continent, and 42 were salvaged at Horham after being damaged beyond repair. A total of 1,336 planes were repaired after major battle damage. The Group had 611 men killed in the line of duty, lost 851 crew members as P.O.W.s, and had 171 crew members return to base severely wounded. 65 members interned in Switzerland or Sweden, and another 61 evaded capture after being shot down behind enemy lines. There are still 5 crew members listed as missing in action. The 95th Group claimed 425 enemy planes destroyed and another 117 probably destroyed, with 131 damaged. The 95th led the first daylight bombing missions to Berlin. We were the only Group of the 41 Groups in England to receive three Presidential Unit Citations. These were for leadership and valor on missions to Regensburg, Munster, and Berlin.

When I review these records and realize that my crew, as one of the 95th, flew thirty-five of those missions without one single injury or death, I know without doubt that many prayers were offered and answered. Each day I pray that none of my descendants will ever have to fight through another war. Surely man can learn from his mistakes of the past to find a way to live in peace.

In closing let me tell of a young boy about twelve years old who used to ride his bicycle to our base. He was fascinated with our planes and someone would always show him around. Today he is an 8th Air Force historian and has written a number of books and poems about the air war. He is a well-known speaker and author, especially in Europe. He has visited with us at our reunions and at the Heritage Center in Savannah, Georgia. His name is Roger Freeman and I close with one of his many poems, a favorite of mine.

THE SKY WAS NEVER STILL
by Roger Freeman

The old man sat in the English Pub
As he had for many a year
And listened to the stranger's talk
As he sipped a temperate beer.
A stranger asked how long he'd lived
In the village here about.
"Why, all my days", the old man said
An age, without a doubt.
"I envy you" the stranger sighed
"Your tranquil village life,
The gentle fields, the muted sky,
Devoid of urban strife"
The old man smiled a wistful smile,
"That's just a townie's dream,
For I have seen the sky aflame
And heard the meadows scream.
I've known a thunder at each dawn
That shook the very ground
As warplanes sought to gain the clouds
From airfields all around.
They called some Forts and others Libs
And there were fighters too
I've counted hundreds at a time



Yes, what I tell is true.
They'd climb and soar like flocks of rooks
And round and round they'd mill
From north and south, from east and west
The sky was never still.

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THE SKY WAS NEVER STILL (Continued)

"Sometimes there'd be a wondrous sight
A sight beyond compare
The bombers going out to war
Forging the frigid air.
Four miles above, just silver specks
Like sunshine on the dew
And trailing lines of cloud-like white
Across the cosmic blue.
They set the heavens all a-throb
That did not fade away
For others rose to meet the night
Invisible to stay".
"And when was this?" the stranger asked
"And who were those you saw?"
The old man drank and then replied
"It happened in the war.
They were but boys and many died
Some lost without a trace
For then the sky in foreign parts
Could be a violent place.
Yes, they were boys and me a child
But I remember well
And if you have the time to spare
There's more that I can tell".
The stranger said that he must go
"Perhaps another day"
Indifferent to the old man's tale
He quickly slipped away.
The old man turned to inward thoughts
His memories to tend
He knew that those who were not there
Could never comprehend.
Those who'd not known the crowded sky
The sounds that drenched the land
Or stood in awe and wonderment would never understand.
The old man left the English pub
And stood awhile outside
The evening vault was milky blue
Cloud-free and stretching wide.
He raised his head and scanned the sky
That held so still and clear
And in his mind a memory
And in his eye a tear.