

## PERSONNEL RECORD UPDATE

306th BOMB GROUP ASSOCIATION

Complete as much of this form as you wish, and return to Russell A. Strong, Secretary,  
306th BG Association, 5323 Cheval Place, Charlotte, NC 28205.

Date completed April 20, 92

LAST NAME: *BENSON* FIRST NAME: *EARL* MI: TITLE: *M/SGT-RET'D.*  
 Street address: Telephone: *(NMI) (704)*  
*23 FOX HOLLOW CT*  
 City, State, Zip: *ARDEN, NC 28704*

Date of birth: *07/27/22*Wife's name: *VICKY*College(s) attended: *U.S.A.A.F.*Degree(s): *0*Year(s): *2*  
*EQUIVALENT*

Last employment & job title & retirement date: *NAT'L BUREAU OF STANDARDS*  
*TRUCK DRIVER/SPECIAL EQUIPMENT*  
*JANUARY 1973*

Reunions attended:

*NONE*Serial #: *AF11033289*Squadron: *367*Specialty: *BALL-TURRET*  
*GUNNER*Date joined 306th: *JANUARY 1943*If combat, what crew: *FLEW WITH MIXED*  
*CREW*Special duties or assignments w/306th: *ARMOR GUNNER*Number of missions flown: *5*Date of last mission: *April 5, 1943*

Date left 306th:

*APRIL 5<sup>TH</sup>, 1943*

Highest rank/grade w/306th:

*STAFF SGT*

Other 8th AF units served with:

Top service assignment after 306th: *1<sup>ST</sup> SGT (TEMP) LOWREY FIELD 1945*  
*RET. M/SGT WITH 20 YEARS*

USAF retirement date:

*31, OCTOBER, 1961*

Rank/grade:

*E-7*

Copies of old 306th orders, either from the Group or Station 111, or any of the  
squadrons or other units serving with the 306th, are sought by the secretary, as  
many of these do not appear in any collections of materials in Federal files:

If you know of others who served with the 306th who do not appear in the current  
directory, please add their names and current/WWII hometowns/or other addresses  
to the back of this sheet so that searches may be implemented to add them to our  
present 306th roster.

EARL BENSON  
800 W COMM COLL DR #257  
SAN JACINTO CA 92583

APRIL 10'TH., 1992

RUSSELL A. STRONG  
5323 CHEVAL PLACE  
CHARLOTTE, NC 28205

Dear Mr. Strong,

I realize that the 50'th anniversary reunion of the 306'th Bombardment Group is coming up in August. There must be alot of men, including myself, that will not begin to be able to afford to attend.

I have never attended any of the reunions through the years because of financial and other obligations. I finally attended a meeting for ex-pows at Loma Linda V.A. Hospital, and started getting the Ex-Pow Bullitins about a year ago.

Then, on March 25'th, this year, my wife spotted your book, "First Over Germany" in the museum shop at March AFB. We turned to April 5'th, 1943, and skimmed down the pages. Yup, you listed my name along with my crewmembers names, our B-17 as having been one of four planes that were shot down over Antwerp, Belgium that day. Well, we certainly had to buy the book!

I am wondering if there's a way to list and update the information so that guys like me can find out if the other crewmembers are still alive, so that we can be in touch.

I was the ball turret gunner, and although it was never verified, the upper turret gunner and I shot down 13 or 14 enemy fighters that day, between the two of us.

Since this was my 5'th mission, I was still not with a permanent crew. One of the pilots from one of the other B-17s was Charles Thelen. He survived and was interrogated with me and a couple of the men that were on my B-17. I'd like to find our pilot, Lt. Kelly Ross, Lt. George Lewis, and Sidney Miller, William Hovekamp, and Clyde Smith, and Douglas Bowles. I remember Hovekamp, the upper turret gunner, and Lewis with his red hair, was the bombardier. Clyde Smith was a waistgunner. Bowles must have been the radio operator. One of the waistgunners took a 20mm shell in the stomach. I saw him get hit. That is probably what happened to Hyman. Smith was in shock, and frozen in place in front of the rear hatch. The handle was missing, so I pushed him aside, and kicked out the hatch. I went out, barely missed the horizontal stabilizer. My chute was full of holes, and several shroud lines were severed from shells having gone through it in the plane.

Art Byrd, the tailgunner, had lost radio communication. I figured that he was killed.

There's alot more to tell, and since my wife, Vicky has started writing about my experiences, she is very happy that we have your book. It gave us the names that I had forgotten

long ago. I am really glad to have your book. It is a real treasure for the men who survived, and a valuable learning tool for those who care, but were not there.

Vicky and I will be traveling east this summer, stopping to visit our children in Colorado until September. Then, we will continue on to the Asheville, North Carolina area, where we will settle for the summer seasons. Being snowbirds, we will go to Zephyrhills, Florida for the winter months.

We will be leaving California on about May 14'th, so would be happy to hear from you, if you have a moment to write to us here.

Otherwise, our address after September 1'st will be 23 Fox Hollow Ct. Arden, NC 28704. I would like to have you make that address available to any of the guys that might remember me when you go to England in August. After we get settled in Arden, I'll give you a call, or send you a card with our phone number on it. Charlotte is not far at all from Asheville.

I am going to be 70 in July, and I ride a 1500cc Honda Goldwing motorcycle. I had four by-passes in 1989, at the V.A. in Asheville. I am 20% disabled, and will appeal that once I get back there. That has been a real uphill struggle, with alot of "mistakes" being made on evaluation.

Basically, I am still "hangin' in there". Just like most of the veterans. All the promises that were made when we enlisted!

Russell Strong, thanks for writing the book! I hope to meet you one of these beautiful fall days.

Sincerely,

EARL (NMI) BENSON  
306'TH BOMBARDMENT GROUP  
367'TH BOMBARDMENT SQUADRON  
B-17 BALL TURRET GUNNER  
PRISONER FOR 25 MONTHS  
DULAG LUFT- STALAG 7A- STALAG 17B  
PHYSICAL APPEARANCE WAS: 5'6, 147  
LBS, RED HAIR, BLUE EYES.  
ESCAPED FROM 7A, 4 DAYS-TURNED SELF IN  
DUE TO EXTREME EXPOSURE FROM DRINKING  
POND WATER 1'ST NIGHT OUT.



EARL BENSON  
800 W COMM COLL DR 257  
SAN JACINTO CA 92583

Russell A. Stong, Secretary  
306th Bomb Group Association  
5323 Cheval Place  
Charlotte, NC 28205

April 20'th, 1992

Dear Russell Strong;

I appreciate very much the time and effort you spent in responding to me with all of the information, and the directory.

I am especially grateful to have the April 1986-Vol.11, #2 Echoes publication! They listed me as a nose-gunner, but our B-17 wasn't the model with a forward nose-turret. I was the ball-turret gunner. Hovekamp was the upper-turret gunner. Byrd was the tail-gunner and Hyman was one of the waist-gunners, in case you'd like to update the information. Hovekamp and I downed seven enemy aircraft that day.

I wrote a lengthy letter to Ken Jones, the National Service Director and it will be sent out when I mail this letter to you. I wrote about obtaining the Purple Heart, the Distinguished Flying Cross, about upgrading my 20% disability, and also about the report that my wife wrote up on the V.A. Hospital in Asheville, N.C. during my harrowing stay there. One in every five men was ending up with serious post-operative infections, and the conditions were extremely poor. We "accidentally" went all the way to the national level with that one, and a full investigation was done, with positive results. We thought that Ken Jones would like to see that, and maybe would have some suggestions about the other things.

I am enclosing the Personnel Record Update, and hope that you will continue to use the 23 Fox Hollow Ct. address, as it is permanent. Anything that is sent there will be forwarded on to me. I will physically be there this fall, and then will head down to Florida for the winter months.

If you should have any further questions, please write.

Sincerely,

*Earl Benson*  
Earl Benson

MAIL FILE: JUNE.MST / Last Update: 10  
=====

Record: 489

Last Name: Benson  
First Name: Earl  
Name Display: Earl Benson  
Company:  
Address 1: 7820 Wire Rd,  
Address 2:  
City: Zephyr Hills  
State: FL  
Zip Code: 33540-1895  
Phone: ()- 813-758-9163  
Fax: ()-  
Country Code:  
Title Code:  
Gender Code:  
Selection Code: 367  
Memo 1: Becky  
Memo 2:  
Memo 3:  
Memo 4:  
Date Entered:  
Date Updated: 10 NOV 92  
Followup date:



EARL BENSON  
7820 WIRE RD lot #195  
ZEPHYRHILLS, FL. 33540-1876



Russell A. Strong, Secretary  
306th Bomb Group Association  
5323 Cheval Place  
Charlotte, NC 28205



# OUT OF THE TURRET AND INTO HELL



WWII Aerial Gunner's Story  
Stalags 7A and 17B  
Life of a Prisoner of War

V. Elaine Benson

P-3



# OUT OF THE TURRET AND INTO HELL

MSGT RET'D USAAF EARL & V. ELAINE BENSON  
1317 NORTH MATLOCK STREET  
MESA ARIZONA 85203-4324

---

Phone 480 827-8143.

September 02, 2002

Russell A. Strong  
306 Echoes Secretary/Editor  
5323 Cheval Pl  
Charlotte NC 28205

re: "Out Of The Turret And Into Hell"

Dear Russell,

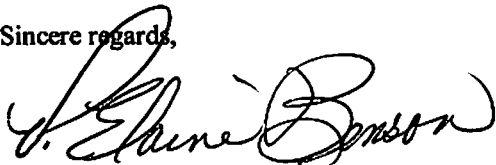
Thank you for placing information about our book in 306th Echoes August 2002 issue. We're happy to hear you'll be including more on it in the next issue. We've received one order already to ship tomorrow.

**Corrections needed:**

- 1: Checks made payable to: V. Elaine Benson instead of L. Elaine Benson.
- 2: 1317 North Matlock Street instead of E. Matlock St.
- 3: If ordering from above address, the total amt. per book is \$17.50. Shipping & handling are included. (on-demand publishing has helped lower cost so we can get more affordable books out there.)
- 4: All orders going to North Matlock Street address will be autographed by still-living, 80-yr-old, Earl Benson, the subject of this account, and by myself, the author.
- 5: Books (not autographed) can be obtained on-line at our website through Trafford Publishing Company at: [www.trafford.com/robots/01-0252.html](http://www.trafford.com/robots/01-0252.html)
- 6: Read it at no cost..... Ask 306th Echoes readers to order this book through their local library, college, or school. Info. needed: ISBN: 1-55212-852-0 Trafford catalogue #01-0252.html

If you have questions, contact us at [benvicbens@aol.com](mailto:benvicbens@aol.com) or call the number listed above.

Sincere regards,



V. (Vicky) Elaine Benson

# OUT OF THE TURRET AND INTO HELL

MSGT RET'D USAAF EARL & VICKY E. BENSON  
1317 NORTH MATLOCK STREET  
MESA ARIZONA 85203-4324

Phone 480 827-8143

August 14, 2001

306th Echoes  
5323 Cheval Place  
Charlotte, NC 28205

re: Request for book review

Dear Russell A. Strong,

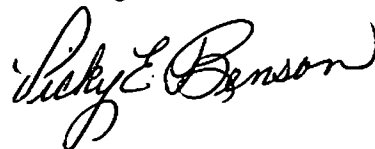
It's all your fault..... that is.... my creation and completion of a book, "Out Of The Turret And Into Hell" - WWII Aerial Gunner's Story - Stalags 7A & 17B. by V. Elaine Benson. It started when I discovered your "First Over Germany - A History of The 306th Bombardment Group" at March Airfield's museum gift shop, pointed it out to Earl, my husband and ball-turret gunner with the 306th. I asked, "Weren't you with the 306th?", then, "What day were you shot down?" He answered, "Yes" and "The 4th of April, 1943." We read about that day, were pleased to discover Earl's name listed with Lt. Kelly Ross' crew, and even though we really couldn't afford it (\$35), we bought it. I don't know if you remember the letter I wrote you back then (1991), I'd asked how we might get in touch with members, etc., but you were kind enough to send us a packet of information an inch thick! Up until then, Earl had managed to block out the names of crewmembers, etc. It took nine years to pull this story out of him, sort it out, document it, write, edit and, well, you know how that goes. (I'm still editing, finding things to correct) The book is published, available worldwide, as of July 26th, 2001, but.... I need reviews. Would you? It's not as big a book as yours...., it is... about one man's experience.... but it has changed a few young lives, as you can see by the enclosed "news release", "Spanning the Generations." Read it, keep it, share it, review it if you will. I sure would appreciate an honest critique from you, good, bad or downright ugly.... I feel it has been a way to inspire young people toward taking an interest in what happened to you fellows... way back when, and is a positive example for them to follow. All ages have read and feedback has been positive.

Second, and this is not your fault, is that I need to place an ad in 306 Echoes if possible. Would you like to take excerpts from the book and fit them into the 306 Echoes with a follow-up on where to call toll-free, visit the website, etc., (the website is loaded with chapter excerpts) or can you tell me what it would cost (and how) to place an ad in the issue? You can email me with answers to the above questions at [benvicbens@aol.com](mailto:benvicbens@aol.com).

Third, and last, how did you get your book into the gift shops, etc. Who would I contact?

Thanks again for your time and patience in dealing with this young baby boomer who never, ever,.... thought she'd be writing a book, let alone about WWII!

Sincere Regards,



## **Depression-era orphan becomes aerial gunner then POW in German Stalags**

**OUT OF THE TURRET AND INTO HELL: WWII AERIAL GUNNER'S STORY –  
STALAGS 7A AND 17B – LIFE OF A PRISONER OF WAR**

by V. Elaine Benson ISBN 1-55212-852-0

*FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE*

CONTACT: author at 480-827-8143 (email [benvicbens@aol.com](mailto:benvicbens@aol.com))

“World War II veterans survived not only the war, but the Great Depression as well,” says author V. Elaine Benson. “We need to read their stories and learn what drove them to fight so hard.”

OUT OF THE TURRET AND INTO HELL is Benson’s biography of her Air Force veteran husband Earl Benson. Raised as an orphan in Connecticut, Earl reached manhood at the end of the Great Depression, only to be cast headlong into World War II.

“The trauma of battle and subsequent capture and internment in German prison camps was a terrible experience,” says Earl. “Thanks to prodding from Vicky, my wife of over 20 years, I was able to recount and recall these events, and she was able to put them down on paper. It reads as dramatically as any war story I’ve ever come across.”

OUT OF THE TURRET AND INTO HELL’s emotional and devastating conclusion is a fitting end to a story of perseverance and fortitude in the face of overwhelming odds.

Born in Dearborn, Michigan in 1951, V. Elaine Benson is a full-time careperson for Earl, who is receiving a 100% disability pension. She earned a diploma from the Institute of Childrens’ Literature in 1998, and her goal is to “write well enough to enable a touching of the heart.”

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Victoria, B.C. V8T 4P4

*more...*

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- 30 -

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**MORE:**

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V. E. Benson

OUT OF  
THE  
TURRET  
AND INTO  
HELL

# OUT OF THE TURRET AND INTO HELL



V.  
ELAINE  
BENSON

**WWII AERIAL GUNNER'S STORY  
STALAGS 7A & 17B  
LIFE OF A PRISONER OF WAR**

**V.ELAINE BENSON**



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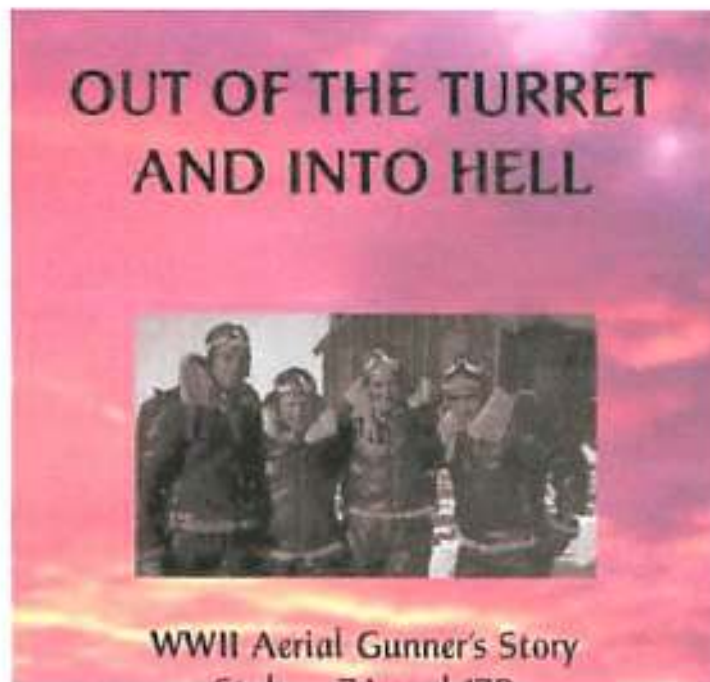
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[about the author](#)

[excerpts](#)

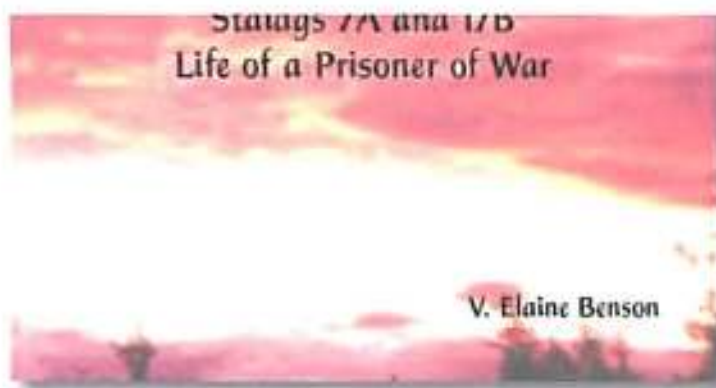
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### About the Book

Presented as a retrospective from the memory of a young boy who grew to manhood, it recounts with humor and wisdom, how five young brothers, dropped off at an orphanage, confirmed: "Us Benson boys are tough..." and how a strange, nightmare premonition brought the one who became a WWII ball turret gunner through the trauma of battle, capture and German prison camps.

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## About the Author

Vicky Elaine Benson is a full-time careperson for her 100% disabled, retired Air Force veteran husband, Earl. Married over twenty years, she feels her objectivity is well-developed in regards to projecting his life story in a manner that will keep the reader laughing, on the edge of their seat, and feeling as if they are with Earl all the way.

Born in Dearborn, Michigan, in 1951, Vicky began a writing career with this novel. She earned a diploma from the Institute of Children's Literature in 1998, and continues to improve her writing skills. Her goal: "Write well enough to enable a touching of the heart."



## Excerpts

### From the Introduction

In the spring of 1931, a Connecticut orphanage opened huge mouth like doors. Five frightened brothers were swept into dank grayness, swallowed up like unwanted puppies dropped off at a pound.

Nine-year-old Earl Benson sensed this as he and his brothers were assigned beds and told where to put belongings.

I'm the reason we're here. The dream says I'm bad, doesn't it? Why won't it go away? Why is God punishing me?

He couldn't remember when the dream had first appeared, but it was long ago, and always the same formidable nightmare. It would take a dozen years and a major global conflict to shed meaning on the frightening vision with its oppressive aspects.

### From Chapter Three - Eggshells

"C'mon guys!" Kenneth said, too cheerfully. Grabbing suitcases, he started out the



door. "Let's get these bags out to the car." Earl and Red looked at Howard. Johnny and Ernie stayed put on the couch. Howard nodded.

Struggling with suitcases, they made their ways down the steps and over to the back of the car. Ernie ran to Pa.

"I know! We're going on a trip! A big one! Are we going to New York State to see Aunt Min? Aunt Min's your sister, huh, Pa? Are we going there to live with you?" John Henry looked up at his wife, who stood on the porch holding baby Robert. He gave her a thoroughly disgusted look.

"You haven't even bothered to tell them..., have you?" Hazel shifted her child from one hip to the other and glared.

### **From Chapter Eight - You're Out**

February, 1938, Earl had his paycheck from the mill.

"It's not fair. I'm right, doggone it, and she's wrong!"

He cashed it, headed for home, then steeled himself as he walked in. Ma faced him, hand out, as he entered the kitchen.

"Give me your check." Stomach churned as it headed for his throat. Confidence abandoned him.

Gotta stand up to her. He swallowed hard.

"I already cashed it, but here's my rent money." He produced a crisp ten dollar bill. Ma moved toward him. A chill, cold as ice, filled with fear, swept the length of his spine.

Snatching the bill, she glared at him.

"This ain't gonna work. You know the rules. Now, where's the rest?" Angry fingers swept over his empty shirt pocket. He stepped back as she reached for his pants pocket.

"Come on. Out with it!" Earl brushed her hand away.

\*\*\*\*

Late August, 1941, after working for Butler for just over a year, Earl was driving a fully loaded dumptruck to Unionville.

He spotted Bobby Pelletier alongside the road, arm outstretched, thumb extended, and pulled over. Bobby ran up, waving.

"Hey, Earl! I gotta catch a lift into town. Can I ride with you?" Earl tapped the top of the steering wheel.

"Bobby, ole buddy, you know the rules. It's illegal to let minors ride." Bobby looked at him.

"Come on! I wouldn't be asking if it wasn't important! Let me ride, just this once. Please?" Earl looked skyward.

"Okay..., but hurry, and keep down, so nobody sees you."

Bobby climbed in. Earl checked his rearviews, then pulled onto the road. Bobby grinned, then began to talk his ear off.

Driving along, absorbed in conversation, Earl was looking at him when the driver of a car, two cars ahead, slammed on his brakes to turn into a driveway. The elderly man in the car ahead of the truck, jammed on his brakes to keep from running into the turning car. Earl looked in the nick of time.

\*\*\*\*

"Son..., you could be sentenced now. This would give you a record and I'd place you on probation.... You've never had a record, seem to be a clean-cut, hard-working fellow, so you have another choice, but I don't want your decision today."

The judge paused, cleared his throat, then continued.

"I understand Uncle Sam wants volunteers for the armed services.... Son, you've a choice..., probation and a record, or enlistment into the service of our country. I'll see you back here in two weeks for your response. Court is dismissed."

### **from Chapter Eleven - The Fifth Mission**

Twenty bombers flew out of Thurleigh toward their intended target, the Erla Works, a Ford factory in Antwerp, Belgium. Ross' crew of ten, counting himself, was ready. Earl scanned the skys from his turret, and talked to himself.

"Squadron looks good and strong this morning. Neat, the way the light reflects across the sky..., real pretty." Nearing the target area, he watched for the enemy.

"Had good action my last four missions.... What will they hit us with today? Well, it doesn't matter, 'cause I'm ready....

"Bogies!!" Fighters were on them before they could reach the target and drop the load of bombs. The elite Luftwaffe hit hard. Earl counted seven fighters queuing up in front of them. Wings lit up as they came in. Folkerwolfes barrel rolled through the formation. Ross shouted into his headset.

"Bogies, twelve-o'clock low! Get 'em, bellygunner!" Earl tracked, spun the turret, fired several bursts, and knocked two fighters from the sky. More came in from a direction that made him realize the guys up front were having trouble getting shots at them. Ross was counting on Hovekamp in the upper, and Earl in the lower turret, to make the shots. Earl lined one up.

"Come 'n get it, ya Nazi bastard!" Bullets bounced off the rounded metal of the turret, shaking it with sharp vibrations.

Relief swept through him when the fighter went down. The enemy knew the angle to use. Fighter after fighter came in, eleven and twelve o'clock level, disabling two engines. It was almost impossible to fire back because of interrupters on the guns, which kept crews from shooting props off of their own planes. Ross' B-17 lagged behind the formation.

"Bogies, twelve o'clock high! Upper turret, why aren't you firing? Fire! We get the bastards off our backs, we'll go home tonight!" Hovekamp responded.

"Can't, Sir! Vibration'll break the windshield!"

"To hell with the windshield! I ordered you to fire!"

Hovekamp laid the big guns down tight against the cockpit roof. The panels vibrated over Ross' and Gate's heads as he knocked two fighters from the sky. Ross bulled the nose of the plane up and down to give upper and lower gunners better advantage. He was out of formation, and the group behind them was too far back to give any cover.

Communication between Benson, Ross, and Gates was uninterrupted until a twenty millimeter cannon shell exploded to Ross' left. It hit in the leading edge of the wing, leaving him no rudder, aileron, throttle, or intercom. Gates took over at his set of controls. Ross saw the formation make a left turn.

"Only one way this bird's gonna catch up." He leaned toward Gates. "Left turn! Let's try to cut 'em off at the pass!"

It became apparent..., there was no way of making this happen. Fear clutched at the lieutenant's stomach. He realized the Luftwaffe was about to have a field day.

"We're losin' it, Ray!"

"Not if I can help it," muttered Gates, bulling the nose up. Miller yelled into the intercom.

"Take 'em down, Benson!" Earl downed the fighter.

"Yeah! Way to go, rascal! Keep after the lousy bastards!" A twenty millimeter whizzed by Sid's ear, and exploded against the oxygen tank. Shouting erupted as Ross, Hovekamp, and Bowles were hit with shrapnel. Miller heard loud hissing as oxygen leaked from the big tank. It should've exploded, he knew that. He'd seen planes explode into a million pieces. Ross, stunned, a piece of skull ripped away, fell onto the control panel. The plane shuddered..., rolled, then dove.... straight down.

### **from Chapter Twelve - Revelations**

American prisoners were dismayed at the Germans' interpretations of the Geneva Convention. Each rare letter Earl got from home was censored, barely readable, and full of blacked out lines. His letters were cryptic: "This place reminds me of the beautiful spot on the hill on the right side of the road coming into Unionville. It has a big building, just like it, surrounded by vast green lawns." He was referring to the mausoleum and the cemetery.

### **from Chapter Thirteen - A Walk Through Freising**

The train stopped at Krems, Austria.

Most of the prisoners stepped down from the cattle cars, but many were carried out. Earl climbed down and looked around the depot. A few civilian passengers, neatly dressed ladies and gentlemen, stood on the platform. When they saw prisoners urgently dropping their pants, and smelled the horrific odor of feces and the stench of vomit from the cattle cars and men, they covered their noses, and turned away in disgust.

The prisoners were not welcome here. The filthy Americans were spat upon and cursed by passersby while being unloaded, and during their five mile force march up the road.

### **from Chapter Fifteen - Cats Have Nine Lives**

Spring arrived, with half-frozen mud and rain to stand in during roll calls. Disease ran rampant throughout the compounds. Earl became ill, felt feverish, and was so weak, he went to bed. He had trouble breathing.

"Can't.... be.... sick. Get up, Benson...." He sat up, then collapsed. Gene carried him to the infirmary.

"What seems to be the problem?" asked the doctor.

"Throat's fulla crud..., hurts.... like hell..., can't breathe."

The doctor peered into his throat, and saw it was full of thick pus nodules.

"It's Diphtheria.... I'll have to put you into isolation."

Earl stared down at his hands.

No...! God..., this can't be happening.... Isolation... is death... You make it out, fine. If not..., well, too bad, you die....

"Try these pills.... Benson?" The doctor's voice floated into his thoughts, penetrating

through fever and pain. Earl blinked, then looked up at him as he repeated, "Sergeant, I want you to take these sulfa pills. It's all I can give you." Earl stared at the doctor's face as he took the pills and a cup of water.

"Oh, man! It's in your eyes, the way you said it..., I'm... gonna die." He choked down the huge pills. As they made their way past the painful nodules, tears moistened his eyes.

A guard was summoned. Earl was half-carried into a barracks which was encircled by strands of barbed wire. The smell of death encompassed him as he was put to bed.

Days passed..., days that took him in and out of consciousness. Too ill to pray..., a mere shadow of a man..., skin and bones rattling and hacking inside an eighty pound body..., he waited for death. Night after long night, half conscious, he listened to men dying around him.

"God..., if You're going to take me..., take me! But..., please..., don't do this to me... Please...." He tried to lift his head, but couldn't..., the tears in his eyes were just too heavy.

### **from Chapter Sixteen - Just Which Side of the Fence**

April 10th, of 1945, the prisoners, under close guard, were force-marched out of Stalag XVII-B. The cleaned up saboteur now hid among the Americans.

Most of the Russian prisoners had been ground troupes. When the camp was evacuated, thirty-five to forty thousand Russians walked out.

Every prisoner coming out of Stalag XVII-B was well aware he had a long, perilous trek ahead of himself. American and British troupes were approaching from the west. Russian troupes were coming in from the east. The Germans were caught in the middle; the prisoners at their mercy.

As the men walked, day after day, in bitter cold sleet and snow, ears, noses, feet and hands froze. They got one bowl of soup and a slice of bread per day, but sometimes didn't get that.

Several days passed. Sticks were found, helping men walk, until the wood was added to night fires. Frozen hands and feet thawed each evening and refroze each day.

Almost another week passed. Walking, daylight to dusk, the group headed toward Braunau and the border of Bavaria by the Inn river, two hundred and eighty-seven miles from Krems.

They were strafed with friendly fire by American, English, and Russian fighters. The Red Cross had indicated that prisoners were to wave their hats so everyone would know they were Americans. Everything happened so fast, that some flyers didn't get the word, and.... there were many casualties.

Earl's friend, Gene, walked beside him. Halfway into the treacherous journey, at Linz, Austria, they were about to cross the Enns river bridge. As they approached, shells dropped by allied forces exploded around them. There was no turning back. Men screamed. Everyone ran, trying to get across the span.

Earl got to the bridge as a bomb exploded, knocking him flat on his face. Blood curdling screams came from behind him.

He raised and turned to look for Gene, who'd just been there..., right on his heels, but his friend was nowhere to be seen.

Bloodied men rushed by, almost stepping on him. Some carried or dragged injured. Earl struggled to his feet.

"Gotta find him!" Panicked men pushed by; more rushed at him, blocking his view. He ducked through them and..., saw Gene..., pinned..., like a rag doll on a clothesline, his

limp, lifeless body hung on the side of a concrete building..., smashed against the wall by the same concussion that had knocked Earl down. Blood ran from ears, nose, and mouth. Eyes..., that moments before.... had been filled with hope and determination, now stared..., wide open in death.

\*\*\*\*

Almost three weeks passed. Weeks filled with agonizing pain, discomfort, hunger, fear..., suffering. In no man's land, starving, half-frozen skeletons put one foot in front of the other.

Many men..., too many..., have been killed each day.

Others fall, and die on the road, too sick to endure another moment of torture. The Russian front is coming up the Danube Valley, and the prisoners from Stalag XVII-B are being force-marched right out in front of them. The prisoners have to move fast in order to avoid being caught in the middle of a heated battle between Russian and German forces, both of whom are pressed toward them by Patton's troupes. Earl peers ahead and sees a large group of prisoners coming at them.

The distance between them closes, then someone ahead of him says, "Gawd..., they're Jews!" Earl shadows his eyes.

"They're going the wrong way." The group moves closer. He stumbles..., mouth falls open.

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## NEWS RELEASE

### “SPANNING THE GENERATIONS”

Retired USAF M/Sgt. Earl Benson of Mesa, Arizona, USA, shakes hands with sixteen-year-old Air Cadet, Marc Welker of Chandler, Arizona, and presents him with an autographed copy of his life-story, **“Out Of The Turret And Into Hell”- WWII Aerial Gunner’s Story - Stalags 7A & 17B Life Of A Prisoner Of War.** by V. Elaine Benson.



Cadet Staff Sergeant Welker, of the United States Air Force Jr. ROTC was presented with a copy when he was a twelve-year-old, with ADHD related learning disabilities. The book inspired Marc to interview Mister Benson, and submit written and oral reports for a school project, for which he received top results, but, the best part came when he joined the Cadets. His ADHD symptoms vanished as grades became important to success. “Out Of The Turret” changed my life,” says Marc. “Mister Benson’s story meant a lot, and gave me a goal. It’s one of those books you can’t put down, and I’m hoping they’ll make it into a movie.”

“I’m glad something I did as a young man has helped,” said Earl “but, if the story hadn’t been pulled from me, written, polished, and published, by my persistent writer wife of over twenty years, nothing would change. Everyone who’s read it says it is an awesome page-turner.”

The 240 page paperback 2nd edition of *Out Of The Turret And Into Hell*, a wonderful, touching, action-packed, humorous account of a WWII aerial gunner’s survival of battle, capture and prison camps, is now available through:

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When a story moves one to rekindle a part of his soul he has all but forgotten in the busyness of living, it is more than a story.... it is a gift. If willing, the reader will turn to his inner truths to the peacefulness of remembering that part of himself. **Out Of The Turret And Into Hell** is an invitation for an unforgettable personal journey.

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