

January 30, 1977

Mr. Russell A. Strong
Rt# 1, Scotch Meadows Dr.
Laurinburg, N.C. 28352

Dear Russell,

I am sending you some pictures that I have of the old 306th Bomb Group. As I do not have the negatives, I would like them returned after you have them copied. You said the USAF Audio - Visual Section had very few photos of the 306th. It would appear from your letter that Waugh and Gentle kept a lot of official negatives for their own file. Army Air Corp regs., at that time required that one print and all official negatives be sent to the Eight AF Pictorial Unit. This large group of 4x5 negatives Waugh is sending you, some no doubt, will be official, and should be turned in to the AF Historical Unit, as they are Air Force property.

I will relate a little of the 306th history from October 1942 to May 1944, as I remember it.

I first arrived at Thurleigh in October 1942, as a member of the 39th Service Group. We consisted of a one hundred and seventy-five man house-keeping unit but no one knew what to do with us. On some ones order, the unit was split until further orders, one half remained with the 306th and the other half went to the 91st Group.

We were told to go find a job with the bomb group in our related career fields. I was the NCOIC of the 39th photo unit and took the four men I had left and reported to the 306th photo unit. The ranking NCO in the 306th was T/Sgt Anderson, the same rank as myself, so we pooled our men and became Co-Lab Chiefs.

Sgt Anderson had been a commercial artist in Denver before the war and was very much interested in working his craft into something useful for the Air Corp. So, on his own initiative and talent, drew a series of safety posters and had them displayed around the base. A few weeks after this, B/Gen Longfellow, from 8th AF Hq's, was visiting our base and saw the posters and wanted to know who drew them, and on whose orders. On being told that Sgt Anderson did them on his own, had Andy report to him when he returned to his headquarters. Andy thought he was going to get hell for making the posters without approval but came back wearing gold bars. He said the General told him that kind of talent should not be wasted in the photo lab. Lt. Anderson was shipped out to a new unit and I took over as the NCOIC of the photo unit.

My biggest problem was getting ground and aerial cameras and equipment. We couldn't get any ground cameras and only a few Britist aerial cameras. We had to make special mounts so they would fit into the B-17 camera well. We had all malfunctions on the first mission we used them, all due to the extreme cold temperture. We got some heating covers from the RAF and had pretty good results. Do to the limited number of cameras we had and the very heavy loss of men and planes, we insalled cameras in planes we thought had the best chance of coming back. Until we got fighter escort all the way to the target and back, the lowest echelon sustained the highest casualty.

As to just how great our losses were was told to me by the group operations officer. No crew member had a mathematical chance of completing twenty-five missions, as we had lost a total number of planes in a group, in seventeen missions.

In an effort to try and locate more cameras and supplies, I was given a letter signed by Col. Armstrong, authorizing me to sign for any type of photo equipment I could find. I got a driver and a six X six and went to main depot. On presenting my letter to the OIC of the depot, I was told Col. Elliott Roosevelt, Commander of a Photo Recon. Sq. and on their way to Africa, had commandeered all the photographic equipment and supplies at the depot. The only thing I was able to find was a photographic trailer and was able to use some of the equipment in it. Thanks to the president's son, it was several months before we started getting any U.S. cameras. When we did get our bomb spotting cameras and hand held aerial cameras, the fact that photographers were not authorized to go on combat missions, we had to train radio operators on the use of both.

One of these radio operators was one of the most memorable men that I have ever known. His name was Roskovitch, the spelling may not be correct. They called him the mad Russian, as he wore a big black fur hat and a knife strapped to his side, on all combat missions. He would walk up to anyone wearing a tie going aboard his plane and without saying a word, deftly and swiftly, cut off the tie just below the knot. After he got back from the mission he would bring the tie into the photo lab and we put it on the coffee room wall with a picture of the victim, if we could find him. Rosko was the first enlisted man to complete twenty - five missions in the ETO. He wanted to bail out over the field on his last mission but he could not get permission. Headquarters wanted to send him back to the states as a hero for being the first to complete twenty - five missions but he would not go, even though he could not fly any more combat missions. They finally gave up and made him a 2nd Lt. and Gp Gunnery Officer. He managed to sneak in a few more combat mission before he was killed in a plane crash in Scotland, going on a weekend pass.

Another radio operator, whose name I do not remember, but truly a great man, was awarded the silver star. It was for his heroic deeds on the same plane and mission that Snuffy Smith received the Congressional Medal of Honor. I heard several people say the medals should have been reversed.

A word or two about Gen. Armstrong. He had a dislike for Gen. Le May that lasted through out their military careers. Le May received credit for a lot of other peoples work. One of those was the box formation used by the B 17's to get more fire power. Sgt Anderson and myself photographed a formation of miniture B 17's on adjustable stands that was set up by Col. Armstrong. The photos were sent to 8th AF Bomber Command and was the same formation subsequently used by the 8th. Col. Armstrong left our unit shortly after and it was at this point, Lt Col Bernie Lay, 8th AF Information Officer, used Col Armstrong's career for a basis on his book 12 oclock high.

After eighteen months in May 1944, someone made a decision on the 59th Ser. Gp. They detached us and assigned us individually to other units. I was sent to a Fighter Gp. I got discharged in Sep. 1945 and was recalled in Oct. 1950, and stayed in to retire in Sep. 1966.


William B. Gibbs

22 January 1977

Mr. Bill Gibbs
26032 18th St.
San Bernardino, CA 92404

Dear Bill:

As you may know, I am researching a history of the 306th Bomb Group, and am making rather good progress, but I have quite a ways to go.

One of the areas of considerable interest is in pictures of the Group. I have had rather a good response from a number of people, but am always looking for more.

Bill Gentle has sent me more than a hundred pictures, and Fran Waugh and I are now working on how I will get prints and negatives from him. He is loaning me a large collection of 4x5 negatives so that I can print them. He is also copying on to 35mm film quite a bunch of pictures, as well.

But, with a voracious appetite, I am looking for more pictures, and therefore am writing to ask what you may have, what you might give me, what you might loan, or whatever. I am open to any ideas you may have. I just want to gather a lot of pictures and get them organized in some fashion.

You might be interested in knowing that I was in Washington last summer and visited the AF audio-visual section to look at their 306th pictures. They don't have many. In fact, I am sure that I now have considerably more than they do, and I am anxious to add any that I can in the next year.

Let me hear from you.

Russell A. Strong

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