

June 25, 1978

Mr. Russell A Strong
Rt. 1 Turnpike Road
Laurinburg, N.C. 28352

Dear Mr. Strong;

Many thanks for your letter and if you put up with my sloppy typing and sometimes disjointed narration I will try to explain my interest in the 367th and 306th BG. I have always wanted to do some research work and am an amateur military historian. My big love has been military aviation and that goes back into the early thirties. I have built a fairly extensive library on this subject.

I had a good friend of high school and college dating from 1933 to 1941, and he was also a fraternity brother with whom I lived for several years at college. He was a co-pilot with the 367th and was lost on the Oct. 14 mission to Schweinfurt. I knew that he had been killed and then a couple of years ago I ran across a clipping in the local paper about him at the time he was shot down. At that time I was deep in some study on the B-17 and became interested in knowing more of his story. His name was 1st Lt. Emil O. Rasmussen, Jr. of Portland, Oregon. When I was at a military cemetery in France in 1975 I looked in the listing they had of all the ~~missing~~ service men ~~xxxxxxx~~ and where they were buried. (Pardon the correction, but I want to express this properly.) There was no listing of Rasmussen or location of cemetery in which he was buried. As you know, the American Battle Monuments Commission state (as they told me) that every missing man is listed on a memorial of some kind in some cemetery.

So, I located a copy of the missing aircraft report, and followed that with excerpts from the report of 306 and 367 of the loss of planes and crews for Mission 115. Further digging got me copies of the change of status from missing to dead in Sept, 1948. I got a copy of Aug 1948 Battle casualty report telling of the loss of the plane and the interrogation of German civilians by the graves registration people.

I found that the plane was lost just before reaching the target and one crew member survived and became a POW, but there is no record of air force interrogation of him as a recovered POW, I think he was blinded and died after return to this country. The bodies of the rest of the crew were put in a common grave, and our graves registration people could identify only two. All nine were taken to St. Avold cemetery in France, and I am now about to initiate correspondence with the superintendent of that cemetery as to the present status.

If you are interested, I can furnish you with Xerox copies of all the pertinent documents that I have--they will be somewhat lousy, but that is due to the fact that the copies the government supplied me were lousy.

I made a trip last October to England and spent part of a day around Thurleigh--it is now both an RAE and RAF base and I was not able to get on the field, but the very sympathetic guard told me how best to see the things that I wanted to. I also visited Chelveston, home of 305 and it is also an active RAF base. I made arrangements to go on the field at Bassingbourn, home of the 91st Tiangle A, and that field is

almost identical with its condition in 43 of 44. The old control tower still stands and the hangars (built prewar) are just the same. The field is used by a reservé unit. The assigned me a guide and I spent quite a while driving down the runways and by the bomb dumps and barracks.

I have had several visits with Col. Budd Peaslee and have had considerable correspondence with him. He was the task force leader on that mission and wrote me "I was leading the combat wing with the 306th as my high group on that day in which your friend was lost. Out of 54 bombers we got back with only 15 so your friend had lots of company on his final mission." Incidentally, Budd Peaslee's book "Heritage of Valor" is in my opinion the very best of anything I have read. Certainly no one has written with greater feeling and he has thanked me for telling him of my admiration for him and his book. The book is out of print and he has only a few copies left and he has said to me that he doesn't know for what purpose he is saving them. I have suggested that he donate a copy to the San Diego Aerospace Museum which is rehabilitating itself after a disastrous fire and a copy to the Pacific Northwest Aviation Historical Foundation in Seattle home of the B-17. He looks somewhat favorably on this suggestion. I also Xeroxed two old magazine articles that he wrote for Flying and True on the Schweinfurt raid and on his development of the Air Scouts.

In Jablonski's book "Double Mission" he mentions two members of Rasmussens crew, the pilot who was killed with Emil and the radio operator who was the POW I mentioned before.

At the time of his death Emil had flown 20 missions, which I assume were all that the 367 had flown to that time. I would be interested in a chronology of all the 367th missions. Of course, there are a lot of other details that I would like to have.


Emil's brother lives near me here in Portland, but knows very little really about any details; their parents are dead, but he might have some of his mother's belongings in his basement which might have items I would like to see.

I have rambled badly, inasmuch as I am in somewhat of a hurry as I am going to be away for a week, but I wanted to write in answer to your letter.

I would be interested in knowing your background and I am anxious to supply you with any information I have or could dig up. I have felt that it was wrong that the Memorial Wall at the cemetery at Cambridge did not list this crew inasmuch as they were missing from that area.

Will try to compose the next letter, if you want one, in a more orderly manner. Hope to be of help to you.

Yours,


R. D. Crookham
2831 N.E. 45th Avenue
Portland, Oregon 97213

2 July 1978

Dear Mr. Crookham:

Thank you for your response.

In regard to Lt. Rasmussen, he arrived at Thurleigh, Beds., the home of the 306th, 4 May 43 on a replacement crew. His pilot was Dinwiddie Fuhmeister, who now lives in Tacoma, WA. It was a common practice to interchange crew members, and probably by the time of the Schweinfurt raid, Fuhmeister was flying as a lead pilot. At the time I was in the 367th Fuhmeister was a major and was squadron operations officer.

The 367th had been flying missions since 9 Oct 42. The group lost one plane on that first raid, and it was a 367th plane. The squadron later became known as the Clay Pigeons because of their high losses. An article in Saturday Evening Post in mid-1943 tells of them and their troubles.

I was with the squadron as a navigator from 7 June 44 until the end of November.

My information says that Joseph Bocelli was the only survivor out of the plane that day, and I just learned last Friday that he is still alive. I have no other information on him or his whereabouts.

I am enclosing a copy of a form letter which I use which will tell you quite a bit about me. I have been researching the 306th for three years and has amassed a considerable amount of information.

I would suggest that if you are interested in aviation history you might wish to join the American Aviation Historical Society, Box 99, Garden Grove, CA 92642. Dues are \$15 a year, and I find their publications quite interesting.

During my research I have spent a great deal of time in National Archives, and other places, as well as corresponding with and meeting a number of other 306th veterans.

We are putting out a newsletter to veterans of the 306th, and have to

this time identified about 1050 of them.

On the Schweinfurt raid, the 306th took off 18 planes and had three abort. Fifteen headed for the target and 10 were shot down. Some of the five planes that completed the day said they really didn't see much happen.

Ten planes was the most the group ever lost in a day, and that happened three times. This was the second occasion, the first having been 17 Apr 43 at Bremen. Personnel losses were high both days, with probably most of the losses due to fighters.

I'm not quite as high on Budd Peaslee's book as you are. I think several others are just as good. Peaslee has the advantage of writing from a unique viewpoint, that of a group commander.

Did you know that the book and movie "12 O'Clock High" is based somewhat on the 306th? At least the opening episode is pretty accurate, and I recently learned in a conversation with Gen. Ira Eaker that one of the authors, Bernie Ley, saw these things happen, so had a front row seat to the action.

As you have noticed, I too jump around in writing a letter.

My guess on Rasmussen's plane would be that they were hit by fighters, very likely the pilot and copilot were killed in a headon pass, and that the plane blew up. This was a fairly common occurrence. The 306th lost 151 planes in combat, and in 17 cases the entire crews were lost.

At the end of the war the pressure was so great to get POWs home, and there were many thousands of them, that few if any were ever interrogated. The only ones I know that were interviewed several years later in reference to the peculiar deaths of crew members--such as one case I know of where the copilot was murdered by a German sergeant.

Nice to hear from you and appreciate your interest in the 306th.

Sincerely yours,