

306 BOMB GROUP – 367TH SQUADRON



367th Bombardment Squadron Insignia

“THE CLAY PIGEONS”



Crew of ten in front of B-17

Top Row: Left to Right: Robert McCourt, navigator; Charles Stanton, bombardier; Joseph Couris, pilot; Charles Barchard, co-pilot.

Front row: Left to Right: Floyd Clites, engineer; Robert, waistgunner; Carl Chase, radio operator; Vernon T. Blucher, tailgunner; Harold Schreckengost, ball turret gunner; Albert Christianson, waistgunner.

A 19 YEAR OLD COUNTRY BOY'S SERVICE DIARY

January 20, 1943 to January 20, 1945

On or about January 20, 1943, a letter came addressed to Vernon T. Blucher. I had never received any letters before, especially from the United States Government. Upon opening the letter I soon found I had been called to active service of our country. The letter read something like this, "Your friends and neighbors have selected you to represent them in the defense of our country against enemy forces. You are to report to your local draft board to be inducted into the armed forces of our country on February 20, 1943 at 9:00 AM".

My local draft board at that time was on the second floor of Finkelstein's Department Store on the York Road in Towson, Maryland. I had never stayed away from home overnight before, so naturally I was excited and afraid too. I didn't even know where Finkelstein's store was. I asked mom and she told me dad would know where it was and would see that I got there. I was always used to walking where ever I had to go. I immediately notified my employer, Bendix Radio Corporation on Joppa Road. They wished me well and informed me my job would be there when I returned.

February 20, 1943 quickly arrived and I was given a farewell party by my parents, inviting all my friends. I don't remember all the details of the party but a good time was had by all. I didn't know it at the time but my future wife was one of the teens at the party as she was a close friend of my sisters. I did not know her at this time.



St. Michael's Luther League and some of the friends at my party including my future wife

At Finkelstein's store after all the other fellows were there we were loaded into several army buses and taken to the Fifth Regiment Armory where there were hundreds of other 18-35 year olds there for the same occasion. In a very short time a big man in and army uniform got on a bull horn (I really don't think he needed the bull horn) and got our attention very quickly by telling us we were not on a picnic and he did not want any more talking or milling around. I knew immediately my life was going to change. Having been brought up in a strict, but fair home, I knew how to take orders. We were told from now on we were to stand at attention when spoken to. He demonstrated what he meant by standing very erect like a stone statue. I soon found out he was a sergeant and meant what he said as he soon chewed someone out for moving to another seat.

We were all told to raise our right hand and he had us all stand as he read us what is known as the "swearing in". He told us now we were officially inducted into the U.S. Army.

We were then marched single file and told to get on the waiting busses to be taken to Fort George Meade. This was all new to me; I didn't even know where Fort Meade was, except it was a long way down the road. We arrived about an hour later and then I really knew I was in the army as the song goes, "You're in the Army now".

We were herded like cattle into a large building where we were given an army serial number, a large bag with a pair of army brown shorts too large to fit anybody except the obese. We were told to put all our clothes in the bag, label the bag with our home address, and put on the brown shorts supplied. Most all of us had to keep one hand on them to hold them up. We were then marched single file to another room. As we went through the door a medic was on each side to zap us with the first of many needles. It was quite scary to see several ahead of me pass out. Another medic would lay them on the floor and use smelling salts to revive them. I made it through, although it felt like they used square needles with a hook on the end. My arms became quite sore within an hour or so. We proceeded down the line where we were given a complete physical over every inch of our body, from the top of the head to the tips of each toe even counting our toes. After this, we were seated, waiting for the medical report to come back. Since we couldn't talk or move about, most of us were sleeping. Every so often a name was called out and the person was told to get his clothes out of the pile and go home, as the army could not use him. Finally, my name was called and I was told to go to the room down the hall where I was given a complete uniform, everything from underwear to overcoat, and nothing fit. I was told to put on all I could and carry the rest. I think the only thing that fit was my handkerchief since with the army one size fits all on the initial issue. I was told misfit items would be exchanged for the right size later. I was taken to a barracks, assigned a bed, told to make my bed and put all my extra clothes in the footlocker at the foot of my bed. We were told to be sure to lock all our possessions in the foot locker and carry the key with you. This was to be my home for approximately ten days while our records were

being processed. We were also told when and where we would go to eat. We were to always keep one ear available just in case our name was called for something. The rest of our time we were to use by memorizing our serial #33558663. We had to give that number everywhere we went, even to eat. No number - no food or as far as that goes, at the end of the month if we expected to get our \$1.00 a day pay, we had to have it memorized. It was amazing when, as a buck private I had to walk into the colonel's office only to find my mind drew a blank trying to remember that number. The first couple of times, if he was a nice colonel, he would help us with the number.

We were told we could not leave the base without a pass but we did not have to be concerned about that because no passes were available except for an emergency. These two weeks passed quickly and on March 6, 1943, we were all told to pack all of our belongings as we were due to ship out in the morning. We were not told where we were going only that the army was taking care of everything. We were put on a troop train with over 1,000 other inductees and the train pulled out of the station. Not to many miles down the rails we were side tracked for the rest of the day so that other trains could go by. It wasn't long before several card games got started. Since I came from a family of pinochle players, I felt like I could hold my own. It cost \$1.00 per game. It wasn't long before I had to drop out of the game because all my money was gone.

Night approached quickly and most of us were fast asleep. I think the engineer of the train was just waiting for us to go to sleep and with a bump and the squealing of iron wheels on the rails; our train was on its way. Clickity clack, the smell of coal smoke, the sound of the whistle, and we were all awake. We rolled along throughout the night and soon the sun was coming up. We were served bacon and eggs, toast and coffee, not bad for army chow.

By looking out the windows we could tell we were heading south because the snow was all gone, people outside were walking around in shirt sleeves. Finally about noon the train pulled into a station and we were all told to get off and fall into a formation on

the platform to await further instructions. We were then marched through town to a bus terminal where we were put aboard. By this time I knew I was in Florida with all the palm trees around and the sign at the terminal read Miami. After the bus was loaded, we headed out once again. Soon we were at a golf course on Miami Beach.

Once again we were marched from the golf course to a hotel. My formation stopped in front of a hotel, “St. Moritz” which was right on the ocean. We were taken into the lobby and told to walk single file up the stairs. At each floor there was a soldier. So many were counted off at each floor, the rest proceeded up the stairs. I was taken off at the 14th floor. We were assigned 4 to a room. After the last room was filled, a voice over the intercom told us to fall out in front of the hotel immediately. We all ran to the elevator for a quick ride down only to be told by the soldier on the floor that elevators could only be used on Sundays, our day off. Just imagine all those men using the stairs at the same time to get to the front of the hotel immediately.



Having fun on my day off in 1943

We all knew by now that when the order came to do something immediately the sergeant meant what he said. After everybody was in formation, we were told to count off from one to eight. We were then told to get in each numbered group. We were to get in these groups each time we were called to assemble and anybody who was late would be penalized. I soon found myself on guard duty which consisted of walking a continuous pace around the exterior of the hotel for the next 24 hours. We had 4 hours on and 4 hours off. It wasn't too bad during the day but night duty was scary because no lights were allowed after all we were at war and we did not want to expose ourselves to the enemy. I don't know how much damage we could do to the enemy who had rifles and we had a Billy club. Other penalties were K.P., scrubbing the hotel lobby, emptying all the trash from each floor and scrubbing the rest rooms on the first floor.



We're in the Army now!

Basic training was about to begin with 5:00 am roll call. Breakfast was at 6:00 am and then back in formation by 8:00 am to be marched through the street, singing at the top of our lungs, on the way to the golf course. We were put through two hours of very rigorous calisthenics, after which we were ready to rest, but that was only for ten minutes. Then each formation was double timed around the golf course. Then we were brought back and told we were the sorriest bunch of men to be called soldiers he'd ever seen. The sergeant in charge told us we were going to keep marching around the field until we learned how to keep in step and when a command was given, we would do it perfect. Thank the lord 11:30AM arrived on time, but we were double timed all the way back to the hotel for lunch.

At the hotel we were given 10 minutes to get to our room for our eating utensils and back in formation, and then marched to the mess hall to eat. The food was good, especially after our morning workout. At 1:00 pm we were back in formation for another rigorous afternoon, then back to our hotel to do those stairs all over again. It didn't take long before some of the fellow devised a way so they wouldn't have to run all those stairs, but ole sarge was way ahead of them by checking each one when they showed up in less time then he knew to make that trip up and back. All of these got one week on KP duty.

It wasn't too long before June 14th, 1943 arrived and basic training was completed. We were put on a troop train heading out of Florida. All along the rails at each place it stopped, some of the men were taken off and the train headed north. The train even stopped in Baltimore, but I was not taken off. The train continued to roll along the rails stopping occasionally unloading but not me. I and some 100 others wondered where they were taking us. Finally after riding for 2 days, the train pulled into Boston, Massachusetts where we were all taken off. A bus ride through town we finally were discharged in front of a Sears, Roebuck store where we were marched inside only to find it was no longer a Sears store but an army barracks and aircraft mechanic school. I stayed here until

October 28, 1943 getting some very expert training in aircraft engines. On October 2, 1943, I was awarded my wings for successfully completing my engineering training and flight schooling although as of yet, I had not even set foot in a plane.



All my grades were in the upper part of the class but some of the others were less fortunate and were washed out of school before completing the course. The army always wants to keep the troops happy so we all got the privilege to choose where we wanted to go for further training. Several bases were named as possible places to go so I chose Amarillo, Texas since I had not been there before. I soon found myself and ten others on a troop train heading south. For the next 2 days, I stayed on the train, sometimes side tracked before moving on. Eventually we arrived at our destination only to find I was back in Florida again.

(10-28-43) My new place was Tyndale Air Force Base where I was enrolled in Gunnery School. I was pleased with this as I liked to do hunting at home. I was taken to a shooting range and after a very rigorous orientation about using a gun I was given a 12 gauge shotgun and a full box of shells and told not to load the gun until told and to follow the instructor. Down through the woods we went, ever so often we would stop, I was given a target with my name on and told to walk off the trail, attach the target to a moving cable and return. While running, the sergeant would bark at me to fire one shell, then I go grab my target and move on to the next place until all the shells were gone. Our scores were posted on the bulletin

board and my score was 10 out of 50. Many of the score cards were blank.



Adaline Mary Otto, that brown eyed girl

On December 18, 1943 I received my first 14 day furlough and headed for home on a train. While home on furlough I met that brown eyed girl I had met at my going away party. She was even more beautiful than before only this time I met her at Sunday school and she was on the arm of an M. P. He introduced me to her and my

comment was, “I’ll have to get to know you better”. Well that never happened because my furlough was soon over and I had a war to win.

1-21-44 I didn’t go back to gunnery school in Florida but to Plant City in Tampa, Florida. I stayed in Tampa for 14 days while my paper work was being processed then on an army bus and down the road I went again. This time it was only a short ride to Avon Park where I met the crew of 10 men I was going to be with in combat.



“The Clay Pigeons” with their B-17 Bomber

We were known from then on as a crew and we would be doing everything together to make sure we were compatible to each other. We spent the next three months together, flying, practice bombing on a range and firing our 50 caliber machine guns at targets set in the ocean. On May 5, 1944 we flew to Hunter Field Georgia with all our baggage where we picked up a brand new plane.

On May 10, 1944 we headed to Gander Field in Newfoundland. We stopped to load up our gas tanks to head across the ocean. We even stood on each wing tip and rocked the plane back and forth to make sure the tank was completely full and no air was locked in. We had to wait for a tail wind to make the trip to Ireland. On May 21, 1944 we were airborne heading east to Ireland. We flew at 28,000 feet where the air was thinner and would not use as much gas. Even then it took us 14 hours to make the trip. Jet engines had not been built yet.

On May 22, 1944 we landed at Nutts Corner in Ireland. Ireland was a very pretty country and as soon as we landed, our plane was taken away to be armor plated. We stayed overnight then taken by truck and put on a boat for a two and a half hour ride to Scotland. We couldn't understand the people and all the kids wanted candy, cigarettes, or gum. We then were put on a bus and wound up at Stone, England. This is the reception center for all incoming Air Force troops where we received more tetanus shots and put on a train for Cambridge.

On May 29, 1944 we were all sent to gunnery school, just to keep us sharp for what was ahead. We used 50 caliber machine guns on targets set in the ocean.

On June 5, 1944 the news came over the radio that Rome had fallen to the allied forces. The next day, June 6, the allied forces opened up an invasion on the Normandy Beach. This is now known as "D" day. I was not involved in this combat, but I was on an unarmed plane, flying around 48,000 feet, reporting back to base just what was happening on land and sea. Many boats had been sunk in the English Channel and the Normandy Beach was lined with dead and injured bodies.

On June 10, 1944 I was shipped out to my new base at Thurliegh, England. We all lived in a Quonset hut #22 which was a concrete slab 20' x 30' covered with sheet metal in a half round shape with a door on each end, a string of lights down the center and a pot belly stove for heat. We ate in a large mess hall and washed up in a common wash room.



The boys of my barracks in England 1944

On June 17, 1944 my first mission was to Noyen, France. We flew in support of the ground troops. I was sitting in the tail with my twin 50 caliber guns loaded and ready when the red baron showed up. Everything was going great. The red baron never did show up but the flak from the ground troops was quite heavy and then I saw two of our planes got hit. Only eleven of the twenty men in the two planes were able to parachute out. The others went down with the plane. We had P-51 mustang escort planes to do the dog fighting for us. I soon realized that this was no longer practice – this was real war. This little boy grew up very fast.



High and White (105mm flak) Low and Black (88mm flak)

As we approached our home base the ball turret gunner, Harold Schrecongost, called on the intercom that he was stuck in the ball turret because the flak had knocked out his power. I helped the waist gunner to hand crank it up because the plane could not land with the turret in the down position.



Harold examining Ball Turret

June 19, 1944 second mission to “No ball” France. We encountered very little flak and no enemy planes. It was very overcast and all planes landed safely.

June 20, 1944 third mission was to Hamburg Germany. We carried 10 five hundred pound bombs in each plane and there were 18 planes in our group. Our target was an ammunition supply yard for the German troops. A very clear day and we saw many large fires. Our plane was hit in four different places but no serious damage. One of our planes was shot down with no survivors.

June 20, 1944 fourth mission we were sent on a special mission none of us knew where we were going or why. We did not have any bombs to drop however we did have our guns but did not need them. We felt it was just a surveillance mission of some sort. All planes returned safely.

June 21, 1944 fifth mission to Berlin Germany a nine hour round trip to drop 10 five hundred pound bombs. Many fires were started. No enemy ground fire and no planes. After I landed my jaw was swollen so I was sent for x-rays, a large abscess had formed due to the high altitude. I was grounded for one week.

June 29, 1944 I was awarded another stripe which made me a staff sergeant.

July 6, 1944 Princess Elizabeth christened plane #547 “Rose of York”. This was a big day for all of the troops. We were all in full dress uniform. Princess Elizabeth broke a bottle of champagne on the plane at 12:30 PM. Several formations of different type planes flew over as King George VI, Queen Mary, Princess Elizabeth, General Jimmy Doolittle, and many high ranking officers were all present. I was able to acquire several pictures even though we were not allowed to get out of formation to take any.



Princess Elizabeth with the King and Queen and General Doolittle

On July 9, 1944 I was awakened at 4:00 am for a briefing to drop bombs on a railroad yard in Le-Cresil, Germany. We dropped 500 pound bombs on a railroad bridge. The bridge was destroyed. I was tail gunner for a different crew on this day. Very little resistance but the plane had an electrical short in the top turret which caught on fire on the way home. We were glad to be out of enemy territory and the fire was quickly extinguished.

July 12 and 13, 1944 several of us got a two day pass and decided to go to Manchester England. A very nice town and the people were friendly to us being Americans. There were many bomb craters. It took us ten and a half hours to get back to our base because we got on the train that was heading in the opposite direction. When we did get back we were sent to the commanding officer to explain our late return. He accepted our excuse for being late so we did not have to do any K.P. or even time in jail.

July 24 and 28, 1944 we flew weather ship for all other planes that day. Our job was to fly ahead and above the formations to report the type of weather they could expect as they got near their target. There was a very heavy overcast so bombs had to be dropped

by the “Norton Bomb Sight” which was the latest in radar to find the target. Weather ship flights were not considered as part of our tour of duty, even though we were still in the battle area.

August 4, 1944 mission seven to Anklam, Germany. The target for the day was to drop bombs ahead of English troops who had been pinned down by the German troops. After bombing the German troops on the way back to our base in England we came upon some ME 109’S (German fighter planes) as we approached the coast. They did not fire at us so we did not fire at them.

August 6, 1944 flying spare today. Did not go on the mission because all 21 of the planes in the squadron were O.K. to go. I still had to get ready as though I was called.

August 8, 1944 mission #8 to Caen, France. Once again we were flying in support of the ground troops which meant we would be at low altitude around 10,000 feet instead of 30,000+ which is what we normally fly. Flak was not too heavy but very accurate. We got hit in the number one engine and oil was leaking so that engine had to be shut down. Not too long after, the number 2 engine got hit and that also had to be shut down. A third shot hit right in the Bombay area opening the Bombay doors and all of the 100 pound bombs were released prematurely so we headed toward home. We were all prepared to bail out if we were hit again but by this time we were out of enemy territory. As we approached the channel the pilot called on the intercom and asked if we were all in favor of crossing with just two engines or would we prefer to land in France if he could locate a field to land in. We all gave a thumb’s up to try crossing the channel and landing just inside the coast of England. The two men, Floyd Clites and Carl Chase, who had got shrapnel in their legs when the shell burst near the Bombay, were both doing fine after being bandaged by the waist gunner and myself. We reached the English coast and did those “White Cliffs of Dover” ever look good. We set down at the first base available. The injured

were taken to the hospital. The rest of us got on another plane and headed for Therleigh, our home base. From 4:00 am to 7:00 pm is a long time to be up, up and away.

August 9, 1944 I received my air medal for achievement while under enemy fire.

August 13, 1944 two day pass went to London and saw Westminster Abbey which had been hit by bombs, St. Paul's Cathedral, London Bridge, Tower of London, Charles Dickens house. Many of the other places were off limit to us. We watched several buzz bombs fly over each night. These buzz bombs sounded like the motor on a model airplane and as long as the motor kept running there was no danger because it would keep going until it ran out of gas. Buzz bombs were designed to put fear in the people.

August 25, 1944, mission #9 to Gelsenkirchen in Northwest Germany. We got as far as the coast of Denmark when #4 engine had to be feathered and shut down. Shortly thereafter, the #1 engine started to run unsteady so we had to drop out of formation. We dropped our bombs, 6 five hundred pounds, into the Kiel Canal where Germany had many ships tied up. After this it was like stirring up a hornets nest as the anti-aircraft guns opened fire on us. Since we were as a lame duck flying in enemy territory all guns were on us. We got many holes in the plane from shrapnel but no one got hurt. We soon got far enough from the coast that the guns couldn't reach. Just when we felt a little safer along came the ME-109's. We felt this was the end but thank the Lord he sent us some P-47's to protect us and take us back to England. After all of this we did not get credit for a completed mission because we did not go to the designated target.



Hole in wing caused by 88 mm cannon

On August 26, 1944 we had to repeat mission #9 to Gelsenkirchen Germany. This mission was to the Rhur Valley better known to us as “Happy Valley” as this is the industrial center for Adolf Hitler. We flew above 30,000 feet which is a little out of range for their anti-aircraft guns. Flak was very heavy. Our target this day was a gasoline storage area. The place was so heavily camouflaged we couldn’t see where the bombs hit, but we felt sure of some direct hits because of all the thick black smoke that came up after we dropped 6 five hundred pound bombs from 21 planes. We all received shrapnel holes in the planes but no physical damage and all planes came back.

August 27, 1944 mission #10 to Wilhelmshaven Germany. Just outside of Berlin. This was my first mission as the lead tail gunner. My responsibility was to keep tab of all 21 planes in the formation and report if any went down and how many and if any bailed out.

There were a total of ten men on each plane. I also had to report by flares of any change in the direction or any changes in our flight pattern. You see in combat there is complete radio silence between planes. All planes came back safely.



Sitting in Nose of Ship watching formation 1944

September 5, 1944, mission #11 Ludwigshaven, Germany. Plenty of flak but it was not accurate. We were over 30,000 feet and the 90 mm guns could not reach us. I flew in the tail of the lead plane in the lower group.



Our gear while flying at high elevation 1944

September 8, 1944, mission #12 to Ludwigshaven Germany. We were originally to go to Bremen Germany but just before takeoff time the weather closed in over target so we were assigned same target as yesterday.

September 14, 1944, mission #13 after all the planes were in the air on way to target the weather turned bad so the mission was scrubbed. No credit for a mission.

September 17, 1944, mission #13 to Vokel, Germany. This mission was to knock out some heavy gun emplacements. Flak was very heavy and we got a direct hit in the middle of the plane. The waist gunner, Albert Christensen got hit in the back of his leg just above the knee. And all of our oxygen lines were cut so we had to drop below 10,000 feet. The ball turret gunner and I moved Albert to the radio room where we could lay him down to Administer first aid to stop the bleeding. We got another hit and the control cables to the rudder were cut. I being in the tail already did the best I could to tie the cables together while the pilot looked for an emergency field to set down in. We came across a small field in France so we did an emergency landing. The waist gunner was taken to a field hospital and we were put on a C-46 to take us home. It was good to get back home.

On September 18, 1944 I received an oak leaf cluster to add to my air medals.

On September 25, 1944 #14 mission to Frankfurt Germany. I flew as a spare tail gunner. The pilot was Colonel Hanson, the commanding officer of the base. Flak was very light and all planes returned to the base without any damage.

September 27, 1944 #15 mission to Koln, Germany. Once again I was flying as a spare tail gunner for Lieutenant Sutherland. Our bomb load was 10 five hundred pound bombs (block busters). I was

not flying as lead tail gunner therefore I did not know what the target was. Usually 500 pound bombs were used for railroads, bridges, or some large building which had to be destroyed. The area was overcast so we dropped our bombs by using the “Norton Bomb Sight” which was the first radar used in combat. We could not see our results but much smoke came up through the clouds and we learned when we got home that direct hits were made.

September 28, 1944, mission #16 to Magdeburg, Germany. This was my regular crew I had trained with back in the United States, all except the engineer who was sick. At the briefing we were always reminded that some of us would not come back alive. This day was going to be a rough one for us all. Our bomb load was 10-five hundred pound bombs. Over the target each plane must fly on a straight and level course or the bombs would not eject from the Bombay properly. We all knew this from previous missions but when we are told that in the briefing it emphasized the danger we were heading into. Everything went well until we were on the bomb run at 30,000 feet when our plane got hit in the #1 engine. The engine had to be shut down to prevent fire. Not long after that, #2 engine began to leak oil so it too had to be shut down. We made it over the target, dropped our bombs and had to drop out of formation because with only two engines running we couldn't keep up. When we crossed the Rhine River which was very heavily fortified, we got hit in the #3 engine. In such a heavy plane and all the way out on the outside the pilot was not able to fly because the good engine had to be on the low side and there was danger that the plane was going to slip and go into a tail spin. The pilot called on the intercom telling us we were going to crash in the next field he came to so we were all supposed to get into the crash position in the radio room. We were all in our position when the pilot called again and told us we had better “hit the silk” because he couldn't find a field and we were losing altitude fast. The pilot told us we were in enemy territory so we should all hide when we got on the ground. I was the second one to jump, after clearing the plane I pulled my rip cord and my chute opened just like the instructor in flight school said it

would. The third man to jump passed me like he was in a hurry to get to the ground but his chute was not open at this time. I looked down to see where I was going to land and saw I had three choices, a thatched barn roof, high power electric wires, or trees. I didn't have much time to decide as it looked as though they were all coming up to meet me fast. I grabbed the strings of my chute directing away from the barn and the power lines. About that time I was crashing through the trees. I kept my feet together and my hands above my head. When the crashing stopped I was dangling about 8 feet off the ground. Now what a predicament, how do I get my parachute harness disconnected with all my weight pulling against me? That part was not in the rule book. I wiggled, squirmed, pulled, and tugged and finally I found myself on the ground surrounded by about 50 people standing over me with axes, clubs, pitchforks, shovels, and any other thing they had just to make sure I was going to stay on my back on the ground until they were sure about who I was. I couldn't understand Belgium and it was clear that they couldn't understand English. I held my hands over my head as a sign of surrender, also showed my I.D. dog tag which was around my neck, but nothing seemed to please any of them and they kept me pinned to the ground with whatever weapon they had. I didn't know the Lord at this time so I had no thoughts about praying, I think I was too scared to pray anyway. Finally, a girl about 14 years old came through the crowd. In English she asked for my dog tags which I gladly gave her. After looking at them she asked me in English what my name was. I told her Vernon T. Blucher and her next question was what my serial number was. I without hesitation told her #33558663.



My dog tags

The next question was where did I live. I told her Baltimore, Maryland. She looked puzzled for a while then she asked what state was north of Baltimore so since this was serious business, I told her Pennsylvania. She thought for a while then asked me what the capital of Maryland was and I told her Annapolis. She paused and I held my breath as I saw these pitchforks, shovels, clubs, etc. the girl spoke in Belgium which I could not understand. Things really did a turn about as the weapons all disappeared and I was picked up off the ground and all kinds of joy and hurrahs broke out. I was hugged and kissed so many times I couldn't begin to count. I didn't know what to expect next but soon the bottles of champagne and wine appeared. The water in Belgium is not fit to drink so it's all wine. I found out by my interpreter that just two days before, the very barn I was aiming for was used as the SS storm troopers quarters and they never took prisoners. They usually would use the parachuters for target practice while in the air. The crowd then took me to a nearby farmhouse where all kinds of food, fruit and drink was made ready. I couldn't understand why all the fanfare over me until I learned how glad they were that the Americans had arrived and had pushed the Germans out of their town after occupying it several years. The longer I stayed, the larger the crowd got and the more hugs and kisses I got. The crowd consisted of senior citizens too old to carry a gun and children too young to shoot a gun. Oh, lest I forget, just the night before the Germans had dropped troops dressed in U.S. uniforms behind the U.S. from lines which had ran them out two days before. I could hear the shells bursting in the distance, that's how close I was to enemy territory. After the rivalry died down a bit I told them there were nine others on the plane and did anyone know where any of them were. I felt like the pied piper, everybody went with me to find them. We met a soldier in a jeep from the Belgium Secret Service who told us he found six of them and two of them were injured. He directed us to where they could be found and sure enough there was a large crowd with them. The engineer had a broken ankle when he landed on a steep hillside. The other was injured when his parachute was delayed in opening. I

figure it opened less than 100 feet above the ground and when it did open he was upside down which caused him to hit head first causing him to have a crushed skull. He was unconscious lying on a sofa with people trying to awaken him by pouring wine down his throat. I told them that would kill him and he needed a hospital immediately or he would die. Some of the young children were told something in their language and immediately the room was empty of kids. Within five to ten minutes in comes a medic from a Royal Canadian Air Force Field Hospital and both men were off for better care. The man with the injured head was Harold Schrecongost from my own crew from the states. I did have contact with him until just a few years ago. He had recovered although he had a steel plate in the back of his skull from the injury. After the injured were taken care of the other four and myself had to decide what to do. The Belgium people decided for us and we were each one given to a different family for a night's lodging. The next morning we all met at a designated place to head back to our base. We were only allowed forty-eight hours to return before A.W.O.L. action was filed.

October 9, 1944 mission #17 Schweinfurt, Germany. Flak was moderate and not very accurate. All planes returned to our base after dropping 10 fifty pound bombs from each plane. It took us three hours to get on the ground after returning because the fog was so thick, and since radar was not perfected yet, as long as we had fuel we circled until a hole opened up for us.

October 14, 1944 mission #18 Koln, Germany. Everything was going a O.K. until we got over the target which was a munitions factory. On the bomb run when all planes fly as close together as possible to make a better concentration, two of our planes collided in midair. Both planes crashed, most of the parachutes opened but the Germans did not take air force prisoners. None of the twenty men were ever heard from again. Two of the men were in the same hut that I was in. A sad day for all of us. Also to make matters worse, as the planes were circling the field to land, two more planes

hit together and crashed killing all 10 crew members on each plane. The wreckage was scattered all over the air base including the bodies.

October 19, 1944 I received my third Oak Leaf Cluster.

October 28, 1944 one of our P-47 escort planes crashed on the field just missing a house. The tail of the plane was about 300 feet from the engine which was about 5 feet in the ground. The pilot did not survive.

October 29, 1944, #19 mission to Munster, Germany. The mission for the day was a gas and oil storage depot. Flak was fairly heavy, but below us. For some reason they couldn't get our altitude in their sight as we were only flying at 18,000 feet. The temperature was -46°F. Since we had electric suits on, and as long as our electric system was working, we did not mind the cold, even though our breath would freeze on our oxygen masks. There was no such thing as a pressurized plane back then. The target was destroyed and all planes returned to base safely.



How we looked in our high altitude gear

November 5, 1944, Mission #20 to Frankfurt, Germany. An eight hour and twenty minute round trip. Our target was a marshalling yard full of all kind of equipment. A clear day for flying and many direct hits sent all sorts of exploding material flying into the air. As the formation left the target, much flak was shot back at us. Not too accurate, although we received a large hole in the right wing. The shell did not explode and did not hit any vital parts, but just went right through the wing, and so did little damage. As we approached the English Channel, the weather closed in on us. The entire formation of twenty one planes had to drop down under the storm to about 400 feet over the channel. Was that ever a rough ride with the storm on top and wind and waves under us. It was so rough some of the men got air sick which is as bad as sea sick. We were surely glad to get on the ground.

November 8, 1944 mission #21 to Merseberg, Germany. A nine hour round trip, a very soupy day weather wise. We flew at 23,000 feet with a Bombay loaded with chaff, which was used to fowl up the German's communication so they could not get an accurate aim at us through the clouds over the target. The U.S. planes were now equipped with a bomb site, which could hone in on a target through the clouds. The flak was very heavy but not so accurate as they could not see us through the clouds. Just when we felt secure with the day along comes a flash through the formation and one plane went down. Soon over the intercom came the message of enemy planes coming at us from the direction of the sun. All guns were pointed toward the sun and sure enough a single plane was in sight. Can you imagine ten 50 caliber machine guns each firing from twenty-one planes what chance one lone plane would have? Needless to say, he never flew anymore planes, nor did we see any more that day, but it sure woke us all up to realize the war was still for real. When we got back to base and were interrogated, we were told the plane we shot down was a Mesherschmidt 262, which was a jet. This too was the first jets used in combat. As of yet the U.S. had not had

any jets in combat, we used p-47's, p-51's, or p-38's, which were the best at that time.

November 9, 1944, mission #22 to Metz, France. This was an eight hour trip in support of the U.S. ground troops. It seems they were pinned down and so we were happy to help them out. Our bomb load was each plane was loaded with one hundred 100 pound bombs which was for personnel destruction. Since we did not know where the enemy was hiding and we did not want to drop on our own troops, our ground troops fired anti-aircraft shells not at us, but in the direction where the enemy was hiding in a wooded area. Our bombs just about flattened the trees and the U.S. troops could move forward. Enemy fire was not very accurate even though we were only about 10,000 feet.



Flak all around us while flying over enemy territory 1944

November 9, 1944 to November 30, 1944, the whole crew was given a rest furlough and sent to South Port, England for the week to do what ever we wanted to for some rest. That was very good for us all.

December 1, 1944, mission #23 to Oberlahnstein, Germany. A seven and one half hour trip with very bad weather, especially over the target, which was a railroad yard. We could not tell the results of the bomb damage. Flak was very light and no fighters were seen.

December 12, 1944, mission #24 to Merseberg, Germany. A nine hour and forty minute trip. Each plane was loaded with 10 five hundred pound bombs known as block-busters as one of them could level a city block. Flak was very heavy but not accurate at 32,000 feet. No planes were damaged. When we got back to home base the weather was so bad after circling the field several times we were sent to another field to set the plane down and we were bussed to our own base.

December 15, 1944, mission #25 to Neuenhaus, Germany. A five hour flight just across the border. Our plane had engine trouble and we had to shut it down, this caused us some difficulty in leading the formation so we had to drop out as it would not be fair to the rest of the planes to make them slow down and make each one a better target for flak or enemy fighters. After we dropped out we kind of zigzagged in the sky so the flak guns couldn't get a good aim on us. We lost some altitude looking for a good target to unload our 500 pound bombs on and what should appear on the horizon but a railroad bridge over a river. Better still, a train was on the bridge – what a bonus for the day. We put the train in the river and headed for home. A sharp eye was kept on lookout for surely a fighter must be on its way, but none came and we limped back to our base just minutes before the rest of the planes all came back.

December 18, 1944, I received another Oak Leaf Cluster for my air medal.

December 24, 1944, mission #26 to Giessen, Germany. A beautiful day not a cloud in the sky, flying at 32,000 feet we could see our target very clear. The target was an air base for German

fighter planes. Many were destroyed and the flak was all below us. All planes returned safely to our home base but the fog had completely closed in the base, so we were diverted to another base and trucked back to our base.



The crew's transport to and from planes

January 3, 1945, mission #27 to Hermulheim, which was just outside of Koln, Germany. Once again we were carrying 10 five hundred pound bombs to flatten some more buildings. We were flying at 32,000 feet but because of a low cloud ceiling we could not see the target so we dropped our bombs using the Norton Bomb Sight, which operated by radar. Our #3 engine lost control and had to be feathered to keep it from running away, causing it to fall off. We all made it safely back to our base.

January 5, 1945, mission #28 to Niedermendig, Germany, which was just outside of Koblenz, Germany. This time we were loaded with 50 one hundred pound bombs, as once again we were flying in support of the English troops. Our target was a heavy guarded air field depot. All went well, no flak, no fighter planes and good weather. Wouldn't you know it, with everything going so well something had to go wrong. Sure enough, as we got over the target, the Bombay doors would not open not even with the hand crank.

The radio operator finally determined that the reason for this problem was that one of the bombs had come loose in the rack and had fallen against the Bombay door, keeping the door from being opened. We couldn't release them no matter what we did so the only thing we could do was take them back home. We even tried over the English Channel, but no go, so we headed for home. This was a dangerous thing to do, land with a full load of bombs on board. One sudden jolt or heavy bump as the plane touched the runway could release all or part of the bombs and that would have been the end for all of us, as we would have been blown to pieces. Thank the Lord we landed safely.

January 7, 1945, thirtieth mission, my last before returning to the states for reassignment. This was a seven hour trip to Urkirchen, Germany to remove some marshalling yards at a railroad where much equipment and personnel were assembled. Much damage was done and no opposition from the ground. All planes landed safely back home.



Peel off over field after returning from mission

January 13, 1945, I received my 5th and final Oak Leaf for a job well done. I was asked to sign up for another tour of duty. I was promised a month's furlough and another stripe to my uniform making me a master sergeant, but I turned both offers down.



Four of the five oak leaf clusters received

My flying days were over, now I had to wait for orders to return to the good ole U.S. of A. I boarded a liberty ship in the harbor at Liverpool, England on February 1, 1945. For the next fourteen days all I saw was water all around me. Some days I was too sick to even care as this small ship was tossed around like a bottle in this big ocean. Finally, the Statue of Liberty came into sight and we were home so we thought. We lay at anchor for two days, waiting to get orders to dock. Finally we docked and were unloaded to a bus, taken to Grand Central Station, loaded on a train, headed to Camden, New Jersey where I was interrogated about my tour of duty. Once again I was propositioned for another tour of duty. I refused and was given a twenty one day furlough. I immediately boarded a train for Baltimore, caught a bus and headed for home. I was free for the next twenty one days so I wanted to make up for lost time and see what I had missed in those two years. Sunday came and as it was my custom to go to church, although I was not yet a born again believer. As I was about to leave the Sunday School building, who should walk in but that red haired girl with brown eyes I had met on my last furlough before going overseas. She immediately

caught my attention and we just made passing comments, after all she was taken already by a handsome M.P. soldier. Well, the rest of the story is history, but I will say the next 67 years has been the best years of my life as I spend each day with that red head. Her name by now you must know is Addie. The Lord has done great things for us.



Our Wedding Day at Chanute Field, Illinois July 26, 1945

Glossary

Ball turret – hangs under the airplane when in the air and holds two fifty caliber machine guns. It must be wound up before landing.

Buzz bomb – used by Hitler on England. Torpedo like and produced a buzz like sound, and exploded on contact or when motor ran out.

Chaff – shredded aluminum foil used to disturb radio signals

“D” Day – When USA went to war in France against Germany.

Dog fighting – two fighter planes trying to shoot each other down

Double time – running in formation

Electric suits – a wired flying suit much like a heating pad

Feather – change the position of the propeller to decrease the resistance on the plane.

Flak – anti-aircraft fire

Marshalling yard – an area on the base where all materials are stored. A supply house.

ME 109 – German Messerschmidt fighting plane

P-47 – American fighter

Side tracked – parking a train on an off line to allow other trains to pass

Single time – marching in formation