

## **Richard J. Kennedy's Stories**

**Compiled by permission for posting at website of  
306<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group Historical Association (306<sup>th</sup> BGHA)  
[www.306bg.us](http://www.306bg.us)**

Richard J. Kennedy's entry in the National Archives' WWII Enlistment Index shows that he was born in the state of New York in 1921. He was a single (without dependents) resident of New York County, NY with a high school education and civilian occupation of 'Guards and watchmen, except crossing watchmen' when he voluntarily enlisted in the Army at New York City on 3 September 1942. After his stateside training, he served abroad in the US Army Air Corps, assigned to the 306<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group (one of the Bomb Groups of the US 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force) at Thurleigh, England (near Bedford). Thurleigh was a former base of England's Royal Air Force, known during WWII as "Station 111" of the US Army Air Corps. Kennedy was tail gunner on the crew of John J. O'Brien, in the 423<sup>rd</sup> Bomb Squadron, one of four flight squadrons of the 306<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group. The crew reached Thurleigh on 12 April 1944.

Other Richard J. Kennedy items posted at the website of the 306<sup>th</sup> BGHA, include:

- The 14-page Correspondence File for Kennedy, whose correspondence with the 306<sup>th</sup> BGHA founding secretary, Russell Strong began in February 1997;
- Two crew photos of the John O'Brien crew, with the first including their ground crew;
- Mission Reports of missions in which Kennedy flew;
- Special Orders in which Kennedy was named.
- Video of the oral history interview of Kennedy conducted on 2 March 2018 by Martin Madert, of the Witness to War Foundation.

Names mentioned in Dick's stories include the below-named crew members in these two crew photos. **Crew photos' names are all listed from left to right:**



**Above: Obrien\_John\_1 crew photo with B-17, 'The Dingleberry Kids' #42-97505 (on which they flew 22 missions); photo taken on completion of the plane's 50<sup>th</sup> mission, 2 July 1944:**

- Front row: Jacob Quintis, Copilot; Richard Raymond, Navigator; John J O'Brien, Pilot; William Ryan, Bombardier;

- Middle row: Clyde Romine, waist gunner; Louis Rohrer, waist gunner; Richard Kennedy, tail gunner; John Lewis, ball turret gunner; Melvin Shipp, flight engineer; Craig Gadd, radio operator;

- Back row [ground crew]: George Lorendo; Roy Secker; Sigyr Gustafson, crew chief; Leslie Gedney. [Note: Kennedy on 24 Feb 1997, wrote of this photo: "We wanted the ground crew in the photo because we thought so highly of them. Never did we have to abort because of mechanical malfunction and anything we requested of them was always well taken care of."]

In Kennedy's 24 Feb 1997 letter that accompanied **Obrien\_John\_1 crew photo** he said re the B-17 Serial number 42-97505, that they then-called her 'Bitter Mabel' – That name "was never painted on any plane, but every plane we flew in, we called 'Bitter Mabel.' It was after OB

[O'Brien] finished his tour, and Jake Quintis became our pilot that the [name] 'Dingleberry Kids' was painted on the plane. As Jake explained, that was not the name of the plane but a label for those that flew in it. Come to think of it, we were a collection of characters!!!” [Kennedy's letter of 24 Feb 1997 went on to explain the story of how the name 'Bitter Mabel' came about, during their Phase Training at Pyote Army Air Field in West Texas. To read the 'Bitter Mabel' story in his 24 Feb 1997 letter, use “Search Options” (from the home-page at [www.306bg.us](http://www.306bg.us); search on his last and first names); at the resulting list of Search Results, a direct link takes one to his Correspondence File.

**Below: Obrien\_John\_2 crew photo:**



Front row: William Ryan, Bombardier; John J O'Brien, Pilot; Richard Raymond, Navigator; Jacob Quintis, Copilot;  
Back row: Craig Gadd, radio operator; John Lewis, ball turret gunner; Louis Rohrer, waist gunner; Richard Kennedy, tail gunner; Melvin Shipp [though this photo's label mistakenly listed him as "cc" or crew chief, Shipp was the crew's flight engineer]; Clyde Romine, waist gunner.

## **My Time in Service Began in 1942**

It all started at 29 Whitehall Street in lower Manhattan, NYC. This was where I went to enlist in the Army in 1942. This was the first time I felt I was part of what was like a cattle drive (not the last). Myself and about 100 other volunteers were ordered to strip to our underwear and we were “herded” from one station to another. At each station, we were poked and prodded to determine our physical condition. We carried our clothing in a plastic bag and our record, which seemed to grow at each station.

Around noon time we were ordered to get dressed and again we were “herded” down to a ferry boat that took us across the bay to Governors Island, an Army Base. Here we were “herded” to the Mess Hall, where we had a very good meal. After eating we were told we could relax; “Smoke if you got ‘em” and given instructions on how to field strip the butt.

Then we were “herded” back to the ferry and back to 29 Whitehall Street where we were individually questioned by a psychiatrist. He must have decided I was sane because I was sworn into the Army of the United States I was given my record that I had to deliver to my Draft Board that I would be informed when and where to report for duty by mail.

For the life of me, I cannot remember where I reported to, but I was sent to Camp Yaphank on Long Island, and for a week we went from test to test every day. I had requested to be assigned to the Infantry because I felt that my experience in the 8<sup>th</sup> Regiment, New York State Guard, would give me “a leg up” at the mechanical tests and my job in civilian life (pneumatic tube technician and apprentice electrician) placed me in an Ordnance Company.

### **Basic Training and on to School in the GM factory in Lansing, Michigan**

I was shipped to Grenier Field, New Hampshire [near Manchester, NH] for Basic Training. Because of my time in the NY Guard I was appointed as a platoon leader but without the pay. Once again, my memory fails me for I’m unable to remember how long we remained at Grenier Field, before we were shipped to an Ordnance Battalion stationed out in the boonies at Fort Dix in New Jersey.

Here I was assigned to weapons maintenance and sent to school to learn all there was to know about the 50-caliber machine gun and the 20-mm cannon. This was Prime Time duty. The school was conducted by General Motors, who were manufacturing the above weapons. I was quartered on the campus of Michigan College and was bussed into the GM factory in Lansing.

We not only learned all there was to know about these weapons, but we were taught how to teach others how to maintain them. We graduated on October 28, 1942 and returned to our Unit at Fort Dix but found that the unit was packing for a move to Florida.

Now I learned new skills: Driving vehicles onto flat rail road cars and chaining and chocking them so they were safe to travel. This proved to be dirty hard work

## **Florida**

It took us five days to get to Florida. Every so often the train was shunted into a siding and we had to check all the chocking and tie downs. On reaching the Orlando Army Air Base, it was great to be assigned to barracks and able to luxuriate in a shower. In short order I was teaching small arms maintenance to many different classes.

After a few weeks, I was assigned to a detail that traveled to Leesburg [Florida] and the Lt. in charge used the carrot on a stick to motivate us. When he led the convoy about seven miles north of Leesburg he pulled the convoy to the side of the road and when we were all assembled he pointed to the jungle-like growth and explained what we were there to do. He showed us marked locations where we had to clear out the vegetation and erect tents where we would be sleeping. It's remarkable what motivation can move G.I.s to work hard. He said that if we cleared a certain amount of vegetation in a given amount of time the detail could go to Daytona Beach on the weekend. Needless to say, all the work was accomplished, the Lt. was happy, and the grunts were happy.

When enough spaces were cleared, and tents erected the rest of the company moved up from Orlando.

## **On Bullies**

I was the first-born child in my family and I'm sure I led a sheltered life. As I grew older I remember my mother telling me that it wasn't nice to hit anyone, so I'm sure I wasn't aggressive. However, I know that I was picked on. When I was seven or eight I spent a summer with my father's parents and I remember my grandfather telling me that if anyone tries to bully you, hit him on the nose. Time passed, and a certain individual started harassing me till the day I punched him on the nose. SURPRISE! It went no further, and we became good friends.

In service for three years and twenty-six days I had only three fights. The first one was the night we graduated from the gunnery school. For the three months of the school we were restricted to the post. When the graduation ceremony was over they gave us a pass off post with the reminder that we would be shipping out the next day on leave. I returned about eleven P.M. and hit the sack. About one A.M. I was aroused by someone yelling 'Where's my bag, I want my bag.' This went on for a long period of time until I had enough, and I yelled "Go to bed and get your bag in the morning". There was silence and I settled down. My bunk was situated with the head to the center of the barrack and suddenly, a voice said, "Did you say that?" When I said, "I did." I saw a raised fist and I was able to roll out of the way as the fist buried itself in my pillow. I told him, "Outside." I headed down the stairs and outside. As I turned to face him he rushed at me and tried to throw his arms around my chest, but I was able to side step him and I was able to slam him down on the ground and I straddled him and with my left hand I grabbed his shirt and drew my right arm back to hit him in the face. Instead I said I said, "I can't hit you, you're drunk." He looked up at me and said, "Well naturally." I almost laughed as I got up and went back to bed. The next morning, he came and apologized to me and said, "I deserved it and I thank you for not smashing my face in."

The second encounter was a lot more serious. I was on a detail that had been sent to a location about seven miles north of Leesburg, Florida, to prepare a site for the entire unit to move into. Our only contact with the company was the mailman. On one of his visits he told us about a new man in the company. He told us that the fellow went out on pass and that he got drunk. He got into a fight and that he knocked the fellow to the ground and jumped on top of him and bit off his ear. When asked why he did that, his reply was "When I been in a fight I want the other feller to know he been in a fight and he lost."

As luck would have it, when the company moved up from Orlando this guy was assigned to the tent I was assigned to. This man was belligerent all the time. He had a scar from his right temple running down his cheek to his jaw and then curved up into his lower lip. He seemed quite proud that his girlfriend did it to him with a broken Coke bottle. When asked what he did to her his reply was that he "like to kill her." He bullied everyone he worked with, including the Sgt. in charge of the detail.

Eventually he got around to me, and when it happened, it was fast. I knew I had to keep out of his bear hug so when he did rush I stepped to my left, grabbed his wrist and as I spun around, bent over and pulled on his arm. He sailed over me and slammed onto the ground and before he could move I put a leg lock on him and told him all I had to do was fall forward and his leg would break in several places. I told him to turn his face to the left. Quite meekly he asked why, and I told him I was going to kick his teeth out. He was quiet and then asked why? I replied "When I've been in a fight I want the other fellow to know he was in a fight and lost." He thought this over and said, "You're an all right guy and we can be friends." I released him, and he made no further advance, but I did not trust him and when he got a pass to town I would stay awake until he came back, usually drunk. My fear was that he would come in and see me asleep in the sack and he would take an axe or a pick axe to get revenge. I knew he was capable of this because when I had a minor disagreement with our Sgt, he later asked me if I wanted, he would kill the Sgt. and bury him in the bomb dump. I thanked him but told him if I wanted the Sgt. dead I would do it myself. Before I transferred out of the unit this individual was court martialed, found guilty and sent to Leavenworth Military prison for assault and rape. It was a good riddance.

### **Leesburg, Florida**

An Engineer company had erected a cinder block building holding latrines and showers. The field they excavated for the drainage field was a glaring white. When the captain saw this, he decided to camouflage by planting shrubbery. I was assigned eight men and told to dig up shrubs and to plant them all over the drainage field. For about a month we did this and as fast as we planted they died. So that detail was cancelled.

Not long after, in morning roll call I was told to report to Battalion Headquarters. I asked the 1st Sgt. what it was for. He told me to go and find out. To my delight I found: The Town of Leesburg had a beautiful swimming pool which was closed because they were unable to get certified lifeguards. When the Military asked for permission to use the pool to teach downed

pilots in water how to remain afloat, I think the Town Fathers saw opportunity staring them in the face. They reached the agreement as follows: the officers would be taught three days a week and the lifeguard/instructors would keep the pool open for the public the rest of the week.

It's a small world. The other instructor was Bob Rushoni who I swam with in the Aquacade – Peaches & Cream! My routine changed, I no longer had to stand Morning Roll Call and so I slept later. When I went to the kitchen the cooks would fix me whatever I wanted, and they packed a box for my noon meal. When I returned at the end of the day they would fix something for me, I was now eating COOK'S FOOD.

Teaching the officers Monday, Wednesday, & Friday, from 9:00 to noon turned out to be a lot of fun for the officers and instructors. We taught them how to use articles of clothing to keep them afloat in the event they had to ditch.

The rest of the week we had children and teenagers using the pool. Instead of formal swimming lessons we made up a game called SHARK. One of us would be the shark and the tots had to catch him. This was played in the shallow end of the pool and the shark would porpoise around and in the excitement the tots forgot their fear of the water and would start to chase after the shark. The lifeguard watched their efforts and then after the game we were able to make corrections. I think we taught half of the tots of Leesburg how to swim well.

One day when Bob was the shark I noticed quite a few adults outside the fence watching. I asked if I could help them and their reply was they were checking out Dick and Bob. It seems the tots were talking at home about Dick said this and Bob said that, and they came down to check us out.

I introduced myself and explained that by overcoming the fear of a non-swimmer the tots were learning faster. One of the parents invited Bob and myself to their home for dinner. It was a real treat. After that I think the tots were competing to have the sharks in their home. I made some wonderful friends – adults, teenagers, and tots.

### **From Florida to California**

All good things must come to an end. The Battalion had to send a cadre to California to form a new ordinance battalion and I was one of about 100 that was selected. It was a good chance for rapid promotion. The move was by train but this time we were in Pullmans and it was an enjoyable seven-day trip.

When we arrived at the Santa Maria Army Air Base I heard they were looking for volunteers to attend Aerial Gunnery School and since I wanted to fly I put in my application and was transferred to a holding company until the next class was scheduled.

On the same day I arrived at the holding company a Master Sergeant with 35 years of experience arrived to be discharged because of age. I don't know what powers of persuasion he used but he wrangled a jeep and a driver and class-A passes for him and driver. Since I hadn't been assigned

any duty I got the job. Oh, happy day!! The Sarge and I spent most of the time off Post and almost daily visits to Pismo Beach for swimming and surfing on GI mattress covers filled with air. Ah, but all good things must come to an end, as I said earlier.

My order to report to gunnery school came through and I said my goodbyes to Master Sergeant Brown and thanked him for my vacation from the Army.

### **On to Aerial Gunnery Training**

When I arrived at Nellis Army Air Field [in southern Nevada] in early September 1943 I had to take many tests to determine my physical ability to fly at high altitudes and this was accomplished by placing ten men and an instructor into a large tank and when you were all seated they closed a door that that looked like the door to a bank vault. The instructor fitted each of us with an oxygen mask while the air was being evacuated from the tank. When we reached the equivalent of 10,000 feet, we had to start breathing oxygen. The instructor handed me a clipboard with a blank sheet of paper and I was told to take off my oxygen mask and to start writing my name and serial number and keep doing this until he told me to stop. As I was doing this he kept asking me how I felt. Each time he asked me my answer was "I feel fine". We were now at the equivalent of 30,000 feet of altitude and suddenly the instructor placed the oxygen mask on me.as he removed the clipboard on which I had been writing.

I was then asked, "Do you think that you did a good job of writing?" My answer was that I felt that my writing was clear and legible. When he handed me the paper I was amazed at what I saw. My handwriting started out fine but as it progressed down the page It started to get larger until near the last it became not legible. The instructor informed me that I had been without oxygen for three minutes. This really brought home the fact of how dangerous it could be, if hits were made on the oxygen system and why there were oxygen checks made so often when you were flying at altitude.

Graduation brought a promotion to Sergeant and two weeks leave. Of schooling that I received, it was excellent in all phases, shooting at moving targets on the ground and in the air. I liked shooting a simulated gun at photos of attacking planes on a giant curved screen. The "bullets" were pulses of light and when you have finished your turn they gave your score of the number of "hits" you made. When my leave was over, I had orders to report to the Replacement Center outside of Salt Lake City. I have no memory of how long I was there, but I do remember that I didn't like it and I was happy when I received my order to report to Pyote Army Air Base situated in West Texas.

### **Pyote Army Air Base, in West Texas, for Phase Training**

The base was also called the Rattle Snake Base because of the large numbers of rattlers living there. Another oddity was that the barracks were all one story high and that they had cables over the roofs and anchored into the ground. When the wind blew, you could stand in mud and have sand blow into your eyes. This was where I was to receive my three months Phase Training with



the crew that I would go into combat with. However, things oft times do not go as planned. I was on the post less than a week and I was in the Post Office to send a Bond home that I had purchased. I was standing in line to the window when an Officer noticed the address on my envelope and asked me if I was from the Bronx. When I said I was, he said he was also from the Bronx and we had a ten-minute talk about our respective neighborhoods. He lived in the East Bronx while I lived in the west. Close enough for government to have a nice conversation before we parted.

That night a sergeant came into my barrack and called my name. He said that I had been assigned to the crew that he was on and that the pilot would like to talk with me. When we walked into the BOQ and the sergeant went to introduce me, the officer laughed and said we already knew each other. He was the officer that I had the conversation with, in the Post Office.

He explained to me that his crew was just starting their third month of training and if I agreed to join his crew I would receive only one month of phase training. I felt the signs were good and I agreed to join his crew. Sgt. Melvin Shipp and several members of the crew helped me move my belongings to their barrack. I joined Sgts Melvin H. Shipp, engineer; Craig Gadd, radio; John Lewis, ball turret; Clyde Romine, left waist; and Louis Roher, right waist. The officers I had met when I went to see the pilot were: J.J. O'Brien pilot; Jacob Quintis, copilot; Richard Raymond, navigator; and William Ryan, bombardier.

The month or so in Phase Training was wrong in intensity and very eventful. When we finished phase training we had two weeks leave at home. On that leave the pilot got married and I went to the wedding and met Jane, his new wife. The pilot and I, at the end of leave, traveled back to Pyote together.

Our engineer, Melvin Shipp, was a very naive person from Texas and I had a lot of fun poking fun at him. I never saw him wearing any footwear but cowboy boots and since he was from Texas I guess it was okay, no one ever seemed to bother him about them.

One day in the ready room, on the bulletin there were samples of propaganda that was used and being dropped on Germany and Japan. The one for Japan was in the shape of a maple leaf with Japanese printing on it. As we were at looking at the display, he said I wonder what it says. I looked at it and told him I would translate it for him. I started off by telling him it stated greetings to people of Japan, then I hemmed and hawed as if I knew what I was talking about. Shipp fell for it, and I left it at that. What I didn't know was that there was a Sgt. who had been in the Philippines when war was declared. He heard what I had been saying and he fell for it too. He asked what crew I was on and I told him JJ O'Brien's. I asked why, and he said the whole crew would be pulled from shipping and would be sent to the South Pacific because they were in need of translators. I finally convinced him that I was just kidding our engineer and I had no knowledge of Japanese. He told me that the authorities were desperate to obtain translators! My explanation saved us from a trip to the South Pacific.

## **On Our Way to England**

We left Pyote and traveled by train to Kearney, Nebraska, arriving there February 26, 1944, to be outfitted for overseas deployment. We were outfitted with heavy fleece-lined leather suits and boots that were issued along with underwear socks and the prize of every flyer -- our leather A-2 jackets. Wow! That meant they recognized us as real airmen. We were all outfitted.

They gave us a brand-new B-17 once again. The best laid plans went astray the night the group was to leave for Europe. We were on the runway when the mother B-17 ran into our left wing. We were detached from the group. The other crew was immediately sent to a port of embarkation to go by boat.

We had to wait for the wing to be repaired before we got to leave on March 19, 1944. We finally took off from Kearney to Grenier Field [near Manchester] New Hampshire, on the way to Goose Bay, Labrador.

We spent a day or two at Grenier Field, NH, and then we flew to Goose Bay, Labrador where we spent a night. The next morning we flew to Meeks Field at Keflavic, Iceland. We were supposed to leave the next day but a minor fire in one of the engines kept us there for several days for repairs. We were briefed that the Germans had a homing device very similar to our own homing signal.

We flew out of Iceland into severe clouds. The navigator was unable to get a fix. It wasn't until we reached a point where the clouds cleared, and he was able to get a reading, that he notified us that we had been following the German signal and that we were too far north to be able to fly into England.

We didn't have enough fuel to fly into Prestwick [airfield in Glasgow, Scotland, UK], so the navigator plotted a course to the nearest airfield which was Stornoway, Scotland [in far northwestern Scotland]. We spent the night there and enjoyed the evening at the RAF sergeants club in our real castle and we had a real good time after dinner. We were seated in the great room. They treated us each with a glass of wine. When we found out that a glass cost only five cents US each of us took a turn buying drinks for the house. Believe me there were a lot of tipsy RAF sergeants by the time we called it a night. The next day we finally arrived at Prestwick, where we had to surrender our nice new B-17.

## **To the Wash for a Refresher Gunnery Course**

We were shipped off to Snettersham, England [in the county of Norfolk] on the Wash [a large square-mouthed estuary on England's east coast] for a refresher Gunnery Course. On the way there we were seated in the train. I took out an orange and started to peel it. I noticed dead silence in the car and I suddenly realized that the civilians in the car were all looking at the orange. I finished peeling the orange, broke it into small pieces, and gave them each a piece. An elderly woman in the car told me that she had not seen an orange in five years. It brought home to me what the Brits had been going through.

The gunnery school was very intense with a lot of firing at moving targets on the ground and also in the air. It was a real good refresher course.

### **Thurleigh, near Bedford**

When we finished gunnery school we were sent to our permanent Station 111, Thurleigh and assigned to the 306th bomb group 423rd bomb squadron. (The 423<sup>rd</sup> Bomb Squadron Combat Diary on 13 April 1944 note the arrival of the crew.)

The officers and the radio operator started flying combat missions with experienced crews to learn the operating methods used in the ETO.

On **27 April** we flew our first mission as a full crew to Nancy, France. Going into the bomb run we ran into some very accurate flak that knocked out two B-17s, one burst into flames and I could see the crew bailing out; the other went down but I could not see anyone bail out.

On **29 April**, I flew my second mission to Berlin. Flak wasn't too bad going in but coming out I felt the sudden rush of heat on my right side, looked out the window, and saw flames flowing past us. My immediate thought was to grab my shoes and get ready to bail out, when I suddenly realized it was the plane slightly ahead of us slightly higher that had been hit. As the plane slid off to the left and down I could see no one bail out. A piece came in from the left and tore a hole in my heater suit. This caused my heated suit and boots to short out and I ended up with frostbite on the sole of my left foot. We received a lot of damage to the left wing and it caused a loss of hydraulic fluid so when we landed we had no brakes. The pilot knew we wouldn't be able to stop before we ran off the end of the runway. So as soon as we slowed enough, the pilot ran off the side of the runway into the grass, to slow us down. It worked, and we stopped just short of the end of the runway. When we got out of the plane and were collecting our equipment about 12 feet of the right wing creaked and groaned and slowly drooped down onto the ground. Later inspection showed that we flew back from Berlin with only 1 inch of the main wing spar intact, praise Boeing!

### **Tale About a Poker Game and an Irate Gunner**

After payday, games of chance were to be found, in furnace rooms, day rooms, barracks, and many odd places on the base. That is a given! During the evening, the CQ would appear and announce the crews that were on Operations by announcing the pilots name, announce the time of breakfast, and briefing. There was no rule, but the crews that were not on "Ops" would go to the club or make themselves scarce so the crews that were to fly could shave and get some sleep before being awakened at an ungodly hour. Now the stage is set!! Action! Around 8:30 P.M. the CQ entered the barrack and announced, "JJ O'Brien's crew on Ops; breakfast at 3:30; briefing at 4:30." This was usually that time when the crews not on Ops would go elsewhere so the crew(s) flying could shave and get into bed and get some sleep before being awakened at an ungodly hour.

However, there was a poker game in the center of the barrack and when the crew that was to fly asked them to finish the game, back came the usual reply “just one more hand”. At about 11:30, someone going out the door was asked to please turn the lights off, which he did. Someone from the game turned them back on. This was the proverbial straw that broke the camel’s back. I sat up in my bunk which was about ten feet from the door, reached over to my shelf, grabbed my 45 automatic and fired seven shots. The door frame on which the switches were mounted, at shoulder height, exploded. The noise was horrendous, pieces of brick and mortar and splinters flew into the barrack, but the lights did not go out. I jumped off the top bunk and was looking for more ammo. When none was forthcoming I reached up, shut off the light switches, and said “the f-----g lights are off and no one had better turn them on.”

I got into my bunk and I was asleep when my head hit the pillow. Irony rules, during the night the mission was scrubbed.

The next morning, I swept the floor of the debris and inspected the damage. I found a hole about 7 inches around and about 5 inches deep. The first shot blew the two switches away from the wall, out of harm’s way, and the next six rounds created the crater in the brick and concrete wall.

I went for breakfast and on my way, I met my pilot. After exchanging pleasantries, he said “I heard there was quite a bit of noise in your barrack last night.” I looked him straight in the eye and replied, “Yeah, some damn fool tried to shoot out the lights.” He rolled his eyes up and tried to suppress a smile as he walked away. For the rest of the time I was on the base, I was waiting to be brought up on charges. I am still grateful that I didn’t kill someone. This stupid act brought home to me how anger can take over your actions. I made a promise to myself to never let anger control my actions, and before I act count to ten, and if possible walk away.

### **Weathermen Predicted Clear Weather, but...**

When the weathermen predicted clear weather over the target area, but the clouds over England are “down on the deck” it is usually a “go” situation for a mission. The planes are lined up in the order they will fly in the formation. When the tower shoots the green flare the first plane starts down the runway and every thirty seconds each succeeding plane will follow, and they must climb at the rate of 300 feet per minute. As the plane enters the low clouds it is like a blanket thrown over you. In the cockpit the engineer calls out the altitude while the copilot calls out the time. At a designated time the pilot turns into the Groups assembly area where you continue climbing and eventually the plane breaks out of the clouds. The sun is glaringly bright, but the chance of running into another plane is lessened. Now the entire crew is looking for the groups colored flares and when found, the pilot takes a course and speed that will put us in the designated position in the formation. The first three planes form a vee shape called an element and the next three planes will also form a vee with the nose of the second vee tucked in behind the first vee. This formation is a squadron. Three squadrons form the group and three groups form a wing (54 planes). A major effort will have the planes forming formations stretched out for seventy-five miles.

On **7 May** I made my third mission, once again to Berlin. After the last trip we weren't looking forward to this one, but it wasn't half as bad as the last trip. There was ten/tenths cloud coverage. The flak was heavy but not as near, near enough however to hit our number four engine and we started leaking oil. So now, flying on three engines we were unable to keep up with our formation. We dropped out of formation and joined another formation that was not going as fast as our group had been going.

On **11 May**, I went on my fourth mission to Saarbrücken. We started the bomb run but because of some problem on the lead ship we did not drop our bombs. We did a 180° and another 180° and tried again, finally dropping our bombs. I had a very close call. A large piece of flak ripped out three bulkheads, ripped out part of the seat and in front of my seat was a small well where I stored my issue box of high carbohydrate candy and it was full of holes. I got a whack on my right shin and when I checked I could see the bone there was no blood, possibly because of the freezing temperature. I pushed the skin back in place and put a Band-Aid on it. I never told anyone because I was afraid I'd be grounded and not finish my missions with my crew.

On **12 May**, I went on my fifth mission to Merseberg. With clear visibility, we really hit the target well. As we left the smoke was reaching 20,000 feet.

On **20 May** I earned the Air Medal with a "Milk Run." We bombed an airfield at Orly, France, about 10 miles from Paris. We had fighter protection in and out (little friends). There was no flak. In fact, it was the first time we brought a plane home without holes.

On **28 May** I flew my 7th mission. We went to Ruhland, Germany. Flak over the target was sparse and off to one side. More missions like this would be most welcome.

On **29 May** we flew an Air Rescue Mission.

On **31 May** I flew my 8th mission to a target near Saarbrücken, Germany but the clouds were so bad over the target we had to abandon the primary and the secondary and bomb an airfield at Liege, Belgium. Our group was the only one of the wing that bombed. The flak was light but very accurate.

On **2 June**, the 8th Air Force started bombing tactical targets and my 9th mission was flown on 2 June to bomb a buzz bomb site on the Pas de Calais, France. The target was covered with ten/tenths clouds so we had to bomb using "Mickey" (code for radar). It was an easy mission as there was no flak.

**6 June:** Today is the day we have been looking forward to: **D-DAY**, 6 June 1944. In support of the invasion we flew two missions. The first mission we took off at 5:58 AM to Annelles, France. We bombed a bridge leading to the front lines. This was my 10th mission, and there was no flak. We were ordered to "stand by" for another mission. At 5:54 PM we took off for my 11th mission. This time we went to Vire, France. We could see the beach and all the landing barges. The sea was alive with ships and barges. The land looked quite peaceful. We were unable to find our group so we joined up with another group. We formed our own element with another B-17 and a B-24. We landed at 10:31 PM. It was a long exhausting day.

We flew to Reims, France for my 12th mission. We hit an airdrome with 12,500 pounds of high explosive bombs. Not very much flak. I saw the invasion coast, clearly and I never saw so many boats. It looks like they were towing England over to France.

Went on 12-b (13th) mission to Illiers-l'Eveque, France. The target was an airfield and it was ten/tenths covered. We were prohibited from dropping indiscriminately in France, so we had to salvo the bombs in the channel.

**14 June** I flew my 14th mission to Etampes, France. We really hit that airfield hard. Saw a gasoline dump explode with a terrific amount of flames.

**15 June**, I reached the top of the hill. The number of missions you had to fly to complete your tour was thirty, but they raised the number to thirty five. That means we'll have to sweat it out a little longer. For my 15th Mission we flew to Nantes, France on 15 June. The flak was accurate right on us. Lt. Weemer who was flying with us to learn ETO procedure was wounded in his shoulder. I was happy it wasn't Lt. Raymond. We lost 212 over the target. The plane peeled off and started down. No chutes seen. Lt. Wieland had to land at an emergency field at the coast with only two engines. This was a tough mission.

On **17 June** we flew to Orleans, France to bomb an airfield. Cloud coverage was ten/tenths, so we did a 360 and started looking for a target of opportunity. I don't know what was bombed, but there was a terrific amount of flak. We were lucky because they weren't tracking our part of the formation. The sound of the flak drumming on the top of the plane was a lot better than the woof, woof noise of the shells detonating and the strong odor from the exploding shells and the flak rattling on the top of the plane. When you heard this, you were thankful that the shell didn't hit the plane because the shell exploding on contact would knock the plane out of the sky. We lost two planes to the flak. This was my 16th mission.

**18 June**: For my 17th mission we flew to Hamburg, Germany. They sent up a terrific amount of flak but, once again, we were lucky because they concentrated on the lead squadron. I saw one plane go down with the tail shot off. No chutes were observed.

On **19 June** I flew my 18th mission to bomb an airfield about five miles west of St Omer, France, supposedly where buzz bombs were being launched. We were flying at 24,000 feet and I had a case of the bends in my left arm. The pain was extremely bad and didn't let up until we reached a lower altitude. Other than that, it was an easy mission.

**20 June**: TT message from 8th Air Force Hq: Credit prorated for three missions!!!! Yippee!!!!

On **21 June** I flew my 22nd mission to Berlin, Germany. It was to be visual bombing but the contrails were so bad that Groups were flying in all directions. Our high element almost dropped their bombs on our formation. The visibility was extremely limited. Another group flew through our formation at a right angle to our course. Lt. Ryan, the bombardier, yelled over the intercom, "JJ Pull up" and as we went up another plane went down under us. It was so close that I thought the vertical tail was going to hit our plane. This mission I did not like!!! There was utter chaos

and it took time to reform our group. It was the usual at Berlin, flak and more flak, and – if you were lucky – when you flew out of Berlin. Flak, when close, sounded like a big dog barking. WOOF, WOOF, and then the pieces hitting the plane like hail on a tin roof.

On **25 June** I flew my 23rd mission to Joigny, France to bomb a RR bridge behind the front lines. The morning briefing told us it was defended by a flak battalion. They weren't aiming too well because all the flak was about 100 yards away to one side and low. I Like that kind of mission.

On **28 June** we flew to Laon, France for my 24th mission to bomb an airfield. They threw up quite a bit of flak, but it was off to one side. To put the runways out of commission, we trained our bombs.

On **2 July** I flew my 25th mission. It was to the Pas de Calais, France to bomb a buzz bomb base. With this mission Lt. O'Brien, pilot, and Lt. Ryan, bombardier, finished their tour and our plane flew her 50th mission and came through this one with only two holes. When we returned to base O'Brien called the tower and asked permission to buzz the field one time. Permission was granted, and they saw the best buzz ever. I was in the tail and had to look up when we passed the Tower. WOW!! We were also celebrating the fact that the major portion of our missions were flown in 505 and she just flew her 50th mission. A first in the ETO. This day she brought us home with only two small flak holes. We always referred to her as "BITTER MABLE" which is a story in its self. Since Lt. Quintis was elevated to pilot, he had "DINGLEBERRY KIDS" painted on her nose so now, I'm a DINGLEBERRY KID.

On **11 July** we flew to Munich, Germany for my 26th mission. It was a 9:20 hour long "Milk Run" very little flak, just a nine hour and twenty-minute tedious trip mostly on oxygen.

On **13 July** we made a repeat trip to Munich, Germany for my 27th mission. This time we flew over the center of the city and although we had flak that we could hear (close), we got only a few holes and dents. We dropped 4/500 lbs HE, six M-17 incendiary bombs that break into 22/2lb and 44/4 lb incendiary bombs. This mission was another 9:00 hours plus mostly on oxygen.

On **20 July** my 28th mission was the roughest one to date. We went to Kothen, Germany. I flew in the lead plane with Lt. Millete. We flew over Leipzig, and Bernburg where the gun sight was shot off and were flying over "Happy Valley" (the largest concentration of flak guns in Germany, to that date). A piece of flak came in the side, plowed through the ammo box, and hit me on the shin of my right leg so hard it left a gash about an inch long. I could see the bone. I pushed the skin back in place and covered it with a band aid. I didn't report it because I didn't want to be grounded and not finish my tour with my crew. The bombardier and navigator were both wounded. The tail section was so full of holes they had to replace it. The last time I flew in 055 they had to replace the tail section.

On **21 July** I flew my 29th mission to Ebelsbach, Germany. It was another long haul back into "Happy Valley". This mission was in the same area as yesterdays, but the navigator was good in steering us around all of the known flak concentrations.

On **24 July** I flew my 30th mission on a tactical mission near St. Lo, France. We were scheduled to bomb 1,500 yards in front of our troops. It was very hazy and we were among the first groups to bomb but because of some SNAFU our group did not bomb. There were planes all over the sky going every which way. The prop wash was terrific bouncing us all over the sky.

On **25 July** I flew my 31st mission back to St. Lo, France. There was quite a haze, so we bombed from 12,000 feet. I was able to see our artillery firing. There was a bit of flak before we reached the target but our artillery firing counter artillery fire negated most of the flak. We dropped 38/100lb. bombs.

On **31 July** we flew to Munich, Germany for my 32nd mission. I had my camera but got only a few shots. This mission was uneventful as we saw very little flak but on the trip home we had to leave the formation at the French Coast and fly solo because our ETA to the base was seven minutes and we had only about ten minutes of fuel. One engine cut out as we taxied to our hardstand.

On **3 August** I flew my 33rd mission to Merkwiller, France. There was no flak at the target but on the way out we passed Aachen, Germany and although there wasn't a lot of flak it was right on our element. I had a big hole in the tail and without only one of the ammo boxes deflecting it, I would have been hit in the back. We lost one plane that went down near Saarbrücken. No chutes observed.

On **5 August** we flew to Stendal, Germany for my 34th mission. For unknown reasons we did not go to our primary target and since it was a visual target, our PFF Target was Berlin and, since it was visual we hit a target of opportunity. We bombed an airfield and there was no flak. Oh, happy day!!

Now all I must do, I thought, is sweat out one more mission.

At this time there were so many new crews arriving in the ETO that the group concentrated on using new crews and planes – so I didn't have to fly my 35th mission! Hip, hip hooray!!