

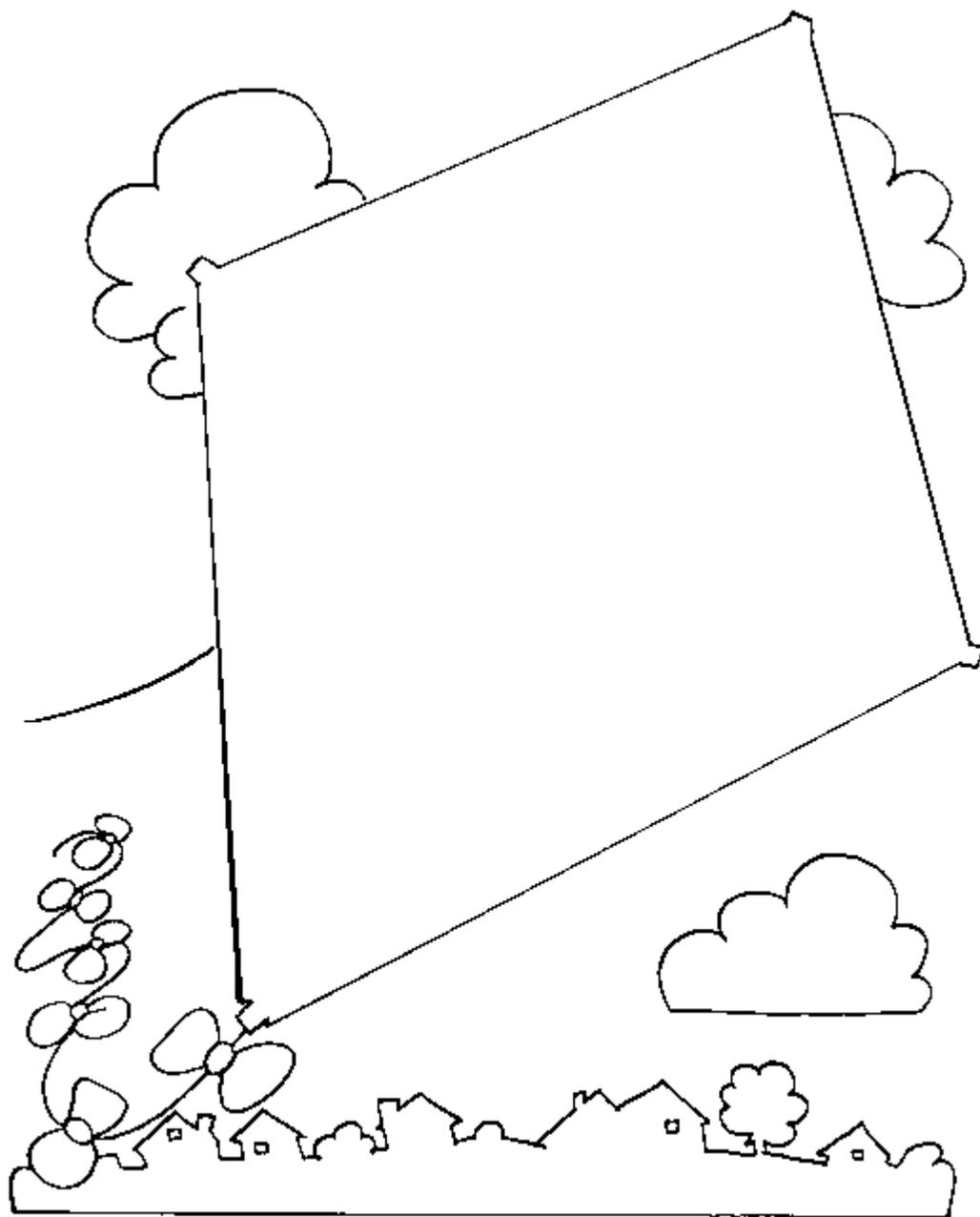


**SOME
CAME
HOME**

Doc Waters 2005

TO
Those who made me want to
And
Those that made it possible for me to

COME HOME





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IN HENRY FORD'S TRI-MOTOR

WONDER OF FUTURE TRANSPORTATION

Sometime, way prior to my teens, my father took this rambunctious son to the County Air Field. A well advertised air show was to take place there and the whole thing was to be free. Dad was always fond of new gadgets; he drove Mom nuts with all the needless kitchen contrivances he brought home from our County Fair. This he had to see, so the two of us piled into the Model-A or T (I can't remember which.) and chugged out bouncing over the rutted dirt trails to visit this master of the sky. Frankly, it was not what I'd expected. The plane had a wrinkled tin skin and three big motors with wooden propellers.--.someone called them props. One of the motors and its prop was right in front of a little bitty windshield. Which made me wonder...How was anyone supposed to see where he's going...This I had to see. I darted through a forest of legs, some cloaked in a drape-like material mom called skirts. Losing Dad, and unmindful of those patiently waiting in line, I scurried up to a ladder that led to inside the plane. There I found more skirts and panted legs pretty much plugging up a narrow isle that had plush seats, in a single row, each side. In fact that's all I saw but I did hear several squeals and remarks about bratty kids. I figured the aisle lead to the answer to my puzzle. So scrambling along it, finally, I arrived at a doorway. It was plugged with a pair of dark blue clad legs that met their floor space in shiny black shoes. They didn't move. There was no room to pass them, on either side, but a light gleamed between them. I dove for that only to find myself abruptly elevated and rushed back through the previously hard won maze. This

time I was carried aloft but no less jostled. Upon reaching the entrance ladder I was rather roughly deposited to the care of my Dad.

On the way home I learned: the place I couldn't get into was a cockpit; a place where all the buttons, wheels, dials, gauges, levers and other stuff to make the plane go are kept. From Dad's description I reasoned that it sort of had to be like that sacred place where he made our car go. He also told me; if the motor was running, you couldn't even see the props; they'd be just a blur. Dad was real nice about explaining all that. He was quite a guy. By-the-way, I didn't get spanked either. I got an ice cream cone on the way home — Mooney's Chocolate. That was the grand conclusion to my first time in a plane. I was lucky I didn't get my knickers messed up more than I did, because Mom didn't even scold me either.

A sister, Sally, arrived at our house about my age seven and Mother proceeded to teach me to respect girls. Mother, I might add, with plenty of help from Dad, renewed my schooling about girls by presenting the family with Susan when I was ten. At twelve years of age Boy Scouts taught me respect for a uniform and mother nature. The biggest blow of my youth was when younger brother Tom left us. I didn't know what it meant to cry until that happened

In the grade school years I made kites; when not involved in other monkey business, like shooting home-made carbide cannons. Kites were the most fun. Oh the intricacy of making and sailing a kite. I'd glue newspapers together. One page was never big enough. The paste was made of flour, water, and I think, a little salt. While that dried I'd meticulously nail together narrow thin sticks of wood, cut from orange crates slats, in the form a cross. Carpet tacks were nails of choice. Next, was the task of fastening a length of cotton twine, usually from knotted together short pieces, into notches at each end of the cross. At that point I had a frame I could lay on the paper and cut all around it so the paper was just...only...say, about a an inch too big. The inch excess was folded over the string and trimmed to expose the cross ends. The end of the longest cross arm had to be left exposed so there would be ample room to tie on a tail. Then the paper was unfolded, pasted, and folded back again. After the glue dried a bow string was tied to the shorter wood arms' ends so as to cup the back, or stick side. This was to let the air striking the paper side slide off easier. Another piece of string left a loop on the paper side with its ends through the paper and, fastened to the longest vertical stick above and below the stick crossing it. The loop on the front was used to tie on the flying line. It was now time to let everything dry in our damp basement while I scrounged through the kitchen and bothered the neighbors to come up with enough good string to form a respectable ball of flying line. It was probably just as well that it took a considerable amount of time to gather, unravel, sort, splice and wind the selected gathered pieces onto an eight inch hunk of twig so it would unwind smoothly. Getting the flying line just so; gave the paste more time to dry. Finally, with the flying line's loose end tied to the front loop it was time to attach the tail. Any old worn rag was good for this. Old flour sacks were my choice. Any cloth that could be ripped to proper width and properly knotted together until they formed the proper weight and length, proper, for sailing on a particular day. Only then was it secured to the bottom of the cross and creation was finished.

A few blocks from home, not far from Diendorfer woods, there were good open fields, next to the woods, for putting kites aloft. So flying space was not the problem. The wind was. Constant tail length adjustments were necessary. Next came the running,

and running, and more running to get the thing in the air and have it stay there. When you did and the wind was right, you could take a small scrap of paper, form it into a cone shape around the sailing line, and you could send messages all the way up to the looped string on the front of the kite...What a grand, proud, pleasurable feeling -- Oh, Oh! Not too high now. The wind will break the line — better let some out. Look out: She's diving! Run, run, run? No! Now ease out more line. See how far away you can get it. Wow — Look out for that tree! — Pull it in — not too hard or the line will break — Oh, No! It's diving again? Run, Run, Ah! Aw! Too late. Pick up and salvage. Go home. On the way wonder where I could get some better stuff to make the next one.

Dad built a crystal radio. It was said that it played best in the evening, on the front porch. I know that's true 'cause that where all the neighbors showed up to hear the Brown Bomber (Joe Louis) fights and, that's also where, when, and how I learned Lucky Lindy made it across the Atlantic. After such events my duty was to pick up empty beer bottles, take them down in the basement and wash them out for the next batch of home brew. In those days one way of passing time was to set on the front porch and watch the neighbors. If one made just one trip, down and back to the pump on the corner, it was just to have fresh water for supper. If he made several trips, he was probably making beer and his viewers, so presuming, would start counting days until he thought it proper to pay a neighborly visit, chew the fat, and quaff a few from the new batch of home brew.

By the time I was, about halfway through elementary school, and still in knickers, I must have glued a whole Balsa tree to our white porcelain topped kitchen table. There was little to show for it. I can't recall any model planes hanging from the bottom of Tom's bunk or our bed room ceiling. Kite flying gave way to climbing trees, milk can hockey and scooters: A fairly respectable scooter could be built from an orange crate, on end, fastened to a length of two by four under which the wheels from a single roller skate were nailed at either end. The road in front of our house became a paved street and a great place to play kick the can. Rubber guns were big. We made them from a piece of hard wood flooring, a couple nails, half a clothespin, and hunks of old inner tubes cut into big rubber bands. Hurt like hell if you got hit with one of the rubbers at close range.

Frank Mason and I started Kindergarten together and soon found ourselves appointed patrol boys. When it rained, and we were waiting for the school bell to signal that our attendance was required for classes, we'd build mud dams in the gutter both side of our post. Somehow, probably for Christmas, I got a B-B gun. Dad taught me the rules of shooting in Diendorfer Woods. I think I shot a lot of trees there because; it seemed to me, that the sparrows and frogs always knew I was coming.

Some people by the name of Hausas moved in next door. They had a kid, Kurt, about my age. He tried to teach me German and I tried to explain English to him. We had some splendid fights. Then all of a sudden he and his family were gone. Mom said their government wrote and told them they had to return to Germany. Mother didn't think the head man over there was very nice — some guy by the name of Hitler.

Starting North Intermediate School brought on swimming, hunting, fishing, ice skating (At Hoyt Park or on the rink Dad made in our back yard), learning to drive, smoke, chase girls and stuff like that. Believe it or not I got my drivers license when I was 15; but that's another story. It did make it possible for me to drive up to my folks' cottage and get my first taste of architecture helping build it. It was a small place but we all had a great time at Bud Lake, Harrison, MI.

While attending Arthur Hill High School I was supposed to grow up. But, I'm still not sure I made it. As I look back on those days, a considerable amount of time was spent with the assistant principal in charge of discipline, Ray Marlowe, in his office, listening to lectures. He was also very good with a paddle. Not only in his office but also when he caught me trying to sneak out a classroom window. As graduation drew near I had no idea of what I was expected to do next. Harry Davis, a friend, said he was going to try getting into the Air Corps. "You know; learn to fly and get paid at the same time." That sounded good to me. So I piled on the back of his motorcycle and we went to the Armory where a recruitment drive was under way. The place was crowded with Guys like me (Known as recruits.) that were herded about by men in brown army uniforms making sure their physical exams and knowledge tests were properly given. Just basic stuff it seemed to me. In a week or so Harry was notified that he was accepted, I was not. I never found out why and I really didn't care. I found a job working in a boat yard for nothing. That lasted only a short time then Dad obstinately suggested I go to Junior College. My second year there the government started a program called The Civilian Pilot Training Program (CPTP) under which a student that could pass the physical and afford a nominal fee would be taught to fly. I asked my Dad if I could sign up. "Sure, if you pay for it," was his reply. Jobs were not that easy to come by but I got lucky and landed one as a nighttime gas station attendant. I spent most of my time doing homework or sitting on a curb waiting for a car that needed gas. It was at this station that I was awarded my nickname. My boss, Frank Nash, lived west of Saginaw, some where around Hemlock, or out that way. I seldom saw him, except for pay days when he paid cash. On one pay day he announced, "Business is doing pretty good, and so I'm going to get each of the help a shirt with their name on it. Spell your first name for me," says he. "C-L-A-R-E-N-C-E," say I, to which he replied, "Can't use that, too many letters to pay for and besides the C-E will droop over the edge of the pocket. What's your middle name?" "Lawrence: L-A-W-R-E-N-C-E," I proudly answered. "That's just-as-bad." He scolded, and then after a thoughtful pause, he says; "I'm going to put Doc on your shirt. Then anybody can wear it." I've been called Doc since. Except for my Grandmother Waters who refused to give up calling me, "Clarency" until the day she died at age ninety three.

With the new nick name I started flight training. Al Hoffman was my CPTP flight instructor. He taught by cussing. Cussing, I'm convinced, was his one and only language. He used it to let his students know even a minor infraction of his rules or misunderstanding his directions was not to be tolerated. It also came in handy to remind them of how dumb they were. Somehow I stuck with what he was trying to pound into our youthful heads. I'd learned recovery from stalls and spins, how to find my way around a square mile using minimum stick and rudder still keeping an equal distance from its boundaries and maintaining a constant altitude, and how to fly cross country; all to Al's satisfaction and, of course, how to make a fairly respectable landing. After about twelve hours flight time and, being cussed out an unimaginable number of times, I was practicing touch-'n-go landings when he says: "Get this GD sack of papers down to the end of this rotten runway for another of your dumb assed take offs." This I did and was ready to take off when he opens the cabin door and hops out. While holding open the door he yells back at me: "If yaw wan naw break your GD ass, go ahead, but don't expect me to be a part of your sloppy assed flying." That was my introduction to my first

solo—civilian style. After accumulating thirty-five hours air time, some in the quiet without al's bellowing, I was able to pass the government required check ride and ground school tests and receive my Private Pilot's License. My Dad was the first person I took for a ride. Mom said: "No thanks."

I finished that stint of flying and Junior College about the same time as my job at the gas station ended and, naturally, my source of money ran out. I'd been accepted into the School of Architecture in Ann Arbor and Dad sent me with a few restrictions that I thought I could tolerate. I loved Ann Arbor, the school, the town, and the fun. I even enjoyed my job, working for my meals. A member of my gang in Saginaw, Herbert Murray Bentley was my room mate. (He talked me into studying architecture.) Flying? I didn't do any in Ann Arbor but my kindergarten buddy Frank Mason did. He'd been in CPTP with me and decided to continue on with the program to try for his commercial pilot's license. Being in different schools at the University we didn't see much of each other. Then, one day mom called me and told me Frank had been in a plane crash. I hastened to the hospital. Frank would never make commercial pilot. He did, somehow, pass the draft physical and served as an infantryman overseas. We're still buddies. On one of the few trips back home Uncle Bill arranged a blind date for me with a sweet little thing that was to become my wife, Loretta J. Wilson.



What-do-ya know There sits Mason in a RYAN ST—on a grass field known as Wayne County Air Port at that time. Later known as Romulus--Where the B 24's were made.





Uncle Bill (My two year older uncle.) and Dee Trier (A high school class mate.) had come down to the Lower Forest Avenue Music-Cal Society (Our room in Ann Arbor) to celebrate my up and coming twenty second birthday. We four, which included Bud Bentley, were wrestling with; hangovers, blankets, clothes, furniture and an occasional empty beer bottle to straighten the joint up prior to venturing out into a dark December day. The mess had probably come about because of our shenanigans we had demonstrated at the Pretzel Bell the night before. We were almost tidied-up and were waiting for Bud to be presentable when a guest seeking a better style of music turned the radio volume up instead. Before adjustment, to an acceptable level, could be found, our President, FDR, began shouting something about: “A DAY THAT WILL LIVE IN INFAMY.” We finally got the radio quieted down and listened further to the mess the Japs had made of Pearl Harbor. No one seemed particularly surprised or excited. It was almost as though it had been expected. After all, hadn’t we already signed up for the draft? Couldn’t we still be deferred because of our schooling or jobs? Hadn’t I completed the Civilian Pilot’s Training Program? So what’s to worry about? Nonetheless, lunch was rather subdued and seeing Dee and Bill off for their hundred mile trek home was like watching the last float of a parade. Bud and I finished tidying up and doing homework very quietly. The next day, walking to school, someone yelled: “Hey Bud! I hear they just drew your draft number.”

January brought a new semester a new apartment and two more roommates; Jack McCann and Sam Sneath. The four of us worked in a restaurant, ‘THE LITTLE-SHOP’, for our meals. Jack also cleaned a dorm to pay for his share of our rent for a three rooms and bath apartment. Sam got lucky and inherited a bank, somewhere in Ohio, Tiffin I think. He quickly learned how to spend money. That practice was just as quickly interrupted by the discovery that his good fortune was limited by the fine print in his benefactor’s bequeathing documents. So it became necessary for him to miss school every once in a while to convince his board of directors, in said town, his funds needed replenishing... For some reason the University was not happy with the missing school part and let it be known that Sam would have to change his ways or he would not be around long. So Sam, not to be outdone, visited the dean in the School of Engineering to remind him of how he had intervened in the dean’s son’s attempt at suicide. The visit was so successful that Sam stopped going to classes’ altogether. What with such antics and those of my own, Bud and Jack; foot ball players –Sam’s friends.—became drop-ins. Other visitors, and the constant press of homework, time slipped by rapidly.

New government rules seemed to make it tougher and tougher to stay in school. Classes started earlier and lasted longer. There were no holidays. PT (Physical Training) became a must. I remember a prof telling me; “Waters: Until 11:30AM you look like you just got up. From then until noon you look pretty good. After noon you look like

you're ready for bed again." Sometime in early '42 Jack joined the navy hoping to become a flyer on a flattop. Then Sam's excuses started failing to help extend his leisurely style of life. His father, who was an engineer in the Department of the Navy, Washington, DC, got him drafted into the Army Tank Corps as an officer. Bud and I hitch-hiked to Detroit and joined the Army Air Corps Reserves in hopes of squeezing out enough schooling to graduate. We didn't make it. Bud was called up first and left without so much as a 'So-Long'. Me? In January of '43 I was sitting in a Heat Engines class, last row of course, noisily shaking news paper pages, as I read a story on the inside of the Michigan Daily. The prof, apparently irritated, made some snippy remark to the effect that some students might find it rather difficult to get a passing grade in his class. I theorized, since he was looking directly at me, that this dribble had something to do with my inattention and abruptly rearranged the paper. With my arms crossed the inside headlines now faced the prof. and he could easily read: RESERVES CALLED UP. "Oh!" says the prof. I finished reading the article, folded the paper, tucked it under my arm and headed for the registrar's office to collect my tuition fee. By the time I got back to what was once the abode of four fun loving guys, having stopped periodically to pay bills, I had less than fifty bucks left. I packed, shipped some of my precious belongings home, (Collect, of course.) and pointed my thumb towards the North Country and home.

It's hard to put a number on how many going-away parties there were for those inducted or volunteering. It seemed a train or buses, loaded, left daily and I was there, shaking hands and waving goodbye, along with tearful parents. Buddy after high school buddy boarded for the unknown. It was not a pleasant time except that I was able to date Letty and get to know her better. Otherwise I was sad, worried and bored stiff. March, or about then, I received my anticipated call-up notice from Uncle Sam. I do not remember who saw me out of Saginaw. I suppose there was a similar entourage as for the others that left Saginaw. I can't imagine my Mother and Father missing that.

My recollection of the trip that tore me from my home town start with screaming train brakes bring us to a halt at the picturesque Ann Arbor station to board some more raucous youths. When we began chugging away again a song-fest was prompted by a guy claiming it was his birthday and strumming and old guitar. During a pause between renditions a suggestion was made that we should share a birthday drink with him. This, naturally, was signal for the train to hit a switch jostling everybody and everything. Our birthday boy cried; "Oh! No," and dove, as if in a swan dive, to catch a suitcase taking a like dive from an overhead luggage rack. He rescued the case on only the second bounce and lovingly lifted it to a secure spot. As he opened it the smell of flavored alcohol invitingly filled the air, but upon inspection of the case's interior, there appeared to be slivers of glass in the liquid intermingled with completely soaked garments. Undaunted, our hero plunged his hands into the case and came up with a wet but otherwise usable shirt, and with nimble hands began wringing as many drops as possible back into the case. When it became obvious that an errant drop was about to take a circuitous route its tacky maneuver was foiled by the flick of a tongue. Once the garment had given up its expendable moisture it was stretched over a corner of the case and became a sieve through which tiny birthday drinks were sieved into skimpy paper cups. Each cup was solicitously dispatched to an eager songster. (Never did find out how old the guy was.) More songs ensued. Then someone thought cards would be nice. A suitcase resting on the knees of opposing players became the table. I became the partner of the birthday boy

for my first ever bridge game. I was bad; very, very bad and several artfully expressed cuss words let me and everyone within earshot know it.

Soon I began to appreciate the libation, little as it was. That and the continuous chattering of unintelligible conversations coupled with tiresome tedium of clattering rails and incessant swaying motion induced sleep, even on a rickety old wood coach bench drenched with soot from the engine's coal burning boilers. I swear almost immediately as I nodded-off some huge masculine types, dressed in army ODs (Olive-Drabs), started shouting--"CUSTER---ALL--OUT!"





Abruptly, about the first part of April, we (Those classified as keepers.) found ourselves on a train with all our earthly GI possessions crammed into barracks bags which were neatly jammed into the baggage car ahead. We're heading to--Hey! Nobody told us. We're captured. For endless days, and sleepless nights we were covered with soot, and eating what ever is delivered on board at whistle stops; and we played those ubiquitous bridge games until we thankfully arrived in sun drenched Miami, FL. I'm in a bunch quartered in the Sands Hotel, across a road from the west side of Biscayne Bay. The weather's great.

Here our soul and body is to become accustomed to operating by the numbers, Army numbers, and Army etiquette, decorum, etc. We get up and go to bed by what they call Reveille and Retreat. At these ceremonies we stand at attention while the old glory is raised at dawn and lowered at sundown. What's left of daylight hours is used to teach us such things as how to field strip an M1 rifle, a 45 caliber revolver and a 45 automatic; which means to take them apart, clean them and put them back together again. Once this was mastered we learn to shoot them. And of course we're taught out how to form ranks and dress-right-dress. (This, incidentally, has nothing to do with what you may be wearing, but rather how to acquire your own private little space from your neighbor on your right while the neighbor on your left is trying to do the same to you.) We learn what belongs in, and how it is supposed to be put into a back pack. As a reward for mastering such details we are treated to five mile hikes, at night, with full packs, and carrying M1 rifles. (That's five miles out and five miles back.) To be physically fit for such an award we are asked to play volley ball or run miles in the sand and surf and participate in other fun types of PT. Sometimes we run a couple miles just because some Non Com (Non Commissioned Officer, a GI) or real Officer thinks maybe it would help us learn which foot our left foot is. Any time there is a lull between required rituals we are obligated to 'Police the Area'. Another cute command that means you should pick up anything that doesn't grow. And, if it's too big to pick up, paint it. Old cigarette butts are to be 'Field Stripped' by ripping the paper from the tobacco, wadding the paper and tossing it and the leftover tobacco to the wind.

Then there are times we get the command; 'At Ease'. Almost always it had the words; 'Smoke if you got 'em', attached, meaning keep your position but not at attention. You can even talk and bum cigarettes from the guy next to you. Such reprieves will naturally have strings attached. About the time we start enjoying our smoke we'd find out that 'At Ease' was a prelude to having us sit and listen to a lecture. Not all lectures were boring; some were very educational and useful like: How to throw a hand grenade. (The GI demonstrating this always thinks it funny to fumble and drop one as he pulled the pin. We pretended that we didn't know it was a dud.) How to use a pro-kit after having sex is another bit of advice than will get the recruits attention (No comment.)

Others that might fill time at a rest stop were: How to use a tourniquet; How to administer morphine, even how to sign our name and put you serial number in those little bitty boxes so it didn't infringe on the box next to yours. Thereby making it impossible for you, and the guy whose sign box you just scribbled in to get paid.

.By far the most useful thing I learned in Basic Training was to never be sick in the service. I awakened one morning with what, I thought, was a pretty good fever so when 'Order Arms'. 'Dismissed' (A delightful command that meant put down the rifle and quit what ever else you had been doing.) concluded Reveille I checked in at sick call where a corpsman was kind enough to give me a Brown Bomber and send me back to barrack. The barrack's chief found me in bed. He decided the back to barrack order didn't mean bed but meant cleaning and, further more, cleaning meant scrubbing four flights of stairs and the toilet rooms on each of the floors they served, twice, on my hands and knees. There were no time outs until the rest of the unit returned for the evening chow. Then two things happen: 1) I tried to clean myself up but discovered someone skipped off with my Zippo lighter and my soap dish; and, 2) the Brown Bomber had begun to work. Bismuth is the Army's cure for that and the results of the Bismuth is cured by a Brown Bomber.

After a month or so of basic training (The Navy calls it 'Boot Camp)I was happy to be heading NORTH again.





The Miami group was almost totally-made up of Regular Army Enlisted men who, I suppose, thought flying was the easiest way to complete the ‘hitch’ they had signed up for. A few must have changed their minds because they didn’t board the north bound train when our stay in the sun was over. More soot, lousy meals, sleeping in luggage racks, and trying to make sure you were up in the morning before the tiny lavatory at the end of the car ran out of water. And, in my case, more bridge games. I’m convinced that if all the people moving about the country on Army trains, were to be sent to the front lines at one time, the war would be over. Right Quick! But, Army trains don’t go over water. So where are we going this time? When the speculation was over, we had arrived in Indianapolis, IN and billeted in, more than adequate Butler University dorms. We were to stay here while the Army, in its devious way, determined whether we were capable of learning to become Officers and Pilots. We had classes in rudimentary high school subjects such as math, history, and science and were ruthlessly tested on them. We also had at least two different IQ tests, I can remember. Classes, tests and marching programs continued for our entire stay with only periodic breaks.

Everyone was afforded the opportunity to show off his command abilities by directing a squad through close order drill (Marching a squadron, while at attention, to rapidly given orders.) or at least making sure the squad being directed got from one assignment to another. Somehow, I was made a squad leader, and I seemed to have little trouble giving the orders but the members of my squad seemed to get their feet tangled up following them. Most of my squad, being Regular Army, gave me the feeling that they resented me trying to put them through a task that they knew better than I. For a while I did a lousy job. Then one day Fred, a GI from before Pearl Harbor, came to my room and told me to: Start handing out gigs (Citations for minor infractions of appearance or duty and calling for loss of off-duty time.) and show them who was boss, or these guys will run you into the ground and think it’s funny.” It worked, even made some friends doing it. Shortly after, Fred showed up, subdued, and secretly told me, that if anyone asked I should not give them a recommendation for him. I was to say that I didn’t know him well enough. With that he left my life. I later inquired after him and was told only that he was Court Marshaled -- Strange? No one ever asked for a recommendation.

In another event, that would headline today’s TV talk shows, a professor at Butler made it be known that his daughter had been raped. The denounced dastardly varmint was supposedly a member of those in uniform. Believe-it-or-not the scoundrel readily admitted to having had sex with the maiden but held that it was all her idea and that she even insisted that the act take place in a stream running through the campus. When the Investigating Officer got the offended recipient to admit that the creek was indeed her

favorite location for pleasing herself “and all the boys,” the case against our buddy was dropped. She was referred to a psychiatrist for treatment.

Life became pretty much routine except for a field trip through the Allison Engine Plant a weekend off and, Oh–Yes–Flying. Well, it was only ten hours in the air in small aircraft like Piper Cubs. The kind I already had my license in. The instructors (All civilians) had their hands on the controls most of the time until mine discovered I had a license. After I did a couple flights around a square mile I was pretty much on my own. Some recruits just couldn’t stomach the experience and went on to other places in the Army where they were better suited.

It was at Indianapolis that I had my first visitor from home, Letty. I even got a weekend off to see her. Her hotel was across the way from a burlesque theater, which she soon discovered from the window of her room. Naturally it became a topic of conversation. She confessed she’d never gone to such a place and thought it was time she did. So we went. It was a waste of time and money. We just nicely got seated when a four or five piece band started playing Let Me Entertain You with rhythmical rim shots off the snare drum. Shortly a chorus line, of no more than five girls, appeared. Each girl exaggerated their hip first steps in time with the rim shots. One gal overstated her steps enough to be closer to the front of the stage than the others. She then did what could have been a back displacement turn; purposely ending with her hind-side to us. At that point she started reaching up her back, hands contorted at the wrists, as though trying to get at her bra. I’m not sure if she made it or not because about this time Letty gasped, as if in pain, covered her eyes, grabbed my hand, and rushed me stumbling to the exit. Her face was bright red.

Shortly there after Letty left for home, and the troops packed. Our stay at Butler was terminated. Once again we’re on the train heading south, making our immediate occupation the staking out a claim to sleeping space. While checking mine out for size, comfort, privacy, and convenience I got thinking: Who’s the genius that figures out this massive puzzle of transporting thousands so they arrive at the right place, and the right time, with the least commotion and inconvenience? Not exactly an easy chore. Oh well, where’s my partner and bridge table for this trip? Food that’s usually a problem wasn’t this time. This time we had the luxury of a kitchen and dining car being part of the train make-up. Food, pardon me, chow, was at least warm.

I believe the next port-of-call was Nashville, TN. The trip there must have been uneventful because little is remembered of it. The camp itself was a huge training base for an Army Infantry Corp. Its boundaries were marked by miles of fencing inside of which were all the necessities of a large city. Upon arrival we were quarantined, as was expected every time we moved. I got better acquainted with one of these necessities--the inner workings of a mess hall-- by serving on KP (Kitchen Police–dish jockey) for a few days. I peeled potatoes, scrubbed garbage cans and slung chow at tin trays. The mess hall was next to the perimeter fence and one night I saw some of our bunch scale it for what they probably thought was a trip to town. What they got was a jail cell on the base and their chance to fly canceled.

At Butler we were exposed to a few bits of new topics to learn. At Nashville, new topics became even fewer. But here we studied subjects we’d had no use for before but were

afraid we might need later like: Morse code, map reading, celestial navigation, air craft engines, weather, and theory of flight. Not the tough stuff yet: Just the basics. PT continued daily and was made tougher. Physical examinations were renewed. This time the emphasis was placed on the eyes. I barely made the twelve words a minute required for Morse code, managing only fifteen. The eye tests I had no control over but I anxiously checked my score each time it was posted. Every thing, all subjects and human actions, and reactions, were thoroughly tested. We waited days for the final results to come in. When they did, I sent a telegram home: Accepted as a Cadet.

All-of-a-sudden, routines that had become ingrained as necessity for daily living ceased. There were no classes to attend, no marching and no incessant PT. Time was our own for a while. I wrote a lot of letters back home, from the Mess Hall, between meals, or when it was not otherwise in use. It seemed to me that they probably had no place to put us because all of a sudden we were granted a furlough. It took me no time at all to get on steam driven wheels heading north. I was heading home but, taking the shortest route was not necessarily the fastest and somehow or other one of my detours took me to Ann Arbor. The stop here meant a visit to Francis Anthony Tice's Men's' Clothing Shop. Would you believe that there was a football game that very day? It was to be held in the Michigan stadium against, of all teams, Notre Dame? Tice had a ticket on the fifty yard line given to him by one of Michigan's players. He insisted I go with him. But, how was I to do that? I had no ticket and no money to buy one and besides the place would be jamb-packed. "Follow me," says Tice, and with a wink said, "Do as I say." As we approached the stadium gate Tice pointed to one side of it and said; "Stand over there." He presented his ticket, went on through, and soon disappeared in the crowd. I stood my ground outside the gate and smiled at the ticket takers. In no time Tice was back with a police man pointing at me and shouting: "You! You! Get In Here!" Following the Officer's orders I entered the gate while the ticket takers stood sheepishly aside, watching. Quickly, I found myself, with Tice, at the top of an aisle looking down on the fifty yard line. We managed our way about halfway down the stairs to the row of seats that his ticket stub called for. Both of us crowded in his seat. After a few grunts, groans, and fanny adjustments back and forth all along our bench, everyone was seated without further complaint. You know, I can't remember who won.

The next day I was home trying to surprise Letty. I drove to the Gun Plant, where she worked, and snookered down under the steering wheel of Dad's car as best I could. I knew she'd recognize the car, and come running to find out who was there to pick her up, but would not expect it to be me. It didn't work. She knew it was me as soon as she saw the car. My family wouldn't leave the car unattended. I got a nice kiss there and another when I left too.

A/S C.L. WATERS
SQA. BKS #1
IND. GEN. COLG.
INDPLS., IND.



MR FRANCIS A TICE
1107 S. UNIVERSITY ST
ANN ARBOR, MICHIGAN



UNITED STATES ARMY
AIR FORCES

Friday
June 18, 1943

Dear Tico:—

Long time no write eh?
The last couple months this place
has managed to find plenty for
little blawnc. to do. Now I'm
in the home stretch - graduation
week - and get a little
more time to myself so I'm
trying to make contact with
some of the people I have so
badly neglected.

Here's a bit of bad news
Bud's mother passed on last
Saturday. I understand
she was sick for quite a
while in the University Hospital.
I called Bud as soon as
I learned of his misfortune. He

seems to be taking it very well.
Of course he received a pulow
to be present at the funeral.
So kind of the army, don't you
think?

He says he may go back to
Texas via A.S. and Indianapolis.
So look for him.

I imagine you have heard
how well our boy Mac is
doing. That guy is "on the beam."
He is over in the windy city.
Lucky boy.

Your trucky has just com-
pleted 10 hrs of flight training
and was highly recommended
for further training. Makes me
mighty happy. Now all I
have to worry about is the
physical I will get at my



UNITED STATES ARMY
AIR FORCES

next post - which I leave for
on the 26th.

It's a good thing my
mother, father, and sisters
are coming down this week-
end. It may help me keep on
"the beam".

I'll never know how I
did it but I was made a student
commissioned officer here. It has
taught me plenty about discipline
and men. There is a hell of
a lot more to being an officer
than giving orders and wearing
a gold bar. It certainly taught
me to respect the boys who
have got the real bars on.
They must have a terrific job.

One minute your treading a needle
for a man, consoling a home sick
jerk, and writing a letter for
a man who has just had
an operation. The next your
screaming at a man because
he's out of step, late for formation
or failing to salute an officer.

We have a class system
here. It supposedly helps discipline.
Underclassmen are known as
gophers. The poor bastards have
to practically eat shit. Every
time they pass an upperclassman
they must "hit the wall" and
stay there until given "carry on."
I've seen some of them sweat
their image on the wall waiting
to be relieved. If the move
so much as an eye ball they
get gaged and six gags means



UNITED STATES ARMY
AIR FORCES

an hour of walking at 128 steps
per minute, at rigid attention.

Every body hits the wall for
officers - ain't I lucky?

Last week-end I was officer
of the day. It's his job to see that
all the bad boys walk there 128.
Believe me it's more trouble
getting those farts to do it
the way they should than doing
it yourself. I figure I walked
a total of 100 miles packing a
six shooting forty five just to
keep 8 jokers going 16 hrs.

How's every thing at the
Flomme plant or have
you left there? How's A.A.? The
same old beer drinking place
I hope. Say hello to

all the gang and Mrs. Monk
and the "Little Shop"

Drop us a card once in
a while. I don't like these
sudden announcements of
death.

By the way did you get
married again yet? Much
against your good judgement
I got myself engaged but
I don't think I should go
any further or do you? How
about some motherly advice

Two weeks ago we ran
into a beautiful quart of
Old Bushmill. Of course the
next morning I thought a
truck ran into me but she
said she had fun so

Don't take too many
prots
Doc



A Maxwell Fieg photo announcing I was a
Cadet



Arriving back at Nashville rumors flew: Where to; San Antonio? Montgomery? What kind of training would it be? Transports? Bombers? Fighters? But, first there was the inevitable train ride...Where do they resurrect these coaches from? This one must have been in the Lincoln funeral procession...Probably modernized by deleting the cast iron stove...

In the middle of the night, after about four months of service to my credit, we're delivered to Maxwell Field, Montgomery, AL, covered with soot. We are greeted by a bunch of grommet stiffened OD hats. Each sprouting a big pair of open brass wings, bisected by an over sized, vertical chrome propeller mounted above and centered on a polished leather cap bill. Against the right stiff a shoulder board, a chrome plated sword is held with its blade edge forward and perfectly vertical. A sparkling white glove at the sword's butt end pressed against the bearer's manages that The owners of these intimidating displays ushered us, in our befuddlement, out onto a dark rail yard and put us into rows and columns, standing at attention, by shouts of orders meant to be obeyed:

"Eyes front. Mister...Shoulders back. Mister...Chin in. Mister...Stomach in. Mister...

"Wipe that smile off. Mister..."

After a number of such commands I'm wondering--What's this 'Mister' stuff?

Never heard that before?

"Stop looking around. Mister. What do you want to do; buy the place?"—.

That last command from a Shiny Sword breaks the night. And this time gets a reply.

"Sure: Got change for a nickel? Says the Mister"

Unhesitating, a Shiny Sword sternly replies: "One step forward, and follow me." From the corner of my eye, the new comer is gone; to where I'll never know.

Nothing is ever as published or rumored, witness the hoopla we endured about Maxwell Field compared to what it was really like. Maxwell was the West Point of the Air Corps. Everything (Supposedly for the good of the Cadet.) is done to excess which led a few so called cadet officers to over stretch their authority. They tried to lead by the letter of the order, not the meaning, by threat not by leadership. They, and their deeds were known as 'Chicken-Shit' i.e. bird brained. Some such 'officers', and I use the word loosely, could and did find themselves blindfolded, tied, and dropped in a shallow creek, in the dead of night. PT had its excess as well; one was its obstacle course, called The Burma Road, it supposedly was the toughest course in the country. You ran it until you dropped and then, if you were lucky, while lying there you'd be asked to do push-ups.

This was in lieu of being ordered: “Out-Ah-Here.” Or being given enough gigs to last you through the rest of your stay at Maxwell.

Gigs were easy to come by: improper dress, shoes not shined or tied right, cap at the wrong angle, neck tie improperly tucked in your shirt, shirt button flap and belt buckle and pant’s fly not perfectly aligned. In the barracks they were accumulated for: dust anywhere, bed not being made so a coin bounced when tossed on it, pillows with their case wrinkled or their openings facing the Inspecting Officer, towels and wash cloths not displayed so only folded edges faced the Inspecting Officer, personal belongings incorrectly displayed, late for class, early for class, violations of mess hall manners (Of which there were many. Ever try to eat a square meal?), out of step when walking with another and many other trivial things gave reason for gigs to be handed out. . When you got enough gigs you walked a Tour. Meaning you marched in full dress uniform, at attention, for one mile with full back pack and rifle. I did my share. One time my Tours were interrupted by a visit from a kind soul from my mother’s church. He even gave me a pocket size copy of the New Testament of the Bible. I carried it everywhere. Still have it. Another inconvenience was to be caught by a Cadet Officer in a minor infraction; like tying one of your shoes in public. Such an act was reason enough for him to put you in a brace. So; there you are at attention, chin pulled back into your neck so far you could hardly breath, and afraid being caught doing it. He inspected you to see if he could find a reason to give you a gig. If he found none, which was seldom, he’d ask you a question like; “What time is it Mister?” To which, there was only one answer: “Sir! My chronometer is in such in accord with the great sidereal system that I am unable to precisely evaluate, for you, the exact hour, minute, second, and tick you require”--plus another couple hundred words or so that we were had to memorize. There were several other embarrassments such as these little ditties that were part of the hazing we felt necessary to endure. Hazing was uninterrupted; morning room inspection with all occupants present was conducted daily. One time seven of us received gigs because the eighth room mate was absent. Unbeknownst to us he had been hospitalized with yellow jaundice, for which we were quickly quarantined. Meals and class work being fed to us by people with white gowns and white masks for a week.

However, we did gain by not having to participate in one of the weekly regimental parades. These things were held on a huge barren, unpaved, dust generating field. They lasted for what seemed like hours of just standing at attention waiting to march past the administrative officers of the base. (Pass in review they called it.) The sun just a-beaten-down! If you locked your knees to hold your upright position you’d lose circulation in your lower limbs and fall over. If that happened you were washed out of cadets. One of the guys in our room studied this situation and discovered a way to remain upright even when asleep. He used to do this at daily inspections. Never got caught and giggered for it. The inspectors looked for dust not a cadet at attention and asleep. Close order drill was another means of entrenching in us the necessity of complying with Army orders without hesitation. Believe it or not, the squad I was in won a cup for being among the best at this.

Classes were as tough as any I’d ever taken anywhere: public, college or Army Schools. Some were extensions of what we had been taught. Some were repeats. Others were refreshers. Most were comprised of all new material. Here I had my first introduction to link trainers for a class in instrument flight. It was at Maxwell I learned

what could happen to person flying at high altitudes without oxygen. Here Morse code continued. Tests were frequent and tough. There was no such thing as make-ups or retesting. You either passed the first time or you washed out.

There was no flight training up in the wild blue yonder. Close as we came to it was instrument training in Link Trainers. We also experienced what it was like run out of oxygen at twenty thousand feet

At the end of the Maxwell stay I was able send to a telegraph home: "Classified for Fighter Pilot training.





It was a happy day when I found that I would be able to keep that winged propeller; Cadet Insignia on my cap and collar points a while longer. We're off to Souther Field, Americus, GA. I say, 'we', like it's the same group I started with. Not so. Until this move it seemed the Air Corps had a fetish about individuals or groups staying together. We were simply never with a person or group long enough to have close ties to anyone. Arrival at a new base meant you were quarantined to base for a week or so and while so confined you were exposed to new surroundings, new officers, new rules and new personalities. All had to be recognized quickly for being a friend or not. It became natural to recognize the goof-offs and the goldbricks from the good guys. There seemed to be no rhyme or reason as to how individuals were matched. You could only hope you'd be assigned to, and what you perceived to be, a unit of good guys. At Americus a unit was called a flight and it was composed of, around, ten cadets. This number was supposedly easy to maneuver from one activity to another and was about all one flight instructor could handle. The timing and location of activities were conveyed to the flight via a bulletin board and the leader of the flight, being so notified, was to consider such notification an order to have his flight present on time ready and properly suited for the task to be performed. Sounds simple enough?

After the discipline of Maxwell, Americus looked to be a real joy. How or why I don't know; but, once more I was made a flight leader. My flight was mostly composed of what I considered good guys; some were regular army. First duty was getting settled in a barracks. I ended up with a bottom bunk; one side of which opened to a space full of bunks on the other side was a nice wide corridor. The other side of the corridor was an exterior wall with lots of windows, and at one far end of the corridor was a latrine. With this choice I was able to enjoy the extra space provided by the corridor and view out the windows, but, alas such privileges could only last so long. One night everyone came down with the GI's (diarrhea). My bed became a parking place for those anxiously awaiting a vacant stool and I went without sleep listening to their moans begging for relief.

I have no way of knowing whether it was because of my patience or if it was some sort of punishment for my impatience but I and my flight received some unexpected good news. We were moved to a neat little cabin all to our selves. Being a flight leader had damn few privileges so the new digs were appreciated. Other than that it caused me to spend a good deal of time standing at attention in front of the Commanding Officer, a young Captain; thank heavens he had a sense of humor. The reasons for my seeing him were usually nothing serious, just trivial infractions by the flight or me. In my flight, it was just the nature of the regular army members to push regulations to the very edge of disobedience. Example: Lou driving his car (Where he got one, I can't imagine.) behind the rest of the flight on its way to PT --.Start over--.As it happened we were to wear

winter underwear tops that day (maybe the Capt.'s girl friend was visiting.). The flight, of course, obliged. But, they figured out that our elongated winter T-shirts could easily be worn with their bottom hem well below the knees and since the orders didn't specify otherwise that's exactly how they selected to wear them. Short shorts were put on fitted to the bottom of the T-shirts extending from there down to scrape the top of the shoes. That was our interpretation of the required dress for the day. I think it was Leo Tomzack who found that if we operated our legs only from the knees down and swung our hips from side to side while doing so we'd resemble the movement of a penguins walking. It may be hard to picture or even harder to believe but that's the way my flight marched to PT class that day; right down the main road, past HQ, (Head Quarters) to PT; swaddled in OD colored garments and appearing for the entire world like OD penguins stumbling in what could only be mistakenly interpreted as a formation. To add insult to injury Lou's car brought up the rear precisely guided by his bare feet on the steering wheel. Quickly, the inevitable call came: "Waters to HQ, on the double." I quickly changed to the proper uniform by adjusting my penguin garb and scurried to the HQ. A regular GI directed me to a chair in the Captain's outer office. Here I sat for a considerable amount of time; left to contemplate the punishment for which I surely was entitled. Then the GI says: "You're to go in now." The Captain was stern but I thought had a smile hidden in his reprimand. Lou's car was banned from the base until further notice. The flight was to do extra PT during what was essentially free time. All gigs received by any member of the flight, including its leader, would be doubled, etc., etc. But; we could still fly and if there were any awards to be won for flying my flight won them.

Souther Field was a great place. The parade grounds had grass cover as did the PT field and the flight field. The sheer number of people, cadets and officers, flight instructors, etc, was greatly reduced from other bases visited on my training schedule. There was little or no hazing. The object here was to teach us to fly the Army way. Like always we were confined to the base right off the bat. Why not? There was no place to go. The town was only about one thousand in population making it necessary for the cadets to hide a box in a pile of grass clipping at one end of the flying field. By placing a dollar or so in this box on a night, early in the week, a couple of beers and change could be found to replace the bills. This enterprise, while it lasted, ended with the beer's recipient lying on the grass mound, staring at the stars, and thinking of home. I was never privy to how the bookkeeping of this capitalistic venture worked but the beer was our only welcome relief valve.

Blind flying in a link trainer for instrument flight training increased. That's where you sat in a box in which all that looked like the cockpit of a plane. A portion of the box folded over your head. All you could see was the lighted dash board with its working instruments. The box moved, or supposedly moved, to simulate flight by operating normal plane controls. The simulation was only partially accomplished because the movement was made by spurts of air that turned every adjustment of the flight controls into an abrupt jerk. I suppose this jerking made us handle our real airplanes more smoothly. I loved the regular flying part of the Americus adventure. Our flight instructors were civilians. Army pilots gave us the check rides. Those cadets that could not pass a check ride left us unannounced. Lessons consisted mainly of a mastering the PT 17-Stearman (Nick-named KADET) in such maneuvers as stalls, spins, slips, take-offs, landings, dead stick landings, spot or emergency landings etc. Once in a while an

instructor would treat us to a loop or guide us through some other aerobatics such as a snap roll or loop. The Stearman was a great plane, a lot of fun to fly and it could take just about anything an instructor or cadet could dish out. I do not recall a single crash; there were a couple of ground loops though...Not mine, thank heavens. A ground loop happens when a plane is landed on one wheel and with the wing tip on the same side hitting the ground about the same time. The plane then thinks it is great sport to use the wing tip in, or on, the ground as a pivot around which the remainder is forced spin around until there is not much left to spin.

On good weather days, flying usually took up our mornings and ground school with navigation, engines, link trainers, PT and rules of the road filled our afternoons. One of the ground school instructors tried extra hard to get navigation math through our stubborn heads; our flight rewarded him by carving a wooden breast pin that looked like shoe soles shaped to resemble pilot's wings. They were much too big but he loved them. We all passed.

We graduates were given a booklet describing Souther Field's part in the war. It was a surprise to all to find out that Lindbergh soloed here, in a Curtis Jenny that he bought at auction.

Of course there were always letters to write and others gratefully received.





The majority of Cadets in my class at Souther Field satisfied the Army's Primary Flying requirements, and with something like eighty five hours flying time under our belts boarded other chow-chow, played cards, and excitedly talked flying on our way to Basic Flight Training. It was now about January 1944 and, for me, Basic took place at Walnut Ridge, AR, at the Army Air Corp Training School. Here I met Chester J. Swierczynski. Lou Freeman was around somewhere but was rather subdued. At least I don't recall any pranks he pulled during 'Basic'. Walter Umla became Lou's buddy. Maybe he calmed Lou down. Charles Philbrick was with us, but quiet. Alvin Hand was still with us as was Bob Petit, Bob Redwood and others, whose names escape me at this moment.

My first encounter with Chester occurred during our introduction to our Flight Instructor, an Army Officer. He asked each of us for our name:

Chester replied: "Chester J. Swierczynski sir."

"Spell it," asked the instructor.

"C-H-E-S-." Chester started.

"No. The last name." Said the instructor, interrupting.

Chester began again. "S-W-I-E-R-C-Z." But, before another letter could be uttered the instructor said;

"From now on you're Murph. I can spell that."

So it's been ever since.

We flew a lot of solo in BT-13's. A plane rumored to be rather difficult to recover from a spin, but a couple flights with the instructors, soon taught us otherwise. They impressed on us how anticipation and smoothness of control application brought about enjoyable flying and made us safer pilots. There were extended flight lessons under the hood. (Head covered with a canvas canopy so all you could see was the instrument panel. The plane clarified what the link trainer was trying to teach us.) The instructor would be in the back seat acting as look out and giving directions. We called his position 'Riding shot gun.' The link trainer was still around trying to simulate blind flying in a plane and increase our instrument proficiency. Those learning enough about the importance of flying by instruments alone, were introduced to the next step; Night Flight and how to defeat vertigo.

The first solo night flight came with each participant allotted an air space. Simply put, said air spaces resembled four one thousand foot thick cubes put together to form a square made up of two by two cubes in a horizontal plain. Two diagonal cubes, of the four, were displaced vertically so that there was hundred feet difference between the horizontal plains of any two adjacent cubes. The center meeting, line of the four cubes was located over the center of the air field. Additional four cube clusters could be added vertically to the original four at the base commander's discretion.

The experience started prior to dusk so that every participant had enough daylight to maneuver his plane into his allotted cube before dark. Therein the pilot was to take up a circular, level flight pattern, and was to continue circling until given permission to land by the ground controller (the tower).

My first time in this training ritual went well until dark. Then Ron, whose voice I recognized, wouldn't give his name, number or position and started shrieking; "I'm coming down. I can't take it." Trying to locate him visually was useless. Those still able to pay attention to flying were directed to make their circles at the outer extremities of their assigned space until further directions. This, I suppose, was meant to create as much space between planes as the tower thought was needed. But, how did we know whether Ron might also be circling at the outer edge of his space; or attempting to go down through the planes below him for a landing. Then just as things were beginning to calm down a bit Ron chimes in with; "I running out of gas! I'm heading in!" At this point the ground controller anxiously tried to vector him to the center of the field; but was interrupted as another BT-13 announced that it too was running low on fuel. This could not be if all planes had full tanks to start with as ordered. It was obvious, to the tower, an emergency situation had developed. The tower made an attempt at getting things in hand by ordering radio silence. Once that was established the tower ordered each plane, in turn, to report its location and fuel aboard. When that roll call was completed he started giving landing instructions starting with what he thought was the lowest plane first and waiting for the instructed plane to land before directing another in. That procedure seemed to take forever; considering the number of planes aloft and was further slowed due to a couple crash landings. But, eventually my first night flight was over.

Ron had been in my flight at Americus so the next day I decided to look him up. He wasn't in his barracks. He was in the hospital. He was in a barbed wire enclosure attached to the hospital with a sign ordering; NO VISITORS. I called to him through the wire. He only stared back.

Other night flights were more pleasant. I enjoyed the cross countries where all we had to do was follow coded flashing lights, on towers, spaced ten miles apart. (They were originally installed for the use of commercial air line pilots.) With visibility unlimited the; flashing tower lights, the brightness of the twinkling stars, the massed lights indicating towns, the sheet of blackness between towns spotted here and there with single dots of light-- some moving, made these flights above the earth memorable.

Then another scare occurred while landing after a daylight flight lesson flight lesson. I was on my final landing approach, with my instructor in the back seat, when the radio shouted: "Approach Plane 234!! Pull up! Pull up and go around!" 234 wasn't our plane. My instructor banged the stick forward, almost out of my hands. He then carefully eased it back maintaining our glide path heading, but now at less than a hundred feet altitude. Then he says "You got it better add a little throttle," calm as could be. Just

as our wheels squeaked on landing we hear the control tower say: “.Boy! Was that close”. 234 had been on a collision course with us. They were on the same glide path heading as we were but they were coming in steeper, from above us. I’d rather not have to go through that few seconds again nor would that instructor.

During daytime there were aerobatics to be learned. Aerobatics were fun. That’s what we were waiting for. You-know, they’re not as hard as they look but a lot tougher on the pilot than you might think, but enjoyable if they’re done right. Got my name posted for good Immelmans. Which is done by starting a loop, and at the top, rolling the plane over to an upright position and be heading the opposite direction from which you started

Ground work started to become more war like: Lots of skeet shooting, even from the back of moving trucks. Not so much marching or close order drill now, but plenty of PT. The base quarantine order was rescinded after a couple weeks and on my first trip to town, for some reason that for the life of me I can’t remember, I was obliged to participate in the manly art of fisticuffs with another Cadet. It took place behind some beer joint. I am not sure whether I won or not. I think I did; but even if I had there was little use to brag about it. Such conduct could mean dismissal from cadets. The next day I went to my rival’s barracks to apologize. All he said was; “Forget it.” I guess I’ll never know if that was meant as a sign of victory or defeat. I never saw him again.

Four of us applied the acceptable mode of travel, hitch hiking, for a proposed week end tour of Little Rock. The thumb of one, maybe two, pointed in that direction as any vehicle approached going the way we wanted. Picking up men in uniform must have been a way to display ones patriotism because in short order a car stopped for us. It was a beat-up, rusty old four door. Lou grabbed the front seat. The rest filled in the back, but there was no seat back there. It had been replaced by bottles, lots of bottles, bottles of all shapes and sizes, all lying horizontally. “Hep yur sef, boys;” says the driver. “It be fresh corn squeezin’s.” We somehow got a bottle out from under us and held it up to the light. It wasn’t exactly clear—had bits of what looked like ground up straw floating all through it. “Good fresh squeezin’s, the feller ah’m tack’n’ it ta wont know how much he’s fix’n’ ta git.” We all took a sip. You know, it wasn’t half bad. Later, as we got close to the city limits, our bootlegger stops and says; “Figger yeah-awl best tack off hea. The law’s mighty fussy ‘bout us-un deliverin’ corn now-days. But, tack all yeah wants. Reckon you boys air gun-a need it.”

I remember the respite as being short lived and much appreciated, but more flight training waited. Walnut Ridge added eight five more hours to the old log book but there is more needed.





Something like 80% of us graduated from Basic and rode the rails to Spence Field, Moultrie, GA. for Advanced Flight Instruction. The enthusiasm of those still in Cadets had increased in spite of miserable transit between bases. Upon arrival we again shuffled into the dark of night, and without even being commanded, formed ranks according to height. Someone started calling out names. Mine jerked me to a state of semi awareness and I heard the dreaded, "One Step Forward." Those likewise disturbed were culled for the purpose of emptying a boxcar of duffel bags so they could be delivered to rightful owners, hopefully for the next few months.

If I had asked: "Why me?"

The answer, as usual, would have been, something to the effect of: "You should be proud to be one of the honored few to help your buddies."

To which, I might have whispered to myself: 'Sure; and to get the knuckles, on both hands, worn raw from handling those damn bags'."

Even if unspoken, such thoughts would only be answer with: "Just think, Mister, when you're done, you can go right to the head of the chow line. Just tell them that I said it's OK."

And I'd mumble to my self: 'Oh boy! Doesn't that sound great, but: Tell who, what exactly and, by-the-way, who the hell are you? The last time I tried that, I damn near got my head knocked off for bucking the line; and if the duty is so great, how come your not unloading bags'?

Somehow everything gets done, and wounds start to heal, and morning comes. We fall out and march to headquarters for the welcoming speech. We're at attention, facing a raised platform decorated with a few flags and several empty chairs. We're doing our best to look like, and be, the cadets Maxwell taught us to be. Presently a Major and his entourage appear. The tag-along entourage takes seats. The Major stands at the edge of the platform facing us. (Looking for-all-the-world like Scott portraying Patton, in a recent movie I saw.) He starts to enlighten us on all the good stuff: Rules of the base; who's who, manners; discipline; food; ground school; flying; quarantine; etc. Next he hesitates, clasps his hand behind his back and just glares at us. Then: changes his stance. Hand knuckles are now in on his hips, feet spread apart about shoulder width. With-out an inkling of unsteadiness, he puffs out his chest as if he knows this reduces the visible portion of his scrawny neck. He juts his chin forward. (I figure, they must teach this

stance at West Point.) His carriage doesn't scare us but his next words do: "Look at the person on each side of you. Remember him well. When this training is completed, in three months, two of you will not be here. Welcome to Spence Field, Moultrie, Georgia." With that he dose a beautiful about face and scurries off the platform towards the Head Quarter's Building, followed, at a respectful distance, by what we are lead to believe are his enforcers. When May, 1944 rolled around he'd pretty much kept his word. I remember a nice guy whose folks came down Moultrie to see him sport his new uniform, wings and gold bars being called out for a check ride the night before he was to wear them. He 'washed-out'.

Ground school tests grew tougher. A new thing was added that took up our leisure time in the ready room, waiting for a flight was Air Craft Recognition. That's sort of a game where the instructor flashes the silhouette of a plane on a screen; they could pictures of be ours or the enemies. Could be shown in, side, front or rear views. The images stayed on the screen for anywhere from a half a minute to a tenth of a second. The teacher would then point to somebody and he'd better know what it was.

PT was not quite as time consuming but just as tough. It was usually taught by a GI. It seemed that cadets were the bottom of the chain of command, not just here at Spence but everywhere we'd been. Everyone in uniform said: Mister, do this. Mister, do that; even other cadets. The only reprieve was solo flight.

With classes, PT, flying, all time seemed to roll along quickly and the number of cadets obviously became smaller. Those of us, with the propellers on our caps began to know the good guys better: Lou Freeman; the groups clown, who acted as if rules were meant to be broken but somehow managed to stay out of trouble; Walter Umla; Lou's manager or the guy who probably thought up Lou's antics yet stayed in the background far enough to be safe from any extra duty; then there was tall lanky, always well dressed; Chester Swierczynski; the biggest of the bunch, happy, a hard worker, didn't drink but was willing to take you back to base if you had to much. There others too, to many, I fear, to remember. Perhaps they will come to mind as we continue with words and places that jar my memory.

We spent a lot of time with an instructor riding shot gun while we were under the hood practicing instrument flying. One such lesson was to fly at a certain altitude and follow a radio beacon until it went silent. If no signal was heard it meant you were over the radio tower, and in its cone-of-silence. At this point you were supposed to know where you were and the heading (Compass course) to a runway by having studied and memorized a chart. When your memory was working properly, you were then supposed fly to and line up on the runway and begin your landing approach. Sounds simple doesn't it. But, remember this had to be accomplished under a hood, unable to see anything but the instruments on the fire wall (dash board). When all went well and you were down to three hundred feet, or so, the instructor would have you release the hood so you could see how well you made the approach for a landing through an imaginary fog. With a lot of concentration it could be done. One of the instructors I had for this was an officer by the name of Hunter. If your lesson didn't require repeating, he'd put you back under the hood and instruct you to take up a series of different headings, air speeds and elevation. After a bit, he'd say: "Pop the hood." Usually you'd find yourself in a valley staring at rock walls a very short distance from your wing tips. You knew the lesson was over when he ordered; "Take me home." Once in the landing pattern at home base, if he

said; “I got it,” you were in for a Hunter Landing. He’d hold his landing approach at a constant one thousand feet of altitude until he was directly over the end of the runway. There, having throttled back to idle, he’d put the plane in a stall, whereupon he’d dump the stick (Point the nose down.) and dive at the runway recovering with the joystick back in his lap as the wheels squeaked on the tarmac for a thrilling, but good, landing. I guess he knew the CO wasn’t watching. He said he’d learned to do it practicing with cloud top as runways. I tried it—with clouds only.

Outside of the old movies, social life was nil. One time a bunch of us went to a country club somewhere-or-other but, since we weren’t members and didn’t own golf clubs we were not allowed to play golf. It was just as well, I was never much good at golf. We were invited to play Duck Pins though. I had never played that game before nor have I played it since. Went back to base and wrote letters.

Mostly we tried our damndest to study ground school work and think through problems given us while flying and have flying become automatic as well. All so we’d be around when the day finally came that we’d be given three hundred and some odd dollars to purchase officer uniforms. Lou volunteered to locate a place where we could get the most and best for the buck. We gave him the job. Why not—The city of Moultrie only had a population of only a couple of thousand and the only tailor not in the service was right on our base. His shop must have been approved by the Army. They did a pretty good job with pinks, greens, OD’s, shoes (Oxfords for a change,) socks, trench coats, pea coats, hats, caps, insignia, etc. I even had a couple of bucks left after the purchase. The government supplied us with A-2 flight bags (Canvas suitcases.) and a jim-dandy green foot locker with our name and serial number emblazoned thereon. Mine read: Lt. C.L. Waters 0832948. And, oh yes, new metal dog tags: same name (less the Lt), same number, a P for Protestant, and O for blood type stamped in them, and a hole for a neat metal bead type chain so they could be worn like a pendant. I cut new circles from an oxygen mask supply tube to frame the tags. That way they wouldn’t stick to my chest when they froze while flying at high altitudes.

The day of our graduation, before we fell-out for the ceremony, we spent time inspecting each other. The last thing we wanted was to be washed-out for improper dress. Passing inspection we formed ranks before the Head Quarter’s Building and were individually called inside to appear before the CO. A seated WAC officer had to be passed on the way to the CO’s desk. The WAC was the first woman Officer I’d seen. Thank heaven I remembered to salute. It was said those who failed to do so helped the CO make his quota of wash-outs. The CO’s job was to swear us in as officers and give us our gold bars signifying our rank as second lieutenant. This over with we got back in formation and were given the familiar: Right-Face-Forward-March. We were heading for the parade grounds, proud officers in the United States Army Air Force. After months of worriedly wondering if we could be fighter pilots we would finally participate in a solemn ceremony; where hard earned wings would be presented that told the entire world we were pilots in the United States Army Air Force. Thoughts of past tribulations, buddies lost or washed-out, brought a lump to the throat of everyone and a reverence to the occasion that repressed any feelings of self elation for our accomplishment. That is, for everyone but Lou. He brought us back to earth with: “Hey, Umla; get out-a step. What-ya doing? Bucking” (Meaning: trying to improve your rank).

I don't remember the ceremony, at all, but on my way back to the barracks I received my first salute from a GI, Ken Lawson, a guy from Saginaw who'd married a friend's sister, Shirley. I gave him five bucks. (The tradition demanded only one buck but I had nothing smaller.) He filled me in about the home front and said that he was being sent to Tifton, GA as permanent cadre. He and Shirley were to have an apartment there. We chatted a while then I scampered back to the barracks to find out my next assignment. The bulletin board read that I too was headed for Tifton for Transition Training. That meant I'd fly a real fighter plane. The good news had hardly soaked in when the P.A. system barked; "Lt. Waters to the flight line." What now? When I arrived at the flight line they had me suit up for flight and then told me I was to fly a P40 to Tifton. I tried to explain, that I'd not been checked out in one and heard: "That's OK; the Lieutenant here will get you in the air." So, for an hour, I sat in a cockpit and memorized the location and use of all instrument levers and gadgets while the Lieutenant calmly recited the P40's flying characteristics. When once I mentioned that maybe someone else should fly the ship to Tifton, he answered with: "What do you think those wings you just got are for?" So after a blindfold test that showed that I knew where gadgets were I was released to resolutely and meticulously taxi out for take off. The first time you put full throttle to one of those babies you're not quite sure who's flying it, you or that huge powerful engine just ahead. So it's; easy does it. Then after reaching altitude and throttling back I must say I enjoyed my short flight to Tifton





After establishing myself in the Officer's Quarters at Tifton I looked up Ken and Shirley and they invited me to dinner. I must say I enjoyed the meal and the chatter about the hometown folks until we were interrupted by some of Ken's buddies looking for a place to party. A quick search of pockets, and the donation of coins they held, soon produced more than enough corn liquor than was needed for those present. Now I had a problem. Here I was a new officer hob-knobbing with enlisted men. I figured I better not stretch the rules too far on what was, practically, my first night out as an Officer, so I excused myself and went to write letters. Next time I heard from Ken he thanked me, saying; his guys had more fun without an officer around.

Tifton was not a long stay. Some enjoyed the hum of the thousand horse power P-40 engine dragging their plane through the skies. Still we lost a few that decided they didn't want to be in fighters and a few others that just couldn't train so many horse power how to act. They were among the few in number that messed up planes. Most accidents were caused by bad landings. We had no ground school that I remember and PT was either volleyball or softball at our own discretion. All we did, or wanted to do was learn to fly a fighter plane. This was about all we talked about, yet for the most part, it had to be self taught. I purposely put a P-40 in a spin. It was not a required maneuver. It scared the Be-Jesus out of me thereby making it my last spin, ever. The hundred and sixty plus or minus hours the government gave us through Primary, Basic, and Advanced flight training was to tutor us through the fundamentals of flight. Now we had to learn how to fly by the seat of the pants when the weather permitted and to automatically switch to instrument flying when the weather told us to.

Umla provided the most memorable entertainment. He discovered that if he put some lighter fluid in his mouth, puckered up his lips and spurt the fluid at a lit cigarette lighter a spectacular ball of fire would appear and it would bring forth many Os and Ahs. It worked to, until he drooled or someone made him laugh just prior to the spurt. Needless to say he was without earned laughs from that audience and found it unnecessary to shave or wear an oxygen mask for quite some time.





Back in those days there were no passenger trains serving the West Coast of Florida, south of Tampa. As far as I know there still aren't. So, with our destination being Page Field, Fort Meyers, Florida, we were treated to a bus trip. This was a refreshing and clean experience when likened to old coaches dragged by soot belching boilers jerking and rattling as they delivered their cargo to new destinations. Our conveyance, this time, had large clear windows, soft spacious seats, but no rest room facilities. The corrective measure, to remedy this oversight, was to make occasional pit stops along south bound highway US 41. After utilizing the reason for one such halt Murph and I found ourselves window shopping in Sarasota; completely oblivious to the time marking the end to our transport's kindly breather. Returning to again board our bus all we saw was the back end of the vehicle sending forth great plums of diesel smoke. Without hesitation we scrambled into a taxi that, fortunately, had just taken over the bus's parking spot. We let its driver know he should; "**Catch that bus!**" A grand high-speed chase began that ended with horns honking, lights flashing and Murph and I and the taxi driver, shouting at the top of our lungs until the bus was caught and stopped, on the shoulder of the road, so Murph and I could get back where we belonged. We scaled up the less than comfortable bus's steps to be seated and greeted with Lou hollering: "Hey! Those guys are part of our gang;" as if being in his gang was a position to be cherished. We were honored with the front seat on the right side of the driver for the rest of the journey south so belonging to the gang did have a few perks. The taxi driver? He didn't even want to be paid. He just wished us well.

Preceded by our foot lockers we arrived at Page an hour or so later, to find our billet was to be in regular Army barracks converted to Officer's Quarters by removing the top bed from bunks and placing partitions so as to create separate cubicles for every six beds. When you found your foot locker at the end of a bed you were home. By-the-way, the beds here had mattresses made-up of two biscuits. Guess where the joint between the two came when you laid down. Oh well, they were not much worse than the three biscuit type we had just learned to sleep on, before heading south..

To be cool enough we soon learned to sleep with all windows and doors wide open. But the bugs and mosquitoes considered this an invitation to pester us, so we were finally forced to request screens. This deterred the mosquitoes but other varmints became part of our reveille and getting dressed act. Each morning, prior to putting on our shoes, we would tap their heels on the floor and then turn them over. This usually dislodged the scorpions which probably would have made walking uncomfortable. There was another pest too. Not necessarily related to the South but that gossip attributed to former occupants of our lodgings. BED BUGS! To foil their bites we obtained netting for our beds which just gave the pests another place to hide. We got all new bedding, to no avail; it only gave them a nice clean place to hide. We were given delousing showers and that night we fed the critters deloused food. The only remedy was new, sterilized or fumigated everything or moving to different barracks.

My way of solving the bedbug problem was to get married and move to a road side tourist cabin. At least that's how Letty says I solved it.

Concurrent with the care and feeding of bed bugs, there was still ground school and flying. The land area around Fort Meyers being composed of several fertile swamps, we were treated to a course in swamp survival. They taught us stuff like: That if by chance, we were forced to land in one and if by chance, having safely landed in one, an alligator appears--hit him in the snout, and if a snake shows up and bites you, carefully check the site of the bite to see if there are two puncture wounds. If so, the snake was probably poisonous so plunge the can opener blade of a Boy Scout knife into the wound to make it bleed freely. Use clean bandages on the wound and see a doctor or go to a hospital as soon as possible. The questions left unanswered were: Wouldn't hitting an alligator make him mad, and how do you find a doctor or hospital in a swamp? Yes, we were all issued a Boy Scout knife, but we never did find out where the clean bandages were to come from?

As to the alligators; I did see one. Not in a swamp though. I was walking down the Tamiami Trail US 41, the main street of Fort Myers, and I noticed everyone on the other side of the street was crossing over to my side. That seemed strange? There didn't seem to be anything on my side to attract the crossover. As I approached this interchange activity, it became obvious. An alligator was casually lumbering along claiming the sidewalk across the road as his own. No one, not even the alligator seemed upset, excited or fearful. People treated it as an everyday occurrence--just something to talk about with the neighbors. That pretty well typified Fort Myers in '44. Before the War it was a popular winter resort. The winter homes of Henry Ford and Thomas Alva Edison were there on the South side of the Caloosahatchee River. Sanibel Island stood as sentinel at the mouth of the river; that's the island Anne Morrow Lindbergh wrote about in her fine book, Gifts from The Sea. Along the Tamiami Trail, North of the river, on the Gulf side, was the Royal Palms Hotel; an old, wood framed, white, two story, building that was destined to become our off duty hang out because of its friendly bar room with a small platform acting as a stage for a piano and Lou. Right across highway US 41 from the Palms stood a cute little wood framed Methodist church. It was painted a sparkling white, steeple and all, and was to see quite a few pilots and their sweethearts joined in holy wedlock. South of the river was the main part of town. The Franklin Arms, a three story, brick hotel was the town's most imposing building. Completing the make up of the village was one drug store on a main cross roads corner, a small J. C. Penney store, a few other shops, a couple of little restaurants with counters to eat at, and a dinky movie theater. Scattered along the trail were a few tourists' cabins, used as married officer's quarters.

Originally Page Field was built as a city airport to accommodate northern visitors. It was still in use by a very few commercial craft when we were there. The Army had taken over and added to the south side of it for its own use. Bomber pilots and aerial gunners, firing from SBDs, were taught here before we came. The how or why of the Army's layout was never explained. We merely accepted that it was right and proper that one runway; the main one we used should butt its end, asphalt to asphalt, against the East side of the Tamiami Trail. A feature that came in handy if you landed long but became a reason to be embarrassed as hell if you'd landed long at night and turned down the Trail thinking it was a taxi strip. One guy did just that and didn't discover his mistake until he read SARASOTA on the lighted sign atop a North bound bus. We never let him forget it.

The Army part was also devoid of any decorative vegetation, except for the tree stumps remaining from clearing glide paths beyond runway ends. The stumps gave new meaning to the cardinal taking-off rule: With engine failure on take off do not attempt to turn, go straight in. 'Into stumps?' Army greenish grey painted, skimpy wood buildings did little to enhance the place; but what-the-heck, it was home base.

Flying was fun: Punching holes in clouds, target practice on a towed sleeve, bombing targets posted in the swamps (just for us), formation flying, buzzing fishing boats or just flying so close to the gulf that your prop left a wake; these were favorites. The low level stuff was frowned upon but contemptuously pursued. Those not frowned upon we became quite proficient at. While practicing low flying one guy did so well that he picked up a few pine needles in his air scoop. For this he was made an instructor and not allowed to go overseas with us. We bombed and bombed and bombed some more. I even hit a steer that had clumped its way between me and the target. The bomb was only a light weight practice type, loaded with bread flour that made a nice white plume when it hit. The rancher never complained and my instructor didn't report it or I may have ended up as an instructor too. Of course instrument flying never stopped. We did a lot of it in link trainers and, for more realistic training, in a Navy SBD, Douglas Dauntless, Dive Bomber; where we were either under the hood or riding shot-gun. This craft was something else. You could point them straight down, with full throttle and their cheese cake flaps extended, and never get over ninety miles an hour. We also got time in a Norseman. Why I can't remember. The Norseman is the type air craft that Glen Miller was on when he disappeared. over or in the English Channel. He was heading to the main land of Europe to entertain the troops...Some time in 1944.

Accidents were few, at least few were publicized. When a guy didn't show up for a formation or at meal time you assumed he just wasn't coming back. It didn't necessarily mean he was dead. He just wasn't coming back. South of us there was a training squadron flying P-32s, Air Cobras. (A fighter that shot a cannon through its nose cone.) These were thought to be quite unstable in flight. Several made forced landing at Page. Rumors were many about their loss record, but such hearsay only made us feel lucky to be in our ole war-weary P-40s. Not that we didn't have our mishaps. I bounced one, on landing, so high you could have driven a six by six truck under it. The ribbing I took for that kept me red faced for a long time. Speaking of war-wearies; a crew chief removed an inspection plate from the rear part of the fuselage of one and pointed out, what he said were, a few bullet holes for me.

I think it was Lou who good naturedly, conducted any ribbing or needling the flight needed. He thought he was the self appointed instigator, and director, of most of the Squadron's amusement. Nightly he'd perform Boogie-Woogie piano recitals at the Royal Palms' piano during our martini cocktail hour. When the bartender informed us that olives were no longer to be had Lou, and Umla, escorted a bunch of us through Fort Myers' one building warehouse district. Here we came up with a gallon jar of olives to rectify the bar's shortfall and, of course, they were free. The bartender kept this rather large trophy displayed prominently on top of the bar where we could watch its contents rapidly vanish. When the last olive was plunged down some flyer's throat Lou, and Umla, invented a Gah-Zear-E-Um. They centered a shot glass in its bottom and filled the jar with water. Then an ample slot was cut in its ample lid and the lid and returned to its rightful place. Directions were pasted on the jar's side notifying everyone that a coin dropped or plunged through the slot, into the water,

and landing in the shot glass would be rewarded ten to one. The shot glass, magnified by the jar's shape and the water, appeared as big as a bucket and impossible to miss; but nearly everyone did. Soon the jar filled with coins to the top of the shot glass and the bartender wondered what to do with the considerable profit. Lou and Umla decreed, without hesitation, that it should go to charity.

Again Lou had a car. He always had a car. They were clunkers and where he got them we never knew. They just appeared. But Lou and his car were useful for making trips to some of the small towns when the local drugstore ran out of booze. The town visited would be one that had no Army Air Base nearby so that its liquor dispensing drug store usually had an ample supply to fill our needs. Sometimes we didn't even have to buy a bottle of gin with each bottle of whiskey. Such trips took forever; it wasn't the distance, it was just that Lou insisted on stopping for all ruts or potholes as though they were rail road crossings. Had to preserve the tires you know. When things got dull Lou would take some of his gang for a ride and when they found a likely spot he'd carefully back down, part way, into the roadside ditch (All Florida roads had ditches on both sides) only far enough to be able to drive out if things didn't go as he planned. Then they'd sit and wait. Usually it wasn't long before some kind soul, usually an elderly couple, would stop and offer to help the poor troubled servicemen back on their way. Lou would let them help and then insist on taking them to dinner. Sometimes the gang would just settle for finding an off the beaten path bar for a beer or so. If the place had a piano, Lou played. If it had a jukebox and a piano, Lou would unplug the jukebox and play the piano. If some local objected and plugged the jukebox back in; Lou would casually unplug it again, hand the plug to the biggest GI in uniform, and with the rest of his bunch gathered around, Lou would give, an uninterrupted, Boogie-Woogie concert. Lou also made it a point to attend the wedding of every fellow pilot taking place in the little white church. When the rites reached the point where the Chaplin said: "I now pronounce you man and wife;" Lou could be heard throughout the edifice proclaiming his approval with a loud: "TERRAZZO!"

Umla was Lou's right-hand man through these antics, or maybe it was the other way around? They were not our only wags though. There was also Pop Ansel. Pop was a year or so older than the rest of us, had been in service longer than most of us; and as 1st Lieutenant out ranked us. Some how, he got the opportunity to become a fighter pilot and caught up to us at Page. His rank didn't bother us but it did get him some good duty. One assignment had him on courier duty. Besides delivering some Army paper he was to pick up a new Navigator graduate in New Orleans and deliver him to Detroit. Seems the poor guy's mother had passed away and his father pulled enough strings to get him the trip home for the funeral. Navigation was another nose-to-the-grindstone program similar to flight training. Anyway, after taking care of his paper route, Pop found the lad in the waiting room at the airport in New Orleans and they headed out to the ship for the northbound flight. The, I suppose, depressed graduate, trying to be helpful, said: "If you wish, I'd be glad to navigate for you, sir." He was probably eager to show off his newly, hard earned, skills to a superior officer. Pop didn't know about the loss of the kid's mother and only wanted conversation to keep him awake during the flight. He'd flown a lot of the big stuff on long hauls and really didn't need help. So he replied: "Hey kid, we're only going to Detroit." The kid got in the plane and never said another word. He didn't even say thanks when he got off the plane to be picked up by his dad. Pop continued on with his courier flight to Harrisburg, PA, RON'ed (Remained over night.) and

then came back to Page. When I asked him; "How'd it go?" He told me he'd found out about the kid's mother after he got to Harrisburg, got drunk, and that some GI woke him up the next morning calling him; the: Mayor of Harrisburg.

Alvin Hand, a, short jolly guy who seemed to be continually blushing and who also liked to believe he was leader of our group, still seemed to feel it was his responsibility to keep the troops informed of all erotic happenings or opportunities that presented themselves. I'm pretty sure it was our first night out after settling down at Page, with several of us assembled at the Royal Palm Bar, that Alvin rushed in to proclaim that he was the first one to have a dame in the Gulf of Mexico (Shades of Butler U.). And, it didn't take him long to point out that the night shift waitress at the local hamburger stand had: "A belt that went all of the way around; entirely made of pilot's silver wings. Mine's right in front". One time we were invited to a country club by the Fort Myers Ladies USO. It was a nice affair: Eats, music, dancing and the like. It made me lonesome so I excused myself and went outside to call Letty from the public phone booth. When I got close to the booth Alvin was coming out of it followed by, I guess, a girlfriend. He sported a big smile on his face. She appeared rather surprised and bashful... I turned and went back to base and wrote letters.

Receiving letters was such a gratification that it made answering them almost a pleasure. It was through letters that Letty and I got to know each other better and to fall in love. Through letters she decided to cajole her father into allowing her to make the fifteen hundred mile trip to Fort Myers. Making that trip alone must have been miserable and frightening. There must have been several transfers getting to Tampa and then a switch to a bus to reach her destination. Undaunted she sent me her ETA (Pilot talk for estimated time of arrival.) which, of course, I had announced to the welcoming committee, gathered at the Royal Palm for the arrival ceremonies and to meet this much publicized girl of my dreams. The committee included Lou, Umla, Philbrick and Redwood and possibly one or two others. Murph being a tea-totaler was not present. We probably had a drink or two before I left for the bus station to pick Letty up and escort her back to meet the Page field elite. It was a bit of a walk there that produced only a sign saying that the bus from Tampa was delayed an hour. Back at the hotel I disappointedly announced the new ETA and my companions condescended to wait with me. This happened, maybe, three times and each time I had to report: No Letty, and each time, I found another courtesan had been added to our table --Thanks to Philbrick having a demented idea of a fun thing to do. A disheveled Letty did finally arrive with her luggage still on the platform in Orlando. The guys, she knew from letters. The ladies; she never guessed their specialty until I told her sometime later. I had a hard time forgiving Philbrick for his tasteless joke made worse by his drink inspired comments. When the welcoming committee broke up there was much explaining to do to the hotel clerk to get Letty a room without her luggage but, we prevailed and I was able to retire back to the base a happy man.

Letty became friends with the other pilots' wives and visiting girl friends without my help. I imagine their girl talk helped keep her busy during the day. With my free time, I tried to fill the rest. One evening we found ourselves sitting on the end of a dock silently admiring phosphorescent jellyfish's tentacles swishing like fine frayed silken strands as they propelled their semi spherical iridescent bodies in a slow motion dance through the warm Gulf waters. Letty seemed pensive while I pondered the right and wrong of marriage, knowing my uncertain future. Exactly who said what to whom or if

we both spoke at once and what was said is our secret but, well, we'll be married sixty years this fall.

The wedding was a thing to behold. Murph was my best man. He had to remind me that I really ought to put my gold bars and silver wings on my sun-tans before entering the little white church. Redwood's bride-to-be was Letty's bride's maid. Most, if not all, the other pilot's wives were in the procession forming the maids of honor. Redwood and a couple other plane jockeys, that Murph convinced, stood up for me. Letty was heavenly in her new dress. She'd made a special trip, in Lou's car, alone, to Sarasota to buy it. On another trip to Sarasota we picked out the rings and had our wedding picture taken. Chaplain Brown, our base Chaplin, performed the ceremony. The church was crowded, and, yes, Lou shouted out: TERRAZZO and it was done. A young lady; (I'm ashamed to say I don't remember her name.) a WAAF that flew all kinds of war planes around the country, took over and arranged a fantastic reception. We saw little of the results of her kind help though. I'd been given only the weekend off. Pop had loaned us his convertible and we had to drive it north eighty miles to Sarasota to get gas without ration stamps. Then back South on the Tamiami Trail at the end of which, in Miami, hotel accommodations supposedly awaited. It was getting late and dark. All sorts of weird things came out of the swamp. They reveled in the warmth of the black topped Trail, their presence helped keep me awake. The only congratulatory signs we saw admonished us not to stop and pickup hitch-hikers, because there was an Army prison camp nearby. Letty finally fell asleep and we arrived safely at the hotel, only to find we were too late.

Our reservations had been given to someone else. Letty slumped exhausted into one end of a lobby davenport. The other end of which held a sleeping male civilian, probably a salesman. I stood at the desk trying to talk the night clerk into renting us suitable accommodations. He said that he was sorry for me but there was nothing he could do. The place was filled. He professed to know how I felt because after all didn't he have a son in the Air Corps learning to fly B-29s. I'd heard of these monsters of the sky but I'd never seen one. I sensed this was my chance and seized the moment. I became the one guy that could answer any and all questions this proud father might have about the new dreadnoughts. My answers must have been good because, after a considerable amount of my educational lecturing, he finally pointed at the salesman sharing Letty's resting bench and asked if it didn't look like a suitcase on the floor beside him. It sure did. The clerk called a bellboy and told him to check the room our sleeping case owner should have been in. The report was that the room was undisturbed. Letty and I had it for two nights. Nice guy, that clerk. Hope his son did well in B-29's. I am still speculating about what the slumbered one on the other end of the sofa did and said when he woke up? Bet his neck hurt.

Back in Fort Meyers Letty and I rented one of Tate's Tourist Cabins beside the Caloosahatchee and settled into a love-birds lifestyle. Sure we had the spats like other newlyweds. But the make ups were just as good and both shall remain ours to savor. We had parties and ate well. To eat well it became necessary to write home for food stamps. Each of our family's sent a bunch. "Let's have ham," Letty said and ham she purchased; A whole bone-in ham. She comes from a family of six brothers and a sister. They always had a whole ham if that was the meat of the day. She didn't even know you could buy just a piece of one. Thank heavens the neighbors helped us out.

I was busy most days at the air field. One day, in late October or early November, I was in a Link Trainer pursuing blind flying training when the thing surprisingly puffed and wheezed to a stop. The instructor popped the hood and announced that I was to go home, pack a bag for a few days, and report back to the flight line A.S.A.P. Letty was not home when I got there. I packed and left a note to the effect that I didn't know where I was going or when I'd be back; it turned out she already knew. Most of the pilots and a few crew chiefs were to fly to Meridian, Mississippi for a few days. A hurricane was headed for Page. Letty, a bunch of other wives and some of the Officers left behind, went to the Franklin Arms and stayed with Pop. She later told me six girls slept cross-wise in the only useable bed for a night. I was to fly a Douglas Dauntless out from Page with a crew chief as passenger. The take off was in real instrument conditions and the first thing I saw was FORT MEYERS painted on a water tank dead ahead. After some bit of panic maneuvering I called the tower and asked them to change the heading for planes leaving. "Why?" came back the reply; "You're the last plane out." Finally I broke out of the clouds to find clear skies for the rest of the way to Sarasota. There I went to the officer's club, as instructed, to wait for further orders but instead of orders I got a chewing out by some bird Colonel because I was in the officer's club in a flight suit. He didn't even apologize when told why I was so attired. Rank has its privileges. New orders said I was to fly as a wing man to another SBD to some field-or-other along the northern Gulf Coast, Meridian, MS as I remember or some where in that area. Anyway, things went swimmingly until I flicked on the light switches at twilight. I had no lights. Then the radio died, well not entirely. I could receive but not send. Through hand signals I was able to convey my plight to the leader and he took over handling my communications. He landed first. I was to follow him in the landing pattern. When I was on my base leg and he appeared to be landing, he just disappeared. I thought I could see the runway and runway lights but not his plane. Then I got his call: "Suggest you make a power landing. There's a thick ground haze that reflects the runway on top of it." His advice was followed and found to be excellent. I greased my SBD in. There were four that flew SBDs, to report to the CO upon landing. Our number obviously concerned him when he sharply questioned us with: "I thought I gave strict orders that there was to be no pilots as passengers; only crew chiefs." "That's right sir," said our leader. "There are four of you and I only saw three planes land". Came from the CO so now it was my turn; "My light's malfunctioned, Sir," I said. The CO replied; "Oh. You're excused. Check in with the billeting officer," ending the conversation. The stay in the Deep South was short and uneventful. I noticed that Murph didn't seem to be with the guys that flew in. Asking about him got no answers.

In just a couple of days, with radio and lights fixed we were on our way back to Page. When it came into view I broke formation and circled our river side cabin. There was Letty, out in front of it, wading in knee deep water. She was safe. I was able to smile. Upon landing the most noticeable things to be seen was twisted inverted wreckage marking the end of a gallant old, war weary, P-40, and the palm covered pagoda the crew chiefs use to get out of the sun had vanished. The next day Letty and I took Lou's transportation for a spin along the gulf beach. The hurricane's work was evidenced by a lot of beat up cottages and spaces of where others had been, but we saw no people. Those evacuated must not have returned yet. One thing that caught my attention and made me feel sorry for some poor soul was just the edge of a blanket exposed in what should have been the driveway to a garage. There was no

garage. Next to the blanket was a car with its hood up. Everything was covered with sand, except that blanket edge. Sand made smooth depressions of what might have been bolt holes and mounded over what were probably removed parts. Somebody had quite a job ahead of himself. Wonder, if he even tried? Murph still was missing for a few more days but finally showed up. He never told me where he'd been until years later. Would you believe an ingrown toenail made him watch the hurricane through a window of an Army Hospital?

Once back at Page things quickly got back to normal. Both Lou and Redwood got married, to resounding 'Terrazzo's. Murph asked his love life to come for a visit from New York State. She wrote that she didn't want to. He wrote back: "Please come." She wouldn't. They sadly broke up. Flying became routine except for the fun stuff. Volleyball was strenuous but a way to keep in shape and have some fun at the same time. We got so we could name the planes flashed on the screen pretty good. And they started showing us actual aerial combat films. We buried a couple of our guys and began to understand why we should not grieve over those lost. It was time to move on. We headed north. Letty drove Lou's jalopy with Redwood's wife as company and for girl-talk. Lou's wife drove her own new car. It blew a rod about Tampa. Letty and her passenger made it without incident, but slowly, all the way to Tallahassee. The men folk were piled in buses. Rumors had it that we were headed overseas. We weren't. Not yet. We had to spend a couple of weeks at some Pensacola field brushing up on low level flight and short field landing and take offs. An instructor said that we were to fly off a carrier from someplace in Africa which seemed hard to believe. Finally, when we were considered ready, some benevolent master sergeant figured a week's leave would even further our desire to kill. Letty and I headed north on a train; what-else. It was a sleepless trip to Cincinnati that found us there without connections to Detroit. After fruitless calls to airports and no better results with railroad personnel, on my part, it was Letty who discovered another car had been added to a train bound for Detroit. A call home had my mother and father meet us there for the last leg of the journey to Saginaw. After a short but pleasing leave and an uneventful return to Florida plus a few base changes I somehow met Letty at Bob Redwood's folk's apartment in Manhattan for one last visit prior to a long boat ride.

Did I skip D-DAY? I didn't mean to. I'm sure we must have heard about it. We most likely considered it as just another battle. I can't remember any emphasis being place on it. Not even after we got overseas.





For the life of me I can't remember Christmas 1944. Don't remember giving or getting gifts, receiving phone calls or even calling home, decorated trees, carols, or not one thing about it—Except—There was dried-out turkey breast for lunch. I know I was somewhere in Jersey, confined to base, getting paper records in order. Well, not just papers. Seemed as though every shot my records said I had, even if it was only a week or so old, was a directive to have it repeated. Then there were the ones required, just in case, you might go to Outer Mongolia or some other unearthly place not even on the map. Of course, the booster shot for tetanus was administered, or should I say plunged, deep enough into your arm that writing home was only done to relieve a guilty conscience. Then there was the food? I did believe we should be grateful to our allies. But, does that mean we have to disregard every dish mother put on the table and learn to enjoy mutton? And, what about all that stuff made from powder?

I suppose transportation to the docks, the day before New Years Day, was by a six by six. There, as I remember it, a long line of OD uniformed humans were, positioned by alphabetical order, facing a ship's painted steel wall. Umla and Murph were the only ones I recognized. Studying the camouflage paint revealed only one door. It had a rounded top and bottom and it was opened with its out side against the paint; thereby exposing an ugly apparatus of hinges and locking devices that were meant to deter any entrance from our side into and an ominous looking black hole when the door was closed and the devices properly engaged. Next to the hole was a platform on which stood GI reading orders from a clipboard. Most of which we had already heard, like: At all times wear OD uniforms and life preservers when on deck, backpacks to carry a week's change of attire, etc. Then a new one stating: "**No alcohol**" Such palaver was repeated constantly as we shuffled our way forward to pass into the hole; to who knows what. They must have meant the no alcohol thing because bottles started to appear on the land side of shoulders of those about to enter the unknown; only to be captured, opened, and tipped by the recipients to the rear. The unfortunate being relieved of his treasure meant that, at first there was little liquid left by the time a container reached the Ws, but as the line shortened those whose last name began with letters forming the concluding end of the alphabet were amply rewarded. Beyond the door and through some twisting corridors we were deposited in an all steel enclosed, dark space (couldn't call it a room) with probably twelve plus metal double bunks crammed together. About the time we settled in all light was gone. The steel door slammed shut and its squeaking rods found their homing to bolt us into darkness.. Cigarette lighters responded to the dark and someone by the name of Victor said; "Hey! It's New Years' Eve. Let's have a drink." He then produced a contraband bottle and carefully measuring an equal portion in each roommate's tin cup; he shouted; "Happy New Year," and we all sang: "Should old acquaintance be forgot"... It was January one nineteen forty five

After a restless night we were assigned to new quarters. State Rooms, they said? This they might have been before the war and before this one time Atlantic cruise ship, the U.S.S. America, was converted to a troop ship. Six of us were squeezed into a space originally designed to accommodate one guest. The mess hall kind of made up for the sardine can sleep facilities. It was a salon that had kept its original decor making it better than any officer's mess I'd ever seen. Subdued lighting, tastefully decorated, and with officers of various ranks unobtrusively isolated from one another. The food was not half bad. On deck was our only place to stretch our legs and except for certain activities like life boat drill, were pretty much officer's country. Avoiding seasick GIs was another such activities. They had to be given a wide berth. Seasickness was not a problem with pilots. Some of us even thought it great sport to talk ground pounders (Ground pounders were infantry men.) into seeing our ships' convoy formation from the bow of our vessel. This being the part of the ship where its motions seemed to be exaggerated the most. Such a trip forward usually ended with the earthbound soldier draped over the rail losing his past several meals.

There were rumors galore of sub attacks. Each one brought ninety percent of those aboard up on deck re-enacting lifeboat drills. The rest were, I suppose, either running the ship or sea sick. Some even claimed they saw a periscope, only to find out it was probably some ship's trash carelessly thrown overboard. Other ships with us were always at such a distance that they looked to be nothing more than black logs. Once, a naval vessel came close enough to be recognized. "Must be chasing a sub;" someone shouted starting lifeboat drill all over again.

Other than that life was very boring. That is, it was, until Lou showed up. He'd found a piano; brought the thing into our little State Room and played a concert. After the concert he had us lug the thing down, I don't know how many ship's ladders, into the hot smelly bowels of the ship where the enlisted men were quartered. The poor devils were in hammocks stacked six high. Tightly packed end to end and with barely enough space to walk between their sides. Somehow Lou found them and being disgusted with their plight, helped them clear a stage space for one of his piano recitals. Lou figured he needed three men; a small boy, and a staff car (A saying used for the help needed to perform any silly task.) just to move the piano but settled for four buddies. Those of us that helped were all hot, sweaty and mad at Lou until we saw how it cheered up the GI's. The next day some Major, and a ship's officer, showed at our stateroom wanting to know if we had heard music coming from our end of the passage way. They also seemed anxious to know if we knew anything about a piano that was missing from the officer's salon. Those making music at an unauthorized time and anyone who moved the piano from its rightful place would be put on report. Which I guess meant they'd be burnt at the stake. It's hard to believe but to the best of my knowledge the piano was never found; singing sounds continued from our room, and the hold, but, no one in their right mind would have ever regarded our dulcet tones as music.

A mystery remains as to how long it really took, but in the middle of the night, the U.S.S. America tied up to a steel floating dock at Le Harve, France. Silent and cold, airmen hurriedly boarded a train quite different from those back in the States. The whistle sound was, well, ancient. The clacking sound of the wheels passing over rail joints was, I guess you could say, crisper like maybe the cars didn't weigh as much as ours. They just did not make the old familiar clunk-et-tee-clunk we knew from the states.

The cars were laid out different too like, with boxes for setting on one side of the car and an aisle on the other. Each box held two benches easily longer than two of our seats. A sliding door leads from the box to the aisle. Curtained windows were on both sides of the door and exterior windows opposite the door.

Wherever we were going seemed to take forever. Someone, who must have studied French geography, said he thought we were headed for Paris. We parked on a siding, hungry, cold and thirsty and someone spotted what looked like a farmer in a field. Maybe he could at least get us some water. A couple of us jumped down and ran to him, being mindful that the train might move any time. We didn't know French and he didn't know English. Through sign language and considerable gibberish, prattle, etc., he finally said; "Ah Vino" and he furnished each of us with three bottles of a red liquid. I tried to shake his hand to thank him. He extended only his wrist. We got back to the train in plenty of time and shared our loot with thankful others in our cubicle. The wine seemed flat and warm. I complained that it was not at all as expected. Mr. Smarty Pants, the one that told us where we were going, explained that in the rural areas of Europe, water was not fit to drink and was so polluted that it was used for fertilizer. Good wine was for meals, house guests, and sale. The dregs were for quenching the thirst. As for the handshake, let's just say they don't practice sanitation as we do and toilet paper was not for farmers. Offering his wrist was his way of being extra polite.

When we got to Paris It was dark, cold and snowing. Our place of rest was to be in unheated tents and, I guess, because we were officers they had wood floors. Other places that the Army required for our connivance were in similar shelters reached by muddy paths. The whole lovely camp was in a place called the *Bois de Boulogne*. As if by magic, axes and pry bars appeared from nowhere. Wood, from anything that would yield it, was gathered. Then dilapidated stoves, made from anything that supposedly would not burn, furnished blessed warmth and hot coffee. This, of course, was accomplished without any light showing to the outside. Blackout you know. We were in a war zone. The next day I managed a ride into Paris. The driver called the place the East Bank or West Bank or whatever. Anyway, I found a nice little dimly lit bar for a glass of splendid wine and a skimpy lunch. (Electric power had not yet been fully restored). After another glass of wine I felt the need to relieve myself. This brought about a bunch of gibberish that taught me that the next time I should ask for a *pisser*. The bar's place was down in the basement. No lights of course. I managed the stairs and at the bottom perceived a slight glow. When my eyes became accustomed I barely made out a woman sitting at a table on which was a book and a lantern. She appeared to be reading the book. As I approached she rose, picked up the lantern, and lead the way. I was guided to a urinal. Not as we know them but a trench in the floor. She held the lantern as I made use of the running water in it. Then she shepherded me back to the foot of the stairs, produced a tin cup and rattled it with what I suppose were some coins. At least that's what I put in it.



479th FTR GRP air field Wattsham, Eng
1945



In a day or so some of us were on a plane from *Orly* Field, France to London, England. Still wondering... 'how do they figure out who goes where in what?' This time I landed at Biggin Hill Airport, England; a large commercial air port, just south of London. At the terminals' entry way, I think it was, I was handed orders:

Lt. Clarence L. Waters 0832948

Report for duty (one day hence) to Wattisham, England
434th Fighter Squadron
Major Robin Olds Commanding
479th Fighter Group
65th Fighter Wing
8th Air Force

Bob Redwood and I, and as I remember, John Taylor, and probably a couple others received the same orders. Charles Philbrick was assigned to a different Squadron. Others were sent to various fighter bases throughout East Anglia England. Our gang was forever disenfranchised. Most I never saw or heard from again.

Bob and I took a short train ride into that bulge of land; that juts into the North Sea, northeast of London, that the Brit's call East Anglia. At that time it was jokingly known as Little America because of the number of American air bases located there. Before the trip we made a quick tour of London, and then after only about a forty-five minute train ride we came to a jerking stop. Out the aisle side windows all that could be seen was a wood platform and beyond that a six-by-six. (Truck) Standing in the doorway of our cubical a brass buttoned, navy blue jacketed individual, whose pillbox cap announced he was the conductor, shouted; "Come along Governor! This is Wattisham: Off-you-go." Having barely touched the platform a GI sprang from the cab of the six-by, grabbed our A-2 bags, and saw us, bags and all, over the tailgate of his six-by, into the cavernous cargo deck with GI-green canvassed topping. As we were getting seated the truck's engine noise told us to hang on and shortly we were at the guarded entrance of our new home base. We presented our orders for an MP's (Military Police's) inspection and were waved through with no salute. Then in nothing flat, we rounded a circle drive to a large brick building and were dumped out. Our assisting GI picked up our bags, and showed us up a few steps onto a spacious verandah spread before what looked like a large hotel. "You'll find the Officer-of-the-Day in there," from our driver, explained what our next move should be. So, through one of several glazed oak doors we entered through a vestibule into spacious lobby. The place was without a reception desk and devoid of any

welcoming personnel but well furnished. A light shown around a partially open door, beyond which we found the OD. We presented him with our orders and said we were ready to report to the Commander of the 434th for duty. “No such luck,” says he; “Olds never sees new replacements. You’re to report to Captain Richard Creighton. He’ll be your Executive Officer. But, first I’m to show you the layout of this place. By the way, you’re now in the war zone.” *‘Gee? I thought I just came from one?’*

With the OD as our guide we get a quick tour and accompanying verbal chatter: The Mess hall, directly across from the main entrance, was a large two-story high room with seating for the Group’s Officers in three rows of tables: One row for each squadron. The 434th was on the right of the entrance. At the far end was a platform for senior officers. “Zemke, (Col. Zemke was the original 479th Group Commander.) used to sit up there when he visited us”...”evening meals are always in full dress. Sometimes, when missions allow, and the CO sees fit, they bring in a few six-bys full of local gals for a dance. Our guys make up the band.” *‘Did I sense a chuckle?’* Back in the lobby, facing the mess hall entrance is a hall to the right and on its right, is a long, carpeted, sunny lounge room. “This is for casual dress, card playing and laying around; except Friday nights. Then it’s full-dress for movies.” Further down the hall a stair going up and a corridor going both to the left and right. Both sides of the corridors are doors, like in a hotel, they indicate quarters for squadron of pilots. “Up the stairs are Senior Officers’ quarters. Don’t go up there: Period.” Back to the lobby, and on the side that we found the OD, there were other offices. The largest is for the Club Officer. Next to it is a couple of phone booths. “For you, only one phone works. It’s so you can use to talk with the guard house at the main gate if and when someone shows up to visit you.” Another corridor, opposite the one to the Lounge, takes us out of the lobby and past a well appointed barroom on the left. “It’s open after the evening meal...Full-dress, at all times...If your CO decides you’ve had a good mission. Then flight suits are OK. He’ll tell you when: Be there.” At the end of this corridor another stair and corridor mimicked those we just saw beyond the Lounge. “Going right are squadron pilots rooms, both floors. Going left are Executive Officers, both floors. Four-thirty fourth is on the main floor right. Fire exits are where the signs say they are. Captain Creighton is dead ahead. He’s expecting you.” *‘Pretty casual’*, Me thinks. Bob and I proceed on by ourselves to meet our new boss. We rap. Someone says; “OK.” We enter. The door side of the room is finished off with closets; some of their doors are open. On the right wall, there’s a lavatory counter well stashed with shaving and other male hygiene stuff. There’s a mirror above the sink. Towels droop from both sides of the counter rather than from the towel bars on the sides of it. Ahead, two twin size beds flank windows. Head ends against the outside wall. A dressed pilot sits on the left bed. In the other are a guy and a girl. Sheets pulled up to just below bare shoulders leave little doubt of what they cover. Pretending not to notice anything unusual Bob and I snap to and the first to get his wits about him says, to the left bed: “Lieutenants Redwood and Waters reporting for duty sir.” “Oh, that’s him over there. We call him Tripod.” We quickly face the other bed, the one with dual occupancy. The female now has a bare back to us and the male is facing us, propped on an elbow to better see over it. He speaks; “Right. Go to the flight line and find the Billeting Officer. He’ll take care of you. Leave your orders here. Report to the Squad room at oh-six hundred tomorrow.” No salutes, no hand shakes, no hello there, no military. Must be, we’re in a war zone?

‘Flight line, flight line; must be around here somewhere? Ah yes, over by those large hangars’. We walk on concrete sidewalk (‘haven’t seen one of these in awhile’.) towards it. A staff car approaches with a flag, indicating the rank of its occupant, just a-snapping above the right front fender. We pull up abreast of the curb and on a count give it our best salute. The car stops. The right front door opens. We are facing a Bird Colonel and we wonder: *‘What the hell did we do wrong now’*. He says; “New here?” Our weak reply is: “Yes sir.” He turns to re-enter his car and over his shoulder says; “We don’t salute on this base. I got enough to do without saluting all day.” He’s gone. Bob says; “At least he had wings on.”

After a few queries we found the Billeting Officer and were located. Not on the first floor of the Officer’s Club, in the 434th’s wing, but a goodly distance away in one of those Army wood building, second floor. Still, not half bad digs. Just as good if not better than most we’d had State-side. We were also presented with a list of things to be accomplished ASAP. Like: Check in at the hospital for a flight physical. Yup, the base had its own hospital. Next drop by the parachute shop for fitting of our own personal chute, life vest, and pick up a silk scarf. Then supply where we pick up: flight helmets, G suit, throat mike, ear receivers, oxygen mask, goggles, gold and grey Ray-Ban sunglasses, hack watch, a light weight cotton sun-tan and a darker tan gabardine flight suit both fitted with a Marine Corps hunting knife filed down to a specific length and placed in a scabbard to be sewn to the outside of the lower right leg of the flight suits, a shoulder holstered automatic forty-five caliber pistol or revolver (Pilots’ choice.) with ammunition, light and heavy leather, fleece lined flight suits. (The heavy one had matching boots which could be dandy for ice fishing but were really to clumsy for flying fighters) And, of course, an escape kit containing: a silk escape map of Europe (supposedly edible), a couple of fish hooks, some black fish line, a tiny vial of iodine, a couple of crackers, and, Oh yes; a G.I. can opener, bandages, matches plus a few other odds and ends. All this escape stuff is in a one-inch thick by three-and-a-half, by-five-inch, and semi transparent box that just fits in the shin pocket of a flight suit. Then, I think it was one of the last things, wonder of wonders an A-2 leather flight jacket, symbol of an Air Corps Pilot on combat duty.

We’re wondering what are we supposed to do with this stuff. When some body says: “Take all your equipment to Sergeant Claybaugh in the 434th Locker Room, but first stop by personnel and the photo lab for identification processing.” The lab took our pictures: Flight helmets on, Officer’s caps on, no hats on, standing, and seated. Personnel registered our jewelry and personal items; “So they can identify you—Just in case you burnt up in a crash.” They also checked whatever papers that we had accumulated throughout our service to our country, without crashing.

We found Sgt. Claybaugh seated on a bench in what could pass for a high school football team’s locker room. “Dump it over there.” He says. “Ah’ll put it in a locker, when I’m done with it. See me before any flight. ‘Specially a combat mission. Ah’ll get yeah anta what you need. Name’s Claybaugh, forget the Sergeant, ‘less your mad at me. Let’s-see: Your chute, G-suite and vest, ’ill be sent ta me when they’re done with ‘am. I’ll see they’re kept up ta-date. The silk scarf and A-2 jacket are y’urs ta wear when yeah want. The scarves ‘posed ta keep yer neck from get-‘en raw from rubbin’ a gin’ OD shirt collars. I’ll fit the earphones in y’ur helmet. Le’-me know if yah get static in ‘em. Keep them mike buttons, those round things on the strap that goes round your neck, dry or

they'll burn circles the size of quarters on both sides of yer Adams-apple. Most guys don't wear throat mikes when they use oxygen masks 'cuss the masks has their own mike. I'll fit the straps-n laces on all the stuff first time yeah put um on. There aint no tint in y'ur goggles so put on whatever shades yeah want. The G- suit's got laces I'll fix fir yeah. The gun is for combat missions, only. It aint fir killin'. Its fir putting a slug through your gun sight or protect'n y'ur sef from German civilians, when yah git shot down in enemy territory. The knife is fir yeah ta cut your chute lines when yah have ta ditch. Remember that raft goes with yeah when yah git out-a plane. So don't unhook it from the raft tell yeah need to. Sometimes a bubble gets in 'em when they pack 'em and they'll blow up at high altitudes. If that happens le' me know, 'n Ah'll get yeah a new one. When yeah figger-out which suit yer goon' ta wear put yer escape kit in it, fur that mission. Ah'll remind yeah. Now! Ah'm not goon' a tell how ta dress ta keep warm. But, these fifty-ones do a pretty good job up to twenty thousand. At twenty thousand the temperature is usually pretty close ta minus fifty outside. The choice is yers. Oh yeah; take the hack watch with yeah. Wear it all the time. Yeah can check the time with OPs (Operations) and if it gains or loses Ah'll get yeah a new one. Le'ss-see: Yeah! Most guys wear army shoes, dyed black, on missions. I guess that's it. Yer Redwood, 'n yer Waters, right? See yeah after the mission tack's off tomorrow."

Sometime later I received a copy of all of the photos and an eight and-one-half, by eleven, depicting, in a medallion inset, the head of each pilot of the 434th. This was posted on the inside of my closet door. I used it to draw a halo over the head of each individual that just didn't come back from a mission. At the war's end about one quarter of the medallions had halos. I only meant the halos to signify a Job well done.

We'd met Claybaugh, our Squire. His locker room, just for the 434th, was only big enough for each pilot's locker in two rows, one on each side of a bench and, of course there was room for His desk. The only door to the room(It had no windows.) opened into a small Ready Room where, dressed for flight, pilots sat on benches waiting to be picked up by a six-by truck for transport to their plane's revetment. There was a drinking fountain in the Ready Room between the doors to Claybaugh's Room and the toilet. A sign on the toilet door read: **Enlisted Men, Please Refrain From Using This Toilet Just Prior to Missions. Pilots Sometimes Have the Nervous GI's.** The Ready Room had no windows and only one low-watt red light bulb. I guess that was to keep pilots' eyes adjusted to the dark when missions started before dawn. Another door from the Ready Room led to the Squad Room, (Also referred to as a Ready Room.) which was just a big assembly room furnished with card tables, comfortable lounge chairs and a coffee bar from which breakfast was usually served prior to a mission. This was the Squadron off duty lounge; if you weren't on a mission this is where you hung out. It also served as our classroom and Squadron mission briefing room. Squadron offices for the CO, Intelligence, Engineering, Personnel, the Chaplin, and the Flight Surgeon etc. were connected for easy access. It was a rather pleasant place. Missions started and ended here. From here there was access to Group briefing where color coded chairs designated the squadron position their occupants were to take in the sky. A stage, at one end of this briefing room, was flanked by doors through which various senior officers came to brief pilots on what was known, and could be told, about the mission at hand. A map of Germany, festooned with colored yarns, designated courses to be flown, adorned the back

wall of the stage. That's pretty much the layout of where we P-51 pilots were to spend our time prior to a combat mission.

There were all sorts of other provisions: photo labs, parachute shop, hangers, machine shops, ordinance and supply dumps, and a tower (We called ours Newcross)... various trades to carry out the work and accommodations for the men that kept fighter planes ready for battle. Our Group Commander had a regular bungalow, pretty much isolated. Athletic facilities, to keep every one in shape, were created by converting an English cricket yard, just out side the Officers' Club, or quarters, into an American softball field for use of both enlisted men and officers. For pilots PT took place next to our ready room on a volleyball court. Of course, air raid shelters were scattered about the base.

Oh! Did I tell you that Wattisham was a permanent English air base? The US took it over on a lend-lease deal. The Americans used it for bombers before P-38 fighters took over The 38s were followed by P-51s. The bombers being there first, the 8th air force built another hanger and added a thick topping of concrete to the runway so the repair facilities could be used jointly with the RAF. Other buildings were remodeled, added to or built new to satisfy USAAF requirements. Thus the 434th had about the best quarters—If not the best—of all fighter squadrons in the European Theater.

This will give you a ruff description of the 434th facilities where I was to spend the duration. Similar facilities were provided on this Home Base for the other two Squadrons of the 479th Fighter Group. The weather? Well, during winter time the temperature in England didn't seem as cold as it is in Michigan. That's because the nice warm Gulf Stream wipes along her west coast and keeps temperatures in a tolerable range. Daylight is a different matter. Being further north than the U.S., England has less daylight hours in the winter but the sun rises sooner and stays up longer in the summer. Summertime we could play softball at eleven o'clock at night.

Like uniformed police, MPs were our most visual protection. When the base was closed, prior to a secret mission, it was their duty to see that no one entered or left the base. Protection from air raids was, supposedly, to be found in air raid shelters. Because they were not expected meant there had to be one; so when the air raid siren sounded for a real raid, everyone scurried for their assigned shelter; which were concrete elongated boxes, sunk half below grade and the upper half covered with a goodly amount of earth and or weeds. I, and the pilots assigned to our so-called protection, refused to go in them. We sat outside on the entrance walls and ushered the ground pounders in. The floor of the place was covered with putrid rancid water; so deep that only above your knees, were you out of reach of the floating scum. Setting on the nice cold concrete benches meant that the bench might also be wet. We didn't see anything and heard only load noises, but the next day we learned that a hangar and a plane in it were damaged.



PRECOMBAT

Obeying Capt. Creighton's order, to be in the Squad Room at oh-six hundred, Bob and I didn't mind the five o'clock call by English dog robbers. (Dog robbers is an expression for enlisted personnel who act as butlers, taking care of Officers' accommodations, their appointments, their apparel, make their beds, etc.) We were excited. We met Creighton on time and he directed us to have some breakfast at the Squad Room's bar. We were careful not to disturb the guys in ODs. They were the ones



scheduled for the day's mission. After they disappeared for group briefing and we finished feeding our faces Creighton put us in the Ready Room to observe a mission's pre-flight ritual. The mission's participants emerged from Claybaugh's Locker Room looking for all the world like something the cat got in a fight with and won: Hoses and wires sprouted from every piece of equipment they wore; chutes formed ugly flat humps on backs, some had chutes that banged the back of their legs just below the buttocks making walking look inhuman. The Flight Surgeon stopped each one for a moment, looked into their eyes, and through the magic of his craft silently declared the examinee's readiness for war. Those suspected of having indulged a bit too much the night before were ordered to spend ten minutes lying on the wing of a plane breathing pure oxygen before a recheck. Those complaining of, or found with, a runny nose were invited to lay on their backs on a bench; back in the Locker Room, with their necks bent back as far as

it would go. The doctor would then fill each nostril with an ungodly concoction that made proboscis's owner think their brains were coming out when they could again sit up. Those without such frailties sat quietly on a Ready Room bench, bent over with elbows on their knees or with the chutes on their backs propped against the wall. A few restlessly trudged to the drinking fountain. Bob and I stood in a corner silently observing, almost hiding so as to keep out of their way. There was very little talk.

At some point I decided I needed a drink of water. One of the mission's ready warriors was already using the fountain. I stopped behind him. He finished, and turned around facing me, on his way back to his back to his bench. I didn't want to be in his way so I stepped to my left. Wrong! He went to my left. I reversed. He reversed. Finally we stopped dancing and he said; "Don't tip me over or I'll spill." Never saw the guy again. His name was Wendt. (A few days later I heard that he had misused his bar privileges and gone out to the flight line, at night, with a forty-five or a commandeered six-by-six or some such other weapon and before the MPs could stop him messed up a couple of P-51s. Reportedly he had mental problems, or maybe he had accrued too many missions.)

The exterior door of the Ready Room opened and we watched real fighter pilots walk out and climb into waiting six-by's that would take them their reported superior war machine. It would be a few weeks more before I really knew what it felt like to go on a real mission over enemy territory and experience a real war.

We followed Creighton into the Squad Room to chug down another cup of coffee while he checked with Ops. (Operations officer. The man that knows who is flying what, where, why and when.) On his return he says: "You're in luck. We can get you checked out today. After ten hours over jolly ole England you'll be combat ready." He then proceeded to tell us what he knew about 51s in no particular order: "Horsepower, 1640; there will be times you'll wish there was more. She'll outdo a 109 at either climbing or diving and can turn tighter, if you learn how." Prop settings; mixture settings; tab settings; flap settings, landing and stalling speeds etc. "Push everything to the firewall when you get into a dog fight. (*He didn't have to tell me that.*) As soon as the tail wheel leaves the runway, on your take-off run, push the stick forward just enough to keep a little pressure on the front gear. Then move the gear lever to up position. Keep holding the front wheels on the runway 'till you get air speed, then pull her nose into the air and start your turn. The wheels will come up by themselves. This gives you one less thing to do while trimming for flight. Do not put on the brakes when the gear comes up. They're metal to metal disk type and might freeze together; and make your landing look pretty silly when your prop's digging up the runway---There's more, but it can wait. Go see Claybaugh and suit up. I'll order you a six-by. The crew chief will give you the blindfold routine before takeoff. Time for first flight--Thirty minutes. See me when you get back if you have any problems. By the way, practice your breaks." At this point Bob asks: "Excuse me sir, but what's a break" "Good God, didn't they teach you people anything? It's the fastest, tightest turn you can make. Forget coordination, forget everything. Just get you nose around as fast as you can. Now get with it."

Belying his seemingly, lackadaisical, know-it-all manner he'd shown at our first meeting, Claybaugh was all business. He treated our street apparel to be left behind as if it were to be on display at an exclusive men's shop. He made flight articles fit as comfortably as he possibly could and still have them perform their intended use. All the

while he emitted a facetious line of drivel that intended or not, made a couple of 'replacements' quizzical speculations all but disappear. The ride to the large circle of paving (Revetment) with planes pointed towards its center was chauffeured by a GI. He preformed as someone who evidently knew each of the base's roads without having to think about which one went where, and he knew the exact maximum speed each curve would allow his six by six to go to negotiate it. Unceremoniously he dumped Bob and me at the entrance to our planes' revetment and a couple of GIs indicated the plane each was to fly. Under watchful eyes of my fatigue-clad crew chief, I managed to preflight mine by: removing the pilot tube cover; checking tires; looking into wheel wells for leaks; making sure aileron, elevator and rudder locks had been removed, etc., etc. Then I mounted the right wing on to a black sand-finished narrow path up to the cockpit. As I'm about to climb in, I take my first good look at the crew chief on the other wing:

"Hey! Don't I know you?" Says I.

"Yeah-- Page Field. Got my chief rating there. Been here since. What's with you?"

"Oh, flew out of Page to miss a hurricane. Did some low level stuff in North Florida, and...? Oh yes: Got married and here I am".

"Yeah, I thought about getting married--Then I decided to go to a ball game. That only last nine innings."

The blind fold checkout went great. The thirty-minute air time went by like a flash. Mostly it was just for looking over the area, its structures that would mark the way back to the field and getting acquainted with a new plane. England and all of Europe, as a matter of fact, does not have the neat compass coordinated layout of boundary lines, like the U.S. Their boundaries are all curved to follow rivers, hills or any other thing that can be used to define a boundary line. Metes and bounds they call their property descriptions. Naturally, roads, stone fences and railroad tracks all follow this jigsaw puzzled layout. This makes finding landmarks with quirky characteristics, and memorizing the heading (compass course) from them back home a necessity. This occupation along with a couple barrel rolls, a snap roll or two, an attempted slow roll and a few tight turns made thirty minutes, excuse the pun, fly by. I checked the field for traffic and made a greased-in power landing that ended my first flight time in a P-51D Fighter. As I taxied to the revetment I noticed her nose seemed to stick in the air higher than the ole P-40s. Her canopy worked smoother and had better visibility so a little extra fish-tailing to stay on the taxi strip and see ahead didn't matter. Funny, I don't recall that taxing out for that first take. I don't even recall performing the take-off checklist. Excited I guess. On return to the revetment the crew chief was right there to see I properly parked. I cut the ignition switch and shoved the mixture to full rich. The crew chief placed the wheel chocks and hopped on the left wing and waited for me release myself from his lovely beast. I filled out the plane's and pilot's forms for the flight and, with the chief's help, unbuckled, hopped out and found my way into a six-by for a quick trip back to the Squad Room where it all began. Bob was there, waiting, with a big smile

on his face. That was our first flight in a month and our first in a sweet plane, THE P-51D MUSTANG. Enjoyable as it was, we knew there was much more about the pride of American fighters to be learned.

Creighton was waiting. He explained: "No, those are not to be your crew chief and plane; that have to be earned. From now on you will fly what, where, when and how you are told, regardless of weather." That was pretty much as our previous training had taught us, except for the weather part.

P-51s were the only planes this Squadron was presently flying in combat. I say presently because I was told that in the beginning the 434th flew both P-38s. There was still one on the base along with an AT-6 a P-47, and some others which were used for fun flying and simulated combat. Mainly we made up the ten hours pre-combat time in P-51s; practice flying formation, simulated combat, towing and shooting at sleeve targets, bombing, and just finding our way around England. Bombing was done at targets floating in the North Sea and the shooting of our six fifty caliber guns at towed sleeves was done over the Sea. Everybody got a chance to drag the damn sleeves. A couple times, when I was dragging them, tracer bullets were seen going by my cockpit. All it took was a sharp broadcast; "HEY", and I'd get back a sheepish, "Sorry 'bout that". When a flight called for going out over the North Sea we'd have to radio; "Newcross, crossing out." When we returned we'd radio; "Newcross, crossing in." This was thought to keep the English anti-aircraft guns from firing at us. Rumor had it that they had more American plane silhouettes painted on their guns than enemies. Mostly the P-51 was great and did as one wished but, a real scare was created when its engine cooling system sprung a leak. What looked like blue smoke would be vented and its pilot knew that he had only ten minutes flying time left before the engine would freeze up. I saw it happen to a fellow pilot only once. "Blue smoke," was called out (Radioed) to a plane we were playing war games with. Thankfully, it was landed safely in a farm field. The pilot telephoned Newcross from an English pub for a ride home. Another crazy thing that happened while doing non combat flying was; A replacement pilot flying simulated combat with us put his plane into a nose down tight turn, kept it in that attitude until he crashed. No one knows why. He had plenty of time to recover or even bail-out but did neither. Must have blacked out or had a heart attack or something. His name was Preston; came from Michigan's Upper Peninsula where his father was involved in politics. I remember him telling us that his dad had three faucets at the kitchen sink, one hot, one cold and one for cold beer.

While waiting for good weather to get flight time and hasten our ten hours pre-combat orientation we played lots of bridge; learned not to blink during aircraft identification, viewed the latest Combat Kills movies, watched missions take off then anxiously waited for their return. If someone broke off from the returning formation and did a roll over the field it meant he'd shot down a Jerry and we'd probably get a request from the Major to join him in the bar? If a flight, normally composed of four planes, only put three ships into a widow maker for landing it meant someone was going to be missing at dinner that night, the next day and from then on. There was never any announcement as to who or why. No moment of silence. No memorial service. He just didn't come home. It was as though he never existed. It was like that all through training and

combat. Were we cold-hearted? I think not. It meant another halo had to be drawn over the pictured head of the pilot, in a medallion frame, posted in my locker.

There was a time one did come home. A Jerry bullet or a hunk of shrapnel from an eighty-eight made it through our hero's canopy; pierced his leather helmet, and continued on being only able to part hair and to draw blood while making a neat furrow on its way exiting on the other side of his helmet. Our Commanding Officers thought that this event was so unique that it deserved special recognition and decided to make it a day to remember. VIPs were flown in. A viewing stand erected along side a taxi strip. A band was put together composed of anyone who could or had ever played an instrument. (Good thing they didn't know that I once played the flute in Intermediate School band.) Bunting was hung from the stand, the hangar, and the barracks, everywhere. And, there was a grand parade: Cooks, dog robbers, crew chiefs, pilots, everybody. All in spit-n-polish uniforms passed in review. Flags dipped (Except for Old Glory, of course.) as they passed the reviewing stand with eyes-right, every single man in step, and eventually ending up as sprightly rigid formations on the side of the taxi strip opposite, but facing, the stand. There, at stiff attention, they listened to speeches, only those of command rank of course, benedictions and enthusiastic (If not good) band playing. There was even a fly-over. Then the hero was called from the ranks. He looked sharp: His polished visor cap, with its crown wrinkled down over his ears setting jauntily lopsided that said; "I'm a pilot". His wings were polished and pinned perfectly parallel to the ground just above a good conduct ribbon, and a couple of others that belied the number of missions flown, battles fought and one for the European Theater. He marched out with head erect, shoulders back, stomach in. Just as he'd learned at Maxwell or at West Point. He made a column left and halted as his right arm swung into a smart salute and ended up facing the Group Commander. The Commander's return, I thought, was a bit more of a casual, sort of a flick of the wrist. Then the Commander took one pace forward, struck his left hand tucked it under the impeccably pressed the left lapel of the hero's impeccable pressed green jacket and with his right somehow managed to pin a gold-trimmed purple ribbon with a heart-shaped pendant below the polished silver wings. Unfortunately the lower portion of the new metal partially covered the meager collection of decorations below it. Thus the Purple Heart had just been awarded. The only one I ever saw given to a live fighter pilot. The crowd was subdued. This was not a charade. Tittering or guffaws were immediately stared down or the offender otherwise had it made known that this was a serious ceremony. The affair did honor the recipient and certainly was not meant to belittle the Purple Heart. More importantly, it was an opportunity to honor and remember those who did not return to us ----.

---Sorry about that. There was no such ceremony. The hero and the wound were real though. I talked to the pilot about the wound, and you know, he almost felt bad for getting a medal for it.

Believe it or not, some of us didn't want a Purple Heart. If we reported a wound incurred on a mission we'd be automatically grounded for a couple of weeks so the Flight Surgeon could daily view the penetration and make absolutely sure no infection was taking place. Grounding meant being taken out of the rotation schedule that assigned pilots to fly missions. No, we were not anxious to get over there and kill people or be shot at. Missions were counted and when the number was high enough, along with a few other things, you would be shipped back to the States. The other things varied according

to: the state of the war, your number of kills, your rank, the number of missions flown and if you were more valuable to the service elsewhere. Naturally we didn't want our mission total interrupted by something as insignificant as a sliver of flak because there count was our best bet for a trip home. So, if Claybaugh didn't see a spot of blood as we changed our flight paraphernalia for ground uniforms our number of missions would continue to increase.

Injuries not contributed to combat didn't take on the same importance. Once I stumbled off the wing of a plane and sprained a finger. A medic checked it over, applied a tongue depressor to each side, wrapped it with gauze and tape and declared me fit for duty. It hurt like hell and at the evening meal I found comfort in resting my elbow on the table and pointing my forearm and fingers at the ceiling. Sometime into the meal I looked up to find my table companions staring at the ceiling. "In-coming enemy?" Asked one. Hurt or not the finger stayed in my lap after that.

Few, a very few, that didn't come back, became prisoners of war. A West Pointer, bellied-in (landed, wheels up.) somewhere in France shortly after D-Day and spent the rest of the war with the French resistance forces. Of those not returning most had been killed. Their mothers or wives received a Purple Heart along with a letter from the Squadron CO. Thousands upon thousands of little dark blue leather covered boxes containing the metals were presented to service men that were killed, or injured in combat. Those who died in the various branches of service had the boxes mailed to their nearest of kin along with a letter from a grateful Government. When a family received the box and they got over their grief a family member silently removed the blue star displayed in the front room window and proudly replaced it with a gold star.

The 479th had its own Chaplin who gave the blessing before the evening meal, conducted non denominational Sunday services, and generally tried to be helpful. Once, about Easter, a Catholic Chaplain, with wings above his left pocket and birds on his shoulders, visited us for a service. The CO thought enough of the occasion to post a notice requesting all to attend. I attended but, with others, left early. There were very few fly boys present and you couldn't say the place was overcrowded with enlisted men either. Prior to missions our Chaplain was always somewhere in the Ready Room but practically invisible. Most of us got what we needed in our own way. I got mine from that pocket edition of the New Testament, received, all-be-it by a circuitous rote, as a present from my mother, alone in my room.

Little is known about the fate of those that didn't come home. If you were flying with the squadron when something happened to a plane, or its occupant, about all you heard was; "Blue-Four going down." Unless the Squadron Commander wanted to refill that spot with someone else, radio silence was maintained and we carried on as though nothing happened; except most thought, as I did, '*Poor Devil*'. Refilling the space was as simple as the commander saying something like; "Spare Two to Blue Four." (The color and number identified a specific plane.) If we were over Germany and escorting bombers there was little chance you'd see Blue Four's landing. If we were over the North Sea when you heard the Blue Four distress call you knew he was in for a rough time to say the least. After switching to the emergency channel he had only two choices. He could bail out, as taught: He'd set his trim for a minimum glide, release his safety harness, open the canopy, stand up on the seat and dive head first at the wing. With luck he'd go between the wing and the horizontal stabilizer and then he'd pull the ripcord. When the

chute opened he'd start shedding stuff he no longer needed, grab his knife and cut a few of the chute's shroud lines loose. Then wait to get wet. He knew the temperature of the sea was such that if he was going to be in it over forty-five seconds there was little chance he'd be able to crawl into his raft. So getting out from under the chute and inflating and struggling into the life raft immediately was paramount. If he got into the raft he'd be left to wonder if a rescue boat heard his distress signal and was looking for him. A few airmen got back to England that way. Most of these were close to England's easterly shores. Had they been on the east side of the Sea, chances were pretty good that a German plane would use them for target practice. We had a practice chute jump into water once. Our jump was into a nice warm inside pool from a sixteen-foot high tower. A simulated chute dumped on top of us. Everybody got in the waiting raft in the allotted time.

The other choice was to stick with the plane and ditch it. (Land in the water.) Sounds easy enough doesn't it? Sure, everybody has seen movies of pretty girl, standing on the wing of a plane floating in the water and waiting patiently to step into a dry boat and be rescued. (Who was that gal?) Those planes were either bulbous low wing commercial types or small lightweight private crafts. Both have a weight to volume ratio that greatly favors the volume. A fighter has the opposite. They are small and sleek like a fish. What volume they have is packed with gas tanks or guns and a very heavy engine that is meant to drag the craft into and through the air. That engine is up front and when the plane is put in the water the engine wants only to take every thing behind it to the bottom as fast as possible. Adding to this, the P-51 is blessed with an air scoop projecting beneath its belly. It works great for a cooling the radiator but when landing on water it becomes a thing that will stand a plane on its nose, pointing the engine like an arrow for a faster trip to the bottom -- Sound terrible enough--Well, they lectured us on a couple of handy-dandy maneuvers that, mind you, were not guaranteed. One was to belly flop the plane into the water, wheels up, of course, thus making as much of the surface of the plane contact the water at the same time as possible. They said that this would eliminate the scoop's dragging action and possibly increase the plane's floating time. They didn't say how much. They did say that type landing was difficult because a pilot's depth perception is not as dependable over water, without objects around to gage distance by, as it is over land. The other method was to put a wing tip in the water, preferably the left, while holding the plane in a stalling position close above the water. The theory behind this was that when a portion of the left wing entered the water it would act as an anchored center pivot point and the rest of the plane would be propelled around it, like a sling, thus helping to keep it afloat longer. The pros and cons of both water landings were discussed at length. No slides or movies were shown of how easily either method could be accomplished. We, understandably, never practiced either and no one ever showed up to claim which was the best. I decided, if need be, I'd bail out. Sorry as we were, we did have one of our squadron radio us that he was going down into the sea. He was one who just didn't come home.

When considering our physical training, ground schooling, hazing, combat awareness exposure and flight time, it hardly seemed possible that there were those who could not mentally stomach combat flying. One, I saw, took to drink in an attempt to hide his fear. The Flight Surgeon was the first to catch this ruse during his pre-mission exam. The first grounding was forgiven. Exactly how many groundings were given for

him to lose his wings and be permanently grounded was the doctor's prerogative. A permanent grounding did happen. The person was last seen hanging around the door to the bar room but not allowed to enter. That was the signal the poor guy was about to be shipped back Stateside. There were also one or two pilots that appeared before their CO and asked to be relieved of combat flying status; thereby admitted their fear. We were all scared in combat but fear had to be overcome or you were useless in the air. The CO did not want someone up there that might endanger a mission and respected their courage to confess their frailties. He'd accept their decision and turn them over to Personnel. Personnel saw to it that the guy was assigned to some safe duty like teaching aircraft recognition at a distant base or where he was unknown and could retain a semblance of pride. One or two, who were exceptionally good pilots, were transferred to the Air Transport Command.

The P-51 occasionally had a cranky but seldom produced habit of the engine cutting out on the takeoff run. Most of the time, the engine would just sputter, and quickly catch again, and a successful takeoff would be made. The problem arose when it didn't catch again. We were taught the answer to this predicament was to punch the red button on the top of the joy stick to release the wings tank or bombs, if any, and land straight ahead. Scattered, burnt or otherwise mangled, wing tanks and plane pieces at the end of our runway impressed on us that such a moment of panic could be real. It happened to me once on the start of what was supposed to be a long enough mission to require wing tanks. On my takeoff run my engine sputtered long enough for me to press my thumb on the button jettisoning wing tanks full of gas. I must say that the ball of fire thus created behind me was quite impressive. The guys in the pair of planes following me were not nearly as impressed. My engine caught again and I became airborne without further trouble. But, without the required fuel I had lost the chance to add to my mission total. I just flew around locally until the squadron headed out. Another member of the 434th was not so lucky. His engine did not restart and he was just air born, wheels up. He had no choice but to make a belly landing straight ahead. Loaded with gas and ammunition, his landing turned into spectacular fiery crash that had fifty-calibers popping off in every direction. The fire, ambulance and crash trucks raced out to help, but after viewing the wreckage decided that there was nothing they could do and were preparing to leave the scene when our hero raised his head above the ditch he was using for protection and called; "Hey! Can I ride with yah?" His face was burned some and he missed several missions because of that, but he was soon back flying again.

Everyone was aware of a phenomenon heard every time they crossed out and have nothing but North Sea ahead; the engine would run rough or, at least, it seemed to. Many a 51's log was written up to testify to this but crew chiefs could never find any mechanical reason for pilots' claim. Yet the complaint persisted. I'll admit I too was tempted to add my collaborating remarks every time I crossed in after a mission. It scarcely seems such a universal feeling could have been psychological because it sounded so real. Could it have been the sound an engine makes over water is different than that over land? Does the land soak up the sound more, even at ten thousand feet plus, than it does over water? Hardly seems so? Yet, it was never explained. Why just the other day I was talking to a friend that flies his light plane over Lake Michigan to Oshkosh, Wisconsin for the yearly air show, he says he experiences the sound change in his engine each time he makes the trip. It's so real that, he tries to get enough altitude to

be able to glide half way across the lake by the time he's at the half way point in case of engine failure. That's a bit much! Fat chance we'd have had to do that and hold formation in combat.

Here, let me explain what formations were. To start with you should probably know that when only one plane flew on one mission, that action was called a Sortie. Four planes, flying in formation was a Flight and if they were on a combat mission that would constitute four Sorties. Three Flights constituted a Squadron except when a maximum effort was called for. Then a Squadron had four or more Flights in the air. A Group was made up of three or more Squadrons. OK? Now; back to a Flight formation. Place your hand, palm down, on a flat surface. With your fingers tight together, neglect your thumb. Spread your fingers apart, just a bit. Your finger nails will represent the position of each plane in a Flight or of the four Flights of a maximum effort Squadron formation, or of four Squadrons of a Group formation. For a single Flight, four ships, the Flight-Leader would be the middle, or long, finger. The index finger his Wing-Man; the ring finger, the Element-Leader and the little finger his Wing-Man. If you spread your fingers apart you'll notice that the finger nails pretty much keep the same relationship to each other. Your fingernails now represent what a combat formation looked like. In actual combat the Leader and the Element-Leader, each with their Wing-Man, usually broke the Flight formation and the fighting was done in pairs. Each Wing-Man usually flew in an echelon position to protect his Leader or Element-Leader. To keep all this straight each Flight in a Squadron was given a color. The lead Flight was normally RED and the tail end charley Flight, BLUE. Positions within a flight were numbered. The Leader was, naturally, ONE; his Wing-Man, TWO. The Element-Leader was, THREE and his Wing-Man, FOUR and so on. Missions were usually flown under radio silence but if conversation was required it was a simple matter have it between the ships it was intended for.

Remember I wrote about a flight coming in to do a 'widow-maker' for a landing. That was how every fighter landed unless he got permission from the tower for a straight-in approach and landing; which probably meant he had trouble. The object of the widow-maker was to get the planes on the ground as fast and safely as possible. Here's how it went with a flight: The leader, by the dip of his right wing, would signal the three other planes in his flight to form a tight echelon formation to his right. That meant everyone but the leader had his eyes glued on the plane to his left. Once formed, the leader started a rapid decent, aiming for a landing at the end of the runway's left side, speed, about 165 miles per hour, crossing the end of the runway at ten feet, or so, of altitude; the leader would throttle back to idle, pull into a tight 360 degree climbing turn to his left and, while continuing his turn, line up on the left side of the runway for his landing. He'd have; dropped his gear, set his flaps, lost altitude from the top of his climb and reduced to landing speed as his wheels touched. The plane that was on his right, mimicking his actions and holding its position, would almost immediately squeak his wheels on the right side of the runway only a little behind the leader. The third plane followed the second landing on the left side, a little behind the second plane. The fourth followed suit back on the right side. In short order four planes were on the ground and all on the same runway at the same time.

Such things were taught, heard of and/or experienced, then later discussed while tied to the ground waiting to get in our ten hours flight time over England. It took about a

month to accumulate that amount of air time. Ground School, PT, instrument flying, bridge games, a weekend in London, weather and what have you contributed to delays and ate up days. We were anxious. After all, we'd just spent the whole month of January without leaving the ground even for a local flight and now a month was to pass before we'd see combat.

Prior to being given a place on the combat rotation roster Bob and I were honored with accommodations in the 434th section of the Officers Club. It was a spacious room; kitty-corner from Capt. Creighton's. Much bigger than Bob and I needed. We almost felt guilty having a twin bed for each of us and a desk. Most rooms in the section were furnished with double decked bunks and writing letters was done on a clip board. So, it was some what of a surprise when we found out our lavish suite had been abandoned by four dog robbers. They were moved to quarters more respectful of their rank, the enlisted men's barracks. Naturally, we paid a price for their inconvenience. The contents of our liquor bottles, of which there were few, inexplicably evaporated; regardless of how carefully the volume was marked and recorded or the bottles were hidden. Cookies and other goodies from home vanished. No crumbs would be left. Not even a trace of the morsels, just empty containers. The sweets disappearance was solved by sharing and eating everything upon arrival.

Speaking of goodies; Letty once wrote that she was sending a care package with cookies, and a bottle of gin. In the gin she hoped to have hid stuffed olives. There was no such thing as stuffed olives over there. Martinis were served with only gin and vermouth and, in the winter months, occasionally ice. Upon arrival of the package a goodly crowd had gathered hoping for a taste of a real Martini. Haste in getting to it sent cookies scurrying across the floor and ruffled paper, pieces of the box and various lengths of twine decorated my bed. It was a sad group that found Letty's olives were the ripe kind not green, pimento stuffed kind so eagerly anticipated, and to add insult to injury, the trip over turned them from ripe to rotten. They not only spoiled themselves but also ruined the gin.

The dog-robber and liquor problem were more easily corrected. The door to the barroom was just down the hall, around the corner, and next to the bulletin board posting the duty roster. If you were smart you'd check the duty roster before going into the bar and if your name was posted to fly the next day you were expected to know enough not to have more than two drinks.

The Lounge was just a short jaunt around the corner, past the bar, the Mess Hall and through the Lobby to where Bob and I spent hours playing bridge. We were, or at least we considered ourselves to be, not just Squadron but Group champion bridge players. We probably would have gone on to the Wings' finals, had the war held out. Tournaments were held with forty shuffled decks of cards. Each deck constituted a hand and dealing the hands rotated around the table, making it more difficult to memorize card hands. I didn't know it then but, now they call it duplicate bridge. Once, our competitors slipped in a trick deck. The hands dealt Bob and I read that we had a grand slam in diamonds. Our opponents bid a slam in no trump. We doubled. The trick was that after the bidding was completed and the first lead was made it became obvious that our diamonds were worthless. We couldn't get to lead them. That little episode should have made me realize I was not quite as good as I thought I was.





Finally, there was a tap on my shoulder. I was at the coffee bar in the Squad Room having a mug full of coffee and a cigarette. It was Major Olds tapping. "Waters suit up and get in No.234," he says. I do as told. Rather ordered. No. 234 had a practice bomb hanging under each wing. I reasoned that I'm to be checked for bombing accuracy. Olds led the way onto the taxi strip, and fish tails to the end of the runway; he parks on the grass of its far- left side. -He's the leader. - I as his wing man park on the near side grass. Without delay, as rehearsed, I go through the memorized take-off checklist and finish as he pulls onto his side of the runway and stops. I follow and stop on his right: my left wing a little behind his right, my eyes glued on his head and the swastikas indelibly painted on Scat, (His plane's name.) below the edge of his canopy. He nods and starts the take-off run. I increase my throttle to maintain position. Then when the tail wheel leaves the ground I move the gear level into up slot; front wheels held down with slight pressure on the joy stick. He lifts off and at the same time starts a tight turn towards the North Sea. I follow; my front wheels follow each other as they in turn clunk into their wells. As I mimic Scat's every move flaps are retracted, mixture and manifold pressure and rpm set for a climb, trim tabs adjusted, all without looking at the instrument or words spoken. Seemingly without my trying 234 flies as if it is glued to Scat...As though Scat was flying 234...It holds position tucked under Scat's right wing. We fly as one, north. Then, in what seems like only a short time, we head east and soon I hear him say, "Newcross One Crossing Out." Shortly there's water below, only water, as far as I can see ahead. We gain altitude to eight thousand then keep it straight and level until he points down at a bomb target anchored in the North Sea. He peels off. Dives for the target and releases his load. I follow, dropping mine. I'm aware of the routine except this time he doesn't try to gain back the precious altitude. He stays on the deck, skimming over the top of the North Sea. I regain position at his right wing and: Hey! We're still heading east. That's the course we hold for quite a spell. Than! Is that land ahead? If it is it isn't ours. He rocks his wings, meaning I should move out to battle formation which makes room for abrupt maneuvers but still holding the same relative position to Scat. I'm out there but he's pointing down. I'm too high. I inch 234 down to be as low as Scat and get an OK sign. We stay that way. I'm thinking: It's a good thing we fooled with this low water flying while at Page. In no time at all I'm able to distinguish one building from another on the land ahead, and at the same time the sky lights up with tracer bullets. Little puffs of white smoke on the buildings-no sound- tells where the shots come from. If it had been peacetime and the Fourth of July I'd probably have thought them pretty, but, now it meant: *Get the hell out of here.* Olds didn't have to ask, order or signal, me to follow him into a full power, tight climbing turn of a hundred eighty degrees and then back down to just on top of the Sea heading west. In a few minuets we begin to gain altitude still heading west. I enjoy the rest of the ride towards

home base. He calls, "Newcross crossing in." Then it seems only minutes and I'm following him into a widow makers. (A landing maneuver) Taxi and park in 234's revetment, fill in the forms, get out of flight stuff and into a ground uniform, go back to the Squad Room and have another cup of coffee. Flight over.

I never talked to a superior about the flight, not even Olds. Never knew if my performance was good or bad, never received credit for a mission and never found out if my bombs hit the target. None of which bothered me. I was amazed to find that those little bright tracers didn't scare the Be-Gee-Us out of me. Maybe it was because I couldn't hear them or I was too excited. Even took a while for me to realize that they were meant to kill me. The next day I was relieved to find out that I was put on the rotation list for combat duty.

You might say the Officer's Lounge was my nemesis because it was on a Friday evening here, that in full-dress uniform, I and a friend were seated to view, a movie. Supposedly the One and Only—Betty Gable—In the Greatest Love Story Ever Filmed. Our seats were excellent; about half way back and centered on the screen. We sat almost breathless waiting for a GI to dim the lights and for another to start the film clacking through the projector which was to broadcast, onto a slightly warped screen, its blinking, muted black and white tones depicting the rear view of a bathing suit. Said suit would be covering a well-formed buttock supported by long, svelte legs with dimples on the back of the knees. Above all this would be the smiling face, belonging to the girl left behind by every homesick American Soldier, looking seductively over a shoulder strap...But wait!...Major Olds and a West Point buddy of his have taken seats directly in front of us. These are big guys. Our view of the screen has been blocked. All that was visible were burly backs. Adjusting our chairs or ourselves in them does little to increase the visible portion of the screen. My eyes are somehow drawn to Major Olds' head. His hair is long and thick on the back; reaching all the way down to the top of his shirt collar. Our commander! With hair like that! The guy who showed me what bullets fired at me looked like--My Hero. Not living up to the dress code? I mention it to the guy I came in with; I hoped loud enough for Olds to hear. There's no reaction. I should have left well-enough alone, but no, I try again, louder: "We have to get our hair cut once a week. You'd think the Commander would set an example." At that Olds slowly turns to face me and says, "Your facetious remarks are not appreciated." Then he slowly turns back to face the screen. There's no place for me to hide. I can think of nothing to say. I've violated a cardinal rule: "Never speak to a superior officer unless spoken to." I quietly wait for the end of the movie. I don't remember a thing about the movie. Not even the title. When it's over I slink back to my room. You just don't treat a superior officer that way, especially your Commander and an Ace.

Breakfasts were had in the Squad Room; lunches were either caught there or gone without as during long missions. The food as served in the Officers' Club Mess Hall, the evening meals, was not very memorable. There was probably mutton; potatoes, another vegetable, bread and butter, some kind of side dish and a drink of your choice; wholesome yet nothing spectacular. I do remember Brussels sprouts though. Sometimes we had them twice; even three times a day. If that vegetable is not a member of the cabbage family it certainly should be. It's just as good at developing gas. Don't believe it? Try eating a meal of them and then get in a plane, take off and climb to twenty thousand feet. You'll immediately know why we hated them and why it was said that

only God and the laundry man knew how scared we were in combat. In warm weather they provoked us with another misery. They wanted me to gulp down salt tablets that were as big as horse tablets and they made me sick. No matter how the flight surgeon cajoled or preached I could not stomach them. There was always a big bowl of them by the door for exiting the Mess Hall. If I was forced to take one on my way out, I'd race to my room to be rid of it.

Then, of course, there was the bar. It was a good idea for me to check the duty roster before going in. If I was scheduled for the next day's mission I'd limit my drinks to just two. Mostly, we hung-out there to sip a few, shoot the breeze: talk: flying, exaggerate tales of home, what we expected to do when we got back to the States, what went on the last time we were in London. If someone got promoted, tradition demanded, he'd pay for an open bar on the day of his new rank. If he was a nice guy his tab reflected it by being small. If, on the other hand, he was thought to be too devoted to Army discipline his bill could be outrageous. I happened on one party for the later type: There was a lineup to get to the bar and everyone in it was holding two *schoppens* (a German stein or mug, holding about a pint of beer) to be filled. That mission accomplished, the recipients joined a new line; its destination being an open casement windows in a far corner from the bar. Although there were other windows closer, I assumed, this particular one was chosen to allow sipping time of participants prior to slouching the bulk of their *schoppens'* contents outside. They would then regain a position in the line headed back to the bar for refills. So it was that they could continue to aid in the watering of the shrubs outside. Fortunately, for the 'honored benefactor', a Colonel came in, sized up the situation, and limited the parade of *schoppens* to those that would empty the container of lager presently on tap. I've often wondered if the Colonel knew that a new keg had just been opened.

The group CO, a full bird, Colonel, was an all-right-guy. Riddle was his name. Our group was known as Riddles Raiders. He hosted a party at his house to celebrate his birthday and according to tradition all Officers were expected to attend. There were lots of drinks, nibbles and songs while he played the grand piano. Good thing there was no mission the next day. He'd have had a hard time getting a full squadron in the air. There was a time when I flew in a Group mission he led. After the bombers were safely on their way home he didn't take us down for targets of opportunity. Instead he circled us back into Germany to even higher altitudes. Looking to get a shot at some stray Jerry, I guess. We went up to thirty thousand feet and then some, which was the highest I ever went. The ole P-51 was just mushing along. And cold, I've never been so cold. We stayed up there for what seemed like forever; I didn't see a thing but the cloud cover below. Nothing was expected above us and nothing was seen there either. When the lead flight began its power glide down; the rest of us gratefully followed. Finally we were at an altitude where we could fly. But my thick, glass, bullet proof, wind shield had so cold that the moisture held in the warmer air below condensed on it and froze so thick that I couldn't see through it for a while. Finally the temperature rose to a point where I was able to keep warm and more importantly we were heading for home. Days later we learned the Colonel thought he had spotted a lone enemy, gave chase, and fired before he recognized that his quarry was a Russian. Poor guy had to write a letter of apology to the Russian Air Force. To make matters worse, he didn't even hit him.

At this point it has undoubtedly occurred to you that fighter pilots are either arising or practiced extroverts. They must do or make themselves better, at any task, than anyone else; particularly if that task was to be viewed by others. Once mastered they would then delicately make it known--something like: 'Hey look! I'll bet you can't do this or at least can't do it as perfectly as I can.' Flying their slow rolls must be the most exact. Eight-point rolls perfected so each point is held without even the tiniest visible slip-out and, the whole maneuver, made to look easy. Turns can only be made so coordinated that the needle and ball, on the instrument panel, remain perfectly still and precisely centered, and the result was to be tighter than anyone else's. On the other hand the Army Dress Code was to say at least, tarnished by pilots who would wear: oxblood Wellington boots rather than Army shoes, a white silk scarf, made from parachute silk, rather than a khaki necktie and a visor hat with no grommets. Supposedly the grommets were removed so radio earphones would fit tighter to the ears. If they smoked, cigars were preferred over cigarettes, rarely lit. And, the A2 leather jacket was a must, unless full-dress, then an Eisenhower jacket replaced the green tunic. Oh, by the way, one pant leg was usually casually stuffed into the Wellington boot. So, what could draw the attention of others in the bar where everybody dresses the same and supposedly is in a quiet somber mood? In our bar it was the coin trick. It wasn't only practiced, but it was perfected, and then used to deliberately show off: Here's how it done: Get a beer. Set it in front of you. That's to project your character and show your will power. You're not about to drink it just yet. Now with your back to it put an elbow on the bar. That arm can be either vertical or horizontal.--Probably horizontal is best—Looks more casual that way. The hand of that arm is sort-of cupped; fingers extending straight out from the palm. Held near the tip ends of the thumb, the index finger, the middle finger and the ring finger are three coins, by their edges. Shillings were just the right size in England. Here, in the US, the fifty-cent pieces or silver dollars will do. Hold the coins with their flat surface loosely together. Now, here's what you do. It may take a little practice but you can do it. Using only the fingers of the hand holding the coins, and its little finger only if necessary; remove the center coin. Turn it so its heads and tails are reversed and reinsert it back in its space between the other coins from whence it came. There, see that was simple enough. Try it with five coins, turning the two coins on either side of the center one. When you perfected that feat of dexterity, you may drink the beer. Everyone will be looking at you so look casual. Show your suaveness. Remember, you're trying to be a Fighter Pilot.

The Squad Room was really our family room. We were there during the day-time-hours whether or not we were to fly. We were there to watch missions' take-off and missions' return. It was the place to relax when we returned from one. It was our classroom; card room, squadron briefing room, and whatever. Just outside was our Volleyball Court. A six-by-six truck would be waiting on the tarmac outside to take to us to a revetment if we were to fly. Anybody looking for you would try the Squad Room first. Its windows overlooked the air field on one long side and equal windows were opposite. Offices were on one end. The breakfast bar was the main feature of the other end. Lounge furniture, tables and chairs were ample for more than just the groups pilots. The walls and ceiling were in painted crisp light colors. Murals depicting planes and the Squadron's patch (Tutor ET Ultra, The Teacher and the Pupil), adorned the walls in back of and on the face of the bar. They were very well done. One of our pilots that didn't

come home was the artist. Darned if I can remember his name; he must have meant more to me than just an acquaintance because a friend of his (a pilot from another base) came to the 434th and found me in the Squad Room. He told me the artist's folks had asked him to look me up and have me show him their son's work. I showed this flyer around, gave him a cup of coffee and told him what I knew of the painter. The paintings always meant more to me after that. I wish I had pictures of them now.

It was in this room that the Major and I watched our crippled squadron return from a particularly hard mission. It had been the last big air battle of the war. We lost several planes, one from the position I normally flew. But, there was good news too. More than one victory roll was made. A new replacement got two. His victories seemed to make him withdrawn and it took a few conversations with the Major to snap him out of his despondency.

After victory in Europe the Major got the squadron together in the Squad Room and had all of us agree to go to the Pacific as a unit. Of course it never happened. We stayed right where we were until Japan gave up. But, while we waited someone got the bright idea of having a mock battle with English Spitfires. They supposedly could perform maneuvers equal to Japanese Zeros. Bob and I were not scheduled to fly in that charade but were in the Squad Room just after it was over. The Englishmen were a sad looking bunch and our guys didn't look much better. Two Spitfires had been lost in a mid-air collision that neither proved nor taught anything.

Prior to a mission and right after group briefings the Major, or whoever was to command the squadron that day, would give a short speech. That was the Squadron Room Briefing; held to: point out what was expected of each pilot, last-minute changes in positions, what areas of the bomber box each flight was to cover, and other nitty-gritty duties. The more important things: weather, where we're going, why, expected resistance and flack, we heard about in group briefings. They always ended with, "And the temperature today, at twenty thousand feet, is minus fifty degrees; Attention, Dismissed." I can't recall anyone saying, Happy Hunting. I sat through twenty some mission briefings. All were an overture to a trip over the North Sea, deep into the German air space. One was delivered to us on the day the war ended in Europe. After that briefing, those of us suited up and seated waiting for a ride to our planes, we waited and we waited not knowing why. Finally the word came; the mission was cancelled. The war was over. Some of us, still supporting back packed chutes, flight helmets, oxygen masks, wires and tubes dangling, went out and stood in front of the control tower and had our picture taken. We were supposed to look real sad, as though we wanted the war to continue and give us another chance at the enemy. That's one photograph I'm glad is, with several others, lost

An earlier briefing, that I sat through; resulted in an abort because of avoidable engine trouble...We'd taken off and were climbing out east over the sea. When we reached the altitude where the turbo charger was to cut in, it did but turned itself off again, just as fast. I flipped the switch to turn it back on, overriding the automatic feature. The turbo caught and quickly cut out again as the switch snapped back to its off position. Jiggling the switch was of no avail. I either had to hold the switch in the on position or the turbo wouldn't run. I reasoned that I wouldn't be of much use with one hand glued to the instrument panel so I called in, "Blue Four Going Home," and made a 180 degree turn heading to Newcross. When I heard; "Alternate One to Blue Four." Meaning one of the spear planes that were not required for a complete squadron

formation that day was taking my place. Back at Newcross the automatic turbo charger switch was found to be defective and I was exonerated of any wrong doing. Lesson learned--Carry a rubber band to hold the switch in the 'ON' position.

I and another pilot did get credit for what we thought might not be a mission. It was labeled as Photo Reconnaissance Escort. We were given a course and altitude to fly, and a time to take off so we would find an F-58. (A P-38 specially rigged for photo reconnaissance. It had no guns.) We were to see that it got to its target and returned to friendly air space. We had wing tanks. The F-58 did not. The 58 knew what and where the target was. The Escort 51s did not. We plodded east for a long time with a 51 either side of the 58 and slightly above. Spaced horizontally in a ruff combat formation; seeing no enemy. I for one was half scared we might; thinking only two P-51s would have a tough time stopping a squadron of ME109s. But we saw nothing going east or returning west. After a five hour ride we found out the target was Berlin...Never did see any of the pictures.

Yet another time, Bob and I were assigned to be the radio relays. It was another long ride and this time we didn't receive a credit for a mission. We were assigned to fly over some long forgotten town in eastern France and there to circle at a given high altitude and relay a messages between the Mission Control in England and the Mission Leader far in eastern Germany. Aircraft radios used FM and hence broadcast on a line-of-sight. That meant if the mission proceeded into Germany, far enough, the curvature of the earth would interrupt the line of site from England to the mission. This would negate any conversation between Control and the Mission. Bob and I were to extend the communicating distance by flying over the interrupting point to relay messages. We circled for a long time without a message from either end. Being ever-mindful that some enemy might just pop up to see what we were up to. Finally, a message came. It simply said, "Relay Go Home," and meant that Mission Control was back in contact with the mission and resuming its direct control. Going home, Bob and I saw the White Cliffs of Dover and since it was a bright sunny day decided to show them how much we enjoyed the view. We dove at, around and over them and, of course, did more than a couple of slow rolls before continuing on. Back in the revetment at Newcross the crew chief said, "How was the mission?" "Milk run," says I. (Pilot jargon for 'Didn't get shot at.')

The crew chief tosses me a rag and says, "Clean it up." You see, there is an overflow pipe that releases what could be a dangerous build up of engine oil on the normal bottom of the pistons when the plane is upside down. This pipe spills the oil along the side of the plane. A crew chief was taught to be proud of His plane and of pilots that flew it. He would sit and sweat out their return every time His ship took-off. He'd work all night, if he had to, to keep His ship in first class condition. For this chief, cleaning up a mess made by me having fun while he sat wondering if His ship and pilot would come back was—well, it got to him. I understood. I wiped down the plane and threw the rag back to him. He said, "Thanks sir," I replied, "I wouldn't try that too many times Sergeant". I understood his feelings. I hope he understood what I meant.

Some where I read: **The past is never where you leave it.** That being true the recollections you find piped onto these pages should be digested carefully. As to what I experienced on a mission I leave to what you may gather from the following letter, written to my parents; rather than the distortion of scribbling produced through the use of this glorifying memory.

LT C. L. WATERS 080248
334th FRI. #74th FESG
APO 558 9/4 PM NEW YORK



MR & MRS C. L. WATERS
2516 SCHAEFER
SAGINAW MICHIGAN
U.S.A.

Clear cell letter

PART I

20 MAY

1945
IN ENGLAND

DEAR FOLKS: *ee*

I CAN'T UNDERSTAND WHY MY GOING OFF TO ENGLAND SCHOOL SHOULD HAVE CAUSED EVERYONE BACK THERE SO MUCH CONCERN. PERHAPS IT WAS BECAUSE I SAID I DIDN'T WANT TO GO. I REALLY DIDN'T, NOT AT THAT TIME. IT SEEMED LIKE THERE MIGHT STILL BE A CHANCE FOR ONE MORE CRACK AT THOSE BASTARDS AT THAT TIME AND I DIDN'T WANT TO MISS OUT ON IT BY BEING AWAY AT SCHOOL. I WENT ANYWAY BUT DID NOT MISS OUT ON A SNOW SO ALL IS WELL. THE DETAILS OF MY SNOOGLING YOU SHOULD HAVE RECEIVED BY NOW SO WE WON'T GO INTO THEM AGAIN.

I MUST SHAME FACEDLY ADMIT THAT I COMPLETELY FORGOT ABOUT MOTHERS DAY. I TRUST MY WIFE TOOK SOME OF MY FACTS INTO HAND AND DID THE APPROPRIATE THINGS FOR THE OCCASION. ACTUALLY EVERY DAY IS MOTHERS DAY OVER HERE. NOT ONE PASSES WITHOUT A SHORT PRAYER FOR OUR MOTHERS THAT THEY MIGHT NOT WORRY ABOUT US AND UNDERSTAND THE HORRIBLE THINGS WE ARE FORCED TO DO THE OPPOSITE OF THEIR LOVING TEACH-

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INGS.

NO, V.E. DAY WAS JUST AN ANTI-CLIMAX FOR US. THERE WASN'T EVEN VERY MUCH EXCITEMENT. A FEW OF THE MORE SENTIMENTAL JOES GOT A LITTLE STIFF DRINKING TOASTS TO THEIR DEAD BUDDIES. FOR MOST OF US THERE WAS MOSTLY A LITTLE SENCE OF RELEASE FROM THE TENSION OF COMBAT AND A MARKED INTEREST IN THE OTHER WAR.

ONE THING WE ARE NOT ALLOWED TO ELONGATE ON IS HOW ANYONE WAS KILLED. THERE IS NO SENCE IN RENEWING AN OLD HURT. THE FEELINGS OF SUCH A LOSS AS BOB ARE MUCH EASIER SUBDUED IF LEFT ALONE. I CAN ONLY SAY HE DIED AS WE ALL WOULD LIKE TO - FLYING - "KILLED OVER ENGLAND."

^{JUST SAY HE WAS}

I CANNOT SAY AS TO WHERE WE WILL GO OR WHAT WE WILL DO NOW. PLEASE DO NOT ASK. ANYTHING I MIGHT SAY COULD BE NO MORE THAN A RUMOR.

I DIDN'T GET TO SEE MORPHY. HE IS IN ANOTHER OUTFIT AND I GOT THERE JUST ONE DAY TO LATE. LETTY HAS HIS ADDRESS.

POP WHERE DID YOU GET THE IDEA I WAS A CROSSER. I SIGN MY NAME TO MY ENVELOPES TO SHOW THAT I KNOW THE

(2)

CENSORSHIP LAWS MY LETTERS ARE STILL SUBJECT TO CENSORING.

SO YOU WANT TO KNOW WHAT IT'S LIKE TO RIDE A MUSTANG ON A MISSION? I DON'T SUPPOSE MUCH OF THIS WILL MAKE MUCH SENCE TO YOU BUT HOLD YOUR HAT.

I'M JUST A PROY, A WING MAN, WHAT I DO ON A MISSION IS FLY AN AIRPLANE, CLEAR THE SKY, AND AT ALL TIMES THE AIR BEHIND MY LEADER. BEYOND THAT I AM LITTLE NEEDED. THE SUCCESS OR FAILURE OF A MISSION RESTS WITH ME BUT ONLY IN SO FAR AS I DO MY APPOINTED TASK. THE MILLIONS OF MEN ON THE GROUND, MECHANICS, RADIO MEN, GAS MEN, INSTRUMENT MEN, ARMORERS, OPERATIONS MEN, INTELLIGENCE, WEATHER, AND THE GENERALS WHO SAY WHERE WE GO AND WHAT WE DO ARE THE GUYS THAT DESERVE THE CREDIT.

BUT WHAT ~~IT~~ DO GOES SOME-THING LIKE THIS.

ONE DAY LAST MARCH I HAD MY DINNER AND WALKED DOWN THE HALL PAST THE BAR TO THE SQUADRON BULLETIN BOARD - YOU ALWAYS CHECK TO SEE IF YOU'VE GOT ON THE NEXT DAYS MISSION BEFORE YA START DRINKING. THERE I WAS, RED TIED, IN A GOOD SPOT. A COUPLE OF THE OTHER GUYS

(3)

COME UP TO CHECK. A COUPLE
REMARKS ARE PASTED LIKE:
"I WONDER WHERE TO THIS TIME."

"WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE. THOSE
BASTARDS WON'T COME UP ANY
WAY"

"YEAH, PROBABLY BE JUST ANOTHER
MILK RUN."

"WE OUGHT TO SENT THOSE SHITS
A SHIP LOAD OF GAS AND CHANGE
THEM."

"HEY ~~LOE~~ - YA ON IT"

"YEAH. COFFIN CORNER - OLE
BLUE FOUR."

"WHO'S LEADIN'?"

"OLDS"

GOOD HE ALWAYS FINDS SOMETHIN!
IF THERE IS ANYTHING"

ON THE WAY BACK TO THE
ROOM YOU STOP IN THE BAR
AND HAVE A BEER, TWO AT
THE MOST. AND MORE AND I
COULD N'T HOLD IT FOR SIX
HOURS. I SAY "HI" TO THE BOYS
THAT AREN'T GOING TOMORROW AND
KINDA ENNY THEM THAT THEY CAN
STAY UP AND SULL FOR A WHILE
LONGER THAN I. MAYBE PUT A
YAW COINS IN THE SLOT MACHINE
BUT GET TO THE ROOM PRETTY
EARLY. MAYBE WRITE A LETTER
OR READ A LITTLE BUT I AM
USUALLY MUCH TO RESTLESS TO STAY

(4)

AT ONE THING VERY LONG. ABOUT NINE THIRTY I GO DOWN TO THE MESS HALL AND GET A MIDNIGHT SNACK. THEN BACK TO THE ROOM AND AFTER A LITTLE CONVERSATION ABOUT HOME WITH THE ROOM MATE, BOB, I TURN IN; NEVER LATER THAN TENTHIRTY.

THE NEXT MORNING LONG ABOUT SIX OR SO THE ORDERLY STICKS HIS HEAD IN THE DOOR AND SHOUTS "LT. WATER? BRIEFING AT SIX THIRTY." (I HAVE GET TO SEE THAT GUY'S FACE BUT I'M PRACTICALLY CERTAIN I WOULDN'T LIKE HIM.) I STILL FEEL DEAD TIRED BUT I GET UP AND START DRESSING. ALREADY YOU CAN HEAR THE BOMBERS OUT THERE GETTING FORMED UP. ONCE AGAIN I WONDER "WHERE TO" TODAY. — THE P.A. SYSTEM ANNOUNCES "434TH'S PILOTS TRUCK LEAVING IN TWO MINUTES. I GRAB WHAT CLOTHES I HAVEN'T ON YET AND HIT THE ROAD BUT NOT BEFORE BOB GET A SHAKE, (S) (IT'S S.O.P. THAT THE ROOM MATE GETS WOKRE UP BEFORE YOU LEAVE.)

YOU GO OUT TO THE TRUCK
AND ZIP UP THAT NICE FLEESE
LINED JACKET. IT'S DAMN CHILLY
AND MORNING IN ENGLAND.
A COUPLE OF LATE COMERS GET
RAZED FOR SLEEPING THEIR LIFE
AWAY. SOMEONE ELSE ASKS IF
THEY DON'T KNOW THERE'S A
WAR GOING ON. THERE IS A
LITTLE GROUND FOG AND THE
CAPTAIN WONDERS IF "THIS SHIT"
WILL BURN OFF BEFORE TAKE
OFF TIME. THE LAST MAN GETS
IN AN IS GOOSSED ALL THE WAY
DOWN TO THE ONLY SEAT
LEFT.

WE GET DOWN TO THE LINE
IN TIME FOR A CUP OF COFFEE
BEFORE BRIEFING. I SCURRY
AROUND AND ROUND UP MY
KNEE PAD AND A PENCIL; THEN
INTO THE BIG BRIEFING ROOM.
I PICK OUT MY SEAT - REDBACK
SECOND FROM THE AISLE. OTHER
GOYS KEEP DRIVING IN. I COPY
THE POOP FROM THE BIG BOARD
AND ABOUT THE TIME I GET
THROUGH THE INTELLIGENCE
(6) OFFICER SAYS - "YOUR ATTENTION
GENTLEMEN" - "TODAY WE HIT

A G.A.F. STATION AT ---, " HE
GIVES US THE REASON WHY THIS
PLACE IS TO BE BOMBED, THE
EXPECTED RESULTS, EXPECTED
REACTIONS AND EXPECTED
OPPOSITION. HE TELLS US WHAT
BOMBERS WE WILL ESCORT,
WHERE WE MEET THEM AND
WHERE WE CAN LEAVE THEM.
HE GIVE US OUR GROUND FORCES
RECOGNITION SIGNALS FOR THE
DAY, AND ~~THE~~ RUSSIAN RECOGNITION
PLUS A LOT OF OTHER STUFF.

NEXT "STORMY" TAKES OVER
AND GIVE US ALL THE LATEST
POOD ON THE WEATHER. TODAY
HE SAYS "NO RESTRICTION TO
ENEMY OPPOSITION." THAT
MAKES YOU FEEL GOOD.

LASTLY THE GROUP LEADER
FOR THE DAY TAKES THE
STAND AND HE TELL US WHAT
HE EXPECTS AND WHERE HE
WANTS US TO GO. THEN
HE CALL FOR A "TIME CHECK"
AND IT'S ALL OVER.

BACK TO OUR SQUADRON
ROOM WE GO - HAVE A SHORT
TALK FROM OUR MAJOR ON
WHAT HE WANTS OF US AND
THEN BREAKFAST.

(7)

PLENTY OF WISE CRACKS ARE IN ORDER NOW. WE'RE ALL AWAKE - PEPE'D UP TO A T. MOST OF THE CRACK INVOLVE SEX OR THE LAST 48. NOT MUCH SAID ABOUT THE MISSION NOW.

AFTER BREAKFAST I GO TO OUR PILOTS DRESSING ROOM. SOME OF THE GUYS ARE THERE ALREADY AND THE TRADITIONAL RAZING OF CLAY BAUGH HAS STARTED.

Sgt CLAY BAUGH IS THE GUY THAT TAKES CARE OF OUR EQUIPMENT. SHINES OUR GOGGLES, INSPECTS OUR SKUTES AND IN GENERAL KEEPS EVERYTHING WE USE IN TIP TOP SHAPE.

HE HAS NO RANK TO US NOR US TO HIM. IT'S A DAMN RARE DAY WHEN HE SAYS SIR TO ANYONE AND THEN HE USES IT ONLY TO BE SARCASTIC.

"WHERE'S THAT INDIANA DEMOCRAT?"

"DON'T YOU CALL ME A DEMOCRAT?"

"CHRIST IT'S NOT IN HERE"

"THE MAN HE SAYS THIS JOINT IS TO BE 80° DON'T BLAME ME."

"WHERE THE HELL IS MY SKUTE?"

"REPACK"

"REPACK! SHIT, YA JUST REPACKED"

"LAST WEEK"

(8) THE CHART SAYS 30 DAYS AGO BUT THAT JUST SHOWS HOW WELL I TAKE CARE OF YOU GUYS

"GOT ANOTHER I CAN USE"

"SKIT KID LOOK AROUND - HERE
USE THIS ONE - ~~FOUR~~
AREN'T WORTH YOUR SALT, BOY
WHEN I GET BACK TO INDIANA
I'M GONNA HOLE UP AND NEVER
LOOK AT ANOTHER PILOT."

"INDIANA? WHERE'S THAT?" "HERE
CRY ON MY SHOULDER, CLAYBANK,
IT'S WATER PROOF!"

AND SO IT GOES WHILE I TAKE
OFF MY GREENS AND LOW CUTS
AND ~~SEE~~ PUT ON MY GEAR.

GI SHOES; BETTER TO WALK HOME
IN - WON'T COME OFF WHEN YOU
BAIL. WOOL SOCK - IT'S COLD AT
30,000 - 50° BELOW. OD PANTS,
SONYAN SHIRT, G" SUIIT - ANTI BLACK
OUT JOB, DAMN THING FITS LIKE
A GIRTEL, FLYING SUIIT - CHECK FOR
ATTACHED COMPASS AND KNIFE,
JACKET, MAY WEST, EXTRA FIRST
AIR KIT, TURNAQUET ON MY WEST,
GLOVES, SHUTE AND GUN; THEN
LAST I GRAB MY SEAT COSSION
AND SIGN THE GROG SHEET AND
GO OUT TO THE OPS. BOARD.
I FORGOT MY KNEE PAD AND GO
BACK FOR IT.

I COPY OFF THE FLIGHT POSITIONS
OF THE OTHER GUYS. WE'RE ALL
(9) ABOUT READY NOW. S2 COMES
OUT AND GIVES US OUR ESCAPE

KITS AND EXTRA RATIONS PLUS A
FLAG WITH SOME RUSSIAN THAT
SAYS YOU'RE AN AMERICAN!

THE MAJOR LOOKS US OVER
AND SAYS, "THE SPARES CAN GO
ALL THE WAY TO DAY. IF THEY
STAY AS A PAIR. LET'S GO". I WALK
DOT TO THE TRUCK SOCKING LIKE
MAD ON WHAT IS TO BE MY
LAST CIGARETTE FOR HOURS. AS
WE PULL OUT FOR OUR SHIPS
CLAY BUGHN IS LEFT BEHIND
SHOWING A BIG V SIGN WITH A
STILL BIGGER GRIN.

I'M FLYING "H-HOW" AND AS
I CRAWL UP ON THE WING OLE
PURDOE, THE CREW CHIEF, GREETES
ME WITH A "GOOD MORNING SIR;
HOW ARE YOU TODAY?" I CRAWL
IN THE COCKPIT. "FINE AND
HOW'S THE HOT TODAY?"
"KARIN TO GO SIR". I HOOK
UP MY DINGY, MY G "SUIT
FIX MY SHOULDER STRAPS AND
SAFETY BELT, PLUG IN MY
HEAD SET AND MICK, PLUG IN
MY OXYGEN, CHECK IT. AND STOW
MY MAPS; PURDOE HELPS WHERE
EVER HE CAN. I CHECK MY
INSTRUMENTS AND SET THEM

(10)

PULL UP MY FLAPS SET MY TRIM AND THEN RECHECK EVERY THING. NOW ALL I HAVE TO DO IS WAIT.

WAITING; BY FAR THE WORST PART OF THE WHOLE MISSION. YOU CAN IMAGINE A MILLION THINGS. IT'S ALWAYS HELPED BY THE GUY STANDING ON THE WING THERE TALKING TO YA. HE'S YOUR CREW CHIEF AND HE'LL BE SWEATING YOU OUT ALL THE TIME YOUR GONE. HE KIDS WITH YA RIGHT UP TILL THAT FLARE GOES OFF.

THEN DOWN OFF THE WING HE GOES AND ~~TO~~ START 'ER UP, STARTED I LOOK ONCE AGAIN AT PURDUE. HE DIRECTS ME OUT OF THE PARKING AREA. NOW I'M ON MY OWN. I WATCH FOR J-JAKE WHOM I FOLLOW. TO THE UNTRAINED EYE IT WOULD LOOK LIKE JUST A MESS OF PLANES FIGHTING FOR A CHANCE TO GET ON THE PERIMETER TRACK. BUT ACTUALLY IT'S EACH GUY WAITING PATIENTLY TO GET BEHIND THE RIGHT MAN HE IS TO FOLLOW. WE REACH THE RUNWAY AND "CUE" UP-LEADERS

(11)

PART II

20 MAY '75

ON ONE SIDE COMING MEN ON THE OTHER. NOT A WORD OVER THE HORN YET (RADIO). THAT'S THE SIGN OF A GOOD MISSION. I ROCK MY CANOPY SHUT AND RACE MY ENGINE TO CLEAR IT OUT. I CHECK MY MAGS - OK. ALL THE TIME INCHING FORWARD TO GIVE THE GUY BEHIND CHANCE TO GET ON THE RUNWAY. THE ONES IN FRONT OF ME HAVE BEEN TAKING OFF TO MAKE THE ROOM AND NOW IT'S MY TURN. I LOOK AT MY LEADER AND RUN 'ER UP TO 30 INCHES AGAINST THE BRAKES. HE NODS HIS HEAD - BRAKES OFF AND EASE IN MORE THROTTLE. DOWN THE RUNWAY TAIL UP - HOLD 'ER DOWN - NOW EASY BACK - UP WHEELS - AND I'M FLYING.

WE PULL UP BEHIND WHITE FLIGHT AND SOON THREE AND FOUR JOIN US. THEN YELLOW FLIGHT BEHIND US AND BLUE BEHIND THEM. I DON'T SEE ALL THIS BUT I KNOW THEY ARE THERE. I CAN'T TAKE (12) MY EYES OFF MY LEADER. HIGH WAY - GROUP LEADER - GIVE ME THE

DOPE OVER THE HORN - "HELLO GANG,
HIGHWAY? HERE, SETTING COURSE,
WE CROSS THE COAST AND HIGHWAY
TELS OUR U.K. CONTROLLER WE'RE
AT SEA. WE DRIVE ON AND
SUDDENLY SOME ONE CALLS IN
"HELLO HIGHWAY, RED YOUR HERE,
GOT A BAD ENGINE; GOING HOME"
"ROGER BO? SPARE ONE TILL
IN." LATER WE CROSS IN ON
THE CONTINENT AND THE
CONTINENT CONTROLLER TAKES
OVER. "YOUR BIG FRIENDS ARE
ON COURSE ON TIME AND HAPPY"
HE INFORMS US.

WE MEET THEM RIGHT ON
THE HEAD. HIGHWAY PUTS US
IN BATTLE FORMATION - OUR
WORK HAS BEGUN. NOW I
CAN LOOK AROUND BUT I
STILL HAVE TO KEEP ONE EYE
ON MY LEADER. I CAN'T LOOSE
HIM. IN FACT I'M FLYING
FORMATION WITH HIM STILL.
LOST THE SAME THE NECK STARTS
MOUNDING AND DOESN'T STOP.
(13) A COUPLE "BOOGIES" ARE CALLED
IN BUT QUICKLY IDENTIFIED

AS FRIENDLY. WE CROSS THE
RHINE - "BIG RIVER" WE CALL IT -
AND HEAD SOUTH. A LITTLE DEEPER
IN AND THEN ON TO THE BOMBING
RUN. NOT EVEN ANY FLAK - GEAR
LOST ANOTHER MILK RUN. THE
"BIG FRIENDS" DO A FINE JOB - LAY
'EM IN THE AISLE. WE MAKE
OUR FIRST TURN FOR HOME
AND A COUPLE OTHER JOKER
CALL IN WITH TROUBLES. THEY
LEAVE US AND HEAD FOR FRIENDLY
TERRITORY. MY ASS IS GETTING
SORE. I TRY TO FIND A NEW
WAY TO SIT ON IT BUT THAT'S
PRETTY TOUGH WHEN YOU ARE
STRAPED TO A SEAT. I ENVY
THOSE GUYS GOING HOME BUT THEN
I THINK THERE'S STILL A CHANCE
WE'LL SEE THOSE BASTARDS. WE
JUST DRIVE ON.

FINALLY HIGHWAY CLEARS
OUR SQUADRON FOR A SWEEP
SAYS HELL TAKE THE BOMBER
HOME. SWELL - THIS IS WORTH
COMING FOR - A TANK RUNS DEEP
- MY HEART STOPS - I SWITCH
TANKS AND WAIT FOR IT TO CATCH.
(14) THIS COULD HAPPEN A HUNDRED
TIMES A MISSION BUT IT WOULD

STILL SCARE THE ASS OUT OF ME.
IT ALWAYS CATCHES GREY - AT
LEAST IT ALWAYS HAS. IT CATCHES.
WE START DOWN AND AT 15000
I TAKE OFF MY MASK AND LIGHT
UP A BUTT.

WE DRIVE NORTH AND CHECK
THE AIR FIELDS. ABOUT OVER
MONSTER WHITE TWO CALLS IN
A GAGLE OF BOGGIES 1100 O'CLOCK
HIGH.

WHITE LEADER SAYS "DROP TANKS"
WE'LL CHECK 'EM." THEN, "IT
LOOKS LIKE THE YELLOW SONS-A-
BITCHES" UP GOES THE REV. AND
FORWARD ON THE THROTTLE. "IT'S
THEM" - BALLS OUT. "OKEY,

GANG THIS IS WHAT YA
WANTED GO AFTER 'EM BUT
BE CAREFUL THEY GOT US
OUT NUMBERED" - "WATCH
YOUR ASSES" - "YOCKE WOLVES

AND ONE-O-NINES" - "WATCH
YOUR ASSES" - THEY'RE ABOVE
US YET SO WE CLIMB UP
TO MEET 'EM ON THE OPPOSITE
SIDE OF THEIR TURN. WE
GET LOST ABOUT EVEN AND
SOME OF THEM START ROLLING
AND SPLIT 'ING" FOR THE

(15)

DECK TRYING TO SUCK US DOWN.
WE DON'T TAKE THE BAIT.
ONE DOES A ROLL. THE MAJOR
HOLLER - "A SON-OF-A-BITCH"
AND GOES AFTER HIM. I
CALL MY LEADERS ATTENTION
TO ONE THAT IS CLOSING
IN ON MY ASS. "PREPARE
TO BREAK-RED FLIGHT." - "Now
BREAK" JUST AS HE HOLLERS
IS SEE SMOKE AND FIRE
COMING FROM THAT BASTARD
BEHIND ME. I PULL ON THAT
STICK LIKE I NEVER DID
BEFORR AND LOOSE HIM IN
THE TORN. I'M NOT SCARED
JUST GOD DAMN MAD. MY
LEADER SPIT "SES" AFTER
ONE I FOLLOW, CLEARING
HIS TAIL. HE SHOOTS AND
NAILS THE BASTARD - FLAMES
POUR OUT OF HIM AND IT
MAKES ME FEEL GOOD ALL
OVER. I WATCH HIM TILL
HE GOES STRAIGHT IN AND
EXPLODES. I SPIT IN HIS
DIRECTION AND HAVE TO WIPE

(16)

OFF THE CANOPY BECAUSE I DID,
"NICE GOING RED LEADER" I
SAY — "THANKS" HE SAYS AND
I KNOW I'VE DONE MY JOB
TOO. THE FIGHTS OVER. THE
WHOLE THING TOOK MAYBE
A MINUT AT THE MOST. NOT
AT ALL LIKE THE MOVIES. BUT
JUST LIKE I'D BEEN TRAINED
FOR.

THE MAJOR CALLS FOR A FORM
UP AND SAY WE'D BEST START
FOR HOME. GAS IS GETTING
LOW. HE DOESN'T BOTHER COLLECT-
ING THE WHOLE SQUADRON. TELLS
US TO TAKE OFF BY PAIRTS. WE
FORM UP AND SET COURSE FOR HOME.
STILL PRETTY MUCH EXCITED FROM
THE FIGHT WE DON'T PAY TOO MUCH
ATTENTION TO WHAT WE'RE FLYING
OVER AND THEN ALL OF A SUDDEN
POW — FLAK — WE'RE RIGHT OVER
A TOWN — FLAK — SO CLOSE YOU
CAN HEAR IT — SO CLOSE IT SOUNDS
LIKE THE ENGINE'S CUT — SO CLOSE
IT SCARES YOU SO BAD YOU CAN'T
EVEN CALL THE LEADER AND
TELL HIM IT'S THERE. THERE ISN'T
MUCH NEED IN CALLING THROUGH
(17) CAUSE ALREADY HE'S STARTED
JINXING. AND SO ARE YOU, FOR

ALL YOUR WORTH. THE FLACK AIN'T
BAD ENOUGH I HAVE TO HAVE A
TANK RUN DRY RIGHT OVER THE
STUFF AND SCARE ME SOME MORE.
BUT WE MAKE OUT OKEY. I'M
ON MY LAST TANK NOW SO I
CALL THE FLIGHT LEADER AND TELL
HIM. HE SAYS HE'S PRETTY LOW
TO SO WE PULL EVERYTHING
BACK AS FAR AS WE CAN AND
STILL STAY IN THE AIR. I SPOT
SOME BOGGIES AT NINE O'CLOCK
LOCAL AND CALL THEM IN. "THAT
LOOKS LIKE THEM AGAIN BOYS
LET'S GO" - SAYS THE LEADER AND
ITS BACKS OUT AGAIN BUT THIS
TIME THEY'RE FRIENDLY AND I
HEAVE A SIGH OF RELIEF - A FIGHT
NOW WOULD MEAN LANDING ON
THE CONTINENT AND SWEATING
OUT GETTING GAS. NOW ALL I
HAVE TO DO IS SWEAT OUT THE
CHANNEL. GOING BACK TODAY WE
HAVE AN UNDERCAST SO IT AIN'T
SO BAD - I CAN'T SEE THE WATER.
BUT I'M STILL SWEATING GAS. WE
DRIVE ON FOR WHAT SEEMS LIKE
YEARS. THE GAS IS "FAIRLY PISSING
OUT." FINALLY WE LET DOWN
(18) THROUGH THE STUFF. YOCKED IN
ON THE LEADER A TIGHT AS

POSSIBLE AND PRAYING HE KNOWS
WHAT HE'S DOING - GOING DOWN
THROUGH - BOY THAT'S ONE TIME
YOU REALLY HAVE TO HAVE FAITH IN
THE GUY UP FRONT. WE BRAKE
OUT AT 300 FT. AND THE LEADER
CALLS FOR A HOMING - HIS RADIO
IS GETTING BAD SO I HAVE TO
RELAY THE DIRECTION - WE WERE
ALL MOST DEAD ON COURSE ANYWAY.
I HEAR SOME JOKER ASKING FOR
ADVICE - HE HAS BATTLE DAMAGE
AND CAN'T SEEM TO GET DOWN
THROUGH "THE SHIT." THE LEADER
TELLS HIM TO GIVE IT ANOTHER
TRY AND IF HE DON'T MAKE IT
TO MAKE SURE HE'S OVER THE
"ISLAND" AND THEN BAIL. EVERY-
ONE GIVE HIM A WORD OF
ENCOURAGEMENT. THEN WE SPOT
THE FIELD. MY GAS GAGE DOESN'T
EVEN BOUNCE ANY MORE. I MAKE
A CALL AND GET PERMISSION
FOR AN EMERGENCY LANDING.
AS I "PEEL OFF" MY LEADER
DOES HIS VICTORY ROLL OVER
THE FIELD. I HEAR THE GUY
WITH THE DAMAGE GOT THROUGH
(19) OKEY AS MY WHEEL TOUCH

DOWN. MORE GUYS ARE CALLING
IN FOR HOMINGS AS I REACH THE
END OF THE RUNWAY. I TURN ON
TO THE PERIMETER TRACK AND
START TO TAXI BACK TO MY
REVEGMENT - SUPT AND I'M
OUT OF GAS - JUST MADE IT
DOWN - A TRACTOR PULLS ME
IN.

I'M EXCITED, TIRED, AND
SWEATING LIKE MAD BUT
FROM HERE ON IS ANOTHER
STORY

LOOK TO ALL
D&C

USAAF RECORD—8 MAY 1945—COMBAT MISSIONS—C. L. WATERS						
DATE	MISSIONN	TARGET	OPNL	TOTAL	CLAIMS	REMA
3 Mar	E	Magdeburg	5.20	5.20		
5 "	E	Hamburg	5.10	10.30		
9 "	E	Osnaburck	5.05	15.35		
11 "	E	Kiel	2.15	17.50		abort
12 "	E	Swinemunde	5.45	23.35		
17 "	E	Kassel	4.05	27.40		
19 "	E	Leipheim	6.15	33.55		
20 "	PRU	Berlin	6.00	39.55		
21 "	E	Frankfurt	4.00	43.55		
23 "	E	Osnaburck	5.00	48.55		
31 "	E	Brunswick	4.25	53.20		
Apr 2	E	Kaltenkirchen	5.15	58.35		
6 "	E	Leopoldshall	4.45	63.20		
7 "	E	Duneburg	4.10	67.30		
8 "	E	Nurnburg	5.00	72.30		
10 "	E	Parchim A/D	5.15	77.45		
9 "	E	Landsburg	5.15	83.00		
17 "	E	Falkenau	5.45	88.45		Spare
19 "	E	Brandenburg	2.00	90.45		
5 "	E	Salzburg	5.45	96.30		

E= Escort PRU = Photo Reconnaissance Escort

The preceding table is what the Army called, a 'True Copy', of the various missions I participated in. They now seem a token number when compared with list of missions Olds and some other pilots accumulated.

The purpose of any WWII mission is best left to the politicians and generals that ordered them. Or you might read several of the over abundance of books written on the subject. You must realize that by the time I got into combat the air war was pretty much a one-sided affair in favor of the Allies.

When I arrived: ready for battle, I think, longitude six degrees east was considered the front line of the air war. East of that line we tried to protect bombers; whether they were heading into Germany or coming out. The job of our Squadron was to Escort and protect or cover bombers. Meaning we were to see that they got to their target, drop their bombs and return home safely. We called bombers big brothers whether they were B-24s or B-17s and they called us Span Cans; or it might be little brothers—which ever suited their fancy. The CO of a P-51 Squadron assigned his command by two or four planes units to various positions around a Box of bombers, (Our name for a fighting formation of bombers. A Box in disarray because of enemy action was referred to as a gaggle.) where he thought they were needed.

Bringing up the rear of a box was the worst. Being given that position meant you would be riding in bomber prop-wash ('Con-Trails') and air made turbulent by their props. It was like riding a bucking bronco threw a cloud of white feather. The Jerry's had learned, early on, that this area was a good way to weasel in for a kill so our job was to stop them.

Top cover was more like being assigned as lookouts. These 51s were to call out and/or chase the enemy from where-ever they came. I called out boogies (Unidentified

air craft, usually the enemies.) only once. We gave chase but another squadron got to them first and rapidly dispensed with the threat

The Axis did provide us with a few innovative surprises. One was Jet fighters. Fortunately, the Axis didn't have many jets or many pilots to fly them and; apparently were not willing to reduce the number they did have. The German ME-262s trick was to fly close enough for us to recognize them as enemy. Then we; of course, being fighter pilots, wanting to have a jet to our credit would open our throttles and give chase. When the jets first became the part of the Germans' air arsenal said chase was made up of the better part of a Squadron of 51s all after one jet. Of course the jet had little trouble staying just far enough ahead to be out of range of the 51's guns but allowed them to in close enough to keep our fighters interested. The jet could not loose if speed alone were involved, and as long as the chase lasted the bombers were left wide open for Jerry's conventional fighters to practice their gunnery. To counteract the uneven odds, US Fighter Command devise a plan by which one flight, four planes only, was assigned as jet chasers and they were to be recalled to their original cover position at the Squadron Commander's discretion. The rest stayed with the bombers. I had this chaser duty once and was happy to be recalled. It's tough chasing a jet and watching your tail for a Jerry that might be bearing in for a pot shot at your rear end. No one got a jet on any mission I flew. I'm told that the first Commander of the 65th Wing, Col. Zemke, was last seen heading straight up into a cloud chasing one. He ended up a POW in *Stalag* No. 1. (German for Prisoner of War Camp.)

If your flight was to cover the side of a Box, and you were picked to be the Re-Con, it meant you were to slide sideways into-wards the Big Brothers so as to keep your broadside facing the bombers. That view from the bombers meant the fighter was in no position to fire at the bombers and it gave bombers a chance to recognize the fighter's markings as friendly. As Re-Con It was a relief to have your earphones report, "Got-yeah Spam-Can. Stick with us", rather than having their tracers heading your way. There's a story about one such Re-Con pilot sliding in and being recognized. He got in close enough to be able to see the faces of the guys manning the bomber's side guns before they gave him the recognition call. Sliding back out to his Flight and repositioning himself, he looked back for the big brother. It was gone. Only a big puff of smoke and some falling, flashing aluminum dripped down where it had been. Flak! Flak was the bombers' big problem. There was no way they could outmaneuver it. The Germans didn't mark a plane to aim at. They just sent up a continuous barrage of their 'Eighty-Eight' shells at the bomber's altitude that upon exploding sent bits of metal in every direction and with the bomber committed to a given altitude and heading they were the recipients of many hits and many losses. Flak was heaviest over Germany's industrial complexes like the Ruhr Valley. A loud groan could always be heard in Group briefing when the mission's course-marking yarn indicated that we were to go over such places. Flying these courses meant we'd usually be spanked pretty good. We could maneuver enough to make our P51s unsure targets, but the bombers just sat there, held their course and altitude and hoped for the best. Towards the end of the conflict someone did figure out that if the bombers shoveled out a goodly amount of shredded aluminum foil it would confuse German radar and gun aiming ability. It must have helped, or so they thought, because after the war every German wood lot looked like its trees were decorated for Christmas.

If a big brother was just crippled a flight of fighters, or maybe just a couple ships, would stick with it until it was safely out of enemy skies. Stories persisted of how bomber crews that bailed out and got into their rafts near Europe's west coast of the English Channel were used for target practice as soon as our escort left.

All our missions, gas permitting, turned into search and destroy or targets of opportunity sweeps as soon as our escort duties were satisfied. This usually meant low level hedge hopping looking for targets that were listed as or thought to be fair game. Railroad locomotives at one time made wonderful targets. After hitting one of these, flying through its escaping steam was like riding a large rapidly rising elevator. Horses made the list late in the game because the Germans started being short of gas. They would hide their planes in woods beside *autobahns* and use horses to drag them on and off the roadway which they used as runways. At one point even Jerry pilots became fair game when they bailed out. After all, they shot our guys in chutes. Of course, to get a German pilot in a chute you had to first cripple his plane and probably put it on fire. A list of targets of opportunity was posted in the Ready Room and kept up-to-date by anonymous authors. This schedule listed the targets in order of the risk they posed to their intended destroyers: An old woman pushing a baby carriage; if there was a baby in the carriage and not a gun, usually headed the list. A priest in pants, not a frock, that could hide a gun, was another prime target. On one sweep for targets of opportunity I spotted a couple of much-advertised German Flak Towers. These were large concrete, water-tower-like, gun platforms meant to protect our enemy from our low-flying aircraft. They were formidable-looking things, like pillboxes with slits to fire through; perched high on concrete columns. They were high enough so that they could have fired down on us flying at strafing altitudes. But, there was no longer a need. They were now behind our lines

There were missions where we were assigned an area and told we were to see that nothing moved. We had such a mission when General Monty crossed the Rhine. We saw nothing move, so I guess we did our job. Right after that mission I was on leave in London and saw a news paper cartoon showing a guy swimming with a rifle. The paper's headline read: 'Monty Crosses the Rhine.' Sure! But who made it possible? Monty was not our favorite English General.

Shooting at ground targets didn't hold quite the dangers that air combat did. That is if we followed the rule drilled into us: Make only one pass on a target; a second pass would find the enemy set up and waiting for you. Always make a pass at a train across the tracks. Guns protecting trains are carried aiming parallel to the tracks when the train is moving and it takes time to swing them for cross track firing. Don't worry about rifle fire. A hit from rifle would be a lucky hit. *'Oh! And who's the unlucky recipient'*.

When attacking a target with anti-aircraft protection the drill was for the squadron to fly high enough to be out of range. Then, with the squadron circling, the leader would assign a flight to draw fire, i.e. dive at the target until they were fired at. Then the leader could assign the other flights, and hopefully the one that was used to draw fire, to attack the gun positions the leader spotted. Each flight was to fly at its assigned target from a different angle and fire at will. That target, of course, was firing back. It was sort-of-like flying down into a gun barrel that was firing at you and waiting to see who'd give up first. The planes were supposed to win. There were four of them, each with six fifty caliber machine guns against but one ground job. For me, just knowing such things could happen was thrill enough.

Where did we learn such tactics? I'm sure it must have been from the Squad Room tale bearers. I don't remember learning such things from any tutored assembly. We did have disciplined get-togethers where the result of air-to-air combat was shown. The firing mechanism on our guns was such that when the trigger was pulled on the joystick all six fifty calibers would burst into action at once and a motion picture camera would record what happened to the target. We never knew who, or even what squadron, was credited with the kills we saw. We'd cheer when: puffs of smoke told us the Jerry had been hit, pieces of a Jerry's plane flew back at the screen or when we could see its pilot bail-out. One film that disturbed me then, and still does, was of a German pilot running down a ditch and being fired at. There were also pictures of enemy planes being strafed where they were parked on their airfields. Some caught fire, and some did not... Ground kills were few and far between by the time I got into combat, so I assumed these were old films and shown as morale boosters. I never saw pictures of horse kills but was told that they just exploded.

We saw lots of film on bombs being dropped and crater where they hit but hardly any of their contact with the targets. Bombing results were usually shown as stills taken from photo-recognizant planes. The devastation shown was hard to believe, but that's what bombs do and, of course. There were many stills of near misses; pictures of just circular depressions with banks or burns. Some showing craters in groups, some with overlapping edges showed the hits in rows. One group of photos were of a bridge that apparently had no damage; yet the area all around it was pock marked with multiple depressions. Prior to seeing these, which was several days in a row, we'd hear the mission briefer say: "And today the 100th Bomb Group is going after the Biefefeld Viaduct." Their bombers never hit the bridge. Then somebody, probably a General, got the idea that maybe, just maybe, fighters could knock it out. Why, I don't know, we got the job. All our fun flying around England became the practice of dropping bombs at targets in the North Sea. And after about a week of tearing up targets the briefing announced; "Today we're going after the Biefefeld Viaduct." I had never dropped a 500-pounder and this was to be the day. Dressed, I rode out to the revetment, ready for flight, but first I had to stand aside for a tractor-dragged flatbed hauling the critters. It stopped in front of my ship and a GI on the back of the flatbed nonchalantly kicked the bombs off. No one had told me they weren't armed yet, so I must have looked really silly, taking a deep breath and looking for a place to hide. After the bombs were hanging under their wings, on hooks that normally supported gas tanks, and were armed, sixteen planes with a total of 16,000 pounds of bombs took off and made it to Biefefeld without incident. The leader gave the signal to fly in echelon formation for peel-off to the bridge. Here we were. Four echelons, of four ships each, one following the other, each of their pilots specifically trained to rid the Allies of the dastardly Biefefeld Viaduct. The squadron leader peels off for his run at the viaduct and the rest of his flight prepares to follow. The leader depressed the button on the top of his joystick. Both his bombs released. Both hit the target. Demolish it. The rest of us had no target to dispense ours into and we cannot drag the armed bombs home and land with them. So thirty bombs made craters that were rapidly filled in by the North Sea—Ah, the futility of war.

Was that a war story--Could be...War stories are those heard and told, but seldom experienced by the teller. All are told and retold until the teller believes that he was actually part of it, and he is usually the hero. Of course, the listener should not have

reason to dispute the story's validity. The more time between the act and the telling of it, the less likely it is to be proven false

The amount of time we could spend over enemy territory was limited by: the gas we carried, whether or not we became engaged in fighting the enemy, how far into enemy territory the mission took us, etc. Using only internal gas tanks we could carry 270 gallons, plus or minus a gallon or two, and we had a range of flight of about 1100 miles. External, or wing gas tanks, (The big silver things, hanging from bomb rack, under each wing.) added an impressive 220 gallons to gas we could carry and increased our range to nearly 2100 miles, but they slowed us down and made the P-51s much less maneuverable. The P-51's internal, or built-in gas tanks, were: One in each wing and one directly behind the armor plate behind the cockpit seat. Takeoff was always done with the selector on the internal left wing tank. With flight established the tank selector was switched to the one back of the seat until it was about half-emptied. This gave the plane a chance to be put on what was called its step. A step being a term for a position of flight that which increased speed slightly without increasing gas consumption. From there on it was up to the pilot to select gas from a tank that suited him and his plane the best. External wing tanks were interconnected. Gas was used from both simultaneously and both were dropped as soon as enemy engagement was obvious; otherwise, if these tanks were made of the pressed paper, they could be dropped at the pilot's discretion.—preferably as soon as they were empty. If they were made of aluminum they stayed in the bomb racks until the Squadron Commander gave the order for their release. (Metal tanks could ignite any residual gas in them upon striking a hard surface.) When possible the order often came while we were over towns. Another thing about external tanks; especially the paper ones, was that they would occasionally get hung up. Even shaking the wings didn't help. When that happened it took but a burst from the guns to send them on their way. Taking off for a mission with full tanks, and encountering no opposition, meant we could fly for around six hours, some say seven. There was another method of reducing gas consumption involving the setting of engine and propeller controls but, I'll leave that for another time. My Gosh! I haven't thought that much about gas since I left the service.

Switching from one tank to another was always fun. You never knew if there might be an air bubble in the feed line from the tank you're switching to. If there was, the engine would quit, and you'd say a prayer waiting for it to start again. Sometimes it even became necessary to go through the entire engine start up procedure again. That was exciting. One time while flying Capt. Creighton's wing over Germany he had that problem. We glided silently down from sixteen to about three thousand feet before he got his engine started again. That was a thrill; wondering if he'd land and expect me to pick him up from enemy territory

I remember one mission that was extra-long; we landed at a refueling field in Belgium. Big brave me pulled up to the gas truck, rolled back the canopy, propped my feet on the dash, stuck a weed in my mouth and slung one end of my silk scarf out over the cowling. I was waiting for recognition from the guys gassing the plane. There were four *swastikas*, painted on the plane, showing just below the end of the scarf. No remarks came. Slightly chagrined, I gathered myself together and took off for home. Oh well, I guess everybody's got their own job to do. Anyway, the *swastikas* were not mine.

Pilots had a saying for encountering the enemy or it might be used to describe any mission that they considered rough. It goes something like this: 'Only God and the laundry man knew how scared I was.' It was true, but of course no one would admit it. We were well aware that there was a possibility that we might not come back, yet each time we took off we were much too busy twisting our necks looking for enemy, or holding formation, and just plain flying to be bothered with stuff we had no control over-- Like--'This time it might be me, -- the other poor guy maybe but not me'. Sure some died. Some were knocked out of the sky by bullets from an ME109 or a FW190, some by flak. Some had mechanical problems. Some were lucky enough to bail out and land safely. Some went down with their 51. I witnessed a few that went down, and like the rest of us remaining in the sky, wished the poor devils leaving it a 'Happy Landing'. Some pilots were not bothered one bit by enemy fire. It was said Major Olds chased a Jerry with his ship's wheels knocked down by enemy fire. He came back and made a victory roll, with them still down. There was a few that for whatever reason lost their plane and got back to fight another day. My college roommate, Bud Bentley, flew as a navigator/bombardier out of Italy. His ship was blown out of the sky twice. He walked back once. The second time he became a P.O.W. The best man at the wedding of Letty and I, Chester J. Swierczynski, spent twenty-eight days as a P.O.W. after taking fire on a strafing run. There were pilots that crashed in enemy held territory and continued to fight with patriot groups.

Some pilots were lost not because of the enemy but because of weather. We never really knew what kind of weather we'd find over England when we returned from a mission. We were told that quite a ways south of Wattisham a runway was built that was almost as wide as it was long, and it was extra long. Barrels of gasoline lined its perimeter, and were to be ignited in an attempt to raise fog enough so a landing could be made. Of course, first we had to find the runway. We heard of some planes coming back and, finding England fogged in, actually flew all the way across England and were lost to the Atlantic Ocean. There were plenty of things to worry about if you wanted to, but grieving for those not coming home could only inhibit your ability to do your job and come back to fight another day. In the Squad Room you never saw a person grieve.

I had one welcome guest during combat. Can't remember if he found me or I found him? Lee Thurlow, high school hunting and fishing buddy, was a PFC in a unit about to be shipped across the channel. Through letters, I guess, we ended up meeting at the 434th. I got him a ride in an AT-6; on landing he was handed a bucket of water and a rag to clean up the mess he made. Seems the guy that gave him the ride thought Lee would like to know what aerobatics were like. An enlisted man was not allowed to eat in the Officer's Mess so the club officer set up a private room for the two of us. That went over *real big* with the GIs that had to wait table for us. After evening chow I fixed it with my CO so he could be served in the Officer's Club bar. He wasn't allowed to buy drinks and, of course, he hadn't seen so much booze and beer since he left home so he decided to make up for lost time. I guess you might say he became a mite noisy. For that he could be forgiven. The trouble began when he spotted the ground forces' Liaison Officer assigned to our Group. Lee had had enough Officer Stuff and plenty to drink, so he accused the Liaison guy of sitting around in a cushy bar while all of his fellow infantry men were over there being shot at. Lee was politely ignored, but I heard, "Waters over here." I promptly scampered to Major Olds' table, snapped to and listened to a

few choice words that meant Lee and I was no longer welcome. The next morning I saw Lee off on a train back to his outfit.

I don't know how I did it but, I wheedled a pass and a plane and flew to see Lee. He was about ready to ship out. I landed at a small airport quite a way from his camp, and called his outfit's transport guys for a ride, telling the motor pool I was Lieutenant C. L. Waters. A Jeep arrived looking for Lieutenant Colonel Waters, and, of course, that didn't cement my relationship with the driver in a manner I would have liked. Before our error was discovered by senior officers we forgot our ill feelings towards each other and somehow found Lee. I found that the eating arrangement there were to be much the same as at the 434th only this time the private room was just off the Enlisted Men's Mess Hall. The food was great and the Mess Officer was agreeable enough. Trouble was that enlisted men, at least these enlisted men, didn't care to have their buddy treated special. Naturally, it wasn't Lee's fault, it was mine. So that night I had no cot to sleep on and damn near froze under a single GI blanket on the floor of the GI's barracks. Dawn found me in their Officers' Club begging for soap and water. Cleaned up, a captain found me and put me in charge of marching a squad or platoon, or whatever, to the train yard to board steam transportation for a ride to the ship. The march to the yard went well, I thought. They marched, I walked alongside. It went so well that I decided to ride to the docks in a rail car with Lee and his buddies. The ones I'd just been in charge of. Well, thank heavens for Lee. He protected me. I was booed, hissed, called names and what-have-you, not all out of earshot. Seems officers and enlisted men just don't socialize. Boy was I ever glad to get back to my base. Awhile later I received a letter from Lee; he was some where in Belgium riding a troop carrier and shooting wild boar for dinner with his buddies.

A year or so ago I was asked to appear before a high school history class and tell the students of my experiences in WWII. Rather than go into a lengthy tirade, I requested that they ask me what they wanted to know. One young man asked: "Did you ever kill anyone, and how did it feel." I answered, "No.—we were taught to shoot planes not people;" which was not a complete answer. The planes we were to shoot at were not drones. Someone had to be flying each one and that someone would be destroyed along with the target. Each pilot had to rationalize a resultant death he might or should cause, in his own way. For some it was as easy as believing, "If I don't get him he'll get me." Others brought their religion into their reasoning; thinking the whole thing was preordained. I, more or less, favored the words Gary Cooper used when he portrayed Sergeant York: "I did it 'cause I wanted to stop them from killin'." And that some how my performing as I was instructed would bring this whole mess to a conclusion, faster.

None of the Pilots I served with, or under, were cowards. Few wanted to be in the conflict once they had experienced it, and fewer still delighted in being heroes. I was not a hero. There were, and still are, plenty of pilots that will laughingly relate how the enemy they knocked out of the sky unluckily flew right in front of them making it possible for them to claim a 'kill'. In some cases, such a 'kill' contributed to making them an ace. I never had the experience of a 'kill' and only chased after a few with killing as the intent. But, I do know what it is to be shot at.

Anyone who is, or has been, a pilot has felt panic at one-time-or-another. Nearly all of them have gone back to flying. There is a saying that flying is ninety percent boredom and ten percent panic. It's still true to this day. Panic means something has

happened that needs correcting, NOW. Panic is never seen in pilots, but something many experienced. It means: Find out what's wrong--Fix it--Get this rig flying as it should.

Fear is a malady any pilot should not have, and fighter pilots could not have. It's the continuous nagging realization that an uncontrollable action of torturous consequences could happen to ones person, and there is nothing can be done about it. If a fighter pilot was possessed with fear it meant he would have lost all mental and physical means of performing his job. In flying combat we knew we had the best equipment and the best training, and if we kept if twisting our necks, so as to see the enemy before they saw us, we had the best chance of survival.

Records indicate that slightly over two thousand US fighter pilots died, in Europe, due to of enemy action; and records also indicate, that in retaliation, twenty two thousand German were downed by eight thousand American fighters. We did not grieve for those lost. We dared not. We had a job to do. Grieving would only diminish our efforts. Perhaps it was our training that taught us not to, or maybe we were just too young to know what it meant to grieve. When some one was lost we'd just think ...'the poor guy...he was here yesterday and the day before...he just won't be here tomorrow', and go on about our business; never believing that it might possibly happen to us. I'm not sure that some of the feeling might have had to do with the fact that we were spared the sights and sounds of human suffering, caused by guns, and bullets, and bombs, and shells and....





To relieve the stress of a mission we were entitled to a double shot of whiskey after debriefing or, if we chose, we could bank the shots until they amounted to a full quart; most everyone did that. It made a dandy thing to take to London when next you got leave. I'd venture that I probably got to London, maybe four times – In my case, never with a quart. For the most part London's most renowned spot was a pretty depressing place at night: No lights exposed to the sky after dark. The fountain of Piccadilly all boarded up, lots of rubble piled up from bombings received. Not exactly a tourist's attraction. The sidewalks of the Circus were absolutely jammed with people; troops from every member of the Allied Nations, English Bobbies, and prostitutes. No shops were open that faced onto the Circus. The Bobbies were there to keep the morass moving, thus making it not quite impossible for buyers and peddlers to conclude a deal. A prod from a Bobbie's stick and, "Move along there governor", was all it took to get couples out of doorways and back shuffling around the Circus. It was said that if you felt a hand on your shoulder, it was not to draw your attention, but to find out what your rank was so the hands owner would know how much to charge.

Bars, or pubs as they called them, opened onto the on spoke like side streets dead-ending into the Circus. On one such side street was, The American Club, I was told was a great place. It was a gyp-joint. Outrageous drink prices, membership fee, and tolls, even to sit. I wish I could remember who was good enough to give me its exact location so I could return the favor. Another recommended after hours place was the Stage Door Bar. Directions to the place's location came with the description of the place, but neither could have been made by a travel agent. Luckily aided by a dim light emitted from a transom and focused downward by a cardboard awing, I found the door labeled Stage Door. I entered; it was not a bar but rather the dingy, poorly lit, backstage of a theater. As my eyes adopted I made out a group of three guys in sailor uniforms and a gal. The gal turned out to be Ginger Rogers. She was letting the sailors, who turned out to be actors, in words that should not have come from a lady, know that their acting was not going as she wished. I quickly left that recommended place and went to a YMCA.

Sleep did not always come easy, in London. Realization that the war was still going-on was brought home abruptly when the darkness was shattered by searchlights and the wail of air raid sirens. The next day you'd see more debris being added to already noteworthy piles. People would be tidying up the rubble to make passage easier or just looking through it to find a cherished memento.

Daylight excursions in the big city were somewhat more pleasant. Hyde Park, where we had learned the finer points of getting out of a parachute and into a rubber life raft, was really a delightful place, devoid of war's responses. No wonder Ike had once picked it as the location of his first allied headquarters. Westminster was a must-see stop,

as was Buckingham Palace. The Palace was seen through guarded gates only. On our Westminster tour Bob and I decided we should have a guide. Our guide pointed out bits of historical treasures and graves of the rich and famous, he did a commendable job. He was a pudgy gent with a rather ill-fitting suit that looked a bit worse for wear. We paid for his services, added a tip and, as an after thought offered him a cigarette, which he refused. This was strange since most Brits were only too grateful to receive American smokes. We queried his reluctance and he replied; "None of my vices show." We found lots of nice shops but it took some getting used to their names. When I was looking for my Wellingtons, I found out that any store displaying a sign saying, 'BOOTS', was really a drug store. There were other places visited, called '*Squares*'. They were not square at all: just places where several roads found an area to go around a statue in order for one to continue on or to change directions. Most seemed pretty empty and dingy to me. 'Combat zone you know.'

English cab drivers were courteous enough, but you had to watch your wallet. They took great delight in making change for we Americans since we never did quite understand pounds, pence, hay pennies, bobs, shillings and that gibberish. As I recall, a pound note was worth about four bucks American back then. The exchange was worked out between the British and American governments to make the pay of British people in service seem closer to what American service men received. The arrangement worked to some extent except that when a Brit soldier was promoted his pay stayed as it was before. All he got with his higher rank was more responsibility. I did have a few conversations with Limey service types but never really got acquainted with any.

Pubs were kind-of neat bars. They were usually split into two seating areas; one for men and one for women and family. During the war this separation of the sexes was pretty much ignored. Girls stood at the bar with whoever would buy them a pint or half-pint. *Half and half* was popular. That's half stout mixed with half beer or ale. Nice girls, or at least those wishing to stay relatively sober, would order a pint of mixed beer and lemonade. If a gentleman ordered whiskey, he always got Scotch. American blends and bourbons, ryes, etc. were in short supply. It seemed if you knew the staggered closing schedules of enough bars you could buy drinks forever. If these crazy closing times were government-regulated, they sure had peculiar laws. If you happened to be in a pub at its closing time you were reminded that you were on your last drink by the bartender calling: "Time, gentlemen—Time. Come on all you yank out from under the tables."

I rode the tube (subway) and I rode in one of their double-decker buses but the bus only once. There was a mad scramble to get to the lower level when it started raining. Another thing, I found, hard getting used to was women giving servicemen their seats on public transportation. Once, on a train ride to London, a lady insisted that two of us take the seats from her very small daughter and herself. Her daughter must have been about five. We thanked her, sat, and started jabbering some thing like: What are you going to do when you get to London, Bob? First I will find a place to sleep, stash my stuff and then have a great big steak, Bob answers. The little girl looks at her mother and says, "Mommy, what's a steak?" I assumed she'd never had one or maybe it was just another of those peculiarities of our two languages. Speaking of language differences, try understanding Cockney being emoted from a person on a soap box, in a public park, with everyone in the crowd shouting Hear-Hear even before a sentence is finished.

Remember the little girl who gave us her seat and didn't know what a steak was? Well, we made up for the seat or a portion there-of by slipping her a few bits of candy pilfered from our packages from home, but as for the steak, there jus wasn't much we could do about that. Even in the in the ritzy places the biggest stake served would only be about as big as your ear. Oh, there were plenty of guys that claimed I just didn't know the right place to go to, but believe me good food, of any kind, was served in small portions,





Our last scheduled mission, found some of us posed despondently in front of the Newcross Tower. It was, probably, May 8th 1945-- maybe a day or so before. Anyway, right after that, for a very short time, life got a bit less military. Bedraggled returning POWs, fresh replacements, a pilot that had spent a year or so fighting with the French resistance forces and, of course, we unscathed active fighter pilots crammed the Officers' Club Bar. Hunter, my ex-instrument instructor, was one of the replacements. I found him leaning on the bar practicing the one hand, fingers only, coin flipping feat and wondering; how he could get to the Pacific. A pilot, a West Pointer, looking as if he was on leave from the French Resistance Forces, was there. He was dressed looking like the French farmer that gave us the *Vino*. He wore; a tam, a flimsy subdued neck scarf, knotted loosely at the throat and tastefully pushed to the right side of the Adams-Apple; a baggy, black wool suit jacket, a too short, not quite matching wool pants--also too short. Every bit of exposed clothing was begging to be cleaned and pressed. The poor guy was commanding a section of the bar and for anyone that would listen to his bemoaning his lack of promotions. I suppose no one knew if he was alive when they were handed out. Most of our cadre of officers were there milling about and wondering where we'd be fighting next. It was a rather an exciting bit of history but, of course, it couldn't last.

Very quickly we discovered that the Ex POWs and replacements were no longer needed so they and the ersatz Frenchmen left us for Stateside. Someone decided those remaining ought to start looking and acting like real Army. No more parachute silk scarves, except on the flight line, proper respect was to be shown to superior officers, saluting became necessary; except on the flight line; stuff like that became the order of the day. And, since we had no combat to worry about maybe we should take on some other officer type duties. All the above came together for me when I was given the orders to see our enlisted flight line personnel accompanied (meaning marched) to their work stations in a military manner at the proper time of six AM. Our dog robber got me up in time for a quick breakfast and a leisurely saunter to the GI barracks. A sergeant, forewarned of the new marching regulation, was awaiting my arrival. I found him pacing in front of the barrack with some of his men, under his jurisdiction, trying to line up in a fragmented marching formation. There were lots of holes in the ranks indicating missing personnel. The holes easily outnumbered those present. As I stopped facing this disheveled group the Sergeant called those present to, Dress-Right-Dress, which shrunk the lines of the formation considerably. With that to some extent accomplished, he put the troops at--what they tried to portray as attention. I asked the Sergeant for a roll call. The Sergeant complied and reported that an 'X' number was present and a 'Y' number was revealed as being absent. The 'Y's outnumbered the 'X's. "Perhaps those absent didn't hear the order to fall out?" I queried the Sergeant. With some sprightly moves he quickly entered the barracks. Loud words were heard and several men that were in the

'Y' category stumbled from the barracks while trying to button enough fatigue buttons to hold their pants up. Mumbling, they filled in a few previously vacant spots. The Sergeant reappeared in front of me, at attention, and before he could report I asked for permission to inspect the barrack. The Sergeant naturally gave his permission. He put his men at ease, and he and I entered his dimly-lit domain of the 434th specialist that kept our planes running through the war. Lumps in bunks' bedding confirmed my suspicions that the holes in the tattered ranks outside were really these irregular shaped masses. So I suggest that the Sergeant explain to them, or get someone who knew how to explain just what the meaning of 'Fall-Out' is. With that I went back to face the ranks and became impressed to see most of its voids were being filled, all-be-it with grumpy sleepy bodies. The Sergeant reappeared. I waited a moment or two while our newcomers finish dressing and then got everyone's attention by almost shouting: Attention; Dress Right-Dress, Right-Face, and Forward-March. It was only a short way before our sleepy lot reached the dead end of our marching direction. It has dead ended into another road running perpendicular to it. To the right, by a circuitous route, the cross road would eventually bring this mass of humanity to its destination, the flight line, this, of course, was the long way. It also meandered past the Officers' Club and along the way pilots went from the Club to their Squad Rooms. Anyway, as we reach the dead end I ordered; Column-Right, March. Immediately there was a mess of bodies going every which way, stumbling, and bumping into each other. Not a pretty sight. I shout, Halt; which appears to stop further distortion of the ranks but not the words coming from them. Such words as you have never heard. The sergeant figures the way to correct this is to remind the men they are at attention. That tends to get them upright and silent but not in what you'd call a marching column. Everybody was facing a different direction; more or less towards the way each would normally have taken as half asleep mechanics, meandering to their war time duty post, and of course, there were a few, very few, still facing the direction called for. The Sergeant and I were still on the road dead-ending into this mess. So I order, "Fall-Out and Fall-In-Facing Me, On-The-Double." After a little shuffling they're back in ranks and a brisk "Attention, Dress-Right-Dress, Right-Face, Forward-March"; gets them started toward the dead end again. This time a little more briskly, and this time on the command, "Column-Right, March," they do just that. There is still considerable mumbling and grumbling heard. And it continued as we marched onward. Soon, on the right of the column the Officers' Club came into view. I ordered: "The Air Corps Song—In Cadence-Sing.: They sang: "OFF WE GO. INTO THE"...Boy; did they sing; loud but good, and the closer we got to the Officers' Club the louder they sang. All of a sudden every window in the Club that faced our path opened and T-shirted, sleepy pilots stuck their heads out to see what the commotion was all about. Major Olds was there, at his second floor window, with a clinched fist shaking in my direction. He was shouting something; I couldn't make it out, above all the singing.

Did this actually happen? I want to say it did, but probably not exactly as those words here say it did. I did have the privilege of marching our ground crew to the flight line and do remember singing the Air Corps Song with them though. Was the rest just a dream...Am I to remember every detail after fifty plus years?

Flying became a matter of keeping up our proficiency in shooting, formation, punching hole in clouds etc. And: Oh yes! Right after V Day we had a victory flight over Germany. With no bombers to watch over, it became a low level hedge-hopping

flight. It was rather nice shimmering those green fields and not having any enemy to worry about. I remember kids running scared by the noise from our engines. I wonder if they knew there would be no more bombs.

A new Group commander came in and wanted to lead a flight of the entire group; roughly a formation of about fifty fighters. It was to be a boring parade of a few hours or so to Land's End and the same back. I settled in position of Blue Four and flew close formation on Captain Creighton's wing. There was little radio contact and no scenery I could look at except the Captain's ship. Somewhere, on the trip back, a gas check was called for and when it became my turn I checked my tanks and reported: Blue Four, 30-Right, 30-Left, Rear-Dry. Almost immediately; I realized I was reporting that my right and left tanks could be dry. The engine sputtered and went silent. Training said: "CHANGE TANKS". I did: The rear tank gave no indication that the sixteen hundred horse power front of me wanted to start. To the left wing, it still said it had thirty gallons but the engine didn't even cough. To the right wing tank, still nothing. I try the primer. Nothing happens. The plane is out of gas. I push the Squadron communication radio button and tell them; "Blue Four-going down." We must be almost to Newcross. I turn to a heading into the wind. There's a runway almost straight ahead. I start a glide path to its end; losing altitude at 500 feet per minute. 'Where's Creighton. I was on his wing'. There's no Creighton following me. He stays with the Squadron. I forget him and stick to flying. I'm too high for a proper approach so I make a turn to the right increasing time and distance to landing thus adjusting altitude and glide speed. Then turn back left to line up on the runway again and it looks like I'm still too high. This time it's a turn left first then back right. Line up just a bit high and fast. I cock the wings and do a slip. There, that should do it.' I dip my wing's tips up and down to signal an emergency landing. In what seems like seconds the time comes to put down the gear and flaps. Neither one moves. I'm committed to land here and now. The runway is rushing past too fast and I hold it off to kill speed as long as I can but don't want to hit buildings beyond the end of the runway. I put the nose down and hear and feel that terrible chunking as my prop tries to dig up the runway. Its rotation makes the 51 slide a little sideways with the nose going right. Finally, it's over. We're stopped, I'm not hurt but I'm looking at this field's Church straight ahead, may be two hundred feet away. I give my thanks. Men and equipment are racing toward me. The canopy is all-ready back. I unbuckle, jump out on a wing, and wave off the men. Telling them a fire is possible. None happened. They give me a ride to their base operations where I'm offered a shot of whiskey. Scotch, it's an English base. They get my home base information and call them. Then I sit there feeling miserable for having belly landed one of Uncle Sam's \$50,000 pride and joys. A jeep takes me back to Newcross. A day or so later I find out I've been given 40% pilot error for causing the crash; because by leaving the wheels spin when retracted on take-off made a tire wear through an out of place hydraulic line. I should have noticed the line was out of place during preflight inspection.

Today a private pilot would get 80% pilot error for running out of gas. In our Squadron it was the crew chief's job to see that the tanks were filled. I don't know what punishment my chief got. I got none. Mine was the only plane to run out of gas. All the others made it back without mishap.

Bud Bentley, my college roommate, the navigator-bombardier, and ex-POW found me somehow and stopped in to see me on his way home. We had a nice visit. He

ate like a bird and drank nothing. For Bud this was highly unusual. He said it was on doctor's orders because of the way he was treated in prison camp. He left with a letter, I wrote, to be delivered to Letty telling her the latest rumors had it that I might soon see her on my way to the Pacific. Not long after that we were told to pack our footlockers and live out of our A-2's and musette bags. Maybe we were to be on our way. Our foot lockers left but we stayed still flying and recognizing silhouettes of Jap planes.

When we heard of the big one being dropped on Hiroshima, for a moment, I thought back to the night hotel clerk in Miami and wondered about his son's B-29 training. As soon those thoughts evaporated they were quickly replaced with conjecturing that now I would soon be on my way to be with Letty. Our foot lockers came back. Major Olds left for the States; supposedly to marry Ella Raines, a movie star. About the first part of November, Captain Creighton and the members of the Squadron with the enough missions and points, followed for the US of A. That's when I heard about the point system. I suppose it was devised to send the troops home in an orderly manner. Exactly how it worked, I don't remember but I think it was something like: If you'd signed up for a specific number of years you had to serve those first. For others points were awarded for: time-in, missions flown, medals awarded, and all sorts of other accomplishments and that I had signed up as an member of the Air Force Reserves. My records showed that I didn't have enough points, and had not fulfilled my assignment to the Air Force Reserves. Most of the guys I came into the 434th with were short points. After finding out their point total some made claim that they had been shot at on a sortie; like the one Bob and I flew as a radio relay. Proving you were shot at added points. I probably could have claimed the flight with Olds, that initiated me to gunfire, as a mission but I never gave it a thought. Anyway, Olds wasn't around to confirm such a claim so it probably wouldn't have worked, but I'll never know, because I didn't try.

So now, with no war, what can they do with those remaining in what was the 434th? Mostly we just split up. Some were made Air Police of Germany (whatever that meant).Some went to Air Transport Command, and some got ground jobs. I was to stick around Newcross for a while, flying left-over 51s, and anything else they wanted delivered to Birmingham where I watched their demolition. When I'd land there I would be told to take the clock out of the dashboard and bring it and the plane's paperwork to the operations desk. The clock was thrown into a box, beyond which I could see new leather A-2 jackets being taken from their water proof shipping containers and slashed with linoleum knives. Outside I'd hear bulldozers dragging the planes away to be run over and made into scrap metal. The ride back to Newcross was a sad one; full of what-ifs.





I must have been close to the last to leave Wattisham when orders came to climb into a B-17 for a new assignment. I chose the bubble nose to ride in; just to see where Bud Bentley had worked. I couldn't see anything but straight down. It was some time in the later part of November and it was snowing. We landed, on a grass field, in *Furth*, Germany. There I learned I was now in the 9th Air Force, 9th Air Force Service Command, and 9th Air-Drome Squadron, stationed at *Erlangen*, Germany. *Erlangen* was about fifteen miles north of *Furth*; *Erlangen* had no air field which made sense because it had been a German tank training school and an American Air-Drome Squadron's Technical Orders did not say one it was supposed to have planes or pilots. We were sent there, along with an engineering company personnel, (Who, also, didn't have enough points.) to turn a tank school into an air field. And, when called upon, the few pilots there with me, were to do our flying out of *Furth's* grass field a few miles north of *Munich*.

First, where do I bunk? The billeting officer in *Erlangen* tells me: "Pick a house: "Any house--who do you think won the war." Seems there are only accommodations for enlisted men attached to the tanks playing fields. (How the Germans handled there Officers here, I had no idea.) *Erlangen* didn't seem to have any significant war damage. It was, and probably still is, a quiet university medical teaching center with a nice big hospital, supporting buildings and housing very much like the nice subdivisions in the States. (Some-where, I recently read that we still keep *Erlangen* as one of our largest overseas air bases because it is the closest one we have to the Russian border.) Anyway I wander about and picked out a neat little bungalow that has been commandeered for officers' use. A nice elderly couple lived in the house and they had to leave. There was no haggling they just must left, taking only their personal belongings with them. I did, however, allow them to set up housekeeping in a shed at the rear of the property; which worked out good for me. The *Herr* (Mr.) took care of the yard and she, the *Frau* or Mrs. saw to keeping the inside of the house shipshape. A couple Majors, who arrived at the command shortly after I did, think I got good digs and they move in with me. The three of us got along fine.

About the time we get settled-in we hear there are still Germans that think it is possible for them to win the war. Out numbered, as they were, the Germans devised such fancy tactics as stringing piano wire across roads, height to decapitate a Jeep driver, or simply murdering American caught alone in a small village after dark. The decapitating problem was corrected by welding an angle iron frame work to a Jeep's front bumper that extended vertically high enough to protect the drivers head and of his passengers'. The village's murder score diminished after our troops learned not to visit small towns' beer joints unless accompanied by their own personal army. A further security measure meant our yardman and maid could no longer live or work on what was once their own property. We managed by procuring servants that had no personal interest in the property but were more than happy to receive the edible goodies we furnished them periodically.

Transportation was required to and from *Furth* so we could accomplish our flying chores. Scrounging, transport was accomplished in whatever kind of vehicle was left unattended and easily pilfered. At one point I, temporarily, possessed a monstrous Harley-Davison motor cycle that I used to deliver me back and forth. Other pilots preferred Jeeps with holes drilled in their hoods indicating the Army Unit that was the rightful owner. Four pilots even used a convertible German, six wheeled, Mercedes command car. That is, they used it until a Colonel thought it suited his status better than theirs. I did hear of some GIs sending a whole Jeep home in the mail, part by part of course. I managed to send my dad an unused German infantry rifle. (I think my son David still has it.) Such luxuries lasted only until M.Ps finally restored Army discipline. These were crazy times; a half a bar of soap would get your week's dirty laundry cleaned and ironed. Germans even rummaged through our mess-hall garbage cans to rescue our discards for their food or things they could sell on their black market.

Through it all the Engineers got to work leveling the tank obstacle course and putting down a pierced plank runway to make a fairly respectful air field; some better than the grassy patch we used in *Furth*. At least now we didn't have to chase rabbits, as big as cocker spaniels, with Jeeps to clear a path for night landings; nor did we have to bear the bumpy six-by ride between towns.

I was picked for Air Drome jobs such as: Air Supply Officer, Air Control Officer and Parachute Officer for the Air Dome's operation. There were no facilities to provide required maintenance of parachutes although we had plenty of parachute riggers. SO...The riggers (specialist) were put to work knocking out the partition between two adjacent rooms in the non-coms' quarters for a folding room. The folding tables left a bunch of GIs wondering where they were supposed to eat one night but cleaned up just fine for our purpose. For parachute drying the space had to be a tall enough to hold a full length, draped, open chutes. So once again non-coms found themselves, as carpenters, knocking out the floor structure of a second floor room, which was, luckily, the ceiling of the room below, and—Presto, a drying tower. Drying heat came from exterior gas powered aircraft engine heaters. A penthouse or cupola atop the two story barracks became our control tower. The guys slapped that together using wood from the parachute folding and drying rooms demolition work and other building materials from I don't know were. They also fashioned a ladder extending from the first floor corridor through the second floor, the second floor ceiling, the attic space and roof to an enclosed platform. Radio and electric work was provided by courtesy of flight line GIs that knew the required trades. The controllers had a great view of the field. A building, next to our taxi strip, that looked like it might have been horse stables, was remodeled into an aircraft supply office with cribs, counters and storage shelves. I think it had really been the parts supply shop for the German tanks. Thanks heavens the men assigned to supply knew supply. They started counting bolts and nuts as soon as there was a place to put such stuff, and were still counting when I left. A hangar was made by tearing out the end of what had been a tank repair shop. It worked pretty well for sticking in the nose of a small plane for engine repair.

Soon there was no semblance of German tanks around *Erlangen*, (I Managed one ride in a German tank before the last one left *Erlangen*) I was transferred to the 9th Air Service Command Headquarters. I had an office in a nice German two story brick building located at the bottom of a 'U' shaped court yard facing the air field. How or

why I know not, but I was made a Statistical Control Officer. May be it was because I had just been promoted to First Lieutenant. I had a 2nd Louie working for me that was supposed to know where each person assigned to the American sector was. I took charge of knowing where all the 9th Air Force's planes were. A kindly Major, that liked chasing nurses more than work, was our direct boss. Rounding out the office staff was a Master Sergeant and a bunch of GIs who did the real work

A letter from Letty informed me her brother, Jack, was in *Erlangen*. The 2nd Louie (I think his name was Nash; nice Guy.) quickly located him in, of all places, the *Erlangen* Hospital. I visited him there and finding his problems to be minimal invited him to the bungalow for a stay with the Majors and me. He came, he ate, he played cards with us and he drank – too much. After I put him to bed, in a second floor room, he got up, opened the window, and decorated the shed roof of the porch below. A few buckets hauled up from the first floor kitchen got the roof cleaned off. After breakfast the next morning; politely nudged by scowling Majors, he left. I was not to see him again until I got home.

A couple more Majors thought I had good enough quarters for them too, and moved in We got along fine; played cards in the evenings and slung the bull. But, I soon began to feel uncomfortable with all the high rank and found a place closer to the air field, my office and with pilots to talk to. It was a big comfortable home; probably had been German non commissioned officers' quarters. Each occupant had a private room. There was a kitchen with an Army field kitchen stove we had 'borrowed'. And good sized dining room, a screened in porch, a grand lounge or living room, ample toilet facilities, and one drawback...There was only toilet facility with one tub for bathing, and that one had a demand hot water heater to try and satisfy the tub's over taxed need for hot water. It took all the matches you could find to light the pilot light and forever to get enough water for even a tepid bath. The problem was—Gas pressure. I knew of no place in the entire American sector that had adequate gas pressure.

Using, what we called the boarding house, were five pilots and one ground officer type. Here I met Buck Lind, a pilot that taught me how to fly C-47s and helped me find a boxer puppy for a pet. Buck claimed it was easy to slow roll a C-47. I never tried. He was fine big, quiet guy and we had many flights together. I was excused from office work to fly, pretty much, when ever there was a plane available so I could get a minimum of four hours. Four hours air time was the amount needed to maintain flight proficiency and receive flight pay. Other than that I made myself available when ever one more pilot was needed. I got checked out in some of the bigger stuff; C-47s, C-45s, and again in C-54s, even a Lockheed passenger job, (I forget their Army designation.) a B25 etc. etc. The C-47 was our work horse. The small planes were used for hauling VIPs, currier duty, and the like. One time, with an ex-bomber jockey for a co-pilot, I was on a flight from some supply depot in England to a depot in Germany; all the co-pilot did was bitch about being scared stiff while flying to bomb the hell out of Germans and now having to haul 8,000 pounds of nails to build the place back up. To him that didn't make much sense.

On long flights, if you started with a pack of cigarettes, and if a couple countries were scheduled stops along the way, you could have a bicycle when you landed back at your home field. Back then: A few bucks from each of several GIs could end up as a six-by load of booze. Lucky winners of crap or poker games sent home their winnings

via postal money orders. That was one way it would not show as money spent on their finance record, A German five-or-six-piece band would play all night, at our Officers' Club, for a couple of beers. At one point we took over an Erlangen brewery when its beer was found to be better, at least looked clearer, than that from the brewery we had previously taken over.

The bulk of the German folk tried hard to keep their dignity and maintain their possessions and property in a condition that could be respected. Each morning, as I walked to the air field or my office, it would be on a dirt sidewalk next to a low newly whitewashed wood fence. This footpath either had been, or was being, swept with a broom made of sticks; swept to erase previous impressions of shoes made by those trespassing earlier and to decorate the path for the next to use it, in an intricate manner. It seem to me to say, 'Hey, I live here and I love this place'. I almost hated to have it rain. The house side of the fence was similarly treated. Flowers, herbs, and bushes were meticulously placed, trimmed and weeded. Each yard was different and interesting. Today, I regret that I was never able to get back to Germany and see her people as they must have been prior to Hitler. While stationed there we had little contact with German people though, because to fraternize was to break a sacred commandment. Yet, I remember one of our control tower operators radioing a pilot:

“Hey Captain, isn't that *Fraulein Marlene* your steady?”

The Captain answered, “Yeah, why?”

And the controller broadcasts, “Well, I was just scanning the *strassas* with my binoculars and I saw what looked like her in a dark blue blazer.”

“Could be her,” the Captain says.

The controller says, “Yeah but, when she turned around, just now, I could see U.S. Navy emblazoned across her buttocks.”

The connection between the Capt. and Tower ended with the Tower receiving, “Oh shit!”

Through it all I managed a rest and recreation leave in Cannes, France on the French Riviera. I had a nice room, overlooking the Mediterranean; in a beautiful hotel the Army took over and used to reduce the strain on we overworked souls. There were nightly, very good, stage shows and the food was excellent. The hotel drinks were inexpensive as they were at all American-run establishments in Cannes. MPs would escort anyone with a bit too much under his belt back to his room and put him to bed, only once. The second time, I'm told, meant the rest of their vacation would be spent behind bars. I loved the beach. One of the pass times was to watch the French girls come to the beach, fully clothed, and carrying a towel and swimsuit. Through peculiar body contortions, and very careful manipulating of the towel they had wrapped themselves in, they'd emerge ready for a plunge into the Mediterranean. When sufficiently refreshed they'd reverse the procedure and you'd never see bare flesh expose

in the wrong place during the change in apparel. Boats? There were supposed to be lots of big yachts. I saw but one rather small one. A trip to Monaco proved to be useless because its borders were closed to all GIs.

I applied for a leave that would get me an audience with Pablo Picasso but I was “bumped” (A higher ranked individual took my place) and I settled for Switzerland. For my stay there I had a room in the Hotel Grand Dolder. It was a real swanky place. Celebrities had stayed there before the war. It had a great view of Lake Zurich. Each of its personnel spoke, at least, three languages and if you were lucky, one might be understandable English. After checking in I thought a nice warm bath would be just the thing. Especially after using that chilly German tub. Guess What? No hot water. I called the desk. The person I reached took their time figuring out that I was disturbed by not having an English-speaking individual listening to my complaint before I was transferred to another person that could understand my torment, and language, and the cause of my inconvenience. This next individual was gracious and clearly sympathetic and insured me that I should have hot water posthaste. I was so consoled by her dulcet tones and declarations that I let a goodly portion of time slip by before I realized that I was wasting a fair proportion of my leave waiting for a plumber and called the desk again. Wouldn't-you know I got the same person whose three languages did not include mine and I patiently waited until, again somehow I became connected to the person, I thought, understood the English spoken word. I tried desperately and politely to query her as to whether, or not, the local plumber or hotel maintenance jokers were out to lunch, on strike, or may not have been notified of my dilemma. I was informed: Yes, they'd been notified and if I would look outside the door to my room I'd see that my request had been fulfilled and was there anything else the management could do for me to make my remaining visit pleasant; as the management was delighted by having me as a guest at the famous Hotel Grand Dolder. I did not need another dissertation like that so I headed for the spot where the Bell-Boy had barricaded my escape, and the use of my luggage, until he received an outrageous gratuity. Here I could open the door to the hall, and outside it, in the hall, on the floor was a bucket of what was now tepid water. Do you suppose Hollywood stars were treated like that? I guess, to make up for that they were more than helpful aiding me make an international telephone connection so I could talk with Letty and my family for the first time in over a year.

The weather, as I recall, was not the best for my Swiss visit but, I managed a few hikes into the hills looking for aircraft personnel that strayed into neutral territory during the war. I found none. I did manage to send a few Swiss knickknacks home; watches for my sisters, mother and father, and a musical clock for Letty that played **My Bonnie lies over the ocean.**

There were flights that took me to Orly Field, Paris. I took advantage of these to see Notre-Dame. Near it, I purchased a single point perspective drawing for Letty; there was all-kinds of little box type stalls lining the top of the Seine River, near the cathedral. Of course, I had to see the Follies. Actually, the Follies were a disappointment. I understood little French and my seat was so far back from the stage I saw little or nothing.

When I was not flying or on leave, my office job entailed knowing the whereabouts of all aircraft and all personnel in the 9th Air Force. Mostly, I was kept busy locating planes. I found one behind a barn near Stuttgart. A sergeant was charging

to give flying lessons to anyone with ready cash. Many times I'd be handed a letter from The Washington Office of Foreign Liquidation Commission telling me that planes numbers so-and-so through so-and-so were to be sold to someone, delivered to another country, or sent for demolition to a distant air strip. I'd get the planes and pilots together for the delivery and arrange for the return of the pilots back to their home base. It was never any trouble to get my name on the list of pilots needed and in that way I saw a lot of Europe, mostly from the air. One time I flew one of twelve L-5s (Those are the light planes like I first soloed in.) to Amsterdam for delivery to a cartel that was going to open a flight training school. Being small light planes with short range it was necessary for each plane to carry a five-gallon 'Jerry Can' of gas (I guess our five gallon cans resembled the Germans, and hence everyone called them 'Jerry Cans'.) in the front seat. (The back seat of a tandem two seat plan is reserved for the pilot in charge.) We'd fly as far as we could on our built tanks then land on roads to refuel from the 'Jerry' cans in order to make the next airport. There, we'd refill the plane's tank and the cans for the next leg to an airport. Being hot shot pilots we'd excite the tower (Ground controller.) by taxiing with enough power to raise the tail so we didn't have to zigzag to see where we were going. Breaks and rudder came in handy for this nonsense. We saw lots of red lights from towers but they didn't stop us.

In Amsterdam the war damage had been pretty much cleaned up by the time we got there. I stayed in the home of one of the entrepreneurs; he saw-to-it that I wore wooden shoes for a special guided tour through a dairy. There I was able to have my first glass of fresh milk since arriving overseas. (The Netherlands was the only country over there that pasteurized milk.) He also introduced me to the town's architect, who designed all of the city's public buildings and approved design concept of all others before they could be built. The architect gave me a pass to the gallery of the historically important Amsterdam Stock Exchange. I was not impressed with the building, but I can now say, I've been there. That evening I was treated to a splendid Dutch meal in one of their plush restaurants—wild boar. I had a choice of wild boar or wild bear and I thought the boar might taste less wild but it didn't. My guest explained that most of the Netherlands's meats were imported because the Germans had taken everything with them as they retreated and the better quality products had not been replenished yet. One evening I participated in their custom called 'Men's Night', an occasion that dictated that it must happen only Mondays, in bars with no women allowed. Because I was a pilot I was taken to a bar that had been a favorite of German pilots during their occupation. During their tenure they had managed to pretty well cover the walls with their signatures. I was honored by being invited to add mine to the decor. The names of some well-known German Aces adorned the walls. But, to me, now, they are long forgotten.

One of the letters from Washington called for a bunch of C-47s to be set aside for pickup by pilots of the Russian Air Command. Since *Erlangen* was the closest field to Russian Zone I selected our field, outside my window, as the place for the pickup. After the ships had arrived for dispersal, a gentleman came into our office, sat next to my desk, and told me that if there was anything in the planes we didn't want the Russians to see, it should be removed. The gentleman was dressed as an English officer but somehow didn't impress me as being English I reported my suspicions and conversation to the Major who in turn had me repeat everything to the Colonel. I did just that but I never knew what the Colonel did with the information. The planes went to Russia. Round

about that same time, during a bridge game at our 'boarding house', a fellow boarder, a communications officer, was abruptly called back to work. Upon his return to the table he was grilled to find out what the call was all about. Casually he informed us, he just had to see that our lines of communication were run perpendicular to the Russian sector. "So?" I asked and, was taught; if an overland line runs perpendicular to the enemy and it is cut you can still use what's left in friendly territory, but if a line runs parallel to the enemy and is cut you've lost all use of it, because the whole thing is in enemy hands. Looked like the Cold War was heating up.

Gen. George Patton's jeep argued with another jeep vehicle at a crossroads near us. Patton's opponent won and there was much ado about what was to happen to the GI Joe that drove the dastardly winning contraption. Until the quandary was solved the GI was confined to our headquarters compound. He was not a prisoner, had a nice private room, ate in a small private room of the GI's mess hall and was free to roam the base at will; except, he had to be in his room at specific times so the Officer of the Day could verify that he was still around. When I was awarded OD duty I found him where and when he was supposed to be. An accompanying MP said that the verification was really unnecessary because, they (the MPs) knew where he was all the time. I'd see the guy walking around, once-in-a-while. Then all of a sudden he was gone. Probably discharged and sent home after the politicians and generals had their fill of his investigation. Never did hear what really happened.

It didn't seem very long before my Major took his discharge in France so he could be near his properties he had purchased with money from home. (I Guess) Scattered throughout the American sector. A West Point Captain took his place. I never heard from nor saw the Major again. There seemed to be an overabundance of 'Point' second Louie's around about that time. I figured it must have been graduation time back in the States. One 'Pointer' tried to get me to sign up for a four-year hitch; he said I could be in line for all sorts of good things. "No thanks," said I. Buck and I continued to haul all sorts of freight and personnel, all over Europe. Once we flew a load of ground-pounders (Infantry types.) and whiskey from England to Cannes in some very rough weather. Poor ground-pounders, some pretty high ranked, had a mess to clean up when we got there. I flew a happy bunch of nurses destined for La Harve and their trip home. Several stops were made along the way to pick up the pretty things. On the last stop before Le Havre I decided to refuel. The gas we got was contaminated. Thank heavens the engines cut out while I was doing the take-off check list or, I'm afraid, there could have been a pretty mess at the far end of the runway.

Almost daily letters came to my desk directing disposal assignment of aircraft. For a while most of those not to be sold or those found unnecessary and/or deemed unfit for Army use were turned over to some demolition outfit; engineers I suspect. They tore them apart and then burnt the remains. Some overzealous reporter from stateside saw the flames, decided it was a waste of good usable material and told the world what despicable, wasteful bunch of Nair-Do-Wells we were. This became a political football that lasted until someone figured out that the Army had tons of explosives to get rid of and that satchel charges were adding to these tons. Furthermore they didn't cause a flame after they went off. So the problem was solved, at least in the eyes of the politicians and our loveable reporter. Now all the demo-o boys had to do was strap enough charges to a plane. Make them go bang. Push the remains into a pile and wait for Mother Nature to

do its work. No! The government didn't want to sell the scrap. As with all of our war excess materials they were afraid to flood the market and ruin the economy. During my schooling; or some time after, or maybe I just read about them, I became aware of computers. They operated with punch cards back then. Well, it just so happened that I was taking a walk through the *Erlangen* business district and I just happened to look into a basement window. Perhaps I was drawn by the clacking sound or, the light from the windows, or the pretty girls below and there they were! Girls working card punch machines. For who or what I had no idea. As I walked on, I thought: Boy! Those would sure make life easier for my gang. I told my sergeant about the discovery and in a few days I began to hear the clacking sound of machines and giggling of girls coming from his large office next to mine. How the transfer of machines and girls was attended to, I know not. In a day or two the giggling stopped and when I popped my head in the door to find out why, I saw only GIs pecking away at the machines but, smiling. They seemed happy to have machines to blame mistakes on.



The dog is ready
to board ship for
home June 1946



Then it came as I'd been wishing it would for the longest time. I don't remember the date but it came; my orders to be mustered out. I had a few days to pack and break-in a replacement for my job and to fly. Looking for one last flight, I checked with OPs and was assigned to fly a B-25 that was on the list for demolition. I got in the thing, Went through the engine start up and looked out to get taxiing hand signals. Instead of moving signals I saw motions that meant cut the engines, -- a hand swiped across the throat. I cut them and saw a finger pointing at the left wheel. Underneath it was a nice fresh puddle of oil. Apparently my holding the brakes during start and warm-up had broken an already weak hydraulic line. I went back to Ops and told the Captain in charge I'd rather not fly the 25. He said, "Ah, go ahead you can belly land it when you get there." I showed him my new orders...Thus ended my last opportunity to be in command of a military aircraft.

My last ride in a military aircraft was to Amsterdam, Netherlands where hundreds of service participants were made ready for the trip back to the States. Records were checked; monies over those earned, less those spent, were surrendered (Returned to the Army). The remainder was changed into good ole US currency. Then time crawled while we waited not knowing how, when or on what we'd depart; hopefully for the states. *We're going to fly home*; was a rumor for a while. Poker game stakes became higher. The rumor turned out to be false. Time slowed; then when the ship boarding time was officially announced it seemed as if no one was ready to leave and there was a scurry of activity to do so. One of the other guys, from the Erlangen boarding house gang, had a problem. He had this dog; actually it had been my boxer named 'Boxer'. I'd given it to him because I hadn't taken the time to find out if the mutt would be welcome at home. The EX- Erlangen had managed to keep his intentions to take the dog state side a secret so far. Now the problem was: How was he going to get it, against orders not to, on the boat? Solution: He had an empty duffel bag. My duffel, bag, along with my other luggage, had all ready gone aboard. We reasoned the dog could be brought aboard, hidden, in the duffel bag. But would the dog suppress the desire to get the hell out of the bag. With very little persuasion, that minor hitch was solved by finding a veterinarian who was happy to present us with some knock-out pills, to be given to the dog, just prior to boarding. Well, the dog got the pills and got stuffed into, what was now referred to as 'That other Officer's duffel bag', and I carried it aboard without incident. After the ship got underway there was a few anxious moments wondering if the dog was ever going to come to again. But it did and when we let it out on deck to do its thing. Surprise! Surprise! There were all kinds of dogs aboard that must have found the same ticket for boarding. That doctor must have been a real animal lover.

The ship's captain was another matter. First, he announced that all pets were to be thrown overboard. Of course, abruptly, all pets just disappeared but their smell

lingered on and grew stronger and stronger. Then, very soon, (probably because of the order foreign to a troop ship) the ship's crew members were seen putting piles of rags on deck. An announcement was made requesting even more rags and rapidly answered. The pets were to use the rags as their, oh-so-missed, turf but at just certain times. The pets, coaxed by their owners learned to use the rags but never did fathom the time requirement. This led to the pet owners taking charge of keeping decks spic and span, and that made the ship's crew more pleasant to deal with. The whole episode ended with the non pet owners happily letting the pet owners, the ship's crew and the pets know they were each the recipients of a good ole American tradition known as compromise. Thus ended the pet thing, which was really a shame because there was no further excitement for the rest of the trip. The old LST, made by 'Molly the Riveter', just pounded her way towards home while in her hold fortunes were made and lost in crap or card games.

When we pulled into a dock, somewhere in Jersey, a small band greeted us. We were fed a big meal of what I don't remember. Hey wait! I do remember that the ice cream. It was the first I had since last I was on US soil that was not made from powder.

Wow! We must be something. We're put aboard a Pullman car bound for Chicago. Imagine, having a real bed in an enclosed space to sleep in, on a train, and knowing where the train is going. Chicago means Fort Sheridan and going through a ritual similar to the Army's entrance to service procedures, way back when. Only this time I'd be leaving, not entering active service. A Navy ensign, a pilot became my bunk mate at Sheridan--He had the upper. We talked a lot about flying, but really spent most of our leisure time listening to ground Officers' tails of their war experiences.

Probably the best War Story I ever heard came from the ensign. A bunch of us, about to be freed officers, were flopped on our bunks waiting for release. The fly-boy hadn't said much. Mostly, he and I just listened. Finally one of the ground guys says; "Hey! Fly boys, aint you guys got any stories?" The Navy ensign sets himself up on one elbow and says; "I got one—I was kind-a late getting over to the Pacific. So I didn't see much combat. Most of my duty consisted of flying wing while our outfit was clearing out hot spots on islands. That was so the ground troops, like you fellows, could occupy them. On one of these missions, my flight leader and I – I was his wing man—we'd roughed up a place pretty good; enough so there was a line of Japs heading down a road, to who knows where. Well, my leader sees this and figures it ought to be stopped. So he lines up on the center of the road and goes down and strafes them. 'Course, I'm his wing man—flying off to his side—so I can't really line up to line to shoot at the Japs. So I just rolled back my canopy and listened to-'em scream." We never heard another story in that camp.

The final review of my medical records is before a doctor who tells me I'm fine except I have athlete's foot. But, that the Army can cure it in about three months with blue ointment. "Or," he suggests, "You can go to a drug store and get an over-the-counter tube of——." You know, I can't remember the name of that salve, but it worked. Any...way I agreed to the salve treatment and he signed me out as medically fit for civilian use.

With just one more ritual to attend to, happily I stand before the barred window of an office with FINANCE in metal letters above. A WAC officer stares at me through a hole in the glass, which are on the other side of the bars separating us. I'm expecting to get some cash and a discharge and be on my way, but I hear:

“Raise your right hand,” as though she knows I’ll comply.

“What for,” says I. She’s stunned and wants to know:

“You’re going to join the reserves, are you not?”

“Do I have to?” I ask, almost scared to hear the answer.

“Well if you don’t you’ll be here for another week-or-so while some more paper work is taken care of.” She sweetly replies.

I raise my right hand. I’m in the reserves but, I have a discharge and mustering out pay in hand. Then that cute, but frightening, voice again startles me:

“Oh by the way, I see you’re a pilot. If you go across the hall, to the FAA office, they will update your pilots license.”

Relieved, I follow directions; get a new pilot’s license that reads COMMERCIAL - AIRPLANE SINGLE AND MULTI-ENGINE LAND. (You know it bothers me, still, that I have only had one opportunity to use it.) I go back to my bunk and I pack. The ensign says he’s checked out too so the two of us hop a cab and stop at a bar. We have a farewell drink and a farewell drink it really was. I never heard from him again but I still remember what a wonderful drink it was and I hope that he does too. Would you believe, we didn’t even exchange addresses? Hurriedly, I leave him and hop in a cab. I ask the driver to take me someplace I can get a good steak. The steak place is somewhere near the Chicago stockyards. The steak was excellent.

Back in another cab I go to the American Airlines office and ask for a flight to Saginaw, Michigan. A clerk tells me, “There is none.” I start walking out wondering; ‘what now; how do I get home’. Then I remember a card given to me by an American Airlines buyer, of some of the old C-47’s, in *Erlangen*. I remember I had given the gentlemen a tour of the 47s before he decided to buy a few. I must have helped him because he gave me his card with D.A.P. scribbled on the back and telling me the letters meant: Do All Possible. When I received it I remember thinking: ‘Not in this man’s army’, as I stashed it in my wallet. At the door out of the AA office I retrieved the ducat and returned to the ticket counter to confront the lady that said, “There is none.” I show her the card hoping that maybe, just maybe, it might in some way get me a ride. She looks at it: flips it over, reads the back, flips it several times more, and looks up and down the counter while tapping it on the counter top. Finally, she says: “Just one moment please.” Just as sweet as you please and she’s gone. She’s somewhere, way in the back, behind the counter. I fidget as I wait. I’m beginning to wish I’d never thought of the dumb card when a well-dressed dude appears, preceded by the clerk, they head to her counter space in front of me. My card looks to be the only thing that might possibly disturb the dude’s overly dignified nature. He holds it at arms-length, and focuses on it critically. I’m thinking; ‘this guy could be a General if he wasn’t so young’. He and Miss “There is none,” for a moment, scramble for position at what was her counter space. He wins and asks, “Where did you get this?” He’s protectively holding the card and

acting as if I'd pilfered it. I tell him the story relating to my possession, and without a word, he bustles his way to a phone out of earshot, and talks into it; not more than a minute or so. Then while he listens, he smiles at me over that part of the phone not plugged into his ear. The smile is one of those disconcerting types that salesmen use to signify: Got-Cha! He then turns his back and as he finishes the call, hangs up the phone, turns around again and hastens to face me. He calls me, "Lieutenant Sir." Now of, course, the details I have just reiterated about the airline's office are not exactly as they happened some fifty odd years ago but, they make a reasonable story of what did take place to get me on a plane to Detroit. First class, I might add.

Arriving in Detroit I inquired as to how I could get the rest of the way to Saginaw. It seemed there were no more commercial flights headed that way for the rest of the day. But, some nice lady at the A.A. counter suggested (I think the card thing preceded Me.) that I might try out at the hangar. A2 bag in hand I trudge to the hangar, there I find a bunch of men sitting around a table having lunch. "And what we can do for you, Fly Boy," one says. Sheepishly I tell them I'm looking for a ride to Saginaw. A nice-looking fellow says he is, and points at a four-place paper-plane, like a Piper Cub, asking, "Can you fly that?" "I guess I can," I answer and hand him my newly acquired license. He looks at it, hands it back and says, "OK, but you have to land in Flint and Owosso first: I'm pooped." We load up, I get cleared for Flint and after I take off, he goes to sleep. At Flint I land, he jumps out delivers a package from the back seat. Once he's back aboard, I take off for a repeat performance at Owosso. Then take-off again, this time it's Saginaw and home I'm heading for. A few miles before touch down I asked for landing instructions and was told Saginaw (now MBS) was closed and to try Saginaw County. There is no communications available with the County field so I land there without further radio chatter. It's still the same air port where I crawled into the Ford Tri-Motor, way back when, and it still has no radio and no paved runways. I taxi to a building that I recognized as a hanger hangar, which is the only thing new on the field. It has a sign over one door that reads: OFFICE. I wake up my benefactor, go to the office and call home. Would you believe it! No one answers. I call a cab and gawk at the new and old building all the way home. On arrival, and just as the unanswered phone call warned me, NO BODIES THERE? Why? I'd called from Detroit and told them I was on my way, and I tried to call again from the County Air Port. All that greeted me was the blue star in the front window. I sat on the front porch, waiting, next to my A2 bag, and looking around the neighborhood. Nothing much seemed to have changed or our house but, where was everybody? Then I saw a Buick coming down Schaefer St Dad always drove a Buick. I start smiling. It's them. They must have seen me because they missed the driveway and parked in the street. They're out of the car and running up toward the porch I almost stumble as I go down the steps to greet them. There are hugs and kisses and laughter and love from Letty, who won the race; and then the same from Mom, and Dad and my two sisters, Sally and Susan. Where had they been? They went out to the Saginaw airport to see my fly in. After waiting some time they found out that the field was closed to transient traffic in order to accommodate an air show and returned home.

It was the Fourth of July Nineteen Forty-Six...



PARTICIPANTS

Al Hoffman:

Al continued as one of the few flight instructors in the Tri-City area for years; even taught two sons. One is the manager of the Brown Air port. (Once known as Saginaw County Air Port.) I understand the other owns a pilot school somewhere in Florida. Al retired to Bois Blanc Island in northern Lake Huron and flew the mail back and forth to the main land until a year or so. His fine obituary appeared in the Saginaw News this year.

Alvin Hand;

I attended a masonry seminar in Pittsburg at one time, after the war, and while there tried to call Alvin. I was told: Yes, he owned the Ford dealership, but that they had no idea of how to contact him. I left information on how he could contact me but have never heard from him.

Bob Pettit:

Bob didn't fly to Meridian, MS with us during the hurricane. He stayed behind to protect the women folk in Pop Ancel's hotel room; and from the water snakes around the cabins until we returned. Bob is one of those that received a halo. He's buried near Fort Meyers, FL

Bob Redwood:

I can't seem to find out any thing about bob. Letty said she heard that he and his wife were going to get a divorce but when they found out how much it would cost, they quickly decided not to.

Bud Bentley:

Bud and I joined the Army Air Force Reserves together with the hope of finishing college, becoming pilots, and shipping out together. I guess the Army didn't know of our dreams, because Bud became a navigator-bombardier flying out of Italy. On one mission his ship was shot down and he walked back; after a few more missions his ship was shot down again and this time he was invited to spend the rest of the war in a German POW *Stalagh*. He married after the war and graduating from Architectural school. He and Betty brought three children into the world. We remained friends but saw little of each other after I moved back to Saginaw from Detroit. He stayed in Detroit; working for a large Arch' firm until he retired. Betty and Bud have since passed away. Bud's real name was Herbert Murray Bentley – The second son of Letty's and mine was Tim Murray Waters.

Captain Richard Creighton:

I saw the Captain's picture in the Detroit Free Press, when I was working in that fair city. He looked great leaning against the wing of a plane except that he was then wearing silver leaves of a Lieutenant Colonel. Inquires recently made as to his whereabouts ended with finding out he had been killed in an automobile accident

Charles Philbrick:

Letty and I spotted him in Ann Arbor when I was there on business back in the early fifties. He was there visiting his new wife's parents. Her father was the Dean of some school or other. We invited him and his wife to visit us in Detroit. They came; she seemed quite nice. He drank too much and became his old obnoxious self. We didn't ask them to stay for dinner. There has been no reason to find out about him since.

Chester J. Swierczynski:

Now legally Chester J. Swier – He still has the nick name, Murph. When he got home from German prison camp; he finished college, became an art teacher in the Cuba, NY school system. He lives in Cuba with his wife Donnie. They brought a couple girls into the world. I know of only one grand son. Murph stayed in the Air Force Reserves and flew with them for awhile then tried the National Guard. Now he's retired and just paints. He's very good at it. We usually manage a good gabfest, with Letty included, about once a year.

Don Trier:

Don left us a year-or-so ago. Don was drafted and sent to Africa. After some time there he was found to have TB and was sent back home for a lengthy hospital stay. Once the hospital stay was concluded, he became a successful contractor. He married Katie and filled their home with a set of twins, boy and a girl, and another girl, and of course there were grand children. Don and I met in High School and remained friends there after. Don passed away last year

Frank Mason:

Frank is still going strong: Blind; he manages to go to work most days and cares for his wife when he's home. They were blessed with two kids, a boy and a girl they, and a grand daughter that sees he and Marcia get where they want to be. Frank married not long after a plane accident in the Ryan ST shown a the end of the BEFINNING. He was deferred from service, because of injuries, for quite some time, but was finally able to get in with a limited service rating. Because of his rambunctiousness he quickly found himself in Europe for the duration. Frank and I started kindergarten together and have remained friends since.

Hunter -- Can't remember his first name; if I ever knew it.

Hunter saw combat in the Korean conflict after Europe. He showed up in my Saginaw office as a sales representative for his uncle's porcelain enamel firm. We had a great time talking flying during his first visit. His firm stopped making panels about the same time the job I was designing porcelain for fell through and he quit flying. Haven't run into him since

Jack (John) Mc Cann:

Jack finished the war on a flat top; some where in the Pacific. He finished schooling, married, and moved to Pasadena, CA. He was forever trying to get me Letty and I to come out there for a Rose Bowl Game – We never made it. We always exchanged Christmas cards. Then one day I received a letter from his wife, who I had never met, saying Jack had died of prostate cancer.

Ken & Shirley Lawson:

They open a kitchen supply business in WI and eventually retired to AZ. Ken is no longer with us; Shirley has moved to WA with her daughter.

Lee Thurlow:

Lee had an amazing life: He became a chef in a hotel, married a divorcee (With one girl child.), ran/owned a hotel at Trout Lake (In MI UP.), was a contractor for a real-estate developer, moved to CA, developed a cabinet making company, built and owned and rented properties in AZ, had two boys, retired to Redwood, CA, divorced then spent remaining days in a home he remodeled and learned to sail on San Francisco Bay. While still around MI he and I spent nearly ever deer, fall season fishing for rainbow in the Two Hearted River, in the MI-UP.

Lou Freeman:

I know nothing of Lou's overseas experiences. He did visit Letty and I in Detroit once. He told us he was a sales representative pedaling plastic toilet seat covers and that he lived in Pasadena, CA. He said that he was trying to get his dad to move out there because of the rock situation. I asked him what rocks had to do with it and was informed that it was because, in Pasadena, you could hardly throw one without hitting a rich widow.

Major Robin Olds:

The Major retired as a Brigadier General after flying in two wars and making innumerable kills. He now lives in Colorado and has survived three marriages. Rumor around the 434th was that his first was to be to Ella Raines, a movie actress. The last time I saw him he was on TV; he was telling about his first kill. Seems he was in a P38, over Germany, and had forgotten to switch tanks upon running out of gas. He was gliding when a Jerry flew in front of him and he shot it down. He claims to be the only person to shoot down an enemy while in a glide mode. I have had no contact with him since Wattisham.

Pop Ancel:

Someone informed me that Pop has flown to a better place.

Sam Sneath:

I never heard from Sam after he left the Lower Forest Avenue Music-Cal Society. Tice told me; that he had heard Sam was killed in a tank battle in Germany. Sam was color blind. We always made it a point to see that he wore an orange tie on St. Patrick's Day. He was a lot of fun.

Tice:

He was actually Francis Anthony Tice. Tice looked just like the little guy that was the Esquire magazine icon. He owned a men's clothing store on East U' in Ann Arbor. All the guys in my gang, and a lot of football players hung out there; some even worked there. Tice was ten years older than I. He was drafted late and sent to Europe after VE day. He was made a guard in a camp for German POWs. There he made friends with one of the prisoners and after the war went to visit him in Germany. During the visit, Tice was made the Grand Marshall of a parade because of his treatment of the friend. Tice had two wives. (One before and one after the war.) The first marriage produced two fine boys. He passed away last year after a long battle with diabetes

William Lawrence: better known as Uncle Bill:

Uncle Bill is my real Uncle. (Two years, three months, fifteen days older than I.) He, belatedly, became a gunner on a B29 in the South Pacific. After the war He married Aunt Kate and they have four kids and an all girl bunch of grand kids—All girls.

Walter Umla:

Walt was in the Twentieth Fighter Group with Murph. Murph gave me his phone number in Florida. We talked once, recently: He'd inherited the family lumber business in the New York City area, married twice. Now summers on the water near NY City, winters on the water around Jupiter, FA, and said he hasn't seen Lou in twenty-five years. Other than that the conversation left me with a lot of questions unanswered. Murph told me Walt was credited with three planes destroyed on the ground.

479th's HOME BASE

LOCATION: Wattisham, East Anglia, England. Northeast of Ipswich

BUILT: 1938+or-: Brick structures as a permanent RAF base with 4 hangars for Blenheim bombers.

US OCCUPATION: Wattisham passed to the US in 1942. Four more hangars were built, and concrete runways and revetments added for US bombers. It was also known as the 4th Strategic Air Depot, Station 377. The 479th Fighter Group, composed of the 434, 435, and 436 Fighter Squadrons took over in May 1944. The 479th was the last Fighter Group sent to the UK. It flew P38s until September 1944 when it received P51s. The Group flew 351 combat missions, and claims to have shot down the first jet air craft, a ME262. It was recalled to the US in November 1945 and was decommissioned in December 1945. When the US left the RAF used the base for Phantom Jet Fighters until they were retired after the cold war.

It is presently used by the British Army, 3rd and 4th Regiments, and Army Air Corps.

P-51D Mustang (Last prop combat plane active in USAF.)

Wing span: 37'-0"

Length: 32'-3"

Height: 13'-8"

Weight: 12,000lbs max

Armament: 6, 50-cal machine guns, 10, 5" rockets or 2,000 lbs bombs

Engine: Packard built Rolls-Royce "Merlin" V1650 hp

Cost: \$54,000

Built: 14,855

Survivors as of 5/8/05:

Air worthy: 151

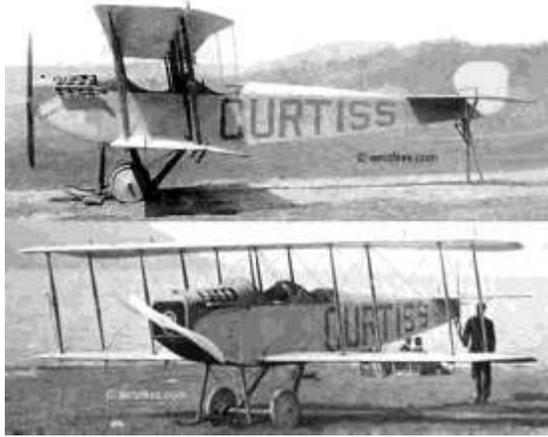
On display: 57

Being restored: 45

In storage: 22

Unknown: 5

THE SCRAP BOOK



Jenny: Lindbergh bought and soloed one of these at Souther Field. L-4 Grasshopper Student Trainer.



Ford Tri Motor: Some are still flying 1930



Fouke Wolf 190: The enemy



Link Trainer: For instrument training
Used through-out flight training.



ME-109: Another enemy



ME-262: An enemy the GIs got to first



P-51 Combat Formation with wing tanks



B-25: Michelle Bomber. A noisy ride
Erlangen 1945-46



C-45 Expediter Airliner, 8 passengers
Erlangen 1945-466

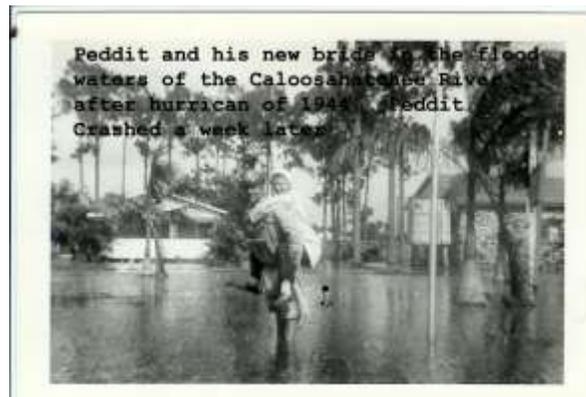


C-47 (Douglas DC3) Sky Train-a work horse.
Erlangen 1945-46



A nice tight fit in a P-51-England

Page Field, Fort Meyer, FL



Wattisham England -1945



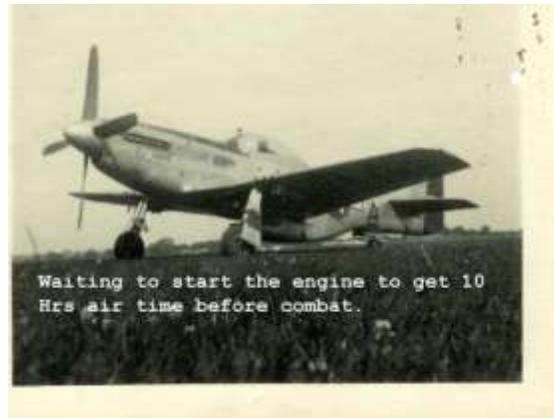
P-51D MUSTANG-Just resting.



1945--A 10HR RIDE OVER ENGLAND



A JUG, anole P-47 for practice combat.



P-51-Combat will come soon enough.



New Cross Tower, Wattisham, England

ERLANGEN GERMANY - 1945



Buck Lind ; Tought me how to fly his C47. Erlangen,1946

For a ride back and forth to Furth



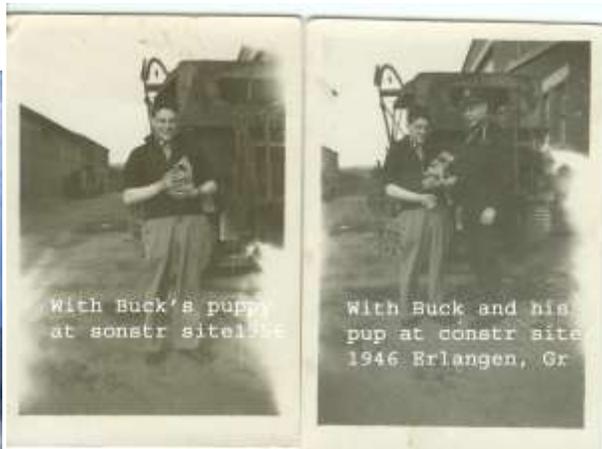
L-5 SENTENAL – for light hauls



L-4 GRASSHOPPER – to Amsterdam



AT-6 TEXAN - One passenger in a hurry. We only had one



With Buck's puppy at sonstr site

With Buck and his pup at constr site 1946 Erlangen, Gr



Dear Janiece:

Subject: Some Came Home story.

These remembrances, ramblings, stories, and a few related facts have been gathered from the memories of this bewildered ex-fighter pilot. Recalling some of my flights for you, partially, brought back the restrained feeling of the times all pilots went through in their chosen method of aiding their country. As your audacious scrivener it is hoped that none, in any way, cast doubt on the ability or eagerness of any one that fought in WWII.

If what I was told is true, twenty four thousand, American men, started training so the US could send the eight thousand fighter pilots to England. How many of the twenty four thousand that started died in training; I have no idea. Of the eight thousand reaching England two thousand were lost in combat. I do know each and every one that died deserved a halo for a job well done...And I do know how honored I am to have been among the eight thousand.

That through all the death and destruction related to the flying war It is hard to believe something beautiful could have been produced. Before the United States entered the war a young American went to Canada and joined the Royal Air Force; he learned to fly Spitfires and flew against German planes invading English air space. Before he left these earthly ties, he wrote the poem presented on the next page. It is my favorite of all poems...As it is for a great many pilots. It is presented to you on the next page of this letter...

I now consider your request answered; yet I will make myself available to answer what questions you may have. What you do with this document is entirely up to you. I can only hope that whatever it is it will make it impossible for someone in the future to be asked to write a similar story.

Love:

Doc

p.s.: Please thank David for his help as my Computer Guru, and thank Tom and Letty and Pat for their patients. And again thank you for nagging me to this thing's completion.

HIGH FLIGHT

Oh, I have **slipped** the surly bonds of earth
And danced the skies on laughter-silvered wings;
Sunward I've climbed, and joined the tumbling mirth
Of sun-split clouds – and done a hundred things
You have not dreamed of – wheeled and soared and swung
High in the sunset silence. Hov'ring there,
I've chased the shouting wind along, and flung
My eager aircraft through footless halls of air
Up, up the long, delirious, burning blue
I've topped the windswept heights with easy grace
Where never lark, or even eagle flew.
And, while with silent, lifting mind I've trod
The high untrespassed sanctity of space,
Put out my hand, and touched the face of God.”

John Gillespie Magee, RAF