"WITHOUT GLORY" GROUND CREWS

{of the Army Air Corps, World War II}

454th Bomb Group (Heavy) Insignia

Being a personal account of my Service in World War II.

Much of the text was copied from a diary I kept spasmodically.

Some text was copied from letters I had sent home.

The bulk of the story was first written in 1990,
and copies given to my children and grandchildren, as part of an autobiography.

By

William M. Robishaw

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

TO MEMBERS OF THE UNITED STATES ARMY EXPEDITIONARY FORCES:

You are a soldier of the United States Army.

You have embarked for distant places where the war is being fought.

Upon the outcome depends the freedom of your lives: the freedom of the lives of those you love—your fellow-citizens—your people.

Never were the enemies of freedom more tyrannical, more arrogant, more brutal.

Yours is a God-fearing, proud, courageous people, which, throughout its history, has put its freedom under God before all other purposes.

We who stay at home have our duties to perform—duties owed in many parts to you. You will be supported by the whole force and power of this Nation. The victory you win will be a victory of all the people—common to them all.

You bear with you the hope, the confidence, the gratitude and the prayers of your family, your fellow-citizens, and your President—

Franklin D. Roosevelt

PROLOGUE TO WAR

In 1941, Adolph Hitler's German military forces attacked Poland, quickly overpowering the meager Polish forces. Mussolini's Italian military joined in the conflict, throwing Europe into turmoil. The third Axis power, Japan, had earlier occupied Manchuria, threatening to conquer all of China. Thus World War II was under way, Hitler launching the Third Reich in what he promised to "last a thousand years."

The United States remained neutral, but did provide "Lend-Lease" war materiel to both England and the Soviet Union. The American neutrality continued until December of 1941, when the Japanese Empire launched an aircraft carrier air attack on American naval forces at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. As a high-ranking Japanese military officer remarked, that attack "awakened a sleeping giant."

In mid-1941, I had begun dating a young lady, Jean Cilimburg, who lived at the Clifton Post of the American Legion, the Post home being on the edge of the Rocky River Metropolitan Park valley. We became engaged late that summer. On December 7th of 1941, Jean's father and brother Bud and I were behind the Clifton Post building, target shooting with Bud's 22-caliber rifle. Jean came out to tell us that the Japanese had attacked Pearl Harbor, and the next day our nation declared war on the Japanese, and subsequently on the other two Axis powers of Germany and Italy.

Fig. 1 Jean and Bill, Oct. 1946.

On Valentine's Day of 1942, Jean and I went to the Robinson Jewelry Store in downtown Cleveland. I wanted Jean to pick out a diamond engagement ring herself. We had already spoken of marriage long before that day, but giving her the ring made it "official." We also agreed, at that time, to wait until the War was over to be married.

Early in 1942, Bud had started to work at the American Steel and Wire Company, working in the wire-die shop with me. He became an instructor when women were being hired, as the young men went into the military service.

Fig. 2 Herm Wiley with Bill on front porch of Clifton Post house, 1942.

In mid-June of 1942, the company received a very large order for "high carbon" wire, from the Soviet Union --- which was to be made into barbed wire for their defense against the German invading armies. I was then working the 11:00 p. m. to 7:00 a. m. shift; and for production reasons, the shift was changed to a 7:00 p. m. to 7:00 a. m. shift, seven days a week. We were not even permitted to take a day off to switch to the day-time twelve-hour shift. I had been playing on the Dover Gardens Clague Park "A" league softball team at the time; so I turned in my uniform, having to quit playing. Bud also worked the same twelve-hour shift.

Many young men were being drafted into the Army during that year of 1942, as the military went onto a wartime footing, and were building up toward an Army of millions. A good friend of mine, Herm Wiley, had decided to enlist so that he could choose his branch of the service. There were some young men that had special occupational skills and jobs that were important to the war

effort production. Many of them received deferments, at least for some time, and did not have to go into the military service. My foreman had told me that he was trying to get me such a deferment. Imagine my surprise on my twenty-first birthday to get my draft notice. When I checked in with my draft board, I was told that I would be called up in October; and there had never been any application from work seeking a deferment.

I was disappointed by the foreman's deceit, but I certainly had been expecting that I would have to go into the military service. I thought that as long as I was going to have to fight for my country, I wanted to see some of that country. I had always had a desire to "go west," perhaps some of that desire due to Alex's letters from the West when he was in the Three-C's. So I asked Bud and Jean to take a two-week trip out West with me, to see some of the country. They agreed, and we planned to leave in early September. Bud and I both quit our jobs in the die room the next morning, when we told the foreman right after our shift ended at 7:00 a. m. Jean also quit her job, and we got ready to "go west." I had recently bought a 1941 Plymouth, trading in my second car, a 1935 Plymouth two-door sedan. I wanted to have a good car when I returned after the war; I thought, correctly it turned out, that it would take some time after the war for auto-makers to get back into production, from their war-time tank- and jeep-making, et cetera. The last cars made during the war were 1942 models; and they started painting the trim instead of using chrome. The 1942 models started coming out in September of 1941, production stopping right after the first of the year in 1942, so not too many were produced. When I went looking for my "good" car, I found "it" on the showroom floor, and it really was like new.

We did leave for the West in early September, and had an enjoyable trip. As we drove through Springfield, Ohio on our first day, we stopped at a little camera shop; I wanted to get a camera so we could get some pictures. In those days, almost everyone took black-and-white photos; and I didn't even know there were cameras for amateurs that could take color pictures. The salesman showed me a 35-millimeter camera, the first I had ever heard of. It was a cheap German make, costing only twenty dollars. The salesman also explained that it could take pictures in color, but only as slides. Well, I bought the camera and some rolls of black-and-white film; also buying one 18-exposure roll of color slide film and the Kodak mailer (the only way to get the color-slide film processed at that time). I decided to save the color film for the Grand Canyon and Yellowstone Parks. The slides are in the slide files of mine; and although over sixty years old, are still quite colorful. Surprisingly so, since they were the first I ever took, and without the use of any light-meter (the camera was not one of the auto-exposure ones so common today).

When we returned from the trip, I found that I was to report for my physical examination and induction into the Army on October 31st of 1942.

MILITARY SERVICE HISTORY

October 31, 1942 to October 6, 1945

You're in the Army now,
You're not behind the plow,
You'll never get rich,
By digging a ditch,
You're in the Army now!

CLEVELAND – CAMP PERRY INDUCTION CENTER

And indeed I was in the Army! I was inducted into the military on October 31, 1942, and received notice at that time that I was to report for active service on November 14th. I did so report to the Cleveland Union Railroad Terminal on Public Square. There I with several dozen others boarded a train and headed for the Induction Center of Camp Perry, on the shore of Lake Erie near Sandusky. It was not a pleasant ride, and we arrived at Camp Perry in due time. I wonder how many of those lads, if any, never saw home again? I'm sure that at least a few of them must have been lost in the service!

We received our Amy clothing shortly after our arrival, and also our first Army haircut --- and I was pleased to have Jean drive her brothers and sister to Camp to see me for a few hours. I had left my car with her, to use and take care of while I was gone; otherwise I would have had to store it somewhere.

Fig. 3 Bill and Jean at Camp Perry Nov. 15,1942

During the few days I was at Camp Perry, I was given several tests to see what abilities I had, or did not have. I also was given a personal interview though short, during which I was asked if I had any objection to serving in the ground forces of the Air Corps. I replied that of course not --- I could not believe that I was asked such a question. I always thought that when a person went into the military service, he was put wherever they wanted or needed him. After my testing, I was asked what kind of job I would like to have in the Air Corps, which at that time was a part of the Army, not a separate branch of the military as it is today. I looked over the list of jobs that the Air Corps had, and selected Bombsight Mechanic as first choice; and Military Police as my second choice --- though I cannot say why I selected either one. I was then given a more lengthy personal interview, as my test scores were high enough to get me into the Bombsight Mechanic training program; a 139 on the General Aptitude test, and a high score on the Mechanical Aptitude test. During the interview, I clearly remember the officer asking me what I thought about Communism in Russia. I also remember my reply to that question: "If they want to have it there, I don't care." I believe that that question was the beginning of a security check on me, because I would have access to confidential information if I attended Bombsight Mechanic training school. Pop later told me that somebody had been to the wire mill asking questions about me, so I guess they were trying to be selective in the personnel assigned to certain military jobs and equipment.

BASIC TRAINING AT MIAMI BEACH

After a few days, a trainload of inductees from all over the Midwest left Camp Perry, not knowing where we were going. It turned out that we were headed to Miami Beach, Florida, where we were to receive Basic Training. We were quartered in many of the hotels there, which the Army had leased for our "barracks." I was quartered in a room with three others, in the Edgewater Beach Hotel; this hotel being across the ocean-front boulevard from a beautiful sandy beach. We had frequent inspections to see that not only were we, our equipment and clothing in good shape; but that the hotel room was spotless. Every day everything had to be cleaned or scrubbed, and during the frequent inspections one of the inspecting officers would hold a mirror mounted at an angle to a short stick, inside of the toilet bowl, and inspect under the rim. If there was any rust or other stains there, the toilet had to be re-cleaned and inspected again.

As we were right on the ocean, lights from the buildings would have made a great background to silhouette any passing ships for German submarines to see. So the whole coastlines, both east and west coasts, were under a "screen-out," as it was called. All windows had to be shaded; and in the case of our hotel's Venetian blinds, they had to be adjusted so that any light leaking out would be reflected upwards, not downward where it could reflect off ground objects.

Our Basic Training at first consisted mostly of "close order drill," or marching, and obeying the drill-sergeant's orders to "Column left" or "To the right flank" and so on. Our drill field was on a golf course, which had also been leased by the Army. I remember one day a new drill was added, "Left oblique march" and "Right oblique march." We were practicing this drill in files of four recruits at a time, and I thought I had it down quite well, until after the final commands of "Halt" and "About face" were given. To my surprise, I was all alone, the other three of our file (who had been behind me) being back in their correct places in ranks. The drill sergeant came up to me and put his face right in mine, and asked what I was doing. I replied that I had taken a ""right oblique." He then explained to me in his best drill-sergeant voice, that the command he had given was "To the right flank." I had just assumed that he was going to give us more "obliques!" Was I embarrassed!

We also had a few days at the obstacle course. About seven or eight days into Basic Training, an ingrown toenail became so bothersome that I had trouble walking, so I reported to "Sick Call." The doctor gave me a few shots of Novocain, and cut out part of the ingrown nail. I had to stay off my feet a few days, and then was moved to a different training group; and actually progressed to only the twelfth day of the Basic Training program.

We had some additional testing while at Miami Beach, and again I did well, even raising my General Aptitude test score one point, to 140. Once again we were asked our preference as to the military job wanted; and I repeated my first two selections.

TECHNICAL TRAINING SCHOOL
LOWRY FIELD, DENVER, COLORADO

Sometime in early December, I was once again aboard a troop train, this time ending up at Lowry Air Field just outside of Denver, Colorado. I found that I was to enter Bombsight Maintenance School, my first choice. Three eight-hour shifts of classes were run around the clock. I was fortunate to be in one of the daytime classes --- which met from 8:00 in the morning until 4:00 in the afternoon. We marched to and from classes, at noon time marching to the mess hall, then back to the classroom. It was real marching, too! But we did sing, which made it easier to keep in step. There was one big farmer from Georgia in our class, and one day the non-com (non-commissioned officer, such as a corporal or sergeant) marching us to lunch started chewing this guy out for being out of step. The big farmer just smiled and pointed to his feet, which really were in step with everybody else. He had just changed the swing of his arms to the opposite-from-natural rhythm, a difficult bit of coordination, and so looking at his arms it did appear that he was out of step. The non-com had to laugh, and it wasn't long until the whole class was swinging their arms opposite from the normal rhythm.

One morning we awoke and looking westward towards the mountains some twenty miles away, we saw fresh snow on them that had arrived in the night --- it was really a pretty sight.

I found that we could stay out of camp all night, just so we got to class on time the next morning. We could do this regularly, also being permitted to leave the base right after class. We also had every Friday off completely. In writing back and forth to Jean, and with a few telephone calls, we decided that she should come to Denver and we would get married, and she would stay there with me; perhaps even following me to other bases. In the meantime, through the USO (United Services Organization) I believe, I was able to find a room we could rent. I arrived at the house at 920 Detroit Street in Denver, to arrange for the room rental, and met the owners, Mr. and Mrs. Hutchinson. Mr. Hutchinson was confined to his bed, having been in an auto wreck on a mountain road about fifteen years earlier. He had been a traveling salesman, and had been trapped overnight in the wreck. He was paralyzed from the waist down, spending all of his time in a hospital bed in a downstairs bedroom. He had a telephone by his bedside, and kept active. After making the arrangements, and telling the Hutchinsons something about Jean and myself, Mr. Hutchinson told me that he would take care of making arrangements for our wedding. He did so, and extremely well.

Fig. 4 Wedding photo
January, 1943

Jean arrived about 9:00 in the morning on January 22, 1943, after a long and tiring train trip, riding in a coach seat. Mr. Hutchinson had made an appointment for her to get the necessary blood test that morning, and for us to get the marriage license also. Because their daughter was visiting them, and would be using our room, he had arranged for us to use a room at a nearby boarding house until “our” room would be available. That evening of January 22nd, three friends from the Bombsight Maintenance class went with us to the minister's study at a downtown Denver Presbyterian Church. Mr. Hutchinson had also arranged this, where we were married. After the simple ceremony, with the minister's wife also in attendance, the five of us went to a nearby hotel dining room for dinner---on me, of course. We were all going to order mountain trout, but the waiter

returned with the news that there was only one left. My three classmates and I agreed that the new bride should have the trout, and we all ordered fried chicken. Jean's face was a study when the waiter brought out her meal---the whole fish was there, head to tail, with the eyes still in place. Of course, it had been cleaned, but the looks of it shocked her a bit.

On one of my Fridays off, we took a bus to Boulder, Colorado, about thirty miles from Denver and just at the foot of the Rockies. We bought a few sandwiches at the bus stop, and then hiked up a mountain road about three miles. We ate the sandwiches sitting on some rocks, and returned along the highway for the long bus ride back to Denver --- a nice restful day, even with the strenuous hike.

Fig. 5 Bill and Jean, Hutchinson's side yard.

Jean and I enjoyed our stay at the Hutchinson's. And our room was very large, and had a large walk-in closet. It had been the master bedroom, and had its own bathroom. Another couple from the air base had another upstairs bedroom. Jean's meals were included in the room rent, and occasionally Mrs. Hutchinson would invite me to have dinner with them. Mr. Hutchinson had arranged for Jean to take a Civil Service test in early February. After passing the test, she began work on February 8th, as a typist in the Denver Military Medical Depot. Every evening when I would arrive, I had to "report" to Mr. Hutchinson, and give him any news that I might have.

On another of our Fridays, Jean and I took another bus ride, this time to Colorado Springs. We had been there in early September with Bud, and at that time had also driven up Pike's Peak to the top. This time we walked through the Garden of the Gods, even though it was winter and cold --- but there was no snow. There was one week in February, when Denver had a lot of snow, and the temperature stayed below zero for the whole week.

There was a fine city zoo not too far from Hutchinson's, and we visited there a couple of times. Near the zoo was Denver's East High School; what a great location for the school, adjacent to the City Park and zoo.

Another of my Fridays off, February 19, 1943, I decided to take a bus to Colorado Springs with another classmate, Melvin Pugh. We were going to visit the Garden of the Gods, and I wanted to take a roll of color film for slides, but color film was very difficult to find. Mr. Hutchinson got on the phone when he heard of my wish, and just told some photo store manager that he wanted a roll of color film, and that's all there was to it. One evening of the week we were to go, I found the roll of color film waiting for me when I made my usual "reporting in" stop at Mr. Hutchinson's bedside.

Fig. 6 Bill, Colo. Springs

Sometime in mid-course, someone in charge decided that an eight-hour school class was too long, and so the three around-the-clock classes were changed to three six-hour classes, starting at 6:00 a. m. and ending at midnight. My class time was changed to run from noon to 6:00 p. m. This meant that Jean and I had a few hours less together each evening --- but we were thankful that my class was not either of the other two times.

Of course, the twelve-week Bombsight and Autopilot Maintenance Course did come to an end, in early March. We anxiously awaited word of where I would be sent next. (See next

page.) While waiting to be sent to the next assignment, I was placed in a "holding" squadron, until individual soldiers were re-assigned. During those few weeks, we were permitted off base every evening, but had to return through the guard gate by 1:00 a. m. Finally, my orders came and Jean and I had planned that she would leave for home shortly after I left. She did want to give a week or so notice to the Medical Depot where she was working.

REPLACEMENT DEPOT

SALT LAKE CITY ARMY AIR BASE

I left on March 27th, being sent to a "replacement depot" at the air base just outside of Salt Lake City, Utah. This was another "holding" base, until I was assigned to a real air base and could actually work on bombsights. Incidentally, I had learned early in the Bombsight training that it also included Automatic Pilot maintenance. (See page 47.) The two units were mechanically and electrically hooked together, the bombsight actually flying the plane through the autopilot during the bombing run. In fact, the only reason for the autopilot was for this purpose of bombing --- to guide the plane as accurately and as smoothly as possible during the bombing run.

One evening many of us stationed temporarily at this base, were privileged to be taken into Salt Lake City for the world premiere of the movie, "My Friend Flicka," the story of a horse, starring Roddy McDowell (then a young lad). The film had been filmed mostly on location in the canyonlands of southern Utah, which is why the premiere was held in Salt Lake City.

Part of our time awaiting orders for our next assignment included physical training. One early April afternoon as we lined up on the training field, the instructor announced that we could either do the usual calisthenics, or participate in some sport. I selected to play in a touch-football game for my part of the physical training. During the game, I went up for a pass and fought for the catch with one of the other team's players, coming down hard on my left knee. I was barely able to walk, and reported to sick bay. The medical officer (doctor) that examined me said that I would have to stay off the leg as much as possible, and that he would suggest that I ask the squadron adjutant for a ten-day or two-week convalescent furlough, and go home. I reported to the adjutant, and he gave me a ten-day furlough, the minimum suggested by the medical officer. This furlough was to run from April 8th through the 18th. I hurried to try and find a way home, and thought that I might get a military aircraft flight for free. In the meantime, I had contacted the American Red Cross office on base, and was given a forty-dollar loan. I had little other funds, because pay-days were always late for those not attached to a "permanent" squadron. Well, I was not able to get a military plane ride, so once again hustled to get a train ticket for home, which took most of the forty dollars. I left Salt Lake City with only $1.93 in my pocket; which had to provide my food for the next two-to-three days during the train ride home. I was really appreciative of the Red Cross and USO ladies at the various train stops along the way, and the free donuts and coffee they handed out to servicemen aboard the trains that stopped at their stations. Those free donuts made my journey much more comfortable than it would have been otherwise --- and I was still hungry when I arrived at the Cleveland Union Terminal.

Jean, in the meantime, had left Denver a few days before I left on my furlough, it so happened. When she arrived home for the first time after our marriage, she learned that I also was on my way home, with the convalescent furlough. I guess she was pleasantly surprised! I had wired the news of my twisted knee and furlough to her folks.

(See Diary of the Furlough on following pages.)

Convalescent Furlough --- April, 1943

(Copied from Diary)

Tuesday, April 6, 1943

Gotten up at 3:55 this morning, and reported for K. P. I served food today, scrubbed kitchen floors, and peeled spuds. These mess halls are too small to have electric potato-peelers, and so they must be peeled by hand. Went to the show with Keen and Jarvis, as Jarvis is now out of the hospital. Saw "Pride of the Yankees" for a second time, but it was worth it. To bed about 11:00 p. m. .

Wednesday, April 7, 1943

This morning ten of us were sent on a wild goose chase to the station hospital. It was ten before we could find out that we weren't wanted, and so we ended up loafing the morn away. In the afternoon the squadron went to the athletic field, and had a half-hour of calisthenics. Afterwards we played all kinds of games; baseball, basketball, volleyball, and football. I played football because there were only a few doing that, and it seemed that everyone was going to play softball. I twisted my knee pretty bad playing football, and I'm sorry to say that the strap came off the watch. The Doc put an elastic bandage on my knee, and I'm going to see him again in a few days. Jarvis and I each got passes, so we went into Salt Lake City. We saw the World Premiere of "My Friend Flicka."

Thursday, April 8, 1943

Because of that second twist, going into town, my knee feels worse this a. m. than it usually does after twisting. So I went on sick call, relieved of duty for seven days. Came back to barracks, decided to try for a furlough. Chased around the Air Base all afternoon, almost getting plane to Cheyenne or Denver. Borrowed $40 from Red Cross. Went into Salt Lake City about 5:00 p. m., paid $45.90 for train ticket. Leaves me $1.95 to eat on for two days. Train pulled out of Salt Lake Union Pacific Station about 8:45 p.m.

Friday, April 9, 1943

Finally ate, for free, in North Platte, Nebraska. Just riding, seemingly slow, all day!

Saturday, April 10, 1943

Got haircut, shave & shine during lay-over in Chicago. Finally arrived at Terminal Tower at 11:55 p. m. Jean. Lois and Bob were waiting for me there.

Sunday, April 11, 1943

Dinner at Elsie's. Alex and Lois wee out to the Post in the morning. Supper back at Jean's. Her Aunt Helen, Uncle and cousin were there.

Pot roast, mashed potatoes, lettuce, some kind of pie.

Monday, April 12, 1943

To Gram's today, after buying license, getting ration points and barracks bag from Union Terminal. Back home, but weren't hungry, so had no supper.

Also bought slide projector, at Sears, on way home.

Tuesday, April 13, 1943

Picked the red-head (Marjorie) up at school (Old Red Brick in Westlake) at 3:30, then went out to Elsie's for supper. Aunt Jessie and Jack (Van Keuhls) were there. Took Aunt Jessie home, Jack to Lake and Detroit, then picked up Jean's Mom at Aunt Helen's. Took Aunt Flora home and then were able to take ourselves home.

Pork roast, sweet potatoes, mashed white potatoes, lettuce salad, apple pie.

Wednesday, April 14, 1943

Supper at Jean's tonite. I went to see the boys at the shop, leaving Jean at Gram's until I got back. Then Gram and Uncle Dietz went out to supper with us. Took them home later on, and that's all for today.

Snow and rain quite frequently this week.

Steak, mashed spuds, lettuce, corn.

Thursday, April 15, 1943

To Alex's house for dinner tonite. Took ride to roads behind bomber plant, then through Berea to home. The people they rent from came over to see the slides, and shortly after we went home.

Roast beef, creamed carrots, cottage cheese, cauliflower, mashed potatoes, apple pie.

Friday, April 16, 1943

Thought I'd have to leave today, so I checked in barracks bag at Union Station. Then I showed the furlough papers to an M. P., and he said that I wasn't due until midnite of the 19th.

So I got another day! Ate at Jean's again, then went in to see her old gang. Saw Marion Joss and Jean Dost. Carol not home. Again homeward bound at the end of the day.

Canned salmon, waffles, fried mashed spuds, sausage, lettuce.

Saturday, April 17, 1943

Train was late, and left Terminal Tower about 12:40 instead of 11:20. Jean was the only one down to see me off. Better that way. Ate supper with soldier and sailor during lay-over in Chicago. We ate at a restaurant outside of the station.

Seats on coach for rest of trip are pretty good.

9

DAVIS-MONTHAN ARMY AIR BASE
TUCSON, ARIZONA

After returning from the furlough, I was soon shipped out via train, and as usual no one on the train knew where we were going. As probably happened on every such troop train, rumors flew rampant about our destination. A few of the train commander and his assistants knew our destination, but they never let any of the train's "passengers" know what it was. Of course, we could tell in what direction we were going generally, and that knowledge gave rise to the rumors. We were headed southwest, and found ourselves in the Los Angeles railroad terminal. We were told that we would be spending the day there. A few of the men on the train were from Los Angeles, and they were lucky enough to get permission to go home for several hours. The local USO people took bus-loads of us to see part of the town, and also to see a fine stage show in one of the downtown theaters.

Late that night our train started eastward, and finally I found myself at Tucson, Arizona, and assigned to a training squadron at Davis-Monthan Air Field near town. After being assigned to a working training squadron, I had to wait several days before being permitted to actually start the further training. I first had to get my clearance pass (see copy on next page) for admittance into the "bombsight vault," or workshop. I also found that I could live off base again; and if I got a corporal's ranking, I would also be eligible for drawing rations pay for living off base, if I wished to. Of course I wrote Jean right away about this, and found a couple of other fellows from Ohio, who wanted their wives to come out also. Neither of them were bombsight mechanics, but some other ground crew. The one fellow's wife lived in Washington Courthouse, Ohio, and would drive out. It ended up that Jean got a ride out with her. They arrived late at night on May 28th, and we three G. I.'s waiting for them were sure happy to see them.

The afternoon she arrived, I was able to get a ride on one of the squadron's heavy bombers, a B-24 Liberator, when it was to do some practice bombing. That was my first airplane ride; and although the flying crew told me how I should be prepared to get airsick, I was not. (See page 49.) Soon after Jean arrived, I found my name on the advancement in rank list; I had skipped the PFC (Private First Class) and became a corporal.

In the squadron mail one day, I received a several-page mimeographed news- letter, which I was happily surprised to find was from a few of the girl classmates of my Dover High School Class of 1939, my graduating class. They had printed a little bit about everyone in the class, and especially those in the military service. When I read the short bit about myself, there was a sentence that there was a surprise for me later in the newsletter. I surely read through the rest of the newsletter quickly, not knowing what kind of a surprise there might be. I finally found it --- in the item about Vic LaNasa, who was the editor of the school paper, when I wrote the sports news. Vic was a flying officer, instructing would-be pilots in basic flying at another air field near Tucson. I was able to get in touch with him; he had just returned from a furlough with his young wife, Fran. He had driven his 1936 Ford V-8 with him. Jean and I got together with the LaNasa's several times during my stay at Davis-Monthan, one time packing a picnic lunch and driving up into a nearby National Forest canyon outside of town. We often went swimming together at a municipal pool near the edge of town, and those swims were surely appreciated in that 100-degree-plus climate.

One time Vic called to ask if I wanted to go on a flight with him. It seems that one of their training planes was missing, and it was believed to have crashed. Some of his squadron's planes were to go on a search mission, and I could go along with Vic as his "observer." I was pleased for the opportunity, and the next day found myself in the rear seat of his B-18 Trainer. We took off in formation with one other plane, and as we climbed to the proper altitude, the other plane

peeled off to our left, and did a slow roll. Vic looked back at me and asked with his motions if I would like to do that also. I nodded assent, and the first thing I knew Vic had snapped the plane through the roll, and was diving full-throttle toward the ground, chasing some grazing cattle on the desert rangeland. I really hardly knew what happened, it was so quick.

Another time I went up with Vic, ostensibly this flight also for a "search" mission for a downed plane. I knew Vic pretty well by this time, and knew that he liked to joke and tease a great deal, on the ground as well as while flying. So when I found myself flying straight at the top of a mountain, I just acted nonchalant, and looked at the desert scenery and the mountainside coming up at me. We passed over the top of the mountain with a scant ten to fifteen feet to spare, but I never worried. Later when we landed, Vic told me that when we flew so close over that mountain top, that he was quite worried. It seems that a strong down-draft was coming over that mountain top, and it was all that Vic could do to gain the necessary altitude to clear the top. I thought that he had been trying to scare me, when in reality he himself was scared. Ignorance can sometimes be a blessing!

On another occasion in mid-July, Vic got permission to use the plane on his day off, and we were going to fly to the Grand Canyon. I bought three rolls of color-slide film, and we set out. We had to land before reaching the Grand Canyon, to have the plane refueled --- at an Air Corps base, of course. While waiting for the refueling and checking in his flight plan, Vic learned that the Canyon itself was socked in by clouds --- one of those rare summer days when that would happen. I especially was disappointed, because I had looked forward to flying into the Canyon and getting some good pictures. Now that I look back on that day, I think perhaps it really was for the best: with Vic's daring we may have crashed into the Canyon. As we left to return to Vic's base, we circled two or three times around the saucer-like basin of the refueling airstrip, trying to find a clearing through the overhanging clouds. We did finally find such an opening, and proceeded back, arriving safely.

Fig. 7 454th Group Insignia

In just two short months, my learning on-the-job was over. I found I had become a member of the original cadre of a new squadron of a new group---the 737th Bomb Squadron of the 454th Bomb Group (H). The group was to be assigned B-24 Liberator Bombers. During the few weeks while the cadre awaited shipping orders, we went through some advanced training. This consisted of daily calisthenics, introduction to the use and practice with the standard Army 45-caliber automatic revolver, and the same with the 45-caliber Thompson sub-machine gun, or "Tommy" gun, as it was commonly called. Also, we were given real training for use of our gas masks for the first time. The final training session with the gas mask was to march quickly into a building that was filled with tear gas, and as soon as we got inside, to begin putting on the gas masks. The trick was to hold your breath and close your eyes, take out the mask and put it on securely, before breathing again. If you were successful, you avoided most of the discomfort from the tear gas, but your neck and other bare-skin areas would really burn---and what a relief when you were permitted to leave the test building.

I believe that it was during those two last weeks in Tucson that I went to see the Squadron Adjutant --- the administrative officers. I requested to apply for flying school, which would mean pilot training first; if I "washed out" because of lack of flying knowledge or skills, I would most likely be assigned to navigator or bombardier school. Considering that I was already trained in the bombsight/autopilot maintenance, I later thought it a good chance that I would be put in bombardier's school.

McCOOK ARMY AIR BASE

McCOOK, NEBRASKA

On July 28, 1943, the new 454th Bomb Group shipped out of Tucson. For once we knew where we were going, even before we left Tucson. We were going to a new Air Base outside of the small town of McCook, Nebraska. We were to be the first outfit to train at the base; it was so new that the only roads to it from town were dirt, having been scraped out of the Nebraska sod. For some time the roads were to remain dirt, and during the rains that came, they were almost impassable.

Jean was able to get a ride up to McCook with some other wives, and we were able to rent a small room in town. After a time she was able to get a part-time job at a small jewelry store in town. Most of our evening meals were eaten out, often in the company of other squadron friends, in a small restaurant in McCook.

For the first weeks at McCook, our four squadrons (736th, 737th, 738th, and 739th) of the Group were at minimal manpower. There were only a few of each department in each squadron; I being the only one in bombsight maintenance. Each squadron had brought only one plane (a B-24) and one flying crew; these four flight crews were called “model crews,” I guess really being a model for new crews that would arrive. One morning as I reported to my work station, which really wasn't much at that time, I met a second bombsight maintenance mechanic --- Melvin Ames, who was to remain with us for the duration. Some time later our third man joined us --- Ralph Pellegrini: now we had the full bombsight/autopilot staff of three.

Because of the shortage of planes and the resultant lack of real work, many of the ground crew personnel were given eight-day furloughs. I was given one, from August 15 to 22, 1943. Jean and I packed for “our” furlough after getting train tickets for the trip back to Cleveland. We waited hopefully at the McCook railroad station for the Burlington Zephyr, a streamlined passenger train that traveled fast, and did not stop at every town on its way to Chicago. At Chicago we would have to transfer to a Cleveland-bound train. Unfortunately, we could not get space aboard the Zephyr, even though we begged the conductor to let us on --- we would sit in the aisle or anything. We did get home of course, and enjoyed the visit, which was all too short. We were able to get enough gasoline ration stamps to “move” back to McCook, so drove the car. We did have some problems with the cooling system on the way, and had to have the radiator flushed when we got to McCook.

During the furlough, the Group's furloughs had been changed to ten days, and my Adjutant thought that I should get the extra two days. So he gave me a two-day pass. Still having enough gasoline ration stamps left, Jean and I drove to Denver for a short visit with the Hutchinsons, who were happy to see us.

Our work picked up then, as we had more new planes assigned to us. At one time, on September 11th, I had to work from 2:00 a. m. until 8:00 a. m. Perhaps this was installing one of the new “joy-sticks.” These “joy-sticks” were small handles with a pistol-grip, that electronically operated the hydraulic controls that in turn operated the three control surfaces of the plane (the ailerons, elevator, and rudders --- two rudders on a B-24). Each control surface had a separate hydraulic unit. To install these joy-sticks, we had to trace wiring throughout the plane, adding new wiring from the joy-sticks to the three hydraulic control units. We did not install these on all planes, and new planes were to have these factory-installed. For some reason, they did not come with all new planes we received from then on ---- and we did not install any when we got overseas. The pilot could fly the plane quite well by using the joy-stick --- controlling it with the regular control column and rudder pedals was a physically-demanding task. (One time when overseas, the pilot of a plane I was flight-testing, let ground crew members on the flight sit in the co-pilot's seat, and fly the plane a bit. That's the first I realized what a tough job flying those

"box-cars" could be.) We heard a few stories of how pilots had been able to bring a plane back from combat by using the joy-sticks, after some of the main control-cables had been shot away.

While at McCook, I received the rank of sergeant, and also began receiving flight pay; the flight pay was a 50% pay raise over the normal pay. Part of our job included flight-testing of the bombsight/autopilot system, and as I was the senior bombsight mechanic and department head, I was given the first option to accept the assignment. Also while at McCook, sometime in early September, the Squadron Adjutant called me in. He asked if I still wanted him to forward my application for flight training; and I told him "No!" He replied "That is what I thought, and that's why I had held it up." I shall always be grateful for his understanding!

As September neared its end, rumors started flying that we were about to ship out; some of the rumors even being that we were going overseas from there. We did receive notice that wives should not follow; no passes if they did, except perhaps on week-ends. Finally we received notice that we would be shipping out on the evening of September 30, 1943. We were also cautioned not to say anything, because as usual, this was to be a secret troop movement. Some "secret troop movement." On that evening of September 30th, we were loaded into military trucks and driven to the edge of McCook, where we got out and formed into marching ranks in full fatigue dress, with back-packs and helmets. At least, none of us had as yet been assigned any weapons. It was a dismal rainy evening, and after the usual waiting, we started marching through town to the railroad station. To make sure that this movement remained a secret, the Army Base Band led us through town, playing military marches loud and clear. I think the whole population of McCook and the surrounding farmland were lining the streets of our route. At the station, Jean and many other wives were waiting for us, for what was to be a last farewell until after the war was over in Europe --- although none of us knew it at that time. We were permitted to break ranks alongside the railroad tracks, where our train was waiting for track clearance. After a long time, in which farewells and last embraces were shared, we were told to board the train. Many of us found windows, and looked at our wives standing out in the rain. After several minutes, we were told we could get off the train again, as track clearance could not be obtained for some time. So off we got, hurrying to the arms of wives again; and Jean remembers that she got bumped in the head by my helmet several times that evening. Of course, it seemed like such a short time before we were ordered back aboard the train; and once again we were permitted to leave for a while. At least twice we were permitted off the train; and perhaps as many as four times, before finally waving a last goodbye as the train rolled onto the main-line tracks.

CHARLESTON ARMY AIR BASE
CHARLESTON, SOUTH CAROLINA

After several days, during which we were certainly heading generally east, we pulled into Charleston, South Carolina, or some nearby town. We soon found ourselves in barracks on the Charleston Air Base. It didn't take us long to realize that this base, although older than McCook's, was not completely ready for the final training job it was to provide. Ames, Pellegrini and I were bunked in the same barracks, which was a good distance from the flight line, or plane parking stations. Thus we were assigned a jeep for our use.

Our Bombsight Officer was Lt. Robinson, who arrived about the same time we did. He showed us an old Quonset hut of pretty good size, and told us we were to set up some bombsight trainers in it, for bombardiers to practice their skills. These trainers, and there were to be two of them, were really just fifteen-foot-high moving scaffoldings, constructed of tubular steel. They moved at a very slow speed to simulate the flight of an airplane at a high altitude, and there was a "target bug" that could also move slowly --- it was to move to either the left or the right to simulate a cross-wind, which would affect the drop-path of bombs. The three of us had to put these platforms together, mount the bombsights on them, and hook them up electronically so that the bombardiers could operate them for training "bomb runs."

We also had to take care of our regular work, and during the several days from October 5th to 22nd, we only had one evening free --- working from early morning until sometimes eleven or twelve at night, with only meal-times off. The one night we did have off, Lt. Robinson took the three of us into Charleston and treated us to a dinner, and then two stage shows, all "on him."

A technical representative from the Sperry Gyroscope Company, which made the bombsights and autopilots, spent a week or so at our Charleston base, giving all the bombsight mechanics some additional and specific training. One day he accompanied me on a flight in one of our planes, to help find and correct a problem with that plane's autopilot. On the flight, only the pilot, co-pilot, and flight engineer were going up with us --- the minimum flight crew. The pilot told us he was going to practice a short-field take-off. We paused at the end of the runway, and both the pilot and copilot held the brake pedals down hard, opening up all four engine's throttles to full speed, letting the engines "rev" up to full speed. The Sperry "feather-merchant" and I were standing right behind the pilot and copilot during this time, along with the flight engineer. The plane shook and rattled something fierce as the engines neared full speed, and I thought the vibrations were going to shake the plane apart. At the pilot's signal, a nod of his head, both he and the co-pilot released the brakes, and the big awkward "bird" lurched forward incredibly quickly for such a plane. Within two-hundred yards, we were in the air, and I remember that it was a real challenge to hold on and keep our feet as the plane accelerated from standing still to the take-off so quickly.

After leveling off at the planned cruising altitude, the pilot switched on the autopilot. The elevator and rudder controls operated fine from the autopilot, but not the ailerons. The Sperry representative went into the bomb-bay where the autopilot aileron control unit was located, and found that the aileron control was not engaged. He returned and told me to go into the bomb-bay and disengage the mechanism, and then re-engage it properly --- he would have the pilot hold the ailerons steady. I hesitated at his order, because our training had taught us NOT to try and engage a hydraulic control unit while in flight --- as a sudden movement of the main control cables could easily catch fingers, perhaps even cutting them off. But as the improperly engaged unit was my doing in the first place, I went into the bomb-bay. I sure was careful as I braced myself on the narrow catwalk, and focused a flashlight on the aileron's hydraulic control unit. I

quickly disengaged the unit; then the risky job of re-engaging had to be done. The pilot did hold the ailerons steady, and I swung the mechanism into proper position, and snapped it into place --- with a great sigh of relief. And that turned out to solve the problem. I learned my lesson, and never did engage another auto-pilot hydraulic control improperly. (The term "feather-merchant" was given to military supply company representatives, because everyone thought they had a pillow-soft job, with no military risks such as soldiers faced.)

One day Mel Ames was assigned to K. P. (Kitchen Police --- work in the Mess Hall), which made all three of us unhappy. We needed all the help we could get at that time --- sometimes even Lt. Robinson pitched in and helped us. Mel reported to the Mess Hall in his stocking feet, and when the Mess Sergeant saw that, he asked Mel what the idea was. Mel told him that he did not have any G. I. (Government Issue) shoes, and that he had been trying to get his size for some time; and that he would not wear his own "civvy" (civilian) shoes for K. P. So the Mess Sergeant sent him back to the barracks, and he joined us in our work after lunch, when we had driven back in the jeep.

At Charleston, we (the 737th Squadron) lost our first plane but I don't know what caused the crash. Because of the confidential nature of the bombsight equipment, the bombsight was returned to us from the wreckage --- in a broken-up condition. There was nothing we could salvage from it, however; so we dismantled it as much as we easily could, and disposed of the pieces. I still have a few of those pieces in a margarine-spread container in the garage.

One of the "advanced training" events of the Charleston stay was for the Group to spend a

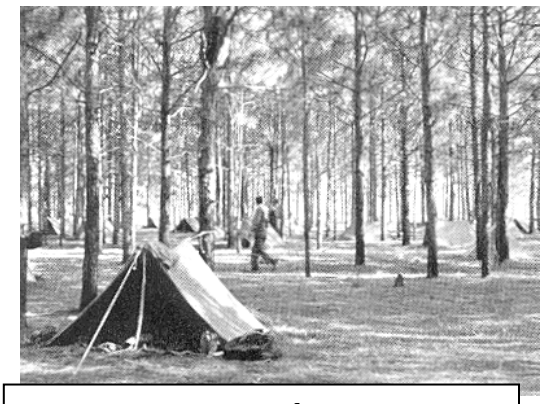


Fig. 8 Pup tents in bivouac area.

Fig. 9 Target shooting with carbines.

week on bivouac, of one squadron per week. At bivouac, we were each issued a shelter-half; and had to find a "buddy" to get the other half, fastening them together to make a small "pup-tent" in which to sleep and keep our belongings. We also were first issued our mess kits, which we were to use all of the time we were overseas. The cooks had to prepare our meals under canvas shelters, cooking on field stoves. Also, several lectures were given, and training in the use of the carbines which were issued to all ground-crew enlisted men. (All officers and flight crew personnel were issued the standard Army Colt .45 automatic pistol.) We spent a few days on the rifle range, learning how to use these light-weight ten-shot semi-automatic weapons. It was an interesting, if uncomfortable, week.

When the rating advancements were posted at the end of October, I found that I had been promoted to staff sergeant, which was to remain my rank for the duration of my stay in the service.

Near the end of November of 1943, it became apparent to all that we were about to be sent overseas --- our training was about complete. Another Group at the base was also about to be

sent overseas, and this fact brought a bit of humor to nearly everyone on the base; as well as the realization that going overseas could not be avoided or put off. It seems that one of the men in this other Group really was fearful of going overseas (I think we all were, really), so much so that he went in to see his commanding officer about it. He told his C. O. that he just couldn't be sent overseas, because he had not been properly trained. Well, the C. O. quickly came to the conclusion that the young man was right, and proceeded to correct his training deficiency. The C. O. had the man given special and individual training alright; by having him dress in full field equipment, including helmet, gas mask, field pack, shovel, rifle (unloaded), etc. The man was put to work outside of the squadron headquarters, digging a fox-hole; and whenever one of the squadron office personnel thought of it, or wanted to, they would step outside and blow a whistle. That was the signal for the "trainee" to dive into the foxhole, where he was to remain until the next whistle was blown. Then he would climb out and resume his digging. Other forms of "training" were invented and given. It seems that the word of this fellow and his "training" reached everyone on the base, and many a jeep or truck would be routed past that squadron headquarters, for a peek at the "trainee." One noontime on our way to lunch from the planes, the three of us (Ames, Pellegrini, and myself) made it a point to drive past slowly. As we did, a non-com sergeant was directing this "trainee" in sneaking up on a coal shed, crawling along on his belly with his rifle at the ready.

Although this must have been terribly embarrassing to that "trainee," it sure made an impression on everyone else on the base, and it is doubtful whether anyone else complained about having to go overseas.

Fig. 10 Most of the ground crew personnel boarding train for Port of Embarkation.

On December 8, 1943, our start for overseas was made---just two years and a day after Pearl Harbor. The ground crew was to travel via a "Liberty Ship," which turned out to be the "Button Gwinette," which was named after one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence. However, each "Section Head" was to fly overseas, on one of his squadron's planes, so that there would be ground crew personnel with the planes (we found out soon enough that the flying crews were to receive additional training enroute to the overseas base). As section head of the bombsight-autopilot section, I was one of those sent by plane. Each of our B-24's had a flying crew of ten men; and each plane had a "crew chief" or head mechanic, who was responsible to keep the plane in flying condition; he would replace engines after a certain number of hours of use, and other mechanical and electrical maintenance.

The plane I flew over in was named “Gentleman Jim” by its crew, because the pilot of the crew was James Corbett; and “Gentleman Jim” was the nickname of another James Corbett, a former heavyweight boxing champion of many years ago. In addition to the ten-man crew and crew chief, the squadron parachute “rigger,” radio repairman, and I were passengers. All of our “luggage” was stored in special plywood “bins” fitted into the four bomb bays of the plane; and in addition I had my set of tools, as did the crew chief and radio repairman. It might be worth mentioning here, that each squadron had at that time twelve planes, and twelve flight crews. Other flying crews would join us overseas, two or three crews sharing each plane so that they did not have to fly into combat every mission.

Fig. 11 Bill beside “Gentleman Jim,”
San Giovannin Air Base¸ Cerignola, Italy.

OVERSEAS JOURNEY

TO SAN GIOVANNI AIR BASE ITALY

The dated paragraphs that follow were copied from a "Diary" I kept of the journey from Charleston Air Base to our overseas base, where we stayed for eighteen months.

Dec. 8, 1943

We left Charleston Air Base at 11:30 a. m. Arrived over New York City at 16:00 (4:00 p. m.), the city being hid by low-hanging clouds. Circled for two and a half-hours, finally coming down in the semi-darkness. At one time we nearly hit another plane head-on, but we pulled up in a heckish hurry when we spotted it. This evening I went into the big city with George Chaplin, a waist gunner, and Herb Spielman, the radio-repairman passenger. Herb used to dance for the Metropolitan Opera Company, so he was our guide. He took us to the Stage Door Canteen, where he left us, as he wished to visit his parents. George and I went in, received our sandwich, coffee, cake and cider, then found a table and began our little feast. I managed to spill the cider on myself, and one of the women there insisted that I get another cup of cider and a sandwich, so who am I to argue?

Dec. 9 to 15, inclusive

I spent several evenings in the U. S. O. in Hempstead, as it is rather close to Mitchel Field where we were based. One evening as I was dancing, a couple of other G. I.'s came down from the cloak room wearing the silliest hats. I didn't laugh more than a few seconds, as I guessed what was about to happen, and it very definitely did. I don't believe I did justice to the one I modeled, but seeing the dancing partner enjoyed it, I guess I was doing my bit to keep up the home front morale. Went to several movies during our stay at Mitchell, seeing Glen Gray (big band leader) in person on one occasion. George and I stuck together throughout, except for the second evening, and then I went in with Lt. Robinson, who had also been selected to fly overseas.

Dec. 16, 1943

Today we saw the last of New York City for what will undoubtedly be quite a long time, and we were lucky enough to have a clear day. Lt. Corbett, our pilot, circled the Statue of Liberty, and it was an excellent view indeed we had of the old girl. Also saw the Empire State Building in daylight, which we were unable to do during our sojourn at Mitchel (this is the correct spelling of the Air Base). As we flew near Washington, the pilot was cautioned to stay completely clear of the Capitol and White House area. But the pilot did fly over the outskirts of nearby Baltimore, at the request of the Navigator. It seems that the navigator had graduated from one of the suburban Baltimore high schools. With no notice to the half-dozen of us in the waist or tail-section of the plane, who were loafing or dozing, the plane went into a sharp and sudden power dive. This really jolted us awake, and we sprang to the waist windows and opened them to see what was going on. In fact, the parachute rigger already had one foot on the window edge ready to bail out, when the plane leveled out and went into a sharp banking climb. Soon the plane turned back, and the steep-dive-and-climb was repeated; and then a third time. By the time of the second dive, someone in the waist had called on the intercom to the pilot, and was told that we were "buzzing" the navigator's old high school. That was great for the navigator in the nose section of the plane, I guess, but it scared the living dickens out of half-a-dozen guys in the back part of the plane.

Later we dropped down at Charleston, and were surprised to see the country- side covered with snow. Stayed overnight, most of us staying at the U. S. O. downtown. I had a meal-and-a-half of spaghetti at the little restaurant which we had patronized while stationed at Charleston.

Dec. 17 to 22, inclusive

Left Charleston for West Palm Beach, Florida, arriving there at noon. George and I went sown-town the evening of the 19th, although we didn't go exactly according to regulations.

Dec. 23, 1943

We put Morrison Field and the States behind us at 2:10 a. m., and landed at Waller Field, Trinidad, British West Indies, about eleven hours later. Passed Puerto Rico and many small islands on the way, and they all looked very beautiful from the air.

Dec. 24, 1943

Arrived at Belem, Brazil, a little after noon, having left Trinidad early in the morning. There was a Christmas party for Army and Navy personnel, and a few American girls from in town gave out Red Cross Xmas packages.

Dec. 25, 1943

What a Christmas! We left Belem at 7:00 a. m. (5:00 a. m. Cleveland time). Were you still asleep at 5:00 a. m., in-laws? Arrived in Natal, Brazil, shortly after 1:00 p. m., and thought we had missed our Christmas dinner. But we hadn't! It was the largest assortment of food I've seen anywhere, for any meal. In the last two days I've seen quite a bit of Brazilian jungle and wilderness.

We stayed over at Natal until January 3, 1944. I spent a few days at the beach with George and Herb, and we saw movies nearly every night. This New Year's Eve was the first that I've stayed up all night; not that it was my wish to stay up, but I just couldn't sleep. I was nearly asleep when Herb reached over at midnight, shook me and said, "Hey, it's 1944! " I told him off in no uncertain terms, but I wish I hadn't started off the New Year cursing a fellow. After that I squirmed all night. My right hip had rheumatism in it, and I only hope it doesn't come back on me later on in life.

(This paragraph is not from the "Diary.")

About this time I decided that I would build a model of a B-24 when I returned home after the War. To do this, I would first have to design my own "model kit. I decided that first I would get the measurements of the plane I was flying on, Number 263, the "Gentleman Jim." To do this, I first made a tape measure of some fiber-tape about 3/4 inch wide. I took a one-foot ruler, and marked each inch on the tape with ink, also numbering each inch. I then started measuring the plane: at each fuselage former or rib, I measured the height, width, and diagonal measurements, writing them in a notebook (which I believe I still have in 1990). Each former or rib was numbered, from the front to the back of the plane. I later did the same with the wings, rudders and elevator, getting those measurements from planes that were partially scrapped near our overseas base. I had also to measure lengths between the formers and ribs, and the measurements of all parts-that I could. I guess some of the flying crew thought that I'd "had it before I even got overseas. There will be further mention of this model B-24 in future parts of this "story."

Jan. 3, 1944

Today we made the long hop from Natal to Dakar, Africa. We turned the auto-pilot on upon leaving Natal, and headed the nose of the plane for Dakar. With a few navigational adjustments due to cross winds, we split the Dakar Air Base nearly in the middle, after a flight of over twelve hours, and a distance of over two thousand miles. An autopilot that can do that is a compliment to the manufacturer. I spent some time in the P. X. at Dakar, buying a few articles which we expect a scarcity of later on. The beer sold at the Dakar P. X. was made of peanuts.

(The following paragraph not in original Diary.)

As we started across the Atlantic from Natal, the pilot was permitted to open our "sealed orders," giving our destination as Italy---after some advanced training in North Africa. After some time on the flight, the pilot ordered everyone on board, all fourteen of us, to move forward in front of the bomb bays; which meant the flight deck, the nose bombardier/navigator section, and the crawl-way around the nose wheel from the flight deck to the nose section. It was really cramped quarters; and one time I went to the waist area to use the latrine, which was just a funnel to a tube leading out of the plane. Then I stayed there until the crew chief came back to have me move forward again. It turned out that the pilot really knew what he was doing, because the tail was a bit heavy. With all of our luggage and tools and spare parts in the bomb bays, the tail was "dragging" a bit, and the more weight in the back, the more it would drag, thus using more fuel. As we did arrive right over Dakar, our destination on the eastern edge of the Atlantic, with only about one-half hour of fuel left, it was sure a good thing that the pilot moved everyone forward. At Dakar I spent some time before supper in the P. X., as mentioned above in the "Diary." When I returned to the barracks I was told by the other enlisted men from the plane that we were to start taking atabrine tablets, a ritual that was to continue daily until we returned from overseas. These tablets were pale yellow and about the size of aspirin tablets, and were to prevent malaria. They had my two tablets for me, and when I asked how they were to be taken, one of the "wise guys" told me to "just chew them up." I did so, to find that atabrine has what must be the bitterest taste known to man; certainly I have never tasted anything so bitter, before or since. I was sure very careful after that to be sure to swallow those pills with a good drink of water.

Jan. 4, 1944

Marrakech is our destination for today. We finally arrived here this afternoon, after flying over wastes of sand and mountains. We passed the last range of mountains at an altitude of 12,000 feet, and we had to look up off our starboard wing to see the snow-capped peak of one mountain. Marrakech is a walled-in city, probably left so from earlier days when wandering tribes plundered cities.

Jan. 5, 1944

Tonight we are stopping at Algiers, and our tent is located about five miles from the air field. It is my turn to guard the plane all night, really just sleeping in it. At 3:00 a. m. of the 6th, I was rudely awakened by an air raid siren. It blared for fifteen minutes steady, not changing pitch a bit. I found out the next morning that it had only been an alert. Many thoughts of what I should do in case the raid materialized into the real thing raced through my mind, and I'm not sure yet what I would have done. The Algiers base showed plenty of signs of bombing, and I guess both sides contributed to it.

Jan 6, 1944

This morning we left for Oudna Field, just outside of Tunis on the edge of the Mediterranean Sea. Landed barely in time to avoid a sudden sleet storm, and got into tents as it really started to pour. This is to be our base for quite a few days, as the flying crews get in some practice in formation flying. Our second night at Oudna, a gasoline heating stove in the next line of tents blew up, and that tent burnt to the ground very fast indeed.

As an afterthought, I must mention that our Group Headquarters at Oudna Field was in what was called the "White House," Field Marshal Rommel's headquarters before he was driven from North Africa.

(The following paragraph not in original "Diary.")

One day while at the Oudna Field, Herb Spielman and I caught an Army truck for a ride into the city of Tunis. I had not shaved since leaving the States, nearly a month earlier. On the way in, we saw some native Tunisians dressed in what looked like dirty, shabby mattress covers, the men wearing beards. As we walked around the city, we came to a barber shop, and got haircuts. I thought that I must look like some of the poor Tunisians we had seen on the way into town, so asked the barber for a shave. He was a Frenchman, and tried to first get me to let him just trim the beard; finally trying for just a little goatee. To humor the guy, I finally permitted him to leave a thin-lined mustache --- which I promptly shaved off as soon as we got back to the field. Near the end of our stay at Oudna, Ralph Pellegrini was flown in from the Group's base in Italy; he was needed to help complete some of our maintenance work.

Jan. 23, 1944

Pellegrini arrived by plane from Italy today, to aid in maintenance of Bombsight-Autopilot equipment before the Group's aircraft joined the Ground Echelon of the 454th Bombardment Group.

SAN GIOVANNI AIR BASE
NEAR CERIGNOLA, ITALY

Jan. 26, 1944 ("Diary" continues)

We left for our permanent base, flying a formation of twelve planes. The nearest town to our base is about five miles southeast of the base, and its name is Cerignola. On the take-off from Oudna, George and I were in the bomb bay. When we had almost reached the end of the runway, while still on the taxi-strip prior to take-off, everyone on the flight deck rushed out through the bomb bay doors. When I heard the engines being cut off, and saw the pilot go out the front bomb bay with a scared look on his face, I thought our plane had caught fire. George went out a waist window, and I went out the front bomb bay. As I got out, I saw a plane coming in on three engines --- nicely skimming over the tangle of planes on the runway. The reason for everyone piling out was that the plane coming in was headed right for us. Saw Pantelleria and Sicily on the way over, and the rugged beauty of Italian mountains. Sicily had many farms that looked very nice from the air. The Group buzzed a bunch of American tanks somewhere in Italy's interior. We arrived at our field about 3:00 this afternoon. We found mud, and plenty of it. Most of the enlisted ground personnel were sleeping beneath shelter halves, and what rotten homes they are.

(End of "Diary" for a time)

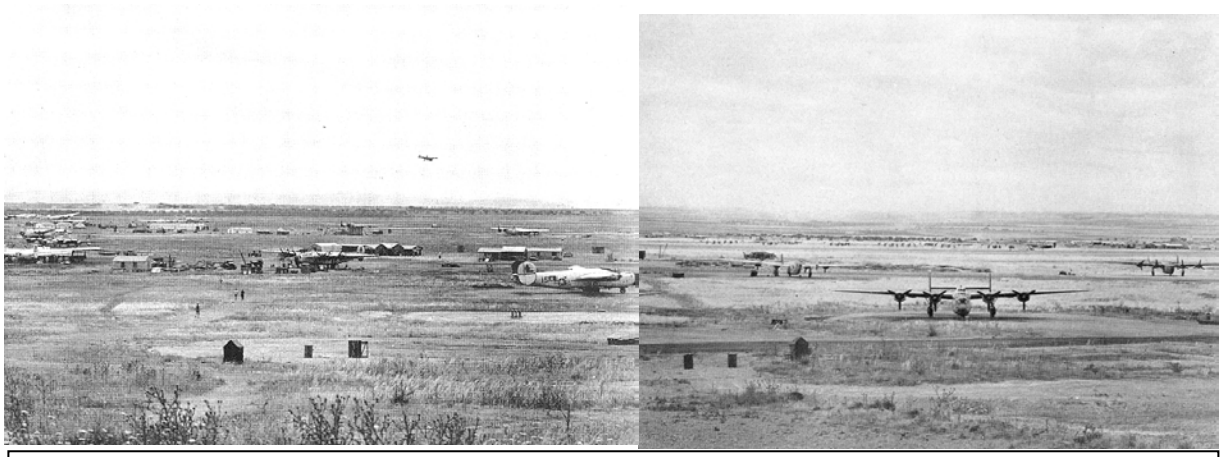


Fig. 12 "The Line" at San Giovanni Air Base, home of the 454th Bomb Group.
The 737th Squadron area is at the left; 738th Squadron area is at the right.

Our first task on arrival at Cerignola was to set up our shelter halves, the rest of the ground crew having of course already done so. They had arrived there some time ahead of the air crews and the few of us ground personnel who had flown over with the air crews. It was wet, rainy and cold at that time of the year, and the shelter halves were quite uncomfortable quarters---but only for the time being, fortunately. There were a limited number of six-man pyramid tents for the flight crews. A few of the fellows grouped to either in fours, thus getting the four shelter halves to close in both ends; with two shelter halves, one end only would be closed in; the other being open. One particular group of four men also decided that to get room to sit up in their tent, they would dig about one foot deep inside of their four shelter halves. This was a great idea until the

real Italian rainy winter set in in earnest; then their blankets and anything else they had stored in that one-foot-deep "room" ended up in a one-foot-deep pond.

After a few weeks, more pyramid tents arrived for the rest of the squadron personnel. Groups of six men would obtain a new tent from the supply room, and pitch it wherever they wished in the squadron area. There were no streets or any other patterns to go by. So it ended up kind of a of a "topsy-turvy" sort of a tent city. Later paths would be made by the men taking the shortest routes to such places as latrines, mess hall, and their particular workshops. It should be--mentioned that the 454th base was set up in quite-flat farmland; and that the 455th Group was just across the twin runways, one runway for each Group.

Fig. 13 Air view of the town of Cerignola, the Cathedral being the dominating feature of the town. Cathedrals were often the most imposing buildings in Italian towns.

Fig. 14 Cerignola Cathedral

Fig. 15 Teatro Mercantile, Cerignola Opera House. It was the Red Cross Music Hall during Allied Occupation.

Ames, Pellegrini and I got together with three Armament Section personnel, and got our pyramid tent. We set it up on the "outskirts" of the squadron tent city. The three Armament men were Nellis Webber, from near Steubenville, Ohio, along the Ohio River; Frank Pugh, a former auto salesman, and about ten years older than the rest of us; and Lester Rowe, a one-quarter-blood Indian; a big, easy-going fellow. It wasn't too long before we set up a heating stove in the tent, with a chimney through the roof --- the chimney made of one-gallon food cans wired together. The fuel for the stove was gasoline, piped in from a small tank outside, and allowed to drip into a one-gallon can half-filled with gravel. This burner was covered with half of a 25-gallon oil drum. When the burner was lit, after opening the valve from the tank, the fire heated the oil drum half which in turn made the temperature in the tent bearable, if not real cozy. I recall one night as we were playing cards near the stove, which was set up near the center of the tent, that someone noticed that the chimney had gotten red hot. Soon sparks landed on the roof of the tent, which started smoldering a bit. We all rushed out, and gave Pellegrini, the smallest of our six, the task of climbing up the roof of the tent with a can of water to put out the smoldering embers before any real damage was done. Needless to say, the fire was turned down immediately, and never permitted to get that hot again.

Fig. 16 Right: L. to R.: Lester Rowe, Bill, Frank Pugh in front of our tent in Italy.

Our six bunks were arranged along the edges of the tent, one on each side of the doorway, two on the opposite wall, and one on each side. Mine was on the one side, nearest the flight line and runways.

Ralph Pellegrini spoke fluent Italian, his parents having been born in Italy and emigrating to Brooklyn, New York as adults. Shortly after settling into our pyramid tent, Ralph visited an Italian farm about a half-mile from our tent. In visiting with the Italian farm family, he was invited to dinner the next Sunday afternoon; to also bring our four-man bombsight section personnel. We put on our olive-drab dress uniforms on Sunday, and walked to the farm with Ralph as our guide and interpreter. We were warmly welcomed, as all Italians were tired of war, and were treated well by the American soldiers.

The home was of a stone construction, probably made of "tufa" blocks. The living quarters were three or four steps above ground level. The roof covered not only the living quarters, but also a ground-level dirt-floored section that served as a barn.

We were served a spaghetti meal, with some kind of a meat sauce --- what kind of meat, we didn't care to ask. The spaghetti was made of coarse flour, and was like American wide noodles. Home-made wine was offered, and as I did not drink (at that time), I hesitated to accept a glass. Ralph told me that to refuse would be an insult to them, so I did drink some. A few chickens roamed around the floor, unheeded by the family.

After the meal, all went outside, where I took a colored-slide photograph of the family. A copy of that photo is on the following page.

Fig. 17 Italian family that invited us to a Sunday dinner, near the 454th Bomb Group base near Cerignola, Italy; c. April, 1944. Ralph Pellegrini is standing at the left, Mel Ames kneeling next to Ralph. Lt. Robinson is at far right, back to camera. Notice that in front of Ames, the farmer is holding a pig that is sitting up; and next to him, is a young man holding a sheep.

Our first "mess hall" or kitchen/cafeteria was just a large tent; in fact, two tents: one for storage and one for the actual cooking. The meals were quite meager for the first weeks, and we tried to supplement them as best we could. One day Ames was on K. P., and as we ate our noon meal against the back wall of the food supply tent, Ames came out to visit with us a bit. He returned to his duties, and soon there was a thud just inside the wall of the supply tent where we were sitting. We made some mention of "something must have fallen" for the benefit of others; and soon there was a second thud. We then reached under the edge of the tent to retrieve Ames' "requisitions"--- a loaf or two of bread, a can of catsup, and a bag of dry macaroni. That afternoon we cooked the macaroni and served it to ourselves, adding catsup to it. Not much, you may think, but to us it was a great addition to the small meals we were getting then.

Our bunks were first made of straw placed inside of mattress covers, laid on the ground. After several bombing missions, we were able to obtain enough "fin cases" for everyone to have his own bunk up off the ground --- two fin cases wide and five fin cases long. Some of the fin cases were used for chairs, and four or six were put together to form a table for writing or playing cards. Early in our stay there would be a real competition to get these fin cases; and having three armament men (who really were the "bomb jockeys" that loaded the bombs into the planes) gave us an advantage. These fin cases were heavy sheet-metal made to hold the bomb-fins for shipment from the factory to the air bases. They had four angle-iron "legs" that protected each wing of the fin; and a solid heavy metal bottom so the fins could be stacked for shipment.

After some time, some of the bomb loads were “fragmentation” bombs. These were anti-personnel weapons, or used to spread a lot of shrapnel upon impact. These “frag” bombs were shipped from the factory in tin-lined wooden crates, about four-and-a-half feet long and about ten inches square. The tin liners were really a tin box with a separate lid that was fastened on to protect the bombs from moisture. The wooden crates were made of 3/4 inch thick wood, and the top of the crate, or lid, was fastened on with three hinges. When it became known that frag bombs were to be loaded, there would be a real competitive rush to salvage the cases and liners. There was just no other wood to be had, for any number of purposes in making our lives more comfortable. Again, our three bomb-jockey tent-mates were a real help. Too, they had a little pick-up-type truck (called a weapons carrier) that they could use on occasion. When they told us they were to load frag bombs, we three bombsight mechanics would get their truck, and meet them at the planes they were to load.

After stacking up our take of crates, the next day would be spent in taking the crates apart, being careful to save every nail, and every screw from the hinges and fastening hasp; there were no nails to be had overseas. Soon we lifted the four walls of our tent to a horizontal position, and used the frag bomb crate “lumber” for new walls to the tent. This expanded the inside of the tent about four feet on each side, making it much roomier. We also saved some washers we had found, which had been used to fasten the luggage bins of plywood inside the bomb bays on our flight overseas. We used these washers for poker chips during our stay in Italy.

Fig. 18 Our six tent-mates splashing along a base road in the Armament weapons carrier.

After the tent-enlarging had been completed, I decided to build myself a desk for my section of the tent to keep it simple, I just took a frag bomb case the way it was, and left the hinged lid on it. I cut one side of a second frag case in half, and used it for legs, nailing it to the ends of my frag-case desk. The inside of the lid became my writing surface, along with the side it was hinged to --- a drop-leaf desk of sorts. I then built some pigeon-holes into the ends of this desk, and I was set up fine. Electricity soon was added to all of the tents by our engineering section. So each tent had one light bulb; and sometimes extra lights were added. Now we had heat and lights --- but still no running water!

In early April of 1944 I received a package of balsa wood from Jean, and she had sent just what I asked for --- different thicknesses (of 1/16”, 1/8”. and 1/4”). I wanted to lay out all of the parts for the model B-24, cut them out while overseas, and then ship the finished parts back to Jean to keep until I returned, when I intended to complete the model. By the time the balsa wood arrived, I had obtained all the necessary measurements, and reduced them to the ¾” to 1’ foot scale I had decided upon. Then my desk and small swinging lamp over it came in handy, as I drew out each rib and former. Following that, each rib and former had to be traced onto the balsa wood and then cut out and properly notched for assembly later. This task kept me busy for many hours, and helped keep up my morale by looking to a future time after the war. The cut-out parts were mailed back to Jean on August 25th of 1944 --- my 23rd birthday. I did return after the war, of course, and sometime during the following five years I did begin construction of that B-24 model. I did not complete it, however; but there are a few pictures in one of my photo

albums of the plane, as far as I got with it. When I started my teaching career in Arcadia, Ohio, the model moved with us, where it sat un-worked on for another year; and then moved with us to Fostoria for another year of no progress. Finally, in moving to Avon from Fostoria, it was badly damaged en route, and I reluctantly burned the remains. I still have those original measurements and plans, including all rib and former drawings; and also a few parts from the original work.

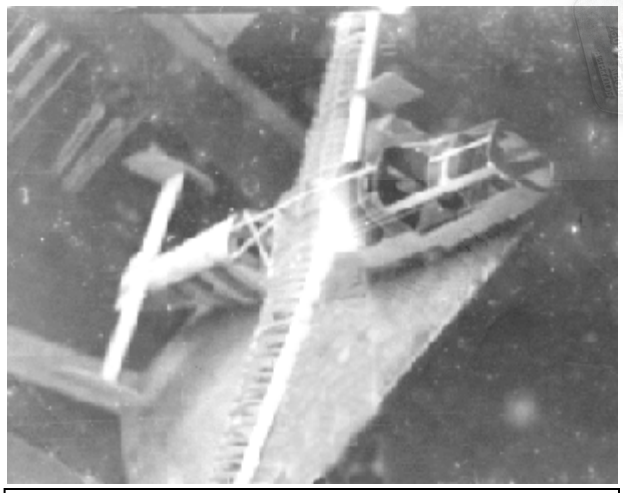


Fig. 19 Model of B-24, as far as completed.

Some weeks after settling in at our San Giovanni Air Base outside of Cerignola, and while our mess hall was still in a tent, with eating being done outside wherever we could find a place, rain or shine, we had a real breakfast treat. The cooks had their field stoves still set up outside, and this particular morning cooked bacon and fresh eggs to order --- two eggs per man. Those were the first fresh eggs we had seen in months, and I believe the cooking-to-order was a step to boost our morale---and it certainly did just that!

Several months later, fresh eggs would become available on occasions. The first time that eggs became available then, Ames found out about it the night before, and he had the CQ (Charge of Quarters) non-com wake him up with the flight crews; and he then went to early breakfast with them. They were permitted to have all the eggs they wanted, and Ames had more than a dozen that time. He repeated that procedure one other time some months later. On that second occasion, I went along with him, but had only four eggs. It wasn't worth it to get up that early.

(The following paragraph copied from my "Diary")

Our first mission was on February 8, 1944. The bomb load was ten 500-pound demolition bombs per plane; the target, Orvieto Airfield, just above Rome. This airfield was taken by Allied troops on or about June 8th, 1944. This first mission (and most others, I find) our planes were escorted by a strong fighter force. No flak (anti-aircraft fire) or enemy fighters were encountered, so we lost no planes. Since then we've sent up plenty of missions, today making our 97th, with the take-off time at 3:15 a. m., and the planes hitting just ahead of an invasion force in southern France.

On April 3, 1944 the new 737th Squadron Mess Hall opened. It had been constructed of native "tufa" block by Italian civilian labor; tufa blocks being solid stone blocks about the size of American concrete blocks --- but of a very soft material.

Some time after we were operating out of the San Giovanni base, we were shipped several new aircraft. At that time of the war, each plane was shipped with its own bombsight and autopilot installed. Later, only the autopilots would be standard equipment; as bombsights would be sent out only on lead or alternate-lead planes of each squadron. As these new planes arrived, we had to remove and check each bombsight in our shop. Lt. Robinson got us a weapons carrier (light pick-up truck) to use for this work. The three of us and Lt. Robinson were at our temporary shop with some of the equipment, and the Lt. was visiting with some other officers somewhere nearby, while the three of us went about our work. We had to get going, to get supper before the mess hall closed, or to get some equipment back to the planes, or perhaps both. We couldn't find Lt. Robinson, and after waiting as long as I thought we could, I drove the

three of us to chow, and we completed our work after that. The fact that it was raining pretty hard did not help Lt. Robinson's disposition when he found that we had gone, and he had to walk the half-mile back to our squadron area. He was quite furious and really chewed me out. He also had me put on guard duty, but because I was a staff-sergeant, he had to be content with my being assigned as Sergeant-of-the-Guard. For this I was assigned a jeep, to take the relief guards to their posts on the flight line --- the only place we had guards on the whole base. I found out later that he had to argue quite strongly to get me on the guard duty, as the squadron adjutant didn't think a staff sergeant, especially of a skilled position, should do guard duty. I had to be on duty throughout the night for one week straight, from 6:00 p. m. until 6:00 the next morning. Most of that time I just sat in the squadron orderly room (office headquarters) to answer any phone calls, in addition to taking the relief guards around, every four hours. Usually each night I would also drive the Officer of the Day around to inspect the guard posts.

During that week of guard duty, several more new planes arrived, and that put a real burden on Pellegrini and Ames. As the section's weapons carrier had been taken back, and I had a jeep assigned to me for the whole week, as sergeant of the guard, I would help them by taking them and equipment around; but I would not help in the actual maintenance work. During this pressure on the other two, Lt. Robinson went to the squadron adjutant and tried to get me taken off guard duty. I guess that this didn't go over too well with the adjutant --- first arguing to get me onto guard duty, and then to get me off a few days later. And I didn't get off! And Lt. Robinson got a chewing out from the adjutant!

(The following are two quotes from letters to Pop)

"2-14-44: There is so much in my future and so little in my present, that to me this war is just a by-path on my road of life."

"5-25-44: Today I caught a softball game, the first softball I had played since entering the Army. It did feel good, but I believe that was the only ball playing until the following spring."

(The following copied from my "Diary.")

On May 31st a plane of another group came in for a landing, as he was low on gas. While making his approach, an engine conked out, so up he went again. Again he made an approach, and another engine died. This time when he had gained altitude, he decided to abandon the plane. The navigator's 'chute failed to open, and he fell through a tent in the 736th Squadron area. He was still a little alive when the medics got to him, but he soon died. The two waist gunners refused to jump, probably having seen the 'chute failing to open. The other two engines were beginning to cut out, and the pilot finally called to the waist gunners on the inter-phone, and said, "Do as you please, but I'm bailing out!" He jumped, and a few seconds later the two gunners also jumped out. Practically as soon as their 'chutes opened, their feet hit the ground. A little less altitude, and 'chutes wouldn't have helped any. When the plane hit, it flew apart, but as it was out of gas it didn't burn.

So far I've seen eight planes, from distances, burning and then a bomb going off shortly after. Two of them collided in mid-air upon returning to their base. Know of at least three others crashing upon return.

(The following is a quote from a letter to Pop.)

"6-6-44: Like the rest of the Allied world, the 454th was awaiting the invasion of Europe by Allied forces. And here it is at long last."

(The following copied from my "Diary.")

Several tons of our bombs have been dropped in the Adriatic Sea, and it seems a shame to throw so much money away. As of June 19, 1944, we've had 38 planes, and now have a remainder of 20. Of the 18 missing, three have been sent on detached service, leaving 15 that have crashed, blown or burnt up. Our first loss to enemy action was #225, lost over Spain. The crew was treated excellently, and lived lives of civilians. They all returned to our base between the 15th and 20th of June. #798, our first all-silver (unpainted) plane, came to a very tragic end. I saw that one spin in, and it crashed about a hundred yards from me. One engine was cut off, and the pilot had wheels and flaps down. The dead engine caught my eye, which is why I happened to see it go down. The plane was going slowly, and was up only about five hundred feet or so. The pilot banked it to the left, to return to a landing, but in too steep a bank for its speed. To top it off, he should have banked it to the right, as the two engines on the starboard wing overpowered the one running engine on the port side, causing the plane to go into a spin. As soon as the plane hit, everyone ran towards it, as it was burning just a short ways down the slope leading to the parking area. That slope saved many tents in the area a few minutes later. As everyone was running towards the plane, someone remembered its bomb load and yelled a warning. What a mad retreat! I dropped into the nearest fox-hole with a half-dozen officers and men, the rank at that time meaning less than nothing. As this particular fox-hole was a bit nearer the plane than I was when it crashed, and what with 2-1/2 tons of 500-pound bombs in those flames, we all figured we were a little too close for comfort. We expected all ten bombs to let go at once. A few hundred feet further away, I was just falling to my hands and knees when what I thought was all hell broke loose. I was rudely flung to the ground by the concussion, and turned in time to see the flames from the explosion. The flame was well over a hundred yards in height, and I noticed in the billowing smoke a double red and a red-green flare go off. What little things a person notices at such a time! At that same moment I became aware of a loud whistling, and looked up to see a piece of iron casting hurling itself towards me end over end. It was plenty high up when I first saw it, and so I stayed put. On my hands and knees, of course, and ready to scamper from under said projectile. After what seemed ages, it hit within ten yards of me, and bounded high in the air. All during this five-minute period, 50-caliber ammunition was popping like pop-corn, and long after the bomb blew. While I was crouching, Ames also heard a whistling, and so stopped and turned to see what caused it. As he turned, a flaming generator dropped just about where he would have been if he hadn't stopped. He is sure grateful for his good ears!

We've seen or heard well over a dozen bomb explosions since then. Saw two that crashed in mid-air, as they burnt on the ground.

(Still copied from my "Diary.")

On June 22nd we were standing outside of our tent, when a bomb blew at the end of the runway. We found out later that a plane had gone past the end of the runway, never getting off the ground. Eight were killed outright, but three were able to get out of the wreckage after the explosion of the 1,000-pounder. Two were able to walk, and the third crawled under a wing, having one leg blown off. The Group Engineering Officer ran in and dragged the third fellow out from under the wing. Unfortunately, he died later.

Fig. 20 Right: See above paragraph.

.

June 27th we lost another of our original planes, "Ragged but Right." Our Wing lost 25: the 454th lost 3; the 455th lost 10. The target was Vienna, and one of the 455th's planes knocked down nine Nazi fighters.

July 7th our target was Breslow (New Berlin), and the Group took its heaviest loss to date. We lost "Sassy Lassy" and "Buffalo Gal." We still have four original planes left, three of them having over 45 missions each. "Star Dust" is the first to reach 50, now having 51. Several crews are nearing their total necessary missions in order to get a return trip to the States, and some have finished them (I believe the necessary number is 50). Today I went to Foggia's Flagella Theater, and saw the original stage show, "This Is the Army." Irving Berlin sang "Oh, How I Hate To Get Up in the Morning," "White Christmas," "Alexander's Rag-Time Band," and his latest tune, "When the War Is Done." . He sang several choruses, and if it hadn't been for a few WAC's and nurses in the audience, he would have sung a few much "better" choruses. It was the best entertainment I've seen in any line, and I appreciated it thoroughly. While in Foggia I bought Jean a cameo brooch, and a five-cameo bracelet. As we returned from Foggia we saw the result of a head-on collision of two 2-1/2-ton Army trucks. Some must have been hurt, but we didn't see any ambulance.

There were no real Army P. X.'s (Post Exchanges) overseas, of course; but we were provided some luxuries of sorts through the Squadron P. X., such as it was --- operating out of a regular pyramid tent. On a certain day each week, we were permitted to buy our rationed goodies. They included five packs of cigarettes (per week); two bottles of beer; two bottles of Coca Cola; and one bar of soap. There were also some candy bars, and a few other things. Not smoking and not drinking beer, I found that my ration of those items were tradable commodities. I was always able to trade a beer for a Coke with no problem; and sometimes I could get an extra Coke for a pack of cigarettes. The brands of cigarettes were limited: we usually got a pack of Old Golds, Lucky Strikes and Camels. The Old Golds were not at all popular, so I would often give up my Luckies or Camels for the Old Golds of other guys. Usually I would either give the cigarettes away for the nickel-a-pack that they cost, or trade for a candy bar or Coke. Nellis Webber of our tent usually traded me his Old Golds for my Camels or Luckies, until I found out that he was taking them into town and selling them on the black market for one or two dollars a pack; the Old Golds were not able to be sold for nearly that high a figure.

Most of the men on the base would have their laundry done by some Italian woman or family. Because Pellegrini spoke Italian very well---I think his parents had been born in Italy---he found a young Italian teen-age boy who would collect our laundry once a week, and take it to his mother to wash; and then bring it back to camp. Now that I think about it, Italian civilians could come and go on the base just about as they wished; the base was not at all fenced in or secured with guards. We always had to furnish soap with our laundry, as soap was an impossible item for the Italians to buy in their stores during those war years. We knew that we always gave more soap than was needed for our laundry, but as the cost of the laundry was just a dollar or so each week, we didn't mind helping an Italian family out a little bit. The only soap we had to give them was a bar of regular bath soap, such as Lifebuoy, Palmolive, or Ivory.

During the summer of 1944, the mess sergeant planned to treat the 737th to ice cream, but the ice cream freezer broke, or ice was not available. The ice cream mix was already mixed, and no way to freeze it --- until someone came up with the solution. Then the mix was hurriedly delivered to one of our planes, and the flight crew took off, climbing to well over 20,000 feet altitude. The kitchen help that went along stirred the mixture during flight, and as soon as it was

frozen, the temperature at that altitude being well below freezing, the pilot quickly returned to the base, and we did get our treat

Also in the summer of 1944, July 1st to be exact, the 454th Bomb Group had a First Anniversary Celebration. I don't remember much about the celebration--- and probably only attended the special dinner and the Special Service Show. A copy of the cover of the "Souvenir Program" of that celebration follows.

454th
BOMBARDMENT GROUP

JULY
1944
ITALY

SOUVENIR PROGRAM

For some reason I went off flight pay shortly after reaching our San Giovanni base. Then I went back onto flight pay in July of 1944. Some of the moments of flight interest to me follow, with dates as remembered.

Shortly after Allied troops had captured and liberated the Italian capital city of Rome, the pilot of a plane I was flying on, "Yamacraw Lou," flew the plane over the city of Rome, and we really got a birds-eye view of the Colloseum and Vatican City, from an altitude of less than a thousand feet.

(The following paragraph is copied from my "Diary" about that flight.)

> July 16, 1944: Today I flew in "Yamacraw Lou," and the pilot flew over Casino and then continued on over Rome. I was much impressed with the ruins of Montecasino Abbey, although I didn't even see the ruins of the town. There was no sign of a stray shell or bomb crater on the steep hill supporting the Abbey, which reflects favorably on the marksmanship of our artillery and dive bombers in eliminating the Abbey. (The Germans had used the Abbey as both an observation post and artillery base which hindered the Allied drive on the move toward Rome and the northern part of Italy.)

On one of the test flights with a hot-rod young pilot, we ended up flying quite low. I cannot remember what had happened, but that some part of our flight plan was not permitted. The pilot then flew along very low, and at one point I looked out of a waist window to see that we were flying very low over a country lane. An Italian farmer was trying to control his team of horses or mules, which had become frightened by the noise of the plane coming up behind them.

On one test flight I was to test the operation of the bombsight and autopilot in unison. The bombsight was intended to control the flight path of the plane when the bombardier was on the bomb run and actually aiming the plane over the target. By the turning of a directional control knob on the bombsight, the vertical cross-hair of the sight was to stay on the target. The sight had another control to keep the horizontal cross-hair on the target. The vertical cross hair was the critical one as far as the coordination of the bombsight and autopilot went. On this particular plane, there had been a question as to the coordination of the two units working properly, which is why I went up to flight-test our ground adjustments to the bombsight. When we had reached the proper altitude, the pilot told me to go forward and get the bombsight turned on---this after we had been operating the autopilot for some time, and the pilot's autopilot controls were operating the plane properly. Forward I went, crawling through the tight space past the nose wheel and into the nose section, usually occupied by the bombardier and navigator during a regular bombing mission; either of them acting as the nose turret gunner, when not actually navigating or bombing. In this test flight, neither of these two were along, so I had the whole nose section to myself. I hooked up my earphones and throat microphone, and told the pilot that I was turning on the bombsight, (a Sperry model), and would let it get warmed up a few minutes. When I felt it was ready to operate properly, I called to the pilot, and he replied that he was throwing the switch to give me control of the airplane, and to go ahead and fly it wherever I wished. Of course, if anything had gone wrong he could have disconnected the bombsight from the autopilot electrically, turned off the autopilot completely, or in the case of a last resort, disengage the autopilot controls from the plane's control surfaces with the mechanical emergency-disconnect system. It was one of those rare summer days, with beautiful soft white fluffy clouds scattered about the very blue sky. When he told me to "go ahead, I had control of the plane," the pilot really "made my day." The "aiming" control of the bombsight was a round knob about two inches in diameter, and at least a quarter of an inch thick --- a good one to get a grip on easily. At first I started looking through the bombsight's telescopic aiming lens, but soon gave that up, as I could not enjoy the view of those lovely clouds and the blue sky. So I just knelt there over the bombsight, and gently turned the control knob slowly to left or right, playing a game of hide-and-seek with the cottony clouds. I made it a point to fly among the clouds, without actually going through any of them, the plane banking gracefully. It was a peaceful feeling as the plane soared quietly and smoothly along. I had a blissful ten to fifteen minutes before the pilot interrupted my idyllic trance, asking how the bombsight was functioning. I then came out of my dream-world to reply that it was working beautifully, and had obeyed my every command.

(The following indented paragraphs copied from my "Diary.")

July 21, 1944:

I started a three-day pass this noon. Left camp at 9:30 a.m. passing through Cerignola on my way to Foggia. A Limey (British) weapons carrier provided me with transportation from Cerignola to Foggia, and I stopped there long enough to get a cup of coffee and a few doughnuts in the American Red Cross Enlisted Men's Club. Caught a ride in a jeep half-way through the hills to Naples, and a couple of fighter squadron boys were along. A couple of their buddies went past in a Limey truck, and as they recognized the two in the jeep, they stopped the Limey and the three of us transferred to the Limey job. This ride took us as far as Ciscerta, where we had eggs and chips at four bucks per each. We each had a double portion, though. The others bought some wine, and we caught a G. I. 2-1/2-ton out of Ciscerta. The driver downed some of the wine-- and that nearly cost us our lives. What with the purchase of five additional bottles, our driver got to feeling pretty good by dark. At the top of a stretch of down-hill hairpin turns, he started in. The first, and tightest, turn of the whole trip, he picked as a spot to pass a

truck. Then he raced into each blind hairpin turn. On a straight stretch between turns, he got up to a speed of about 45 per. A long flat-bed wreckage trailer was coming up at us, and our driver kept crowding over towards it. Just as we began to breathe easier, thinking ourselves safely past, he managed to nick our front fender on the rear wheel of the trailer. After getting out of the mountains, the driver began passing a P. X. convoy, barely skimming a line of trees on the left side of the road. He was so close to the trees, that a couple of guys sitting on the left side of the truck moved to the right side, feeling a bit safer there. It was a little after ten that night, when I got off with a couple of other G. I.'s, and we were still about a hundred miles from Rome, our destination. They had a "Wop" with them, who worked at their Quartermaster base, and his home was in Rome. An English officer picked us up and took us into Rome. We appreciated that ride very much! The "Wop" couldn't wake anyone at his home, so we slept in a passenger car at the railroad station.

The next morning I visited the Colloseum, Forum, and Vatican. Also Garibaldi's Monument, and its "Best View of Rome." In the afternoon I went on a Red Cross tour, and the guide was an Italian who spoke very good English. He took us to the Colloseum, Vatican, Pantheon, and Catacombs, and explained them to us very fully, as follows:

("Diary" continued)

ST. PETER'S CATHEDRAL --- AND THE VATICAN

The Vatican City is guarded by 500 Swiss guards, and they inherit the right to that guardianship. After spending two years in the service, they return to Switzerland. They appear as noble figures in their Royal Blue uniforms.

Fig. 21 Left to right: Bill and another G. I. on roof of Vatican, Dome of St. Peter's.

St. Peter's Cathedral is a monument to the Apostle, St. Peter, and it took well over one hundred fifty years to complete. The present Cathedral is the second, the first having burned on the same site. It marks the spot where the notorious Emperor Nero had St. Peter crucified, which happened to be the finishing line of Nero's well-known chariot races. Atop the colonnade immediately before the Cathedral are 140 marble statues. In this large piazza, up to 200,000 people gather to listen to the Pope give his blessing on Easter, Christmas, and other Holy days. Facing this piazza, and on the top of the Cathedral, are marble statues of the twelve Apostles, each one being twenty feet high.

As a person enters the Cathedral, a window at the far end catches the eye. This window is not stained glass, but Egyptian alabaster marble. The Pope's pulpit is covered by a canopy which is supported by hand-carved one-piece columns of solid bronze. There are forty chapels in the massive structure, and it can accommodate up to 80,000 people at once. Michelangelo designed and built the dome of the gigantic architectural wonder, and much of his work is in the Vatican Museum, which has been closed during the War. There are no paintings in the Cathedral, but copies of many famous ones are made of mosaic --- small bits of colored stone blended together. These mosaics are really masterpieces, and are said to be very exact copies of the paintings they represent. These little pieces of stone that are used in the creation of the mosaics are manufactured within the Vatican City, and in 22,000 shades of color.

THE PANTHEON

The Pantheon was erected in 27 B. C. by Augustus Caesar in memory of Marcus Agrippa, the emperor's famous general. The Pantheon is the first Roman structure made of bricks and mortar, all previously-made buildings being made of marble or granite. These bricks were covered on the outside with large slabs of marble, as were the bricks of the Colosseum. (The marble was stolen from both of these pagan structures by Christians, and were used for five palaces and three churches.) There are several forty-foot columns in front, of solid Egyptian granite. How those large pieces of granite were transported from Egypt in that day is a mystery to me. The door is the original one, of hand-carved bronze, and it weighs twenty-seven tons. This door is approximately thirty feet high, fifteen feet wide, and eighteen inches thick. The Pantheon is the best-preserved of all old Roman buildings, the roof being the only part to ever receive any attention. The Pantheon is the same size as St. Peter's dome, and Michelangelo copied his plans from the Pantheon. Upon one wall is an original fresco 500 years old, very well preserved. The only light is admitted through a hole in the roof about twenty feet across. The tomb of the great artist Raphael is in the Pantheon, and the only monument to him is a bust made by one of his pupils.

THE COLLOSEUM (Collossal Structure)

Its real name is the Roman Amphitheater. It took eight years to construct, from 72 to 80 A. D. The reason for the speed of construction was the procurement of 40,000 slaves from Jerusalem, procured by Emperor Titus during the war with the Jews The mammoth arena seated 70,000 spectators; the seats were made of marble, and built up in five balconies or tiers. The top tier was standing room only, for the common, or poor, people. The next lower was for the women; the next for the soldiers; the next for the nobility; and the lowest tier was for the senators and consuls, and their families. There were two balconies which extended from this lowest or first tier: the one on the south being for the emperor and his family; the one on the north for the Vestal Virgins. In the heat of July and August, a pure bright colored silk canopy was hung over the entire amphitheater, a hole being left in the center to permit light to enter. There were originally 260 statues inside the structure, and 160 outside.

The purpose of the Colloseum was to provide an arena wherein Christians were tortured and slain; there were 24 prison cells in which men, women and children were all thrown together, to stay until the time of their torture, or they just died from their filth. In this arena "professional" gladiators fought. These "professionals" were Christians, and the victor was allowed to go free; in order for there to be a victory, one of them had to die. Twice a week the arena was flooded with water from the nearby Roman Aqueduct, and mock naval battles would ensue between Christians.

We also saw Mussolini's favorite balcony, from which he made most of his speeches. It's on the side of the Venetian Palace, over-looking the Venetian Square. Nearby, the monument to King Victor Emanuel and the tomb of Italy's Unknown Soldier are as one.

Just a stone's throw from the Colloseum is the Arch of Constantine, and the Palatine Hill lies just beyond. Upon the Palatine Hill is the Temple of Venus, or, rather, its remains, and also the remains of the old Roman Baths, which covered quite a lot of ground. We passed through the old city walls on the ancient Appian Way. There are 24 miles of these thirty-foot walls with their monstrous gates and watchtower

THE CATACOMBS

74,000 bodies of Christians lie buried in these Catacombs. There are eight miles of twisting, crossing passages, so naturally we kept pretty close together. It reminded me of the Cave of the Winds in Colorado, although it wasn't as cool.

August 15, 1944:

This morning we sent up our planes for the fourth straight day, the take-off time being about 3:15 a. m. They dropped their bombs in the vicinity of Toulon, France at 7:30 a. m., and the crews reported that there was a black ribbon of boats from the island of Corsica to the beach near Toulon. Another invasion, and this time we had a direct part in it. We've had six or seven practice missions at night during the past two weeks, in preparation for this morning's raid. During the routine of take-off, we lost #395, and with it our last aerial photographer, as the plane blew up in mid-air. We have 16 planes left; and have had 42.

August 17, 1944:

Today we lost "Yamacraw Lou" on the squadron's 98th mission. Also lost Lt. Col. Gunn, who was Group C. O. for about a week only. Later he was to be the man behind the air evacuation of captured American airmen that were shot down in the area of Ploesti, and were then prisoners in Romania. After the majority of the planes of both the 454th and 455th Groups had landed, one came in with only the left main gear and the nose wheel down. He came in nicely, holding the right wing up just as long as possible, cutting the engines from right to left. Very beautiful landing, and everyone seeing that landing paid the pilot either a silent or oral tribute, although of course he didn't know it; many of us shouted and clapped our hands. (One of my "Vignettes of the Liberators" has more of this story; and may also be found in the 454th's book of "Memories," along with a response from the pilot of that aircraft.) Several planes came in with no brakes, and so opened parachutes as they hit, to slow themselves up --- the parachute harness being strapped to the waist gun mount. One came in fast, hedge-hopping, and did a neat job of landing.

August 19, 1944:

Today I flew with Capt. Graham in Rough Cobb, and reached the highest altitude I've ever been to.

August 21, 1944:

Captain Goosen was the pilot this hop, and he allowed several of us ground-pounders to fly the ship ourselves.

August 22, 1944:

Our 101st mission today; George Chaplin, the gunner I spent so much time with on the way overseas, was on one of the two planes that are missing, and that's the first guy I've felt anything about losing. He may have bailed out, but I've heard nothing as yet. (lapse of some time here.) A few minutes ago a fellow told me that George's plane was forced back early, and that they landed at Vis (a small island in the Adriatic). I was sure glad to hear this.

August 24, 1944:

George arrived back at our base today, having been flown to Bari (a city several miles south of us) from Vis. He told me that their plane had two dead engines, and that a bunch of Lightning fighters had escorted them back to Vis. About 20 Lightnings, so you can see that our boys are protected as much as possible.

August 25, 1944:

Twenty-three years old today, and to celebrate I went into town and saw Ben Lyon and Babe Daniels at the Cerignola Music Hall (in person). While in town I mailed home a few cameos.

August 29, 1944:

As my nerves are getting the best of me in the matter of flying, I'm going to give it up. Finished setting up our mock-up today, and we should have power to it within the week. Rough Cobb went down in flames on today's mission, but the crew bailed out okay.

September 1, 1944:

Rather a rude awakening this morning! I was blown awake, clear out of my sack, nearly an hour before dawn. My first impression was that a plane had crashed in the immediate vicinity of our tent, and that it may have been loaded with bombs. Everything seemed bright, with a bright red glow, such as is made by a burning plane, or home. Forgetting the time-losing normal habit of getting to my feet in order to travel a few feet, I stayed on my hands and knees, and began making tracks in the direction of the tent door. Pellegrini was evidently thinking the same as I, that it would take too long to get to his feet, and consequently I was slowed up (but very slightly) as I came to his bunk. We crawled head-first into the foxhole in front of our tent, with no hesitation whatsoever. A few seconds later we peeked over the edge of the fox-hole, and to my great relief saw that the fire was down on the "line." It was the first bomb burst which had awakened us. After a period of time which I took to be about ten minutes, the fire seemed to have burnt itself nearly out, so we all decided that we might as well get another hour's sleep. During this so-journ in the hole, Petrucci, Healy, and Goldy had deemed it very appropriate to pay us a visit, as their tent was a few hundred feet closer to the scene of the action; and furthermore, they had never dug a fox-hole, being too lazy to dig one. (Confidentially, we paid two Italian kids to dig ours for us.) Joe Kenworthy would have been with them also, but he stubbed his toe on a tent stake upon his speedy exit from their tent, and that slight fatality had stopped him in his tracks ---- where he remained until the fire died down.

As I lay in my sack a few minutes after returning there, I looked out and saw several flashlights bobbing along, and could make out dim forms of G. I.'s going places in a hurry. So I roused the boys in our tent again, and this time we stayed in the fox-hole about a half hour, during which time more than half-a-dozen bombs went off. One concussion in particular was awe-inspiring as its echoes reverberated again and again, seeming to continue forever. Another plane had caught fire from the first one, and the bombs in it must have been much livelier. We found during that day that the first plane had begun burning when the crew chief turned on the main switches, and as the fire was in the bomb-bay, he was more or less trapped on the flight deck. He managed to squeeze himself through the pilot's window, a space of about 8 by 12 inches. All of the damaged planes were those of the 736th squadron, and so they borrowed a few from each of the other three squadrons for the day's mission. Two were burnt completely, two damaged so bad that they were salvaged for parts, and four damaged enough to be taken to the service squadron for major repairs.

During the "second warning" one of the communications men came racing out of a nearby tent, wearing nothing but his helmet and a very frightened look. He raced by our tent and foxhole, continuing on past the tent area and through the recently-cut hayfield just beyond. He was soon lost to our sight, along with his more-fully clothed companions. After full day-light had come, and the fires had died out, that group of men returned through the hayfield. The helmet-clad-only lad had a very difficult time picking his way tip-toeing through the stubble --- where a few hours earlier he didn't pay a bit of attention to the stubble, racing full-tilt from supposed danger.

September 14, 1944:

No mission today, so all available planes went on a practice mission. Schuttenberg, bombsight repairman of the 738th, went along on a gunnery mission, and his plane crashed and burned. One of the waist gunners was able to bail out from an altitude of approximately 400

feet, breaking an ankle upon hitting the ground. He lost his wits completely for the time, and ran up the side of a mountain, broken ankle and all. All other aboard, however, were killed instantly, and burned beyond recognition. None of us knew anything of this until the 15th, Troyer then coming down and asking one of us to go along to the funeral, which was held that afternoon in Bari at three o'clock. Pellegrini was selected to go and represent the three of us from the 737th, and we all chipped in a few dollars for flowers.

There were two makes of bombsights and autopilots: Sperry and Norden. There was a good deal of rivalry at Lowry between trainees for these two makes, each claiming theirs to be far superior to the other. I was in a class that was trained for the use of Sperry equipment, and I was assigned to the 454th Group that had all Sperry equipment. However, while overseas, for some upper-chain-of-command reasoning, the Sperry equipment was replaced gradually with Norden equipment; that is, additional or replacement planes were all equipped with Norden equipment. So for a time, we had some of each. In September of 1944, I was sent to Bari for two weeks of training on the Norden bombsight and autopilot. Ames had gone the two weeks before I went; and Pellegrini was to go for two weeks after I returned. (See pages 35 and 36)

The following paragraph copied from my "Diary")

Sept. 18, 1944:

This morning I left for Bari with Bricker, for two weeks of school on the Norden sight and C-1 Autopilot. Schuttenberg would have been going with us if it had not been for that fatal crash. Upon arriving at the school, we reported to lst Lt. Wm. Patterson, and although I failed to recognize the name at first, I knew the fellow to have been a fellow-student at Lowry Field. Didn't get much time to speak with him then, but learned that Lt. Rathbun (another fellow-student from Lowry) is over here somewhere.

Bari was on the Adriatic Sea or east coast of Italy, several miles south and east of our base. While there, I had to walk through an Army shop of some kind; at any rate, as I walked through this shop to and from the Norden classes, I noticed that there were large bins filled with nails. Knowing that Ames and I had already talked about building a "shack" or "hut" for our own living quarters, I was sure that these nails would come in handy for that purpose. So I obtained a quantity sufficient to build our "shack."

Here's First Picture of Norden Bombsight As Army Partially Lifts Veil of Secrecy

In this first picture of the Norden Bombsight, U. S. Navy Captain Frederick I. Entwistle (left), co-designer, explains the mechanism to Louis Marrone at the Museum of Science and Industry in Rockefeller Center, New York.

U.S. Bombsight Does the Math, Releases Load

WRIGHT FIELD, O. (AP)—The famed and secret Norden bombsight solves bombing equations instantly through "a mass of gears, prisms, cams, lenses and mirrors," says the Army Air Forces, which has partially lifted for the first time the veil of secrecy covering the instrument.

Partial details were made public, said the Air Technical Service Command, because, although several of the sights have fallen into enemy hands, it would take two years to develop manufacturing and assembling techniques and put the unit into production.

By then, ATSC said, Army Air Forces would have perfected enough improvements to make the captured sight obsolete.

Fitting into an overnight bag, the bombsight determines the range—distances from point of bomb release and the target—and releases a pre-determined number of bombs automatically.

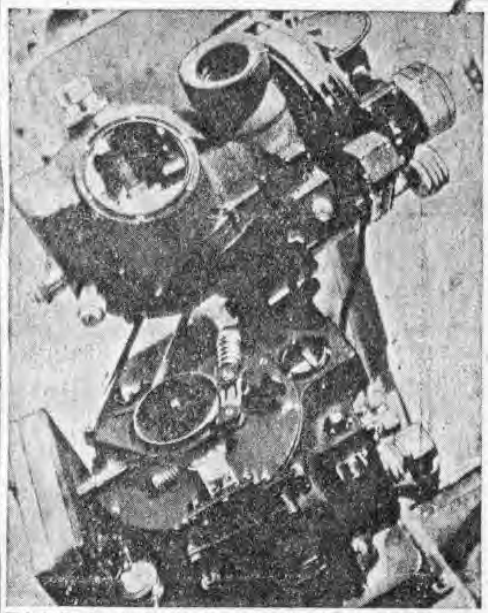
Lieutenant General William S. Knudsen, ATSC director, said the bombardier must compute such elements as wind velocity and other variables, but the bombsight does the mathematics.

Electric Control Stick Perfected For Heavies

LOS ANGELES, Calif., April 16 — An electrical control stick which enables pilots to guide a heavy bomber with less effort than a child uses in turning a bicycle was unveiled today by the Minneapolis Honeywell Regulator Company.

The pistol-grip, ten-inch lever is mounted with an arm rest beside the pilot and is free to move in all directions. It controls the plane through electronic amplification. Designed for use on heavy bombers, the stick has resulted in dimished pilot fatigue, company officials said.

Fig. 22 Norden Bombsight, clipping from Milwaukee paper.



This is the famous Norden bombsight, the details of which were long kept secret by the army air forces. These photos of the highly accurate sighting mechanism used by American bombing forces were released Sunday. This is an exterior view. The lower half (usually permanently installed in a plane) is the stabilizer, containing a horizontal gyroscope which maintains azimuth control. The vertical gyroscope, affording stability to the telescope, is in the upper half with range computing apparatus (right). The rubber eyepiece is mounted in the center of the upper half.

—AP Wirephotos From Army Air Forces

A bombardier, beginning a 25 second bombing run, sights his target through the telescope in a Norden bombsight as he sets up correct range. The controls of the plane are in his hands as he operates an automatic pilot.

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 26, 1944

A bombardier's eye-view of a target is aligned through the cross-hairs of the Norden bombsight.

SHE KNOWS the famous Norden bombsight forward and backward, especially forward, and she wears gloves to protect it from damage. Miss Louise Miller is one of the many women precision workers at a Chicago plant which makes these important instruments.

Fig. 23 Norden Bombsight, clipping from Milwaukee paper.

On my return, and after Pellegrini had left for his two-week training, Ames and I took down our sides of the tent walls, converting them to the lumber we would need to build our shack. The other Armament boys did not object, except that they were going to have Pellegrini all to themselves when he returned.

We planned our shack, and somehow found out that there was a service supply depot not too far distant. Borrowing an Armaent section weapons carrier, we went there to get some canvas that had been used earlier to make our bomb-sight carrying bags. We found that this came in a three-foot-wide roll, and we had a requisition made out for enough to cover the roof of our shack. As we talked to the sergeant at the supply depot, and found out that the roll had somewhat more than we needed, we changed the requisition and took the whole roll. That amount turned out to be enough to waterproof the whole shack on the outside, walls as well as the roof.

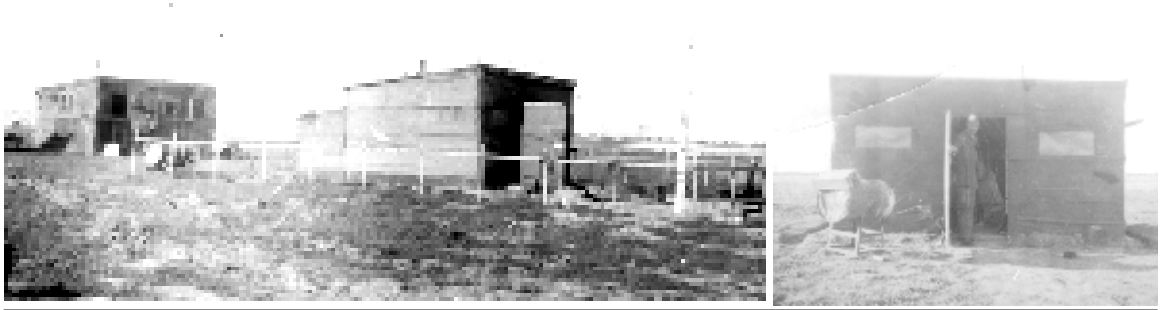


Fig. 24 Two views of our "shack," the left view showing our "fence." The right view shows the front door and the 50-gallon gas drum for use in our heating stove.

This shack included an oxygen tank converted to a water storage tank on the outside, with running water through aluminum fuel lines into our sink---the sink being half of a spherical hydraulic pressure tank from a wrecked plane. The valve to turn the water on and off was electrically operated by a 12-volt battery line, that we had strung from our bombsight maintenance building to our shack, about 75 feet. We also had a regular 110-volt power supply, which came from an Ordnance generator that some ordnance section men had by their shack near ours. That generator ran out of fuel about ten every evening, which was okay with us; if we wanted to stay up and read or write letters, we would just turn on our 24-volt power from the bombsight maintenance line.

(The following is a quote from a letter to Pop.)

> "I've seen enough of this old world to realize that the guy who first said 'See America First!' was right! Except that I'd just plainly say, 'See America --- Period.' Sept. 30, 1944"

I had been pleased to receive the 50% extra flight pay, but the stories of test-hop accidents and my own experience on one test flight finally got to my nerves. I gave up the flight pay to Ames, who I guess would liked to have had it all along.

I was going up on the test flight noted above, and as we were getting ready to climb aboard, I found that there were to be fourteen men going on that flight. I thought this would be great, because certainly it would be a simple safe flight if that many were going along. Many of the fourteen were ground crew personnel going up just for the ride; they had nothing to test or check on the flight. A wrong assumption on my part, I was to learn in about an hour! Everyone had been issued an oxygen mask, as it was planned to take the plane to at least 20,000 feet altitude, where the air was too "thin" and lacking oxygen. Of course, it was standard procedure for each person going on a flight to have a parachute and harness. Usually the harness would be

worn at all times by most; the bulky 'chute pack itself usually being stored nearby during the flight.

As I wanted to observe the operation of the autopilot, I was permitted to stay on the flight deck during the flight. All of the other ground crew just up for the ride stayed in the waist, or tail section. As we reached 12,000 feet, the pilot said something to the flight engineer to "go back to the waist and tell those back there to put on their parachutes." I watched as the flight engineer went into the bomb bay on his way to the waist. I didn't like what I had heard; furthermore, I didn't understand why the order was given. A few moments later while the engineer was still gone, the pilot glanced around at me and asked, "Do you have a 'chute?" As I replied in the affirmative, he continued with "You'd better put it on!" This I did not like either, nor did I like the reason he gave such orders. It seems that the plane had just returned from the service squadron, which had just made major repairs to the rudder and elevator controls, which had been shot up in the plane's last mission. The purpose of this flight, I then found, was really to check out those controls, to see if the service squadron had done a good job. I still can't understand why any pilot would let so many men fly on that type of a flight!

When the flight engineer returned, the pilot gave the signal to the co-pilot and engineer, and put the plane into a power dive. I was standing beside the flight engineer, just back of the pilot and co-pilot. My eyes became fixed on the rate of climb meter! This instrument showed how fast the plane was climbing, or descending as in that case. It was limited to 6,000 feet-per-minute, either up or down; and it quickly reached its limit. I wonder how far it would have gone if it had been calibrated beyond the 6,000 feet-per-minute! Not only did the pilot put it into a power dive, but he put it into a spiraling dive. I looked out the windshield, and all I could see was the Italian country-side coming up at me, spinning at what I thought to be a very rapid rate. It probably wasn't as rapid a spinning as I imagined, in my real fright. About the time that I thought we were surely going to crash spinningly into the ground, the flight engineer told the pilot that the people in the waist saw gasoline flowing from the wing and past the waist window. Another thing I was not pleased with about that flight; but at least it did get one good reaction from the pilot that I did approve of --- he leveled the plane out, and sent the engineer back to the waist for a first-hand look. The engineer returned and confirmed the report, and it was decided that we would immediately return to the field. I was thankful, but still was worried about that gasoline leakage and the possibility of it igniting and sending us down in flames. As we landed the plane, I breathed more easily. The pilot guided the plane, rolling down to the end of the runway, stopping to make the turn onto a taxi-strip.

Turning the plane on the ground was done by applying the right wheel brake for a right turn; or the left wheel brake for a left turn. As the pilot had applied the right wheel brake for our turn, it only held for a short part of the turn; not enough to even get the plane off the runway fully.

A truck was sent to take the 14 of us back to the parachute rigging shop, where we turned in our 'chutes. Later we were to find out that it had not been gasoline, but hydraulic brake fluid, leaking from the wing area past the waist window. This fluid was used to raise and lower the flaps and landing gear, as well as operate the brakes. Most of it had leaked out as we flew; we had just enough left to lower the landing gear and flaps, and barely enough to stop at the end of the runway. If we had lost a little more of that fluid, we would have sailed past the end of the runway and down a gentle slope, piling up into whatever was there. Another plane had such a misfortunate end on returning from a mission several months earlier.

Other planes had landed under such loss of hydraulics, but they were aware of the nature of their problem. They were able to crank down the landing gear and flaps by hand. To aid in

stopping the plane, two or four parachutes would be attached to the waist machine-gun supports, and opened out the waist windows as soon as the plane touched down --- the billowing 'chutes helping drag the plane to a slow stop.

As I said at the beginning of this episode, Mel Ames got the flight pay as soon as it could be arranged!

(The following are two quotes from letters to Pop.)

"Three years of war are behind us now, and I believe they have been the toughest ones! Perhaps the toughest in our country's history! We've come a long way on the road to victory since that tragic Sunday, and things have changed a lot in the process! I for one! My way of life has been changed completely, and no longer will I romp and tear every Sunday at the Legion! 'Keep 'em Smiling!' Dec. 7, 1944

"Thank God Jean and I are still young! We at least will have an advantage, knowing just how much we mean to each other! Something good which the war brought about!" Dec. 15, 1944

How we looked forward to Christmas of 1944, with the hope that there would be no bombing mission that day. There were also many prayers that the war would soon end; prayers that we realistically expected to be answered. We really celebrated the day and night before, for the most part. Ames and I had bought a large bag of almonds in the shell from some Italian farmer; and Ames with his always-requisitioning ways had obtained a gallon-can of butter from the mess hall. We shelled the almonds, then blanched them in boiling water, squeezing the skins off of them, one by one. Then, wearing gloves to handle our mess kit, we roasted the blanched almonds in butter over our hut's heating stove --- about a week before Christmas. We had to take turns doing the roasting, because the hut got so hot we could hardly stand it. But as it turned out, it was well worth it.

A little "side-story" should be related here, I think. The night after we roasted the almonds, our hut was still so hot that we turned off the stove gasoline line valve. As we lay in our bunks on either side of the hut, I noticed a strong smell of gasoline. When I mentioned it to Ames, he agreed with me, so we got up to investigate. With a good bit of sniffing, finally we determined that it was coming from the floor, or from under it. We lifted a couple of the pieces of ½" plywood flooring, and found that the aluminum tubing from our 55-gallon gasoline tank to the stove, had been worn through with tiny pit-holes, evidently from the rubbing between the floor and the dirt as we walked on the floor. And as the shut-off valve for the line was right next to the heating stove, gasoline from the tank was very slowly seeping into the ground, some of it also being absorbed into the plywood floor. We left the flooring up, and went outside and disconnected the gasoline tank from the line into the hut. The next day we replaced all of the gasoline line, this time putting it below the surface of the soil, so that we would not be pressing on it as we walked about inside the hut.

The celebrating that we did may not seem much to anyone now-a-days, but to us at that time it was much. We invited some friends from the Armament Section on Christmas Eve, serving popcorn, roasted almonds (we had two cigar boxes filled with them), potato chips (not too fresh), Christmas cookies from home, candy, Coca-Cola, and orange juice. All enjoyed the treats, and also the eight-inch high decorated and lit Christmas tree I had put together, using the tree that Mom Louise Cilimburg had sent me. I used tiny beads, silver anti-radar foil for tinsel, and eleven tiny instrument light bulbs (from bombsights). I still have a few of these tiny lights in the garage with model-making materials.

Unfortunately our hopes for a mission-free Christmas were not to be realized, as the planes were loaded with 500-pound demolition bombs. The target selected was the main railroad marshaling yard at Wels, Austria. To add to the mission that day, and to make it really memorable for Ames and myself, was the following. The Fifteenth Air Force would be led by the 304th Bombardment Wing; which in turn would be led by the 454th Bomb Group; which in turn would be led by the 737th Bomb Squadron (ours); and which would be led by the plane that Ames and I had prepared the bombsight for. At this stage of the war, when the lead plane released its bombs, all of the other planes in the formation were to release theirs. This was called "saturation bombing." Even if the lead bombardier was off target by even a large margin, the planes to either side or behind were sure to hit the target. To make it easy for other plane's bombardiers to know when the lead plane had dropped bombs, we had installed what we called a "bazooka" on the tail of each plane. This "bazooka" was nothing more than a three-inch open pipe across the tail. It was wired directly to the bombsight, so that when the electrical signal went to the bomb-release mechanism in the bomb-bays, it also would fire two red flares out of either side of the tail, from the "bazooka." When these flares were seen, all other planes were to release their bomb loads.

A part of our job was to put a small portable hand-held tachometer near the bombsight, when we installed the bombsight. This was used by the bombardier to adjust the bombsight during flight. It would make it possible for him to adjust the sight's mechanism according to the plane's speed, and drift caused by cross-winds. I guess it could be done by the use of a sweep second hand on a wrist watch, if the bombardier were exceptionally able.

As the planes left for this 172nd Group bombing mission, Ames and I certainly hoped for the best. We spent the day awaiting their return in our hut, enjoying more Christmas cookies and roasted almonds. After several hours, Lt. Robinson came to find us, and gave us the bad news that the lead plane --- ours --- had dropped its bombs, with all other planes dropping as planned --- only to find that the lead plane had missed the target by some three or more miles. They did do a great deal of damage, not to the railroad yard as planned, but to farmland. Further, in a radio report to the Wing and Air Force headquarters, it had been reported that there had not been a tachometer in the lead plane. The bombardier, wanting the glory of being the leader of the whole Fifteenth Air Force, had decided to try the "sweep-second-hand" technique, but he evidently wasn't capable enough. What he should have done was to radio to the alternate lead plane, also of the 737th Squadron, to take over the lead.

As time drew near for the return of the planes, Ames and I found ourselves at the lead plane's parking area---along with several high-ranking officers of the Wing and Fifteenth Air Force. It appeared very likely that Ames and I would bear the brunt of the wrath of the higher-ups, and both could expect to lose our stripes and become privates immediately, at the least, for such a goof-up. Finally the planes arrived and parked. The crew got out, and several of the awaiting officers engaged the bombardier in conversation and interrogation. Meanwhile, I immediately climbed into the nose section by way of the nose-wheel opening, and looked around for the missing tachometer, which both Ames and I were sure we had placed there. We even had its serial number, as well as the serial number of the bombsight itself. That was just standard procedure to follow. But to no avail! Ames then got in the nose section, and had the same poor luck. I then got back in, removed the bombsight, and handed it down to Ames through the nose wheel opening --- the bombsights were always stored in our maintenance shop, and not left in the planes overnight. We loaded the sights in the planes just prior to the flight crew's arrival. And then we only loaded sights in the first three planes; the lead plane and two alternates. When I got out, Ames and I were surely worried. Ames got in for just one more look! After a few minutes, during which he was blindly feeling in places we couldn't see, and among spent 50-caliber machine gun shell-casings, he held up his hand with the "missing" tachometer in it. What a joy I felt! I notified the nearest officer, and we showed it to everyone

near. Then the bombardier was really getting interrogated by the higher-ups. Ames and I just put the tachometer in the bag with the bombsight, and headed back to the maintenance shop to store them until the next mission. We never did hear what else became of this big goof-up, but presume that the bombardier in question must have received some sort of discipline. We really didn't care, and didn't care to know; all we cared about was that we had not goofed up that mission!

(The following is a quote from a letter to Pop.)

"Another year is here, and God alone knows what is in store for this World of ours. Perhaps He will see to it that this war is successfully brought to a close. Jan. 1, 1945

In January of 1945, new orders required five men to be assigned as bomb- sight/autopilot mechanics for each squadron. No new trainees from the States were to be provided, but the two additional men were to be found in the squadron itself. Our two additional men were from the Armament section; Dave Purdy, who had been a watch repairman in civilian life; and George Breisch, and I don't remember ever knowing what his civilian work had been. The training of these two men became our responsibility; I know of no help being offered from higher up the chain of command --- not even from our Lt. Robinson.

(The following is a quote from a letter to Pop.)

"Although the war news is practically all good lately, somehow or other I hate to write about it. There is too much blood being shed by good men, on both sides! March 5, 1945"

Many times I had opportunities to visit the nearby town of Cerignola, or to take a few days leave to go to other towns; but I only wanted to leave the base for one reason, and that was to return home. However, I was sent to the Air Force Rest Camp in Rome for a week, sometime in the late spring of 1945. While there I bought a few more souvenirs, and sold my old 35-millimeter camera for $80 to an Italian photo shop. I had been having a lot of trouble with light leaking into it, and a piece of film clogging part of the view.

Fig. 25 Bill and two unknown friends, in a Rome restaurant.

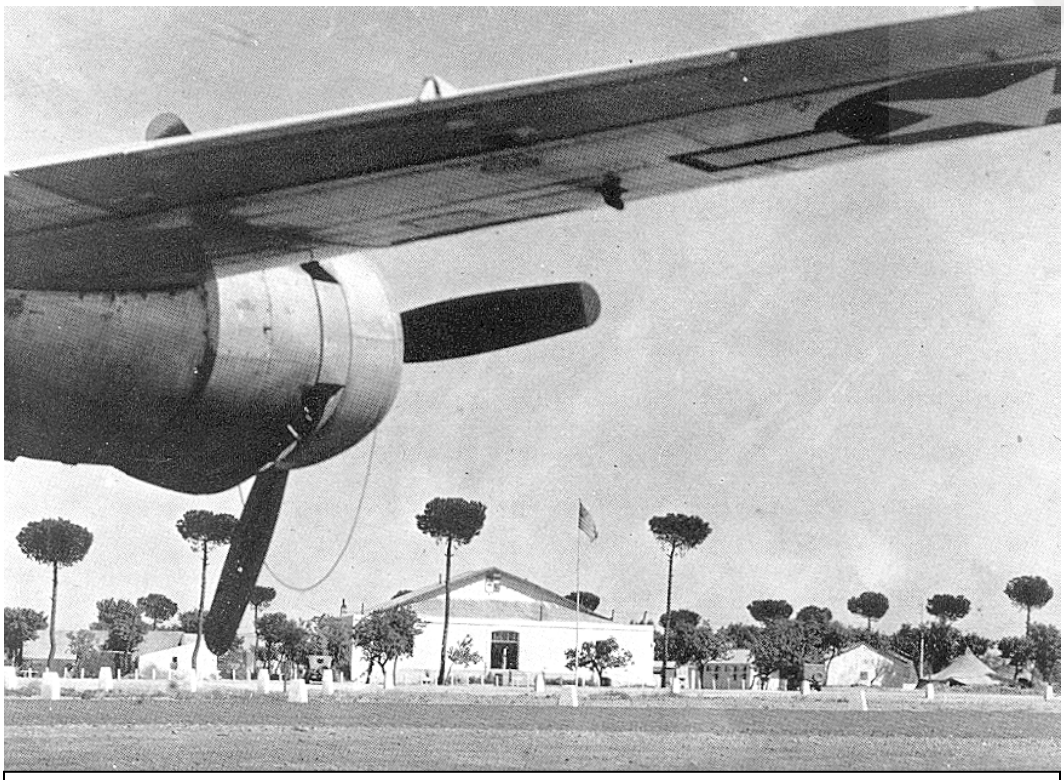


Fig. 26 454th Group Headquarters, in large farm building, perhaps used as a storage facility.

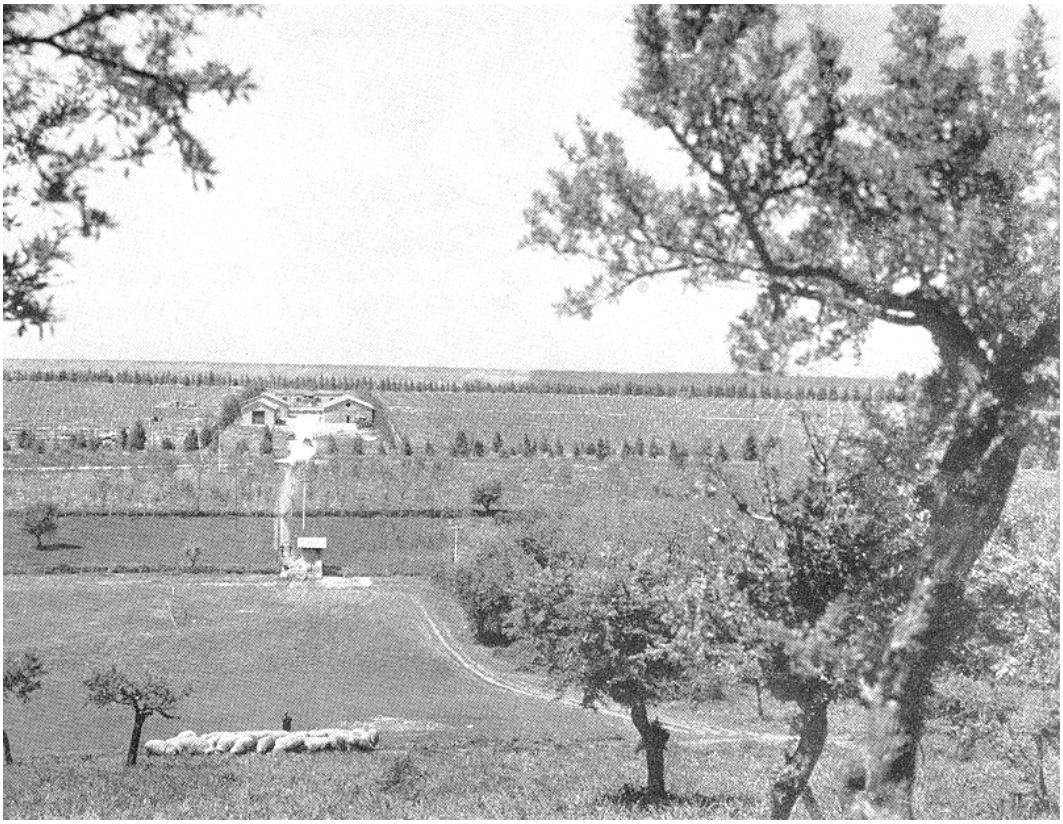


Fig. 27 Group showers, in left center just below horizon.
Dam of mountain stream is half-way down path, where water is piped to showers.
Note Italian shepherd and flock of sheep in left foreground.

Our air base at San Giovanni was about five miles from the nearest town, Cerignola. It had been a farm before the war broke out, and was part of a plains area. Nearby, perhaps a mile from the flight line, was an ex-rubber plantation, which the 454th Group took over also. In one of the rubber storage barns they had installed hot and cold showers, which were open to us every day, during regular all-day hours. These showers were a real treat, being much better than the alternative; a helmet bath, which we had used until the showers were completed. One spring day of 1945 during early March, Ames and I walked to the showers. We hadn't been there for over a week, partly because of the work load, and perhaps also because of a bit of laziness. When we arrived at the showers, we found that they were not working that day for some mechanical reason. As we started back to our hut, we stopped at the little mountain stream that ran past the ex-plantation. It had been dammed at this point, so that the above-dam pool of water could be pumped for irrigation purposes during the pre-war years. I believe it was from this dam also, that the water for the showers was taken. At any rate, we both decided that we surely needed a shower, so would bathe under the dam, using the overflow for our shower. Talk about a cold shower! That was it, with snow-run-off feeding that stream. After we were finished, I found myself climbing out first. I picked up my towel and was nearly finished drying, when Ames climbed out on the opposite bank of the creek, just about twelve feet away. He said that I had taken his towel from that bank, and then crossed to where my clothes were --- his clothes being where he was then standing, naked and shivering. I looked down, and saw my towel with my clothing, sure enough. So I picked up my towel, and said to Ames, "Here, use my towel," and threw it across the creek to him. Unfortunately, it flew open in mid-flight, and landed in the creek. Ames grabbed it out, but it was already soaked. I don't remember what he said td me, but I know he was not too-well pleased as he stood there shivering, wringing out my towel before he dried as well as possible with that damp towel.

It might be of interest to know that our government paid rent for our base, to the farmer who owned the land. I presume this was a standard practice during the war.

In the spring of 1945, a new technical order was issued to all pilots. This order informed the pilots that the stress of the torque to the landing gear caused by raising the gear while the wheels were still spinning could cause some damage and eventual weakness and failure of the landing gear struts. To avoid this stress, the pilots were to follow a new procedure: namely, to apply their foot brakes after take-off, before raising the landing gear. This would stop the wheels from spinning. This new procedure caused the following two crashes, as pilots wanted to get their gear up as soon as possible, so that they would gain more speed to lift their fully-bomb-loaded planes.

(The following copied from my "Diary.")

In early April a pilot thought he had cleared the ground, and so put on the brakes in order to stop the spinning wheels before retracting them. He must have been quite surprised to find himself still on the ground, and his wheels locked. Both tires burnt out immediately, and the plane was a total wreck. One fellow was pinned inside with a slight leg injury, but otherwise everyone got out okay.

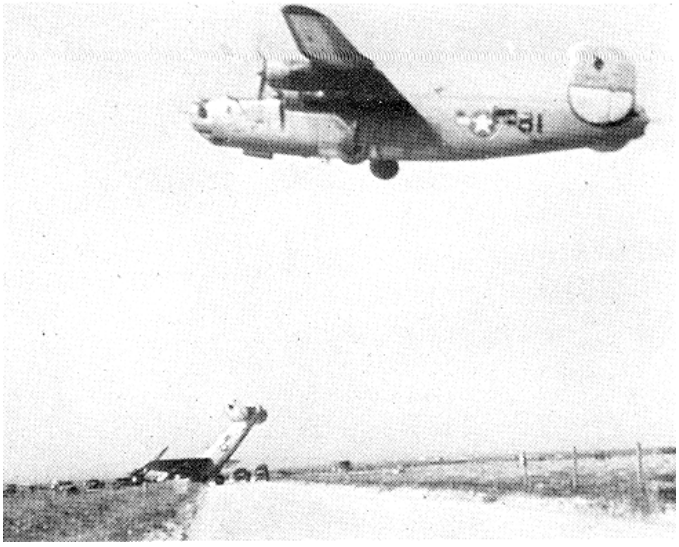


Fig. 28 A plane takes off from the 454th Group runway, with a second plane resting on its nose at the end of the 455th Group runway. (See above paragraph.)

A few days later, the 12th in fact, I was disturbed by someone yelling "Let's go!" as they raced past the shack. I went out the door in a hurry, inadvertently kicking Jo (Ames' little dog) in the head on the way, and immediately made off in the popular direction. Two hundred feet from the shack, I turned and saw that a plane of the 455th had crashed on take-off, and all that was visible was a cloud of dust. Konkle was in our shack at the time, and as he went out the door he turned to see what the trouble was. As a result, he nearly broke our fence down. After reaching the ditch we had been heading for, we stopped and took a breather. As the dust finally cleared, we could see a B-24 standing perfectly on its nose, though exactly how this was possible was beyond our comprehension at that time. No fire was issuing from the wreck, so we returned to the shack in a much more leisurely manner than we had left. I grabbed Ames' camera, and along with Konkle took off to get a closer look at the crashed plane. We found that six in the nose section were killed, as it had been ground away. The four men in the waist were okay, although shaken up quite a bit. When rather close to the remains, we could see why it had stood so nicely on its nose; all four engines were resting in a ditch, and so the plane was held rather securely, by its four propellers.

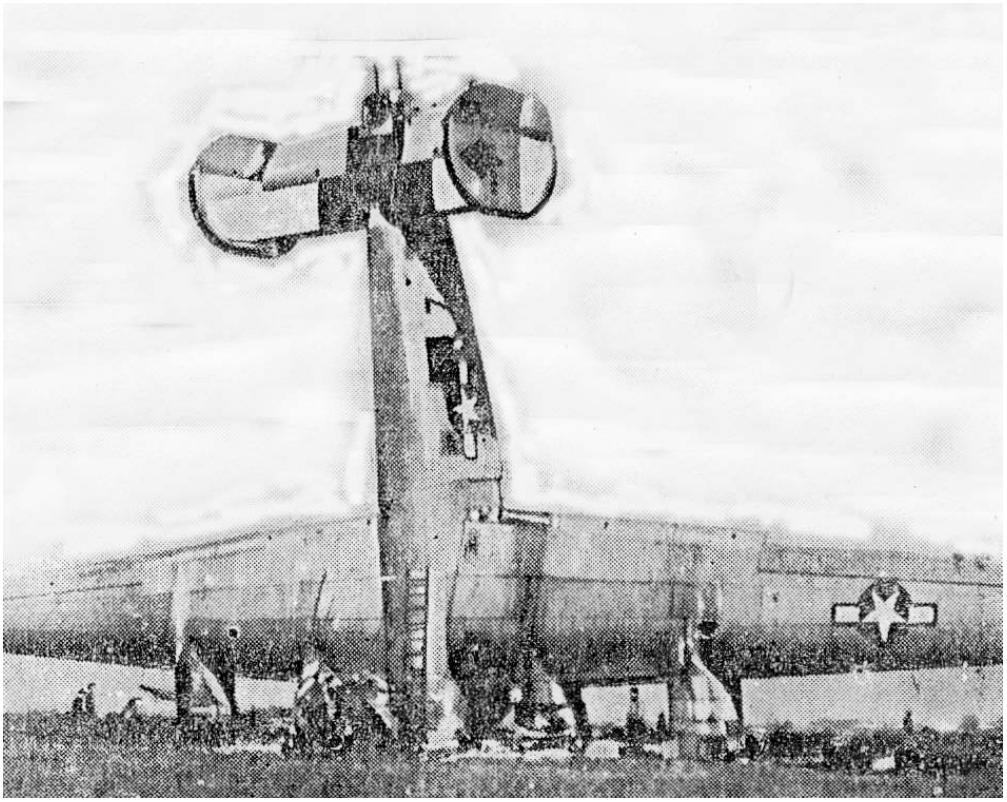


Fig. 29 Six men were killed instantly when this 15th AAF B-24 crashed squarely on its nose during a takeoff. An accidental application of brakes is believed to have caused the accident. (MAAF Photo)

Still a few days later 072 crashed, it being on fire and then blowing up just before crash-landing. As far as I know, three are still alive, although only two are expected to live. The third is being fed at present through tubes directly into his stomach.

(Late March, 1945)

Nearly two months ago George Breisch and I were in the shop as the planes were returning from a mission. There was a sudden explosion, and we headed for the nearest ditch. Upon turning, the sight of a plane burning on the 455th runway greeted our eyes. We learned later that it had reported to the tower that it had a fire in the bomb-bay, and just as it hit the ground it blew up. All but one waist gunner were killed on the spot, and that one died a few days later. Seems funny that none bailed out.

The 454th Group had two USO shows presented at the base, one day after the other. The first show featured the star of the radio show, "Duffy's Tavern." Somehow I was detailed to help cart that USO troupe's luggage to their quarters. During this time, all the star did was to gripe and complain about the quality of the weather and everything else. During his show performance, he continued complaining, making many unkind remarks about the weather, and the poor stage situation. The Group had provided a flat-bed semi-trailer for the stage, with a flight of steps leading up to it from the back side. This truck had been placed at the foot of the small hillside that led from the Group tent area to the Group showers; thus all of the men could sit on the hillside and have a pretty good view of the show. There were microphones, amplifiers and speakers, so hearing was good. Needless to say, this "star's" performance was not thought much of by any of the Group.

Fig. 30 Frank Sinatra and showgirl in USO show.

The next day's show was given by the Phil Silvers and Frank Sinatra USO Troupe, which included a couple of good-looking showgirls as well as Phil and Frank. Of course, Sinatra sang several popular songs, and Phil Silvers played the clarinet and also did a fine job as the show's comedian. I can't remember what the girls did, but probably they sang and danced some. Before this second show, many of the G. I.'s disliked Sinatra, probably because they were envious of his popularity with the girls back home. After the show, during which none of the cast made any mention of the "poor facilities" or dusty and windy conditions (which were the same for both shows), most of the 454th men changed their opinions of Sinatra, now considering him to be okay.

(The following copied from my "Diary.")

April 19, 1945: It's been quite some time since I've written in here, as you can plainly see. Both the Eastern and Western fronts have advanced deep into the former Reich. In fact, Berlin is now well within fifty miles of either front. This afternoon as I was playing ball with a few other guys, three planes came in at once, two on our runway and one on the 455th runway. The second one on our strip had a feathered prop (dead engine), and was coming in too close to the first. The tower shot out red flares and the second plane tried to go up again. Meanwhile, the first plane was slowing down after having landed, and probably had no idea that the other plane was so close behind him. Near the far end of the runway, the second plane seemed to just fall down. It pancaked barely ahead of the first plane, and no doubt the pilot and crew of the first plane nearly had heart failure when they saw that plane mush down right in front of them. Luckily, the second plane's wheels weren't quite down, and so it didn't bounce a bit. It skidded along on its belly and gradually slid to the right. All of the crew walked, rather ran, from the plane, so the pilot did a fair-enough job. I found out a week or so later that the pilot of the second plane had clearance from the tower to land, as he had engine trouble. An air-lock developed in the gas lines, and the three remaining engines died out.

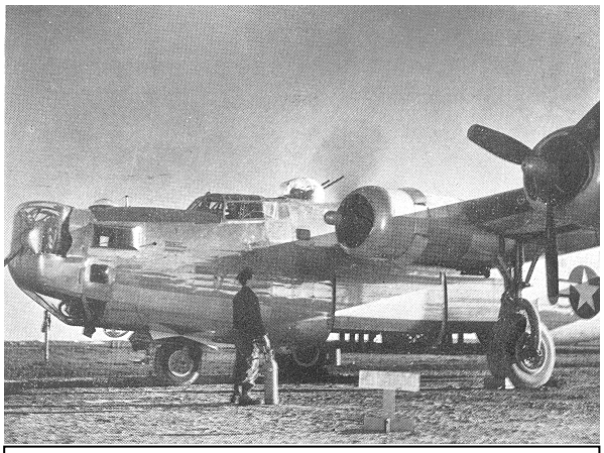


Fig. 31 Starting engines in preparation for mission.

Fig. 32 Take-off for the day's mission.

Fig.33 After take-off, planes join in formation over Group Headquarters.

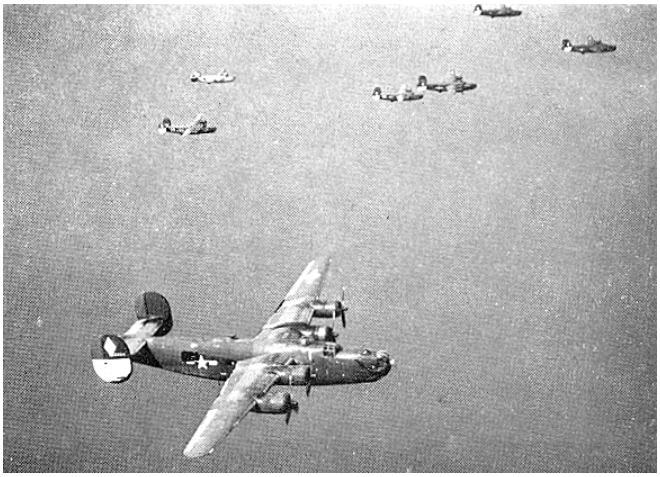


Fig. 34 Reaching altitude, the formation heads for the day's target.

Fig. 35 As the target is approached, enemy flak from anti-aircraft guns seek the planes.

Fig. 36 Over the target, the bombs are released.

Fig. 37 A lone B-24 flies over Cisterna in northern Italy.
Insert shows concentration of bombs striking a German supply road.

Fig. 38 Left: Damaged hydraulic systems caused parachutes to be used to help slow this plane upon landing. The parachutes were attached to the waist machine gun mounts, and opened after the plane landed.

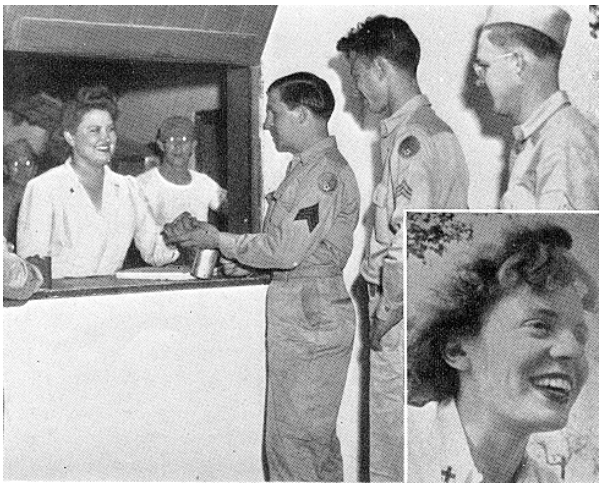


Fig. 39 The American Red Cross sent "donut girls" to serve coffee and donuts to flight crews on their return from missions.

Fig. 40 The powerful engines were replaced after the required number of running hours.

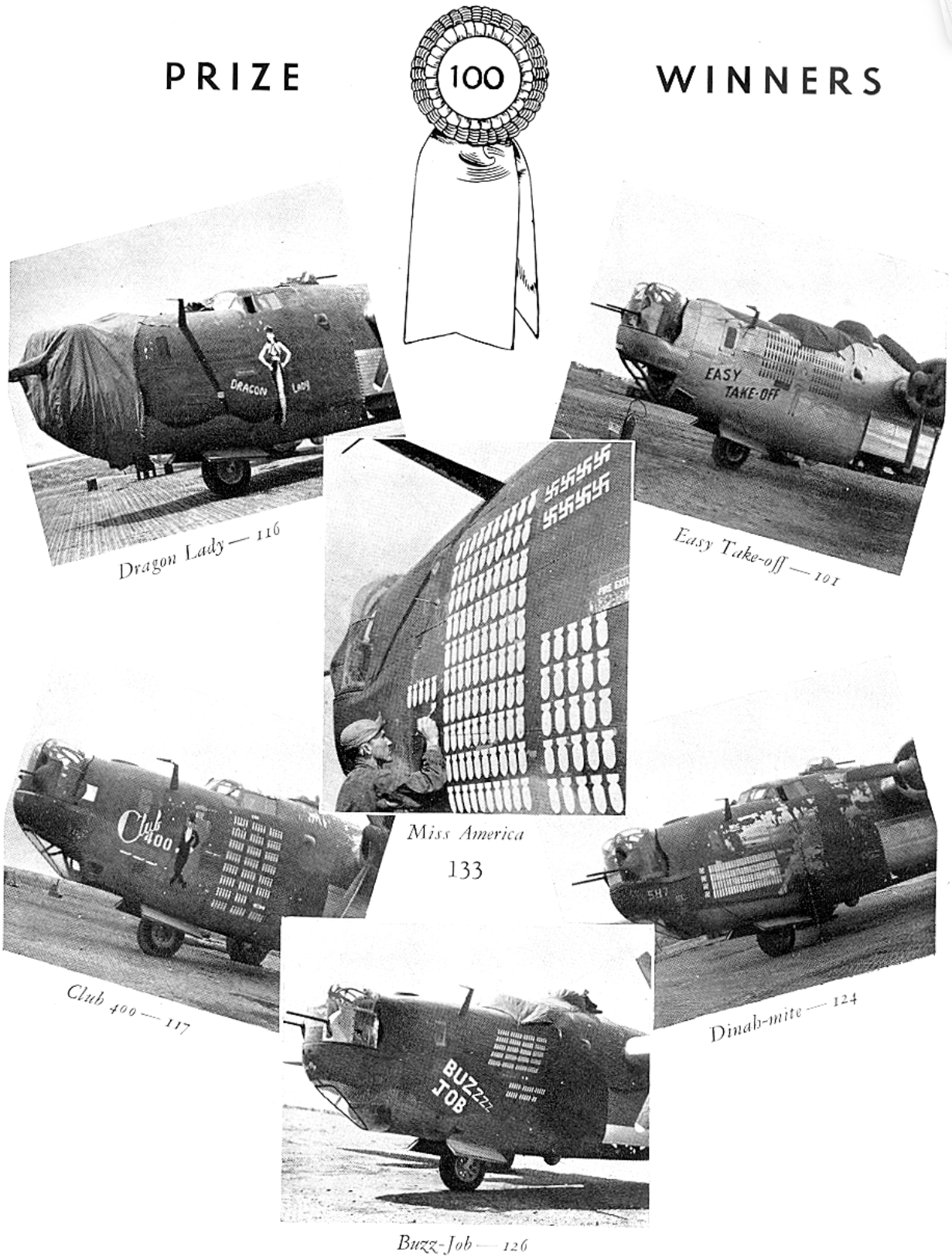


Fig. 41 B-24's of the 454th Bomb Group that had over 100 Combat Missions.

Fig. 42 737th Squadron Armament Section.
William Robishaw is kneeling in the front row, third from right.

Fig. 43 Right: William M. Robishaw
Staff-Sergeant
Cerignola, Italy --- 1944

"V-E DAY" --- VICTORY IN EUROPE

(The following copied from "Diary.")

May 7, 1945: The news has gotten around to us that the war (in Europe) is over, although not officially until tomorrow. From all the shooting and shouting around here, one would think it over right now. Tonight we went up to the enlisted men's club and bought some sandwiches, and brought them down to the shack to eat them. Also had some beer, Cokes and fruit juices. Guards have been put on all planes, so that no one will shoot the machine guns. Some of the guards were shooting the flare pistols, though.

(The Program of the 454th Bomb Group's Celebration of "Victory in Europe" is on the following page.)

I had done no ball playing except for one game in 1944, until the spring of 1945. As our 737th Enlisted Men's team got into practice, Captain McClure, our Armament Officer, asked me to be the "manager" of the team. The 454th Group was to have an eight-team league; an Enlisted Men's and Officer's team from each of the four squadrons. It turned out that George Breisch, one of our new bombsight mechanics recruited from the Armament Section, was a very good pitcher. "Fastpitch" was the only softball played until a few years after the War, when "blooper" and then "Slow-pitch" came into being. I did the catching, and there were several good players in our squadron; and also in other squadrons. Our Officer's Team also had a good pitcher, who was one of the pilots. When we played each other, it was a very competitive game, hard but cleanly-played, as were most of the games; and the officer's rank was forgotten during games.

As a part of the celebration of V-E (Victory in Europe) Day, there was a Group Softball Tournament, of four teams, one from each squadron. It really became a best-of-the-enlisted-and-officer-teams for each squadron. The good-pitching pilot of our squadron and I shared the responsibility for selecting and managing the 737th team, and it was really great to "work" with him. There was no thought or distinction of rank in our cooperation.

454TH BOMB GROUP CELEBRATION

OF

VICTORY IN EUROPE

PROGRAM

The following is a program schedule for celebration of Victory Day in Europe -

0800 Catholic Service – Chaplain John Duggan (304th Wing), Group Chapel

800 Protestant Service - Chaplain Thomas C. Hepner, (454th Bomb Gp) Group Chapel

1000 Jewish Service – Group Chapel

1000 Movies - Group Theater

1000 736th Softball Team vs 737th Softball Team. place-Ehrenkrook Park

738th Softball Team vs 739th Softball Team place-738th Ball diamond.

Noon meal will be in Squadron mess halls,

1400 Movies at Group Theater

1400 Volleyball game - Group Champions (738th EM) vs All Star Gp team place - Chapel area.

Baseball Game - 454th Bomb Group vs Guard Squadron place - 739th Ball diamond.

Softball Game - Championship Game playoff at 738th Ball diamond.

1600 Beer till "finiti" at picnic area back of Group Chapel

1630 supper in picnic area - bring your mess gear

1730 Relay races in picnic area

1800 Catch the greased pig and win a bottle of American Whiskey.

1830 Mass games 736th, 737th, vs 738, 739th - in picnic area

1900 GI entertainment in Picnic area

Baseball Throw for Cigars Bingo Games for money Dart games for cigars

plus

43rd Air Service Group Grace Hoppers Band

FINNI

The details of the V-E Day celebration and softball tournament may be found in the following copy of a letter I sent Jean that wonderful day of May 8, 1945.

May 8, 1945.

Darling,

Remember the date, for this is it! Yes, Honey, finally the war with Germany is over, and as a result of our joy over here, I missed writing you yesterday --- but I'm sure you'll forgive me! This morning we had a mass Group formation, at which the Chaplain said a prayer for final Victory and a lasting peace. News of the European victory was given, and today and tomorrow we have off. Many guys are sick this morning and noon, as a result of over-celebrating last night. Many flares were shot last night from many points. The control tower shot off a good many, too! The four squadrons are having a softball tournament, two squadrons playing others this a. m., the two winners of those games playing this afternoon. We won this a. m., thirteen to one! I caught, and will again this afternoon. An officer pitched this morning, and George Breisch will pitch this afternoon. Officers and Enlisted men played together, and there were no distinctions of rank! We've really got a swell bunch of officers here, and it's not just because of V-E Day! Will finish this after supper, which I believe is to be a picnic supper!

So long for now, Angel Mine!

Back again, Sis, and I'm really beat out! We won our game this afternoon, four to three, in ten innings! The score was tied at the end of the seventh, two and two! They scored in the first of the eighth, and with one out your lucky husband hit a double down the left field line! On the throw to second, which was high, I managed to get to third! Then on a fly to short center, I beat the throw, but very close, and that again tied the score, three-all! In the last of the tenth, an officer hit a long one along the left field line that scored an enlisted man from second! Each of us that played in either game will receive either a fountain pen or a cigarette lighter! Picked two men off of first in the second game!

After this we had all the beer we could drink! I was pretty thirsty, until I found a water tank-trailer. Quite a few fellows offered me beer, seeing how we won! Officers danced with men, everyone shook hands with each other, and on the whole everyone is happy! There were only a few fights, which I consider lucky! Right now I'm listening to a radio program, especially for V-E Day! And what a day! No doubt the whole world is rejoicing wildly, and I hope I'm home on the final V-Day!

Well Honey, I'm too happy to write more! I must close with the prayer that we will see each other before Fall, '45.

I love you deeply,

Your Bill

The 454th Bomb Group received its first Distinguished Unit Citation for its July 25, 1944 bombing raid on the Herman Goering Tank Works in Linz, Austria. Some time later a second Distinguished Unit citation was issued to the 454th, for a mission in which the Messerschmitt Aircraft Factory at Bad Voslau, Austria, was severely damaged. Although this was the second Citation, this mission actually preceded that for which the first Citation was received, being on April 12, 1944.

The European/Africa/Middle East Campaign Ribbon was authorized for the 454th Bomb Group, and eight Battle Stars were authorized for the 454th Bomb Group members to wear on that ribbon: for the Foggia/Naples Campaign (which I did not receive, as I was in Africa during the authorized dates; Rome/Arno; Southern France; Northern France; Air Combat/Balkans; Germany; North Appenines; and the Po Valley Campaigns.

A list of the 737th Squadron's planes may be found below.)

737th Squadron Planes ("Mickey" planes were equipped with radar)

1	2171	Vicious Vixen	shot down
2	2188	Star Dust I	detached service to 304th Wing
3	2193	Star Dust II	crash landing; salvaged
4	2192	no name	detached service to 304th Wing
5	2203	Hell's Angel-Shadow	shot down
6	4466	Dinah Mite	flown home after War; 100+ missions
7	9263	no name	shot down
8	2263	Gentleman Jim	flown home after War
9	2256	Buttercup	shot down
10	2225	no name	forced landing in Spain
11	2264	Ancient and Honorable Artillery Co. of Massachusetts shot down near end of War	
12	2236	Sassy Lassy	shot down
13	4495	Hot Rock	lost at sea on practice mission
14	9265	no name	shot down
15	2323	Liberty Belle	lost at sea
16	2265	Ragged but Right	shot down
17	8193	Miss Minuki	shot down
18	2312	Miss America '44	returned to 739th Squadron
19	780	no name ("Mickey")	detached service
20	5380	no name	shot down
21	316	no name	brakes locked on take-off; salvaged
22	8297	no name	shot down
23	315	no name	???????
24	313	Rough Cobb	down in flames
25	341	no name	returned to 739th Squadron
26	8009	San Antonio Rose	forced landing on Viz after 100th mission
27	????	Wit's End	shot down
28	8367	Yamacraw Lou	shot up; forced landing
29	8150	Pistol Packin' Parson	declared war-weary, sent away
30	359	no name	crash landed, salvaged
31	801	Chuck o' Luck	shot down
32	581	no name	returned to 739th Squadron
33	8278	no name	returned from another field
34	8993	The Joker	crash landed, salvaged
35	978	Dragon Lady	flown home after War
36	198	(see page 69)	crashed and burned near 737th area
37	258	no name	blew tire on take-off; burned later
38	197	no name	blew tire on take-off; salvaged
39	387	The Wench	flown home after War
40	458	no name	shot down
41	395	no name	crashed on take-off
42	323	no name	shot down
43	366	no name	flown home after War
44	290	no name	crash landed, salvaged
45	648	no name	flown home after War
46	954	no name ("Mickey")	flown home after War
47	408	no name ("Mickey")	flown home after War
48	404	no name	flown home after War

49	417	Willie the Wolf	flown home after War
50	507	no name	crashed on take-off; salvaged
51	685	no name ("Mickey")	crash landing, salvaged
52	????	no name ("Mickey")	lost on first mission
53	099	no name	flown home after War
54	829	no name	flown home after War
55	972	no name	blew up just before crash landing
56	006	no name ("Mickey")	flown home after War
57	383	no name	flown home after War
58	664	Lotta Laffs	flown home after War
59	595	no name	crashed in Adriatic Sea while "buzzing"

Now that the War in Europe was finished, G. I.'s all over Europe "sweated out" their turn to return to the States, or to be shipped directly to the Pacific Theater. Of course, rumors flew around like wildfire. In the meantime, we of the 454th just sat and waited.

During the few weeks shortly after the cessation of hostilities, our planes were to fly additional missions --- this time as cargo planes. The crew chiefs and mechanics installed the plywood luggage bins in the bomb-bays once again, for the ferrying of supplies to troops in Europe. Stockpiles of materials were stacked at the various plane parking "revetments"---some of the materials being canned beans, cheese and chocolate from Australia, and other foodstuffs. Many of these food "goodies" found their way into tents of the 454th personnel during the darkness hours each evening.

One day with nothing much to do, as every day was for most of the group during those "waiting" days, I found myself in a poker game in one of the tents near our orderly room. I had a phenomenal string of luck; and after a while someone changed the game from 10 and 20 cents to 20 and 40 cents; then to one and two dollars. I continued playing, as one after another the others were replaced, after they had lost what they wanted to, or what they had. After a while, I would even stay in and draw to cards I should not have, just to let someone else win; sometimes this back-fired, as I would draw a winning hand while "trying" to lose. My luck was short-lived, however, as I tried to make my few-hundred dollars winning into a big bundle at the craps table of the Enlisted Men's Club --- where I lost most of my poker winnings.

RETURN TO THE "STATES" AND THIRTY-DAY FURLOUGH

Finally, we did get our orders to ship out the next day. Some of the tents had pet dogs or cats, which they were told they could not take with them. Not wanting to abandon them to starve or worse, the overwhelming majority of them were put to death, usually with a shot from a forty-five automatic. To do this was very hard for the "owners" of these pets. On the farm that we occupied for our base, were some underground granaries for storage of grain, and perhaps silage also, as American farms have silos. These were round cylindrical holes several feet deep, with a small opening at the top. On that last day before shipping out, these underground granaries became a dumping "land fill" for whatever garbage and rubbish was around, including the dead pets.

Fig. 44 Right: Early the next morning, July 8, 1945, the motor pool lined up the trucks and we prepared to board for the first leg of our journey back to the States. We were sure that we would all be given 30-day furloughs before being reunited for transfer, probably to the Pacific. Our convoy carried us through most of the day, with a noon-time C-ration lunch break beside the road, water from our canteens being the only beverage available.

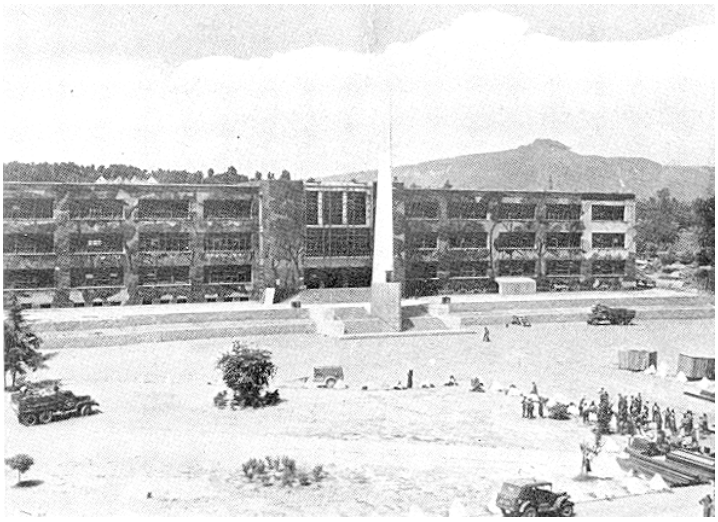


Fig. 45 Above: We arrived at Collegio Di Ciano, at Bagnoli, a "staging" area on the northern outskirts of Naples.

Fig. 46 Right: Ten days later the 454th boarded the "S. S. Argentina" for the return to the States.

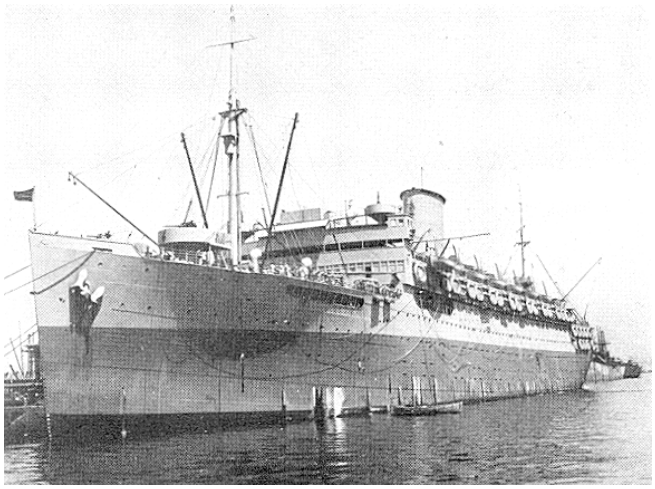


Fig. 47 Left: The "S. S. Argentina" was a luxury liner that took 600 tourist passengers to and from South America before the war. As a troop ship, 8,000 "passengers" crowded aboard for that journey home.

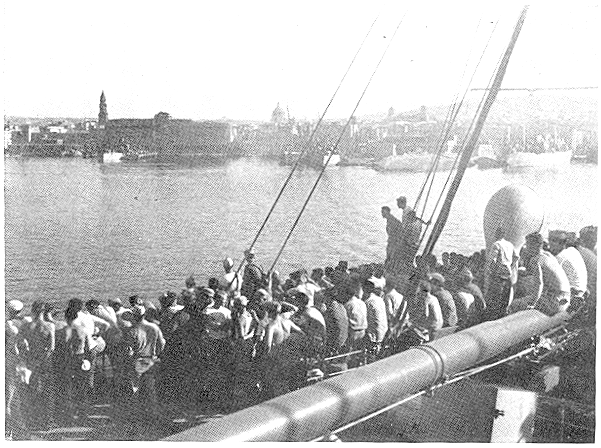


Fig. 48 Right: The evening we left Naples, the deck was crowded with troops happily watching the city fade into the distance.

Fig. 49 Left: "Bunks" on the S. S. Argentina Although not too comfortable, there were no complaints, as all were happy to be returning to the States.

The next morning I was out on deck at dawn, after sleeping in one of a four-high tier of canvas bunks, with duffel bags crowding the floor beneath and between them. As I looked over the rail, the easily-riled Mediterranean Sea was mirror-smooth under the calm pale skies. I spent most of the ten-day voyage waiting and watching. One day the ship's crew held a gun-firing drill, with about a four-inch bore naval "rifle" mounted on the forward deck. I was back at least seventy feet or so when they fired it, and the heat from the flash was almost unbearable for a few seconds. I cannot understand how Navy gun crews could stand the noise and heat during combat!

One morning I was out at the front (I should say "bow" or "prow," I guess), looking over the port side. I was watching the bow cut through the water, when all of a sudden a twenty-to-thirty-foot whale rolled over and dove; it was right against the side of the ship, perhaps having been floating when the ship pushed it aside.

After the voyage we approached New York Harbor, and heard the news that a B-25 bomber had crashed into the Empire State Building, at that time the tallest building in the world. It had crashed during a dense fog, falling to the street below. Fortunately the crash came at an early hour, and injuries were thus kept to a minimum. The next morning we sailed into New York Harbor.

Fig. 50 Right: As we entered the harbor, a tour boat approached, the passengers waving greetings.

As we headed for our dock, the Statue of Liberty appeared to the left, or port, side of the vessel. Hundreds of soldiers rushed to the port side to get a look at the Grand Old Lady. This caused the large vessel to lean far over, or "list to port." I not only felt the leaning, but could easily see it happening. I feared that after all our time overseas, we were going to be dumped into New York Harbor by the very joy of returning home; so I climbed up the tilted deck to the starboard rail. Surprisingly, I had a great view from the elevated position of that side of the deck, a view of "Liberty" I will never forget!

Fig. 51 Hundreds of servicemen line the rails to admire the Statue of Liberty on their return to the States.

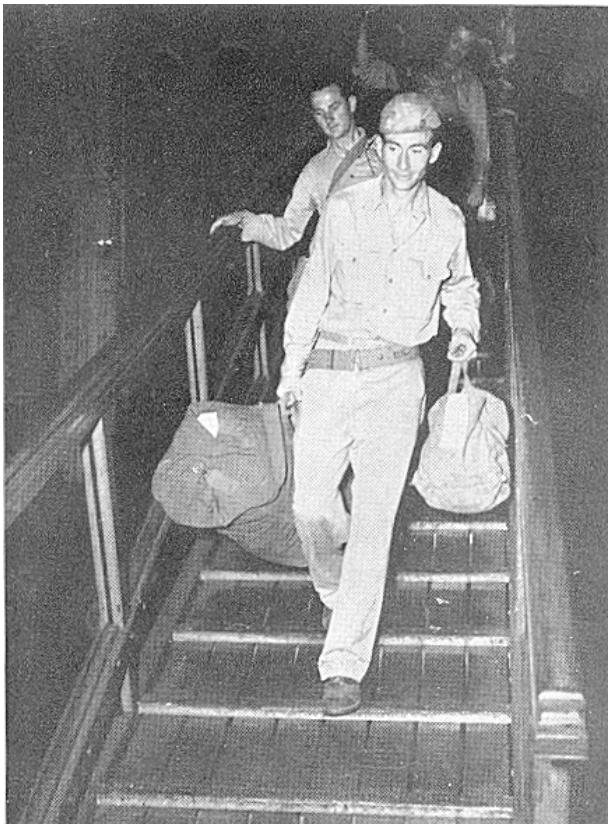


Fig. 52 Left: Finally, the 454th Bomb Group personnel disembarked at New York, enroute to homes and thirty-day furloughs.

From the dock we took a train to Fort Dix in nearby New Jersey, and from there we separated, being sent to bases nearer our homes for processing of our 30-day furloughs --- furloughs we had looked forward to for over a year-and-a-half. I was sent to Camp Atterbury in Pennsylvania, and left for Cleveland early on August 2, 1945.

I arrived at the old railroad depot near the Stadium and the Lakefront --- that station long-since razed. From there I took a cab to meet Jean at the Westlake Hotel, where she had gone the night before, after receiving my telephone call with details of my furlough.

My 30-day furlough was certainly more glorious than I would have imagined. In addition to being with Jean and both of our families, I found that Jack Mains, one of the Parkview bunch that spent so much time at the Clifton Post together, was also home on leave, with his new bride. Naturally we got together with Jack and Margy, his bride. One day we packed a picnic lunch of cold fried chicken and other great non-Army food, and made a day of it at the Euclid Beach Amusement Park, on Cleveland's far-East side. We found that servicemen in uniform had free rein at the Park. As far as the rides went, there was no charge. Jean and Margy joined us on most of the rides as often as they wanted to; and as it was a week-day and during war-time, the place was not at all crowded. Jack and I had a great time riding the Bubble-Bounce all by ourselves, the operator stopping it only when someone else wanted to ride it, Jack and I staying on. The same with the Flying Scooters; and riding the Flying Turns as much as we cared to. Why we didn't get sick is a mystery to me!

And then on August 6, 1945, came the radio broadcasts announcing one of the greatest scientific events of the twentieth century --- the dropping of the first atomic bomb on Hiroshima, Japan, from the "Enola Gay," an American B-29 bomber. Then a few days later, a second atomic bomb was dropped over Nagasaki, Japan. Then came the joyful announcement of Japan's unconditional surrender to the Allied nations. Jack, Margy, Jean and I drove to downtown Cleveland that evening, and drove through the Public Square and downtown streets with windows wide open. It seemed that everyone else was doing the same, with horns blaring, everyone shouting and laughing, many in tears, and much flag-waving. What the American citizens had worked so very hard for these many seemingly endless months, had actually come to reality and completion: Peace at long last!!! It had rained some that evening, but no one cared! One sight we will always remember is the young lady in a dark wool skirt that had been in the rain; and her skirt had shrunk so that several inches of her white slip were showing --- but neither she nor anyone else noticed, or just did not care! What a great evening of impromptu celebrating!!!

A few days later, I called the local authorities, as gasoline rationing had been lifted, to see if I would be permitted to travel to Canada while on furlough. I was told that it would be okay; so Jean, Pop, and brother-in-law "Butch" (Bob) left for several days of fishing at Honey Harbour, Ontario, where Pop and I had gone several times before the war. We didn't catch much; I think Jean caught one small pike, and Butch another small bass.

Finally, much too soon, the furlough was over, and my furlough papers showed that I was to report to the Air Base at Sioux Falls, South Dakota. Of course when the furlough was issued, we were still at war with Japan, and were expecting to be sent somewhere in that theater of combat operations. Of course, the end of the war changed all of that. At Sioux Falls we had nothing to do but wait --- for our discharges. As help was in short supply, we were permitted to work for anyone that wanted help, day by day. I worked one day for the Morrell Meat Packing Plant there, shoveling rock salt from a box-car into a wheelbarrow and then wheeling it to a storage bin inside of the plant. Another day I worked on a farm, cutting corn and loading it into a silo. I cannot remember what I did in that operation, but I'm sure it wasn't anything complicated. I do remember that the noon meal was the kind I had heard about as far as harvest-time meals went. It was served on a long make-shift table outside, with all of the local farm-hands and the soldier help eating a large meal.

When I made the rating of staff-sergeant in Charleston, I had visited the squadron orderly room and signed up to change my allotment check that was being sent to Jean. She had been getting $50 a month up to that time; and I increased it to $100 per month. Unknown to me for many months, really until after the war in Europe was over, someone in the Army (either 737th squadron or further up the chain of command), had increased that allotment by $100, to $150. On two occasions, I received letters from Jean asking how come she was getting $150 each month; on the first occasion really surprising me with that news. On both occasions, I wrote back that "I am being paid $145 per month, and get $45 here, sending you the rest." I didn't really know what had happened, but guessed that the Army had made some sort of a mix-up. Sometime in June of 1945, the 737th first sergeant asked me why my wife was receiving $150 a month instead of $100. I replied that I had no idea that she was doing so.

We shipped back to the States some weeks after that, and I went on my 30-day furlough. After the furlough, while at Sioux Falls awaiting discharge, Jean received a letter from the Army to the effect that she had been receiving $50 a month more than she was entitled to; and that she must repay the Army $950. She thought perhaps the Army would not give me my discharge if she didn't pay, so she withdrew the amount from the savings account she had been putting most of the allotment into. We still have the copy of that cashier's check in our files.

Finally, the waiting and processing was over --- really, it was less than a week! On October 6, 1945 1 was no longer "Staff-Sergeant WMR," but hence-forth would be simply "Mister WMR"---a civilian again ... safe ... wiser...and healthier than three years before when I left for the Military Service. Upon my return to Jean, I found that our hopeful expectations were to be realized, as she was pregnant.

In the Appendix will be found additional stories of overseas events under a title of "Vignettes of the Liberators." (20 "Vignettes," or short anecdotes)

A brief "history" of my military service during World War II follows on the next page.

MILITARY SERVICE OF
William M. Robishaw, 27040 Center Ridge Road Westlake, Ohio

Serial Number: 35 519 875

Entered military service November 14, 1942 at Cleveland, Ohio. Boarded train at Terminal Tower Railroad Station and went to Camp Perry Induction Center (near Sandusky, Ohio).

To Miami Beach, Florida for Basic Training, Nov. 16, 1942 (progressed to 12th day of Basic Training only)

To Lowry Field near Denver, Colo. on Dec. 15, 1942
581st Technical School Squadron

To Salt Lake City Replacement Depot on March 13, 1943; 39th Bomb Group,
Provisional Squadron B

To Davis-Monthan Army Air Base, near Tucson, Ariz. 61st Bomb Squadron

Promoted to Corporal in June of 1943

Assigned to 454th Bomb Group Cadre at Davis-Monthan Air Base in early July, 1943 --- 737th Bomb Squadron

To McCook Air Base near McCook, Nebraska. on July 28, 1943

Promoted to Sergeant in September, 1943

To Charleston Air Base near Charleston, So. Car., Sept. 30, 1943

Promoted to Staff-Sergeant in Oct., 1943

To Overseas Assignment with 454th Bomb Group, Dec. 8,1943, via Mitchel Field, near New York City; Charleston; West Palm Beach, Florida; the Island of Trinidad; Belem, Brazil (Christmas Eve); Natal, Brazil (Christmas Day); Dakar, in northern Africa (Jan. 3rd); Marakech, Africa (Jan. 4th); Algiers, Algeria (Jan. 5th); Oudna Airfield outside of Tunis, Tunisia, (Jan. 6th);

San Giovanni Air Base, near Cerignola, Italy (Jan. 26th); until Victory in Europe

Start of Return to States, July 8, 1945
To Bagnoli Staging Area, near Naples, Italy, July 8th. Ten days later boarded S. S. Argentina, and set sail for the States, arriving in New York Harbor some days later. Then to Fort Dix, New Jersey.

To Camp Atterbury, Pa., to receive furlough papers.

Thirty Day Furlough begins Aug. 2, 1945

War with Japan ended while on furlough

Report back to Sioux Falls, South Dakota, for Discharge

Discharged October 6, 1945.

(Appendix)

Vignettes of the Liberators
(B-24 Bombers)

by William M. Robishaw
S/Sgt., 737th Bomb Squadron
454th Bombardment Group (H)
15th Air Force

based near
Cerignola, Italy
January, 1944 to July, 1945

(Several of these "Vignettes" were printed in the 454th Memories in 1991)

Vignette # 1
Arrival at McCook Air Base

The original cadre of the 454th Bomb Group of World War II was formed at the Davis-Monthan Army Air Base, Just outside of Tucson, Arizona. There were a few, at most, of each of the job-classification personnel in each of the four squadrons comprising the 454th. I was quite fortunate, I feel, to have been the only automatic pilot and bombsight maintenance person in the 737th Squadron of this Group. In early August the Group moved to McCook Air Force Base, near McCook, Nebraska. Upon arrival, we found that ours was the first combat Group to occupy the Base --- except for permanent base personnel such as the always-present Military Police. During our several weeks stay at McCook, our ranks were filled out with the authorized number of additional personnel; the flying crews began arriving; and further training took place.

Because of the nature of the aircraft, bombing practice was a definite must in the daily routine of things. For this, a target was of course needed, and was situated at some distance from the Base, out in the Nebraska prairie. The target was, as many others must have been, a typical marksmanship bulls-eye, with the rings being measured at fifty or one hundred-foot intervals. This particular target's location was generally known to the headquarters personnel, who were to give compass directions and other navigational aids and data to the flying navigators.

A part of the training of all flying personnel was devoted to skeet shooting, using twelve or sixteen gauge shotguns. This was to train them for firing at enemy fighter planes during actual combat, and no doubt was very worthwhile. Thus it followed that each air base had its skeet-shooting range an d clay pigeons set off there were to simulate enemy aircraft.

Upon our arrival at McCook, four flying officers of the headquarters staff decided that they had better go out and look over the bombing target, to be sure they knew where it was and its situation. Stocking C-rations into a command car, they set out over the wide prairie --- which abounded in game birds such as pheasant. And included in their provisions, if one were to look, could be found four shotguns and several cartons of shells.

Vignette #2
"Secret" Troop Movement

In the fall of 1943, our stay at McCook came to an end, and as our departure time approached, there were many sad G. I.'s to be seen in camp. Many of their wives had been staying in McCook, with their Army husbands living with them in McCook much as civilians did, coming home every day when off duty. It was felt by the majority of this group of couples, especially, that the 454th was bound for overseas from McCook.

During the War, troop movements were a secretive Army affair. Posters cautioning soldiers, sailors and marines to remain quiet when in the presence of strangers; warnings by base personnel at all bases to be careful what you write home about, especially upcoming movements of military personnel; and other precautionary measures to prevent the sabotaging of troop trains. The American G. I. was very much aware of the need for keeping such things "mum."

Of course, everyone at the base knew we would soon be leaving McCook, but did not know the exact time or where we were going. It was a safe bet, though, that we would be traveling by rail, and there was but one railroad line through McCook --- the Burlington. As the final hour of departure approached, wives were telephoned from the base that the time was soon to arrive. The evening of departure came upon us with a dismal slightly-more-than-a-drizzle rainfall. Trucks whisked the 454th through the prairie mud-and-gravel roads-in-the-making into the outskirts of McCook, where we were mustered into a column of fours, with field packs --- sending our duffel bags ahead via the trucks. To our surprise, this "secret" troop movement was marched through McCook to the railroad station, led by the McCook Air Base Marching Band; and we were cheered by not only our wives, but by nearly the whole town of McCook and many of the nearby farmers. As a typical Army follow-up (or was it foul-up?), we spent about three hours standing around outside in the rain at the railroad station, waiting for our train to arrive, or be made up; and unlike the Army, we were permitted to visit with our wives during this time, and did not have to remain in formation.

Vignette #3
Setting up Trainers & "KP"

When we arrived at the Charleston Air Force Base, we found that the flying crews were to receive advanced training in their particular "trade." Because I was the section head for the bombsight and autopilot maintenance at the time, I was responsible for setting up four bombing trainers in a small hanger set aside for that purpose. These trainers had arrived crated, and had to be assembled where they were to be used. Each trainer was a rolling platform, approximately fifteen feet high. The framework was constructed of pipes bolted together, with a wooden platform and bombsight mounting bracket atop this framework.

None of our section had more than seen these trainers previously, and thus the construction of the first one took much effort --- reminding me now of those children's toys that fathers spent all Christmas Eve putting together "in a few simple steps." There was a deadline to be met, so that the bombardiers that would be arriving at the base would be able to get in more practice than would be available in real practice missions. The 737th section took the initiative, probably because Lt. Robinson, our section officer, appeared to be the only Squadron Section Officer for bombsights and autopilots --- at least, I cannot remember the other three Squadrons having one in Charleston. So the three of us comprising the 737th section --- Ralph Pellegrini, Mel Ames, and myself --- set to work. After completing the first two of the trainers, we were happy to note the arrival of the sections from the other three Squadrons to help on the last two trainers. We worked for twelve to sixteen hours a day over a two-week period in order to complete the work on schedule.

During this time, Mel Ames was a PFC (Private First Class), and as such was of course subject to assignment on KP (Kitchen Police, or work preparing meals and/or cleaning up after meals). Lt. Robinson did try to get him released from this duty, as we needed all the help we could get, but he was unsuccessful. Mel was assigned to report at five one morning, when we were at our busiest. He told the Squadron Adjutant that he did not have any shoes due to the Supply Room not having his size in stock. He had tried to get these shoes for some time, but was still awaiting them --- wearing his low-cut personal civilian shoes until the Supply Room could properly fit him. The Adjutant looked at his feet when Mel gave him the story of no shoes, and was quick to point out that Mel did have shoes on. Mel told him that those were his own shoes, and that he would not wear them for KP. The Adjutant thereupon ordered him to report to the Mess Hall the next morning, as scheduled.

The next morning at five, Mel arrived at the Mess Hall, wearing GI socks but no shoes. The Mess Sergeant on duty questioned him as to the unusual footwear, as the rest of the KP's laughed. Mel told him the story, and asked what his KP task was. The Mess Sergeant told Mel that he would have to get shoes in order to work there; the story finally getting past the Adjutant to the Commanding Officer of the Squadron. The CO ruled that Mel would not have to pull KP. As the KP's served for a full week at a stretch, we welcomed our KP hero back to our working ranks setting up the bombing trainers --- where Mel worked harder and longer than if he had served on KP. And --- oh yes! He did wear his low-cut civilian shoes to work with us. It was just the principle of the thing with Mel.

Vignette #4
"Feather Merchant" Guidance

While at the Charleston Air Base, our bombsight and auto-pilot sections had the opportunity of being helped to learn about the Sperry bombsight and auto-pilot through the services of a Sperry "feather merchant." "Feather merchant" was the term applied to civilian employees of companies that supplied equipment to the Air Force --- a sarcastic term referring to the fact that these company technical representatives had a feather-soft job, with expenses paid. This representative would be sent to the armed service bases to help the G. I.'s learn the proper care and maintenance of the company's equipment. The better the job these "feather merchants" did, the greater the satisfaction the armed services would have with that company's equipment --- making for more orders in the future, of course.

Naturally, our "feather merchant" was a representative of the Sperry Gyroscope Company, and was a very conscientious worker. He gave us many valuable tips on the operation and maintenance of the equipment we were responsible for --- tips that continued to prove valuable for us for many months to come, in Italy. Some of these tips simplified our routine maintenance; some helped in trouble-shooting for malfunctions in the equipment; and some helped us in making adjustments to the equipment. His help relating to the autopilot was especially helpful.

On one occasion, he wanted to find the cause of a malfunction of the autopilot on one of our planes. These autopilots consisted of two high-speed gyroscopes, spinning at 25,000 revolutions per minute. These were electrically connected to three hydraulic servos, which operated the three control surfaces of the aircraft. The servo operating the elevator was located just forward of the rear turret, at the top of the fuselage; the one operating the rudders (twin rudders on the B-24) was located on the floor of the half-deck, above the rear bomb-bays; and the third servo operating the ailerons was in the center-structure of the wing --- being available for maintenance from the cat-walk of the bomb-bay at about the middle. After having done some preliminary ground-checking of the equipment, and testing the emergency release-of-servos cables (this cable hook up would disengage the servos so that an electrical short would not cause one of the servos to lock the controls in a full-over position), the company rep asked for a flight test. So the rep and I boarded the plane, which was manned by the minimum possible crew of pilot, co-pilot, and flight engineer --- and the pilot taxied the plane to the end of a runway. As we waited for clearance for take-off from the field's control tower, the pilot said that he was going to practice a short-field take-off. In order to do this, the co-pilot held the wheel brakes locked, and the pilot took the flight controls. The flight engineer adjusted the engine controls and throttles, as the Sperry rep and I stood just behind the pilot and co-pilot, looking over their shoulders, and bracing ourselves against the armor plating behind the seats. The plane vibrated terrifically as the four engines reached their maximum power --- the plane shaking as though uncontrolled. Finally the pilot called "Brakes off!" to the co-pilot, and the big "flying boxcar" lurched forward precipitously. I was nearly thrown from my feet, backward, as the big bird rapidly gathered headway, the flight engineer rapidly calling out the airspeed. Within two hundred yards, I am sure, the plane was airborne, containing one mighty shook-up ground crewman, believe me.

As we reached altitude and began testing the autopilot, everything worked well until we began checking the aileron controls. For some reason, the ailerons did not respond at all, let alone respond properly. Upon the suggestion of the Sperry rep, I went into the bomb-bay to check on whether the aileron servo was properly engaged, after our ground-checking of its release mechanism. I found that this servo was not engaged properly, as I had evidently goofed

after the ground checking, and reported this to the Sperry rep. He told me to go back and re-engage it properly, and he would have the pilot hold the ailerons steady while I did so. This was against the Air Force regulations, as fingers could easily get caught and mangled in the cables if the aileron controls were suddenly moved. Although frightened, and not positive that the pilot would be able to hold the controls steady, I nervously made my way again along the catwalk in the bomb-bays. After all, I had goofed, and better not to have to report the goof to any officer on the ground. Although I was fearful of catching my fingers in the cables, I was more fearful that such an accident might make me step inadvertently off the catwalk onto one of the bomb-bay doors, which would not have held me --- and I could not move along the catwalk with a parachute on. With great care, I disengaged the servo with a screwdriver, and then just as carefully, re-engaged it properly --- and being very sure to do it properly.

All concerned were pleased that the malfunction had been found and repaired in the preliminary ground checking --- especially yours truly.

Vignette #5
First Aircraft Loss

While stationed at Charleston Air Base, our Group was involved in final preparations for going overseas, where the flying crews would enter combat areas on bombing missions. Bombardiers were concentrating on learning the techniques of using the bombsights, and we were very much concerned with this on the bombing trainers set up in a large hangar-type of building; spending a two-week period of fourteen-hour days setting up the training equipment. The flying crews were preparing for their overseas assignments by formation-flying practice, gunnery practice, navigation practice, as well as the regular practice of bombing runs, using one-hundred pound bombs with a minimum of explosives in them.

On one of the practice bombing missions, one of the planes of the 737th Squadron caught on fire. Evidently the fire spread rapidly, because the plane exploded before anyone bailed out. There was only one survivor from this accident, that one being the pilot or co-pilot (I forget which, at this time). This fortunate fellow found himself blown clear of the airplane wreckage by the explosion, and falling through the air. He was still strapped in his bucket-type seat, he told his rescuers. As he was wearing a seat-pack parachute, he was in a very serious predicament, as it could not be opened while he was still sitting on his ‘chute. He was able, either calmly or frantically, to unbuckle his seat belt as he fell, and get the seat away from him. He then pulled the ripcord of his ‘chute, managing an unusual escape from death.

The bombsight from this wreckage was returned to our maintenance shop, and of course it was a complete loss. Some of the parts from it are still in my possession as souvenirs.

Vignette #6
Special Overseas Training

While stationed at Charleston Air Base, the word got around that we were in our final training preparations, prior to being shipped overseas. The Base was known as a final training area, and other Bomb Groups were also stationed there, making final training preparations.

In one of these other outfits, a ground crew member felt that he had not received enough basic training to prepare him for overseas duty; and he reported this to his Commanding Officer. Perhaps he thought that this complaint would save him from going across the ocean to serve; but he was fortunate to have an understanding Commanding Officer --- as nearly all personnel on the base found out. This understanding CO saw to it that the complaining GI DID receive sufficient training for overseas duty; and he did receive training in the proper methods of protecting himself in case there were any enemy air or ground attacks. This "untrained" one was sent out every day, for at least one week (during which time nearly everyone on the base visited his area, in order to see the poor soul in training), in full field pack, carrying an entrenching shovel and a carbine. He was sometimes led by a non-com (non-commissioned officer, of corporal or higher rank), in stealthy approaches to "enemy" positions --- such as barracks or trees or coal bin sheds; and he was also instructed in how to retreat and take cover. Much of his training was in the proper method of digging a fox-hole --- which must have been something to see. In order to more nearly simulate battle conditions, he was instructed to dive into the fox-hole whenever someone would open the Squadron Headquarters door and blow a whistle; he was to remain crouched there until the next time someone would blow the whistle, when he was to crawl out of the fox-hole, still in full field pack, and resume the digging.

The day that I drove through his area in our Section's Jeep, he was being directed by a sergeant --- directed in a mock attack upon various items in the area; a tree, then a wood-storage box, a corner of a building. He was making his "attack-approach" flat on the ground, while the sergeant ambled along behind, pointing out to him the various means of cover he might make use of in his approach to his objective. The poor guy certainly received a sufficient amount of overseas training, in a concentrated period of time. His plight perhaps kept many other frightened GI's from complaining in a similar manner --- once they saw how much good the complaining did this one guy. In fact, we all felt, after seeing him in "training," that we were very well prepared for overseas duty.

Vignette #7
Flying Overseas

Due to the fact that I was the only bombsight and autopilot maintenance man in the original cadre of the 737th Bomb Squadron, I was selected and designated to accompany the airplanes and flying crews to the overseas destination. I and three other ground crew personnel were assigned to fly in the B-24 that the flying crew had named the "Gentleman Jim" --- named after the former heavyweight boxing champion, "Gentleman Jim" Corbett; and also so named because the pilot and commander of the plane was also named James Corbett. The average age of the crew was probably twenty-two. After flying to Mitchell Field near New York City, and spending about a week there in final preparations and indoctrination for flying across the Atlantic Ocean (or perhaps Pacific), we headed south to West Palm Beach, Florida. We left New York in mid-December, and flew south over Baltimore on our way south. It seems that the plane's navigator had attended high school in a Baltimore suburb, although none of the gunners or ground crew personnel aboard were aware of this, until later. Being cold, the waist windows of the plane were closed (these windows would be removed before flying into combat). Most of the six of us in the waist section were dozing about the time we were approaching Baltimore, when we were aroused by the feel of the plane being in a steep dive. One of the ground crew assigned to the plane was a parachute rigger, and he awoke quickly and rushed to one of the waist windows. He had the window open in just a few seconds, even before the rest of us were completely awake and aware of the rapid descent. In fact, he had one foot on the sill of the opening, preparing to jump out and parachute to safety, when the plane suddenly leveled off and went right into a steep climbing turn. Upon leveling off at a somewhat safer altitude, the plane again headed into a rapid dive, and repeated the previous maneuver. As we changed from the dive into a climb, we saw a high school right under us, and realized for the first time that we were for some reason doing a "buzz job" on this building --- but we still did not know why. We must have "buzzed" the building five or six times before continuing southward. We were able to see the U. S. Capitol Building in the distance --- flight regulations permitting no plane to approach within five miles during the War. Needless to say that the six of us in the waist section were thoroughly shaken up by this "buzzing" experience --- and there was little snoozing during the rest of that flight.

Vignette #8
Oudna Accidents

Many of the packing containers for items shipped to the Armed Forces overseas were eagerly sought by personnel for other uses, after they were emptied. One of these items in demand were fifty-five gallon gasoline or fuel drums. Some were used for the storage of wash water; some had their tops torched off by welders, or chiseled out, and used as rubbish containers or to heat water; and some were cut in half by torch or chisel to be used for various other projects.

While stationed at the Oudna Air Base near Tunis in North Africa, I witnessed two accidents caused by such "extra-curricular" use of fuel drums. The first occurred while I was driving down to check some equipment on one of the planes, which were being used for advanced formation-flying training during our thirty-day stay near Tunis --- while waiting for our permanent base near Cerignola, Italy, to be set up by the bulk of the ground crew personnel. (One member of each ground crew department was flown overseas along with the planes so as to be available for maintenance along the way, and during the advanced training period.) As I neared the "line," my electrician companion and I heard a muffled "boom," and turning toward the sound we saw a G. I. in welding glasses stumble from a tent-front and tumble to the ground. He was hustled into a Jeep, and rushed away --- presumably to a hospital or medical aid station. We found later that he had just put a torch to what he thought was an empty gasoline drum; but the fumes were still inside, and the torch caused the fumes to explode --- which bulged out both ends of the drum. We later learned that he had suffered no ill effects, except for having his breath knocked out of him by the concussion; and he had recovered pretty much from this by the end of his Jeep ride at the medical station or hospital.

Some of the fuel drums were converted into gasoline burning heating stoves, placed within tents with gasoline fuel supply located outside and piped into the stove through aluminum tubing from wrecked aircraft. One evening while lined up for our evening meal, we were surprised by the shout of "Fire!" One of the heating stoves had caught fire in an unexpected manner --- perhaps because too much fuel was allowed to flow into the stove before it was lit. The whole tent caught fire, fed by not only the gasoline, but by the piles of straw which made up the "mattress" of each of the six bunks inside. The six men of a flying crew that were assigned to this tent each lost much of their equipment and personal belongings, although some duffel bags were pulled from the flaming tent.

Vignette #9
Improving "Housing"

After several months at the air base outside of Cerignola, Italy, several of the guys became tired of living in the general "tent city" some distance from the parking area of the aircraft. Too, some became weary of living in the rectangular pyramid tents that were issued to groups of six men. It is interesting to note that with all of the organization that the Armed Forces has, the men were not assigned any specific tent, nor were the men even grouped by assignment; nor were the tents required to be located in any particular pattern, and they were NOT in any pattern. Instead, as four to eight men would decide on their own, they would become tent-mates; I say four to eight, although usually six shared a tent.

Many sought ways to expand their quarters. One very early venture of this sort occurred before the pyramid tents were sufficient in number to be doled out to the ground crew personnel; all of the enlisted men having been issued a shelter half (half of a "pup" tent). Two of the ground crew men were able to get two extra shelter halves from two of the flying boys, who of course were quartered in the pyramid tents. They then joined the four shelter halves together, thus getting twice as much space as the rest of the poor ground crew men. Not satisfied with this much extra room, they dug out the ground to the depth of about one foot, the shape of the four shelter halves, and then set up their tent sections over the dig, thus being able to even sit up in their "home." The Italian February weather was somewhat mild; and when the inevitable Italian "liquid sunshine" came down in a fine terrific storm, their glorious abode was converted into a foot-deep pool one night --- this completely demoralizing the-expansionist philosophy of others who were thinking of so enlarging their shelters.

I shared one of the pyramid tents, when they became available, with seven others. Just in front of the doorway, we paid a couple of Italian youths to dig us a comfortable fox-hole. After some weeks, during which time we added a few pieces of home-made furniture, the tent had become quite crowded. To help ease the situation, we decided that we would lift the four sides of the tent, one side at a time as we were able to obtain the necessary materials --- the four-foot-high sides of the tent to actually become a part of the roof. This expansion would give us a four-by-sixteen foot additional space, in which we could place our bunks --- and some duffel bags or other paraphernalia. In fact, we would get three of these four-by-sixteen foot spaces; along each side and the back of the tent. The fortunes of war really dictated the pace at which this expansion would proceed, as the "materials" necessary were to be procured from the packing cases of certain types of bombs --- anti-personnel fragmentation bombs, to be exact. These packing cases were about four feet long, and ten inches square, made of 3/4-inch pine, with a two-hinged lid with a pair of locking hasps. the cases were also fitted with a sheet-metal liner, with a clamp-on lid for it. Because these bombs were not used too often, at least by our Group, the empty ones were always at a high premium, throughout our stay in Italy. When it was learned that the next day's mission was to carry such a bomb-load, many ground crewmen would visit the aircraft parking revetments, waiting for the armament men to load the bombs into the aircraft. The armament men had a very difficult time convincing the others that the empty cases could not be taken from the area immediately, but had to be kept in case the plane(s) would return from the next day's mission without having dropped the bombs --- in which case the bombs would have to be repacked in the cases and returned to the "bomb dump." Of course, some planes were frequently unable to reach the target because of mechanical failure, and these of course would bring back their bombs.

I was fortunate to be in one of those tents that had a number of armament men as inhabitants --- five of the eight being of that line of work. As such, these bomb-jockeys knew

what the bomb-loads were going to be for the next day as soon as other enlisted men, or sooner. As a result, our building expansion program moved along quite nicely, and in due time not only did we expand the two sides and rear of the tent, but also were able to lift the front tent sides and gain spaces for the seventh and eighth bunks --- leaving the sixteen-by-sixteen-foot center area of the tent for living quarters, except of course for the four-inch tent pole; and all eight of us were sleeping in space that was originally outside of the tent walls.

Before spring had arrived, nearly every tent had its own little gasoline heating stove inside --- with fuel supplied from a storage tank outside via tubing from wrecked aircraft. These of course could become very dangerous --- and I do not know of any tent that had the stove going all night. I know that one evening, during a real spring downpour, someone noticed that some sparks from our chimney (which ran up the tent pole and out at the top of the pyramid) had evidently landed on the roof, and several burnt spots were noted. Some nights later, the same thing occurred, but without the help of the rain. We all scrambled outside, and someone grabbed a can of water, and we boosted Pellegrini onto the roof of the tent, as he was the lightest. He scrambled up the steep slope of the roof, carrying the water, and put the smoldering embers out. We learned from this that we must control the flow of the gasoline a little closer, and not let the fire get too hot, no matter how cold the outside air.

Also during the first spring, small one-hundred-ten-volt gasoline generators were made available for the flying crews tents, so that they might have electric lights in their quarters. The number of tents getting the electricity was so limited because the small size of the generators made it impossible for them to carry a great load. In spite of this and orders from Headquarters, several ground crewmen could be seen after dark running wires from their tents along the ground and tying them into the wires running to the tents of the fly-boys. By late summer, generators of sufficient power were available that made such “bootlegging” unnecessary.

One day two of our tent-mates spent a one-day pass visiting the nearby town of Cerignola. While gone, there was a heavy rain lasting late into the night. We heard them returning long after dark, as they splashed their way to our tent. We also heard them grumbling and cursing loudly. It seems that as they splashed through the standing water everywhere in the dark, one step was not just into standing water, but into another tent’s foxhole. They were soaked not only from the rain above, but from the full foxhole below.

Vignette #10
Germans Bomb Bari Harbor

During our first few months at the 454th's Cerignola base, we were awakened from one evening's rest by the sounds of explosions far to the south-east. Some flashes were visible in the sky, much like Northern Lights, but not great or spectacular. The next morning we received the news that the Germans had staged what turned out to be one of their last bombing raids of the War; an air attack on the port city of Bari, on the Adriatic coast. They had caught several American supply ships in the harbor, and did quite a lot of damage --- with the help of a lucky direct hit on an ammunition ship, which blew up causing much damage to other vessels.

Vignette #11
Move to New "Shack"

Several months after the 454th's arrival at Cerignola, I was sent to Bari, an Italian seaport about sixty or seventy miles south of Cerignola, on the Adriatic Sea. I was to receive further training in the maintenance of the Norden bombsight and autopilot equipment, which was coming in as regular equipment on the replacement aircraft we were receiving. While at Bari, I regularly passed through an Air Force supply room to and from training sessions. Each day as I returned to my quarters, I would obtain some hard-to-come-by nails. When I returned to the Cerignola base, it was to find the little Italian-descent bombsight man of our squadron was on his way to Bari, for a week of the same training that I had just completed. Mel Ames, the third man of our bombsight and auto-pilot section, and I decided that we had enough of this fellow's company, night and day --- and so planned immediately to move out of the tent, and build our own two-man "shack" in the midst of the aircraft parking area. Probably the acquisition of the nails triggered our action, plus the fact that Mel had obtained several "frag cases" while I was at Bari. We proceeded to dismantle the one side of the tent where we had our bunks, dropping that side of the tent back to its intended position and use.

After much sawing and hammering, we came up with a slightly-sloping roofed "hut" of about ten by fourteen feet. On the roof, we placed overlapping "shingles" of the metal liners from the "frag" cases, but were somewhat concerned over how to waterproof the sides. I remembered that I had visited a Service Supply Squadron shortly before, to obtain some autopilot parts, and while there I had seen a roll of canvas, three feet in width. With some quick figuring, we at first thought that we would cover only the two sides facing the prevailing winds; then we thought better, and decided to cover all four sides. This meant that we needed a little over two hundred feet of the material, so we made out a requisition for two-hundred fifty feet. When we went after this canvas, it turned out that there was about two-hundred eighty feet on the roll; so at the suggestion of the Service Supply Squadron clerk, we took it all.

After a few days of concentrated efforts whenever our ground-crew duties were completed, we had a fine little building, with a gasoline-burning stove for heating (later replaced: see "Vignette #12"); running water stored in an oxygen tank from a wrecked plane, and fed through aircraft aluminum tubing); plywood floor (in several sections, from two to three foot dimensions); plexiglass windows from wrecked planes; and both 110-volt and 24-volt electric supply for lighting. We spent many under-the-circumstances-happy months in our little "hut"; and had the War continued for another winter, we had plans for additional luxuries, including hot running water.

During the one winter we did spend in the "hut," both Mel and I were smelling gasoline each night for several nights, after we had gone to bed. One mild day, we determined to try to find out the reason for this. We lifted the plywood floor-boards, that covered the pipe-line that supplied our stove with gasoline for fuel (100-octane aircraft fuel, we usually used). We found that by walking on the floor, we had rubbed the aluminum tubing against the ground, and this had worn several pitted holes in the tubing, through which gasoline had been seeping. We felt very fortunate that the gasoline-soaked floor had not become ignited, and sent us to a flaming end.

Vignette #12
Heating Systems

During the Italian winter of 1944-45, the weather at Cerignola was quite damp and cold, therefore being rather uncomfortable for all Armed Forces personnel of both sides. It was of course extremely so for front-line troops, as well as Air Force personnel in comparative safety many miles behind the battle lines. In such comparative safety, it was but natural for the Air Force personnel to seek warm and dry shelters. Most men were bunked six to a tent, the tent being pyramidal in shape, with side walls about three-and-a-half feet in height, and the perimeter of these walls being sixteen feet to a side. These tents, if properly erected and situated, were dry, but needed some artificial means of heating them. It was seemingly ridiculous to us, what with the gasoline rationing back in the States, that nearly all tents were heated with gasoline-burning stoves, many of which were of a "Rube Goldberg" design. Most had a fuel tank outside of the tent, made from some aircraft part; the fuel line from this to the stove being made of copper or aluminum tubing from some wrecked aircraft. The stove was made, if possible, from half of a twenty-gallon oil can, turned upside down. This was usually placed near the center of the tent, and in some cases had a chimney of empty food cans running up through the roof, so as to carry off fumes. The fuel was permitted to run into either an empty tin can placed under the stove, or is some cases to run over a can filled with stones.

The 454th Bomb Group Engineering Officer devised a very fine stove-and-chimney combination, which he ordered a nearby Service Squadron to make up for the tents of all the flying crews on the base. My hut-mate, Mel Ames, and myself were aware that these stoves were being made for the flying crews, and decided that we would like to have one for our hut on the line, which we had built with the aid of much conniving. The stove itself, as designed by the Engineering Officer, was of fine practical worth, having a burner and door and chimney-opening built in --- these three items being difficult for us to build into a stove because of our limited supply of tools. However, the Service Squadron was equipped to completely repair damaged aircraft, and so had all the tools and equipment necessary. The chimney was made of slightly-tapered sections, each about four feet long --- which were made from the sheet-metal liners of crates bringing fragmentation bombs to our squadrons from the States. These chimney-sections were crimped, and formed into nearly-perfect cylinders.

One night, about nine or ten o'clock, Mel and I borrowed the "weapons carrier" (like a pick-up truck) from the Armament Section, which we were technically a part of. We made the short journey to the Service Squadron area, which was adjacent to our base. I parked the weapons carrier on the outskirts of the area, and Mel got out and started off on his lonesome "moonlight requisition" mission. Mel was selected, as he had the proper qualifications of nerve and innocence for such work. He found a member of the Service Squadron at work crimping the sheet-metal chimney parts, and somehow wangled a stove and two sections of chimney from him, which was all we needed for our purposes. He had been gone for about thirty minutes when I made out his ambling figure returning, carrying his treasures, and we made off without incident.

The next day found us returning in daylight, to the wreckage of many planes in the Service Squadron area --- the wrecks being in a "graveyard" section for planes that were completely impossible to fix. These wrecked planes were "free pickings" for any Allied personnel, as all wanted parts had been removed. We were able to find plenty of aluminum tubing and a few valves with which to control the flow of fuel to our fine new stove, and we lived in comfortable warmth thereafter.

Vignette #13
Special Bomb Fuses

On a few occasions, to provide a demoralizing as well as damaging effect, our bombs were to be equipped with unique ultra-sensitive detonating fuses. These fuses were rather tricky to install in the bombs, and once installed, they could not be removed without also detonating the bomb. A reverse turning of the screw-threads of the fuse even a small fraction of an inch, would in fact cause detonation. As a result, these fuses were installed just minutes before take-off, when there was no longer a possibility that the mission would be called off.

Another feature of these fuses was that they could be set to detonate at impact, or at a certain time delayed until after impact, up to as long as twelve hours after impact. Thus, when a raid had passed a target area, and many bombs had exploded, the people might return from their shelters only to find that they would be subject to sudden unexpected explosions for several hours. Of course, they did not know when these types of fuses were being used, and if any unexploded bombs were found in the area, they would have to be left alone, or defused --- which was impossible with these fuses. Such knowledge must have been rather unnerving to the population of any target area.

If for some reason one of our planes had to return without reaching the target (such occurrences were common due to engine failure), these bombs would have to be disposed of, because they could not be unloaded from the airplane. On one occasion, one of these returning planes crashed into the fields some miles away, exploding in flames. The flames activated the time fuses, and the Military Police were informed. A patrol had to be put on duty for over eight hours, in order to keep all persons, G. I. or native Italians, away from the wreckage. By the end of this time, all bombs aboard had exploded, with the patrolling M. P.'s keeping count so as to be sure when the area could be declared safe.

Vignette #14
A Pilot that Wouldn't Wait

So that the planes could take off early in the morning, the armament crews would begin loading them the night before, with whatever type of bomb loads were called for by the target, and the damage desired. Sometimes the decision as to the target and/or the bomb load would not be reached until late in the evening, which meant that the armament crews responsible for loading bombs would be working late at night, perhaps beyond midnight. Then, if for some reason such as the weather, the mission would be called off, the bombs would have to be unloaded the following morning, for safety and/or convenience of the ground crew personnel working on maintaining the planes. Sometimes the mission would be called off at the last hour, perhaps even after the flying crews had been briefed for the mission, and already were at the planes.

Such was the case at an airfield some miles away one bright morning in the midsummer of 1944. One of the pilots was at the plane with his crew, ready to go, when word came from the Fifteenth Air force Headquarters to forget the mission for the day --- a mission which called for each Liberator to drop eighteen bombs of two-hundred fifty pounds each onto a rail yard in Austria. The pilot wanted to fly that day, the weather being so fine, and decided that he would take off without waiting for the armament crew to unload the bombs. His full crew boarded the plane, and they took off for what was expected to be a joy-ride.

At our base, the same morning, we were able to hear the bombs of that ill-fated plane exploding, four or five separately-spaced explosions. We later learned that the pilot had succumbed to that malady known as "buzzing" --- flying the plane at slightly above ground-level over a tent area and thus frightening the occupants, perhaps even to the extent that some would jump into foxholes. As happened many times, these pilots thought that they were "pretty good" fliers, and as many others did, this pilot became overconfident. In banking to make a low-altitude turn, his plane lost just enough altitude to drag a wing-tip along the ground --- and as a result the big lumbering Liberator cart-wheeled along, finally splatting into the earth and breaking into flames. The tail section of the plane had broken free of the rest of the fuselage, and tumbled some hundred yards away from the burning remainder of the plane. There were four crewmen in the tail section, who fortunately survived, receiving only severe bruises as a result of their tumbling. Of course, the six men in the fore-part of the plane died in the crash and resultant fire.

Many planes were lost in similar fashion in our area of the European Theater --- just because the pilots thought themselves to be "hot shot" pilots.

Vignette #15
Straight-Down Crash at Base

The Armed Services have several classifications into which all data and written material fall. Many written materials are available to the public, and the bulk of the remainder of the information concerning guns, tanks, planes and so on is classified material. It falls into one of several classifications --- restricted, confidential, secret, or top secret. During World War II, bombsight and autopilot information started out as "secret," and by late 1942 had been changed to a "confidential" status. This meant that certain personnel only were to be given the information regarding bombsights or autopilots, and that any written materials concerning these items were to be the responsibility of authorized personnel only.

On one fine sunny morning some months after our arrival at the Cerignola base in Italy, I was making my way toward our maintenance shop, carrying several "log books" in which the running and maintenance records of bombsights were noted. These, of course, were my responsibility, and when they were out of the shop were to be with me. As I passed our squadron orderly room, or headquarters building, I gazed into the clear blue sky and noted one of our silver Liberators approaching at a low altitude. I was curious as to the reason for the low altitude, and so paused for a few seconds. The orderly room stood on the lip of a saucer-shaped depression, in the center of which were the two side-by-side runways, and the parking revetments and several maintenance buildings --- this area being referred to as "the line." As I stood on the edge of the lip, I made out that the approaching lumbering plane had its left outboard engine stopped, and the propeller "feathered" (turned so that the edges of the prop faced front-and-rear, thus reducing air drag and preventing the prop from turning, or "wind milling"). As I watched the plane approach, it began a slow turn to the left, preparing to line up with a runway and land; the dead engine forcing the plane out of that day's bombing mission. As it slowly banked to the left I was surprised and horrified to see the two right-side engines overpower the single left-side engine --- carrying the plane completely over on its nose, at an altitude of what must have been far less than five hundred feet. As the plane rolled over into its nose-down position, it spun into the ground very quickly, as I watched with my feet glued to the spot. The plane struck the ground with a terrific crunch, and the wing tanks filled with high-octane gasoline erupted into a flaming funeral pyre for the unfortunate ten men of the flight crew --- who were probably feeling themselves lucky to be missing the bombing mission, up to just a few seconds previously.

I soon recovered from my horror-struck awe, watching the flames leaping high into the sky amidst clouds of heavy black smoke. The nearest tent and foxhole was but a few rods away, and so I jumped right in, without waiting for an invitation from its inhabitants --- a few other ground personnel barely beat me to the haven of safety. We all crouched down, with the knowledge that the bombs aboard the plane and now surrounded by the flaming fuel might go off at any moment. In discussing this possibility, we found that one of the men in the foxhole was an ordnance man --- the personnel that dealt with bombs. He reported to us, upon being questioned, that the five hundred pound bombs aboard the plane would kill a man, just from the shock of detonation, at a distance of some sixty-plus feet. We were within a distance of two-to-three hundred feet; and there were ten bombs aboard.

With some quick mathematical reasoning, we figured that we were twice as close as we should be, to feel completely safe. (Later, it was found that we had not considered other factors in our reasoning, and that we had been perfectly safe in that foxhole, from concussion at least.) Some of the fellows in the foxhole were afraid to leave, and make a run for it, because the bombs might go off before they reached another foxhole, the next closest being at least three hundred

feet away. However, I and a few others decided that sitting there, too close, was not good, and the sooner we started the farther away we would be before any explosion took place. I had already placed the log-books on the edge of the foxhole, and so away we went.

About three hundred feet away, I dove to the ground, but at the time I did not know why --- and still do not. I landed prone just as the sound of a bomb-burst reached my ears. I turned over and looked back, to see a great column of black smoke rising above the wreckage of the burning plane. As I gazed in wonder at this sight, I saw a piece of the wreckage falling toward me; I got to my feet quickly, and judged the approach of this large piece of the wrecked plane --- judged just as a baseball outfielder judges the flight of a long fly ball. The piece of wreckage struck the ground about twenty feet to one side of me, bouncing ten to twelve feet into the air when it hit; and continued bouncing and rolling for several yards. I went over to look at this smoking piece of wreckage, and found that it was about the size and weight of an automobile generator, perhaps larger.

At this moment, a ground-crew man stepped from a tent nearby, evidently not having been aware of the wreck until the bomb exploded. As he turned to look toward the explosion, I saw him glance at his hand --- discovering that a very minute piece of the plane's "skin" or some such fragment had slightly scratched his hand.

After waiting nearby until the smoke of the fire had died down, and it being evident that there would be no further bombs detonated, I made my way cautiously back toward the orderly room, and looked down from the saucer lip. There, a short distance away, lay a complete mass of unrecognizable metal, with no shape resembling anything man-made at all. It smoked for several hours; it was no use for fire-fighters to approach it, for the ten unfortunate fly-boys that went down in the craft had no chance for survival whatsoever.

After gazing at the wreckage for several minutes, I returned to the first foxhole, to find the log-books untouched. I picked them up, making sure that all were still there, and made my way down to the maintenance building; and continued the day and my small part in a very big war.

Vignette #16
Sabotage, or Accident?

In early September of 1944, the camp area of the 737th Squadron was rudely awakened at the first light of dawn by the explosion of what turned out to be a one-thousand pound bomb. My first moment of consciousness was as I was rolling from my home-made cot to the floor of the tent; and followed by the fastest move I have ever made on my hands and knees. I hit the floor crawling, and headed right out the door of the tent, diving into the foxhole outside head-first --- the others of the tent arriving within I would say five seconds, which wasn't bad at all for eight guys who had been sleeping ten seconds or so before. Our first thoughts were naturally that somehow the German Air Force had gathered together enough strength to mount a raid on our base --- and we all turned our heads toward the basin where the "line" was. Because the "line" was in a shallow basin, all we could see was the bright glow from a fire, which we knew came from one of our planes. After about ten or fifteen minutes had passed, and there were no further explosions, we felt that it was safe to return to our bunks, especially as the glow from the fire had died down considerably, evidently the gasoline having been about burned out.

As I lay on my cot, I lifted up the tent flap and looked toward the "line," and after only a few minutes, I saw that the glow from the fire had increased a great deal, and quickly. I called this information out to the others in the tent, and headed for the foxhole again, only this time I was walking. The others followed, and we were only there a few moments when another thousand-pounder let go, and we all ducked down; although we were probably at least a thousand feet from the nearest plane, I had seen a large chunk from a former crash hurled that far --- a chunk at least the size of an automobile generator. As the echo of this second blast came, we could see all of the tents emptying their residents.

During the next half-hour, I was as scared as most of the others. However, I vividly remember a few incidents that took place during this half-hour, that bring grins to me now --- now that the incident is over, and as no one was injured or killed --- just three or four aircraft destroyed by the fires and explosions.

The tent nearest to us housed several men of the Communications Section, among whom was one rather short, stocky lad named Joe Kenworthy. Joe had always been a morale-booster, with his clever quips and actions. As we watched this tent-full emerge very hurriedly, we were amazed to see Joe stop just outside of the tent, and remain standing there. We could clearly hear him cursing, as this tent was only about one hundred feet away. Joe continued his ranting and swearing, and later after things were back to normal, we learned the reason for his strange behavior. It seems that when Joe rushed out of the tent with the others, he turned a little too quickly, and slammed a big toe into one of the tent's very secure two-inch-square tent pegs; stubbing it so severely that it jarred him clear to his teeth, the pain being so great that he would rather stay put and take his chance than to put any weight on the toe.

The second incident was also quite humorous, when the story ended. Also at the second bomb-blast (which was followed by several others during the next twenty minutes), the tents emptied out, as mentioned above. One of the lads was evidently roused quite suddenly, and could think only of putting distance between himself and the area of the burning planes. As he raced past our foxhole, we were quite surprised to see that he wore absolutely nothing but a frightened look, and his helmet. Just beyond the tent area, he was seen racing through the stubble of a recently-harvested wheat field --- and we all marveled at his speed of foot through the wheat stubble barefooted. Some time later, after the fires had died away, we all saw this same fellow returning, gingerly picking his way back through the wheat stubble, still "dressed"

in only his helmet. We all had a good laugh, recalling the difference in the speed of departure from the tent area, as compared with the speed of his return trip.

POST SCRIPT --- the following was copied from the June, 1996 issue of "Post San Giovanni," the Newsletter of the 454th Bombardment Group Association: In turn copied from the 1995 Fall issue (No. 54) of BRIEFING.

SWIFT JUSTICE

B-24 Sabotage In Italy - would like to hear from any B-24 vets who may be able to shed more information on this story which did indeed take place. Possibly the swiftest case of Justice on record.

It was either the spring or late summer of 1944 at an airfield near Cerignola and Foggia, Italy a number of B-24 sabotage actions were carried out with the resulting loss of approximately 10 B-24's.

The culprit was finally caught in the act of placing a bomb in the wheel well of a B-24, attaching the bomb to the landing gear electrical system.

When the gear switch was activated the bomb would explode. The culprit turned out to be an American T/Sgt who at one time was a member of the German/American Bund.

When apprehended a court martial board was convened and the saboteur was executed by firing squad 45 minutes later.

He had received $1,000 for every B-24 destroyed. The Cerignola-Foggia area is approximately in the middle of Italy's "boot." The B-24's involved were assigned to the 15th Air Force, the 454th Bomb Group. How many of our members can recall this incident?

(WMR comment: I had not heard any news or rumors that the incident related in "Vignette #16" was an act of sabotage,
nor that the "culprit" had been caught and executed.)

Vignette #17
Two-Wheel Landing

After one trying mission into the heart of the Nazi-held fortress of Europe, our Liberators returned quite the worse for wear. Many bore the scars of German flak, and some were damaged to the extent that they returned with only three engines functioning, the fourth having failed during the air battle. This was a rather common occurrence, and such planes were usually given a priority to land before the more-able aircraft. Too, on some occasions the flying crews were unfortunate in that they were also struck with the flying fragments of ack-ack shells, or the projectiles from German aircraft. Those bearing wounded personnel would signal to the waiting ambulances and medical personnel upon approaching the runway, by firing a red flare. Also, the pilot would signal that there was some mechanical defect in the same manner, so that both ambulances and fire-fighting equipment would follow the plane along the runway after landing.

This particular incident refers to a plane firing a red flare as it approached, but which had no injured aboard, and all engines functioning well. As always, the crews already in and all ground personnel about, stared at the plane, trying to determine the cause for the flare. I happened to be at one of out parking revetments nearest the runway, meeting a plane that had just taxied into its parking spot. The crew had just debarked, and were also watching the approaching plane as it fired its red flare. As it neared the point of touchdown on the runway, we were all able to spot the reason for the flare --- one of the main landing gear had failed to come down into place, remaining locked in the wing. It happened to be the gear on the near side of the plane, and as the pilot brought the plane in softly on its one main gear and nose wheel, I could feel the silence building in the air, as those nearby (and I'm sure all others watching) waited with literally stilled breathing. It seemed that the best to be expected would be a cart-wheeling effect as the near wing-tip fell heavily into the earth runway, with good fortune perhaps permitting no outbreak of fire from the torn gasoline tanks --- at least no fire until the survivors could be removed from the wreckage.

As the plane continued down the runway, the pilot miraculously was able to keep the near wing-tip up, until finally the plane lost too much ground speed. As it was still rolling, we were able to note the engines stopping, and in sequential order from the near side toward the far side, so as to prevent the propellers from striking the ground while still turning rapidly. Of course, the near wing-tip did finally settle to the runway, but surprisingly softly for such a large and awkward bird.

As the wing-tip hit the ground, the plane continued on, veering slightly toward our side of the runway, slithering to a halt a few yards off the runway. As it halted, the crew poured from its hatchways, all uninjured, as we counted the full complement of ten. As the last emerged, it gave me a feeling of great pride in men to see all those at the revetment, and at nearby revetments, break into spontaneous applause and cheering --of course unheard by the pilot of the plane who caused the applause. The pilot certainly deserved this great praise, which was indeed great coming from others of his own profession. It was too bad, I felt, that he was so far away that he was unable to hear the cheers and applause of these appreciative guys who felt a kinship and pride in their fellow-man.

Post Script: I sent this "Vignette" with others, to the 454th Bomb Group Association for inclusion in the Group's book, 454th Memories, which was published in 1991. In the March 1994 issue of the "Post San Giovanni," (the Association's Newsletter), there was an "Open Letter to William Robishaw" from Norman Stoker, the pilot of the aircraft of the above "Vignette." He had been pleasantly surprised to read my account in 454th Memories. (see next page)

Mail Call (Continued from page 5)

Dear John:

This is an open letter to William M. Robishaw which I hope, you will include in an issue of the Post San Giovanni.

Dear William:

When I received my copy of the *454TH MEMORIES*, many months ago, I said I must acknowledge the contribution of W.M. Robishaw. Why? It's simple -- you provided a number of excellent articles and I was particularly pleased to read your "audience" account on page 95 of the Wheels Up Landing -- ie no right main. At this late date, I enjoyed and appreciate the spontaneous applause of our comrades who observed this event and who did so much in the common effort. Thanks. Unless there were two or more such incidents, this one occurred on August 17, 1944, Mission Ploesti, the aircrew was of the 738th. I think you may be interested in the following:

This was the mission where someone, in authority, decided to bomb in the column of boxes of about 10 aircraft each. All went well up to a point. The box in front of us experienced absolutely no resistance -- flak or otherwise. We couldn't believe it -- Ploesti and no flak! Lt.Col.Gunn led our box of 10 aircraft. We flew in number 4 position all set to toggle on the lead when shells started exploding in rapid succession. The first burst I saw hit the nose of Gunn's aircraft. The second burst hit the #2 engine and the third removed most of the left vertical tail section. Another burst got part of the tail section of number 3 aircraft. We salvoed and avoidance of a mid-air collision was a matter of good fortune, rather than exceptional flying skill. Three of us came off the target. I know that lt. Fry (flying number 6 position), and probably Lt. Mc(something) flying number 5 position were the other two.

We set a course for home well south of the outbound course to target avoiding return routes and populated areas that would avoid fighter attack. The other two aircraft must have figured we were lost and left. Upon assessing damage, we found numerous shrapnel holes and hydraulic system damage. Upon reaching the Adriatic, we altered course and proceeded to base at 5,000 feet. Over base we attempted to lower the gear by normal and emergency method. We were able to get the left main and nose gear down and locked. We were not able to get the right main down manually, as a pull on the cable revealed the cable had been severed. The option was given to bail out or stay with the aircraft. There were no bailouts. Fuel was low, the aircraft was relatively light and a landing on dirt, not PSP, appeared to be a reasonable solution. This was reinforced when a visiting crew member popped his chute.

Our decision to land was made. I preferred to call it a planned crash landing. Preparations for landing were made, and the necessary notification to the tower was given prior to final approach. We were advised by the tower operator not to land on the steel matting. The approach was normal, with proper aircraft engine configuration for a normal landing. After the left main touched, the nose wheel was held off and when it started down, left aileron was applied to help hold the right wing up, Engines 4, 3, 2, and 1 were cut as the right wing touched. Left brake was applied, using accumulator pressure.

Evacuation was performed in a hurry. At this late date, we express our thanks for the applause and a lot of good fortune. I was subsequently told there were 73 shrapnel holes, cutting the emergency gear cable. Later the count of shrapnel holes was up-graded to 173, and then 273. Does anyone out there know how many? The aircraft was back in commission in a couple of weeks, attesting to the efficient work of the ground support personnel.

Of the other two aircraft that left Ploesti, one landed at Bari. Fry landed at home base successfully with, as I recall, a damaged hydraulic system and limited braking.

Again, William, Thanks for the record of a special event in our lives.

P.S. My 8 X 10 glossy of the aircraft after landing disappeared at the San Antonio Reunion. As I recall a Panda was painted on the nose of this particular aircraft. If anyone has a photo, I would appreciate a copy.

Norman P. Stoker (738th)

Vignette #18
Early Braking at Take-Off

The main landing gear struts of the Liberators were of tubular steel or aluminum alloy, approximately four to six inches in diameter. These struts carried the four-foot main-gear wheels, and retracted laterally into the wings. After the plane had lifted from the runway in take-off, the wheels were retracted quite quickly so as to reduce drag and permit an increase in speed, which was important so as to get more lift --- especially when the plane was fully loaded. There was an appreciate decrease in speed too, as I know from watching the air-speed indicator on occasions when landing from a training mission or test-flying mission for the autopilots. The air-speed indicator would drop approximately twenty miles per hour when the landing gear was dropped in preparing to land. As the plane needed at least one hundred miles of airspeed in order to become air-borne, and usually attained one hundred-ten before the pilot would attempt the lift-off, this increase of speed was very desirable, and was to be sought as soon after lift-off as possible.

The Air Force Headquarters Staff in the States, as well as the plane's manufacturer (Consolidated Aircraft), was constantly testing and modifying the Liberator in order to improve the plane. The main landing gear struts came under scrutiny, for some reason, and it was found (overseas personnel were told) that these struts were being put under an unnecessary strain during retraction. The large main gear wheels were quite heavy, and were acting as gyroscopes during the time right after lift-off, due to the speed of rotation. This gyroscopic action was placing the strain on the struts, weakening them so that they might collapse under the impact of landing, especially if the landing were a bit rough.

As a result of the tests in the States, Air Force authorities sent out a technical (tech) order that in the future, all Liberator pilots were to apply their wheel brakes after lift-off, before retracting the landing gear. This would stop the rotating of the wheels, so that no strain would be applied to the struts during retraction.

As a result of the above tech order, our base experienced two tragic and unfortunate accidents within a few days of one another, both identical in that they were caused by pilots attempting to follow this tech order; and also identical in that each accident took the lives of the full crew. The second accident was slightly more spectacular, however, and will be described here.

Mel Ames and I had been living in our "shack" near the "line" for some time, and had gone so far as to put a kind-of-a picket fence around the yard. There were several of us sitting around inside, as the planes had begun their way to the far end of the runway for take-off, carrying one-thousand pound general purpose demolition bombs. Suddenly a muffled explosive-type sound struck our ears, and all hands made for the door and turned and ran away from the accident we all knew must have happened at the runway. About two hundred feet away, we fell into a shallow ditch, and turned to locate the cause of our concern. All that was visible to us was a large cloud of what appeared to be yellow smoke at the nearby end of the runway, where the planes should have been rising from the ground. After a few minutes, the yellow cloud (of dust, as it turned out to be) dispersed, and to our amazement one of the Liberators was seen standing with its empennage pointing directly skyward. As we saw that there was no fire, due to the fact that the wing tanks had not ruptured (as they usually did upon crashes of any kind), we approached near enough to ascertain how the plane could remain in such a precarious balance position.

Nearing the plane, we immediately knew what had occurred. The pilot had followed the new tech order, and had applied his wheel brakes before retracting the landing gear. Unfortunately, as in the case of the other similar incident, the plane had not quite accomplished the lift-off; what he did was actually to apply the brakes, which slowed the plane abruptly, causing it to lose the flying speed it really did have, and as it settled down [he brakes became even more effective. This sudden braking of the plane caused its nose to dip, as the front end of an automobile dips when the brakes are applied. The sudden dip put an unbearable strain on the nose wheel strut, which collapsed, and the nose itself dipped into the runway. This applied yet more braking action to the plane, and it slowed more, causing more friction and drag, which made it dip even harder into the ground. And so on, literally causing the nose of the plane to be ground away as it skidded along the gravel surface of the runway. The whole front section of the plane was thus ground away, and with it the six occupants of that part of the plane. The four crew members in the tail section were thrown about violently, also being killed. The plane's momentum ended as it reached a shallow ditch, which was holding the plane in its precarious position, balanced by the four propellers straddling the ditch. Somewhere in my scrapbook can be found a photo clipped from the Army newspaper "Stars and Stripes" showing this plane in its unusual position. (see copy of that photo on page 52)

Vignette #19
Fatal Test Hop

One of the nicest lads we met from the flying crews was a Jewish radio operator, who had arrived late in 1944 from state-side. He was a friendly fellow, who was well-liked by everyone. He was the member of an ordinary flying crew, eager to do his best.

One day he and his pilot, co-pilot, and flight engineer, were to take the plane up for a test-hop after it had received some minor repairs. This Jewish boy awoke that day with a terrific head cold, and was not permitted to fly. Another young radio operator from the States had arrived at our base a few days earlier, and asked to be permitted to take the Jewish boy's place; as he had no flying time in since arriving in Italy. He was granted permission, and the plane took off on its test hop.

Sometime during the midst of the test hop, the pilot decided to "buzz" the Adriatic Sea, skimming along above the waves. As we later learned from the lone survivor, the pilot kept lowering the Liberator, closer and closer to the waves, refusing to pull up even when one of the crew asked him to do so. Inevitably, one wing-tip struck the water, throwing the plane into somersaulting rolls, ending up by plunging into the sea and killing those within on impact, or drowning them --- except for the surviving flight engineer.

The Jewish lad, the regular member of the crew, who had such a cold he was unable to be along on the test hop, moped around for many days, feeling that he was responsible for the death of the younger replacement radio operator. And what could anyone do to ease his troubled conscience, even though everyone knew that it was certainly not the fault of anyone, except perhaps the pilot.

Vignette #20
Rest Camp at Rome

After V-E Day, the chores at the 454th's base were only those preparatory to returning to the States. Because there were comparatively few chores to be done, the ground crews were rotated on ten-day tours of duty at the Rest Camp in Rome. The Rest Camp was located in the dormitories constructed for the Olympics held in Rome during Mussolini's pre-War days. While at that Rest Camp, I visited some of the famous historical sites of Ancient Rome --- such as the Forum, Catacombs, and Colloseum. Unfortunately, I had no thoughts that my future would hold teaching; nor teaching of Ancient Rome. If I had had but an inkling of this, I would have taken much greater advantage of the opportunities that were available to visit and study these important historical sites. When our base was finally prepared completely for withdrawal, and transportation home to the States was available via the S. S. Argentina, we traveled by Army truck convoy to Naples for embarkation. During the few days in Naples, while last-minute details were being attended to by the Squadron and Group leaders, many of the guys took a train ride out to the remains of the little town buried by the ashes of the erupting volcano, Mount Vesuvius --- of course the town being Pompeii. We were surprised to find how well-preserved so many of the buildings were; including not only walls and floors, but some of the colorful frescoes as well.

Picture Credits

Fig.	Credit
1	W. M. Robishaw
2	W. M. Robishaw
3	W. M. Robishaw
4	W. M. Robishaw
5	W. M. Robishaw
6	W. M. Robishaw
7	Flight of the Liberators
8	Flight of the Liberators
9	Flight of the Liberators
10	Flight of the Liberators
11	Flight of the Liberators
12	W. M. Robishaw
13	Flight of the Liberators
14	Flight of the Liberators
15	Flight of the Liberators
16	Flight of the Liberators
17	W. M. Robishaw
18	W. M. Robishaw
19	Flight of the Liberators
20	W. M. Robishaw
21	Flight of the Liberators
22	W. M. Robishaw
23	Milwaukee Newspaper
24	Milwaukee Newspaper
25	W. M. Robishaw
26	W. M. Robishaw
27	Flight of the Liberators
28	Flight of the Liberators
29	Flight of the Liberators
30	MAAF Photo
31	Flight of the Liberators
32	Flight of the Liberators
33	Flight of the Liberators
34	Flight of the Liberators
35	Flight of the Liberators
36	Flight of the Liberators
37	Flight of the Liberators
38	Flight of the Liberators
39	Flight of the Liberators
40	Flight of the Liberators
41	Flight of the Liberators
42	Flight of the Liberators
43	Flight of the Liberators
44	W. M. Robishaw
45	Flight of the Liberators
46	Flight of the Liberators
47	Flight of the Liberators
48	Flight of the Liberators
49	Flight of the Liberators
50	Flight of the Liberators
51	Flight of the Liberators
52	Flight of the Liberators