

The combat stories of **GRANDY K. BOSWOOD**

Dates of Service: 1942 – 1944
Branch of Service: Air Force
Unit: 12th Air Force, 416th squadron, 99th bomb group
Locations: Northern Africa and Italy
Battle/Campaigns: Missions over Italy, Greece, France, Yugoslavia, and Austria
Highest Rank: Sergeant
Wounded: Yes

Grandy Boswood recalls several close calls during his 50 missions on a B-17 as the radioman and radio gunner.

These stories were compiled by an interviewer, who prefers to remain anonymous, and goes by the nickname 'Kilroy Was Here.' These stories are posted through a partnership between 'Kilroy Was Here' and the Witness to War Foundation. Permission to use any of these materials must be granted by 'Kilroy Was Here,' which can be obtained through the Witness to War Foundation.



I was a member of a crew who flew on the B-17 named 'Lil Chum' as its radioman and flew 50 combat missions, the first being on August 21, 1943 and the last on February 24, 1944.

The 'Lil Chum's' crew was S/Sergeant James Kirkpatrick (tail gunner), S/Sergeant William Jenkins (assistant engineer and ball turret gunner), T/Sergeant Kevel Boswood, which was me (radioman and radio gunner), T/Sergeant Levi 'Slim,' as we called him, Wyning (engineer and top turret gunner), S/Sergeant Roy Horning (right wing gunner), S/Sergeant Arthur Shanley (assistant radioman and left wing gunner), 2nd Lt. Willie B Jenkins (bombardier), 2nd Lt. Orville Darnell (navigator), 2nd Lt. Cornelious Glen (copilot), and our Pilot was Orville F. Eiden, who also named our plane.

We landed about ten in the morning on July the 29th in North Africa and my first view as we came in was of a caravan of camels being lead by nomadic Arabs, making their way into the desert.

On August the 2nd we moved a little closer to our destination, to a place famous for its name. Casablanca was a rather beautiful place to spend six days seeing the sights it had to offer.

On August the 19th I started my combat journal, which was no more than notices.



Aug. 19 – My first mission in combat – much flak but only one fighter – hit by flak in no. 2 engine. Foggia

On August the 19th 1943, I flew my first combat mission and the target that day was over Foggia. I will have to admit it caused me much anxiety but the fact of being with my buddies helped. That morning 12 planes of the 416th went on the flight line for the mission. As we neared the target, our fighter escort of P47s engaged the German fighter, which was a Messerschmitt 109. As we got closer to the target, the fighter broke off and the flak heated up and our number two engine was hit. As the bomb bay doors opened, I took the opportunity to look down at the city of Foggia, Italy. As I watched, the clouds of smoke started to appear as the bombs reached their targets, blocking the view. Needless to say, we were told that the mission was what they called a soap run but being a new crew, we viewed it anything but that.

Aug. 26 – made a mission to an air base near Naples. First shot at a fighter. Flak moderately heavy.

On the August 26th mission our target for the day was the air base near Naples. This mission was my first chance to shoot at an enemy fighter. The flak that day was moderately heavy and I'm sorry to have to say, during the fight I inadvertently shot a chunk of skin off



from the vertical stabilizer of our plane. For some unknown reason, the gun barrel stop had been removed from my gun and as the fighter came in with its guns blazing, I couldn't see the stabilizer through my sights. As the fighter passed our tail gunner, James Kirkpatrick passed the word that the fighter was coming at me and I fired 8 to 10 rounds, which tore away a section of the skin about 12 inches high and about 5 feet long.

On the September 2nd mission, a captured P-38 made its way through the formation and attacked a B-17. The Germans also had a captured B-17 that they used to fly into our formations. From it, they would radio the ground batteries our barring and altitude. The first time I saw it our pilot called back to me and said, "Hey Boz, look out our port window," and there was this black B-17.

Sept. 14. – Bombed roads and junctions near Naples. I saw the city and also the 5th Army invasion south of there. They were really giving each other HELL. Saw 4 fighters.

On September the 14th we bombed the roads and junctions near Naples. As we approached the area, I bet we were at no more than 500 feet and could see a large fleet of ships of all kinds and sizes below as we passed over. They were really given each other HELL as the boatloads of troops neared the shore. We were advised



that day that our mission was to stop the flow of Germans moving to the front lines. From the bomb bay doors I could see anti aircraft fire coming from the trucks below us as we passed over our target.

Five months later we flew support for the Anzio beachhead. Seeing the soldiers making their way ashore and inland made me thankful I was an airman and not a ground soldier.

During my 50 missions over targets you had a defense against the fighters but the fact was clear that there wasn't any defense against the anti aircraft flak and when it exploded near our plane, it sounded like rocks hitting a tin roof. I saw a number of times where planes were hit by it and went down with its crew.

As far as the fighters went, you learned the difference between German pilots and Italian pilots. The Italian pilots wouldn't get as close and would break off. As for the Germans, who were very aggressive, they would come in as close as they could get and wouldn't break off until they were low on fuel.

As the radioman I had two small windows. On one mission, as I was looking out at the plane beside us, I watched as a flak round went right through the plane wing between its two engines. As it did, the plane slid to its right and downward under our plane. The pilot had to have been good because it wasn't long before he had his plane back under control and back in place. As the plane came back up beside us, I could see the large hole with

jagged metal pointing up in the wing.

Oct. 21 – mission to Terni Italy. It was the closest call I have had yet. I was at the left waist gun that day. A fighter came out of the contrail under us at 5 o'clock and started shooting. There were 5 20mm shells that went through our left wing, one hitting the prop. One bursting the gas line causing the gas to leak freely. One shell tore up the controls to the left wing flap, the other hit caused no damage. The fifth shell hit under the stabilizer and exploded cutting off the oxygen in the rear of our ship.

On the October 21st mission to Terni Italy, I had decided to fly as the left waist gunner and it proved to be my closest call. As we flew along, I remembered it was my dad's 53rd birthday so thoughts of home and how he was doing were on my mind. The 'Lil Chum' had a trail of heavy contrail, as did all the other bombers. As we got within 30 minutes of the target, a German fighter came out of our contrail before anyone saw him and as he broke through; he fired a volley of 22mm rounds into our plane. Two rounds hit our number two engine causing black oil and smoke to trail behind us. Eiden quickly turned off the ignition and feathered the prop to prevent further damage. As the round tore through our horizontal stabilizer and entered the fuselage, it cut off the oxygen supply line serving



the five of us in the rear of the plane. I was looking forward when the last shell exploded inside. The last thing I remember as it did was a red flash and being blown backwards. The next thing I knew when I came to, I was lying on my back looking up. It was at that time I started struggling with my chest chute but it wouldn't clip onto the chute harness because it had been sewn on incorrectly. Panic set in and I struggled even more. As I struggled, I became exhausted in no time and that's when I looked down at my oxygen indicator and saw it read zero. I placed my hand to my aching head and that's when I realized a piece of shrapnel had hit me just above my left eye, which was swelling. The engineer came back to check on us and it was at that time he advised us that the spare oxygen container hadn't been filled by the ground crew. He went on and gave us the news on the shape of the plane and that we should make ready to bail out.

We had been trained in survival methods on how to survive due to the lack of oxygen at a high altitude and stay calm, but here I sat, no oxygen and a chute that wouldn't work and he's telling me to be prepared to bail out, "HELL, WITH THAT!" The five of us in the rear gathered close to each other and waited for Slim to return. We were asked if we wanted to vote on taking the chance and continuing on to the target or returning with the other plane that had been hit. We voted to continue the mission.



We returned and landed safely and the five of us who had been without oxygen were taken to the hospital and checked out. As for my wound, it wasn't bad and I was able to return to my duties. But the 'Lil Chum,' which had brought us all back safely didn't fair as well. For ten days they worked on her around the clock trying to put her back in flying shape. After the ten days, the ground flight chief said the 'Lil Chum' was unfit to use as a high altitude bomber or in any mission that was long distance. The 'Lil Chum' flew only one more mission, only to go down with her crew while flying combat support.

In our tent, the six of us were taking turns sneaking things out of the mess tent at night. One night it came my turn so I made my way to the backside of the mess tent where there was an opening and we stuck our hands through. Reaching inside, I grabbed two cans and since it was dark, I had no idea what I had. After putting the cans in my pockets, I made my way back to our tent. Getting back inside of the tent I reached in my pocket and pull out two cans of salmon. Being as hungry as we were, Slim took his hunting knife and opened the first can and passed it around. There the six of us sat, trying our best to eat that salmon and we couldn't do it. It seemed the more we ate, the more there was. It was so bad we never opened the last can and when we moved, we tossed that can in the trench behind our tent and covered it with dirt. To this day that can is still there.



It wasn't long after that when Slim and I came up with a plan on how to get more to eat. The first part of the plan called for Slim to go and get a plane window and some sheet metal, which he did. The tents didn't have a window, so we decided we would have one and after Slim cut a hole in the tent, we screwed the window in place. With that done, it was time to put the second part of our plan into action, which was to turn ourselves in. So we marched over to the master sergeant and told him we were there to turn ourselves in and he asked why. Looking at him, we said we had defaced some government property by putting a window in our tent. With that he said, "Well I guess I'll have to put you two boys on KP duty." He just didn't know that was what we were hoping for because we knew the guys who had KP got all they wanted to eat.

February 18th non – op bad weather – it is 6:50 PM Friday, and I am listening to a German program called Jerry Calling.

They just played a tune which was sung in English called 'Happy Days Are Here Again' – ha. The announcer is a woman and she is now calling off some names of allied POWs, mostly British – she just named a guy from Brooklyn, New York and she claimed he was alright and there was no need to worry. Jerry takes the rag off the bush if you ask me, they just played



Yankee Doodle. They are now playing and singing Alexander's Ragtime band sung by our German girl friend Sally –ha. She just said something about us having some nice dark handsome men and the man announcer said, "Listen Sally, what the hell do you think this is?" They call the band the Jerry Tigers.

On February 22nd we were to go to Gray Austria airbase but had interphone failure and had to return. The three long range planes from our squadron went for the target in Germany. The weather was bad and they couldn't see the targets. ME 210s attacked them and two of our planes were shot down. Lt. Mcgee's plane was hit in one of the right engines and wing and blew apart as it descended. Three men were seen bailing out, but only one chute was seen. Lt. Perry's plane was hit also and last seen heading for Switzerland. Their fate is unknown, but it is possible they are safe in Switzerland.

February 24th 1944, mission to Fiume refinery Italy and it was my 50th mission, thus ending my combat duty.