THOSE WERE THE DAYS
True experiences of a WWII USAAF B-17 Pilot
by
W. C. Bramlett

"Today we celebrate the 50th anniversary of the bombing of Pearl Harbor by the Japanese on December 7, 1941. This event changed the course of our country's history and the lives of all the people". Those words were being said over and over as the television reporters highlighted those events to the viewers.
My wife Marian and I were watching television, seeing yet again the films of the bombing of Pearl Harbor that we had seen so many times before. We listened to WWII veterans telling of their experiences, some who had survived the bombing, and others, like ourselves, remembering exactly where they were when they heard the news. The voice of President Roosevelt declaring that the United States was at war, still, after all these years, caused tears to come to our eyes. We remembered how we felt then and reminisced again about the war years that followed Pearl Harbor, 1941 - 1945.

I had first met Marian six weeks after Pearl Harbor when we were both working for the War Department. This Federal Agency occupied two floors of the Hurt Building in Atlanta. I had noticed Marian White when she came to the Mail and Records Section where I worked but we had never spoken. I did know that she worked down the hall in the personnel office. The War Department had hired many young men and women not long out of high school, business school, or college in those pre-Pearl Harbor years. A group of single young men worked for the War Department at that time. We found any small reason in those days to get dates and celebrate, as we were all good friends. Several of the fellows had birthdays in January, mine being the 18th, so the latter part of January several of us took dates to a dinner dance club, Peachtree Gardens, in Atlanta. One of the fellows brought Marian. Coincidentally, I had a date with a former college classmate of Marian's when they attended had Georgia State College for Women, Milledgeville, Georgia. At the dinner table that night I was seated between Marian on my left and my date on my right. I asked Marian to dance, and we discovered that both of us would be working the next day, Sunday. (Immediately after Pearl Harbor the War Department went on a seven-day work schedule). The next day I found the area where Marian worked and stopped by her desk to ask her for a date. That's how it all began.

Now as we reminisced Marian encouraged me again, as she had many times before, to write about my military experiences, my training to become a pilot, and my active duty service during the war. She said she felt I had a story to tell; one that would be very meaningful to our two sons and our five grandchildren, and to their generations.

Later I began to think seriously about what Marian had said. She had remarked so many times when I would tell her my "war stories" that she was amazed at the clarity of my memories; the details, the circumstances, etc., of my war-time experiences. "Those were the days", we often remarked - a time in history unlike any other. It happened over half a century ago, but in a way it was much clearer in my mind than any other time in my life. I suppose one never forgets a time like that. I decide I must do this. So with my Pilot's Flight Log, my copy

of the operational record of my old 8th Air Force Group, and notes I made long ago, I will attempt to do justice to my WWII experiences.

* * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * *

The summer of 1941 was one of the most enjoyable of my life. I was a young man twenty-one years old. I had a good job with the Federal Government. I owned a new yellow convertible automobile. I had a wonderful home and loving family and I didn't have a care in the world. What more could a young man want?

The country was slowly recovering from a long and terrible depression. I was employed by the U.S. Army War Department and although we were certainly aware of the trouble brewing between the countries in Europe, the possibility of U.S. involvement seemed remote. We had long been taught that the U.S. was far too isolated from the rest of the world to be drawn into their problems. We thought we were such a mighty world power that no one would dare bother us. In retrospect, we were far below the strength militarily and economically of a number of other world powers, but at the time we thought, why worry?

My complacency was jolted a little when the government had all men age twenty-one and older register for the draft. Surely, I thought, I'm a perfect candidate for this. I was twenty-one and single and could think of no reason that I might be rejected. A few days after registering I received my classification. I was put in 1-A just as I had expected. I probably will never be called, I thought. Some National Guard Units were being activated and the number of volunteers was increasing. And since I was a civilian employee of the Army, I could be deferred because of my job. I would not have requested this though - I felt at the time as I do now that all able men should serve if called.

I was quickly brought back to reality when Cobb County issued the first draft orders. Lo and behold, I can't believe this - my name is included! I was to report to Fort McPherson, Georgia, to be inducted into the United States Army. Entering the service had seemed absolutely impossible, but after some thought I decided I could do it easily. After all, we weren't at war and we had been told that our period of service would be for only one year.

I reported to Fort McPherson fully expecting to be gone from home for not more than one year. It turned out I was gone for much less than that. I spent only two days taking all the physical examinations, then was released and re-classified 1-B. My upper front teeth were on a removable partial plate instead of a permanent bridge and for this reason I was rejected. At one time the teeth had been on a bridge. Catching a batted baseball in your mouth isn't good for your front teeth. I had subsequently broken the bridge and had it replaced, then one day at school I was drinking at a water fountain when a girl playfully tapped the back of my head. This broke it a second time. Nothing hit the fountain except my upper bridge. I spat teeth all over the place. The two teeth the bridge was anchored to were also damaged and would have to be replaced. By now my dentist and I were becoming good friends. I was sure I was helping support him with all my dental work. This time we decided to put the teeth on a removable partial plate so I wouldn't damage any more permanent teeth. I have often

wondered if that girl had any idea how that simple tap on my head changed so much of my life!

After this experience at Fort McPherson I became concerned enough about my future that I began thinking about which branch of service I would prefer, should I be drafted again. I made some inquiries and learned that many types of night classes were available in Atlanta. I had also decided that the Army Air Corps would suit me best, so I enrolled and completed a course in engines and power plants. I then enrolled at Central Night School for a course in preflight aeronautics, why I don't know, for I had never really thought about becoming a pilot. The course covered theories of flight, as well as meteorology, navigation, and math. I completed these courses and still had heard nothing from the draft board.

The month of December 1941 changed the lives of nearly everyone in America. One Sunday as I turned into my driveway, the music on my car radio was interrupted by an unusually excited announcer. As I sat in my car I heard him say, "The Japanese Air Force has bombed our bases at Pearl Harbor in Hawaii". I ran into the house yelling for someone to turn on a radio. Needless to say we did nothing else that day except listen to the radio for any further developments, wondering what now lies ahead for us all. My youngest sister, Christine, had married just the day before. Surely her new husband would be called to active service along with Arthur, my sister Louise' husband, who was in the National Guard. What about me? I was sure I would hear from my draft board any day now. That 1-B classification probably would not mean a thing now.
Monday morning I reported for work as usual but nothing at work was "as usual". Everyone in my department gathered around the radio that morning. We listened intently as President Roosevelt declared war on Japan. It was a very somber morning. After our declaration of war on Japan, Germany immediately declared war on us. The U.S. had been shipping what supplies we could to the European Allies, but now we felt certain shipments would be increased substantially.

□
A few days after Pearl Harbor I received notification from the draft board that I was being reclassified as 1-A. I was now fairly certain I would soon be called to active duty. Since I had been regularly dating Marian White, a nice very pretty young girl, I began to dislike the thought of entering any branch of the Service. I realized I was getting pretty serious, whether or not she was.
I had a very close friend from High School, Douglas Bell, who had moved away and was now working at Brookley Field, Mobile, Alabama. I had visited him there a number of times and he always pressured me to request a transfer to Brookley Field. Brookley was growing rapidly and Doug had pointed out that I could probably get a job almost any place there that I liked. I was hesitant about leaving Atlanta though because all my family and friends, and especially Marian, lived there. But the Personnel Department at Brookley assured me that I would have much better advancement possibilities if I accepted an assignment there. If I planned to remain in Civil Service a move there would help my career. I also considered it possible that a position at Brookley Field might enhance my chances of getting into the Army Air Corps should I be drafted. All these things influenced my thinking. Besides, I knew I

would be leaving Atlanta anyway if I were drafted. After some more soul searching I decided to transfer.

I had been living in Mobile for only a short time when my friend Doug received his induction notice. He entered the Army Air Corps and soon went into training to become a Bombardier. He seemed to get into this so easily that I began to think seriously about pilot training. I took a few vacation days and returned to Atlanta to check into this. I went to the Air Corps Recruiting Office, which was located in Atlanta and applied to the Cadet Corps for pilot training. I spent an entire day taking both written and physical examinations, trusting I would make a good enough grade to be accepted.

Late one afternoon after all the tests were completed I was told that I had passed all my exams. I would, however, have to get my front teeth put on a permanent bridge before I would be accepted. Once again my teeth (or lack of) kept me out of the service - but this was the branch I really wanted to get into!

I returned to my job at Brookley Field trying to decide what to do. If I put all those teeth on a permanent bridge again it would have two more teeth than had been on it before. This would be extremely heavy and put a lot of pressure on the bridge every time I bit into something. After consulting with my dentist I decided against having this done.

My Department Chief at Brookley Field was a career Army Colonel. He and I talked about the Air Corps often and he knew I was trying to get into pilot training. I felt we had become friends even though there was a great difference in our ages. Here I was trying to get into the Air Corps and he was thinking of retiring. He often kidded me about replacing him, but he told me he would help me any way he could.

The end of August was approaching and I still had heard nothing from the draft board. I realized I was becoming more anxious daily because the first thing I did each day was to check my mail, looking for an induction notice. One day the Colonel came over to my desk and told me the Air Corps was lifting some restrictions for getting into the Cadet Corps. He didn't know if the changes were in the written exams (which I had already passed) or the physical exams, but that I should check into this. I requested and was given a few days leave. That night I was on board a train headed for Atlanta.

I arrived in Atlanta early in the morning and headed for the old Post Office building where the Recruiting Office was located. After they reviewed my previous test results they didn't seem to care whether I had any teeth or not. That morning, September 1, 1942, I was sworn into the Army Air Corps.
Only a few short years ago I couldn't have imagined in my wildest dreams that I would be entering into military service at this time in my life, especially not in the Air Corps. But volunteering gave me a choice of serving where I wanted - not where someone else wanted me.

The Recruiting Officer told me that I would be called to active duty within thirty days and I should go home and take care of all the things necessary to be done before I entered active duty. I resigned my job at Brookley Field and returned to my home in Marietta to await my orders. Acting so quickly proved to be a mistake because it was five months

before I received my orders to report for active duty. Of course during this time I couldn't get another job anywhere because I was already in the service and could be called at any time.

Finally, in the latter part of January 1943, I received orders to report to the Army Air Corps Training Center at Miami Beach, Florida, on February 1st. This seemed to me to be an odd assignment. I had never heard of anyone entering the Cadet Corps at Miami Beach. I left home by train January 29th for Miami Beach, heading into what I could not possibly imagine.

When I arrived at the Training Center I learned that I would be in the very first Army Air Corps College Training Detachment. Did this mean I would be going to college while in the service? I was told it certainly did. Several hundred new recruits reported for thirty days intense military and physical basic training before we were all to attend college under this new program. During this period of training we would be housed in beautiful hotels along College Avenue which parallels the Atlantic Ocean Beach. Spending the winter month of February on Miami Beach would really be great, I thought. I didn't realize the only time we would ever be on the beach would be when we lined up for breakfast each morning, long before daylight.

I was assigned a room with two other cadets in the Broad Ripple Hotel. We were allowed to select our own roommates if we knew any of the other cadets. I was lucky enough to know two of them very well. I had attended High School back in Marietta with one of them. The other was a friend I had worked with in my old job with the War Department in the Hurt Building back in Atlanta. We were all surprised to see each other here. We had been out of touch and had no idea we would all end up here. The three of us decided to share a room.

We were divided into groups of 120 and assigned to a drill instructor. I had heard all sorts of stories about drill instructors but ours proved all these stories to be false. He was a very likable, friendly person. He worked us very hard but was always ready to help us in any way that he could. I can still hear that deep bass voice barking out orders on the parade grounds. His voice was much stronger than were any of the other instructors', and I felt he must have made them feel a little embarrassed for he always could drown them out. I'm sure the people living near our drill parade grounds always knew when our squadron was there. They couldn't possibly miss that voice.

After our first full day's drills we returned to our hotel, dead tired. All three of us stretched out on our beds to get a quick rest before we had to "fall out" for dinner. The next thing we knew we were being awakened by reveille. Not only had all three of us missed dinner but we had also slept all night. We were still in our uniforms just as we had been yesterday when we completed drills. We jumped up, prepared for another long rough day, and "fell out" for breakfast. You wouldn't believe our "mess hall". It was one of those huge dining rooms in the Cadillac Hotel. All the furniture and carpeting had been removed. The room was filled with long tables where at least ten men could be seated on benches at each table. Though the floors were bare, we still ate our meals under those great beautiful chandeliers that had been left installed.

Even though it was the middle of winter, the days were very warm and the sun was much hotter than we had been used to at home. We were out in the sun all day, every day, and we all blistered. The tops of my ears were so blistered they became very sore and stayed that way until several days after we left Miami Beach.

After many long days of constant marching and drilling the end of February was approaching. One day we were taken to a large theater to be given several written exams. These exams would give the Air Corps an indication of how much college training we would need. We were told that in a few days we would be leaving for a University somewhere in the United States. We asked which one, but received only silence in reply.

On the last of February we left Miami on a troop train headed for a college somewhere in the U.S.A. This was my first experience on a troop train. After several later trips, we learned it was useless to ask about our destination. As we neared the end of the second day on the train I noticed we were coming into very familiar territory. We had arrived in Atlanta and the train was taken over by a new crew from the L&N Railroad. I recognized our new conductor. I had known him through my Dad's employment with the L&N Railroad. We left Atlanta late in the afternoon and before dark were nearing Marietta. The train passed almost within sight of my family's house. I looked hard as I could all through Marietta but saw no familiar face.

We had been so busy for the past month that home and family seemed far away, but this moment traveling through my hometown brought back so many pleasant memories. I felt homesick for the first time. For the first time since I had left home I realized I had no idea when I might return this way. I knew I was in the military service of my country, and my country was at war. It was impossible to know what lay ahead for any of us.

The conductor stopped by the car I was in and sat with me for a long time. He told me we would only be on the train until approximately midnight. By that time I reckoned we would probably be in or near Knoxville, Tennessee. With this information we all figured our destination must be the University of Tennessee. Several days after we arrived I was able to get in touch with my family. I learned that the conductor had told my Dad where I was.

As predicted, we rolled into the University of Tennessee about midnight. During the war so many young men had entered the services that the colleges had very few male students enrolled. At UT so few boys were enrolled that most athletic programs had been canceled. The University had no football, basketball, or baseball teams. There were, however, about 3,500 girls on campus and this knowledge wasn't too hard to take. As we left the train and marched to the school dormitories, windows came up everywhere and girls began whistling at us. What a change! We were hurried inside a building because we were in our summer uniforms that had been issued at Miami and the ground here was covered with snow. We were freezing.

After settling into my studies, I began to wish I hadn't done so well on those examinations I had taken in that theater in Miami. We had been divided into squadrons and our grades on those exams had determined each squadron's assignments. A and B Squadrons would only be in school for

two months, C and D Squadrons for three months, E and F Squadrons for four months, and some remaining individuals for as long as five months. But we would all cover the same studies in our allotted time. I was put in B squadron along with Kenneth Buzza who had become my friend at Miami. I quickly realized I would need to do some serious studying to keep up. Most of the men in A and B squadrons had more than two years of college. The first night at school we all slept on cots on the floor of the gym but after that we were housed in football stadium rooms that normally were occupied by the football players.

Every morning we were awakened by a bugle call at 5:30 A.M. I wondered how the civilians living close enough to hear liked that. We were in the cafeteria at 6:30 for breakfast, then on to our first class at 7:30. We attended classes until 5:30 P.M. with a break some afternoons for physical education. Of course we also had a break for lunch in the school cafeteria.

We took classes in Math, Physics, Meteorology, World Geography, and World Politics, and our military training was increased steadily. The classes were always tough and we were expected to learn so fast. Some of these subjects were new for me. Some guys in my squadron were college graduates or had at least three years college. Some of us were not so fortunate. If any of us felt we needed additional instruction we could attend make-up classes from 7 to 9 PM. Needless to say, I spent many nights in these classes but I was not alone. Most nights the rooms were full. I also had help in my room at night. One of my roommates had been a senior at Massachusetts Institute of Technology when he entered the service. He was a great help to me as well as some of the others. I often wondered why he was there with us. One of the instructors told us he probably would graduate and go straight to Air Corps Engineering Research, likely as a test pilot.

Lights had to be out at 10 P.M., so many nights our studies were continued by flashlight under a blanket. I had heard of college students doing this but I never thought I would be in the same position.

The University at Knoxville is not terribly far from my hometown of Marietta, Georgia, but I never had time to go home. We only had a day-and-a-half off on weekends. One Sunday my Mother and Dad and my youngest sister, Christine, came to see me. I was disappointed though, because I had something scheduled for that night and I couldn't get time to see them. I did get permission to skip breakfast and see them at their hotel early Monday morning for a short visit.

Marian also was able to come up one weekend and I did have half a day Saturday and all day Sunday for her visit. I was very thankful for this.

The last two weeks at UT we were given a little flight time in a Piper J-3 Cub. I suspect the reason for this was to give the Air Corps an indication of our potential piloting ability because no one was allowed to solo, even if he could. Several of the cadets in my squadron already had private pilot licenses.
When our time at the University was completed we were transferred to Nashville, Tennessee, to the Air Corps Replacement Center. Here I ran into an old playmate from my childhood, Bill Meek, who had lived up the street from me in Marietta. Bill had the honor of being the cause of my

ongoing teeth problems. One day long ago he had hit me right in the mouth with a baseball. It was really my fault, not his, for I should have been paying more attention to what we were doing.

At Nashville we spent three weeks with more examinations, both written and physical. It seemed we took written exams all morning and physical exams all afternoon. We supposed that all these tests would determine our next assignment. Once again we were divided into groups - some for pilot training, some for navigational training, and some for bombardier. I was overjoyed to learn that I would be going to pilot training. My new friend, Ken Buzza, was also going to pilot training. We were told we would soon be transferred to a preflight school.

Finally we were loaded onto a troop train and headed in what seemed to be a southerly direction. We arrived in Chattanooga about noon and, to my surprise, we disembarked. We were marched right downtown to a large cafeteria and served lunch. You should have seen some of the food we put away. Some of the fellows had two trays with enough food to feed a small family. You would have thought we hadn't eaten for a week. The food was so much better than what we had had in the University cafeteria. After lunch we again boarded the train and left Chattanooga. Later in the afternoon we arrived in Montgomery, Alabama where we would be stationed at the Maxwell Field Preflight school. I thought, how lucky can I get? I was close enough to home that I might be able to get back there some weekends.

We left the train and marched off to our new quarters. Here at Maxwell we continued our military training and classroom studies. One of the new courses we had was Morse Code. We were required to send fifteen words per minute and receive twelve. (I may have that backwards). We continued our studies in meteorology and navigation. Another new course was aircraft identification. Silhouettes of aircraft would be flashed on the screen for a fraction of a second and we were required to recognize them immediately. This was difficult because the instructor would mix German and Japanese planes with our own.

At Maxwell we experienced something new which drove home the fact that we really were in the Cadet Corps. We began to be hazed by the upperclassmen. Underclassmen were never allowed to walk on the sidewalk, only in the gutter by the curb. Whenever we were out of our rooms we were required to walk at 120 paces per minute. This is a very fast pace. We had to always look straight ahead, never down or to either side.

During meals one underclassman sat at the head of each table that was occupied by the upperclassmen. These were called "gunners". This meant that he was to pass all food and drinks down to the upperclassmen at his assigned table. Again we held heads erect, never looking down at our food. This was difficult at first. We spoke only when spoken to. We had to know all Cadet Officers from division level down to squadron and upperclassmen were allowed to stop you anywhere and interrogate you about this. I was never sure the upperclassmen really knew who the Cadet Officers were because they were changed constantly. We always had to give our name and serial number. It didn't take long to realize any number would do because they didn't know the difference.

No underclassmen were allowed to leave the post. When we finally became upper-classmen we got a weekend off the post. Three of us from the Atlanta area drove home one weekend. One of the fellows had a car he had put in storage in Montgomery and we used it. I felt sorry for some of the cadets in my class because they had received enough demerits to keep them on the post.

While we were underclassmen any cadet officer could inspect our rooms and bath at any time. If the smallest bit of dust or dirt was found on anything we received demerits. A drop of water in the sink could get you demerits. Your shirts had to hang in one direction in the closet with all sleeves buttoned. Many different infractions could get you enough demerits to make you lose open post privileges. All inspections were made with white gloves and they better not get any dust on them, even when rubbed across the top of a locker.

We were at Maxwell Field during the summer of 1943, which was a very hot summer. Since we had been issued only two uniforms we attended classes in our fatigues, which were hot and heavy. By noon each day we were soaked with perspiration. We washed them in the shower at night, hoping they would be dry by morning. This really didn't matter as they were soaked with sweat again by noon. In those days there was no such thing as air conditioning on an Army post.

We were regularly assembled on the parade grounds for review. Several thousand cadets in full dress uniforms, including white gloves, would march to the parade grounds. Marching that distance, then standing at attention in perfect formation in that heat, was just too much for some. Occasionally one would pass out and slip to the ground. He would be dragged over to the shade and attended to. I suppose some of us who were from the south were more tolerant of the heat because we could make it through all these reviews without any problems.

Another trying time for some of the fellows was our physical training. Our physical ed. instructor was a professional boxer and he would really put us through a workout. We had an obstacle course that was extremely difficult but I was always able to complete it in the required time. We also ran a five-mile trail up and down hills through the woods. The cadets had named this "The Burma Road". Again I think growing up in the South and walking everywhere helped me because I never failed to complete the run, even though sometimes I had blisters on my feet. Some in my squadron were never able to run the entire distance during the two months we were at Maxwell.

The day finally arrived when we had completed our work and were given a big graduation dinner and dance. We were allowed to invite guests for the party and since some of our homes weren't too far from Montgomery we were able to invite girlfriends from home. I asked Marian to come over for graduation and was thrilled to hear she could come. After graduation we finally would be on our way to a flight school.

When our graduation ceremonies were completed we returned to normal military life. One morning we boarded another troop train and headed straight south. Our classes in navigation were paying off because we always knew which direction we were headed even though we had no idea of our destination.

After a long and tiring trip, we arrived at our new station. We were to receive our first flight training at Lakeland, Florida, at the Lodwick School of Aeronautics. This was a very good civilian pilot training school. Most of the Air Corps Primary Flight Schools were operated by civilian flight schools. Here at Lodwick we would be flying the old Stearman PT-17, an open-cockpit, two-seat biplane.

We received the usual indoctrination and were assigned to our quarters. We began our first ground school classes which would continue throughout all our training. Later we were taken to the flight line and introduced to the plane we would be flying while we were here. Flying these planes would be quite different from the flight time we received in the Piper J-3 back at the University. Compared to the Piper Cub these PT-17 planes seemed so big. We would be flying here for the next nine weeks (if we survived the training). We had heard so much about the number of cadets who washed out in primary. Each cadet would receive 70 hours flight time doing stalls, loops, snap rolls, slow rolls, touch-and-go landings, Immelman turns and chandelles, and anything else this plane was capable of doing.

Ken and I both managed to solo after the required five hours flying with our instructor. Each instructor had five cadets and Ken and I had the same instructor. Flying was beginning to be fun now and all the hard ground school work of the past months seemed worth the effort.

Every other weekend we were given "open post". This was the only time we were permitted to leave the post. We would be off duty from noon Saturday until Retreat roll call at 6 P.M. Sunday. We looked forward to this time since we weren't very far from Tampa, St. Petersburg, and the Gulf Coast at Clearwater.
About the fourth week after arriving at Lodwick, four of us went into Tampa for the weekend. A bus ran back to Lakeland that left Tampa at 4:30 P.M. We had ridden this bus before and knew it would get us back to the base with a little time to spare before the 6 P.M. roll call. After our weekend in Tampa we arrived at the bus station a little before 4:30 and found a completely loaded bus; not a single empty seat. We boarded anyway, planning to stand in the aisle, but the driver would not allow this. We explained that we had to get back to our base and didn't mind standing for this short distance. We pleaded but to no avail. He said it was against the rules for passengers to stand, so all four of us sat down on the aisle floor. This must have irritated him more, especially since we had argued so long and it was past time for him to leave. He called the Military Police in the bus station and had us removed from the bus. The bus then left Tampa without us and we knew we would be in serious trouble if we weren't back at our base before 6 P.M.

The M.P.s took us to their office, took all our names and station assignments, then let us go. This didn't give us much relief because we learned the next bus to Lakeland wouldn't leave until late that night. We pooled our money and came up with the grand total of $32.00. We found a taxi driver who agreed to take all four of us to Lakeland for this amount.

We arrived at the base too late to attend Retreat. We knew we had missed roll call and would be counted AWOL. We missed our dinner and went straight to our barracks. We heard nothing that night but knew we would first thing next morning. I doubt any of us slept very well that

night for we had heard many stories about how the Base Commanding Officer enjoyed punishing cadets who broke any rules. Only a few military personnel were assigned to this base and our Commanding Officer was a First Lieutenant. Rumor had it that he had washed out of flight training. If this were true maybe it explained some of the tough punishment he seemed to enjoy dishing out. Oh well, it couldn't be too bad, we thought. We had only been about an hour late returning to base.

The next morning while we were in our first class we were ordered to report to the Commanding Officer. We were taken to his office immediately. When we got there he made all four of us stand at attention in front of his desk while he silently read some reports. I'm sure he must have gotten them from the Military Police in Tampa. When he finished reading, he made us stand there for an hour while he lectured us. We learned we were not only going to be punished for being late but also for causing a scene at the Tampa bus station. He said we were a disgrace to the Officers Corps and if he had his way not one of us would ever receive a commission in the Air Corps. We were kept standing there at attention while he sent for our ground school and flight records. He said that if any one of us had any mark at all against us in ground school or flying he would wash us out of the Cadet Corps immediately. Thankfully, all four of us were progressing very well in all programs. Finally he doled out our punishment which seemed rather harsh to me. We would be required to walk forty punishment hours in full dress uniform. This would be done on our open post time and was not to interfere with any of our other duties. We knew this would be a problem to complete since we only had time off every other weekend. We did it by walking from noon Saturday until 6 P.M. Sunday every time we were off duty on a weekend. We didn't walk all Saturday night but took a short nap in our barracks after midnight.

One Sunday afternoon while walking our punishment hours we realized everyone must be in town. It was too quiet on the base. The temperature on the flight line ramp must have been over 100° and we were terribly hot. Since no one seemed to be around we might as well take a rest. We went behind one of the hangars and sat down in the shade. We had been there only a short time when we noticed one of the military check pilots standing at the end of the building watching us. We thought our goose was cooked. He questioned us about our need to be there and we told him the truth about our punishment hours. He didn't say anything but took us inside one of the offices, raised the windows, turned on two great big electric fans, and told us to stand there at attention. He said he needed to make a short flight and for us to stand there until he returned. We heard him take off in an AT-6 advanced trainer that the officers sometimes used. We marked the spots where we were standing and then sat down and relaxed. This was about lunchtime and we stayed there reading magazines and newspapers until about 5 P.M. when we heard his plane returning. Before he had time to reach the office we were standing at attention on the exact spot where he had left us. He came in, saw us there, told us standing at attention for five hours was enough punishment, so return to the barracks and get ready for our Retreat roll call formation. Some of our check pilots were really very nice fellows.

Ken, who was from Hollywood, Florida, was the only one of us who was married. He had made arrangements for his wife to come to Lakeland and stay for the duration of our primary flight training. I'm sure he was

much more disappointed over our punishment than we were. He was in trouble with his wife, too, because he had to call her and tell her not to come.

During the next weeks we continued ground school and pilot training. Except for being confined to base things proceeded very well. After each of us completed 20 hours flying we were required to take a check ride with one of the military check pilots. The first of these flights made me a little nervous since I had never flown with a regular Air Corps pilot before. They would require us to perform all the maneuvers we had been practicing.

After a few weeks at Primary we began to notice our ranks thinning. We were losing some cadets who were not able to satisfactorily complete the program. We had one cadet who would get airsick every time he flew. He must have been a good pilot in spite of this because they continued working with him. They even kept him back one class, since he hadn't completed his flights, when the rest of us were ready to move on to our next basic flight training.

Our field was very close to Drane Field, which was a training base for the Martin B-26 bomber pilots. Some nights when they were flying they would buzz our barracks, waking us in the middle of the night. Those big noisy planes sounded as if they were coming right through our barracks. We longed for the day when we too could do this.

The runway at our base was only 2600 feet long - plenty long enough for our PT-17s but not near long enough for a B-26. Off the end of our only runway was a small lake. One morning as we arrived at the flight line we saw a B-26 sitting about 50 feet out in the shallow lake. He had mistaken our field for his during the night. Of course our runway was much too short and he ran off it into the lake.

One day the wind at our base was extremely high and gusty. We always landed our planes parallel to the wind tee, regardless of the angle it formed with the runway. This allowed us to land directly into the wind, but that often meant landing in the grass and crossing the runway at an angle. The landing gear on the PT-17 was very narrow and landing this way increased the possibility of ground looping the plane, especially in a gusty wind. Everyone complained about flying under these conditions but our complaints were ignored. We were not allowed to stop flying.

About half way through our morning flight period an advanced single-engine trainer, an AT-6, approached our field and requested permission to land. The landing gear on the AT-6 is also narrow, making it difficult to control when landing in a high, gusty crosswind. A Brigadier General happened to be aboard this plane, which was piloted by a Captain. They landed directly on the runway, but about halfway down it the pilot let the plane get away from him and ground-looped it, dragging the right wing on the runway. After that incident all flying at Lodwick field was finally cancelled.

I was one of the few who was fortunate enough to complete my primary flight training and was now ready to move on to a basic flight school. Many of those who had come to Lodwick with us were now gone and were no longer in flight training. A large percentage of the class had washed out of this program and moved on to some other type training.

We boarded a troop train and departed Lakeland, once again bound for an unknown destination. After many hours we arrived at the next station. It was the middle of the night. We were taken to a barracks without being told where we were, but the next morning I learned my good luck was holding. We were at Cochran Field, just outside Macon, Georgia. This is only a little more than 100 miles from my home in Marietta. Surely, I hoped, I would be able to make it home some weekends.

At Cochran we flew the two-seat, low single-wing BT-13. Cadets called it the "Vultee Vibrator" or "Cadet Killer" because of its past history. It was a large, noisy, under-powered plane that looked much like the AT-6 but without the retractable landing gear. It had the reputation of being extremely hard to recover from spins sometimes, and we would be required to do spins here just as we had done at Lakeland. We quickly settled into our new routine of flying here and, as always, had more ground school. Our station here was quite different from Lakeland. We were now training at a regular Army Air Corps Base.

One day while flying with my instructor and practicing spin recovery we had a problem. I was making 1½-, 2- and 2½-turn spins above some clouds. We were required to come out of our spin on a pre-designated heading, which is hard to do, even under the best flying conditions. I put the plane into a spin and all was going well until I tried to pull out of it. The plane didn't respond at all. I reversed the controls and tried again and again but we continued spinning until we hit the clouds and everything went milky white. My instructor took the controls and somehow recovered. We were so near the ground that I was ready to part company with that plane. If we had not pulled out when we did I would have bailed out. I was glad I hadn't had to test my parachute, even though we had been told we would be given a new one if ours didn't work.

One flight I always enjoyed was actually designed for fighter pilots although I always hoped to be assigned to the large multi-engine planes. I wanted all the engines out there I could get. On this particular flight our instructor would take one plane with one cadet and each of his other four students would fly solo. We would play follow the leader, or "rat racing" as we called it. Our instructor was in one plane with a cadet and we all lined up in the air behind him. We knew better than to let him lose us. Sometimes I thought the wings would surely fold in the tight turns and maneuvers we put those planes through. If you happened to be the fifth plane in line you felt more like you were playing "pop the whip" because all the turns were so much tighter. We did our best to keep up because we knew what our instructor would do if we didn't. He was a very tough but very good instructor though sometimes I think he just enjoyed chewing us out.

We were at Cochran during the early Fall months and some days we couldn't fly because of the weather. On those days we continued our ground school classes just as we had at our previous bases. We also began our Link Training here. This is simulated instrument flying in a ground-based vehicle called a Link Trainer. You fly the Link totally by instrument because you cannot see outside for reference. We also began our first night flying, some formation flights, and cross-country navigational flights landing at strange fields.

While at Primary at Lakeland we had had a few minor scrapes but no serious accidents. During Basic at Cochran, however, we had six cadets and two instructors killed in separate crashes. One night near the field we had a mid-air collision when one plane let down right on top of another. One plane was so badly damaged the cadet bailed out but the other managed to get his plane down safely. Another night we had a plane not return to the base although we had no report of a crash. The next morning we flew search patterns laid out over south Georgia, particularly the Okeefenokee Swamp, looking for him. Finally his plane was spotted down in the swamp but the cadet had not survived. I never learned why he crashed.

I was able to make a few trips home from Cochran just as I had hoped. We were allowed to go into Macon on weekends but were ordered never to go more than ten miles from the base. Three of us in my squadron were from the Atlanta area and we had hoped to go home on some weekends if at all possible. Our plan was to board a bus in Macon just before it pulled out of the station. As we came into Atlanta we would get the driver to let us off near the State Capitol Building just before the bus station. That way we could avoid going into the bus station where we knew there would be Military Police. We didn't want to be spotted by the M.P.s since we had no passes allowing us to be this far from our base.

This little scheme worked well for us until our last trip when we were ready to return to base. We must have become overconfident because this time we boarded the bus downtown at the Atlanta Terminal. We had been on board for only a few minutes when two Military Policemen came on board and began checking the passes of the servicemen on board. We knew we were in trouble again because we had neither passes nor orders allowing us to be here. We were seated near the back of the bus and to our great relief the M.P.s never came that far back. I never knew why. They may have thought we were officers because the summer cadet uniforms were similar to the officers' uniforms. We wore the same insignia on our shirt collars but without the bars. While walking on the streets in Macon at night we were often saluted by other servicemen that we met, because at night our uniforms were even more easily mistaken for officers'. Then again maybe we weren't checked because the bus was already leaving the terminal before the M.P.s reached our seating area. Whatever the reason we were certainly glad they didn't check us. We had barely avoided another incident like the one in Tampa.

Back at Primary we constantly practiced all the maneuvers we had learned, plus many others. One I didn't particularly like was landing over obstacles. A line was stretched across the end of the runway about ten feet off the ground. You had to cross over this line and land before the plane reached a certain spot marked further down the runway. This required flying the plane with full flaps down, low and slow, and it could get very tricky. Another maneuver I didn't mind too much was cutting back your power to idle while on your base leg, which is 90 degrees to the runway, and landing on a marked spot. You began this approach while flying at 1000 feet altitude and once you cut power you were never to use it again until touch down, unless you got into trouble and couldn't reach the runway. Of course this would be an unforgivable offense. We would cut power, glide through our turn toward the runway, and touch down on the desired spot without losing flying speed and

stalling. After much practice at this I felt I could set her down on a dime.

We also made our first instrument flights during basic training. A hood was installed in the cockpit and you wore a pair of goggles that made the hood look completely black. You could see nothing outside the plane. Instrument flights were always made with an instructor flying in the back seat as an observer. If you did have to remove the goggles you could see through the hood, but we quickly learned to make our instrument approaches and do all sorts of flying by relying entirely on our instruments. It doesn't take long to learn to depend on your instruments because you can pull out of a steep turn and believe you are turning in the opposite direction if you have no point of reference. This training, along with our Link Trainer, taught us much that we would need to know when we began actual instrument flying.

One maneuver we were required to do during instrument training was very difficult at first. With the hood installed and your goggles on so you couldn't see out of the cockpit, your instructor would fly the plane. He would do many maneuvers; loops, snap- and slow-rolls, spins, and sometimes in a spin he would say, "OK, she's all yours, take me home". You had to get the plane flying straight and level, and then locate your position using the instruments and all available radio facilities. You then had to determine the direction to the base and fly all the way home. When you were finally established on an instrument approach to the field you were allowed to remove your goggles. All this had to be done with your gyro instruments caged (inoperative) because they couldn't be used during violent maneuvers. This left only your needle/ball, airspeed indicator, and altimeter. You were required to do this successfully in order to pass an instrument flight check, sometimes with a check pilot you had never met before.

My first experience with night flying was really interesting, just as my first solo had been. Most night landings were done at an auxiliary field that was also used for other training. The first time there we made a few landings, then were sent up alone for an hour or more just to become familiar with the night experience. Flying alone up there in the dark can really become a lonely experience.

While at basic we also made our first cross-country navigational flights, landing at a strange field and then returning to Cochran. Late one afternoon while on a solo cross-country flight to a point in South Carolina I had a little problem. We always strapped our map to one leg so we could follow our route and would be able to see all our checkpoints for reference. Just before I reached my destination in South Carolina I dropped my map. There is no floor in the cockpit of a BT-13, just two runners for your feet to slide up in. These lead up to the rudder pedals. I could see my map way down there in the belly of the plane but how in the world was I ever going to reach it? I had to have that map because it contained all my flight information and I might not get back to Cochran until after dark. I trimmed out the plane so it would fly straight and level with hands off the controls. I then unbuckled my seat belt and parachute harness and slid around the stick, keeping one hand on my control stick and one eye on my instruments to make certain the plane continued flying straight and level. After several tries I managed to stand the map on its edge and pull it to me. What a relief! I could now proceed with my flight. One of our

instructors was already at the field in South Carolina to make certain I landed there, which I did uneventfully, then flew back to Cochran.

I could fly the BT-13 forever and never learn to care for the way the flaps were operated. There was a crank on the left wall of the cockpit that was used to manually crank down the flaps. This wouldn't have been so bad if you never had to pull up suddenly from a landing approach and go around.

Sometimes when flying with your instructor, just as you began leveling off to land, you would hear him say, "pull up and go around". If you pushed your throttle to full take-off power with the flaps fully extended the plane tried to turn straight up. It was very hard to hold but if you didn't keep the nose down level it could pitch up enough to stall and crash. I sometimes moved my right knee over and propped it against the stick to assist my right arm while I cranked the flaps up with my left hand. Sometimes this was the only way I could get enough pressure on the stick to hold the nose down.

The happy day finally arrived when we had completed our 70 hours flight training at Cochran and now would be moving on to an advanced flying school. This day also was a little sad for we would be leaving some old friends who had been with us since Miami Beach. Those going to single-engine advanced would be training to be fighter pilots while those going to twin-engine advanced would be training to fly the large, multi-engine aircraft. I was happy to learn that Ken Buzza and I would both be going to twin-engine school. All through our training we were constantly filling out many different forms and one question we were always asked was our preference of the type plane we would like to fly. You were required to weigh at least 150 pounds to get into the bombers. I was always right on the border and sometimes below. Ken was no bigger than I was so both of us were pleased to learn we would be going to twin-engine school. We would learn which school we were assigned to just before we shipped out.

This time we were on a troop train for a very short time. We moved from Macon to Moody Field at Valdosta, Georgia. Here we would be flying the twin-engine AT-10 airplane built by Beechcraft. The AT-10 was built to be used only as a trainer. The fuselage had only a two-seat cockpit with no room for passengers. One thing very noticeable about this plane was that some of it was made of plywood. It proved to be a very safe plane to fly because of its ability to fly at very low speeds, yet it cruised at about the same speed as the AT-6 advanced single-engine trainer. We were so close to two single-engine advanced flight schools, one at Moultrie, Georgia, and the other at Selma, Alabama, that often we engaged in dogfights with them. Of course we never did this if we were riding with an instructor. We always felt we could out perform the AT-6 since we could fly slower and make tighter turns, yet we could fly just as fast as they could.

The AT-10 had two seats in the cockpit, which were side by side. This was new to us since the other planes we had been flying had a front and rear seat. If we were flying without an instructor another cadet would be in the right seat flying as copilot. There would be times when you would be flying right seat with another cadet that you had never met before. I didn't care very much for this. I wanted to know if he could fly that plane before I rode as copilot but I had no choice. Normally

we flew with a cadet who had the same instructor that we did. Like the other schools, an instructor had five students. Cadets were usually assigned to instructors alphabetically so Ken and I had the same instructor, and we flew together quite often at Moody Field. Of course this way we became very familiar with the way the other could handle the plane.

We were always told to stay off the controls when flying copilot with another cadet but one night while making night landings I broke that rule. We were practicing touch-and-go landings. This means we landed, got everything under control, and took off again without stopping. I did my five landings and taxied around to the end of the runway to change seats with the cadet I was flying with. I had never flown with him before and really didn't even know him since he was in another squadron. He made a couple of landings that I thought were pretty bad, then came in on his approach for his third landing much too high. We touched down way down the runway and as soon as he had everything under control he began advancing the throttles to take off again. The end of the runway looked awfully close and I knew we weren't going to take off in such a short distance. In fact, I didn't believe he would get off before we ran out of runway. I jerked the throttles back and got on the brakes hard. I said "You may be going around again but if you try it from here you go without me. I'm staying on the ground". He didn't say a word, just taxied around to the end of the runway and made his other two landings. I fully expected to get chewed out by his instructor when I got back on the ground but evidently he said nothing to his instructor since I never heard a word about what I did.

One day Ken and I were practicing touch-and-go landings and he almost pulled the landing gear out from under me. We had flown together so much we were very used to each other. We had gotten into a routine whereby the instant either of us pulled off the ground the one flying copilot hit the gear-up switch. That day we hit a little bump on our take-off roll and since we were almost to take-off speed the plane jumped a little off the runway. When it went airborne Ken hit the gear up switch. I had one rough time keeping the propellers from digging into the runway. After that we tried to be more careful. We realized we were getting careless and that could kill a couple of cadets.

One night I was flying copilot for another student pilot named Boyd. He and I had flown together before and I knew he was a very good pilot. We were on a night navigation flight down along the West Coast of Florida, which was very dark with very few ground lights to use for reference. I sat there with my feet propped up on a bar along the bottom of the instrument panel. I happened to be situated so that I could turn on the different warning lights by touching a test switch with my foot. One of these lights warns that there is low oil pressure. Without oil pressure the engine will overheat. It then must be cut to keep from burning up. I leaned back and acted as if I was sleeping. I then touched the switch with my foot for an instant just to flash the warning light. I saw him immediately check the other engine instruments. After I repeated this a few times I knew I had his full attention. I pushed the switch down and held it on. He quickly cut back the throttle on that engine but before he could touch any other switches I grabbed his hand so he couldn't cut the engine. The AT-10 is a very good plane but doesn't fly well on one engine because the propeller can't be feathered. It just sits there and windmills, which can be dangerous. After a minute Boyd was OK. It

didn't bother him too much since he had pulled a number of tricks on me when I was flying and he was my copilot. He, Ken and I were always doing something to each other on these long navigational flights. I suppose it broke the tension many times.

One night while doing some work at an auxiliary field I was flying with my instructor. We were making night landings on this field which had no runway marker lights. We were at the end of the runway waiting for another plane to land when he had an accident right in front of us. He came in O.K. and made a good landing, but then he must have braked too hard without holding his tail down. He stood that plane right up on it's nose, then on over on it's back. Fortunately, neither the cadet nor his instructor was hurt.

We also did formation flights at Moody. At first formation flying is very hard, at least it was for me. You tend to over control at first but with practice it gets easier. I soon reached the point where I felt I could stay right on another pilot's wing regardless of any move he made. One night we made some formation flights with our wing marker lights off. The night was very dark and I could hardly see the plane that I was almost on top of. I hoped my instructor, who was with me, had better eyesight than I did.

There's one thing about Moody Field that every cadet who ever trained there remembers. The food at the mess hall was excellent. Complaining about the food was a favorite subject for servicemen everywhere but to this day if I run into someone who went through Moody Field they always remember how well we were fed.
We practiced all maneuvers at Moody, especially navigational flights, both day and night. We also flew many hours of instrument flight training. We did this because we were to be flying the large bombers or transport planes on very long flights.

One cold morning we were all down at the flight line for our morning flying period. One plane took off with two cadets on board. They had cleared the end of the field when both engines suddenly quit. They had no time to make a turn so they continued straight ahead and landed safely in some farmer's cow pasture. Neither cadet was hurt. They didn't even hit a cow nor do much damage to the plane.

We were fast completing our work here and would soon be receiving our wings and Officers' commissions. This was the day we had looked forward to for so long. We had already been measured for our officer's uniforms and expected them any day. The air was filled with excitement.

One day Ken and I were in the Post Exchange and there sitting at one of the tables was our old Commanding Officer from Lakeland. We had long ago forgotten his promise that if he had anything to do with it we would never become Officers. Was he here to make good on his threat? Though he didn't seem to recognize us, our hearts sank. We were almost resigned to becoming Flight Officers rather than 2nd Lieutenants. A few in each class always seemed to graduate as Flight Officers. We never knew why or what determined this, but now we felt we might be two of them. We would just have to wait and see what our fate was.

The BIG DAY finally arrived. On February 7, 1944, I graduated with class 44-B, received my pilot's silver wings, and was commissioned a 2nd

Lieutenant in the U.S. Army Air corps. Ken received his commission also so our worries about our old Lakeland Commanding Officer were for nothing - we were two proud USAAF Pilots.

Graduation Day was a very big day at these Advanced Flying schools. We were given a big dinner dance and allowed to invite a guest. Marian was able to come down for graduation. She pinned my first pair of silver wings on my brand new Officer's uniform. We were filled with joy and excitement but couldn't help wondering what lay ahead for us.

The afternoon after graduation exercises were completed we assembled back in the auditorium to receive our assignment orders. Ken and I would both be going to flight training in B-17s at Chanute Field, Illinois. It was good to have him going with me since we had been together for such a long time. Very few of us were assigned to Chanute so it was good to have my best friend and flying buddy going with me. The class was divided up and sent in every conceivable direction, with every kind of assignment. We were given two weeks leave, then required to report to our new stations. Marian had waited in Valdosta for me after graduation so we caught the next bus to go by her home in Glenwood, then went on to Atlanta. Oh, happy day!

I spent my two weeks leave at home in Marietta, visiting old friends and showing off my new silver wings. The time passed so quickly. It seemed I was on my way to Illinois much too soon. We were Officers now and able to travel on our own. I reported to Chanute on February 21st. What an extreme change in the weather going from Moody Field in south Georgia to Chanute Field in northern Illinois! We had left Moody in very warm weather and arrived at Chanute to be greeted by several inches of snow.

I was getting settled in my room when in walked my new roommate, Ken Buzza. We would again be stationed at the same base and share the same instructor. Our quarters here were quite different from the barracks in which we had been accustomed to living. Here at Chanute only two men shared a room.

After settling in my new quarters I walked down to one of the hangers where some of the B-17s were. I had never seen one up close and this was one of the largest planes I had ever seen, so much bigger than anything we had been flying during our prior training was. In its day the B-17 was one of the largest planes in existence.

Now we would be flying a plane where all five student pilots plus the instructor could fly together. On our initial flight our instructor took all of us up for orientation. One student would fly from the left seat while the other four stood behind the seats and watched. The top turret had been removed so several men could stand in the cockpit behind the seats and observe. We would receive 110 hours pilot training and many more hours flying copilot with another student.

One requirement before we could solo with another student pilot was to get thirty hours cockpit time. With the plane parked on the ground we would go through every conceivable maneuver in order to familiarize ourselves with every switch, indicator, and control. We had to become familiar enough with everything in the cockpit that we could touch anything our instructor called for while blindfolded. We were required

to simulate cutting an engine's power, feather the propeller, turn off every necessary switch in the proper order, and do it in a few seconds - all while blindfolded. By the time you become proficient at this, you are very familiar with everything in the B-17 cockpit.
Unlike before, Ken and I never flew together here. Although we were still assigned instructors alphabetically, here we had new pilots that had come from other schools. I now had a new flying partner, Ralph Brown. Ken flew most of the time with a student pilot named Butts.

We flew many long periods the first few days just practicing landings. One morning Ralph and I made forty-five landings in one 5½-hour period. We flew many hours of night and day navigational flights, and many hours of instrument flight training under the hood. Sometimes we actually flew on instruments when the weather was bad. We also made our first high altitude flights. We were rushed through training at Chanute because we were needed in Europe, although at that time we didn't know the reason for the big hurry.

We worked many long and tiring hours at Chanute. Since we were there during the winter, on many days we flew in very bad weather. Of course this was ideal training for flying in Europe since the weather there is also bad during the winter months.

One Saturday while our class was flying we encountered a severe snowstorm. It happened in the middle of the morning while most of us were already in the air, some on cross-country navigational flights. Ralph and I were airborne but we made it back to base O.K. By noon all except one plane had returned safely. The snow was blinding. As time passed we all became deeply concerned about our absent comrade. We had almost given up hope, praying he had landed safely at another base. Finally around 2 P.M. the snowfall let up and we joyfully spotted him approaching the field. He had been lost in the storm but had managed to stay aloft until it had eased a little and then had found his way home. He must have been running on fumes because to stay airborne all that time must have nearly emptied his fuel tanks.

One night Ralph and I were flying a night navigational mission from Chanute to Memphis, then on to Omaha and back to Chanute. The flight to Memphis was fine but soon after heading northwest toward Omaha for the second leg of our flight we ran into some very bad weather. As we continued on course the weather worsened. We were flying in rain and the outside temperature had dropped below freezing. Under these conditions we began to pick up ice. Ice can become a flyer's worst enemy because it can build up on the wings so much that the plane loses its ability to fly. Much of your lift is gone because ice on the surfaces becomes rough and heavy, disturbing the even airflow across the wings.

Soon our windshield was coated with ice so heavy we couldn't see outside. We could hear the propellers slinging it off against the fuselage. In addition to this problem we couldn't identify any radio stations because of too much static. After some time had passed we realized we must be over a large city because of the glare on our windshield. We figured we must be over Kansas City, the largest city we would pass over on this leg. If we could receive two identifiable radio stations we could determine our exact position.

Ralph flew the plane while I slipped down to the Navigator's station. We felt I would have more luck at this radio station plus I would have a table to work on. Sure enough, I managed to locate and identify two stations and mark our exact position. We were right on course but still enveloped in this terrible weather. I had no idea how much longer we would be in this storm so I plotted a course for Chanute. I moved back up to the cockpit and gave Ralph the heading to Chanute. We decided "to heck with Omaha" and turned for home. After a short time flying due east we began to break out of the bad weather and had clear sailing home.

At Chanute our days were divided into three periods. On certain days we attended ground school in the morning and flew in the afternoon. The next day we would have ground school in the afternoon and fly until 1 A.M. Then the next day we would only have a 5½-hour flight period with no ground school. We enjoyed this schedule since every third day we were off from noon one day until noon the next. Chanute was only a short distance from Champaign/Urbana where the University of Illinois is located and also not too far south of Chicago. These 24-hour off periods allowed us time to visit either place. We could take the train to Chicago in the afternoon and return the next day in time for our afternoon classes. Needless to say we went to Chicago often. It was a wonderful city for servicemen. Due to our status as servicemen we could enjoy some of the best attractions the city had to offer without paying a cover charge or minimum. We could ride the trains anywhere and the motorman would just place his hand over the fare box when we climbed aboard. Now that we were Officers we could go wherever we pleased without a pass, as long as we returned to the base in time for our duty.

After our forays into Chicago, it's amazing no one was killed while flying in our sleep-deprived state. Often some of us stayed out in Chicago all night. In the morning we would return to base for ground school then have night flying until 1 A.M.; all on what little sleep we got on the train back from Chicago, which wasn't very much.

In due course we completed our B-17 transition training and received our orders for transfer. We were given three days travel time and ordered to report to Lincoln, Nebraska. Ken and I boarded the train to Chicago where we were to transfer to a train to Lincoln. It was just an overnight train trip to Lincoln, so our three-day allotment gave us some extra time to spend in Chicago. Unfortunately, the distractions of Chicago caused us to leave a day later than the date we should have reported to Lincoln. Ken and I had stayed over an extra night to see a show we knew we wouldn't get another chance to see. We finally arrived in Lincoln early one morning and reported to the base. We were afraid we might be in a little trouble but we knew we wouldn't get fired. So many new Officers were reporting to Lincoln for assignment that no one noticed we were a day late.

Lincoln was the base where the new B-17 crews were formed. We spent several days just killing time and waiting for our assignments. (The same old Army "hurry up and wait"). After breakfast each morning we assembled and names were called out for transfer. One morning both Ken and Ralph were called but I wasn't. They weren't told where they were going, just to be ready to leave the next morning by troop train. After a year and a half together Ken and I were going to be separated. We promised each other we would find a way to keep in touch.

The next few days were rather lonesome. Even though I knew quite a few of the pilots left there with me, I sure missed my old buddy. Then one morning my name was finally called. My orders included the names of all my future crew members but not a hint of my destination; just be ready to leave the next morning on a troop train. Since entire crews were being transferred we had crewmen of every rank on board this 16-car train. As the train pulled out of Lincoln I walked through all the cars thinking that perhaps I could locate some of my new crew, but had no luck. We had come from schools scattered throughout the country so not many fellows knew each other. No one knew any of the fellows listed on my orders.

After two days and nights we arrived at Dyersburg, Tennessee. The weather in Lincoln had still been cold when we left and we were wearing our winter uniforms. Here at Dyersburg, though, the temperature must have been 90° and we were roasting. Our baggage had not yet been sent to our barracks so we couldn't get into our summer uniforms. Before, we had always carried our own belongings, but this time when we really needed them, we didn't have them. Finally everything was delivered, our barracks assignments were made, and we were able to get into cool uniforms.

The first couple of days at Dyersburg were very busy ones. Presently my new crew was scheduled to make our first flight. This would constitute a check flight for me where I would finally get to meet the fellows. This initial check flight usually included only a skeleton crew to fly with the pilot. My instructor along with my new copilot, John Sachtjen, from Madison, WI, flight engineer, Francis E. Doan, from Indianapolis, IN, radio operator, Daniel E. Morrison, from Westkill, NY, would go along. I would meet the rest of the crew afterward at the briefing. Not one of my new crew had ever been on board a B-17 and I knew they were really in for a rough ride. From past experience I knew what a check ride would put them through.

For 5½ hours we did everything that plane could do plus some under-the-hood instrument approaches and several touch-and-go landings. I was surprised none of the crew got sick from all the stalls we did. If you are standing up, as they were, the bottom just drops out from under you. They all made it very well without any problems.

When we returned to base and were standing under the wing my instructor paid me a very nice compliment. He said it was good to get a pilot who flew the plane and made it do exactly what he wanted. He said that most pilots just out of transition just herded the plane along, letting the plane fly them. Of course this shot my ego sky high because my crew heard him. I later learned my flight engineer had passed this comment along to the guys that weren't on the flight.
At Dyersburg we really worked hard since we all realized this was our final phase of training. Our next stop would be somewhere overseas and we wanted to be as well prepared as possible.

We repeated much of our past training but this time with a full crew, just as we would be doing in combat. We were again flying low- and high-altitude formations, more instrument flights, and navigational flights all over the eastern United States, but then something new was added. We did high-altitude practice bombing and air-to-air and air-to-

ground gunnery practice. Air-to-ground gunnery practice consisted of firing at targets in the Mississippi River. Air-to-air practice was conducted with simulated fire, using gun cameras instead of bullets, but we did fire real ammunition when doing air-to-ground on the Mississippi.

The practice bombing range was close enough to Dyersburg that we flew over some of the residential sections of town on our bombing pattern. One day someone accidentally dropped a practice bomb that landed in someone's back yard. Practice bombs had only five pounds of explosive combined with 95 pounds of sand. Fortunately this one did very little damage - it could have done more. The people of Dyersburg knew the job we were training for and made very few complaints about anything that we did, especially if it was an accident.

There was a rumor going around that no leave would be given before we shipped out. This certainly ruined the morale of the Group, as one would imagine. My flight engineer was expecting his first child and desperately wanted to go home before going overseas. I was afraid he might go AWOL. It had happened before. One day one of our planes was on a flight near St. Louis when the waist gunner just opened the fuselage door and bailed out. He was from St. Louis and he said he only wanted to go home one more time before being shipped overseas. We never learned what, if any, punishment he received. But considering the desperate need for all of us overseas, they were probably just glad to get him back.

We completed our work at Dyersburg early. To our great relief we were given five days leave before we shipped out. A fellow pilot and good friend of mine had a car at Dyersburg. He was from Birmingham so I rode that far with him, then took a bus on to Atlanta. I felt sorry for some of the fellows who lived so far away, some from as far as California, and couldn't possibly get home. We didn't have the fast transportation in those days that we have today.
Our five days leave included travel time so we actually had only three days to spend at home. They passed so quickly. Sadly I left home and family, and Marian, not knowing when I would return. I prayed that I would see them all again.

We had been ordered to return to Dyersburg by a certain date and by no means be late. We were scheduled to leave by troop train at a specific time and we must be there. I left home by bus for Birmingham, then transferred to one bound for Memphis. I felt I had plenty of time to arrive at Dyersburg on time. In those days the buses were always very crowded. Usually there would be more passengers than seats but servicemen were always allowed to board first. In the station at Birmingham a lady about my Mother's age had told me she had to get to Little Rock because of a death in her family. Could she board with me? I didn't know if she was telling me the truth or not but I took her aboard with me. The crowd was so large that she would never have been able to get on board without me. I sat with her and talked with her all the way to Memphis and decided she was telling me the truth.

After we had been on our way for several hours we ran into some very bad weather. We were soon in a very bad thunderstorm. The visibility was terrible because of the torrential rain. We began to get lightening so badly that the driver pulled off the road in a large service station and we stayed there until most of the storm had passed. Other storms were

still all around but we pulled out of the station and were slowly on our way again. All I could think of was what time would we get to Memphis. We had lost lots of time and I was afraid I would miss my connection to Dyersburg. I had no idea when the next bus to Dyersburg might be but I knew our troop train was leaving that night.

We arrived in Memphis about two hours late and the bus to Dyersburg was long gone. I was told that the weather had played havoc with travel all over. I found a telephone and called my squadron headquarters. They told me to not worry; the weather had stranded servicemen all over the southeast. I wouldn't have been able to get to Dyersburg anyway. The road from Memphis had been closed because of fallen trees and debris in the highway. The troop train had been rescheduled for the next night, they said, just come on in as soon as I could.

The weather eventually cleared up and I boarded a bus and headed north. Twice we stopped for workers to clear debris from the road so we could proceed. I arrived at the base after midnight and learned that several others were still out there trying to get back. I was glad to learn that my flight engineer had made it home to see his pregnant wife and was now back in Dyersburg. All the members of my crew were back by the next morning and by the middle of the day so was everyone else. That night we were all ready to go.

We departed Dyersburg just after dark aboard a troop train headed for what would likely be our last station in the continental United States. Late the next afternoon we arrived in St. Louis and were told we would be there until 10 or 11 P.M. We could go into town but were told to be back no later than 10 P.M. so as not to miss our departure. I thought, surely the Army must know that some would not make it, and sure enough, some didn't. I wondered how they would get to the next station since we didn't know where our next station was. I guess everyone made it eventually. We left St. Louis that evening and arrived a day later back in Nebraska, this time in Kearney.

We stayed in Kearney several days readying everything to head overseas. We didn't know where we would go from here. Kearney is just about in the center of the United States and we could go to either the Pacific or European Theater. Our bet was on Europe because that's where most of the B-17's are operating. We were given physical exams and shots for everything we had ever heard of and some things we had not. I had to take all my shots a second time because somehow my first ones were not recorded. They wouldn't take my word for it when I said I had already had my shots. All the Doctor said was that now I would be twice as immune.

One day while we were in Kearney we were ordered to make a check ride on a new plane. Some problems had been found on the flight to the base and it had to be checked out after repairs had been made. We had been airborne only a short time when our Navigator began to have extreme pain in his ears. The pain was so severe that we returned to the base and sent him to the Flight Surgeon. He had never had this problem before, even when flying at high altitude. It was serious enough to cause him to be grounded temporarily. Since we were scheduled to leave within the next few days we couldn't wait for him to be cleared for flying again. We were assigned a new Navigator, John Lurtz, who had been training in B-24s.

Though John had never flown on a B-17 before he really proved to be a Godsend. I had never seen one work so hard. He always knew exactly where we were. We hadn't had the same confidence in the Navigator we were losing because he sometimes tended to get lost even in the U.S. with all the navigational radio aids we had here. One night before while we were at Dyersburg we had made a night navigational flight to Albany, Georgia. He got really lost on our way home. John and I were in the cockpit listening to some music on a Memphis radio station when we noticed we were way south of our planned course. When the radio compass is tuned to a station an indicator on the instrument panel points in the direction of the station. The indicator was slowly moving off to the right when it should have been pointing almost straight up or a little to the left. This meant we were passing Memphis south of the station when we should be passing northeast. We decided to let him go until he admitted he was lost. We got all the way into northern Mississippi before he finally came up to the cockpit and admitted he had been flying off course. He was finally able to get his bearings and give us a new heading for Dyersburg. This was not the first time something like this had happened.

This problem had concerned me greatly because I knew we would not have the radio facilities or navigational aids overseas that we had in the States. My entire crew could be in jeopardy if we were hundreds of miles from our home base, had to leave a formation, and depend on our Navigator to get us home. I had even spoken to my squadron commander at Dyersburg about the problem and he had told me to request that he be removed from the crew when we arrived at our next station. I hated the thought of doing this but felt it was necessary. After the flight today my prayers had been answered. Everything had worked out perfectly.

On another night mission at Dyersburg I scared our radio operator almost to death, literally. John was flying the plane and we had all the cockpit floodlights turned on. I had my feet propped up on a bar that runs under the instrument panel and was reading a newspaper. My foot happened to be up against a push button that was mounted on the left side of the fuselage, at the lower side of the pilot's panel. This is an emergency switch that rings the bailout bell in the aft fuselage. Suddenly Dan, the Radio Operator, came on the inter-phone and was so excited I couldn't understand a word he said. I told our flight engineer to go see what was the matter with him. A few minutes later he returned and told me he had found Dan at the fuselage door with his parachute on, ready to jump. I had been ringing the bailout bell. I was more careful after that. I would hate to lose a crewmember as good as Dan.

As we left Kearney each crew would ferry a new plane overseas. At the time we were scheduled to leave we were having one thunderstorm after another, both day and night. We were scheduled to leave at night, for security reasons I suppose. For two consecutive nights we sat in our plane until early morning, waiting for favorable weather. On the third night we finally took off about 2 A.M. and headed for Manchester, New Hampshire. It was raining and the plane was about seven thousand pounds overloaded with mail and other supplies, plus our crew and luggage. I must have used every foot of the runway trying to get that plane airborne. She finally lifted off smoothly and we were on our way to experiences we had only read about.

Nine hours after take-off we arrived at Manchester to find the field completely socked in with bad weather. I had made many simulated instrument approaches and a few in actual instrument conditions, but never at a strange field. This made me a little more tense than I should have been but we made it in and landed safely.

We stayed in Manchester for only one night and early next morning we were off to Goose Bay, Labrador, Canada. After a while in the air we solemnly watched the United States border slowly disappear behind us. Every member of my crew seemed so quite. I'm sure everyone said a silent prayer as I did for we had no idea when or how we would ever return this way. We crossed the St. Lawrence River, then the Bay of St. Lawrence, and headed on northward toward Goose Bay.

We were well on our way when we spotted a twin-engine plane down in the wilds beneath us. The plane was so well preserved that we thought it had only recently crashed. I dropped down and circled as low as I dared, just skimming the tree tops, but we could see no sign of life, or even see any bodies. We had been told to use our radio only for extreme emergencies, therefore we continued on our way and reported this when we reached Goose Bay. We learned that the plane we saw had been there for more than a year and every plane passing over it reports seeing it. We were told we had been right on course because that plane is on a direct line between Manchester and Goose Bay. This gave us some added reassurance about our new Navigator. The weather that day had been excellent, so much better than the past few days of rain and thunderstorms, so we had a very good flight.

During WWII Goose Bay was a very remote station, with no roads or railroads anywhere near. The only way in was by plane or boat as it was near the Atlantic Coast. We stayed there for two days being briefed on problems we might have if we had to land at Greenland which would be on our way to Meeks Field, Reykjavik, Iceland. Our course would carry us over the southern tip of Greenland and if we had problems that forced us to land there the approach and landing could be frightening if the weather was bad. We would have only one approach to the landing strip there and the approach would be at an altitude lower than the mountains of ice on each side of the landing strip. A large table displayed a layout of the Greenland landing strip, showing the approach and everything we would see at the base. I studied this until I felt certain I could make a safe landing there should we be forced to.

On the morning of August 10 we took off and headed for Iceland, about ten hours away. The entire flight would be over water except for the short time we would be over Canada and when we crossed over the southern tip of Greenland. It was a long and tiring flight but uneventful. We did have a few small mechanical problems but nothing that would ground us. With the guidance of our flight engineer the crew made these repairs while we were in Iceland.

One very noticeable thing about the base at Reykjavik was that all the ground was volcanic rock with very little growth anywhere. I'm sure the people in the city had some plants and such cultivated but we never had time to go into town. The weather was nice, a little cool for summer, but otherwise OK. Another thing we particularly noticed was that the sun never seemed to set. It never got dark while we were there. The

sun would rise above the horizon, circle most of the sky and set almost where it had risen that morning, never getting directly overhead as it does at home. Of course we were there in the summer when the days are extremely long. We never saw the sun rise or set but were told that it set sometime after midnight and rose long before we woke in the morning.

We spent two nights at the Reykjavik base, then departed for a base in northern Scotland. This flight was rather short compared to some of the flights we had made the past few days. It was uneventful except for our spotting a submarine out in the cold North Atlantic waters. When flying over the water it's possible to see down into the water much deeper than you can see when you are riding on the surface. The submarine was beneath the surface but was very visible to us.

The weather was very nice until we began to approach Scotland, where we ran into thick cloud coverage. We could see nothing on the ground as we arrived and were diverted to a base at Nutts Corner, just outside Belfast, Ireland. We found no weather problems there and landed without further delay.

We stayed at Nutts Corner for three days, then were taken to the harbor where we boarded a ship. That night we crossed the Irish Sea and docked at Liverpool, England, the following morning. At Liverpool many of the crews were split up and the members sent to different bases all over England as replacements for the dead and wounded. I was very thankful that my crew was left intact.

While at Liverpool I ran into my old flight partner Ralph Brown. He and his crew were bound for the same 8th Air Force Group that we were. I learned from Ralph that Butts and his crew had run into a very bad thunderstorm on the flight from Kearney to Manchester. Their plane was so badly damaged by the storm that they had to wait until they could get a replacement plane. I was happy to learn that Ralph and I would be at the same base although we would not be flying together now that we each had our own crews. He told me he and Ken Buzza had been together at Alexandria, Louisiana, for their phase training. Ken was somewhere on his way to England but Ralph had not seen him since they had left the States.

We left Liverpool by train and headed to our base somewhere in the 8th USAAF. On the way to our new base we experienced our first total blackout at night. At a point somewhere near our destination the train slowed to a halt. It was around midnight and we were taken off into total darkness. Those in charge carried small flashlights but otherwise there were no lights anywhere. Our train then departed into the night and we were taken to a point somewhere in the rail-yard and left standing in a line. We were told to sit on the ground but under no circumstances were we to move from our position, or a moving train could strike us. The trains had no running lights and we couldn't see them in the dark. What an eerie feeling to hear a train rapidly approaching and never see it! They passed so close to us that the air would whip at our faces as they rumbled by.

After some time had passed, probably shorter in duration than it felt like in our apprehensive state, we were loaded onto Army trucks and taken a short distance to our new permanent base. We were assigned to the 95th Heavy Bombardment Group, 13th Combat Wing, 3rd Division, of the

8th USAAF, located at a small English village named Horham, about ninety miles north of London.

At orientation we were told that we would lose one waist gunner because gunners were becoming short. Also the German Luftwaffe was not as active as it had been in the early stages of the war. Steve Vennis, one of our two waist gunners, had been through engineering school and was considered our assistant flight engineer. Vennis would remain with the crew but Stafford, our other waist gunner, would have to go. This probably suited him just fine. He was a very good typist and would be assigned somewhere else as a squadron clerk. He would not have to fly any combat.

Our base was actually larger than the village of Horham. The base and the village were so intertwined that highways ran right through the base. It must have been extremely hard for the people of Horham to get any sleep; some lived almost on the base. I remember a two-story house lay dead ahead as we took off, our planes just clearing it. The ground crews would work all night, running and testing engines, loading the bombs and preparing the planes for the next day's mission. Then the squadrons would take off, sometimes long before daylight, right over those rooftops. Despite this we never heard one complaint. The people of Horham were very good to us and spoke of us as "their boys". They were eager and willing to share what they had with us even though almost everything in England was rationed. We were happy to return the favor since we usually had more food items than they had. Many times when we returned from missions I saw villagers standing by the little St. Mary's Church counting the planes returning. They would pray that all thirty-six planes of the Group would make it home OK, and that "their boys" were safe.

We had assumed that when we left the States our training flights were over. We couldn't have been more mistaken. Some months the 8th A.F. performed more training missions than the 2nd A.F., which was the actual training Air Force in the States. Just as soon as we were settled in our new quarters we began to fly more training missions. We would fly them early enough to be back on the ground before the real missions returned.

In the early days at our new base I spent a lot of time at the flight line. On the morning of September 9th we watched as a plane that had aborted the day's mission was returning to base due to a mechanical problem. Just before he touched down he must have realized his tail wheel had not come down with his main gear. He was already so slow that his main gear had touched momentarily but he decided to go around. He pushed his throttles to take-off power, then realized he had lost so much speed and was so far down the runway he couldn't possibly get off before running out of runway. He cut his throttles and tried to stop but it was too late. He ran off the end of the runway, still at a high rate of speed, struck and demolished a cement mixer, then struck a bank that sheared off his main gear and broke the plane completely apart at the radio room. The two halves slid to a stop. Unbelievably, there was no fire or explosion even though he still had his 500-lb. high-explosive bombs on board. Except for some severe bruises not one crewmember was seriously hurt. This was just another of the miracles we prayed for. Meanwhile all of the new crews continued flying practice missions almost daily until September 12.

The day that we had been training for finally arrived. Each afternoon about 6 P.M. our squadron, the 334th, would run up a red flag at Squadron Headquarters if our Squadron was scheduled to fly. We would all hurry to read the names of the crews who would be flying the next day's mission. If your name wasn't there you were free to do whatever you pleased, which was usually either to go into Norwich or Ipswitch, the closest and largest cities to our base. If your name was on the list, it meant early to bed for a good night's sleep. Today my name was on the list. I would be flying my first combat mission tomorrow, the 13th of September 1944.

I doubt any of my crew slept soundly that night - I know I didn't. Though we had trained these many long months for this day, I realized that tomorrow we would be heading into the unknown, engaged in combat for the first time. This would be like nothing we had done before. It hadn't helped our nerves when we arrived here and the older crews had told us the average life of a combat crew was 16 missions. We were scheduled to fly thirty-five. Many prayers were offered up that night, I'm sure.

About 4 A.M. I heard the click of the barracks doorknob as the Squadron Orderly came to wake me. From that time on when I was scheduled to fly I always heard the click of that doorknob, even through my thirty-fifth mission. After a few missions, if I didn't have to fly, I could easily sleep right through when he came, and the noise everyone else who was flying that day would make. If I didn't have to fly on a mission day I could sleep through anything, with one exception. One morning a German plane dropped two bombs on our base. I was still in bed asleep but I heard the swish of air the falling bombs made and I hit the floor before the explosion.

At breakfast that morning we had eggs. I hadn't seen an egg since we left the States. Combat crews were always served a large breakfast with eggs on days they flew. We nervously ate our breakfast, proceeded to our lockers to dress for the mission, and then attended briefing. We were told that this would be a light mission, with very little flak and no German fighters. We were to bomb storage warehouses and railroad yards at a city I had never heard of, Sindelfingen, Germany. Since this was supposedly a light mission (a milk run) I'm sure that was the reason several new crews were along. Today we get our feet wet, so to speak.

Our missions usually were flown at an altitude of 25,000 feet. In the European winters the temperature at this altitude could be 40 to 60 degrees below zero. Every inch of your skin must be covered because the metal inside the plane was so cold, bare skin would stick to anything it touched. The reason for this was that our planes were not pressurized or heated as they are today. Some days the temperature inside the plane was almost as cold as the outside.

To compensate for this extreme cold we wore an electrically heated suit over our clothes. Very heavy socks were connected to our trousers, which were in turn connected to our jackets, all electrically heated. Over this went our flight suits then a "Mae West" inflatable life jacket in case we were forced to ditch in the North Sea. On top of all this we wore a parachute harness. We wore black silk gloves under our electrically heated gloves. We wore a helmet holding both our earphones

and oxygen mask. Our microphone was in a strap fastened around our neck. As we neared the target area we would add to all this a heavy flak helmet over our regular helmet and a very heavy flak suit to protect us in front. Our backs were protected by a one-inch thick steel plate that was installed in the cockpit behind the pilot and co-pilot seats of all combat planes. We wore thick heavy boots over our heated socks. At the mission altitude of 25,000 feet you die in a few minutes without oxygen, therefore we constantly checked the entire crew to make certain everyone was O.K.

This was a clumsy and awkward way to fly but it was necessary. If we should ever be forced to ditch in that cold North Sea we were told we would freeze to death in about 20 minutes if we got wet. If we managed to stay dry we could last a little longer. Not to worry though, the British PT boats used for air/sea rescue would be there almost by the time you hit the water. I hoped I never had to learn if this was true.

Despite all my training, the emotion I felt prior to this first combat mission was very new to me. After briefing I stood under the wing as I would many times in the future thinking of home, my family, and Marian, wondering what they might be doing at this very minute. It would be about bedtime at home. I knew my loved ones would be saying a prayer for my safety, as I knew they did before they slept every night. I also uttered a prayer and then I climbed aboard. When I saw those big 500-lb. bombs hanging on the bomb racks I knew this was for real.

We took off just before daylight. We were off O.K. but either someone had failed to tell me our squadron leader would be firing a red/green flare every few minutes or I just missed this information. The red/green flare identified the 95th Group; other Groups used different colors. I approached what I thought was my Group but as I got closer I saw that it wasn't. Groups were identified by a large letter on the vertical stabilizer (the tail fin), ours being a "B" inside a square. I "backed out of there" and soon located our 95th Group.

We reached our target and made our bomb run O.K. Exactly as we had been briefed the anti-aircraft fire was light. It was plenty enough for me though, since this was my first time being shot at. If German fighters were anywhere around our P-51 Mustang "little friends" kept them away from us. The introduction of the P-51 fighter, with its long-range escort capability and superior speed and firepower had made a significant improvement in our bombing success in the final years of the War.

I knew all the other first-time crews flying today were just as nervous as we were but we couldn't let that interfere with our performance. We just had to have faith that God and our training would see us through.

After 7½ hours in the air we returned safely to dear old Horham, which had become home to us. What a relief to get this first mission behind us! We only had two planes sustain some damage from the flak and ours wasn't one of those. After debriefing and dinner we discussed our new experience with some of the other new crews. I realized I had flown my first combat mission on Friday the 13th, just as I had made my first solo back at Lakeland on a Friday the 13th. I thought, I'm in the 13th Combat Wing so maybe 13 will turn out to be my lucky number. It had been so far.

Two days later we were briefed to make a flight all the way to Warsaw, Poland. On this mission we wouldn't carry bombs but would drop supplies by parachute to the Polish Army as they fought the Battle of Warsaw. This distance would be too great to return to England so we were to land at a Russian Yak Fighter Base in Poltava, Russia, and remain there overnight. The Russians permitted us to keep personnel there to service our planes as they flew these shuttle missions from England to Russia, then to Italy, and back to England. We were to remain at Poltava overnight, bomb a target the next day as we flew to Italy, then on the third day we would bomb another target on the way back to England. We would fly three missions on these three days.

We left England with each plane carrying twelve 500-lb. canisters of arms, ammunition, and medical supplies. We flew out across the North Sea then crossed over Denmark, but when we reached the Baltic Sea Headquarters ordered us back to our base. The Germans had overrun our drop zone at Warsaw. When we got back home each plane made a pass over the field, dropping the canisters as we had planned to do over Warsaw. We couldn't keep them on board because our Group might be flying another mission before we could return to Warsaw. This way we at least got some practice dropping supplies and it was actually quicker to unload this way than it would have been to land and have the ground crews do it.

Two days later we were up at 3 A.M. and briefed to fly the same mission to Warsaw. This time we made it all the way. We came in over Warsaw at a much lower altitude than would normally be the case if we were dropping bombs. We were low enough to see the fighting in the streets, smoke and fire everywhere, but worse, we could actually see the anti-aircraft guns firing at us. We didn't see any German planes but the anti-aircraft fire was extremely heavy and accurate. All our planes were picking up too much flak. We had one engine damaged so badly we had to cut it and continue on with three. The B-17 actually flew very well with an engine out. After dropping its bombs and burning the fuel used to get to a target, three engines were more than adequate for the lighter gross weight.

We left Warsaw flying east and crossed the Vistula River with both Germans and Russians firing at us. The Russian Army had driven the Germans all the way across Poland to the Vistula River at Warsaw. They had arrived there three weeks before our supply run. When they reached the outskirts of Warsaw thousands of Polish Home Army forces attacked the German occupational forces in an attempt to drive them out. They assumed that they would have help from the Russian Army there on the edge of the city. Instead the Russians made no attempt to cross the river. They allowed the Germans to slaughter the Polish Home Army. More than 200,000 Poles were killed, including more than 125,000 civilians. The Polish Home Army fought gallantly, begging for the help which we wanted to give but Russia would not permit us to land in their country until the fighting had almost ended. During that time the Polish Army, lacking sufficient supplies, was destroyed. The Russians waited three months before attempting to cross the river.

We dropped our canisters in a zone marked off for us by Polish civilians. They had marked an area with white paint. We dropped our canisters and continued on toward Poltava. After landing we learned 18 of the 108 planes on this mission had received heavy flak damage, one so

badly it never flew again but was salvaged for parts. We spent an uneventful night at Poltava and the next morning, after an early breakfast, we attended morning briefing for the mission to Italy. Much to my surprise I learned our crew would be left behind. The engine we lost over Warsaw had been so badly damaged it would have to be replaced before we could fly again.

We watched glumly as our Group took off leaving us stranded at this Russian fighter base in the Ukraine. We had no idea how long we would have to stay here. The three groups, the 95th, the 100th, and the 390th, which had flown the Warsaw mission had landed at three separate bases. Twelve planes total (including ours) had been left behind at these bases because of battle damage. Only one plane had been shot down over Warsaw. Considering the low altitude we had flown this was hard to believe.

After our Group left for Italy those of us left at Poltava assembled for instructions as to how we would live while there. We would continue to live in the tents that the Russians had assigned to us. We had also been issued a sleeping bag and four heavy army blankets. The night before I had slept in my sleeping bag on a cot with all four blankets piled on top. Even with all this I was still cold. Finally I realized I was freezing from the bottom since the thin cot and one layer of sleeping beg was all I had underneath. I folded two blankets, put them on the cot as a mattress, then the sleeping bag, then put the other two blankets on top. Now I could slip into my sleeping bag, zip it closed until only part of my face was exposed, and sleep comfortably. The nights could get extremely cold, yet the days were rather comfortable in our winter uniforms we had brought from England.

Our tents were situated across the field from the Russians and under no circumstances were we allowed to go over there. A Russian guard was posted near our tents to make certain we obeyed these rules. The Russians allowed no fraternization with us. And we thought we were allies! I later learned just how wrong we were.

There was a small number of Air Corps personnel stationed at these three bases to service the planes coming through on shuttle runs. Our army trucks ran a regular route between the base and Poltava. We were allowed to go into town if we pleased but never without our .45 automatic pistols and never after dark. If we did go into town our guard would probably follow us.

We were free of course to roam about the section of the base where the Americans lived. Most everything at the base had been destroyed or severely damaged as the Russians and Germans had fought here on two different occasions. Burned and wrecked B-17s seemed to be everywhere. These planes had been on the first shuttle run and were not from our 95th Group. On that first shuttle mission our Group had landed at Mirgorod and the other Groups had landed at Poltava.

One day a German photo reconnaissance plane had made several passes over the bases at Mirgorod and Poltava. The Russian anti-aircraft fire was weak and inaccurate and the German plane had no problem taking all the photographs he wanted. The mission Commanding Officer had wanted to send two of his fighters up to shoot him down but the Russian Base Commanding Officer refused to give permission. Since the Americans in

Russia were under the control of the Russian military, the fighters remained on the ground. The Group Commander realized the Germans now would know where they were. The Luftwaffe would more than likely raid these bases that night. All these planes on the ground presented too good a target to pass up. Our people at Mirgorod tried in vain to warn the other Groups at Poltava by telephone and radio but were unsuccessful.

It was obvious after they were discovered that the planes at both these bases would have to be moved. The Russian military had already demonstrated they were unable to fend off an air raid, but their commander was reluctant to allow the planes to be moved. He insisted they could protect our planes but he was finally persuaded. Contacting the other Groups at Poltava continued to be unsuccessful even though our personnel at Mirgorod tried on into the night. It was finally decided the planes at Mirgorod would be flown to bases near Kharkov and Kirovograd. Unbelievably, the Russians could furnish no maps or charts of the route to be flown to Kharkov but they did manage to provide a road map.

When night fell the planes were moved from Mirgorod. They were fortunate to get the planes moved because late that night the Germans bombed Poltava. Almost all the planes there were destroyed. Forty-six were totally destroyed and twenty-six more were heavily damaged. Of the total number of planes at Poltava only six were salvaged. These burned and damaged planes had been bulldozed off in a heap. We searched through these remains but anything worth salvaging had already been taken. The Mission Commander had saved all his other planes by moving them from Mirgorod.

One night we attended the Post Theater. We couldn't believe what we were seeing. A large screen had been painted on a remaining wall of a building that had been destroyed. Folding chairs were strewn out in the open facing the wall. Imagine sitting on a cold metal chair in freezing weather. If you didn't like the movie you could watch the moon and stars. The wind blowing across the flat plain of this part of the Russian Ukraine created a wind-chill far below freezing.

The feature that night was an old movie I thought I remembered seeing as a child. I don't remember what it was because we left soon after it started to keep from freezing to death. Our winter uniforms, even with our heavy flight jackets, couldn't keep us warm in this night weather.

Back on our first morning at the base we were sent down to the Supply Department to pick up supplies that had been promised to us. Since we were stranded with only the clothing we had brought along for what was supposed to be a three-day mission, the Supply Dept. had been authorized to issue us two packs of cigarettes, a bath-size bar of soap, a small tube of toothpaste, and some other toiletries. Half the crew didn't smoke but each of us took everything offered because we were told by the servicemen stationed here that we could sell anything in town.

There was a large park in town where each afternoon the news was read over a loudspeaker. Harry Keck, our ball-turret gunner, could understand enough Russian to give us an idea of what was being said. All the war news was about the glorious Red Army and the successes they were having. The Allies on the Western Front were never mentioned. I

have often wondered if the people of Russia even knew at that time that we were also in the war. I wondered where they thought all their equipment came from. Every truck I ever saw in the Russian Army was a Ford.

During the daytime we walked around Poltava. This had once been a city of approximately 200,000 people but was now almost deserted. The Germans had fought through and occupied Poltava for about two years. As the Russians drove them out they had fought building by building. Even much of the residential section of town had been destroyed. As the Germans retreated they burned and dynamited everything they couldn't take with them. They really believed in the "scorched earth" policy.

We had been there a few days when we were told to board several trucks that would take us to a place where we could shower. Since none of us had bathed since we arrived we climbed aboard thinking how great a good, hot shower would feel. We were carried several miles from the base to a sight even more unbelievable than the theater. This so-called "shower" was a wide creek ravine with banks about ten feet high on each side. Creek water had been piped to the area with open-ended pipes about head high. The water temperature must have been close to freezing. Russians from the village nearby had learned we were there and soon gathered along the top of one bank to watch. Both men and women were there. Needless to say, most of us went another day without a bath and returned to base.

We had a Russian guard assigned to us the entire time we were at this base. He followed us when we went into town. But since there were nine of us and only one of him, we always split up in town and lost him. I often wondered if he got into any trouble because of this.

When we were in our tents during early morning our guard would come down and try to buy American cigarettes from us. Since we knew he wasn't allowed to accept gifts, we wouldn't sell him any cigarettes but would try to give them to him. We couldn't get him to take even one cigarette unless we accepted his rubles. We refused to take his money so he left without any cigarettes. One day we tried to give him a Life Magazine we had brought from the plane but he wouldn't take it. He wouldn't even look at it. We knew this would have been a terrible offense if he accepted anything from us. The Russian soldiers were always afraid someone might report them for fraternizing with us, even though we were supposed to be allies. They never treated us as friends.

We saw more evidence of this fear in our mess tent. Women in the Russian Land Army served all of our meals to us. We teased them constantly during our meals and they teased and laughed, and seemed to enjoy themselves. We didn't understand what they were saying and were certain they didn't understand us. But once they were outside the mess tent there was no laughter, not even a smile for us. They acted as if we didn't exist or they had never seen us before. They might be reported if they were friendly toward us.

Often we would take our cigarettes and soap into Poltava and sell them on the street. Everyone, even the little kids, had large rolls of rubles. Inflation was so bad then the ruble was really worthless. At first we didn't realize our selling on the street constituted dealing in their black market. We could get anywhere from $65 to $75 for a carton

of cigarettes and $35 for a bath-size bar of soap. Of course this was the equivalent dollars to rubles rate and didn't mean anything for any rubles we accumulated couldn't be taken out of the country. We couldn't exchange them at our Finance Office for dollars or English pounds because then we would have had to explain where we got them. We couldn't do this so we spent them for whatever we could find to buy. Although we could send our mail free we bought airmail stamps and sent all our mail by air. I ended up with enough airmail stamps to last my entire stay in Europe.

We could, however, buy very good Russian champagne. We took a case of it back to England even though it had cost the equivalent of eleven hundred dollars in American money. This was the price we had gotten for only a few cartons of cigarettes and some soap, but if we had kept the rubles we couldn't have taken them out of the country, so we bought the champagne instead. The fellows found some nails and boards and managed to build a crate for the champagne to keep the corks from blowing out at high altitude. I was surprised it didn't explode at the 25,000 feet altitude we flew on our way to Italy, then to England.

My bombardier Chet and I went into town late one afternoon but this time we stayed until after dark. As we approached a nearby bar or restaurant we heard a group of Russian soldiers having a noisy argument. They seemed to be drunk and probably were because Vodka was everywhere. Suddenly we heard a shot and wondered if maybe one had shot another. We didn't see it and certainly didn't hang around to find out. If one was killed it probably was chalked up as another war casualty. The Russians placed such little value on life. We located a truck and returned to base. After that incident, we decided to stay out of town after dark.

Another day we four officers on the crew were in town when we came upon a Russian M.P. Lieutenant and his driver trying to load three of my crew into their jeep. We asked what was going on. The Lieutenant, in his broken English, said they were under arrest for dealing in the black market. We knew there was no way we could let this happen. We had heard too many stories of what could happen in the Soviet Union if you were arrested. You could disappear without a trace. There were seven of us and only two of them and it was obvious we were all armed. Chet made sure they knew this as he had unbuttoned his jacket and his .45 was easily visible. I retrieved my crewmen and just walked away over the M.P.s protests before they could get reinforcements. I knew we could be in serious trouble if we didn't get out of there. We found a truck heading to our base and climbed aboard.

I thought we had it made when we arrived safely back at the base but we had a surprise waiting for us. The Russian Lieutenant was there and had brought his Captain with him. The Captain could speak fairly good English and had already explained to our Base Commander what had happened in town. I have no idea how he found his Captain and reached our base before we did. They wanted us punished immediately but our Base Commander wouldn't agree. After a long argument he finally convinced the Captain that we were not under his command and he could not do what they asked. He would report everything back to our base in England and we would be punished there. I think they finally realized this was all the satisfaction they would get and they left the base. We didn't worry too much about this at the time although we thought we

might hear something about it after we returned to England, but we never did.

Later that night I ran into the base C.O. and he brought up our little incident in town. He said he wouldn't order us to stay out of town but if it were his crew he would keep them out. The Russian M.P.s might be watching out for my crew and next time we might not be lucky enough to get away. We took his advice and remained on base both day and night.

I was surprised too at the amount of money the permanent personnel on this base could legally make. Shuttle missions would occasionally come through for a very short time, usually landing late in the day and leaving early next morning. The men on these missions had no chance to get souvenirs of their trip to Russia so they exchanged money. At that time in 1944 the English pound was worth $4.04, and since they were coming from England their money was in pounds. At the Finance Office they could get four dollars worth of rubles for one pound, and when they arrived in Russia the G.I.s stationed there were ready for them.

Tables were set up with stacks of rubles where they offered five dollars worth of rubles for a Pound. There were always long lines at these tables, each man waiting for this bargain. The base personnel could then send their English Pounds home and exchange them for dollars. After seeing how easy it was to accumulate rubles I wished I could be there long enough to take advantage of this system myself. The ingenuity of the American G.I.!

The maintenance people finally completed the engine installation on our plane and it was ready to fly. A new engine must be broken in properly and is usually flown at a low power setting for four hours. We were getting a break, we thought. Flying at low altitude for four hours would give us a great opportunity to see some of this part of Russia. We plotted a course for this purpose but on the morning of our departure we got another surprise. A Russian Officer and Sergeant were waiting for us at the plane. They had been ordered to fly with us to see that we flew the proper route, which they would give us. They must have been afraid we might see something we shouldn't. We were ordered to fly a rectangular course around the base for four hours, never straying very far from the base.

Neither of the Russians had ever flown before. The fellows wanted to see if we could make them airsick so they told the Sergeant he could get a better view from the tail gunner's position and they put him back there. This isn't the best place to ride in a B-17, even in good weather. John and I continually rode the rudder pedals to keep the tail swaying back and forth. It didn't take long riding under these conditions until the Sergeant lost all his breakfast. When we returned from the flight the Lieutenant made the poor Sergeant wash out the plane even though he was so sick he turned green. Airsickness is much like seasickness, you really feel terrible.

The day finally arrived when all twelve planes at the three bases were ready to fly. On a beautiful clear Sunday morning we were briefed to fly to Foggia, Italy. Mel Scott, one of the other pilots, had problems with his plane and couldn't take off. We had a strut almost flat on our left main landing gear but since we wouldn't be landing in Italy with a very heavy plane I decided to keep quiet so we wouldn't be left behind

again. I knew I could get airborne OK and I would try to touch down in Italy as easy as possible to keep from doing any damage to the strut.

We took off, assembled our formation, and headed south toward the Black Sea, then west toward Italy. We had to fly across parts of Romania, Yugoslavia, and Albania, which were all occupied by the Germans. I have often wondered why the Germans didn't come up after us since we were eleven lone planes with no fighter escort, but they didn't. We were in the air 7½ hours, more than half this time over occupied territory, and could easily have been intercepted. We did pick up some anti-aircraft flak, especially as we passed over the Albanian coast at the Adriatic Sea, but it was rather light and not very accurate. Though we carried no bombs we were over enemy territory so long we were given credit for one mission.

We must have arrived in Italy during their monsoon season, if they have one. It stormed all night, and all day and night the second night. During the second night a bad thunderstorm blew over one of the tents we were in. The fellows in that tent were soaking wet by the time they were able to get to another location. Water ran through our tent and soaked our shoes that were on the floor. We had to wash the mud out of them. We had to wear our heavy flying boots until our shoes were dry. The weather was so bad the 15th Air Force, which was stationed in Italy, couldn't fly any missions. Since they were grounded these few days we ran into several fellows who had been with us during training back in the States.

When we reached Italy we landed at Foggia Main Airport and were transported by truck to a 15th A.F. B-17 base about ten miles north of Foggia. The second day we were there we were sent to get our planes and fly them to the base where we were stationed. The bad weather continued and it was raining hard as we taxied out for take-off. As we headed north my radio went out completely. We had no maps covering this area so we flew north along the highway that passed our base. Since we were unable to contact the tower we watched as other planes landed in order to see which runway was in use and which direction we should land. I entered the traffic pattern and as I turned on the approach I saw a plane coming in for a landing from the opposite direction. The tower was flashing us a red light, signaling us not to land. If we had we would have met this other plane head-on. The wind had changed enough to change landing direction, but since our radio was out there was no way we could have known that. I pulled up, circled the field and entered the traffic in the correct direction, received a green light from the tower, and landed safely.

We stayed in Italy several days waiting to return to England. In Russia we had only been furnished some basic necessities but here it was different. We were quartered in large tents and ate at the combat crew mess hall with the other troops, and we could go into Foggia anytime that we wanted.

The American dollar was accepted everywhere we went but we had exhausted our funds in Russia. Then we remembered how we could replenish our supply. Each combat crewmember carried an escape kit that contained $50 along with maps and other things he might need if he was shot down. We decided to open a couple of these, dividing the money among the crewmembers. Later we opened two more, making $200 total we had used.

I expected to have to repay this when we returned to England.

We could ride a truck into Foggia anytime and we took advantage of this every day. This was another reason we needed money, to make purchases in town. One place we needed it was in the barbershops. We would get up in the morning, eat breakfast at the base, and go into town, get a shave, have our shoes shined, get a haircut and shampoo if we needed one, and the total cost in American dollars was thirty-five to fifty cents. We never shaved ourselves but instead went to a barbershop each morning for a shave.

The Italians readily accepted dollars from all of us, with the exception of Chet. Chet wore Bombardier wings and the Italians blamed the bombardiers for all the destruction that had been done in southern Italy before we finally invaded. While our Air Force was operating out of Africa they had bombed targets in Italy and done considerable damage. Chet soon learned to keep his wings in his pocket when we were in town.

On one occasion Chet and I made a trip to Naples by accident. We were eating in a little restaurant in Foggia early one evening and met a Doctor and a Nurse in the Medical Corps. They were driving to Naples in a Jeep. We asked if we could ride along even though they planned to leave just as soon as they finished their dinner. The Jeep would be crowded but they were willing if we were. We rode all the way to Naples across those high, cold mountains sitting on the panels in the back of the Jeep.

We arrived in Naples about midnight. The Doctor, who was a Captain, was very familiar with Naples. He dropped us off at a very nice hotel where we spent a very comfortable night. Next morning we were up early to see what we could of the city. Again we met some fellows we had trained with back in the States. Chet ran into his old roommate from Bombardier training, and two of my old cadet classmates were there. They showed us around Naples and also taught us how to get around town on our own. Our military personnel used Italian drivers to drive the command cars around town for official business. Very few of the drivers could speak good English but could usually understand where we wanted them to take us. We would flag them down as one would a taxi at home, and since we were officers they always stopped. They carried a trip ticket that had to be signed and we always obliged. We signed our name but wrote only "8th USAAF" on the line that asked for our assigned station. I wonder how much confusion this caused when the driver returned to the Motor Pool.

We wanted to get back to Foggia that night because we could be leaving to return to England at any time. It would be no trouble getting a truck back across the mountains because they ran day and night, ferrying supplies and ammunition needed by the combat forces further north. Somehow Chet and I became separated during the day. He had gone off with his friend and I had remained with my fellow pilots. We hadn't planned this so we had failed to make arrangements for a time or place to meet at day's end. My pals and I rode all over Naples looking for Chet but had no luck. I realized I was going to have to return without him.

As the sun began to set and darkness approached the other fellows had to return to their bases outside Naples because the weather had cleared and they could be scheduled to fly the next morning. They pointed me in the

direction of Foggia and we said our good-byes. I was now alone and darkness was coming too fast for comfort. All the command cars had returned to the Motor Pool and I couldn't find one anywhere. I remembered we had driven along the base of Mt. Vesuvius, the big volcanic mountain just outside Naples, as we had come into town last night, so I began walking toward that point. Naples is a large city and I walked alone in this strange place for what seemed like hours, always keeping Mt. Vesuvius ahead to my right. Several times I stopped in a store or a shop to ask for directions but strangely no one spoke English. This seemed odd because I hadn't yet been in a store in Italy where there wasn't someone who could understand enough English to help me make a purchase. I knew, though, we were still considered the enemy by many Italians, and many of their soldiers were far north of here still fighting alongside the Germans against the Allies. I knew that if I didn't find the highway soon I had better get back to the center of the city for the night.

I finally found some highway signs I could read and felt I was headed in the right direction. I thought surely a truck would be along soon and before long my prayers were answered. Two U.S. Army trucks drove into view headed in the direction of Foggia. I could think of no reason why they wouldn't stop for me but I didn't take a chance. I moved far enough out in the road that they wouldn't be able to pass without running me over. I was determined to go with them regardless of where they were headed. Luckily, when they stopped I discovered that the route to their destination would carry them right through Foggia. There was only room for me in the back of the truck, but that was fine with me. In these mountains the temperature could get very low, even in the summertime. I didn't mind being a little cold, I was just grateful for the ride. I climbed in the back and we were off. As I settled in for the trip I wondered where Chet might be.

We got to Foggia about 1 A.M. I was very happy to be there even though I was still about ten miles from my base. The ground war was still going on a short distance to the north, so trucks were passing my base constantly, day and night. I was soon on board one of these headed back to the base.

Finally I was safely back in the tent that housed about twenty of us when something caught my eye. There was Chet, sound asleep in his warm bed. He didn't look too worried about where I might be. I considered dumping him out. Next morning he told me that he and his friend had also ridden all over Naples late that afternoon, looking for me. We had probably passed each other in our search. It turns out he had met another crew that he knew. They were at Naples in a B-24, and were flying back to Foggia before dark. He had been trying to find me so we could fly back with them. He finally gave up looking for me and rode back with them, arriving in Foggia just before nightfall. I never let him forget he had deserted me.

Another day during the terrible weather we were having, one of our pilots, Hal Thomas, somehow managed to get permission to fly to Rome. He asked me if my crew and I would like to come along. Rome had just been liberated and even though there was still fighting going on a short distance north of the city, we could get into the airfield there O.K. This was too good an opportunity to pass up so we agreed to go in spite of the weather.

It was late afternoon and the sky all around was black with thunderstorms. Clouds were down on top of the surrounding mountains. I was hesitant about flying in these conditions but we were told the weather at Rome was good enough for us to land. Besides, the chance to see Rome was just too inviting.

Thomas and his crew, along with five of us from my crew, boarded his plane and taxied out to the end of the runway. A thunderstorm had now settled directly overhead and it was raining so hard we could barely see, but we found the end of the runway. The tower instructed us to hold our position and not take off.

We held for several minutes, ready to go when the weather let up enough for take-off. I was standing behind Thomas' pilot seat watching the storms pass over, one after another, and having a little argument with myself. I couldn't help thinking that flying in this weather was rather stupid unless it was absolutely necessary, and this was only a pleasure flight. We would be flying on instruments over high mountains, in treacherous weather conditions, and landing at a strange field near the fighting at the front lines. But again the possibility of seeing Rome was just too exciting. I might never have another chance to visit the Eternal City. Should we go or not?

Shortly the decision was made for us. The control tower finally advised us to return to the parking area; our flight was canceled. The weather at Rome had deteriorated badly. Visibility had become much worse and the ceiling had dropped almost to zero. Clouds had dropped almost to the ground and it would be impossible for us to get into the airport. I couldn't decide whether to be disappointed or relieved. We taxied back to the ramp and secured the plane.

On the morning of October 4th we took off for our home base in England. This would be an 8½-hour flight, much of it over parts of France that were still occupied by the Germans. We headed northwest across Italy, across the Island of Corsica and the Mediterranean Sea, and on toward France. We then turned north across France toward England. The flight was uneventful though tiring. We were finally home and landed safely.

It seemed we had been gone for months but it had really been for just a few weeks. We received both good and bad news when we returned. Scott and his crew that we had left behind in Poltava were already back. When I heard about the route they had flown home I wished I had reported that flat strut at Poltava and maybe we could have done the same. They had flown from Poltava to Teheran, Iran, then to Cairo, Egypt where they spent two days, then spent two days at a base in Algeria, and finally two days in France at a base that had been liberated from the Germans, then home to England.

We also learned that the Group had a rough target when they flew from Poltava to Italy. The lead plane had received severe damage from flak during their bomb run. Colonel Carl Truesdale, our Group Commanding Officer, was flying as command pilot on this mission and was on this plane. Their left wing caught fire and the bail out order was given. Four members of the crew, the Group Navigator, Squadron Navigator, Bombardier, and Flight Engineer, had already bailed out when the fire was finally extinguished. The fire appeared to be out so the remainder

of the crew decided to stay with the plane and try to make it to Italy. This was a real tragedy for the Bombardier, John Bromberg, who was flying his last mission. He would have been headed home to the States had he made it back to England. John's capture and mistreatment by the Germans were later detailed in a book.

We also learned that while we were freezing in Russia a fellow pilot and good friend, Bill Heath, had been shot down over Mersburg, Germany, a heavily defended oil target near Leipzig. We learned later through the Red Cross the crew had bailed out successfully and were now in a POW Camp. Bill had a brother, Jack, who was a pilot with his own crew in our squadron. We had another set of brothers, and a father and son in our Group, flying combat. To me that would be too nerve-racking, to be a father and watch your son take off on a mission while you stayed behind. The other casualties that occurred during our absence were Johnny Walter's copilot, who had been killed on September 26th, and Glovick's waist gunner, also killed. These two were fellows we had trained with in the States.

Now that we were back in England we would soon be flying combat missions again. Too bad the war hadn't ended while we were away. Hitler seemed determined to fight until his last soldier died.

On October 12th we resumed combat flying and flew our fourth mission. We were up before daylight for breakfast and our mission briefing. This mission would be to Bremen, which was one of Germany's larger cities. As we prepared for this mission I couldn't help thinking about the casualties our Group had incurred while we were in Russia. I guess we felt then, as young people always do, that we were invincible and nothing would happen to us, it's always the other fellow. Still you say a prayer before boarding your plane.

The anti-aircraft flak over the target was not too bad considering the size of Bremen. German fighters were reported in the target area but they must have been engaged with other groups for we saw none. Of course some of our planes, as always, received some damage from the flak, but we made it through the area and safely home. After landing back at our base we learned that one of our P-51 escort planes piloted by a young Lieutenant, Chuck Yeager had failed to return and was down somewhere in Germany. Of course at that time we had no idea he would later become so famous.

On Saturday, October 14th, we resumed flying practice missions. When we got back to the base I stopped by Headquarters and saw my name on the list for tomorrow's mission.

Combat pilots have many superstitions and some of them are pretty far-fetched. I wasn't very superstitious, but I didn't like to fly on Sundays or holidays. I guess I just felt we shouldn't be fighting on these days, but the war didn't care one way or the other. It continued on Sundays, holidays, birthdays, and every other day.

At briefing we learned our target would be in the city of Cologne in Germany's Rhur valley. There were several large cities in the Rhur that were heavily defended, and this knowledge caused us great apprehension. Our take-off, assembly, and the flight to the target went very well. The flak over Cologne was very heavy and accurate and we were lucky to

get out of there with only one plane missing from the formation. He didn't go down over the target but made it all the way back to Ghent, Belgium, where he landed safely. This far into my tour of duty we had seen no German fighters, even though the flak had been rough. The German fighters had played havoc with the earlier 8th Air Force missions, shooting down our B-17s sometimes in great numbers.

Two days later on October 17th we were briefed to return to Cologne for our sixth mission. The weather for both missions to Cologne had been very good, unlike so many days we had flown. This time the German anti-aircraft gunners didn't intend for us to get through so easily. The mission today was much rougher than the previous one to Cologne had been just two days earlier. We encountered extremely heavy flak on our bomb run and it really scattered some of the planes from our formation. Too many of our planes were losing engines or taking enough damage to make them drop out of formation. We needed to keep a tight formation if fighters attacked us. Eleven of our planes received heavy damage, including ours, and three failed to complete the mission. One plane had both the #2 and #3 engines knocked out and their left wing was on fire. They bailed out over the target. This was our first time seeing a plane go down close enough to watch the crew bail out.

Many days later, through the Red Cross, we learned the Bombardier had been killed but the remainder of the crew had been taken prisoner. Waddell, another pilot, was wounded but was able to get back as far as Belgium where he made a forced landing. Klein's Bombardier was wounded and my good friend Hiram Griffin's waist gunner, Bob Hamlin, was wounded, but both these crews made it back to the base. Another crew, Miller's, really had it rough. Miller, his Bombardier, his Flight Engineer, and his Ball Turret Gunner were all wounded, and his Navigator was killed. Miller had too much damage to his plane to make it home and crash-landed in Belgium. It was hard for me to realize at that time just how lucky we had been. All this damage happening to planes and personnel all around us, and though our plane had some severe battle damage, not one of us had even a scratch.

As we left the target with what was left of our formation an anti-aircraft shell exploded right under our plane, much too close for comfort. Immediately we began our crew check, which we did regularly, especially after a close shell burst for shrapnel often comes through your plane. We began with the tail gunner and worked forward, everyone reporting his condition by inter-phone. Harold in the tail was O.K., Steve, our waist gunner was O.K., then there was a short pause and I heard Steve say, "Dan, come help me get Keck out of this turret!" My heart sank, as I was afraid our good luck might be running out. We feared the worse, but as soon as they got Keck up in the fuselage and were giving him pure oxygen they reported to me that he had regained consciousness and was O.K. He hadn't been hit by flak but had passed out from lack of oxygen. His heated suit had become disconnected as he reached across the ball turret, which is awfully small with a man curled up inside. He had pulled his oxygen line loose without knowing it. A man can freeze to death in that turret without his heated suit, and without oxygen he can die in only a few minutes. If that shell hadn't exploded so close we may not have found Keck before he died from lack of oxygen. In the short time he was without heat his feet had gotten so cold we were afraid his toes might be frostbitten. The fellows did the best they could to keep him wrapped up in the fuselage until we could

get back to the base. When we landed the ambulance met us and Keck was taken immediately to the hospital for examination. We all rejoiced when we learned that he was O.K. No damage had been done. Our Guardian Angel must really be looking after us.

We had a day off after this mission to rest, but sometimes that can work against you when you have nothing to do but reflect on all that happened yesterday. But the second day after Cologne we were up again and briefed to fly our seventh mission. Today we would be going to the Ludwigshaven/Mannheim area. The weather was still good and our flight to the target went smoothly. The flak was there, as always, but our Group didn't receive too much battle damage. One of our planes had to land at Woodbridge, which is an emergency landing strip near the coast. It was built especially for planes that were damaged so badly they were afraid to land at their home base. The runway at Woodbridge was almost three times wider than a regular runway and was 12,000 feet long, plenty long enough for a B-17 to land without brakes or with other damage.

After this mission we received our first three-day pass. We were given these passes approximately every other week during our tour here. Now we could visit London, an adventure we had looked forward to since our arrival in England. We boarded the train and upon arrival there we reported to a billeting office operated by our Armed Forces. Our Army had charge of many of the smaller hotels in London and would assign us to one of these whenever we were in town.

This assured us of having a place to sleep whenever we could get to London. The Red Cross also operated several sleeping quarters we could use if we had no hotel room, but these were just large rooms with several rows of double-decker bunks.

Our Armed Forces also had an Officers Mess Hall that was a very good cafeteria in the Grosvenor House, one of London's better hotels. The food and service there were excellent, especially when compared to our food at the base. The Grosvenor House was often used as a meeting place for Officers stationed in England. The first day we were there for lunch I ran into my old buddy and flying partner from my cadet days, Ken Buzza. We were happy to see each other and spent this leave together, sharing our experiences since we had been separated back in Lincoln, Nebraska. We planned to keep in touch and meet here on future passes. Little did we know that we would not see each other again while we were stationed in England.

London is one of the world's largest cities, and the total blackouts at night seemed so strange. We moved about at night with our little flashlights and the English people took everything in stride, even when the air raid sirens sounded. They paid little attention to these warnings and after several months, we didn't either. I'm certain, though, if any German planes had appeared we would have hurried to the air-raid shelters.

When we returned from our London visit, we flew several practice missions, then on October 26th we were briefed for our eighth mission, this one to Hannover. After take-off and assembly I began to have problems with an engine. Everything had gone perfectly but as we headed out over the North Sea, still climbing toward our bombing altitude, I noticed the oil pressure on one of the engines was slowly dropping. We

continued our flight, keeping a watchful eye on that oil pressure gauge. Suddenly the pressure began dropping faster and was about to reach the critical point where we wouldn't be able to feather the propeller. If the pressure drops below 40 p.s.i. the propeller can't be feathered. It will continue to windmill until it spins so fast that it causes vibration problems and can even break off under some conditions. I cut that engine. We were already past the continental coastline but not yet at bombing altitude.

Climbing and staying in formation with both a full bomb and fuel load is hard to do on three engines, especially with some of our older planes, so we left the formation and headed for home base. After landing at the base I was a little embarrassed when the ground crew checked the engine and found it was fine - it was the oil pressure indicator that had malfunctioned.

We had also landed with a full bomb load. It was always the discretion of the pilot to evaluate any problem that arose on a mission and to decide whether to proceed or return. I had decided to turn back, but I also had to decide what to do about our bomb load. We could either bring them home or drop them, unarmed, in the North Sea. For obvious reasons, it was risky landing with bombs on board, but I made the decision based on the fact that I had always felt I would have no problem landing with my bombs, even on three engines. Plus, I hated the thought of wasting them in the North Sea. Even though we had to abort, we learned that we had been far enough over occupied territory to get credit for the mission. This, of course, was always good news.

November 3rd we were briefed for a mission that was scrubbed because of bad weather. We had just missed a mission to Mersburg the day before, which was always a rough place to go. It was an oil target and the Germans attempted to protect them at all costs. Maybe our luck will hold and we will never have to go there, we hoped.

Late Saturday afternoon, November 4th, we saw the red flag go up on the squadron flagpole. This meant another Sunday mission and I hoped my name wouldn't be on the list. If it was I would miss the dance at the Officers Club that night. Every other Saturday night we had a big dance at the club but if we were scheduled to fly the next day we couldn't go. We had to be in bed early since we would have to get up long before daylight. Chet and I went to check the list and, sure enough, there was my name. Another Sunday mission - the dance would just have to go on without us.

Early Sunday morning we were briefed for our ninth mission, this time returning to a familiar target: Ludwigshaven. The weather recently had been very bad; all foggy and rainy, but today seemed to be a good day for flying. Our take-off and assembly of the three squadrons of our Group went well and we headed out across the North Sea toward our target. On this day, just like the second trip we made to Cologne, the Germans were waiting for us. Some of the German flak batteries (a group of anti-aircraft guns) were installed on railroad flat cars and could be moved around the country overnight. They always seemed to know exactly where we were going, and this day they had moved many gun batteries to Ludwigshaven. The German anti-aircraft guns were the best in the world at that time.

Over the target we had an excellent view of German ME-109 fighters in the air (which we could do without). They were all over the target area but our fighter escort, those beautiful little friends the P-51s, kept them off us, however I don't know about the other Groups. Some of them were certainly hit for we could see the fighters attacking the Groups ahead of us. The flak was extremely heavy and accurate. We picked up quite a number of flak hits but no one was injured and all four engines were performing perfectly. Wright's plane was so badly damaged they were losing control. All had bailed out except his wounded Navigator and his Copilot. Somehow they managed to keep control long enough to get back to Belgium and crash land. The rest of us managed to keep the formation together long enough to get home. We learned that seventeen planes had heavy battle damage. One was so badly damaged that it was salvaged for parts and never flew again. What a way to have to spend a Sunday, but I knew we were so blessed, and thanked God for continually watching over us. Wright and most of his crew would spend the rest of the war in a POW Camp if they were lucky enough to land safely.

On November 6th I lost a good friend and fellow pilot from Georgia. He was flying a night navigational practice mission and the weather was terrible. On some practice missions only a skeleton crew would go along and this was the case that night. The radio static was so bad they lost contact with our base. The base radio had only a short range so any German planes that might fly over couldn't "home in" on the signal, or hear transmissions made to our aircraft. The winds that night were over 100 M.P.H. at altitude and blowing, as always, toward the continent. After a long search they finally found enough clearance to descend below the clouds and continue flying beneath the cloud cover, hoping to be able to get a fix on their exact location. They spotted an airfield and began a landing approach immediately, even though they were unable to contact the tower. Much to their surprise they had landed at a German airfield in Holland. For several weeks we had thought they might have been lost somewhere in the North Sea but we later learned through the Red Cross what had happened. They were now in a POW camp and their war was over. It was many years after the war and we met again at home that I learned from him just what had happened that night.

November 7th we were flying another practice mission and my electrically heated boots malfunctioned. We were out 5½ hours and by the time we got back to the base my feet were so cold that I couldn't tell they were on the ground when I tried to stand. They were completely numb from the cold. I was taken to the hospital and examined to be sure I had no frostbite but I was O.K., just very cold.

After this practice mission we returned to London on pass. I had made contact with one of my brothers-in-law, Arthur Poor, who had recently come to Europe with a field artillery unit. We had made arrangements to meet at the Grosvenor House. We were lucky to have this chance to meet because his outfit soon moved across the channel to France.

After this London pass we returned to our base and continued with our practice missions, flying two more before we flew another combat mission. Then on the afternoon of November 15th my name was on our squadron list for tomorrow's mission.

The early morning of November 16th we were briefed to fly our tenth mission to the freight marshalling railroad yards at Langerwehe/Duren.

I suppose you could say that day we really learned the meaning of a "milk run" for we saw no enemy fighters and the anti-aircraft fire was light and inaccurate. I wished they could all be this easy. But the early morning preparation and briefing were always nerve racking.

As we approached the winter months the weather began to turn much colder and we were having more fog and rain, sometimes snow or freezing rain. More missions were being canceled because of the bad weather, but we continued to fly both combat and practice missions whenever the weather permitted.

November 21st we flew our eleventh mission, this one to a target at Giessen, Germany. This was another easy mission with only small amounts of flak, though we would have picked up heavy flak had we strayed just a little off course. We did have one crew who failed to return. They had left the formation because of heavy flak damage and we learned some time later they were all in a POW Camp. They had been unable to continue in the air and were forced to bail out. I guess this mission was not so easy for them.

We flew our twelfth mission on November 29th to Hamm, Germany. This mission also went well with no fighter sightings and inaccurate flak. We sustained only light damage to some of our planes and all returned safely. The weather these last few weeks was causing more trouble for us than the enemy resistance. We knew these easy missions couldn't continue but we prayed they would.

November 30th our Group flew another mission to Mersburg and again fate seemed to be with my crew. We were not on the schedule to fly that day. It turned out to be another rough one, just as all earlier missions to this target had been. Chuck Payne and his crew were shot down. His co-pilot and top-turret gunner were killed and the rest of the crew were taken prisoner. One other crew was shot down. Of the total number of young men flying that day, seven were killed and eleven were now in a POW Camp in Germany. After any rough mission it was always a somber night at home base. Too many were not there and many of us had lost close friends.

We didn't fly another mission until December 5th when we were briefed to strike targets at "Big B". For the first time we were on our way to Berlin! This would be our thirteenth mission and we all said a prayer that my "lucky 13" would continue to hold. Sometimes the responsibility I felt for the fate of my crew really became awesome but they always made me feel they had complete confidence in me. I certainly had confidence in all of them. I had come to know that my crew (my family now) had worked together so long that we had become one of the best.

Take-off and assembly of our formation went very well and we headed out over the North Sea toward Berlin. As we approached the I.P. (Initial Point where we begin our bomb run) we encountered German fighters. This was only the second time we had run into them up so close. Fortunately there weren't very many of them and we were well into our bomb run before they attacked. They made only one pass at our plane and didn't do too much damage. Our bombs were away and we weren't hit again, but some of the other Groups were hit very hard. The fighters left us alone since we were already through our bomb run and they went after the planes that hadn't dropped their bombs. We saw our first jet fighter on

this mission, an ME-262. We had been told the Germans had developed and manufactured jet fighters but until today we hadn't seen any. Man, were they ever fast! They were so much faster than our P-51s. I'm glad they didn't attack us. My "lucky 13" still held and we returned to our base with only light battle damage and only one man wounded in the entire Group.

The cold, rainy weather let up some and we took advantage of the good flying conditions by flying four consecutive days, two practice and two combat missions. December 9th and 10th we flew formation and navigation practice missions. On December 11th we were briefed to fly our 14th combat mission, this one sending us to Giessen again. When we returned to a target for a second time we always ran into new problems. Still, we prayed this would be as easy as the first mission to Giessen. Our prayers were answered; the mission was as easy as before with all planes returning safely with very little flak damage.

December 12th we flew mission fifteen to Darmstadt. This mission and the previous day's mission to Giessen kept us in the air for 7½ hours each day but both were relatively easy. We continued to have no resistance by German fighters. Thank goodness for our fighter escort!

When our fighters had finished escorting us to targets they would leave us and would head back to their base. On the way they would "hit the deck" and shoot up any military targets they could find on the ground. Our P-51 escort planes, plus the other fighters that had been sent over to destroy planes and other ground targets, had depleted the German Air Force. Also, we had bombed so much of their oil production facilities they sometimes couldn't fly the planes they had left for lack of fuel.

One of our planes on this mission did have to make a forced landing in Belgium. The mission was relatively easy for us, but not so, I'm sure, for the crew who failed to get back home safely.

December 16th we flew our sixteenth mission, this one to Stuttgart. There always seemed to be one difficult mission to make up for any easy ones we flew. That morning the weather was so bad I didn't expect to get off the ground but we did. We were briefed to assemble our Group over a certain point in France. For two hours each plane flew alone with the fog so thick we sometimes had problems seeing our own wingtips. You tend to get more tense when you know there are hundreds of B-17s, each with a full fuel and bomb load, all in this soup with you, and all heading for the same point in France. We had had mid-air collisions before, and we all were very aware of the extreme danger involved with a flight like this.

Our plane reached the rendezvous point, which luckily was in a clear area. We began circling and searching for other members of our Group. One by one all appeared and our squadrons were assembled. We headed toward our target, still flying in and out of heavy cloud coverage. We flew into another weather front soon after we left our assembly area with our formation intact but we knew it would be extremely difficult to keep it that way. Each of the three squadrons had twelve B-17s trying to stay together in clouds so thick we were lucky to be able to see more than three or four planes in our own squadron. We just hoped that everyone kept alert and was capable of holding his position. I was in the low element of the low squadron so I backed off just a bit since I

knew no one was behind me. This was a mistake for suddenly everyone disappeared in the thick clouds. I had lost sight of our Squadron but we continued on alone toward Stuttgart. I was afraid to slow even a little for someone might hit us from behind. I just hoped we didn't overtake and collide with a member of our own Squadron. We finally broke into a small clearing but our Group was nowhere in sight.

After several minutes we located a B-17 Group from the First Division and we joined them. The First Division planes were recognizable by their vertical stabilizer markings. All First Division planes had a large letter in a triangle while the Third Division (ours) had a large letter in a square. The Second Division flew the B-24. This Group we were now joining had been flying in the same weather conditions we had been in and evidently had lost members of their Group for they had several empty slots. We quickly filled one of these, being careful to keep our new position so they wouldn't think we were Germans flying a B-17. We knew this was a precarious situation to be in because the Germans had some B-17s and P-51s they had been able to restore for flight. Supposedly they would join a formation and fly with it, while reporting its airspeed, heading, and altitude to their own fighters and anti-aircraft batteries. We had been told if a plane like that joined our formation and attempted to leave as we began our bomb run, shoot him down. Now we couldn't contact this Group or our own because radio use was forbidden except in extreme emergencies.

We were able to keep our position with this Group and make our bomb run, running into some very heavy flak. Even though we were bombing through a heavy cloud cover, the Germans could hit us very well with their radar controlled gun batteries, We could also hit them pretty well with our own "Pathfinder" Radar planes, which were the only planes in our squadrons with radar.

We were only a short distance from Stuttgart when we were right back in all that bad weather. Again we lost all visual contact with the other planes and were alone again, flying in heavy clouds, with too many other planes near us, and none visible. If our luck continued to hold, as it had done in getting us to the target, maybe we could make it back to our home base.

John Lurtz, our Navigator, gave me a heading for home, and once again I realized how fortunate we were that he had been assigned to our crew back in Kearney, Nebraska. On previous flights he had proven just how good he was at his job, but today he became a genius as far as I was concerned. All the way out of Germany and across France he continually gave me heading corrections to make so we would avoid flak areas. He must have missed them all for we never flew over a point where we received any flak. Even though I couldn't see a thing, he told me when we were leaving the Continental Coastline and a little later reported we were approaching the English Coast. He gave me a heading to fly to the base. Finally, even though I hadn't seen the ground or sky since we left the target, John's voice came over the inter-phone telling me we were directly over our base. This seemed incredible to me. I began a slow, circling descent until we broke out of the clouds with the base in sight.

We landed without any problem and learned at debriefing that two of our planes had failed to return. Later we learned that Coffman and his

entire crew had been killed but I never learned how it happened. Another crew had landed at a base at Framlingham because of the bad weather. Still another had made a forced landing at Leiston, England. After this mission we were dead tired and I wished for some time off for the crew to relax, but the very next day we were scheduled to fly again.

Next morning we got up early, went to breakfast, then learned the mission for today was scrubbed. Missions scheduled for the next several days were canceled because of the very bad weather. Some mornings after briefing we sat in our planes waiting for the weather to clear up enough for us to take off. Sometimes the fog was so thick we couldn't see the plane parked right next to us.

We were anxious to get in the air to fly front-line support for our troops at the front because they were getting pounded by the Germans. The Germans had chosen this time to make an effort to drive the Allies off the Continent. They knew the weather was so bad we couldn't give our ground forces the air support they had enjoyed since we had invaded the Continent. From rumors we were hearing, we were afraid our fighting forces were going to be driven back into the sea as had happened at Dunkirk after France had fallen. We were never able to get off the ground on these days.

It was not long before Christmas, but our forces held their ground after some fierce fighting and turned the Germans back. The Germans had made a deep bulge in our lines. They had taken advantage of the bad weather to attempt to drive through the Ardennes and continue on to Antwerp, cutting the Allied Forces, dividing them into two groups, which they hoped to destroy. They had moved the majority of their forces to this battle, intending to drive through the Allied lines. Our troops fought one of the fiercest battles of the war there and stopped the Germans at Bastogne. This battle of the Ardennes was later to be known as the Battle of the Bulge and was one of the war's most costly.

These days were very tense and we continually watched for the weather to clear enough for us to give our ground forces some help. We were hearing all sorts of rumors about the battle going on and the fact we couldn't help was causing great concern at our Group.

Again on a Saturday afternoon my name was posted for the next day's flight. I would not only be required to fly on Sunday but tomorrow was Christmas Eve. I wondered what in the world I could ever have done to deserve this. This would be our seventeenth mission. We had already surpassed the number of missions that we had been told was the average number flown by a crew before they were lost. We were also reaching the halfway point for thirty-five missions. Since the German Air Force had been almost completely destroyed we just hoped our luck would continue through the last half of our tour of duty.

The morning of December 24th at briefing we learned the mission today would keep us in the air for 8½ hours. We would be going to Biblas Airfield to bomb the field and the many planes the Germans had there. The flight to the target was a routine one but the flak was very accurate. The Germans were desperate to protect those planes. The Group picked up considerable battle damage though the flak wasn't real heavy. Two planes failed to return. One that did was damaged beyond repair and salvaged for parts. One pilot, Deshazo, was wounded and

Taylor's Bombardier was wounded. One plane crash-landed in France. Griffin and Richardson both had to land in France but were able to make it home later. After the mission we thought surely we wouldn't be on the schedule for tomorrow, Christmas Day. Maybe a mission wouldn't be scheduled since it was Christmas, but if it is maybe we won't be on it.

After debriefing and dinner, which was very late in the day, I returned to my squadron area and was surprised to see the red flag already flying on the flagpole at Headquarters. We would have a mission on Christmas. I went in to check the flight list and there my name was again. This was somewhat upsetting - Christmas Eve and Christmas Day! I had so hoped I wouldn't be flying tomorrow. I knew the war never took a holiday, but I had hoped we would get lucky.

After a night's sleep the orderly awakened me. As I dressed I couldn't help wondering what plans my family and Marian had for this Christmas Day. I couldn't keep my mind off the fact that this was Christmas and I have to be flying combat. It would be our eighteenth mission and the beginning of the last half of our tour.

We ate our breakfast, silently for the most part, and proceeded to the briefing room. We anxiously waited for the briefing officer. He began by saying, "Today you will be delivering Hitler a Christmas present". I thought, I would just as soon leave Hitler off my Christmas list and stay at home. The officer continued, explaining that the 8th Air Force was sending 2,200 heavy bombers over Germany along with several hundred P-51 escort planes, and the 15th Air Force in Italy was sending more than 1,500 heavy bombers with their fighter escorts.

The massive air traffic over Germany that day was hard to believe. I had often wondered how the German people could survive all the bombing we had been doing lately. Most of our missions these days always included more than a thousand bombers and several hundred fighters. We would bomb by day and England's Royal Air Force would bomb every night. Often as we left England in the morning we would meet the R.A.F. returning from their night raids. At one time during the latter part of 1944 the R.A.F. bombed Berlin forty-three consecutive nights.

Our mission was to Kreuznach and Badmunster. Other Groups had other targets. The flight to the target, our bomb run, and the flight home were fairly uneventful, though we had all picked up some pretty heavy damage from the flak guns. This mission may have been easy but when we arrived home the "fun" began.

As we approached the base we could see a dense fog moving toward the landing field. The base was easily visible now in the bright sunlight but that fog bank was thick as milk and it was moving in rapidly. We were to be the last of the three squadrons to land that day, which meant that twenty-four planes would have to land before we had our chance. We entered the landing pattern and every ten seconds a plane peeled off to land. Finally it was our squadron's turn, but it was too late. The fog had completely covered the base. We had noticed that if we stayed above the fog we could actually see right down through it, so we requested and received permission to attempt a landing. We had no ground control approach or any of the modern landing aids that are commonly used today. Our approach and landing would have to be done visually.

In the small village of Horham there is a small church, St. Mary's, with a high bell tower that we often used as a point of reference when we were landing. If we circled that church tower and turned to a certain direction we would be heading right down the runway. We circled the church and lined up to begin our descent. We were fine until we dropped into the fog, then everything turned milky white. I couldn't see the ground at all. Chet, our Bombardier, was sitting up in the nose of the plane and was to tell me when we reached the end of the runway. On the first pass we made none of us saw anything, so I figured we must be high. I circled and tried again. Suddenly Chet yelled, "Set her down, set her down, we're right over the runway!" But I couldn't see a thing, and since I had no idea how far down the runway we were I decided to pull up and try again. On the third attempt the same thing happened again. Chet was up front and could see straight down but I had much more fog to look through and I could not see the runway. Out of the corner of my eye I saw one of our hangars go by - and the roof was higher than we were! Thank goodness we were over the runway or we could have easily crashed into a building or the tower. I was surprised the tower hadn't told us to get out of there after the second pass. I pulled up and out of there immediately. I had no intention of trying that stunt again. As we climbed out through the fog I vividly recalled the crash we had watched last fall after a plane had run off the end of the runway.

I was instructed by the tower to attempt an emergency landing at Woodbridge since the fog had not yet reached there. Woodbridge had gas jets at the end of the runway that could be used to burn off the fog if it got there before we did. We were to land at Woodbridge and a truck would be sent for us. We landed there O.K., taxied to the parking area, cut our engines and secured the plane, then stepped out into about eight inches of snow. It was almost dark and we hadn't eaten since 5 A.M. that morning. We opened some boxes of rations that we always kept on board, sat on the boxes under a wing, and had a Christmas Dinner of canned rations sitting there in the snow. It would be hard for anyone to imagine that we sat there laughing and joking and kidding each other, but we did. This was just our way of relieving some of the tension we all felt after a mission.

We weren't the only ones who failed to get into our base that day. Three more of our squadron had landed at Woodbridge and another other eight at Framlingham, which was the home base of the 390th B-17 Group, also in our 13th Combat Wing.

As we waited for the trucks to come for us we inspected our plane for battle damage. We found quite a number of flak holes. Normally when we landed at our base, battle damage was checked out and patched up by the ground crew, so it was a sobering surprise to us to see all the holes in the fuselage. Not long after dark the trucks finally came to take us home to Horham. What a way to have to spend Christmas, but we were grateful that our entire Group had made it safely back to England.

We did get some time to celebrate Christmas later. In America, we celebrate the birth of Christ on December 25th. So do the English, but they also celebrate about as much on the 26th (Boxing Day). This tradition started back in the Victorian era when the lower classes who had to work on Christmas Day were rewarded by their employers with gifts and a holiday on the 26th. We were able to celebrate the Christmas

season even longer because we didn't have to fly again until the 30th. On that day we would fly our nineteenth mission, which would take us to Kassel.

After our experience on Christmas Day this mission was fairly easy for us. Pearson, who had to make a forced landing in France, suffered the only mishap in our Group. I never learned if he landed there because he was low on fuel or had wounded on board that needed attention. The rest of the Group returned home safely, and the luck of my crew continued to hold.

As we reached our Squadron quarters following debriefing we noticed that the red flag was already flying on the flagpole, announcing that we could be flying a mission on New Year's Eve instead of celebrating. We checked the list and, sure enough, found my name there. After the so-called "Christmas present" we had delivered to Hitler we had hoped he would surrender. But no such luck - we fly tomorrow.

We ate an early breakfast, dressed for our flight, and attended our briefing. Today, when we thought we would be celebrating the coming New Year, we would instead be bombing the submarine pens at Hamburg, where the German Navy brought their submarines in for servicing. This would be mission twenty for us and it turned out to be one we would never forget.

The sun rose in a sky almost free of clouds, a good day for flying. Most of this flight would be over the North Sea and we wouldn't be over enemy occupied territory very long. Group assembly after take-off went well with no problems and soon we were over the North Sea, climbing to bombing altitude.

As we approached the Continent we looked for our P-51 escort, but there was no sign of them. We thought that surely they would join us soon. They usually did long before we reached the target. We continued on our way and were approaching the Initial Point to begin our bomb run, but there was still no fighter escort to be seen. We couldn't understand how this could happen.

Earlier 8th Air Force flights had been made without fighter escort and we knew how treacherous those missions had been and how many crews had been lost. Surely we will never have to go that route again, we thought. Only later did we learn that our fighter escort had been intercepted back at the coast, and were engaged in fierce dogfights with the Luftwaffe.

Feeling awfully alone, we turned down the bomb run toward the submarine pens and docks of Hamburg. Suddenly, right out of the sun so we couldn't see them, a swarm of German ME-109s attacked from the rear of our formation. They were on us and firing before we even knew they were there. The sky lit up all around with tiny flashes, caused by 20mm shells that didn't hit, but exploded in the proximity of our planes. I could hear the jackhammer roar and feel the vibration of our own .50-caliber machine guns firing as the crew fought back. I felt my frustration rising as I tried to hold steady on the bomb run. We couldn't take any evasive action, because once we were lined up on the bomb run we had to fly straight and level in order to give the Bombardiers enough time to sight in the target. It's tough for them

too, because they have to ignore everything taking place around them and concentrate on their bombsights. I felt like a "sitting duck" ready to be knocked off, but there was nothing I could do until our bombs were away. Of course the Germans knew this too - they always attempted to strike during a bomb run when our planes were most vulnerable.

As soon as the first wave of enemy fighters passed through our formation a second wave came in right behind them. They were really hitting us hard. Two of our planes were already knocked out of our formation. John tapped my hand, which was glued to the throttles, and pointed straight up. A plane was almost directly above us with its waist door open. Men were visible at the door and so close we could have identified every one. I backed off the throttles a little to allow them enough room to abandon their plane. Immediately three figures sailed past our nose. The crippled plane then began to veer off to the right as the rest of her crew tried to bail out. I tore my eyes away and turned my attention back to regaining our position in what was left of our formation. I was having trouble catching up because the first fighter wave had shot out one of our engines and we were now flying with only three.

As the next squadron of fighters attacked, an ME-109 pilot jettisoned his canopy and bailed out as he passed in front of us. Doan and Keck had hit him pretty good because he had made his pass in a spot where they could both bring their turrets around and catch him in their sights. Chet had probably hit him too with the chin turret he operated. On the second pass Harold had also shot down an enemy plane from his tail turret. Before the battle was over the fellows got one more German fighter, giving them three confirmed kills. Today they earned their keep and I was extremely proud of them all.

We were feeling pretty good about fighting off the enemy fighters when suddenly I felt a severe jolt and a large hole appeared in our left wing outboard number one engine. A large round, probably an 88mm anti-aircraft shell, had passed through it without exploding. Had it done so it probably would have blown our plane up with it and we would have joined the long list of war casualties. It was just another example of our incredible luck, and I wondered how much we had left.

After what seemed like an eternity, our bombs were finally away on target and we began a slow descending left turn. We always did this when leaving the target area so that any planes straggling behind could cut the turn short and catch up. As we made the turn I could see that half our squadron was missing. The missions of the past several days had been so rough that we couldn't put thirty-six planes in the air from our Group. We had borrowed three planes with crews from the 100th Bomb Group and all three of those were missing. One of those had been the one whose crew had bailed out in front of us. Mike Ryan, flying on our squadron leader's left wing, was on fire. Flames were streaming back so far from his wing that they were hitting his horizontal stabilizer. We were flying on the leader's right wing anxiously hoping Mike's crew would get the fire extinguished or move out of the formation. If his plane exploded there was a possibility they would take the other two of us with them.

When we reached the coastline and headed out over the sea, Mike turned back. He must have decided to get back over land so they could bail

out, because his plane continued to burn. I will forever be grateful the German fighters didn't pursue us after our bombs were away for now we were only five struggling planes trying to keep some sort of formation. We would later learn the extent of our casualties.

Two other planes from our Group were on fire when we left the target, one being Reed's plane. Some of his crew had managed to bail out but his Ball-Turret Gunner, Waist Gunner and Tail Gunner were killed. His Navigator had bailed out and was later reported missing in action. I never learned whether or not he was ever found. The other plane on fire was O'Reilly's. O'Reilly, his Copilot, Radio Operator, and Ball-Turret Gunner were all killed in action. The rest of his crew bailed out over the target. We later learned from the Red Cross that they were POWs. Of the twelve planes in our Squadron that had begun this mission there were now only five and we were all heavily damaged.

We made it to the continental coast and began a slow descent from our bombing altitude as we headed home over the North Sea. We were getting vibration from our damaged wing and I prayed it would hold until we reached our home base. I didn't care to spend one minute of New Year's Eve down in that icy, cold water of the North Sea.

When we were down to 20,000 feet I pulled away from our small formation and held this altitude. If that wing broke off I wanted us to have plenty of time to bail out. It's very hard to move about in a spinning plane and we needed all the time we could get. When we finally spotted the English coast I began a slow descent to 12,000 feet.

John and I had already decided to take the plane in for a landing but we gave the rest of the crew a choice. If they were afraid the wing might come off in the rougher air at a lower altitude, we would circle the base and let them bail out. Otherwise they could stay with us as we attempted to land. They all wanted to stay. Chet said, "Since we've all been together through everything else, we'll go through this together too". Our good luck continued to hold and we made our approach and landing with no problem. The wing held fast.

We sure were happy to be back home on the ground after this mission. Out of our Group of thirty-six planes, twenty-two returned with heavy battle damage, but the saddest thing was the seven young men that were killed, four more wounded, and ten somewhere in Germany in a POW Camp. As we reviewed the mission back at home base, I couldn't help thinking of those lost young men, most of them younger than I was. I thought of all the fighting and destruction over Hamburg and us being on the lead ship's right wing in the middle of everything. Yet we had made it through again without a single scratch. Some day maybe I will learn why we always seem to be spared. It surely must be answered prayer for I have many at home praying for my safety.

We stayed with our plane for a little while trying to calm down some before going to debriefing. I was relaxing and gazing at the sky when I spotted a plane coming in. The pilot had both left engines feathered and there was lots of "skin" missing from the left wing and left horizontal stabilizer. It was Mike Ryan! They had made it home after all. The fire had gone out after they had turned back to bail out. Mike had immediately turned back around and headed for home on their two

good engines. To reduce the plane's weight they had thrown everything they could overboard, including all their guns and ammunition.

As they got closer we could see that the fire had burned and melted a large section of "skin" from his plane. It looked a lot worse than ours did.

Our plane that had taken such a beating that day wasn't the new one we had been flying. That one had gone in for major repairs, so today we had flown my roommate Johnny Corbin's new plane that he had just received. I thought, he is going to die when he sees what I did to his new plane!

The Group Engineering Officer came out to check our plane and immediately remarked to us how fortunate we were to be home. He said that so much structural damage had been done to our left wing that it was too weak to support the plane and should have broken off. Yet we had just completed a 400-mile flight, mostly over water, and the wing had held fast. Now we were sure we were being watched over and protected in all we did. This had been another Sunday mission and I prayed we would be forgiven for the destruction we had caused and the terrible harm to the people on the ground. The fact that it had to be done sometimes didn't give any relief.

Now that we were safely home I was so tired that the only New Year's celebrating I wanted to do was to fall into bed and sleep for about a week. I was always grateful that I could sleep soundly, even after a mission as rough as the one we had flown today. So many of the fellows weren't able to, and would wake up in the middle of the night with their nightmares. I often thought, how long can a man last, going from the security of the base into absolute terror, then from safety into terror all over, again and again, week after week?

In fact by that time some men had broken under the strain. Recently one of our pilots had just refused to fly again and was transferred. One pilot's wings were taken away because his flying had become so unsafe he was not only a risk to his crew but to the entire Squadron. We had another pilot who, when he returned from a mission, would sit at his locker crying and swearing he would never fly another combat mission. But when his turn came again he would be there ready to go, then he would go through the same thing all over again. This seemed to be, for him, a way of releasing the tension and emotion we all had to cope with. He had a brother who had already been killed in the war, but since he never mentioned this, neither did we. I always remembered him in my prayers and hoped he was going to be O.K.

Before our next mission we were given a three-day pass and we headed into London. After getting settled in our hotel we went to the Grosvenor House for dinner. Here I ran into a pilot that had been with us in the cadets. He hadn't made it to B-17 transition school but had been assigned to my old buddy Ken Buzza's crew as Ken's Copilot. Sadly, he told me that Ken had been flying with another crew and had been shot down just before Christmas. He was now in a German POW camp.

We didn't fly again for a week but then on a Saturday afternoon my name appeared on the list for Sunday's mission. I thought, maybe I'm always

on these Sunday missions to keep me away from the Saturday night dances at the Officer's Club.

We were up long before dawn and after breakfast were briefed for the mission. This would be our twenty-first mission and would take us back to Cologne for the third time. This time everything went fairly well - nothing compared to the last time we were there. However, one crew did fail to return. The mission wasn't an easy one for them.

As we got deeper into the winter the weather got worse. We were having lots of snow and all the roads were covered with several inches of ice. Twice we were briefed for missions that had to be scrubbed because of the bad weather.

When a crew neared the middle of their tour of duty they were given a week's leave and sent to a very nice facility operated by the Red Cross. This was designed to give them time to relax and forget about flying. We called it "flak leave" and the Army knew it was necessary for us to get this time off. Finally it was my crew's turn and we were given orders sending us to a hotel at Bournemouth, a city on the south coast of England.

We boarded an early train on January 10th, then in London we transferred to another train to Bournemouth. After a few hours we arrived at this very nice, quiet hotel and were assigned our rooms. We lounged around at the hotel that afternoon and on into the night. As bedtime neared we discussed our being there and decided that a week of complete rest might get awfully boring. We weren't so certain this was for us. London beckoned, so instead of turning in for the night we called the railroad station to inquire about trains to London. One would leave Bournemouth about 2 A.M. and after a quick discussion the four of us officers decided to go.

The enlisted men were assigned to a different hotel and we wondered if we should tell the other crew members we were leaving. It was getting so late we decided against this. Since the itinerary at Bournemouth was planned ahead of time, they could either stay here and relax, which I knew some would, or leave as we were now planning to do.

We took a taxi to the station and found three of our crew members standing there waiting for the London train. Apparently we weren't the only ones who thought London would be a better place to spend our "flak leave". They were more considerate than we had been for they told me they had left a note taped to my door at the hotel telling us where they were going. They just thought we were asleep and would get the note in the morning. I never learned what happened to that note.

We spent an enjoyable week in London, returned to our base and were scheduled to fly our twenty-second mission on Saturday, January 20th. By being away from the base on leave, I had missed flying on my birthday, which was the 18th. You wouldn't believe how superstitious some of the fellows were about flying on birthdays, anniversaries, holidays, and anything else they could think of. Flying so many Sundays was beginning to get to me too.

The weather on the morning of the mission was terrible. A heavy, thick fog covered all of southern England and the temperature was almost down

to freezing. The cloud coverage was almost down to the ground and visibility was such a short distance I doubted we could get off the ground. At briefing we learned our target for the day would be Heilbron. We would have to climb several thousand feet before we could break out on top of the cloud coverage. Our weather people told us that all this weather would move out before we returned and I hoped they were right because there was no way a pilot could get back into the base in these conditions.

Although I had hoped differently, the mission was not canceled. Since we flew on the lead ship's right wing as deputy squadron leader, ours would be the second ship off the ground. We taxied out to the end of the runway and prepared for take-off. The procedure was that when the lead ship began his run we began counting the seconds. The lead plane began his take-off run and disappeared into the fog only a short distance down the runway. After twelve seconds we began our run, hoping he was off the ground and not stopped somewhere down the runway. He must have become airborne because we didn't hit him.

We were soon off the ground and in the clouds. We began circling and climbing, keeping as close to our base as possible for we knew other Groups, as well as our own, were in this soup with us. You certainly didn't want to be overlapping another field's flight pattern and meet someone in this soup head on. We continued to climb until at about 7,000 feet altitude we almost collided with another plane. We passed so close behind him it seemed as though I could have reached out and touched him. I could see the shocked expression on the face of the tail gunner as he came into view for a few seconds, then he disappeared and we were alone again. We knew hundreds of planes were in here with us - how close we couldn't tell.

We had reached an altitude of about 12,000 feet when I began to notice our rate of climb was slowly decreasing even though we had all engines set at full climb power. We were picking up so much ice on our wings and control surfaces we were slowly losing our lift. If the ice builds up enough to distort the airflow over the wings the plane loses its ability to fly. This concerned me greatly since I didn't know how much higher we needed to climb to break out of the clouds. If it became necessary to return to base I was certain it would be impossible to get into the field.

Several agonizing minutes passed and our rate of climb was down to a critical point. If we didn't break out soon we weren't going to make it. Suddenly we were skimming along the tops of the clouds. How beautiful all this bright sunlight was! As we cleared the top of the clouds the ice began coming off our plane, and once again all was O.K. I always wondered how you could pick up so much ice, break out on top into much colder air, and the ice would break off immediately. I guess it just becomes too brittle.

We assembled our three squadrons of the 95th without further problems and headed out toward our target. We were now flying in bright sunlight above a blanket of smooth, white clouds. This is a beautiful scene as long as you can forget that down below the enemy is waiting for you at Heilbron. We ran off these clouds before we reached the target, which meant we would be able to make a visual bomb run. As we flew down our bomb run we ran into some very accurate flak. One of our planes was

badly damaged but made it back to France before crash landing. The crew was later able to return to duty. Another landed somewhere on the continent so badly damaged it never flew again and was salvaged for parts. Another crew, Conover's, was still in the formation when we left the target but after entering some clouds we never saw him again. Later we learned that Conover, his Navigator, Bombardier, and Top Turret Gunner were all killed and the other crew members were in a POW camp. Four more of our Group were killed that day and one wounded, but the rest of us made it home O.K. We arrived at home base and found the weather had cleared just as we were told that morning. We landed without incident. Six planes, including ours, landed with heavy battle damage.

After this flight we were so tired we ate our dinner after debriefing, then went to bed without checking the names scheduled to fly the next day's mission. I should have checked because, much to my dismay, I was awakened about 4 A.M. and told I was to fly again that day. It was Sunday - I should have known I would be on the list.

The weather appeared to be just as bad as the day before, but we were told the cloud coverage was not as heavy and should be long gone before we returned eight hours later. We were briefed to go to Mannheim for our twenty-third mission. We taxied out for take-off and just like the day before each plane disappeared from view before it left the runway. Soon after we lifted off we were into the heavy cloud coverage. Our weather people had been right; the clouds weren't nearly as thick as the day before. We broke out on top at about 5,000 feet altitude.

Our Group assembly and flight to the target went without any problems. We saw no German fighters and the flak over the target was not as heavy as we had expected. We did have one plane crash-land on return, but all the crew members survived and were returned to duty. One plane returned to base with so much damage that it had to be salvaged. These B-17 Flying Fortresses continue to amaze me in that they are able to fly home with so much damage that they have to be scrapped.

Two days later we were off on our twenty-fourth, which would take us to Dusseldorf. Thankfully the weather fronts we had been experiencing had passed on through and on this mission we would have fairly good weather. Just as on the previous mission, the flak over the target was less than we had expected. We continued to hope the Germans would decide further fighting was useless and they were ready to quit. How wonderful that would be. The entire flight on this mission went well and all planes returned safely to home base. Only four planes of the entire Group had very much battle damage.

January 31st we were briefed to fly our twenty-fifth mission but the weather had returned to terrible. The clouds and fog completely covered everything, right down to the ground. Visibility was so bad we all felt the mission would be canceled. The 334th (my squadron) was scheduled to fly lead that day which meant we would be the first squadron off. Since I was now deputy squadron leader I would be the second plane off the ground and fly the lead plane's right wing.

If a mission was canceled after we boarded our planes, the tower would fire a red flare into the air rather than contact us by radio. The Germans could hear a radio transmission and know the mission was

canceled. So we sat in our planes and watched the tower, hoping to see that red flare. Engine start and taxi time came and still no flare. We had thought, surely we wouldn't fly in this weather. If anyone had an emergency after he got off the ground that forced him back to land, he would be in trouble. The crew would just have to bail out for there would be no way to get back to base in this soup.

We taxied out to the end of the runway but there was still no flare. The lead plane began his run and disappeared in the fog a few hundred feet down the runway, as we had seen him do twice before. Twelve seconds later we began our take-off run. I listened as John called out our speed, "70 - 80 - 90", when out of the corner of my eye as we passed the tower I saw that red flare fired. It was much too late to stop. We were at take-off speed with a fully loaded plane approaching the end of the runway. All I could do was continue my run and take off. As soon as we lifted off everything on the ground disappeared. We were in the air with no place to go since our base was completely socked in with this weather.

I climbed out to a safe altitude and called the tower for instructions. We were told to drop our bombs in the North Sea and proceed to a Royal Air Force Base near Land's End at the southwestern tip of England. All England was covered in low clouds except a small portion of the southernmost part. Maybe we could get in there. I didn't like the sound of that "maybe" after the bad weather we had been flying in.

We flew out over the North Sea and dropped our bomb load. The pins that armed the bombs had not been removed so they wouldn't explode on impact. Normally Keck removed these pins after we were in the air. After dropping the bombs we flew all the way across England, past Land's End, and over the Atlantic before we finally found a hole in the cloud coverage. We descended back towards Land's End through heavy rainfall (which helped to wash away some of the fog) and managed to land safely at the local R.A.F. base. We were there for three days before the weather was clear enough to return to our home base.

The morning of February 3rd we were awakened earlier than usual. On the way to breakfast I could hear the engines being put through a test run to prepare them for the flight. The fuel trucks then moved in after the engine run and replaced the fuel the maintenance people had used. When they did this I knew we were in for a long and tiring flight. Every drop of fuel is precious and they made sure we had all 2,800 gallons the plane would hold.

At briefing the curtain was pulled back revealing the information for that day's flight. There were a few groans when we saw that our twenty-fifth mission would take us back to Berlin. Presently we learned this mission would be quite different from previous ones we had flown.

Normally we carried high-explosive, anti-personnel, or incendiary bombs. Sometimes the first two squadrons carried high-explosive demolition and then the third squadron would follow up with incendiary bombs to set the target on fire. Today the lead squadron would drop 500-lb. high-explosive bombs to explode on impact, the second squadron would drop 500-lb. high-explosive bombs with a two-hour, delayed-action fuse, and the third squadron would drop 500-lb. high-explosive bombs with a six-hour, delayed-action fuse. The purpose of this plan was simply to

destroy more people. During the raid the people would take refuge in their air raid shelters. After our planes were gone and the "all clear" sounded, people would leave the shelters and the two-hour delay bombs would begin exploding. They would then return to the shelters but wait longer to come out next time, probably an hour or so, but when they did the six-hour bombs would explode. This action was designed to kill as many people as possible, to destroy the German people's morale and their will to continue to fight. Of course, at that time we didn't know they had no choice, but continued to fight because their leaders forced them to fight on.

On all previous missions we had a definite military target to hit. We never had bombed just to kill as many people as possible. I couldn't help being concerned for all those civilians who would be down there. Certainly many weren't there by choice, and probably wanted nothing to do with this war. This was my first time being briefed for a mission I had rather not fly. We had never given much thought to the people involved when we bombed an oil refinery, a rail marshaling yard, an airfield, or any other military target, but this time we had no such target. But we had to go ahead and perform to the best of our ability. We were not given a choice about which missions we wanted to fly. I just prayed that we would be forgiven for what we were about to do.

Shortly after take-off we noticed the oil pressure on #2 engine was lower than the other three. As we assembled our 95th Group we watched the oil pressure drop slightly, then fall off to zero. The engine was performing flawlessly and all other indicators for that engine were normal. I remembered the problem with a faulty indicator we had several missions ago and decided to let this one run for awhile. We were still over England and not far from our base, so we could easily get home if any problem arose. I decided to watch our #2 engine closely and continue on our flight.

We held our position in the formation as we flew out over the North Sea and headed toward our target. The engine was still performing just fine so we assumed the indicator must be faulty. We arrived at the I.P. and turned to our bomb-run heading. We knew from experience that Berlin was a well-defended city and this day was no exception. The flak batteries were putting up huge amounts of flak right in our path. I knew we were going to pick up a number of hits, but we held our position and flew directly into it.

That day our Squadron happened to be far back in the line of 8th Air Force planes. Many Groups had already dropped their bombs before we arrived, and the city was almost obscured by thick, black smoke rising several thousand feet. This wasn't surprising since every minute for the past two hours a squadron of twelve planes had dropped 72 tons of high-explosive and incendiary bombs on the city. As we flew down our bomb run we received a bad hit in our #3 engine. Oil spewed out over the cowling and engine housing. We managed to get the engine cut and the propeller feathered before losing all the oil pressure on that engine. Now we were several hundred miles from home with only three engines running and we still weren't too sure about #2. I just prayed we had made the correct decision about the indicator on #2 and it would continue to run on the flight home.

We were taking a beating from the flak all the way down our bomb run. Jim Taylor's plane was on fire. He pulled away from the formation and then they all bailed out. They were lucky to be able to abandon the plane so quickly for it went into a dive and exploded. Several days later we learned they were all in a POW Camp. Thank goodness they are alive but their war is over. I could see that my old plane, number 2951, that had carried us on so many previous missions, was on fire and had a runaway propeller. Today Richard Morris (the brother of Chester Morris of Hollywood fame) was piloting it. Morris left the formation under control but we lost sight of him. He later failed to return and we didn't know what happened to him for several days. Then the Red Cross informed us that Morris was a POW but all the other members of his crew had been killed. Another of our planes left the formation over the target but was able to get all the way back to Belgium to land. The crew eventually made it back home and were returned to duty.

What was left of our Squadron was scattered all over after bombs away, but we did manage to get our remaining planes into a fairly good formation. We ran our three remaining engines as hard as we dared in order to keep up. I was just thankful no German fighters had been around while we were so scattered. We headed home with an eye on that #2 engine but it never failed. This was yet another sad homecoming. Seven of our friends had been killed, one was missing, and ten more were in a German POW Camp.

Several days after we flew this Berlin mission an article appeared in an English language paper we received from Sweden. A reporter that had been in Berlin during our raid reported that more than 35,000 people had been killed. This didn't seem to bother some of the fellows. They knew from experience that the German people, especially the Hitler Youth, would kill you before you were captured by the military if they could get to you first after you bailed out. For this reason we now carried our .45 caliber pistols. Earlier we had left our pistols at home because you were usually killed if you were armed when you landed on the ground. But we later learned that our men who bailed out were being killed anyway, so our guns were given back to us for our own protection. As General Sherman said, "War is Hell". How right he was.

January 26th we were briefed to fly our twenty-sixth mission. The weather was awful again but we were already off the ground when the mission was recalled. Everyone safely returned to base.

For the past several days the weather had been too bad to fly. Some days, missions were scheduled but later canceled. On the only days our Group flew my name was not on the list. This gave us some much-needed down time for a little rest.

We didn't fly again until February 14th, Valentine's Day. For our twenty-sixth mission we would be flying another long one, this time to Chimnitz. We would be in the air for more than 8½ hours. This was a long and tiring mission but proved to be an easy one for us. The anti-aircraft fire at the target was rather light and we saw no enemy fighters. The Germans still had many fighters left but couldn't get them into the air because of their lack of fuel. We figured our raids on oil targets were the reason for this. Our planes returned home with only three having noticeable flak damage.

The very next morning we were up early and had completed breakfast long before daylight. At briefing we learned we were going on another long one. For our twenty-seventh mission we would fly all the way across Germany to Cottbus. We now seem to be able to fly anywhere over Germany we like without any fighter opposition. Of course this relieves some of the tension we usually felt during these long missions. This day we were out there more than nine hours. The flak at the target seemed light to me but it must have been pretty accurate. One of our planes was damaged and spun out of control but we thought we counted enough parachutes to account for all crew members. They did in fact manage to get out for several days later we learned they were all POWs. Another plane was damaged badly but managed to get to Belgium and land safely. One more plane left the formation at the target and failed to make it home after the mission. He must have gone down somewhere over Germany. We never learned what happened to him. All the rest of us made it safely home.

February 19th we were briefed to fly our twenty-eighth mission, this time going to Osnabruck. This would be a much shorter flight than the last two. Once again I prayed it would be an easy one. We were getting too close to completing our tour.

We reached our I.P. without any problems and turned on our bomb run. The Germans put up the usual flak dead ahead and we flew directly into it to reach our dropping point. The flak over the target wasn't too bad and after bombs away we turned toward home thinking all was well. We had seen no German fighters and should be back in Horham before long.

Shortly after leaving the target Keck, our Ball-Turret Gunner, told me something was running out of the wing behind #3 engine. He said he didn't think it was oil or hydraulic fluid. Since we don't carry any water out there, it must be fuel. There's a white-hot supercharger fan running back of that engine and 100-octane aviation fuel is highly explosive. We couldn't let the fuel hit that hot fan so we cut the engine immediately. There was also a large self-sealing fuel tank behind #3 engine. There must have been a flak hole in it so large it couldn't seal. We began transferring the fuel from this tank to the other tanks to keep from losing it or taking a chance it might start a fire or explode. There must have been at least 200 gallons of fuel still in that tank. The supercharger cooled enough after we cut the engine that the fuel that did run out of the wing didn't cause any other problem. We made it safely home on our other three engines.

We were flying every day now when the weather allowed. February 20th we were briefed to fly our twenty-ninth mission, this one to Nuremburg. We thought, we must be going after Hitler and his Commanding Officers for we had recently heard that the German Army Headquarters had been moved from Berlin to Nuremburg. We continued to have very bad weather and that day was no exception. We took off in the fog and climbed through thick clouds to a clearing to assemble the squadrons. After take-off and assembly we continued to run in and out of clouds as we climbed toward our bombing altitude. Sometimes we were in clouds so thick we could hardly see the number three plane flying on our leader's left wing. I could see the three-ship high element leader but that, plus our lead plane, was about all. I just prayed everyone kept a sharp eye on the planes they could see and held their positions to avoid any collisions.

We continued on toward our target and were now flying in complete cloud coverage with no breaks anywhere. This could wear on your nerves when you considered the fact that you weren't the only squadron up there. More than a thousand planes must be in this soup and you aren't able to see any of them. The Groups, each consisting of three 12-plane squadrons, are only about three minutes apart, all flying in the same direction, and all going to the same place.

That day our Guardian Angel was surely working overtime. John and I usually took fifteen-minute turns flying the plane when we were in formation. In weather like this we stayed as close to the lead plane as possible. You didn't want to take your eyes off him for even a second. I was flying the plane and for some reason (probably answered prayer) I looked over to the right away from the formation. Just as I did we broke through a tiny hole in the clouds. Another squadron broke in from our right at that exact time, heading on a collision course with us. I pulled hack on the control column as hard as I could and our plane almost jumped straight up. Although I couldn't see anything, I'm sure we barely missed some of our other squadron members. Tragically, the squadrons did collide. We heard the explosions as planes ran together. Harold could see planes crashing into each other from his tail-gunner position. Two of our planes and three of the other squadron planes went down in balls of fire. We were back in the clouds so quickly we couldn't see all that happened, but we knew it was terrible. We only learned after returning to base that five planes had been destroyed. Here again, I was flying in a position right in the center of the collision, yet miraculously we escaped without a scratch!

After the collision we lost all sight of our Group. We continued on alone toward our target, considerably shaken but determined to complete our mission. Before we reached Nuremburg we broke through the frontal weather and saw a group of B-17s directly in front of us. We thought it might be our 95th Group but it wasn't. We overtook them quickly and filled an open position in their low element vacated somewhere along the way for some reason, probably the weather.
The weather continued to be a problem but we managed to stay with this squadron. We reached the I.P. and began our bombing run. Though we were flying above complete cloud coverage, the Germans must have had their best anti-aircraft batteries down there. The flak was extremely accurate and we received considerable damage to our plane. We were sure the others did also. After bombs away we turned toward home and that awful weather that we knew lay ahead.

We hadn't gotten very far away from Nuremburg when we were back in that weather front and again the weather broke up the formation. Since we were not with our squadron we didn't mind this too much. We stayed at our bombing altitude hoping this would keep us above the other planes heading home. We knew they usually made a slow turn after leaving a target and dropped one thousand feet below bombing altitude. Maybe we were a thousand feet above them. We certainty didn't want to risk another mid-air collision.

We made the entire flight home flying on instruments and depending on John Lurtz, our Navigator, to keep us out of any flak areas. We had no more problems but learned after we landed that five of our planes had failed to return. Two that did had been so badly damaged they had to be

salvaged, and ten others, including ours, had heavy battle damage. Al Weiss' copilot was wounded and the Bombardier on another crew was wounded. One plane that failed to return had landed safely in Belgium. Thank goodness our ground forces had liberated a large part of Belgium because that had given us a safe place to land if we couldn't make it all the way home.

After debriefing and dinner we stopped by our squadron to check the list for tomorrow for we had seen the red flag flying. My name was there and since we were so tired we hit the sack early to get as much sleep as possible. We were up about 3 A.M. the next morning, ate a quick breakfast, then went to mission briefing. When the curtain was removed showing the mission, it looked just like yesterday's. For our thirtieth mission we would be going back to Nuremburg. We had failed to get the desired results yesterday so here we go again.

That day, February 21st, the weather was much better. The front had passed through the target area so we had good flying weather all the way to the target. We reached Nuremburg and found that either the Germans had moved many of their flak batteries or they weren't expecting us to be back so soon. The flak was light and not nearly as accurate as the day before, even though the weather conditions were clearer. We made a visual bomb run that was much more accurate than our first one. Only one plane returned with significant battle damage. We all returned safely.

After debriefing and dinner we learned we were not on the list for the next day's mission. That was a relief, since we had flown missions on three consecutive days. We certainly needed a rest and slept almost until lunch the next day. After lunch we stayed at the Officer's Club until the day's flight was due to return, then went down to the tower to watch. We counted the planes in each squadron as they landed and saw that all had returned. We figured this must have been a "milk run" and wished we could have gone along. At debriefing we found we were mistaken. They had run into heavy and accurate anti-aircraft fire over the target and were very lucky that all were able to return. Twenty-four of the thirty-six planes returned with battle damage, some much worse than others, yet fortunately no one had been wounded. We had been just as well staying home.

My tour of duty wasn't all bad. We next had a three-day stand down with Glenn Miller's Band to entertain us on Saturday night and Sunday afternoon. Two days later, February 24th, we were briefed to fly our thirty-first mission. This mission would take us to Bremen. It proved to be much like the one we had missed three days before. The flight to Bremen went very well and the weather was good, but the mission proved to be a very rough one. The Germans were trying to make up for their lack of fighters with very heavy anti-aircraft fire. Everyone made it through but we returned to base with twenty-seven planes, including ours, incurring heavy flak damage. Yet in the entire Group only two crewmen were wounded. I was happy neither of these were in my crew but sorry none the less for the two who were wounded.

It was hard to believe we had flown thirty-one missions since arriving in England. The fact that we only needed to fly four more safely became our main topic of conversation. The closer we got to that magic number thirty-five, the tenser we became. Happily, we were off for another

three-day pass. I hoped the break would relieve some of the tension. We spent the time in London then returned to base on Saturday, March 3rd, only to hear the terrible news that there had been a mid-air collision between two planes in our group. One had been completely destroyed killing all aboard, but the other had managed to get back to the field and land safely. We had had mid-air collisions before and fortunately had also avoided many others. On reflection, I'm surprised we didn't have even more. The terrible weather conditions we were sometimes forced to fly in combined with the close proximity of the bases left little margin for pilot error.

March 4th was Sunday and (of course!) we were scheduled to fly our thirty-second mission. We were briefed to go to Ulm. The weather was not too bad, just some broken clouds. As we left briefing to go to our planes two German V-1 "Buzz Bombs" passed directly overhead, less than a thousand feet high. This caused a mad scramble for cover but their engines kept running and they continued on their way toward London.

The V-1s were not very accurate but the Germans could hit a city large as London with them. They would fly until their fuel was exhausted then glide to the ground and explode on impact. We could see and hear the V-1s coming, unlike the V-2 rockets that come in so fast and noiseless. One early morning while I was on leave in London I heard several V-2 rockets come in and explode. I was always amazed that the people of London paid so little attention to them. When I was close enough to hear the explosions so loud, I knew they were striking somewhere very near. That made me a little nervous!

The flight to Ulm wasn't bad. The German Air Force was still unable to send up fighters to intercept us, but we still had our P-51 escorts just in case. The flak at the target wasn't so heavy but we did have seven planes return to base with flak damage.

Our Group didn't fly again for the next two days. This gave us some time to rest up and sleep but I'm not sure this was best for us. I could see some of the crew getting tenser and I'm sure they saw the same in me. I just prayed it wouldn't affect my ability to do my best. You would think the idea of having only three more missions to go would provide some relief but the opposite was true. You just couldn't help thinking of the friends you had seen killed or wounded or bail out over a target to be captured by the enemy. You know it would take only one well-placed 88mm anti-aircraft shell and you wouldn't even know what happened. You remember Bromberg's last mission. Your nerves begin to play tricks on you and interrupt your sleep. Then you realize you have been out there thirty-two times - surely your luck will hold for three more. You stop and say a prayer.

March 7th we were briefed to fly our thirty-third mission. This one would take us to Dortmund and we were cautioned that the flak could be very heavy. Our take-off, Group assembly, and flight to the target went very well. The weather was clearing but we remained on instruments for about an hour before we were able to assemble the Group. As we left the I.P. and headed down our bomb run, we had a rather pleasant surprise. The flak wasn't nearly as heavy as we had expected but it still did considerable damage. Nine of our planes returned to base with some flak damage.

I was always thankful for our ground maintenance crews. Amazingly, they would have every damaged plane ready to fly the next day - even if it meant working all night in the damp, cold English weather.

The very next morning, March 8th, we were up early to fly our thirty-fourth mission. We hadn't done much damage the day before at Dortmund so we had to go back and finish the job. The day was clear and beautiful. These cold clear days made for good flying but the clear sky meant we wouldn't have any cloud cover under us over Germany. Our good luck continued to hold. We made a good bomb run, destroyed the target, and only eight hours after take-off were all back safe at our base at Horham. After debriefing we checked the list for tomorrow's flight and found my name there.

Flying missions on three or four consecutive days was very stressful; much more so than flying consecutive practice missions. Combat missions (obviously) took so much more out of us. When a crew got close to the end of their tour the Group leaders deliberately scheduled them to fly every day so they wouldn't have time to think. We would fly a mission, come home and sleep, fly again, and sleep again with no time to sit around and worry. This was extremely tiring but I suppose it was for the best; at least the powers above thought so.

Friday, March 9th, we were briefed to go to Frankfort for our thirty-fifth and last mission. Frankfort could be a very rough mission and I didn't like the idea of going there on my last mission. If we could make it through just this one more time we would be on our way back to the good old U.S.A.! We would then have six months in the States before Army policy would allow us to be assigned to any more combat (unless we volunteered). This didn't seem likely for any of my crew. They were all too anxious to get home, especially Doan, who had a new son that he had never seen.

As we went through our pre-flight checks I couldn't help noticing how quiet everyone was. There was none of the joking and kidding around that usually went on. I just hoped we weren't too tense to perform at the level we must.
This was our first mission to Frankfort and we were told at briefing that we would come within range of more than a thousand anti-aircraft guns; it could get very rough. I couldn't help thinking of things that could happen and what a terrible day to have to fly combat. Tomorrow is Marian's birthday. If our luck runs out today she is going to get one awful birthday present. I tried to dismiss all this from my mind and concentrate on what I must do.

The weather that day was excellent and we wouldn't have to contend with the instrument flying we had been doing so much of recently. Our plane, which we had flown for the past fifteen missions, was an exceptional one, so that was one thing in our favor. It could take an awful lot of punishment and keep on flying. Before boarding the plane and taking my seat in the cockpit I stood, as usual, under the wing for awhile, but this time I was close to tears. It wasn't from fear but from the thanks I felt to God that He had brought us this far, and how blessed we were to be heading out to our last mission with the same crew members with whom we had begun our tour. Many crews who had come over with us were no longer here; so many wounded, so many killed, and so many in Prisoner of War Camps.

Hollywood movies always portray men charging into combat to fight for home and country. This was our motivation also, of course, but it isn't what most men are thinking about when they head into battle. We had learned all too quickly what to fight for - our comrades who were right there with us. We had all become family and we did our very best to protect each other. We really fought for one thing - SURVIVAL.

I must have lingered under the wing a little too long because Doan, my Flight Engineer/Top Turret Gunner, came over to ask me if I was O.K. I assured him I was fine and thought to myself, "Here is another reason I can continue. I couldn't have found a better man for this job anywhere than Doan". He could have been grounded long ago because of serious sinus problems he had; problems that were aggravated by high-altitude flying in cold, un-pressurized planes. He came home from every mission in pain and headed straight to the Flight Surgeon's Office for relief; however he chose to stay with us and for his sacrifice I will always be grateful. Four of my crew members had children to go home to if we made it back from this final mission. Doan had only one, a son born after we had left the States whom he had never seen. We must complete this mission safely. I boarded my plane for my last mission.

Take-off and assembly of the Group went well and we were soon on our way to Frankfort. We had no problems on the way and the weather was beautiful - no clouds at all. As we approached the I.P. I heard someone ahead reporting, "Bandits at twelve o'clock!" and also desperate calls for our "little friends". Enemy planes were always called "bandits". I knew one of the squadrons ahead was under attack and braced for an attack on us.

When we reached the I.P. and turned to our bomb run heading, I could see the German ME-109s attacking the squadron ahead of us. They were taking an awful beating and being worked over all the way down to bombs away. Since we were only thirty seconds behind them I knew we were next. The squadron ahead dropped their bombs and the German fighters turned toward us, but instead of attacking they passed a few hundred feet underneath us and struck at the squadron behind us. They must have figured our squadron was too far down the bomb run and they would be unable to hit us before our bombs were away. Once more our prayers had been answered.

Even though the fighters didn't engage us we were still not out of the woods yet. The anti-aircraft flak was heavy and deadly. One plane left the formation on fire. All the crew bailed out O.K. and we learned later they were all taken prisoner. Our lead plane had one wounded and another crew had a wounded Bombardier. Another plane was badly damaged and forced to land in Belgium. Still another made it back to England but had to make a forced landing at the emergency field at Woodbridge.

Chet, our Bombardier, had decided that since this was our last mission he would sit right up in the Plexiglas nose so he could get a good view of everything. Usually he would kneel behind his bombsight and John Lurtz, our Navigator, would kneel right behind him. They would then cover their backsides with flak jackets for protection. In this position they also felt the chin turret gave them some protection in front and underneath since they were almost on top of it. Today, however, Chet was up front with his feet propped against the Plexiglas nose. Suddenly I heard him on the inter-phone yell, "I'm hit, I'm

hit!". A few seconds later I heard Lurtz say, "Aw, shut up. It didn't even go through your boot". A piece of shrapnel had penetrated the Plexiglas and struck him hard on the heavy sole of his boot. If it had hit him anywhere else it could have done a lot more damage. Fortunately all he sustained was a bad bruise on the bottom of his foot which made walking difficult for several days.

As we banked away from the target we noticed the plane's hydraulic pumps running constantly. This concerned me because they shouldn't have been running at all. Doan cut them off until we could determine what the problem was. A few minutes later Keck said something was running out of the bomb bay and coating his turret so badly he couldn't see. It didn't take long to figure out that what he was seeing had to be hydraulic fluid. We would have to make certain the pumps stayed off until we reached home to land. If we lost all hydraulic fluid we wouldn't have any brakes. I had landed without brakes before on the long runway at Woodbridge but sometimes no brakes can cause real trouble. We would just have to wait and see. Since this was our last mission we definitely wanted to land at our home base. Luckily the landing gear was electrically operated and would come down without hydraulics.

Other than the problem with the hydraulic pumps, the trip home went very well indeed. It had been a long time since I had heard so much joking and kidding among the crew. When we reached the Coast of England we left the formation and beaded straight home. The fellows began celebrating by throwing lighted flares out the waist door. I wasn't aware they had them on board and I'm sure they hadn't told me because they knew I would never have carried them into combat. They were much too flammable. I just hoped nothing got set on fire on the ground, but they probably burned out before they hit.

We reached the base before the rest of the formation arrived and buzzed the field. We only had time for one pass. Normally this was never allowed but the brass overlooked some things on a last mission. Since we were ahead of the formation we had to stay aloft until the entire Group landed. That was O.K. We needed everyone else out of the way because we might not be able to stop before we ran out of runway. The alternative was to divert to the emergency field at Woodbridge. If I had reported our problem we would have been sent there, but I knew we just couldn't celebrate properly at Woodbridge.

After the rest of the Group landed I began my approach. The plan was for Doan to switch on the hydraulic pumps the instant the gear touched the runway and hope we got up enough pressure to help us stop. We touched down and Doan switched on the pumps. I hit the brakes - and nothing happened! All the fluid must have leaked out long before we reached home.

I had made the approach as slow as I dared and touched down right at the end of the runway. We cut the inboard engines but halfway down the runway we were still going too fast. We had no reversible propellers as today's planes do. I headed off the runway into the soft grass that bordered it hoping that would help us stop. This was risky because if the ground was too soft the landing gear could sink in and stand the plane up on its nose. Fortunately the ploy worked and we lumbered to a halt before we ran out of field. We cut the two outboard engines and left our plane for good sitting peacefully in the grass.

At debriefing we learned that four of our planes had failed to return and seventeen, including ours had sustained heavy flak damage. When we left debriefing we quickly changed our uniforms and headed for the combat crew mess hall. Usually ten or more hours pass between breakfast and the end of a day's mission, so we were always hungry, but this day was a special one for us. This was brought home to us when at the mess hall we saw a large table in the center of the room, covered with a tablecloth, and set with silverware and china; things we never normally had. This special table was only used by the "Lucky Bastard Club" and today, March 9, 1945, we had become members of that envied group. We were to be served a special meal at this table of honor, and it would be brought to us. No waiting in the chow line today. It's our special day and we are going to enjoy every second of it. The food was special too - a lot better than what the other guys were getting in the regular chow line - and complemented with two fifths of good blended whiskey. Of course being the good fellows we were, we never touched that.

We lingered for a long while, still seated around the table when we noticed we were alone. Everyone else had finished their meal and gone. As we laughed and celebrated, I pondered for a moment just how fortunate we were. Here we all were, together just as we had been back at Dyersburg in the States. Ours was the only crew I knew of, of all who had come over with us, that had no wounded, no one killed, and was still flying together. What a load had been lifted from us that day! And how many prayers had been answered. No more losing friends forever. No more watching a plane explode and knowing nine or ten young men will never go home.

We left the mess hall together to send cablegrams home with the good news. All we were allowed to say was, "Missions completed. Be home soon". That wasn't much but it was enough.

We knew we would now be going home soon but we didn't know when. We were put on three weeks leave, over our objections, for we didn't want to use any leave time until we were back in the States. I guess it was necessary since we had to wait until the next available ship convoy was ready to go. We could do whatever we wanted for the next three weeks so we became tourists. Some of us stayed on base, some in London, but Chet and I visited parts of northern England where we hadn't been before. We even made it all the way to Scotland.

Almost a month passed before we were sent to Liverpool to board a troop transport. The ship then moved out into the harbor and dropped anchor. We stayed out there for a couple of days, unable to go ashore while the convoy was being assembled. Finally late one afternoon we moved out and joined a large number of other ships. With a destroyer escort we headed westward toward America. It was hard to believe we were on our way home.

The first morning at sea we were up early for breakfast. We were told that we would have only two meals per day while we were at sea. That was O.K. with us because on mission days we only had two meals and they were usually more than ten hours apart. We could also have some fresh fruit at lunch if we desired. We hadn't seen fresh fruit for several months so we made certain we got ours every day.

We sailed in a convoy of about thirty-five ships, including several destroyers to escort us across the Atlantic. The Germans still had submarines in the Atlantic so this escort was necessary. It also gave us some feeling of security. These troop transport ships, known during the war as Victory Ships, were not the most comfortable luxury liners. We were assigned bunks for our voyage home. Most of these were four bunks high and seemed to be below the water line because we could hear the ship's propellers beating against the water, and even feel some vibration. We didn't mind this too much since they were beating us a path home. We weren't crowded at all. The ship was capable of carrying six thousand troops and we only had about fifteen hundred on board.

Our first two days out passed uneventfully, but the third night out we were awakened by loud thumps and could feel the vibrations. Chet and I went up on deck to see what was happening. We were told that signals, thought to be German submarines, had been detected. What we were hearing was the explosion of depth charges being dropped by our destroyers. I thought, let's get those submarines if they are down there. I certainly didn't want to fly thirty-five missions over Germany and then be lost at sea on my way home. How ironic that would be.

The North Atlantic can be very rough during this time of the year. Some days it was so rough that we couldn't go up on deck because the ship's tossing and rolling, plus a very wet deck, could wash you overboard. At the beginning of the voyage we were told that the convoy would not stop to pick up anyone who went overboard. He would have to swim the rest of the way home. The wind was blowing so hard it could blow you right off the slick deck.

Some days Chet and I spent time as far up on the bow as we could get. As the ship tossed up and down it seemed we would almost go into the water, then rise until we could see the 18- and 20-foot markers on the side of the ship's bow. We watched the stern of the ship just ahead. As he tossed up and down his propellers would come all the way out of the water, then go down again until the stern almost went under. Trying to walk anywhere on deck in these conditions was very hard to do, but nobody went overboard and none of us was ever even seasick. That was a miracle in itself.

In order to pass time some days we played cards from just after breakfast until dinner in the evening. The tables were bolted to the deck but the chairs weren't. As the ship tossed about we held tight to the table so we wouldn't slide all the way across the room. We solved this problem by tying our chairs to the table post.

One day while we were at sea, busy with our card game, it was announced over the ship's speakers that President Roosevelt had died. This put a damper on everything.

We had been at sea for ten days when late one afternoon the announcement was made that we would dock in New York harbor next morning about 7 A.M. All our activity ceased immediately and the conversation for the remainder of the day was about being home. The excitement and anticipation of the troops on board was even greater than when we had boarded at Liverpool. I don't know about the others but I got very little sleep that night. I was just too excited.

Next morning, long before daylight, we went up to an already crowded deck. Everyone was eagerly looking for some sign of land. Before the sun rose we began to see lights on the horizon, then the engines stopped and we stopped moving through the water. As daylight came we could see that we were already well into New York Harbor. Soon we began to move again, passing right by the Statue of Liberty. What a beautiful sight! We docked about 9 A.M. and thankfully were not kept on board very long. We boarded a troop train right at the dock and were soon on our way somewhere. No one knew or even cared where we were going. We were home so it didn't matter. After a fairly short ride we arrived at Camp Kilmer, New Jersey. We were taken directly to the mess hall for it was already early afternoon and we hadn't eaten anything all day. To us the food was excellent. We had fresh fruit and milk with our meal. I must have downed at least a quart of milk for I hadn't seen any milk since we left the States last year.

Early that evening I made two phone calls, one to my Mother and Dad, and one to Marian, telling them where I was and that I should be home in a few days.

We were at Camp Kilmer for only two nights taking the necessary physical exams; then on April 19th, 1945, I was once again boarding a troop train. Our destination was Fort McPherson, Georgia. This train was very different from any troop train I had ever ridden before. All the cars were Pullman and we had our own beds. Normally on troop trains we slept in our seats or on the floor or wherever we could find space to lie down.

This was a happy day for me but it also had a touch of sadness. I was leaving the last members of my crew. We had been separated from our enlisted crew members when we left England. We had all come home in the same convoy but were not on the same ship. They hadn't docked at the same dock we had so now I didn't know where they are. Now I was leaving the three officers on the crew. We said our good-byes and promised to keep in touch.

Early Saturday morning, April 21st, we pulled into the rail yards of Atlanta. We stopped and waited, then moved forward a mile or so, and waited again. We couldn't interfere with the regularly scheduled trains passing through. I knew we had to wait for them but we were all becoming impatient. We were just too close to home to be wasting so much time. It was after 9 P.M. when our train pulled into Fort McPherson. We underwent a quick physical examination, then were given our orders for our new assignments and released. I was to report to Miami Beach Replacement Center but I had three weeks before my date to report. One question we were asked before we left was if we would be reporting to Miami Beach with our wives. Three of us who in fact weren't married yet said yes. So many weddings had been planned by Victory Mail. I was back home at last and left Fort McPherson as soon as I was dismissed.

* * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * *

Marian and I were married the next Saturday, April 28th, 1945 in the Chapel at Fort McPherson. We had planned this day for the past year. The War had postponed this happy day for us, as I am certain it had for many young couples, but here it was at last. We spent one week's

honeymoon in New Orleans, then back to Atlanta for a few days before boarding a train for Miami Beach. All the married Officers were permitted to take their wives to Miami Beach. We were assigned a room in the Atlantic Towers Hotel right on the Atlantic Beach. We spent three weeks there which Marian and I treated as another honeymoon since I had nothing to do except wait for my next station assignment. During this time I ran into my Copilot, John Sachtjen, and Bombardier, Chet Wilcoxson who also had their wives with them. We had a nice mini-reunion but John Lurtz, our Navigator, had been sent to the West Coast so we missed him.

Because I had been in England for almost a year with hardly any exposure to bright sunlight, I had become fairly light-skinned. I was not accustomed to the scorching Miami sun. And although I had never blistered before in my life, after spending only a couple of hours on the beach I was cooked. It was miserable. What a way to spend a honeymoon!

Finally, I received my new assignment. My orders were to report to Hendricks Field, Sebring, Florida, as a B-17 flight instructor. We remained in Sebring, with weekends in St. Petersburg and Clearwater, until November. The War finally ended and Hendricks Field was gradually closed. We were receiving no more pilots for flight training in the B-17. Men were being discharged on a point system and I had more than enough points to be discharged. I asked to be relieved from active duty to be effective November 1, 1945. I was transferred to Maxwell Field where I was discharged.

I returned home to Marietta and continued flying with the Air Force Reserve at Dobbins Air Force Base at Marietta. During the summer Of 1950, while on fifteen-day active duty, I began having trouble with my eyes and was grounded until I could get this corrected. I was replaced in our Squadron at Dobbins and told to return when I could pass my physical. Shortly afterward the war in Korea broke out. The unit at Dobbins was called to active duty but I was omitted. Individual pilots with combat experience were being recalled and every day I expected to receive my orders but they never came. Many WWII pilots had volunteered for active duty. Had I been called I felt certain I would be sent to Korea because I had been flying the Douglas B-26 at Dobbins and that bomber was being used in Korea.

The war years of my life seem to me now to have occurred in another lifetime. Sometimes it feels like ages ago, sometimes like only yesterday. It was a time I never forget, not even for a minute. I can recall instantly every plane I witnessed going down. And I never forget how fortunate I was. Our Squadron leader was shot down twice while we flew on his right wing, requiring us to take over as lead ship, yet I nor none of my crew were ever injured. Mike Ryan flew the lead plane's left wing and I flew the lead's right. During the course of our tour Mike had nineteen engines shot out, three times two on a mission. Twice he was set on fire. We flew only a few feet from him and yet we lost only five engines during our entire tour. How lucky can you get?

I am very proud to have served as one of the pilots of the 95th Bomb Group of the Mighty Eighth Air Force. Our 95th flew 321 combat missions, dropping 19,769 tons of bombs, flew a total of 8,625 plane missions, utilized a total of 359 B-17 Flying Fortresses in combat

action, of which 156 were lost in combat, with 36 lost in other operations. 61 were forced down on the Continent, and 42 were salvaged at Horham after being damaged beyond repair. A total of 1,336 planes were repaired after major battle damage. The Group had 611 men killed in the line of duty, lost 851 crew members as P.O.W.s, and had 171 crew members return to base severely wounded. 65 members interned in Switzerland or Sweden, and another 61 evaded capture after being shot down behind enemy lines. There are still 5 crew members listed as missing in action. The 95th Group claimed 425 enemy planes destroyed and another 117 probably destroyed, with 131 damaged. The 95th led the first daylight bombing missions to Berlin. We were the only Group of the 41 Groups in England to receive three Presidential Unit Citations. These were for leadership and valor on missions to Regensburg, Munster, and Berlin.

When I review these records and realize that my crew, as one of the 95th, flew thirty-five of those missions without one single injury or death, I know without doubt that many prayers were offered and answered. Each day I pray that none of my descendants will ever have to fight through another war. Surely man can learn from his mistakes of the past to find a way to live in peace.

In closing let me tell of a young boy about twelve years old who used to ride his bicycle to our base. He was fascinated with our planes and someone would always show him around. Today he is an 8th Air Force historian and has written a number of books and poems about the air war. He is a well-known speaker and author, especially in Europe. He has visited with us at our reunions and at the Heritage Center in Savannah, Georgia. His name is Roger Freeman and I close with one of his many poems, a favorite of mine.

THE SKY WAS NEVER STILL
by Roger Freeman

The old man sat in the English Pub
As he had for many a year
And listened to the stranger's talk
As he sipped a temperate beer.
A stranger asked how long he'd lived
In the village here about.
"Why, all my days", the old man said
An age, without a doubt.
"I envy you" the stranger sighed
"Your tranquil village life,
The gentle fields, the muted sky,
Devoid of urban strife"
The old man smiled a wistful smile,
"That's just a townie's dream,
For I have seen the sky aflame
And heard the meadows scream.
I've known a thunder at each dawn
That shook the very ground
As warplanes sought to gain the clouds
From airfields all around.
They called some Forts and others Libs
And there were fighters too
I've counted hundreds at a time

Yes, what I tell is true.
They'd climb and soar like flocks of rooks
And round and round they'd mill
From north and south, from east and west
The sky was never still.
-102-
THE SKY WAS NEVER STILL (Continued)
"Sometimes there'd be a wondrous sight
A sight beyond compare
The bombers going out to war
Forging the frigid air.
Four miles above, just silver specks
Like sunshine on the dew
And trailing lines of cloud-like white
Across the cosmic blue.
They set the heavens all a-throb
That did not fade away
For others rose to meet the night
Invisible to stay".
"And when was this?" the stranger asked
"And who were those you saw?"
The old man drank and then replied
"It happened in the war.
They were but boys and many died
Some lost without a trace
For then the sky in foreign parts
Could be a violent place.
Yes, they were boys and me a child
But I remember well
And if you have the time to spare
There's more that I can tell".
The stranger said that he must go
"Perhaps another day"
Indifferent to the old man's tale
He quickly slipped away.
The old man turned to inward thoughts
His memories to tend
He knew that those who were not there
Could never comprehend.
Those who'd not known the crowded sky
The sounds that drenched the land
Or stood in awe and wonderment would never understand.
The old man left the English pub
And stood awhile outside
The evening vault was milky blue
Cloud-free and stretching wide.
He raised his head and scanned the sky
That held so still and clear
And in his mind a memory
And in his eye a tear.