

# **LIFE IN THE MILITARY**

by  
Bud Turner

## **BACKGROUND LEADING TO ENLISTMENT**

In 1939, I graduated from Nottingham High School in Syracuse, New York. I spent the summer working as a drill press operator in a machine shop where parts were being manufactured for the Curtis variable speed propeller assembly. The shop was owned by a neighbor, Emmett Doyle. I earned \$0.67 per hour.

In the fall of 1939, I enrolled in the New York College of Forestry, with the help of another neighbor, Mr. Zimmerman, who ran the bookstore at Syracuse University. There was no tuition at that school, but the cost of fees, books, and supplies amounted to about \$200 per year.

This was a four year course leading to a Bachelor's degree. The first two years were the same for Forestry School and the Pulp and Paper Program. I planned to enter the Pulp and Paper Course because it was the closest to a Chemical Engineering Program which would allow me to get into the field of plastics.

At the end of the second year, students had to serve a 6-week apprentice in either a forestry job or in a paper mill before they could start the third year. Unfortunately, I had failed a course in Integral Calculus and had to make it up before I began the third year. I also had run out of money, so I dropped out of school and began looking for a job.

For the first two years, the courses were heavy in science with various forestry courses added in. The professors were of very high quality, since the state paid higher salaries than Syracuse University did at that time.

One of the most interesting courses was called, "Dendrology", the study of the identification of trees. For laboratories, we would go to a wooded area and the instructor would teach us how to identify trees by their leaves, bark, shape, color, etc. For tests, he would stop at a tree and point to it. We would then write down the Latin name, common name, and identifying characteristics. At the end of the course, we could identify 40 trees by their leaves, and 20 trees by their bark. The only Latin name I remembered was, "Liquidambar Styraciflua Hamameladaceae"- better known as Red Gum.

Luckily, I was offered a job by a close friend and neighbor of Mimzi's family, Mr. Ed White. He was a Plant Engineer at Crouse Hinds Co., a manufacturer of electrical junction boxes known as Condulets. My job was to move steel drums of condulets from the foundry to finishing areas and then to packing stations. Loaded drums weighed between 300 and 400 pounds, so I was able to get in good physical condition on that job.

By June of 1942, the war was well under way, and I knew I had to make a decision; either volunteer in the Army Air Corp, with a chance to learn how to fly, or wait to be drafted and end up in whatever branch of the service that was needed at the time. I chose to volunteer, and in early June, 1942, I was on my way by train to a base at Fort Niagara, near Buffalo, N.Y.

We arrived at night, and were issued G.I. clothes and supplies. Then my military education really began. We were asked to line up for what was called a "short arm inspection." We were told to unzip our pants, remove our penises, pull back the foreskin so a guy with a flashlight could walk by and look for any evidence of sexual diseases. Later, we were shown films on how to acquire these diseases. So my first lesson in the military was - **YOU LEAVE YOUR PRIVACY AT THE GATE WHEN YOU ENTER THE MILITARY!**

The second lesson was - **ALWAYS START OUT WITH YOUR LEFT FOOT!**

## **SHEPPARD FIELD, TEXAS**

The next stop was Sheppard Field, Texas, near Wichita Falls and northwest of Dallas. Shortly after we arrived and were assigned to our bunks, they brought out the "guys with the flashlights". We were beginning to catch on to the drill.

While there, I was qualified to drive a "6X6" truck. This vehicle had 6 axles, 10 wheels, all-wheel drive, and a winch on the front. The winch was usually used to pull some officer's staff car out of the mud. I think I was chosen to be qualified because I had a driver's license.

The typical daily activity consisted of KP (kitchen Patrol), marching drills, retreat formations (at the end of the day when they took the flag down), and lectures and movies explaining military practices and procedures. The KP detail was an opportunity to learn how to peel potatoes, cut up beans, wash dishes, pots and pans and in general clean everything that needed cleaning. If during the daily activities you messed up, you found yourself with extra KP assignments. I got to be pretty good at peeling potatoes.

Another activity was called a "Work Detail". A sergeant would look around for a row of tents that needed to be moved 2 feet to the left and 3 feet back. He then showed us how to do this and after much time and hard work, the tents got moved. It took many inspections before all the superiors agreed that the tents were properly lined up. The next day, the sergeant ordered the tents to be moved back to their original location.

Still another activity was called the "Obstacle Course". This was a physically challenging test to see how far you could go before you dropped. It consisted of walls to climb using a rope, pipes to climb through, barbed wire to climb under, and lots of sand to run through. They kept a record as to how long it took to traverse - too slow and you got extra practice.

The thing I remember mostly about Sheppard Field was the very high temperatures and very low humidity. We were required to drink lots of water and take lots of salt pills.

## **FORT MEYERS, FLORIDA.**

This was the next stop. The air base was just being constructed, so conditions were pretty primitive. Shortly after we got settled in, you'll never guess who we ran into; right, the "guys with the flashlights".

I sometimes wondered after the end of the war and these guys were applying for a job, what they wrote when asked what their military expertise was. Then I wondered what kind of jobs they got. I also wondered if later, the military ever issued flashlights to the women soldiers. If not, it sounds like discrimination to me! Oh well, back to the war.

Fort Meyers is remembered for very high temperatures and very high humidity (August). It also typically rained every day around 3:45 PM and retreat was scheduled for 4:10 PM, so we didn't stand many retreats. That base commander was one cool cookie - I guess he didn't like to stand retreats any more than the rest of us.

## **NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE**

This was a testing and evaluation center to determine if you were qualified to enter the training programs to become a pilot, navigator, or bombardier. They had a number of machines that tested your coordination and reaction times. Eye exams were very thorough including depth perception and color. They had a number of

booths equipped with head phones. They gave tests for hours involving a number of disciplines.

When they finished, I was qualified for all three programs; I chose pilot training.

## **SANTA ANA, CALIFORNIA**

Santa Ana is located just outside Los Angeles. This is where Basic Aviation Cadet

Training was held. They cranked up the discipline and physical training, similar to that at West Point. Daily inspections of foot lockers and personal dress were held, and the blanket on your bed better be tight enough to flip a quarter, or you spent an hour walking between two points at night with a rifle on your shoulder.

There was a lot of concentrated classroom work that was done here in the mornings. We studied basic navigation, Morse code, (which was needed to identify radio beacons at airports when instrument flying so that you landed at the right airport), instrument flying principles, meteorology, mechanics and the like. There were many examinations, and some cadets were dropped from the program. In the afternoon, there was about two hours of exercises - all kinds, followed by a 2 mile run through the sand. It was not a good idea to drop out of the run unless you had a heart attack, broken leg, or something more serious.

We happened to be there during the Christmas of 1942. Apparently, it had become a custom of residents to go to the main streets of Santa Ana and invite cadets for Christmas dinner. We had been given leave to go to town, and I was with some cadets that were invited. It made the Christmas a lot more pleasant.

## **RANKIN AERONAUTICAL ACADEMY, TULARE, CALIFORNIA**

This was a Primary Flight Training School. It was privately owned by Tex Rankin, a very famous stunt pilot in his youth, and today, may still hold records for the most square loops, outside loops, etc. All of the planes were PT-17 Stearman Biplanes. The instructors were all civilian pilots with a great deal of flying time.

We arrived in early January, 1943 on a Sunday night. We were greeted by Tex Rankin who gave a short speech. It was clear that he loved flying, and he told us about the great opportunity we had ahead of us. At the time, he was grounded for some medical reason, and I think he would have given away this school if only he could fly again.

I heard after the war that he was again flying and had taken over the dealership for some commercial airplane. While taking off one day, the engine failed, he hit some power lines and was killed.

The group that arrived that Sunday night was designated Class 43 F, which meant that if we finished the complete flight training course, we would graduate in June 1943. That meant that we had about 8 weeks to complete Primary Flight Training. Historically, about 1/3 of the candidates washed out in Primary.

The program got underway rapidly and consisted of military discipline, classroom training, physical development, as well as flight training. My flight instructor was a civilian, married, owned his own plane and used to fly the mail up and down the west coast. He loved to fly and he passed on this love of flying to his students.

My first flight was an experience that I will never forget. Being free from the ground and being able to move effortlessly through the air was truly an exhilarating experience.

One of the first things he taught me was to always be prepared to land the plane in the event the engine failed. During a training flight, he would pull back the throttle and say, "THIS IS IT." I would then look for whatever emergency sites were available, and glide the plane to the best site, making an approach into the wind. After making the approach, he would advance the throttle and we would resume the training. If he thought I should have picked a different site, he would show me what I should have done. It became second nature to look for smoke on the ground to determine the direction of the wind. Whenever we were flying near an air strip, I knew he wouldn't test me because it would have been too easy.

After 6 hours and 45 minutes, I soloed. At the end of a flight session, we landed and he climbed out of the rear cockpit, mumbling something about the security of his wife and kids. He instructed me to take off, follow the traffic pattern around the field and then come in and land. I did that successfully, although it was clear to me that I had a great deal to learn about controlling an airplane.

As the training progressed, I learned to handle stalls, slow rolls, snap rolls, spins, and other aerial maneuvers. I discovered that the Stearman Biplane was an outstanding aerobatic airplane.

On one solo practice flight, I was practicing stalls. This involves pulling back the throttle, raising the nose until the plane stalls, then lowering the nose and advancing the throttle. The day was cold - near freezing. The carburetor heater switch in the cockpit was on, and after the plane stalled and the throttle advanced,

the engine died. The carburetor had frozen. I was close to a practice landing strip so I landed there without difficulty. I called the Academy and they sent a car to pick me up. The heater was found to be defective.

At the end of about 8 weeks, I was informed that I had passed the Primary training and I was ready for Basic training.

## **FRESNO, CALIFORNIA, BASIC TRAINING**

Basic training was conducted at a military base outside of Fresno, California, not far from Tulare and also in the San Joaquin Valley. The instructors were military pilots, and the planes we would fly were BT-13s and BT-15s. These planes had fixed landing gear, a canopy over the two cockpits, and a larger engine.

Basic training seemed to be just an extension of Primary training. We did more cross-country flying up and down the valley while we developed our navigational skills. As I recall, this was where we began training in the Link Trainers. These were used to learn blind flying abilities.

Link Trainers were a machine that you entered and sat down in a seat that duplicated a typical cockpit, with all of the instruments necessary to fly without being able to see the ground. The Link Trainer Operator could cause all of the sensations you experience when climbing, descending, turning, spinning, and the like. They could even cause the unit to buffet as you would feel in gusty winds. The operator would instruct you to take off and fly a certain course. Then he would announce an emergency - loss of an engine, or perhaps ice formation on the wings. His imagination in thinking up emergency problems was unlimited. At the end of a session, he would point out how some of the problems could have been solved.

Link Trainers were used during the rest of our training in the states, and are still used today for instrument flight training.

## **YUMA ARIZONA, ADVANCED TRAINING**

Yuma is located in the western part of Arizona, close to the California state line, and very close to the Mexican border. There were three types of airplanes used there for training. The AT-6 was an outgrowth of the BT-13s and BT-15s in that they looked very similar except they had retractable landing gear, a more powerful engine, and were equipped with a 30 caliber machine gun for gunnery practice.

The AT-17 was a twin engine plane known as "The Bamboo Bomber". The fuselage and airfoils were cloth covered and it was the main training plane. It was not very exciting to fly.

The third plane, the AT-9, was also a twin engine plane with aluminum skin throughout. It originally was designed as a fighter plane, but for some reason, it never got approved, so they reduced the size of the engine and made an Advanced Training Plane out of it. It was a great airplane to fly. It landed faster than any of the other training planes; about 90-95 miles per hour. When it stalled, the bottom fell out of it and there was no doubt about the fact that it had stalled. For that reason, some students disliked flying it. I loved it!

Yuma is located in desert country. One day, it rained. This was so unusual that everybody ran outdoors just to experience the rain - an unusual occurrence in Yuma.

When landing on the north-south runway headed north, if you made your approach from too far back from the runway, you were probably flying over Mexico. The Mexican government was kept busy registering complaints about training planes over their country.

A few days before graduation, my instructor told me I was slated to be assigned to P-38s, a twin engine fighter plane used in the West Coast Interceptor Command. I was overjoyed. I made an airline reservation to fly home to Syracuse where Mimzi and I planned to get married. Unfortunately, the day of graduation, they changed all of the assignments and cancelled all of our travel plans. It seems as though the Fifteenth Air Force was just being expanded for assignment in Italy and many 4 engine bomber crews were needed. I was assigned to the airbase at Tucson, Arizona, not too far from Yuma.

I don't even recall the ceremony when I received my commission and wings. I was devastated. Nevertheless, I got on a train headed for Syracuse, hoping I could get there and back within the 10 days allowed for the transfer to Tucson. When the train reached St. Louis, MO, it came across some track that was flooded, and the engineer had to back up 18 miles to find another track.

## **HOME AT SYRACUSE, NEW YORK**

The train arrived in Syracuse on Saturday, June 26, 1943. It arrived early in the morning and I was greeted by Mimzi and her dad and my parents, as I recall. Bob Voorhees had the job of tracking down a Municipal Judge to get a marriage

certificate signed. It seems that this judge had a practice of visiting several pubs on Saturday, but Bob managed to track him down and get the necessary papers signed. At the same time, others were contacting the local Catholic priest who agreed to the marriage providing everything was resolved by 3 PM since he had Confessions scheduled for 4 PM.

The marriage went off as scheduled, although to this day, I don't know how so much happened in such a short time. The only uniform I had was a winter uniform; pink pants and wool olive drab jacket. The weather was quite hot and I recall suffering in that uniform.

After the ceremony, there was a reception at my family's home on Sherbourne Road. I was amazed to see so many friends and relatives there. I have no idea how they all managed to congregate there in such a short time. It was exciting to see them all and once again to be with family.

Arrangements had been made to allow Mimzi and I to use the Hollingsworth's home on Skaneateles Lake, about 25 miles away for our honeymoon. Mimzi and I returned to her home where there was another reception. I changed to civilian clothes and we left for the lake in a borrowed car.

Our 2 days at this summer home were memorable. After a year of rigid military life, it was great to be alone with my new wife and my best friend. But Monday came too soon, and we drove home so that I could catch an airline back to Tucson. It was hard to leave Mimzi but I had no choice. Mimzi would meet me in Tucson later.

## **DAVIS-MONTHAN AIR FORCE BASE, TUCSON, ARIZONA**

I arrived at Tucson on time. This was a B-24 training base. That was all that was flown at this location. My first flight in this plane convinced me that this was a boxcar with wings. It was huge! With 5,000 horsepower, a wingspan of 110 feet and a length of about 67 feet, and stood 18 feet tall. When loaded, it weighed 63,000 pounds, carrying over 12,000 pounds of bombs.

This was a plane that required a lot of physical and mental stamina. There were no servos to help reduce the fatigue of operating the controls. All controls were operated by cables between the cockpit and the various controls. With the failure of one or more engines, it required a great deal of physical effort to keep the plane flying, an experience that happened many times while flying combat.

The first important lesson learned was that the B-24 pilot had to make the plane do exactly what was needed instead of having the plane overwhelm the pilot. When flying close formation, it was essential that the pilot had complete control of the plane and immediate changes in the plane's attitude would result from the pilot's changes in controls.

When Mimzi arrived at Tucson, we apparently had free time to visit some of the attractions in the Tucson area. Some of the attractions were historic, either Spanish or Indian based. There seemed to be a lot to see and do in that area, and we visited many sites with other B-24 trainees. As I recall, one of them had his car with him which allowed us the freedom to travel.

## **ALAMOGORDO, NEW MEXICO**

The next base where we trained was in Alamogordo, New Mexico. It also was the place where the 455<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group and the 740<sup>th</sup>, 741<sup>st</sup>, 742<sup>nd</sup>, and 743<sup>rd</sup> Squadrons were first formed. The group and squadron leaders were chosen from officers that had completed a combat tour of duty and consequently knew the type of training that was most important for combat success.

There were no outside living quarters at Alamogordo, so Mimzi flew from Tucson to El Paso, Texas where some strangers helped her to find living accommodations. This was pretty daring for a young lady to travel around without much help in those days. I was very proud of her. We met again at our next station, Salt Lake City, Utah.

## **SALT LAKE CITY, UTAH**

Our next stop was Salt Lake City, Utah. Mimzi arrived and located a room there. Here again, we were able to visit some of the sites in the area.

Flight training concentrated on close formation flying and low level flying. When in combat, the safest places are either at altitude (25,000 feet) or down on the deck (50 feet). At the lower level, the enemy sees you for a shorter time, (assuming trees, hills, and man-made structures obscure the gunner's view). This was an outcome of the experience the group and squadron leaders had in their previous combat experience. The low altitude flying probably had something to do with the many moves we made around the states since many complaints resulted from people who didn't like these monster bombers flying by at tree-top level and shaking everything in sight.

## **LANGLEY FIELD, VIRGINIA**

Our next stop was at Langley Field, Virginia. Since there were no living quarters available in the area, Mimzi flew home to Syracuse.

This was an old base where flying research was headquartered. It also was a home base for B-24s that were used for anti-submarine patrol off the east coast. It was not generally known at the time that there were many German submarines patrolling along the east coast and that many were sunk by the B-24s.

This was the base where our final training took place in the U.S. We practiced almost daily - morning and afternoon, so at the end of the morning when everyone was returning back to the base for lunch, landing became a frustrating experience. We would be coming in to land at, say 3,000 feet altitude and the control tower would instruct us to climb to 8,000 feet and get in line to land. After a while, some pilot would call in and say he had an engine failure and was flying on three engines. The control tower would give him priority to land. It wasn't long before it took two engine failures before the pilot would be given priority. Soon after, a pilot called in and said he was coming in on one engine. The tower cleared the field, called out all the fire and rescue equipment, and they all watched as a single-engine P-51 plane came in and landed. The pilot was instructed to report to the Tower as soon as possible. I imagine they explained to him that that wasn't a very good idea. After that, we went back to getting in line at 8,000 feet.

## **MITCHELL FIELD, LONG ISLAND**

This was our last assignment before going overseas. There were the usual inoculations, legal paperwork, and the like before we left the country. Mimzi came down to New York and stayed in the Pennsylvania Hotel, across the street from the Pennsylvania Station. We were able to get leave at night and would travel by train into New York City to be able to spend the evening with our wives.

One evening, we were in the main ballroom of the Pennsylvania Hotel and Benny

Goodman was playing there at the time. Sometime during the evening, Gene Krupa, a former drummer in this band came in from behind the drapes in the back and started playing the drums. He had just been released from jail on drug charges. When he started playing, you could feel the excitement in the room- he was one of the greatest!

## **THE OVERSEAS FLIGHT TO BRAZIL, AFRICA, AND TUNISIA**

Shortly before Christmas, we left on a flight that would eventually bring us to Tunisia, North Africa. Many of the pilots had been assigned new airplanes and had a chance to fly them cross country around the East to check on the aircraft and the fuel economy. I was not one of those, so my crew and I had to share the use of someone else's plane. I shared the use with Bud Schoene, a pilot from Buffalo, New York.

I believe the first stop was Trinidad, but I'm not sure. It was mainly to refuel. The next stop was Natal, Brazil, which was the most eastern spot in Brazil. There, planes were accumulated until the weather over the southern Atlantic was favorable and a number would be released to fly the Atlantic. Our destination was Dakar, Africa, the westernmost point in Africa. From there, we worked our way up the western coast of Africa until we arrived outside of Tunis, in Tunisia. This was our final training location before leaving for Italy.

The training at Tunis was intense. It was concentrated on close formation flying and low altitude flying. At this base, we lived in tents, and each tent had a small gasoline heater with a stack that passed through the tent and up in the air away from the tent. One day, a pilot was practicing low altitude flying when he hit the top of Colonel Kool's heater pipe. That brought a stem order from the Colonel - no more flights below 50 feet!

Someone found out that there was a British Dump in Bizerte nearby, containing captured German war equipment and supplies. A bottle of whiskey to the guard gave you permission to locate a German motorcycle and drive it back to the base. He even supplied German 87 octane gasoline to fuel the bike. It then became a routine to race these motorcycles up and down the runway. When it was time for the B-24 practicing crews to return to the base, someone would get in a jeep and chase all the motorcyclists off the runway so that the planes could land.

When it came time to fly to Italy, another edict from the Colonel prohibited the motorcycles from being transported to Italy, under severe penalty.

## **COMBAT FROM ITALY**

Our base in Italy was located near the town of Cerignola, near Foggia, which is near the spur of the boot of Italy on the east coast. Our living quarters were in tents in an olive orchard. There were two runway strips, one for the 455<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group and the other for another group. There was no mess hall; food was prepared and dished out from a food line and you then found a place where you could eat

your meal. Drums of hot water were provided for washing and rinsing your mess kits.

The tents were lined up in two rows; enlisted men on one side and the officers on the other. So, our enlisted crews were just across the street from us. Each tent had a gasoline heater. These were made from half of a 55 gallon drum with an opening cut in one side. A coffee tin was filled half way with sand, and a copper tube was fed from a drum outside the tent to the coffee tin, setting inside the drum. The end of the tubing was formed into a circle and the end was plugged and a number of small holes were drilled in the tubing. A hole was cut in the top of the drum and a pipe fastened to the top that went out through the top of the tent.

Lighting this heater was an exciting experience. Those who never learned the technique of lighting it and running out of the tent before it blew, ended up with black faces instead of white. But since the weather in January was freezing, we all learned to live with it. The fuel was captured 87 octane gasoline.

The S2 (Intelligence) tent was located on a rise off the end of the runway. It was near the Mess Area, Briefing Area, Squadron Headquarters, and the like. All of the squadron pilots formed a pool to go to the first pilot who could blow down the S2 tent. The technique was to approach the tent low, rise up enough to go over the tent, and then pull back on the control wheel so that the prop wash would be directed at the tent. The pilot who tried it first probably came the closest. It wasn't long before a number of additional guy ropes were installed on the back side of the tent. This tent had a very non-GI appearance. To someone who didn't know the reason must have wondered if those S2 guys knew something the rest of us didn't!

One day, the Group S2 officer, a Major, came to inspect the Squadron S2 operation. It had rained the night before, and the place was a sea of mud. He was about to enter the tent when he heard the roar of a B-24. He turned to look and discovered he was about on eye level with the pilot. He immediately hit the deck - in the middle of a mud puddle. As the plane raised enough to get over the tent, the prop wash blew the muddy water over the back of the Major. This upset him greatly and he went back to his tent to get cleaned up.

Several pilots observed this incident and they rounded up all the pilots that weren't flying that morning and we collected skeleton crews and went down to the flight line and took off for some unassigned practice. We located the tent blower and the others who were practicing. Around noon, we all returned to the base, and there was the Major sitting in a jeep at the end of the runway marking down all of the plane numbers. When he was done, he had a complete list of all of our planes.

When our crew went down in May 1943, the S2 tent was still standing, but you wouldn't believe the number of ropes that were used to support it!

A typical mission would usually start around 4:00 AM to 5:00 AM. After breakfast, we reported to the Briefing Room, one of the few buildings on the base. Here, the mission would be described in detail along with any intelligence information that might be pertinent. Then we would be given a ride to our planes which were then thoroughly checked. Each crew member had his own list of things to check. At the appointed time, engines would be started, and we would line up on the taxi strips. When a flare was sent off from the control tower, planes began to take off in 30 second intervals. We then assembled in squadron and group formations and headed for the target.

Before every mission, each airman would be given an "Escape Kit". This was a small plastic box containing a map of the area where they were going, a \$5 gold coin, a fishing hook and line, a small compass, and a small hacksaw. The kit would be returned to the S2 people at the end of the mission.

Before entering a combat zone, the gunners would each test fire their guns. They then would collect the empty (and sometimes full) cartridges from the floor and throw them out the window, so that they wouldn't slip on them in the combat zone.

A seasoned pilot once described a heavy bomber mission as, "Endless hours of boredom followed by moments of sheer terror" - probably the best description that I've heard. As we entered enemy territory, the nervous chatter of the internet would taper off and the formation would close up to form a tighter formation, which provides more concentrated fire power against enemy fighters.

As we approached the "Initial Point", the formation would head for the target, and no evasive action could be taken until the bombs were released. This was usually the time when intense anti-aircraft fire was received. Enemy fighters always hit the formations before or after the bombing run. After bomb release, we turned and headed for home. We usually could expect fighter attacks part of the way home.

When we arrived at the home base, we made a report as to the damage that usually occurred, and then went for debriefing where we reported the events of the mission. The Group Medical guy used to mix up a drink for anyone who wanted it. It was made from medicinal alcohol and fruit juice - the best part of the mission! After supper, we usually turned in early since we had to be ready for the early call in the event there would be another mission.

With our early missions, we had fighter escorts part of the way to the targets, but they didn't have sufficient range to stay with us. As soon as they turned around and headed home, the ME-109s and the FW-190s would swarm all over the formations and shoot down a number of bombers. The early German pilots were very skilled, but as the war progressed, you could see the deterioration of their skills. Also, the P-51 was later provided for escort and this plane could accompany the bombers all the way to the target and back. When this began, the American losses of bombers dropped off rapidly.

From the time we first reached Tunis, there was evidence of sabotage, and it involved parachutes. Parachutes were spring loaded and when a handle was pulled, it released the spring and the chute would deploy. A light string prevented the handle from accidentally releasing. The parachutes had to be repacked periodically, and they were trucked to a central point for repacking. When finished, they would be trucked back to the base. On this return trip, saboteurs would climb in the back of the truck and inject sulfuric acid into the chute. When the chute deployed, all you would see was a body falling with cords flowing behind him. A 25,000 foot fall to a certain death.

In Italy, chutes were found with wire holding the handle in, and it was impossible to release the handle. Fortunately, the chutes were built with a flap that could be raised to inspect the handle connection.

As I recall, the first combat mission took place in early February, and was a mission to a railroad marshalling yard in northern Italy. I was selected to fly Bud Shoene's plane. The anti-aircraft flack was pretty heavy, and we picked up quite a bit of it. We lost an engine and lost some gasoline so we had to drop out of the formation. We didn't make it back to our base but I found a landing strip just north of Bari, Italy. It was dark when we arrived there, and we made one pass over the landing strip. It looked very short, but we were low on fuel so the next time around, we landed. We touched down at the very beginning of the runway and used the brakes hard to stop. There was about 4 or 5 lengths of the plane remaining after we came to a stop.

We went to the Operations Office there and they asked us if we just landed a B-24. They said the runway was way too short for a B-24; the main runway was under repair. They arranged to get us a ride back to the base after we arranged to get the plane repaired.

When Bud Schoene heard that there were 152 holes in his plane and one engine had to be replaced, he was distraught to say the least. To make matters worse, he had to wait until the main runway was reopened before he could retrieve his plane.

On one of the early missions to Northern Italy, we were returning along the west side of Italy, near Mt. Vesuvius, when a wingman's plane blew up. It just disintegrated, with the loss of 10 men. The plane probably had experienced some damage that caused a gasoline leak into the bomb bay and an electrical spark set off the gasoline vapors. The bomb bay could not only carry the bombs but it could become a bomb itself very easily. The crew lived in the tent next to ours.

Perhaps, the most dangerous mission we were on was a mission to Northern Italy. It was considered a "Milk Run". There were no enemy fighters, and the flack seemed light. After finishing the bomb run, we discovered a rather large hole in the lower surface of the right wing - about 1 foot from the fuselage. The hole was about 3 inches in diameter. After we landed and inspected the hole, we could see something stuck inside the fuel cell with gasoline dripping from it. We isolated the plane and kept everyone away from it. They flew a Captain in from the Anzio Beachhead who was an ordinance expert. He removed what he identified as a nose fuse from an 88 mm anti-aircraft shell that had not exploded. He destroyed the fuse and flew back to Anzio.

88 mm flack shells are about 3 inches in diameter and are equipped with two fuses, one in the nose and one in the tail. The timing of these fuses can be set slightly differently in order to determine the pattern of the flak when it explodes. When the shell explodes, a number of jagged pieces of iron are sent flying in the vicinity of the explosion. In this case, the tail fuse went off but not the nose fuse. Had the nose fuse detonated, it would have taken the wing off, and B-24s are reputed to not fly well without the wing!

Another mission was to bomb a German submarine base at Tulon, France. As I recall, that mission was quite successful.

On another mission to, I believe, either Budapest, Hungary or Bucharest, Romania. As we crossed Yugoslavia, the gunners test fired their guns. I had been assigned the fourth position in a flight of four - directly under the lead ship and slightly behind. When the waist gunners threw out the rounds collected off the floor, they hit our windshield and broke it. Well, at 25,000 feet elevation, the temperature is 45-50 degrees below zero. The flight engineer jammed a flack jacket in the opening so that we weren't facing a 200 MPH wind, but both my feet and hands were badly frozen. We flew about 4 hours under those conditions.

Another mission was very far into Germany, and we were told that losses could reach as high as 75 %. Fortunately, before we reached Austria, the weather turned severe, so the mission was scrubbed.

There were two methods of keeping track of the number of missions that were flown. To complete a tour of duty in the Fifteenth Air Force required 50 missions. Besides counting the actual missions flown, there were some missions that were considered very hazardous, and double credit was given for those missions.

The mission to Styria, Austria was a double mission. There was a ball bearing factory there and it was hoped that the destruction of this bearing factory would reduce the output of war equipment such as tanks and planes. But this was also the reason that the Germans defended the target with heavy concentrations of flak guns and fighter planes. The mission was fairly successful, but our losses were high. There were around 70-80 fighter planes going most of the way up and back. The Germans later moved this ball bearing plant into the side of a mountain so that it couldn't be bombed directly.

Ploesti was a very high priority target. Over a third of Hitler's fuel needs came from the oil fields and refineries around Ploesti, Romania. The first mission to Ploesti was made from North Africa, and was a low altitude mission. It took place in August of 1943, and of the 177 bombers sent on the mission, 54 didn't make it back.

They flew from North Africa to the mountains of Yugoslavia and then headed East towards Ploesti. When they passed over the mountains, they dropped down on the deck and headed for the target. It is very difficult to navigate at low altitude. The check point you are looking for may be just on the other side of a hill but you can't see it because you are too low. Some groups got lost. They were looking for the Blue Danube, but it turned out to be brown. When they reached the target area, the lead navigator headed for nearby Bucharest, and this caused all sorts of confusion over the target. The targets in the area were hit and much damage resulted. I believe there were more Congressional Medals of Honor given to leaders of this mission than any other.

This raid convinced the Germans that they needed to intensify the defense of the Ploesti area, and as a result, Ploesti became the second largest defense system in Europe. The next raid took place in April 1944 and was a high altitude mission. Our crew was on this mission as well as two more before our final mission to Ploesti on May 18, 1944.

## **OUR FINAL MISSION, PLOESTI REFINERY, MAY 18,1944**

On May 18<sup>th</sup>, we were scheduled to bomb an oil refinery outside of Ploesti, Romania. Our plane had been grounded to allow some modifications to be made to one of the gun turrets. We were assigned to fly a plane normally flown by the Squadron Commander, Captain David Thayer, called "Rock", a Texan with the build of a football tackle and a very skilled pilot.

Our right waist gunner had been grounded because he had flown extra missions with other crews and they didn't want him to get ahead of our crew in missions. A replacement was assigned who had never flown a combat mission before. As usual, we expected very heavy opposition. Typically, we flew through flak for about 25 minutes, and it was unusual if you didn't experience some damage before reaching home.

This flight was fairly uneventful until we approached the target. About 20 seconds before bomb release, we received a direct hit in the right wing that destroyed one fuel cell, knocked out one engine, and a supercharger on another engine. We probably lost about 200-300 gallons of fuel, and about 70%-80% of the power from the engine with the damaged supercharger.

We applied full power in order to stay in the formation until the bombs were released, but after we turned toward home, we reduced the power because the engines could only operate a few minutes at full power before failing. As a result, we had to drop out of the formation and we headed for home by ourselves. We also could not maintain our altitude, and we expected to be jumped by German fighters since a single bomber is very vulnerable to fighters. I anticipated problems crossing the mountains of southern Yugoslavia where the clouds had built up to 20,000 feet, and I knew that there were mountain peaks above 10,000 feet. I called the navigator and told him to track our path as accurately as possible because we might have to fly through the clouds on instruments and we had to know where those mountain peaks were. He responded by saying HE DIDN'T BRING ANY MAPS WITH HIM! I was shocked that a navigator would go on a combat mission without the ability to navigate. I asked him why he bothered to come on the mission since he was just excess weight and of no use to the crew. He had no answer.

We opened up the escape kits to get at those maps. Every escape kit had a map of Tulon, France instead of a map showing Romania and Yugoslavia. The S2 had issued the wrong escape kits. So much for the maps!.

Before we left the plains of Romania and approached the mountains of Yugoslavia, I decided our only option was to look for valleys through the mountains and fly below the cloud layer in the valleys. Since the clouds could close off the passageways through the valleys, we flew very close to one side of the valley, so that we had enough space to turn around in the valley and retrace our path. We had to do this either once or twice. Eventually, we were approaching the southern border of Yugoslavia on the border of Albania when the fuel ran out. The engines began to cut out and then pick up again, causing very severe yawing. I gave the alarm signal to bailout while I tried to hold the plane as steady as possible. The flight engineer laid my parachute alongside of my chair before he jumped. The navigator kept yelling in my ear asking if I was going to jump. I ordered him to jump, but he was panicking. I told him to sit down, I lowered the nose, advanced the throttles, (the engines started to put out power) and started to look for a place to land. With the plane yawing out of control as soon as I let go of the control wheel, I knew I didn't have time enough to reach down and clip on my parachute, leave my seat, move to the bomb bay and jump. The plane would have been into the side of the mountain by then.

As the plane picked up speed, I hoped the higher speed would give me more choices as to where to land. The terrain was very rough and I didn't see any place that offered any hope. While I was looking for a landing spot, flak from a German 88 mm gun was being directed at the plane. By the time the speed had increased to about 175-180 MPH, I looked to the left and saw a flat field. I cut the throttles back and knew I couldn't depend on the engines anymore, so I began a "dead stick" landing. After lowering the flaps, I knew I was too high and had too much air speed, so I turned 90 degrees and paralleled the field until I was low enough and slow enough to land. As I approached the field, I left the landing gear up. (The Germans used to take bombers that were slightly damaged, repair them, and then sneak them into an American formation. It was easy for them to shoot 2 or 3 bombers down before the Americans caught on as to what was happening).

As I approached the field, I saw the anti-aircraft gun that had been shooting at our plane. I leveled off at the edge of the field about 5-10 feet above the ground. With the air speed at 135 mph, I lowered the nose slightly so that the plane would touch down forward of the bomb bay first. If the rear bulkhead hit first, I was afraid it would tear the fuselage in half. I was able to hold the plane fairly level until the speed dropped below about 40 MPH when the left wing dipped down and the #1 propeller (outside left) came off and cart-wheeled in toward the cockpit. Fortunately, it veered off toward the front before it arrived at the cockpit.

I ordered the navigator to climb out the top hatch and slide down the nose. I followed him, and from the ground on the left side, I used my 45 cal. automatic to break the plastic window on the side of the nose, and fired three shots at the bombsite before the gun jammed. (I believe with the gun inside the opening where the window was, a spent cartridge probably caused the gun to jam. In any event, I field stripped the gun and threw the parts all over the field.

By then, I had a chance to look over the situation and saw about 20-25 German soldiers running toward the plane, some of whom were firing their sub machine guns. I also was amazed to see an American Airman standing in front of the plane. It was the right waist gunner who was on his first combat mission, and who apparently was too frightened to parachute. How fortunate for him I decided to land the plane!

It was apparent that I had landed on a German Auxiliary Airdrome. There were no German planes on the field, having been moved to other locations that needed better defense. They moved us to a small shack near the middle of the field while they decided what to do with us. While there, a German soldier came in the shack yelling, "Where is the spring?" I'll bet it was about 30-40 feet away from where I field stripped the gun - it really sprung!.

They next moved us back to the rear section of the plane while they searched the plane. By this time, there were about 30-40 Germans around the plane - some civilians. I noticed that some of them would walk around the back of the plane and then back to the waist window to get another look at us. I finally realized they were looking at a row and a half of German swastikas painted on the tail turret for planes that were shot down. This was the first time the Germans discovered that German planes were being shot down as well. The German propaganda never admitted the loss of any German planes.

They moved us into a small jail. After a thorough search, they took my wrist watch and leather jacket, never to be seen again. The cell was about 6 feet wide and perhaps 12 feet long. The bed consisted of a concrete slab, slightly inclined. There was a single window about 12 inches square with iron bars in the opening. It looked out onto a wall that had imbedded broken glass along the top of the wall to discourage climbing over it. I remember eating brown bread (reported to be made from sawdust), coffee (acorns), and some kind of broth. No danger of gaining weight there!.

Looking back on the landing, I recall that I had complete control of the plane while it was gliding, even though it had been heavily damaged from flak hits. My hands were very steady and light on the controls, and I could position the plane exactly where I wanted it. After a short time in jail, my hands began to shake - they're still shaking!

At the same time, the crew that bailed out was landing higher in the mountains and landing in some very rugged terrain. One landed OK and was busy hiding his parachute in some bushes when he looked up and saw about 6 natives watching him and wondering just what he was doing. Another landed with his chute caught in some branches at the side of a cliff. He looked up and saw some civilians pulling on the cloth of his chute. He didn't know if they were after the silk or whether they were trying to help him to safety. Luckily they were trying to help him.

The civilians located a man who spoke English. They showed the crew leaflets saying the U. S. would pay \$500 for the return of every American airman, but they explained that if they did not turn in the airmen, the Germans would come up and capture the prisoners and kill a few civilians. They took the crew to a small local store, and the co-pilot used a \$5 gold coin from his escape kit to buy a pack of cigarettes. The co-pilot had never smoked before in his life. .

The next day, all of the crew was together again. Either the next day or the day after, they loaded us all in the back of a stake truck with a canvass cover and began a journey up to Wiener Neustadt, Austria, on a road called, "The Street of the Balkans". I lost track of the time - perhaps 3 or 4 days. They also loaded on the back of the truck duffle bags of clothing, boots, etc. that they found on the plane. There were 2 guards who rode in the back, and one driver. The road was a collection of serpentine curves that led down one mountain side and up another. Yugoslavia has some very rugged mountains.

About the first night, the guards were getting tired and less alert, so we loosened some of the tarp ropes and began taking items from the duffle bag and sliding them between the truck body and the tarp, hoping the guards wouldn't see the item falling out of the truck. This operation continued until everything in the duffle bags was gone except a teardrop shape enclosure for a loop antenna that they removed from the plane. This enclosure was made of aluminum and was about 6-8 inches in diameter and perhaps 18-20 inches long. One night, we loosened the ropes some more, and when the truck was rounding a curve, we slid it out. It made a loud crash when it first hit the ground and then we heard it bounce down the mountain side. The guards heard it also and stopped the truck. They looked in the

back and saw two empty duffle bags. Needless to say, they didn't seem to be too happy about the whole thing, but they decided to resume the trip.

Toward the end of the trip, we stopped at an airport in the mountains where they placed us in a local jail. Without a doubt, this was the place where my morale hit rock bottom. The jail cell was about 3½ feet wide, 6½ feet long with one window with bars but without glass. When it rained, the water came in the window and collected in the bottom of the cell. There were two pieces of pipe, about 1½ inches in diameter that were imbedded horizontally in the walls about 6 inches from the walls and up about 3 inches. The mattress was burlap containing some wood chips and it floated in several inches of water. I decided my sleeping mode for the night would be to sleep standing up on one of those pipes. Everything started out OK until some visitors showed up. Two hungry rats decided that they would chew on my boots. I found that after I kicked them away, I could close my eyes for about 6-10 seconds before they returned. Needless to say, by morning, I was not feeling very chipper.

### **WIENER NEUSTADT, AUSTRIA - FIRST INTERROGATION**

When the truck ride was finished, they left us at an interrogation center in Wiener Neustadt, Austria. There didn't seem to be many prisoners there at the time. Once again, we were kept in individual rooms, but I don't recall the details of the facilities. The interrogator was a Major in the German Air Force (Luftwaffe) and he had been a professor in an Austrian University. He told me when I was married, where I had trained, and he said if I were to be held there for about two weeks, he would be able to tell me which missions I had flown. The Germans had a very thorough intelligence system that used newspapers and magazines, as well as spies to provide a wealth of information. By telling you this information, they hope that you will be impressed with their extensive knowledge and that you will say something that will confirm some knowledge that they already had. They use many techniques to get you to open up. This center used the, "Friendly Father" approach. I found it interesting, but stuck with name, rank and serial number. We had been forewarned of the various techniques that would be used to pry information from us.

### **FRANKFORT-ON-THE-MAIN, GERMANY - MAIN INTERROGATION CENTER**

We arrived at this interrogation center by train. All Air Force prisoners were processed through this center. There were many prisoners there and the Germans were very well organized. They generally used threats for their mode of operation.

We were questioned many times by many interrogators. In one case, I was being questioned when a German officer entered the room, pulled out his pistol and pointed it at my head. He said he wanted to know certain information about the 455<sup>th</sup> Group or he would shoot me. I gave him the name, rank, and serial number and he pulled the trigger. Fortunately, there was no bullet in the gun. He left the room laughing.

## **SAGAN, GERMANY - STALAG LUFT III - FIRST PERMANENT CAMP**

At Frankfort, the enlisted men and the officers were separated and sent to different camps. We arrived at Stalag Luft III on June 6, 1944 - D Day, the day the Allies landed in France. This camp was located in Poland and the camp was in an area known as Silesia. This was our first opportunity to talk to other Americans, and we were greeted with silence. It seems that there was a committee in the camp who were responsible to verify the authenticity of every prisoner before we could talk to anyone. The Germans were always trying to sneak in stooges to gain intelligence.

Many of the details that I will mention about confinement come from a book called, "Escape From Terror" by a senior officer in our camp, Col. Paul Burton. He was a B-24 pilot who was given permission by the ranking U.S. officer in camp to maintain a diary. Normally, this is prohibited in enemy territory.

This camp was constructed in the shape of a cross. We were held in the newest branch, called the West Camp (Westlager). This camp was reputed to be the most escape-proof, since it avoided the means of escape that were used in the older three camps. The containment fence was 10 feet tall and 5 feet thick. It was constructed of 2 fences 5 feet apart with thick barbed wire in between. At the top, there were three more strands of barbed wire at a 45 degree angle. There were guard towers at the corners as well as in between on the sides. These towers were called, "Goon Towers". Guards were equipped with rifles, machine guns, searchlights, field glasses and a telephone.

In the West compound, there were 17 barracks that held about 2,400 prisoners, including two Navy Officers and two chaplains from the British Army. I lived in a 15-man room that measured 21 feet by 16 feet. The equipment in the room consisted of 4 stools, two benches, two tables, two water pitchers, and a locker. Each man had a cup, bowl, knife, fork, spoon and small dish towel. There were 5

triple decker bunks with a few wooden slats to support the mattress, which was made of a burlap bag filled with wood chips.

There were three outdoor toilets (aborts) and each had to be used by 800 prisoners. They frequently were overflowing, and with no screens in the buildings, everyone was treated to a regular case of gastroenteritis.

There was a central kitchen, and three times a day, krieges lined up for their hot water ration, which was used for cooking, washing, and shaving. The kitchen used to also boil German-issued potatoes. Goon rations usually consisted of bread, potatoes, and some vegetables. In addition, Red Cross Parcels were issued, one half box per person per week. The box contained a can of Spam, a can of Corned Beef, a can of Oleo margarine, some crackers, and some cigarettes. There also was a "O" Bar, a chocolate, high nutrition bar that didn't melt in warm weather.

After about 2 months, some letters began to appear. After 5 or 6 months, packages from home started to arrive. Some of the letters were pretty painful, and some of the letters were posted on a bulletin board for general amusement. One wife said she was so upset by her husband's capture that she moved out of his parent's home and rented an apartment. She also bought a used Buick Convertible, and explained to him that if he could maintain his present status for another 1½ years, the car would be all paid for when he returned. There were a few "Dear John" letters saying that she had found someone else. Some of the packages indicated the senders didn't understand the status of the prisoners - they sent boxes containing ski wax and toilet paper, assuming they were being held in Switzerland!

Life in camp was generally boring. All we thought about was food and escape. We were told that the Geneva Convention Treaty pertaining to POWs had a condition that you could be repatriated in 7 years if the war wasn't over by then. But with the Allied landing in France already accomplished, we thought it would be over within a year or two.

Around September, 1944, we began to set aside some food that would be used to bake a cake to celebrate Christmas. About a week before Christmas, the cake was mixed up using crackers, "O" bars, oleo, and a secret ingredient - German tooth paste, which had some bicarbonate in it. It was hoped that the resulting CO<sub>2</sub> would add a little levity to the cake. The batter was sent over to the kitchen every day and it got baked a little. The next day, the procedure was repeated until the cake was done. Unfortunately, we didn't have enough of the tooth paste, and as a result, the cake had a rather "solid" feel to it. None was wasted. But since we had saved up

food for this one meal, our stomachs couldn't handle the volume, and we all spent the night heaving up that delicious dinner.

Sometime in the fall, the Senior American Officer (SAO) issued orders that everyone had to start an accelerated physical training program by walking around the compound a number of times every day, in expectation of a forced march that would happen when the Russian troops approached the camp from the East. On Sunday, January 28, 1945, the camp was evacuated.

## **FORCED MARCH = SAGAN TO NUREMBERG**

The night before, we had been instructed to gather our blankets, food, and clothing in preparation for the forced march. They lined us up outside the camp at 7:30 PM where we stood around in the freezing cold until midnight. We then double-timed away from the camp in columns of three. Each prisoner was given a Red Cross Parcel box but it was impossible to carry this box along with everything else we had to carry, so we broke open the boxes and stuffed as much food in our pockets and discarded the rest.

The weather was brutally cold - the snow would squeak when you walked on it probably well below zero Fahrenheit. There were about 10,000 Kriegen in this march and the line extended about 15 miles. The first stop was at Freiwaldau, about 16 miles from Sagan. There was a prison there where about half of the group could rest at a time. The other half waited outside in the cold weather until it was their turn to come in.

The march itself was something that is hard to describe. The weaker Kriegen were kept in the center column, so if they staggered, someone could grab them before they fell out of the march and got shot by the guards. The center column was also used to allow men to get some rest. By closing your eyes and remembering to put one foot in front of the other, you would bounce between the men in the outside columns and still stay in the formation, thus getting a little rest.

Most, if not all, of the prisoners were hallucinating, talking to themselves, and some lost complete control of their minds. We finally stopped on January 30, 1945 in the town of Muscau, Germany. During the 36 hours of marching, we travelled 40 miles. We out-marched three sets of guards, and the horses that were pulling a wagonload of German supplies gave out.

After another 4 miles, we approached a Pottery Factory where 1,000 prisoners could rest and get warm. At this stage, some prisoners were passing out on their

feet. Some wanted to lie down in the snow and sleep. Most were seeing visions and hearing strange noises. A few went insane.

After I warmed up, I removed my shoes and socks and discovered my toes had turned green. One of the American prisoners had had some previous first aid training and the International Red Cross had given him some drugs and medical supplies. He looked at the toes and put some sulfa powder on them. He said I would have to decide to be turned over to the German medical people for further treatment or take a chance staying with the American prisoners. I decided to stay, even though I might lose some toes. There were rumors going around that German doctors were conducting experiments on prisoners.

We spent the night in the factory and received a ration of bread and margarine while we were there. The next day, we marched 11 miles. It was easier after the rest and a chance to get warm. We stopped at the town of Glaustein where there were 18 barns. The straw on the floor of the barn was better than any bed in a Holiday Inn I have ever stayed at.

The next morning, we walked 5 miles where we were loaded onto 40 and 8 cars (40 men and 8 horses). There were about 60 men in most cars, so you could only stand. There was no food or sanitary facilities on the train. Whenever the train stopped, everyone got off and relieved themselves in whatever way was necessary- and always in public view. The Russians were within 60 miles of us at that point.

We arrived at the Nuremberg Railroad Yards on February 4, 1945. Some of the prisoners had been routed further south to Mooseburg, near Munich. We were herded to a camp about 1 kilometer away. The camp had previously been occupied by Italians and looked like a pig pen, complete with lice and a variety of other bugs. There were no lights, latrines, and very little fresh water. There were 14 small barracks, each containing 144 triple-decker bunks. Since there weren't enough, some of us slept on tables or the floors. In time, the Germans provided some additional space that helped to relieve the crowded conditions.

Since we were very close to the main marshalling yards and the city of Nuremberg, we were exposed to some severe bombing for the next two months. In the daytime, the American bombers would come over, and at night, the British bombers would appear. When a 4,000 pound went off, it would knock you off your feet onto the ground from the concussion. Finally, the Senior American Officer ordered the prisoners to dig slit trenches outside the barracks, using tin cans and hands to dig with. We used these during air raids, even though the

Germans tried to stop their use. A lot of Krieges stayed alive as a result of those slit trenches.

We started to receive German rations of potatoes, bread, kraut, margarine, and soup. The Red Cross food was about gone, and we were hungrier than at any time in the past. By the end of February, the caloric count of the rations was well below that required to sustain life. When we did receive German rations, it often included cheese or kraut that had been contaminated with ammonia (a refrigerant used in cooling systems that escaped during bombing damage). We also received dehydrated vegetables that were filled with bugs and worms. We ate it all, because that was all that was available to eat. Our weight loss was severe. There wasn't much left besides skin and bones. It was even painful just to sit down.

On March 14, 1945, three GI trucks arrived from Switzerland loaded with Red Cross parcels. This seemed to be the turning point for the food supply, because parcels seemed to be arriving on a more regular schedule.

On April 4, 1945, after two months of intense bombing, we started a march to Moosberg which was 100 miles to the south. The march was relatively uneventful. The weather was warmer and the pace was reasonable. I don't recall the number of days, but when we arrived, we discovered that Moosberg was a collection point of all POWs, numbering around 128,000 prisoners. Food seemed to be available and we all began to gain some weight.

We lived in tents and slept on the ground. Although I had developed an infection in my kidneys, I was pretty happy with the fact that my toes had cleared up and it looked as though I wouldn't lose any of them.

By the end of April, it was believed that the Allied Forces were nearby. On Saturday, April 28, 1945, a captain from Gen. George Patton's army surrendered at the camp and told us that Patton's Army would be arriving in the morning. There would be a lot of arms fire and all POWs should stay as low as possible when they arrived.

On Sunday morning, April 29, 1945, orange colored tanks could be seen coming over the horizon. A skirmish ensued that lasted about 1½ hours. The guard towers were shot up, and finally, a tank entered the main gate. It didn't open the gate - it just tore down the gate. An older soldier climbed out of the tank and asked where a certain Lt. was located. The POWs led him to a tent and the soldier said, "Well, I guess the old man got you out of trouble again". It was the Lieutenant's father.

Later in the day, General Patton came in the camp in his command vehicle, all dressed up with his two pearl handled revolvers and gave a short speech. We were liberated at last.

## **CAMP LUCKY STRIKE - NEAR PARIS**

After a few days, we were transported to Camp Lucky Strike, located just outside of Paris, France. This had been a staging area for soldiers getting ready to enter combat. It was very large and was laid out like the streets in a city. We lived in tents, but we had cots on which to sleep. Real luxury! We would go to an area mess tent and have a meal. We would then walk down the street to another mess tent and have another meal. By then, we had over-eaten for the size of our shrunken stomachs so we had to unload some of that food before we went on to another mess tent. We had a hard time accepting the idea that the food supply was not going to run out.

The next move was to board a Liberty Ship headed across the Atlantic and on the way home. We were given new clothes and some spending money. It wasn't long before the Krieges discovered the ship's store where candy bars and cigarettes could be purchased. The candy ran out after the third day. Pockets were bulging with candy bars and cigarettes!

The voyage took about two weeks. When we arrived in the states, we were processed and given a 30 day leave. I returned to Syracuse, weighing around 165 pounds, mostly fat. From the time we arrived in Mooseburg, we ate everything that was available to eat, and as a result, we gained weight rapidly.

It was great to see Mimzi and our families and to enjoy the freedoms that we tend to take for granted. I learned to ride a horse, and generally enjoyed the chance to catch up on things that were denied during the wartime period.

After the leave was up, I reported to Atlantic City for reassignment. I was sent to Dothan Field, Alabama. There were no housing facilities there so Mimzi could not stay there with me. The base was a training school for Mexican cadets, and there were some P-51 Mustangs there. After checking in at the base, we were met with a sign at the Operations Office that said, "No Combat Returnees Will Fly The P-38, P-51, or P-47 Type Aircraft". Needless to say, we were all pretty disgusted with this assignment, because we all wanted to get back into flying again.

The base commander, a Colonel, tried to treat the returning POWs like cadets, but he wasn't very successful. He called a meeting of all POWs and none of us showed

up. He confined us to the base, so most of us went home, got our cars, and returned to the base. We then started to visit various spots of interest, returning every few days to pick up some clean clothes.

By August, the war was over and I requested a discharge. I travelled to Fort Dix, New Jersey where I was discharged, effective December 6, 1945. This was the end of my military career.

## **EPILOGUE**

After three and a half years in the Army Air Corps, I am reminded of many memories both good and bad. Among the good memories are the pilots who taught me to fly. All of them seemed to have that love of flying that they passed on to their students. As a result, flying became a part of my life I will never forget.

I recall memories of interesting things and places that I saw around the country and parts of the world that I might never have seen had I not joined the military. I recall memories of many airmen from our squadron, especially those who were on our crew, who faced death on a daily basis with me - some very amazing people.

And of course, there were many bad memories. The memories of friends lost in combat were difficult, especially those crewmembers who were lost when their plane exploded in the air. Ten people were wiped out in a second with no evidence that they existed before the explosion. Some men died when their parachutes didn't open - a long time to think of how they would land.

Memories of the 44<sup>th</sup> combat mission - our last - continue to linger on. I've probably re-flown that mission at night every few weeks for the last 58 years or so, searching for something that could have been done better. I have always concluded that guiding the plane through the valleys of the Yugoslavian Mountains under the cloud layer almost to the Adriatic Sea was done with a high level of skill. I have always concluded that the presence of the German Airfield within gliding distance was a stroke of luck beyond belief.

The memory of the navigator, Lt. Leonard Hines, who caused 9 other airmen to suffer a year in prison camp as a result of his irresponsibility keeps coming back. I believe with proper maps, we could have reached the east coast of Italy. The memory of the intelligence people who gave us the wrong maps in the escape kits doesn't speak well for them either.

The memories of the Forced March are still very painful, and will never go away. It was a striking example of how much abuse the human body can take and still

survive. I sometimes wonder if those who lost control of their minds ever regained their sanity, or if their bodies recovered but not their minds.

This story was written because Mimzi wanted it to be written as part of our family history. She also thought that there might be some therapeutic benefit from putting it down on paper. There were times when it was very difficult to relive parts of it, but now it is done.

I don't plan to write anything further about my past. Instead, I'll try to put the bad memories behind me, and get back to enjoying my hobby of amateur radio, do some travelling, and perhaps make a few more worthwhile photographs.

THE END

January 11,2002