

I, Robert Vannoy Black, was born in the small town of Mexia, Texas, which is located about forty miles east (and slightly north) of Waco. My parents were Grandison Dee Royston and Faira Jewell (Weldon) Black. My birth date was March 1, 1923. I was born at the beginning of the "great depression". I have a brother, Weldon, who is three years older, and a sister (now deceased) six years older than I. I have a brother, Glenn, who is nine years younger. My parents were affected badly by the depression. Dad worked in the oil fields during the oil boom, at Mexia, during the 1920's. His work took all of us to Van and Longview, Texas, during the oil booms at those locations. My Dad worked as a laborer. My mother worked hard in making a good home for us, on the meager pay Dad received. I began school at Van, Texas, completing my first year. My second year was in the Pine Tree School, located just east of Longview, Texas. We had moved back to Mexia for my third year of school. I completed both my grade school and high school education at Mexia.

While I was in Mexia High School, several of the boys that I was in school with were members of the National Guard. Beginning in 1939, I had a great desire to join the National Guards, as they made \$1.00 for each meeting, and would go for about two weeks training during the summer. My Dad was adamantly against me joining, so I stayed a "civilian", unable to join up with my friends. I wasn't able to wear the uniform, that I secretly envied my friends wearing. As it turned out, the Texas National Guard made up the 36th. Division. Many of the friends were killed during WW-2. There was one batallion, which was the Second Batallion of the Artillery, which was sent to the South Pacific. They were captured in Java, or I should say the ones who were not killed, were captured. This batallion was known as the famous "Lost Batallion". The War Department did not know where this complete batallion was for the whole war, except for a few letters that were received from men while they were prisoners-of-war, in Japan. There were only a few letters that got back to the States. I have a friend, Bob Stubbs, who was in the Second Batallion, and was captured by the Japs, on 2 March 1942, and was a prisoner for 3½ years.

After December 7, 1941, when I thought I could talk with my Dad, I asked him to sign a minors release, so I could enter the military. I will not try to attempt to give his answer, but I would certainly know that he would not agree for me to go to the war. Everybody was patriotic during WW-2. It was very common for one or two of the boys to drop out of high school and join the service, at any time. Many dropped out during the senior year to do so. I dropped out to go to work for a short time in the Naval Air Station, at Corpus Christi, Texas. I used the minors release the following October to "join up". By October, I did reluctantly have my dad and mom's approval. I wanted their approval, and to not have to feel that I had to "run off" to join.

October 26, 1942, I volunteered for the Army Air Corps. I was very proud of my accomplishment, and for the first time in my life, I put my utmost into everything. I enlisted at Dodd Field, Fort Sam Houston; San Antonio, Texas. We were given the I. Q. test, and I put everything into it that I had to do my best. Surprisingly, I did make a high score on the test. I was sent to Greenville, Texas for my basic training. I was in very good physical condition, and all of the drilling, running, crawling, the obstacle course, or any other physical exertion was a "breeze" to me, as I was only nineteen years of age, and had been eager to try my military life.

After our basic training (or as some call "boot camp") had finished, we were separated into different groups. I don't know where the group of men were sent, or what they did after we didn't see them and more, that seemed to not know their right hand from their left during our close-order drill. I was sent to aircraft mechanic school, at Sheppard Field, Wichita Falls, Texas. I arrived at Sheppard Field in January, 1943. The school lasted for four months. We were rushed from one subject to the other, and I still feel as if I did not learn as much as I should during this time. My grade average was 83, which was considered between "satisfactory and very satisfactory". During this school, which lasted for eight hours a day, for five days a week, we still ran the obstacle course, marched, bivouaced, and took cross-country hikes. We were kept very busy, but I still enjoyed every minute of it. I wore my uniform proudly, and put everything that I had into the training. I began the AM school on February 4, 1943, and completed it on June 4, 1943. Upon completion of our AM school, we were put into a decompression chamber, to determine if we were fit for high altitude flying. I passed the test, then I was sent to Fort Myers, Fla., for Aerial Gunnery School. I would like to add, at this time, that during the AM school, we went to school for eight hours a day, ate one meal during that time, and after school, we either marched, ran the obstacle course, etc. for three more hours. The remaining thirteen hours, we went to eat two meals, slept, and did any of the other things we wished to do, if we had time. We could not leave the base, as we couldn't get a pass until we had our "week-end", which could easily have been during the mid-week. While I was at Sheppard Field, the order was passed, that any personnel that was attending any technical training school, would be promoted to PFC. I sewed that single stripe on my uniform.

We arrived at Buckingham Army Air Field, Ft. Myers, Florida, during the hot weather of June, 1943. We worked K.P. until it was our time to begin the Aerial Gunnery school. We were all glad to see our names appear on the bulletin board, when our gunnery school was to begin. I enjoyed the gunnery school immensely, as I had spent many week-ends, as a civilian hunting, with my .22 rifle. Every phase in gunnery school was some kind of a challenge, as well as a different, and exciting experience. We learned so many different things about the fifty-caliber machine gun, from completely taking it apart blindfolded, then putting it back together, blindfolded. We shot skeet and trap, shot the .50 caliber on the gunnery range, shot skeet from the back of a G. I. truck, with a turret-mounted fifty caliber. We flew in a bomber, shooting at a target, which was towed by a single-engine plane. We had to run three or four miles each day, after our schooling was completed. We were in tip-top shape and condition, and were proud of everything we accomplished. Occasionally, we could have a weekend pass. There was nothing to do, except to go into Fort Myers. I had no desire to do any drinking, so I usually went to a bicycle shop, and one of my buddies and I would spend the day riding the bicycle in the Fort Myers area. At this time, I was twenty years of age. I spent my twentieth birthday while I was at Sheppard Field. We completed gunnery school August 15, 1943. The next day we were issued our flying equipment, including the three stripes of "Buck" sergeant. Our flying equipment consisted of: B-4 bag, flyers A-3 bag, flying sun glasses, winter gloves, summer and winter flying helmets, A-2 flying jacket, A-5 winter flying jacket, oxygen mask, chest-type parachute, fur-lined flying boots, fur-lined flying pants, life jacket and sweater. We were all suited-out for flying. We left, by troop-train for our destination, Salt Lake City,

Utah. While we were at Salt Lake Air Base, we flew with various men, just to make up a 10-man crew. We never really got acquainted with the men we flew with while we were there. We did quite a lot of night flying, and flying over the rocky mountains. We didn't really know our reason for being at Salt Lake, except for re-assignment. We were soon sent to our new base, again by troop-train. Our new assignment was to be at Clovis Army Air Field, Clovis, New Mexico.

We arrived at Clovis Army Air Field about the middle of September, 1943. Again, we flew with make-up crews, as we did in Salt Lake AB. This time, it seemed that we were there for a reason; as we were assigned to a 10-man crew, while we were at Clovis. We did not meet any of our crew members until we were enroute to the new base, Langley Field, Norfolk, Virginia. While we were at Clovis, we were "housed" in 6-man tents. There came one of the worst sand storms that I had ever seen, while we were in the tents. The next morning, we dug out of the sand and cleaned our bags as well as we possibly could. That same day, a group of men were shipped out of one of the tar-paper barracks, and we were moved in. We flew with various men who were assigned to the squadron, awaiting to be shipped to Langley.

We were put aboard the troop train, bound for Langley Field. While we were on the train, I met, for the first time three of the crew members that I would be flying combat with. One was nineteen year old, Robert F. Matthews. I was still twenty years of age, and the rest of the crew ranged from twenty-one to twenty-four years of age, except for the "old man" of our crew, John Warren, who was twenty-seven. Can you imagine a crew of men virtually averaging only twenty three years of age, flying combat today? But there were some pilots who were hardly twenty, who was the commander of a four-engine bomber, during WW-2! I have heard of a crew that none of the men were out of their 'teens, but I can't say that I knew them. When we got to Langley, we soon became acquainted with each-other. Willis J. Pardoe was our pilot. Our co-pilot was William V. Costello; Bombardier was Thomas J. Patterson; Navigator was Leonard M. Gottlieb; Top Turret-First Engineer was John M. Warren; Assistant Engineer-Ball Turret Gunner was Robert P. Leonhard; Radio Operator-Right Waist Gunner was William B. Roberts; Nose Turret Gunner-Armorer was Edward C. Kimberly; Tail Turret Gunner-Armorer was Robert F. Matthews; Asst. Engineer-Right Waist Gunner was Robert V. Black. All of the officers were second lieutenants, and were "sporting" the WINGS of of their training. All of the enlisted men were "buck" sergeant, and were "sporting" the WINGS of an aerial gunner. I had received my wings and promotion to sergeant when I completed my gunnery school. As the days and nights together, each of our crew became closer and closer friends. The enlisted men became good friends with the officers, and the officers were good friends with us. As a good soldier should, I still respected each officer to address them by their ranks, "Lieutenant" before calling their names. Our friendship grew more, as the training and flying together progressed. I can not remember any serious disagreements or arguments that any of the crew had between themselves. To ourselves, we seemed to be a "model" crew. Bob Leonhard and Bob Matthews seemed to become two that were closer friends, John Warren and I became closer friends, as I respected John very much for his intense interest and knowledge of the B-24. It seemed that John knew anything and everything that was to be learned about the plane. John drank alcoholic beverages sometimes to the extent that I felt he shouldn't,

and I felt that I should be there with him, when he was drinking. I still drank very little. John was a small man in size, but would challenge anybody after he began drinking. Before his disagreements would come to blows, he would always have me involved. He called me his personal "bodyguard". I was in tip-top condition, weighing about 185 pounds, and was 5' 10½" tall. I didn't like to fight, but could handle myself well enough to take care of John and myself. Incidentally, I might add that I still wore size 32 waist; the same as I did when I went into the army air corps. John didn't weigh much over 130, if he weighed that much. It was doubtful that he was over 130#, but when he began drinking, with me backing him up, he became a large man! We were the best of friends, and I saw that nobody would attack him, even though he would most of the time, provoke a provocation. Everybody seemed to know their jobs to the utmost, and we were comfortable flying together.

We would always "pull" little tricks on each-other. One day, when we were flying, Bill Roberts asked me to give him some gum to keep his ears "cleared", while we were in the air. It had become my duty to furnish the chewing gum for any member of the crew. This day, I was ready to furnish the gum. I had bought a box of chiclets gum, and a box of feenamint. I took the feenamint from the box and replaced it with chicallets, visaversa. When we arrived at the plane to make our daily flight, Bill Roberts asked me for some chewing gum. I casually handed the box labelled "chicallets", which I had filled with feenamint. Bill took three or four of the tablets from the box and put them in his mouth and began chewing. He chewed them during the whole flight, which lasted four to six hours. I had actually forgotten my trick, until the next day he made his complaining, "I don't know what I ate, but something sure did give me the G. I.'s." I began laughing and just couldn't stop, but I never told him of the trick that I had done. Roberts was a Golden Glove boxer, and a good one, at that. I had put the boxing gloves on with him, and he mauled me around, as he wanted. I was strong, but I had no boxing training. I kept my secret to myself, and never told him what had caused his calamity. I kept my hair cut very short, which was known as a G. I. , or "crew cut". Every time we assembled at the plane for a flight, Lt. Gottlieb would brush my hair vigorously, with his hand. (That was when I had hair.) While we were stationed at Langley, both Lt. Pardoe and Lt. Costello got married. All of the crew were invited, and attended the weddings.

Our training missions took us to practically anywhere we wished to go. Once, on one of these missions, we were to make a night flight. We flew to Oneida, New York, which was Lt. Pardoe's hometown. I'm sure he had contacted him family that we would be "buzzing" his hometown. ("Buzzing" was flying at a very low altitude, which was sometimes lower than it was safe.) We reached Oneida, and Pardoe began his altitude descent. We made two passes over his hometown, which seemed to be just over the housetops. Once, I looked out of the waist window, and a tall church steeple was just off our left wing-tip, as we went by. Lt. Pardoe turned his landing lights on, while we were over Oneida, so we could definitely be identified by his family. After we returned to Langley, I approached Lt. Pardoe and told him, about us being so close to the church steeple. He grabbed his forehead, and said, "Oh my God, I forgot all about that church steeple. How far were we from it, Black?" I told him that it was just off the wingtips. He repeated, "Oh my God, I forgot all about that tall steeple." It was undoubtedly the tallest structure in Oneida.

If we had been only about twenty feet to the left, we probably would have clipped the top of the steeple from the church. More of a possibility, we could have crashed into the city of Oneida. Nothing was ever said about the church again. This was kept only between Lt. Pardoe and myself, with later, some of the crew members knowing of the incident. It certainly never got back to our squadron. One of our training missions took us far over the Atlantic ocean. This mission was to be for the training of our Navigator, Lt. Gottlieb, as well as for us gunners to shoot our fifty calibers into the water. A long distance, Lt. Pardoe and Lt. Costello "buzzed" just a few feet over the water, with the propellers of the engines, spraying the water back onto the fuselage of the plane. After we pulled to a higher altitude, we gunners fired into the water. There was no target, so we just fired. It was to make us more familiar with our weapon. Occasionally, we would have "formation" flight, which was to familiarize Lts. Pardoe and Costello with flying in formation, and to keep as close to the lead plane as possible. On this particular training mission, the pilot and co-pilot was told to keep the wing of our plane as close to the left window of the lead plane, as he possibly could. Our pilot and co-pilot kept the wing tip so closely into the waist window of the lead plane, as was safe to do so. The lead plane would move over, and our plane would follow. Every time the lead plane would move over, our plane would follow, keeping our wing-tip just out of the waist window, and out of the "slip-stream" of the lead plane. When we landed, the pilot of the officer, who was the pilot of the lead plane proceeded to "dress down" Lt. Pardoe for flying too closely to their plane. Pardoe simply told him that he was told to try to keep a close formation, as he was instructed to do. Their skill in flying formation, which was proven on that mission, earned a "key" spot for us to fly to the left of the lead plane, while we were flying our combat missions. On one of our training flights, when we landed, our #3 engine "conked out". This left us without any hydraulic system, including no brakes to slow or stop the plane. The end of the run-way was just about 300 yards from our squadron mess hall (enlisted mens), and our barracks. Of course, there was no way to "reverse" the engines, as the jet planes did. Reversing the engines was unheard of at that time. We raced toward the end of the runway, with Pardoe, Costello and Warren doing everything possible to stop the plane before it crashed into our mess hall. It just so happened, that it was lunch-time, and the mess hall was full of men. The plane was slowed down enough to make a "fast" turn, at the end of the runway, which did not collapse the landing gear. In the back of the plane, where the gunners flew, behind the bomb-bay, none of us actually knew what was happening, as we had taken our positions against the bomb-bay wall, for the landing, and could not see the engines. We only knew that we were not slowing down. Our excitement came later, when we were told about the happenings. We only knew that we "coasted" to a stop. One day, Lt. Pardoe called us together, after we had virtually completed our second and third phase for our overseas training. He told us that he was sure that he had proven himself as a pilot, who was ready for our combat, which was to come shortly, but we had not proven ourselves to him to be "good" with our fifty calibers. We were to go to a gunnery training range, for about a week, for some additional training, and to prove that we could "hit". I still don't know the location of the camp, but it seemed that it was far into the "boonies". All week, we fired the fifty calibers, our .45, and a sub-machine gun. (I couldn't hit anything with the sub-machine gun on fully automatic.) With the fifty calibers, and the .45, I made very good scores. My best was with the .45. The man who

was watching our targets brought my target to where we were firing, and asked who had been firing at target #7. I told him that I had fired at that target. He told me, "Man, you sure did make a high score". I never asked him what my score had been, and I wished that I had every since, but I am sure it would have qualified me for "expert", as I could shoot and hit with that .45. Our training was over too soon at Langley Field. We had completed our overseas training. We were given an off-base pass, so we decided to go into Norfolk for the night. We ended it in a dancing "joint". There were so many sailors there! I'm sure there were twenty service men to every female. I was content to watch in amazement, as the others danced. I was still "the country boy that came to town", even though I had been promoted to Staff Sergeant, and was wearing my Gunners Wings, with my "Good Conduct" ribbon pinned under the wings. I had been in the Army Air Corps for a year, and had all my training for overseas.

We left Langley Field for Mitchell Field, New York, by plane. At Mitchell Field, we received all of our shots, (AGAIN) had all of our equipment checked, and issued anything that we might have missing. Of course, if anything was missing, we had to sign a "statement of charges" to have it replaced, as we had already received everything before. Two nights, in a row, we were given overnight passes to go into New York City. John Warren and I went into New York together. This was the first weekend of December, 1943. John and I made the mistake of going into one of the "dime-a-dance" clip joints. I spent more money for the few dances than I should have, but I did learn to not go into those places again. We took the subway from Pennsylvania Station back to Mitchell Field, arriving just about daybreak. The next night we were free to go into New York again. Upon arriving, John wanted to go the "dime-a-dance joint again. I told John to go ahead, and have a good time, that I thought I would go and see some of New York. I walked probably several miles, being sure to not get too far off Broadway. I went and saw the Times Square Building, and wandered into the "ritzest" hotel of New York. I have forgotten the name of it. It didn't take long for this old country boy to feel completely out of place. There were no other men in uniform there, just the men dressed in their tuxedos and the women with their furs around them. I slipped back across the plush carpet to the outside door, trying to not be noticed. I walked for a while longer, then decided that I would go into a restaurant, that I was passing, and eat. I sat at the counter and ordered probably the cheapest thing on the menu, a sandwich. While I was eating my sandwich, a man who was probably my age came in and sat beside me. We looked at each other, but he didn't have a uniform. When we finally began talking, I learned that he was a Merchant Marine, and was also a stranger in New York. The Merchant Marines did not have to wear their uniforms off duty, as other service men, during WW-2. During our course of conversation, he asked me if I would like to go to the BILLY ROSE DIAMOND HORSESHOE with him. I had learned to trust him by this time, so having nothing to do, I told him that I would. He told me that he had met a "rich man" who had invited him to join him for a night at this famous night spot. After we had finished eating, we decided to go to the Diamond Horseshoe. When we arrived, the "rich man" was introduced to me, and we were told to take a chair at the large table. There were girls everywhere around the table, each one wanting to know more about us. I simply told them that I was from a small town in Central Texas. Drinks were ordered for us. Not knowing anything about a mixed drink, I ordered the same as my

newly-made friend, which was a "cuba-libre". (rum & coke) It tasted so good that I was ready to order another in possibly a couple of minutes. My friend looked at me, and told me to not drink them so fast, but to just sip, as it would soon make me "woosy". I took the advice. I soon thought it was my time to order the drinks, so I let our host know that the next time would be my time. He assured me that the whole party was his pleasure, and we would pay for nothing. We saw a tremendously enjoyable floor show. I kept watching my watch, for the time of the night. When I saw that I had to go to the train station to catch the subway back to Mitchell Field, I told my friend that I had to go. When I told the host of the party, he told me that he regretted to see me to have to go, as the party was still going on, and that I was welcome to stay until day-break. I told him of the time I had to be back into camp, and he assured me that he enjoyed me having joined them. I thanked all of them for the perfectly enjoyable night, then went out of the music, into the street. I looked up and down the still-busy street, not knowing just which way I should go to reach Pennsylvania Station. Soon a taxi came by, and I motioned for him to stop. I told him to take me to Penn Station. I was only about eight or ten blocks from the station. I entered the large station building, walked down the stairs to the already waiting subway. I didn't go by and get John Warren to go back with me, as I knew that he would have no trouble getting back to Mitchell Field by himself. The next day I told my crew members about my fabulous Diamond Horseshoe adventure. The men who were from the northern states told me what a fool that I was for trusting a stranger, as I trusted the Merchant Marine. Having lived in a small central Texas town, I was taught to trust people. I found these people to have been completely trustworthy, and I did enjoy the night with them. On December 7, 1943, two years after Pearl Harbor was bombed, we took off, by plane, bound for for our overseas duty. I had thought that the war would be over before I could get over there to do my patriotic duty! I was eager to go overseas and be a part of the war. There will never be another time, as it was during WW-2. There will never be another time when our Country is filled with patriotism. I am glad to have lived during the days of WW-2, and to be a part of it.

Our plane landed in Key West, Florida later in the day of December 7th. We were told that we could not write a letter, or make a phone call to anybody. We were also told to not write anything about our route that would take us to our destination. We were dismissed soon, and we made a "bee-line" to the coolest place we could find, as it was so hot and humid that we could hardly breathe. When we landed, we were wearing our O. D. wool uniform. As soon as possible, we changed into our khaki uniforms. But it was still too hot! We did not have any special duties while we were in Key West, except to wait for the time when our plane would take off. We were told to be ready on December 9th., for our take-off, then we were on our own. Bob Leonhard and Bob Matthews both decided to go to the barber shop and "get the works", a haircut, shave, a facial, (including the mud plaster) a "singe", after the haircut, or anything else that was there to offer. I thought that was a good idea, so I decided to have "the works", too. My face became so tender, when I would go out in the sunshine, that I would soon hunt the shade again. We all went to a picture-making studio, and had two pictures made of ourselves, to be developed, after we had gone, then mailed to our families. It was just something to remember us by, just in case we didn't make it back to the States.

On December 9, 1943, we left the U. S. A. from Key West, Florida, flying south, over the water. Later that day we landed at an air base on Trinidad Island. It was still hot, and the mosquitoes were very hungry. They gave atabrine tablets for us to take, to keep from taking malaria fever. We were to take them until we reached a cold climate. The atabrine tablets made your skin a deep yellow color. That night we slept with mosquito nets hung around the bunks, as the mosquitoes were so plentiful.

December 10th., we left the mosquito infested island of Trinidad. Our plane was soon over the lands of South America. There was nothing but solid trees below, for miles and miles. After a few hours, we were over the Amazon River. We crossed it, at it's mouth. It was ninety miles wide, and the water was a red muddy color. I was glad to see the air base ahead, where we landed at Belem. We were at the Belem air field just overnight. The landing strip was very short, but we managed to stop before we ran out of run-way. The next morning, December 11, we left Belem. Knowing that the run-way was very short, I stood in the waist window to watch our take-off. The pilot ran the engines up to full throttle, holding the brakes. When he let the brakes off, we surged ahead, to take off. As I was watching, I could see the trees at the end of the run-way getting closer and closer. It seemed that just at the nick of time, the plane lifted above the treetops. There were thirteen men aboard the plane, with everything we owned, inside the bomb-bays. The Army Air Corps had built large plywood boxes to hang inside the bomb-bays. These large boxes were where our possessions were carried. The flight from Belem to Fortaleza was a short hop, but the forests, or rather the jungles below were awesome. If a plane went down in those jungles, it is quite possible that it would never be found. We found the air base at Fortaleza to be much nicer than the one we had just left. We had about a two or possibly three day lay-over in Fortaleza. We went to town twice. Some of the crew members bought boots, while they were in town. I bought two pairs of silk stockings, and sent them to my mother and sister. I had the opportunity to walk through the jungle trails that led from the base. I was surprised to see that people, or families lived in the jungles, with only a single-path trail going to the houses. The houses were built from the red clay in that region. I took my .45 pistol with me, just in case I saw something that I would like to shoot. Just as I came in sight of the first red clay house, a large lizard-looking reptile ran across the path, in front of me. I grabbed for my .45, aimed and shot it through the head. The natives came running, all excited. They saw the large lizard lying on the edge of the trail. They all got very excited about it, and was speaking to each other in the language I had never heard before. I motioned for one of the men to take the lizard. They were all happy about it. I'm sure that they ate those lizards, when they could catch them. One of the men picked the lizard up and carried it toward the house, looking back at me, smiling and talking. That lizard was as big as the leg of a man below his knee. I'm sure they had "lizard stew". We reached Fortaleza on December 12th. I am not sure if we spent two or three nights there, but it seems as if it had been three.

We were awakened about 1:00 A. M., on the date of December 15th., as well as I can remember. We went to plane in the middle of the night for our flight across the Atlantic Ocean. The first thing for me to do when I got to the plane was to complete my nights sleep. I laid down on the floor of the plane, not waking up for our take-off. What good would it have done? It was still night, and you couldn't see anything. I was sound asleep, but was

awakened by the jolting and pitching of the plane. We were in a violent storm. The lightning was flashing all around us. We hit an air pocket, and we undoubtedly dropped straight down for 1,000 or 2,000 feet. It seemed that at any time we would be hitting the dark water below. All at once, the engines stopped running away, and they began the groans of pulling the plane back up. It seemed as we would never stop climbing, and all four of the engines were roaring. All at once, we were straightened up and flying level again. We were out of the lightning and storm. The excitement was over, so I laid back on the floor of the plane to complete my nap. The flight from Fortaleza, Brazil to Dakar Senegal (Africa) was a long flight, and there was no fuel to waste. There was a landing field on an island that they called "The Rock". We were not to land on The Rock, unless we were certain that we would not have enough fuel to go on to Dakar. The pilot felt that we had enough fuel, so we went on and landed at Dakar. We were at Dakar for a short time. (NOTE: I referred to some notes that I had made in a New Testament that was issued to me when I went in the AAF. It reads that we left for Dakar on December 22nd. Also it reads that we landed at Fortaleza on December 11th. We were at Fortaleza for 11 days. If I didn't have it written down, I could have never remembered it.) It was hot at Dakar, and we were still taking our atabrine tablets. We went to the beach and bathed in the Atlantic ocean, while at Dakar. I do not remember the reason that we stayed eleven days at Fortaleza, or if we were ever told that there was a reason. I do know the traffic from the U. S. A. to North Africa was very heavy, and sometimes there was a wait until there was a space for the planes. On December 25th., Christmas day, 1943, we flew from Dakar to Marrakech, Moorcco. We flew over the Sahara Desert. There were miles and miles of nothing but pink sand dunes below us. The complete trip was over nothing but desert land. We griped about having to fly from Dakar to Marrakech on Christmas Day, because we knew that we would miss Christmas dinner. When we landed, we were told to go to the mess hall for our Christmas dinner. We had turkey, dressing, gravy, and all the trimmings that you could expect, if we had been home. We were at Marrakech for a full week. While we were there, the C. Q. failed to wake the tent that we were in, for our plane to Marrakech, so we found ourselves afoot! The Commanding Officer of the base, at Marrakech, found a chore for us to do, which I felt would last until the last of the war. We had to unroll barbed wire entanglements that the Germans had put there before they made their retreat. Our own Commanding Officer found that we were kept at Marrakech untangling barbed wire. He sent a direct order to the C. O. of the Marrakech base to put us on the first flight out, without fail, as we were going into combat. On January 1, 1944, we reached Algiers, Algeria. When we landed, New Years dinner was waiting for us, which was about the same feast as we had when we landed in Marrakech. (NOTE: Back to Marrakech, for a note: We were always intrigued in seeing the arabs coming into Marrakech off the Sahara desert. You would wonder where they lived out there, or if they didn't live there, what were they doing out in such a vast wasteland. The camels (about five to seven) had a pack on their backs. It was hard to tell which was the dirtiest, the camels, or the arab that was leading them. Also, an interesting thing that I saw while I was in Marrakech, was what was undoubtedly the capitol building. It was built of what looked to have been granite or marble. I was quite a distance from the building, so it was hard to tell just the kind of material that it was built with. Another interesting thing, was that when we were sent from Marrakech, we boarded a B-25 2-engine

bomber, which took us as far as Oujda, which is in a high mountainous area. We only spent the night there. The next day, we boarded a C-46 cargo plane, which took us on to Algiers. When we landed at Oujda, it was very cold. It was in some high mountainous region. The C. Q. sent us to his tent for the night, because he had a fire in his tent. (We all appreciated this!) Algiers was a city of many contrasts. You could meet with a dirty arab, with only a short distance, could be a well dressed and clean young woman. I know that the young women that we saw in Algiers had probably left France some time during the war, to be away from any possible fighting, or more probably to get away from the German occupation of France. There was also an amazing numbers of young men, who I feel were from France, also. We were at Algiers long enough for me to recognize the familiar streets that I had seen before. Once, I was walking through Algiers, and I came into what was known as the Casbah portion of Algiers. It was where the Arabs lived. I walked several blocks into the casbah, and would meet with other Americans. Some would be all dishelved, with their shirts unbuttoned, not wearing their cap, and their uniform be dirty. I would speak to them, but would get a look of mistrust in return. All at once, I came on a sign posted, "This Area Off Limits To All American Service Men". I turned back and retraced my steps for about possibly 10 to 15 blocks, and saw a big sign reading "Off Limits". Probably, the men who were in the Casbah section of Algiers were AWOL. All of the arab people would look at you with a mistrust, or quite probably, with a look of hate. I did not like the Arabs then, and I still do not like them. They were the kind of people who would cut your throat from ear to ear, if they were only given the "opportunity". Algiers was full of loafing arabs. Most of them would be sitting flat on the sidewalk, or if you would meet one while walking, he would turn and walk sideways, to watch you. Algiers could have been a beautiful city, if there were not so many arabs, and if it could be cleaned up. We were told to not eat anything, unless we buy it from the Red Cross, or obtain it from the Salvation Army. (The Salvation Army did not charge you anything for food, but the Red Cross certainly did. I found this to be true everywhere I was located during WW-2, except for the Red Cross parcels that we received while we were prisoners-of-war. The food that was in the Red Cross parcels was in camouflaged G. I. containers, most of the time. The organization of the International Red Cross was only used to get G. I. food to us.) When we arrived at the air base in Algiers, we caught up with the plane that left us in Marrakech. They told us the reason we were left. The men who had been awakened for the flight went on to the plane. When it was time for the pilot to line up for his time to take off, he protested, by telling the man in the tower that four men were not aboard that were supposed to be flying on the plane. The top ranking officer was in the control tower, and ordered the pilot of the plane to go ahead and take off without us. The officer in the tower was undoubtedly a higher ranking officer than the pilot of the plane. When the pilot received orders from a higher ranking officer, he had no alternative but to go ahead and take off, leaving us behind. The base at Algiers was a more permanent base than some of the bases. Some bases had only a run-way and control tower, without any facilities to do any kind of maintenance on the planes. The base at Algiers had large steel structures for hangars, and a very good run-way system. I liked everything around Algiers, but we had to move on closer to our combat base. On January 12, 1944, we left Algiers, and landed in Tunis, Tunisia. This would be our headquarters base until our base could be completed in Italy, which would be slightly just over two weeks. Our complete Bomb Group assembled at this base, in Tunisia.

Every man slept in 6-man tents; officers and enlisted men alike. We flew "practice" missions for formation flying. There was one plane that tried to take off, and they forgot to unlock the controls. The plane got to its take-off speed, but when the pilot tried to leave the ground, the plane flipped upside-down and skidded along the run-way. It almost immediately burst into flames, with the ten men of the crew trapped. The first men to reach the burning bomber said they could hear the trapped men inside calling for somebody to help them get out. By the time I got to the plane, I am sure that all of the men were dead, as I did not hear anybody. The ten men didn't have the opportunity to fly any bombing missions, and bomb any of the targets that we bombed before we were shot down. Our tent area was within a few miles of the location where a fierce tank battle occurred. It was over across a hill from where our tents were located. Several times, I would walk to the other side of the hill, and look at the burned out tanks, trucks and jeeps. There was an ammunition dump in that area, too. Lots of live 30-caliber ammunition, hand grenades were left at this site. The hand grenades had the cork "pin" about half-way rotted out. I stepped around these hand grenades and live ammunition very carefully, to be sure that I did not step on anything, or kick anything, when I walked. I think I only went to this ammunition dump twice, as it would give me an "unsafe" feeling to be there. Also, I did not know if any of the burned out tanks had been set with a "booby-trap". I went to the top of the hill, and looked down on the tanks, trucks, jeeps, etc. several times again, but I didn't go walking into the area.

When we would go into Tunis, we would have to walk about three or four miles, and catch a 6 x 6 truck, which was assigned to a field artillery outfit, that was stationed there. All of us Air Corps boys and the Field Artillery boys were good friends, when the trucks went into Tunis. But when we all started to return to our own outfit, after drinking some of their wine, the Artillery boys didn't want us to ride their truck. There was always a scuffle or two on the way back to camp. I'm sure the Artillery boys had been overseas much longer than we, as we had just arrived. That probably had something to do with us not riding their truck. To ride their trucks was the only transportation to and from Tunis that was available to us, as we had no trucks assigned to us at this temporary base. The only reason that I cared to go into Tunis was to get away from the boredom of our "Tent City". I did not care to drink any of their wine, and that was the only beverage that was available. I went to Tunis to be with my crew members, as all of us had become very close buddies. I actually did not like Tunis; as I felt that it was an ugly town, compared to Algiers. Tunis was built on a comparatively flat land, where Algiers was built in a sort of mountainous region. I was glad to leave Tunis. On February 1, 1944, we were transferred to our permanent base at Cerignola, Italy. When we landed on our newly built runway, it lacked a lot being completed. The runway was built from spreading caliche, and attempting to smooth it down with bulldoziers. Our base was one of the two-runway bases in Italy. The 454th Bomb Group had the east runway, and our Bomb Group, the 455th, had the west runway. I had heard that we were to have had steel matting for our runway, but the rumor was, that the Germans sunk all of our supply ships in Bari harbor. I do know that we didn't have any PX supplies for quite a while. When we landed at our new base, the ground crew were already there, and had their tents prepared, and sleeping in them. They were told to give their tents

to us, the flying crews. I am sure that this caused some hard feelings. The ground crew had to sleep in pup tents until the new supplies were received. Five men of our crew, with all of our clothing and equipment, were packed into a six-man tent. One of the enlisted men, Ed Kimberly, stayed with somebody else. It was still cold in Italy, and as was done in Africa, a 55-gallon drum was cut in half, making two makeshift heaters. For fuel, we burned captured German gasoline, which was fed from an outside tank for each tent, through copper tubing, into the half 55-gallon barrel. It was not very uncommon to hear an explosion, and when we would go outside to see about it, one of the 55-gallon half-drums would have had too much gasoline into it, when it was lit. There were tents that burned, but we didn't have that misfortune. We always made sure that somebody was inside the tent to light the gasoline, as it first came trickling into the stove. The officers had the same accommodations as we, a 6-man tent. I don't know if the four officers of the crew shared a tent with somebody else, or not. Even the "hospital" was a 6-man tent. The headquarters was the same. We all lined up for our chow, off a 6 x 6 mess truck. The food was cooked off the back of the truck, when we first arrived in Italy. Soon, a "chow hall" was built, and we could sit inside and eat. When we were served from the back of the chow truck, we had to either go back to our own tent to eat, or eat, sitting on a log, which was about the size of a telephone pole. Our rest room wasn't a room at all. There was only a log over a "slit-trench" to sit over. Water had to be hauled in on back of a tank truck. There were canvas water containers that stayed close to the headquarters tent at all times. When we first arrived, we didn't have any place to obtain wash water for our faces and hands. There was a spring of water that was discovered about a quarter of a mile from our camp, so that problem was solved. We washed and shaved in our steel helmets. We had to catch a truck, when we wanted a shower, and go about 35 miles, into Foggia. Then we had to stand in line to take the shower that we knew would be cold. We had to catch a truck back to our base, after our shower. I will say something very much in favor of the drivers of the trucks. I never knew of any of them passing any G. I., or officer, without offering a ride. We had some very good and dependable drivers, in Italy. Incidentally, we had our own trucks and jeeps after we had arrived in Italy. The location for our briefing before and de-briefing after the missions was in a large wine cellar, located about a mile from our tent area. Also, across the road from the briefing room, was where you could buy wine. My old buddy, John Warren, enjoyed drinking his wine, so I went there with him several times. Once, when we were at the "winery", I noticed a small dog in the room. I just reached down and picked the little dog up, and carried him back to our tent. He became our "crew mascot". I named him Buddy. He became a very friendly puppy, and all of the men in the tent liked him. I might add, that Buddy did like G. I. food, as he ate the same food that we ate. He stayed around our tent, and never wandered away. He was white, with black spots, with medium length hair. I have often wondered what happened to him, when we didn't return from the last mission. I am sure some of the boys were glad to have him, as a mascot, for another crew. All of the above may sound as if a man couldn't enjoy army life, after all. I loved it, as I had wanted to get into the fighting for so long, that I thought the war would be over before I would ever get into any of it. My mother had told me that she didn't want me to write letters back to them, complaining of anything. I promised to myself, that I wouldn't write anything about as a complaint. I kept that promise. My brother didn't like the army, and he didn't keep it a secret from home.

Our Bomb Group made it's first bombing mission on February 16, 1944. The second mission was made February 17th. Both missions were to bomb for the Anzio beachhead, but since cloud cover was so bad, our bombs had to be dropped on other targets. It was so much danger in bombing for troops, at high altitude, with clouds being between us and the targets. I was not on either of these two missions.

Mission #3 was made on February 22nd. I was on this mission. It was to bomb docks and the harbor at Zaro, Yugoslavia.

Mission #4 was flown on February 25th. I was on this mission. We bombed the Talerhof Airdrome, at Graz, Austria. One of our bombers, with ten men aboard were shot down and lost. The 454th Bomb Group bombed with us, on this mission. They lost five bombers, and fifty men. The flak on this mission was very heavy and accurate. Several German fighter planes made repeated attacks on us.

Mission #5 was flown March 2nd. I was on this mission. We bombed troop concentrations in the area of Cisterno, Italy. We didn't lose any planes, but four of our planes were damaged by flak.

Mission #6 was flown March 3rd. I was on this mission. We bombed an airdrome, north of Rome, at Fabrica Di Roma. The flak was light, and we did not have any opposition from German fighter planes. None of our planes were lost.

Mission #7 was flown March 7th. I was not on this mission. Our group returned to Fabrica Di Roma to bomb the airdrome again. No planes were lost.

Mission #8 was flown on March 15th., after several days of our being grounded by bad weather. I was on this mission. We bombed Cassino Abbey, because the ground troops were being were having such a hard time taking anything north of the abbey, as they couldn't get around it. We didn't lose any planes.

Mission #9 was flown March 17th. I was on this mission. Our group bombed railroad yards in the Vienna area. The flak was intense and accurate in the Vienna area. None of our planes were lost.

Mission #10 was made March 18th. I was not on this mission. Maniago Airdrome, in the Po valley was bombed. We did not lose any planes.

Mission #11 was flown March 19th. I was on this mission. We were to bomb the aircraft factories at Steyr, Austria, but we were turned away because of bad weather. We bombed an airdrome at Graz, Austria. Two of our aircraft collided in mid-air, over the Adriatic Sea. No chutes were seen to open. Two aircraft were lost, and twenty men were lost.

Mission #12 was made March 22nd. I was on this mission. Our primary target of a marshalling yard (Rail Yard) was clouded over, so we bombed the secondary target, which was a different marshalling yard, at Bologna, Italy. No planes or men were lost.

Mission #13 was flown March 24th. I was not on this mission. Our group was to bomb the Steyr-Daimler-Puch aircraft factory, but clouds over the target, so our planes dropped the bombs on a rail yard at Rimini, Italy. We did not lose any planes or men.

Mission #14 was flown March 26th. I was not on this mission. The Bomb Group was briefed to bomb the Daimler-Puch Aircraft factory again. Again, the cloud cover didn't allow the bombs to be dropped. Bombs were dropped on the Rimini marshalling yards again.

Mission #15 was flown March 28th. I was on this mission. We bombed the marshalling yards at Verona, Italy. Flak was intense and accurate. We didn't lose any planes or men. Our P-38 escort shot down eight German planes.

Mission #16 was flown March 29th. I was not on this mission. Our Group bombed marshalling yards at Milan, Italy. No planes or men were lost.

Mission #17 was flown March 30th. I was on this mission. We bombed the industrial center of Sofia, Bulgaria. Cloudy weather interfered with this mission. No planes or men were lost.

Mission #18 was flown on April 2nd. I was on this mission. It was the mission in which I was shot down. Our group bombed the Steyr-Daimler-Puch Aircraft factory. We received the Presidential Unit Citation for this mission. This mission was a great success, even though we lost four planes and forty (40) men. It was the most successful mission that the 455th Bomb Group had flown.