

Leland Brice Hall

Experiences in World War II

As a little boy I envied the birds because they could fly and I could not. My first experience at flying was in Myrtle Beach, SC, when I was fifteen years old. A Fokker tri-motor plane was taking passengers on a flight down the beach for one dollar. I spent my last dollar for that ride and never regretted it.

After graduating from high school in 1939 the depression was on and no one had the money to go to college except a few of the wealthiest people. My brother finally got a job for me at a chain grocery store. I was paid twelve dollars a week. Most of that went for food and lodging at a boarding house. I made friends there with a parachute rigger who worked at the air base training aviation cadets in their first phase of flying. He offered me a job to help him with his work. When I wasn't working, I was watching the cadets take off and land. I got to know the officers and instructors at the base, and they would take me up on flights. I also got to know the flight surgeon there.

When the flight surgeon realized how much I wanted to fly he suggested that I come up to the office and he would give me a physical to see if I could qualify. I went there the next morning and everything was okay except that I had 20/25 vision in my left eye. A vision of 20/20 in both eyes was required. After we chatted for a while he could see how crushed I was. He picked up a card and said, "I am going to help you get in and never mention this to anyone, not even to me." He put the chart up on the wall again and told me when they handed me the card to cover one eye, but just don't quite cover it, and read the chart with both eyes. A week later I went to the air base in Sumter, SC to enlist as an aviation cadet. I passed the physical, the written test, and the interview. This was in October of 1942.

I was sworn in and told that I would be called to active duty in about a month. I soon went home to await the call. The call came the first of February 1943. I reported to Miami Beach, FL, a week later and endured a month of basic training. From there it was on to Nashville, TN, for more tests to decide if we were to be pilots, navigators, or bombardiers. I was very happy when I was picked as a pilot.

From Tennessee it was on to Maxwell Field, AL, for two months of the most stringent training we could have imagined. We named it "Little Westpoint". From there it was on to Clarksdale, MS, for primary flying training and we felt for the first time that we were getting somewhere. Three months later we moved on to basic flying training with larger, more complicated planes. We finally ended up in George Field, IL, for advanced training in twin engine planes. We graduated, received our wings and bars, and headed home for a week of leave. This was the first leave we had gotten since we entered the service sixteen months before.

It was a great relief to realize that I had made it! About 25% of those who entered had not. Many of them went on to gunnery school to become gunners on the planes. Most of us were sent to bases for training in four engine bombers, on B-17s or B-24s. I was sent to Harlingen, TX, for training in B-24s. If we would have had a choice that would have been our last pick. It was known as a hard plane to fly and a hard plane to land. It had been described as a boxcar with wings and it looked like one. It also had its good points like four terrific engines, a long range of 3,000 miles, and it carried 2,700 gallons of gas. We were trained with pilots who had either already flown it in combat or had many hours of flying time in the plane.

The next step was to the air base at Omaha, NE, to form a crew of ten men to train as a crew. The crew consisted of two pilots, a navigator, a bombardier, engineer/gunner, two waist window gunners, a nose turret gunner, a tail turret gunner, and finally a ball turret gunner that hung below the belly of the plane. All the turrets rotated. We then headed for Tucson, AZ, for three more months of intensive training as a crew. We were given seven days leave again and after that we headed overseas. In about a week's time we had flown our brand new plane from Wichita, KS, to New Hampshire, Newfoundland, the Azores in the south Atlantic, north Africa, and finally into Italy. We landed at a base used for supplies for the Fifteenth Air Force, supplies including new planes. The next day we were flown to our base which was the 460th Bomb Group. The base where we landed was a huge disappointment. It consisted of mostly tents and a headquarters in an old railroad station. Our briefing room for the air raids was an old barn. The runway consisted of a mile long steel mat laid out on top of a smoothed out strip of land in a valley between two hills. I might mention that in order to fly the plane from Newfoundland to the Azores in the south Atlantic the bomb bays were filled with two very large tanks of gas that we could transfer in flight to the wing tanks.

Most of the crews lived in tents. Some of the more enterprising ones were building one room houses out of a stone that was plentiful in that area. The stone was soft and light and easy to handle. We began to build one with the help of some Italian farmers. It was a large one room with a canvas top. The stove was made from a 50 gallon drum and it burned kerosene. It wasn't considered completely safe! The latrines were a community affair just down the hill and were made of wood. They had no top. There were long rows of them in a number of locations. You could imagine what it was like on a cold winter night. Or can you? There were no places to take a bath. A bath consisted of a tin basin of water that had been warmed on the stove. On our off days we would get a Jeep and go to a nearby village to take a bath at the Red Cross. The Red Cross was also there on the flight line to feed us coffee and donuts after a bombing raid.

We began to make a number of flights around the area of the base, practiced forming squadrons of seven planes in the air, and became familiar with the area. We had done quite a bit of formation flying back in the United States, in advanced training in Tucson, AZ.

Our first raid was suddenly upon us. We looked forward to it, but there was also the fear of the unknown. Our targets were in Germany, Austria, Romania, Hungary and Czechoslovakia. The first raid was to Graz, Austria. We bombed some railroad yards full of hundreds of flat cars filled with German tanks. The flak (German word for anti-aircraft fire) was not too bad. A few ME-109 German fighter planes made one pass at us, but our fighter escort chased them away. Our gunners fired away at them but there were no hits I'm sure. It was the gunner's first chance at firing at real planes. In training all they got to fire at were targets towed by other planes. The veteran crews described the raid as a "milk run", slang for an easy mission. Two or three days later we flew again, this time to Vienna, Austria. In the briefing before the run we were warned that this would be no milk run and it certainly wasn't. We were briefed that there would be approximately 500 anti-aircraft guns. It was probably more like a thousand. I saw several planes in our group take several hits with engines smoking and on fire. Again, we had one quick attack from German fighters, and one of our P-51 fighter escorts got on one's tail and raked him with his 50 caliber machine gun fire. He kept going down with smoke pouring from his tail. I want to mention something here before I forget it. One of our escort fighter groups was composed of black pilots that had trained at Tuskegee, AL. They were assigned to the Fifteenth Air Force and we had them as our escort quite a few times. They flew P-51s. We also had P-38s, a beautiful twin tail fighter. These black pilots were always a pleasant sight to see. They hung close enough to us so that we knew they were there. It was generally agreed that they were one of the best, if not the best, in the Fifteenth Air Force. This is not to infer that the other fighter pilots didn't do an excellent job of protecting us.

As the winter of 1944 approached, flying in bad weather became as much a problem as the German fighters and anti-aircraft fire. It wasn't exactly safe to fly in heavy clouds in close formation with each other. When a situation like that approached, we would begin to reduce altitude and get under the clouds which made us much more vulnerable to anti-aircraft firing. On a number of occasions, we would have to turn back and drop our bombs into the Adriatic Sea. They had already been armed and landing with them could cause them to explode. Upon returning from one raid in Italy, we ran into a snowstorm and had to land wherever we could. Our base was closed and we managed to land at another base further south. Some planes had to fly across the mountains and the Mediterranean Sea to land in Egypt. The German army at that time was still in northern Italy and the American 5th Army, under command of General Mark Clark, was slowly driving them further north. We were asked to do what had also been done against the Germans in the Normandy invasion. The 5th Army was preparing for a big "push" against the Germans and we flew a raid against them. The army shot up a line of anti-aircraft fire to explode about a thousand feet below us and we dropped our bombs just beyond that line. The raid was quite successful. The American infantry reported that as they pushed forward they came upon groups of Germans that were still alive, but were stunned by the concussion of the 500 lb. bombs and surrendered without resistance.

Finally spring came and we were able to increase the number of missions we were flying. During that period we were able to acquire enough air crews that we would fly 35 raids and fly home. It had earlier been 50 missions. On April 25, 1945, we had flown 32 missions and the crew had agreed to ask the squadron commander if we could fly the last three in a row to get it over with. When you get that close to a finish you begin to feel a fear that you are so close to surviving and if you could just get it over with, then that would be it. It's like a pitcher in a baseball game in the ninth inning, two outs and one strike and the next man up to bat with one run ahead. The commander agreed and we flew again the next day for our 33rd raid. We took off as usual after getting up at 3 AM and eating the usual breakfast of powdered eggs, oatmeal and coffee. We went to the old Italian barn for our briefing on the raid. We then went down to the flight line, checked out the planes, started the engines and got in line for the take-off. This raid was to Linz, Austria to bomb oil refineries. It began as a routine flight, forming our formation of seven planes for each of four squadrons for our group. We were flying in line with other groups spread all over southern Italy. We then headed north and over the Adriatic Sea into northern Italy, over the Alps Mountains, and north to the city of Linz. We had been there before and it was considered a milk run meaning not much flak or fighters. That had definitely changed and we were briefed accordingly. I didn't see anyone laughing or kidding as usual that morning. As we flew over the mountains and turned northwest I glanced to my left and saw a huge column of smoke and wondered what it was. I thought the Eighth Air Force from England was invading our territory. I later found out after the war that the British Air Force had bombed Bertchergarten, Adolf Hitler's hideaway in the mountains. It was rumored that he had left Berlin and was hiding there. He was, however, hunkered down in a bunker in Berlin, and was soon to commit suicide.

While approaching Linz we began to see a lot of flak ahead. As we turned further west, we passed by the target, turned back to the east, and then to the south over the target. We also made these types of maneuvers in order to have a tail wind. At 20-30 thousand feet it would increase our speed over the targets as much as 100 miles an hour. This allowed us to pass over the target in less time. As we were nearing the drop zone the flak was the worst I had ever seen, other than the oil refineries around Vienna, Austria. Almost simultaneously with dropping the bombs we had a "near miss" burst of flak off of the right wing. The noise always sounded like a loud KER_WHUMP. This particular one was a very loud KER-WHUMP. You could hear the rattle of pieces of the exploding shell hitting against and into the plane. At about the same time the inboard engine on the right wing burst into flames. A few second later the same thing happened to the left wing outboard engine. We managed to extinguish the fires and "feather" the propellers. This was done by turning the sharp edge of the propellers into the wind so that they would not "windmill" and put a drag on the speed and control of the plane. By then, we had dropped out of the formation with a continual loss of altitude and speed. Our group was steadily pulling away from us. We began to realize that we would not get over the twelve-thousand foot altitude of the Alps Mountains and back into our base in Italy. This left us with two possible solutions: to head for the town of Pecs in southeast Hungary and attempt a landing in a small

grass airport (we knew that planes had landed there before), or, as a last resort, bail out if we were losing too much altitude to reach the airfield for a landing. By then, two P-51s of our escort fighters had pulled up alongside us to protect us from German fighter planes. But before we reached the airfield, the escort planes came in close to us, “waggled” their wings, and said goodbye and good luck. They were low on fuel and had to head back to their base in Italy. Less than an hour later, we arrived over Pecs and saw the field on the edge of town. We began to “let down” for the landing and as we turned onto the final approach, we encountered a heavy crosswind that pulled us back and forth and up and down. We made a very hard landing and the landing gear immediately collapsed. The bell of the plane began to tear out and the noise was deafening. Part of the left wing broke off, including the left outboard engine. The plane skidded to the left and finally stopped after what seemed an eternity, although it was probably only a minute. Gas was pouring out of the wing tanks, so we jumped out of the waist windows and ran away as fast as possible. It was a miracle that it didn’t catch fire or explode. About that time, a Russian army truck drove up and took us into town.

We were carried by the Russians to an ancient old brick hotel. They took us to two adjoining rooms with no beds and left us with a Russian soldier guarding us. By this time night had fallen, and they brought us the first of many meals. It was moldy sausage, boiled cabbage and very black bread. The next morning they began to interrogate us but they didn’t get very far. One of the two men involved spoke some English. After the interrogation we went back to our rooms and discussed the meeting among ourselves, we decided that they were very unhappy and thought that we had crashed that plane on purpose so that they could not use it. They were going to take us to Vienna, Austria, and meet up with the Americans and release us to our army.

A couple of days later we were taken to the railroad station which had been burned out, probably as the Germans had retreated from the Russian army. Soon we heard a train coming so we went outside. There was the train. It looked like one we had seen in old western movies. It had four or five passenger cars with a caboose hooked behind. It was loaded with refugees inside, outside, and hanging on top. The Russian soldiers quickly routed them off, made them sit down, and loaded the ten of us on and away we went with one Russian soldier as an escort. The train cars were made of wood with wooden benches along the sides. We soon took our blankets and laid down on the benches or floor and went to sleep. We would wake up and look out, but there was no moon and it was very dark. I recall that we stopped several times while meeting other trains. Early the next morning we awoke as the sun came up. The train had stopped and we began to look out the windows. Almost immediately we knew something was wrong. Then we saw it down the track. Yes, believe it or not, we were at the same railroad station that we had left from the night before.

One escort seemed to be as distraught as we were. He motioned for us (in sign language that we had begun to understand) to get off the train and stay at the station until he returned. By that time we had begun to form a bond with him as he was all we had. We had nicknamed him Joe

because he looked like Joseph Stalin, the Russian dictator. After several hours our escort had not returned and we began to feel some apprehension. He did show up a little later, and again you might not believe this, but with him were three two-wheeled carts, pulled by three old horses that were skin and bones, and driven by three drivers sitting in the carts. He came over to us and indicated that he wanted us to load up. He pulled out his map and pointed to where we were going. It was a huge lake (Lake Balaton) that showed up very large even on a world map. If you'd like, check and see where we were. In we got and away we went heading north. The roads were unpaved or occasionally black topped. The ride was bumpy to say the least. The terrain was hilly, and the horses would get quite tired and refuse to go on. We finally decided to get out of the carts and push them up the hills, then jump back in and ride down the hills. This would have seemed funny to us except we began to feel that we would never get to where we were going.

It took us a couple of days to get there and we realized why. We came into what we considered a major highway taking into consideration the quality of the roads we had traveled. We spent the nights in little villages along the way. Joe, our "friend and guide", would walk around the neighborhood brandishing his gun and demand rooms for us. The villagers gladly complied with more meat and vegetables than I had never seen before and had no desire to ask about. We waited several days there and kept pressing Joe to tell us what he intended to do. The drivers and carts had already headed back home.

Finally, Joe got a stick and had us gather around him. He began to draw lines in the dirt, hold his hands out, close his hands, and move them back and forth. He made a noise that sounded like a truck. We then began to walk along the road and hold our hands out like we were driving a truck. He began to laugh and was very proud that we finally understood.

The next morning a large convoy of Russian army trucks came into town and stopped. There were perhaps as many as twenty of them. We decided that he had heard before we left the town that we had landed that he could intercept a convoy there. The next morning we headed out toward Vienna, Austria, in one of the empty trucks.

The convoy made frequent stops along the way and seemed in no hurry to get anywhere. They were "living off of the land". We would stop in a small village, get out of the trucks, and the Russians would fire their guns into the air. The people would come out of the houses and the Russians would go in and look for food. The Hungarians were living on whatever they could find since the German army had taken everything they had while on their retreat back to Germany.

Late one afternoon we arrived in a large town. There we saw thousands of Russians in and around the town. They were yelling, dancing in the streets, and firing their guns in every direction. We stayed very close to our trucks! Joe, who had disappeared for a while, came running back to our trucks with another Russian officer who spoke some broken English. The

war had ended and Germany had surrendered! We were told by the Russian officer that we were invited to a celebration that night. The General in charge of that area would be there. He also mentioned that the food would be better and the wine would be plentiful. Of course we accepted. We needed the food and the adult beverages.

The celebration was in an auditorium and on the stage was a Russian General and his staff. It was a large building filled with soldiers and thousands more were in the streets. Our whole crew was introduced to the auditorium as the "Americakonsky Peelots". We could not understand the speeches, but the food and drinks were good, and before we knew it was 2 AM. We were taken back to the truck that morning, and Joe came by and indicated that he had to go back to his outfit in Pecs, Hungary. He hugged us all and kissed us on both cheeks. There were tears in his eyes and ours as well.

We then headed out again for Vienna. The convoy stopped frequently, usually out in the country. The truck drivers and soldiers would get out and walk around while firing their guns. They seemed to enjoy firing at the glass holders that held the phone lines on the tops of the poles. We were still in Hungary in a area of beautiful rolling farm land where wheat had been planted and harvested. It was obvious that a huge battle had been fought there between the Russians and the Germans. There were many burned out German tanks and other assorted weapons. This area of battle was stretched out over several miles. The amazing thing to me was the maze of trenches as there were in World War I. I picked up a German helmet that looked as though it had never been used. (I managed to bring it all the way home.) At this time in our journey the convoy began to stop at various camps, unload supplies, and pick up other things. I never knew what those things were. I only know they were crates and boxes. We were all generally in a fairly good mood but growing frustrated at the slow pace of things. We were sure we would meet up with our ground troops east of Vienna sometime in the future. About a week later we arrived in a town called Wiener-Neustadt, about 20 miles south of Vienna, Austria. They told us to stay in the trucks and they would go look for a place for us to stay and make arrangements for us to meet the American army. They took us south of the town to a small village with a beautiful little stream that ran through the center of the town. An army camp of Russians was in sight near the village. We stayed at the truck while they began to walk down the dirt streets knocking on doors. They soon came back and took us to several houses. The houses were very small with only room for two of us to a house. My bombardier and I were together. Our room was next to the milk cow's room. The main difference in the rooms was that the cow's room did not have a floor. The Russians settled us in and left to stay at the camp just a quarter of a mile away. Twice a day they would pick us up and take us to the camp to eat. The first night at the house was quite an experience. We shared a small double bed with a mattress filled with straw. We were tired and went to bed early. Before we went to sleep we began to feel as if something were moving in the mattress. We decided it was our imagination. A while later we hear a noise and quickly decided it was coming from the mice running around the floor. We got up and lit the kerosene lamp and there they were. We saw a small hole in the corner of the floor where they were

coming in. We began to beat on the mattress and several mice ran out and disappeared into the hole in the wall. We spent the rest of the night with at least one mouse remaining in the mattress. The next day we fixed the hole, took the mattress outside and put some blankets that we had gotten from the Russian soldiers over the springs so we could sleep on it.

We were sure we would only be there another day or two. We were there at least two more weeks or more. Every day we would inquire as to when we would go to meet our troops. Every day the answer was the same, "Tomorrow". We were getting pretty tired of the food. They parched wheat and we saw them boil it, making what we call coffee. We had moldy sausage and black bread for breakfast. We had the same for supper with the addition of boiled cabbage.

During this time we had many visits from the Russian soldiers. They were curious about us because they had never seen Americans. We had never seen them either except pictures in the newspapers. One day they began to talk about the war and all the battles they had been in. They began to undress down to their underwear, if they had any, and would show us their war wounds. I remembered that our tail gunner had a lot of scars. He had lived in Chicago and spent his summers at his uncle's farm in southern Illinois. He had machinery. I suggested that he take off his coveralls. The Russians were very impressed.

In all of our thirty-two air raids we only had two men injured by anti-aircraft fire. One of our waist gunners lost all of one foot. The navigator was wounded in his shoulder. He was able to return to his post in about one month. We had a medical kit in the plane consisting of tourniquets, bandages, morphine for pain, etc. The nearest I ever came to being hit was when a large piece of flak came up through the cockpit and between my legs up in front of me and on out the roof. I sat on a flak jacket after that.

Late the next day we were told to prepare to move and that we were going to meet the American Army. We hardly slept at all that night. Early the next morning they came back to pick us up. A few miles away there was a small grass airfield that we were unaware of. I recall that there were a number of "yak" or Russian fighter planes there. They looked somewhat like the German Folfewolf. There were several cargo planes, including an American C-47. The C-47s were what our paratroopers used to bail out of on their drops. Some of the C-47s are still flying in America to this day. We thought of how nice it would be when they told us we would see the Americans today.

The weather that day was awful, rain and fog. The fog began to lift and the rain stopped but the clouds remained just a few hundred feet above the ground. I began to wonder why they didn't climb above the clouds instead of flying so close to the ground. As I sat there I began to notice how, and wonder why, they would occasionally turn the plane left and then right. I finally figured it out. They were "daytime only" pilots, with little or no training in instrument flying, and were following the roads and railroads. I became sure of this as I watched out the window. As the weather began to clear we all began to realize that we were not flying west as we should

have been. We had been in the air much too long in order to meet the American ground troops. When we tried to talk with the pilots they would only shrug their shoulders. We became more alarmed than we had ever been.

We began to see a large city ahead and the plane began to descend. When we landed at the rather large airport we saw a sign on a building that read Bucharest-Romania. We had been flying almost due east instead of west. We stopped for fuel and soon took off again flying northwest. We sat for a while in a stunned silence, staring out the window and at each other. We all felt completely helpless for the first time. We finally decided there was nothing we could do except wait and see what happened. Ahead of us, a few miles away, we saw a large body of water. We weren't sure what it was, but we knew that it was big. In the smoky haze we saw a city that was approximately the size of Washington, DC. After landing we taxied off the runway and stopped, but nowhere near the other planes. Within a few minutes a truck pulled up and we were told to get out of the plane. One of our crew moaned, "Not another truck again", but this time nobody laughed. The drive of the truck indicated that we were going to see the Amerikonskys. At this point I don't think any of us believed that and we had nothing to say. By this time it had grown dark. The lights were very dim. After an hour or so drive we pulled up to what seemed like a number of brick and stone buildings. We couldn't see much of them because there was a large brick wall build around them. Someone from my crew spoke up and said, "It looks like a prison to me." When we stopped the driver got out and motioned for us to follow. We went into one of the buildings and down the hallway. He motioned for us to stop at a door.

What we saw in the next few minutes made us happier than we had been in months, maybe even years. An American army major came to the door and said, "Welcome, men. We knew you were on the way." I didn't ever think to or care to ask him where he had found that out. We were told later that this place had been an insane asylum. Kinder names are used to describe these places now. The major chatted with us a while, wanting to know where we had been shot down and where we had been. We asked him where we were and he said, "You are in the city of Odessa, Russia." which was a large sea port on the Black Sea.

In addition to the major, there were several other enlisted men. A Russian nurse and a doctor began to ask us about our health, etc. The doctor began to look at a crew member's hair and scalp. We had lice and didn't know it. Remember, we had rarely had a bath for two months. Our baths had consisted of ringing out rags in cold water and wiping off our bodies. By this time we all had long hair and beards. I often wish we would have had a camera to take a picture of us. It was getting late so we had baths and were all sprayed with something for lice. We all went to bed after having the best meal we'd had in several months. The rooms were old with two double beds in each but they had clean sheets and pillows. These rooms were without a doubt the best we'd had since we left the United States. We also found out that night that there were military people there from all over Europe that the Russians had picked up at prison camps in eastern

Germany and were brought there by various ways. The American army major and groups like his from all of the European countries were there to pick up their people.

We stayed there for about a week waiting for a British troop ship to arrive and drop off a group of Russian soldiers they had picked up in Germany. The ship apparently arrived the next day, but we had to wait for over a week to board the ship. I found out from one of the British soldiers that it took them that long to clean up the ship after the Russian soldiers had debarked. He remarked, "They were like a bunch of hogs, you know, very uncivilized." I could not have agreed with him more, but I still thought of our friend "Joe" and how much he meant to us during the early part of our sojourn in Eastern Europe.

There was a great sense of relief when we boarded the ship and headed down through the Black Sea. We were alone on the ship except for the British crew. They treated us like kings. We had cabins to ourselves if we wanted. We even had a cabin boy to make our beds and shine our fleece-lined winter flying boots. The only drawback was that we were constantly served mutton. It was always my least favorite meat. They also drank their beer warm.

It was now somewhere around the first of July. The weather was beautiful and we spent most of our days on the deck. The ship had a large cable around it at the water line that stood out about two feet or more. It was there to explode the mines if they got too close. The Russians had placed mines in the water and they were floating. There were guns on swivel posts, I don't remember the caliber, and every so often a mine would be spotted and they'd open fire and explode it. The mines delayed the trip because we had to pull into port at night to avoid them.

We finally came by Istanbul, Turkey and into the Bosphorus Sea, and then through the Dardanelles, between Greece and Macedonia. From there we went into the Aegean Sea and around to the Mediterranean and on into the seaport of Taranto, Italy. We were taken to a nearby air base depot where all of the "war weary" planes were kept as well as other supplies. The next morning we were flown to our base. Not much was left there. The crews, planes, and most of the personnel had left for the states. Just a few people were left in the headquarters building to do the final closing of the base. The major in charge told us that we would be flown home in a week.

We asked about our clothes and other personal things, but were told that they had been shipped back home. They were never received. Our personnel files were still there so they gave them to us to take with us and turn in to our next assignment. We had all been promoted to the next rank. I had been promoted from Second Lieutenant to First as well as promoted from Co-Pilot to First Pilot.

We were flown to Naples that afternoon. We spent the days going into Naples and seeing the sights. We spent the nights in tents. One week went by and then another. We were finally told that they were not sure when the plane would arrive to take us home. They told us that they were

going to fly us to Bari, a large seaport on the Adriatic Sea, and we might stand a better chance of getting a plane home. We were there about two weeks with nothing happening. The Colonel in charge suggested that he could call the office in charge of the base that had the “war weary” planes and maybe we could get on and fly it home. The next day we were picked up and headed for the base. We were beginning to think that this situation was about as confusing as the time we had spent with the Russians.

When we got there we checked with the Colonel in charge. He suggested that we test-hop some of the better planes and find out what we thought about flying one back home. He showed us two planes that he considered being okay. We did test flights on both planes the next day. We decided on one that needed one new engine and a few other small things done to it to make it air worthy. Three or four days later we began our flight back on the same route that we had come. It took us about a week to get home. We arrived at Bradley Air Base in Connecticut. That day we all went our separate ways by train to our home states on a 30-day leave.

I arrived at home two days later. It was the latter part of August 1945, after a trip that began on April 25, 1945, including my being shot down, and concluded in late August 1945. I decided to stay in the service for a while. I was making a salary much greater than I could have if I had gotten a job in civilian life.

After my leave I reported to Monroe Air Base in Monroe, Louisiana. My first job there was flying navigator students on night training flights. The Air Corps, as was the rest of the Army, was in a state of utter confusion. There were millions of people in the various services and no particular jobs for them. By the end of the war, these forces had reached over 13 million people. There were thousands of pilots and other crew members without specific jobs. Most of us were given other jobs with just enough flying time to warrant our flying pay. Air bases were closing and were being transferred to others. I was transferred to Boca Raton Air Base in Boca Raton, Florida, and I was assigned to the air police squadron as an adjutant. I learned as fast as I could. The commanding officer was a Lt. Colonel. In my first interview his only advice was, “I will tell you what to do and you just go and do it.” I didn’t think that would work but I found out that it was pretty good advice. The job was mostly paperwork and substituting for him when he wasn’t in.

Several months later a friend and I went to Miami to apply for a job with Eastern Airlines. They were the largest carrier in the US at the time. They offered us a job as co-pilots for \$150 per month. Their airlines at the time were DC-3s, a twin engine plane, which was what we used during the war as transport planes. It carried about 40 passengers as I recall. We left with a “thanks but no thanks” as we were making about \$800 a month at that time.

The base was closed shortly after that. A hurricane had come along and didn’t leave many buildings standing. They were mostly made of wood. I was transferred from there to Chanute Field, Illinois. It was about that time that I began to think that being in the service wasn’t that

much fun. At this same time, the troops that had stayed in Germany in the occupation forces after the war were rotated home and needed replacement. I volunteered to go to Germany soon after. I was assigned as adjutant of the Air Police squadron. The commander there was a jolly old guy that had made a career of the Army and was nearing retirement. In our first conversation he told me that if I would head the squadron at the Saturday morning parades, he would see that things would go well for me. He was true to his word. He hated parades.

Promotions had been frozen for reserve officers after the war,, and had remained that way for five years. After being there for about a year, I was promoted to the rank of Captain, despite the fact that promotions were still frozen for a couple more years. Did this bother me? No, I felt I deserved it! I got to tour most of the western European countries while I was there. I might add here that people would say we had the “cushy” jobs, but it was a matter of record that air crews stationed mainly in England, North Africa and Italy lost about 25% of their crews either to being killed, being taken as German prisoners, or to end up in a rather unique situation like mine.

I was rotated back to the states and resigned from the service. I spent six years in Forest Grove, Oregon near Portland at Pacific University and eventually found my way to Sanford. I want to add, and I mean this sincerely, that I found a home here. I have lived in many places in my adult life, but none better than Sanford, including both the people and the town.