

The following is the text of a letter received by Fred Riley, 456th Bomb Group Association Historian. Clarence had not had contact with the Association until shortly before this time.

March 13, 1998

Dear Fred,

I received your March 4 letter along with the 456th Bomb Group History Book, the air base photo, and the photo of Col. Steed. Thanks very much for your quick response.

I have just started reading the History Book, and it is already obvious that it will bring back many memories; some good, some bad, of military life in the 456th, and of many very close friendships.

The faces have changed and the names have faded, but I have already recognized several faces and names among the photos of association members and the 456th Bomb Group roster.

You asked how close were you on the bombardier school that I attended. You hit it right on the button - Big Springs, Texas class of 44-7. Someday I should like to hear about your tour there.

You were not quite as close on the rest of my history. You listed my address in Louisville as Wellwood Ave. actually, Mellwood Ave. - not very important unless you tried to contact me at that address.

Your statement that I was MIA 12 October 1944 is undoubtedly correct according to the official records; however, it came as quite a surprise to me.

We did make an emergency landing in the San Marino, Italy area on our return trip from the 12 October 44 mission to Bologna. The emergency was due to mechanical problems and not enemy action.

We had heard that we would be reported as MIA if we did not return to the base within three days. We therefore made a special effort to get back as soon as possible. I caught a ride back with another crew going in our direction and arrived back at the base in three or four days. The rest of the crew and the plane returned

about the same time. Someone apparently forgot to correct the records. Our families were never notified that we were MIA

With reference to the Vienna mission of 11 December, it was a rough one. The flak at Vienna was, as usual, very heavy and quite accurate. Almost immediately after our bombs had been released, there apparently was one or more flak bursts very close to our plane.

As evidenced by the damage from the nose to the tail of our plane, I feel certain several bursts hit us. As I was trying to observe the bomb strike a piece of flak came through the window in front of the bombsight, spraying Plexiglas in my face.

I received a small laceration over my eye but nothing serious. One piece came through the top turret, barely missing the flight engineers head. One piece ricocheted around inside an oxygen bottle, causing a small fire on the flight deck. The crew member using that oxygen bottle was a new pilot on his indoctrination flight. What a way to start a tour of duty! The tail gunner was also hit by flak.

Our hydraulic system was apparently damaged, as we lost almost all, if not all, pressure. Upon landing he had to crank down the landing gear, and pop a chute to enable us to stop.

We counted one hundred and seventy five holes in the plane. Roy Firestone, our flight engineer, said the crew chief asked him why we even bothered to bring that plane back! (To which Roy responded, "because we didn't want to walk!" - webmaster note).

Although I was on the 18 November '44 mission to Vicenza, I still do not remember anything about it. Maybe later.

Fred, I am enclosing a few pictures which you might like to see. These are copies so no need return.

Sorry for the long letter. I won't be so gabby next time.

Clarence Knopf.