

"Prolog"

Prologue

by A. Willard Reese - Pilot B-17

As I approach my 81st birthday, and as events and scenes of 58 years ago begin to fade, I feel compelled to put in print my remembrance of a special time and place so many years ago. Most of us fail to recognize at the time the most significant moments in our lives. I think perhaps the years '42 through '45 were the years that shaped the future for me. I often wonder how different my future would have been had it not been for the events of those years.

My generation was born in the early "Roaring Twenties", grew up and suffered through a world wide economic depression which lasted through the 1930's. We were just beginning a recovery from this depression when we found ourselves thrown into an enormous world conflict called World War II. My experiences during this war from 1942 through 1945 are the basis for this web site and represent my best efforts at recalling in accurate detail as much as I am able. My family has been supportive of my effort and have lovingly encouraged me during the many months I have struggled to make this a reality.

This was a time, when each American, young and old alike, gave of themselves for the love of their country. A time when almost everyone worked in war industries and no one doubted our ultimate victory. A time when those of us in our teens anxiously awaited our 18th birthday so that we could enlist in the services. A time when we eagerly awaited the completion of our cadet flight training so that we could join in combat and help conclude the war. A time when many of us left our homes and loved ones for the first time and learned what it meant to be homesick. A time when most of us had to deal with the death of close friends or crew members for the first time.

The exuberance of youth made us feel invincible and thoughts of death seldom crossed our minds. To say we were scared flying into enemy territory would understate our feelings. The tightness in the stomach, when the curtain was raised in the ready room to display our target, is still felt today. Only the flares bursting in the darkness, signifying the order to taxi our plane, relieved the tensions and we were again ready to go to work. Our flying training had prepared us for this mission and our fears left us temporarily.....only to reappeared when we sighted the black puffs of antiaircraft fire or distant contrails of ME 109's.

I raise a reverent toast to those of my comrades who made the supreme sacrifice for their country.....and there were so many.

Our crew flew 30 bombing missions over enemy territory in a B-17 "Flying Fortress" - the finest bomber produced in WWII. Most of the missions that we flew between October 1944 and April 1945 were not memorable. This was a period in time when we experienced the worst of European weather and a period when all our missions were accompanied by a friendly fighter escort, unlike the earlier part of the war when fighters did not have the range to accompany bomber all the way to the target. We seldom saw enemy fighter aircraft up close and frequently our targets were obscured by clouds, leaving the results of our bomb drops to our imagination.

We regularly flew from the initial point (IP) to the target, through a field of hundreds (seemed like thousands) of bursts of 88 millimeter anti-aircraft fire (Flak), always flying straight and level and at a

fixed altitude - a perfect target for the German antiaircraft gunners intent on sending their shells into our plane or deflecting us from our target. I don't remember a single mission that we did not encounter some anti-aircraft fire.

I hope that these real life stories will be read by my family and my descendants and those of my peers who were with me at that time and may survive me.....and to all others who may have an interest in this short period of time in the history of our country.

Respectfully submitted,
A. Willard "Hap" Reese

"From Kingston High School to the Flying Fortress"

From High School to War

My beautiful daughter, Diane, now 40 something, is the one person most responsible for my getting started on this web site. She has prodded and encouraged me every step of the way. She frequently asks me to write about what she thinks others would like to know about me and my experiences of 58 years ago. Recently she wrote me as follows:

"Dad,

Now, here's a topic for you to write about, and about which I'm curious. What was it like *before* you joined the Air Corps? Did you enlist, or were you drafted? Why did you pick the Air Corps? How did you sign up for (or were you somehow chosen for) pilot training? (Why did you end up a pilot and not a bombardier or a navigator or radioman?) What was your training like? How did you get to be an officer? Did you ever doubt your choices? Did you have any contact with the guys in your crew before you were thrown together to fly overseas? Did you get to choose them, or were you handed the names?"

I'm going to attempt to answer all these questions by creating the following semi-autobiography. This autobiography will cover the years from high school through aviation cadet training and up till the time I first flew with my talented crew in a B-17 - about a three year period.

I was raised in the small town of Kingston, Pennsylvania located in the Northeast area of Pennsylvania in coal mining country. I grew up in the period between the two world wars and enjoyed a childhood that spanned the decade of the great depression. At the time I did not realize that this was a difficult period and I did not learn how painful it was till many years later. My childhood seemed quite normal and I really did not miss the many things of which I was deprived because of the depression economy.

We were fortunate that, throughout this period, my father held a job when so many were unemployed.....learning later that during this period his highest salary was \$22.00 per week. Still, with this minimal wage, my parents managed to house, clothe and feed me and my sister even through the worst of times. It is with fondness that I remember the great meals cooked by my grandmother who lived with us till he death in 1940. There are so many great memories of growing up with my family in this town.....I have come to realize that it was their love that contributed most to my happiness during this terrible economic period.

As a student in high school I struggled through a college preparatory course knowing that my chances of going to college were poor indeed since my folks did not have the resources to finance an advanced education for me . It was in my junior year of high school that I met Edna Storch, the most beautiful girl had ever seen. I was madly in love with this young lady who would later become my wife and the mother of our kids, and with whom I recently celebrated our 58th wedding anniversary. Our first date was for the Junior Prom in the gymnasium at Kingston High School.

Edna and I graduated from Kingston High School together in June of 1941, just seven months before the attack on Pearl Harbor. During my high school years the international scene was one of chaos and war.

Hitler had annexed Austria, invaded Poland, Norway, Denmark and overrun Netherlands, Belgium and France. Yugoslavia and Greece were under attack and Germany had joined with Italy into what became known as the Axis powers. The Axis military power seemed unstoppable and indications were that an invasion of England was imminent.

There was still a strong isolationist policy in this country up until Pearl Harbor was attacked. In order to give support to England and other countries fighting the Axis powers, the United States would become the "Arsenal of Democracy" with defense industries springing up throughout the country. The US economy was gradually coming out of the depression. War industries and jobs were becoming plentiful. Without family financial support I had to give up any idea of going to collegea disappointment that I felt deeply. Instead, after graduation from high school, I took a ten week "Defense Training Course" at a local extension college. This course was mostly a crash course in mathematics, blueprint reading, drafting and other skills that would enable one to hold a job in a defense industry. We were guaranteed employment after graduation in some defense plant in the northeast region.

I accepted an offer from the Glenn L. Martin Aircraft Co located a short distance outside of Baltimore, Maryland and began my career in the aircraft industry with a grand starting salary of \$.60 per hour (that's 60 cents). I withdrew all my life savings from the bank and purchased my first car.....a 1939 Plymouth sedan, for the sum of \$200.00.

Off I went to Essex, Md where I managed to find a bed in a boarding house with nine other young men who also worked at Glenn Martin. I paid \$10.00 a week for room and board. This arrangement provided a cot in the unfinished attic of a saltbox style house with 10 cots laid out dormitory style. The rent included a bag lunch each working day and a full dinner in the evening. I mailed my clothes home for washing and ate a thirty five cent breakfast each morning. I still had enough change left to fill my gas tank with \$.12 per gal gasoline.

During the fourteen months I worked at Glenn Martin Company, I traveled the 120 miles from there to Kingston about once each month... or whenever I could take a weekend off from work and obtain enough rationed gas to make the trip. The time I spent at home was mostly with Edna and it was while I was with her on a Sunday afternoon in December that we heard the report of the bombing of Pearl Harbor by Japan.

I guess what eventually led me to the Air Force was a stroke of luck in being assigned by Glenn Martin as an aircraft hydraulics inspector in final assembly at their B26 bomber assembly plant. It was my job to check out all hydraulic components of this bomber as it came off the final assembly line and just before it went for its first test flight. Since all controls on the B26 were hydraulic, I had the opportunity to sit in the cockpit of this plane and push the buttons, lift the levers and operate the planes controls. I operated the planes brakes, landing gear, flaps, bomb bay doors, etc. I would sit in the cockpit each day and fantasize how I would someday pilot such a plane and surely become a hero in defense of our country.

I was then only 18 years of age but when I turned 19 in the middle of 1942, I started to work on my parents to sign the papers for me to join the service. This [picture](#) of me was taken in September of 1942, two months before I enlisted. There was never any decision as to which branch of the service I desired - it would have to be the Air Force. With my parents approval, I enlisted in the US Army Air Force in

November of 1942 in Baltimore, Maryland but because of the rush of young men to enlist at that time, I was not called to active duty till February of 1943.

While awaiting the call, I returned to Kingston and took a job in a local toy store and again spent most of my free time with Edna. I well remember the difficult time I had parting with my parents and, of course, with my love. I promised to write regularly and assured everyone that I would come home whenever I could get enough leave time. As it turned out, I managed to get home only once, for one week, between the time I enlisted and the time I returned from overseas.

I entrained at Baltimore, Maryland with about a hundred other Air Force enlistees....to report for military duty at the induction center at Miami Beach, Florida. When enlisting we were not assured that we would ever get to fly or even be a member of the crew of an airplane. We had to take our chances. Whether we would commence training as a pilot, navigator, bombardier or gunner would be determined only after a lengthy series of mental and physical tests. That determination would occur at the southeastern "Classification Center" in Nashville, Tennessee some months after our induction.

Having lived for the past year away from my family, the separation now was tolerable and "homesickness" was not the problem for me that it was for so many others. I'll not forget our arrival in Miami Beach. I had never seen such a place. We arrived late at night enjoying the 70 degree weather in February and were billeted in one of the many beautiful hotels right on the beach. The atmosphere was to change radically the next day when we were called out at dawn to do PT on the beach in our civilian clothes. We were shortly thereafter outfitted in the standard GI garb and proceeded for the next month to learn to march, drill, serve KP (kitchen police), fill out tons of paper and get the usual shots that GI's everywhere got. Each day began with an hour of physical training (Ouch!). I liked being in this gorgeous wonderland of beautiful beaches and luxury hotels but after about a month I was ready to get out of there and on to classification.

Then the bad news struck. The Air Force announced that there were too many enlistees to process at the Classification Center at this time so we were to be sent to what they called CTD (College Training Detachment) where we would continue with our routine training and attend college classes at the same time. I was sent to Xavier University in Cincinnati, Ohio with about 60 other cadets who would henceforth be known as the class of 44C. I believe we were at Xavier for about ten weeks and very much enjoyed my stay in this beautiful city. It was while I was here that my family and Edna came to visit me. I felt very important showing them around the college and the town in my GI uniform. And it was then that I knew Edna and I would be married some day if I survived the War. We were very much in love. Parting was difficult indeed.

Our Class of 44C left Xavier about the middle of June and arrived in Nashville, Tennessee the next day. I remember Nashville as the worst of all stops in my military career. First of all, the lodgings were, one story wood structures covered with black roofing paper (we called them tarpaper shacks) and the latrines were about a quarter mile from our building. We were housed about 40 men to a building. I guess the worst part of the time we spent here was in anticipation of the testing that would determine whether we would become pilots, navigators, bombardiers, or gunners (If you flunked out of the first three categories you were sent off to gunnery school and if you did not qualify there you would be relegated to the infantry). The series of tests we took over the next few weeks was extremely difficult and nerve wracking. First, we experienced the most detailed and complete physical that I have ever been through,

taking almost a week to complete. Then we spent about a week in which we were checked for physical dexterity, night vision, aircraft silhouette recognition, depth perception, sound and visual perception, etc., and on and on. I remember some of the fellows would spend the evening before the night vision test stuffing themselves with carrots.

Then came the psychological examination which consisted of interviews with psychiatrists and written questionnaires with lots of multiple choice questions.. We all sweat out each test and did not know the final results till a couple days before we shipped out. Those who did not qualify would be sent to gunnery school or to GI boot camp. Those who did qualify (probably around 75%) were assigned as either pilot, navigator or bombardier. Only those selected to be pilot's would go on to flight training. It would not be until we finished basic flight training that we would know if we were to go to single engine or multi-engine aircraft.....and that was usually determined by the need for that category.

Anyway, I made pilot training and felt a wave of relief after the previous 5 months of anticipation and waiting.

My next stop was at Maxwell Field, Montgomery, Alabama. This was preflight training on the order of West Point. During our first month at Maxwell we underwent one horrible month of hazing....we walked everywhere at 120 steps per minute, saluted the water cooler (General Electric), absorbed severe verbal abuse from the upper class men as the lowest of human life, earned demerits for the slightest infractions of rules, endured "white glove" room inspections, had to memorize large passages of text overnight, walked tours (marching alone at attention in the courtyard with a rifle continuous for one hour at a time for each demerit over 4 - I believe). I had to walk 5 tours.....I remember them well in that 100 degree heat.

In addition, we had a formal military parade EVERY day in that afternoon sun in July and August of '43. Our strenuous physical training each day concluded with a run on "The Burma Road" obstacle course. All cadets that were at Maxwell Field will well remember the "Burma Road". When we left Maxwell Field we were not only disciplined cadets, we were also in top physical condition.

I went from Maxwell Field to Dorr Field in Arcadia, Florida for Primary flight training. Except for the bugs and heat, this was a place I came to like very much. The field had been a resort in the middle of the Everglades that taught flying to those who obviously had money. Our barracks were really private rooms with bath that we shared....six men to a room. There were tennis courts and a beautiful swimming pool. Our flight instructors were civilians that had taught at Dorr Field before the war for Embry Riddle School of Aviation. It was here that we would have an experience reserved for only some of the cadets who reached Primary flight training....flying the Stearman PT-17. This plane was a fabric covered biplane with two open cockpits and a 220 hp motor. The student sat in the front and the instructor in the back. This plane was everything that we ever expected of a trainer. It could do all kinds of acrobatics even though the engine cut out when you were inverted (gravity feed fuel tank in the wing overhead). We soloed after only six hours of training and from the moment of solo till we left Dorr the hours of flying in the PT-17 were some of the most enjoyable of my flying career. It was such a safe plane that we were instructed that if we were to loose the engine we need not bail out but should ride it down and, if necessary, just pancake the plane into the tops of a grove of trees. You could stall out and mush in at about 40 mph. I did very well in the Stearman and got excellent marks from my instructor.

My next stop was for Basic training at Courtland, Alabama, a rural airfield located in northern Alabama along the Tennessee River. Here I flew the BT-13A -- also known as the "Vultee Vibrator". The title is self-explanatory.

That winter in northern Alabama was extremely cold from the middle of November to the middle of January in 1945. I vividly remember those cold winter days we spent on the flight line and in our living quarters, feeding coal to the small stove in the middle of our room. The barrack buildings were reminiscent of those at Nashville except much smaller and with no insulation.

The major event associated with flying that I remember from my time at Courtland was a disaster in which some twenty student pilots, including me, were sent on a night cross country flight prior to our having had any instrument flight training. During the flight we encountered severe frontal weather with huge thunderstorms extending from a few hundred feet up to perhaps 30,000 feet. Because of the weather I decided not to attempt to reach our destination at Nashville and instead dropped down to about 200 ft altitude where I could just barely see the ground through the darkness and heavy rain. I flew south at about 200 feet altitude for about an hour till I sighted the Tennessee river and then followed the river back to our field at Courtland.

Six of the twenty cadet pilots crashed somewhere in Tennessee during that storm. All were killed. There was a Congressional investigation of this tragedy and the commander of the field was removed from his command for sending cadets out on a night cross country flight without having had proper instrument training. The experience was a tragic one for me since I knew all of the cadets who were killed. They had all been with me throughout our training. We had been together since CTD at Xavier and we were all members of the "Class of 44C". There were many more losses to come in future months but the death of friends so close to home was very upsetting to each of us who served with them. It somehow seemed appropriate to die in combat but not in a training accident.

It was at Courtland that a determination was made as to which cadets would continue on to single engine and which would go on to multi-engine advanced training. I was selected for multi-engine. The selection for twin engine or four engine bombers or transports would not be made till the completion of advanced twin engine training.

My twin engine advanced training would take place at Columbus, Mississippi. Here we flew the AT-10. The plane had twin 230 hp engines and was physically larger and had more power than anything we had flown till now. One of the less desirable features of the plane was that it was constructed of plywood. This feature was less than reassuring to this student pilot. We practiced formation and cross country flying and learned for the first time to work with a copilot and share flight duties.

Upon graduation, we were commissioned 2nd Lieutenants. Suddenly we were officers who commanded a salute and the many other perks that went with the title. It was a real sense of freedom after the past year of difficult training. In addition, we were given a ten day leave.... my first since enlisting. Before commencing my leave I was "asked" by the commanding officer to stay on at Columbus as an instructor for a few weeks since there were no openings at four engine flight school and the 'powers that be' felt that I was suited to B-17 piloting. I was then assigned as the instructor for five already commissioned officers who were seeking flying status. They were regular Army officers who had come up in rank from Officer's Training School with ranks from captain to full colonel. Here I was, a newly commissioned

2nd Lieutenant, giving orders and flight instruction to officers that ranked well above me. It was more fun than I expected. I was an instructor for only 3 weeks before an opening occurred at B-17 Transition school at Hendricks Field near Sebring, Florida.

Before proceeding to Florida, I took my 10 days leave starting in March of '44 and returned to my home in Kingston, PA. It was one exciting week as a new officer in a new officer's uniform and with everyone I knew in the town wanting to treat me or have me for dinner. I spent most of my time with my family and with Edna. We knew then that I would be going overseas within the next six months. We got engaged, ring and all, and agreed we would be married as soon as I returned.

After my leave I proceeded to my assignment for Transition flight training at [Hendricks Field](#) near Sebring, Florida. I arrived at Hendricks field in April '44 and, beginning the next day, spent the most exhaustive six weeks in my flying experience. The second day I was on the base I flew a B-17 with my instructor. What an experience! After flying what seemed like miniature planes, I had finally graduated to a real plane and "what a plane". I knew from the first flight that this was where I should be. I had often bemoaned the fact that I had been selected for bomber training when there seemed to be so much more appeal in flying single engine fighter planes. That feeling left me completely the first time I flew the "Flying Fortress". The solid feel of the plane and the sound of power that emanated from the four engines provided a sense of strength and power that I knew would carry me and my crew through the hard times to come.

The training was rigorous to say the least. My pilot's log book indicated that in one day's practice, I shot 16 landings. That's a lot in a B-17. We learned the basic flight procedures, instrument flying, formation flying, high altitude practice bombing runs, and cross country navigation. On each flight I was accompanied by another student pilot or an instructor who flew as copilot. During this training we did not fly with a full crew only a single engineer who accompanied us on each flight. I did not know at this time who would eventually make up my crew.....that would be determined at my next stop at Plant Park in Tampa. I began to look forward to this event, knowing that I would have the right of rejection for individual crew members but would otherwise have no choice in the selection of those with whom I would spend the coming year and in whose hands our collective destiny might rest. I was not to be disappointed in any of the crew that was assigned to me.

"An introduction to the crew of 'That's My Baby'"

Crew #424

Pilot - Lt A. Willard Reese

The military learned long ago that if you placed ten men together, put them through months of training as a team, and confined them to a small area like the fuselage of a B-17, there would be created a "Esprit de Corp" that others who had not been through this could not easily understand. Friendships developed in this way are strong indeed. On the crew of an aircraft, each member of the crew places his life in the hands of his fellow crewmember and depends on them to carry out the specific mission for which they have been trained.

Our crew first met each other when assignments were made (by authorities unknown) in Tampa, FL. I remember it was a tent city located in a stadium on the football field of a local college in the city of Tampa, FL. The place was known as Plant Park.

From Tampa we went by train to Gulfport, Mississippi to a B-17 training field where we spent the next few months learning to perform as a crew. We practiced formation flying, cross country navigation, landings and takeoffs, simulated bomb runs, and high altitude techniques. There was gunnery training (gunners shooting at a sock being towed by another plane), instrument flying, bail out and other emergency procedures, and all those elements that would serve us so well in the coming months. My first impressions of the officers and enlisted men who were assigned to be my crew was very positive. Here are my brief impressions - lovingly given.

The pilot. A. W. "Hap" Reese (that's me) was a young roughneck from Kingston, PA. His credentials in flight training were among the top cadets in his class of 44C. He was a sober, friendly, likeable, chap who was master of the B-17. (How's that for self praise)

Our copilot, Jim Stoner, was from a small town near Pittsburg. Like the rest of the crew, he was about 20 years old at the time. A smiling, happy faced, swaggering, "Hot Shot Charlie" type. He was just perfect as a contrast to my rather conservative, reserved nature.

Our bombardier was Joel Lester who hailed from Patterson, NJ. Joel was trained as a bombardier/navigator - we did not know it then but this capability would serve us well in the future. Joel was the friendly type who never hesitated to take on any task.

Don Scheuch, from Rochester, NY was our navigator. He looked about as young as I did and was very close to my age. His credentials told me that we were lucky to have him. He took very seriously his responsibilities and navigated with pin-point accuracy. We lost Don on his second mission when he flew with another crew and was shot down.

Our radioman, Charles Kenney, was a tall handsome fellow from Dayton, Ohio. He never had any trouble making friends with anyone. He was dedicated to his radio. A solid member of our crew. He held several records for Morse Code speed at the training school he attended.

Edward Peters, from Gloucester, MA, was our engineer and there was no better flight engineer

in the 8th. He looked older than the rest of us because of his heavy growth of beard that always looked like it needed to be shaved. He knew the B-17 inside and out and could "fix" anything.

It takes a very special person to serve in a ball turret and Jim McCloskey was that person on our crew. He never complained . Jim was a fun-loving, blond, energetic lad from Baltimore, MD. We could always count on Jim to handle the toughest job with a smile.

Clair Hetrick, our waist gunner, was from a town outside Pittsburg, Pa and was the youngest member of the crew - in fact, he was one of the youngest men to fly in the 8th Air Force. A true military type, he was friendly and diligent and all the crew respected him as I did.

Percy Mack was our tail gunner and came from a farming background in Vermont. He was a very sober person who seldom seemed to smile. He was always quick with a witty saying and had a great sense of humor that we all loved. He was a perfect compliment to the makeup of our crew.

Officially, Albert Knox was called an armourer (actually a second waist gunner). He was from Colorado and the only one of the crew from west of the Mississippi. He was always congenial and friendly.

Paul A. Brook was a Navigator who replaced Don Scheuch. Don was lost on the Nov. 2nd Merseberg raid. Paul was a fun loving adventurer who shared the compartment with Joel Lester and soon made his presence felt as a member of the crew. We never got to know much about his past but he performed his duties well.

"This Pilot's Diary"

A Pilot's Diary - From Tampa to Glatton

June 23, 1944 Hendricks Field, Sebring, FL.

I will be leaving [Hendricks](#) tomorrow. Just got my orders to report to Plant Park in Tampa and am quite excited about what is going to happen there. I will get to meet my "crew" for the first time. It's been tough but satisfying here at Hendricks. I've put in over 100 hours of intensive training in B-17's and I'm really looking forward to getting on to crew training.

June 25, 1944 Plant Park, Tampa, FL

Just arrived here and was really surprised by the accommodations. Plant Park is a tent city set up on the football field in a stadium of a local college. Anyway it's only temporary. Tomorrow they will be posting the list of crews and I will find out for the first time the names of those who will make up our crew.

June 26, 1944 - Plant Park

Today I met our officer crew members. I feel real good about them and expect we will be getting along fine together. We are all about the same age within two years at age 20. Jim Stoner seems just right to share the cockpit with me and Joel Lester and Don Scheuch are both outgoing and friendly. In a couple days the officers will be gathering with the enlisted crew members for the first time. Let's hope things go as well as they did today.

June 29, 1944 - Plant Park

The other six members of the "crew" were introduced to the officers today. What a gang! If I could have hand picked them I don't think I would have done as well. Again, they are all my age (approx) and I suppose it will take some time getting to know them, and how they will work out will be determined only by time. It was kind of formal with each individual not knowing exactly what to say - sorta awkward, but, I'm sure that will work off. We have been informed that we will ship out to Gulfport, Miss. on July 7th so we have some time to get acquainted and to see the city of Tampa.

July 7th, 1944 - Gulfport Army Air Field

We arrived here today after a one day train ride from Tampa. The enlisted men seem to be getting along fine and the four of us officers are having a ball together. We all play bridge and that fills in a lot of time. We spent the evenings and time off in Tampa and visited most of the bars there - ha! All members of the crew will be familiarizing themselves with the B-17 for the next week. None of the others in the crew has had more than a few hours in a four engine bomber so it's up to me to acquaint them with the procedures and equipment. We will all be taking some ground courses in the next week before our first flight together.

July 12, 1944 - Gulfport

Our first flight together. We took up a B-17G for 2:35 hours for a general familiarization with crew duties in the air. We had a few goofs but things went pretty well. Everyone seems anxious to make this crew the best.

Sept 25, 1944 - Gulfport

We flew a long distance flight to Dallas, Texas and return today and this finishes our training here at Gulfport. It's been a thorough education for each of us and the teamwork has convinced me that we are ready to go.

During the past 10 weeks we have: flown high and low altitude formation, instrument flight checks, high altitude gunnery, cross country navigation, high altitude practice bombing, air to ground gunnery, more practice bombing and more and more of everything. We have flown both B-17E's and B17G's. The crew has experienced being on oxygen for hours on end. We have practiced abandoning ship, fighting on-board fires, ditching at sea, and every possible emergency procedure. We are ready. The teamwork is exceptional and everyone is anxious to go.

That's good because I got the order, after our flight today, that we will leave by train tomorrow for Savannah, GA and Hunter Air Base. It looks for sure like we will be going to the 8th Air Force. (We're all happy about that)

Sept. 26, 1944 - Hunter Field - Savannah, GA

We arrived the same day after one of those dismal army train trips from Gulfport. We were immediately assigned a new Boeing B17G which we will be flying tomorrow. The plane has no air time on it except the ferry time from the Boeing plant. All of us have been outfitted with equipment meant for our overseas flight, like; hack watches, flying glasses, knives, and I have been issued a 45 caliber pistol with 20 cartridges. Things are getting serious. Tomorrow we make a local flight to calibrate the speed indicator, radio altimeter and other instruments before the start of our long trip overseas.

Sept. 27, 1944 - Hunter Field

We took off at 8:00 AM and flew the instrument calibration mission over Georgia and the area surrounding Hunter Field. We returned to the field after 2:55 hours. What a plane. It seems to have more power and lift than others we have flown and handles like a charm. I'm sure everyone is as excited as I about the start of this new adventure.

After landing, I was required to sign a receipt for one Boeing B-17G, serial number 43-38650 and all equipment on board. Can you imagine me, having just turned 21, signing a receipt for a B-17? It's a bit overwhelming.

I have since discovered that this plane eventually ended up with the 351st Bomb Group at Polebrook, a group in our Wing, and was badly shot up on a mission to Dresden on Oct 7, 1944. She crash landed in France. She had been named "Merry Christie".

We have received word that we are to report early tomorrow to begin our flight to Dow Field, Maine on our way, via the northern air route, to England.

Sept. 28, 1944 - In flight from Hunter Field.

We are on our way. We took off early this morning and are heading north mostly via radio control routing. We will be passing over Charleston, Raleigh, Richmond, Washington, Philadelphia, and New York City. What a cooks tour of the great Eastern cities! The sky is clear and the weather great here in Georgia.

I am thinking now about what this means. I'm thinking that here I am, a kid just turned 21, only three years out of high school, in command of a B-17 and it's 10 man crew with the responsibility of getting this ship and its crew safely to the other side of the Atlantic. I'm a bit overwhelmed. I am also cognizant of the fact that we are now on our way to join the air war in Europe with the prospect of never returning. I'm confident but a little scared about both of these future events.

The trip to Dow field is going to be slightly more than 1000 miles and will be the longest cross country flight that we have made -- and that's only the start. We still have to cross the Atlantic.

Sept. 29, 1944 Grenier Field, Manchester, NH

Well, we had a surprise. We spent last night at Fort Dix Army Airfield. As we approached Philadelphia, we were instructed via ground control radio that the weather over New England was very bad and that we should land at Fort Dix. We were there over night and were off this morning for [Grenier Field](#) in New Hampshire instead of Dow field in Maine. That's a change too. As they say, "That's the Army".

Our flight up from Savannah was spectacular to say the least. None of us had ever flown over this part of the country and it was something. We were within sight of the Atlantic coastline most of the way, and with the weather so clear, we had a great view of the big cities. Washington, DC shown in all it's glory. We could see the White House, the Capital building, the Washington Monument and the Jefferson Memorial -- it was a rare treat for all aboard. Then there was the New York City skyline, the Statue of Liberty, and all. The intercom was buzzing as members of the crew were constantly pointing out sights which they could spot from their vantage point.

We are now at Grenier Field near Manchester, NH.

Sept 30, 1944 Goose Bay, Labrador

We took off this AM from Grenier Field on our way to Goose Bay, Labrador. Things are certainly getting serious now. At Grenier we were outfitted with cold weather gear -- 10 sleeping bags, 10 sets of mountain ski's and ski goggles, 10 electric flying suits, and 8 cases of 'K' rations in case we were forced to land in Greenland. They also installed an auxiliary gas tank in the bomb bay to give us the extra cruising range for the long trip. They also loaded part of the bombay with about 20 bags of U.S. mail bound for England. The flight here to Goose Bay was uneventful except that we were surprised by all the crashed planes we saw as we flew over this much traveled route.

It's cold here. There is snow and ice all around and this base is much like the early settlers forts that I imagined were built in the west. It's all wood log construction with nothing, absolutely

nothing, within 100 miles or more. Everything that this base needs must be brought in by plane in the winter months. Tomorrow we will be off on the longest leg of our trip - the flight to Meeks Field in Iceland.

Oct. 1, 1944 Meeks Field, Iceland

We are now at Meeks Field in Iceland. It was a flight of almost 8 hours -- our longest by far. We got airborne at Goose Bay without incident and had clear flying weather most of the way. We were within sight of Greenland and could see nothing but white snow and ice. I expected to be able to see some land there but this land is totally covered with ice. We could see Bluie West, an emergency landing strip in a small bay on the Southwest corner of Greenland. No one wanted to have to land there because a four engine plane could land OK (with some difficulty) but could not take off. The plane would have to be dismantled and taken back by boat.

Shortly after passing Greenland the weather turned bad. We flew on instruments for almost 2 hours and as we neared Meeks Field we let down below the overcast. To maintain visual contact with the water, we had to fly at about 200 feet for the last hour. This was further complicated by a freezing rain which caused ice to build up on the wings and other surfaces.

Don's navigation, so far, has been great. We were right on course at Greenland. We were able to pick up the marker beacon at Meeks Field just when we expected and came the last 100 miles on the radio beacon. We landed visually at what appeared to be the worst looking place in the world. We left the plane in a cold freezing rain, the ground was icy and frozen hard and the sleeping accommodations were Quonset huts half buried in sod to help protect them from the weather, wind and cold. Burying them did not help. To make matters worse the weather has forced us to stay here another day and we cannot get off to England till Oct. 3rd.

Oct. 3, 1944 - Valley, Wales

The last leg of our flight to England had some changes too. The extra day in Iceland was spent mostly sleeping -- we needed to catch up after the long flights we had put in the previous few days. The weather was not good but we got airborne early today and as we flew East the visibility was much improved. After about 4 hours we spotted the northern tip of Ireland and knew we were right on course for Glasgow, Scotland which was to be our destination in Great Britain.

As we passed Ireland, we received a radio message that the airport at Glasgow was fogged in and that we were to proceed to Valley, Wales. We were not prepared for this but again Don's navigation was right on target. We flew South down the Irish Sea with Britain on the port wing tip and Ireland off the starboard wing.

We landed safely at Valley Airfield and I turned over our B17G to the air base there (I did get a receipt for it).

Soon we will be leaving here by rail to go to our new home in the East Anglia section of Britain to become part of the 1st Division of the 8th Air Force. We have been assigned to the

457th Bomb Group at Glatton Air base which will become our home for the remainder of our tour in England.

The flight over here this past week was an experience I will never forget. Nor will any of the crew, I'm sure. We have surely bonded as a crew because of this experience. We are grateful that we have arrived safely and that our prayers have been answered.

Now we must prepare ourselves mentally to take on the tasks we have been training for these past few months. Only God know what's in store for us.

END OF FLIGHT

Author's note: The above diary is a reconstruction of some of the memorable events in my life and in the life of our crew from the time we first met in Tampa on Jun. 26, 1944 to the time we arrived in England on Oct. 3, 1944.

It is accurate in time and detail and was compiled from personal notes, memoranda, official documents, army records, log books, etc, and -- from my memory.

A. Willard Reese, 1st Lt. Air Corp, Serial No 0825283

The Mission Daylog of This Pilot

The Mission Day Log.

Most of us who flew in bombers in the war will vividly remember the events that went into the physical and mental preparation for a bombing mission. Only those who flew those missions will remember that strong inward desire to somehow avoid being awakened on that morning when we must once again prepare ourselves for the unknown.

In spite of these yearnings, each flyer dutifully forced himself to perform those task for which he had been trained, knowing full well that this day may be the last he would ever experience. Each member of each crew managed to perform that same ritual time and again -- 25 times, 30 times, 35 times.

The following mission-day outline, which I shall call a "Mission Day Log", is an attempt to detail the events, experiences, and yes, the feelings of one individual while preparing for a bombing mission to a target in Germany. This is my experience as a pilot. Other crew members preparations were only slightly different in detail but I believe we all had similar feelings.

The night before:

Usually we had advance warning that a mission was pending. If the weather was good and if we were not on leave we could expect that notice would be posted in the afternoon or evening of the day before our group was to participate in a bombing raid. The officers were usually at the [Officer's Club](#) or alone in the hut when the word came down. A typed notice that listed the crews that were to fly the next day was placed in the Club and in the Squadron headquarters. Each of us nervously searched that list for our crew name. There was no indication as to where this mission would lead us or the time of the morning that we would be awakened.

After the mission notice was posted, the atmosphere in the Club and squadron area changed radically. The joviality of the evening was gone as everyone became conscious of the meaning of this coming event. Some who could sleep would immediately retreat to their bunks and try to get much needed rest for the coming difficult day. Other's who could not sleep, would write letters, read, play cards, or anything that would help to make the time go by more swiftly. I usually chose to spend the evening writing a letter to my sweetheart or to my mother or both, figuring it might be a very long time before I might be able to write again.

We each faced the coming event in different ways. Newly arrived crews, who might be flying their first mission, would be looking forward to the event with great trepidation. Those of us who had been there before could scarcely control our desire to "get on with it". After all, the sooner we could complete our required number of missions the sooner we'd be going home. We could not choose the target or the time so we just took our chances and hoped that this target would be a "milk run".

I usually stayed up till about 10:00 PM. There was always the hope that I would suddenly be overcome by sleep. Why did time pass so slowly? There were times when I passed out and slept like a rock but most mission nights were spent in a very restless, fitful sleep. The expression "sweating it out" must have originated with airmen. Some airmen, when awakened the morning

of a mission, would literally be in a cold sweat. No one said a word when one of his buddies arose in the semi-light of the early morning with sweat glistening on his torso. We understood.

Early Wakeup - 0330 hours.

It seemed to me that we were always awakened by an orderly at 3:30 AM -- it was not always 3:30 but it seemed that way. A rough hand on my shoulder and a flashlight in my face and a gruff "Wake up, sir. Briefing at 0430 hours", greeted me in the cold darkness of our hut. Lights were not turned on in deference to the sleeping crews that were not flying on that day. The four officers of our crew, Jim, Joel, Don and I lived together in hut #29. We each arose quietly in this early morning hour...usually by flashlight.

I dressed quickly in a sleepy stupor. There always seemed to be a chilling cold in the hut at that time of the morning but I felt comforted by the knowledge that wherever we went this day the temperatures at twenty five thousand feet would be much colder. I almost always wore my G.I. issue long johns. I never liked them but they did keep me warm. On one occasion I tried flying a mission without them and that experience convinced me that I could tolerate the itchy wool underwear better than the freezing cold. I also regularly wore a cashmere scarf which I had purchased on our first trip to Edinburgh, Scotland. The scarf was long enough so that I could wrap it around my neck, cross it over my chest and loop it under my arms.

The latrine, which served about fifty men, was less than a hundred feet from our hut and allowed us to sometimes be the first to wash with hot water....it ran out quickly. After ablutions and a quick shave (sometimes), we gathered our flight jackets and headed for the officer's mess for breakfast.

Our squadron, the 751st, was located about a quarter mile from the mess hall. I'll always remember the solemn procession of officers with flashlights spotting the way, trudging this quarter mile in the dark from the squadron area to the mess hall. In rainy or foggy weather the eerie procession was even more somber. We were each absorbed in our own thoughts of the coming mission and what it might mean.

Breakfast -- 0350 hours.

The [mess hall](#) was not the noisy, friendly place that we knew on non-mission days. Everyone was more subdued.....still trying to wake up. There was always someone, however, who decided to enliven the atmosphere by joking, or singing, or performing some nervous comic ritual to break the ice. No one seemed to appreciate this and the performer was quickly told to "sit down and shut up".

I usually had no appetite for food but also realized that it might be 12 hours or more before I would eat again, so I forced myself to enjoy the grits (or cereal) and "square eggs" and bacon that made up the usual breakfast menu. There was always fresh fruit - something I'm sure the GI's did not often enjoy. A cup of strong coffee topped off breakfast and acted as a quick picker-upper.

Mission Briefing -- 0430 hours.

Leaving the mess hall, Jim, Joel, Don and I, proceeded to the flight line for the officers mission briefing. We had been informed when we were awakened that briefing would be at 0430 hours --

it was now 0415 hours. Using our flashlights, we followed a short-cut path that took us to the flight line through a wooded area and saved a few minutes on this half mile walk. Walking this dirt path through the woods at this time of morning would normally be avoided but this morning there were enough of us that we seemed to form a continuous line from the mess hall to the briefing hut.

The briefing hut was an extra large Quonset hut with a blackout double door entrance. We shielded our eyes from the lights as we entered from the darkness of the early morning. Inside were rows of wood benches extending from the back of the hut to a raised platform stage at the front. A center aisle split the rows of benches. Overhead bare light bulbs in porcelain reflectors illuminated the space. The back wall of the stage was covered by a very large map of the European continent. The map was presently covered by a drawstring drape that would later be pulled back to display the route to our target for that day. The room could seat about 150 men and would be almost full this day since the group was putting up 36 planes. (Here is a picture of a typical [briefing room](#) almost like the 457th's)

By now, we were very much awake with anticipation. As the room filled with men, the nervous chatter of speculation and joking enlivened the atmosphere and the gathering seemed almost surreal. It took only minutes for the thin haze of tobacco smoke to fill the room. We anxiously awaited the moment of disclosure.....would our target be Berlin...or Mersberg...or hopefully some coastal target with no enemy fighters and little or no flak. We called this kind of mission a "milk run".

Promptly at 0430 hours the entrance door swung open. "Atten-Hut", and everyone snapped to attention as Colonel Rogner entered, strode briskly down the center aisle, and bounded onto the stage followed by the S2 officer, the weather officer, the colonel's aides and several other associates.

"At ease" shouted Colonel Rogner and moved directly to the center of the stage and immediately began a quick review of everything the group did wrong on the last mission. Fortunately, this only took a few minutes. He then quickly turned and signaled for the drawstring drape covering the map to be opened, and said, "Your target for today is the marshaling yards at Frankfort, Germany". At that moment it seemed that each flyer felt compelled to express himself with a gasp, moan, or some inappropriate remark as he observed the long black ribbon line on the map extending from Glatton to Frankfort, Germany. After the initial reaction, the seriousness of this [briefing](#) was evidenced in the expression on the faces of the men as each concentrated on the instructions being provided by the officers on the stage.

We now knew that this would not be a "milk run" and that we must prepare for a long, difficult day....there had been many disquieting stories circulated about our group's last mission to Frankfort.

Col. Rogner then proceeded to detail for everyone the following schedule: Stations - 0600 hours, Start Engines - 0630 hours, Taxi - 0645 hours and Takeoff at 0700 hours. He described the color flares to be used that day and gave other special instruction that were important for this to be a successful mission. He then explained what position our group would be flying in the Wing and

in the Division. He described our specific target, how many planes we would be putting up, where other groups in the division were going and concluded with a traditional expression that we heard before each mission "This is the 457th Bomb Group, let's fly a mission worthy of her today".

The group commander then turned the stage over to the [S2 officers](#) (intelligence) who, using a pointer on the large map, proceeded to describe all that intelligence had learned about enemy fighters that might be expected and the location and number of flak guns that we might encounter at the target and en route. He then pulled down a projection screen over the map and signaled his assistant to start the overhead projector. For the next few minutes we saw aerial photographs of the target area, enlarged aerial views of the marshalling yards, ground pictures taken in that region, and occasionally some unnerving photos.

I vividly remember him showing a photograph, taken on the ground, of a line of telephone poles along a country road somewhere in Germany. From each of the first few poles were six airmen that had been hanged from the cross arms of these poles. "Don't let this happen to you" he said, "Defend yourself against civilians - surrender only to the military or the local police". It was then that it became clear to me why we carried a 45 caliber pistol.

The S2 officer then relinquished the stage to the group command pilot who named the squadron lead planes, repeated the times for stations, start engines, taxi and take off. He gave us our bombing altitude (25,000 feet), reviewed with us the primary target and named the secondary target in the event we could not bomb the primary. Next came the weather officer who described the expected cloud cover over England and over the route to our target and what we might expect at the target and at our base when returning. We always took this weather report with a grain of salt because weather predictions were seldom correct. The weather officer would say, "The temperature at 25,000 feet will be -40 degrees Fahrenheit." He was never wrong about that. The intelligence officer again took center stage, and, looking at his wrist said, "We will now set our watches -- the time will be 0457 hours at the cue. In 10 seconds the time will be 0457 hours,, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1, Hack". In unison everyone in the room pushed in their watch stem and started their watch. "Those of you who wish to talk with the chaplain can be dismissed now to the adjoining hut". The formal part of the briefing was over.

Equipment Preparation - 0510 hours

The lead teams now gathered together at tables at the front of the room. The navigators and bombardiers of the lead and deputy lead teams went to another hut where they reviewed the targets and the navigation to the target and return. The copilots went to pick up an escape kit for each of the crew and the "flimsy's"- a thin rice sheet with the day's flight information and radio codes printed on it to be used by the pilot and radio man and to be eaten, if possible, in the event of bailout or capture.

We then left the briefing and proceeded to the [equipment room](#) to don our flight gear - the coveralls which we gratuitously called a flight suit, our leather-cloth helmet, goggles, gloves, Mae West, and parachute harness. We also picked up our oxygen mask, a throat mike, flak vests and parachute, and draped a 45 caliber pistol in a shoulder holster under our left arm. Some wore electrically heated suits but after my first experience with them, and the uneven heating I

experienced (my rear was roasted), I elected to fly with the long johns and as many extra layers of clothing as I could manage to support and still have enough freedom to fly the plane. We then threw our loose equipment onto the back end of a canvas canopied truck which delivered us through the still dark morning to our assigned plane. The enlisted men had already arrived at the hard stand and were checking their guns and the bomb load.

Stations - 0600 hours

We are now all assembled at the plane we are to fly. Each of the crew members proceeds to load his equipment, parachutes, flack vests, etc. into the plane and scurries to locate it in the appropriate area. I spend some time with the ground crew chief reviewing the status of the plane and any mechanical problems that he thought we might encounter. It was never very good news to hear from him that No 2 engine had been acting up and that we might have trouble starting - but he thought it would be 'OK' once it started. Jim, our copilot, walks the exterior of the plane with one of the ground crew, observing every detail and especially seeing that the control locks and pitot tube cover have been removed and that all the engines had been "pulled through". It is now 15 minutes before scheduled start of engines.

Prior to boarding the plane each of the crew members pays a visit to the rear of the hard stand and "waters the Queen's grass". We know that it will be 10 hours or more before we will return and, with ambient temperatures at -40 degrees Fahrenheit, we do not want to risk getting certain parts of our anatomy frostbitten. Sometimes a crew member will throw up his breakfast. I am especially anxious at this particular time. I make every effort to disguise my anxiety by my assertive actions, but I'm sure I am not the only flyer on this plane who is experiencing butterflies in the pit of his stomach as we await engine start.

Jim, our copilot, and I climb up into the open waist entrance door and proceed through the plane, squeezing through the bomb racks loaded with 500# demolition bombs. I exchange some words of encouragement with each member of our crew as we slowly move through the plane. Once at the cockpit we seat ourselves in our respective positions, strap on our parachute over the Mae West, connect the throat mike, check our oxygen mask and adjust the seat position. We give a quick overall check of the instrument panel and then commence our startup checklist. By this time I can hear the put-put of the ground crew's portable generator that is plugged into our plane until the engines are started. This generator provides power to our instrument panel, engine starters, lights and radio equipment and minimizes the drain on our planes batteries.

With Ed Peters, our engineer, looking over our shoulder we complete the preflight checklist and prepare to start engines. The copilot first makes a crew check to insure that everyone is aboard and in place and verifies that all guns have been checked and ammunition is at stand-by. Joel, our bombardier, checks the bomb bay to be sure the pins have been pulled and the bombs are ready and that the camera in the radio compartment is loaded and ready to take strike pictures. Sgt., Kenney, our radio man, checks his radio and the intercom and prepares the chaff that he will be dispensing on the bomb run.

It is now 0630 hours and looking out our cockpit window we see an arching red flare that has been fired from the control tower. The "engine start" is right on schedule. This is our sign that the weather is as expected and there is now a 90% chance that we will takeoff on schedule. The

one thing we did not want at this time was a "scrubbed" mission. A mission might be called off for any number of reasons at the last minute . If the mission were "scrubbed" we would then have to close down, return to our huts, and repeat this same routine another day. We had mixed feelings about this. Sometimes we were glad that we had been given at least one more day before we would have to face the experience of being shot at. At the same time we knew that we would still have to complete the same number of missions, so, "We're here, let's go now".

Jim and I have now begun the startup check list. After signaling to the ground crew chief that we are ready to start engines, we begin by starting engine #1, then #2, #3, and #4. [A copy of the B-17 pilots checklist is in the section titled "Here is a copy of the pilots checklist" on this web site.] All items on the list are carefully checked, one at a time. When all four engines are warmed up sufficiently we run up each engine to full throttle for a few seconds to check rpm and manifold pressures and other instrument gauges. This is the time when the butterflies begin to disappear. We feel at home now and the familiar roar of our four Wright Cyclone engines is comforting indeed. We are ready to go.

At 0645 hours we signal for the chocks to be pulled from the wheels and, giving a wave to the ground crew, we slowly move toward the taxi strip leading to the takeoff runway. I have been given our plane's position at the briefing and now proceed to flow into that lineup of taxiing planes. We are now one of dozens of planes slowly lumbering, nose to tail, toward the takeoff runway. We will be the sixth plane to take off this day. The sky has begun to brighten somewhat but the sun has not yet made its appearance over the English countryside.

Takeoff - 0700 hours.

From our vantage point we can see the group lead plane move to the center of the takeoff runway to await the flare that would signal the start of the mission. The green flare comes at exactly 0700 hours. The lead plane slowly picks up speed and roars down the runway. Within 30 seconds after the lead plane had started down the runway, the second plane follows. Additional planes depart at thirty second intervals. As we await our turn to move onto the runway, I think about the coming mission and about how much my flying skills on this day will determine the safety and well being of the other men on board.....a responsibility that weighs heavily on me. I say a short prayer.

It is now our turn. I slowly taxi out to the center of the runway. Our brakes squeal ominously as I make the 90 degree turn to line up on the center line of the takeoff runway. The gyro compass is checked and reset, the generators turned on, the wing flaps lowered one quarter and the tail wheel locked by the copilot. We await the green light signal for takeoff which will come from the mobile trailer parked ahead of us and along the port side the runway.

When the green light flashes, I press heavily on the brake pedals and advance the four throttle levers to full forward position. When the rpm reaches 2500, I release the brakes and we slowly start to move down the runway. As our speed picks up and I begin to feel the acceleration I realize that we are now committed to takeoff with our crew of ten, a 5000 pound bomb load, and 2500 gallons of aviation gasoline. Our plane creaks and bounces heavily as it slowly accelerates on the uneven concrete runway. As the speed increases further, our plane's tail slowly rises in defiance of gravity. To keep us centered in the runway I push heavily on the left rudder peddle.

My eyes flash quickly from the runway to the instrument panel and then back to the runway. I can see this long concrete strip gradually disappearing beneath us as our speed begins to build. The roar of our engines at full throttle becomes deafening. Jim begins to shout aloud our airspeed.....80, 90, then 100 mph, and at 110 mph I pull the column back slowly and feel the welcome resistance that tells me we are at a speed that will allow us to become airborne. Slowly the nose rises and we lift off the runway - at that instant the ride suddenly becomes as smooth as silk and the comforting familiar roar of the engines is all I hear.

The landing gear and wing flaps are raised. We are on our way.

"The infamous Merseberg raid and the FW-190 attack"

Anyone who flew with the 457th bomb group in the fall of 1944 or after is familiar with the "Merseberg" mission of November 2nd, 1944 and the losses encountered on this flight. Our bomb group had several times flown to targets where it had suffered heavy losses in terms of planes and crews but nothing any worse than the mission to Merseberg.

The first of these had been a raid on the Krupp Machine Shops at Magdeberg, Germany on September 28th, 1944 where our group lost six planes and crews. The next mission which resulted in high losses was a raid on synthetic oil facilities at Politz, Poland on October 7th, 1944. The group not only lost five planes on this Politz raid but it also lost Colonel Luper, the commander of our field (he remained a POW for the balance of the war). The losses at Magdeberg were from an attack of some 50 enemy fighters. Our losses at Politz were from extremely heavy and accurate flak.

Within a month after the Politz raid, the 457th was to face the worst losses of its 236 missions flown in World War II. The mission was to the Luena synthetic oil refinery near the town of Merseberg, Germany on November 2nd, 1944.

For this mission the 457th bomb group launched a complete 36 ship box. The group was led by the 748th squadron. Our 751st squadron, made up of 12 planes, flew the low box. Our position in the squadron was the number two position in the upper element of the low box. As things turned out we would be one of only five crews of the 751st that survived that day and the only plane that was capable of returning to our field at Glatton.

Merseberg was very heavily defended by hundreds of anti-aircraft batteries and was one of those places that no crew member ever wanted to see as a target. Anywhere else was better than Merseberg. On this particular mission there was no flak -- a possible clue that we had not found nor bombed the assigned target. Prior to November 2nd, the German air force had not been seen in three weeks. We were later informed that on this date the Luftwaffe had put up over four hundred fighters in defense of this target.

With virtually no warning, the Luftwaffe attacked the 457th bomb group with an estimated 40 ME 109's and FW 190's, concentrating their attack on the 751st squadron in the low box. Before our fighter escort could reach us, possibly 10 minutes after the start of the attack, nine planes in the group had been shot down.

Our group had been many miles out of the division stream and the low box had been separated by about a mile from the lead and high box of our group. We were set up perfectly for an attack by the Luftwaffe. There was (is) much disagreement as to why we were so far from the target area and so far separated from the bomber stream that day. An official inquiry after the mission determined that the responsibility for our being where we were rested with malfunctioning radar equipment in the group lead plane. I will give my impressions and details of that mission, as I remember them.

This was my 4th mission and only the second for several members of our crew. Don Scheuch, our navigator, was assigned to replace the navigator on another plane in our squadron for this mission, and, since Joel Lester was qualified as both a bombardier and navigator, I had no reason to protest.

That morning we were assigned to an older B-17, serial number 42-31505 /D, and named "[Miss Cue](#)". (This plane was to meet it's fate later this same month [Nov 30th] when it was badly shot up by flak and crash landed in France)

[image missing]

This is an illustration drawn by Nick King of good old 'D505', the plane we flew on this November 2nd, 1944 mission to Mersberg.

We took off early that morning, assembled on our buncher without incident, and proceeded to the target flying above heavy overcast skies. We seemed settled comfortably in the bomber stream as we crossed over the North Sea and entered Germany. All navigation was being done by radar in the lead ships. When we reached a point about 5 minutes from the Initial Point, the lead plane in our group began a turn to the Northeast out of the bomber stream. The lead ships in the upper and the lower box, which were also navigating on radar, broke radio silence and notified the group lead commander to "Check your navigation".

In spite of this communication we continued on to a point where the lead ship opened it's bomb bay doors and salvoed its bomb load. The rest of us followed -- not at all disappointed that there was virtually no flak in the area. We were now about 20 miles or more from the bomber stream and at least that far away from our fighter support. As we turned to start our return to England the distant bombers appeared as tiny specs against the clear blue sky. We felt very much alone and tension filled everyone aboard.

After dropping our bombs and closing our bomb bay doors, our lead started a slow turn to the right to rejoin the bomber stream. Being in the low squadron, our turn was somewhat late and we began to lose contact with the lead and upper squadron. As we drifted low and wide and had about completed a 180 degree turn we were alerted by shouts from Percy Mack, our tail gunner, that he had spotted a "Mess of bandits at six o'clock".

From his description afterwards, the attackers were strung out in two rows of about 20 planes each, one above the other, and diving from slightly high out of the sun. My first indication that we were under attack was when I saw hundreds of cottonball-like explosions just in front of the nose of our plane. I thought to myself that they must be some new kind of flak that the Germans were hurling at us. It was the first time I had ever seen anything like this and learned only after the attack that these were exploding 40 millimeter cannon shells that had overshot our squadron.

My first visual of the attack was the plane to my left on whose wing we were flying, suddenly burst into flames -- both engines seemed to explode at the same time and the plane immediately dove out of formation. My heart was pounding and sweat broke out all over me. I never saw that plane again. By this time almost every gun in our plane was firing. The vibrations from the 50 caliber guns caused the plane to seem to shudder and gave me the impression that we had taken a hit. As I looked out the window on my left, an FW-190 passed within 50 feet of our plane -- so close I could clearly see the insignia on the plane and expression on the face of the pilot.

He had not quite passed the wing tip of our plane when he took one or more hits from our 50 caliber guns and his propeller came unscrewed and spun off, flying awkwardly out in front of the engine. The

plane immediately rolled over and went into a steep dive. Before it had left my sight, I saw the canopy fly off and the pilot bail out.

Out of the corner of my eye, I could see yet another plane at our level burst into flames and then another. All the guns in our ship continued firing and the top turret, manned by our flight engineer, was spitting spent 50 caliber shell casings all over the back half of the cockpit directly behind me. Mack in the tail and Hetrick in the waist were pouring round after round at the attacking planes. Jim, in the ball turret, later told me that his turret was like a spinning top.

The cacophony of sounds over the intercom was a jumble of voices saying "Here's one at two o'clock", "Now! High at 9 o'clock", "Where is he?", and on and on. While it seemed like hours, it was only about 10 minutes before we caught our first sight of our P51 fighter support. Never have the "little friends" been more welcome. I don't know how many fighters appeared but they quickly engaged the attacking planes and the swirling sight of fighter planes in combat suddenly took center stage.

As I turned and looked to my left I could see no planes where moments before the twelve bombers of our squadron had been. Jim Stoner was calling for a "crew check" and I was relieved to hear a response from each crew member. I called on the intercom to the ball turret gunner, Jim McCloskey and inquired if there were any other ships near us and his response was "Yes, only one, and he's directly under us". With the attacking planes having been engaged in dogfights or having fled into the clouds below, I now had a chance to survey the sky around us. Out of the window to my left I saw no one at our elevation. As I looked downward to my left I felt my stomach tighten as I saw my squadron, decimated by enemy 90 millimeter shells, falling in flames. There were at least 5 of our bombers afire, one had rolled to its back and was diving out of control, another apparently had exploded and a giant plume of smoke filled the sky some distance behind the rest. The sky far below was filled with parachutes, silhouetted against the heavy cloud cover. Other chutes were opening as I watched. Our guns were now silent and I heard one of the crew talking aloud to himself on the intercom, encouraging other of his comrades in the wounded planes to "Get out of there". The fighters had driven off the attacking planes and all was quiet now. Where shortly before there had been a 12 plane squadron, we were now a squadron of two planes. The realization that Don Scheuch, our navigator, was in one of those planes suddenly struck home. No one spoke but I'm sure each felt as helpless and heart broken as I did. I quietly said a prayer in silence that Don had survived and that he had managed to get out and parachute to safety.

A survey of damages to our plane revealed that we had miraculously survived with very little damage. We observed some holes in the fuselage near the top turret and in both wings from bursting 40 millimeter shells. We also noted several holes in the fuselage made by 50 caliber bullets, probably from the guns in other ships of our squadron. We were relieved when a detailed check of instruments and engines showed everything to be normal. No one in the plane spoke for several minutes with all eyes glued to the disaster taking place thousands of feet below us.

I was now able to focus on our options. I could see the lead and high box of the 457th about 3 miles ahead and perhaps a 1000 feet above us. I elected to attempt to join up with the lead group and applied almost full throttle. The plane below us, while suffering more damage than we, was able to stay with us. After almost thirty minutes of slow catch-up, we finally pulled into position with the lead group and flew the position normally reserved for "Tail End Charlie".

The group rejoined the division stream somewhere before we left German territory and we returned to our field without further incident. I later found out that other ships from our squadron had survived and had been able to return to England. Because of major damage they had landed or crash landed at emergency fields somewhere along the coast.

As we touched down, I'm sure everyone in the plane was feeling the relief I felt and were privately saying prayers of thanksgiving - and a prayer for our missing navigator . Strangely, I felt an overwhelming feeling of guilt, that perhaps we had not done something right or perhaps we should have followed the burning planes down or pressed our leader to get the squadron back into group formation or, or something.....! That we had survived this attack and suffered so little damage, while so many of our fellow 457th comrades had met their death or had been taken prisoner that day, was something we would ponder for the rest of our tour.

Each of the gunners on our plane put in for a kill of one or more enemy fighter but since it was required that there be confirmation from another plane and since there were no other planes to confirm, I recollect that we got credit for two possible kills.

With the normal turnover of crews and because of the Magdeberg, Politz and Merseberg raids in the past three months, our squadron had been decimated. When I flew my sixth mission I was the second most experienced pilot in the 751st squadron in terms of missions flown.

In a period of sixty four days the 457th bomb group had suffered the loss of 20 bombers and their crews and major damage to dozens more.

It was a very difficult period for the men who had to face the empty bunks in their hut.

"A Bombing Mission to Metz"

On to Metz

This was my 8th mission and the first time we had flown a mission in support of our invading army. The date was November 9th, 1944 and the Allied troops had broken out of Normandy and were now streaking across France toward Germany. General Patton was advancing toward the French town of Metz and had asked for bomber support from the Eighth Air Force. The target was enemy gun and infantry positions near the town of Metz.

The B-17, while able to deftly handle 500 and 1000 pound bombs, was ill equipped to handle the many small 50 pound antipersonnel bombs which were loaded in our bomb bay this day. The B-17 has about six shackles on each side of the bomb bay set one above the other. In order to carry a reasonable load of these 50 pound bombs, the bombs were hung two to a shackle. This may have been the first time bombs had been hung two to a shackle and it certainly was the first time we had encountered such an arrangement since we had been flying.

The mission was flown without incident. The route was mostly over France and friendly territory. The cloud cover this day was about 50% over France and our bomb run was made on schedule and as briefed. Our bombs were released on target.

As was typically the case when the bomb load was dropped, our lumbering plane rose perceptibly, as if sighing at relief of the load it was carrying. This time however, a strange "staccato-like vibration" echoed through the ship as if we had been hit several times in quick succession. I immediately checked the instrument panel for the possibility of engine failure suspecting that we had received a hit from some unobserved flak. After that was ruled out I called for a crew check to determine if anyone had observed whether we might have been hit. None of the crew seemed to know what had happened.

It was standard procedure that after the release of our bombs the radio man would check the bomb bay and give an OK by intercom to the bombardier to close the doors. Seconds after my crew check, the radio man screamed excitedly over the intercom "Don't close the doors", "Don't close the doors", "Don't close the doors".

What had happened sent chills through everyone aboard. The radio man explained that one of the two bombs on the bottommost shackle had not come cleanly out of the shackle. All the bombs on the five shackles above had bounced off this one bomb after their release. This was the vibration we had heard a minute earlier. It did not take us long to find that the force of this action had bent the bottom shackle and had firmly locked this 50 pound bomb in our bomb bay. To make matters worse the safety pin on this bomb had been pulled or dislodged by the other passing bombs and this bomb was now activated.

We were now flying with a live 50 pound antipersonnel bomb hanging half out of our bomb bay and in such a position that if the doors had closed the bomb surely would have exploded.

We immediately left the formation, cut the throttle, and dropped down to about 10,000 feet so that we could get off oxygen and have more freedom to decide how to attack the problem. Everyone on the crew felt the danger of the situation as evidenced by the unusual silence that prevailed on our intercom.

Because of the narrowness of the catwalk and the location of the shackle, it would require abandoning ones parachute in order to maneuver into position to work on releasing this errant bomb. Lying on his back in the walkway, with the bomb bay doors open and without his parachute, our flight engineer determined that the standard manual shackle release was inoperative because the shackle had been badly bent and the release mechanism jammed. Our bombardier, (Joel Lester) and our engineer (Ed Peters) worked together in the open bomb bay to unbolt the shackle from the ships frame -- using tools from the planes tool kit.

For more than an hour they carefully worked to release the bomb knowing full well that one slip and it would all be over. The rest of the crew maintained total intercom silence as these two crew members conversed and as the rest of us sat helplessly by. We are not ashamed to say that many prayers were said in this hour.

Suddenly the words we had so patiently waited to hear, "bombs away" came over the intercom from Joel Lester. "You can close the doors". Everyone on the plane breathed a huge sigh of relief and a short prayer of thanks, I'm sure.

Each of the ten men of our crew will forever owe a great debt of gratitude to Edward Peters and Joel Lester for the skill and courage they showed on this occasion.

We returned by ourselves to Glatton Airbase feeling elated that we had been spared a fate that might have ended our tour. Not from enemy flak or fighters but from our own bomb and over friendly territory. The exhuberant banter by the crew on the intercom was music to my ears.

The ironic side to this incident is that, after we returned to our base, I was called to the squadron commanders office to explain to him why we had left the formation and what had happened. After hearing my explanation he severely reprimanded me for dropping this errant bomb on French territory and not holding it till we were over the English Channel where it could be safely dropped.

My rather terse response was "You had to be there, sir". An investigation the following week determined that our bomb had fallen in some farmers pasture and had harmed no one.

So, another mission under our belt. The next will be number nine. Twenty two more to go.

"This is a 'Mission Possible' - or maybe it's just luck"

Mission Possible - Fulda

Sometimes you just luck out.

It was my 29th mission -- next to my last. The official records show that our primary target was to be the marshaling yards in a town called Moblis, in Western Germany but my recollection is that the primary target was Plauen, Germany, a town south of Leipzig and near the Czechoslovakian border. Fulda was our secondary target. The date was Mar 19, 1945.

We had little trouble reaching the target area except for dense, persistent contrails that caused us to fly higher than our planned altitude. I recall that we flew in the low squadron as deputy lead. At the primary target, clouds totally obscured the target so that we were unable to bomb visually.

There was much confusion in the target area. Other groups were crossing over and under us and crowding the target area in such a way that a PFF radar instrument run was impossible.

The group did a 360 degree turn and was still not able to run on the target. By this time the target area was so overcast with contrails from all these bomb runs that no one could see anything below. We then turned East and began searching for the secondary target -- marshaling yards in the town of Fulda, Germany.

As we approached this target area the clouds began to clear and we were able to make a perfect visual run on what was a very small town at the juncture of several railroad lines. The marshaling yard appeared a great deal bigger than the town itself and was presently packed with railroad cars.

During my tour in Europe we had few missions where the target area was as clear as it was on this day. Each squadron leader sighted the target through his bombsight and the planes in the squadron dropped on the squadron lead. (rather than on the group lead).

We completed the bomb run from the IP to the BRL without any flak or fighters. At the moment of release, our electric bomb release mechanism did not function to release the bombs and our bombardier quickly salvoed them manually using the pneumatic bomb release backup system. This delay in the release caused our bomb load to trail the rest of the squadron by about a second or two.

After leaving the target area, cheers sounded from several of our crew members in the rear of the plane as they observed that the target had received a direct hit resulting in an unusually large explosion.

We returned to Glatton without incident, went through the debriefing and reported our late bomb release as we were required to do, and returned to the squadron enclave. Early the next morning I was awakened by an orderly telling me to report immediately to the squadron commander. Dressing hurriedly, I proceeded to the squadron CO's hut. Inside several squadron officers were present and were pouring over some target photographs taken by reconnaissance planes shortly after the bomb drop at Fulda.

"Lieutenant Reese, your bombardier dropped late" remarked Col. Peresich sternly and without otherwise greeting me. I knew we had dropped late, but that was not unusual under the circumstances, and, in

addition, we had reported the failure of our bomb release mechanism to the debriefing officer. I was surprised, expecting that the CO was about to berate me for a mechanical failure.

"Take a look at these pictures" the Col. said pointing to the table containing the spread of aerial photographs. By examining the bomb pattern on the ground, photo experts could tell where the bombs from each plane had fallen. A careful look at the picture disclosed that all the bombs from our squadron fell short of the target, plowing up a large unoccupied farm field west of the targeted marshaling yard. It appeared that, because we had released a second or two behind the rest of our squadron's bombs, our bombs had fallen directly on the rail yard and, had not only hit squarely in the target, but had hit an ammunition train parked among the many boxcars in the yard. The ammunition car had exploded and wiped out a large section of the marshaling yard and just about everything else within a half mile radius.

"Congratulations Lieutenant Reese, you were the only crew to hit the target and you picked the right boxcar to hit", he said with a seldom seen smile on his face -- knowing full well that this was just an accident of timing.

(In the past month (Feb 2000) some photos from March of 1944 came into my possession. To my delight, in this group of photos was included the 'strike photos' of that very raid on Fulda on March 19, 1945. These strike pictures are here):

[Bombs released.](#)

[Bombs just starting to strike.](#)

[Bombs at moment of impact.](#) (Note that all squadron bombs fell short of target - except one).

[The ammunition car exploding.](#) (By now the other squadrons bombs are exploding)

[Another view of the explosion.](#)

Sometimes it's skill and perseverance and sometimes it's just luck.

"We probably all remember a special Christmas Eve."

A Christmas Eve to Remember

It was the middle of December in 1944 and the weather over Europe and England had been the worst in memory. Fog, rain and heavy overcast had shrouded the continent for many days. The Germans had broken through the Allied lines at the 'Bulge', fighting was heavy at Malmedy, and German tanks and troops were moving toward Antwerp unobstructed by fighters or bombers.

The Allied Air Forces had been grounded by the terrible weather for almost a week. It was a frustrating period. The Eighth Air Force had been grounded at a time when the fate of the Allied invasion of the continent was at stake. Then, on December 23, we were alerted that the weather was expected to clear the next day. In anticipation of clear weather the Air Force Command ordered a 'maximum effort' for Christmas eve. A 'maximum effort' required that every available bomber in England was to be loaded with fuel, ammunition, and bombs and was to proceed to a designated target on the continent. According to official records of the Eighth Bomber Command, this December 24th raid was the largest air strike of WWII with 2034 bombers and 853 fighters.

Until this mission the largest number of planes that had flown on a single mission from Glatton was 36. On this date the 457th Bomb Group was prepared to put up 45 planes.

We were awakened very early on the morning of the 24th and through the darkness before dawn we could see that the weather was anything but clear. A cold rain mixed with snow was falling through a light fog. We could anticipate that by dawn this fog would become very dense.....similar to others fogs that were familiar to those of us who had spent the past few months in England. Walking toward the ready room, hardly able to see 10 feet ahead, we fully expected there would be no mission on this day. Instead, our flight positions were assigned, the target described, and the briefing proceeded in the usual manner. The target for the 457th was to be Koblenz, Germany -- a rail intersection that was very important for marshaling trains supplying German troops that were fighting in the Bulge.

As we proceeded through the fog by truck to our plane, loaded with flight gear, maps, flak vests, etc., we still fully expected a stand down. In violation of the order to maintain radio silence, the signal to taxi came by radio instead of by flare. The fog was too thick for us to be able to see the usual flares. As we taxied out, nose-to-tail, it was impossible to see anything except the plane that we were following. Takeoff was delayed again and again and it was nearing 10:00 AM when the word came by radio to commence takeoff.

We had been flying squadron, group, and deputy leads for the past 10 missions. It was the usual procedure to have the lead ships takeoff before any of the rest. Each of the lead ships carried radar units (sometimes referred to as a 'Mickey' unit.) that replaced the ball turret. We were the sixth plane in order of takeoff.

The other five lead planes ahead of us roared down the runway and were swallowed up in the fog before they had gone a hundred feet. When our turn came, we pulled out into position for takeoff and lined up on the runway centerline marker -- we were unable to see the edges of the runway through the fog. The usual method of visually releasing a plane for takeoff was by flashing a green light from a small portable trailer stationed very near the edge of the runway at the point where we started our takeoff. We could not see the trailer through the fog.

A green light appeared from nowhere out of the fog. Did they really intend for us to takeoff under these conditions with a full fuel and bomb load? I called the tower to confirm (breaking radio silence) and told them I could not see the edge of the runway and could not reliably set my gyro compass. The response was "line up using your magnetic compass."

Well, we had practiced this in training but always considered it somewhat of a gruesome joke. For those of you familiar with a magnetic compass you know that it's like a cork in water and at best "comes close." True to our training, we did as we were ordered. We lined up magnetically and set the gyro as best we could. We locked the tail wheel, lowered the flaps to about half, set the turbo, checked the compass one last time and gave it full throttle - holding on the brakes as long as we could. Then we released and we were on our way.

Under these circumstances it was standard procedure for the bombardier to try to guide the pilot down the runway since the bombardier had the best view of the runway ahead. I listened intently for his familiar voice but heard nothing until -- "We're going off." To me that meant he could see the edge of the runway and that we were about to leave the paved surface and encroach on the soft muddy grass field. I could not correct direction because I did not know whether we were going off to the left or to the right. If we left the runway, and the wheels were to dig into the mud at that speed, we were sure to nose over, and, with a full gas and bomb load we could expect a quick end to our tour.

A quick glimpse at the airspeed indicator showed our ground speed slightly over 70 mph (90 mph is considered stalling speed). At this point I made the decision that we had no choice but to attempt to get airborne. With one quick motion and without taking my eyes off the instruments, I reached for the turbocharger and turned it clockwise as far as it would go. The engines literally screamed as the extra manifold pressure was applied to them.

We had been cautioned never to go to maximum manifold pressure except in extreme emergencies since this could easily blow a cylinder with ensuing disastrous consequences. Fortunately, that did not happen on this occasion. I pulled the stick back and it came quickly into my lap with almost no resistance at all..

As we slowly mushed off the runway at about 80 mph my mind flashed to the muddy field approaching and thoughts of the consequences if we could not stay airborne. At that instant we hit the soft earth - but with one bounce were again airborne. We raised our landing gear and began to pick up speed, flying completely on instruments. We seemed lost in a sea of fog for about 2 minutes more and then suddenly broke through the fog at about 200 feet. Only a pilot who has experienced the thrill of suddenly breaking from a cloud into the clear atmosphere and blue sky can possibly know the feeling -- and especially under these circumstances.

The fog lay like a blanket over England as far as one could see and above the fog was a crystal clear blue sky -- beautiful flying weather. We had survived a takeoff that none of us would ever forget. Most of the members of our crew were unaware of how close we came to ending our tour - not over Germany, but on our home field.

As we began to climb above the fog, the waist gunner called on the intercom and noted that smoke was

spiraling up from just under the area that we had broken through the fog. The ship that took off directly ahead of us had crashed.

We received word by radio from our field that all flights were scrubbed and no more planes would take off until the weather had cleared. The book "Fait Accompli", a history of the 457th, states that the last plane to take off crashed but it was actually the plane ahead of us. We were the last to take off.

Here we were, five lead ships with no ball turret guns, representing the 457th bomb group, circling and climbing into formation. Orders came from the ground to "Proceed on the mission as scheduled". Six ball turret-less bombers on to Germany. Our group was apparently the only group assigned to bomb Koblenz, so, in keeping with the traditions of the Eighth, we carried on.

Hours later, with hundreds of planes in the bomber stream around us, we left the Division formation and turned toward our target. Noting our vulnerability, the group commander contacted fighter support and five P51's appeared just above our small formation criss-crossing over us. What a great sight to see our "Little Friends" giving us a personal escort.

On our approach to Koblenz we were spotted by a single Me-262 twin engine jet fighter. It was our first view of the new German jet. The pilot of the jet managed to stay just out of range of our 50 caliber guns, and, for the next 30 minutes, made numerous passes at us firing his 30 mm cannon shells into our formation.

It appeared he was trying to draw off the fighters. The P-51's, wise to this maneuver, would chase him for a mile or two and then return to escort us. None of our planes were lost.

Except for moderate flak at the target, the bomb run was uneventful. We later joined with another group and returned in loose formation to England.

Because we were so late getting started that morning, it was almost dark when we spotted the coast of England. To our dismay, the fog still covered our field and most of East Anglia. Radio reports told us that there were a few fields open east of London, so we proceeded to an English field near London and landed safely -- the only time we used our landing lights since joining the 8th Air Force.

Landing at this field was yet another unexpected experience. Hundreds of other B-17's and B-24's, like us, had been forced to land at this field because of the weather. The field was solid with planes. When we touched down in the darkness, we could see planes parked just off our wing tips on both sides the full length of the runway. Almost every square inch of that field was covered with planes. I thought at that moment what damage a few Luftwaffe bombers could have done had they known.

This was Christmas Eve, 1944. We were an American flight crew far from home on a strange British airfield -- but we were not alone.

I remember singing Christmas carols with hundreds of other crew members around a Christmas tree in the mess hall. We slept on the floor that night, weary from the day's adventures, and returned to Glatton on Christmas day.

This is my memory of a Christmas Eve in 1944.

"The big February raid to Berlin"

BERLIN!

Berlin, or Big "B", as we called it, was a target that no one wanted to go to and a target that everyone wanted to go to. It seemed that everyone wanted to participate in a raid on Berlin because bombing big "B" was really striking at the heart of Nazi power and it was, in a way, retribution for the bombing of London, Rotterdam and other major cities. By the same token nobody really wanted to go to Berlin because it was a very long mission over heavily fortified German territory and was very heavily defended by both fighters and antiaircraft. The thought of being in sub-zero temperatures and having an oxygen mask on for eight hours or more was not particularly appealing.

The 457th Bomb Group had bombed Berlin several times in the past but the mission of February 3rd, 1945 was to be the biggest in terms of aircraft involved and tons of bombs dropped.

At this point in time the German offense in the Ardennes (Bulge) had been stopped and the Whermacht was now in retreat. The allies were advancing on German soil and the end of the war seemed within grasp. I believe that this raid was a political statement more so than a raid on a strategic target. I'm sure it was felt that this strike at the heart of Nazi power would demoralize the enemy military and civilian forces and put extreme pressure on Hitler to seek an armistice and a quick end to the fighting.

Toward this end the allies put up 2000 bombers and over 1000 fighters from the 8th Air Force alone and the British, who bombed exclusively at night, put up many hundreds of Lancasters that preceded the 8th to the target. The RAF went in ahead of the 8th Air Force in darkness and we followed in a bomber stream that is recorded as being 500 miles long. The bombing of Berlin was sustained from near midnight through the following day till near 2:00 PM that afternoon. I recall that before we were within 300 miles of Berlin we could clearly see the RAF Lancaster bombers to the North of us over the Baltic Sea on their return to England having already dropped their bombs on Berlin.

The 457th put up 36 planes for this mission and led the 94th Wing with Col. Rogner as commander. We flew as deputy lead in the high box. We had been briefed that the weather over the continent would be CAVU (Ceiling and Visibility Unlimited), a condition that we seldom experienced in the winter of '44/'45. This made the adrenaline flow a little faster because we knew that with clear weather like this the antiaircraft fire would be more devastating than usual. We were not disappointed.

As we formed up over the Glatton buncher it was apparent that the weatherman was correct. I had never seen the sky so clear and the visibility so good. Forming up a bomber stream of 2000 planes is extremely difficult when clouds or fog interfere. Because of the inability to see distant planes in the sky, precautions had to be taken to avoid mid-air collisions involving dozens of planes. There were times when one group would actually fly through another (called shuffling-the-deck) leading to multiple collisions and the loss of many lives. This usually happened over England and was especially heart wrenching because a mid-air collision was usually fatal to the whole crew and sometimes to other crews in the same formation. So, to avoid this, the bomber stream got either strung out or bunched up in bad weather and the crowding sometimes followed you all the way to the target area. That was not the case on February 2nd.

We had no trouble forming up and the bomber stream was orderly and well formed. The sky was filled with planes. I often wonder how it looked to those on the ground to see 2000 planes in the air on a clear winter day. We proceeded to the continent without incident, following our prescribed route. Once we crossed the Dutch coast we started to get some antiaircraft fire, which, with this visibility, would continue sporadically for the rest of our 9 hour flight..

Other than the antiaircraft fire that we encountered on the way to Berlin there were several other events that remain fresh in my memory.

First I remember the tail gunner calling "Bandit at 12 o'clock high". I never saw him nor did any of the guns in our plane fire at him. It was a single plane that made one pass at us and disappeared below - being chased by our fighter escort. No one fired at this intruder because he appeared so suddenly, made one pass through the formation at very high speed, and was not identified by any of the crew as a German aircraft. It turned out from information gathered later that we had seen a rocket powered miniature Luftwaffe fighter designated as an ME-163 Komet. This was the only time that we saw this fighter and was one of only a few that got into combat before the end of the war. This was an advanced swept wing rocket powered fighter that could outrun and out climb any Allied fighter but had the shortcoming of being able to make only one pass at a formation because of it's limited fuel.

The Komet could climb to extremely high altitude, almost vertically, and then could dive onto a bomber formation at perhaps over 600 mph but would have insufficient fuel to climb again. It had no landing gear so it had to belly land when it returned to it's field. The P-51's did not attempt to catch the Komet only to follow it to it's base and then attack after it had landed or when it was on it's final approach. The other two events occurred about the same time as we passed near Potsdam.

Our radio man had almost no duties when we were on the bomb run except to monitor the radio. The radio room had only two small windows, one of them on the port side next to where the radioman sat but above the level of the wing. From this window the radioman could see nothing of the ground, only the top surface of the port wing and the two engines on that side.

Sgt. Kenny called on the intercom just as we crossed our initial point and said that we had been hit by flak in the port wing. None of the others in the crew could see any damage and my instruments showed normal for engines #1 and #2. After returning to Glatton, Sgt. Kenny took me by the hand and led me around the plane to the area of the wing between engine #2 and the fuselage and pointed up. There in the wing was a perfectly round hole about 10 inches in diameter that passed directly through the wing without touching anything vital. A few inches to the port side and it would have punctured one of our fuel tanks. The damage was not at all like holes created by shrapnel. We concluded that an 80 millimeter shell had passed cleanly through our wing without exploding. "I almost never look out that window and especially on the bomb run but this day I did" Kenny said. "While I was looking out, this hole opened up right before my eyes" he said with a look of dismay. I believe we were all pretty lucky that day.

Shortly after we passed the initial point (IP - start of the bomb run), the intercom was active with voices from the waist gun position. Sgt. Knox sounded off on the intercom that he had been hit by flak and was asking Sgt. Hetrick to check his leg around the knee. Hetrick, coming to his aid, said that he did not see any blood or any sign of injury. It was not until we returned to our home field that we found what had happened to Knox. Below the waist gun window is a section of armor plate, about 3 ft by 4 ft, intended

to protect the gunner from flak or gunfire - not a lot of protection but some. It seems that Knox was kneeling on this plate (which most waist gunners did when flak was bursting nearby) when a piece of shrapnel hit the armor plate very close to the spot where his knee touched the plate. We later examined the hole through the fuselage and could see a major dent in the armor plate made by the flak. Knox carried a bruised knee for several week after but was able to continue flying.

As we approached Berlin at about 25,000 feet (and still a hundred miles from the city) we could see that it was taking a terrible pounding. Smoke billowed from all areas of the city. The smoke made it difficult for our navigator and bombardier to see the check points and our target. This did not seem to have any affect on the anti-aircraft gunners however. The flak was intense and a number of planes from the earlier groups were seen over the city trying to maintain flight with one or more engines feathered or on fire.

Our target on this day was the bridge across the River Spree. The map to the left shows the location of our aiming point which was on the Friedrichstrasse (noted on the map as Friedrich Street) near the Railway Station (Marked on the map). The dual road at the bottom of the map is Unter den Linden.

With the visibility so good each squadron dropped its bombs on its squadron leader instead of on the group lead. To do this we had to space out each squadron of our group before we started the bomb run. It was a procedure we had followed many times and presented only minor problems. We dropped on our squadron leader and the bombing results were excellent.

We were the seventh group in the Division formation that was led by the 379th Bomb Group with Col. Lewis Lyle as Air Commander. Col. Lyle's comments about the mission were as follows: "There was a bomber stream three to five hundred miles long. Turning off the target and heading back to England, there were bombers heading for Berlin, practically all the way back to England. It was a very successful mission".

After dropping our bombs we turned north and then west and headed back to England over the Baltic Sea. The group lost no planes on this mission. Eight other planes besides ours were damaged by flak. The mission was long and it was eventful. We all slept well that night.

"Flak, the nemesis of every flight crew"

"Flak !"

Many stories have been written about the gallant defenses and the huge losses that were sustained by the Eighth Air Force as a result of Luftwaffe attacks on our bomber formations. And, to be sure, they were especially devastating and very often resulted in major losses of bombers and crews. Aircrew gunners have written time and again of the exchanges between their 50 caliber guns and the 20 millimeter cannons of the enemy and how bomber crews had fought off enemy planes and persisted in spite of the attacks. The "Memphis Belle" and "Twelve O'clock High" films are testaments to the tenacity of aerial combat.

I'm sure, however, that when the records are finalized and one looks closely at the losses, it will be determined that more B-17's were lost to antiaircraft fire than to FW190's or ME109's. One could not shoot back at "Flak" so it tended to be less glorious -- but nonetheless deadly.

Whenever there was heavy overcast we would encounter barrage type flak, that is, all antiaircraft guns were controlled by a central radar unit and all fired simultaneously causing hundreds of shell bursts in one general area and at one specific altitude. This was the kind of flak that was described as "heavy enough to walk on" -- and was the most deadly if it happened to be accurately placed.

On a clear day, when the antiaircraft gunners could see our formation, they were cleared to fire at any plane which they might pick out and adjust the direction and altitude of their shell bursts as they fired and as might be necessary. The quality of the German antiaircraft guns and the skill of their gunners made life miserable for those of us who had to fly straight and level through a sea of bursting flak and flying shrapnel. If "practice makes perfect", then the German gun crews were the best. Here is a typical German [battery](#) of four 88 milimeter antiaircraft guns and their crews firing in unison (barrage).

The following is about one of our many encounters with flak. It's about a German gun crew firing at a plane almost five miles above them. A gun crew whose accuracy and persistence almost brought to an end the tour of one crew of ten men in a B-17.

This particular encounter occurred on Feb. 16th, 1945. It was our twenty-fourth mission and our target on this date was the synthetic oil facilities at Gelsenkirchen, Germany. The route of the 457th was on course and on schedule. The visibility in the target area was crystal clear with only light cloud cover at about 5000 feet. From the initial point to the target the flak was extremely heavy and accurate, something we had come to expect on a clear day such as this. But this day, moreso than others, it seemed that each shell was bursting immediately adjacent to us and with each burst our plane shuttered a little as if fatally hit. Every plane in the squadron was taking a murderous beating from the flak. Midway on the bomb run the deputy lead plane in the low box sustained a direct hit in his starboard wing between the number three and four engine. Almost immediately the wing folded up and broke off, almost colliding with another plane. The two parts of the plane spiraled out of control with fire billowing from each part as it fell. No one in our crew saw any parachutes.

The intercom was ominously quiet.

Weeks later we learned that six of the crewmen did not survive.

It was not unusual, after a visual bomb run with heavy flak, for the formation to break after dropping its bombs. Each plane would take its own evasive action to try to avoid the flak and then later reassemble with the squadron after leaving the target area. We felt safe from Luftwaffe fighters at this time since any attack while we were in the target area would also expose them to their own friendly flak fire. On this day, immediately after dropping our bombs, we broke formation to the right from the high box and immediately were tracked by a single anti-aircraft gun. The flak bursts were directly in front of the nose of our plane -- one after the other in rapid succession about 3 seconds apart. It seemed they were no more than 50 feet in front of the nose of our plane. The black bursts were unusually large and we were instantly engulfed in the residual smoke from the burst. We dove sharply and the flak followed. We turned as tightly as a B-17 can turn and the flak followed directly in front of us.

Then, suddenly we were hit.

The explosion was in the nose compartment of the plane where the navigator and bombardier were located. Even with our helmets and headphones on, the sound was deafening. A fierce, cold wind suddenly blew through the pilots compartment. A quick glance at the instrument panel told me that engine number three had been hit. The oil pressure was dropping rapidly. Flying bits of aluminum gave me a clue that there was damage overhead in the pilots compartment and our instrument panel now had a major dent from the force of shrapnel hitting the forward side of the panel.

We immediately feathered engine #3 and cut the switches. Oil was streaming from the engine nacelle. I tried to contact Joel Lester in the forward compartment but could not. The silent intercom to the navigator's compartment only reinforced my belief that we had sustained major injuries.....or worse. My worst fears were relieved when Joel's head appeared through the opening leading from the nose compartment to the flight deck. His oxygen mask had been blown off by the force of the wind and he was asking the flight engineer to get him the emergency portable oxygen bottle. We were still at 20,000 feet altitude and oxygen was an imperative. Joel shouted to me that he and the navigator "didn't have a scratch" but were about to freeze from the blast of subzero air now blowing through the front of the plane. The flak bursts were still coming but we were almost out of the range of the gun and were no longer concerned with evasive action.

A quick look upward told me that some flak had penetrated the fuselage above my head and there were several nicks in the bullet resistant glass of the windshield that had not been there before. Our bombardier and navigator crawled out of the nose and retreated through the pilots compartment to the radio room. From the rush of cold air we knew there was a major opening in the nose of the plane and the acrid smell of gunpowder lingered in the air. The air temperatures at this altitude in the winter frequently exceeded 40 degrees below zero.

We were now down to about 16000 feet and far from our squadron which was reassembling several thousand feet above us. With only three engines we were never able to catch up with our group but we were able to keep them in sight till we reached the English coast. Again we were fortunate that no fighters were in the area as the physical condition of our plane and our isolated location was a 'made-to-order' type kill for them.

Our bombardier, Joel, having found a throat mike and helmet in the radio room, proceeded to update me on what had happened. He reported that the burst had not been in the nose but directly in front of it. The shrapnel had shattered the plexiglas nose, damaged the bomb sight, and sprayed the nose compartment with deadly pieces of flying metal. It had miraculously spared both he and the navigator. It seems that one of the pieces of shrapnel had hit a 50 caliber ammunition box on the floor adjacent to his foot and had exploded several shells which, in turn, had blasted a hole through the aluminum fuselage of the nose compartment without injuring him.

After crossing the Dutch coast we dropped down to about 2000 feet over the North Sea where the air temperature was considerably warmer. It had become unbearably cold in the pilot's compartment and, although it was February the blast of air now flowing through our compartment felt comfortably warm. We continued to Glatton on our three engines and landed without incident.

As I loosened my parachute to leave my seat and review the damage first hand, I observed that the flak fragment that had pierced the fuselage almost directly above my head had indeed come close. It was lodged in my parachute directly behind my left shoulder. I later dug out the [fragment](#) and still have it today. A souvenir of a close call -- both to the plane, the crew, and to me. A slow walk around the plane made me aware of how fortunate we had been. The front end of the plane suffered major damage. The plexiglas nose was almost completely gone. There was a hole just above and to the starboard side of the navigator's compartment about a foot in diameter (where our exploding 50's had exited) and the chin turret was inoperable. One of the two 50 caliber guns veered off at a sharp angle from the other. Several other fragments had punctured the fuselage in the navigator compartment, the leading edge of the right wing, and the cowlings of the number three engine.

This was one of many episodes with flak. I cannot recall a mission where we were not under fire from anti-aircraft guns for at least a portion of the time we were over enemy territory. This time our plane suffered major damage but none of the crew was scratched. We had a few silent prayers of thanks as we returned to our hut that night.

Addenda:

The following is an excerpt from official War Dept. document about "Flak" and the results of flak on the air war over Europe.

Fliegerabwehrkanonen (FLAK) Ack-Ack

The accuracy and effectiveness of FLAK or anti-aircraft artillery fire was derided at the start of the war but it gained a healthy respect as the war dragged on. By 1942 15,000 88mm (3.46 in) guns formed the bulk of heavy flak defenses for Germany. Large numbers of 37mm (1.47 in) and 20mm (0.79 in) guns filled the skies with shells during every air raid. Often arrayed in "belts" around a city or target 88s could fire 22 lb (10 kg) shells up to 35,000 ft (10,600 m) at a rate of 15 - 20 rounds per minute. The excellent 88mm (3.46 in) gun proved very effective especially when radar was used to help with aiming. The shells exploding at a preset altitude sending metal splinters flying in all directions. Later groups of up to 40 heavy flak guns Grossbatterien fired rectangular patterns of shellbursts known as box barrages that proved very deadly to enemy bombers.

In 1944 Flak accounted for 3,501 American planes destroyed, enemy fighters shot down about 600 less in the same time period. More flak guns gradually appeared, mainly the 128mm (5 in) German Flak accounted for 50 of the 72 RAF bombers lost over Berlin on the night of March 24th, 1944. An incredible 56 bombers were destroyed or crippled by flak during a B-17 raid on Merseburg in November of 1944.

"'Shuffling-the-deck' - a flyer's nightmare"

Shuffling-the-Deck

Whenever a large number of planes are attempting to form up over England in bad weather there is always the possibility of a collision. Often there were low thin clouds that obscured or limited visibility to less than a mile at specific altitudes. Each group commander would attempt to get his group above this haze layer by climbing as quickly as possible.

It was on one of those hazy, cloudy days, that, while forming up, we suddenly found ourselves face to face with another bomb group and in seconds we were fighting madly with the planes controls to avoid a multi mid-air collision. When two groups (usually 64 planes) come together on a collision course we called it "shuffling-the-deck".

This dreaded event almost always resulted in one or more collisions of aircraft and the death of many flyers. And it usually occurred at lower altitudes which did not allow sufficient time for men to escape a falling, badly damaged plane.

On this occasion, while we were still climbing to our prescribed altitude, our leader spotted the other group coming toward us through the mist perhaps two miles away and at almost the same altitude. A command came from the lead (or someone on the radio) to "Spread out", "Spread out". In seconds every plane in the group swerved, dived or climbed at the same instant. Those on the upper tier climbed as steeply as they could, those in the lower tier dived sharply and those in between turned left or right as the space allowed. It was rather like "every man for himself" with each crew trying to find a spot in the sky where he would be safe from these giant objects filled with his fellow flyers. The other group which was approaching us performed almost the same maneuvers and for the next minute the sky was filled with 64 planes attempting to avoid collision.

Of course the pilot cannot see all areas around the plane and relies heavily on his crew at these times to tell him of approaching planes from above or below and a good crew will keep the pilot informed. On this occasion the intercom was filled with excited vocal directions of "plane coming in on port side", below..CLIMB", "plane close at two o'clock", and on and on.

In less than a minute it was all over and a check of the sky and a voice relay from the crew indicated that, as far as we could tell, no one had collided. It was a welcome miracle that none of the planes was even damaged.

My heartbeat must have hit 150 in that short time and I'm sure the rest of the crew felt about the way I felt. The plane we were flying that day responded beautifully to the sudden change of power and the unusual maneuvers to which I had forced it in those few seconds. This was one of the many reasons we loved flying the B-17. Now, out of danger, we just flew straight and level for a few minutes while we tried to compose ourselves. I looked at Jim in the copilots seat and his usual smiling face was almost white.....he made a gesture with his hand of wiping his brow and then proceeded to call for a crew check on the intercom.

The violent wrenching of the plane during these maneuvers had sent some of the crew flying violently around in the nose and the waist compartment but no one was the worse for wear and I'm sure they were all thankful that a few bruises were the worst injury they would sustain after shuffling-the-deck. A further check confirmed that the closest encounter occurred within the low squadron but all had survived.

Our group leader again began shooting flares so that we could identify him through the misty atmosphere and slowly but evenly we resumed our positions in group formation.

We were now on our way to the target. All this and we had not yet left England. We would be late for our rendezvous with the bomber stream but we had survived one of the worst experiences for a flight crew. To go down over your own field as a result of a mid air collision or to be the cause of a crash or death of another crew from your own group was about as bad as anything you might experience while flying.

"The Fateful Voyage Home"

The Long Voyage Home

There are some events that are fixed in my memory as if they happened yesterday while others seem to have gradually faded. I'm convinced that events, especially those that were "life-threatening", were permanently imprinted in my memory and will probably never fade. Those experiences which I have related in this web site were of that nature and mostly involved flying into battle over enemy territory. This story is about an experience that was every bit as terrifying as fighting enemy aircraft or dodging flak but is an experience that occurred after my 30 mission tour was completed.

I had completed my final mission on March 23, 1945 and spent the next few weeks taking it easy on the base and sightseeing in England while awaiting orders to return home. I was the first of our crew to complete a tour and thus the first to leave Glatton. I had great difficulty bidding farewell to those men to whom I had become so closely attached over the past eighteen months, some of whom still had missions to fly to complete their tour. There was a strong feeling that fate would prevent me from ever seeing some of them again.....a feeling that was to become a reality. Since that day of parting in 1945, and until 1997, I have seen or talked to only five of our former crew of ten. We all survived the war but five of our crew have died of natural causes since.

My orders finally arrived sometime in mid April for transport from the ETO to the USA.

From Glatton, I proceeded by train to a camp in the center of Britain called "Stone" - somewhere between Oxford and London. I can't account for that name but it sort'a describes the place.....it was a huge camp of wood dormitory-style buildings where thousands of military personnel were collected together to await the formation of a convoy of ships to cross the Atlantic. While at Stone we were not allowed off base and the boredom of doing nothing soon began to take its toll.

The wait in this camp seemed interminable. I remember that one of the things I was assigned to do while at Stone was to censor v-mail letters that were going from England to the USA. Reading someone else's mail seemed voyeuristic to me and I never got any pleasure out of it. It did help to put in time, however. After a couple boring weeks at Stone we finally received notice that we would ship out the following day. The better part of the next day was spent in a military truck convoy making our way to the city of Southampton, our port of embarkation.

From a dock loaded with hundreds of military personnel, we quickly boarded a very depressing looking transport that obviously had made many Atlantic crossings. This type of vessel was called a "Liberty" ship, made primarily for cargo and turned out by the hundreds in shipyards in the US. It was not good news to hear the rumor that this ship had been fully constructed and launched at the Philadelphia Navy Yards in less than one week.

We had one clue as to which route we would be taking on this return trip.....we were issued an extra heavy wool GI army blanket (which I kept and still have to this day).

I was assigned to a stateroom with seven other Air Force officers. Sound luxurious? These 'staterooms' were modified so that two-high bunks lined both side walls of the room with barely enough room between

the bunks to get dressed and no room at all to do anything but sleep. The most depressing aspect of this accommodation was that there was no porthole or natural light from any source and most upsetting of all, as we later discovered, this room was below the waterline of the ship.

The first night out, as our ship began to assemble with the convoy, we were awakened by what sounded like someone pounding on the hull with a huge hammer. The next morning some of the ships crew informed us that these sounds were depth charges being dropped by our escort destroyers. While the war was close to an end, fighting was still taking place both on land and on the sea with submarines still sinking ships wherever they found them. The first night out and submarines were detected? What a start to an Atlantic crossing!!

The next morning, as the convoy moved into the English Channel, we were allowed on deck for some fresh air and exercise. The convoy was well under way and appeared to be made up of about 20 or 30 ships of all sizes and types.....many like our Liberty ship, some considerably larger and some luxury ocean liners. Our naval protection consisted of about five destroyer escort vessels (we would have felt better if we had twice that many). I would guess that our ship held about a thousand men, most of them in the hold of the ship where hundreds of bunks had been constructed four-high, where there was no natural light and where the ventilation was poor at best. We were lucky to have the stateroom and never complained again after we saw the conditions in the hold.

Wartime secrecy prevented us from knowing where we were going or when we would arrive but it soon became obvious from the drop in temperature that we were headed for the States via the northern route.....similar to the route we followed when we flew over.....only this time we would be riding the waves. Rumors had it that this trip would take us about six days if all went well. The speed of the convoy being determined by the slowest ship - and I think that was ours.

About three days out of Southampton the weather began to change and by the fourth day we were no longer allowed on deck. The sea began to build and our ship began to bob like a cork in water. It soon became apparent that we were in the middle of a real Nor'easter. (North Atlantic term for a hurricane) somewhere off the coast of Labrador or Nova Scotia. As the sea swells increased, our ship began to creak and groan. With each monstrous wave the bow of our ship would be thrust into the air atop the swell and then would come crashing down with a thunderous boom. As the bow hit the bottom of the swell the ships props would come out of the water and every inch of the ship would vibrate violently. There was an inner panic when this first occurred but as the night wore on the violence of this action seemed to increase with first the crashing of the bow hitting the water followed in seconds by the violent vibrating of the ships props as they left the water. This action repeated over and over and over again for the next three days. All of the men aboard were airman who had completed missions and had many hours of flight time in turbulent weather but none of us had ever experienced anything like this. For those three days I felt terrible (not quite seasick but almost). With the rest of the men we spent our days and nights in our bunks almost going crazy with the repetitious sound of the banging and vibration. At one point I literally fought my way down to the hold, clinging to whatever I could that would help me to stay upright, to see how conditions were for those unfortunates assigned there. I found almost everyone in their bunks since standing or walking were near impossible. The floor was awash in vomit which sloshed from one end of the hold to the other as the ship rose and dropped. It was a terrible sight. The fear that this ship would not hold together another night seemed for sure to become a reality. To make matters even worse, in the midst of this nightmare, all power, except for the emergency lights, went out and the ventilation system failed.

After several hours without power, the odor and heat began to build to a point where some of the men had to be restrained by the on-board MP's from trying to open the hatches to get some fresh air into the living spaces.

There is no doubt in my mind that there was not a man on that ship that did not contemplate the possibility, that he, having survived enemy action over Europe, was doomed to end up at the bottom of the Atlantic. A parachute would do no good here.

As time wore on the tossing and vibrating of the ship began to subside and a thousand stomachs began to return to normal. We had left Southampton on May the third and we knew that the war in Europe was just about over. We had no access to radios or any news as to what was transpiring with the war until, on May the 9th, the ship's intercom belted out a message from the ships' captain "The Germans have surrendered. The war in Europe is officially over. In celebration of this momentous occasion there will be free beer for all in the Galley for the next few hours"

Well, I'd say there were no more than a handful of strong stomachs that were willing to attempt a beer at that time...even free American beer. A shaky visit by me to the galley confirmed that only about forty or fifty men were still hearty enough to be enjoying the 'free beer'. What a celebration!

The war was over. What welcome news.

I clearly remember that on this special day we were finally allowed to go on deck - for the first time in 3 days and nights.

I was astonished by the view that confronted me as I emerged out of the lower level of the ship. The front of each Liberty ship had a steel platform constructed about 10 feet above the deck on which was mounted a naval gun, the caliber of which I could only guess. This gun served mostly to give the crew the feeling that they had something with which to fight back if they were attacked by another surface vessel. This steel platform, gun and all, was totally flattened against the deck by the storm. It was as if one mighty hammer blow had been swung down directly on top of the platform. In addition, all the steel ventilator intakes had also been flattened and the hand railing around the bow of the ship was ripped away and hanging awkwardly over the side. Other damage was apparent wherever I looked. We had indeed weathered a vicious storm and possibly had come near breaking apart.

We later found out that our crossing had taken three days longer than normal because of the storm and that for these three days we had almost stood still in the midst of the storm trying to maintain a proper spacing of the ships in the convoy.

Now the storm was over and the sun shown brightly as we slowly made our way down the New England coast. Some of the ships in the convoy continued on to other ports but most of them joined us as we paraded into Boston harbor.

I remember the feeling of stepping onto solid ground once again and saying a little prayer that I was safely back in the good old USA. At my first opportunity, I found a telephone and called my mother. I had arrived home on Mother's Day, May 12, 1945 and it seemed appropriate that this should be my first call.

It had been two years and eight months since I enlisted. I had completed many months of training, flown the Atlantic to England, flew thirty combat missions over Germany in a B-17, survived a very stormy Atlantic crossing in a Liberty ship, and was now finally HOME. I had much to be thankful for.

"Anecdotes"

Reese's 457th Bomb Group Anecdotes

Definition - Anecdote: "A short narrative of a particular incident or occurrence of an interesting nature"

Early Morning Crash Landing

It was a cold dark morning and we were on the taxi strip awaiting our turn to takeoff. I don't recall the mission but several planes had already taken off and we were about fifth in line on the taxi strip with our running lights on. Without any explanation, takeoffs were halted. As we sat there with our engines idling we suddenly saw coming toward us out of the darkness, one of our groups planes that had taken off minutes before. He was obviously in distress with fire streaming from engine #3. His landing gear was down and his approach indicated that he intended landing on our takeoff runway.

Under these circumstances, with a full gas load and a full bomb load, the standard procedure would not permit your landing in the dark with dozens of other planes on the taxi strip - anyway, here he was.

The approach looked good as his wheels hit the runway about 200 feet from where we were parked. At the instant of impact the landing gear collapsed and the plane dropped on it's belly with a tremendous crash that could be readily heard over the roar of our idling engines. The plane, as it skidded down the concrete runway was engulfed in a halo of sparks which trailed far behind the injured bird. The whirling props dug into the concrete and pieces of metal flew in all directions.

The real concern here was that if the skidding plane were to leave the runway it might crash into one of the planes on the taxi strip. Such a crash, with most of the groups planes standing nose to tail, might set off an explosive chain reaction that could wipe out the whole squadron. I was not alone with this thought because, as I looked out the pilots port window seconds later, I saw the shadowy figures of several crewmen running into the nearby wooded area. To this day none of our crew will admit to abandoning the plane on that morning - I'm not too sure.

The skidding plane, fortunately, stayed on the runway. Within minutes the ground emergency crews and fire trucks had the situation in hand. All the planes awaiting takeoff were diverted to a different runway and the launching of another mission continued.

This was just one more of those unexpected events that often added to the excitement of a mission day.

Losing a Friend

There are certain events from 54 years ago that are fresh in my memory to this day. One memory is about my experience with a fellow flyer in the 751st squadron named John. I don't remember his last name so I will refer to him here only as John.

I guess I had about 10 missions under my belt when I received the message that on our next mission my copilot, Jim Stoner, would be replaced by a newly arrived pilot whose name was John. It was customary

for all new pilots to fly their first mission as copilot with an experienced crew. This would give the inexperienced pilot a chance to become familiar with the procedures and routines that were peculiar to an actual combat mission. I can well remember the anxiety and fear I felt when I flew my very first mission with another crew. Flying with a strange crew was always a challenge but flying into combat with total strangers was an experience that would remain in this pilot's memory for many years.

John and I met the morning of the mission we were to fly together and immediately took a liking to each other. We had much in common....we had trained at the same airfields in the States, we were almost exactly the same age, and his family background was very similar to mine. There was a bond that developed between us from the moment we first talked. I liked John and recognized in him someone whose friendship I would like to cultivate. I think he felt the same way.

The mission we flew together was fairly routine. We experienced the customary amount of bad weather and a moderate amount of flak over the target with no damage to our plane. During the flight I watched John, thinking at the time how I felt on my first combat flight, and knowing that he was experiencing those same feelings. We dropped our bombs and returned to the base without incident.

In the following days, while we were grounded because of bad weather, we got to know each other much better. John went to London with me for his first visit to the big city. He was from somewhere in the Midwest and had never ridden in a subway. It did not take me long to introduce him to the London "Underground" and other tourist's stops around the city. It was a fun day for both of us.

It turned out that on the next mission the 751st flew both John and I were to be in the same formation. This would be John's first mission to be flown with his crew. I was flying a deputy lead - the number two position on the low squadron leader. John was assigned a spot that flight crews referred to as "tail-end-charlie". This was the lowest position in the low squadron and the furthest plane back in the group formation. It was a difficult position to fly because all changes in speed or altitude by the lead plane were magnified the further back in the formation you flew. In addition, because of this partially isolated location, the tail-end-charlie position was the most likely to be the target of enemy fighters. We flew our first mission in that position as did almost every new crew.

After takeoff and during the flight, I found myself checking with our tail gunner and asking how John and his crew were doing. Because of our location in the formation our tail gunner, Sgt Mack, was able to see and report on all the planes in our squadron. As we crossed the Dutch coast and started into Germany, Sgt Mack reported that John's plane had fallen back and seemed unable to keep up with the formation. As we proceeded further into Germany his plane fell further and further behind. There was no visual indication of trouble and no apparent radio contact. Sometime in the next hour, Sgt Mack reported that he could no longer see John's plane....he had fallen too far back and the squadrons trailing contrails had obscured his plane. This meant also that he probably could no longer see our group.

We proceeded over our target, dropped our bombs, and turned 180 degrees to return to our base. Still no sign of John's plane. I hoped that he had joined up with another group, all the time worrying that something much worse might have happened to him and his crew.

After landing at Glatton, I waited on the field, hesitating to go into debriefing, and hoping to hear his plane pass over.....arriving late but safe. I waited for almost an hour. I checked with other pilots that

were with us in that formation but no one seemed to know what happened. They had seen him fall back, but like us, lost sight of him before we reached the target area.

John and his crew were "missing in action" on their first combat flight!

I felt sick all that night. After all, I had checked him out and felt some responsibility for what had happened. Two days went by and our squadron operations officer, after making the usual checks, had classified John and his crew as "MIA".

I never saw John again and I never learned what had happened. He may have strayed off course and been hit by a random burst of flak, a Luftwaffe fighter might have pounced on them as easy prey, or they may have had engine trouble or some other mechanical problem that might have prevented them from returning. I eventually stopped inquiring about my missing friend.....perhaps because I was afraid of what I might find.

This incident has stayed with me for these many years and was an experience that troubled me very much at the time. None of the rest of our crew knew John so they did not know how I felt and ,of course, did not feel as I did.

After this episode I think that I intentionally tried to avoid close friendships with the members of crews other than our own. It was difficult to lose a close friend in combat and worse not to know what happened.

I returned to the States without ever knowing what had happened to John and his crew.

A Surprise in London

About once each month we got an overnight pass and had a chance to get off the base for some much needed recreation. On this particular weekend in January, 1945 Joel Lester and I took the train out of Peterborough to London. The English trains were a treat to ride after the troop trains we had to live with while in the States. We arrived in London at King's Cross station and proceeded to find a way to spend the flying pay which we had accumulated the past month. I don't remember all that we did that day but the weather was nice and we splurged a little by having dinner at a restaurant in one of the large exclusive hotels in London. All I can remember of the meal is that we had brussel sprouts and joked about it at the time. Whenever we ate at a British restaurant we always had brussel sprouts....at least it seemed that way. It's one vegetable that was plentiful in England during the winter of '44/'45.

After an evening visiting as many pubs as we could find around Picadilly Circus , we made our way through the darkness of the London blackout to a nearby service men's Red Cross shelter where we were to spend the night. I remember, after checking in at the desk, that we had to climb a few flights of stairs to where we were to sleep. The "bedroom", as they called it, was a huge warehouse loft dormitory with perhaps a hundred or more army cots set out side by side almost as far as the eye could see. There were no partitions and windows only in the far end of the room. Almost no one else had chosen to sleep on this floor so we picked out a bed and began undressing for the night. When a soldier is tired, no place that is warm and has a cot is ever rejected. We were dog tired and ready to sleep.

Joel had just taken off his shoes and socks and I was preparing to do the same when suddenly all HELL broke loose. There was a tremendous explosion. The whole building seemed to heave and glass in the windows at the far end of the room crashed to the floor. Some of the cots seemed to move, dust fell from the floor (or roof) above, and the lights went out. The thought crossed my mind that perhaps we had survived enemy fighters and flak but were destined to end up buried in rubble in a collapsed building in central London. The building did not collapse. Joel looked at me and quietly said "Let's get the hell outa here and back to the base. It's not safe here". He was quite right but he reconsidered and we stayed. What had happened is that one of the V2 rockets that frequently bombarded London had landed only about a block away from where we were staying. The V2 carried a two ton bomb on its nose and, since it was fired from Germany into the stratosphere, it would return to earth noiselessly and without warning. An explosion of 4000 pounds of dynamite packs a major wallop.

The next day we walked to where the bomb had landed and were amazed at the damage. We were witness to a major disaster. The British, however, just walked rapidly by on their way to work as if what had happened was a daily occurrence..... and it was. The bomb had landed about 500 feet from where we had been sleeping and had hit in the main shopping area of London on Regent Street immediately adjacent to Selfridge's Department Store. The front of Selfridge's was almost one hundred percent glass window and all that glass had landed on the sidewalk in front of the store piling up almost a foot in depth. For blocks around the sidewalks and roads were covered with glass and overturned cars. Fire trucks were pumping water into the buildings adjacent to a huge hole in the ground that was about 100 feet in diameter and at least 10 feet deep. There was no trace of the building that had been there the day before. It seemed strange to see no one gawking at this carnage. Instead we witnessed dozens of civilians helping to sweep up the glass and board up the storefronts so that the merchants could open their doors for business that same day.

On one other occasion I had seen a V-1 buzz bomb passing over London but this encounter with a V2 was too close a call not to remember it like it was yesterday.

Dive Bombing

I don't remember what date or time of year this was but it was a time of very bad weather. We had prepared for a mission and had taken off with a full load of 500 pound bombs. Before all the group's planes were airborne there was a mission recall. This meant that the mission was scrubbed, probably because of very bad weather over Germany. I believe only a handful of planes were in the air when the recall came and we were one of them. We were told via radio that we were to dispose of our bombs and return to our field.

Our Group's procedure for disposing of our bombs was to arm them and drop them in an area of the North Sea that cuts into the side of England known as "The Wash". The Wash was perhaps a hundred miles Northwest of Glatton airfield. The other primary rule in doing this was that the visibility must be clear, we must be out of site of land, and we were to drop our bombs only when we were sure no English fishing or military boats were anywhere near the area.

We proceeded to the Wash only to find that there was a low thin cover of clouds whose top was perhaps 400 feet above the water and extending as far as we could see. There was never any thought of returning to the field with the bombs. Landing with a load of bombs and full gas tanks was too risky.

What to do?

We decided to go down to determine how low the cloud layer actually was. We made a slow instrument descent through the clouds. When we broke through at about 200 feet we found the visibility to be clear and we could readily see for a considerable distance over the water. A suggestion from our bombardier and with gleeful agreement from the rest of the crew, we decided that we would rise above the cloud layer, which was only a few hundred feet thick, arm a bomb, then dive down through the cloud layer, level off, observe that no ships were in the area, quickly release one bomb, pull up as quickly as possible and get as much distance between us and the bomb before it exploded.

We did not know how close we could be to an exploding 500 pound bomb without sustaining damage. We first made a dry run or two before Joel finally armed one of the bombs. Then, down we went. We started at about 1000 ft altitude and dived down with engines at full throttle, broke through the clouds, "bombs away" came over the intercom from Joel, and up we went as fast as a B-17 could climb at full throttle. Just before we broke out of the cloud layer we heard the bomb explode with a loud 'WOOMMP'. Hearing the bomb explode surprised me. A check of the crew and the plane determined that there was no sign of damage and no one in the crew observed the bomb exploding through the clouds.

We continued this bombing, one at a time, until we had exhausted our supply of bombs. Everyone seemed to enjoy this adventure and I kinda wished that we could do this with some of the Group's targets in Germany. Bad, bad, bad idea. This may be the only B-17 in the 8th Air Force to practice dive bombing.

There was much chatter on the intercom as we returned to our home field about the incident and the fun we had had. Dive bombing in a B-17G.

Swapping Places

I recently watched a program on the History Channel on television titled "Suicide Missions - the Ball Turret Gunner".

What a great show. Nothing I have ever seen before portrayed the bravery and dedication of the ball turret gunners in WWII more clearly than this show. Watching this documentary brought to mind my one and only experience in the ball turret.....and other experiences while "swapping places".

As the pilot of a B-17, I spent about 95 percent of my time in the pilot's compartment. There were occasions, however, in training and when overseas, that I would stroll the plane while the copilot flew in the pilot's seat. Frequently, on training missions, we would let one of the other members of the crew fly in the copilot's seat with the opportunity to handle the controls for a short period. Everyone on the crew got their chance and seemed to enjoy the experience. It broke the normal routines and helped to convince them that piloting a B-17 was no "walk in the park". By the same token I would often spend time in the nose of the plane with the Navigator (Don Scheuch) and Bombardier (Joel Lester). I also spent time in other parts of the plane; with Ed Peters where I got to operate the top turret, with Clair Hetrick checking out the operation of the waist fifty calibre guns, and with Charles Kenny in the radio

compartment. I suppose these visits were an attempt to experience what other members of the crew experienced while performing their specialty in flight. Besides, it gave me a chance to stretch my legs and reduced the boredom of long training flights .

On one of these occasions when I ventured to the rear of the plane I offered to exchange places with our tail gunner, Percy Mack. Now, you all know that the tail gun position is at the extreme rear of the plane and the only access to it is from the waist position but what is not obvious is the difficulty in getting to that position in flight. The passage is very narrow and one must squeeze past the tail wheel of the plane which retracts up into the plane when in flight. One then crawls on hands and knees into a position where there is less and less room to move. When you reach your destination you are on your knees and your head is touching the top skin of the aircraft with barely enough room to turn your head from side to side.

With a full compliment of high altitude clothing and equipment and an oxygen mask, just getting into position was a feat of heroic proportions.

The only redeeming feature of this gun position was the fact that it had its own personal escape hatch. A small hatch, perhaps 18 inches square was immediately to the left and behind the gunners position and provided a way out in an emergency.....albeit somewhat difficult.

On my first visit to this position I came to the realization that the tail gunner had much more to contend with than the cramped quarters. Each movement of the plane controls in flight was greatly accentuated at the tail. Flying formation particularly, resulted in continuous small adjustment to the elevator and rudder by the pilot to maintain position. These small adjustments resulted in a rise and drop and a left to right of the tail.....often a distance of four or five feet. I was in this position only a few minutes when I began to feel queasy from this constant motion..... as if in a small boat on a stormy ocean. It took me no more than five minutes to conclude that if I stayed there much longer I'd be losing my breakfast. After that experience I had a new respect for Sgt Percy Mack and the tail gun position. It was his job to stay in that position for as long as ten hours at a time and that surely required a high degree of stamina and endurance.

My next trial run was to the ball turret. For this I needed some instructions from our Ball turret gunner, Ed McCloskey. He reviewed with me all the procedures to follow for getting into the ball and what to do once I got settled there.

The only access to the ball is through a small hatch in the top of the ball that is only accessible when the ball was in a special position with the guns pointing straight down. I proceeded to connect my intercom before entering the ball as this would be my only means of communication once that hatch door was closed. Since we were not at high altitude it was not necessary for me to wear the heavy clothing and oxygen mask that were normally required of the ball turret gunner when flying a mission.

As I slithered through the small hatch down into the ball I had a queasy feeling that I was leaving the airplane. A very uncomfortable feeling for sure. I placed my feet in the footrests and settled down into the seat as my knees slowly pulled up almost to my head. My head was between the two 50 calibre guns with the barrel only inches from my ears. Can't even imagine what it would be like when the guns were firing. I was now seated in place and fought the tight space to fasten a chest chute to my harness. The

chute had been handed to me by one of the crew through the open hatch above my head. I now sat normally with the bulbous parachute sitting on my stomach, my legs pushed up in a fetal position, and a couple of gun barrels just a few inches from my head. I had been so busy that I'd not yet looked around at the space outside the ball.....that was to come shortly.

Just as I was about to ask another question I heard the hatch door above my head slam shut. I was now on my own.

I roughly grasp the handlebars of the gun and ball control and immediately began to spin. The ball, and I, spun swiftly to the left. In an attempt to slow the spin, I overcorrected and immediately began to spin in the opposite direction. After fighting with this for a few minutes, I finally came to a full stop. I then tipped the handlegrips backward and immediately was thrown down on my back as the ball rotated and the guns came from a perpendicular position to a horizontal position. This is where I wanted to be.....resting on my back and looking straight ahead out of the small glass window directly in front of me. It was at that moment that I lost my breath. I suddenly could see nothing of the plane, no fuselage, no tail, no wings, nothing. I'm floating in space in a ball with no reference to the horizon on this cloudy day. It was eerie and breathtaking.

I must have sounded panicky to the crew when I called over the intercom "Get me out of here". I had been in the ball for perhaps 5 minutes and I had had enough. The lonely feeling and the sense of abandonment from the rest of the plane and crew was something that I did not enjoy (and never would). I positioned the ball so that the hatch could be opened and when it was aligned I'm sure that I set a record for extricating myself from the ball up into the waist of the plane. I was out of there in less than 15 seconds, I'm sure.

I have said before that it took a special kind of person to fly the ball turret. Jim McCloskey was that person on our crew and I think he deserves a special debt of gratitude from the rest of us in the plane for the many, many hours he spent in that ball. That was my first, last, and only experience in the ball turret. God bless the ball turret gunners.

"More to come"

"Trouble at the 'Flak Home'"

This is a picture of the English country manor called FURZE DOWN, located somewhere near Southampton, England. It's where we were sent for our "Flak Leave".

[image lost]

THE FLAK HOME CAPER

This is a story that seems to have no satisfactory conclusion - at least for me. Each surviving member of our crew recalls these particular events of the winter of 1944/1945 differently. After 54 years, when all the old crew gathered at the 457th reunion in Savannah, I felt I would finally get a picture of what happened to the enlisted members of our crew at their flak home on that cold January day. Alas, that was not to be.

This is not a story of a combat mission or a confrontation with enemy fighters. It's about an event (both serious and humorous) that took place at a rest home somewhere in England.

It was SOP (Standard Operating Procedure) for crews that had completed their first 15 missions to be directed to take a "Flak Leave". A "Flak Leave" was intended to give bomber crews a week to rest and relax away from flying. The time was to be spent away from the field and in the luxury of English manor homes or resort hotels. After a week at a "flak home" we were presumed to be refreshed and ready for another 15 missions or more. The entire crew went on flak leave at the same time but the officers went to one home and the enlisted men to another.

Joel, Jim and I were ordered to a home called Furze Down (picture above) that was located somewhere near Southampton. It was even more beautiful than the picture. We dined, slept, played and enjoyed our stay immensely. The home was run by the American Red Cross and all kinds of entertainment and programs were pre planned for our pleasure. The owners of Furze Down seemed to be away but all their servants were still there on duty and pampered us continually.

The enlisted men were sent to a different flak home. I don't recall just where but it's not really important to this story. So.....!!

We had been at the flak home for only about three days, enjoying a luxury and freedom that we had not felt in many months. In the evening of the third day an urgent message was delivered to me from the commander of our squadron. It instructed me and the other officers of our crew to return to base immediately and report to him when we arrived. This was unusual, to say the least, but we packed up the next day, and, with much apprehension, returned to Glatton and the 751st squadron compound.

I immediately proceeded to the headquarters hut and to the commanders office. For the next half hour I received a "dressing down" that was exceeded only by the first month in preflight at Maxwell field. The Colonel was not entirely clear on what had happened but from what I understood, the enlisted men of our crew had committed some major crime at their flak home and were presently under house arrest and on their way back to Glatton. The Colonel mentioned something about a truck being stolen at the flak home and that our crew members were

responsible. He said that they were now reduced in rank from staff sergeants to privates and they would either face a courts marshal or be given a rifle and sent to join Patton's troops on the continent as regular infantry GI's. He also said that the officers would continue to fly but that we would now fly with a new crew of misfits from the reserve pool. This was really bad news for us as no one wanted to fly with a makeshift crew. It was not unusual to have one of these crew members fill in for a mission or two but to have a new crew made up of these individuals was unthinkable. His threat was the ultimate intimidation. I left the Colonel's office feeling totally dejected.

The next day we held a meeting of the entire crew in the enlisted men's hut. Sgt. Charles Kenney, our radioman, was elected by the enlisted men to be their spokesman. Charles painted a story not too different from the Colonel's except that he assured me that the sergeant in charge of the motor pool at the flak home had given them the OK to take a truck into town. It seems that there was to be a dance or party in the local town and the entire flak home had been invited. Our crew, for some reason or other, missed the bus that was to take them to town. Not wanting to miss the big event, they went to the motor pool at the flak home, took a truck and started into town on a narrow, icy road. Somewhere along the way the driver, Ed Peters, lost control and the truck slid off the road into a ditch. No one was hurt and the truck suffered no major damage but it seemed permanently stuck in the ditch. Their best efforts could not get the truck back on the road. To compound this matter, two of the crew walked back to the motor pool at the flak home, and commandeered a jeep which they drove to the site -- planning to use it to pull the truck back onto the road.

When they arrived at the accident site, and before they could extract the truck, they were greeted by none other than the commander of the flak home who just happened by in his jeep.

And that was the story!

We all suffered through the following days together awaiting a decision as to what would happen to the enlisted men and what lay in store for our future as a bomber crew. It was a particularly difficult period for each member of the crew.

Suddenly, without prior notice, we were informed that our crew would be flying the next mission, and, since no one under the rank of sergeant could fly combat missions, all the members of the crew were instantly promoted to sergeant. Without telling us, a decision had been made to forgive our misdeeds. We were once again a crew and flying deputy squadron lead on the next mission. Normally we would not celebrate the fact that we were chosen for a bombing mission.....this time was an exception.

Last year, at our group reunion in Savannah, three of the crew who were involved in this caper were present. It was my chance to finally find out exactly what happened. Well, I will never know for sure because each of the three had a slightly different version to tell. They each recalled the event but could agree on only a few facts. One said that they missed the bus because they had found a wine cellar at the flak home but another said that they were just hiking and returned late. One said that they got a key from the sergeant in charge of the motor pool and one said they just took a truck that the keys had been left in and the other said one of the crew hot-wired the

ignition. They did agree that Peters was driving. One said that the truck was just stuck in a ditch without any damage and the other said the truck was tipped up on it's rear bumper so that it's head lights were pointing skyward thinking at the time about the wartime blackout and how the headlights would be a beacon that would attract civilians and military alike. One of the three did not remember getting the jeep but the other two did because they were the two that got the jeep. They all remember very vividly being confronted by the Colonel in his jeep.

I guess that this story shows how one's memory fades over time and how we often remember in great detail the good memories and tend to let fade those that were not especially enjoyable. The surviving crew members each remember very well those days we spent waiting for our future to be determined. And, how relieved we were when we were again placed on flying status. I will say that I remember this event as vividly as any war experience. The comradeship and unity of a bomber crew was something very special and being separated from ones crew members, whether in combat or on the ground, could be equally devastating.

"Never did get that letter."

Mail From Home

This looks like an ordinary letter but actually it's something special to me. I've kept it all these years as a remembrance of a time when the US Postal Service was a service that we all admired and when it was said that "Neither rain, nor snow, nor dark of night will delay the US postal service from its appointed rounds" it was more than just an expression.

If you notice the postmark is Kingston, PA, November 13, 1943 and was a Christmas card that was sent to me from the Bible Class at my Methodist Church. I had left the address to which it was mailed long before Nov 13th.

The remarkable thing about this mailing is that I did not get it till June of 1945 when I returned home and was discharged from the service. My father got the card from the church where it had been returned to the sender and marked "Undeliverable". The card was originally sent to me when I was in the Air Force in CTD (College Training Detachment). Because of the shortage of flight training facilities and the large number of cadet enlistees, we were placed in colleges throughout the country to await flight training. This gave us a chance to take some college courses and provided the colleges with students they would not otherwise have - a good overall arrangement. I was stationed in the 30th College Training Detachment at Xavier University in Cincinnati, Ohio.

Now, if you look carefully at the envelope you will see that this card, with a \$.03 cent stamp on it, was forwarded many times before being returned to the sender and each forwarding address is like a roadmap of my travels in the Air Force during my training.

First, it went to Xavier University (CTD). From there it was forwarded to me at NAAC Nashville, Tennessee where I underwent mental and physical testing to determine if I should proceed to flight training.

From there it followed me to Maxwell Field in Montgomery, Alabama where I underwent the rigors of Air Corp Preflight training. Next, the letter followed me to Dorr Field in Arcadia, Florida where my primary flight training took place in the PT-17 Stearman biplane. From there it was forwarded to me at Courtland, Alabama where I had basic training in the infamous BT-13 Vultee "Vibrator".

The final stop, before being returned to the sender, was to Columbus, Mississippi where I had advanced twin engine flight training in the AT-10 and where I graduated and received my wings and commission. Then this much traveled letter was sent back to Kingston, Pennsylvania where it originated.

That's seven "forwards", never quite catching up with me.

That's the end of this story. Just a memory of the days when the Post Office "delivered". How different today.

Some events that I remember so well

Remembrance

Some events and experiences of World War II are gradually becoming fainter in my memory -- it has been 54 years. I will make an attempt here on the following pages to record some of the sights and events as I remember them. For those of you who are of my generation, I'm sure they will stimulate your recollections of another time and place. For today's generation, these memories hopefully will provide some insight into what it was like then, and how it felt to be far from home in the middle of a war.

This was the winter of 1944 /'45 at Glatton airfield in East Anglia, England -- the home field of the 457th Bomb Group, First Division, 8th Air Force. The 457th group was made up of four squadrons; the 748th, 749th, 750th, and 751st. We flew in the 751st squadron. These are some brief remembrances of a time long ago.

I remember:

My arrival at Glatton -- when we entered the Quonset hut to which we were assigned and found 16 empty bunks. The Politz raid a few days before had devastated the squadron.

The small black round steel canister stove that sat in the center of the Quonset hut and its sheet metal stack through the roof. This stove provided our only source of heat....as long as it was fed a reasonable amount of the rationed coal. Sometimes, when we overloaded it with coal, the stove got so hot that it actually glowed red - and the hut was still cold.

The latrines that were located in a separate building about 100 feet from our hut, and the cold, cold, dark mission mornings when we rushed from our hut with a handful of clothes to try and get to the showers before the hot water ran out.

The olive colored, mostly mud covered, English bicycles that proliferated the base and were about the only means of transportation -- and getting used to using those hand brakes.

The Officers Club and the many hours I spent there perfecting my Bridge game. (Never did perfect my efforts on the crap table).

Square eggs in the cafeteria for breakfast. (I should not have to explain square eggs). Sometimes before a mission we would get real eggs -- what a treat.

Some have asked me to explain square eggs. OK: Since fresh eggs were so scarce in the ETO and since they could not be imported from the US, we were constantly deluged with powdered eggs. These eggs were not really powdered but instead came in huge 5 gal cans already mixed (liquid state). In the mess kitchen they were cooked on a large range

cook top. The method of cooking the liquid eggs was to spread about a gal at a time on the cook top and when they were sufficiently cooked, cut this huge (3 ft by 2 ft) egg into squares (about 6 inches by 6 inches) to serve. Thus "square eggs". Blah!!

Bartering cigarettes and candy with some British civilians who would sneak onto the base with a few dozen fresh eggs. And then cooking those eggs in our hut on that heater stove.

The pistol range that was in a field some distance from the huts. Finding that even with lots of practice I would never be able defend myself with a military '45. We joked that we'd have a better chance throwing the gun than shooting it.

The silence and then muffled murmurs that followed when the curtain in the briefing room was pulled back to expose the mission we were to fly that day.

A little English home with a real thatched roof just to the right of the entrance to our base from the highway.

[On Jan 9, 1999 Richard Hollobush sent me a picture taken by his dad, Robert Hollobush who was a crew chief in the 748th squadron. The picture is of that [thatched roof house](#) just as I remember it. Thank you Robert and Richard]

Sleeping on English Army issue "biscuits". These were mattresses ??. They were 36 inches square and about 4 inches thick and filled with straw. When two were placed together they made a mattress for our bunk beds. That crack in the middle let in a lot of cold air.

That sick-stomach feeling when I flew my first mission as copilot with another crew. All the training in the world could not prepare me for the nerves that accompanied me on that first flight. All the others were bad but flying that first one without my crew was terrifying.

The disappointment I felt when I looked in the bomb bay before a mission and found we were to carry leaflets or Chaff instead of bombs. Imagine a raid with everyone shooting at you and all you have to deliver is paper.

["Flak Jackets"](#). Their weight and the problems of donning them while flying and wearing an oxygen mask. We were each supposed to carry one flak jacket for our own use on each mission, but some of the guys pirated extra jackets and almost completely covered themselves for protection when we were under an intensive flak attack.

Being in London and experiencing the "Buzz Bombs". These flying bombs were propelled by a ram jet engine and flew at about a 1000 ft altitude. When the engine

stopped the bomb fell. Hundreds fell on London and hundreds were shot down. The Brits would ignore the put-put-put sound of the bombs until the sound stopped -- then everyone scrambled for cover. You had about 15 seconds.

Seeing the first of many V2 rocket bombs being launched from western Germany and the lowlands. We would see the contrail from these rockets as they passed our bomber formation at 20,000 feet on their way to the stratosphere and on to England.

The sumptuous 200th mission party at the Officers Club. This party was attended by selected busloads of English girls that were brought onto the base from Peterborough. While they were supposed to entertain the "boys", I think most came for the food and drinks.

Most of Britain was on strict rationing at that time. I remember one young lady, perhaps eighteen, asking me if I thought it would be OK for her to take home some of the fruit piled high on the buffet table. She said that she, "did not ever remember eating a banana". There was little or no fruit available in England for civilians.

The coffee and donuts - and the shot of whiskey that we were offered by the Red Cross after a mission. Having not eaten sometimes for the past 12 or 14 hours, and being so physically exhausted, that shot tended to make things spin a little. After debriefing, we would rush to our dingy cold hut, climb into our bunks, and sleep for the next 12 hours. What a relief -- safely back after one more mission.

Buying our weekly ration of one carton of Lucky Strikes for \$.50 (that's fifty cents) at the PX. Surprisingly not everyone smoked and those who did not had lots of offers to buy their ration.

Visiting the dentist on our base. What an experience. I think the dentist was one who roved from base to base and his office was a trailer behind a six wheeler. To my chagrin the dentist drilled my tooth without the benefit of electricity (or anesthetic). Only an Army private (must have been serving some kind of punishment) peddling a bicycle next to the dentist chair, which, in turn drove a cable that turned the drill. That was the worst experience of my lifetime at the dentist.

Picadilly Commandos - need I say more?

Did not intend to say more but others have asked for an explanation. OK. You all know that Picadilly Circus is the center of London today and it was then. It was a favorite loitering place after dark for the "Ladies of the Evening" (prostitutes) who would roam London soliciting service men. It was hard to walk a block without being stopped and sometimes grappled by more than one at a time. Thus "Picadilly Commando's".

In the dark of the blackout it was impossible to tell what these girls looked like but often many of the men found this was a way to find a comfortable room for the night -

with added delights. Ask any serviceman who ever visited London during the war what a "Picadilly Commando" was and I'm sure you'll provoke a smile or two.

Experiencing true vertigo while flying in formation over Germany. Sometimes the contrails or heavy cloud formations were unavoidable and the formation was required to fly through this dense fog-like atmosphere. I'm sure most pilots remember the feeling that your plane was in a steep bank while your instruments told you that you were level. Resisting the natural pull of your own muscles was exhausting. Only the many hours in the Link trainer in flight school prevented disaster.

The rain and generally bad weather that winter of 1944, 1945. It's been said that "It never stops raining unless it's foggy.....and that means it's just about to rain". I have never seen fog like I saw in Britain that winter.

My first visit to London and my first view of the antiaircraft defenses in the city -- particularly the barrage balloons which floated by the hundreds over the city.

Easter Sunday in 1945. Joel Lester and I were in London and on impulse decided to attend Easter Sunday services in Westminster Abbey. It was a very solemn and beautiful service that I shall never forget.

The loss of our Navigator, Don Scheuch. On my fourth mission, Don was asked to serve with another crew whose navigator had been wounded several days earlier. Since our bombardier, Joel Lester, was a qualified bombardier/navigator we were able to fly on the same mission but with Don in another plane in our squadron. This was the mission to Merseberg on Nov. 2nd, 1944. (See my description of the mission to Merseberg) The plane that Don served on was shot down. He fortunately survived but was a POW for the remainder of the war.

We all felt terrible....knowing his plane went down but not knowing whether he had survived. It took us many months before we came to terms with this and then only after getting word that he was not killed but was taken prisoner.

Warm British beer. It began to grow on you the more you drank. Most of us ordered "Arf & Arf", or half ale and half bitters. It was always tap beer and was usually served in a very large glass.

The crap table at the Officer's Club and how I learned to play craps.....only to regret the day. My leisure hours were better spent playing bridge. I spent many hours at that and became quite good.

The sculptured shrubs on the rear lawn at Furzdown (flack home) and the kennels at the rear of the property where they raised Welsh Korgi's. I had never before seen a

Welsh Korgi and thought it to be the strangest looking dog I had ever seen.

→

"A recent letter to my surviving crew members."

Edna and Willard Reese

xxxxxxxxxx

FL 32137

Nov. 5, 1996

Friends and fellow crewmembers,

As I sit to write this letter I find I am somewhat overcome with mixed emotions. I am, first of all, happy and excited that I have located all but one of our old crew, but sad and disappointed to find that four of our members are deceased. I also feel regret and guilt that I have failed to maintain contact with any of you over the past 50 years.

Why now? Well, there is a story behind this that begins with retirement, continues with some modern technology, and ends with a major stroke of luck.

For the past 10 years since we retired to Florida, and even more since Edna's stroke six years ago, my interests have centered on computers. The War's 50th anniversary celebration and lots of TV talk and film clips of bombers over Germany, and with my knowledge of Internet search capabilities, I determined to try to locate some of our old crew.

I will not go into detail here but I had phenomenal luck. I first found Percy Mack. (He is the only Percy Mack in Vermont.) He led me to Clair Hetrick and Ed McCloskey. Additional searches over a period of weeks have led me to all but one of the others.

A very real reward for me during these searches was the telephone conversations with each of you.

There was also the special feeling accompanying the contacts I made with the families of the deceased, and with total strangers -- all of whom, without exception, were friendly, curious and helpful. The disappointment, of course, was finding that Ed Peters, Jim Stoner, Don Scheuch, and Charles Kenney were all deceased. In most instances, I was able to talk with their wives or children -- a warm experience that I will treasure. Al Knox is still missing but I have not given up hope of finding him.

I know each of you has a story to tell about your life and travels over the past 50 years and your plans for the future. I would welcome a phone call or letter from you so that I might add to the information you have already given me in our short telephone conversations.

A little about me:

At the end of the War I married my high school sweetheart, Edna. We raised two children; Diane, who is the mother of our only two grandchildren (boys 7 and 9), and David, who tried marriage but is now single. We lived for a few years in Pennsylvania where I attended Lehigh University under the GI bill and graduated with a degree in Engineering. In 1952 we moved to New Jersey where we lived until we retired in 1986. (We have had 11 different mailing addresses since we married.)

I gradually advanced in my profession to become Vice President of a New Jersey firm of Architects and Engineers. My specialty was the design of mechanical systems for large commercial, educational, and industrial structures throughout the Northeast.

During this period, from 1945 till two months ago, the only members of our crew that I had contact with were Jim Stoner and Joel Lester. Jim and his wife visited us shortly before he died in 1951. Joel Lester and Evelyn stopped by to visit somewhere in the mid 60's. I also have a Christmas card from Hetrick -- a picture of his daughter Debbie sitting on Santa Clause's lap. (She was 5 years old)

After 34 good years in engineering, we retired in 1986 to a home we built in Palm Coast. Palm Coast is a small secluded coastal community in northeast Florida where we had vacationed (in a condominium we owned) for the previous 10 years. We love the area and plan to never move again.

Our life in retirement has not been what we had planned. (But then, we cannot plan the future, can we?). Edna suffered a major stroke about 6 years ago and is confined to a wheelchair. She is very dependent on me. This event has drastically changed our lifestyle but we thank Almighty God that we are still together and otherwise in fairly good health.

It's indeed difficult to sum up one's life in a few paragraphs. Many milestones, both happy and sad have been omitted. Overall, I would say I have been richly blessed in so many ways. I have a wife and children who have loved and supported me every moment of my journey through life and that's the most important thing after all.

Now! We have a great opportunity to all get together next October when the 457th Bomb Group has its reunion in Savannah, Georgia.

For those of you who do not know about this I am enclosing a mailer concerning the reunion. If you are a member of the 457th Association you will be receiving further information on the reunion in the coming months. Let's keep in touch through the coming year and all plan to be in Savannah.

Can you imagine the fun we can have reliving those months we spent together in 1944/45?

I am attaching a list of the crew members and the information I have obtained about each - or about their families. This information is incomplete and perhaps inaccurate. If you will contact me we will try to get the facts.

I am also including here a list of the missions that I flew and the dates and air time. (One of you said he would like to have this information.) Your missions may differ slightly because some of us flew a mission or more with another crew. Anyway, this is my list. If anyone desires a copy, I also have a list of all the missions that the 457th flew with dates and losses (dead, POW, missing, wounded).

I look forward to seeing each of you next October and, if any of you gets to Florida before then, I will expect a visit.

Pilot to Crew -- "over and out".
Willard

[Daughter's addendum: all 5 of the surviving crew members did meet in Savannah, GA, in 1997. I was honored to be there to meet them all and to have every single one of Dad's crew members take me aside and tell me that if it were not for him, they would not have survived the war.

--Diane Reese.]

My thirty mission list.

751st Bombardment Squadron
457th Bombardment Group
Office of the Operations Officer

26 March 1945

Lt Reese's record of combat missions

1. Oct. 22, 1944 Hanover, Germany-----	7:00 hours
2. Oct. 28, 1944 Munster, Germany-----	6:00 hours
3. Oct. 29, 1944 Munster, Germany-----	6:00 hours
4. Nov. 2, 1944 Merseberg, Germany-----	8:00 hours
5. Nov. 5, 1944 Frankfurt, Germany-----	7:00 hours
6. Nov. 6, 1944 Hamburg, Germany-----	7:45 hours
7. Nov. 8, 1944 Merseberg, Germany-----	6:30 hours
8. Nov. 9, 1944 Metz, France-----	8:00 hours
9. Nov. 16, 1944 Eschweiler, Germany-----	6:00 hours
10. Nov. 21, 1944 Freidberg, Germany-----	8:20 hours
11. Nov. 25, 1944 Merseberg, Germany-----	9:15 hours
12. Nov. 26, 1944 Misburg, Germany-----	7:45 hours
13. Nov. 29, 1944 Misburg, Germany-----	8:00 hours
14. Dec. 4, 1944 Kassel, Germany-----	9:00 hours
15. Dec. 11, 1944 Frankfurt, Germany-----	9:00 hours
16. Dec. 15, 1944 Kassel, Germany-----	9:00 hours
17. Dec. 24, 1944 Koblenz, Germany-----	8:30 hours
18. Jan. 7, 1945 Bitburg, Germany-----	7:00 hours
19. Jan. 17, 1945 Palderborn, Germany-----	7:15 hours
20. Jan. 21, 1945 Aschaffenberg, Germany-----	8:30 hours
21. Jan. 28, 1945 Cologne, Germany-----	6:00 hours
22. Feb. 3, 1945 Berlin, Germany-----	9:00 hours
23. Feb. 10, 1945 Dulmen, Germany-----	7:00 hours
24. Feb. 16, 1945 Gelsenkirchen, Germany-----	6:45 hours
25. Feb. 28, 1945 Soest, Germany-----	10:00 hours
26. Mar. 9, 1945 Kassel, Germany-----	7:00 hours
27. Mar. 11, 1945 Bremen, Germany-----	6:05 hours
28. Mar. 17, 1945 Altenberg, Germany-----	9:15 hours
29. Mar. 19, 1945 Fulda, Germany-----	10:15 hours
30. Mar. 23, 1945 Recklinghausen, Germany-----	6:50 hours

Total combat hours-----230:55 hours

More details on each mission.

Missions of A. W. Reese's Crew No. 424.
From the Official Documents of the 457th Bomb Group.
(From Oct. 1944 to April, 1945)

No.	Target	Date	Plane S/N	Plane Name	Crew	Mission
# 1 (138)	Hanover	Oct. 22, 1944	42-38021	Mission Maid	P-Ernest Salzer CP-A. Willard Reese N -Donald Scheuch B -William Stepvan TT-Jack Scarborough R -Vincent Toth W- Charles Gordon BT-Richard Zetrenga TG -Benjamin Hasrick	36 Sorties. 32 A/C ttacked primary. 3 A/C attacked T/O. 1 aircraft failed to attack due to mechanical failure. Battle damage - none. Bomb results unknown.
# 2 (141)	Munster	Oct. 28, 1944	43-38528	That's My Baby	P- A. Willard Reese CP-James R Stoner N - Don Scheuch B - Neil C. Shroeder TT - Edward Peters R - Charles Kenny W - Albert Knox BT-James McCloskey TG - Percy Mack	36 sorties. 2 A/C attacked primary. 2 A\C failed to attack because of mechanical failure. Casualties - 2 wounded. Battle damage - 16 minor, 11 major. Bomb results; Lo Sq - unidentified. High Sq -unknown. Lead Sq. - fair
# 3 (142)	Munster	Oct. 30, 1944	42-31630	Pakawalup	P - A. Willard Reese CP - James R Stoner N - Don Scheuch B - Joel Lester TT - Edward Peters R - Charles Kenny W - Clair Hetrick BT-James McCloskey TG - Percy Mack	34 Sorties 2 a/c attacked T/O. 2 A/C failed to attack due to Mechanical failure. 30 A/C attacked the Primary, Casualties - none. Bomb results - unobserved.
# 4 (143)	Merseberg	Nov. 2, 1944	42-31505	Miss Cue	P - A. Willard Reese CP - James R Stoner B - Joel Lester TT - Edward Peters R - Charles Kenny W - Clair Hetrick W - Albert Knox BT-James McCloskey	36 Sorties. 2 A/C failed to attack due to mechanical failure. 1 A/C attacked T/O (Bippen) 9 A/C lost to enemy fighters. Battle damage - 5 minor,

					TG - Percy Mack	4 major. Bomb results - poor. E/A claims - 8 destroyed, 2 probable, 10 damaged. Casualties - 2 wounded 82 missing.
# 5 (144)	Frankfurt	Nov. 5, 1944	42- 97123	Ipana Smile	P - A. Willard Reese CP - James R Stoner N - Joel Lester TT - Edward Peters R - Charles Kenny W - Clair Hetrick W - Albert Knox BT-James McCloskey TG - Richard Seely	35 sorties. 35 A/C attacked the target. 2 A/C failed to attack due to mechanical failure. Battle damage-10 minor, no major. Bomb results - Fair/Good.
# 6 (145)	Hamburg (Marburg)	Nov. 6, 1944	42- 107034	Rampant Pansy	P - A. Willard Reese CP - James R Stoner B - Joel Lester TT - Edward Peters R - Charles Kenny TG - Clair Hetrick W - Albert Knox BT-James McCloskey W - Fred Barshop	36 Sorties. 5 A/C attacked secondary target, PFF. 1 A/C lost to reasons unknown. Casualties - 9 missing. Battle damage - 3 minor, no major. Bomb results - unobserved.
# 7 (146)	Merseberg	Nov. 8, 1944	xxxxx	xxxxx	P - A. Willard Reese CP - James R Stoner B - Joel Lester TT - Edward Peters R - Charles Kenny W - Clair Hetrick W - Albert Knox BT-James McCloskey TG - Percy Mack	14 Sorties. Mission recalled. 1 A/C attacked target with another group. 32 A/C failed to attack because of weather. 1 A/C was lost at sea (accident). 1 A/C jettisoned bombs in Dummer Lake. 1 A/C bombed PFF with Deenethorp. Casualties - 1 wounded, 9 missing. Battle damage - nil.
# 8 (147)	Metz, France	Nov. 9, 1944	42- 97123	Ipana Smile	P - A. Willard Reese CP - James R Stoner B - Joel Lester TT - Edward Peters R - Charles Kenny W - Clair Hetrick W - Albert Knox BT-James McCloskey TG - Percy Mack	36 Sorties. 35 A/C attacked target. 1 A/C failed to attack due to Mechanical failure. Casualties - nil. Battle damage - nil. Bomb results - obscured

						by 10/10 clouds.
# 9 (148)	Eschweiler	Nov. 16, 1944	42- 97123	Hamtramack Mama	P - A. Willard Reese CP - James R Stoner B - Joel Lester TT - Edward Peters R - Charles Kenny W - Clair Hetrick W - Albert Knox BT-James McCloskey TG - Percy Mack	36 Sorties. 36 A/C attacked target. No Casualties. No Battle Damage. Bomb Results Unknown
#10 (149)	Merseberg	Nov. 21, 1944	44-6621	Tryp's Troubles	P - A. Willard Reese CP - James R Stoner N - Paul A. Brook B - Joel Lester TT - Edward Peters R - Charles Kenny W - Clair Hetrick BT-James McCloskey TG - Percy Mack	36 Sorties. 21 Attacked T/O at Friedberg 15 A/C attacked other T/O Casualties - 1 wounded. Battle Damage - 5 minor - No major. Bomb Results-poor/unknown
#11 (151)	Merseberg	Nov. 25, 1944	42- 97123	Ipana Smile	P - A. Willard Reese CP - James R Stoner N - Paul A. Brook B - Joel Lester TT - Edward Peters R - Charles Kenny W - Clair Hetrick BT-James McCloskey TG - Percy Mack	36 Sorties. 36 A/C attacked target. 1 A/C lost to reasons unknown Casualties - 9 missing. Battle Damage - 5minor - 1 major. Bomb results - unknown.
#12 (152)	Misburg	Nov. 26, 1944	42- 97123	Ipana Smile	P - A. Willard Reese CP - James R Stoner N - Paul A. Brook B - Joel Lester TT - Edward Peters R - Charles Kenny W - Clair Hetrick W - Albert Knox BT-James McCloskey TG - Percy Mack	36 Sorties. 35 A/C attacked target. 2 A/C failed to attack due to mechanical failure. Casualties - none. Battle Damage - 17 minor - 3 major. Bomb results - unknown.
# 13 (153)	Misburg	Nov. 29, 1944	43- 38301	Liberty Belle	P - A. Willard Reese CP - James R Stoner N - Paul A. Brook TT - Edward Peters R - Charles Kenny W - Clair Hetrick W - Albert Knox BT-James McCloskey TG - Percy Mack	12 Sorties. 12 A/C attacked target. No A/C lost. No Casualties. Battle Damage - 1 major. Bomb results- unknown.
#14 (155)	Kassel	Dec. 4, 1944	42- 97827	My Mary Myrtle	P - A. Willard Reese CP - James R Stoner N - Paul A. Brook	36 sortees

					B - Joel Lester TT - Edward Peters R - Charles Kenny W - Clair Hetrick BT-James McCloskey TG - Percy Mack	35 A/C attacked target. 1 A/C failed to attack due to mechanical reasons. 1 A/C lost to reasons unknown Casualties -9 missing. Battle Damage - none Bomb results - unobserved by 10/10 cloud cover/
#15 (158)	Frankfurt	Dec. 11, 1944	43- 37733	Ace of Hearts	P - A. Willard Reese CP - James R Stoner N - Paul A. Brook B - Joel Lester TT - Edward Peters R - Charles Kenny W - Clair Hetrick BT-James McCloskey TG - Percy Mack	36 Sortees 36 A/C attacked the target. Casualties - none. Battle Damage - none Bomb Results - unobserved.
#16 (160)	Kassel	Dec. 15, 1944	43- 38301	Liberty Belle	P - A. Willard Reese CP - James R Stoner N - -Paul A. Brook B - Joel Lester TT - Edward Peters R - Charles Kenny W - Clair Hetrick BT-James McCloskey TG - Percy Mack	36 Sorties 36 A/C attacked the target Casualties - none Battle damage - none Bomb Results - obscured by 10/10 Cloud Cover.
#17 (162)	Koblenz	Dec. 24, 1944	43- 38301	Liberty Belle	P - A. Willard Reese CP - James R Stoner N - Paul A. Brook B - Joel Lester TT - Edward Peters R - Charles Kenny W - Clair Hetrick BT-James McCloskey TG - Percy Mack	8 Sorties 7 A/C attacked target 1 A/C attacked T/O 1 A/C crashed on takeoff. Casualties - 2 wounded. Battle damage - 3 minor 1 salvaged (crashed on T/O) Bomb results unknown
#18 (171)	Bitburg	Jan. 7, 1945	43- 38301	Liberty Belle	P - A. Willard Reese CP - James R Stoner B - Joel Lester TT - Edward Peters R - Charles Kenny W - Clair Hetrick BT-James McCloskey TG - Percy Mack	36 Sortees 36 A/C attacked target Casualties - none Battle damage - none Bomb results - unobserved.
#19 (175)	Palderborn	Jan. 17, 1945	43- 38885	Ruthanne	P - A. Willard Reese CP - James R Stoner N - Paul A. Brook B - Joel Lester TT - Edward Peters R - Charles Kenny	36 Sortees 36 A/C attacked the target. Casualties - none Battle damage - 3 minor. Bomb results - unknown

					W - Clair Hetrick BT-James McCloskey TG - Percy Mack	
#20 (177)	Aschaffenberg	Jan. 21, 1945	43- 38885	Ruthanne	P - A. Willard Reese CP-James R Stoner N - Paul A. Brook B - Joel Lester TT - Edward Peters R - Charles Kenny W - Clair Hetrick BT-James McCloskey TG - Percy Mack	36 Sortees 36 A/C attacked the target. Casualties - none. Battle damage - 2 minor. Bomb results - obscured by clouds. 3 A/C bombed with the 487th Group
#21 (179)	Cologne	Jan. 28, 1945	43- 38885	Ruthanne	P - A. Willard Reese CP - James R Stoner N - Paul A. Brook B - Joel Lester TT - Edward Peters R - Charles Kenny W - Clair Hetrick BT-James McCloskey TG - Percy Mack	35 Sortees 35 A/C attacked the target Casualties - 9 missing. Battle damage - 1 minor 2 major. Bomb results - obscured by haze
#22 (182)	Berlin	Feb. 3, 1945	43- 38885	Ruthanne	P - A. Willard Reese CP - James R Stoner N - Paul A. Brook B - Joel Lester TT - Edward Peters R - Charles Kenny W - Clair Hetrick BT-James McCloskey TG - Percy Mack	36 Sortees 36 A/C attacked the target. Casualties - none Battle damage - 5 minor, 4 major. Bomb results - good to very good
#23 (185)	Dulmen	Feb. 10, 1945	43- 38887	Perpetual Hell	P - A. Willard Reese CP - James R Stoner N - Paul A. Brook B - Joel Lester TT - Edward Peters R - Charles Kenny W - Clair Hetrick BT-James McCloskey TG - Percy Mack	34 Sortees 34 A/C attacked target. Casualties - none. Battle Damage - 4 minor. Bomb results - obscured by clouds.
#24 (188)	Gelsenkirchen	Feb. 16, 1945	44-8152	Miss Ida	P - A. Willard Reese CP - James R Stoner N - Paul A. Brook B - Joel Lester TT - Edward Peters R - Charles Kenny RN-Thomas F. Smith W - Albert Knox TG - Percy Mack	12 Sortees. 12 A/C attacked the target. 1 A/C lost due to AA fire. Casualties - 10 missing. Battle damage - 5 minor, 1 salvage. Bomb results - poor.
#25	Soest	Feb. 28,	44-6603	Pretty Baby	P - A. Willard Reese	

(198)		1945			CP- Medford E. Hollis N - John F. Kelly N - Roy E. Snyder B - Joel Lester TT - Edward Peters R - Charles Kenny W - Clair Hetrick RN -Hobart W. Merritt TG - Percy Mack	36 Sortees 35 A/C attacked the target. 1 A/C lost due to mechanical failure. Casualties - 3 missing. Battle damage - nil Bomb results - unobserved.
#26 (205)	Kassel	Mar. 9, 1945	42- 31588	xxxxxx	P - A. Willard Reese CP - James R Stoner N - Paul A. Brook B - Joel Lester TT - Edward Peters R - Charles Kenny W - Clair Hetrick W - Albert Knox TG - Percy Mack	37 Sortees 37 A/C attacked the target. Casualties - nil. Battle damage - 8 minor ,3 major. Bomb results - good to very good.
#27 (207)	Bremen	Mar.11, 1945	44-8512	Miss Ida	P - A. Willard Reese CP - James R Stoner N- Paul A. Brook B - Joel Lester TT - Edward Peters R - Charles Kenny W - Clair Hetrick TG - Percy A. Mack BT-James McCloskey RN -Mathew Patulski	35 A/C Sortees 35 A/C attacked target. 1 A/C fialed to attack due to mechanical difficulties. Casualties - nil. Battle damage - nil Bomb results - unobserved.
#28 (211)	Altenberg	Mar. 17, 1945	42- 98028	xxxxxx	P - A. Willard Reese CP - James R Stoner B - Joel Lester N- Paul A. Brook TT - Edward Peters R - Charles Kenny W - Clair Hetrick RN -Lawrence Powers TG - Percy Mack	27 Sorteed\s 36 A/C attacked the target. 1 A/C attacked with another group. Casualties - nil. Battle Damage - nil Bomb results - unobserved.
# 29 (213)	Fulda	Mar. 19, 1945	43- 38479	Thy Will Be Done	P - A. Willard Reese CP-Howard Hampton N - Paul A. Brook B - Joel Lester TT - Edward Peters R - Charles Kenny W - Clair Hetrick RN -Hobart Merritt BT-James McCloskey TG - Percy Mack	37 A/C Sortees 33 A/C attacked the target. 4 A/C landed away. Casualties - nil Battle damage - nil Bomb results - good to fair.
#30 (216)	Reckling- hausen	Mar. 23, 1945	44-8557	xxxxxx	P - A. Willard Reese CP-Thomas J.Tredici N - Paul A. Brook B - Joel Lester	36 Sortees 36 A/C attacked the target

					TT - Edward Peters R - Charles Kenny W - Clair Hetrick RN - Mathew Patulski BT-James McCloskey TG - Percy Mack	Casualties - nil Battle damage - 9 minor, 6 major. Bomb results - good.

→

B-17 Pilot's cockpit checklist.

B-17 Cockpit Checklist

From the Pilot Training Manual for the Flying Fortress - p.55 - 56

APPROVED B-17F and G CHECKLIST

PILOT'S DUTIES IN RED
COPILOT'S DUTIES IN
BLACK

BEFORE STARTING

1. Pilot's Preflight-COMplete
2. Form 1 A-CHECKED
3. Controls and Seats-CHECKED
4. Fuel Transfer Valves & Switch-OFF
5. Intercoolers-Cold
6. Gyros-UNCAGED
7. Fuel Shut-off Switches-OPEN
8. Gear Switch-NEUTRAL
9. Cowl Flaps-Open Right-OPEN LEFT-locked
10. Turbos-OFF
11. Idle cut-off-CHECKED
12. Throttles-CLOSED
13. High RPM-CHECKED
14. Autopilot-OFF
15. De-icers and Anti-icers, Wing and Prop-OFF
16. Cabin Heat-OFF
17. Generators-OFF

STARTING ENGINES

1. Fire Guard and Call Clear-LEFT Right
2. Master Switch-ON
3. Battery switches and inverters-ON & CHECKED
4. Parking Brakes-Hydraulic Check-On & CHECKED
5. Booster Pumps-Pressure-ON & CHECKED
6. Carburetor Filters-Open
7. Fuel Quantity-Gallons per tank

8. Start Engines: both magnetos on after one revolution
9. Flight Indicator & Vacuum Pressures - CHECKED
10. Radio-On
11. Check Instruments-CHECKED
12. Crew Report
13. Radio Call & Altimeter-SET

ENGINE RUN-UP

1. Brakes-locked
2. Trim Tabs-SET
3. Exercise Turbos and Props
4. Check Generators-CHECKED & OFF
5. Run up Engines

BEFORE TAKEOFF

1. Tailwheel-Locked
2. Gyro-Set
3. Generators-ON

AFTER TAKEOFF

1. Wheel-PILOT'S SIGNAL
2. Power Reduction
3. Cowl Flaps
4. Wheel Check-OK right-OK LEFT

BEFORE LANDING

1. Radio Call, Altimeter-SET
2. Crew Position-OK
3. Autopilot-OFF
4. Booster Pumps-On
5. Mixture Controls-AUTO-RICH
6. Intercooler-Set
7. Carburetor Filters-Open
8. Wing De-icers-Off
9. Landing Gear
 - a. Visual-Down Right-DOWN LEFT
Tailwheel Down, Antenna in, Ball Turret Checked
 - b. Light-OK
 - c. Switch Off-Neutral
10. Hydraulic Pressure-OK Valve closed
11. RPM 2100-Set
12. Turbos-Set
13. Flaps 1/3-1/3 Down

FINAL APPROACH

14. Flaps-PILOT'S SIGNAL

15. RPM 2200-PILOT'S SIGNAL

Back side of checklist

AFTER LANDING

1. Hydraulic Pressure-OK
2. Cowl Flaps-Open and locked
3. Turbos-Off
4. Booster Pumps-Off
5. Wing Flaps-Up
6. Tailwheel-Unlocked
7. Generators-OFF

END OF MISSION

1. Engines-Cut
2. Radio-On ramp
3. Switches-OFF
4. Chocks
5. Controls-LOCKED
6. Form 1

GO-AROUND

1. High RPM & Power-High RPM
2. Wing Flaps-Coming Up
3. Power reduction
4. Wheel Check-OK Right-OK LEFT

RUNNING TAKEOFF

1. Wing Flaps-Coming Up
2. Power
3. Wheel Check-OK Right-OK LEFT

SUBSEQUENT TAKEOFF

1. Trim Tabs-SET
2. Wing Flaps-UP
3. Cowl Flaps-Open Right-OPEN LEFT
4. High RPM-CHECKED
5. Fuel-Gals per tank
6. Booster Pumps-ON

7. Turbos-SET
8. Flight Controls-UNLOCKED
9. Radio Call

SUBSEQUENT LANDING

1. Landing Gear
 - a. Visual-Down Right-DOWN LEFT
Tailwheel Down, Ball Turret Checked
 - b. Light-ON
2. Hydraulic Pressure-OK
3. RPM 2100-Set
4. Turbo Controls-Set
5. Wing Flaps 1/3 - 1/3 Down
6. Radio Call

FINAL APPROACH

7. Flaps-PILOT'S SIGNAL
8. RPM 2200-PILOT'S SIGNAL

FEATHERING

1. Throttle Back
2. Feather
3. Mixture and Fuel Booster-Off
4. Turbo Off
5. Prop Low RPM
6. Ignition Off
7. Generator Off
8. Fuel Valve Off

UNFEATHERING

1. Fuel Valve-On
2. Ignition On
3. Prop Low RPM
4. Throttle Cracked
5. Supercharger Off
6. Unfeather
7. Mixture Auto-Rich
8. Warm up Engine
9. Generator On

SEQUENCE OF POWER CHANGES

INCREASING POWER

1. Mixture Controls
2. Propellers
3. Throttless

4. Superchargers

DECREASING POWER

1. Superchargers
2. Throttles
3. Propellers
4. Mixture Controls

"About the 8th Air Force and the B17"

Boeing B-17G: "Flying Fortress"

More than 12,700 B-17's were built by Boeing, Douglas, and Lockheed -Vega. The first B-17 (B) was delivered in October 1939 and the last B-17 (G) was delivered July 29, 1945.

Approximately 6,000 heavy bombers (B-17's and B-24's) were lost during operational sorties and another 2,000 were written off as a result of crashes or extreme damage. Around 2,500 were returned from Europe after the war most of which went into storage in the Arizona desert.

In addition to the 6000 heavy bombers, there were 500 medium bombers, and 2500 fighters lost.

Over 30,000 airmen were killed or missing and another 30,000 made prisoner of war.

Only one of three airmen survived the air battle over Europe during World War II. The losses were extraordinary.

The casualties suffered by the 8th Air Force in World War II exceeded those of the US Marine Corps and the US Navy combined.

The B-17G carried a standard crew of 10: comprising a pilot, co-pilot, bombardier/chin turret gunner, navigator/cheek gunner, flight engineer/top turret gunner, radio operator, ball turret gunner, two waist gunners, and tail turret gunner.

The area of England known as East Anglia, about the size of Vermont, became what flyers called an "unsinkable aircraft carrier" and was the home for more than 130 American bases and 75 airfields. Almost 350,000 airmen passed through these 8th Air Force airfields during the war. The very *British* names of these bases became familiar to all who flew -- Glatton, Snetterton, Stowmarket, Lavenham, Bassingbourne, Polebrook, Molesworth, Martlesham Heath, Podington, Eye, Bury St Edmunds and Kingscliffe to name just a few.

The typical airfield in East Anglia was home to about 50 B-17's or B-24's and had a compliment of about 2500 men who flew, repaired, serviced and supported the air operation. Not to be forgotten were the men who "kept 'em flying". For every bomber at the field there were 30 or more men who did not fly. They repaired the plane, loaded the bombs and munitions, policed the field, maintained the radios, cooked and fed 2500 men a day, operated the laundry, worked in the PX, and handled the many other duties required to keep the planes flying and the field operating -- all essential to the successful launching of the air strike.

The average flyer was about 20 years of age and even for these young men the effects of flying very long missions under extreme cold, the constant hum and vibration, and being exposed to enemy fighters and flak, resulted in unusual stress that sometimes resulted in a breakdown. Most flyers slept long hours when not flying. I can attest to that.

In the early years of the air war crews were required to fly 25 and later 30 and then 35 missions before they were returned to the States. This was called a "tour" and upon completion the survivors automatically became members of the "Lucky Bastards Club".

I guess those of us who survive today must surely consider ourselves "Lucky Bastards".

Those who are interested in details and statistics on the B17G can spend some time absorbing the following:

The Michael King Smith Evergreen Aviation Educational Center B-17G	
Serial Number	44-83785
Registry	N207EV
Manufacturing Date	1945
Wingspan	103 ft 9.4 in
Length	74 ft 3.9 in
Height (tail on ground)	19 ft 1.0 in
Wing Area	1,420 sq. ft
Tailplane Area	331.1 sq. ft
Vertical Fin and Rudder Area	180.7 sq. ft
POWERPLANTS: 4 Wright R-1820-97 nine-cylinder, radial, air-cooled, turbo-supercharged engines.	
Horsepower @25,000 feet	1,200 hp (each)
"War Emergency" Power @25,000 feet	1,380 hp (each)
Fuel Capacity (combat)	2,180 gal (in wings)
Fuel Capacity (additional ferry tanks)	Two 820 gal (in bombay)
PROPELLERS: Hamilton Standard three bladed, hydromatic variable pitch, constant-speed, fully feathering.	
Diameter	11 ft 7 in
PERFORMANCE	
Max Speed @25,000 ft	287 MPH

Max Speed @25,000 ft ("War Emergency" Power)	302 MPH
Cruise Speed	182 MPH
Economical Climb	140 MPH
Max Diving Speed	305 MPH
Take-Off Speed	110-115 MPH
Take-Off Distance	3,400 ft
Landing Speed	90 MPH
Landing Distance	2,900 ft
Time-to-Climb 20,000 ft	37.0 min
Range with 6,000 lb bomb load @10,000 ft	2,000 mi
Range With Ferry Tanks @10,000 ft	3,400 mi
Service Ceiling	35,600 ft
WEIGHTS	
Empty Weight	36,135 lb
Normal Gross Weight	55,000 lb
Max Take-off Weight	65,000 lb
ARMAMENT: 13 x 0.50 -in machine guns 6 x 1,600 lb bombs (9,600 lbs total) or 2 x 4,000 lb bombs (8,000 total)	
Chin Turret	2 x 0.50-in guns
Starboard Cheek Gun	1 x 0.50-in guns
Port Cheek Gun	1 x 0.50-in guns
Upper Turret	2 x 0.50-in guns
lower Ball Turret	2 x 0.50-in guns
Starboard Waist Gun	1 x 0.50-in guns
Port Waist Gun	1 x 0.50-in guns
Radio Compartment Gun	1 x 0.50-in guns
Tail Turret	2 x 0.50-in guns

"Some historical background of the 457th Bomb Group"

457th Bomb Group History

The 457th Bombardment and the 748th, 749th, 750th and 751st Squadrons came into existence on July 1st, 1943 under General Order number 78. Their first home field was Geiger Field, Spokane, Washington.

The commanding officer was Col. Herbert Rice. While Spokane was designated as the home base, the group was shortly thereafter transferred to Rapid City, South Dakota. Lt. Col. Hugh Wallace replaced Col. Rice shortly thereafter. The group was then transferred back to Spokane to Ephrata AAB and the first combat crews began their flight training there to meld into the first fighting group known as the 457th. Approximately 72 crews commenced training in formation flying, gunnery, instrument flying, night flights, practice bombing, cross country navigation, Link training, etc. On Jan 4, 1943, Col. Luper replaced Lt. Col. Wallace. Col. Luper was a 1938 graduate of West Point and proceeded to set up the flight crews in a fashion that he learned at West Point. This was not readily accepted by the converted civilian airmen and soon the group labeled itself "Luper's Super Troopers".

The group aircraft left the United States for England on Jan. 17th 1944, landing at Presque Isle, Maine, Goose Bay, Labrador, Iceland and from there on to Glatton. They arrived on Jan 22nd, 1944. The ground echelon left New York by troop transport on Jan. 18th, 1944 and arrived at Glatton on Feb. 2, 1944. With the end of World War II the field at Glatton was officially closed and its existence terminated on June 1st, 1945.

The base was located along an old winding two lane road built by the Romans and known as Old North Rd. It was about 60 miles north of London and near the town of Peterborough. The 457th's air base was located in the parish of Connington, County of Huntingdonshire in East Anglia and was given the name of a small local hamlet called Glatton.

The Group was part of the 94th Wing of the 1st Division of the 8th Air Force. Three Bomber Divisions made up the 8th, the 1st and 3rd were B-17's and the 2nd was B-24's. The 94th Wing was made up of three Groups; the 457th located at Glatton, the 351st at Polebrook and the 401st at Denethorpe -- all located within 10 miles of each other. The Wing commander was Brigadier General Williams. The groups rotated wing leads in the bomber stream and for the most part, each group in the wing flew to the same bomb target. Here is some information on the setup of the 94th Bombardment Wing

457th Bomb Group - Glatton
Squadrons; 748th, 749th, 750th, 751st
First Mission - Feb. 21, 1944
Last Mission - Apr. 20, 1945
Total Missions Flown - 237
Total Bomb Tonnage Dropped - 16,915
351st Bomb Group - Polebrook
Squadrons; 508th, 509th, 510th, 511th
First Mission - May 14, 1943

Last Mission - Apr. 20, 1945
Total Missions Flown - 311
Total Bomb Tonnage Dropped - 20,357
401st Bomb Group - Deenethorpe
Squadrons: 612th, 613th, 614th, 615th
First Mission - Nov. 26, 1943
Last Mission - Apr. 20, 1945
Total Missions Flown - 255
Total Bomb Tonnage Dropped - 17,778

The group's first combat mission was on Feb. 21st, 1944 to Gutersloh, Germany and it was on this mission that the 457th lost it's first bomber and crew. The crew of Lt. Llewellyn Brederson was shot down by flak on the bomb run.

The Glatton Base Call sign was "Nuttree" and the group air call sign was "Woodcraft Baker". The squadron call signs were; 748th "Wedon", 749th "Eclipse", 750th "Bluebell", 751st "Cutter". The group motto was "Fait Accompli" (An Accomplished Fact) and the group nickname was "The Fireball Outfit".

The group flew 236 combat missions with a loss of 86 planes and 729 men, either killed, wounded, taken prisoner or interned in neutral territory. Some 78 men made it through enemy lines after being shot down. The 457th Bombardment Group was credited with participation in the following campaigns:

Air Offensive Europe
Normandy
Northern France
Rhineland
Ardennes-Alsace
Central Europe

The two group commanders, Col. Luper and Col. Rogner were each killed in military aircraft crashes after the end of World War II.

Some general information about the B-17 appears in "B-17 Flying Fortress" compiled by Joseph Baugher and reads as follows:

"The B-17 Flying Fortress was perhaps the most well-known American heavy bomber of the Second World War. It achieved a fame far beyond that of its more-numerous stable mate, the Consolidated B-24 Liberator. A total of 12,677 Fortresses was built before production came to an end.

In August of 1944, the B-17 equipped no less than 33 overseas combat groups. It was to achieve lasting fame in the daylight precision-bombing campaign over Germany in 1943, 1944, and 1945. It achieved a reputation as being capable of absorbing a tremendous amount of battle damage and still continuing to fly. In later variants, it had an exceptionally-heavy defensive armament. It had an excellent high-altitude performance. It was able to win the affection of the crews who flew in it, since it was often able to bring them home safely.

B-17s dropped 640,036 tons of bombs on European targets during the war, as compared to 452,508 tons dropped by the Liberator and 463,544 tons dropped by all other US aircraft. Boeing records claim that the Fortress destroyed 23 enemy aircraft per thousand sorties as compared to 22 for Liberators, eleven by US fighters, and 3 by all US light and medium bombers. Approximately 4750 B-17s were lost on combat missions, which is about one out of three of all B-17s built".

The 8th Air Force flight crews had a higher percentage of casualties than any branch of the service during WWII. There were 340,000 persons in the 8th Air Force, of whom 135,000 were combat crewmen. Of this 135,000, more than 26,000 were killed and 28,000 became P.O.W.'s....a loss ratio of 40%.

[notes on the original main website, started Aug. 1998]

This page is dedicated to the memory of the men who served during World War II as members of the Eighth Air Force, First Division, 94th Combat Wing, 457th Bomb Group. They were the men who flew in the B-17 Flying Fortress.

I dedicate this website to those members of our crew who are no longer with us: Jim Stoner, Don Scheuch, Joel Lester, Clair Hetrick, Jim McCloskey, Charles Kenney, Edward Peters and Paul Brook (who replaced Don). I also dedicate this to the only other surviving member of our crew, Percy Mack,

Pilot and author of this page - A. Willard "Hap" Reese

Photo: crew3_1.jpg [lost]

The Crew - Then - 1944

Standing from left to right: James McCloskey (BT), Percy Mack (TG), Charles Kenny, (RO) Clair Hetrick (WG), Albert Knox (WG), and Edward Peters (E)

Kneeling from left to right: Joel Lester (B), Don Scheuch (N), Jim Stoner (CP), Willard Reese (P)

Photo: oldguys.jpg [lost]

The Surviving Crew Members - Now - 1997

(At a reunion in Savannah in Oct. 1997)

Standing from left to right: Clair Hetrick (WG), Joel Lester (B), Willard Reese (P), Percy Mack (TG), James McCloskey (BT).

In the year 2003, we lost three members of this group; Joel Lester, Clair Hetrick, and Jim McCloskey. We will miss each of them as we do the rest.