

2 I graduated from advanced training at Frederic Oklahoma on January 7 1044. It snowed all day and when we left the base at 4:30 there was 10 inches of snow on the ground. I had a ride home with Robert Rudd of Pulaski, IA. By the time we got to town we knew that all the roads out of town were blocked. The landlady rounded up some blankets and all four of us slept on the living room floor that night. We got started home about 9:00AM in the morning. After we got out of Oklahoma, we got along OK.

**3&4** I reported to Liberal Kansas on January 24<sup>th</sup> and there was still a lot of snow around the base. The planes, B-24s, had gone to California when it started to snow *Ploesti* Jan. 7<sup>th</sup> and were just now coming back. From the flight line, when a plane came in to land it would disappear behind the snow bank except for the top of its tail. All the snow delayed training by three weeks, so by the time I had completed my training it was mid May. I had accumulated 90 hours of observer time. On Easter Sunday 1944 we were scheduled to fly in the afternoon. My partner, Moon Mullins, flew first and shot three touch & go landings and one full landing before we changed seats and I took off to shoot some landings. When we were on the base leg the tower declared the field closed because of blowing dust so we left the area and went to Gage, Oklahoma to fly the radio range. We flew through every kind of weather and it was so rough we couldn't change seats so I flew for four hours, through rain, snow, sleet, and hail. We were even struck by lightning. Finally we started home and arrived over the field about 6:00 PM. Static was very bad and we didn't know whether we were over the runway for sure but a hole opened up and we could see the runway. The plane was caught in an updraft and suddenly we were up at 10,000 ft. We lost radio contact with the field and the radio beam went out as well so the instructor said to fly south and see if we could get out of this weather. We did and Moon Mullins took over the flying. We eventually reached Pampa, Texas, and landed there. Another B24 saw our plain and landed as well. Both planes were beaten up by the weather and low on fuel. They asked us where we came from and when we said Liberal, Kansas, They told us a tornado was reported to have hit the base at 6:00 PM. That explained why we had taken the sudden ride up to 10,000 ft. They had to send a tanker truck to Amarillo to get gas for our planes.

They didn't have accommodations for the officers so we had to go into town to a hotel, but we didn't wear uniforms under our flight suits and we couldn't leave the base in out flight suits so we went to the P X and bought shirt, pants, tie and insignia so we could go to town. Later when I was flying missions, that is the uniform I wore.

- 5 We did our over seas training at Tonapah air base. On one of our early flights we lost an engine and had to make an emergency landing. We came in smoothly but the nose gunner was standing down on the catwalk and yelled "let me know when we're going to hit", Lash turned and said aw shut up we're already rolling down the runway. That smooth landing cemented my standing with the crew.
- 6 We were sent to San Francisco for overseas staging. One morning at formation 45 crews were called out and the rest were given 4 day passes. We were one of the 45 and began processing for the European theater. We sent our foot lockers home, had our shots, wrote wills made out allotments, and had our pictures taken with civilian clothes for escape photos. We were put on a train and sent to Camp Kilmer, NJ where we were given overseas equipment and put on the
- 7 Ill-De France for a 5 day trip to Europe along with a full division of Cavalry and Bing Crosby's USO troupe. He has given four shows a day during the trip to the troops on board.
- 8&9 In England we received further processing and were assigned to the 389<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group at Hethel, England (at the request of Eighth Air Force Headquarters). We arrived about 7:00PM and Major Winters came out of headquarters and asked what are you doing here, we have no crews coming. I told him it was at the request 8<sup>th</sup> AF headquarters and suggested that possibly Major Sieverding saw my name and asked that we be sent here. Major Winters said no, Vic got sick in August and went home. Then he asked if we had someone named Fontana on our crew. When I said yes, he said oh Jesus Christ I have to call Headquarters. Pretty soon Corporal Leo Fontana peddled up on his bicycle. He was the one who had arranged for us to get to Europe.
- 9 We were assigned to the 566<sup>th</sup> Squadron and moved into our barracks. We were fitted with heated flying suits, parachutes, etc. and 45 caliber automatics and ammunition. That evening we were sitting in our barracks when Captain Bill Graff, and Bill Boone came in and joined us. Bill Graff had finished his missions in August and married an English girl. When his crew wanted to paint some nose art on his plane he said alright but she must have black hair and will be called Delectable Doris. When done it became the most popular art in the Group. Every one wanted to have their picture taken in front of that plane. Bill wanted to stay in England so he was made Group Operations Officer. He lived in town with his wife but he had to have a bunk in our barracks for those times when he couldn't leave the base such as this night when he was Officer of the day. We were talking and sitting on the bunks. He asked to see Art Dunn's gun and looked it over then with it laying across his
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hand he pulled the trigger and bang it had a shell in it. The slug went into Dunn's mattress about an inch below his ankle. Luckily no one was hurt. We had dinner with Bill & Doris in Fort Worth in 1989. Bill Boone was from Strawberry Point IA and was shot down and killed flying Delectable Doris in January 1945.

**12** My first mission was to Hamburg as an observer with another crew. Our first mission as a crew was October 7th to Kassel with a co-pilot from an experienced crew while our co-pilot flew with their crew.

**13&14** The flack was very heavy and after we turned off target Dunn was looking out the right blister window when White poked him to show him something on the left side of the plane. He had just pulled his head out of the window when a piece of flack came through and shattered the blister window. And continued across the plane and exited by my foot. I noticed we were gaining on the formation and I had made two or three power reductions by now it was obvious the supercharger control was not working. As I reached up and pulled the

**15** throttles back I noticed the manifold pressure was falling away from 75 inches.

**Cockpit** After slowing down I pushed the throttles forward and we could not get up to power, so we had to leave the formation and descend to a lower altitude where we could maintain a reasonable air speed. We got home all right and the next day the crew chief said that the flack had cut the wires leading to the control on the pilot's pedestal, and that all the gaskets in the induction system were blown out. That was the reason we could not regain power.

**16** Jimmy Stewart worked at Second Division Headquarters Which was adjacent to our field. He briefed us on several missions and flew as command pilot on a couple missions that we were on. He was a regular guy and wanted to do his part. When he was officer of the day he would put himself down to fly a mission known to be a tough one, but by 11:00PM orders would come through from Eighth Air Force ordering him stood down and someone else was assigned to fly it.

**17** This is a plane that was just ahead of me in the traffic pattern and ran out of gas crash landed. Every one got out of the plane OK. The farmer came storming out of the house and asked "Who's going to pay for my chicken house."

On November 26, 1944 we flew a mission to Misburg to bomb a petroleum plant. Our squadron was leading the Second Division and we made a feint at Berlin then turned back and bombed MISBURG FROM THE EAST. As we approached the target there was no flack but just as we released our bombs there was one burst of flack which was a direct hit on the javelin down leader. We found out later that one man lived through it and was a prisoner. Then the

fighters attacked us. They got several planes that day. We found out later that the Germans had sent up about 25 planes and our fighters followed them away from our formation then 100 more planes came up and attacked our formation.

- 18 One day coming back from a mission the field was covered with clouds down to about 200ft so the command pilot took the formation out over the north sea and found a hole big enough so the formation could spiral down through it. Then brought the whole formation in under the 200ft ceiling. I was in the high right element and looking down across the formation it seemed like the low left planes were dragging their wing-tips on the ground, but we all got in OK.

On Christmas day 1944 we flew a mission to Wahlen, a crossroads behind the bulge. The squadron ahead of us missed their initial point, while we turned at ours then they had to fly over us to get to their target. I held my breath but every thing worked out OK. After we turned for home we were hit by a single

- 19 fighter who shot down one plane, my friend Walter Kunkle and his crew. They all got out and as they were coming down in their parachutes they cold see both the Germans and the Americans coming after them. When they landed they ran toward the American lines and made it but they had to prove they were Americans, then they were escorted to the rear and eventually got back to Hethel. They were shot down in March 1945 and Kunkle was confused and walked the wrong way, away from the American lines, which was good for him. He went into a shed to hide and rest for awhile. There he met a German captain and a Russian who both wanted to be taken prisoners and escorted to the American lines. They made it.

During the month of December we had a lot of fog at our base. On one mission take-off I thought our plane was lined up with the runway when the

- 20 compass read 239 degrees instead of 240. We could see about two runway lights ahead of us on each side. I asked the co-pilot and engineer to watch the lights on their side and let me know if we were getting close to the lights. When we reached 60 mph lash started calling out air speed as he always did so I asked him if he was watching the lights. He looked out and said look out you're running off the runway to the left. We were doing about 90mph then so I called full flaps, emergency power and pulled on the yoke and kicked right rudder. The plane jumped about 5 ft in the air and moved over toward the middle of the runway. I knew we couldn't sustain flight at that speed so I held the yoke steady, and it took a lot of pressure on the yoke to keep the nose from coming up. We bounced at about 110 and I figured we could make it so called the gear up. As we gained flying speed we brought the flaps up and reduced power and set the controls for normal clime-out. We broke out of the fog at 700 ft and continued a normal climb.

On a mission to Aschaffenbring we were coming back near Cologne the air was so clear the crew could see the Cathedral. As we approached the front lines an 88 opened fire and from the first three shots I could see that three more shots would put him right on us, so I pulled out of formation and flew out around the flack. As I was pulling back into formation I got a call from the leader asking me to escort Gowie's plane to an emergency field in France. Because his navigator was badly wounded. We took off and he was following me but we came to a thin layer of clouds. I called him and told him my speed and heading and said we would meet him below the clouds. He didn't show up. I found out later that the crew got the bleeding stopped and he had called Woodbridge for a heading and went there. Woodbridge was an emergency field for wounded and damaged planes. He had tried to call me but was on the wrong channel. While we were flying around looking for him #4 engine went out so we feathered it. The engineer and co-pilot were transferring fuel from #4 to #3 and #2 when both of those engines started to fail. The co-pilot reached for the feathering controls, but I grabbed his arm and said no! Turn on the booster pumps. He did and both engines came back. It was standard procedure to have the boosters on when transferring fuel.

We got home late and were directed to land on runway 30 which was a short runway, only 4700 ft long. We came in high and landed too far down the runway. I hit the brakes and when we reached the end of the runway I called cut the switches hit the left brake and ground looped the plane. The rubber in contact with the concrete stayed there while the wheel turned around it tearing the rubber out of the tire and it went flat. The tower sent a truck out for us and the maintenance crew had to come out and change the tire.

Our longest mission was eight hours and forty minutes flying time to Ingolstat, Germany. We had clouds above us and below and as we were making the bomb run the space between them narrowed. I came up a little to stay out of the clouds below and the plane ahead of me dropped down a little to avoid the clouds above and suddenly I was in his prop wash and our air speed dropped to 80 mph and I was in a stall and I was working the rudders to keep us level and in the same relative position so we didn't get hit by a bomb from above the same time I pulled the salvo handle on the pilot's pedestal to dump our bombs Again we had to fly home alone.

We were lucky to get through our tour with no injures other than a scratch our waste gunner got when a piece of flack hit him in the pocket where he carried his zippo lighter. We finished our missions on March 9, 1945 and our enlisted men were on the way home in a short time thanks to Leo Fontana. We officers

had to go to Stone, England and wait for the numbers built up to fill a ship. We finally got on the President Madison and I got home to Grundy Center on May eighth, V E Day.