



467th BG Chapman Crew 92 - Part Two

Twenty-eight years after the Chapman Crew 92 was shot down, this article was published in the Russian newspaper "Pravda" in the September 1973 issue. It was written by Col V A Timofeev, retired from the Russian Air Force, who had met the Chapman Crew after they had been shot down.

This follow up involves a crew and plane from the 791BS of the 467th BG. The crew was that of 1LT WILLIAM R CHAPMAN, pilot, flying A/C B-24J 42-50599, on Group Mission #196 - BERLIN. CPT EDWIN J ALEXANDER had been the Squadron Bombardier of 788th BS of the 492nd BG and was also the pilotage navigator for this mission.

They Met in '45

by Col V A Timofeev

The old photograph from the war years is carefully kept in a Chicago home and in an apartment in Moscow on Roshchinskaya Street.

This occurred on March 18, 1945. Explosions, like clouds, encompassed the airplane. In spite of the fire of the anti-aircraft guns, the U.S. B-24 Bomber confidently maintained its course towards the capital of Fascist Germany. When the plane was already over the city, a large caliber shell hit the plane. The navigator was killed; the mechanic was thrown out by the explosion. The plane lost altitude.

"Then," wrote the pilot of the American plane later in his memoirs, "I decided to turn the Flying Fortress in the direction of the Russian troops so that the men could parachute out. We were just above the front line when a Messerschmitt 109 attacked us. The YAKs appeared on the scene, and the ME-09 took off. The upper gunner was the first to jump, then the radio operator and co-pilot. I stopped and looked at the dead navigator. He was lying face-down covered in blood. Then, making my way to the bomb hatch, I also abandoned the plane. I had no sooner touched the ground when I noticed people running toward me. I saw caps with stars."

"On the Oder there was one of the rare moments of silence on the front," relates the former Commander of the Aviation Division, Vyacheslav Arsenevich Timofeev. "Suddenly the broken rumble of a single airplane - an American bomber flying low over the Oder, leaving a trail of black smoke. Dark, small figures were jumping one after the other out of the burning plane..."

We awaited the return of the medical vehicle sent to the area where the crew landed. And then a swarthy faced man wearing a flying suit and supporting himself with a cane entered our HQ. Behind him came a young man in a flight jacket and cap with the insignia of the American Army. Unmercifully breaking the Russian words and making expressive gestures, the young man told of the accident which befell the crew. We seated the Americans at the table and offered them everything that conditions at the front allow.

Soon the radio operator informed us that the rest of the crew bailed out successfully near the town of Landsberg. The wounded airman, having forgotten, it would seem, about the pain in his leg, ran to greet his friend. "Souvenir, Souvenir" he repeated quickly reaching into his pockets. He finally got something out and handed it to me. It was a topographic map of the area of military operations printed on a piece of silk. Then the young man gave something that was preserved in his singed flight suit. And I did not even have a cigarette lighter handy. I picked up a "Kazbek" cigar box and wrote some friendly words on the lid and gave it to him. We came down off the porch. It is here that our photograph was taken.

"In Landsberg, where the second group of our crew members showed up," recalls the commander of the Flying Fortress, "the Russians invited us for dinner and set aside a special room."

The funeral service for Navigator Van Tress was to be at 6:00 that evening. There were about 20 graves of Russian soldiers with red stars on the tombstones in the Central Square of Landsberg, where the navigator was buried. I said a few words of farewell and recited a short prayer. Then we all stood quietly while a company of soldiers fired three volleys and the coffin was lowered into the grave. The Russians set up a stone and laid a wreath on the grave. An airplane arrived for us on the next day.

"Many years have passed since that time," says Vyacheslav Arsenevich, leaving through an album with photographs from the time of the war. "Many times during these years I have recalled the spring at the front on the Oder and the two American Airmen. Should I look for them?" I didn't even know their names. Nevertheless, I decided to try. The Press Agency Novosti sent the picture to the United States.

It was published in "Air Force Times." Soon a letter arrived at the address of the journal: Without a doubt, I am the person to the left in the photograph standing next to Colonel Timofeev. The Colonel made an inscription on a cigar box that day which I kept and brought home. I would very much like to get in touch with him. (Signed) Edwin J. Alexander

It was in this way that the friendly correspondence of two veterans of World War II began.

"It is indeed a small world if I have been successful in locating you," wrote V.A. Timofeev to Chicago; "I remember well how then in '45 we talked about the war, about Russia and America, and about how we should keep friendships formed during the war years, even after victory over Fascism."

Soon after the war, I retired and began to write books. They are about us, soldiers of the sky; they are reflections about the war, which should not be repeated. We Russians suffered more than other nations from that war. Many did not return, many were left invalids, including my wife, Anna, Hero of the Soviet Union, who served in the ground attack aviation. Personally, I consider her to be a hero twice over, because after the war she managed to raise two sons. Tell me, please, about yourself. How are you doing? Is the work that you do interesting? An answer was not long in coming from Chicago.

"We were quite fortunate since my former Commanding Officer noticed the photograph in the 'Air Force Times' and let me know about it," wrote Edwin J. Alexander. "At present, this photograph hangs over my desk."

I think that you took up an interesting profession in the post-war years. Perhaps you could send me some of your literary work.

After my military service, I began the career of a business man. The company at which I am working makes various everyday items, such as pens, pencils, fans. My wife, (her name, Mary) and I have a son, Bill. I am enclosing a picture with the letter. The portrait of Bill was painted by Mary. And I am now gray and wear glasses. By beginning a correspondence after so many years from the time we met, I believe that we might possibly meet in the future."

And in another letter from Chicago: "I received your book, which is being translated for me into English. I want to continue our correspondence. Therefore, I intend to begin studying Russian in the fall at a night class. Then I think I will be able to answer your letters myself."

The next letter from Moscow arrived for New Year's. It looked bulky. "I decided to make you happy, Edwin, with a New Year's gift," wrote V.A. Timofeev. "I know they say that gifts are not to be regiven. But there are exceptions. I am sending half of the topographic map which you gave to me on March 18, 1945, the day of our meeting on the Oder. The other half will remain with me."

Once a letter addressed to V.A. Timofeev in an unfamiliar handwriting arrived from the USA. An American teacher, D. Putrich, wrote it. "Dear Vyacheslav Arsenevich, I think that Mr. Alexander has already told you that I have translated two or three of your letters for him. I am a high school teacher of Russian. I still do not speak and write Russian very well, but I try.

I have three classes, 51 students. They are good kids, members of our 'Russian Club.' They are always asking me about the USSR and life in the Soviet Union. I have not yet visited the Soviet Union. I hope to be able to come, but I don't know when. Our 'Russian Club' puts out a little publication, "Iskra" translation: "Spark." Students from our school and other schools write poems, articles, and stories in Russian. We think that the publication has been quite successful. If you like, I will send you a few issues."

"I am always pleased to make associations with people of your profession." Replied the Soviet pilot. "In my opinion, this word sounds dignified: teacher in life. I dreamt of being a high school teacher from childhood, although it turned out otherwise. I became a pilot.

"If you do come to the USSR, it will be interesting for me to meet and talk with you. You may be certain of Russian hospitality, and you will have many impressions about the lives of Soviet people..." Recently another letter left for the United States to Edwin J. Alexander.

"As I write, I am looking at the photo - how long ago it has been. 28 years have passed, but it is impossible to forget the battle on the Oder, March 1945, and our meeting in the German village of Krischt. It is nice that this meeting has been continued in letters. Perhaps to some people it would seem strange that we correspond - people brought together only by fate. However, it was not at all by accident. There was a war, we were fighting hand in hand, and Lieutenant Van Tress is buried next to our boys.

"You know, Edwin, I think our meeting in the USA. I wish you the best, Edwin. Write..." at the end of the war will not be the last. We can be glad that the relations between our countries are improving. The press, radio, and television in our country are giving a great deal of attention to the development of Soviet-American relations. I believe that this is also evoking active interest.

In spite of many years, the short meeting on the roads of a large and difficult war, waged by the people of our countries, has not been erased in the memories of the two veterans V. Peresada.

Former Allies Sought

Air Force Magazine, January, 1966

Gentlemen,

Arms of Friendship, Inc., has received a letter from the Soviet Union asking our help in locating two US pilots whom Russian Air Force men met during World War II. Former Col. Vyacheslav Timofeyev (second from right in the photo below) would like to reestablish contact with two American Air Force veterans (on either side of him in the photo). Following a bombing raid, they made a forced landing in their badly disabled Flying Fortress on the morning of April 4, 1945, on a Russian-held airfield on the Oder River.

Colonel Timofeyev's detailed description of the incident ends thus: "Twenty years have passed since then, and a lot of things have happened in that troublesome period. However, we still cherish the memory of those fine men, and I would like to learn now where and how my comrades in arms live. I would be glad to know what my front-line colleagues are doing."

The Air Force has not been able to pinpoint this incident. We would be glad for anyone with leads to get in touch with: C. Grant Pendill, Secy/Treas. Arms of Friendship Inc. 4150 Henry Ave, Philadelphia, PA 19144.

This Story Continued from Part One: [The Mishap of Crew 92](#)

Sources / credits:

• Bill Alexander, son of Ed Alexander

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Russian newspaper Pravda - September, 1973

The photo, taken in March of 1945, shows Soviet Commander Vyacheslav Timofeev (center) flanked by Americans William Yarcusko (on his right) and Ed Alexander (on his left).



March, 1945: East Meets West in the German village of Krischt

The only people we can positively identify in this photo are Soviet Col Vyacheslav Timofeev (second from right) and Captain Ed Alexander (far right).