

Remembering Uriel F. Robertson

Uriel Falex Robertson was born 25 August 1923 and died 19 May 1944. His parents were George Bryant Robertson and Myrtle Irene Shatterly Robertson of Graham, North Carolina. He was a good singer and sang at the Methodist Church in Graham, North Carolina, starting at an early age when he had to stand on a box so he could be seen by the audience. He sang beautifully in a quartet.

After extensive training at Alamogordo, the 492nd departed for England in April 1944. Uriel flew overseas with his crew using the Southern route, down to Brazil, over to Africa and up to the United Kingdom. His crew arrived on the last day of April.

Uriel flew all three of his combat missions with his crew. On 19 May 44, his plane was shot up by the Luftwaffe near their target at Brunswick, Germany.

His navigator, Ernie Gavitt, recounts the story with mixed emotions. With only two engines running, the crew thought they could limp their way back to England. But soon after entering the Channel along the Dutch coast another engine failed and they were losing altitude fast. It took everything they had to reach the Dutch coast again on one engine. By then they were flying at 400 feet and dropping. Rather than attempt a low level bail out, the crew elected to ride the plane down as the pilots would try their best to crash land it. Ernie felt the pilots could use an extra pair of eyes to find a field long enough to land in so he wedged himself into the cockpit looking for a place. There wasn't much time as the plane was quickly going down on its own. No fields long enough for a landing could be seen. At the last moment, the pilots decided to attempt their landing using multiple fields. This required jumping the canals that divided the fields. Ernie went back to take his crash position with Uriel. Crash landing was practiced during training. Every crewman had his assigned spot and knew what to do. Ernie's position was to sit on the floor with his back against the pilot's bulkhead. He was to spread his legs so Uriel could sit in between them, like two people riding a sled. Uriel was already sitting in Ernie's spot. "You're in my place," said Ernie. "What's the difference? I'm already here," replied Uriel. With no time to argue Ernie sat in between Uriel's legs.

Their plane lost its wheels as it clipped the far bank of the second canal they jumped. The plane then slid on its belly across the muddy field. During all of this, the plane buckled and the overhead hatch behind the bulkhead jarred open. The hatch door swung down and clobbered both men in the head. Uriel was killed on impact. Ernie was knocked out and bleeding heavily from his head wound.

The Germans had the plane surrounded before any of the crew could get

out for they had landed in the middle of an anti-aircraft battery manned by 800 soldiers. After the crew got out, a quick count showed they were missing two men, Ernie and Uriel. With hand signs and gibberish, the German soldiers understood there were more inside. Two crewmen were allowed back inside to find them. As they went in Ernie had just come to his senses, although still dazed. They carried Uriel out and laid him out on the field. The Germans took their prisoners to a farmer's house nearby. It was the last time any of them would see Uriel.

After the war, the US Army took Uriel away and reburied him at the Ardennes American National Cemetery. He remained there for a short time, until his family requested he be brought back to North Carolina so they could find closure