

Stories written by **Edmund A Wanner** (1921-2011) B-24 pilot, 445th bomb group, Tibenham, England.

The following pages from my father's self-published stories of his time in England with the 8th US Army Air Force are being submitted to the 2nd Air Division Memorial Library in Norwich and the American Air Museum in Duxford.

I am removing his stories of cadet training (the class of 43K) in the States in order to reduce the file size under the maximum limit. I helped him put his stories into a book in 2006.

My father flew 30 combat missions as a pilot and squadron leader with the 445th in Tibenham from July of 1944 to February of 1945.

He did tell me that he regretted buzzing that haystack in the English countryside while on a training mission. Hopefully, nothing was damaged. See "Bless 'em All"

My thanks to the British people for their forgiveness of this incident, but especially for honoring the American Servicemen who sacrificed so much during the 2nd World War. I am looking forward to my upcoming visit to the Norwich area.

Glen Wanner
April 2024

THE WILDER AND BLUER YONDER



By Ed Wanner

HIGH FLIGHT

**Oh! I have slipped the surly bonds of Earth
And danced the skies on laughter-silvered wings;
Sunward I've climbed, and joined the tumbling mirth
Of sun-split clouds, -- and done a hundred things
You have not dreamed of -- and wheeled and soared and swung
High in the sunlit silence. Hov'ring there,
I've chased the shouting wind along, and flung
My eager craft through footless halls of air...**

**Up, up the long, delirious, burning blue
I've topped the wind-swept heights with easy grace
Where never lark nor ever eagle flew --
And, while with silent lifting mind I've trod
The high untrespassed sanctity of space,
Put out my hand, and touched the face of God.**

Written by John Magee, an American Aviator, at the age of 19---about one month before he was killed during WWII while serving in the Royal Canadian Air Force.

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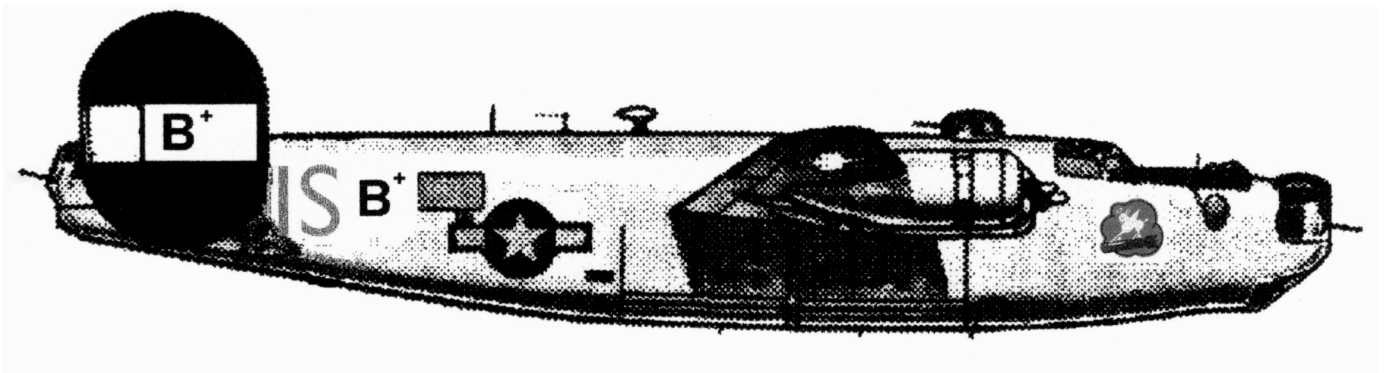
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INTRODUCTION

There are three ways for an Aviation Cadet to answer a question: “Yes Sir,” “No Sir,” and “No Excuse Sir.” I relate those three answers to my life as follows:

“Yes, Sir.” As a kid, my dad and mom gave me everything: love, encouragement, education, understanding and an appreciation of nature. My uncles and aunts were more than kind to me. My neighbor and buddy, Bob Weatherby, was and still is a role model. Such gifts made it easy to respond with a snappy “Yes, Sir.” But it was not so easy to say “Yes, Sir: when my artistic life-long friend, Eddie Wheeler, an Army medic, was killed during WWII. Or when my high school classmate, “Tiny” Bill Jennings, lost his life in a B-29. And there are many others that I think of often.

“No, Sir.” I can only say that my regrets are few. Still, I would not repeat some of the harebrained tricks I performed in an airplane that could have endangered other people’s lives. And “No, Sir,” I would not forget the families of lost friends.

“No Excuse, Sir.” I have made many mistakes. Some of them I have benefited from, and too many I have conveniently forgotten. Some cannot be undone, and some are best left alone. All in all, I hope that my mistakes have been because of frailties and innate faults—not excusable—but human nonetheless.

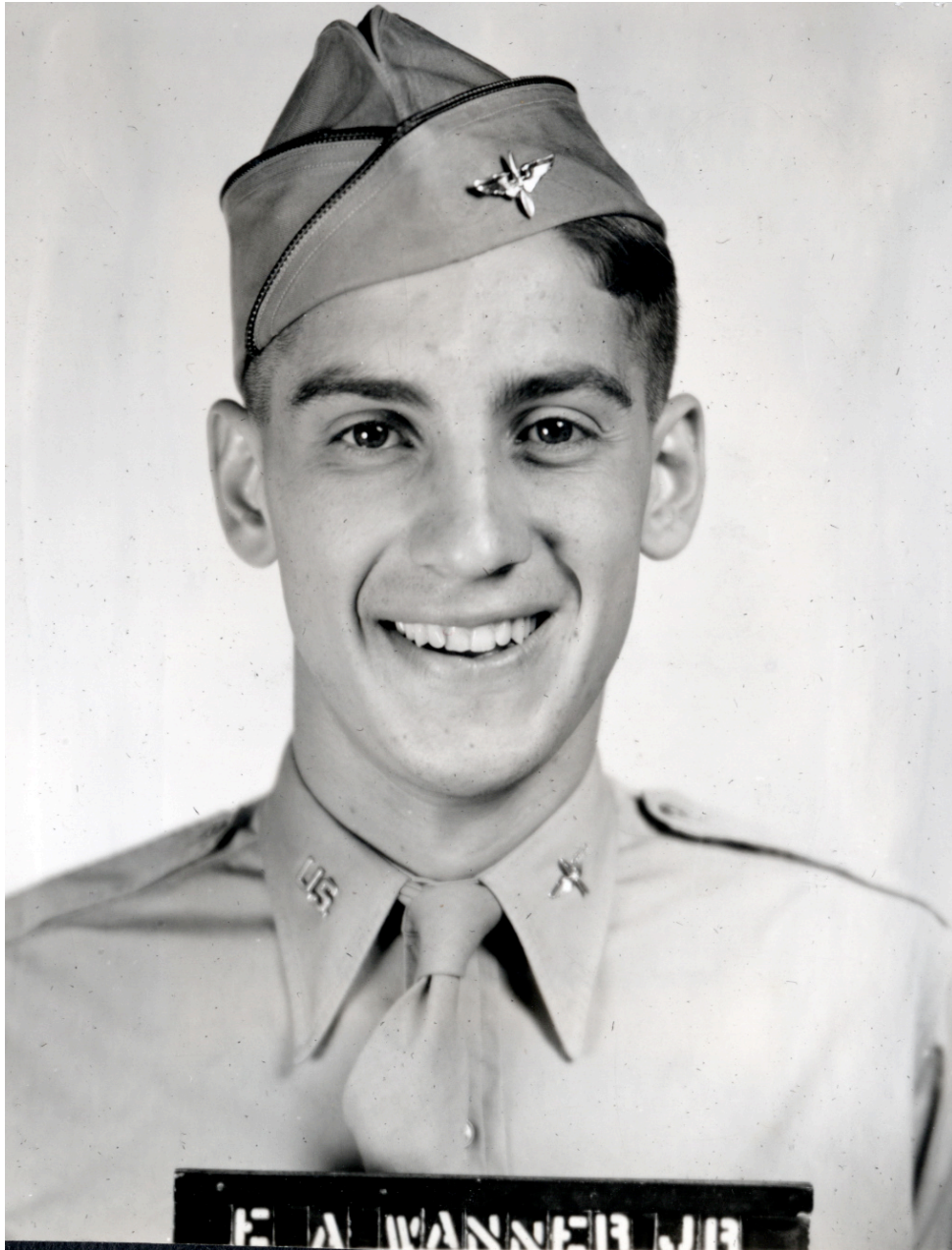
My intent in writing this book is to share my experiences as a combat pilot during World War II. It begins with my stint as an Aviation Cadet and then describes my time with the Army Air Force when I was based in Tibenham, England.

(And no, I didn’t forget my University High School classmate, Bob Bennett, killed in action; nor Tony Pieczkowski, my crewmember who became a POW.)

CADET TRAINING CLASS OF 43K

SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS
PINE BLUFF, ARKANSAS
COFFEYVILLE, KANSAS
ALTUS, OKLAHOMA
FORT WORTH, TEXAS





TIBENHAM, ENGLAND 1944



NOTHIN' BUT THE BEST

A great crew is rare. Maybe the best crew in the European Theatre of Operations (ETO) occurred about as often as a total eclipse. If you would like to be able to recognize such a crew, read on.

Newly formed crews sometimes had an obvious misfit. I'm not crazy enough to name names. Perhaps it was personality or maybe someone managed to slip through training programs without enough knowledge of his specialty. My crew's misfortune was that three members had to be replaced. Since this 21 year old wasn't exactly brimming with experience as an Aircraft Commander, it was a traumatic experience.

The first to go was the radio operator. He was cursed with airsickness, which he thought gave him several near death experiences. If his episodes were like mine he might have been more afraid that he would live. Anyway, our Commanding Officer threatened to remove me from my crew if I ever again brought him back to the field early from a practice mission just because of sickness.

The second airman removed brought a more assertive response. He was from my hometown and felt he was entitled to extra privileges. When he told me he was going to get a dose of claps (venereal disease) so he wouldn't have to go overseas--that was it!

Just when I thought things couldn't get worse I got this co-pilot who had been a BT-13 instructor. He was unhappy about being a co-pilot for some guy he could have taught a thing or two about flying a Vultee Vibrator. He reduced the technique of bitchin' to a fine art and reminded us all that he was God's gift to the wild blue yonder.

Taxiing out to take-off in Colorado Springs one morning, he asked sarcastically: "Will this thing come up?" He pushed the safety button in and tugged up on the gear handle. It was like getting a 25,000 volt shock as I watched. Subconsciously I knew the wheels wouldn't come up with the ship's weight on them, but I yelled something at him as I slapped down on the lever and his hand. WOW! Talk about adrenaline! I was furious, even knowing that he deliberately scared the pants off of me to get transferred out of 24's. And I wanted him out! The good news was, I got three replacements: gunner, radio operator and co-pilot that were high-class winners.

Some crews kept all their originals, but once an entire crew refused to fly with a guy that had been our Tactical Officer in San Antonio. We all remembered how chicken s.... he was, so it wasn't a surprise. Other crews hung together in spite of some friction and worked together successfully. Then there was a crew like mine that had that rare combination of excellence. But the wheel of fortune wasn't always siding with the superb crews. They went down too!

Tibbenham, England

We'll never know why we didn't "buy the farm" (crash), or who was really the best crew in the ETO. It's just enough for us to think ours was the best! And I think it was!



TOP ROW:	Ed Wanner Pilot	Bob MacAnelly Co-Pilot	"Sandy" Sanderson Navigator	
MIDDLE:	Joe Weitz Bombardier	Ed Weiman Navigator	"Mickey" Doyle Radar	Stan Davis Engineer
BOTTOM:	Al Climer Radio Op.	Clark Kuepker Waist Gunner	Arnold Glenna Waist Gunner	Bussie Green Armor

SO THAT WAS JOHNNY!

Well, I knew I wasn't exactly a fashion plate when we moved into the "The Nut Hut" with Lumley's and Farr's crews. We'd been flown from a combat crew pool in North Ireland to our air base south of Norwich. We were all wearing the same uniform but somehow some of the guys always looked raunchier than others. Farr had the ability to look like he'd slept in his "pinks" (dress pants) for months. Chick had a hat that had the famous 200-mission crush. He must have jumped up and down on it for hours. Some of my crew, including me, also tried to mash our hats to look like we weren't the newcomers to the ETO.

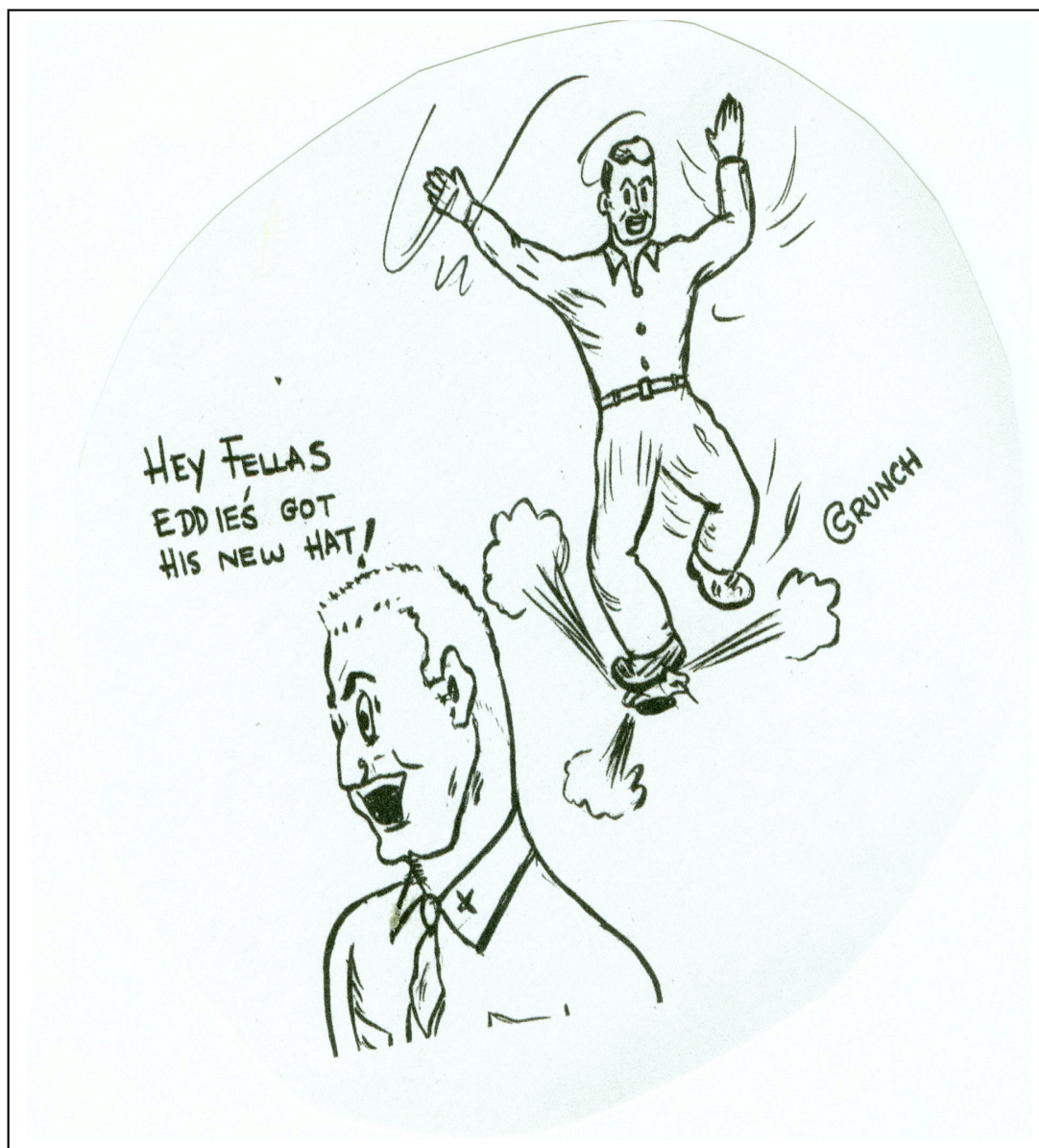
I didn't want to look like I had just arrived, but several of us were a bit fanatic about having clean laundry. There were some guys on the base that washed and ironed their own shirts. My attempts at that were complete failures. But I eventually did find a solution. A pilot in one of the other huts tipped me off about this little British kid that would pick-up and deliver laundry. Oh! It was great! The kid always had a smile and the laundry always came back on time. The clean smell of shorts, T-shirts, socks and shirts in a world that was short of soap. What a luxury!

A recent article in the Second Air Division Journal reminded me of the laundry kid's name. It was Johnny. Johnny Wenn. He was a bright-eyed alert kid (about 12 years old) that used even more four-letter words than I did. Probably learned them from GI's. Anyway, I considered him a gold mine for taking care of my laundry problem. I enjoyed talking to him and I wanted to figure out what I could do for him. There must be something. And sure enough, a thought struck me.

As a kid I use to love airplanes, probably like Johnny. I hung around Port Columbus Airport when I could, made models, read paperbacks like *Flying Aces*, flew paper airplanes, bummed a ride in a little Aeronica monoplane. Maybe you did a lot of fantasizing too, way before you got in the Air Corps. Finally, I got this idea! He'd surely be excited. I couldn't wait until he came back to the hut!

Later in the week I practically pounced on him when he walked in with my laundry bag. "How would you like to take a ride this afternoon?" I asked. I was going to "slow-time" a Pratt and Whitney that had just been installed in one of our B-24's to replace a flak-damaged engine. I started to tell him we'd just fly around East Anglia for about an hour and I'd take Mac, Climer and Davis as a skeleton crew, and him – but I never got all the words out of my mouth. Johnny met that invitation with a flood of expletives!

Here I was, asking this kid if he wanted to fly in this big bird that he'd seen crash more times than I'd care to think about. If he didn't always see the plane go in, he'd at least see the oily black smoke billowing up from a crash, or hear the explosion. After all, Johnny had lived in buzz bomb alley long before I got to England and would be there long after I left. Hell no, he didn't want to fly! You were right Johnny Wenn--so right!



FEATHER THREE

There was a definite vibration. Damn! Mac was pointing at number three's engine instruments. He was right, that engine's temperature was climbing, the oil pressure had dropped and just looking at the nacelle we could see it shaking. Our B-24 had taken a hit.

Pratt Whitney engines were our pride and joy, but we were already cutting the gas off for number three and with one last hopeful look at the engine, I told Mac to "feather three". The prop slowly stopped windmilling and I reached for the rudder trim tab. Our indicated airspeed dropped at this high altitude even though we were pushing the three good engines. We started easing out of the formation. The plane flying in the slot would pull up to take our place as deputy leader for the squadron.

After letting the crew know what was going on, we reminded them (as if we needed to) to be on the lookout for "bandits". We all knew we were more vulnerable to Luftwaffe fighters when we became separated from our squadron. Just our guns alone to drive them off wouldn't be as effective as the guns from eleven other Liberators. We were probably thinking we were like a sitting duck. In a non-combat flight over friendly territory a lost engine wasn't a big deal. We could have just dropped down to eight or nine thousand feet and headed for the nearest base with hardly any loss of speed.

But this was different. The puffs of flak reminded us that this wasn't friendly. At our assigned altitude we needed all of our superchargers and four good engines to get that bomb load to our target and then out of enemy territory as quickly as possible. It was out of the question to try and keep up with our formation so I stuck our nose down to gather some speed and head for home.

We could hear the three engines labor with their extra load. Mac's and my eyes kept checking the manifold pressures, cylinder head temperatures and oil pressures. We nursed them by giving them a little richer mixture of fuel—we'd lean out the mixture later if it looked like we might run short of fuel. But for now we wanted cool running engines and a little extra power. Number one was running a little rough. Maybe it had taken a hit too.

The ground beneath us seemed to creep by. Someplace along our route we were hearing calls from bombers expecting to be under attack, asking for fighter cover. Every eye on our plane was searching the sky for a sign of a German plane. It is an eerie feeling being someplace over Germany with no one else around. In the distance the waist gunners could make out the stream of allied bombers heading for their targets and here we were below them and heading the other way.

We couldn't maintain our altitude with a heavy bomb load and a feathered engine so we were slowly losing altitude. We could jettison our bombs to lighten the load, but it would be a wasted mission for us. When we were lower in denser air we'd be able to hold our altitude better; especially if we got an opportunity to dump our bombs on a German target. Unfortunately, when we'd go lower we were an easier target for the German 88 mm anti-aircraft guns.

Someone on the crew called out the position of possible enemy fighters. So, limping along with our loss of altitude and loss of air speed, I decided to give our fighter escort a call. After several "Hello Little Friend, this is Big Friend" we finally got a reply. Trying to keep my voice steady, I told them that we were having a bit of trouble and could use a bit of company to keep "Bandits" away. A far off voice said, "Roger, we'll be right down." At this point my co-pilot was still struggling to keep as much altitude as we could. We didn't want to make things too easy for the flak guns below.

After what seemed like an unreasonably long time, there was no sign of our fighter escort and I was beginning to wonder if they were using us for bait. Or maybe they couldn't find us and we were hoping the Germans couldn't either. Here we were in this big "banana boat" that anyone could have seen for miles and it was hard to convince ourselves that we couldn't be seen by about everyone in the Third Reich.

Our other three engines were starting to run a little hotter than normal in spite of our efforts to nurse them along. The one that had been running a little rough seemed to be OK but we eased off a little on it's power setting. We hadn't found any other damage from flak and some of the engine instruments were reading just a little bit out of the green. After awhile I called "Little Friends" again and was assured that they would be right down. As we waited I listened to other squadrons that spotted "bandits". Their escorts were above their groups S-ing back and forth as top cover. We figured that our lone plane must have a low priority as these "ace happy" fighter jocks wanted to go where there was more action.

Still no friendly fighters! As I was mumbling to myself about the ancestry of our fighter pilots, the waist and tail gunners called on the intercom to say that two fighters were diving from five o'clock high. Green, in the tail turret, called to ask if he should open fire when they were in range. I replied, "Hell yes! If they don't act like ours, start firing". The two fighters kept boring in until they were just barely out of 50 caliber range, then pulled off to the side and did a quarter roll. Now we could recognize them as P-51's. Bless their pointed heads! Our heartbeat slowed down to a gallop. They really didn't hang around very long. Probably just long enough to reassure us that they were in the neighborhood. And it did improve our morale!

At about 14,000 to 16,000 feet we were flying pretty well and able to hold our altitude, but we had lost another of our electrical generators. Maybe we had more damage than we thought. We still had a full bomb load so Sandy and Weiman were looking for a target of opportunity. After all, we might not get credit for the mission if we aborted without hitting something.

About five minutes in front of us was something to hit! A railroad marshaling yard. Joe was on the bombsight and the bomb bay doors were coming open. I waited for the red light on the instrument panel to light; meaning bombs were away. In a few moments Joe called to say the target was blowing up. I replied, "How can that be? We haven't dropped yet." About that time someone discovered a squadron of B-17's way above us. They must have dropped their salvo of bombs almost through us. Wow!

We did find another target. A large farm complex or something with clusters of buildings. We had to get rid of our bombs soon and head for home. Someone reminded me that we were carrying mostly propaganda leaflets with just a few bombs. We dropped everything anyway and someone suggested, as we straggled over the North Sea toward England, that with thousands of paper leaflets fluttering down, the Krauts would have enough toilet paper on that farm to last until the end of the war.

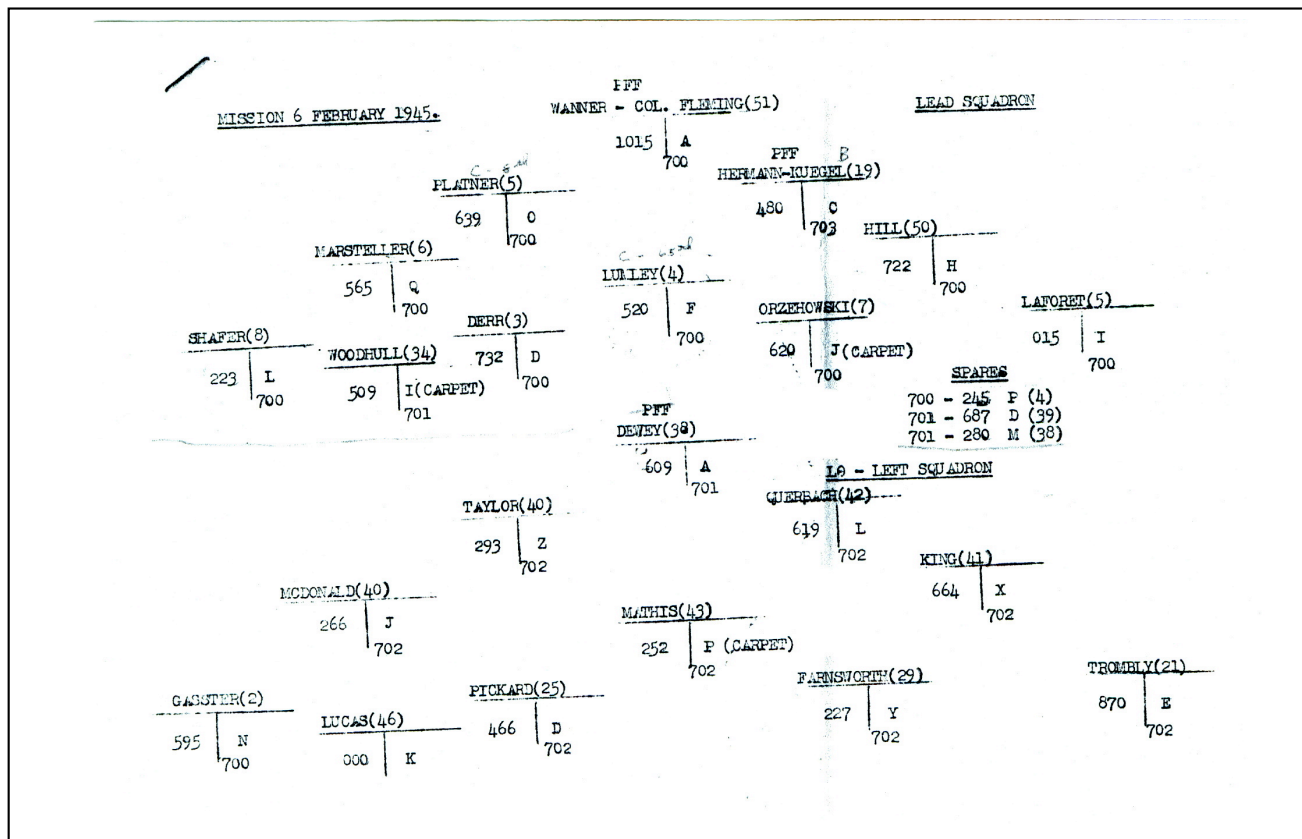
To add to our excitement, gunners Kuepker and Swede spotted an unidentified fighter plane approaching us from the right side as we crossed the North Sea. We were suspicious of him since we had been warned that Germans sometimes had our planes. It was probably a Mosquito from Britain's Air Sea Rescue with the red tail. In fact it was. He was escorting us, but looking down the barrels of Davis' top turret twins and a waist gun. I've wondered what he was thinking as he flew a close formation with us, looking down the bore of those fifty caliber guns pointed at him. When we got close to the English coast he saluted, waggled his wings and left. What a beautiful little plane!

Ahead was a rather large armada of U.S. Navy ships and suddenly there were four bursts of flak up ahead; almost in a line across our flight path—with red smoke. This was a little too much for one day. Our Navy wasn't convinced that this lone B-24 was the U.S. Army Air Corps, so they were impolitely warning us away. We fired colored flares with the identification code of the day and lit up our ID belly lights, then did a right turn (as prescribed) to fly parallel to the coast until we could turn back toward our base without flying over the "Bloomin' Navy." Naturally we weren't very happy with them since we were coming home with flak damage. But, they were a bit touchy about any plane approaching them. After all, we didn't take any chances with the Mosquito escort did we?

The B-24 came over the English coast at about 4000 feet. The green fields below us were beautiful. Tibbenham Tower cleared us to land and we did a straight-in approach; no regular landing pattern. We wanted on the ground soon.

Mac, our co-pilot, and I were both on those rudder pedals for the landing. With a cross wind blowing we "crabbed" into the wind as the wheels touched down but that marvelous tricycle gear straightened out our B-24 perfectly for the landing roll. We landed "light as a feather" with one feathered. After writing up the Form I (aircraft's mechanical problems) we climbed down through the bomb bays and looked at the flak damaged engine and other holes. With a sentimental gesture, just like in the movies, I gave that Liberator a very friendly pat. How could such an ugly plane be so beautiful?

Formation Plan



IT WAS COLD!

It was cold! I don't know really how cold, but for a kid from Ohio it was cold! Tibenhams may have weather records, but I never really cared enough to substantiate the meteorological files to see if there were signs of an approaching Ice Age. I was convinced that, after the war, there was no point in suffering through bone chilling, teeth chattering, shivering and hypothermia; an English winter was just too cold and too damp!!

When I awoke one morning and pushed aside four or five layers of blankets it probably startled some of my crew to discover that I was even sleeping in my cot. It sagged so much that I could have had company in the sack and with my five layers of blankets no one would have been the wiser. Anyway, being alone and cold as usual, I sat up and quickly started getting a pair of socks on over my blue toes. When Sandy, my navigator, said something about my hair getting gray, it really didn't register. After all, I had about six gray hairs when I was in high school and people had been kidding me about that for years.

This time my hair was white. A crack in the hut windowsill had let some snow drift in during the night. Usually my head was buried under blankets but I must have come up for air and carelessly neglected to submerge again.

It just seemed that we never were warm. When we flew at high altitude the cockpit heater didn't work. The electrically heated suits would short out with little wisps of smoke curling up from our back. Naturally when we were getting burned we turned them off and then our hands in the electrically heated gloves got so cold that we could hardly feel the throttles. The gunners in the waist must have been even colder when the waist windows were open. No wonder they got frostbitten necks. We sometimes got obsessed with getting warm.

Having been unable to thaw out for what seemed like an eternity, it didn't take much urging from somebody for me to contemplate committing a felony. It isn't clear anymore in my memory how we rationalized our way out of the guilt feelings of stealing from the government. Being old fashioned, maybe we rationalized that we were merely trying to avoid freezing to death.

Everyone called it a "midnight requisition". The coal pile for the Base was in a barbed wire enclosure of about 100 by 100 ft. One night we were getting a little desperate to get warmed up, since we had been up in the "cold blue" flying a practice mission. It was a very foggy night, which we felt would aid the five of us. We made our way to the coal pile with some difficulty. The visibility was about 10 ft. Two of us got hoisted over the barbed-wire with big "parachute bags". When we had them full of coal we'd hand them back over the fence. The mission had to be considered a success since we didn't get shot by the MP's.

We didn't fly the next day, so our co-conspirators in the hut built a little "coal bin" just inside our "blackout" back door. Instead of a meager 1/3 bucket of coal for the hut per day, we had

come up in the world to about two buckets full. Our popularity increased among the other huts and we often had visitors drop by who wanted to get warm.

All good things must come to an end. (I hope the statute of limitations has run out). One day our Base Deputy Commander, with nothing better to do, inspected the huts in our squadron. Naturally, he asked some embarrassing questions and wanted to know where we got all the coal. We explained that we'd been saving it for several weeks. He didn't seem to believe us but had no proof. However, he did make us tear down the bin.

Our technology took a quantum leap. Without mentioning names, like Farr, someone in the hut with engineering skills got some pipe and valves from the maintenance hangar plus a large ancient oxygen bottle from a wrecked B-24. The next step was a visit to a hangar which stored some old engine oil. I believe the term this time was to "liberate" the oil for humanitarian purposes.

Our hut genius filled the oxygen bottle with oil and hooked it up so that a pipe ran from the hanging oxygen bottle down under the linoleum floor and up into our oil barrel stove. Whoever got up first in the morning would turn on the valve, open the stove door and try to light it. Well, the idea was brighter than the flame, which didn't burn very well. Somehow we found that we had to mix oil with 100 octane gas to make it ignite and burn hot! Pretty exciting to be the one to light it because it would act like a flame-thrower – a big whoosh, with the added gasoline. We had to stand back and around the corner so the flame wouldn't singe us.

The gasoline-oil mix worked so well that our stove would glow cherry red. My co-pilot was afraid the stove might melt down when we had it going too "good", but at least it certainly heated up K-Rations in a hurry. There was a problem, though, because lots of black smoke came out of the chimney. This would make it obvious that we weren't just using our little one-third bucket of coal for heating.

We'd confined our heating comfort to after dark. Dwayne (the other crew's co-pilot) tried to light some wood one time with a shell from his flare pistol. It was dramatic! Yellow and red flare balls were coming out of our stove-pipe chimney. The light leaking through the stove door was a brilliant green. It was a great and beautiful idea, but it didn't light the wood. We even bought a tree stump one time and after working hard to try and chop it up, found that it was practically fire proof.

With our latest heating method, no "big brass" was out and about at night since it was often rainy, foggy and cold. The stove was great for cooking our K-Rations when we got home from a mission too late to get a meal from the mess hall. We were careful to have clothes hanging up in front of our "fuel bottle" to conceal it when we were inspected. Our clothes were taking on an oily, smoky smell. We were warm but that wasn't to last.

As was destined to happen, our heating system was discovered by our favorite Base Deputy CO. We all wondered if we might get court-martialed, but no one seemed to remember how the elaborate system ever got there. Ignorance was bliss. When our only Captain had moved

Tibenham, England

out of the hut to be a Squadron CO, that left me as the ranking officer. I had to assure my superiors that I would see to it that our heating system was disassembled.

I still remember this on winter evenings, with my feet propped up by the fireplace. The whiffs of smoke from the crackling fire have a clean fresh wood scent: not oily!



Climer in electric suit

NO BOMBS AWAY

If this title caught your eye, the writer hopes that you aren't expecting a blood and guts article. In fact, on this mission, all of the squadrons returned to base safely--perhaps with a few flak hole--so not really a "milk run". No brilliant decisions by the crew nor feats of bravery or talent. So you may wonder why you would want to continue reading this.

We were leading the high right squadron and had just left the IP (Initial Point). Our lead navigator, Sandy, had put us over the Point right on time. Joe, our deadeye bombardier, was probably searching through the haze for our target and this pilot was trying to keep our B-24 steady for the Norden bombsight's run. We were all set. No German fighters sighted. There was moderate accurate flak fire and our plane's bomb bays were open. Just about a minute before our drop.

Then on the intercom: "Waist to pilot. There's a squadron right below us." I craned my neck to look down and could barely see the edge of the formation below. There was no way to drop now without the risk of hitting B-24s from another Group. No way to slow down or speed up and avoid the planes below.

I called Joe to NOT DROP and started a turn to the left to bring us full circle for another pass at the target. That 360 degree turn seemed to take forever, but finally we straightened and were on the bomb run again. The "bombs away" light went on.

Immediately we did a 90 degree turn to the left and dropped about a thousand feet of altitude in order to pick up speed. No use in making things easy for the German flak guns on our second time over the target.

The waist gunner, either Kuepker or Swede, thought the planes under us on the run were from the 453rd Bomb Group. My pal all through cadets and transition at Fort Worth and to this day, Big Stoop, was a squadron leader with the 453rd. Wouldn't that be ironic if he had been the one down there?



"Big Stoop" Wallace

CUTTING EDGE

“Flight minimums.” Old War Birds will remember that phrase. It meant that you couldn’t do an instrument letdown through clouds lower than 500 feet and with less than 3 miles visibility. Well, 8th Air Force crews can possibly remember letting down on instruments over the North Sea to about 200 ft and hoping their altimeters were accurate. Then when the cliffs of East Anglia appeared ahead they’d pull up over them and sometimes fly along side a railroad track and try to read the name when we passed a station. Not exactly the cutting edge in modern aviation navigation.

We use to call it “flying the iron beam”. When we went low over Norwich one day I could see faces in the windows and my bombardier remembers looking slightly up to see a clock tower. Then we flew along the track that would lead us to a station called Diss. From there we’d make a right bank and fly a course of about 330 degrees for four minutes and presto, there was our runway. We’d do a straight-in landing approach. Some of us remember when we would have to taxi behind the “follow me” sign on a jeep to find the end of the runway for take-off. We could barely see our wingtips. And here we were doing an actual instrument take-off like we sometimes practiced doing in a link trainer.

Flight Operation called me in one day to tell me that I’d be practicing with a new gadget for bad weather landings. It seemed like we often had bad weather, so they selected two other pilots from other squadrons who were also flying as deputy leads. I started in the left seat and we flew to Heathrow to try out this thing called ILS (Instrument Landing System).

Wearing red goggles and placing a transparent green plastic sheet over my windshield I started an approach to the runway. I could see my instruments, but couldn’t see through the windshield. Of course the co-pilot was watching and ready to take over. If the PDI (Pilot Direction Indicator) needle moved to the right I would turn to follow it until it was centered. It meant I was lined up with the runway. If the horizontal needle was above the center dot then I was too low and would pull up to get on the glide path again. When we were actually about 200 feet above the runway, the co-pilot would call “OK, climb out”, and the pilot would take off the goggles to see if he could have landed. They’d pull up to go around again for another try.

By the time I did my third and last try with the ILS, the simulated landing was right on the mark. What a gadget! I was in love with it! The other two pilots took their turns with me standing between the seats watching and they had great success also. So we headed back to our base. When we were near, the 1st pilot called for permission to land, but the field was closed. Some low scud clouds had blown in and that socked it in good. Too bad our field didn’t have ILS. No problem we thought. Just ask for permission to go back to Heathrow and use the ILS there even if it was almost a pea soup fog. Wrong! They didn’t want us to use their ILS, except for practice.

Instead we had to fly inland trying to find an open field. By this time we were getting a heavy rainstorm. The co-pilot had called “Darkie”, the volunteer spotters of the RAF. They would give you a steer to an open airfield if you were lost. And we were. We had a skeleton crew of three pilots and an engineer. No navigator. They radioed us a heading toward what we hoped was an open field. We were getting lots of turbulence at an altitude of about 400 feet and I was having a hard time standing on the flight deck. After about an hour of this milling around my stomach had an uneasy feeling

From past experience I knew if I were sitting down or flying I’d have my stomach under control again, so I asked the two pilots if anybody wanted to trade places with me. To my surprise, both volunteered and the guy in the left seat told the other one to take over while he traded with me. I’d just gotten my safety belt and harness snapped and was trying to get my earphones plugged in while we were in a steep bank. When I looked to the right I could see we were sort of pivoting some trees that seemed a bit close. Then the co-pilot banged me on the arm and motioned me to take over.

At this point I wasn’t exactly oriented and had difficulty holding my altitude in that bank – which probably gave my co-pilot a big thrill looking out his side window at those trees close up! I leveled off but had to stay under the clouds or I’d never find that field. Finally I did cross the airfield diagonally and turned to fly parallel with the runway. After setting my gyro compass to zero we did a left hand pattern and ended on the final approach lined up better than I’d expected. The tower was generous and someone lighted an oil drum of fuel at the end of the runway to help me keep lined up on the landing roll in the heavy rain.

When we got back to our home base about three hours later, I thought we all deserved a ration of medical bourbon.

BRICK BOMB

A brick bomb? I don't think the Nazis would have panicked if they had known what I was thinking. I was boiling inside! I don't think I'd felt the hate toward my enemy before as I had this past week.

I'd seen too many of our planes go down. Sometimes in flames; sometimes with two or three chutes blossoming. And because of Hitler my buddies were being killed--to say nothing of the GI's on the ground that were struggling to land on the beaches of Normandy and fight in the forests of the Ardennes in the cold, mud, and rain. Sometimes I carried a 45 automatic in a shoulder holster but what good would that do against a ground target? And anyhow, Intelligence had advised us not to carry a firearm to avoid being shot while coming down in a parachute.

Yes, I was planning ahead. I calculated how long it would take an object to hit the ground if dropped from our plane's altitude. Usually about 25 to 35 seconds. I even had a formula to figure it out, from my days in physics classes. It was a stupid thought since dropping anything without a bombsight, the expectations of hitting it were remote. But those bastards down there were constantly trying to knock us out of the sky with their 88mm flak guns. And fighter aircraft! Damn them! They started this war!

When we came out of briefing one morning, I reached down and picked up a broken brick from the ground. I carried it, sort of half concealed, onto the GI trucks that took us to the hardstand where our plane waited. Climbing up to the flight deck I put it on the floor to the left of my seat. My co-pilot, Mac, was outside doing the pre-flight inspection and I went down to join him.

Sandy and Joe, our navigator and bombardier were busy with their preparations, as was the rest of the crew. Soon, the Tower signaled that it was time to start engines and Stan, our engineer, told me that we were all set. Green assured me that our bombs were secure. We lifted off the runway into gray skies and headed toward Germany. The Group formed into formation and we droned toward our target.

Sometimes the flak came close and all of us became tense. I gritted my teeth and hated being shot at when I couldn't fight back. There were small towns ahead of us and I could estimate how far away I had to be from them to be directly over them in about 30 seconds.

Finally, ahead of us and right on our path was a German town. I slid my window open and glanced toward my co-pilot who was flying. He was busy and not looking my way. I called the waist gunners to have them see if there were any of our planes directly under us. No! Now was the time! I watched the town as we crept nearer. Grabbing the brick from the floor I quickly held it out the cockpit's side window--and dropped it!!!

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There was no possible way for me to see where that brick hit. We were at about 22,000 feet. Maybe it smashed through the roof of a building, maybe it hit a German soldier, maybe it hit out in a farmer's field--but I had my chance, just this once, to fight back! Just so it damaged something of the Germans.

Mac, my co-pilot, might have seen what I did. His oxygen mask covered his face, but when I looked toward him it seemed his eyes had crinkled. Thankfully, this quiet Texan never said anything about my stupidity. And Joe, our bombardier, I never told him. He would have known how futile dropping a brick was. A squadron leader was supposed to have more sense. But I never felt sorry.



One hour delay on runway



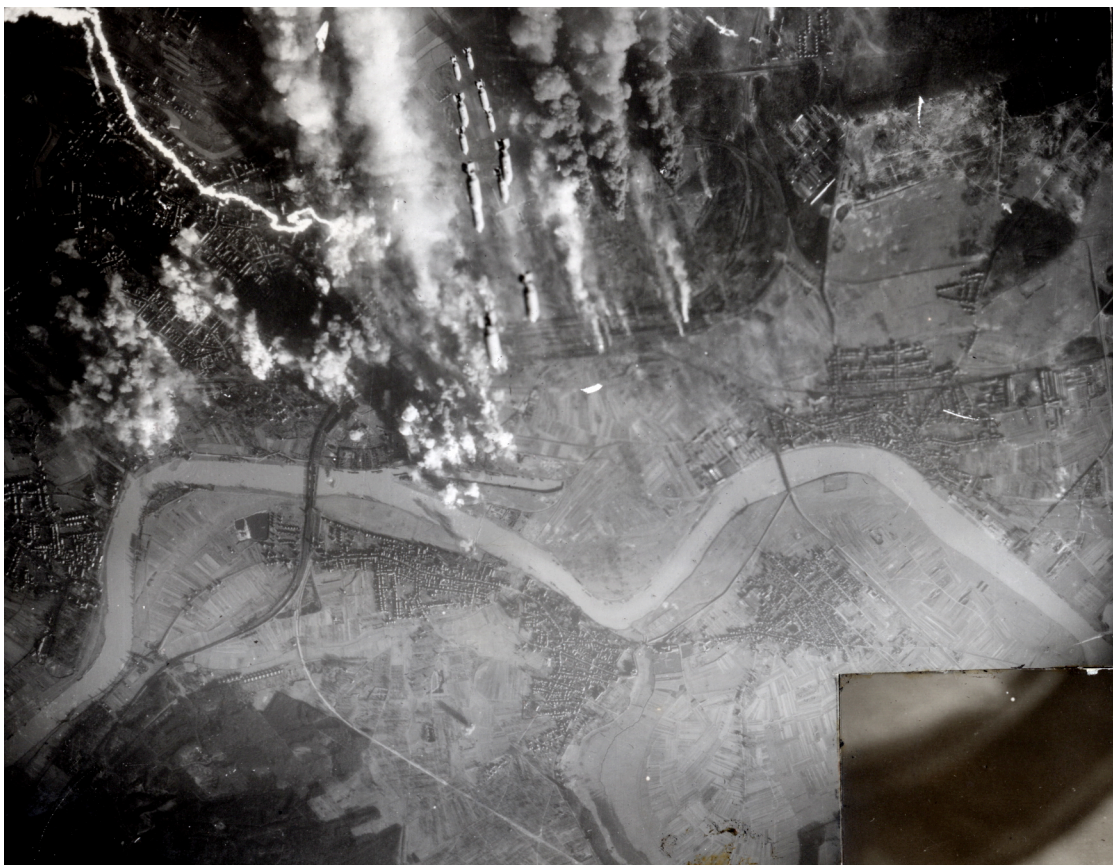
Flying in formation



Flak from anti-aircraft guns



Bombs Away!



PSYCHIC

You know how some combat crews stand out in your mind? Besides your own, of course. For me it was Farr's crew who shared the Nut Hut (Nissen Hut) with my officers. There was Chick, Lumley, Dwayne and Farr. All in all, they were the raunchiest good guys I'd ever known. But something strange happened with them one time.

Our crew was "stood down" for lead training so we weren't flying missions as fast as the others. On this particular day I had been walking around the base doing some errands, like going to the PX, etc. When that day's mission to Germany had returned, I was in the mess hall. It was then that I heard that Farr's crew was missing.

No one in the group had seen any of our planes shot down while they were under heavy flak attack. No explosions, no smoke trailing, no parachutes blossoming. Just a few airplanes limping back to the base, but not Farr's. There hadn't been any radio communications – but, after all, the group was supposed to observe silence, at least until back over the North Sea.

Back in the hut, my crew was upset but carefully controlling their outward feelings. Damn, how could it be that no one observed them dropping out of formation? Even if they were flying the slot formation position, you'd think that someone would have noticed them straggling or going down. There were times when everyone on board the bomber was busy taking care of problems in their own ship. I think they were flying "Four F" which I always considered a flying wreck when we were assigned it. Maybe, just maybe, they'd get it back to an emergency strip in occupied France.

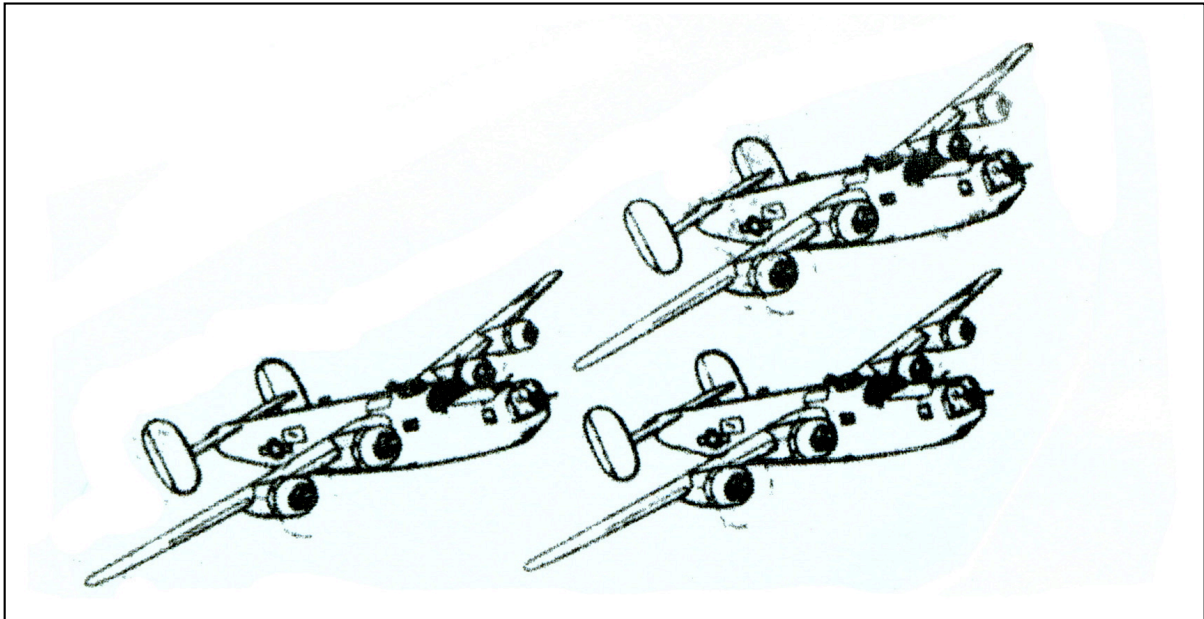
The next morning Mac, my co-pilot, and I went down to Operations to see if we could find out what happened to our Hut mates. No word from them and the plane was presumed lost! It was like reading a story and you finish the last chapter, but there is no end to the story.

In the afternoon I returned to our hut after having been to several places on the base. I told Joe, Sandy and Mac that Farr's plane would be landing in about 30 minutes. We all felt relief and someone commented that, knowing those guys, they probably had been living it up in France.

I was sort of the messenger and other crews stopped by to ask about Farr's coming back from a French emergency strip. We went down near the runway to witness their ship make one of the smoothest landings we'd ever seen him make. We found later that they were carrying more than a few bottles of French wine.

We had to laugh at all the cargo those guys brought back. But I wasn't laughing when the Squadron CO called me into Headquarters to question me about where I got my information about their return from France. A breach of security? I could never figure out who had told me they were coming back. I sure didn't make it up! No mysterious long lost crew member materialized out of vapor and whispered in my ear that this crew had made a forced landing in France with mechanical problems and was on its way back to our field.

There is one question that I've always wondered about. Did Farr's crew make a landing in France just to pick up a cargo of wine? There's only one hot pilot that I know who could give me that answer.



ICE CREAM AT 20,000 FEET

If you needed someone to tell you how to find something on base or needed to know how to do something, who would you check with? A wise GI would probably go to a First Sergeant or Master Sergeant. So once upon a time someone in our squadron had this great craving for ice cream. You know and I know that ice cream wasn't on the mess hall's menu while I was in England. But my dear ol' grandpa used to say, "Where there's a will there's a way." At least I've always told people that's what he said.

I was getting over one of my long term colds and a cough. It would have been great to have some nice smooth vanilla ice cream going down my throat. Whoever it was I talked to that day was a doer, not a talker. It was only a few days later when he was back telling me that the Mess Sergeant would give us the ingredients for some ice cream if we'd do the freezing for him.

This sounds like a spy thriller or a drug deal doesn't it? All I had to do was fly this one gallon container around for about two hours at an altitude that was cold enough to freeze ice cream. My memory of how we got the Operations Office to let us fly the plane is a little hazy. Maybe we got a load of practice bombs and told them we were flying to the practice target range or maybe we were slow-timing a new replacement engine. Vaguely, I have the notion that the plane's name was either "Father Time" or "Ramblin Wreck". I can tell you for certain that it wasn't my favorite airplane.

Its intercom was consistent in being non-operational. Some enterprising crew chief, having gotten sick and tired of the Form One full of complaints about no communication from pilot to navigator, had finally rigged a pulley system. You could clip a note on it and pull the wire until the note got to the navigator. Really high tech! That plane had other delightful surprises like the gear lever would sometimes come down by itself. Sort of like it was haunted and was hinting it wanted to go home. Of course, it could have been worse if the gear wouldn't have come down at all.

I think there were several other thrills in store for us as we circled over England at about 20,000 feet, freezing our cargo and part of my anatomy. Nothing as bad as a runaway prop or a bomb bay door that stuck open--but enough for me to sit in the cockpit after landing and begin writing in the Form One, listing all my complaints of the aircraft's systems. I think everyone had left the hardstand by the time I finished and I was thinking of how much gasoline we'd burned to freeze that stuff. Probably over 350 gallons. All of us lucky enough to get a dab really enjoyed that ice cream.

The saga of the ice cream making airplane was to be short. The day came for Farr's crew to fly it on its 100th mission before going on their Bond Tour. But fate would have none of that. That war weary Liberator blew a tire on take off and crashed on its belly, skidding across the field. The miracle was that no one was hurt. Just their psyche. There was no Bond selling trip.

Eyewitness accounts reported that “Chick”, the bombardier, and Dwayne, the co-pilot, set an outdoor track record in getting out of the way of a possible explosion! Very wise! Remember, though, how we won the war. It was with the help of vanilla ice cream.

WELCOME HOME

It felt good coming home from a mission. It was downhill flying and without bombs and with less gas the planes were lighter, faster and more responsive to the controls. We hadn't lost any planes today so our mood was good. The flak had been moderate with no apparent damage and no attacks by "bandits" near us. Glancing at our rate of climb instrument, it told us we were descending at a steady 200 feet a minute. Soon it would start warming up a little at a lower altitude. But never soon enough for this Ohio kid that never liked the cold.

"Asbestos Alice" was our lead Radar Pathfinder ship and our three navigators, Sanderson, Weiman and Doyle all agreed that we were well over Allied occupied Territory. Glenna, Green and Kuepker, our gunners, were still keeping a lookout for enemy fighters, but by now we were past the German flak guns. The engine instruments showed that our four Pratt-Whitneys were all running smoothly and our flight engineer, Davis, had just finished transferring some gas from one tank to another. We had plenty of fuel to get to our base with some to spare, so the rest of the mission would be an easy "milk run".

I asked Mac if he wanted to tune in to the German propaganda station for the crew because their music was always the latest American record hits of Dorsey and Miller. We would have to listen to some garbage from the German propagandist, Axis Sally, about how such and such a bomber group had bombed churches, schools and hospitals. Someone figured that there must be churches and hospitals about every other building in Germany and always placed where there were factories manufacturing tanks and aircraft.

Now flying over the cold North Sea we had let down to about 10,000 feet by the time we saw the English coast. I would wait until I was about ten or so minutes from Tibenham Tower before calling in. They would want to know that the 700th Squadron was almost home. The cloud cover below us was about 1/10ths with strata cumulus tops at about 5000 feet making little fluffy mounds of white. My wingmen were flying a comfortable loose formation. They were damn good formation fliers, but there was no need to be in tight.

Just before landing I pushed the mike button and asked Sandy how many minutes to our base. Almost immediately his answer came back, "about twelve minutes". Unsnapping my oxygen mask I plugged in my throat mike and called the Tibenham control tower to tell them we were about 20 miles from the field and would be landing in about 10 minutes. That is what I thought! But their transmission came back loud and clear. The field was closed! What were they talking about? I could see the ground easily through broken clouds, but as we got closer the cloud cover became almost solid. The radio crackled the advice to fly inland to find an "open field". Well, "Roger Wilco" we would do just that, but it wasn't to be easy. Occasionally I could see patches of ground through small holes in the clouds, but the airbases that radioed wouldn't clear the squadron for an instrument let down to 300 ft. The chatter on the radio from my other pilots let me know that they weren't glider pilots and their gas was so low they claimed they were practically running on fumes. I had a horrible vision of the crews

of ten aircraft bailing out over England when their tanks ran dry. The loss of all those planes crashing into the English countryside or small towns would have been a nightmare.

Mac was motioning off to the right. There was a hole in the clouds and through it we could see runways. I called the field and with proper radio protocol, requested permission to bring my squadron in. I was ready to peel off my number three plane and get everybody through that hole quick while it was still there. The tower's reply came back in a clipped British accent and I was stunned. They denied us permission to land.

Thinking that maybe they hadn't understood that we were very low on gas, I repeated the request. Their reply was for us to find another field. I thought "The hell with this. We have to get on the ground and soon!" The other planes in my squadron would be lower on fuel than our lead ship. It wasn't exactly a sophisticated ploy, but I pretended that I hadn't received the RAF tower's transmission. I called for permission once more, knowing that I wouldn't get it, then gave a visual signal (porpoising) for my number three plane to peel off and we'd all follow him in for a landing.

Talk about close! The fog was rolling in when our wheels touched down. Even then, we weren't the last plane on the ground. One plane had an engine quit from lack of gas as he was taxiing to park. By the time everyone had shut down their engines and cut all switches, we couldn't even see the Control Tower or any of the buildings. Letting ourselves down through the bomb bay we looked down the line of Liberators, but by then the plane past the first one just melted into the fog. I scrambled back up into the cockpit to radio the RAF tower to request Lorries (trucks) to take our crews in out of that cold dampness. They never arrived. Probably lost.

After what seemed like a long time I radioed the tower again to ask them to give me a compass heading for us to walk, so all one hundred of us could get started for someplace warm. They couldn't help since the fog had reduced visibility to zero and they didn't know where we were. It must have looked very strange to see over a hundred bedraggled Yanks emerging from that thick fog. At least we ended up fairly close to the Operations Building even after "walking blind". I think I know why the RAF didn't exactly welcome our squadron landing on their field. They had trouble getting quarters for our crews. The "limeys" had to set up folding cots and then had to search to find enough mattresses and blankets for us all. Also, I'll bet the mess Sergeant probably went into shock when he found that over a hundred bloomin' Yanks had dropped in for dinner.

As soon as the RAF placed a guard on our PFF (radar pathfinder) ship and notified Tibenhams that we had landed, I joined the rest of our officers in the British Officers Club. We could wait there until someone could assign us a place to sleep and clean up before evening mess. What a motley looking outfit! We were in our winter flying gear with our electric suit heating cords dangling and with those big flying boots that had been sloshing through the mud and into the Club.

The main room of the Officers' Club seemed big, with a large bar stretching across one side. More than a few of us bellied up to it to compare notes on the mission. We wouldn't get our

usual free after-mission medical ration of bourbon, but this would have to do. A dartboard was on a far wall with some British Officers tossing at the target with their usual great accuracy. Others quietly hovered around a pool table. By contrast, we were noisy and talkative.

Americans are a bit loud and outgoing compared to the reserved British. The noise and our sloppy appearance in this rather staid and dignified Club was more than our allied officers could take. They very quietly put on coats and caps and without a glance in our direction, walked discreetly out the door and into the fog. It seemed a bit of a slap in the face at the time, but the British people tolerated our less than ideal conduct in many ways.

After thawing out for about a half hour I went back to the tower to call our base. Unfortunately, the 445th wanted me to read the names of each crew and their members over the phone. Using the British war-era phone system was equivalent to having tin cans with waxed string stretched between. My voice was almost gone by the time I had finished the shouted communication of over a hundred crew names. I overheard someone say, under their breath, that Tibenham could have heard me without the phone.

Davis and the rest of the crew were reminding me that we didn't want to get stuck on this RAF field over Christmas. Every few hours I'd go to the control tower to use the phone and to see if our home base was open yet. Days later I got a tentative clearance for the squadron to return, so I used the Base Tanoy (PA System) trying to get all the aircraft commanders to round up their crews for immediate take off before our base socked in again. Everybody was supposed to be standing by before 10:00 A.M. to take off individually, but some crews had a hard time finding all of their GI's.

Our co-pilot had been in charge of refueling our squadron's planes. He had perched on the wing of each plane while the petrol tanker truck was pumping to make certain that enough fuel was put into each ship, plus a little extra. We wanted to know for certain that we had enough gas to get back to Tibenham. When we were ready to go, I could see a few of the other ships' crew members running for their planes while they were taxiing for take off position. I did feel a little smug that my crew was on board and on time. Where were the other flight crews when we called them on the Tanoy system? Do you suppose they might have been chasing some pretty English girls?

It was only about a 45 minute flight back to our bases. This time we were looking at the ground through 4/10ths low cumulus clouds. Most of the 700th Squadron's ships made it while our field was still open. One crew landed at the 453rd Bomb Group, about eight miles away, when our base finally got socked in again with fog. At least they got to an Army Air Corps field. All of our crews were accounted for, no injuries, no severe aircraft damage. What more could we ask?

No one wanted to miss a Christmas turkey dinner with all the trimmings that we had been anticipating for weeks! And we didn't. It was good to be "home" in our own hut, as humble as it was with its smoky smell. That "after mission ration" of medical bourbon that we had missed, well, we never got that. The Army Air Corps still owes us that one!

OUR CLOSE CALL

Captain Simmons: He was a squadron leader and somehow was behind his crew in the missions required to be rotated home. I wasn't very happy when they told me that he would be replacing Mac, my co-pilot. Not that he wasn't an excellent pilot, but Mac and I worked so well together in the cockpit.

We formed up our squadron formation over England and proceeded to the IP (initial point). Turning left on the bomb run we observed moderate flak, which was considerably ahead of us, but unfortunately was exploding at our exact altitude. Joe, our bombardier, had opened the bomb bay doors and was aligning the bombsight.

As we approached the target the 88mm flak bursts got closer and closer as the four puffs blossomed just ahead of us. Every 10 seconds the four black puffs would repeat. Finally, I knew the next bursts would be right on us in a few seconds, and my reflexes wanted to turn sharply to the left. I was counting seconds and when I got to about 8 seconds, the "bombs away" light came on. Banking sharply left, time ran out and I heard a loud thud. I knew we were hit as flakes of snow-like stuff blew around the cockpit. Glancing at my co-pilot, I saw the look in his eyes and knew instantly that he'd been hit. I think he was looking at me to see if I was hit. Continuing my bank, I headed for England. I called for help from my waist gunners. Swede gave our co-pilot a shot of morphine and helped him out of the seat.

Climer, our radioman, sat in the right seat and watched the engine instruments for signs of any more trouble. Engine number three was running a little rough and there were at least 30 flak holes in our plane. Meanwhile, I had signaled my Deputy Leader that I couldn't lead, as we straggled out of the formation. Our waist gunners were giving our co-pilot first aid and Kuepker was looking for enemy planes. I knew that if we had to bail out, it would be tough to drag our wounded man with us, so I thought we would try to get to Allied-occupied France for an emergency landing.

A welcome sight was an Air-Sea rescue plane escorting us part way back to England where we knew we could get the best medical help for our Captain. Davis got in the co-pilot seat for the approach and landing at Tibenham. Somebody was firing our VARY pistol flares to signal our distress as we landed. While the ambulance was unloading the wounded pilot someone leaned over my shoulder and said, "Are you hit? There is blood under your seat." When I looked I thought, "Holy Smoke! Maybe I am". Then I realized it was blood from our co-pilot that had melted and run under my seat.

When our crew visited him in the hospital the first thing he asked was, "Will I be able to fly again?"

P.S. He did.

SO LONG, SIR

He was a nice guy. Everybody liked him. He flew some missions with the 445th and then was transferred to a different Group that was having morale problems. But Jimmy Stewart was quite a guy! A good guy!

Eventually he went to Wing but came back to the 445th now and then for a party. Someone told me one night that he was over at the Officers' Club. They said the guys were trying to get him drunk and asking him who were the sexiest female stars. I couldn't resist going over to the Club, but there was a mob around him and I never could hear the conversations. There was lots of laughter, but I learned later that he was always a good storyteller.

Jimmy's stories were never one-liners. That wasn't his style. He liked those convoluted tales that only experts would dare to tell. And he was an expert.

There are many things to admire Jimmy Stewart for. Remember, he was a volunteer in the Army Air Corps and must have been well over 35 years old. Way past draft age. He was a civilian pilot of high reputation so he was highly qualified to do training films for the Army Air Corps. And he did them well with his friendly, convincing style. He elected to be in combat and therefore he trained in and flew approximately 15 missions in a B-24 Liberator bomber over Germany.

There was one thing that used to scare me more than flying a mission and that was public speaking! About a week after our group had put up a mission with four squadrons, the word came down that the squadron leaders were to report for a critique. Although I had led one of the squadrons I knew they wouldn't call on this newly promoted Captain for the mission's critique because they always selected the senior squadron leader for that duty.

When I went into the critiquing room I sat fairly close to the front. We had to sit through three other missions before they got to ours. All of us noticed that we had quite a bit of "brass" from Wing sitting in back. I watched and listened to the other critiques with little interest. Finally they got to ours. The CO, Colonel Jones, called the name of one of our squadron leaders. There was silence. Someone explained that he was on sick call. He called another leader. Another silence. Someone explained his absence.

By the time he called the third leader, I was very uneasy and was desperately looking around the room. Damn! He wasn't here either! It was inevitable. Colonel Jones called my name as the 4th squadron leader. In my panic I was trying to think of the name of the target, which I had mentally blocked! Someone came up and handed me a pool cue stick to use as a pointer on the big map in the front of the room.

Clutching the cue stick, I walked hesitantly to the front trying to collect my thoughts, when I glanced to the side of the room and recognized Colonel Stewart. I opened my mouth to say

that the assembly went smoothly—but nothing came out! If my ship had ever wobbled as much as the cue stick I was holding we would have crashed.

But, I didn't crash because Jimmy jumped in with a long but extremely simple question about the Group assembly over England. It gave me the chance to breathe again and pull myself together.

Thanks Jimmy. So long, Sir!

KASSEL

This story concerns the “Kassel” mission of September 27, 1944.

My crew was frequently “stood down” for training while we were being trained as a lead crew. We had been flying some missions as Deputy Lead, usually of the high right squadron of the Group. But we were all anxious to get our 35 missions in and get home. After we started flying as squadron leader the number of missions required was reduced to 30, but some of the crews that we had arrived with had already finished their missions and were heading home.

Certainly we weren’t flying as frequently as most other crews. Often we were assigned practice missions over England and were often sent to a bombing range so that Joe Weitz, our bombardier, could drop sand-filled practice bombs. Sometimes, to lessen the boredom of the crew, I’d promise to do some buzzing on the way home from the practice bomb runs.

On September 26th the crew was restless since we hadn’t had a mission for quite a few days. A couple of our enlisted men stopped over to our hut to see if we were going to be on the next day’s flight plan. My co-pilot, Bob MacAnelly, had already checked and we weren’t scheduled to fly the next day. The crew was anxious to get their missions over so they put a bit of pressure on me to see if I couldn’t get us on the flight plan. I finally weakened and got aboard a borrowed bicycle to ride down to the Base Flight Ops. After doing some complaining about our not having been on a mission for over a week, the operations officer put us on standby status.

We were number two on the list, so if two crews weren’t able to fly, we’d be on the mission. The other crew in our hut was number one on standby. At about 4:30 the next morning I heard the jeep stop beside our Nissen Hut and the driver came in to rouse Farr’s crew--but not ours.

In the late morning I heard a rumor that we’d lost a lot of ships on this mission. None of us knew what the day’s target had been. A little later someone told me that Farr’s ship had just landed. They hadn’t gone on the mission to Kassel after all. They only acted as a radio relay circling out over the North Sea. The worst part for their crew would be that they wouldn’t get credit for the mission. However, when their radio operator started getting messages about the waves of German fighters that were attacking the Group from the front (a new tactic) and many planes were going down, their perspective changed.

Many of the flight crews that did not fly that day gathered down by the runway. We saw only two (out of 35) make it back to Tibenham. Maybe one or two made it to the emergency strip along the east coast of England and a few others landed or crashed in France. Most went down over Germany. My crew never again tried to persuade me to ask to be placed on a flight plan.

The shock stunned us all. The hut next to ours was empty. The guys some of us had talked and joked with the night before were all gone. The following morning there were trucks backed up to many of the huts, loading the missing crews’ personal belongings. The 445th couldn’t put a

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mission in the air for several days. No planes and too few crews! But soon there were brand new silver B-24J's being ferried in--the only bright spot for the "Bloody 445th".

The 445th and the entire 8th AF learned some valuable lessons from this disaster. Slowly, through the weeks and months that followed, our morale returned. Pride in our bombing results and optimism that we would make it through our combat tour kept us flying and fighting.

THANK YOU, WHOEVER...

It rained and rained that night. Not a heavy downpour but in between a drizzle and a light rain. Joe, our bombardier and several of us sat near our oil barrel stove for warmth, but very little warmth. I wondered if any rain would come through the hole in our Nissen Hut where Dwayne had fired a 45 caliber bullet several days ago. Can't remember why he did that.

Everyone always wondered if they'd be flying the next morning's mission. I didn't really want to wade through the mud puddles to Flight Operations to see if we were on the Flight Plan for the next day but I felt like I should. Everyone in the "Nut Hut" seemed so comfortable. Farr was asleep, Lumley was reading, Rasmussen was singing "I've Got Sixpence", Dwayne was cleaning his 45 and Sandy, Joe and Mac were writing home.

Mac, our co-pilot, would have loaned me his bike, but someone had borrowed it and it was still AWOL. It seemed like we were always walking someplace; to Supply, Mess Hall, Intelligence Room, The Club, Squadron Headquarters, the firing range, the PX, the Briefing Room--just about everywhere. We kidded Mac about his decrepit bicycle with the wheels that were barely round. In spite of our remarks he was always generous. So generous that the bike was often missing from its usual place outside where he leaned it against the hut wall. Finally I did wade to Operations. I think Mac went along because he always agonized over writing letters. He preferred the rain. We found we weren't scheduled to fly the next day, except for a training mission.

When we got back to the hut, sloshing through mud of course, Joe and I were talking and I think our conscience got the better of us. We decided to go shopping for used bikes of our own and quit sponging off Mac. The next time we got a two-day pass we decided to sacrifice one day to go buy our own.

We had a two-day pass in our pocket as we waited at the Tibenham train stop late one sunny morning. The approach of the British locomotive was heralded by the distinctive high pitched tweet of the whistle. Slinging our musette bags over our shoulders, we climbed into a compartment and settled down for our shopping trip. If we could find bikes soon enough and get them back to the base, we'd still have time to use the rest of our pass in Norwich. Maybe go to a USO dance or go sightseeing at the castle.

We had gotten varied advice from our English laundry boy Johnny and assorted GI's as to the most likely village for us to find some used bicycles. When we arrived at a village that we thought would be a good prospect, we climbed out of our compartment and headed for some little shops. After about an hour with no success the truth finally hit us that there weren't any used bikes for sale in this village.

We walked back toward the little station to try and figure out the railroad schedule. Somehow we must have read the timetable wrong, so finally we went inside to ask the stationmaster for help in finding out when our train would leave. He said something like "9:35" so I remarked

that we'd have plenty of time to have dinner at the Inn before catching the train back to our base. He squinted at us and, replying in his delightful British accent said, "Yes you will sir, and breakfast too." It was hard for us to believe that there wasn't a train going back until the next morning.

Joe and I tried the Inn for a room without success so we wandered over to the Red Cross cottage for doughnuts and suggestions of where to stay. After being turned away from all of the suggested room prospects, we figured we could think better if we weren't running on an empty stomach. The two Red Cross lady volunteers were very nice and advised us of several other places that we might find a room. Well Joe and I looked but the sun was setting and we had no luck. As we said, we could think better with our stomachs full, so we went back again for coffee and doughnuts. I think the two ladies were more dismayed than we were that we hadn't found a place to sleep. The next thing you know, as dusk fell, they were each taking us to their homes for dinner and a nice clean bed with sheets.

Of course we enjoyed dinner with the British families that evening. I remember that "my family" had a son serving in the desert war (probably against Rommel). Such nice people! It was a treat to have a bathroom to oneself with clean towels and hot water. The next morning I was awake fairly early (for me) and went downstairs to be greeted by a breakfast of not powdered eggs but real ones, plus toast that wasn't soggy. It was nearly time for me to start walking to the train station to meet Joe, but what could I do to show my appreciation without doing something awkward?

I felt a little smug walking down the path toward the train. I'd left a full bar of soap in the bathroom, which we all knew was something that was in short supply in England during the war years. That was pretty subtle of me, I thought. By the time I was about a hundred yards from the station I heard this musical voice behind me calling: "Lieutenant, Lieutenant!" Pedaling frantically after me was this sweetheart of a British lady returning my soap. What could I say?

By the time Joe and I returned to the states, without ever owning a bicycle, my mother was trying to make up for the British family's generosity by mailing them various packages. What wonderful ladies! I only wish I had retained their names, or their children's, and addresses. Did their son come home? What an example of "hands across the sea". Thank you, whoever you were!

WHEELS UP, ALMOST

We crept along the taxi strip straining our eyes to see the khaki colored jeep that was leading us. If I'd been that driver I would have worried about those four big propellers behind me. The jeep driver got us close to take-off position and then slowly made his way after another B-24 with his Follow Me sign.

As usual, it seemed, we had to hurry up and wait. And here we were with engines idling and fog so thick I could barely make out the blurry halo of a red wing tip light. My co-pilot, Mac, was sure they would scrub this mission to Koblenz. But the tower let us sit with no red flare "scrubbing" the mission. I was thinking about wasting gas, but nevertheless I ran up the engines now and then to keep them clear.

Someone was telling me on the interphone that a jeep had pulled up near the waist window. I knew someone was clambering up to the flight deck. I twisted as much as my flak suit and Mae West would allow me, in time to see the Group Commander, Colonel Jones, leaning over my shoulder. It's fair to say I had never talked to my CO, much less been this close to him before. Now he had his hand on my shoulder in a fatherly way, and was explaining that this instrument take-off in dense fog was strictly voluntary.

Here I was, on January 1, 1945, with new captain's bars and more optimism than good sense. "Yes sir! We'll do it", I replied to his question of whether we would volunteer to go. He slapped me on the shoulder and said something to the effect that I could turn off the taxi strip if I changed my mind.

We inched forward closer to take-off position and I ran up the engines again. There was plenty of time (at least it seemed so) to go over the checklist once more. Mac and I decided that on take off I would stay completely on instruments and he would try to help guide our roll by trying to watch the edge of the runway. We had our engineer kneel between the seats for whatever assistance he could give.

The plane ahead disappeared in the fog as he turned onto the runway. I can't remember how the tower could see to tell us "clear for take-off". Clear? What an exaggeration! Anyway we got our Liberator lined-up with the runway and I set the gyro compass on zero. This would have to be a needle and ball take-off.

The engines roared as I pushed the throttles full forward and released the brakes. One last look at the edge of the runway and a glance straight ahead at the gray nothing. I told our engineer to call out airspeed so my eyes could stay on the gyro and the needle and ball. As we got close to lift-off speed I yelled, "Give me air speed quicker!" Over the roar of the engines and the bouncing plane, Davis thought I said *wheels-up*. He pushed the safety button and wrestled the gear lever up! There must have been practically no weight on the wheels so they started to retract.

What was that grinding sound? I felt like the plane was tipped. Out of the corner of my eye I saw Mac knock the gear lever back down--then we bounced again, struggling into the air and I called for wheels up. Watching the artificial horizon, air speed and rate of climb, the B-24 kept climbing to about 2000 feet before we broke out of the clouds. It was sunny with the rising sun painting the cloud tops orange. It was beautiful, like an orange sea. I signaled Mac to fly it for a while.

When I realized what had happened I could feel my tense legs shaking! We climbed to over 12,000 feet to form our squadron by firing colored flares so they'd recognize us. Then we headed for our bridge target. We saw oily black smoke coming up from one of our planes that crashed on take-off. Colonel Jones apparently grounded the rest of the Group, so those of us already up proceeded to target with only 23 ships in our three squadrons. We were flying as the low left squadron lead with 1000 lb. general purpose bombs and three smoke bombs to signal the other ships when to drop.

The flak was moderate over the target on this New Years Day and I don't recall if we picked up any flak holes or not. We didn't need any more excitement after that take-off. How much luck can you expect in one day?

For a while we kidded our superb engineer by calling him "*Wheels Up Davis*". It wasn't really funny and we quit saying it. They could have just as well have called me *tongue-tied Wanner* or *mush mouth*. We talked about the dense fog we had that morning for a long time. Somewhere we heard the estimate that visibility was 50 yards at take-off. Wow! Half a football field, which isn't much when you are traveling 130 mph trying to get airborne. I would have guessed it was a lot less than 50 yards, at least when we first started taxiing.

I'll never forget looking out of the cockpit window and barely seeing my left navigation light. What a way to start New Year's Day! But! Only six more missions to go!!

HOLD A GRUDGE! WHO ME?

Have you ever looked back at your military days and thought of those people whose sole purpose seemed to be to make everyone's life miserable? If there was a silver lining to these people, they had the effect of bonding you and your newfound friends together at a time when you really needed friends.

As a cadet in SAACC I had an upper classman who wasn't exactly fond of me. I never knew why because my conversations with him were always, "Yes sir, No sir, and No excuse sir". Maybe I reminded him of someone that he disliked. Whatever the reason, regrettably, he decided to give me his own brand of special attention.

When he would jump in my bay (bunk area), to start the usual upperclassman harassment, I could count on him putting me in a "swinging brace" (exaggerated rigid attention) until I started turning blue. He was talented at catching me breaking some rule that no one had ever heard of before. In a sort of helpless anger I could only fantasize punching him right on his red sunburned nose or imagine him tumbling down the barracks steps. But alas, nothing like that ever happened. My mental revenge came later when he washed out of flight training. I always believed this would be the greatest indignity that could ever befall him. Especially if he could have known (or cared) that I made it all the way through flight training. Naturally I wouldn't want him to know it was by the skin of my teeth.

Some of us can remember a TAC Officer during our pre-flight cadet training at San Antonio who, as a reward to us for winning a parade competition, made us drill for an extra hour or so on that same day. This was to make certain that we would win the next one for him. Other squadrons were headed for town on passes by the time we got back to our barracks, exhausted.

There was no other description that ever seemed as adequate in describing him as, "C.S." We usually tacked on S.O.B. just to insure accuracy. He later got into the cadet flight program in class 43L, one class behind ours. After we got our wings and gold bars we saw him on the base at Fort Worth, where we were going through B-24 Transition School. We would pass him on the street when he was either walking or driving and loudly proclaim to each other what we thought of a certain TAC Officer that we had had at San Antonio. The ultimate blow to his ego must have been when his first crew refused to fly with him. I wonder why?

Then there was a Coffeyville, Kansas flight instructor in BT-13's who I loved to hate. He won all of the air battles by beating my legs black and blue with the joystick when I erred in a maneuver, or if he made me airsick, he laughed uproariously. He sent me up for an E-ride (elimination ride) with the Squadron CO, which everyone expected would end my flying career, but I was so relaxed, having assumed that I was finished as a pilot, that I did everything right. I got another instructor and as luck would have it, he was the roommate of the first one. His mind was already made up to "wash me out" before I even got the Vultee Vibrator off the ground. His approach for teaching me something was to deliberately make me sick. He was notoriously successful at that. So, off I went on my last E-ride.

Naturally, I was completely discouraged, but on that last “Washing Machine” ride with the Squadron Commander, I flew like a bird! I couldn’t do anything wrong. He gave me a third instructor from another squadron. He must have been a merciful teacher, because he got me through Basic Flight Training with only a few gremlins riding with me.

Being a less than forgiving type, I thought of that first BT-13 instructor when I was flying the “Big Ones” with four powerful engines. The thought that he was probably still back there in Coffeyville, sitting in the back seat of a BT-13, beating some poor cadet’s knees.

From there on, through Advanced Flight Training in Altus, Oklahoma and B-24 Transition in Fort Worth, Texas, things went very well. Wallace, O’Leary and I had a recent returnee from Polesti, Major Kilgore—an excellent instructor. We were then ordered to Combat Crew Training in Colorado Springs where our crew met for the first time, then to the 8th Air Force in England via the Queen Elizabeth.

Time went fast and there were no more hassles. I guess my hostility was directed toward Hitler and the Third Reich after seeing our planes go down in smoke and flame and having the nights sometimes shattered by buzz bombs landing nearby. That is, not until we had been in the 700th Squadron for 4 months. Those were nerve-racking days in September 1944 and the only slight respite from military worries and responsibilities was an occasional three-day pass for the crew. We had not been off base for some time and there was no doubt in my mind that the crew deserved a pass. I wasn’t inclined to use superlatives very much in those days, but I knew that every member of that crew was damned good, so I was ready to ride a bike down to the orderly room and request that we get a few days leave in London.

Many weeks before, one of our hut-mates who had finished his required missions as a squadron leader was made CO of the 700th Squadron. We hadn’t known him very long, nor very well, but he always seemed like a good guy and almost always wore a big smile.

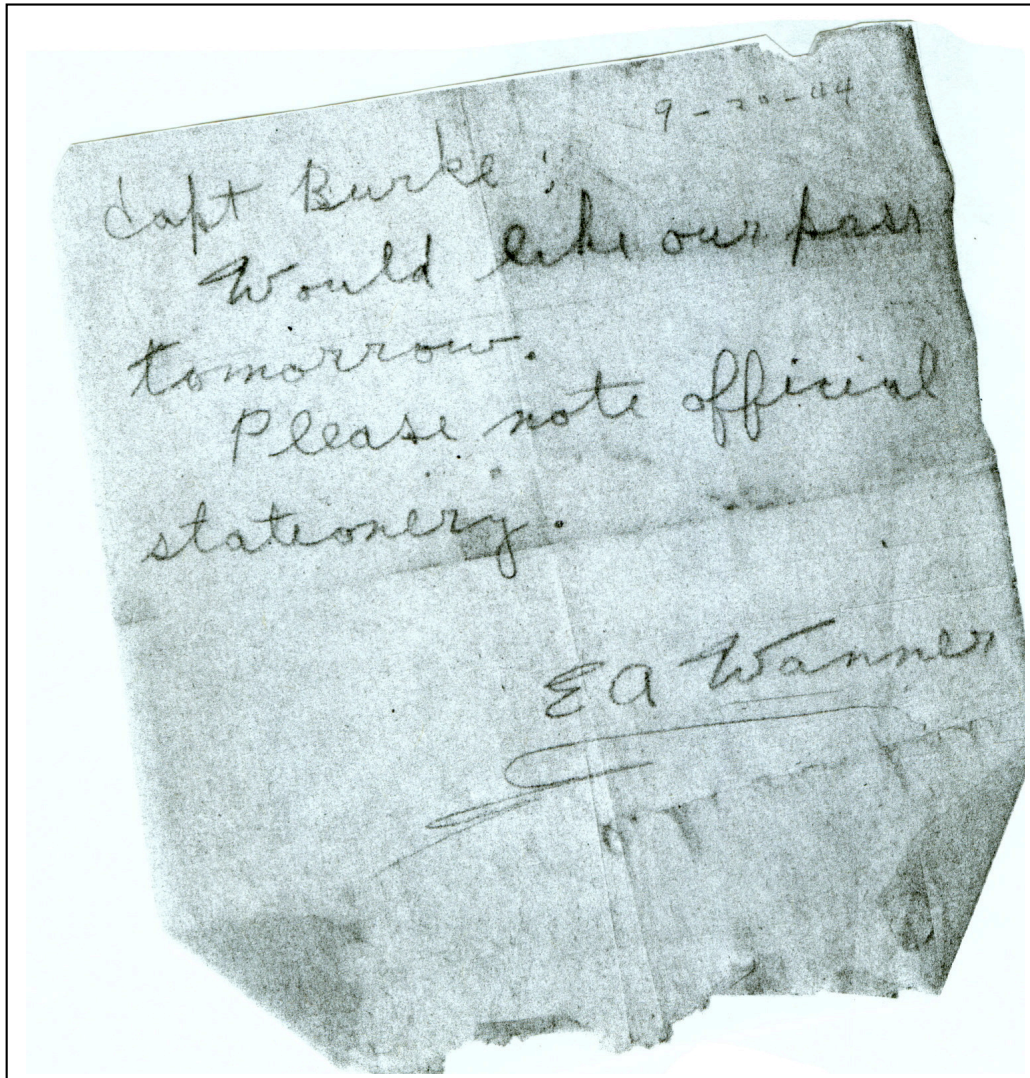
Well, when I got to Squadron Headquarters, I leaned the bike against the wall outside and hurried inside only to find that the CO wasn’t there. The orderly said I could write a note to him requesting a pass for my crew. The problem was he couldn’t find any paper---in an Orderly Room? Ridiculous! Well, after searching and more searching I thought, “ Hell, there must be something to scribble a note on.” At that point one of my less inspired ideas struck me and I went into the latrine and got a sheet of toilet paper. About an hour later the Tanoy (PA system) blared a message for me to report to the Squadron Commander immediately. Back on the borrowed bike, I peddled to go pick up the passes for my crew. But, how wrong I was!

My CO was sitting with his feet up on the desk, a cigar in his mouth, and a couple of buddies sprawled on chairs against the wall in the small office. It is funny how a perfectly vivid image sometimes sticks in your memory. He was holding my note in his hand and there was not the usual smile on his face. Only his buddies were smirking as I got chewed-out for the toilet paper note. At first I thought my former hut-mate, and now CO, was kidding. When I asked if this was really on the level, I found out. It was! I saluted and left.

The toilet paper note might have been OK, except at the bottom I couldn't resist scribbling: "Please note official stationery". Well, it was obviously the wrong thing to do to a new CO that I thought I could joke with! Oh! Well, what do you expect from a 22 year-old pilot and a CO who was maybe even younger? Yeh, I was mad as I pedaled back to the hut with no passes. Even then, I think I realized that my warped sense of humor had got me in trouble, but the rest of the crew were innocent bystanders.

When I got my captain's railroad tracks some time later, as a squadron leader, my CO told me that I could call him by his first name again. He was a major then. I thanked him, but it never would have felt natural for me to dispense with military courtesy at that stage.

Who said that I wasn't very good at letting bygones be bygones? However, by this time, maybe, I have mellowed a little bit. By the way, Johnny B., I still have that note.



ON THE WAY HOME

What kind of a war souvenir is a Colt 45 automatic? I had field stripped it and put parts in my shave kit and the rest in a musette bag. I was taking my Base Clearance sheet around for signature and everything had gone smoothly until I arrived at the Squadron Orderly Room.

“Captain, sir, I can’t sign this until you turn in your 45. And sir, please don’t tell me that you lost it over Germany, ‘cause I can’t clear you from the base till I get it, sir.” I imagined that the PFC had a smug look, but he was probably just bored with guys like me that wanted a keepsake. I have no idea why I ever wanted a 45, so I dug down in the bags and reassembled it, then gave it a pat and turned it in. I wouldn’t want anything to delay my departure from the ETO.

Staggering over to where the GI truck waited for us, I shoved up my B-4 bag and my parachute bag, then handed up my musette bag. In the few minutes left, I talked to Mac, my co-pilot, who had volunteered to stay and fly five more missions as 1st pilot. Hated to leave him behind, but we would meet in a couple of years as buddies and civilians in Texas. I glanced over at Johnny, our squadron CO. We had had some differences, but I nodded to him and clambered in the truck just as it pulled away. I waved at Mac and Tibenham and we were gone.

Luck was with us and, due to turbulence, a bunch of us were loaded into a medical evacuation DC-4 instead of the originally intended wounded returnees. It was a long ride from England to the Azores, with canvas benches and litters along the sides of the cabin. It was certainly a lot better than going home by boat. I felt a little guilty about riding in style while wounded GIs had to wait for smoother air.

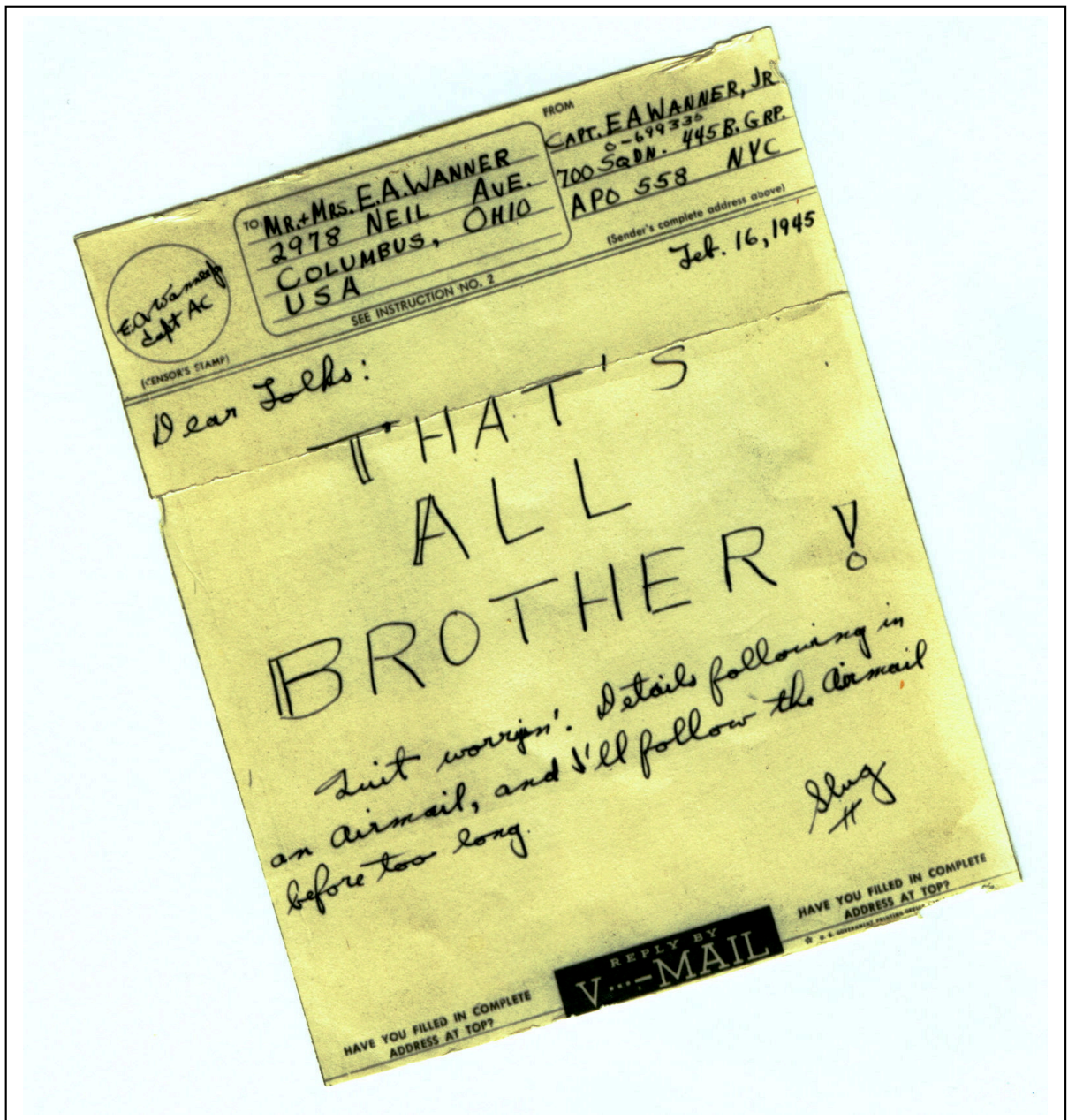
One of the aircraft’s civilian airline pilots came back in the cabin and was talking to some guys up forward. It was boring sitting there after the first hour and I had just finished reading Stars and Stripes. I looked up and saw two groups of Air Corps guys in circles. The two groups each had their own crap game going and I watched for a few minutes, then realized that the two airline pilots were also in there throwing dice.

That woke me up, because I hadn’t seen a third civilian pilot on board. Squatting down beside the airline captain, I asked: “Who’s minding the store?”

He grinned and said: “The engineer. Go on up there if you want to.” I did, and the engineer was sitting there in the co-pilot seat reading a magazine as the autopilot clicked away. I sat in the left seat about four or more hours talking to the engineer. Every once in awhile one of the civilian pilots would poke his head in the door and the engineer would say: “All OK.” Now and then I’d look down at the ocean when there weren’t clouds. There was a lot of water down there, so I was frequently checking the cylinder head temperatures, oil pressure, etc. It would be a lonesome place to go swimming! Eventually one of the pilots came up and took my place and made a course correction.

When we landed in the Azores to refuel and eat, I felt excited. It was balmy warm (unlike Merry Ol' England) and the mess hall had lots of salads and fruits. Slowly we were getting nearer to New York and the USA would soon be in sight.

Through some haze we saw the Statue of Liberty. In just minutes, we were on the ground. I remember some GIs kissing the ground--can't remember if I did or not. When I could I phoned home, then went out with a friend to a diner. We each ordered two milk shakes. Home at last!



Tibbenham, England



1926
5-year old wannabe

1945
*Receiving The Distinguished
Flying Cross*



BLESS 'EM ALL

I never slept on an aircraft while on active duty so it shouldn't surprise me now that I couldn't doze off on our way to London in a commercial 747. Maybe some former pilots are still backseat drivers like I am. My leg muscles tense on what would be the rudders (the poor guy's seat in front of me) when the plane is about to land. At least the boredom was over now and was replaced by adrenaline when we touched down. The thought of seeing England again after 45 years was exciting.

I fought my reflexes to make myself drive on the "wrong side" of the English roads. The only auto driving I did there during WWII was for a duration of about 3 minutes and that was in a Jeep on our air base. It was sort of a "Deja Vu" feeling since driving did bring about a flood of words or phrases that we use to hear when the British gave directions on how to find where you were going. It seemed like we were always asking directions when Sandy, our navigator, wasn't along. "Just go straight-away..." the British would say. "You cawn't miss it" or "You'll go to the 'round-about' and turn...Rawther narrow road...If you turn left there is a red building at the corner and a little further down you'll see an old Norman Church with a beautiful courtyard and then there's the Rover's Inn. But don't go left. Go to the right and straight-away you'll see a hill on the right and just past..." Well, you know how it went.

At least now I know why I always use to get so mixed up with their directions. They were trying to be helpful and they gave me so much detail about the road that I wasn't supposed to take that I never could retain the information about the road that I was supposed to take. All I can say now is: Bless 'em all!

Without a doubt the British must have gotten sick of Yanks. Remember the cabbies always stopping for American GIs while passing up British officers (bigger tip). They suffered in silence when we GIs threw money around because our paychecks were larger by comparison. Sometimes we didn't hold our liquor too well when we had a three day pass. Someone told me that the British comment about the Yanks in England was: "Overpaid, over-sexed and over here!"

I do remember one gray morning my B-24 and crew were returning from a practice bombing mission. As usual, Joe, our bombardier, had hit the pickle-barrel right in the middle. There had been moans and groans before we had taken off because I had insisted that the whole crew go on this training mission. There was a little trick that I used once in awhile to reduce the griping. I'd bribe them by promising to do some buzzing on the way back to our base.

The patchwork of green farm fields flowed beneath us from our altitude of about 5,000 feet. So far Mac, our co-pilot, nor anyone else on the crew had come up with an idea of what we might use for a low buzzing pass.

It was either Kuepker or Swede that used the intercom to tell us that there was a haystack at 10 o'clock that would be great to buzz. Well, I admit, that sounded pretty good to me and having

caught a glimpse of it off my left wing tip, I started flying a left-hand traffic pattern just as if it were to be landing on the haystack. Unfortunately, I missed and had to repeat the pattern--but at least it gave me a chance to drop down to under 1,000 feet. Now we were very low and lined up on the stack.

We got closer and I dipped the nose way down so we were only about 20 or 30 feet above the field. No one on the ground would pay much attention to a lone B-24. There were thousands of them in England. And we were hidden behind the hedgerows separating the fields. Now we pulled up as the hedgerows rushed at us--then down again on the other side. Just ahead was the haystack! All at once I could see the faces of field hands looking toward us! Some diving off the haystack, some jumping off a hay cart, pitchforks were flying. I hadn't seen them before! Pulling up steeply it felt like we were standing that Liberator right on it's tail.

I heard some yells and whoops on the intercom and I asked Green in the tail turret what he could see. He said something like: "We've distributed hay all over that field". So, did you ever wonder why some "Limeys" hated us at times? Now you know! And no wonder! And they were wonderful people, too. I've always regretted that dumb action by some 20 year old Yanks----this pilot and his co-pilot. But, to the British, just like in the song, "Bless 'em all--the long and the short and the tall."

THE CUTEST BARMAID

It is sort of like doing an instrument approach. Visiting England, driving on the wrong side of the road, trying to figure which road we had just crossed and trying to find where we were on our map. My wife and I were driving to my old air base south of Norwich. I had to see it just once more. I had told my wife about the little pub that we had stopped in from time to time during WWII. There were still some of those quaint thatched roofs in the little village of Diss. Just like I remembered.

There was the pub up ahead! I knew “we couldn’t miss it.” It probably had warm beer on tap, just like before. I told my wife about this pretty little barmaid with the cute figure and long dark hair that worked there. I mentioned that we ought to stop in to see if she was still there. My wife gave me a funny look and said: “Do you think you’ll recognize this pretty 65+ year old barmaid with the cute figure?”

There are times when you just can’t turn back the clock. I didn’t stop.

TRAIN STATION AT DISS



445TH MEMORIAL TIBENHAM

