

I Remember...

You never met Ozzie but I know you would have liked him. He was an 18 year old teenager who was sent to Grafton Underwood to do a man's job as a ball turret (belly) gunner on a B-17 Flying Fortress. Ozzie lived in the same barracks at the airdrome that I did. He would probably be classed as a loner and didn't partake in the off-duty activities such as football, baseball, card games (such as poker) and when he wasn't flying he seemed content to stay in the barracks and write letters home, or read books, or listen to the radio. He never went to the villages even though I invited him on several occasions.

Dateline – March 9, 1944

We were alerted the night before that there would be a maximum effort mission the following day,. Usually when we were alerted I didn't sleep too well, wondering if my crew would be picked to fly. It's four AM and you hear the jeep drive up to yor barracks, the Officer of the Day would walk in, switch on the lights, blow that damn whistle, and read a list of names of those scheduled to fly. "Breakfast at 5"... "Briefing at 6"... "Take off at 7"... he would shout and then he would give another blast of the whistle. I swore that one day I would shove that whistle down his throat.

At breakfast I told Ozzie that when he got back from the mission we were going to bicycle to Geddington and I would show him the most beautiful village in England. I told him about Eleanor's Cross, the bridge, the pubs, the beautiful church and the old headstones, the schoolhouse and the row houses and, most of all, the wonderful, cordial, friendly people he would meet. Ozzie was reluctant, but he finally consented to go into Geddington with me.

Our target for the day was Berlin. We knew what to expect - heavy anti-aircraft shelling (flak so thick and heavy that you could practically walk on it). The Luftwaffe was expected to put up all available fighter aircraft to keep us from reaching our target. We knew we would lose some bombers but what happened was the unexpected. Another group of Flying Fortresses were flying at a higher altitude when they crossed over our formation and released their bombs on our group. Some of the bombs hit the Fortress that Ozzie was flying in and cut the plane in half. The Fortress went into a dive and no one saw any parachutes come out. That evening was one of the few I did not go into Geddington. Ozzie didn't come back and he would never see the cross, or the bridge, or St. Mary Magdalene's, or the Star or White Hart. Ozzie would never meet my Geddington friends. OZZIE DIDN'T COME BACK.



Silver Dollar

The Sequel...

44 years later in September of 1988, the 384th Bomb Group held their 11th reunion in Savannah, Georgia. In the memorabilia room was the photo of the B-17 cut in half. Written on the photo were three words. "2 got out". I asked a member "WHO WROTE THAT?" He pointed to a person at the other end of the room. I went over to him to find out what he knew about the two crewmen who got out of the diving B-17. I couldn't believe it! I was talking to OZZIE! My skin tingled and I broke into a nervous sweat. It was like the dead had come back to life! We embraced, stuttered and stammered, reminisced, and probably shed a tear or two. Ozzie never saw Geddington, but who knows, maybe someday. OZZIE IS BACK!!!



**Left - Arthur (Ozzie) Osepchook (BT), Right - John Plotz (WG)
Silver Dollar Survivors
With my father Edmund Zieba (center) at the 1996 384th BG Reunion**

The above narrative was written by Edmund Zieba, veteran of 30 missions with the 384th Bomb Group (H), 546th Bomb Squadron, sometime after the 1988 384th reunion in Savannah GA. He spoke nothing of his service until after he attended his first reunion, and then started speaking at private engagements with fellow World War II veterans.

He was never comfortable speaking of these terrifying events of his youth with anyone else. I never understood until I served myself, and I was never exposed to the horror he witnessed.

He and his wife Jean made several trips back to Geddington for reunions or to visit with the friends he made while stationed in Northamptonshire. During his last visit to England, he suffered a heart attack and died instantly. We, his family, call it irony and we call it a blessing. He loved the quaint country hamlet that was, in a sense, his transit point from youth to manhood. He, like so many of his friends, died in the ETO. It just happened 55 years later. He was proud of his contribution, and we were so very proud of him. He was a part of "The Greatest Generation".