

**Ralph E. Austin**  
**Armorer/Waist Gunner, W. V. Henderson Crew**  
**546<sup>th</sup> Bomb Squadron**

*I have two pictures of the crew of Capt. William V. Henderson. My father, SSgt. Ralph E. Austin (11 Nov 1923 - 20 Jun 2006), served as his armorer / waist gunner.*

*Also have scan of Belgian Franc note with the signatures of part of the crew, presumably from the mission when they were forced to land just inside the front lines and were fed by a civilian family. Ralph Neyer is among the signers of the note: he was KIA in Oct 1944. The following is a description written of the events by my father:*

"We were shot up real bad on one mission and had to land in Brussels. On flight from target I saw object in sun at 11 am. Radioed the pilot and got an answer from outside. It was fighter pilot, Big Friend from Little Friend. Don't shoot. I am watching you until you get over enemy lines. Pilot called base in Brussels but no answer. It was tea time. I shot 50 red flares. He asked if I had used all flares and I said yes. He said prepare for landing. Pilot ground looped plane on ground to stop it short of 20 foot hole. Tried to start the only 1 ½ motors we had but couldn't. No gas. Air Force flew in 3 engines next morning and returned to base in it. We were so close to front lines that their food supply hadn't caught up. One fellow on ground crew lived in Brussels. He took us down dark alley to café. The lady fixed us sausage, bacon, eggs, potatoes, coffee, biscuits and gravy. Were we ever hungry! We asked her what we owed her she said nothing that had liberated them. We left money on table. You could see Germans walking street in front. He asked if we had any protection. We said yes as each one had .44 pistol under our flying suit. We only had one death on our plane and no injuries. Radio operator flying with us from another plane. When he was hit while checking to see if the bombs were clear of bomb bay. Nothing much I could do as first aid man. We went to his funeral. No one told us what to expect at one of those. We were standing at attention while Taps was played a 51 & 47 flew over at about 500 feet. Needless to say no one knew how scared we were but laundry lady. Chaplin asked me to write his grandmother and tell her how he died. His folks were killed before he was old enough to enlist. His grandmother signed his release to go in Air Force. I wrote his grandmother and about 60 days I received letter from his aunt. His grandmother died about week before he was killed. She thanked me for my letter."

Also, if anyone can tell me the name of Henderson's plane I would very much appreciate it, though it seems to me that Dad told me it had no name. Its number would do!

Don Austin  
[austinrdon@hotmail.com](mailto:austinrdon@hotmail.com)