

On Sept. 18, 1966, a reunion of sorts was held at the home of Sturt Gordon in Mendham, N. J. In attendance were four crew members of a B 17 bomber during W W 2, Maxwell B. Hope, Jerry Jerome, Stuart Gordon, and myself, Jules Levison. We contacted Ted Hawkins in Framingham, Mass by phone and all those there had a very fine time. During the reunion I mentioned the fact that I had kept a diary of our missions and everyone expressed a desire to see it, so here goes.

Before presenting the diary, however, I would like to take the liberty of saying a few words about the crew and events leading up to our thirty five missions, as I remember them from twenty one years ago. The crew consisted of Jerry Jerome pilot, Harold Bogli co-pilot, Ted Hawkins navigator, Stu Gordon toggler, Russ Holtz engineer, Arlin Nyborg waist gunner, Max Hope tail gunner, John Asher ball turret gunner, and Jules Levison radio operator. We took our training at Rapid City, S. Dakota and I must admit that we were ^{A PRACTY} motley crew. I'm sure we were last in efficiency during our training. As I remember they were giving odds that we wouldn't even get out of Rapid City alive, much less finish 35 missions. About the only thing I remember about our training was the nights in Rapid City or Deadwood, drinking Whiskey Sours in the rough, getting crocked, Jerry playing the piano and everybody singing. I don't think we ever completed a practice mission, however we finished our training in one piece, plus 35 missions, so I guess we weren't so bad after all or else the good Lord was with us. Maybe it was a combination of both.

The next step was across the Atlantic on the Ile De France. What a nightmare! It took about 8 days, we couldn't eat the food and had to stand in line for hours for Hershey bars. Everyone was seasick and Hope or Nyborg kept pointing an empty 45 to his head and moaning "Oh, if it was only loaded" Well it wasn't loaded and we arrived in England and were stationed at a place called Grafton Underwood. This brings us Feb 6, 1945 and my diary

One that fateful morning of Feb 6 th I heard for the first time a guy come into the barracks, turn on the lights, wake me up and say "Levison 923, north south runway" Of course he didn't wake me up as I had been awake all night pitching and turning wondering what my first mission would be like. I got to briefing and found out the target was plan A-Merseberg, plan B-Berlin. Right away I decided that things were going to be rough. Merseburg is an oil refinery and the most heavily defended target in Germany. There are supposed to be at least 1300 Flak guns there although at the time I was fat, dumb, and happy and didn't realize just how much of a boom, 1300 flak guns made. I don't have to say much about Berlin. Got out to the plane and found out it was a brand new one and it was the first mission for both of us. The pilot was MacKellar and I'll never forget the help and comfort he gave me as I was pretty excited and nervous. He said "Levison, when you come back from this one you'll be a veteran" I was really on the ball and for the first and last time I forgot my flak helmet. The tail gunner who I consider one of the luckiest guys alive gave me his extra helmet. Mac, the navigator, the waist gunner and ball turret gunner were later killed on their 35 th mission, but that will come later. We were all set to go and had started taxiing when there was a delay. Finally they scrubbed the mission. We found out later that a mechanic had run a plane into the mud while taxiing and caused the delay. Everybody on the mission wanted to buy the guy a drink but it probably cost him some stripes.

The next day we got up to go again and this time it was to a jet plant and there wasn't supposed to be much flak so it looked like an easy one. The weather was bad tho and we got Red Red (Cancel Mission) before we got out to the plane.

Feb 8 th we were going to another comparatively easy target in North Germany and were almost to the Dutch coast when we got a recall

signal and had to turn around and come back. It made me rather mad as it seemed like I would never get my first mission completed.

Feb 9 th the target was Lutzkendorf another oil refinery in the Leipzig area. This time we made it and entered Germany through France around Frankfurt. They put up a little flak but it wasn't even close. We got over our target and dropped our bombs(12-500GPs) by instruments as the target was covered. One of the other squadrons did not drop their bombs and while we were waiting for them to drop we got some flak that was really close. On the way back we went too close to Frankfurt and they put some more flak up at us. I looked out from under my flak helmet, took one look at it and decided I didn't want to see any more. All you see is a ferocious puff of black smoke unless it is really close and then you will see a red burst. If you see red that's the time to really start praying in earnest and say sweet things to your parachute. We also ran into some bad prop wash and almost crashed into a plane Holtz was riding in but Mac pulled us out okay. Prop wash, con trails and bad weather have killed a lot more men than enemy action. We landed and I had finally completed my first mission.

For the next four days I was scheduled to fly but everyone was scrubbed because of bad weather. Some were easy missions and some were hard. The hard one made us happy when they were scrubbed while the easy ones made us rather angry. But then you never know and sometimes the ones that look easy turn out to be your last one, so I didn't do much complaining.

On Feb. 14 th I was not scheduled to fly but Jerry's brother decided to get sick so I had to fly in his place. I was kind of sore at first but later on was glad. Russ Holtz also flew on the crew and the pilot was Carlson. At the request of the Russians the target was Dresden as the Germans were sending a lot of traffic through that town. We hit the marshalling yards with 8-500 gp's and 2 M-17 incendiaries.

The Germans say that all we did was kill a lot of evacuees but personally it wouldn't surprise me to find out that we knocked out a locomotive or two. On the way in we had to fly over the Zeider Zee which is the home of Herman and his 4 guns. Herman is a German stationed on the Zeider Zee who fired his 4 guns at you when you fly over. He was a corporal and one day he actually shot down a plane and they made him a sergeant. Well they must have made him a staff because he got a plane in the group ahead of us. We saw it go down in a tight spin and only saw one chute open. It wasn't a pretty sight.

On the way home our gas was getting low so after much discussion we decided to land in Brussels. I sent in a message to Combat Wing that we were landing there so we wouldn't be M. I. A. We had quite a time in Brussels until our money ran out. Nite Clubs, clean sheets good food etc. We were there for 4 days. On the second day the weather cleared and we could have taken off but the pilot was in town drunk. The next day we were all set to take off, there were 19 men in the plane as we were taking back a crew that had crashed. Everybody had a bottle of beer and the pilot was running up the engines with one hand and drinking beer with the other.

The next mission was on the 19th and the target was right in the heart of the Rhine valley, sometimes referred to as Flak Alley. We flew the grand old ship "Damn Yankee" which had over 100 missions, 97 without an abortion. Flak was moderate over the target but pretty accurate even though it was 10/10. Right before bombs away I felt a burning pain in my gut. I thought I might have gotten hit and good old Nyborg dashed up to help me. It turned out that my heated suit had shorted out and I got quite a burn. We also got quite a laugh out of it afterwards. We saw 2 jet planes but they didn't bother us. We bombed from 26,000 feet using 12-500 GPs and it was 32 below zero. Our complete crew was together for the first time.

The next day we went to Nuremburg and again flew Damn Yankee. Had 6-500gp's and 6 incendiary's. We saw a jet soon after getting into Germany but he was just trying to get our altitude. The target was 8/10 covered and as we were the first group over we didn't get much flak. The group behind us got it though and Hope saw one plane go down in flames with no chutes coming out. On the way back Hope fell asleep and we thought he had passed out. Nyborg had to dash back and wake him. Clouds kept us on oxygen for a long time.

The next day Feb 21 we went right back to Nuremburg carrying 5-500 RDX and 5 incendiary's and flying Damn Yankee again. There wasn't as much flak as the day before as they must have run out of it. It didn't make me mad, tho.

Feb 22, 1945 the 8 th Air Force tried a low level bombing attack for the first time. Germany was divided into three parts, each assigned to the first, second and third division. Each group had it's own target which was a railroad yard in hope of knocking out German transportation. 6000 planes took part in this and our target was Velyen. We went in around 10,000 feet with 2-500 GP's and really made mince meat out of that railroad yard. It was a perfectly visual day and I watched the bombs hit right on the trains and tracks. They made quite an explosion and one of the funniest things I ever saw was a train pulling out of the station with most of the cars on fire. I bet the poor engineer was really sweating it out. No fighters or flak. This one was also my Air Medal Mission. Big Deal.

The next three days were spent on pass in Big L. (London to you) My next mission was Big B. (Berlin to you) We flew Dark Angel which was a poor ship and later ended up in the English Channel. We went in at 27,000 feet carrying 6-500 GP's and 4 incendiary's. We had a different co-pilot as Jerry and Bogli had a little squabble which ended with Jerry punching Bogli in the nose. There was plenty of

flak and you could hear it go "whoom" and then hear "tingle tingle" as it hit the ship. You try to make yourself as small as possible and as I am throwing chaff on the bomb run, the more flak there is the faster I throw it. We got two big holes in the wing and one in the tail. Jerry yelled Bombs Away by mistake and Stu dropped the bombs a little too soon. It was his only bad release the entire tour. We were right over the city so it was okay and we kept comforting him by telling him that he probably killed a bunch of pregnant women.

My 8 th mission was Leipzig and we flew a 44 th squadron ship. It was a good plane and we carried 10 500 GP's and came in at 26,000 feet. The target was pretty well covered and we bombed by instruments. There was plenty of flak but it wasn't accurate.

We started off the month of March by going to Bruchal. We had 8 500 GP's and 4 incendiaries and we came in at 20,000 feet. We dropped our bombs and saw no flak. The high squadron did not drop their's and had to go around again. While waiting for them the lead navigator messed up and took us over a flak area. The pilot of the lead ship was hit and lunged forward on the stick putting his plane in a dive. We were flying in the hole directly under him and Jerry was forced to dive our plane to keep from colliding with him. I flew up to the ceiling along with the spot jammer and it was then that I realized if the plane ever went in a dive no one would ever get out, because you just can't move. Radios and logs and just about everything were flying around the radio room. As soon as we leveled out Oberski, the spot jammer and myself both grabbed for our chutes as we thought that we were going down. I jerked open the door to the bomb bay to see if the rest of the plane was still there when I heard Jerry say that everything was under control and explain what had happened. It was probably lucky for us we went into a dive as we got out of the flak. Just before we went into the dive a large

piece of flak tore through the plane between Stu and Hawkins, knocking out the heating system and interphone. When I saw the size of the hole between their heads I turned green. Stu looked up at me with that same grin he would get on his face when he had one drink too many and said, " Close, wasn't it ". I was able to fix the interphone but we were very cold and low on gas when we landed.

The next day we went to Rositz. We flew 106 which is a jinx ship as it is always coming back on 2 or 3 engines or with someone dead in it. It was 40 below zero and we carried 18-250 GP's. The flak was intense and we got a number of small holes. On the way back we were running low on gas and I wanted Jerry to land in Brussels but he wouldn't do it. I kept telling him about the beer, broads and nite clubs there but he kept saying we could make England. We got over to England but Hawk's Gee Box wouldn't work and we couldn't find a field. I was working like mad trying to get fixes for us but every field that I could contact was too far away. We found a Limey field but they wouldn't let us land as it was a soft grass runway. Finally Jerry said to put on our parachutes and get ready to bail out. We got up to 3000 feet and Stu spotted a field. It was also a Limey field but we didn't give a damn and Jerry made a beautiful landing on the grass. When we stopped two of our tanks were completely dry and we don't know yet what kept them going. They treated us pretty nice, gave us a big meal and gassed us up and we flew to our base. The entire town turned out to see us as a B 17 had never taken off from this field. Jerry reved up the engines as far as they could go and half way down the runway Holtz gave full flaps and we took off like a P 38. As we turned you could see the startled expression on the peoples face and then Jerry Buzzed the tower and you know they were saying " Look at those crazy Damn Yanks "

The next day was the payoff. We carried 20-250 GP's and went to Hanover. Our wing went up around the North Sea as a diversionary

group in hopes of drawing the German fighters up there while the rest of the 8 th came in through France. We saw a couple of Jet's and the flak was unbearable to impossible. We got several holes in the plane. About this time, after these last three missions I really started sweating it out and longing for the day when I would be through. You realize that these jokers are trying to kill you. Oh well, only 24 more to go.

On the 7 th of March we went to Giessen with 12-500GP's at 23,00 feet. We made runs on the primary and secondary before dropping on Giessen which was the last resort. There was flak but it was in the other squadrons. Better them than us I keep saying.

The next day we went back to hhe Ruhr and Essen. Target was covered and flak inaccurate. It was a short mission and we carried 12 500 GP's and 2 incendiary's. We got up around 7:30 and took off at 11. Our whole crew is together again.

March the 9 th was a dandy. We flew old 106 and went to Kassel. We carried 18-100 GP's and 8 incendiary's, went in at 27,000 feet and it was 40 below zero. It was a perfectly clear day and the flak was terrific. It was exploding all around us for what seemed like hours. Just after Bombs Away flak tore through a bag Nyborg was sitting on grazing his behind and knocking out the oxygen. He went back to bring some oxygen bottles to Hope and when he came back he pointed to his rear end. I went into the waist and was all set to jab him in the behind with morphine but he wouldn't let me. I got back to the radio room and found out the my oxygen had been shot out also so I had to use the other system. We had a lot of trouble with # 3 engine and Jerry told me to change the amplifier. I had to use a walk around bottle and crawl under the radio desk and it was quite a jpb as my mask kept coming off. Finally got it changed and when we landed we found out that flak had hit a part of the supercharger. Jerry said that had it hit 2 inches closer it might have torn the whole wing off.

Bogli and Stu saw a ship blow up into a bunch of little pieces. Oh well, things are rough all over.

March 11 th we went to Bremen by request of the of the Brittish Admirality. I wish the Admiralty would mind their own business. We took 38-100 GP's and had 10/10 coverage. Good thing too as they put up plenty of flak but it was inaccurate.

The 14 th we flew another good old ship, Pauline. We went after a bridge with 6-1000 lbs of bombs. The bridge was near Minden and we only got a little flak from the town. Even Herman let us go by without any trouble. We are flying with a different ball gunner as Asher has pneumonia. This was the day they took pictures of us and Jerry was tearing down the runway with one hand and waving with the other. What a guy.

We went on a 48 hour pass and upon returning went to Berlin. It was on March 18 th and we led the whole 8 th Air Force on what was the largest raid ever made on the German capitol. We led the second element and were the 4 th ship over the target. Some 1300 more followed us. We dropped 5-1000 lb. bombs by instruments with a visual assist. There was plenty of flak but as we were first over we didn't get too much. Saw one jet. For at least 45 minutes after we were going back we could see other groups going in to bomb the city Herr Goering said would never be bombed. What a dope he turned out to be.

March 19 th we went to Plauven and formed over France. Hawk decided to see Paris as it was a clear day. There we were sight-seeing over Paris with 5000 lbs. of bombs. There are spots of Paris and Versailles that are really torn up. There wasn't any flak at the target but the group in front of us and in back of us got hit by bandits. (Enemy planes) We ran low on gas and finally landed at an R A F base at Munston. I sweated plenty getting QDM to the field. We flew our own ship today and have various names for it. Umbriago

Jerry's Playmates, Steady Banging, and the one I like best "Let's go home , Jerome."

The 23 rd we again flew our own ship and went to Gladbach. We carried 34-150 GP's, went in at 25,000 feet on a visual day. Flak was moderate but accurate and we picked up a hole by the tail wheel. I saw a ship blow up. It's hard to describe but first you see a B 17 and then puff, you don't see anything. I imagine that's the best way to cash in your chips, fast and quick like.

March 24 th we flew our shortest mission of only 5 hours to an airfield at Vectra. A perfect mission with no fighters or flak. We carried 16-500 SAP's and they went use that field for a long time. They flew two missions that day but we didn't fly on the second one.

March 26 th we were briefed to go to Zeitz, one of the roughest targets in Germany. We had 10-500 GP's and the mission was 10 hours long. We formed in France and there was bad weather so we didn't even make a run on the primary target, thank God. We made three different bomb runs and finally dropped on Meiningen, although personally I think that we tore hell out of Fritzie Schnitzelbaum's cabbage patch. We were all pretty mad and as Bogli said, Germany is a hell of a place to go sightseeing. We got flak at various places. We couldn't make it back to the base as we were low on gas so we headed for Munston. Our boy, Joe led us down to 300 feet and then we ran into soup. Planes started crashing into each other and Jerry said the Hell with this and we got out of formation and went up to about 5000 feet, and took off by ourselves. I got fixes and QDM's to Munston only to find it closed in by weather. We then went to Woodbridge and landed very short of gas. We didn't get back until the next day and missed a rough raid. They were hit by jets and flak. Winner and Gus a couple of boys who lived in our barracks went down. They got a direct hit in the cockpit and the plane went down. They might have bailed out. It made us all sick as they were good guys.

March 28 th we went to Berlin for the third and last time. We went in at 25,000 feet with 4-1000 lbs of bombs and 2-500 incendiary's. Flak wasn't too bad and we didn't get any holes. Formed in France and hit fog on the way home. We took off by ourselves and were among the first to land.

March 30 th, our group flew it's 300 th mission and it was no. 23 for me. Once more the admiralty requested that we go to Bremen. Those bastards (The British Admiralty) make me mad. We carried 12-500 gp's, it was 42 below zero and the mission took 7 hours. Flak was unbearable to impossible and just before " Bombs Away " I heard the old familiar " Whom " and " Tingle Tingle " and knew that we had been hit hard. A piece of flak as large as a fist tore through the bomb bay door. Had it hit the bombs we would have had it. We flew " Pro Kit " which is a very cold ship but over the bomb run I was hotter than hell. By this time the whole damn crew was pretty flak happy. Hope would lay in bed looking up at the ceiling moaning over and over again, " Boy that flak was heavy " Practically every night we went into Brigstock and got crocked.

The 31 st we flew our own ship again and carried 18-300 GP's. The mission lasted 9 hours and all the big wheels were in it. Lt. Col Thacker led us and he had a hot shot Major Bombardier and Navigator. The target was covered and photo recon showed that we missed the target by 39 miles. How about that †

Some bright boy with a lot of brass sitting behind a desk decided that waist guns were unnecessary so they were taken out. Nyborg had to fly ball turret for us. Now whenever there were bandits in the air^A radio operator instead of manning a gun has 3 alternatives. 1. He can take his chute, go to the waist door and pray. 2. Throw rocks and make faces at the jets. 3. He can hide mitt de condensors unt reziztors. I usually took the third alternative.

April 3 rd we went to Kiel once more at the request of the admiralty

These guys are giving me a hard time. We flew our own ship and went in at 25,000 feet. It was a good thing the target was covered as they really put up the flak. Even Oberski the radar jammer had to do a little work.

The next day we had a low level attack on one of Germany's few remaining airfields. We carried 38-100 clusters of frags. we had to make 2 runs and the mission lasted 8 hours and 30 minutes. We really blew hell out of the field. One 17 went down in flames. Nyborg was having a rough time in the ball turret. We flew good old 673 again. Our ground crew are really on the ball as we now have the best ship on the field.

Mission 27 was back to Leipzig. We flew our own ship, and carried 18-250GP's and 2 incendiary's. We got a green light from the tower and started down the runway. They flashed us a red light and Jerry had to put on the brakes. As we were taxing back we saw the whole sky light up with a series of explosions. We knew a plane had blown up but didn't know who it was until we got back. When 18-250 Gp's and 2 incendiary's blow up it's like the end of the world. It was pitch dark one moment and everything was a bright orange the next. The weather was bad and con trails very persistent. Nyborg and Hope saw 2 B 17's in the group behind us collide and go down. Flak was light but just after Bombs Away two more planes in our high squadron collided. One went straight down while the other broke up into little pieces. Hope saw one chute and we were later to find out that four more men got out. They were captured by civilians who killed two of them. The other two were rescued by German soldiers and taken to a P W camp from which they latter escaped. We heard the story from one of them. The kid was so nervous he could hardly talk. When we returned we found out that it was MacKellar who I flew my first mission with that had crashed upon taking off and blew up. His regular navigator, waist gunner, ball gunner also went down with

him. It was their 35 th mission. The nite before the ball gunner and I had a drink together in Brigstock. The bombardier was scheduled to fly but was taken off at the last minute to wait for a promotion. The mission before Mac's engineer had finished. He was so happy he started firing his guns over the English Channel. One bullet accidentally hit the tail and grazed the tail gunner putting him in the hospital thus saving his life. The bombardier finally finished his missions the same day I did. He stayed drunk for a week. Too bad, because these boys were all well liked. This was some day.

The next day we went to Hit_zacker which turned out to be a milk run. We had another ball gunner flying with us. On the 9 th of April we went to Kurstenfeldbruk an airfield near Munich. The secondary that day was Munich and we were all glad when we hit the primary. Nyborg and Hope were going to school and we had a different ball and tail gunner. No flak but there were plenty of jets that were beaten off by our excort. The ball gunner was plenty nervous as this was his first mission and his radioman and copilot had been killed on their first missions.

My 30 th mission was to Frieham a suburb of Munish. I really sweated out this mission as I always dreaded going to Munich. I had a hunch B. Eder a good friend of mine had gone down at Munich. We dropped our bombs and had to make a sharp left turn to get away from the Munich Flak. Our Element Leader didn't turn soon enough so Jerry said the hell with him and climbed up out of formation and banked to the left. We lost the formation but soon picked them up and missed the flak. Jerry really had the right idea. He used to say "Until I drop the bombs I'M working for Uncle Sam but after that I'm working for Mary and Butch.

The next two days we went to Royan, France to knock out some gun installations in preparation for a French drive. There was very little flak and they were nice missions. On the second day we carried

Two 2000 lb. and 2-1000 lb. bombs. The 2000 lb. are really big ones.

April 16 th we went to Regensburg, later captured by Patton on his way to Munich. We flew Shelia as our ship needed repairs. Flak was moderate and not too accurate. Our whole crew flew together again including the two previous raids to Royan.

No. 34 was to Dresden which was also my second mission so I really sweated this one out. We carried 12-250 GP's and 4 M 17's. The mission took 9 hours and though we were supposed to go in at 25,500 feet weather forced us down to 18,000 feet. Going over Dresden at that height is practically suicide but we had good ground speed so we went in and got out fast. Flak was inaccurate. On the way back we (the whole group) buzzed the field. Got quite a thrill out of it as we were in the low of the low and zoomed over the field about 75 feet above the ground.

The next day we did not fly but on April 19 th, 1945 Jerry, Hawk, Stu, Holtz and myself flew our final mission. We had 10-500 GP's and went to Elsterwerba near Dresden with Dresden as the secondary. We had 8 jets fly through our formation the day before but 51's were on them so fast they didn't even fire at us. Didn't see any jets today but had to make two bomb runs and got flak three different times and it was really close. We were very lucky not to get hit. I kept saying to myself " Not on my last mission, not on my last mission " I threw more damn chaff out over Germany that day than any other. the more flak I heard the more chaff I threw out. We kept our record clean of never getting any holes in our own ship. Boy, was I happy when I said. " Bomb bay clear, Lets go home, Jerom for the last time. Hope has one, Bob has two and Nyborg three to go yet. We shot flares off all the way home.

OH HAPPY DAY

The 35

2-9-1945	Lutzkendorf	4-11	Friedham-Munich
2-13	Dresden	4-14	Royan-France
2-19	Munster	4-15	Royan-France
2-20	Nuremberg	4-16	Regensburg
2-21	Nuremberg	4-17	Dresden
2-22	Velzen	4-19-1945	Elsterverba
2-26	Berlin		
2-27	Leipzig		Finis
3-1-1945	Bruchal		
3-2	Rositz		
3-3	Hanover		
3-7	Giessen		
3-8	Essen		
3-9	Kassel		
3-11	Bremen		
3-14	Minden		
3-18	Berlin		
3-19	Plaven		
3-23	Gladbach		
3-24	Vechta		
3-26	Meiningen		
3-28	Berlin		
3-30	Bremen		
3-31	Halle		
4-3-1945	Kiel		
4-4-	Fassburg		
4-6	XXXXXXXX Leipzig		
4-7	Hitzacker		
4-9	Kursten Feld Bruck		

