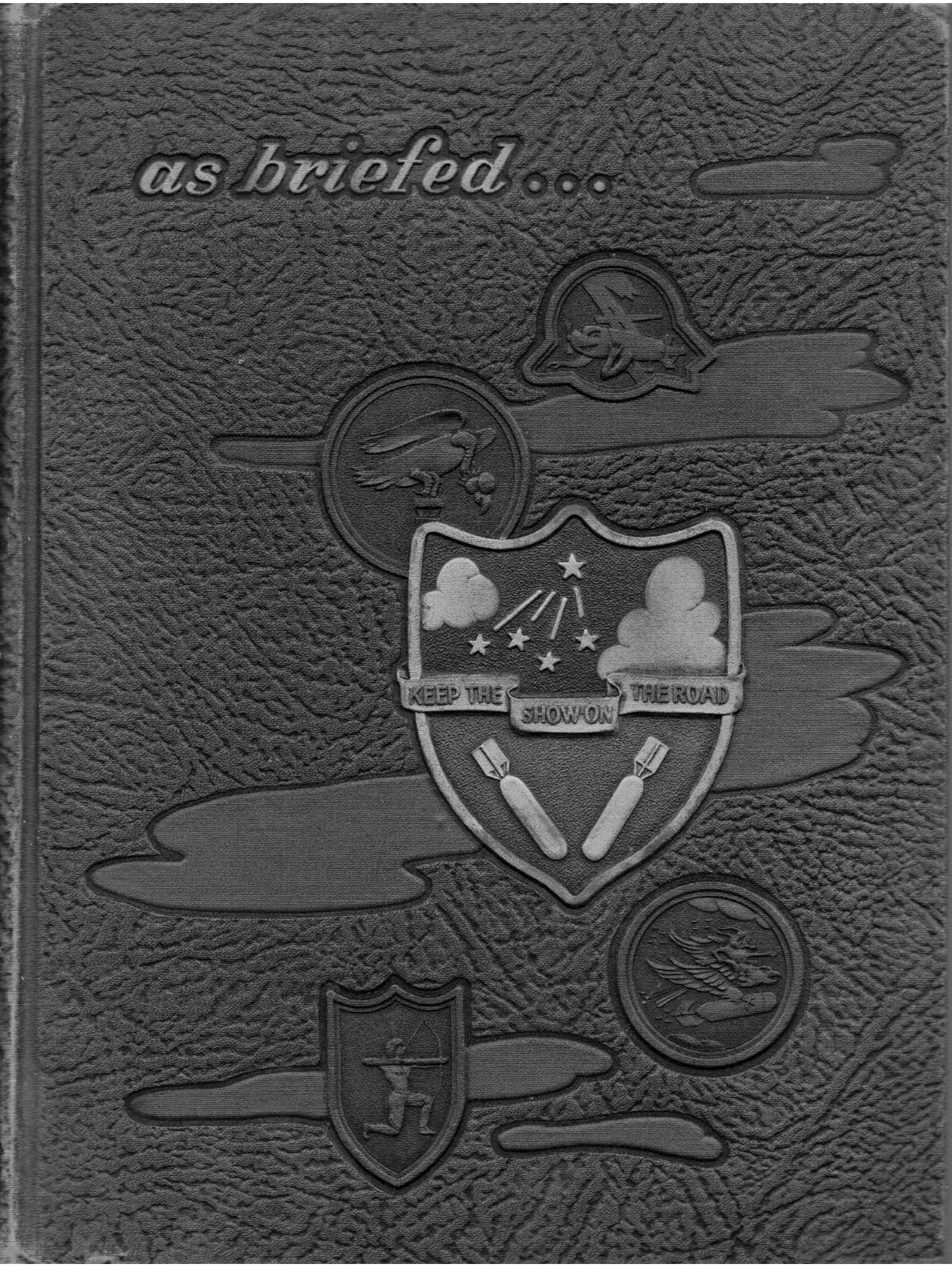
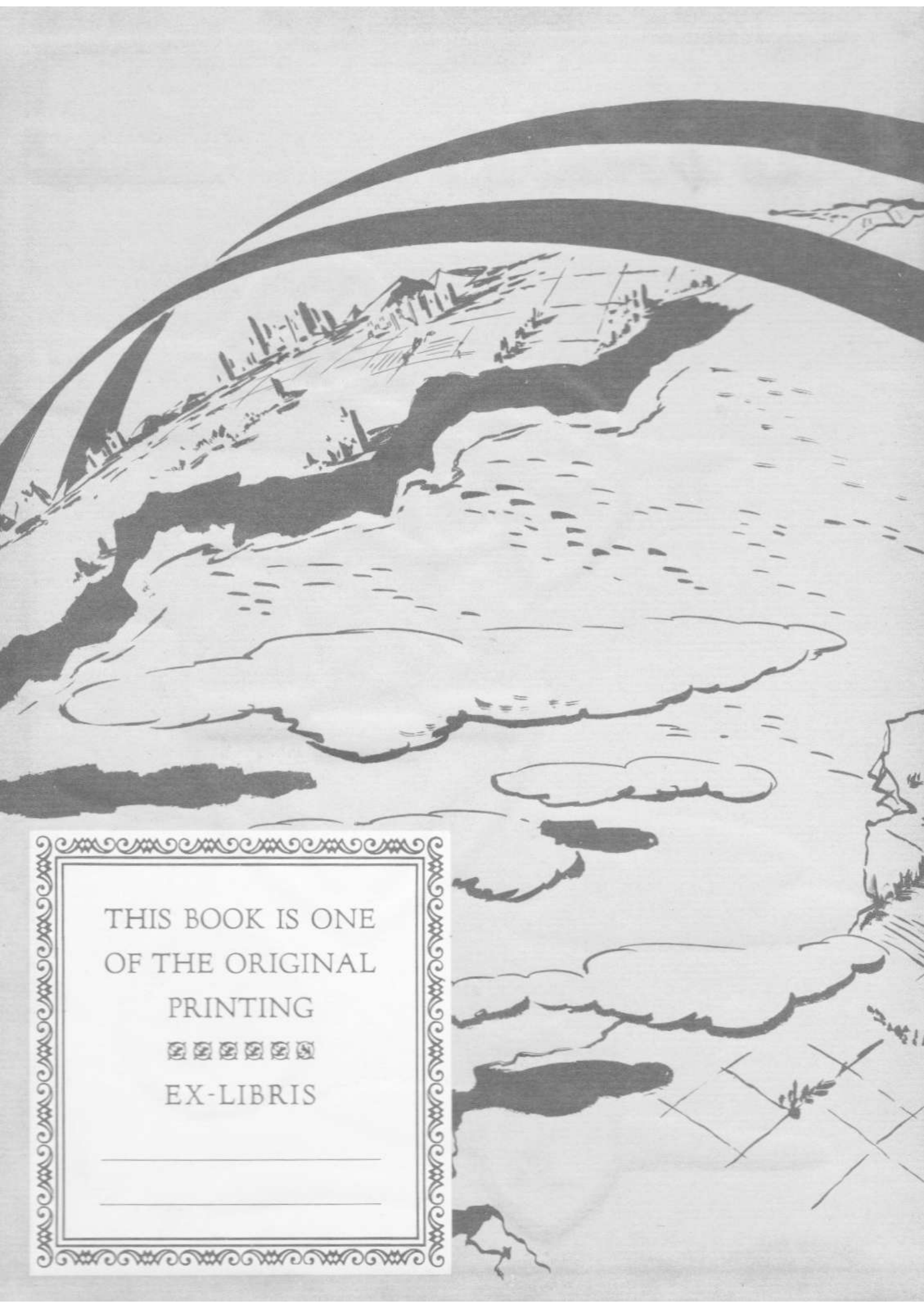
as briefed . . .





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as briefed . . .

by

WALTER E. OWENS

a family history of the 384th Bombardment Group

Acknowledgments . . .

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for his wonderful inspiration in the organization of this book.

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For the men and officers of the
384TH BOMBARDMENT GROUP
by
MAJOR ROBERT C. CHAPIN

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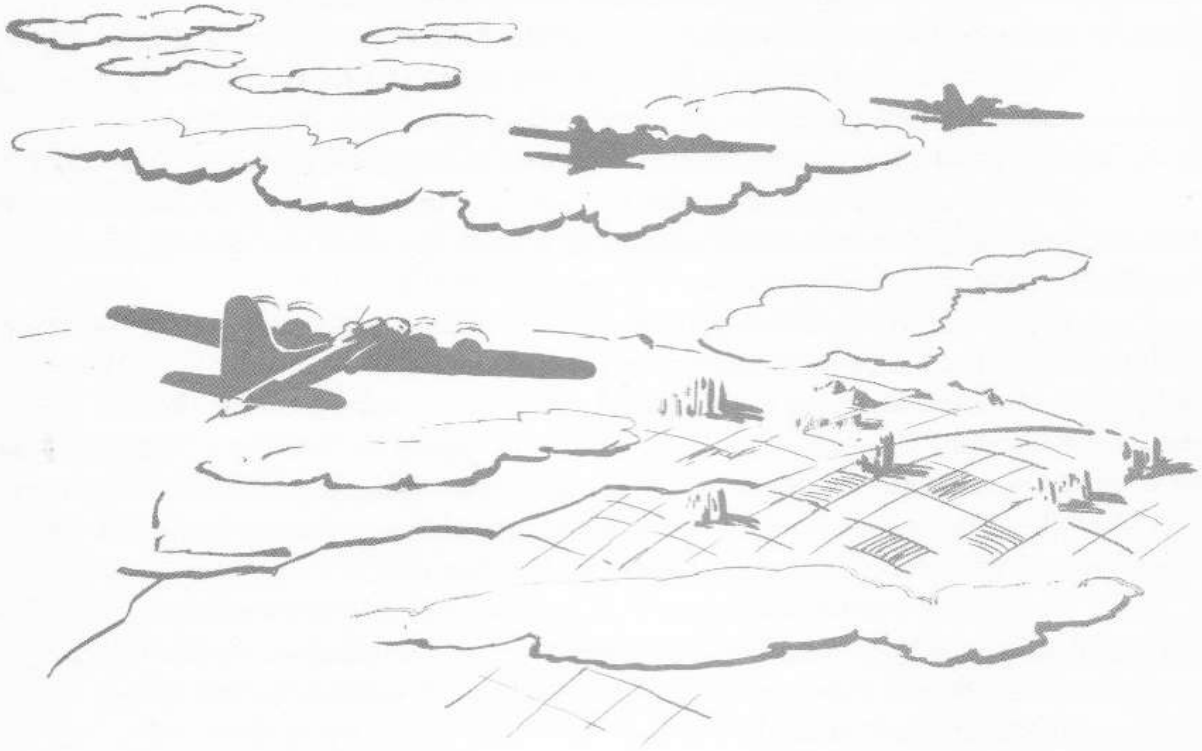
Appendages



The Last Full Measure . . .

Down below you can already make out the houses along the river that you heard about at briefing. From 24,000 feet they look like a long finger of masonry pointing up-river toward Wester Schelde. Beyond the estuary is Walcheren, a huge green hump rising out of the blue waters that lace the coastal islands of Belgium.

The finger ought to be pointing toward Antwerp, forty miles away, but it isn't.

You try to remember what the target will look like . . . a sprawled plant that manufactures replacement parts for military vehicles . . . so many stacks pouring out black smoke . . . before that, check points here and there.

A long time ago, when you should have known Chicago like a book, you still had to inquire of half a dozen people before you could find that address on Arlington Place.

Now you are going directly to an address in a city you have never seen before. Without asking anybody down there about it, you are going to 111 North High Street and without so much as a knock on the door—

That finger down there is Sas van Gent. It is still a couple of minutes ahead. When you are directly above, you will ignore the urge of that finger pointing out to sea and make a gentle turn inland for your run on Antwerp's 111 North High Street.

You look around at the other planes in your formation. Three, six, nine—all twenty of them are still tooling along. Pretty good formation, too. Nothing else in the sky as far as you can see, except that other group of Fortresses following the 384th.

Over the interphone the pilot is making a routine check of positions. You glance at your oxygen indicator and answer in turn as the wave of "okays" passes back through the aircraft.

If you didn't know better that might be Illinois down there. Or California, or New Jersey. From this height Belgium looks just as green and fertile as Wisconsin. And just as peaceful. Belgium is supposed to be a great dairy country. At this time of year, if it's anything like home, the smell of alfalfa should be in the air. What was that old story about some kid who held his fist in a hole to keep the sea from flooding through the dyke? But that was a Dutch boy, and those fields below are Belgian. All Gaul is divided into three parts—Belgae and a couple of other places.

You didn't learn Latin at gunnery school. You might as well have, if this is what combat is like. Hic, haec, hoc. Trajectory, angle of deflection. So this is what you sweated to learn during those practice flights back at Wendover. So this is—

"Fighters at 11 o'clock!"

Suddenly, guns all around start jumping. You follow their tracers until you see those black dots ahead and a little to the left. Your own guns begin kicking out short bursts as you automatically get to work. The black dots are big now—Focke-Wulfs. One of them peels under the formation and you follow him with your guns. You see him explode and crumble in air. Then a huge shudder runs through your own aircraft and you look out to see a jagged tear in the left wing.

This is what you were training for at gunnery school and at Wendover and at Sioux City. This is it!

* * *

Back at Grafton-Underwood that morning of 21 June 1943, dragged on as slowly as a dentist's drill on an aching nerve. Airmen who weren't flying sat idly around their barracks, or hung about Operations and Intelligence, waiting for any word of the 384th's first mission over enemy territory. Sleepy-eyed ground men, many of whom had worked all night on advance preparations for the mission, didn't bother to "hit the sack."

Everyone was going to see this first one through from start to finish.

For many of them, for those in Operations and Intelligence and Ordnance and Armament and Photography and Communications and other sections directly identified with preparing a mission, the day had started an hour and ten minutes before midnight on June 21st. It was then that the teleprinter had clattered out its first warning:

"STAND BY FOR B/CAST—URGENT SECRET."

That was the signal for Captain W. E. Dolan, S-2, and Major Thomas P. Beckett, S-3, to gather the men of their sections into the new building just north of the Control Tower, and on the opposite side of the perimeter track. Jeeps scurried about the field, carrying key men to their posts. Some of the men were already in bed when word came. They slipped into their clothes and hurried to their sections, only to wait two or three hours until the printed order came in and could be translated into duty assignments.

It was not until thirty minutes after midnight that the Field Order which was to send the 384th Bombardment Group on its first combat mission was finally in. Lieutenant Lowell Hansen himself, assistant communications officer, carried the long message from the dungeon beneath the Control Tower, where the printers were then located, to the unfinished building which Intelligence and Operations were already occupying on down the track.

The high-geared human machinery which was to send the Group on scores of future missions as smoothly as an ice skater doing a figure eight was not in evidence that first night. No one was sure what the next fellow was doing. Every section had a full staff on duty, and someone was always getting in someone else's way.

But there was no more confusion than would be expected for a first attempt.

Officers who were to participate in the briefing were still working on their maps and notes when jeeps from the squadron operation sections began making their round of the barracks, awakening the men who were assigned to fly. In each barracks there were a few sleepy queries as the lights went on, then a surge of casual joking as the men pulled on their clothes.

What would it be like? Guns, flak, cannon—those were things you read about. From their conversation now, you'd never know these men had ever given actual combat a thought. To look at them, you'd think they were getting ready to take off on another trip to Salinas, California, as they did once back in training.

In those three or four hours of darkness England has in June, the stage for this first mission was set. Breakfast (eggs that were a little too greasy), briefing (remember this, remember that, remember, remember, remember), engines (eighty of them can make a lot of racket in the quiet of an English dawn).

At the briefing Colonel Budd J. Peaslee, the commanding officer, had looked like a human Gibraltar. There was determination and assurance in his voice as he described the flight plan. For Intelligence, "Pop" Dolan briefed the pilots, navigators and bombardiers, while his photo interpreter, Lieutenant Charles Moon, was briefing the gunners in a back room which many months later was to become a flying equipment section.

". . . target is the General Motors Plant at Antwerp . . . situated northeast of city . . . plant used to manufacture spare parts to repair numerous vehicles captured by the German army . . . factories are working full capacity . . . important . . ."

Each plane was to carry five 1000-pound bombs, a total of fifty tons for the Group. This mission was really a diversionary, as the main Eighth Air Force effort was to go elsewhere. Only two Groups, the 384th followed by the 381st, were going to Antwerp. They were to fly over North Foreland to Knocke to Sas van Gent, their I. P. (initial point).

After "Cloudy Joe" had briefed them for weather (no Army weather man can escape the obvious nicknames of "Cloudy" or "Stormy"), and after they had set their watches on an operations time hack, the crews set out for their dispersal areas.

It was already daylight.

In the near-by villages, in Geddington and Brigstock and Cranford and Warkton, the "natives" were awakened by a dull roar as mechanics gave their aircraft a final tune-up. Eighty 1200-horsepower engines joined in the clamor. The crews smoked a final cigaret, then climbed into their planes to wait.

Six o'clock.

A telephone call from higher headquarters delayed the take-off from the scheduled 0610 hours, but finally, nine minutes later, the first plane trundled down the runway and the 384th's first combat mission was in progress. It still didn't seem real. To those left behind it wouldn't seem real until long after the last plane had gone.

Gone to what?

The men who had lined the near side of the perimeter track to wave their friends away didn't wander far in the next few hours. They stood around in small groups or went to their offices and tried to work. Or they simply sat and waited. There wasn't much talking.

Someone would look at his watch and say, "Well, they ought to be over the channel now."

And there was that long minute after nine o'clock when everyone had a mental picture of twenty Flying Fortresses over Antwerp. If everything was going according to plan, the boys were over their target now. The bombs were falling away.

Grafton-Underwood waited . . . and waited . . . and waited.

By ten o'clock the main briefing room—at that time it was in the south end of the "new" Intelligence building down on the line—had been transformed into an interrogation room. The long rows of benches had been removed and tables had been set up, with coffee cups and platters of sandwiches already in place. Additional tables to take care of the overflow had been set up in what was then the Intelligence Library, the far end of the "gunner's briefing room."

From the windows you could see the scores of men still lounging in the straggly grass on the near side of the perimeter track. They sat or stood in small groups, most of them facing east, because that was the direction from which the planes would return.

"It won't be long now."

"No—" A long look at the sky through eyes that were squinting against the sun. "Oughta be back any time."

Conversation consisted of five or six trite sentences, all of them mere statements of the obvious, repeated over and over again as though each speaker thought he was saying something original. Occasionally someone not directly employed in the preparation of a mission—a clerk in an administrative section, perhaps—would join the waiters.

"How many ships d'we send off?"

"Twenty."

"When they comin' back?"

Such a newcomer to the waiting ranks always had questions to ask. One of them, fresh from a kitchen and still carrying the smudges of his art, sidled up and asked who was leading the mission. Someone told him it was Colonel Peaslee.

"That's my boy," said the dishwasher, a private first class. "Colonel Peaslee's my boy."

The expression may not have been typical, but it demonstrates how strongly the 41-year-old commanding officer had endeared himself to the hearts of his men.

"There they are!"

It's hard to say who saw them first, those tiny, closely bunched specks in the eastern sky, but an electrifying shout spread through the waiting crowd. Everyone was on his feet. A feeling of personal triumph was felt everywhere, for these were our planes coming back—intact.

The waiting men reshifted into new groups, with five or six lucky ones, who had field glasses, as the nuclei. Everybody wanted to look through the glasses. Everyone wanted to count the planes for himself.

"Eighteen," said someone. "I only count eighteen."

By this time the dots had grown large enough to be counted with the naked eye. People were counting out loud. Fifteen, sixteen, seventeen, eighteen. Yes, eighteen. One, two, three, four,—

They counted them over and over again, counted them with a new, sinking sensation at the pit of the stomach, counted them and wondered.

But if the men on the ground had lost some of that feeling of triumph, the men in the air had not. The eighteen planes thundered over the field in closely knit elements. There wasn't a gap in the formation. In the lead was 043, Colonel Peaslee's ship. As the formation passed over the field the thunder of its engines seemed to be a roar of defiance.

Then 005 peeled off for a quick landing, while the rest of the formation flew on before starting its traffic pattern. Red flares were shooting from the hatches of 005. An ambulance was already starting for the far end of the runway.

"Lieutenant Henderson has wounded aboard."

"Yeah!"

An intelligence officer was checking off numbers on a small sheet of paper. *Sky Queen, The Joker, Doris Mae, The Inferno, Deuces Wild, Snuffy, Yankee Powerhouse, Merrie Hell—*

"076 and 853 are missing," he announced. "Wonder what happened to them."

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The black dots are big now—Focke-Wulfs. One of them peels under the formation and you follow him with your guns. You see him explode and crumble in air. Then a huge shudder runs through your own aircraft and you look out to see a jagged tear in the left wing.

This is what you were training for. This is it!

One after another those yellow-nosed jobs come in, turn upside down under the low squadron, and peel off to the right. Then suddenly they stop. You watch them move away and rendezvous on the left. Then the plane lifts slightly and you hear the bombardier announce "Bombs away," and you realize you must be over 111 North High Street, Antwerp.

Those smoke blossoms out there are anti-aircraft bursts. So that's why the Focke-Wulfs left! They're still hanging around, waiting until you get out of the flak.

"Here they come!"

You press the trigger bar and get in burst after burst as the Focke-Wulfs come in, one at a time. You see one of your tormentors explode and for a fraction of a second watch a wing float lazily away from the plunging fuselage.

There is a rending crash and that stretch of blue that is the coast of Belgium appears to bounce crazily a moment. Above, 9000 feet above, a formation of Fortresses is plodding out to sea. Suddenly it dawns on you that that is YOUR formation. That's the 384th and behind it the 381st.

You're going down. And still the enemy fighters come in. This is what they call a rat race. There must be half a dozen of them and you keep firing as they cross your line of vision. You know that every gun in your ship is giving all it has . . .

The sound of the explosion is deafening. You're free of the plane now. You seem to be floating there in mid-air, all by yourself, with pieces of wreckage falling past.

There is one more fleeting instant—one more glimpse of those black specks that are the 384th going home . . .

Fresh Off the Assembly Line . . .

Now that the 384th had tasted combat, those training days from which she had just emerged already seemed part of some vague and distant past. Wendover . . . intense training over the Salt Flats of Utah . . . getting acquainted with these men you now seem to have known all your life . . . and finally the staging area and a last look at the Statue of Liberty.

Although the 384th Bombardment Group had existed on paper in late 1942, the history of the Group as an organization actually began on a dusty, blustery day in January. You don't need a weather calendar to remember what kind of a day it was. At Wendover every day was dusty and blustery.

Whether he can remember the date or not, any original member of the Group will never forget how he leaned against the wind and closed his eyes to keep out the sand when he stumbled from the train at Wendover. From the station platform he squinted with sinking heart at a scene of utter desolation.

This age-old and lifeless desert of salt was the first home of the 384th.

The same attributes which make the Bonneville Desert ideal for auto racing make it ideal for training in aerial warfare. The long stretches of sand are a perfect bed for concrete runways. Above the dust the weather is usually clear, broken only by an occasional sand storm sweeping across the flats. That same uninhabited desert, stretching for miles in all directions, makes it possible for bombardiers to practice destruction without harm to others.

Here, in this barren waste of sand and rocks where no plants grow and no bird or animal finds a natural habitat, the squadrons first began working as cohesive units. The first combat crews had arrived from Gowan Field on the last day of 1942, and twelve additional crews joined them a month later. In the interim, eight operations officers and a like number of intelligence officers joined the organization.

Gradually the 384th began to take on a distinctly organizational appearance. The men began to know each other and their officers, to speak with pride of their commanding officer, and to boast about what they had managed to achieve as squadrons. They were no longer individuals learning the essentials of a job—they were a Group, learning how to work together and accomplish their duty with as little friction and as much efficiency as possible.

While at Wendover the 384th sent out one long mission, a trip to Muroc, California, another desert spot. From Muroc the Group flew a mock mission into the Pacific, over Santa Catalina and San Miguel in the Santa Barbara Group.

Most of the work, for ground and air echelons alike, was done in and around Wendover itself.

And there, in the middle of the desolate wastes, with only a station theater and an occasional trip to Salt Lake City to relieve the everlasting sameness, the 384th found its spirit. There was born the intense loyalty and fervid camaraderie which were to remain with the Group in the harder days to come.

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It was a foregone conclusion that when the 384th left Wendover Field it would be for greener pastures. Ironically, enough, or perhaps it was because the move began on April Fool's Day, a dust storm was in progress when the desert-weary squadrons arrived at Sioux City's Army Air Base.

Nevertheless there were trees and green grass in the surrounding countryside, and even the oozing mud a fellow sank into when he stepped off the boardwalks was a welcome relief from the parched sands of western Utah.

Here, among these gently rolling farms, began the final phase in the training program that was to weld the 384th Bombardment Group into one of the most effective aerial combinations the United States was to throw into the Battle of Germany.

Colonel Peaslee was constantly looking for defects, quietly correcting every discernible fault, loudly proclaiming every achievement of his men. He worked with

them and relaxed with them, and steadily, day by day, he grew in stature in the minds of the men he commanded.

On the week before Easter Sunday the Group sent thirty-four planes to join a large formation bound for the West Coast. For the commanding officer this marked a return to the scene of his youth, for Colonel Peaslee "grew up" in Salinas, Kansas, and it was there that the 384th made its temporary base.

On the way one crew, lost from the other planes, demonstrated how easy it would be for enemy ground forces to steer them into a trap. When they sighted an airfield below the pilot contacted Salinas radio, asked for permission to land.

"All clear. Come on in," responded Salinas.

So in they went—to a naval air base that wasn't expecting them and that happened to be a number of miles from Salinas.

From Salinas the Group flew the longest mock mission of its phase training. A hundred and twelve heavy bombers, led by Colonel Peaslee himself, swept over San Francisco in five regular bombing formations in a northwesterly direction. Reassembling at sea they thundered back from the north and theoretically wrecked the "Golden Gate."

Actual combat was simulated, with Airacobras whining in and out of the formation in a furious attempt to "protect" the city. On another occasion the planes flew a night mission, again with San Francisco as the target.

As they swept in from the sea the city did not show up at all in the dark, but as they passed over the Golden Gate and Bay Bridges, the lights suddenly appeared, outlining the huge spans like a string of pearls lying in the dark water. Although blacked out from the sea, San Francisco was a brilliant pattern of lights to a plane directly overhead.

The tired crews returned to Sioux City on Easter Sunday, proud of the leading part they had taken in the largest formation of heavy bombers which had ever flown over the Pacific Coast.

But in spite of the hard work, the 384th's stay in Sioux City was in many respects like a grand farewell party to the States. The men knew that soon there would be no simulated combat, but the grim relentless fight of men who are in dead earnest. They knew that German planes would not buzz about in mock protest as those Airacobras had. They were facing reality, and the people of Sioux City faced it with them, doing all they could to make that "one last fling" a pleasant one.

★ ★ ★

By this time the 384th was closer to combat than the pleasant atmosphere of Charlie's Steak House or the Empire Room could indicate. Within two months they were to know first-hand that .20 millimeter cannon shell can rip a Flying Fortress apart.

They were to know what flak can do in the blink of an eye. They were to discover how painfully long it takes to say "Jack Robinson."

On 2 May 1943, Major Beckett, Major Taff, Captain Dolan and Captain Johnson left Sioux City and went as an advance party to Atlantic City. The next day, Monday, the ranks at Sioux City were further depleted by the departure of the flight echelon for Kearney, Nebraska, and a final quick phase of training.

But for the ground echelon there was another week at Sioux City, a week that was devoted to cleaning up the squadron areas for the organization which would replace the 384th in this phase of the Army's carefully calculated combat assembly line.

It was late on a sunny Sunday, 9 May 1943, that the men of the ground echelon marched to the railroad siding and piled into the trains that were to take them to Camp Kilmer, a staging area on the East Coast.

To all but a few key men, the move was one of mystery, shrouded in Army secrecy. Yet gradually a Kilmer "rumor" spread through the trains, a "rumor" given credence as the Mississippi River fell farther and farther behind. As security measures, men were not permitted to leave the train during the trip, and train windows were closed at every stop, to prevent idle conversation with civilians.

Shortly before noon on Tuesday, two days after leaving Sioux City, the long strings of men detrained in a New Jersey drizzle and, wet and miserable and awkward under their heavy barracks bags, stumbled, rather than marched, to their new quarters. Almost immediately there were gloomy rumors of long marches in the rain, a month without passes, another complete set of "shots" for all diseases the medical staff could tabulate or even imagine.

Yet all the gloomy predictions of that first day were soon forgotten. The men had some marching, but the extremely rigorous schedule which some had expected failed to materialize, and while the Group was restricted for three days in order to accomplish a few essential tasks, twelve-hour passes were given as soon as those tasks were accomplished.

At Kilmer all pertinent records were examined, and everybody drew any equipment which was missing. All carbines and other arms were inspected; protective clothing for gas was issued; gasmasks were checked.

Here, at Kilmer, a sprawling barren camp that could easily have fulfilled that early conception of a "staging prison," the men were surprised to find they were given a wide opportunity to enjoy themselves before sailing. Yet in spite of the unexpected leniency, it was an open secret that many "inmates" left the post without availing themselves of passes. There was the story of a shavetail and a first sergeant who happened to arrive at the hole in the fence at the same time. After ducking through, the shavetail, noting the number of enlisted men using the same illegal exit, said solemnly:

"You know, we shouldn't allow this."

At Kilmer the ground men had their turn at kitchen police and they did some marching and drilling, but despite that and the persistent drizzling rain they enjoyed themselves. Almost everyone took at least one trip into New York.

Meanwhile at Camp Kearney, Nebraska, the combat crews were getting their furloughs. Most of the ground men had been granted a last trip home while the Group was at Sioux City; now it was the airmen's turn.

Existence at the camp was boring, with little work to be done save the routine of drawing missing equipment. Yet personnel were restricted every night. As at Kilmer, the "chow" was heartily disliked and the Post Exchange enjoyed most of the patronage.

More than a thousand miles now separated the ground and air echelons. Most of the men at Kearney had no idea where their non-flying brothers were, and the Kilmer part of the Group was for the most part ignorant of where the combat crews had gone.

The next time they were to see each other was to be on foreign soil.

★ ★ ★

It was in the pale glow of an English June night that the first contingent of the ground echelon, tired and ungainly under their knapsacks and bed rolls, filed from their train and fell into an awkward line on a railroad siding in the English Midlands.

They hardly had time to scratch their bewildered heads before someone spied a familiar figure—a stocky figure topped by a round face from which jutted the jaunty stub of a cigar—

"Pop Dolan!"

Suddenly other members of the air echelon appeared to welcome the wandering ground men, and there, along the railroad tracks at Cranford, the reunion of the long-separated elements of the 384th began. Waiting trucks carried them through quaint villages that soon were to become familiar to everyone in the group, through Cranford and Grafton Underwood and, beyond them, onto the air field that was to become the foreign home of Colonel Peaslee's bombardment group.

Many of those who had flown across with the air echelon had arrived days earlier, and they had hot food waiting for the newly arrived ground men. Shouted greetings of comrades who hadn't seen each other for four weeks were heard everywhere. Most of the next few hours were spent swapping stories.

The air echelon upon leaving Kearney had broken into two parts, one flying the Goose Bay (Newfoundland) route and the other the Gander Lake (Labrador) route. The first stop for both was Bangor, Maine, in heavily wooded country cut by the smooth-flowing Penobscot. For the first time in their lives some of them enjoyed being restricted, for a number of WAAC's happened to be stationed there, and the WAAC post exchange became the focal point of 384th activities.

At Bangor the flying echelon split up and headed for the desolate north country.

The men who went to Labrador said it was the most barren place they had yet encountered. Even the permanent personnel of the base received no passes of less than four days' duration, for there was no place to go that could be reached in less time.

The other crews went to a base in the middle of Newfoundland. The country was so heavily wooded that planes which crashed were left where they fell, because they could not be reached with equipment. There was no opportunity to corroborate the area's reputation for hunting and fishing, the only permitted amusement being a large theater which furnished entertainment for civilians and soldiers alike.

Both 384th flying contingents—the one at Labrador and the one in Newfoundland—seem to have been most impressed by the huge runways. They were nearly as wide as they were long. At the Labrador base more than two hundred Flying Fortresses were lined up at one time.

Finally, the 384th ships at both places took off for the Atlantic crossing.

Meanwhile the ground echelon had been having even less opportunity for enjoyment. Early on Wednesday, 26 May 1943, the heavily loaded men fell out by squadrons and left Camp Kilmer as they had found it, wet and muddy. To the tune of various Air Corps songs they marched in a drizzle to the train a mile away. After waiting for half an hour or more in the rain, they finally filed onto the waiting cars and sank into the seats with their packs on, already soggy and miserable.

A delegation from Washington, including Congressmen with generous smiles and ready handshakes, had been there to see them off. As the line inched toward the train each man was certain to be asked where he was from and if he happened to know Joe So-and-So in the statehouse back home.

An Army colonel, who had accompanied the Congressmen, joined them in the general handshaking.

"What's your name?" he would say.

"John Smith, Sir."

Once he invented a question of his own:

"How long have you been in the staging area?"

The only time he asked that question the colonel was set back on his heels by a security-conscious 384th man. The second lieutenant to whom he addressed the question looked his superior squarely in the eye.

"I'd rather you'd ask my commanding officer, Sir."

The Washington colonel, realizing for perhaps the first time how men in the field are indoctrinated to prevent the leakage of information, backed up a few feet and remained there while the rest of the line filed past. He might have backed up even farther had he realized the lieutenant's commanding officer was hundreds of miles from there.

During the next few hours it would have been difficult to have found a more miserable lot of men. Clammy clothes and heavy packs had combined to send dull

pains shooting through tired shoulder muscles. During the mad scramble to the Hudson River Ferry, after an hour's train ride, it was not unusual to see a man struggling with one barracks bag over his shoulder, a carbine under one arm, and dragging a suitcase with a broken handle through the water and mud. It was a grim struggle to keep up.

When the ferry, upon which they had been packed like a herd of sheep en route to the slaughter house, finally docked on the other side, they went through the same process again. But now, through the strain of discomfiture surged a new feeling of excitement and wonder. Spirits rose with the band music, and with the coffee and doughnuts gulped down virtually as the men marched up the gangplank.

Into the huge maw of the Queen Elizabeth went approximately 16,000 passengers, divided as they boarded into two shifts, the "up" and the "down," those who remained on deck and attempted to sleep with no facilities and those who went to the cabins below and attempted to sleep with only slightly more facilities.

It was shortly after noon the next day, Thursday, 27 May 1943, that the Queen Elizabeth slid away from the dock and headed down the Hudson River for the open sea.

If you can imagine a huge hotel with such a motley crew of seedy looking men cramming every available inch of its corridor and cabin space, you will have a pretty good idea of what the Queen Elizabeth was like as she skirted the danger zones on her way to England. As soon as the "down" shift had finished its allotted time the tired men shambled up on deck so the "up" shift could take over the sleeping space. Men slept wherever they could find a place to lean.

It is hard to forget those morning musters, that twice-daily trip to the mess hall, the long hours of watching the dark waters swirl past, the rumors that a submarine had been sighted during the night.

Yet despite the constant rumors of foiled enemy activities, of subs and planes which "almost got us," the trip was uneventful. Finally, on Wednesday, June 2nd, the Queen Elizabeth slipped into the Firth of Clyde in the early morning hours, moved slowly up-firth and finally cast anchor off Greenock, Scotland.

Gradually the devious paths taken by 384th men after their separation at Sioux City began to merge again.

The first to arrive at that pin-point in the English Midlands, converging point of all the routes, was an advance party composed of "Pop" Dolan, "Skipper" Johnson, Major Taff.

Planes and crews of the air echelon arrived, at varying intervals, from Prestwick, Scotland, where they had been based temporarily after flying the Atlantic. Members of the ground echelon had only a porthole view of Scotland. For them there were idle hours of watching the gulls wheeling noisily about the boats, hours of waving at rivermen and of tossing cigarets on the decks of passing tugs, hours of marveling at the

many-colored houses marching down to the water's edge on either side of the river, looking like toy villages in some Walt Disney cartoon.

The Queen Elizabeth had docked at about 10 a. m., but it was the next morning, June 3, before the 384th began to disembark. Members of Headquarters Detachment and two of the squadrons, the 544th and the 545th, were the first to set foot on British soil. They loaded into the tugs that morning and, herded quickly into the waiting train, began the trip to the Midlands. It was about 8:30 p. m. when they arrived at Cranford and were whisked to the base. The other squadrons arrived the following day.

Large as the group of men and equipment was, the movement had been carried out as easily and smoothly as a farm dog brings the cows from the field to the barn. One air crew ran out of gas near the end of the ocean journey and was forced to land in Northern Ireland; another ditched in mid-ocean. But for the most part the entire trip was made without incident.

"We had taken off about six o'clock in the evening and at eight o'clock we were four hundred miles out at sea," said Lieutenant Herb Schindler, a member of the crew which had been forced down at sea. "One engine failed and we turned around to return to the base. Then the other engine on the same side failed and we started losing altitude."[1]

Lieutenant Kelmer J. Hall, the pilot, ordered that all baggage be jettisoned. All personal belongings except the clothes they were wearing went tumbling out of the bomb bay.

"We were at 15,000 feet when the engines quit but we were losing about five hundred feet a minute which meant that in thirty minutes we would hit the water," said Lieutenant Schindler. "The crash broke the ship in two and shook us up pretty badly. The ship was settling fast when we got into the life rafts and pushed away so the drag would not pull us under . . .

"Fortunately we had crashed while it was still light and could see each other and get everybody into the rafts. We were all wet and the insides of the rafts were wet. After we had floated away from the wreckage and it became dark, even with ten men in the rafts it was lonely as hell. It rained a little, not much, but just enough to make it a little more uncomfortable. We floated around for about eight hours and when it was dawn we sighted a ship and sent up another flare. We weren't sure that he had seen it so we shot another one up. He headed toward us . . . we were all treated to some of His Majesty's Rum."

And so even the one dangerous incident of the 384th's move into combat ended happily on the morning of June 10th, when Lieutenant Hall's crew was picked up and started back to the American Continent to try it over again.

[1] Six weeks later this entire crew was lost over Hamburg. All were taken prisoner except one waist gunner, S/Sgt. Colgate J. Dean, who months later was determined dead by the War Department.

"I can't quite understand," said Lieutenant Schindler, when the crew was finally reunited with the rest of us at Grafton-Underwood, "—how men live in rafts on the open sea for thirty or forty days."

But that was before ditching became a familiar episode in the life of Grafton-Underwood.

Bicycles, Pubs, and Ha'pennies . . .

Within a few short hours the fact that this was a combat zone was brought forcibly to the attention of the 384th. The last train-load of ground men had arrived on Friday, June 4. That night the men were awakened by the nervous wail of the air raid siren.

Although that siren was to be heard many times during the Group's stay at Grafton, it never again received the spontaneous response given it that first night. Without turning on their lights men piled from the barracks and stumbled along the unfamiliar paths to the shelters. Anti-aircraft fire in the distance stimulated active imaginations.

Yet within half an hour the all clear sounded and the men returned to their beds. Most of them never visited a shelter again, in spite of the fact that the wail of the siren could be heard almost any night during those early months.

For the next day or two everyone was busy orienting himself, settling back into Army routine, learning the short cuts through the woods that would get him to

the mess hall fastest. Some of our widely-dispersed organizations were located a mile or more from the mess halls.

There was a week's restriction for the ground men, and during that time they were to learn more of Army security, more of formation flying, more of those things that had been drummed into their minds back in the States. There also were a few new items, such as what not to do in an English pub.

"Remember, the English like their beer at room temperature," everyone was told. "So don't make a wry face and shove it back across the counter with the suggestion that they put it back in the horse."

Bicycles . . . the first glimpse of Geddington, Brigstock, Kettering . . . the quaint pubs with even quainter names (who'll ever forget The Old Three Cocks) . . . shillings and florins and ha'pennies. . . .

Late on the afternoon of Saturday, 12 June 1943, the 384th had its first fatal accident since its inception half a year earlier. During a practice flight the tail was clipped off one of our aircraft in a collision only a few yards above the field. The plane crashed, killing its five-man crew—Lieutenants Kowalski, Griffin, Eggers and Murphy, and Staff Sergeant Jean L. Blaise.

Those deaths, because they served no purpose in the strategic war against Hitler, were more of a shock than the hundreds that were to follow in the skies over Germany. The day was coming when combat men could describe the last agonies of a Fortress going down in flames and follow it up with the story of the traveling salesman and the farmer's daughter, but it was not yet here.

Meanwhile, the rosters of the 384th still showed three vacancies caused by an outbreak of mumps before the air echelon left North America. The missing men were First Lieutenant William R. Crosby of the Medical Section and Technical Sergeant Arthur E. Brittain and Staff Sergeant Alfred Meyer, aerial gunners.

It was well along toward one midnight when Brittain and Meyer, a little footsore but not too weary, reported at their orderly room with a strange story of how they had caught up with their comrades.

Without travel orders and not certain of their destination, they had lugged three hundred pounds of equipment some 2,500 miles in search of the crews that had "abandoned" them back on the American continent. Brittain became sick just before his squadron, the 545th, took off, and Meyer was quarantined with him.

"The last one to see us was our squadron commander," said Meyer, before the weary pair was allowed to go to bed. "He said, 'Don't spare anything to get back to us.' So here we are."

When their eighteen-day confinement in Newfoundland was over the two castaways finagled a ride with a variety of crates and boxes in an Air Transport Command cargo plane. Reaching England they were confronted by the unexpected problem of locating their outfit in a security-conscious combat zone.

Meyer and Brittain traveled the length and breadth of the island in their search, carrying and dragging their three hundred pounds of equipment as they went.[1]

"I guess we were the two most worn-out guys in London when we got there," said Meyer. "I had a half-dollar in Newfoundland money and Art had ten cents in American money. I matched Art for the dime and won, then I traded the half-dollar for a half-crown. We got six sandwiches apiece and some coffee for that little piece of silver.

It was in London that Brittain and Meyer came closest to giving up. Until then they had thought the trail was getting warmer, but it froze solid when an Army official informed them he had no idea where their outfit was. A few hours later, however, the problem was straightened out and they were put on a train that would take them to their buddies.

"When we saw our squadron commander again he didn't say much," said Brittain, describing how they had reported to Captain Ketelsen. "Just that he was glad to see us. I guess we did just what he expected us to."

The last straggler to find his way back to the group was Lieutenant Crosby, but by the time he arrived the Group was already up to its two thousand necks in combat. After lying around until his cheeks had regained their normal contours, Lieutenant Crosby tagged after his Group in a cattle boat that puffed across the Atlantic in eighteen days.

On Friday, June 11, the day before the fatal training accident and only a week after the arrival of the ground echelon, five of our key combat men flew a mission from Molesworth. The Group there had already been in combat some nine months and the experience gained on that mission was transferred, second hand, to the rank and file of the neophyte 384th.

Various ground sections had representatives on hand, following the procedure from start to finish.

After a mid-morning briefing the Molesworth formation took off, carrying Colonel Peaslee, Major Beckett, Major McMillin, Captain Foister, and Lieutenant Bonnett as observers for the green but eager 384th. Midway to its original target, Bremen, the formation was diverted to Wilhelmshaven. There was a bitter forty-five-minute battle with enemy fighters and half a dozen Fortresses went down. Colonel Peaslee himself saw two B-17's blow up on his wing. The experience of those hectic minutes was brought back by the 384th "observers" and transferred to the rest of the Group, which was now about to make its initial foray against the enemy.

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[1] Within six weeks both these men were lost. Brittain was killed when his plane went down on the Gelsenkirchen mission of Aug. 12, 1943. Five days later his buddy went down, but Meyer survived as a prisoner-of-war.

Although the matter of clean clothes had by this time become an acute problem, it was difficult to resist the curiosity that drew the men like a magnet into the surrounding towns and villages. For many it was to be more than a month before they had fresh laundry. Yet at the first free moment they were to be found brushing out their wrinkled uniforms to mix with civilians.

They were learning to squeeze the left hand first when they wanted to stop an English bicycle, and many had fresh patches on head or wrist to prove they were learning by experience. Their capers as they breezed noisily through village streets, stunting before the curious eyes of pedestrians, must have astounded these stolid British to whom a bicycle is no boyhood toy but the most common means of locomotion.

With that look-at-me-no-hands attitude the personnel of Colonel Peaslee's bombardment group stormed Kettering and Corby and Brigstock, Stanion and Geddington. Although their pockets jingled with those baffling King-sized coins they soon discovered that England's cupboard was almost if not quite as bare as Old Mother Hubbard's. In the pubs they tried mild and bitters and had "a go" at darts and skittles, learned—to the discouragement of native patrons who already were faced with a strictly rationed beer supply—to drink fast in the hour or two before the barmaid draped the pump handles and announced: "Towel's up."

On their own base they learned that those buildings with the words "Ablution Room" on the door had nothing to do with chemical warfare, but were simply wash rooms. Already the Post Exchange was functioning, and there candy and cigarets were rationed out once a week. It was to be many weeks before the Red Cross was to open its Aero Club, but in the interim its English equivalent, the N.A.A.F.I.[2] continued to operate as a hold-over from the days when Grafton-Underwood was an R.A.F. base.

And so the days passed.

Everyone knew the 384th was getting close to combat, yet when the signal finally came many were taken by surprise. It was late on Sunday night when the teleprinter operator began receiving a lengthy message. Although he didn't know it at the time, it was the Group's first field order. To the operator those jumbled words meant nothing—this was just a routine message and he was giving it routine attention.

"None of us had ever seen a field order before," he recalled later. "We had no idea that this was more important than anything else coming off the machines.

To add to the confusion the teleprinter broke down, and consequently it was far along into the early morning hours before the complete order was in. That day, Monday 21 June 1943, the first notation was made in the combat record kept by the Public Relations Office:

"Prospect of getting into action at last was washed out by bad weather today. Combat orders had come in, crews had been briefed, engines had been given a

[2] Navy, Army and Air Force Institute.

final run-up. All was in readiness. Then the mission was scrubbed by the high command because of bad weather over the Continent."

The word "scrubbed" had become a part of the lingo of the 384th.

But there wasn't much longer to wait. That night another Field Order came in and the next day the Group had twenty planes winging over Europe. Less than three weeks after setting up housekeeping at Grafton-Underwood—and a scant five weeks away from final phase training in the United States—Colonel Peaslee's bombardment group had had its baptism in combat—a bloody baptism over Antwerp.

★ ★ ★

By noon of June 22nd, the 384th had one hundred and eighty-one veterans, men who had heard the spat of machine gun fire and had seen cannon shells rip gaping holes in aluminum and had smelled the fumes of powder, and some of whom had tasted the warm blood of fresh wounds. They had left twenty men behind somewhere in that blue void over Germany.

In the interrogation room the story of that first mission was told over and over again.

"Oblinski was caught in a rat race 9,000 feet below our formation. He was being attacked by at least eight planes and three engines seemed to be on fire. The plane exploded in mid-air."

That explained the first battle loss of the 384th.

"Halfway across the channel Disney was seen to make a gliding approach to the water. The aircraft did not sink immediately. No life rafts or men moving about were seen."

That explained the second.[3]

Intelligence officers queried the tired crews, pieced the shreds of information together, compiled the story for a teletype summary that "Pop" Dolan filed to higher headquarters two hours after the mission returned.

". . . We were attacked by an estimated total of approximately sixty FW 190 fighters between ten and fifteen miles from Antwerp. . . . Initial attacks were pressed from 11 o'clock on the low squadron. . . . These attacks were made by from eight to twelve (12) FW 190's, coming in one after another. Two subsequent attacks were from one o'clock, using the same method of approach. The FW 190's turned upside down approximately under the No. 1 plane, B. Flight, Low Squadron, and peeled to our right. . . .

"After leaving the target area anti-aircraft was encountered, and all fighters were seen to rendezvous on our left, waiting until we had passed from the anti-aircraft

[3] It was later determined that eight members of these two crews were killed, but three others were still listed as "missing" at war's end. Oblinski and Disney were among the nine known to have survived as prisoners.

fire. . . . Halfway between Antwerp and the coast we were joined by P-47's. Approximately thirty dogfights were observed. . . . "

Meanwhile the photo section, under Lieutenant Kreidler, was experiencing the first-mission confusion. Ultimately, the time for rushing out the first strike photographs following the return of a mission was to become a matter of minutes, but this time it was more than an hour before the first print was jerked from the chemical bath for interpretation.

Bombardiers, anxious to find out if the photographs substantiated their verbal reports, grouped about the desk as the photo was being studied. Finally the report:

"Five per cent of the bombs hit the dock area and an explosion followed on the river side of the building. A moderate to intense explosion was seen within one hundred yards of the target. . . ."

In days to come the 384th was to build an enviable reputation for accuracy. By comparison, that first attempt was feeble, indeed. We completely missed our aiming point. That we had a fair percentage of bombs in a built-up area along the river was apparently because the lead bombardier had mistaken it for the briefed aiming point.

After studying the fighter claims, Lieutenant W. J. McNeill of the Intelligence section estimated that three enemy aircraft had been destroyed by our gunners and that another was probably destroyed, while four others were damaged.

It is certain that not all the attacking Focke-Wulf's got back to Germany. However, when the analysis had been completed, higher headquarters confirmed only the claim of Staff Sergeant John H. Kuberski,[4] left waist gunner in Lieutenant Rosio's aircraft, a plane that within four weeks was to become known as the *Picadilly Commando.*

The victory had come during the initial attack near Sas Van Gent. Four of the *Picadilly's* guns were turned on one of the attackers, and some members of the crew thought that Staff Sergeant Lewis, the tail gunner, should share the credit for the 384th's first destruction of any enemy aircraft.

"The Focke-Wulf came in at 11 o'clock to within twenty feet of our aircraft," said Lieutenant Rosio.[5] "He was hit by the left waist gunner and the tail gunner. Smoke trailed from his engine and he went straight down and was seen to crash."

The Group also was officially credited with damaging four other enemy planes, one of which was listed as "probably destroyed." It was Staff Sergeant Louis L. Ratkiewicz, tail gunner on Lieutenant Edwards' plane, who got the "probable." The

[4] Kuberski was shot down four days later, but evaded capture and returned to England after five weeks in the underground.

[5] Four days later Rosio and his crew went down over Villacoublay, France, but all escaped death and only two were captured. The others evaded the German net and eventually made their way back to England.

others were credited to Staff Sergeant Reamond C. Smiley, tail gunner in the *Yankee Powerhouse* piloted by Lieutenant Hall; Lieutenant David P. Warrilow, navigator for Lieutenant Lloyd R. Armstrong's *Doris Mae*; and Staff Sergeant Alfred Meyer, right waist gunner on Lieutenant Edwards' *The Joker*.[6]

Eleven of the eighteen Flying Fortresses that returned from Antwerp were damaged by anti-aircraft or cannon fire, and two of them carried wounded aboard. Staff Sergeant J. M. Price, tail gunner in Lieutenant Henderson's ship, was seriously hurt. Sergeant J. R. Dudla and Staff Sergeant J. W. MeKeon, tail and ball turret gunners respectively in Lieutenant D. P. Ogilvie's aircraft also were injured. Dudla, with a flak wound in the right thigh, and Price, with a gunshot wound in the right lung, had already flown their last mission for the 384th. Within a month both had been transferred to the Detachment of Patients, 30th General Hospital.

Significantly enough, those two aircraft became involved in a tactical mistake on the return trip. From the time the enemy fighters left, and after one of our planes had already gone down, Lieutenant Disney was flying a crippled ship. When Disney limped from the formation and started his gliding approach to the water, two of our aircraft followed her part of the way down—the planes piloted by Lieutenant Henderson and Lieutenant Ogilvie.[7]

Henderson's horizontal stabilizer and part of his rudder were shot away. There were twenty-five holes in the vertical fin; the instrument panel was out. That was the aircraft which within a few days was to be christened *Salvage Queen*. The other aircraft which had attempted to aid a stricken comrade, 848, later became known as *Patches*. She had been hit by cannon fire in the tail, waist, radio and cockpit as the formation passed over Sas Van Gent, and went over the target in that condition.

So the 384th's first mission had not been accomplished without cost—two Flying Fortresses and twenty crewmen missing in action, eleven aircraft and three men damaged in action, ugly scars on those queens of the sky that had looked so trim and proud just a few hours before.[8]

Yet that ten per cent loss only added to the determination of the men.

"It might have been worse," said Colonel Peaslee, when the fliers gathered to study the operation in detail. He was speaking directly to the two pilots who had circled away from the formation in an effort to help their stricken comrades. "We got away with it this time, but—"

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[6] Three of the four gunners making these claims were soon to go down in action, Ratkiewicz on the Schweinfurt mission of Oct. 14, Smiley on the July 25 Hamburg, and Meyer over Gelsenkirchen Aug. 12. Ratkiewicz was interned in Switzerland and the others were imprisoned in Germany.

[7] Both these pilots were to go down in action, Henderson on the Villacoublay mission four days later and Ogilvie over Schweinfurt on Oct. 14. Both were taken prisoner.

[8] Two years later our records on these 201 Antwerp veterans were as follows: Prisoners, 88; interned, 7; evaders, 14; killed, 26; missing, 16; died, 1; completed European tour, 36; transferred, 10; grounded, 2; still flying with the 384th, 1.

In that first operational critique he drilled in to the men the idea that under any condition it was a blunder to leave the formation. There were no heroics in this business; it was a matter of survival. By going to the aid of our cripples we were playing directly into the enemy's hands.

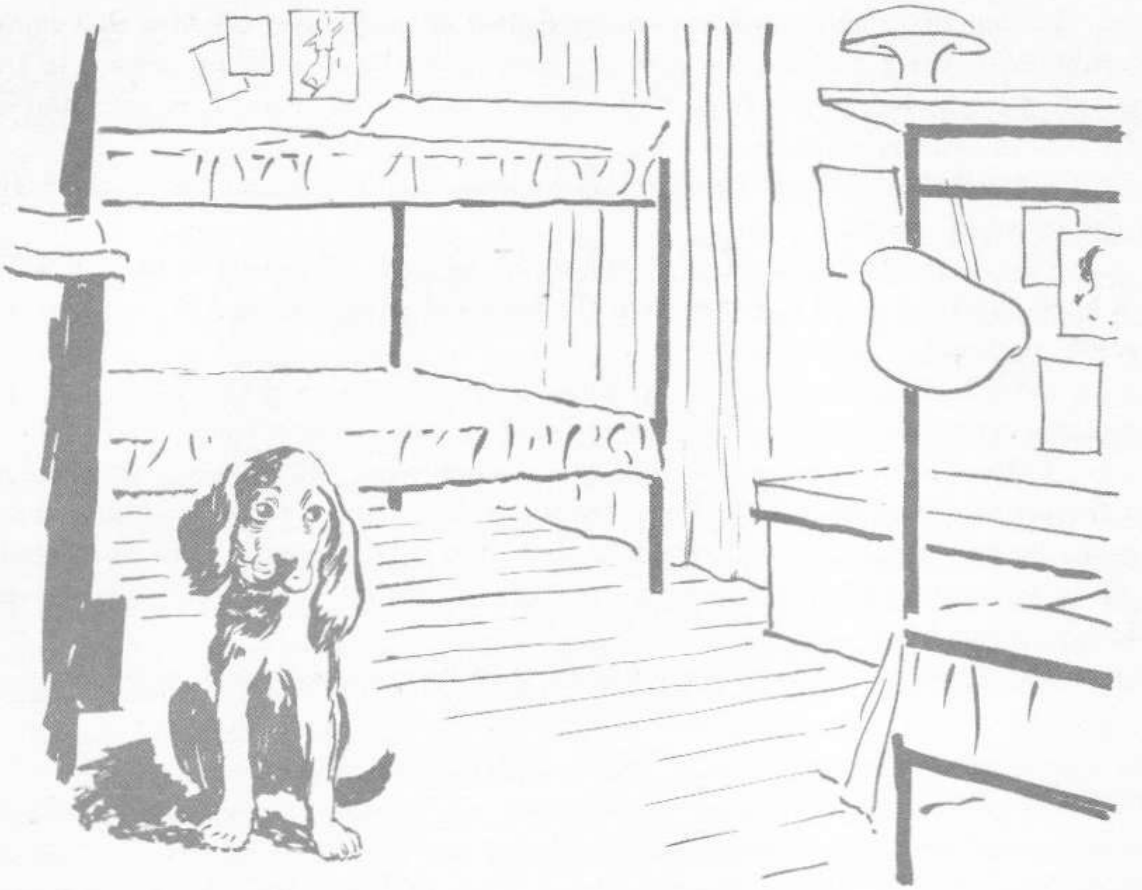
Nevertheless Colonel Peaslee said he was "highly pleased" with the teamwork shown by the crews.

"You stayed right in there all the way," he said. "You held formation in the face of head-on attacks and came through the bursts of enemy ground fire without any hesitation whatever.

"We have had our initiation. This has proved to us that we can take the roughest the Jerry can throw out and we can deal out some pretty rough stuff too."

The lessons brought out in that first mission were well learned, but in subsequent trips across the Channel our losses continued to mount. Of the two hundred and one men who had set out for Antwerp that first day, only a handful ever completed a tour of duty. At the end of our first two months of combat we had only seventy-one Antwerp veterans left.

There was more to this war business than bicycles, pubs and ha'pennies.



Delbert McNasty . . .

Sergeant Delbert P. McNasty wasn't the only dog on the base, but he came of the most doubtful extraction and he had the most unpredictable personality and he created enough disturbance for all the rest of them put together.

As a dog, he wasn't much—just a hunk of black hair with gimlet eyes and ragged, drooping ears. But as a cog in the communal life at Grafton-Underwood he was on a level with all the brass that sat around staff tables determining policy and establishing precedent.

Delbert P. McNasty had become identified with the 384th back at Wendover. They say he just wandered into the 544th Orderly Room one day and before he could back out a service record had been made out for him and someone had tied a pair of identification tags around his neck. At any rate he went through phase training with Lieutenant Jesse D. Hausenfluck's crew and flew to England with the air echelon.

On mission days Delbert used to lie around on the bunks, waiting for the boys to get back. But by the time the planes roared overhead, he would be trotting in

the grass along the perimeter track, ready to give each crew the canine high-sign when they crawled out of the hatch.

That had already become a routine with Delbert by the time the 384th went on its second mission. The day after Antwerp our formation had set out for Bernays-St. Martin in France. Allied policy made it imperative that no bombs should wander off the target when the objective was in friendly but German-occupied territory, so our planes returned with all their bombs because no one had been able to see the target through the clouds.

As that one didn't count on the records, our second mission really took place on Friday, three days after our initiation at Antwerp. We had to beat off enemy fighters to reach the dock area at Hamburg, which was our target, but we made it and had reason to believe we did a good job on those submarine slips. But we lost thirty men that day, including our deputy commander, Major S. L. McMillin, and the Group navigator, Captain J. H. Foister.

Sergeant McNasty, making the rounds in the 544th that night, found a detail gathering up the personal effects of one crew, the crew of Lieutenant John E. Way, whose aircraft had disappeared over Hamburg.[1] He watched for a while, then went out and began rounding up cows in the field behind the squadron area.

The next day it was worse. The same cloud conditions prevented us from bombing an airfield at Villacoublay, so we not only didn't bomb our target but suffered our heaviest loss of the week. Our seventeen-plane formation engaged in a running fight with the Jerries in the Paris area, and for a while there were long plumes of smoke to show where the planes had gone down.

That night Delbert saw them carting away the stuff of thirty more 544th combat men, the crews of Lieutenant Howard C. Burgoon, Lieutenant Thomas A. Cuddeback and Lieutenant Delton G. Wheat.[2] In its first four days of combat the 384th Bombardment Group had lost a hundred men somewhere on the other side of the English Channel, and forty of those men were members of the 544th Squadron.

It was about this time that people began remarking that Delbert P. McNasty was acting funny.

No one gave him credit for being able to sense the tragedy going on around him. No one ascribed the change to war weariness. Instead they attributed Delbert's changed personality to one or more of several things that had happened to him in his brief but active career.

Once, back in the States, they had taken Delbert up to 20,000 feet. His crew mates put him in a parachute bag rigged up with an oxygen tube, but Delbert wouldn't

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[1] Lt. Way and three of his crew were killed.

[2] These three pilots were among the prisoners liberated by Allied armies 22 months later. Five of Cuddeback's crew had been killed in action.

sit still for that. He got out of the bag and wandered around without a mask, and he was pretty dizzy by the time Lieutenant Hausenfluck could bring the plane down off altitude. Then there was the time at Sioux City when Delbert made the mistake of drinking the chemically-treated water the medics had put outside the shower room for a foot bath. And there were those two days he spent in a suitcase to escape official detection at Prestwick, Scotland. And there was that time he got hit by a truck. (Delbert never would get out of the way of vehicles at Grafton-Underwood, and it was a common sight to see two-ton trucks edging into the ditch while Delbert sat in the middle of the road, calmly contemplating his toe nails.) The doctors patched him up, but after that Delbert's front and back legs never seemed to be going in the same direction.

Whatever the cause, Delbert began acting a little strange. The food at the mess hall didn't suit him any more; McKenzie and Kennedy and the others had to carry stuff back to the barracks for him. He even got to the point of rationing his affections. He'd respond to a whistle, reluctantly, stand there poised on three feet long enough for you to reach out a hand with the intention of rubbing him behind the ears. Then off he'd go, leaving you in that ridiculous bent-over position, as self-conscious as a bride who had been left waiting at the church.

A little of that and some fellows were seriously thinking of buying Delbert a swagger stick.

After the costly Villacoublay mission the 384th got in two successive missions without a loss, and when those formations came flying back everyone felt like cheering. The first day, we went to France and bombed the Beaumont-Le Roger air field, with Colonel Peaslee leading. Next day it was Villacoublay again, but once more the Paris area was hidden by clouds. Both times our planes came back over Grafton in tight-packed formation, cocky as hell.

Due to our combat losses there had been some changes in the organizational set-up. Major Beckett had taken over as deputy commanding officer to replace Major McMillin, and Captain Alfred C. Nuttall, who until then had been commanding officer of the 544th, moved to the Group operations post. Captain William F. Gilmore of the 544th was shifted from squadron operations officer to squadron commander.

It was at about this time, too, that we got our first replacements. Two crews were sent up from the replacement depot—the crews of Lieutenant Ernest J. Sierens[3] and Lieutenant Mark S. Willing—and both were assigned to the 547th Squadron.

With fewer empty beds to show for our losses things didn't seem so bad, after all.

Even Delbert appeared to be in better condition. That night, the night of the second day our planes had returned undamaged, he rounded up thirty cows and

[3] Lt. Sierens and all but two of his crew were killed when their plane was shot down on the Gelsenkirchen mission of Aug. 12, 1943.

herded them into a corner back of the squadron orderly room, and he kept them there for two hours.

On July 4th Colonel Peaslee's Group celebrated Independence Day by leading the entire 103rd combat wing to attack an airdrome, a marshalling yard, and an aircraft engine plant at Le Mans, France. The air commander was Captain Raymond P. Ketelsen, commanding officer of the 545th Squadron. His formation bumped into enemy fighter attacks and for a while it was give and take, but the Jerries failed to turn the formation away from its objective.

Two of our aircraft went down under the enemy attacks and again one of them was a 544th plane.

It was the next day, Monday, the 5th of July, 1943, that Grafton-Underwood became an actual if not permanent part of the United States of America, a little hunk of U. S. A. surrounded by England. That was the day the Stars and Stripes went up on the flag pole down near the Flying Control Tower. There was a formal ceremony along with it. The field was delivered by Flight Lieutenant Bryan Cooper, commanding officer of British personnel based at Grafton at the time. On behalf of the American forces Colonel Peaslee accepted it.

Delbert McNasty, who had a faculty for being everywhere that anything might be going on, wandered among the ranks of silent men. He was taking great delight in the whole thing. For once he could pull a trousers leg without so much as a glance of disapproval.

The military personnel of both countries passed in review to the music of an R. A. F. band. The band was playing "God Save the King" when the British standard was lowered. Then the American flag went up and the band broke out with "The Star Spangled Banner."

"From this base American bombers struck their first blow against our common enemy," said Flight Lieutenant Cooper, in delivering custody to Colonel Peaslee. "A great tradition of hard hitting has been built up since then by American units on this field, and I am proud to have the honor of handing over the station to you, Colonel Peaslee, under whose leadership the 384th Heavy Bombardment Group has already added new lustre to that record, under the severest conditions of aerial warfare."

At that moment, as though he had decided to reply on behalf of the Americans, Delbert McNasty uttered a series of sharp barks. Then Colonel Peaslee was speaking:

"It is indeed an honor and a privilege to accept this station in the name of my government. On behalf of the members of this station, I wish to express our appreciation for the cooperation and sincere spirit which have always been apparent in the R. A. F. personnel here. These individuals have been of invaluable assistance and will be missed indeed. I am happy to call you 'Friend and Ally.' "

The 384th felt like a seasoned fighting organization.

Delbert felt it, too. It got the better of his common sense. In the squadron area he scared up a hedgehog, but, just when he thought he was showing off his courage to good advantage, his antagonist let loose with a couple of quills and Delbert yelped off into the woods. He hid for hours. Ever after that, Delbert would go out of his way to avoid that spot, the scene of his great humiliation.

When we look back on it, it seems we had been in combat months or even years before we officially took over the station from the R. A. F. Yet it had been less than two weeks since the Antwerp flight, two weeks in which we had lost twelve planes and one hundred and twenty men.

By this time more replacements were beginning to dribble in. We got six new crews on the Fourth of July, and they were divided evenly between the 544th and the 546th squadrons. Two more crews came in the day after the "keys-of-the-station" ceremony, and again the 544th got one of them, the other going to the 545th.

For a few days after that we had no operations, and combat crews began to relax a little under the soothing influence of bicycle rides into the surrounding villages. The men began discovering Leicester and Nottingham and Picadilly Circus and Northampton.

Then, on the tenth of the month, the day after Sicily was invaded, our bombers went out again. It was another hop into France. Our formation attacked the German airfield at Abbeville, encountering no enemy opposition of any kind.

Four days later we helped the Parisians celebrate their Bastille Day, returning to Villacoublay for the third time in as many weeks. Enemy fighters made a pass at us, but it was flak that caused most of the trouble this time. One of our planes was knocked down, and again it was the troubled 544th that suffered the loss. That was the day Lieutenant James S. Munday and his crew went down.[4]

In those first three weeks one squadron had shouldered half our losses.

The days wore on, ten of them in succession without a mission. They may have given some relief to taut nerves, but the tension didn't wear off.

On Saturday, July 24th, the breathing spell came to an end. That was the day American bombers spanned the North Sea for the first time, carrying out the first attack on German installations in Norway. The target was the German-operated aluminum plant at Heroya, in the Oslo fjord.

The mission was especially significant for Lieutenant Edwin S. Halseth, co-pilot on Lieutenant Gordon J. Hankinson's crew.[5] As the formation flew over the island just off the Heroya peninsula, upon which the aluminum plants were located, Halseth was having his first glimpse of his parental birthplace. It was visible off there

[4] Lt. Munday and four of his crew evaded capture and returned to the U.K. Four of the others were taken prisoner, but the fifth was still listed as "missing" at the end of the war.

[5] This crew was lost over Hamburg the next day, but all survived as prisoners-of-war.

to the east, the city of Moss on the far bank of the fjord. Lieutenant Halseth couldn't tear his eyes away.

"It was beautiful," he said. "Just like my parents have described it so many times. All other members of our family still live there."

His father, Odd Halseth, a flier in the 1914–18 war, won his wings at a British training station only thirty miles from Grafton-Underwood. Old Odd Halseth and his buddies of the other war probably frequented the same haunts that many of the present generation visited this night of July 24th, 1945. Twenty-five years ago pioneer fliers were lounging beneath the façade of the Royal Hotel in Kettering and on the steps of the Queen Eleanor's Cross in Geddington, just as airmen of the present generation were doing tonight.

If they pedaled from Kettering to Brigstock, they may have stopped at a brick farmhouse nestled in a wood off what in this war was the perimeter track of the Grafton-Underwood "aerodrome."

And when they finally reached Brigstock they doubtless stopped long enough to quench their thirst at the Golden Lion. They may even have flirted with Old Mom, who now dispensed mild and bitters for the new generation, and still looks as though she could have been quite a queen a quarter of a century ago.

If they emitted low whistles, as happened occasionally with the present generation of airmen when a pretty girl walked by, it may be that their chaplain had the same ready answer our own chaplain had that day up in Scotland. Members of the ground echelon were having their first look at British soil, from the vantage point of a tug that had tied up against the wharf after bringing them from the Queen Elizabeth. Weary from the weight of their full packs, they lounged about the tug waiting for the signal to disembark. Then a girl flounced by. There was a low whistle and then a chorus of them as she perched on a rail, a good many of her pores exposed to the open air.

The reaction was immediate. Tired as they were, the men perked up. So did Chaplain Schnelle. He followed their enraptured gaze and quickly turned his head away.

"Men," he said quickly, in his best ministerial tone, "let us bow our heads."

But nothing a chaplain can do or say can keep a man from evincing interest in a pretty girl. Kettering and the near-by villages were no different, statistically, from other sections of the world. A certain percentage of the population was female.

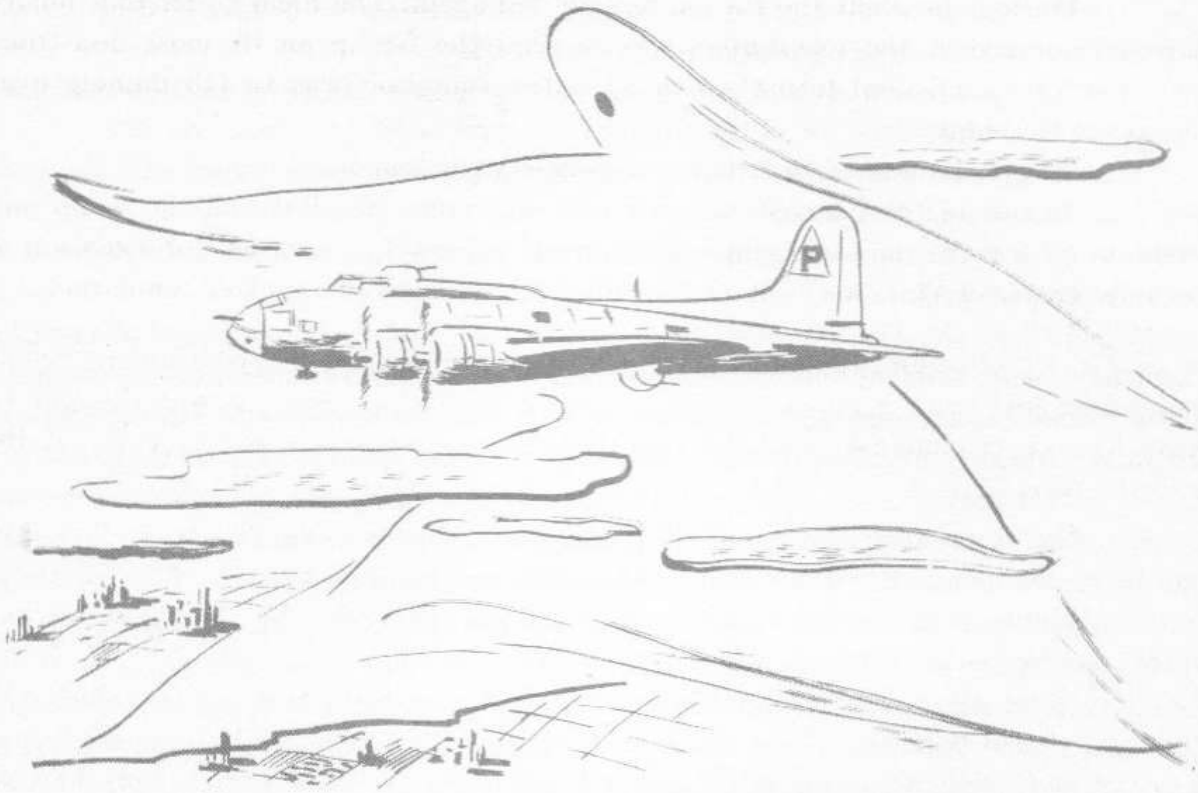
But whatever it takes to make the world go around, spirits were never higher at Grafton than they were the night of the Heroya mission. Our planes had come back unscathed. Although the 384th had lost thirteen planes in its first month of combat, all but three of those losses had come in the first five days. And already there was word that two members of one crew were coming back, after evading capture in enemy territory.

During the night the station was alerted again. The Field Order that finally started coming over the teleprinters was to send the Group on its most disastrous operation yet, a mission during which an entire squadron was to fall flaming over Hamburg, Germany.

But on the eve of that disaster, confidence was high.

In one of the barracks a mock trial was going on. With all the pomp and ceremony of a stern military tribunal, "Private" McNasty was tried for violation of the 96th Article of War. According to the allegation he had "committed a nuisance."

Delbert didn't take his punishment gracefully. He barked continuously while the finding was being read. And then, so methodically that some people thought he must have a mechanical brain, he repeated the offense in the exact center of the barracks floor.



Ghost Squadron . . .

It was in that hour of stillness before sunset. There wasn't a cloud in the sky and the lowering sun had turned the runways to dull gold. Mechanics and cooks and clerks mingled with combat men who had been "stood down." They lounged in small circles, talking, or they lay in the straggly grass around the perimeter track and looked up at the blue sky.

Grafton-Underwood had never seemed so much at peace as it did that evening of July 25th, 1943.

At 7 o'clock interrogating personnel began assembling in the operations and intelligence building. Skipper Johnson was there and Colonel Peaslee and Pop Dolan. Every once in a while someone would go to a window and look out, a useless gesture, as the windows faced west and the planes always returned from the east or the south. As the minutes passed those little trips to the window and the casual glances at wrist watches became more frequent.

By 7:15 p. m. everything was ready. Tables to accommodate eighteen crews had been set up and there was nothing to do but wait.

"Did you hear what broke up the aircraft recognition class?" someone was saying.

"No, what?"

"The instructor asked if they wanted to see any more planes and Joe here said 'Yah, the plains of Arkansas.' "

It was idle conversation, the kind of chatter you used to indulge in at a football banquet back home.

It was another twenty-five minutes before that far-away surge of engines. Then they came. Riddled and broken and bleeding, the 384th came home. At the head of the formation one aircraft peeled off to start the traffic pattern. It was 139 . . . *Snuffy* . . . Major Nuttall's ship. Then, one by one, they came in. Ten of them . . .

Just ten!

So far as the rest of the world is concerned, that peaceful Sunday in late July may be remembered as the day Benito Mussolini was dismissed by the King of Italy. For the Americans of Grafton-Underwood, it will always be the day the 384th lost one entire squadron over Hamburg, Germany.

Gradually, over sandwiches and hot coffee at the interrogation tables, the story was pieced together. There had been a running fight. The attacks had started at the coast and continued to the target and well out to sea on the way back. It had lasted two hours and sixteen minutes.

The low squadron, which was provided by the 544th, took the brunt of it. Of the seven aircraft in the low, only *Liberty Bell*, piloted by Lieutenant Alfred Sprague, managed to get back. No one was sure just when the others went down. Shortly before the formation reached the I. P. the Tail-End-Charlie—Lieutenant Hankinson's *Passes Cancelled*—fell out of formation, went into a flat spin, crashed into the ground in a huge puff of smoke. Three 'chutes were seen.

Over the target a plane from the lead squadron was seen spinning down. That would have been *April's Fool*. Someone in Major Nuttall's lead plane said he could see the co-pilot slumped in the cockpit.

Three minutes later aircraft 075, *Long Horn*, piloted by Lieutenant John Hegewald, dropped away with her right inboard engine smoking.

"The nose of his plane was shot up badly and one man was obviously dead, sprawled in the nose. One other man came from the escape hatch and fell through the air, threshing his arms and legs about as he fell. His parachute did not open . . ."

The fellows in *Liberty Bell* said Hegewald went down under continuous attack. They watched enemy aircraft boring in on the stricken plane, in waves, driving in from the rear time after time. They could see one man lying between the front and side guns in the nose. The glass was all bloody. Finally one parachute came out. The enemy aircraft kept right on attacking the spinning plane and the lone parachutist.

About five minutes after that the *Royal Flush*, piloted by Lieutenant P. J. Ward, was observed going down out of control. There was an explosion in the plane and one parachute was seen.

No one was sure what happened to the other missing planes. Someone in *Liberty Bell* suddenly discovered there wasn't much left of the low squadron. Just one other plane. Somewhere along the route they had lost Lieutenant Clarence R. Christman, Lieutenant Kelmer J. Hall and Lieutenant Robert D. Swank. They had seen planes go down, but no one had identified them. Just beyond the target area one aircraft had its tail assembly shot away, and six parachutes came out. About ten or fifteen minutes later another headed down, its left stabilizer gone. A minute or so after that another Flying Fortress fell away with its right outboard engine smoking. The elevators were shot to pieces and locked in the down position, and from the way the plane acted observers thought the pilot and co-pilot had both been hit.

Some time later Lieutenant Thomas J. Estes' ship fell away, with enemy fighters following her down, and *Liberty Bell* was the only plane left in the low squadron.

That was all anyone knew of the eight missing planes. The interrogation was still in progress when news came that Lieutenant Swank[1] had landed in at Groton, an R. A. F. base, after jettisoning every movable part on board to get back. That reduced our losses to seven of eighteen planes.

Of the eleven planes that eventually returned, not one had escaped damage from flak and cannon. It was hard to imagine how the one hundred and ten could have come back alive, but they did and there were surprisingly few injuries. Lieutenant Floyd C. Edwards, pilot of the *Ramp Tramp*, had been hit in the leg soon after the formation passed the coast on the way in. His co-pilot Lieutenant Paul Gordy,[2] was at the controls most of the time after that.

Estimates of the number of enemy planes that had attacked our formation ran all the way from seventy-five to three hundred and included practically every type of fighter aircraft the Germans had—Focke-Wulf 190's, Messerschmitt 109's, and 110's and 210's, and a few Junkers 88's and Dornier 217's. In the heat of the battle many enemy planes were seen to go down under our guns. At the time it was estimated that nineteen of them had been destroyed and five others had probably suffered the same fate.

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[1] In a matter of days this crew was to have a less fortunate experience. One crew member was killed, two others were determined dead, and Lt. Swank himself was still listed "missing" two years later after their aircraft had disappeared on the Gelsenkirchen mission of Aug. 12, 1943. Six of the crew were known to have been taken prisoner.

[2] Four days later Lt. Gordy, flying co-pilot for Lt. James R. Roberts, went down over Germany. Two of their crew were killed and one was still "missing" two years later. Lt. Edwards flew from Grafton for many months, finally going down on the Oberpfaffenhofen mission of April 24, 1944. A question that haunted him during his year's imprisonment was whether his child was a boy or a girl.

In the officers' bar that night there was more revelry than usual. The men who had returned from Hamburg drank and sang and everyone had a chance to tell his favorite story. The club was never merrier.

Many months later the bartender, Sergeant Primo Lombardi, was to recall that night of revelry as the one in which he first began to comprehend the behavior of combat officers.

"I was almost crying, and them out there drinking and singing and yelling," he said. "I just couldn't understand how the group could have taken it so good."

Colonel Peaslee, with his unfailing ability to sense the mental reactions of his men, noticed how badly the bartender was feeling. He went over and said, quietly: "Look, Primo, don't you understand they feel worse about it than you do?"

From that moment on Sergeant Lombardi knew what was behind the capers of these flying men he served.

"On their faces they was taking it good, but there was lots of crying in their souls and stomachs," he said later. "They don't fool me for a minute any more."

Outwardly, it seemed that the ground men were taking it the hardest. In the 544th area men stood around and sneaked silent looks at each other. No one said anything. There wasn't anything to say.

A month ago, when the squadron had entered combat so cockily and so full of confidence, its nine flying crews were going to win the war. Now they had lost more men than they came over here with . . . eight original crews plus four others that had joined the organization as replacements.

Way, Burgoon, Cuddeback, Wheat, Erickson—five of the nine original crews had been knocked down in the first two weeks. Fifty of ninety men!

When Staff Sergeant George R. Ashworth returned from a forty-eight-hour pass late in June he had found himself sole occupant of a barracks that had held twenty-five men when he left. And when Ashworth himself went down with Erickson a few days later the "morgue detail" found he had packed and labelled all his personal belongings, as though he had known what was coming. Not a sock or a stray handkerchief had been left unpacked.[3]

After those first two weeks there had been a brief respite while the squadron gathered strength again, then Lieutenant Munday and his crew, the first of the replacements, fell in combat.

And now, July 25, six more crews: Hankinson, Kelmer J. Hall, and Estes of the originals and Ward, Christman and Hegewald of the replacements.[4]

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[3] Erickson and Ashworth both evaded capture and returned to England. Two of their crewmates were killed, but the others eventually drifted back, one after receiving underground treatment in a French hospital.

[4] The seventh plane to go down that day carried another original crew, that of Lt. Ralph J. Hall, of the 545th Squadron. Of the 70 men lost on the mission 19 were killed, 40 were taken prisoner, and two returned, while one was still listed "missing" when hostilities ceased. Lt. Christman was the only pilot killed.

But the war went on, and the heavy losses made the 384th more determined. Doggedly, our planes set out for Hamburg again the next morning, but a heavy overcast hampered assembly and they returned without bombing the target. Two days later there was another aerial battle as our planes attacked targets of opportunity in Germany and again the next day we had to fight our way to Kiel. For the two days' efforts the 384th lost two more planes, Lieutenant William Dietel the first day and Lieutenant James R. Roberts the second.[5]

Then, on Friday, July 30th, the 384th had a double dose of good news.

First: Eleven planes from Grafton bombed Kassel that day and although only six returned as a formation they all survived another running fight with the Luftwaffe. Second: Lieutenant Estes and his crew, who had been shot down on the Hamburg mission five days earlier, returned to help fill up those empty barracks in the 544th.

The day's mission hadn't been easy. The formation had been bounced about by flak and beset by enemy fighters. It was hard to understand how *Patches* ever got back at all. Her throttles were jammed; a good part of her elevator was shot away; a chunk was knocked out of the rudder; there were at least a thousand holes in her, and six men lay injured in the fuselage.

But *Patches* limped heavily back across the Channel and set her crew safely down in southern England. The crew left her there—a glorious pile of junk—and hitched their way home in another craft. The trouble had come after Lieutenant William R. Harry, the pilot, had taken *Patches* over the target. Technical Sergeant Curray A. Reid was tossed around in his top turret, got a compound fracture of the leg. A bullet ripped a large hole in his left thigh. But Reid had refused to leave his position while the heat was on, finally had the satisfaction of seeing one of the Focke-Wulfs that had been tormenting him go down in flames. Staff Sergeant John C. McKenna accounted for another. While the fight was going on two first-aid stations were set up in the ship, one in the radio room and the other in the nose.

The pilot, Lieutenant Harry, had been shot through the right hip and relinquished the controls to his co-pilot, Lieutenant Ivan L. Rice.[6] It took both of them to set the big ship down, however, as the damage also included a flat tire.

Lieutenant Harry and two others of his crew, Staff Sergeant Willard J. Cronin[7] and Sergeant Reid, were left in a hospital at the emergency base where *Patches* came

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[5] Lt. Dietel and seven of his crew were killed. Two members of the other crew were killed, but Lt Roberts was among the survivors who sweated the rest of the war out in prison.

[6] Lt. Harry received the Silver Star. His co-pilot, Lt. Rice, with whom he was shot down on the Oct. 14th Schweinfurt, has since been determined dead. Lt. Harry himself was injured again, but lived the war out in a prisoners' compound.

[7] Sgt. Cronin recovered but fell into German hands Sept. 23, 1943, when, with another crew, his aircraft went down on a mission to Nantes.

down. The three other injured crew men, along with the four who were unhurt, came back to the home base that night.

Things were certainly peaceful at Grafton-Underwood. The tonics were working. Maybe the 544th couldn't win the war alone, but give them the help of the other three squadrons and nothing could stop them.

Even the story that Lieutenant Estes and his crew brought back—the story of a harrowing escape during which the bombardier was tossed out of the hatch of his diving plane, the story of a treacherous ditching and forty-one hours adrift in rubber dinghies—everything seemed funny now.

Here's what had happened to *Wearie Willie:*

Shortly after leaving the target the tail and ball turret guns had run out of ammunition, but it was impossible to get more so both gunners remained in their positions and tracked with empty guns.

She sustained those attacks until well out to sea, when only one other ship was left in the low squadron. The oxygen supply of the top turret had been knocked out, the left wing tip had been shattered, three engines had been hit and .20 millimeter shells began exploding in the nose. The explosions knocked the navigator and bombardier back into the tunnel, ripping off their helmets and oxygen masks. Fragments cut their communication lines and ripped their clothing, although neither was seriously injured. Disregarding the now gaping hole in the nose, and without oxygen, both men forced their way back to their guns, charged them and continued to fire. The *Wearie Willie* had begun to fall out of formation. Three fighters continued to attack and followed her down. At one point six Focke-Wulf 190's attacked and the pilot dove the plane down to about 5,000 feet. During that dive the bombardier was thrown through the top hatch and the other members of the crew were unable to catch him, but he managed to grasp the fuselage. When the plane levelled off it threw him back into the radio room. Fighters were still attacking as the *Wearie Willie* hit the water. Shells were exploding in the wings and in the water. Then the enemy planes left, apparently out of gasoline.

After the ditching the crew had time only to scramble into their two life rafts and paddle about fifty feet before the *Wearie Willie* took its last weary plunge. Then someone thought to compliment the pilot on the beautiful landing.

"I didn't do it," said Estes. "I levelled off about twenty feet above the water and told the Good Lord he had control and the Good Lord sure made a wonderful landing."

The raft had been punctured by flak, and considerable patching, pumping and bailing was necessary to keep it afloat. As the ten men bobbed about in their raft, sixty miles from the enemy coast, small things began to take on greater importance. Lieutenant Estes dismantled his cigaret lighter, and put it together again, three different times.

But they found humor in their predicament. Within a few seconds after the ditching, as the raft was still rocking from the circling waves set up by the *Wearie Willie's* last plunge, Staff Sergeant James M. Self looked at his forlorn companions and said, ruefully:

"My, my, isn't this an embarrassing situation for Crew 44 to be in!"

Time passed slowly, so slowly that even seconds seemed to drag out.

It was the experience of the *Wearie Willie* crew that gave Colonel Peaslee's group a slogan that was to guide it in the months to come: "We flew the course as briefed." Although the pilot had known he could save himself and his crew by abandoning his low position and joining the high squadron, he also knew that such action would have left the others vulnerable to attacks. So the *Wearie Willie* continued on course "as briefed."

For security reasons, much of the story could not be circulated, even among Grafton personnel, at the time. In the Occupied Countries men and women of the Underground were working for the Allies. Their chief protection was the pledged silence of the airmen they saved. As a consequence, few men at Grafton-Underwood knew at the time how the crew of the *Wearie Willie* had escaped.

Here is the story, as told in a document preserved by Intelligence:

"We had been in the water for about thirty-eight hours when in the distance we sighted what appeared to be a sail of a small boat. When we saw him coming closer we started to paddle in his general direction. About three hours later he let loose a buoy and put his flag out, then came toward us and picked us up with our raft and equipment. They said that at first they thought we were Germans and therefore hesitated to pick us up sooner. They took us aboard, gave us food and water, and made us as comfortable as possible. We asked them where they were going and they told us ——,[8] Denmark. We told them that rather than go to Denmark we would rather refill our water bottles, get some food if they could spare it, and go back to the raft. I (Lieutenant Davis) explained that it was important that we get back to our base rather than be taken prisoner, and that our men preferred to go back to the raft. The captain said he was afraid of the harm that would come to him and his family if he was caught aiding us and that is why he hesitated. He finally consented to take us within fifty miles of the English coast. We rode all that night with the exception of the hours of darkness when we stopped because of mines in that area. At about 11:30 a. m. the next morning we sighted an English Halifax. We remained on course and the Halifax circled over us for several hours. When we got as close to the English coast as he (the captain) could take us and still have enough gas to get back to his port we stopped. The men took some tarpaulin and on the dark side in white letters inscribed: 'SOS—BRING BOAT.' We took our Mae West life jackets and waved them and also held

[8] For security reasons, even in this secret document the name of the Danish town was left blank.

up the SOS. The Halifax signalled us with his aldis lamp as follows: 'RESCUE MOTOR LAUNCH COMING.' About two hours later two air-sea rescue boats arrived and took us aboard. They gave the fishing schooner's captain supplies, gasoline, fuel and tobacco, and took off."

But it was to be many more hours before the *Wearie Willie* crew reached land. Their rescue boats had been in radio contact with their headquarters, and they were instructed to look for three men reported to have been sighted in a dinghy. The two planes continued the search all night and part of the next day before returning to shore.

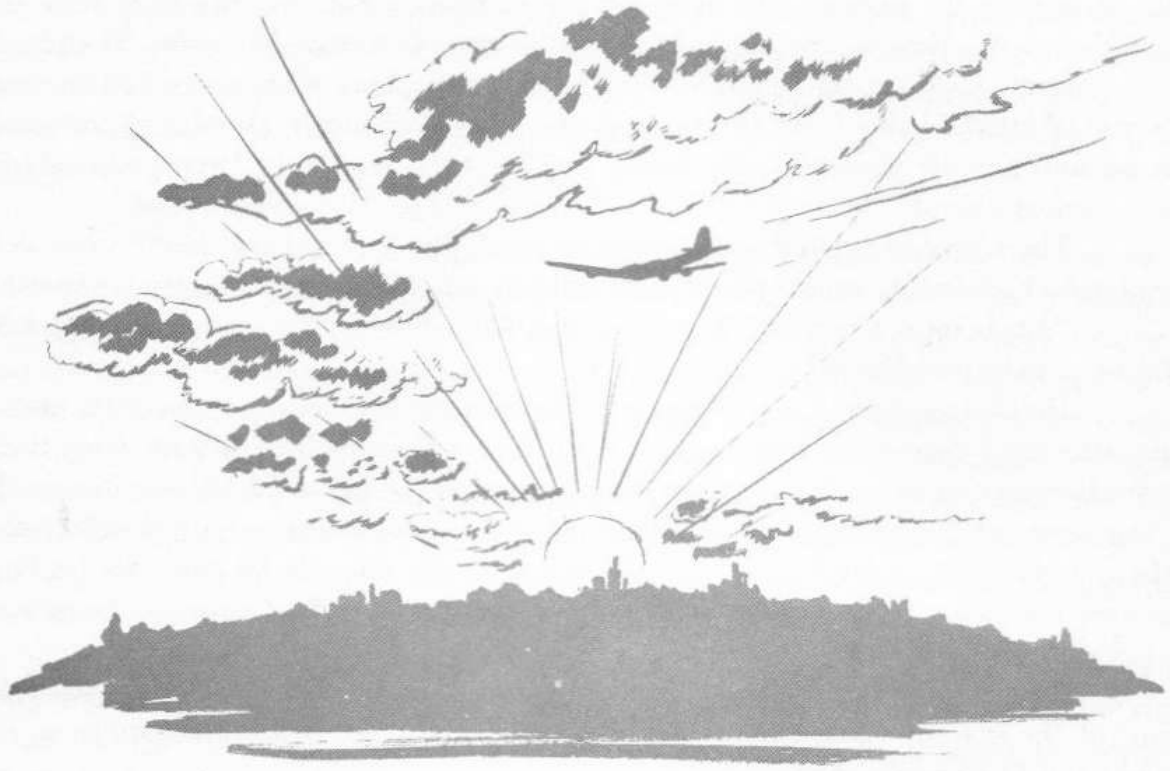
Throughout the entire experience Lieutenant Estes and his crew had kept their eyes open for any observation that might have been of value to Allied intelligence. From their tiny rafts they had watched as hundreds of bombers streamed overhead, by day and by night, in the process of levelling Hamburg. On the fishing schooner they learned much as to conditions existing in Denmark at the time.

The captain of the schooner asked members of the Fortress crew to contact his friends and relatives in England and Iceland with whom he had been completely out of touch since 1939.

"He remarked once," says the document filed by Intelligence, "that there were more Germans in his country than there were native population and that the majority of the people hated the Germans and were passively resisting them.

"A seventeen-year-old boy, who was the cook on the fishing schooner, asked us if he were captured by the English would he be put to hard labor in the coal mines, as had been told him by the Germans."

With the return of Estes the 544th now had two of its original crews. It had a ghost squadron on the other side of the Channel.



Nut and Bolt Factory . . .

It was a warm clear afternoon not long after Delbert was "busted" that our formation got pretty badly mangled over Schweinfurt.

When the planes zoomed overhead it was already apparent they hadn't fared too well. The formation was just half the size it had been at take-off, and the ones that were left showed little hunks of blue sky through their wings. One, apparently more badly crippled than the others, hung around up there while the rest went into their traffic pattern.

"*El Rauncho,*" someone said identifying the aircraft. "That'd be Jacobs."

"He's pulling his landing gear back up."

So everybody kept an eye on the *El Rauncho* while the planes at the head of the huge half-circle began coming in. Suddenly the landing pattern was interrupted, apparently turned away by Flying Control to let Jacobs in. His wheels still were not down. Two of the propellers were windmilling haphazardly.

The *El Rauncho* pointed steeply down, then levelled off at the tree tops and began feeling for the runway. She must have been going a hundred and fifty miles an hour when the friction of aluminum on concrete began throwing off sparks. The plane slid at a terrific pace the full length of the runway, screeching all the way and leaving a shower of sparks behind. At the far end she whirled abruptly about and careened over an anti-aircraft emplacement, finally coming to a stop only twenty-five yards from a parked aircraft.

The crowd of ground men surged forward, but by the time the first one got there Jacobs had already pried himself loose and was calmly shoving a cigar in his mouth.

"Anybody got a light," he was saying, "We didn't have enough gasoline left to fill our cigarette lighters."

He explained that the *El Rauncho* had been in trouble almost from the start. Right after they passed the French coast a .20 millimeter shell hit the port wing, then flak got the same section and messed up the aileron controls. Later the tail was damaged, the top turret quit working, the ball turret oxygen system developed a leak, the belly of the ship was shot up by flak. And finally, when Jacobs gingerly let down his landing gear over the home field, and the wind started turning the wheels around, he saw a big piece of flak in one tire.

Then two engines went out and the plane dropped from 15,000 to 800 feet almost at the snap of a finger, and Jacobs didn't have time to feather the props as he brought the *El Rauncho* down.

"My tail gunner was breathing the paint off the inside of the can before we got back," said Randy Jacobs, studying the ashes on the end of his cigar. "Why, Compton sat back there with four fighters coming in on our tail and kept working on them while telling the top turret gunner how to fix his gun."

He looked ruefully at the junk pile which a few minutes before had been the proud *El Rauncho.*

"I guess they didn't want us to get at their nut and bolt factory," he said.

But the 384th did get to that nut and bolt factory, as photographic reconnaissance later proved. They got there in spite of the fiercest kind of opposition, in spite of hundreds of enemy fighters and tons of flak. And when they got there they put their bombs into a ball bearing factory that higher headquarters had earlier described as "of the most vital importance" and of such a nature that "its destruction must be completed in one operation."

"The three plants at Schweinfurt," they had been told at briefing, "account for fifty-two per cent of Germany's ball bearing supply."

The Eighth Air Force dispatched two hundred and fifty heavy bombers to accomplish the mission, lost thirty of them. That the 384th bore the brunt of the opposition is shown in the fact although providing less than eight per cent of the striking force we suffered seventeen per cent of the total loss.

Of the eighteen aircraft which took off from Grafton-Underwood at noon, ten were known to have dropped their bombs on that "nut and bolt factory" at Schweinfurt. Another one, Lieutenant Frink's crippled *Old Battleaxe*, returned early after picking an airfield for a target of opportunity. Still another went over the target, but its bombs went away minutes too late because the salvo lever refused to work. Two others landed away.

Five didn't come back at all.

"When we got over the enemy coast we had to lose altitude because of the lowering overcast," said Major Beckett in the interrogation room. "That's where the fighters got to us. Although we had fighter support, enemy fighters kept hitting us anyhow. After the fighters left we climbed back to altitude. . . . When we got to the target there were no fighters there. . . . The target was partially obscured by a smoke screen. We picked up the target okay. After we had passed over the target we made a left turn and joined the Group, the Combat Wing, and then the Bomb Division. There were a few fighter attacks on the way back, but not at all like it was on the way in. . . ."

Second Lieutenant Joseph W. Baggs, our Lead Bombardier that day, said he picked out what he thought was the target and synchronized on it.

"At that time it was about the only thing I could see that resembled the target as described," he said. "But as we got closer I could see our target at the right. I saw the race track and knew where I was. . . . I hesitated in dropping the bombs a fraction of a second. . . . As we got over the target we noticed that the first building on the target was on fire."

Our lead navigator was Second Lieutenant Edward J. Knowling.[1]

For some time there had been talk of the Germans attempting to bomb our formation from above, but this was the first time many 384th fliers had seen it. They watched the Jerries try this air-to-air bombing, told interrogators that a B-17 in a wing behind ours was hit.

Among the five 384th planes that hadn't returned was that piloted by Lieutenant Hausenfluck. Only five days ago he and his crew had almost failed to get back from Gelsenkirchen. That was the day his tail gunner, Technical Sergeant Raymond P. Gregori, had been hurt.[2] During an attack by enemy fighters the tail compartment had been riddled and Gregori was hit in the shoulder.

That had happened fifteen minutes before the target, but it was half an hour later before the rest of the crew found out about it. All that time, though weak from loss of blood and shock, Gregori had remained by his guns. The windows had been shot out and the metal around him was a sieve, so he was blue from cold when they

[1] Knowling finished the war as a prisoner, going down on the Nantes mission of Sept. 9, 1943.

[2] Because of his injury Sgt. Gregori, who won the Silver Star for this action, wasn't with his crew mates when they went down. Lt. Hausenfluck was killed, but eight of the crew survived as prisoners.

found him. The heating unit on Gregori's suit had been destroyed and it was forty degrees below zero up there.

And now Gregori was in the hospital and the rest of his crew had been shot down. Technical Sergeant Thomas B. Randolph had taken Gregori's place in the tail.

That other incident had been last Thursday, the day we lost five planes over Gelsenkirchen. Four days after that we had gone to Le Bourget, in France, and lost one more crew. Carrington, Swank, Bigelow, Sierens and Keck on the first one and Magowan on the other.[3] And one man had been brought back dead with the planes that returned.

Sixty-one men in five days, and now fifty more over Schweinfurt.

At the mess hall this Tuesday night everyone was comparing notes, putting the whole story together piece by piece. They were too tired for bed; the exhilaration hadn't yet worn off. They ate and they talked.

An engineering officer was saying that every damn plane we got back had flak or cannon damage. You ought to go out and take a look at *The Joker*, he said . . . and at *Liberty Bell*, and *Sad Sack II*, and the *Loma Lee*. As for *Lucky Thirteen*, she had no right to come back at all.

Lucky Thirteen was Lieutenant Algar's plane. As soon as she had set her wheels down an ambulance had gone tearing over there to pick up a wounded gunner, Staff Sergeant Loring C. Miller. The doc said he was pretty badly hurt, a sliver in the lung.

Lieutenant Frank Celentano, the *Lucky Thirteen's* navigator, said a 20. millimeter bullet exploded in the waist, somewhere between the coast and the German border. It knocked Sergeant Miller down and a fragment also hit the other waist gunner, Staff Sergeant John Schimenek, but Schimenek wasn't hurt much.

Celentano said Sergeant Miller reported over the interphone that Schimenek had been hit. His voice was calm enough, and it was some time later before the crew learned that Miller also had been hurt, and much more seriously. They found Miller hanging on his gun, firing away. The pilot had to send the radio operator back to take over the right waist gun before Miller would lie down and accept first aid. Even then, all the time that *Lucky Thirteen* was under fighter attack Miller would point to the window in an effort to tell Schimenek to get back to his gun and that he was getting along all right.[4]

"As we were crossing Belgium on our way out," said Celentano, "Sergeant Schimenek reported that our wounded man was spitting blood. To keep from choking he motioned Schimenek to remove his mask so he could spit out the blood."

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[3] Of the 60 men on these crews 23 were killed, including Lt. Sierens, and Lt. Keck; 32 were taken prisoner, 3 evaded capture, and two were still listed as "missing" on V-E Day.

[4] Sgt. Miller was decorated with the Silver Star for this action.

So *Lucky Thirteen* started her descent immediately, in order to get back to normal breathing. With a shell fragment in his lung, Sergeant Miller had held on while under oxygen for several hours.

It looked as though everyone had had plenty of combat on this one. Our formation was under fighter attack an hour and five minutes on the way in and fifty-five minutes on the way out. There was a lot of talk about how Sergeant Lemmerman had sprained his wrists. At the outset of the attacks he discovered his right waist gun wasn't working, so he took the adapter off, held the back plate on, and fired by manipulating the trigger bar. That helped bring the *We Dood It* back.

The chatter at the tables went on.

Lieutenant Mark S. Willing's crew had trouble too. They brought the *Ramptramp* home after two engines had failed and everything movable had been tossed overboard during the channel crossing. They prepared to ditch but managed to use their last bit of altitude to reach an R. A. F. landing field. It was "like a pot of gold at the end of a rainbow," Willing said.

And Second Lieutenant W. Y. K. Yee, the Chinese bombardier from Hawaii . . . he and two other members of the *Sad Sack's* crew kept their guns blazing in spite of wounds. Their pilot, Second Lieutenant James E. Armstrong,[5] said all three were getting along all right. Yee probably would be sitting at the card table again tonight, with a couple of bandages on his leg. Lieutenant Carlin and Sergeant Iverson weren't hurt much, either.

Over a second and a third cup of coffee they compared guesses as to how many fighters had hit them. Estimates ran as high as three hundred. Anyway, the armament boys said we used 121,265 rounds of ammunition. A lot of claims were turned in, but Intelligence whittled them down to five destroyed, three probably destroyed, and four damaged. Everybody who went on the mission saw plenty of enemy aircraft go down, and it made little difference who got credit for them.

On the other side of the Channel the Germans probably weren't having so much trouble estimating how many of our planes they had shot down. They had the wrecks sprawled around here and there and all they had to do was count them.

We knew how many we had lost, too. Now that *Ramptramp* had been accounted for it was down to five . . . *Deuces Wild*, *Snuffy*, *M'Honey*, *Vertical Shaft*, and *Powerhouse II*.

The *Vertical Shaft*, piloted by Lieutenant Hausenfluck, was last seen shortly after the formation passed over the coast on the way in. "She kept losing altitude and falling back," someone said. "But she wasn't on fire."

That was forty-five minutes before the formation reached the target.

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[5] Lt. Armstrong evaded capture when shot down on Stuttgart mission of Sept. 6, 1943, but Yee and Carlin were taken prisoner.

There, within the space of three minutes, three more of our aircraft went down. *Deuces Wild*, her bomb bay doors open, under control but with her left wing on fire, fell away at 1505 hours. Someone on Jacobs crew said eight 'chutes were seen.

"After she was hit by flak the fighters jumped her," said a *Loma Lee* crew member. "She lost altitude fast with about eight Focke-Wulfs circling her."

Two minutes later *M'Honey* had pulled out of formation. She was sinking fast and couldn't keep up. A minute after that practically everybody saw *Snuffy* going down over the target. She pulled out of formation with all four engines on fire, and with flames shooting from the bomb bay and the waist windows.

But she dropped her bombs on the target!

Nobody seemed to have any idea what had happened to *Powerhouse II*. She was still flying along when the first fighter attack subsided. Whether she got over the target or not no one knew. Anyway, she wasn't along as the formation came out of Germany.

Five planes—*Snuffy, Deuces Wild, Powerhouse II, Vertical Shaft* and *M'Honey* —five crews, fifty men.[6]

Over in the 544th site Private Delbert McNasty stayed around Barracks S-1 for a while, but Hausenfluck and his crew didn't come back. The next day he moved in with the boys of Lieutenant Estes' crew, but he kept running back once in a while to see if Kennedy or Everson or McKenzie or any of the others had showed up.

Finally, after about a week, he took off with a Red Cross girl and no one ever saw him around the base after that.

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[6] It was learned eventually that 40 of these men were taken prisoner and that six others were killed. Four of the 50 made their way back to England.

A Voice from the Wilderness . . .

A lot of ghosts walk the English Midlands. An easy bicycle ride would carry the more ambitious of Colonel Peaslee's boys to that eerie estate where a mysterious horseman has been pounding up and down the narrow paths every moonlit midnight since the War of the Roses. Over a few hills in another direction is the castle in which the ghosts still wear the togas they started with back in the days of Roman occupation. Knightly armor clinks softly through the woods, but most of the Midland ghosts are fresh young upstarts only three or four centuries old.

If there had been time to dwell on our losses we might have developed a few American ghosts in the tree-shrouded Nissen huts of Grafton-Underwood.

But the echo of Major McMillin's laugh and the clickety-clack of Captain Foister's cowboy boots died away. Henderson, Roberts, Cuddeback, Erickson, Munday —they were names of fellows we used to know in the vague and distant past stretching back from yesterday or the day before.

There was little time to wonder. The shock of each loss was soon buried beneath the shock of another. Schweinfurt, Watten, Roumilly-sur-le-Seine, St. Andre L'Eure, Stuttgart, Brussels, Vitry En Artois—

It was a bright, clear day two weeks after the Allied invasion of Italy that the *Loma Lee* limped home from France long after the rest of our planes had returned. At the interrogation no one was sure what had happened to her. Before reaching Nantes, where we were to bomb the shipping area, there had been some fighter attacks by Focke-Wulfs and rocket-firing Junkers 88's. But the *Loma Lee* had still been around when the formation went over the target.

The fellows around the interrogation tables were still trying to figure it out when the noise of the *Loma Lee's* engines were heard overhead. She didn't waste much time, nosing down toward the runway with flares shooting out in all directions. The ambulance buzzed around the perimeter track to take off the wounded.

Then First Lieutenant Archie B. Ashcraft, Jr., the pilot, went around to the interrogation room. He had six members of his crew with him, but three others had been taken to the hospital, badly wounded.

They told how the *Loma Lee* had struggled to stay in the war after the initial fighter attack, fifteen minutes from the target. Focke-Wulfs had lined up on the formation's tail, their .20 millimeter shells knocking out the radio and oxygen systems in the *Loma Lee.*

One shell tore a hole in the right thigh of Technical Sergeant Romulus C. Jennings, the radio operator. Another destroyed the tail guns, wounding Staff Sergeant William H. Lindsey in the right hip.

It was in the same series of bursts that Staff Sergeant James R. Fields[1] was hit. His left leg was fractured in two places but in spite of the intense pain he shifted his weight to his one good leg and kept on firing at the attacking fighters. His crew mates were sure Fields had accounted for one of the attackers, a Focke-Wulf that Lieutenant Ashcraft said "finally wavered and just fell apart."

During the long trip home, with most of them on walk-around bottles, the uninjured members of the crew did all they could to help the wounded.

While that was going on the *Old Battleaxe* piloted by Second Lieutenant William H. Price, also was having troubles. In the running battle two of her engines had been shot out, the tail assembly had been torn up, and the waist had been riddled by bullets. Four members of the crew claimed to have knocked down enemy fighters, claims that were later to be confirmed by higher headquarters.

The *Old Battleaxe* plunged down to 10,000 feet to shake off the fighters, then skirted the Brest Peninsula alone. She continued to lose altitude, was at a scant 700 feet

[1] As a result of that day's action Sgt. Fields was awarded the Silver Star and subsequently a Russian decoration, Order of the Red Star.

when she passed over an island loaded with anti-aircraft emplacements. The crew strafed the emplacements, then threw their empty guns overboard.

When the plane struck the water the radio compartment collapsed, but no one was injured. The craft remained afloat six minutes. After that the men drifted for some time in their one good rubber dinghy and were finally rescued by fishermen.

A week later, September 23rd, we returned to Nantes, but no one was too jubilant about the results. A few stray bombs wandered away from the river and fell among some houses that were crowding the warehouses down there. As cold and lifeless as a target might seem from 19,000 feet, the bombing that day gave Grafton something to think about. No one could toss it off by reminding himself that it was the French, themselves, who invented the saying: "C'est le guerre."

By this time the nights were cooling off a bit. The army of wasps that had plagued us during the long summer had been reduced to a scant division or two. There were still enough to invade the mess halls unless something sweet were placed outside to attract their attention, but no one had to stand guard over the lemonade or the jam or the butter any more.

It might have been easier had the wasps been as honest as some of the human beings that were occasionally placed under guard. As in any community, Grafton-Underwood had its law violators. Usually there were a few men in the guardhouse, but seldom if ever was there any serious breach of military law. A man would over-stay a pass and be "tossed in the clink," and for a while he would be marching to the mess hall under armed guard.

To show how honest crime was at Grafton, on one occasion a prisoner attracted considerable attention as he walked up and down the mess hall, peering at the occupants of every table. He wasn't exactly frantic, but there was a definite look of anxiety in his eyes.

"Has anyone here seen my guard," he would ask at each table, "I lost him in the chow line."

It wasn't that way with the wasps. They didn't have the faintest spark of honesty.

For two weeks now, the 384th had been under the command of Colonel Julius K. Lacey, an Army career man who had replaced Colonel Peaslee on September 8th. Our old commander, under whose leadership the Group had absorbed the first shock of combat, had been sent to a combat wing.

So far only one Grafton-Underwood man had won the Distinguished Flying Cross, and he hadn't been around long enough to receive it. On three occasions Staff Sergeant George J. Kendall had been credited with shooting down an enemy plane. The order awarding him the D. F. C. finally came through, but by that time Kendall

himself had been shot down. He had been missing with Lieutenant Wilson's *M'Honey* since the Schweinfurt mission, August 17th.[2]

Of the men who stayed around long enough to receive their awards, the first to win the D. F. C. was Lieutenant Edgar E. Ulrey. On August 12th Lieutenant Ulrey had been flying as Lieutenant Charles W. Bishop's co-pilot when flak and .20 millimeter cannon ripped into the plane. Three members of the crew had been injured. Lieutenant Bishop had been shot in the left arm; Lieutenant Anthony J. Grimaldi had been shot in the wrist; Technical Sergeant Cecil G. Morton[3] had been shot in the foot. Six weeks later, under the date of September 17th, the citation came through: "Over the target, the pilot was wounded and Lieutenant Ulrey assumed command. Damage to the oxygen necessitated leaving the formation and it was only through violent evasive action and skillful use of cloud cover that Lieutenant Ulrey was able to save his own crew and ship from destruction and return to his base. . . ."

By now Lieutenant Ulrey was flying his own plane as first pilot.

A week after the *Loma Lee's* experience the Group returned to Nantes. Four days after that it was Aurich, then Emden and Frankfurt and finally . . .

It was October 8th that the mistake made by two crews on our first mission, the Antwerp affair, was repeated by a newcomer to the 384th. First Lieutenant William Kaczaraba's *What's Cookin' Doc* had gone over Bremen as Tail-End-Charlie. In spite of flak and fighters everything went well until members of the crew saw two other bombers drop back in distress. The *What's Cookin'* went to the aid of the cripples, escorted them all the way to the coast. But by the time she had returned to the formation she had been struck by twenty-five enemy fighters, had dozens of flak and bullet holes in the waist, the nose, the left wing, both stabilizers, and the tail. To show for all that damage the crew claimed the destruction of seven enemy fighters and the probable destruction of two others.

It was maddening to see a friendly ship in trouble, fighting it out all alone with enemy fighters, while you had to sit up there in formation and watch without doing anything about it. But the rule binding everyone to stay with the formation was for the general good. Less than a month ago, when Captain Richard T. Carrington had gone down over Gelsenkirchen, other 384th airmen had watched him fighting to the very end. They knew that Carrington understood why no one came to help.

Lieutenant Hausenfluck, who was to go down himself five days later, had been unable to keep that feeling of helplessness from his voice when he described the incident.

"I saw him sliding under my ship," said Hausenfluck. "I couldn't tell whether he was hit, but his ship was still under control. I saw him pass under the ship and then

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[2] It was determined later that Kendall was a prisoner-of-war.

[3] Sgt. Morton was lost with Fioretti's crew on another Schweinfurt mission, April 13, 1944, and at war's end was still listed as "missing."

start dropping back. The next time I looked around he was approximately five hundred feet below me and about a quarter of a mile back. About six or seven enemy fighters were converging on him. He turned into the formation of enemy fighters, pulled his nose up so that the ball turret could let them have it. He did not swerve from his course. All guns which were available and could be brought to bear on the fighters were brought to bear. The nose guns, the ball turret, and, when nose down, the top turret. At that time the formation made a slight turn which put him behind me and out of my line of vision. The last time I saw Captain Carrington he was still under control and knew exactly what he was doing. I think it was one of the most outstanding feats of personal bravery I've ever witnessed."

That was a month ago. Kaczaraba today had faced the same temptation, and had yielded to it. Yet Kaczaraba had come home and it was possible that his action enabled the two others to make it.[4]

So as someone said at the time, it's hard to correct a man for batting cross-handed as soon as he trots back to the bench after knocking a home run.

During the night we were alerted again, and at dawn the 384th was taking off once more. In a deep penetration that carried them far into Eastern Germany, our planes struck at the source of the enemy's air power, pounding the aircraft factories at Anklam, northeast of Berlin. After unloading their bombs they engaged in a running fight for two hours with every kind of fighter the Germans could put into the sky.

Down by the control tower the windsock was standing straight out, like some kind of a symbol of triumph, when the formation came home. General opinion among the returning crew men was that they had "wiped out the objective." They had even dropped their bomb bay tanks on the target, after they had run out of bombs.

"It was perfect bombing. Everybody hit. . . ."

"There were a lot of fighters and a lot of shooting. . . ."

"Smoke was rolling over the whole city. . . ."

It had been a history-making day for the Eighth Air Force. Some bomber formations had penetrated the German defenses as far east as Danzig, not too far from the general area of the Russian front, and our own effort carried us some 1,600 miles.

Two 384th planes were missing: The veteran old *Dallas Rebel*, piloted by Second Lieutenant John T. Ingles, and the *Philly-Brooklyn*, piloted by Second Lieutenant Mark B. Calnon.[5]

By this time the strategic picture was beginning to take shape. It was apparent that we were in the middle of an all-out battle against the German Air Force, first by attacking their aircraft industry and second by challenging them to battle in the air.

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[4] Kaczaraba was to find himself in a like predicament on Jan. 4, 1944, when he went down on a mission to Kiel. He spent the duration in a prisoner-of-war compound.

[5] Lt. Calnon and seven of his crew were taken prisoner. The fate of the other two, as well as of the entire crew of the "Dallas Rebel," was never established in the 19 remaining war months.

The production of enemy fighter planes had reportedly doubled in the last six months under the impetus of reorganization and new assembly line methods. According to Intelligence the enemy's production plans called for two thousand single engine fighters per month by August of 1944 and three thousand per month by March, 1945. Now was the time to strike—even though our bombers had to fight their way in without escort.

The 384th was playing its part in that strategic plan. Harassed by terrific fighter opposition and unprotected by our own fighters we were attacking factories deep in the heart of Germany. It was costing a lot in planes and men, but already it was beginning to have its effect. We had higher headquarters' word for it that Germany's single engine fighter production had been cut to less than half the planned rate.

On the afternoon of Thursday, October 14th, our bombs fell on Schweinfurt again. Newspapers were full of a "terrific air battle" and losses were placed at sixty Flying Fortresses.

Nine of those lost planes were from Grafton-Underwood.

Our formation had taken off in a thick haze at 10:30 a. m. and the field was still blanketed at 4:08 p. m., when our aircraft were supposed to return. Only the lead ship, carrying Major George W. Harris as air commander, returned at the appointed hour.

Three others crashed in the surrounding countryside and the remainder were forced by damage and weather conditions to land at emergency fields. One, which had landed at a nearby base, was able to return to Grafton a little before midnight but the others were gone for the night.

Crews of the planes piloted by First Lieutenant Edmund A. Goulder,[6] First Lieutenant William M. Price and Second Lieutenant Erwin C. Johnson, bailed out over England. One man on Price's crew had his leg broken, the plane crashing near Corby, a few miles north of the base.

Two of the Group's original bombers, *The Natural* and *The Joker*, ended their combat careers as their crews parachuted to safety. The other plane that came down without her crew was the *Windy City Avenger*. The aircraft's elevator had been shot up, but remained in a locked position despite the loss of the control cables. As the aircraft was coming in for a landing the elevator went completely berserk and at a scant hundred and fifty feet above the ground the crew prepared to bail out, but the pilot was able to coax the tricky plane up to a thousand feet before giving the order to "hit the nylon."

Major Harris, whose lead ship *Battle Wagon* also showed the wounds of battle, said that two to three hundred enemy fighters had struck at the waves of Fortresses. The battle went on continuously for three hours and forty-five minutes.

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[6] Six weeks later, Dec. 1, 1943, Goulder went down with Maj. Dillingham's crew on the Solingen mission. One member of the crew escaped to England; all others were captured.

When the survivors finally limped home the mechanics counted up the damage . . . two hundred and eighteen holes in Lieutenant Bedsole's, a hundred and forty-seven in Carter's, and so on. One aircraft had to have a new wing, a new engine and a new ball turret.

Nine more planes lost, sixty more men . . . it was little wonder that airmen of Grafton-Underwood had by this time developed the idea that it was impossible to complete a full tour of duty. It came to be an accepted fact that you would be shot down eventually. The 384th had entered combat four months ago with a combat flying strength of three hundred and sixty-three officers and men. Already we had lost more than we started with. We were just as strong, due to replacements that were continually coming in, but there were few originals left. In just one hundred and sixteen days we had lost three hundred and seventy-one men over enemy territory.

Yet there were signs pointing in the right direction. Just four days ago Technical Sergeant William C. Ralston and Staff Sergeant Julius F. McNutt had proved that it was possible to survive twenty-five combat missions. The 384th had set out for Munster that day. They found the railroad yards and "plastered" them, but when Lieutenant Moon began studying the strike photos he discovered it wasn't Munster but the marshalling yards at Coesfield that we had hit. But that failed to detract from the important fact that two Grafton-Underwood men had completed a tour of duty.

There were other signs. By now we were beginning to hear occasionally from some of the men who had gone down. A few postcards with the big heading "Kriegsgeiangenenlager" trickled in. The messages were brief and carried only veiled hints of what had happened to the writer's crew mates:

"The same guy was out of the ship first, just like I always told you it would happen, and Hubo isn't here any more. Old Pop got it too. Keep up the good work."

And another:

". . . we've got a lot of catching up to do with life. Am up $800 in a credit poker game. Flak wounds completely healed up . . ."

There usually was a lapse of several months between the time a man went down and the time we had our first word concerning him. Through Red Cross Channels the information would go to the United States and then, eventually, find its way back to his old organization. Then the man's card would be lifted from the "Missing in Action" file to "Prisoner of War" or "Killed in Action."

Many, of course, never were heard from and remained as "Missing" until, after a given length of time, the War Department declared them "presumably" dead.

The 384th had now been in action three and a half months and the Missing-in-Action file was growing fast. It had been several weeks since we had transferred our first name from the Missing to the Prisoner file.

That had been just before Colonel Peaslee left. As the combat men were assembling for another briefing that day, there had been electrifying news. A postcard

addressed simply "To My Commanding Officer" had arrived from a German prisoner-of-war camp. It was the first voice we had heard from that wilderness of lost planes. It came from Major McMillin, and it put in plain words the slogan that was to guide the 384th in more fortunate months to come:

"Let's Keep the Show on the Road."

Hands Across the Channel . . .

It didn't really dawn on most of us at the time that there might be a lot of 384th men crawling about the Continent. All we knew was that they were gone—some five hundred of them by the middle of November—and that still the Army managed to keep their bunks filled with replacements.

But almost from the time that first plane exploded over Antwerp there were Grafton-Underwood men hiding in ditches and haystacks under the noses of the Germans. One, in fact, even cadged a drink from a German soldier, and got back to Grafton to tell the story.

From the first, escape had been an integral part of the training program. Hide out. Get away. Escape. Combat crews heard it at Wendover and they heard it at Sioux City and they kept on hearing it up until the day they, themselves, were listed as missing in action.

It had been good news when that first letter came from a prisoner-of-war camp; it was better news when the first of those lost comrades came back in person.

The first hint we had that the escape procedure was working had been several weeks ago, in mid-August, when Lieutenant Joseph Rosio's crew began dribbling back.

Eventually all but two of that crew returned, including Lieutenant Rosio himself.

Each of those first "evaders" was a ghost from the past. For weeks prior to his return, whenever his name was mentioned someone was sure to comment that he "was a hell of a good guy"—in the past tense. And now here he was again . . . that old familiar smile . . . that funny way of tilting his head when he talks . . .

Now, in the middle of November, others drifted back. Lieutenant Dewey C. Brown, Technical Sergeant John M. DesRochers, Technical Sergeant Vern P. Long and Staff Sergeant Ellis H. Klein had been on *M'Honey* when she went down on that first Schweinfurt, August 17th.

From them we learned that *M'Honey* had crash-landed about fifty miles north of Paris. On the way down they had seen a German camp, so they knew the hunt would be hot and heavy. While the navigator and bombardier remained behind to destroy the aircraft, the others dashed off in pairs.

In a little while there was a lot of yelling and shouting as the Germans went about the business of rounding up the American crew. From across a wide gully, Des Rochers and Klein, who had paired off together, heard the search going on until almost dark. It was well along toward midnight when they left the brush, where they had been hiding, and started crawling through the fields toward another wood.

"Every shadow we saw, we were sure, was a German," they said, later. "From the direction of the German army camp, flares were being fired in the air and each time one burst we hit the ground . . . it couldn't have taken us more than thirty minutes to cross the fields but it seemed like hours."

Finally they forced their way a few feet into a briar patch to spend the night. Next morning they went to the opposite edge of the wood and from a hide-out there watched farmers working in the field.

"At noon a young boy passed, and we whistled," said DesRochers and Klein. "He looked around but did not stop. However, an hour later he returned in a cart with an old man. They passed very close to us. We called out 'Americans' to the old man who looked puzzled and frightened. He tossed a package of food into the wood and drove off."

Late that night the two set out along the edge of a wood toward a village a mile and half away. At the first farmhouse there was a commotion. A dog started barking, a door was thrown open, and an old woman rushed out. The woman motioned them inside and poured out a glass of wine, gave them food and clothes, then sent them on their way. Before leaving they learned that two other members of their crew had been fed there the night before. Klein and DesRochers started walking again. The next

day they crawled into some bushes near a farmhouse, from which vantage point they could watch the house a while before approaching it.

"Unknown to us a man had seen us," they said. "He came up the hill to our bushes. We saw him looking around to see where we had hidden, so we whistled to him. We asked about the Germans and the best direction to walk. He pointed to the top of the hill and motioned us to walk in that direction. From his motions we understood that we were to walk slowly and someone would overtake us."

But as DesRochers and Klein started walking away there was a sharp whistle and they looked around to see their friend making frantic gestures for them to run. They ducked into some bushes and presently the Frenchman sneaked around in back of them. He pointed to his farm and made them understand there were Germans around. A little while later another Frenchman came along.

"The new man became very excited when he heard who we were," recalled the Grafton pair. "We had to go through the usual kissing party."

One of their helpers guided them to a new hiding place, while the other went after food. They remained there most of the day, drying their clothes in the sun, and the old man brought them food at noon and in the evening.

"With him in the evening was an old man who told us we were to go with him," they said. "We walked with this old man to a village and were told that if we were stopped we were to pass as his two sons. The old man took us to railroad tracks in the village and pointed down them toward Reims. The old man watched us out of sight and we walked down the tracks as directed. Reims, we thought, was perhaps not too far away."

It was with help such as that, repeated many times during the next few days, that DesRochers and Brown and Long and Klein made their way back to England. Hands across the channel were playing a subtle but important part in our aerial war against Germany.

It was three weeks after the remnants of the *M'Honey* crew came back that Staff Sergeant Peter Seniawsky, a waist gunner who had been shot down on the second Schweinfurt, October 14th, returned to England after a hectic sojourn that began in Germany itself. Seniawsky had walked out alone, using his own ingenuity to cross the border into France and crawl over the mountains into Spain.[1] Here is the story he had to tell:

I delayed my jump intentionally from 20,000 feet to approximately 5,000 feet. While falling I watched the ground and waited until the layout of farm lands was clearly visible. After my 'chute had opened I saw the plane disappear in level flight and counted three 'chutes.

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[1] An act, carried out in the face of extreme adversity, for which Seniawsky was to receive the Silver Star.

There was a town below me which I avoided by working the shroud lines of my 'chute. I landed in a field, fifteen yards from a road, and lay stunned for a few seconds. Then, gathering in the 'chute, I ran to the end of the field, crossed a fence, and crawled into a ditch that was narrow, deep, and over-hung with bushes. In the next few minutes I took off my flying boots and put on G-I shoes which I had tied to the harness of my chute before bailing out. Although I knew something of the route by which we were to have returned to Base, my maps were of no help. While I was studying the maps I heard some yelling and shouting. There were five farmers with shotguns walking through the fields. I dug in under some weeds and lay there quietly for two or three hours, conscious of some sort of search going on around me. Twice I raised up to look over the rim of the ditch. The first time I saw a boy with a shotgun sitting on the side of a hill and again, as the sun went down, I saw the farmers still walking around in the field.

I knew that I should leave this area since my presence was known so I started crawling down the ditch. Where the weeds along the edge of the field were high and thick I left the ditch to crawl in the shadow of a tree. It was darker now and the chances of my being seen from a distance were lessened. I slipped through the weeds from tree to tree, still crawling; across the field a group of soldiers came out of a wood. They were scattered along the wood's edge. Several times they fired rifles and machine-gun bursts into the wood. They were there when I crawled off in the weeds some time later. I could hear the mumble of conversation long after dark and when the full moon rose the only good cover was in the shadow of the trees.

I crawled on through high grass making my way tree to tree and eventually came to a clear patch of ground. This was newly-plowed soil so I crawled on my stomach in the furrows up the slope of a hill. Near the top I saw a silhouetted figure in the moonlight and while trying to crawl away the soldier shouted something in German. I dropped my head in the dirt and hugged the ground. When nothing happened in the next few minutes I crawled on toward a line of trees and got to them safely. I was relaxing in the high grass when a group of soldiers came up the hill. Their conversation and the rattle of their equipment warned me of their approach.

I crawled over the hill-top later and because my arms and legs were tired I rolled down the slope. In an hour or so I felt that I had gone far enough to be out of the sight of any sentries on the hill.

I checked my compass and walked southwest. Once within the next hour I had to jump in some bushes when I heard someone walking toward me. A German officer passed a few feet away but I do not think he belonged to a searching party. After he disappeared I went into the fields and later had to walk around a large town. A low thick fog rolled over the valley shortly after midnight and helped to cover my escape.

The fatigue pills kept me going until just before daylight. I crawled into a haystack and then tried to cover myself without leaving any traces. The hay was wet

and cold, making sleep impossible. When there was enough light I found that I had hidden about four hundred yards from a gun post, and for the rest of the day I dared not move. The Horlick's tablets and the chocolate gave me an uncomfortable thirst. The traffic on the road near me was very heavy and consisted mainly of German motorcycles and large trucks.

At sundown, when there was little activity in the countryside, I crawled from the haystack across a road to the edge of a woods. From there, as it grew darker, I followed the line of trees along the road, hiding when an occasional car passed. To quench my thirst I sucked the dew from the tree leaves.

This road led me up to a large town around which I detoured. In the outskirts, on the opposite side of town, I found a water-pump in the back yard of a house and pumped my water bottle full. I had walked away a few feet when a dog started barking furiously and it was still barking long after I had run into a side street.

A car turned into the side street before I heard it coming. There was just time to get down behind a fence when the car lights swept the tree-lined walks. The car stopped near me and a civilian got out. I couldn't see what he was doing but he stood by the car for a few minutes before driving further down the street. There was no reason to connect his activities with me but I left the neighborhood hurriedly in the same direction I had arrived. From a safe distance out in the fields I followed a road in a westerly direction and walked only long enough after daylight to find a hiding place—a copse of trees in the middle of a large field. All morning my clothes were wet with dew but at noon the sun came out and in a few hours they were dry again. Only several hundred yards away farmers were working in the fields but I felt in no particular danger of being found as long as I lay quietly in the brush. During the day I ate two Horlick's tablets and one chocolate.

At sundown after the farmers had left the fields I moved around to get warm and then started along a road, leaving it when a large town appeared in the distance. In going around the town I lost the main highway which had led me west in a straight line. During the night I walked through an unusually large cemetery, followed several good muddy roads, and circled two or three small villages. I checked my compass often and carefully to be sure that I was traveling west. Occasionally I aroused a dog but there were no incidents from this and I soon discovered that there were few houses in the country. In the early hours of the morning I found a water-pump at a house in the outskirts of a small village.

At daylight I found a three-sided haybarn in the fields for a hiding-place and climbed into the hay by using a rope which hung from the rafters. Soon after I was hidden a farmer arrived to repair the roof of the barn. When he left at noon I climbed out of the hay to look for another hiding place for I was sure he would return in the afternoon. I had not realized how hungry I was until after I had eaten some apple peelings which I found on the ground in front of the barn.

Half a mile from the barn I crawled into a thicket of trees. A light rain made it difficult for me to lie quietly in the bushes, and once when I changed my position I was seen by a farmer, herding his cows. He stared at me but said nothing. About half an hour later he returned with four men and I thought it meant capture. I came out of the trees with my hands up but the men motioned me to put them down. When two of the men spoke to me in French I made them understand that I was an American aviator. I showed them my uniform and wings and indicated that I was very thirsty and hungry. They motioned that they would try to help me, and told me that I was sixty-five kilometers east of Metz. When I asked about Germans, they said that there were Germans all around and I understood that I was still in Germany. We were standing near some railroad tracks and one of the men pointed to the tracks, indicating that they led to Metz. After the men left me I went back among the trees and waited for their return. After dark they brought a large burlap of food and a bottle of whiskey, but did not stay longer than a few minutes after telling me that the Germans were searching the houses and area for American airmen. The boy with them said that he had been in France before the war but now was conscripted to work in Germany. The men gave me some German cigarettes and German money. I showed them my money which they said was French and could not be used in that area.

After leaving them I kept within sight of the railroad tracks and walked toward Metz. At daybreak I could not find a haystack near the tracks, so I turned off into a small woods and crawled into underbrush. After a few hours' sleep I was awakened by rain and searched for better cover. I went back to the railroad tracks and got into a drainage tunnel where I stayed all day. In the early evening I followed the tracks to the edge of a town. Approaching a railroad bridge cautiously I noticed soldiers stationed near but got across easily by crawling. The tracks seemed to run into the marshalling yards of a big supply depot, for in the distance I could see much loading and unloading being done with the aid of large searchlights. Leaving the railroad I cut around the town through the backyards of houses and walked all night. Around 0430 hours I found a water pump near a house in a village. While I was getting the water a woman in uniform came out of the house and walked up to me. She wore a black skirt, coat, and an overseas cap decorated with an eagle and swastika. She said something which sounded as though she were asking what I was doing. I stopped drinking long enough to say "Aqua"—the only word that came into my mind. I asked her, before she could speak again, "Parlez-vous Francais?" She replied, "Oui." Then when I asked "Sprechen Sie Deutsch?" she answered "Ja." I finished drinking the water in the cup, put the cup down carelessly, said "Bitte schon" to her and walked away. She seemed about as scared as I and when I looked back once she still stood by the pump watching me. I followed the road a short distance before finding the railroad tracks again. At one place I skirted a gatehouse and at sun-up stopped near a village because I found a bomb shelter which looked like a safe place to spend the day.

Late in the afternoon, feeling hungry and exhausted, I went into the fields and approached a young girl who was working there. She laughed at me when I went up to her and I realized how much of a tramp I looked. I asked her, in French, if she spoke French but she shook her head and said she was Polish. I told her, in Polish, that I was of Polish origin but that now I was an American airman. She told me to hide while she tried to get some help for me. I asked for food but she said she had no way of obtaining food. After I had hidden a man, sent by the girl, came over to see me. He had a strap in his hand and was suspicious of my story. Because I know some Polish and a few Russian words I tried to talk to him in those languages. I showed him my uniform and wings for identification. He wanted to know what raid I had been on, when shot down, and asked a few questions about the aircraft. Eventually he was convinced and gave me some food which he said had come from the American Red Cross. I learned that he was a Serb working for the Germans and after he brought the food he said he would take me across the frontier into France but that I should wait in the bomb shelter until evening. At sundown he rushed over to the shelter to tell me that the Germans were after me and that he could not help. A few minutes after he left I heard a lot of shouting and had no sooner crawled into a shaded corner of the shelter when a boy knelt at the entrance and looked in. Someone called to him, and I heard him say "Nicht" or a similar word. I don't think he saw me. I did not think he was in uniform but was not sure. I stayed in the shelter until almost dark and then, remembering that the Serb had said I was about thirty-five kilometers from Metz, I started south. I had a loaf of bread, some butter and sardines which had been given me by the Serb.

The southern direction took me over some low hills and after dark I came to a crossroads. From there I went west along a road, having discovered that I could walk more quietly along the road than in the woods. At sunup, looking for a hiding place, I found a barn. I slept undisturbed all day.

At sundown I followed a road for a few hours, but, checking my compass, found that I was going in the wrong direction and after that I walked in the fields due west. Several times during the night I had to by-pass small villages and made little progress because there were so many barbed-wire fences. At 0400 hours when I was too tired to go much farther I skirted a town before hiding so the town would be behind me in the evening. I was sleeping late in the morning when sounds of marching and shouting awakened me and looking through a crack in the wall of the barn I saw a German patrol on the road. They marched in front of the barn and after being talked to by an officer they scattered in several directions. I crawled into a hole in the floor of the barn and pulled hay over me. Once I thought I heard someone come into the barn but was not sure. I fell asleep during the afternoon and when I awoke, looked out on the road; there were two German soldiers with a police dog between them walking down the road away from the barn. I waited until sundown before leaving and then

followed the road for a short distance before turning south into the fields. I found several running streams from which I got water and when it began raining again I found a wagon shack for shelter.

At dawn, while I was looking for a better hiding place, a man walked around the corner of the shack and saw me. Because he looked as if he were going to say something I went up to him and asked, in French, if he spoke French. He answered in Polish. My Polish, I discovered, was not as good as I had thought, but we managed a conversation without too much difficulty. I told him I was an American airman and needed help. He was too scared to be of much use and said that there were two Germans living in the house next to the shed. I wanted to sleep in the barn hayloft; he agreed that it would be all right if I did not move about and if I left early in the evening. Late in the afternoon he brought some pears which were the only food which he had access to. He told me I was two kilometers from the frontier, but refused to help me across or take me any closer even though I offered to pay him. He explained carefully how the road crossed the frontier and the general layout of the countryside. I was warned of German soldiers who patrolled the line with police dogs. Before leaving, the man cautioned me again to keep quiet, and, as I was getting ready to leave at dark, he came back with a sandwich, urging me to leave quickly.

I approached the line cautiously, almost crawling the last half kilometer. Because my light coveralls could be seen easily I took them off and put my dark sweater over them. As the man had described I could see the soldiers walking between the shacks. The best plan seemed to be for me to wait until midnight when they might be less alert. There were at least one hundred yards between me and the first fence; I covered this on my hands and knees and at the fence rolled on my back and edged under the wire. The hundred yards to the next fence were in the open so I crawled forward slowly on my stomach. When I was beyond the second fence clouds passed across the moon and in the sudden cover of darkness I got up and ran. For the rest of the night I followed roads, keeping to the southwest direction.

At sunup I had a few hours' rest in a barn and because I was sure that I had reached France I felt safer and decided not to walk during the day. Around noon I went into a field and told a farmer, who was working alone, that I was an American airman. He believed me without question and took me into a small village where I was fed after he had shown me off to several of his friends. The farmer gave me clothing, food, and I shaved at his house before starting out again. He took me to a main highway and pointed south. When I noticed people looking at me on the road I thought it might be because I had my coat buttoned around my neck to hide an O.D. shirt. To prevent this I ripped the lining out of my coat and made a scarf. I scraped my G-I shoes with rocks and rubbed mud over them. No one spoke to me, even in small towns. The gendarmes, whom I often passed in small villages, paid no attention.

I met a Frenchman walking my direction and told him that I was Polish. To convince him I gave him one of my German cigarettes. Later he asked if I had papers and was frightened when I said no. After that he tried to walk apart from me when we were in small towns but because he looked French I stuck close to him. On the outskirts of one small town the Frenchman halted a truck and got us a ride into Nancy. I avoided conversation and slept during the whole trip. In Nancy I told the Frenchman that I was an American airman. I got him to buy some apples with my money but he could not get food without coupons. After I had said that I was an American airman he tried to get rid of me but without just walking away. I knew that I had stuck to him about as long as I could, because of his fright, and he was not able to suggest any way of helping me. While we were walking down a street I heard a man speaking to someone in Polish. I asked this man if I could not speak to him and discovered that he could not understand my Polish very well. My French friend spoke to him in French, and told him that I was an American airman in need of help. The man was very frightened, but friendly. And my first friend left me with this man.

We went to a restaurant where I was introduced to Russians, Poles, and Serbs. The proprietor gave me food and while I was eating a French detective in civilian clothes, entered. He looked me over carefully and one man near me told me to speak Polish in a loud voice. The trick worked and the detective left without asking for papers. The proprietor asked me to leave because my presence was too dangerous for them. I asked for a place to sleep that night and a young boy took me to his room. He said I would have to leave early the next morning. Before I went to sleep he taught me how to ask for a third class carriage ticket because I planned to use the train if I could.

I left the young boy before daylight and walked through side streets until sunup. After that I looked for churches and spent the morning in them at different services. The town was full of Germans and I wanted to stay off the streets as much as possible. At 1430 hours I found a picture show and saw that a matinee was starting soon. Before going in the show I went to a bakery and bought some cakes by pointing at what I wanted and putting down a franc-note. I bought my theater ticket in much the same way. Because of exhaustion I slept during the picture and stayed until it was over.

Leaving the theater I walked by several bars and finally went into one for a glass of beer. It had seemed the emptiest of all I passed but after I got in I found that among several Frenchmen there was a German soldier at the bar. I tried to casually lean on the bar and point to a glass of beer. While I was fumbling for my change the German, standing near me, put down the correct amount and looked at me with a smile. I managed to smile back and said "merci." When I had gulped down the beer I managed to leave without getting into conversation, though if I had had to speak it would have been in Polish.

I went to the railway station where I studied the timetables on the wall and found a train for Dijon at midnight. I watched the ticket windows, noticing the type of people who went to the windows, and how they got their tickets. When I was sure of myself I walked up to the window and asked, in French, for a third-class ticket to Dijon. I got it without question. After a cup of coffee in the station bar I went into the street thinking I would be less conspicuous there. At 1000, returning to the station, I found that gendarmes were checking papers at the door; I made no effort to get into the station. An hour later, when I came back, the gendarmes were gone; I went into the third-class waiting room and sat near an old man. After a few minutes I asked him in Polish about the train to Dijon. I had some trouble getting him to understand me but eventually learned that the train to Dijon left at 0500 hours. I had made a mistake reading the timetables. I slept in the waiting room until boarding time and got on the train with a large crowd. I felt safer standing and rode this way to Dijon. We arrived at 1300 hours. Gendarmes were checking papers of the people who left the station so I went into the station restaurant to wait.

Later when I strolled into the big waiting room the gendarmes had disappeared. There were few people around the third class ticket window when I bought my ticket to Lyons. I got aboard at 1430 hours without difficulty and thought it best to stand in the vestibule as I had done before. There was a map in the vestibule which I studied and, after discovering that this train went through Marseilles, I decided to buy a ticket for that destination at Lyons but I intended to leave the train at Avignon.

At Lyons I was one of the first off the train and as I ran for the gate I saw a gendarme approaching it. I had reached the gate and was through it when the gendarme had gotten about fifteen feet away. He made no effort to stop me but I am not sure that I was noticed since there was a certain amount of confusion around the gate and a large crowd was pouring off the train. I had ten minutes to get my ticket to Marseilles which was enough, although I had to stand in a small line at the ticket window.

Back on the train I took a third class seat and fell asleep. When I awoke we were beyond Avignon and there was nothing to do but continue to Marseilles. There was a gate-check at Marseilles—two gendarmes flanking the gate—and while I hung back in the crowd, wondering how to get out of this, a group of workmen passed through the crowd walking in the opposite direction. I joined them and left the station by the back gate. This brought me out into the freight yards through which I walked until reaching a street which led me back to the station. I bought a ticket for Avignon and went to the platform where I discovered from a poster timetable that the next train was due to leave in the morning at 0730 hours. Not wanting to risk a night in the station, I waited my chance and sneaked under a train platform. I slept there until sunup; no one was looking when I got back onto the platform and walked into the station through a half-open gate. I went through to the streets and bought some grapes from a street-wagon merchant.

I had no trouble getting on the train at 0730 hours and was in Avignon in a few hours. Because there were many German troops in this town I thought it wiser to stay off the streets although I did go once to a public market near the station to look for food. I managed, by buying three cakes at a time at different stalls, to get twelve cakes; the cost came to two-hundred francs. Back in the station I bought a ticket to Sete and waited on the platform until train-time. Before getting on the train I spoke to an elderly woman standing near me and showed her my ticket just to be certain of getting on the right train. I was speaking Polish and also used a few French words to tell her what I wanted. I learned from her that I was getting on the right train but would have to change at another station along the line to get to Sete. On the train I sat near the woman and when we reached the place where I was to change she leaned over and tapped me on the shoulder. I followed a crowd of people to a waiting train and when showing my ticket at the gate saw to it that the ticket man noticed my ticket read Sete. At Sete I bought a ticket to Perpignan and did not know that I was to change trains at Narbonne until too late.

When the train got to Narbonne it went west instead of turning south to Perpignan and I found that I was on the wrong train. The conductor checked my ticket and began to get excited. I understood him when he asked where I wanted to go so I stated "Perpignan." Fortunately, we were sitting in a station when he checked the ticket and in the ensuing commotion he leaned over to the window and pointed to a train that was sitting on another track in the station. He nudged me and said, "Alle, alle!" I went into the station, looked at a timetable and found there was a train to Narbonne in ten minutes. I guess that it was the train the conductor had been pointing to and boarded it just before it pulled out. The conductor of this train checked my ticket and when he started asking questions I handed him a hundred-franc note. He wrote out a ticket to Narbonne.

Arriving at Narbonne around 1800 hours I found that the next train to Perpignan did not leave until 2200 hours. I produced my ticket to get out of the station and bought some apples in a store. I waited in the third-class waiting-room until train time. Because the train was crowded I stood in the vestibule and about halfway to Perignan I saw two Germans enter the carriage from the opposite end. They went into the first compartment and a few minutes later came out of it and entered the second compartment. I realized they must be checking papers. The only way out of the situation seemed to be to jump from the train. This was not too great a risk because the train was traveling only about thirty miles an hour. When I opened the vestibule door (I was alone in the vestibule) and stepped onto the two train steps I found that I could close the door without falling from the train. I hung here about thirty minutes before climbing back inside and after that did not see the two Germans again.

We got into Perpignan at midnight. To avoid the ticket check I stayed at the far end of the platform in the shadow of the train. Later, when the check was taken

off the gate, I went into the third-class waiting room and slept until 0500 hours before going into the streets. By using my compass and signs I found a road leading south and followed it in the direction of Ceret. About ten kilometers from there I stopped at a cafe in a small foot-hills town. I was alone with the woman who owned the cafe, and, when serving me a cup of coffee, she asked if I spoke French. Because she was friendly I told her that I was an American airman. She was not surprised at this and gave me food, warning me to avoid Ceret because of Gestapo activities. She told me of a safer route if I were careful to avoid the German patrols.

After leaving the cafe I followed a mountain road until it came to an end, and then keeping to a due-south compass course, I started over the mountains. I rested in a shack for the first night but left early in the morning, because it was too cold for sleep. At the top of the mountain I stumbled into a shack and was found there by an old man who gave me some wine and chestnuts—that being the only food he had. When I asked about the German patrols he indicated that they wandered all over the mountains and would not be in any particular place. Walking on at dusk I reached the crest of some high ridges, and, far across the valley, saw a town. From what I had learned when talking to the hermit I knew that the town was in Spain. I did not risk walking in the open or following even the roughest trails going down the mountain; often I stopped to rest and plan a route ahead of me. When I heard any strange noise I took cover immediately and once crawled several hundred yards between two shacks although I had seen no activity there.

After reaching the valley I changed my direction to avoid the town but walked into two armed Spanish soldiers who, when searching me, discovered the heated suit I was wearing. I explained that I was an American airman who had escaped from the Germans. They took me to a prison in a small Spanish town where I was interrogated before being removed to Figueras. Over a week passed before the American consul took me to Gerona and two weeks later I went to Gibraltar via Barcelona-Saragosa-Ahlama-Madrid. On 1 December, I arrived in the United Kingdom.

Sea Hag . . .

Sixty miles southwest of Grafton-Underwood, where the River Thames wanders aimlessly through the Berkshire hills, the villagers could look up almost any day and see those closely-bunched dots in the sky. They were the Flying Fortresses climbing for another strike at the enemy.

Usually they were simply metallic specks high overhead, but on the morning of November 13, 1943, the natives got a closer look . . . too close, under the circumstances.

That was the day one of the "Forts" crashed in the village of Wargrave.

There was a big splurge about it in the London papers next day. It seems the whole village happened to be watching at the time. Wargrave residents insisted the Fortress crew deliberately died to save the village. They talked about it for days, in the pubs and over the gates and before the fireplaces. They told how the Americans, heedless of their own lives, had saved the village from being wiped out by releasing their bombs along the banks of the narrow river a split second before the plane blew up in air.

They wished they could have done something for that nineteen-year-old boy, the only survivor, who had looked so dazed as he stared at the wreckage in which his nine crew mates had been killed.

Staff Sergeant Alan B. Purdy was a hero to the villagers of Warwick.

But when he returned to Grafton-Underwood a few hours later, mentally shaken but physically almost as well as ever, Sergeant Purdy disclaimed the hero's role in which the villagers insisted on casting him. All he had done, he said, was grab a parachute and jump. If there had been any heroes in this affair they were lying in the American cemetery at Cambridge.

All Purdy could remember was this: At 10,000 feet the aircraft had begun to vibrate badly. It went over sharply on one wing and then turned abruptly over on the other. Purdy snatched his parachute and hooked it onto his chest just as the plane went into a tight spin. Centrifugal force threw him to the floor. Finally the pilot managed to pull the aircraft out of the spin, but as it levelled off it broke completely in half in the center of the radio room. Purdy forced himself to the jagged opening, away from the tail, and dived out. He thinks the plane was at an altitude of between eight hundred and a thousand feet at that time. He hadn't known the ship was on fire until he was informed by spectators on the ground.

Sergeant Purdy didn't talk much for a while. He sat around the barracks with a funny look in his eyes.

It had been his first mission, so the medics kept pretty close tab on him. Gradually Purdy began to listen more intently to barracks chatter, and occasionally he'd put in a word himself. Finally the Docs put him back on operations.

Months later, they were to look back with satisfaction on the course they had taken. By the time he had finished thirty missions . . . and there were several close calls among them . . . Sergeant Purdy was laughing and joking with the rest of them again and they figured he had earned a furlough in the United States.

Things like that—the regaining of normal composure following a severe shock—were common among personnel of the heavy bombardment groups.

It was three days after Purdy's miraculous escape in the crash at Wargrave that Grafton-Underwood sent another formation to Norway. They were after one of the smallest and most concentrated targets ever attacked by the Eighth Air Force, a molybdenum mine and its ore processing plant at Knaben, important to Germany's steel production. As the target, in addition to being small, was protected by natural and artificial camouflage, the mission called for expert navigation and precise bombing. The 384th formation, commanded by Colonel Lacey, found its needle in a haystack and bombed it from 12,000 feet—but not until our airmen had spent an hour and a half over Norway and had made enough runs over the area to dispel any fears that they might have picked the wrong speck.

Even Second Lieutenant Elmer L. Smith,[1] a co-pilot whose home was in Aleknagik, Alaska, described the eight hundred mile trip as cold and uncomfortable.

That was the last mission Colonel Lacey was to fly with the 384th Bombardment Group. Exactly one week later, on Tuesday, November 23, the station command was taken over by a tall, beak-nosed West Pointer, Colonel Dale O. Smith.

The Battle of the Atlantic was still going on at that time and the Eighth Air Force was still attacking submarine pens as its part in the grim struggle. By now the 384th knew the way to Lorient and Hamburg and Nantes and the other ports where the submarines lay out between forays. And they knew the destructive power of their bombs by the fierce resistance put up by the enemy.

It was on a gloomy Friday in late November, three days after Colonel Smith took over the station command, that Grafton-Underwood's planes set out for Bremen and once more discovered how desperately the German would attempt to thwart Allied meddling with those U-boat pens.

Our formation, led by Major Ketelsen, and with Colonel Smith himself flying along as an observer, was hit by flak and fighters, fought its way in to bomb the objective, quickly filled in the gaps left by stricken B-17's. We lost four planes that day, three over enemy territory and one in the Channel.

It was *Barrel House Bessie*, piloted by Major Gilmore, that floundered in the Channel. She had been riddled by shells and flak. A fourth of the nose had been shot away. There was a twelve-inch hole in the right wing. The leading edge of the wing had been shot up. The horizontal stabilizers were full of holes. The oxygen system in the waist had been destroyed. The interphone was completely out. And one by one the engines went out.

But the *Bessie* struggled to within forty miles of the English Coast before Major Gilmore set her down in the icy water.

"We had begun losing altitude when the No. 3 engine was set on fire by fighter attack," said Major Gilmore, in recounting the episode after he had returned to Grafton-Underwood. "The fighter attacks continued and a fire was started on the left side of the cockpit. Sergeant Henry put it out, although he was sick and vomiting from the acrid smoke."

By that time *Barrel House Bessie* was lagging far behind the formation so Major Gilmore headed for the protection of a cloud bank. That put an end to the fighter attacks. But the aircraft was losing altitude rapidly and was at a scant 6,000 feet when she broke out of the clouds. Almost immediately she was engaged by flak, but Major Gilmore got her out to sea. By that time he had started the right inboard engine again and was getting spasmodic power from it. Then the outboard engine on the same side quit and the pilot was unable to feather the propeller. He couldn't tell

[1] Less than two weeks later, on Dec. 1, 1943, Lt. Smith's aircraft failed to return from a mission to Solingen, Germany. Months passed before we learned he was a prisoner.

from the dashboard just how much power he was getting, as all engine instruments were inoperative, and he couldn't send out an SOS because the electrical system was out.

"All this time Sergeant Henry was an example to the entire crew," said Major Gilmore. "He quit the defense of his post only long enough to extinguish the cockpit fire. He destroyed one enemy aircraft and undoubtedly damaged many more. Only his efficient performance of the duties of engineer enabled us to get as far back as we did."

Finally both engines on the left side quit and Sergeant Henry assembled the crew in the radio compartment and prepared them for ditching. Off to the right the pilot could make out the wake left by a boat, so he turned in that direction. But all engines were inoperative by that time and the *Bessie* couldn't reach the surface craft.

When the Fortress landed, water gushed into the open bomb bay and the ship broke in half.

"It was Sergeant Henry who directed the crew's exit," said Major Gilmore. "And seconds before the ship went under he himself exited with the emergency radio. Maybe if he could have let himself forget that radio—"

When the rescue boat arrived about ten minutes later, the seamen picked one man out of the water, found six in a dinghy. They didn't find Technical Sergeant Maurice V. Henry or the radio he had assumed the responsibility for.[2]

The other members of the crew were little the worse for wear after they had bundled up in warm clothing and sipped a little hot English tea.

At Grafton-Underwood the mechanics on the line and the specialists in sub-depot had a lot of battle damage to repair. And more work was dumped in their laps during the night, as is implied in a notation jotted down in the Public Relations Office the next morning:

"This big bomber went to Bremen. It plowed through enemy flak and beat off enemy fighters. It withstood freezing temperatures that dropped the mercury to fifty-five degrees below zero. All this without sustaining a scratch or any ills.

"But oh the irony of it all.

"This nameless Fortress landed gently on the home base and nimbly taxied up to her dispersal area for a good night's rest.

"Along came a ton and a half truck and bashed in her tail. The driver of the truck went to the hospital with a gashed forehead."

So for that Friday's efforts the 384th had lost four aircraft and thirty-three men. Bremen, however, was to receive frequent visits from the heavy bombers in the next month. By the time the year was out the Group had returned to that German port five more times, and also had sent missions to Solingen, Emden, Osnabruck, and Ludwigshafen, all in Germany, and to three targets in France.

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[2] Two high awards came out of this "episode." Sgt. Henry, for his valor, was posthumously decorated with the Distinguished Service Cross. His pilot, Maj. Gilmore, was decorated with the Silver Star.

Already the Eighth Air Force was quietly attempting to destroy some highly secret targets, the emplacements from which six months later Germany was to launch her "Vengeance Weapons" against England. Such a target was assigned the 384th for the Day before Christmas, 1943, the day our formation went to Croisette, in the Abbeville area of France.

Then, as though nature herself intended to see to it that the warring nations observed the Yuletide season, the 384th had five consecutive days of idleness due to unfavorable weather conditions.

It was Thursday, December 30th, that Grafton-Underwood went back to war again, the Group sending two full formations to attack the chemical and synthetic rubber plants at Ludwigshafen.

Next day the 384th drew an unusual assignment for its last mission of the year. A formation was sent to seek out and destroy the blockade runner "Orsono," which Allied intelligence said was in the mouth of the River Garrone in Southwestern France.

The planes took off at dawn and were due to return eight hours later. It was almost 5 o'clock, however, before our formation came home—only four of them. The fifteen others weren't so fortunate, two of them crashing in the countryside and the others landing on emergency fields.

The two planes which crashed were those piloted by Lieutenants George W. Stier and John Rich.[3] Lieutenant Stier crashed near Peterborough after all members of his crew, except co-pilot H. R. Bertram, had bailed out. Lieutenant Rich brought his aircraft down with all aboard, everyone except the navigator, Lieutenant J. A. Indest, escaping without a scratch.

There was good news on that last day of 1943, however.

When the four planes were circling over the field upon their return from the day's mission, they were joined by another that hadn't made the trip. It was Lieutenant Randolph Jacobs and the members of his crew who had survived a ditching at sea the day before.

They brought with them the story of an Italian kid who had given everything he had to preserve "the American way of life." The kid was Technical Sergeant Aldo J. Gregori, who before the war managed a Washington, D. C. delicatessen for his cousin, Biagio Ambrogi.

Gregori had been riding as a gunner in the *Sea Hag*.

"We were over France, about fifteen minutes from the coast, when the left outboard motor ran away," said Lieutenant Jacobs, as he warmed himself over a cup of hot chocolate in the interrogation room. "The cowling flew off, parts of it being hurled through the fuselage, and the ship began vibrating

[3] Both were later lost, Stier on the Augsburg mission of Mar. 16, 1944, and Rich on a mission to Sorau, Germany, on Apr. 11. At war's end our records showed Stier and all of his crew and Rich and six of his crew as prisoners. One was killed and two others, including Lt. Indest, were still carried as "missing."

violently. One wing shot upward and we went into a near-vertical bank, almost falling into a spin. Well—"

The *Sea Hag* began losing altitude rapidly. She was at 7,000 feet as she recrossed the French coast. The engine was vibrating so badly that the fairing had started to tear loose from the wing.

"I'll never understand what kept that wing from coming off," put in Lieutenant David H. Davis, the bombardier. "It was under a terrific strain."

The *Sea Hag* was down to four hundred feet and one engine was afire when the pilot 'phoned to the radio room:

"Here we go!"

At his radio table Technical Sergeant Doy J. Cloud punched out one more SOS. Then it happened. When the *Sea Hag* hit the water one wing and part of the tail were torn off, the great ship nosing down almost immediately.

"It threw us all around the radio room," said Lieutenant Davis, a veteran of the *Wearie Willie* ditching of five months earlier. "The navigator and the engineer were swished right through the door into the bomb bay, then the water coming in the bomb bay swept one of them back into the radio room again."

The men began plunging out, Gregori standing by the hatch to help others out.

"He shoved us out, one by one," said Lieutenant Davis. "The plane was sinking fast as we swam away and she was just about under when the navigator came out. Right behind him was Gregori. He had control cables hanging around his neck. I yelled at him and he reached up to grab them, but—"

Fifteen seconds after the ditching, the *Sea Hag* was gone. Twenty-eight minutes later a Royal Navy coastal patrol boat picked up the nine survivors.

And now they were back at Grafton-Underwood. One of them said that maybe, some day, they could drop in at Ambrogi's Delicatessen in Washington where Aldo Gregori used to deal in spaghetti and meat balls.

Thus ended 1943.

The Grafton Plan . . .

Winter in the English Midlands must have been what the bears had in mind when they developed the custom of devoting a part of their time to hibernation. Dawn in the middle of the morning, darkness by mid-afternoon, a continuous dripping fog . . .

By November anyone on the station was ready to give Grafton back to the Indians—or, rather, back to the Duke of Buccleuch. And by November the name of the station had been changed unofficially from "Grafton-Underwood" to "Grafton-Undermud."

Barracks that had seemed so substantial during those long summer days now proved woefully inadequate. Coke was strictly rationed. And even when obtainable it was as difficult to ignite, in those first days of inexperience, as chips from the chalk cliffs of Dover.

As The Plane News once said:

"It's a daily part of your combat experience—a fight with a stubborn coke stove. The steps involved in the fire-starting process are as follows: (1) You set out in

search of combustible materials, returning with an armload of paper and a few scraps of wood and a bucket of coke, (2) the paper usually burns pretty well, (3) there is a half-hour of gentle fanning and blowing and pampering, (4) the fire goes out. When you have turned completely blue you give up trying to read or write letters and crawl into the sack, which is piled high with blankets, overcoats, mackinaws, and anything else which might keep out the cold. Eventually you drift off to sleep, only to awaken in a pool of sweat in the middle of the night. With another Anglo-Saxon monosyllable, you get up and try to slow down that blankety-blank stove—which now that you don't need it has started roaring merrily."

But it was at the mud that most of those monosyllables were directed, soft splashy mud that spread to every corner of the field and even crept through doorways into halls and barracks.

Mud and galoshes and darkness and a damp penetrating chill were the components of which that first winter at Grafton-Undermud were made. Still another ingredient was tossed in when a change of staff gave the ladle to a new commanding officer.

It was one day in November that a second lieutenant, walking with a newly-commissioned officer's brisk stride and carrying the inevitable sheaf of papers, almost ran down a tall stranger in the hall at station headquarters. The stranger avoided a collision by stepping aside to let the lieutenant by.

"Say," the shavetail was inquiring a few minutes later, "who's the new Colonel?"

Whether that episode had any effect on events to come it would be difficult to say. At any rate, it probably was the only time that Colonel Dale O. Smith, who was six feet seven or eight inches tall, ever stepped aside for anyone at Grafton-Underwood. For a few days after he took over the command there was no obvious change. The new colonel quietly visited the various sections, getting acquainted with the men and presumably with their duties.

Then the ax began to fall. It rose and fell with monotonous regularity, first in one section, then in another.

Reveille was moved to an even darker hour. Mess halls closed down long before the wintry dawn. Calisthenics, the men complained, had become almost as important as fixing airplanes or loading guns or packing parachutes.

It was in this atmosphere of general quandary that Colonel Smith on January 2nd, 1944, introduced his sixteen-point program which was to become known throughout the base as "The Grafton Plan." Most of the points were aimed at improving our combat record; others sought improvement in what had become the ordeal of every-day existence.

The eleventh point in "The Grafton Plan" called for recreational facilities to include, among other things, a drained athletic field with a field house containing lock-

ers, latrines, showers and dressing rooms, as well as a squash court and a gymnasium containing a basketball court.

To attain these results Colonel Smith published his "Suggested Methods to be Employed Toward Realizing the Grafton Program," an outline of seven items.

"If you can't defend your request with confidence in having it finally approved," suggested Colonel Smith's suggestions, "drop it entirely and start on a new track which will give you approximately the same results but sounds like an entirely different project. For example: When Randolph Field was built, regulations prohibited the construction of swimming pools. Repeated requests and follow-up could not secure a waiver to that regulation, so authority was secured to construct two emergency water storage tanks for fire prevention. Randolph Field ended with two of the best swimming pools in the country—also emergency water storage tanks. . . ."

Despite the new program, personnel of Grafton-Undermud continued to devote most of their time to the purpose for which the 384th was sent overseas. The development of the pathfinding technique made it possible to bomb without perfect visibility, although visual runs continued to produce the best results. Consequently, the Allies were bombing enemy targets more frequently than would have been possible had they been forced to wait for perfect weather.

This business of fighting an aerial war was more than simply flying over Germany with bombs and bullets, more than fighting just flak and shell. The combat men were also fighting intense cold and rarefied atmosphere.

Both of those natural enemies had claimed victims. Although the 384th had never lost a life to the sub-zero temperatures, we had had numerous cases of frostbite. The other enemy, anoxemia, had taken a heavier toll. There had been many times when the lack of oxygen was discovered just in time to prevent a victim from slipping quietly to death, and on those occasions the rescued had been little the worse for wear. But there also had been occasions when a victim's predicament was not discovered in time.

As recently as November 29th, a gunner on Lieutenant Sydney P. Taylor's crew, Staff Sergeant J. A. Kuspa, had died high in the skies over Germany because his mates had not realized that he was failing to get oxygen.

The symptoms were well understood: A feeling of exhilaration, of a cheap drunk when the task at hand seems unimportant or relatively easy of accomplishment; perhaps a slight drowsiness.

It was to combat this stealthy enemy that Staff Sergeant Joseph G. Rachunas,[1] a former sub-depot man who had pleaded his way into combat status, set to work on the problem. If some kind of a central blinker system could be set up so that a quick glance would determine whether or not every station was getting and using oxygen, many lives might be saved.

[1] Sgt. Rachunas finished the war as a prisoner, after being shot down on the Schweinfurt mission of Apr. 13, 1944.

Sergeant Rachunas had an experience of his own to inspire him. A few weeks earlier, on the 26th of November, it had been a bit of team play enacted four miles above Bremen that had enabled the *Damn Yankee* to return home without a casualty. Sergeant Rachunas was riding as left waist gunner that day. At one time three hung bombs endangered the aircraft, which was carrying Colonel Smith as an observer on his first mission with the 384th. That hazard was removed by the bombardier, working without gloves in a temperature forty-six degrees below zero. On other occasions three men suffered from lack of oxygen as a result of frozen masks.

The *Damn Yankee* was still moving over the target when the bombardier, Second Lieutenant Warren E. Parmer, was notified that three incendiaries had become entwined in the shackle cables. Leaving his parachute behind to facilitate movement, Lieutenant Parmer went to the bomb bay and, leaning away from the cat-walk, set to work on the bombs. Without gloves, he held an arming vane in one hand and cut the cables with the other to release each of the three incendiaries.

A few minutes later, making his periodic check by interphone, Lieutenant Parmer failed to get a response from the ball turret. He notified the waist gunner to investigate. Meanwhile, Staff Sergeant Glen A. Carter, who teamed with Rachunas in the waist, already had gone to the assistance of the radio operator. After reviving him he returned to the waist and found it deserted. Rachunas had gone to the aid of the ball turret man, but his own walk-around bottle had become exhausted. Carter found him, in a dazed condition, near the ball turret. Carter immediately cranked the turret around and removed the unconscious ball gunner, changed his mask, and started giving him oxygen. During intervals when he could he helped Rachunas get back on the oxygen line.

"I'm sure that three men owe their lives to the right waist gunner," said Lieutenant Siguard Thompson, the pilot, in recounting the experience. And the way those arming vanes were winding we probably all owe a vote of thanks to the bombardier."

Sergeant Rachunas didn't simply thank his lucky stars and then forget the incident. Instead, he gathered together a few materials, enlisted the help of a few men in the instrument shop, and went to work. The result was a blinker system, with a panel set up in the nose, where the bombardier could have a central and visual check on breathing at every station in the ship. Experts from higher headquarters examined the device and pronounced it sound. Through medical channels as well as command channels the request for its adoption went back from London to the United States.

There was nothing exactly unusual in that incident. Everywhere that Americans were fighting, men in the ranks were finding ways of improving their equipment. A constant stream of such suggestions moved back from the combat areas, through channels, to the United States. If adopted the plans went to the factory, and the next time the men in the field received new equipment they found their own improvements were now factory-installed.

At Grafton-Underwood Sergeant Sigmund Kramer listened to bombardiers who complained occasionally that they had been forced to make a second run over a heavily defended target simply because they were afraid they had joggled the altitude drum off its setting. Kramer gathered a few scraps of metal and went to work. His "altitude drum lock" was soon standard equipment on all Norden bomb sights in the European Theater.

Walsh, Lowery, Guiles, Brubaker—hundreds of Grafton-Underwood men made their own little contributions. It might be a simple screw-driver so shaped that it would enable a mechanic to remove one damaged part without disassembling the entire piece of machinery. It might be a new tool to meet one specific problem. It might be a hoist or a stand or a cart that would speed up the time required to do a routine job. It might be anything, but if the need was there someone would find the answer.

Most of these inventions grew out of day-to-day experiences in the sub-depot, which was strung along the perimeter track across from the control tower. The 443rd Sub-Depot had been created in mid-November, 1943, with Major John H. Humphries as commanding officer. But as an organization it was much older than that. The unit from which it grew had been formed as early as 1932. Five years later part of that original organization broke off to become a separate outfit. After several changes in name it became the 6th Service Squadron in 1942. Major Humphries' specialists arrived in the British Isles in mid-January, 1943, and were already set up at Grafton when the 384th Bombardment Group arrived four and a half months later.

It was nine days after the inauguration of "The Grafton Plan" that the Eighth Air Force stirred the imagination of the entire world by a sudden stunning blow at the German Luftwaffe.

At Grafton-Underwood that day of January 11, 1944, started with sodden skies and ended with a sleet storm, but between dawn and dusk thousands of airmen were fighting one of the greatest air battles in history. Through that dismal sky the largest force of United States bombers ever until then dispatched in a single day struck at German aircraft plants in central and northwest Germany. More than seven hundred bombers engaged in a running three-hour battle with swarms of German fighters. When it was all over the wreckage was strewn far and wide across the German landscape to tell the story of a tremendous American victory. As the reports came in that night the estimate of enemy aircraft destroyed mounted higher and higher. By morning the number was officially set at more than a hundred and fifty, at a cost of sixty bombers still reported missing.

To make the victory more complete, each of the three targets for the day—Halberstadt, Oschersleben and Brunswick—had been heavily damaged if not destroyed.

For its part in this history-making affair the 384th provided twenty-two aircraft in the armada attacking Halberstadt. Their particular segment in the long stream of bombers was under enemy fighter attack approximately twenty-five minutes. Most

of the attacks were made by rocket-firing ME 110's. But the enemy tried everything he had, and there was a report of at least one Junker 88 that attempted to interfere with the Fortresses by trailing a bomb, on a cable. The bomb exploded as it was being reeled out.

For the magnitude of the battle, the 384th planes escaped with a minimum of damage. Eight of our aircraft were hit, but all returned safely. And to show for their scars they had higher headquarters' confirmation of six enemy planes destroyed and two probably destroyed. One crew alone, that of First Lieutenant Clarence G. Stearns,[2] accounted for two enemy aircraft and was further credited with two probables.

While our planes were fighting their way to Halberstadt a sleet storm blanketed Grafton-Underwood, so we were two days getting our formation home again. Twenty of them were diverted to Seething and the others to Mepal and Coltishall.

By this time some of the goals of The Grafton Plan were nearing attainment. Crews of men had been lining the station roads with large rocks to prevent vehicles from edging onto the muddy shoulders when passing each other. Disciplinary action had been taken in at least one instance of a driver who had parked his vehicle with two wheels off the concrete.

But Grafton-Undermud was still no nearer to becoming a Country Club.

And so the days came and went, days that consisted of a few brief hours of dull light and long, dreary hours of darkness, days in which working hours were occupied with routine duties and leisure hours were spent in hovering over stone-cold stoves and scraping mud from galoshes and shoes. Days of looking forward to that next forty-eight hour pass.

It was on one such pass that two Grafton men uncovered The Great Spy Mystery.

After several hours in the hotel pub of a small northern village, one of them remembered a telephone number and stepped to the 'phone booth. When the dial had quit whirring he listened in amazement. Then, very quietly, he slipped the receiver back on the hook and rejoined his friend, who by that time was having a lively discussion with a pair of English civilians.

"Say," he said, interrupting their conversation, "There's something screwy going on around here."

After he had told his story, all four trouped to the telephone booth. Again the Grafton man dialed the 'phone. He hesitated a moment, then handed the receiver to his buddy. A you-gotta-show-me look died on his friend's face, one of utter incredulity taking its place.

Finally the two Englishmen took their turns at listening.

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[2] Stearns, flying as a squadron air commander, was shot down on a mission that cost the life of his pilot, Lt. Joseph Bedsole, Apr. 13, 1944. He himself survived as a prisoner.

"Blimey," said one of them, when he had carefully replaced the receiver. "We've got to do something about this."

So the whole quartet rushed out of the pub and dashed madly down the street. When they had found a bobby they tried to tell the story calmly, but even the Englishmen couldn't keep a note of excitement from creeping into their voices.

It seemed there was a nest of spies operating around there somewhere. They had accidentally listened in on a couple of them jabbering at each other in German.

The bobby took it all in. He appeared interested but, after getting a whiff of his informants' breath, doubtful.

"Come with me lads," he said, and led the way to the nearest telephone.

Eagerly, the discoverer of the plot dialed the number. Then a frown creased his forehead. He tried again. He kept on trying, even after the bobby had placed his hands on his hips and had begun looking at him with that see-here-little-boy expression. Finally the bobby turned away.

"Yes, I know," he said, soothingly, to the protests of the Englishmen. "Now why don't you lads run on back to the pub."

And that's about all there was to it, except that when the crestfallen quartet got back to the pub one of them ordered the mild-and-bitters while another went to the telephone booth again. And there were those gutteral voices, still jabbering at each other.

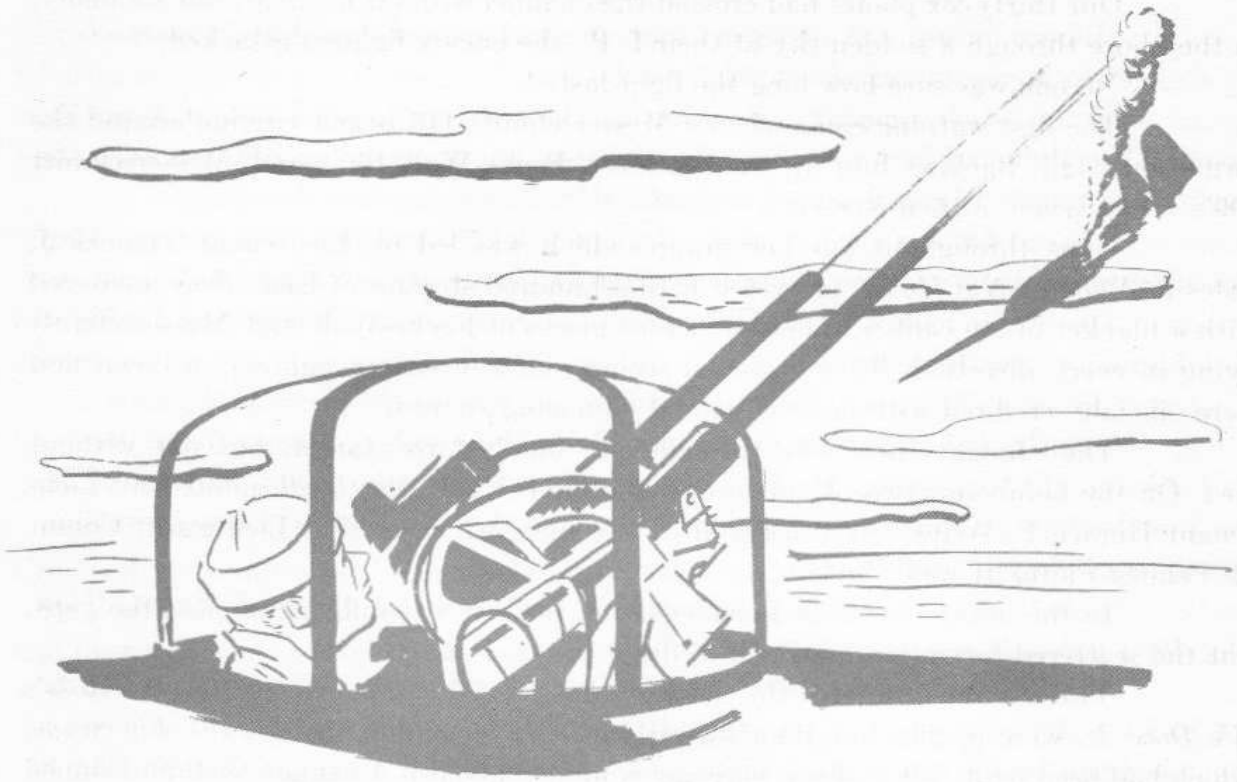
". . . anzieger . . . am angefuhrten Ort . . . Deutschelriegsnachrichten . . ."

Announcements . . . in the passage quoted . . . German war communique.

The two men from Grafton-Underwood spent a very pleasant pass in the pub after learning that the telephone there mysteriously picks up a German radio station.

Then they went back to the mud again, where they found The Grafton Plan in full swing.

For a while, in keeping with Colonel Smith's suggestions, pompous papers were making their way back and forth through channels, endless endorsements were being signed. But eventually The Grafton Program died a slow, agonizing death. Before it died, some improvements had been made. The soupy, slimy mud was only ankle-deep after that.



The Road to Heaven . . .

Like a runner who has conserved his strength for the home stretch, the Eighth Air Force now began to lengthen its stride. It had grown in stature from the puny midget of mid-1942 to a hulking giant, striding deeper and deeper into Germany. And now, suddenly, the giant began lashing out with a fury previously unknown in aerial warfare.

On Saturday, 29 January 1944, the 384th Bombardment Group put up its largest effort up to that time—thirty-eight planes, part of a force of eight hundred American bombers sent out to bomb Frankfurt-on-the-Main. Lieutenant Colonel Buck led our combat wing.

It was a tribute to our maintenance crews that by next morning we were able to send out another large formation, this time with Brunswick as the objective. But whereas our airmen had escaped unscathed the day before, they met furious resistance at Brunswick. Three planes failed to return, and at least one other—the *Ham-on-Rye*—got back by little short of a miracle.

Our thirty-six planes had crossed the channel without incident, but suddenly, as they bore through a sodden sky at their I. P., the enemy fighters attacked.

No one was sure how long the fight lasted.

The first warning came when a Messerschmitt 110 began circling around the formation's tail. Backing him up were a dozen Focke-Wulf 190's and Messerschmitt 109's. Then seven of them struck.

Guns throughout our low group, which was led by Lieutenant Thomas J. Estes in *Nuttall's Nut House*, answered with a hundred streams of lead. They answered with a blanket of .50 caliber bullets that sent pieces of Focke-Wulf and Messerschmitt flying in every direction. They reported seeing nineteen enemy fighters go down and were officially credited with destroying and damaging sixteen.

They fought their way through and bombed the target, but not without cost. On the bomb run two of our aircraft faltered. First, the *Geezil*, piloted by Lieutenant Horace F. Writz, fell away from the formation. Then First Lieutenant Comus R. Penney's aircraft went down.[1]

In the heavy clouds and condensation trails it was difficult to close the gaps, but the scattered formation managed to draw together again.

Two of the aircraft, the *Ham-on-Rye* and Lieutenant Burton R. Ross's *We Dood It*, were on fire but they stayed with the formation. So did the *Big Stupe*, which had been badly hit and was carrying wounded aboard. A cannon shell had ripped into *Big Stupe*, exploding in the waist section. Fragments tore into the left waist gunner's ankle and other pieces of whirling steel knocked down and seriously wounded the other waist gunner, Staff Sergeant Jerome F. Wilson. Forgetting his own wound, Technical Sergeant Everett D. Woodard manned the waist guns on both sides of the aircraft, firing first one and then the other.[2] In spite of his injuries he succeeded in shooting down one of the attackers, probably destroying another, warding off repeated enemy thrusts. During a lull in the fighting he administered first aid to his wounded comrade.

Off his wing, the *Section 8* also was having trouble. First, Sergeant Clarence H. Oien had one of his boots blown off by a .20 millimeter shell. The spent shell ripped both of his boots open, tearing one of them completely off, yet the sergeant's ankle was only slightly bruised. Then the ball turret gunner lost consciousness after his oxygen system had been blown out.

The *Section 8* had used up a lot of ammunition in the fight, had twenty-five holes in her own hide to show for the melee. About that time Lieutenant Archie B. Ashcraft, the pilot, looked up to find a Focke-Wulf virtually sitting on his wing. For a second or more the two aircraft flew wing-tip to wing-tip, while the pilots stared at each other. Then the Focke-Wulf wheeled away without firing a shot.

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[1] Both these pilots became prisoners of war, but seven members of Writz's crew and three of Penney's were killed.

[2] For this action Woodard was decorated with the Silver Star.

Lieutenant Ashcraft said later he had never had such a feeling of helplessness. His top turret gun was out of operation, two other gun positions were not manned because of injury or illness of the crew, and a fourth gun was only partially operative.

"I'll never forget the expression on that German's face," he said. "We looked each other right in the eye for a second or two, then— The only thing I can figure is that he must have been out of ammunition, too."

Over the target the *We Dood It* went down, but not until she had dropped her bombs with the others.[3] This was to have been the last mission for her tail gunner, Staff Sergeant Robert A. Grimes, and the rest of the crew were supposedly on their next to the last. Three 'chutes were seen.

Meanwhile, Second Lieutenant Edward A. Fioretti and his crew were winning their battle with the *Ham-on-Rye*, winning it in a way that must have left German intelligence officers scratching their heads that Sunday afternoon. Enemy pilots doubtless reported that "when last seen aircraft was enveloped in flames and the crew had bailed out." But they didn't find the wreckage.

The wreckage flew all the way back to Grafton-Underwood.

Even the engineering men raised their eyebrows when the *Ham-on-Rye* came home. The pilot was injured and only four others of his crew were still on board. Charred by fire and with only one elevator control cable left, the battered old wreck struggled out of Germany and labored all the way home.

The tail assembly was a sieve; there were no brakes; the chin turret was shot up; most of the instruments were haywire; there wasn't much left of the control cables. And the whole aircraft was pocked by shell holes.

Lieutenant Fioretti had been hit in the thigh in the initial fighter attack, and Second Lieutenant Scott A. Briley, the co-pilot, took over.[4] Then everything began happening at once. Half a dozen .30 millimeter shells exploded inside the ship. Three separate fires broke out. The bombs wouldn't release.

In the top turret Technical Sergeant Walter E. Stuhl was training his gun on a Focke-Wulf when a shell shattered his gun-sight.

"I was blinded," said Stuhl, when the *Ham-on-Rye* had been safely piled up beside the runway. "I climbed out of the turret and succeeded in removing the glass from my eyes. Then I noticed there was a bad fire in the pilot's compartment. I started to help the co-pilot put it out but another fire broke out in the radio room, so I went back there."

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[3] Four members of the crew were killed. The others, including Sgt. Grimes and the pilot, Lt. Ross, survived as prisoners.

[4] Both were decorated with the Silver Star. A few weeks later, on the Schweinfurt mission of Apr. 13, 1944, they were shot down in different planes. Both were taken prisoner. Sgt. Stuhl was killed in Fioretti's aircraft.

Fire also broke out in the nose, and for several minutes most of the crew had to leave their positions and fight the blazes.

"We finally got rid of our bombs and got the fires out," said Lieutenant Briley, the co-pilot. "The pilot had been given first aid by the bombardier and was back on the job. Between us we brought the ship back."

The fighters had left and things were going a little better on the *Ham-on-Rye* when Sergeant Stuhl went back to check the ship and discovered that five members of the crew were gone.

"During the earlier confusion, when there were fires all around and when the bombardier was working in the bomb bay, the radio operator came in and made a motion downward," Stuhl remembered later. "It looked like he was asking if the bombardier wanted any help. The bombardier nodded his head. But apparently what the radio operator really was asking was 'Do we bail out?' "

Stuhl said that Technical Sergeant Joseph H. Sylvia,[5] the radio operator, had been wounded badly about the face and apparently bailed out in that condition.

Although short-handed, Lieutenant Fioretti and Lieutenant Briley brought the aircraft home. As a final mishap in a day of trouble, one of the tires blew out in landing. After the old wreck had been pulled off the runway an ambulance bustled up to tend the wounded, Lieutenant Fioretti and his navigator and bombardier, Lieutenants Samuel J. Merlo and Leonard R. Griffith.[6] None of their injuries was serious.

Three ships and three full crews lost, half of another crew lost—Brunswick was a name the 384th was not soon to forget.

In the officer's club that night the boys tried to help Lieutenant David Davis celebrate the completion of just about as hectic a tour of duty as any 384th man ever had. Davis, a member of Estes' original crew had twice had to ditch at sea. The first time was when the *Wearie Willie* went down, the crew spending forty-one hours adrift in their rubber dinghies, almost within sight of the enemy coast. The other time was just a month ago, when the *Sea Hag* went down taking Aldo J. Gregori with her.

There were a lot of memories packed in Lieutenant Davis' year with the 384th, but this was no time to reflect on them. This was no time to remind each other that Technical Sergeant Fred S. Wagner wasn't around any more. Less than a month ago, on the Kiel mission January 4th, Davis' old crew-mate had fallen from an open bomb bay just as the formation was leaving the target. Crewmen throughout the formation witnessed the accident. Wagner had gone to release some jammed bombs and apparently lost consciousness. In other ships crew men saw what looked like an oxygen bottle fall out, then for a few seconds a pair of feet dangled from the open bomb bay. Finally the unconscious form fell out. At the time the accident had given rise to

[5] It was later determined that he had been taken prisoner.

[6] Merlo and Griffith were among those taken prisoner when Fioretti was shot down two and a half months later.

quite a discussion, the medical men insisting that a person in the early stages of anoxia would regain consciousness quickly, probably by the time he reached 10,000 feet, and would have plenty of time to assess the situation and pull the rip-cord.[7]

But this was no time to reflect on that. This was an occasion for celebrating Lieutenant Davis' change of status. He was now a Happy Warrior, as airmen call the men of the trade who have been taken off combat status.

Wilhelmshaven, Frankfurt, Bricy—Most of our formations now were twice as large as those we were sending out in 1943. The day we went to Wilhelmshaven the entire formation returned, the only casualty occurring when Technical Sergeant Donald I. Collins, ball turret gunner on First Lieutenant Joseph R. Herbert's aircraft, fell out of his turret, without a parachute, while the formation was still in Germany. It was the Bricy effort, Saturday, February 5th, that was to stand out as one of the most effective jobs of precision bombing ever done by the 384th.

Nancy, Frankfurt, again and still again— It was on one of those Frankfurt missions that the *Winsome Winn II*, hit by flak over the target, crossed the Channel on two engines and landed in a gully in Southern England. The crew had to throw out everything they could, including the ball turret, to make it back. The *Winsome Winn* was scarcely three hundred and fifty feet above the terrain when a third engine went out. Lieutenant Norman F. DeFrees saw a patch of plowed ground and started toward it with wheels down. Then someone happened to see the wires! In the split-second left to make a decision, DeFrees knew he couldn't get over the wires on one engine, decided to try crash-landing under them. Then the big aircraft hit. She slid down the slope, through a fence, under the wires, then ballooned uphill after plunging into a gully on the other side. No one had been scratched. It was only when witnesses began to run up from all directions that the crew of the *Winsome Winn* realized what a beautiful landing it had been. That was when they learned the high tension wires carried 120,000 volts![8]

On February 20th, a heavy armada of Flying Fortresses shouldered its way past Germany's stoutest defenses to deliver a smashing blow at airfields in the Berlin area. The 384th was assigned two targets, one, led by Colonel Smith, going to Leipzig and the other, commanded by First Lieutenant Edgar E. Ulrey, turning off for Bernberg.

The heavy bombers blackened the sky like locusts in what was described as the greatest American aerial attack of the war up to that time. Plodding deep into the heart of Germany, the locusts suddenly divided and made two quick thrusts, one at Leipzig and the other at Bernberg, with results that returning airmen confidently described as "the most effective yet."

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[7] Sixteen months later, after Allied armies had overrun the PW camps in Germany, "Pop" Dolan encountered Wagner in Northern France. Wagner jotted down a message to Fred Brace, a squadron parachute man: "This is the first chance I've had to thank you. . . . I still feel I owe my life to you. . . . Thanks a great deal."

[8] Lt. DeFrees and his entire crew were taken prisoner a few days afterward, their plane going down over Aschersleben, Feb. 22, 1944.

By this time the 384th was beginning to have an occasional airplane that didn't wind up sprawled on the German countryside or in the graveyard operated by the sub-depot. One of these was *Old Reliable*, an aircraft that strangely enough was known as *Problem Child* before she moved into combat. The *Old Reliable* already had combat experience when she joined the Group.

Late in February the old veteran was going on her fifty-seventh trip when one of the crewmen, Sergeant Dowsley, was getting in the one that would put him in the Happy Warrior class, his twenty-fifth.

Things were better, in these days of fighter escort, but we were still having our losses. At the operational critiques airmen discussed each mission, tried to iron out their mistakes. It was during one of those critiques that a verbal storm broke over Grafton-Underwood. The mission under discussion was that of February 24th, the Group's third attack on the ball bearing plants at Schweinfurt. Unsatisfied with the bomb pattern, Colonel Smith berated the pilots for what he considered a faulty formation.

It was a heated argument, reached a peak with several pilots on their feet.

That was when Colonel Smith said that the road to hell is paved with good intentions.

"So is the road to heaven," came a quiet voice from the back of the room.

Everyone knew what he meant. Everyone, including the pilot who had just been ordered to fly an extra mission over hostile guns.

Berlin or Bust . . .

It was a cool morning. At 0530 it's always cool in England. Men had the collars of their flying jackets turned up as the guards identified them and let them through that narrow slit of light that was the door of the briefing room.

Inside, they stomped a little and then sat down.

They looked at the drawn curtains on the wall and tried to guess what the target would be. But the map was still covered up, and would be until everyone was in the room and roll call had been taken. It was the usual precaution against leakage of information that might give the enemy a chance to move his fighters to the right places.

After roll call Colonel Smith walked to the front and said:

"Boys, today the Eighth Air Force attacks a vital military target deep in the heart of Germany. The target for today is a ball bearing plant in the outskirts of Berlin."

Then he sat down and the map was uncovered. There were a few low whistles as the men saw that red and green yarn—red for the route in and green for the route out—then an intelligence officer was up there telling them the importance of the target,

where they might have flak, what type of enemy fighters to expect, and what our escort was going to be like.

Weather . . . order of battle . . . time hack . . .

When it was all over and the bombardiers and navigators had had their separate briefing everyone went out to his plane to talk about it and wait. They had about twenty minutes before engines, when the roar would give the signal to the farmer outside the gate and the baker in Brigstock and the bootmaker in Kettering. They talked it over.

Big "B"—the Red Spot—BERLIN!

This wasn't the first time combat crews of the 384th had been briefed to go to the German capital. They had gotten this far several times before, but always the big adventure had been scrubbed or recalled or something.

They had been briefed for it several times within the last week.

In fact, March was six days old and every briefing of the month had been for Berlin—everyone except the first one, March 2nd. That was last Thursday, when the 384th had gone to Frankfurt again, the day that Lieutenant Charles E. Decker hedgehopped back in the crippled *Daisy June.*

The escapade had started deep in France, fifty-five minutes from Frankfurt, when a burst of flak shattered one engine. Lieutenant Decker feathered the propeller and attempted to remain in formation, but when two superchargers failed he decided to get the hell back to England.

For a while they were in a cloud cover at 9,000 feet, but when the clouds gave out Lieutenant Decker dove the *Daisy June* to tree-top level and, with wide-open throttle, began his dash over France.

For an hour the *Daisy* leap-frogged over buildings, trees and high tension wires, and taunted the Germans by bulling her way between their flak towers. Enemy guns along the route maintained a steady stream of flying lead at the Fortress, the *Daisy's* waist gunners retaliating with their .50 calibers.

"It was sort of comical to see the Germans scatter in all directions," Lieutenant Ruffin F. Barber, the bombardier, had said later. "The French people would stop and stare, and some of them would wave. I guess they were cheering us along too."

At the French coast the *Daisy June* had passed over a high cliff, giving the German gunners an opportunity to open up. Out over the water the pilot climbed up to 2,200 feet in order to clear the British balloon barrage. Then, *land!* and everybody heaved a sigh of relief.

But suddenly flak began bursting all about the ship, which was hardly the reception Americans expected from the English. With that as a clue the navigator, Second Lieutenant Dexter Warren,[1] reviewed his charts and discovered that the twist-

[1] Flying with a different crew, Lt. Warren was shot down on the Apr. 13th Schweinfurt mission. He was taken prisoner.

ing, diving, hedge-hopping flight across France had thrown him off his bearings. Instead of spanning the English Channel, the *Daisy June* had merely crossed the Seine Bay and was now over the flak-infested Cherbourg Peninsula.

When, eventually, the *Daisy June* did arrive at her home base the crew made a survey of the damage and found the forward part of the aircraft well perforated with flak and .30 caliber bullet holes.

"We didn't think we'd ever see this place again," Lieutenant Barber had said, almost reverently. All that was last Thursday.

The next day, March 3rd, the 384th had been briefed to go to Berlin. This was the first Berlin assignment that wasn't scrubbed before take-off, but even this one didn't pan out. Twenty-six planes left the field. The formation was soon riddled by abortions and eventually, because the high rate of speed was over-consuming their fuel, the entire bunch was recalled.

It was reported that American fighters had made sweeps over Berlin, perhaps tipping the Germans that they could expect a daylight attack soon.

Saturday, and again our combat crews had been briefed for Berlin. Although this time some American heavies did reach and bomb their targets, our own aircraft were not among them. Unable to maintain the fast pace, they left the huge armada many miles from the German capital. The 384th bombed all right—Bonn, a target of opportunity—and at the expense of three aircraft. But we hadn't yet gone to Berlin.

Sunday—yesterday—the 384th was idle.

But now our aircraft were ready to go again, and again the target was Berlin—Berlin or bust, as someone had said at briefing. The seconds ticked by . . .

Suddenly the mighty roar of ninety-six 1200 horsepower engines awakened the sleepy countryside around Grafton-Underwood. Slowly the planes taxied from their tech sites, forming a continuous line about the perimeter track. Then the first aircraft droned down the runway, picking up speed as she went. Thirty seconds later another.

One accident marred the take-off, Lieutenant Farris O. Heffley's *Bermondsey* blowing a tire. He managed to get the *Bermondsey* into the air, however, and set off with the rest of the formation led by Major Carl L. Liles.

For the men left behind that first Monday in March was one of anxious waiting. It was like waiting in a darkened theater when the film has broken in the middle of the first reel.

Then, at noon, there was bad news. The group was returning due to assembly trouble. It looked as though Berlin was a jinx to Colonel Smith's group. Maybe the 384th wasn't winning the war for the Allies, after all.

A few men drifted down to the perimeter track to see the planes come home, but most of them stayed away. Lieutenant Heffley,[2] who had had the take-off trouble,

[2] Heffley was shot down Apr. 13, 1944, suffering a leg injury for which he was treated in a German prisoner-of-war camp.

made a beautiful landing, his bad wheel on the smooth runway and the good one in the rough, just off the concrete. He had jettisoned his bombs in the channel and used up his gasoline before making the attempt.

One by one the planes came in—seventeen, eighteen, nineteen of them. Where were the other five?

The missing planes were the remainder of the six the 544th Squadron had sent out as part of a composite group. Lieutenant Knapp had returned early, but the five others were still over there somewhere. The hours dragged by.

It was 5 o'clock (1700 hours) when the five lonely looking planes showed up. Some of their occupants had given the thumbs-up as they came down the runway during the landing, but it wasn't until they assembled in the interrogation room that the big question was answered. Did we bomb Berlin?

Dirt-grimed faces told the story. They had gone to Berlin all right!

"The bombs started at the edge of the lake and moved right across the factories."

"I guess I saw about fifty or seventy-five enemy fighters . . . "

"I saw a 210 explode in air. It had made a pass at a straggling B-17, then two Mustangs jumped on him. Flames began shooting out of his cowling and he blew up."

"Our fighters had a field day."

The fifty 384th men who had gone to Berlin had witnessed a terrific air battle between German and American fighters. They had seen several B-17's go down, two of them victims of ground rockets that exploded in violent balls of flame.

"Couldn't even see a piece of metal when the smoke cleared," said Lieutenant Uniszkiewicz.[3]

And that was just about it. The 544th was the first of our squadron to get over Berlin.

"I watched one pilot do a beautiful job with a detonating engine," said Lieutenant James E. Foster. "The engine had started giving trouble about a hundred and twenty miles from the target. It began to smoke something awful, but the pilot took his ship all the way in and all the way back. He sure must have wanted to see Berlin!"

It was only later that Lieutenant Foster learned how many difficulties one of our own pilots had overcome to make the trip. The formation had just begun to assemble when a refiller valve in First Lieutenant George B. West's aircraft fell onto the ball turret track. One-fourth of the craft's oxygen supply was gone in one quick hiss.

With hundreds of miles ahead and with the enemy begrudging every inch of it, Lieutenant West had called a hurried consultation.

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[3] "Murphy," as Uniszkiewicz had been nicknamed, was killed when his aircraft fell at Sottevast, France, May 8, 1944.

"How many of you men want to keep right on to Berlin," he asked, over the interphone, then continued with scarcely a pause: "Well, you're going."

Once the "consultation" was over a lot of work had to be done. Lieutenant West sent his engineer, Technical Sergeant Creig B. Crippen, back to patch things up. Sergeant Crippen, an ex-farmer, changed the line of hose so that the tail gunner would draw oxygen from another system. Then he shifted the radio outlet to another regulator. The left waist was still unprovided for, so the pilot moved one of the two waist gunners into the nose. That left only one gunner to man the guns on both sides of the waist, but at least everyone had oxygen.

To conserve the supply, the crew remained off oxygen until the aircraft reached 17,000 feet. And under those conditions Lieutenant West and his crew participated in one of the greatest air battles ever, until then, fought over Germany.

When they left the target there were two flak holes in the fuselage and one in the left elevator. They were still deep in Germany when they went off oxygen again. The formation had dropped to 16,000 feet, and Lieutenant West wanted to conserve the little that remained, against the possibility of being forced up again by flak. At that time the rear system had only five pounds of oxygen left.

"I guess they all kinda wanted to go to Berlin," said Lieutenant West, later. "It was sort of unanimous."

And that was just about it. The 544th was the first of our squadrons to get over Berlin. Fifty men in five airplanes piloted by Lieutenant Earl T. Allison, James E. Foster, Donald S. Morrison, George B. West, and John E. Clayton.[4]

By the time interrogation was over it had been a sixteen-hour working day for the men who went to Berlin, and they were all a little tired. But they talked about it over a hot supper that had been kept waiting for them in the mess halls, and they talked about it afterward in the clubs, and they talked about it in the barracks after the lights had been turned off.

Now that the jinx was broken the 384th was to make many trips to the German capital.

On Wednesday, March 8th, two days after that first success, we had eighteen Fortresses bombing the ball-bearing plant in the outskirts of the German capital. Some seven hundred American bombers accompanied by nearly nine hundred fighters went after a single Berlin target that day—the plant at Erkner, highest priority target in Germany at the time.

"From a hundred miles away the towers of smoke, which had been carried by the wind, looked like the Rocky Mountains," said Colonel Smith, who commanded the 41st Combat Wing led by the 384th.

The next day we went again, but this time the city was covered by clouds.

[4] Two of these pilots, Allison and Foster, were later lost, and, ironically enough, on the same day. There were only four known survivors of their two crews.

The second of those Berlin trips, March 8th, marked the end of a tour of duty for Staff Sergeant Ralph G. Grant, tail-gunner who had been dubbed our leading "ace-in-reverse." While U. S. fighter pilots had been knocking down Germans right and left until regular aces were almost in the dime-a-dozen class, Sergeant Grant had been building his reputation in exactly the opposite way. His specialty was in being shot down himself.

During his twenty-five missions he had had three Flying Fortresses go out from under him!

Sergeant Grant was in *Ole Battleaxe* the day she got shot up going to Nantes. He and three other members of the crew were credited with the destruction of enemy planes that day, but the *Battleaxe* also had been mortally hit. Two of her engines had been knocked out and there were bullet holes all over the wings and fuselage. She barely limped back to England before a third engine died, and there was nothing to do but ditch. In a few minutes the Fortress had plunged to the bottom of the Channel, leaving her crew clinging to the life rafts. All members of the crew were hale and hearty when a fishing boat came along after about forty-five minutes.

He was in the *Windy City Avenger* that October day when she was mangled at Schweinfurt. As the *Avenger* was coming in for a landing the elevator gave way. The aircraft plunged crazily about, a scant hundred and fifty feet above the ground. Finally the pilot "talked" her up to two thousand feet and everyone bailed out.

He was in the *Sad Sack* that day she had to leave the formation and hustle back alone. Members of the crew were preparing to bail out when they dived through the undercast and discovered they were over water. So they ditched, about twenty miles offshore.

"We were sitting on the wings when two seaplanes came along," Sergeant Grant recalled later. "They guided an air-sea rescue boat to us, and I was just climbing over the side when someone said: 'Look, there she goes.' I turned around and all that was left of *Sad Sack* was her tail, pointing at the sky. Then she dived."

The *Sad Sack* had stayed afloat forty-three minutes.

And now our Ace-in-Reverse was a Happy Warrior. He had finished on Berlin.

By this time there was hardly a flying man at Grafton-Underwood who hadn't been to the German capital. But the veteran of them all was Second Lieutenant Sam Gardner, the only man on the base who had been there all three times. After making the trip three times in four days, here's the way Gardner summed it all up:

"The first time we had plenty of flak and plenty of enemy fighters. The second time there were only a few fighters but considerable flak, and the third time no fighters at all, but the flak was still there."

It was almost two weeks before the 384th was to go to Berlin again. They filled in with trips in Augsburg, Oberpfaffenhofen and Wizerne and then, on the 22nd, set out for Berlin once more.

That was the day the ill wind blew somebody good, an ill wind in the form of a hunk of flak which helped the *Lazy Daisy* get back from Germany.

"I can't believe it yet," said First Lieutenant Julius S. Schwartz, the navigator, when he got through kissing the ground after the aircraft had pulled into its tech site just opposite the hour-glass. "A mechanic couldn't have done a better job than that chunk of flak. We had been staggering along for a couple of hundred miles, wondering whether we'd have to come down in Germany or ditch in the sea. Then some guns began popping off down below and—"

There was a rending crash as flak tore into one of the Fortress' engines. The *Lazy Daisy* shuddered, seemed to shrug her shoulders to shake off her troubles, then straightened out and purred smoothly homeward.

"It's like when you're driving across a rough field and suddenly come out on the highway," said the pilot, Second Lieutenant James G. Miller. "From the time that flak hit us, it was smooth sailing."

The trouble had started an hour or so earlier, when one of the engines quit over Berlin. The windmilling propeller began shaking the whole aircraft, the vibration becoming so violent that the *Lazy Daisy* had to fall out of formation.

"It seemed impossible that the plane could hold together, and the racket was so loud at times that we couldn't use our interphones," Lieutenant Miller said. "Most of the time you couldn't hear a thing over the scream of the propeller."

So, thirty miles from the heart of Berlin, the *Lazy Daisy* let down and started struggling home alone. All crew members adjusted their parachute harness and stood by. Then the pilot pulled the nose up a little, lessening the noise so that he could get through to his crew on the interphone.

"If any of you men want to leave the ship it's okay," he told the crew. "But I intend to take this baby home."

After a few seconds another voice came over the interphone. The voice belonged to Staff Sergeant Lorin Schekel, the tail gunner.

"Take her home," it said. "We're with you."

Although still some four hundred miles from Grafton-Underwood, every member of the crew stayed with the crippled Fortress. Without escort and only 12,000 feet above the German ground defenses they wobbled uncertainly toward the sea. At last a lucky piece of flak knocked off the troublesome propeller, and the *Lazy Daisy's* troubles were over.

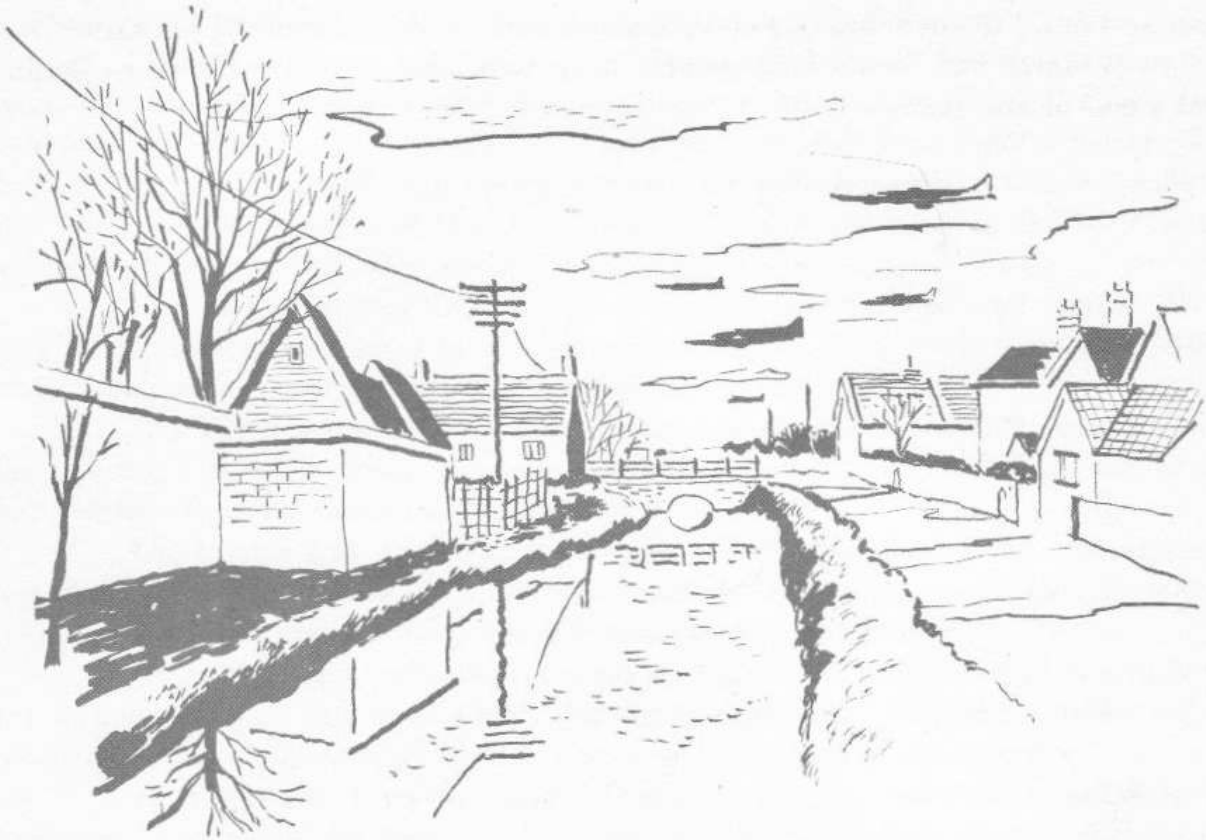
Big "B"—the Red Spot—Berlin!

If there had been a Berlin jinx it was gone now. So far the 384th had lost only one aircraft over the German capital, *Silver Dollar* that went down with Lieutenant Merlin H. Reed[5] and his crew, March 9th. Men flying on Reed's wing said the

[5] Still carried as "missing" when the war ended 14 months later.

Silver Dollar might have been hit by a bomb. One of them said the plane broke up into three sections, "the nose heading straight down and the tail catapulting outward."

March had been a busy month—seventeen missions, four of them to Berlin —at a cost of nine crews.



Two Thousand Miles to Nowhere . . .

Someone was banging away on the piano in the Officers' Club. A couple of card games were in progress and pound notes were changing hands faster than the old dollar bills used to. At the bar Primo and Johnny were watching their charges with the deep understanding they always showed when the 384th had had a bad day.

They would stop to listen to a joke and laugh whether it was funny or not, and occasionally they'd carry another round of beers to the sour quartet over in one corner.

"Did you hear about Helmley?"

"What about him?"

"He's upstairs getting rid of his gas for a crash landing."

Everyone quit talking for a minute. Then above the pounding of the piano and the high note in "Annie Laurie" came the throb of someone's Wright Cyclones.

Then everyone started talking again.

Someone explained that after the formation had come back from Oberpfaffenhofen Lieutenant Lloyd Helmley and a skeleton crew of three had taken off for a near-by field, where they were to pick up the crew of another Grafton ship that had been stalled there after an emergency landing. But when Helmley and his crew got there only one of their landing wheels could be lowered. They couldn't get the other wheel back up, so now there they were, sitting up there like a one-legged man who is about to have the chair pulled out from under him.

"What's he going to do?"

"Get rid of twenty-two hundred gallons of gasoline and then crash it."

A few heads cocked to one side to catch that drone again, then someone changed the subject. As usual, the conversation wound up eventually on the topic of grand strategy. There was always someone around who couldn't see why we bombed what we did, or said he couldn't just to start an argument. Then the intellectuals would explain why we bombed oil depots and why we bombed airfields.

Ever since last July the main mission of the Eighth Air Force had been the destruction of the German Air Force. Along with the rest of them, the 384th had been concentrating on assembly plants, wing and fuselage plants, and ball-bearing plants. When you thought of those Schweinfurts you could understand how important ball bearings were to the whole military machine of the Wehrmacht and the Luftwaffe.

Then there had been those six days in February—the 20th to the 25th—when the Eighth was striking what proved to be a crippling series of blows. There had been twenty-two attacks against seventeen aircraft factories and three attacks against three ball bearing plants that week. For its part in the show the 384th had gone to Leipzig and Bernberg and Lingen and Aschersleben and Frankfurt and Augsburg, all in Germany and all in six days.

There was a note about it in the Intelligence office: "While this series of February attacks did not completely stop German fighter production, it did reduce production of single engine fighters five hundred and sixty or six hundred a month. . . . It destroyed over a thousand aircraft on the ground and in the air . . . ball bearing production fell off sixty percent . . . now a definite ball bearing shortage exists . . ."

Grafton-Underwood felt a natural pride for its part in that show.

By this time the snack bar was open and everyone went in to get a powdered egg sandwich . . . square eggs, they called them . . . and a cup of coffee. The roar of Helmley's engines was still in the background, loud when he was directly overhead and fading as he moved toward the other end of his circle.

"I just called the tower," someone said. "He'll be up there for hours."

Someone else said: "Did you hear what happened to Gowder today?" And when most of them shook their heads, he told the story of the *Liberty Run*.

It seems that a couple of P-47's finally guided the *Liberty Run* in, after she had eluded dozens of enemy attackers and staggered blindly out of Germany with her

controls shot up, her radio gone, no oxygen, and with cannon and flak holes everywhere. Two members of the crew were dead and three others, including Gowder, were injured.

Her run for liberty had carried her practically the length of Germany. She had faced the entire gantlet of Nazi defenses, at times flying a scant twenty-five feet above the heavily defended terrain.

Gowder's troubles had begun just before the formation reached Oberpfaffenhofen. A fighter attack had killed the navigator, wounded the bombardier, shot out the pilot's left rudder, and knocked out the oxygen system. In a few seconds there was another attack, and this time a shell exploded in the pilot's shoe, burning and paralyzing his leg, while another shell was destroying the instrument panel.

By that time the formation was on the bombing run. Along tagged *Liberty Run*, the injured pilot maintaining formation flying with one hand and—because there was no one left in the nose—handling the emergency bomb release with the other.

"His oxygen system had completely drained off," someone said. "He had it for sure today."

Others contributed other parts of the story.

The *Liberty Run* had stayed in formation about three more minutes, then one crew member dropped unconscious. They'd all have passed out if they'd tried to stay up there any longer, so Gowder let down to about 12,000 feet.

There the *Liberty Run* was caught in an intense flak barrage. She escaped by violent evasive action. Then three more enemy fighters came in to harry the airplane, which had only one gun left in service at the time.

Gowder took her down in a fast glide, levelling off at about a hundred feet. He had no maps or radio, the navigator was dead, and the pilot constantly had to change directions to avoid towns.

By that time the ball turret had jammed, the hydraulic system had been shot out, the upper turret had been made inoperative by direct hits, and the automatic pilot had been destroyed.

While skimming over the German countryside the tail gunner, Staff Sergeant James G. Williamson, who had been hit in both legs and one foot during the preceding fighter attacks, refused to leave his position. Despite his injuries he maintained a continuous fire at ground installations and succeeded in knocking out one flak position.

Just when things began to look brighter the *Liberty Run* got another jolt. A direct hit exploded in the waist, killing one waist gunner and seriously wounding the ball turret gunner. It was the ball turret gunner who, earlier in the fight, had fired into an attacking enemy aircraft until it had spun down and exploded.

"They finally found a cloud bank at about 4,000 feet and headed for it," an interrogation officer put in. "On approaching the coast they were again caught in a murderous cross-fire by two anti-aircraft emplacements, but they fooled them. Gowder would fly directly at one until it had his range, then he would pull off and fly toward

the other emplacement. He kept repeating the process until they had worked their way to the channel."[1]

During most of the trip the radio operator had been running back and forth through the ship like a bellhop in a busy hotel. Between times at his instruments he administered first aid, put out a fire in the waist, gave morphine here and blankets there. After his radio equipment had been shot up he devoted his whole time to making the rounds and comforting the wounded.

It was while the *Liberty Run* was limping across the channel that friendly fighters found her, steered her safely to an emergency landing field near the English coast. She came down without benefit of brakes, rolled to a stop on the last inch of runway.

"What about his plane?" someone asked.

"They left her there. She isn't good for anything but salvage."

The drone of Helmley's engines went on. Once in a while he would buzz directly overhead, and everyone would stop talking. Then the noise would fade away again.

By this time the piano player and the quartet had given up. But the card games went on. There were little groups of men talking, munching powdered egg and bread and drinking coffee. Others were lounging around reading papers, most of them with one leg cocked carelessly over the arm of their chairs. A few were writing letters.

From the door to the bar you could hear the juke box playing "Shine on Harvest Moon."

On the line, mechanics were patching and tuning and greasing. In Operations men were making up the loading list for next day's mission. At Intelligence the crumbs of information on today's mission were being scraped together before work began on the next. And in the clubs . . . men reading and talking and laughing.

It was hard to realize that the 384th had had two heavy losses in ten days.

On April 13th, nine planes had failed to return from another one of those Schweinfurt missions. Today, April 25th, seven more planes were unaccounted for. Sixteen aircraft in less than two weeks. A hundred and sixty men missing. And the planes which did get back from today's mission brought back two dead and fifteen wounded.

Overhead, the engines that were using up Helmley's 2,200 gallons of gasoline droned on and on and on.

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[1] Two decorations resulted from this series of actions, the Distinguished Service Cross for Lt. Charles F. Gowder and the Silver Star for Sgt. Williamson.

A Job Well Done . . .

Those engines were still droning over the field the next morning. From a distance, Helmley watched as nineteen Grafton-Underwood planes took off and began assembling for another mission. He kept out of the pattern until they were gone, then he was back again, cutting that same huge circle over the field.

Finally after flying steadily for ten hours and forty-five minutes, after covering some 1,800 miles and consuming what he thought was the last of his 2,200 gallons of gasoline, he was ready for the ordeal.

Throughout the night he had reported at regular intervals to the control tower: "Helmley and company punching the clock." And usually control would radio back: "Place your orders now if you want any hamburgers."

At 3 a. m. another problem had developed. The gasoline gauge quit working and from then on it was guesswork as to how much fuel remained in the tanks.

Now, at 7:35 a. m. and with the planes for today's mission safely on their way across the Channel, Lieutenant Helmley decided the time had arrived for the

one-wheel landing he and his crew of three had sweated out all night. It was a delicate job, but the aircraft came down without mishap—and, as it turned out, with five hundred gallons of gas still left in the fuel tanks.

By now it was known that yesterday's bombing of the aircraft component plant at Oberpfaffenhofen had been a bull's-eye for First Lieutenant Richard K. Crown, the lead bombardier.[1] Despite fierce opposition that resulted in the loss of seven crews, the 384th had thirty aircraft over the target.

Our group, with Colonel Smith commanding, had led the 41st "B" Combat Wing and also supplied the lead and low squadrons of the high group. The specific objective was the Dornier-Werke G. m. b. H. and Factory Airfield.

A total of seven hundred and ninety-six bombers in three separate task forces had been dispatched by the Eighth Air Force. We were in a task force making a triple attack, with a hundred-and-thirteen planes assigned to Oberpfaffenhofen, a hundred-and-seventeen to Erding, and sixty-two to Landsberg.

The formation led by the 384th was first attacked by fifteen FW 190's approximately a hundred miles east of Paris. A record in the Intelligence office tells the story:

"After crossing the German border and approaching the area northwest of Augsburg, a strong force of enemy aircraft intercepted this group and aggressive attacks were initiated, increasing in severity as the B-17's neared their targets until an estimated one hundred enemy aircraft were involved. Opposition was directed almost entirely against this Combat Wing and from this point until some fifteen minutes after the target they were almost continuously engaged in repulsing the savage head-on assaults of German fighter planes.

"With its escort of P-51's outnumbered and drawn off in combat, the formation was left for more than an hour without fighter protection. Before and during this period, in addition to intense fire from ground defenses, the crews of the 41st "B" Combat Wing were exposed to repeated savage assaults from enemy fighters, coming in waves head-on into the formation in elements of ten to twelve abreast. Fighter attacks were made in such volume and in such intensity that their fire power almost completely overwhelmed the group and wing formations. Holes began to appear in the formation when one aircraft after another was shot from its position, some exploding in mid-air, others spinning down to crash into the ground.

"Undiscouraged and undaunted by this intense opposition and despite the eventual loss of fifteen of its aircraft, displaying the highest type of individual and coordinated combat skill, the Wing continued irresistibly into the target at Oberpfaffenhofen, dropping its bombs with accuracy and inflicting severe damage on the enemy.

[1] Crown and Robert C. Chapin, navigator, were soon to become known as one of the most effective bombardier-navigator teams in the European Theater.

"Intense and accurate anti-aircraft fire was encountered on the entire bombing run and although many aircraft were severely damaged and later lost from the formation, every aircraft not immediately destroyed held its position in the veritable rain of fire, dropping its bombs on the designated leader. Ten of our aircraft were lost in the vicious action preceding the target and five additional aircraft at or immediately afterward.

"Reforming on the 384th Bomb Group after leaving the target this force was further engaged by intense and accurate anti-aircraft fire and enemy aircraft for approximately fifteen minutes until it had cleared the target area and was again within the protection of fighter escort. Many aircraft were in grave difficulty due to battle damage and seriously doubted their ability to return to England."

Truly, this was a milestone in the Allied aerial offensive. The Combat Wing led by the 384th had plodded on to the target even after the lead aircraft of its high and low groups had been destroyed. In the lead group, made up entirely of 384th aircraft, two of the squadron leads were shot down.

One of them was Lieutenant Walter B. Harvey, leader of the low squadron, lead group, who was observed turning from the formation with an intense fire raging in the cockpit resulting from a direct burst of flak. Another was that flown by Captain Robert E. Langlois and Captain Floyd Edwards, which was seriously damaged by enemy fighters before the target was reached but remained with the formation until bombs away.[2]

Says the Intelligence record:

"This Group was over Germany and enemy country for almost six hours on this extremely deep penetration, traversing some of the most intensely defended anti-aircraft areas of the German Reich at an altitude of only 20,000 feet and was viciously attacked by an unusually large number of enemy fighter planes over an extended period of time. Although one aircraft after another of their formation was destroyed, the 384th Bomb Group continued undaunted into the target to accomplish their mission and destroy this vital enemy installation."[3]

At the station dispensary that night the medics were busy caring for the wounded. Notations were made in the files:

"Anstead, William W., wounds right arm and right forearm, penetrating, multiple, moderate severe.

"Matican, Sigmund, wound left hand, dorsum, penetrating, moderate severe.[4]

"Bonanza, John J., fracture right ankle, simple.

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[2] Months later Lt. Harvey showed up again at Grafton. He had been for a time with the Maquis, France's underground army, returning to England when Allied invasion armies freed France. The other lead plane shot down carried Capt. Langlois as air commander. The entire crew was taken prisoner.

[3] The 384th won a Divisional citation for its work that day.

[4] At least six of his crew were killed on Sottevast mission, May 8, 1944, and Mattican himself was still "missing" at the end of the war.

"Wyatt, Kenneth, A., sprain, left shoulder, moderate severe.[5]

"Perrone, Michael J., sprain, back, moderate severe.

"Kanclewski, Edwin J., fracture, external malleolus, right, simple.

"Cleland, Deston K., wound, penetrating, right thigh, moderate severe.

"Heim, Gerard A., wound, penetrating, both legs, moderate severe.[6]

"Barad, Robert L., wound, penetrating, right knee, slight.

"Brooks, James J., wounds, multiple, penetrating, right cheek and right arm, moderate severe, fracture, right zygoma, moderate severe.

"Williamson, James E., wound, penetrating, plantar surface, right foot, moderate severe.

"Sacco, Salvatore R., wounds, multiple, penetrating, right leg and right forearm.

"Gowder, Charles F., burn, second degree, sole of right foot.

"Leber, Richard E., contusion, right knee, moderate severe.

"Baird, James J., wounds, penetrating, right chest and neck, moderate severe."

There were other wounded, too. Staff Sergeant William L. Cahill had a sprained ankle; Sergeant Jose R. Menchaca had flak in shoulder and side, Staff Sergeant John J. Stevens[7] had a broken leg, Technical Sergeant Arnold J. Hardtmann, a flak wound in the head.

There was satisfaction in knowing that, to counterbalance our heavy losses, the job had been well done. The destruction of the plant at Oberpfaffenhofen had been an outstanding achievement, not so much because of the bombing results—good bombing was commonplace—as because of the difficulties under which those results were obtained.

Time after time in ten months of operations the 384th had dumped its bombs on the assigned target, occasionally with little interference from the German defenses, but usually with both flak and fighters to contend with. Oil plants, airfields, airplane factories—our job was to bomb the targets given us.

Yet now, as we look back, we could see a general plan behind it all, a plan fulfilling the directive of the Combined Chiefs of Staff at Casablanca early in 1943. In the lap of the Strategic Air Forces in Europe had been tossed a job aimed at "the progressive destruction and dislocation of the enemy's military, industrial and economic system, to a point where his capacity for armed resistance is fatally weakened."

Many of the plants that had to be destroyed before this objective could be attained were so located that they could be found and destroyed only by daylight precision bombing. But first the main German defenses had to be neutralized, and thus

[5] Fell into German hands when his plane went down on the Krzesinki (Poland) mission, May 29, 1944.

[6] At war's end had been "missing in action" since Munich mission of July 19, 1944.

[7] Killed on Sottevast mission, May 8, 1944.

the Eighth Air Force's mission, almost from the day the 384th arrived on the scene, had been the destruction or serious weakening of the enemy's air force.

That explained the Schweinfurts, the Oberpfaffenhofens, the Magdeburgs, the Brunswicks. Along with other heavy bombardment groups the 384th was hitting at the source, at the assembly plants and the component plants and ball bearing plants, and in doing so it was forcing the German Air Force to come out in the open and weaken itself in combat.

If we lost planes and men, so did the Germans. But so long as our bombs were going into those aircraft factories and oil plants, the enemy's ability to replace his losses so that he could rise and fight again was greatly reduced.

By the time the 384th arrived on the scene in mid-1943 German fighter production had greatly expanded. A thousand single-engine fighters were coming off the assembly lines every month and according to Intelligence the goal for the middle of 1944 was double that. That's why the 384th was going to Leipzig and Marienburg and Sorau and Oschersleben and Bernburg.

As the battle against the German Air Force began, late in July, 1943, our heavy bombers stalked brazenly into enemy territory, exposing themselves to terrific opposition. They had no fighter protection, depended solely on their own guns and tight formation flying to bring them through.

That they fulfilled their assignment may be seen in the fact that Germany's fighter production was cut far below the planned rate.

It was only now, in the last month or two, that we were really emerging from that period when we flew unescorted. By this time the Eighth Air Force alone could put over a thousand bombers in the air in a single day, with long-range fighters capable of escorting them to almost any target in the Reich. Then came those six days in February, the 20th to 25th, when favorable weather made it possible for the heavy bombers to strike more tremendous blows just when the enemy's production rate was again on the increase.

March . . . April . . . Now, at the end of April, the primroses that load the paths of Grafton-Underwood were already beginning to fade. The hedgerows had broken into violent color, the red of the hazel and the golden yellow of the willow. Spring, and still no invasion.

The question on everyone's mind was when would it come? With the known results of our operations, was strategic bombardment after all failing in its purpose? It was granted that an invasion of the Continent could not be undertaken in the face of a powerful enemy air force.

At Grafton-Underwood, where replacements were already coming in to fill yesterday's heavy losses, the possibility seemed just as remote as ever.

For almost a year we had been engaged in the job of softening up the enemy's potentialities for waging war, and in all that time the prospect of an invasion of the Continent had been before us. Already it was the Spring of 1944—

In the next few weeks the 384th continued its trips across the Channel, often bombing targets along what already was becoming known as the "Invasion Coast," more often continuing deep into Germany, to Berlin or Merseburg or Munich.

Then, one day, we had a double-header, two missions in the same day. There was another double-header on May 8th, a morning target in Berlin and an afternoon target at Sottevast on the Cherbourg Peninsula. It was a long day, the first formation getting back from Berlin shortly after 2 p. m., the second formation taking off at 4 and returning at 8:15.

Again the 384th was given proof that the longest missions were not always the roughest. The Berlin group commanded by Major Oattis E. Parks went over the target thirty-six planes strong, riding out a terrific flak barrage without loss. It was the shorter trip, the little jump across the Channel and back, that turned out to be the costlier.

There had been one abortion, leaving eighteen planes in the Sottevast formation. Two of the eighteen went down before reaching the target and one shortly afterward.

When the fifteen surviving aircraft returned to Grafton-Underwood it marked the abrupt end of a "ground men's orientation program" Colonel Smith had instigated a few days earlier. The commanding officer had officially requested that ground officers fly on missions, believing that by so doing they might better understand the problems of flying personnel.

As a result, the nineteen planes that set off for France that bright May afternoon carried several officers who flew simply in the capacity of passengers.

One of those passengers (officially carried on the loading lists as "observers") was the base administrative inspector, Major Russell H. Sanders. Major Sanders was a late addition to the loading list, replacing another ground officer, Lieutenant William M. White, as "observer" in the plane piloted by First Lieutenant James E. Foster.

A minute before "bombs away" a flak burst caught Foster's craft between the tail and waist doors, the plane plunged immediately into an uncontrollable dive. It was seen to hit the ground, burning. No one reported having seen any 'chutes, although Foster's tail gunner "seemed to have been blown out" by the burst.[8]

An added touch of irony was that Lieutenant Foster and his crew would have finished their tours with that mission. In fact, for one of them, Staff Sergeant Jimmy L. Overcash, it was an extra mission.[9] After the planes had taken off word came in from higher headquarters that the Berlin attempt of May 4, which had been recalled just after the formation reached enemy territory, would be credited to the participants.

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[8] The plane carried 11 men. Six of them, including Maj. Sanders, were killed in action. The others were still listed as "missing" a year later.

[9] Still listed as "missing" when hostilities ended one year, to the day, afterward.

That turn of events meant that Sergeant Overcash had actually finished his full thirty missions before setting out for Sottevast.

The Sottevast formation was commanded by Captain Randolph G. E. Jacobs, operations officer of the 547th Squadron. His ship, piloted by Lieutenant Earl T. Allison, veteran 544th pilot, was shot down forty seconds before bombs away. A flak burst exploded directly beneath the pilot's compartment and the ship started into a steep spiral.[10]

It was on the return trip that the 384th's third loss of the day came. The Fortress piloted by Second Lieutenant James W. Brown of the 547th had been damaged earlier, started down over the channel fifteen miles from the Cherbourg Peninsula.

Shortly after the planes returned it was learned that Air-Sea rescue had picked up three of Brown's crew, but not until the next day was the full story of that ditching learned.

That was when the bombardier, Second Lieutenant Carl W. Kuba, and the tail gunner, Staff Sergeant George H. Yeager, Jr., returned to Grafton-Underwood. They were the only survivors, and perhaps the fact that neither had the full use of his life preserver enabled them to remain alive in the icy channel.

Their Fortress had been badly damaged by flak. The first burst destroyed the plane's oxygen system; another exploded beneath the pilot's compartment; a third blew off the tail wheel; another set one of the outboard engines on fire. The last and most damaging burst exploded on the left wing, between the engines.

"It almost tore the wing off," said Lieutenant Kuba. "A scant foot on each edge of the wing was all that was left attached to the fuselage. To lighten the load I jettisoned the bombs, then we peeled out of formation, dropped to 13,000 feet and headed for the channel."

None of the ten men aboard had been injured up to that time.

The fire in the wing extinguished itself and it began to look as though the crippled Fortress could make it back to England. The crew didn't know at the time, however, that there was a fire inside the damaged wing. The wounded plane had gone only a few miles from the French Coast when the flames broke through the outer surface and enveloped the entire wing.

At the order to bail out eight men left the ship, the pilot and co-pilot remaining with the aircraft until it exploded about a thousand feet above the water.

Kuba and Yeager came down some distance apart and both had difficulty with their Mae Wests. Only one section of Kuba's would inflate. Yeager had even less luck.

"I pulled the cord and it inflated and then deflated," said Yeager. "I couldn't do anything with it, so I began swimming."

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[10] Jacobs and Allison were both killed.

Both men were good swimmers. Yeager had been a lifeguard at Virginia Beach and once swam for Notre Dame University. This time he was swimming for his life, and two miles away Lieutenant Kuba was doing the same.

Back in 1942, when he was attending an Army Signal Corps School at West Palm Beach, Florida, Kuba and some friends had swam six miles to reach a tanker that had been sunk offshore by a German submarine, and whose masts still jutted above the surface of the water.

In Channel waters at this time of year a person is supposed to freeze to death in much less time than it took a rescue vessel to reach Kuba and Yeager. One of the airplanes which spotted the struggling swimmers dropped a dinghy, but it fell five hundred yards away from Lieutenant Kuba and he was unable to reach it in that cold water.

Yeager apparently was more optimistic, for rescuers found him swimming in the opposite direction, toward England fifty miles away. Both were near the end of their endurance when two Sea Otter planes of British Air-Sea Rescue Service arrived.

It was a fortunate miscalculation that led to the saving of Yeager. Pilots of both planes had spotted Kuba and one of them came down to pick him up. The pilot overshot his landing, however, and discovered Yeager some distance away.

Kuba and Yeager had survived a torturous hour and a half in waters that were supposed to snuff out life in half that time.

Of the other six men who had bailed out with Kuba and Yeager, all died from exposure. The pilot and co-pilot never left their blazing bomber.[11]

A little hop across the Channel and three more planes were gone. No one would hear Randy Jacobs' bellowing voice tonight, nor look up to see his great hulk framed in the doorway and that inevitable cigar clenched between his teeth. Chubby was gone, and Jack and Joe and Les.

Back in Buffalo and Seattle and Kokomo the doorbell would ring in a day or two and a blue-capped boy would be standing there with a telegram from the War Department. Then there would be a new flood of frantic, questioning letters to Johnny's commanding officer . . . more letters to answer, hedging answers that told nothing except that we were sorry too.

"You can't tell me," one mother had written a few weeks earlier, "that a big thing like a Flying Fortress simply disappears in thin air."

For eleven months now letters from mothers and wives of missing men had been piling up in the chaplain's office and at station headquarters. Relatives begged for any shred of information, and some of them couldn't understand that it wasn't military security, alone, which prevented us from telling them what had happened. Often they refused to believe the telegram from the War Department.

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[11] Two months later Yeager was killed in action over Munich, Germany.

"Now do you think that Germany sent a true message?" asked one, whose son had been killed on the Bonn mission of March 4th. "My heart tells me no. Please dear, I plead to you, as a mother to a son, can you give me a little further information or did you hear a whisper, if my son is alive? I hope you always have good luck, and God should watch over you wherever you go . . . "

It was more pleasant to fly over Happy Valley than to write the letter that would smother that last spark of hope.

The letters piled higher and higher.

". . . it is now four months, which seems an awful long time. . . ."

". . . They had the best pilot and crew ever. We are proud of them all, even though . . . "

"Please have patience to a seventy-two-year-old father whose shaky blacksmith's hand had to learn typewriting. . . . "

". . . Jimmie wrote me he bought a bike which he said he paid five pounds for and he said Mother you can not get them for less, he also had a lovely fountain pen a gift from a lady friend and he thought a lot of it she made him promise not to fail to write her and that is why she gave him that pen. . . . "

They were all in the same vein, the letters of the folks back home who were unburdening themselves on the men Johnny worked and flew with, the last who saw him alive.

"Our family is four boys, three of them in the Air Corps," wrote one mother. "So with no girls, many hours I've spent playing baseball, snow ball fights and all the good old American games with our boys. . . . My prayers are for every boy and girl who have been sent so far from their families. . . . "

Sometimes they wrote to the chaplain, sometimes they wrote a "buddy" that had been mentioned in earlier letters home, sometimes they wrote to the adjutant, sometimes they wrote to the commanding officer, himself.

". . . I certainly pray that soon your tasks of fighting the enemy are soon easier so you officers can really set down and rest awhile," wrote one mother in a letter to Colonel Smith. "You have your trials too, which I realize are many. And I hope that Roland was obedient in every way. Every boy or man can ease the duties of the commanding officers if they all think of that which they are doing, and do it the best way they know how. Here's a salute to you all over there and I hope you will all be home soon. . . . Write when you have time. I'll be more than pleased to hear from you. Ask for a box of cakes. I'll send you home made cookies. If there is anything that we Mothers can do to help more to speed Victory let us know and we will sure do it. Will be pleased to send you a package so drop a V-mail for a request. Yours respectfully, A Mother. P. S.: Roland's my only one so you see I am proud of him. Bye now, and Good Luck to you. . . . I'll be praying for you all."

And another:

"Dear Sir: I just had a package returned that I had sent to my son. . . . There are several more on the way. With my permission would you please see that some of the other boys have them. . . . "

Something in the Wind . . .

A strange undercurrent of restlessness stirred Grafton-Underwood that Monday night. Overhead the stars were stone cold, but the languor of Spring was already in the air. A formation of thirty-six aircraft had been sent out during the day to attack a battery of four howitzers at La Fosse, on the east side of the Cherbourg peninsula, but now that our aircraft were all tucked snugly away in their dispersal areas activities on the base had slipped back into their regular routine.

At the Aero Club and the Zebra Club and the Officers' Club the juke boxes were making no more racket than usual. In the field adjacent to the Dispensary the cows, black silhouettes against the black sky, were chewing their cuds just as quietly and contentedly as they had the night before, or the night before that. On the line men were going about their work as methodically as they had every night for almost a year.

But Spring was in the air and the Liberty Run had been called off . . . so Grafton-Underwood was restless.

Unexpectedly, at 8 o'clock, a special staff meeting was called. Key-men from the various sections began arriving at the Senior Officers' Quarters almost as soon as the telephone messages which had summoned them. They met with Colonel Smith behind closed doors—and immediately the switches were pulled that would put Grafton-Underwood under a communications blackout.

While the meeting was in progress a few men drifted to Station Headquarters. It was as though some invisible magnet was at work. In the Intelligence office a restless lieutenant walked in on Captain McNeill and the duty officer, Lieutenant John (Groucho) Henes.

"Somehow it doesn't add up," he said, helping himself to a bottle of coca-cola and knocking the cap off on the edge of a box. "I mean, it looks like they're just trying to cover up something."

"You mean somebody jumped the gun?"

"That's about it." The lieutenant swiped the top of the bottle with his palm, took an easy sip, then settled back with his feet on the desk. "Look what happened in the last war. Someone got his signals crossed and every factory whistle in the United States started blowing five days before the Armistice."

The discussion was about the premature invasion story printed in American newspapers two days earlier, a story which bounced back into the London press, along with official denials. Eisenhower's headquarters blamed it on a poor little WREN (or was it an ATS), who had been "practicing" on a teleprinter. She didn't know the machine was "loaded," headquarters said, then calmly dismissed the matter.

The conversation was still going on, between jelly sandwiches and cigarettes and sips of coca-cola, when Major Dolan and Captain Moon walked into the Intelligence office a few minutes before 11 o'clock. Each had a white handkerchief tied about his left arm.

Suddenly, all over the base, the restlessness that had been in the air gave way to intense activity.

This was invasion night!

Even as Grafton-Underwood was awakening to the fact that the big moment was here, the drone of airplanes became audible. Handkerchiefs suddenly blossomed on every sleeve, and those white blotches moved silently about in the darkness as the overhead parade continued. Airborne and paratroop transports, accompanied by night-fighters and R.A.F. heavy bombers, streamed toward the continent in a procession that was to continue for hours.

Unknown to most personnel, the lid had been clamped down long before it was generally realized that something "big" was in the wind. The Liberty Run had been cancelled, but that was nothing unusual. Communications had been shut off ever since 8 o'clock. There were no off-the-base telephone calls, incoming or outgoing. No one could leave the post.

The net caught one visitor, Corporal Pate, the little Welsh non-com who as a member of the R.A.F. had rendered invaluable assistance to the Intelligence section many months earlier. Corporal Pate, whose frank love for the 384th was reciprocated by everyone who knew him, had been transferred six months earlier, was returning "just to say hello" to his old friends.

As it turned out he had all night to say it in. Although he had planned going to a nearby village for the night, Corporal Pate was caught in the security net and held at Grafton-Underwood until the next day. Likewise, some American motor vehicles which had been on the road at the time invasion orders were issued were held up at an air transport base, where they had unsuspectingly dropped in for gasoline while preparations for the coming event were in progress. Once there, they were unable to leave until the invasion had become a reality.

At approximately the same time that the invasion spearhead began its rhythmic drone overhead, special instructions were issued at Grafton-Underwood. The white band around the left arm was to serve as summary identification. Men were to carry loaded weapons and gas masks at all times. In case enemy planes put in an appearance, everyone was to fall out with arms and masks and steel helmets and move to the bomb shelters.

Only the mobile base defense force was to have freedom of movement during an alert. Other persons wandering about ran the risk of being shot on sight.

In spite of all these midnight precautions everyone appeared outwardly calm. Yet an undercurrent of excitement could be felt. You felt it on the line and in the offices and in the barracks—a suffused excitement that reached into every nook and cranny on the field.

In quiet places where men stopped to talk, in recreation rooms where the blackout curtains were just a little more securely drawn, in rooms where radios were turned on for Lord Haw Haw's latest report—everywhere was this subtle tenseness, this awareness that a great moment in history was being made.

And wherever men gathered the talk was sure to turn to tactical targets.

"It'll be bridges and supply dumps from now on."

"We'll be running a regular shuttle service across the Channel."

"What I can't see is why they'd use big bombers for that kind of stuff when they have planes that can go in from lower altitudes."

"Who said we weren't going in from low altitudes!"

And the subject of tactical targets was sure to bring up the story of Jim Miller and that time he buzzed the fighter field. A couple of months ago Lieutenant Miller had thought he'd retaliate for all those times the fighter pilots had buzzed Grafton-Underwood, decided when he saw a Thunderbolt field below him to give the boys a taste of their own medicine.

So he leaned on the stick, gave it the throttle, and sent his big Flying Fortress thundering across the fighter field a scant fifteen feet above the grass. But the smile of satisfaction died on his face when the control operator got him by radio.

"That's all right, friend," came the exasperating voice over the earphone, "but why don't you come down off oxygen."

It was apparent long before midnight that considerable work was planned for the heavy bombers. Intelligence and Operations staffs were already at work preparing and plotting the supporting assignments for "D" Day. Three briefings for as many different missions were conducted in quick succession beginning at 3 a. m.

There was no element of surprise evident when the combat crews filed into the briefing room. They seemed well aware of the momentousness of the occasion. Underneath it all, however, the excitement was there.

The men laughed when one of the briefing officers, charting certain phases of the first mission on a blackboard, chalked the word "millions" after the heading "Fighter Support." They laughed, perhaps rather skeptically, when told there would be twelve thousand planes "over there today." They laughed when Colonel Travis of the 41st Combat Wing, who was to fly with us, mentioned that the invasion happened to coincide with his thirty-sixth birthday and that he wanted the men to present him with a gift of destroyed targets. They laughed when Colonel Dale O. Smith warned that there were to be no abortions unless they were immediately after take-off. They laughed when told that in case they were forced down over enemy territory they should attempt to join the invading Allied infantry.

"Your primary target," said the Intelligence briefing officer, Captain Moon, pointing with a stick at Meauvaines, "is ten miles west of St. Aubin on the coast. Rocket gun installations of a new type, halfway between Le Havre and Cherbourg. A pinpoint target approximately one thousand by one thousand feet in area . . . consists of a tunnel leading to a small wooded area in open fields. Several firing points are located along the tunnel, so the whole area should be saturated with bombs."

The men filed out, serious, yet still laughing. Their places had hardly been vacated before another group began filing in. Again Captain Moon was the Intelligence briefing officer. Target: two bridges thirteen hundred feet apart in southeast section of Caen . . . heart of old French province of Normandy . . . market center and industrial area . . . key point for main roads and rail lines to Cherbourg area.

They left and the third group came in. Lieutenant Frank S. Taylor, briefing for this third mission, described the target as "the choke point for highways" in the city of Caen.

"Your job is to destroy the enemy's means of communications," he said. "The city is approximately one mile in diameter and has a population of sixty thousand. Your object is to give direct maximum support to our assault troops landing in this area."

By this time the big moment was almost at hand. Men visualized what was happening along those beaches near the targets they were to bomb. They pictured transports storming the coast and infantrymen wading the beaches and airborne troops assaulting installations farther inland. This was their day, and the men who had been flying the big bombers day after day for so many months, bombing the strategic targets to gradually sap the enemy's strength and pave the way for an invasion—these men would step out of the limelight now in favor of ground men who had spent long months doing nothing but training.

But if the airmen expected to be favored by good weather, so they would be able to be of great service to those doughboys struggling on the beaches, they were disappointed.

As time wore on the weather reversed itself. The night of bright moon and swiftly moving clouds turned into a day of thick overcasts and rain. Crews had been warned about flying over the channel below a thousand feet, lest they become targets for the naval vessels assisting in the gigantic landing operations. As it turned out, few men even saw the channel.

The inaugural mission of the day was a six-plane squadron affair composed of elements of the 545th Squadron and led by Lieutenant Colonel Thomas P. Beckett, who had recently been named group tactical inspector. It took off for Meauvaines at 5:25 a. m. Twenty-five minutes later the second mission, a larger formation assigned to knock out the communications at Caen, took off with Colonel Travis leading. Twenty-eight planes in this one. It was 7:30 when the third one took off, twelve planes led by Lieutenant Colonel Alfred C. Nuttall, and headed for more communications points at Caen.

As the morning wore on the men who were left behind began to get a smattering of what was happening on the other side of the Channel. The fact of an invasion being in progress passed out of the secret stage almost as soon as the element of surprise had been attained. An early communique from General Eisenhower's headquarters announced it to the world. The bulk of the initial landings were carried out between 6 a. m. and 8:30 a. m., according to those terse communiques.

A few minutes after 10 the first of our three formations, that led by Colonel Beckett, returned to the base. An hour later the larger formation came home, and by early afternoon we had all our aircraft back from the day's efforts. Further operations were cancelled in view of the worst weather conditions in this area in many weeks. The men were obviously disappointed, partly because they were unable to lend an effective hand to the ground troops at this moment of dire need and partly because they were denied a grandstand seat four miles above the greatest military operation in history.

It had been a day of exhausting exhilaration followed by keen disappointment. Two of our efforts had failed completely, unable to drop their bombs because of

weather conditions. The third and fortunately the largest, the one in which Colonel Travis and Colonel Smith participated, completed its mission but bombing was by instruments (P. F. F.).

"A very smooth P. F. F. run was made and all equipment checked perfectly," said Colonel Travis: "Bombing results should be good."

Colonel Smith, who was flying in another lead ship on the same effort, said a ten-tenths low overcast prevailed over the area, but that bombs went away in close squadron formation. Bombing was from 17,000 feet.

The other formations had brought their bombs back. Colonel Beckett's outfit had roamed the area seeking possible targets of opportunity but had been unable to find any breaks in the thick layer of clouds. No one had so much as seen French soil. Colonel Nuttall's formation attempted to uncover a target of opportunity, but met with like results. Inasmuch as there was no P. F. F. ship in this formation, conditions over France were impossible for bombing, crewmen said.

No one had seen French soil, although a few reported observing streams of various surface craft, including two aircraft carriers, before they reached mid-channel. There was one report of a fifty-ship convoy going up-channel, another of two convoys just off the English coast. Aside from those closely packed ships near the starting point of the busy course to the Invasion coast no one had seen anything but clouds and a couple of rockets.

This was D-Day, moulded from the Berlins and Schweinfurts and Marienburgs and Frankfurts and Hamburgs and Bremens and Kiels of past operations. After long months and quantities of cold sweat over those strategic targets, the men of the heavy bombers felt they were being denied a privilege in not being able to participate more actively in this new phase.

We had dropped some bombs but we couldn't see their effect. Just about the only consolation was a laconic statement by Staff Sergeant Sun W. Pang, a Chinese-American waist gunner:

"The Allies owned the air this morning."

But if the invasion of the Continent was off to a good start, so was the internal battle that now cropped up at Grafton-Underwood. For the most part the chaplains had taken little heed of the ideas generated by Colonel Smith. At last, however, the commanding officer put into effect an order that opened a battle of morals. In the heat of the battle Colonel Smith even sought to have the Catholic chaplain removed. The communication he forwarded to higher headquarters made no mention of the friction, but simply outlined a charge that Father Billy had failed to attend an important meeting in line of duty. Neither did the official communication mention that Father Billy's failure to attend was due to the fact that he had been called to an R. A. F. airplane crash and was fulfilling a chaplain's duties to the wounded.

However that may be, the basis of the internal trouble was evident in the carefully chosen words of Protestant Chaplain Schnelle at the Sunday morning service five days after the invasion of the Continent.

"And now I have an announcement to make," he said at the conclusion of that service in the tiny station chapel, which the men themselves had built. "Some of you may know that the commanding officer has ordered that all men carry prophylactic kits when leaving the post. I have taken it up with the proper authorities and have a solution for those of us to whom the carrying of such equipment is repulsive. If you care to, you may see me in my office and I will fill out a slip rendering you unaffected by this order.

"Will you please open your song books to Hymn 136."

Hello, Yanks . . .

However disappointing D-Day itself may have been to the men in the big bombers, the big show was not to go on without them. Before the month was over the 384th was to have its grandstand seat and was to occupy it time after time as the invasion armies spread out over the coast from Le Havre to Cherbourg. Flying Fortresses from Grafton-Underwood were to loose their bombs on bridges and airfields and railroads a stone's throw from the front lines and they were to return to targets of the old days in the heart of the Reich.

Day after day, with only brief pauses for repairs and rest, *Green Mountain Gal* and *Lazy Daisy* and *Satan's Playmate* and the others flew across the Channel and back.

It was two days after the Allied Armies had swarmed ashore that Lieutenant John Betolatti, who had been missing in action since April 13th, got back to England after as strange an odyssey as ever befell a Grafton-Underwood airman.

In the two months since his aircraft had gone down on another of those Schweinfurt missions, Lieutenant Betolatti had twice struggled across the frozen

Pyrenees. He had been captured and he had escaped. At times he had been near death from cold and exhaustion and hunger, but always that determination to get back into the war had forced him on.

Now, as he looked back on that nightmare, it was as though he were recovering from some serious illness and remembering a dream that had passed through his troubled mind as he hovered between life and death.

With the help of the underground Lieutenant Betolatti had headed for the Pyrenees. It had taken him a whole day to climb the first peak, but progress was even slower after that.

"There was no trail now and the snow was up to my chest," he recalled. "I got over another peak but was exhausted. Every few steps now I would collapse."

Finally he saw a road. So weak he was afraid of dying if he continued through the snow, his one thought was to reach that road. When Betolatti fell through the last drifts and onto the surface of the road, he found himself face to face with three German officers. Weak as he was, he tried to shuffle unconcernedly away.

"I had forgotten that I was soaking wet, as no peasant would be," he remembered. "I got past, but they called me back and asked for my papers. I reached in my pocket, looked blank, and set off again."

But the ruse didn't work. The Germans searched him, escorted him, under arrest, into the village of Pt. de Serau. It was only then that Lieutenant Betolatti realized how close he had been to escaping. Freedom lay just a few miles beyond. But it was no use to think of that now. The Germans drove him back to St. Girons, where he was slapped into jail.

At first Betolatti couldn't stand up long without being attacked by dizzy spells. But he studied his small cell carefully for a plan of escape. He learned that after the third day he was scheduled to be sent to Stalag Luft, but on that day some French prisoners were brought in and he was moved to another cell. This cell, too, came under his careful scrutiny. He noticed that the wall above the door was flaking, and finally he managed to loosen a few stones.

"I pulled myself up and dropped out into the corridor," said Betolatti. There was no guard, but the door was locked. I found a staircase closed with an iron grille. There was a small gap at the inner end and I squeezed through, tearing my trousers and cutting my leg. The stairs led me into a courtyard. I found a pick and shovel in the tool shed and started to dig my way out under the garden wall."

Realizing what a job that would be in his weakened condition, he went back into the jail and entered a room off the corridor, from which he could see the street entrance.

"I waited until the jailer went upstairs with the evening meal, hoping he would leave the door open. He didn't and was soon down again, excited, for he had discovered my break. He called the gendarmes and they ran around chattering and searching for a good hour. In the confusion someone left the door open and I slipped out.

"My first thought was to clear town. Going south meant the Pyrenees. I was too weak to try them so I went north."

Eventually, Lieutenant Betolatti found a wooden shelter, but it was so cold he couldn't sleep. At dawn he set out again, reached a small village where he met a native and informed him that he was an American aviator.

"He spread the word and people flocked around," said Betolatti. "They gave me bread and wine and said I would never make town, forty-eight kilometers away."

But despite their cautions Betolatti set out again, plodded on and on until dark, and spent a good night in a barn full of hay. Next day he went to the farmhouse and told his story. At first the farmer was incredulous, and it took the dog tags and the manufacturer's label on Betolatti's shirt to convince him. That was enough for the old Frenchman. He arranged for guides and a full party set out to see that the American got across the Pyrenees. But a snowstorm caught them and even the native guides lost the trail. By the time they got back to the trail it was too late to make the final pass before the arrival of the German patrol, so the guides gave final instructions and left.

"It was with great relief," Betolatti said later, "that I finally stumbled past Franco's picture into Spain."

He arrived back in England on June 8th.

It was on the 20th of the month, almost a year to the day after Major McMillin and those others went down over Hamburg, that the 384th paid another visit to that savagely blitzed German port. Along with other formations of Fortresses and Liberators our planes flew through intense barrages of flak to reach their objectives, the oil refineries that were feeding the German war machine.

Our planes had been there three days earlier and now, as then, there were reports of huge fires burning in the city and of immense columns of smoke—white, black and reddish—ascending thousands of feet above the wrecked targets.

A few twin-engined 410's made one pass at the formation from Grafton-Underwood, but it was ineffective. Unlike that first trip to Hamburg in June of 1943, this time there were hundreds of American fighters to shepherd the bombers—P-38's, 51's, and 47's that engaged enemy fighters in numerous dogfights.

We had thirty-six planes on the mission, half of them in a 41st Combat Wing commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Nuttall and the remaining eighteen, led by Major Gordon K. Stallings, flying low group in the same wing. Major Stallings himself was forced to turn back at the enemy coast because of a broken oil line, and First Lieutenant Edward P. Thoma took over the leadership of the low group.

For a few short minutes—the last minutes of his life—Lieutenant Thoma had the honor of leading his formation.

But while he was leading the way on the bomb run a stray burst of flak sent steel flying through the pilot's compartment. Levers were sheared off. Lieutenant

Robert E. Strand, the co-pilot, looked down to see blood staining his sleeve. Thoma was slumped against the controls. In that situation, with only metal stumps left on the control panel and with only one good hand to manipulate them with, the wounded co-pilot led the formation over the target, then brought his crippled Flying Fortress all the way back from Germany, and set it down in a comfortable three-point landing.

"I never saw a man so cool," commented Lieutenant Harold L. Rarick, the bombardier, when the ordeal was over. "You'd have thought he bumped into situations like that every day.

"Over the interphone I heard Lieutenant Strand say the pilot was hurt, but he didn't say anything about himself. We continued over the target and dropped our bombs. Just after I called 'bombs away' Lieutenant Strand made a sharp turn to the left out of the flak area and then began reassembling with the formation. I didn't know at the time he was doing all that with one hand."[1]

Members of the crew removed the pilot to the nose but were unable to revive him.

Meanwhile the engineer, Staff Sergeant Edward C. Ticknor, took over the vacant seat in the pilot's compartment to give Lieutenant Strand what help he could. There was a little more flak at the coast, but the formation rode it out without further trouble.

Although the throttle handles were shot off, Lieutenant Strand, manipulating the stubs, made a remarkable one-hand landing. Then he and the navigator, Lieutenant Wilbur Simmons, were taken to the hospital for medical attention. Lieutenant Simmons had minor scratches about the neck caused by flying plexiglass. Neither was seriously hurt.

A Flying Fortress with a dead pilot and a wounded co-pilot had led our formation over Hamburg!

The bombs of the lead group hit the aiming point, the bursts extending to the south part of the target area and into the railway sidings and dock facilities. The low group's bombs fell short but no doubt added to the damage. Many other targets, bombed by other groups, were burning fiercely.

Lieutenant Thoma was mortally wounded while his plane was on the bomb run. Afterward, an exceptionally intense barrage was thrown up over the center of the city, but our formation successfully skirted it.

After the bombs had been released Lieutenant Strand relinquished the lead to Lieutenant John M. Haning, but although operating the controls with only one arm he managed to stay with the wing.

How different it was from those two times, almost a year before, when the 384th had lost nine aircraft and ninety men over Hamburg and had another plane

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[1] Lt. Strand was decorated with the Distinguished Service Cross for this action.

stagger out so badly crippled she was forced to ditch almost within sight of the enemy coast!

Back in the communications section our monitors could tell the difference. The other time there had been long lists of S.O.S.'s, columns of last messages giving the coordinates of spots where American bombers were going down. The communications section itself was different now. "Skipper" Johnson, who had organized it, had left the organization months earlier and after a period in the United States was reported to be serving in another theater. His assistant, Captain Hansen, had gone to Russia to operate with the Eastern Command in U.S.S.T.A.F.'s pending shuttle raids across the Continent.

The section was now operated under the direction of Captain Hobert W. Aiken, whose arrival at Grafton-Underwood coincided approximately with the last change of command.

But if the first and last trips to Hamburg were different, so was the general picture. In our first June we had sent out only five missions, although all of them were packed into the last nine days of the month. Now we had formations out almost every day, and each formation was twice as large and carried almost three times the weight of bombs.

In our second June, the month of the invasion, the 384th was to make twenty-eight trips across the Channel. Our planes were to dump 1,949 tons of bombs on targets all the way from the western tip of France to Berlin itself.

It was a month in which the ground men were to prove their mettle again and again. In spite of the tremendous increase in operations the ground staffs were no larger than they had been in those days when a hundred and eighty sorties were a good month.

To maintain our aircraft for the nine hundred and nine sorties of our second June, the men on the line worked hours at a time, snatching brief and broken naps on the floors of the planes or in the inadequate tents scattered here and there about the dispersal areas. If his plane returned from battle with gaping wounds a mechanic accepted it philosophically. He was a physician and this was his patient, and his code required that he minister to her ills and return her to health as quickly as possible.

There was that day in the middle of June when *Lady Drew* returned with a hundred holes in her glistening aluminum skin. As she passed overhead and wheeled for a landing her ground crew, waiting in the hour-glass back of station headquarters, could see she was badly hurt. There was too much sky showing through her horizontal stabilizer.

By the time *Lady Drew* had landed and taxied to her dispersal area the sub depot boys had a new stabilizer loaded on a truck. It was deposited at the *Lady's* side almost before her propellers had stopped turning.

"She always has caught a lot of hell, ever since she started flying," said Sergeant Laine M. Hansen, her assistant crew chief, surveying the damage. He shook his head as he straightened up after pushing a chock against one of the wheels. "She's been on thirty-two missions and piled up more than five hundred combat hours. She's been hit from stem to stern and four men have been wounded with her. But she always comes back. Now you take today—"

Today the *Lady* had attacked an airfield behind the lines on the invasion coast of France. Just before she reached the target four enemy fighters dove through the formation. When they had gone someone happened to notice that a big hunk of the *Lady's* tail was gone.

"She didn't even hesitate," said the pilot, Second Lieutenant Richard L. Maggart. "I didn't know we'd been hit until someone called my attention to it."

The mechanics got out their measuring sticks and found that a five-foot strip had been torn out of the horizontal stabilizer.

"See that hole over there?" said Sergeant Dominic P. Acquaro of the *Lady's* maintenance crew. "A shell went all the way through there, grazing a gas tank and a mass of controls, yet it didn't damage a working part. It's like a bullet going through a man's stomach without puncturing his intestines."

The truck was backing up with the new stabilizer. The crew went to work on the old one, removing it almost as quickly as the shell had done the damage.

"She'll be flying again tomorrow," said Sergeant Acquaro. "The *Lady's* used to this stuff. She's had two or three new wing tips, and a new aileron, and two new elevators, and I don't know what else. We've put on seven new engines. And you can count the patches on the fuselage yourself, if you have time."

There was a lot of pride in his voice.

"This old *Lady's* going to take us home—some day."

Similar if not identical scenes were enacted all around the perimeter track during those busy days. Mechanics clambered onto their aircraft as soon as she had stopped taxiing, hurrying to whip the plane into shape for the next mission, which might be that same afternoon or surely no later than the next morning. Five 384th mechanics were rewarded with the Legion of Merit[2] and many others plugged along with no reward except the satisfaction of knowing the job was being done.

The month ended on a bad note, however. On the 30th, a Piper Cub monoplane dove into a barracks in the 546th Squadron area. The pilot, who lost control while buzzing the area, escaped with only a few scratches and bruises. The few men who were in the barracks also escaped injury.

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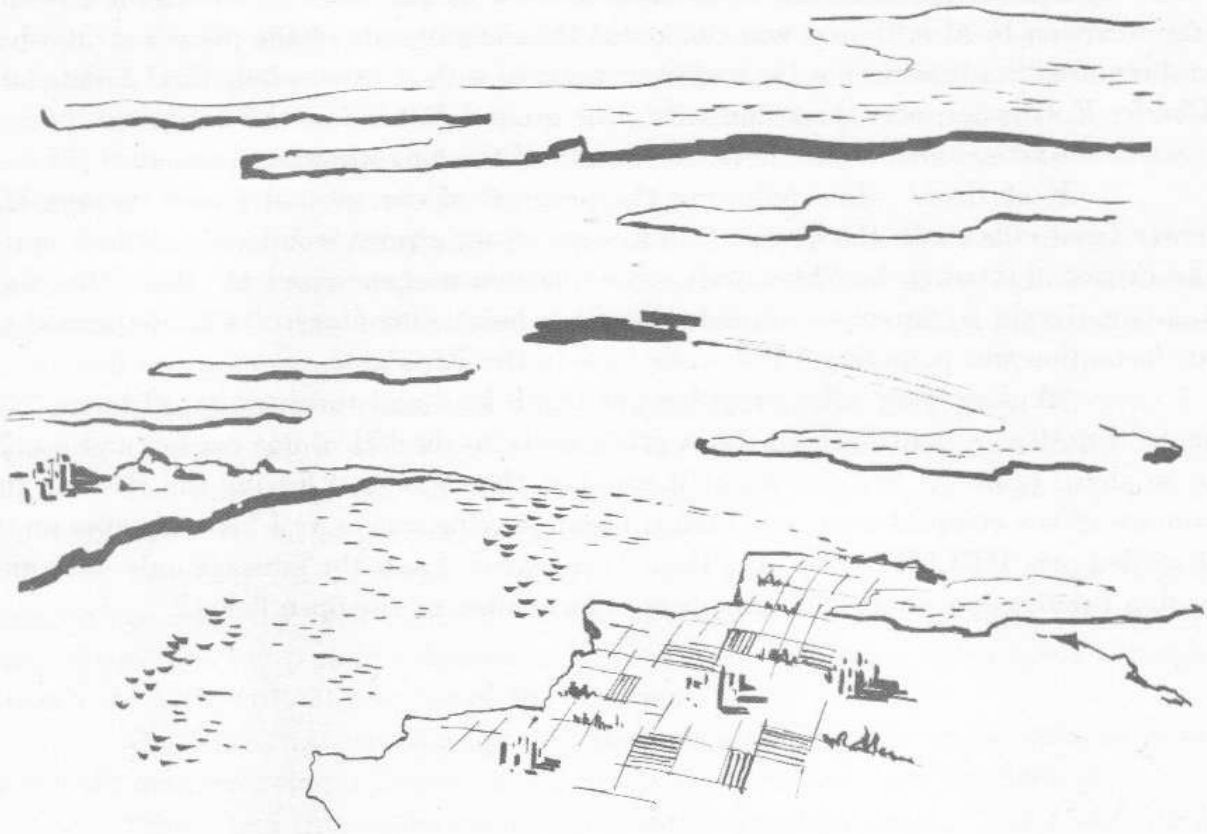
[2] A sixth mechanic subsequently received this high decoration. The six: Arthur E. Guilmet, Hubert P. Konzem, Lloyd H. Berry, Howard B. Pierce, Walter J. Groudis (all master sergeants), and T/Sgt. William E. Walsh.

Second Lieutenant Wilbur L. Shearer, who had just returned from a bombing excursion to Montdidier, was cut about the neck by one of the plane's strut wires and required hospitalization. He had been walking with another pilot, First Lieutenant Charles F. Gowder, who threw himself to the ground just before the crash.

And so ended June, 1944, the month of the long-awaited invasion.

If at times, while following the progress of our ground forces through the newly freed villages on the Continent—if some of our airmen wondered just how much the French wanted to be "liberated"—the question was answered for them that day Captain Gerald B. Sammons came back with a heartening story of what happened as his formation was pounding a Luftwaffe base in the Paris area.

"A short time after dropping our bomb load and turning toward home," he said. "I noticed a light flashing six or seven miles to the left of our course, and a mile or so ahead of us. At first I thought it was just the sun's rays hitting the glass on the window of the compartment, but then it began making sense. As I kept my eyes on it, it spelled out 'HELLOYANK' and then disappeared. I saw the message only once and couldn't determine whether it came from a farmhouse or the open fields."



Reverse English . . .

If it hadn't been for Germany's attempted blitz of London by robot bombs, the most important move in the Allied campaign for the summer of 1944, so far as the 384th Bombardment Group was concerned, might have been the one made by Colonel Dale O. Smith on the second day of August. As it worked out, a good many events overshadowed that move.

The invasion of the Continent was scarcely a week old when Germany unleashed the first of her threatened V-Weapons. Without warning, London again was subjected to aerial attack and this time from a weird flying gadget that had no human hand to guide it. It was the flying bomb, dubbed by stoical Londoners as the "Buzz-bomb" and the "Doodlebug."

At first the British Government admitted only that these new-fangled bombs were falling at random about the island, but everyone knew that the "Southern England" referred to in news releases was London.

What everyone didn't know was that the strategic air forces both of England and the United States had already robbed Hitler's surprise weapon of some of its effectiveness. There had been the Peenemundes, trips to the experimental core of the enemy's "Vengeance Weapons." And there had been the numerous missions to mysterious targets in the area usually referred to simply as "Pas de Calais."

Long before the invasion, the term "No Ball" had become a familiar if whispered part of the airmen's lingo at Grafton-Underwood. That code name meant little more than a concrete ramp and a few sheds to our bombardiers, but without knowing its actual significance they knew that the destruction of "No Ball" targets was important to the Allied cause.

Time after time the 384th had ventured out on these mysterious missions, and although such targets were hard to find because of natural camouflage and hard to hit because of their smallness, these missions were not without success.

Then, on June 13th, the full meaning of "No Ball" was brought home. That was the day the villagers of Swanscombe heard a strange "putt-putt" in the sky, looked up to see what looked like an unorthodox airplane winging overhead, watched it dive earthward after the engine had cut off, felt the tremble of the earth and the tug of the concussion before hearing the explosion. That marked the opening of a new type of aerial bombardment with which Hitler was attempting to strike terror into the war-weary hearts of London.

From that moment on, until the launching sites had been overrun by our ground forces many weeks later, London was forced once more to stand up to a terrorizing assault from the air. People learned to keep an ear cocked at all times for the familiar warning of the engines, and they learned to forget dignity and throw themselves to the ground when the engine quit.

Few of the buzz bombs strayed as far north as Grafton-Underwood, but, preoccupied as we were with lending support to our invading armies, there was a deep desire to help London during this new trial. The opportunity came on July 6th.

That morning Lieutenant Colonel Nuttall led thirty-nine of our bombers as a combat wing of a large formation the Eighth Air Force dispatched to bomb buzz-bomb installations. The 384th's objective was at Coubronne in the Pas de Calais. At the target, planes of another formation (379th) cut in front of Colonel Nuttall's combat wing, and the leader was forced to dive his entire formation in order to avert a mass collision. By the time they had returned for a second attempt another group was making its run on the target. When our formation finally came back a third time the lead bombardier found difficulty synchronizing satisfactorily, and finally the 384th planes split up into three groups to seek separate targets of opportunity.

Three different airfields were the victims of our bombs that day, airfields that might have been spared had not circumstances inte rfered.

Although returning crewmen used the pet phrase, "milk run," to describe the trip, the aircraft piloted by First Lieutenant Richard L. Maggart encountered enough opposition for an entire formation.

On the bomb run a direct burst of flak caught the left inboard engine. Flame began licking out from beneath the cowling. Lieutenant Maggart snuffed it out by turning off the feed valve of the oil line, but that meant a useless engine.

At the same time Lieutenant Leonard Galloway, his navigator, was picking himself up from the floor of the nose compartment. He had been sent sprawling by the concussion of the explosion and by a shell fragment which struck his machine gun, bounced off to penetrate the wood-backed pad on which he had been making a notation.

As Maggart strove to bring the craft back into position another anti-aircraft shell exploded in the open bomb bay. Fragments riddled the bomb bay doors with holes, ricocheted off the cargo of bombs, drove up into the fuselage, snapping control cables, and smashed into the radio compartment, destroying the radio equipment.

Again the pilot attempted to bring his aircraft, the *West End*, back into her place in the formation, then a third hit smashed into the right wing beside the inboard engine. Gasoline gushed from a punctured fuel tank and the engine quit, leaving only the two outboard engines still functioning.

Staff Sergeant Cecil A. Hamilton, the toggelier, had got rid of the bombs almost at the instant of the explosion in the bomb bay, so there wasn't much reason for the *West End* to hang around. She left the formation and headed for home like an old mare that is on her way to the barn after plowing all day.

But it wasn't over. Near the French Coast the crippled plane became the target of more guns, and behind their plexiglas the crew members felt like clay pigeons on a skeet range. A third engine was hit. Three down and one to go—and Maggart was able to feather only one of the three engines. The two others windmilled so violently they threatened to break the ship in half.

"The hell with this," came Lieutenant Maggart's voice over the interphone. "We're getting out."

And like a fullback carrying the ball through center, *West End* bulled through the cordon of flak and got out to sea. She left a trail of equipment behind. Crew members tossed out everything movable to lighten the ship and help that one good engine along. If it hadn't been that one of the wheels refused to let down, the *West End* would have landed at an emergency field. But confronted with this new difficulty Lieutenant Maggart decided to bring her back to Grafton.

With only one functioning engine, with two uncontrollable propellers and no landing gear, with a strong tail wind and with his head out of the window because oil had blackened the pilot's and co-pilot's window, with all these handicaps Lieutenant Maggart brought his flak-riddled bomber down in a belly landing.

Some three hundred flak holes had made a collander of the aircraft. The interior of the fuselage was a jungle of dangling control wires, and the radio compartment had been shot out from beneath and around the radio operator—but not a man of the nine-man crew had been so much as scratched.

In the interrogation room Lieutenant Maggart heard other crews describing how easy the mission had been.

"Well," he drawled, "It was pretty exciting for a milk run."

That same afternoon the 384th sent out another formation, this one of only twelve planes, to bomb another pilotless bomb installation in the Pas de Calais area, this one near Blanc/Pignon/Ferme.

The 384th was to strike many times at the buzz bomb' lairs before they were abandoned by the retreating Germans, but primarily, as always, its job was the strategic targets deep in Germany. For July the principal target was Munich. On three successive days beginning July 11th, Grafton heavies visited the scene of Hitler's little beer-hall episode so many years earlier. After two days' rest we put another formation-load of bombs on the stricken city. Munich was given a brief rest while we struck at Pennemunde, birthplace of the vicious robot bomb, but the next day, July 19th, it was Munich again . . . or rather a tongue-twister called Hollriegelskreuth, seven miles southwest of Munich.

Again the 384th made up an entire combat wing of thirty-six aircraft, Colonel William Travis commanding the formation with Major Stallings and Captain Dewayne Bennett leading the high and low groups, respectively.

The formation found the going much tougher this time, returned to Grafton-Underwood minus three planes that had fallen victim to between ten and fifteen ME 109's and FW 190's. The enemy fighters swooped down out of the sun just after the bombs had been released, made one pass through the wing and cut out three planes.

Escorting Thunderbolts and Mustangs immediately dropped their belly tanks and took out after the enemy. As the 384th airmen closed up the gaps left by their fallen comrades, they had the pleasure of seeing several German fighters go down under the guns of our protecting fighters.

Two of the Flying Fortresses that failed to return were flying in the lead group. The one piloted by First Lieutenant Dick W. Mount had three engines shot out and reported there were four wounded aboard when she wheeled away and headed due west, after the pilot had first asked for and received permission to try to make Switzerland.

The two others left the formation under less favorable conditions. Second Lieutenant James M. Bodker's aircraft was observed spinning down after the fighter attack and no one saw any parachutes. The third victim, an aircraft piloted by First Lieutenant Gerard A. Heim, received a hit in the left outboard engine, fell out of formation and started gliding down, with enemy fighters on his tail and firing continuously.

The watchers up above had seen no parachutes when the aircraft finally exploded under the incessant enemy attacks.[1]

When the formation let down over Grafton-Underwood the men lining the perimeter track could not at first sense the trouble the 384th had encountered. The fact that there were three planes missing meant little, as it was more common now than in the early days for planes in difficulty to land at the first friendly field they reached.

Among the first to land was *The Saint*, piloted by Second Lieutenant John H. Herzog.

When *The Saint* was two-thirds of the way down the runway she still had too much speed and watchers a quarter of a mile away were futilely yelling for her to "Get that tail down!" The end of the field was looming up when Herzog finally yielded to that advice and then everyone could see why it had happened that way. Herzog was bringing his plane in with a flat tire.

No one had an opportunity to congratulate the crew on that landing right away because the ambulance had taken over to remove the wounded. Sergeant David W. Gaston, the radio operator, had been hit in the right leg. It was so bad the leg had to be amputated at the knee a few hours later. Two other members of the crew had minor injuries.

So *The Saint* became just one more 384th Flying Fortress that had demonstrated her ability to take it. The elevator trim tabs were destroyed, the oxygen system in the right waist had been knocked out, one of the superchargers was shot out, and there were plenty of jagged shell holes here and there. But Herzog said *The Saint* had handled well in spite of everything.

By this time six weeks had elapsed since Allied invasion forces had stormed ashore in France, and although they had expanded their beachhead and made some progress inland the German ring still had them pinned down in the general area of the initial landings.

The weather had been none too good for air support. At Grafton-Underwood, where the wild roses had been blooming along the hedgerows for more than a month, it seemed that a cruel fate was preventing us from fulfilling the very purpose for which we had been trained. A pack of hounds, fenced in their kennels, within sight of a fox raiding the chicken yard, would have felt no more helpless.

On the Monday following that last Munich job the 384th received an assignment much to its liking. We were to bomb a target in the St. Lo area in direct support of the ground forces. But our formation found the weather there just as "lousy" as ever, returned with a full bomb load. Under the unfavorable conditions, the group

[1] Actually, three men are known to have escaped from this aircraft. The bombardier was killed and five others, including Lt. Heim, were still missing a year later. Of the 18 men on the other two crews, all but one were interned or taken prisoner. The ball turret gunner on Lt. Mount's crew was killed.

would have been taking a long chance had it attempted to pin-point a target only fifteen hundred yards in advance of our entrenched infantry.

We swallowed that lump of disappointment, felt even worse when news eame that stray bombs from some other group had actually fallen among our own comrades on the ground.

The next day, July 25th, was a different story.

That was the day that more than three thousand planes of all descriptions blasted a wide path through the German strongpoints, enabling our ground forces to scramble out of their foxholes and catch the enemy off balance. For its part in the affair the 384th mustered three formations to form the 41st "B" Combat Wing, with Lieutenant Colonel Alfred C. Nuttall commanding. From 13,000 feet—a record low altitude for the group—our planes bombed two targets, at Montreuil and La Chapelle En Juger. The prevailing undercast that forced our planes to go in from such a low altitude prevented us from bombing a third assigned target, Le Chatel.

To the men on the ground that display of air power must have been more impressive than it was to the men flying over their heads. Long stripes of colored cloth marked their lines and they used colored smoke to guide our airmen. Then . . . dive-bombers barrelling straight down out of the sky, group after group, one after another, straight down out of the sky. And then, perfectly timed, the "heavies," mile after mile of them droning over in a constant procession, marching across the sky as slowly and relentlessly as a tornado being charted on a weather map. Then the swelling fury of noise as those targets a half mile away were being destroyed.

At this stage of the war nearly everyone in uniform had close friends in every branch of the service. Somewhere down there the fellow from across the street was watching from a foxhole. At Grafton-Underwood everyone felt pretty good about the day's work.

Before that week was out the 384th was to discover a new hot-spot, a target to which they were to return many times in coming months and which was to become one of most strongly defended prizes in Germany. From that moment on the words "flak" and "Merseburg" were synonymous.

Weeks ago, back in May, planes from Grafton-Underwood had made their first visit to the ammonia and nitrogen works at Merseburg, but on that occasion their venture had gone unmolested. Now they discovered suddenly how deeply the Germans resented that attack. To protect those synthetic plants, which produced a large percentage of the chemicals supplying their war machine, the enemy moved in great batteries of ack-ack guns.

So when our planes returned to that chemical center on July 28th, they didn't find it the same mild Merseburg. In spite of the intense flak our thirty-six aircraft came away without casualty. The next day, Saturday, we went back in even greater strength, forty-six aircraft in a combat wing commanded by Colonel Smith.

Back in June, the group on two occasions had put up larger formations—fifty-two aircraft on the 13th and forty-eight on the 8th—but those earlier targets had been in France. This time we were headed straight into Germany.

Before reaching the target the wing was subjected to attacks by between twenty-five and fifty ME 109's and FW 190's, beat them off with the claimed destruction of two enemy aircraft and another probably destroyed. Then, at the target, flak—flak that bounced the formation around and interfered with the assembly after bombs away.

In spite of the opposition all but one of our planes returned. What happened to the other, that piloted by First Lieutenant Ned Sweeney who would have finished his tour with that mission, no one was able to say.[2]

A number of men were injured that day. Planes too. Maintenance men in the hospital and on the line had a lot of patching to do during the night.

One pilot, Second Lieutenant Charles Majeske, and his brother, Earl, a staff sergeant who flew as his radio operator, started their tours of duty together with the first of those two successive Merseburg missions. It was their crew mates for whom the claims of two enemy fighters destroyed were put in. There were several bullet holes in the plexiglas nose and two jagged holes in the waist section. And the horizontal stabilizer had been fairly well riddled during the machine gun duel between the tail gunner and a German pilot.

Merseburg was beginning to gain its reputation. But however successful our attacks on that strategic target, nothing could overshadow the new successes of our armies in France. As a result of the massed aerial attacks in the St. Lo area, earlier in the week, the Americans were beginning to break through.

It now fell to the airman's lot to seal off the German escape, to knock out bridges behind the retreating enemy.

On Tuesday, August 1st, the day after engaging in another Munich mission, the 384th took up the assignment with a will. Our formation was after a bridge at Chartres that day. American ground men were spilling out all around the German defense ring.

The Allied Armies were on the move . . . and so was the 384th's Colonel Smith. On Wednesday he left for the United States.

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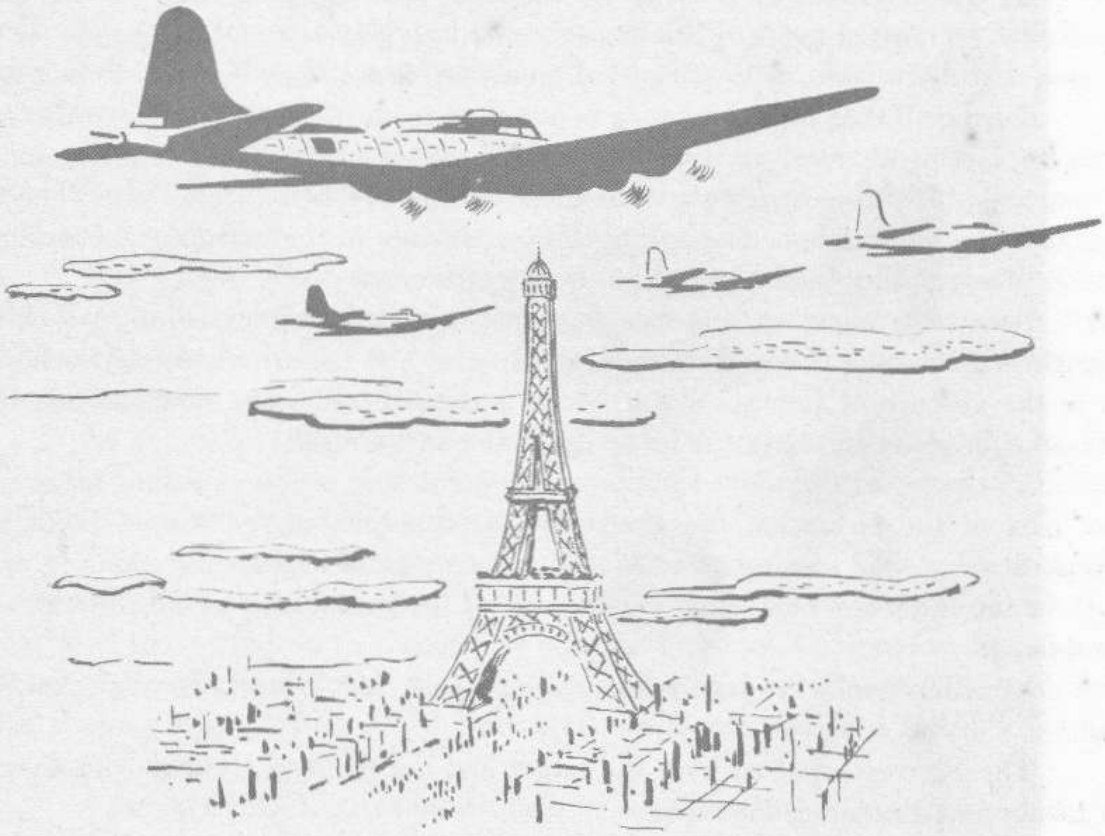
[2] News of this crew was slow filtering in. Two are known to have been taken prisoner, but three months after the European war ended the others were still listed as "missing."



Lafayette, We Were There . . .

It was in the middle of England's August Holidays when the 384th went out with all intentions of knocking out an air depot twenty miles northeast of Munich —and hit a shoe factory instead.

What happened was this: Because of adverse weather conditions the formation couldn't bomb its primary and picked on the boot and shoe factory at Pirmasens, not far from Munich. The footgear were attacked visually, and although there was no photographic evidence to support it, the boys thought they did pretty well.

Without twisting the facts around it could be argued that almost immediately thereafter the Jerries started falling back on Paris, a routed and seemingly defeated Army. However, no reports came through of prisoners being picked up with their feet wrapped in rags for protection, so Grafton-Underwood had no way of knowing just how decisive a blow they had struck. Nevertheless, the boys began to boast that the pompous Nazi warriors had been reduced to a bedraggled and footsore lot, and claimed that the sudden German retreat bore them out.

By the middle of the month the Germans were hurrying back to the shelter of the Reich. On August 25th, Paris was liberated and by the end of the month the Allies were sitting in front of the Seigfried line, waiting for their supplies to catch up.

During all that time the heavy bombers were blasting away at tactical targets . . . gun emplacements, road junctions, airdromes, bridges and so forth. The day following Colonel Smith's departure, we went after a buzz-bomb launching site. The day after that we had a double-header, going to Peenemunde in the morning and sending a formation after another buzz-bomb ramp in the afternoon.

It was the next day, Saturday, August 5th, that the 384th ran into trouble just south of Hannover. Colonel Buck himself, who had taken over the station command in the absence of Colonel Smith, came back with some one hundred flak holes in his lead ship to testify as to the intensity of the anti-aircraft.

As the formation moved in on its bomb run flak began exploding all around. In one part of the formation the *Tremblin' Gremlin*, piloted by Second Lieutenant Arthur J. Shwery, was moving steadily along when a shell exploded at the side of her nose. Over the intercom Lieutenant Shwery heard his bombardier make a calm report of the damage.

"I'm hit," said the bombardier, First Lieutenant Marvin Fryden. And that was all.

The Fortress went on over the target and her bombs fell away with the rest. Then Lieutenant Fryden collapsed.

Crew mates found he had been hit in the chest, figured it must have taken a lot of will power for him to have held himself up long enough to finish the job he had been sitting there for. When the *Tremblin' Gremlin* got back to England only two of her engines were going, the fuselage was riddled with flak, and the bombardier was dying.

Four other members of the crew were hurt, but none seriously.

In the dispersal area at an emergency landing field, mechanics looked over the big bomber. The *Gremlin's* right inboard engine had been hit, the radio compartment was riddled with holes, the radio equipment had been destroyed, the trim tabs were in shreds, the hydraulic brake system had been destroyed, and part of the oxygen system had been shot up. They counted a hundred and six flak holes in the ship.

The aircraft came back in that condition.

Lieutenant Shwery, cut above one eye, had yielded the controls to his co-pilot, Second Lieutenant John O. Buslee,[1] and Buslee handled the Gremlin during most of the return trip.

Shwery's aircraft wasn't the only one that had had trouble. Most of them caught a little flak and one piloted by Second Lieutenant Frank W. Mead, lost half her crew over enemy territory. A small fire in the hydraulic pump filled the plane with

[1] On Sept. 28, 1944, Lt. Buslee, flying his own crew, was lost on a mission to Magdeburg. One of his crew is known to have been killed, while the others were still "missing" at war's end.

smoke and Mead gave the crew instructions to stand by for bailing out. Crew members from the top turret back to the tail apparently took this as an order to bail out, for when the pilot gave the all-clear a minute later he found that five of his nine-man crew had vanished into enemy air.

But in spite of the losses, it had been a successful mission. Photographs credited the 384th with another bull's eye. The target, an airfield at Langenhagen, showed up on the picture as a cauldron of smoke and fire.

Day by day the aerial assault went on. In the middle of the month Captain Nicolai Hansen of group materiel got out a pencil and figured the group had dropped 10,382 tons of bombs in its fourteen months of operations, which would be a pretty handsome figure for twice that length of combat.

At about that time we were feeling especially proud of the 546th Squadron, which had piled up a record of two hundred and fifty-one sorties without a mechanical abortion; thirty-three missions in thirty-seven days.

There were other things we had a right to feel proud about. We were proud of a new fellow, Second Lieutenant Leslie C. Gullekson. When Gullekson arrived and was assigned to a squadron he thought he was pretty lucky. Long before he got here he had been addressing mail to his brother, Cyrus, a staff sergeant, and the address was "384th Bomb Group, A.P.O. 557." Now here was Leslie, assigned to the same Group and even to the same squadron.

Upon arriving Lieutenant Gullekson sought out the squadron orderly room to find out where his brother bunked.

"You haven't heard anything about your brother lately?" asked the clerk.

"No."

"Well, I hate to tell you this, but—about two weeks ago over Munich—"

Lieutenant Gullekson said "Thanks" and walked out. And now Leslie was flying from the same station his brother used to fly from, before going down somewhere over Germany.[2]

We were proud of those grease monkeys out on the line, whose oil-stained fingers were constantly poking in search of a loose nut or a broken safety as confidently as a surgeon probing for a severed artery . . . men like Master Sergeant Louis G. Hopps whose crew at that time had sent their aircraft on a hundred operational missions with only one turnback for mechanical failure.

A month before, the Fortress crewed by Hopps had been badly damaged by flak over Laon ou Voael. Work started at 3 o'clock in the afternoon and by noon of the following day the ship was back in commission. In less than twenty-four hours Hopps and his crew had replaced the right elevator, the right stabilizer, the right outer wing panel, two Tokio gas tanks, the tail wheel, and the right wheel on the main landing gear.

[2] It was subsequently learned that S/Sgt. Cyrus C. Gullekson, missing since the Munich mission of July 19, was a prisoner in Germany.

It wasn't just Hopps who was turning out a job to be proud of; it was all the boys like him in all those nooks and crannies around the perimeter track. During the busiest months they couldn't be sure when they were going to eat or sleep. Even when they could get around to washing up there were still crinkled patterns of oil in their palms and those broken fingernails were edged in black.

Such a maintenance record could never have been established if the maintenance boys had insisted on quitting when the whistle blew—if there had been such a thing as a quitting whistle. It meant hard work, long hours that sometimes stretched into days with only brief snatches of sleep.

The 384th was proud of these things, but you never heard anyone say anything about them. They were just taken for granted.

Except for that Peenemunde mission August 4th and for subsequent trips to Merseburg and Gelsenkirchen and Anklam, all our operations during that month were in support of the big show in France. The speed of our ground armies was almost unbelievable. Just nine days after the fall of Paris, August 25th, Brussels was liberated.

The armies had moved so swiftly it was hard to realize that virtually everything was ours up to the Roer, but we had plenty of occasion to remember as we were getting back a lot of crews which were going down in the same places we had been losing them a few short weeks ago. So many of our planes were making emergency landings in France that some of the fellows began to wonder if they weren't doing it just to get a look at Gay Paree.

Our first three missions in September were aimed at destroying the chemical works of I. G. Farbenindustrie at Ludwigshafen, but after that we switched back to ground support targets. For the rest of the month the 384th spent most of its time hitting marshalling yards here and there, most of them in the vital sections just beyond the front lines.

But on September 12th, a week to the day after Brussels was freed, we flew the full length of Germany and on into Czechoslovakia to strike at one of Germany's last remaining synthetic oil plants, the one at Brux. The Luftwaffe was up in force, but we only had nine aircraft making the trip and for the most part the enemy attacks were directed at other formations. A dozen ME 109's did engineer two frontal assaults against the 384th's formation, however, and they succeeded in knocking one of our aircraft down. The pilot endeavored twice to climb back into the formation, then started gliding down until the right wing fell off. She was last seen spinning down on fire.

Just about that time Sergeant Melvin J. Grams, in the tail section of the aircraft piloted by Second Lieutenant Noel E. Plowman, was jockeying his twin machine guns around trying to get in a burst at four ME-109's that were crashing through the clouds at three o'clock. Tiny streaks of flame flashed from the guns in their wings. They wheeled into reach of the tail guns and Sergeant Grams pressed the trigger bar just as something seared through his left foot.

When he had time to investigate, he saw the hole in the bottom of his boot and the other at the instep and the blood oozing out both sides, but when he reported to the pilot he insisted he was fully capable of handling his position.

They came in again—seven Messerschmidt's from the tail—and Sergeant Grams poured out a steady stream of .50-caliber bullets until the attack was broken off. There was a lull of three or four minutes, then an attack by three more enemy fighters. . . .

For an hour and a half Grams remained doggedly at his post, without revealing the full gravity of his injury. The ball turret oxygen system had been destroyed during one of the attacks and the ball gunner had to climb up into the ship. He could take over for Grams, the pilot said.

Sure that his guns would be manned, Sergeant Grams finally crawled back to the radio compartment, dragging his shattered left foot as carefully as possible, and lay there uncomplaining until the bomber reached home.

They took Grams to the hospital at Thrapston. The medics said they could bone-graft that foot together again. It might take a couple of years, but it would be a foot.

But maybe Grams was lucky, after all. A few days later his crew went down over Germany, a victim of flak. They said the bomber's tail was shot off.[3]

Perhaps we were looking at things through rose-colored glasses, but who can blame us for thinking the Germans were on their last legs? It had been only six weeks since St. Lo, in which the heavies played such an important part, and the Allies had swept clean the whole of France except for isolated pockets here and there.

It was no wonder that old-timers of the 384th, with fourteen months of combat behind them, began talking of T-bone steaks and malted milks and the Statue of Liberty.

We knew that attacks on gun positions and fortified areas around Caen and St. Lo had a lot to do with the final breakthrough. And no one will deny that but for the work of the heavy bombers just before and immediately after D-Day, attacks against marshalling yards and bridges and airfields, the invasion would have been much more difficult, if it could have been attempted at all.

And now, Sunday, September 17th, we were co-ordinating our efforts with a great airborne invasion of Holland. The 384th helped out by sending six squadrons of six planes each to two different targets in the landing areas, three squadrons striking at tank and gun concentrations at Eindhoven and the other three assigned to smash light gun positions west and north of Hertogenbosch.

Troop-carrying and glider-towing aircraft stretched out across the sky for

[3] Grams, who received the Silver Star for his contribution that day, was to learn later that at least two members of his old crew survived as prisoners of war. The others, including Lt. Plowman, were still "missing" when war ended.

seventy-five miles. By this measure the Allies hoped to vault over the strong defenses of the north and unhinge the locked door into Germany.

First Lieutenant Charles W. Bishop, one of the 384th's original pilots, who had been serving as a non-combat operations officer from the time he was badly wounded more than a year ago until a few days ago, was air commander of the thirty-six plane formation mustered at Grafton. It was one of those days when there didn't seem to be a lot of flak, yet there was enough to knock down one of our planes.

Captain Omar F. Kelsay's aircraft, flying one of the squadron leads, got a direct burst in her left inboard engine. She fell down with the right wing enveloped in flames, exploded when she hit the ground. When the rest of the boys got back no one reported having seen more than "three or four" parachutes.

The 384th was idle the next day, but on Tuesday, two days after the opening of the airborne action around Eindhoven, we sent a three-group wing to attack the marshalling yards at Hamm. Two of our ships, both of them spares which had tacked onto another formation (303rd), were lost over there somewhere, but there was good news for our formation when it got back to Grafton.

Six members of Captain Kelsay's crew had returned in the formation's absence, and it had been less than forty-eight hours since the boys saw Kelsay's plane go down in flames and explode. Kelsay had a pretty good story to tell.

The burst of flak that knocked out his left inboard engine also punctured the wing fuel tanks, then another shell riddled the cockpit, knocking the top off the upper gun turret, shattering the instrument panel and setting the bomber on fire. The crew abandoned ship, right in the middle of "no man's land."

Captain Kelsay said he made a delayed jump and came down on the Allied side of the front lines. Some fellows from the armored forces found him and took him back to their command post. About a half hour later his top turret gunner, Technical Sergeant Nicholas M. Pavlos, was brought in.

Pavlos had landed between the lines in a parachute that was well-punctured by German rifle bullets.

"They were shooting at me all the time, but thank God they were lousy shots," he said. "I crawled on my stomach toward our lines in record time."

Kelsay and Pavlos remained at the command post until the next morning and then were sent to Army Headquarters in Holland. From there they were taken back to a point near the Dutch-Belgian border, and they hitch-hiked from there into Brussels. In the Belgian capital they got transportation back to Grafton-Underwood.

Meanwhile, the men of an anti-aircraft battery were retrieving four other members of the crew, Lieutenant Pete F. Ziegler, Technical Sergeant Raymond S. Soto, Staff Sergeant John J. Norstrom, and Staff Sergeant Don E. Kelsey. The ball turret gunner, Staff Sergeant Thomas R. Schmeller, apparently jumped without a parachute. His body was found and identified, but there was still no information about

the other three, although their parachutes were seen to open. Kelsay thought they must have landed a few inches nearer the German lines than the rest of the crew did.[4]

This all happened just a few days before the Group had its "200th Mission Celebration."

The week-end of September 23–24 had been set several weeks in advance and the celebration proved to be a little premature. The weather wasn't too good anyway and some of the scheduled events were cancelled. In the next three days we had missions to Frankfurt, Osnabruck and Cologne and that put us at the two-hundred mark.

But by that time the Allied dash across the Continent had slowed down to a crawl. The ground forces hadn't caught up with the paratroopers dropped around Eindhoven. The Eindhoven boys were putting up a great fight, maybe one of the most gallant stands in history, but the infantry hadn't reached them in time and now the Germans had strengthened the hinge.

Farther south, General Hodges started pounding at the middle of the door. It bulged a little and on October 20th Americans took the German city of Aachen.

At Grafton-Underwood the boys reluctantly set back the date when they would renew acquaintance with that old lady on Bedloe's Island, the lady with a book in one hand and a torch in the other.

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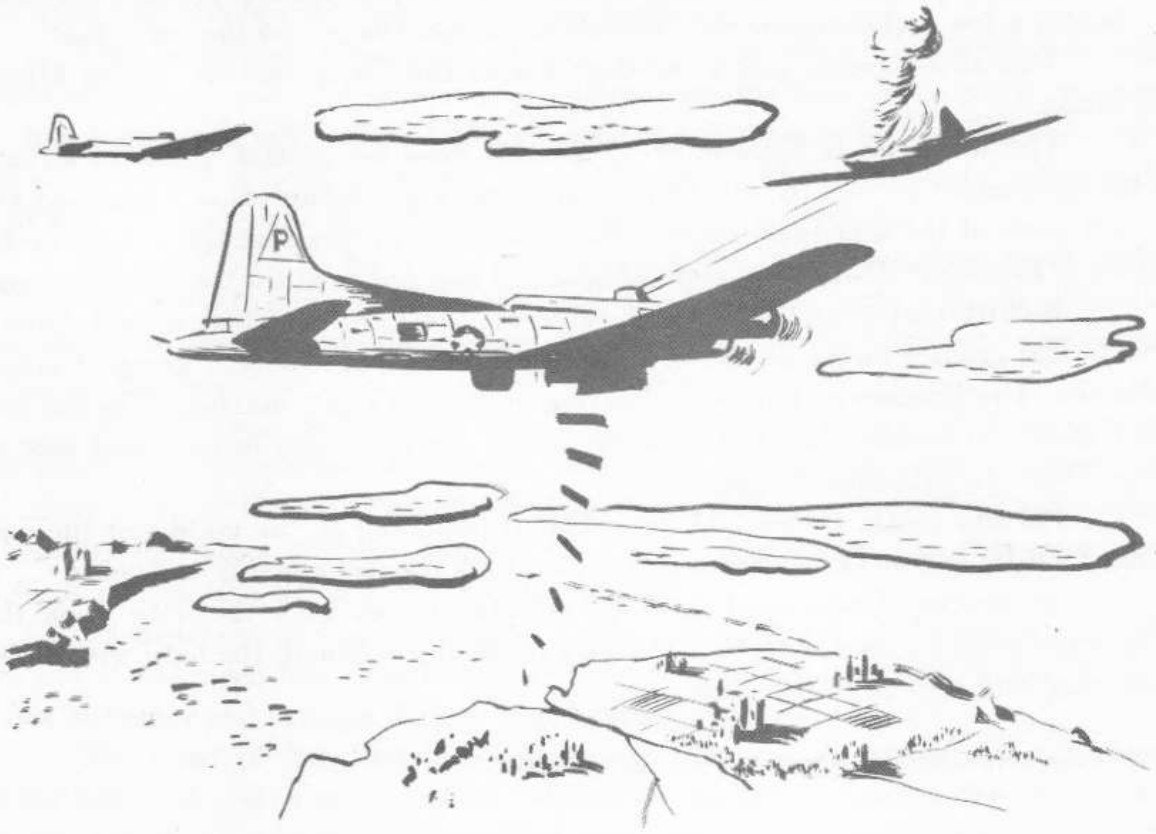
[4] All three were taken prisoner, it was eventually learned.



This Was for Them . . .

For days a heavy fog had lain over the countryside. Vehicles poked questioningly along the roads, their spotlights probing about like the antennae of some clumsy bug. Everything beyond fifty feet was a white abyss. You began to lose any sense of distance. You were shut up in a filmy white room that moved along wherever you went. Shadows looming in and out of the room were jeeps or weapons carriers or pedestrians.

It was no place for anyone with claustrophobia.

For days the 384th planes had been grounded, and with the newspapers full of Rundstedt's new counter-offensive the enforced idleness was beginning to tell on the men who flew the heavy bombers. At Station Headquarters Colonel Theodore R. Milton, commanding officer, was spending a good part of his time pacing the floor.

"We ought to be over there," he said more than once. "I don't care if we have to go in at five thousand feet, we ought to be there now when they need us most."

He stopped once in a while and looked at a map.

"Those poor guys," he would say, not quite under his breath.

The commanding officer was not alone in his attitude. You could feel it everywhere men gathered . . . in the mess halls and on the line and in the offices and in the barracks. Rundstedt had broken through . . . the Americans were falling back . . . the front was fluid . . . S.H.A.E.F. had put a seventy-two hour news clamp on developments . . . the Germans had retaken town after town, had pushed us back fifteen miles, twenty miles . . . Rundstedt had told his men they'd be in Paris by Christmas.

"We aren't fighting this war," grumbled a bombardier. "The infantry's fighting it."

No one gave him much of an argument.

It was hard to remember when the 384th had had its last visual mission. Until the last couple of days, when the weather had become intolerable, our aircraft had been going out pretty regularly in spite of bad conditions.

Colonel Smith had led his last mission from Grafton-Underwood on October 9th and a few days after that we heard we were going to have a new commanding officer. Then Colonel Milton had showed up. We didn't see much of Colonel Smith after that, although he was in London for a while and dropped in at Grafton before and after a trip to the Continent. An order came out October 24th naming Colonel Milton as "temporary" C.O., and it wasn't long afterward that Colonel Smith departed for a new assignment in the States and the "temporary" was taken out of Milton's orders.

Colonel Milton was an oldtimer in E.T.O.U.S.A. He already had the Distinguished Service Cross, the Silver Star, the Purple Heart, the Distinguished Flying Cross with Cluster, and the Air Medal with three Clusters. Overseas since March, 1943, he had served as operations officer of the 351st Bomb Group and as deputy commander of the 91st Group. He came to Grafton from the 1st Combat Wing of the Third Division, where he had been chief of staff.

The 384th's new commanding officer was born in Schofield Barracks on the Island of Hawaii, attended Georgetown Prep in Maryland and the United States Military Academy at West Point. Before entering the academy he served a year in the ranks, learned about chow lines and kitchen police, developed a thorough understanding of the enlisted man's problems. Graduating from West Point in 1940, he attended flying school at Randolph and Kelly, eventually entered combat with a wealth of military ideas to put to use.

Colonel Milton had arrived at Grafton when we were still patching up our aircraft after a costly deal of October 11th. The 384th had put up forty-six planes that day to attack a synthetic oil plant at Wesseling. Two of our four squadrons bucked a hail of accurate flak to bomb the targets with excellent results. The other two went to Koblenz, bombed by Pathfinder technique because of a complete cloud coverage.

The plane piloted by First Lieutenant Max Levine had received a direct hit in the cabin and bomb bay doors. She fell away in flames, disintegrated in air after

dropping about a thousand feet. Three other aircraft didn't return with the formation, but two of them were later found to have landed in Allied territory. The other, which was piloted by First Lieutenant John W. Peterson, was unaccounted for and still hadn't been heard from two and a half months later.

It all added up to two planes lost with their full complements of men.[1] Three men in other planes were brought back dead and a fourth seriously wounded.

Major Bean's lead ship lost two engines to flak over the target, and came back with a lot of other damage. The pilot, First Lieutenant William V. Henderson, finally left the formation and returned alone to Grafton. One of the men killed was in that lead ship, Technical Sergeant Ralph R. Neyer, the radio operator.

It was just about that time that we had begun getting consistently bad weather. On Monday, October 30th, Colonel Milton for the first time had led his new command over enemy territory. The primary, a synthetic oil plant at Gelsenkirchen, was covered by clouds and Hamm was bombed by P. F. F. equipment. That's the way it had been ever since.

"We didn't see anything but clouds . . ."

"The target was completely covered . . ."

The same story day after day. Every morning gray and cold, and usually there was fog or rain along with it. Sometimes our formation would break up after leaving the target and 384th planes would make emergency landings at scattered places all over England, or even on the continent. Maybe it would take two or three days to "get all our chickens" back after one of those affairs.

It was that way November 10th, a bleak, dismal Friday when Grafton-Underwood sent three squadrons to attack a pair of airfields in the Cologne area. Nine planes of Captain Roy A. Vinnedge's high squadron landed on the continent that day, most of them near Brussels.

At the time we didn't know too much about what happened to them, although we had received a report that all of them landed all right. Remnants of the formation that did straggle back to Grafton told of seeing one aircraft get a flak burst in the ball turret, and when the pictures were developed they showed aircraft 448, with most of the turret shot away and with its twisted guns pointing straight down.

The loading list showed that Staff Sergeant Terry L. Jones had been riding there and everyone felt sorry for him, for one look at the picture made it plain that Terry Jones had had it.

But next day Terry Jones showed up again. He had a small patch on his face and both legs were bruised a little, but that was all. His formation had just turned away after dropping its bombs when a blanket of flak ripped into the tight-flying forma-

[1] Six members of Lt. Peterson's crew were taken prisoner. The others also had been reported safe, but no verification of this report had reached Grafton by war's end. Lt. Levine and his crew also were listed simply as "missing."

tion. One burst hit Jones' aircraft near the juncture of the fuselage and the left wing. A gaping hole, three feet long and a foot wide, was torn in the wing. The ball turret, in which Jones had been riding, simply disappeared.

With nothing between himself and the German landscape but four miles of clouds, Sergeant Jones somehow grabbed the turret control handles jutting out above him. His right leg found a footing in the jagged remains of the turret and there he was, hanging on for dear life.

He couldn't have hung on long because his oxygen system was shot out. It was only a matter of seconds before a couple of crew mates poked their heads into the hole above him. One look and they had him under the arms, to keep him from falling away if his grip loosened, while they evolved a plan for getting him up into the ship.

The interphone was buzzing. Every position in the ship knew by that time that Terry was hanging down there without a parachute. He was finally pulled back into the plane and, temporarily blinded by broken plexiglas and blue from exposure to the forty-below weather, led to the radio room. Because of the quick work of his mates he had been off oxygen only a couple of minutes before he was plugged in on the outlet in the radio compartment.

Gradually our planes drifted back and the 384th was ready to go again.

So in spite of the weeks of poor weather, the 384th had been doing a lot of flying. Occasionally, but only occasionally, there was a visual run. But most of our bombing was by instruments. In spite of everything the tempo of the aerial assault on Germany kept climbing. Thousand-bomber raids, once only a dream, were not at all uncommon by this time.

At last, on Thursday, November 16th, the Allied armies along the front had strained forward again. The advance was preceded by an aerial bombardment of German gun positions, and the 384th's part in this affair took it over a target not far from Eschweiler, ten miles northeast of Aachen.

Anticipating poor bombing conditions a new system was used to prevent bombs from falling among American troops. There was to be a line of flak bursts from Allied guns, fired five hundred yards apart to burst at 18,000 feet on a line running north and south on the eastern edge of Aachen. In addition, fifteen silver barrage balloons, three hundred yards apart, were to be sent up to 2,000 feet along the flak line. There also were to be red and orange panels laid out on the ground, on the off-chance that there might be an improvement in visibility.

The formation from Grafton, composed of four squadrons, carried out the plan with little difficulty, bombing by GEE-H. The plane piloted by First Lieutenant Donald G. Springstead was hit by flak in the right inboard engine and caught fire, six of the crew bailing out. With his co-pilot Second Lieutenant Robert C. Barnes dead beside him, Lieutenant Springstead crash-landed at Tongres, Belgium. The top turret

gunner, Staff Sergeant William C. Murphy, rode the crippled aircraft down with him and both were hospitalized in Belgium.

A few hours after the mission had been completed a letter of commendation to the bomber units was received from the commanding general of the ground forces on the Aachen front, complimenting the airmen for the successful destruction of the German fortified positions, which enabled the infantry to make substantial gains in their drive toward the Rhine.

That report from the infantry helped some, but even that couldn't dispel the feeling of helplessness brought about by the bad weather.

There had been little change, unless it was for the worse, when the 384th went to the Leipzig area the last Thursday in November. The Eighth Air Force put up twelve hundred and fifty bombers and a thousand fighters that day, losing eighty-six planes, fifty-six of them heavies. The 384th was assigned a synthetic oil plant at Zeitz. As it turned out, the lead squadron dropped on Meuselwitz and the low on Wintersdorf, both of them communities on the fringe of Zeitz, while the high squadron was bombing a last resort target, an ordnance depot.

When the formation returned we were short three planes. Another came back with four of its crew gone, and still another carried a dead tail gunner on board.

The pilot who had lost part of his crew was First Lieutenant Gene R. Goodrick. His ship was on fire, his oxygen system had been shot away, and four members of the crew, including the co-pilot, navigator and engineer, had bailed out by the time Lieutenant Goodrick's Fortress reached the target. Lieutenant Goodrick himself dropped the bombs, using the emergency release in the cockpit. The fire extinguished itself, and with the assistance of what remained of his crew Lieutenant Goodrick brought his badly damaged aircraft back to England.

It was two minutes before bombs away when the anti-aircraft shell struck his ship, the *Fightin' Hebe*, underneath the forward section.

"It bounced me out of my seat," said Goodrick. "Then I heard this hissing noise behind me and smoke started filling the cockpit. I looked back and saw smoke and flames licking out from beneath my compartment and creeping up the sides."

Apparently believing the *Fightin' Hebe* was mortally hit, the four members of the crew dived out. When they opened the escape hatch on the under side of the plane there was a tremendous draft. Returning crew members thought that had something to do with putting out the fire.

Alone in the front of the aircraft and beginning to feel the effects of the lack of oxygen, Lieutenant Goodrick maintained his position in the formation until he had released his bombs. Then he dove his craft out of formation, a precaution taken so that in case of an explosion the *Fightin' Hebe* wouldn't endanger any of the other planes.

The ball turret gunner, Staff Sergeant Lee F. Pierce, went up front to assist the pilot. Goodrick had been off oxygen four minutes by the time Pierce had hooked him on to another outlet.

On the way home the *Fightin' Hebe* acted like a drunken sailor. As the hydraulic and electrical systems had been shot out, the landing wheels kept going up and down until they were cranked into position by hand. To make matters worse, the speed-controlling flaps had disintegrated, there were no lights, and the bomb bay doors wouldn't close.

It was dark when the formation, with *Fightin' Hebe* tagging along behind, reached Grafton-Underwood. Lieutenant Goodrick had to rely on another pilot to guide him, like a seeing-eye dog, over the landing strip. So with no brakes, a faulty landing gear, and no flaps to cut down her speed, the *Fightin' Hebe* headed down for the runway. Sergeant Pierce joined the pilot and frantically worked the emergency hand pump in an effort to slow the aircraft down, but the *Hebe* was traveling at more than a hundred and twenty-five miles an hour when she touched the runway. The brakeless bomber rolled the length of the concrete strip and off into an open field, but none of her six-man crew was hurt.[2]

Goodrick and other members of the formation couldn't give much information on what had happened to the three missing crews. The aircraft piloted by Second Lieutenant Arthur D. Champ had had a direct burst of flak and was reported to have exploded over the target. Four 'chutes was the most optimistic observation. There was no explanation of what had happened to the planes piloted by Second Lieutenant Warren G. Fleshman and First Lieutenant Hugh L. Evans.

Hours later an encouraging message came from higher headquarters: Fleshman and two unidentified members of his crew were safe and would return to base as soon as weather permitted. It was three days before the Fleshman crew began to drift back, all nine of them, and no one much the worse for wear.

Even now, three weeks later, we still hadn't heard what happened to the crews of Lieutenants Champ and Evans.[3]

All that took place November 30th, and things had been fairly quiet ever since. We managed to get out half a dozen times in the first two weeks of December, but all those jobs were by instruments, either Pathfinder or GEE-H, even that one of December 11th, when we went after a highway and railroad bridge at Mannheim.

And now Rundstedt's counter-offensive was giving trouble. The Germans had opened their assault on Saturday, December 16th, and were pushing right along. We had formations out the next Monday and Tuesday, but they weren't giving direct

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[2] Goodrick was decorated with the Silver Star for this action.

[3] By war's end two members of Evans' crew had been verified as prisoners of war. Nothing had been heard of the others, or of any of Lt. Champ's crew.

support to our troubled infantry. Besides, we had a lot of trouble getting off. On Tuesday, thirty-six aircraft plus three spares were slated to bomb a railway junction at Glaadt, but even while the planes were taking off the weather closed in suddenly and solidly. Only twelve of our aircraft were in the air at the time. They went on to the target, with Colonel Milton commanding, and had to land somewhere else after getting back to England. They were diverted to a field near Swansea, Wales, and even there the ceiling was less than two hundred feet and visibility was bad. Seven of them had to be talked in over V. H. F. It was three days before they could even attempt to get back to Grafton.

But Rundstedt had told his men they'd be in Paris by Christmas!

"I don't care if we have to go in at five thousand feet . . ."

"If this fog would only lift for three days, just three days . . ."

"We aren't fighting this war; the infantry is . . ."

The situation on the ground was so bad the Eighth Air Force couldn't wait for the fog to lift. Despite almost impossible conditions the heavy bombers began to strike back. On Saturday, December 23rd, we bombed a marshalling yard at Ehrang, a principal communications center distributing supplies into the bulge. Only seven of our aircraft got down before the field was completely covered over again. But we got two formations up the next day, one outfit bombing an airfield at Kirch Gons and another formation at Kaiserslautern and Steinbeck. That was the day, Christmas Eve, 1944, that the Eighth Air Force sent out two thousand thirty-four heavy bombers and nine hundred thirty-six fighters, the greatest single force of airplanes that had ever been dispatched. Well over twenty-one thousand Americans flew in that armada bombing marshalling yards, vital communications centers, and airfields behind the enemy lines.

The stepped-up aerial offensive continued, but so did the fog. Our formations were taking off on instruments and sometimes on the return they were dispersed all over the British Isles, but day after day the 384th returned to the front. Between Christmas and New Year's Day we flew four missions. We started 1945 with missions on three successive days, skipped a day, then went back into operations with four missions in six days.

During all of this period the fog had lifted only intermittently. Yet despite the handicaps presented by the weather, there were few accidents. On the first day of the new year Lieutenant Robert J. Fisher had just lifted his wheels off the runway when a ghost-plane loomed up to his right. Too close to the ground to bank and turn, Lieutenant Fisher sideslipped out of a collision path, but clipped off the top of a tree in doing it. He flew his damaged craft to the Wash, dropped his bombs, and groped his way back long after the day's formation was miles along on its way to Germany. After he had set his aircraft down engineering men examined it with frequent expressions of amazement, then shipped the battered machine away for salvage.

A few days later, another aircraft crashed at the end of the other runway, but the remaining planes paraded around the perimeter track and took off over the fog-shrouded wreckage.

Sleet added to the danger by this time, and finally a snow detail was called upon to clear the runways for an early take-off. The low cost in casualties was a tribute not only to the skill of our pilots, but to the efficient handling of air traffic by Major Joseph K. Haley and his men in the flying control tower.

Occasionally a general in London would remind the men that they had "contributed directly to the war effort," and once a tribute from the commander of an infantry division was published. But none of those did so much to bolster the spirit of the 384th as the letter a doctor wrote to Sergeant Ben Klauer of Group Operations. The doctor, who was serving with a medical detachment in the German bulge, wrote on December 30th:

"I swore I'd drop you a line as soon as I could—if only I'd get another chance. Thanks to your bombers we're all O. K.

"I never believed that I'd ever be in a spot where I'd shout my lungs out for sheer joy just to see those big silver babies roar over. I counted them going over every day like clockwork, and we felt the Heinies' steel front weakening after each group flew by.

"You can thank those guys who fly 'em for all us doughfeet, and I don't mean maybe."

By this time the German drive had stopped. The pressure on the sides and end of their bulge was too much and they were beginning to withdraw. At Grafton-Underwood there was a deep respect for the infantryman, the man who slogs through snow and mud and fights with numbed hands.

Over a cup of coffee at the snack bar, which was open one hour on mornings when there was a mission, you would listen to pilots and navigators and bombardiers discussing it all. Someone would say that the infantryman "lives with death."

"We don't," he would say. "There may be a lot of men killed in the Air Forces, but we don't live with death. We leave our dead over there somewhere."

A few heads would nod in agreement.

"We got it lucky," he would continue. "A bed when we come back. Warm water to shave in. What do those doughboys have?"

Maybe then he'd put down his empty cup.

"Freezing and fighting and eating out of cans, the poor bastards."

You would walk out of the Nissen hut with that bombardier, out into the white mist with its vague forms floating by a few feet away. You would hear your planes overhead, climbing, trying to get out of this soup without a collision, trying to

assemble for another blow at Rundstedt's crumbling offensive. There had been a lot of joking the last few days about how the swallows, being smarter than we, had given up trying to fight Nature and had started using the roads our engineers built.

"Those poor bastards over there," your bombardier would say. "They're fighting this war. We aren't!"

Happy Warriors . . .

It was just an ordinary day in April. At dawn our planes had taken off once more, just as they had taken off on scores of other mornings. They took off in a cloudless sky, thirty-eight of them, heading once more along the familiar sky routes into Hitler's dwindling Reich.

And now the men left behind were waiting again, just as they had waited for that other formation so long ago, that tiny formation that Colonel Peaslee had led to Antwerp back in June of 1943.

They lounged in the straggly grass around the perimeter track and squinted at the sky . . . and waited.

By this time Rundstedt's counter-offensive was just a vague and unpleasant memory. The bulge he had forced in the American lines had long since been pounded back into shape.

But back in January, when fog had presented the deadliest opposition, we had lost one aircraft under circumstances that were still being talked about. It was on

the tenth of the month and our formation had set out to bomb an airfield at Bonn. Although five aircraft failed to return with the formation, no one felt particularly uneasy. There was a lot of friendly territory on the Continent by that time, and emergency landings on the Allied side of the front were daily occurrences. Within a matter of hours all of our missing crews had been reported safe—except one.

That one was the crew of Aircraft 2116, which had led the formation over the target, carrying Major Arthur M. Stone as air commander. The lead ship had left the formation, in trouble but apparently under perfect control, as the formation neared the area of the front.

Everyone expected to see Stone and his crew walk in at any minute. But the hours went by, and the days, without a word from the missing squadron commander. A report that ground forces had seen a Flying Fortress blow up over a wooded area on January 10th gave rise to the first doubts.

One member of Stone's crew had been Captain Eugene T. Wilson, a navigator who had come overseas with the 384th. Our original combat crews had been badly mauled in those first terrific battles in the skies of France and Germany. Of the survivors, most had gone back to the States after completing their tours, but we still had four original combat men around until Wilson went down.

And now just three—Bonnett, Bishop, Ulrey.

In the middle of March, less than a week after the Third Army raced across the Rhine at Remagen, Captain Bonnett packed up and said goodbye, headed for an embarkation center and the United States.

It was hard to realize, now, that our psychological approach to combat flying had undergone a drastic change during two years of operations. At first we had an idea that you flew your missions and you either came back or else. For many months our men who went down must have been shocked when they walked into prison camp and found a large delegation of 384th men there to greet them, men they had presumed to have been killed. Now we knew that a fair percentage of the men who went down would survive, although they might be compelled to spend the rest of the war behind barbed wire.

In the middle of January Colonel Milton had received a letter from one of our early combat men. It had been written from the Cushing General Hospital in Framingham, Mass., and was signed by Staff Sergeant Ralph E. Lavoie.

"I am writing to find out if you can help me in a very important affair," wrote Lavoie. "It is a long story and I hope you will be patient through it all . . .

"I was a ball turret gunner on the original Crew 75 of the 547th Bomb Squadron and was shot down on the second mission the Group went on. Four of my crew were killed and six of us were taken prisoners. I was released in September 1944, on an exchange of prisoners.

"The story I really want to tell you is about my pilot, Lieutenant George W. Riches, who was killed saving the lives of the six remaining members of the crew. The co-pilot was hit with flak and killed so he couldn't help Lieutenant Riches to fly the plane.

"Lieutenant Riches' right arm was almost shot off which made it impossible for him to work the automatic pilot.

"Our ship was on fire and Lieutenant Riches instead of trying to save himself remained at the controls using his good arm to fly the ship and ordered us to bail out. The ship blew up before he got a chance to get out so he was killed.

"Maybe I don't make this story too clear to you but the fact remains that he died saving our lives. . . . The rest of the crew are still prisoners as they were not wounded and before I left I promised them I would let you know what Lieutenant Riches did. . . ."

For eighteen months six American prisoners had been waiting for an opportunity to tell us how their pilot had died.[1]

On his hospital bed Sergeant Lavoie could not have known how much had happened to his old group since June 25th, 1943—the day of our second mission, our first trip to Hamburg. Lieutenant Riches had been flying 143, *Yankee Powerhouse*. It was the same day that Major McMillin went down. The 384th had lost thirty men that day.

In his letter to Colonel Milton, Sergeant Lavoie said he had read in the paper that "the 384th is going to bomb Nantes, France, with gifts and that is how I knew you were now the Commanding Officer of the Group."

That Nantes "mission" was still fresh in our memories. For the first time during the war, a 384th formation had bombed a target with something other than explosives. For some weeks prior to Christmas, 1944, the men had been turning in part or all of their candy ration, along with clothing and toys purchased in town or sent over, by request, from friends and relatives in the States.

A special tent for receiving donations was set up in front of the Foxy Theater, as the Nissen hut used as a cinema was called. At the Group's request a couple of French Red Cross girls were sent up to Grafton to operate the tent.

The response was tremendous. One building had to be turned into a warehouse to store the gifts, and in addition the men donated more than $1,800 in cash for the purchase of clothing and soap and other practical requirements of hospitals and orphanages, items that were almost unobtainable in France at that time.

Finally, in time for France's traditional gift exchange on New Year's Day, the stuff was all sacked up in little individual gift packets and stowed away in the planes. It took six big bombers to cart all the presents to Nantes. Unfortunately, due

[1] On the strength of Lavoie's letter, Lt. Riches was posthumously decorated with the Silver Star.

to the pressing need of men and planes for carrying bombs to Germany, the Nantes formation had to return before the celebration was over.

There was nothing really magnanimous about the Nantes project. Once, long ago, when the Eighth Air Force had been concentrating on Germany's submarine pens at Nantes, some 384th bombs had strayed off their course. From an airplane four or five miles up, a city seems just as inanimate as the stones and concrete of which it is constructed. Yet we couldn't forget that 384th bombs had destroyed something French.

As the inventors of the phrase "C'est la guerre," the people of Nantes couldn't see the hidden motive behind our "generous" act on New Year's Day, 1945. A letter from the French Red Cross, written on behalf of General Sice, its president, and signed by Mme. Bellenger, thanked Colonel Milton "for allowing the men in your Command to make such a very generous gesture to our children in France."

"When I saw the tent, I was amazed at the amount of gifts that had been given," wrote Mme. Bellenger. "Would you be kind enough to convey our thanks to your officers and men for their very great kindness to the children in France and also for the way they received our representatives of the French Red Cross."

But already the 384th had gone back to the business of carting bombs across the English Channel.

The Berlin shows were getting bigger and bigger. On February 3rd our planes formed part of a three-hundred-mile wave of Eighth Air Force heavy bombers attacking the refugee-packed capital. A thousand bombers dropped 2,500 tons of heavy explosives, with the Templehof station and marshalling yards, and the government buildings in the center of the city as their objectives. Weather forecasts indicated that a solid overcast covered Germany from the coast to the Berlin area, but that the city itself was unobstructed by clouds, which would not move in until about noon. Weather over the bases in England was supposed to close in about 4 p. m. The mission was planned accordingly.

The 384th lost three planes that day, but survivors of one were picked up at sea after ditching on the return trip. The two other missing planes were piloted by Lieutenants Charles R. Molder and George F. Ruckman. Molder's aircraft was last seen thirty minutes after departing the target, with two engines out. The pilot had radioed the deputy group leader that the ship was on fire, that two members of the crew were wounded, and that the men were going to bail out. Lieutenant Ruckman was last seen leaving the formation shortly after bombs away. There were no other observations.

The aircraft that ditched was *The Challenger*, piloted by Lieutenant Robert C. Long.

A minute and a half before bombs away *The Challenger* was struck by flak. Hits were scored in both the right inboard and outboard engines. The ship still had sufficient power to remain in formation, however, and continued on in to drop its

bombs with the others. As the formation left the target *The Challenger*, with one engine completely inoperative and another giving only reduced power, began falling behind. At first the crew considered heading for the Russian lines, only forty-five miles east of Berlin, but finally decided to try to reach England.

After passing the Dutch coast *The Challenger* began losing altitude rapidly. When she had dropped to 5,000 feet the pilot issued orders to prepare for ditching.

The Challenger had made a gallant effort, but she went down in the North Sea about halfway between Holland and England. As the crew released the two rubber dinghies after scrambling onto the wing, a large wave washed over the floundering Fortress and carried away the life rafts.

The pilot, Lieutenant Long, swam fifty yards through the icy water to catch one raft for his crew. Meanwhile the others tried to reach the other dinghy. Seven of them made it, but Sergeant Fred A. Maki, the radio operator, was unable to breast the swells. Finally one huge swell carried him out of sight of his comrades.

Long's strenuous swim in the icy waters apparently knocked him out.

"We noticed he was lying in the dinghy without moving," said Lieutenant Ralph J. Vrana, the co-pilot. "We decided we'd better investigate."

Forty-five minutes of furious paddling and bailing (Sergeant Jack C. Cook, the ball turret gunner, jumped in the water and kicked his feet and pushed) brought the heavily loaded dinghy beside that occupied by the pilot.

"He was pretty far gone," Vrana said.

Two and a half hours after *The Challenger* had plunged beneath the waves an air-sea rescue launch picked up the struggling airmen. Lieutenant Long failed to revive. Sergeant Cook, who had served as a human propeller to push one dinghy to the other, also died before the British launch reached port.

The North Sea had claimed three of *The Challenger's* crew.[2]

It was past the middle of the next month, when March was trying to decide whether to go out like a lion or a lamb, that a strange flying apparition with the name "*Stardust*" on its nose flapped over the field one day, nodded at the control tower, and then plunked down on the runway with what everyone imagined was a great sigh of relief.

Out of the hatches piled two complete Fortress crews and a fighter pilot, everyone with the Stars and Stripes painted conspicuously on his sleeve or back.

After forty-seven days, Lieutenant Ruckman and his crew were back from the Berlin mission of February 3rd. We learned now that a minute after bombs away a burst of flak had punched the *Stardust's* oil line full of holes. One engine froze and another caught fire and Ruckman headed hell-bent for the Russian-German border, losing altitude every minute.

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[2] For his gallant attempt to obtain the raft for his crew, Lt. Long was posthumously decorated with the Silver Star.

The *Stardust* was almost scraping bottom when Lieutenant John O. Beeby, the navigator, picked up a landing field not far from the Vistula River. The ground was covered by snow and ice and dotted with bomb craters and wrecked German planes, but there was nothing to do but bring the disabled Fortress down. Ruckman did it although the *Stardust* blew a tire in the operation.

As it turned out, Ruckman and his crew had landed on a field vacated only three days earlier by the Germans. There were still Germans in a field about two hundred yards from the field, but the Russians weren't wasting any time ferreting them out. A Russian lieutenant advised the crew to destroy *Stardust's* special equipment, as there was no guarantee against the enemy retaking the field.

The Russians escorted the Americans to a building that had been a club for the Luftwaffe, assigned them rooms which still bore the names of German officers. They also assigned them two orderlies.

"They had fought at Stalingrad and were really battle-scarred," said Staff Sergeant Johnnie E. Young, the engineer. "They looked about sixty, but one was thirty and the other was thirty-five. They were good old Joes. We called them Gus and Oscar, and after a while they began calling each other Gus and Oscar."

Then came the problem of getting back to England, a project that was to take them six weeks.

The *Stardust's* mechanics were sitting back at Grafton-Underwood, but Ruckman and his men, admittedly not mechanics, thought they might be able to mend the oil line and the No. 4 engine, take the prop off No. 3, which was beyond repair and fly back on three engines. The Russians decided they wouldn't take the responsibility for letting the Americans fly back on three engines and a flat tire.

Then came word that another Flying Fortress had made a forced landing about sixty miles away and had run into some trees, so the crew of *Stardust* borrowed a truck and set out to see if there was enough left to patch up their own aircraft. The other Fortress proved to be badly damaged, but two of its engines were in good condition and so were the tires.

Removing a one thousand three hundred and fifty pound engine without the help of a crane proved to be a back-breaking job, but with home-made mechanical aids it was accomplished. To remove a tire was also a task. The wheel had to be chopped out of the ice in which it was embedded and frozen.

That's the way it went, but eventually the *Stardust* was patched up and the two pilots ran up the engines for a test hop. The crews hardly dared to breathe as the ship clattered down the runway. *Stardust* took off and rose, as neatly as a bird.

That is why *Stardust* wasn't quite the same plane when she got back to England on March 22nd.

While Ruckman and his crew were away the 384th had been ranging far and wide over Hitler's narrowing Reich. Lutzkendorf and Erfurt, Dresden, Munster,

Nuremburg, Ulzen, Plauen, Hamburg, Friedrichshafen and Ulm, Leipzig, Hagen, Bruchsal, Rositz, Hannover, Dortmund, Essen, Kassel, Schwerte, Bremen, Betzdorf, Minden, Zossen, Westerholt, Berlin . . . every target in the German Reich was within our reach.

In support of the Russian advance, we had sent formations to Dresden on two successive days. On one of those trips fourteen of our aircraft had to land on the Continent because of dwindling fuel supplies. Until those two days, February 14 and 15, Dresden had hardly been touched by the hand of war. Within forty-eight hours it was described as a dying city.

On Thursday, February 22nd, Washington's birthday, the Allies threw practically every plane they had into an all-inclusive attack on Germany's railways. Some six thousand aircraft were involved. An area half the size of England was the playground for the heavy bombers that struck at more than a dozen points in an effort to knock out Germany's marshalling yards and rolling stock. Some formations went in as low as 9,000 feet. Grafton-Underwood's part in the day's program carried our planes over Ulzen at 12,000 feet. Strike photographs showed that the Ulzen yards were saturated with bomb strikes.

Jet propelled planes . . . V-2 . . . Montgomery's forces piling up along the Rhine, in front of the Ruhr . . . the Americans' sudden dash across a bridge at Remagen . . . Patton's men crossing farther south, by boat . . . then—

On March 24th Montgomery's men in the north made their long-anticipated leap across the Rhine, and the great push was on. From north to south, Allied armies were racing across Germany, biting deeper and deeper into the Reich. In the east, Berlin was already on her knees.

It was at that psychological moment in history that flags all along the Allied lines were suddenly lowered to half mast.

Anyone walking into the "Big House" at Division Headquarters that Friday the Thirteenth would have known something was wrong. Before he could have taken half a dozen steps he would have stopped stock still, the sound of his own footsteps echoing back in the hollow stillness.

There wasn't another sound or movement.

Here and there men stood, unmoving, as though they had been overtaken by some strange catastrophe even as they went about the day's business, as the residents of Pompeii were overtaken a couple of thousand years ago.

In the ante-room leading to the mess hall they faced in all directions, some toward the door, some toward the far wall, some toward the bar. A few of them had drinks in their hands.

Through the open doorway the men at the tables were sitting straight and silent, and the steam still rose from the gradually cooling food on their plates.

Not a muscle stirred.

On a small piece of cardboard hanging from the ceiling someone had written in chalk:

"Five minutes of silence will be observed 1755 to 1800."

It's surprising how many things a man can think about in five minutes. Wendover . . . Sioux City . . . the faces of men shot down many months ago flash across your mind, one after another, like the pictures in a penny arcade machine.

You are only dimly conscious of the men standing at attention around you. Your eyes fasten on someone's ear and you can see the ear faintly in the background, as the pictures keep falling one on top of another.

Colonel Peaslee standing in a hangar at Wendover . . . Sergeant Thiessen working on a map at Sioux City . . . planes taking off, one after another . . . the sun glinting from wing tips of a formation assembling high overhead . . . "Whiskey" thumbing his nose from the hatch of a Flying Fortress as she trundles around the perimeter track for that take-off from which she will never return . . . and always that out-of-focus ear in the background.

A long line of GI's at the dispensary; shoulders sagging, weary, but laughing. When pipes thawed out after last February's freezing spell there had been a shortage of water, followed by a brief period when a good many at Grafton-Underwood had been afflicted by dysentery. For three or four days a steady stream of weak and pallid men filed through the dispensary for the standard treatment, an ounce and a half of castor oil. At one time during these proceedings, as the line dragged slowly through the "sick room," there came a break in the monotony. That was when a corporal, looking just as tired and distressed as the others, reached the head of the line and paused before the doctor.

He shook his head, wearily, as someone prepared the regular dose of castor oil.

"I got just the opposite trouble, Doc," he said, wearily. "I ain't been to the latrine for four days."

You see him standing there a moment, a quizzical smile on his face, as his fellow sufferers burst out laughing. And then another picture falls down.

Major Nelson fumbling with the name "Oberpfaffenhofen" as he reads a citation from a paper in his hand while ranks of men stand at attention. ("Why don't they pick targets with easy names?" Major Nelson said later.) He lowers the paper while Colonel Smith pins a ribbon on someone's breast, and then another picture falls on top of it.

"Cuzz" Taylor, who calls himself a rebel from No'th Ca'lina, is standing in front of a mirror, his face covered with lather, and singing "Ah'm a Yankee Doodle Dandy."

The smell of spring back home . . . your mother sweeping down the front steps . . . Roosevelt's train passing through town during his first Presidential campaign . . . and now Roosevelt is dead; this silence is for him. . . .

Five minutes can be a long time.

The flag in front of station headquarters was still at half mast as we waited for the mission to return on this memorable afternoon of April 25th, 1945.

No one knew at the time that it was the last mission the heavy bombers would fly in the European Theater. We didn't know that the last bombs to fall on Germany had just been unloaded by the 384th Bombardment Group. A long time ago, August 17th, 1942, twelve Flying Fortresses had taken off from Grafton-Underwood on America's first heavy bombardment operation against Germany. And now—although we weren't to realize it until the Air Forces in England were "stood down" after Germany's defeat—now the last bombs had been carried from the same field.

The men who remained behind had been a little worried about this mission. While the bombers were still winging their way across Germany, Czech workers in the great Skoda plants at Pilsen were warned by Allied radio that American bombers were coming. Stay away from the vicinity, they were told; U. S. bombers are headed for Czechoslovakia and the Skoda plants *might* be their objective!

But now our formation was overhead again. Wing-tip to wing-tip, they roared over the control tower, then peeled off for the traffic pattern. One by one they dropped down on the runway and taxied to their scattered dispersal sites.

It had happened three hundred and fifteen times before, but this was different . . . every man up there was a Happy Warrior.

Cheerio, and All That . . .

Big Alf has his regular seat back in Geddington's Jug-and-Bottle now, the same rickety chair he occupied every night for twenty years before the Americans came.

In the Golden Lion at Brigstock, Old Mom has time to feed the chickens and hang out the washing, between customers. Most of the chewing gum has been scraped from beneath the seats of the Kettering cinemas. There are no jeeps careening around the corners and hardly enough Americans leaning against the Royal Hotel to prop up the ancient wall.

The 384th is gone.

After the defeat of Germany, the Yanks didn't waste much time evacuating England. A few crusty old souls were ruddy glad to see them go, but the population in general seemed genuinely sorry about it all. A few of the girls cried a little, and there were stories here and there of small boys who tried to stow away in American vehicles because they wanted to go with the Yanks.

Then, suddenly, the Americans were gone and Kettering had a blank look on its municipal face.

In the last few days before the 384th flew out, life at Grafton-Underwood was an unhappy mixture of heavy crates and bare walls and green paint. It was only a matter of hours until virtually everything except the airplanes had been packed away and the boxes had been nailed up. Then came a rumor-enlivened period of bunk fatigue, waiting for orders that would send the Group to its next destination.

It was in the middle of the afternoon just ten days after victory had been officially declared that Bob Koenig walked in to station headquarters. He looked around with a silly smile on his face, and no one seemed to be able to think of anything to say for a minute or two.

Then Koenig said: "Hi, fellas," as though he had just been gone a couple of hours on a slow-timing job above the field, and someone else said "Well I'll be damned," and went over and shook hands with him.

Koenig didn't look as lean and hard as he had twenty-one months ago, but it was the same old Koenig, laughing and wisecracking just as he had the night before he went down. Lieutenant Koenig was the first prisoner of war to get back to Grafton-Underwood. He had gone down in the early days, a victim of the intense opposition our formation had encountered on that unforgettable "first Schweinfurt" mission of 17 August 1943, the day our formation had returned riddled and broken, the day Randy Jacobs had made his belly landing and then stepped to the hatch with a cigar clenched between his teeth, the day the 544th lost the last of its original crews.

It had been a long mission for Bob Koenig.

In the next few days a few other liberated prisoners showed up and gradually we began to solve some of the mysteries surrounding our lost planes, to discover what had happened to Hal and Dick and Frank that day, to learn how the lucky survivors fared as prisoners of the Germans. And a few new words were added to our vocabulary, words that had been common lingo in the German prison camps ever since the first American Fortress smashed into the German countryside.

When Koenig said the kriegies gave the ferrets a hard time but didn't mind the goons so much it sounded like a foreign language at first. Then we learned that the American prisoners referred to themselves as "kriegies" and to their guards as "goons" or "ferrets," depending upon whether they contented themselves with simple guarding or considered snooping a part of the job.

Ferrets had a habit of crawling under buildings, in the shallow space between the wooden floor and the ground. There would be the faint rattle of a disturbed pebble or the barely audible sound of a man's cap as it brushed against the planking, and everyone would know a ferret was down there, listening. One 384th man had a hand mangled when a ferret fired wildly through the flooring, after the kriegie had innocently poured a bucket-full of scalding water through the cracks.

Koenig must have felt a little lost when he returned to Grafton after all those months. If he expected everything to be the same he was disappointed. Of the men he had known in the old days there had been more in his own Kriegie camp than there were at Grafton now. The only original combat men left were Captain Bishop and Major Ulrey (who oddly enough had entered combat as pilot and co-pilot on the same crew), and Bishop was leaving for a new assignment in the States the next morning.

The 384th had a lot of men to account for. When the last gun had been fired and our losses had been toted up, the figure was greater than our total combat strength had ever been. Some sixteen hundred and twenty-five Grafton-Underwood fliers had been lost in action, and at the time, the way we had it figured, those losses broke down as follows: Prisoners of war, seven hundred and fifty-seven; missing in action, two hundred seventy; killed in action, three hundred and forty-seven; escapers or evaders, two hundred twenty-one; and interned or repatriated, thirty.

Since that Antwerp mission, so long ago, when everyone knew he would get shot down sooner or later, the picture had changed considerably. Just a month or so before the European war ended, higher headquarters took a look at the total statistics and reported that chances of survival were nearly double what they had been during the 384th's first hectic months of combat.

In late 1943, according to the report, crewmen had only a thirty-six per cent chance of completing the twenty-five missions that represented a tour of duty. By 1945 the figure had jumped to sixty-six per cent, even though a tour of duty had been stepped up to thirty-five missions. Chances of individual crew members living out the war were by this time better than eighty per cent, although that figure included those who would be taken prisoner and those who would have to parachute and crawl or swim to safety.

The same report, which had been issued by the Army Air Forces, showed that in the Pacific a higher percentage of airmen managed to complete their tours of duty, although those who went down had a smaller chance of survival due to the long flights over water and jungle.

So far as the European theater was concerned, the day of liberation marked the opening of a new and perplexing period for the men who had been "sweating it out" behind the barbed wire of German prison camps. On the village steeple a few miles away they would see an American flag go up and they would wait breathlessly until a Sherman tank plunged through the gate into their confine and then, suddenly, they would discover they were free.

Some lived on the German countryside as they made the long trek west into France and others were whisked away in Army trucks or air transports, but whatever the transport most of them ended up in Camp Lucky Strike. Camp Lucky was a sprawling tent city set up overnight in the barren lands not far from Le Havre, an unsightly

place into which thousands of ex-prisoners were herded to await the Army's decision on what to do with them.

"The real horror story of the war, so far as I am concerned," said one Grafton flier who found himself penned up there, "was Camp Lucky Strike."[1]

Pop Dolan hurried down to the hastily built tent camp within a few days after Allied armies began overrunning the prison camps in Germany, and he stayed there a month to greet the liberated 384th men. McMillin, Foister, Edwards, Yee—faces from the past drifted continuously by on the dusty camp roads.

"Hello, Pop, you old so-and-so!" Then a barrage of questions. . . .

After interminable days in prison, everyone was hungry for any scrap of information he could get about his old Group. It was as though he had just left in the morning and was seeing you again at the end of the day, and wanted to know everything that had happened, down to the last detail, while he was gone.

That we were just as interested in what had happened to him during the day didn't seem to occur to him.

Most American airmen taken prisoner by the Germans had come from the prisoner-of-war camps at Moosburg, Barth and Sagan. After parachuting from their blazing bombers some of them evaded capture for days before being picked up by the Wehrmacht, but most had begun the life of captivity the same day they went down.

They discovered that German interrogating officers already knew a lot about them.

"Well, how was Shorty when you left this morning?" some of them were asked, and they knew the interrogator was referring to Colonel Smith. One 384th man who went down a scant week after Frink was promoted was surprised by a German officer's laconic comment: "Well, Frink got his majority, didn't he? Guess he had it coming."

Much of that information was given unwittingly by the prisoners themselves. For instance, a new captive would be handed a questionnaire to fill out. The first three questions would be name, rank, and serial number, which is all that a prisoner is required under international law to answer. Below would be a number of other questions of deeper significance.

The German interrogator would meet your objection with a shrug of the shoulders. Just answer the first three, then, and sign on the dotted line at the bottom of the page. Once a man signed he had fallen into the trap. The Germans could then simply fill in the intervening questions with half-substantiated guesses and use it as a crowbar on the next American prisoner to be questioned.

A Kriegie's biggest problem as the interminable days wore on was that of combatting boredom. So far as the 384th is concerned there were few instances of mis-

[1] The site of Camp Lucky had originally been used as a staging area for infantry moving up to the front.

treatment, although had it not been for food parcels from the Red Cross our men might conceivably have fared just as poorly as the political prisoners of the notorious Buchenwald and Dachau concentration camps.

Native ingenuity added to their comfort. With only splinters of wood to burn, the men began making highly efficient cook-stoves out of ordinary tin cans. A hand-cranked fan, made by cutting part of the lid and bending it into the right shape, would serve as a blower to send a current of air through the tiny fire bed. Terrific heat could be forced up by this method, and almost anything could be made to burn.

Some of these tin-can stoves were quite elaborate, even containing miniature ovens.

The Kriegies organized their personnel into various sections. They even had a secret mapping section, where overlays were made virtually under the noses of their guards and hidden against the possibility of future escape. Out of odds and ends they constructed a secret radio by which they could listen, still under the noses of their unsuspecting guards, to the BBC's latest reports on the progress of the war. In one camp they even published a secret newspaper called "Pow Wow"—it stood for Prisoners of War Waiting on Winning—by which the reports of the BBC were made accessible to the other prisoners. So far as is known only one copy of the paper was ever found by the Germans, and luckily that issue, because of bad radio reception at the moment, contained no BBC news.

Considerable time was spent tunneling—there was always an escape tunnel under construction somewhere in the compound—but the Germans usually managed to discover the projects before they could be completed.

The Kriegies kept lookouts posted to prevent the Germans from discovering their outlawed adventures. If you were busy making a map overlay and your lookout walked by and said "Goon up!" you immediately put everything out of sight and started reading a book. When the lookout gave you "All clear!" you picked up your maps again or turned on the radio or returned to whatever task you were performing when the warning came.

With such activities the Kriegies tried to keep themselves occupied, so that the long days between letters from home would speed by more quickly. A letter was something to be read and re-read. Sometimes it became so thumbed and worn it fell to pieces in your hands. Then came the task of fitting and pasting it together again.

Yet all letters from home were not morale-builders. Occasionally a prisoner would get a letter that would stun him as though it had been a blow from an ax. For instance, here is an excerpt from a letter one Kriegie received from his wife almost a year after his plane crashed in Germany:

". . . I am going to have a baby. I hope you aren't mad with me because I'm certainly not mad at you. He's sending you some cigarettes. . . ."

And returning 384th men told of two prisoners who compared the pictures they carried in their wallets and discovered they were married to the same woman!

At Stalag Luft 3, near Sagan, Germany, where a good many downed 384th men were taken, the routine varied little from day to day. Most of them slept in double-tiered bunks, ten men to a room sixteen feet wide and twenty feet long, did all their own cooking with a larder furnished largely by the Red Cross. Their cooking utensils were fashioned out of tin cans, all of them.

Stalag Luft 3 men will never forget the "Rink Project." Colonel Delmar T. Spivey, their senior officer, decided one November that since the Y. M. C. A. had been kind enough to provide the camp with ice skates, the least the men could do was to build a rink and use them. But he reckoned without the climatic conditions of the Reich.

One day it got icy cold, and the colonel collected all the Kriegies from their sacks and sent them off with pails and shovels. By nightfall they had a pretty good rink erected, and they all went to bed expecting it to be frozen smooth as glass by morning.

But morning dawned bright and clear, and the temperature soared to about sixty, and the efforts of the previous day simply melted into oblivion.

One week passed and it turned cold again. The prisoners started from scratch and rebuilt their rink. The next day it snowed; in fact, the next week it snowed and they found their rink buried under huge six-foot drifts. On the first clear day the Kriegies spent the daylight hours shoveling the snow off and getting the rink ready for skating. But of course it melted again the next day, and they were right back where they started.

That sort of thing continued throughout the first winter, without a single person using a pair of ice skates. As late as March the Kriegies were still trying to build an ice rink.

A year passed by. Winter came once again to Germany. The colonel issued a statement. "Boys," he said, "wouldn't it be nice if we could have an ice rink?"

From all over the camp came a wail of protest. But the colonel had spoken so off went the Kriegies to work again.

That second winter they did manage to get a rink in use periodically, and a few men were seen skating on it from time to time. Roughly, they figured that approximately fifteen hundred men had worked an average of a hundred hours each on the "Rink Project."

Another thing the Sagan men are likely to remember is Kriegie brew.

"Now and then we would get the urge to drink," recalled Koenig, over a glass of lager at the Grafton officers' club. "In this matter there was little to choose from. Our Kriegie brew consisted of a sort of raisin brandy. Brewing time: two weeks. Since the making of this brew took a terrific slice out of our sugar ration, we had to content ourselves with having it only on special occasions, like Christmas and the Fourth of July.

"The first Christmas was the biggest and best of these events because the place wasn't as crowded as it later became. Everybody got quite stinko. The six full colonels in camp got tossed into the fire pool amid the floating chunks of ice. An old Eagle squadron boy captured a horse from an unsuspecting goon and galloped all around the camp. One Kriegie climbed unsteadily over the twelve foot barbed wire fence in full view of a guard. When he finally dropped sprawling on the other side the guard turned him around, and I'll be damned if he didn't climb right back over. Then he passed out.

"Of course most of us got sick—the stuff was pretty raw—but we had a hell of a good time."

Between skating rinks and raisin brew and cooking on tin-can stoves, the time dragged slowly on. Invasion Day! The march across France! The Russian drive toward Berlin! The Kriegies heard all about it on their secret radio.

Then, with only a few hours' warning and with the sound of Russian guns audible in the east, they packed up their toothbrushes and as much Red Cross food as they could carry and marched out of Stalag Luft 3 at one o'clock in the morning, 29 January, 1945, into the face of a driving blizzard. They walked about a hundred miles through the Rhineland, in midwinter, with the retreating German Wehrmacht on their tails all the way. At Spremberg they were packed into boxcars and taken to Stalag A7, a camp near Munich. Although the camp was set up to hold about 20,000, it suddenly expanded to 110,000.

"It was a nightmare," said Lieutenant Koenig. "We were there four months and it seemed more like four years. God knows how we managed to get food, but we seemed to—thanks to the Red Cross trucks driving between our camp and the Swiss border."

Each day they watched the American movements on their hastily drawn maps. The pins kept moving closer and closer to their camp, and it was that more than anything else that kept morale high during those four months of hardship.

The pins had almost reached Moosburg when without warning the "goons" packed up and left the camp. The prisoners immediately stationed their own guards around the fence to keep out the terrified civilians who were fleeing before the Russians. In that electrifying atmosphere the Kriegies waited three days for Der Tag—the day of liberation.

The front moved past the camp on Sunday morning, April 29th, but not until the 14th Armored Division had cleaned out the village. The skirmish lasted about two hours and then—

"We all went wild when we saw the American flag hoisted over Moosburg," said Koenig. "A few minutes later, the Sherman tanks came rolling into our camp.

In three seconds you couldn't see the tanks for the swarms of Kriegies climbing all over them. God but we were happy!"

Only a scant handful of the 384th's "displaced persons" ever managed to get back to Grafton-Underwood. They were the ones who succeeded in "evading capture by the Americans," as one of them put it. Once they got "in channels" they were herded directly into the huge, windy, sun-baked tent city of Lucky Strike.

But Major Dolan spent a month on duty at Lucky and some of the rest of us managed to fly down from Grafton for an hour or two, so we weren't completely out of touch with the old 384th men who were being "processed" for the return to civilization.

When a Flying Fortress with 384th markings would set down on the makeshift runway it would immediately be surrounded by men who went down a month ago, or last year, or away back in 1943.

Now, at last, we were beginning to fill in the gaps in the story the 384th had written across the skies of Germany. Many acts of heroism had long been hidden behind prison walls.

It was only now, for instance, that we learned what First Lieutenant Henry V. Markow did that February 27th, more than a year ago now, when his plane went down in flames on the way to Oschesleben. The aircraft had been badly hit during an attack by Focke Wulf 190's. In the bomb bay the incendiaries had been set on fire, and to make matters worse one engine had been knocked out and another was burning; the oxygen system had been shot out; the rudder was gone and the elevator control was damaged; the nose was knocked off; most of the guns had been put out of service. And three men were slightly wounded.

"I had lost my oxygen and interphone and didn't know about the pilot's order to bail out until the navigator told me," said Second Lieutenant George J. Littleton, the bombardier. "By the time I got an oxygen bottle all the men had gone except Lieutenant Markow. I met him at the forward escape hatch and showed him by signs that I had no parachute. I squeezed past him to search the ship, and when I got back to the cat-walk again Markow was gone."

So Littleton climbed into the pilot's seat with the idea of steering the burning, crippled aircraft toward home. He knew the ship couldn't make it, and even if she did it would be a miracle if he, a bombardier, could bring her safely down.

Then there was a commotion behind him and he looked around to see Henry Markow shoving his way into the co-pilot's seat.

The blazing aircraft was still under attack by three Focke Wulf's as Lieutenant Markow, who had discarded his chance to bail out, crash-landed her in a German field.

That's what was behind the simple record in the Intelligence Office: ". . . aircraft was on fire. Eight 'chutes observed."

But the men who came back were reticent about telling their stories. In the midst of a tale, some other prisoner was likely to walk up and break in with the old gag:

"Yes, sir! There I was at 20,000 feet! No wings and no engines. And no parachute! What was I to do?"

The men of the 384th were used to narrow escapes. There was no such thing as a hero.

But the war was over. The few ex-prisoners who did manage to get back to Grafton found the place littered with the boxes and crates that meant the Group was moving on. And within a few days it did. Under a new commanding officer, Lieutenant-Colonel Robert W. Fish, the 384th flew to Istres, France, near Marseilles, to play its part in flying the American Army out of Europe. After that it might be the Pacific, where another war was still going on.

"I am as anxious to see you all go home again as you are to get there," General Arnold had said (in a memorandum to all officers and men of the A. A. F. in Europe and the Mediterranean). "However, we must not lose sight of the fact that there is another job for us to do—in the Pacific. Some of you, but not all, will be needed for its accomplishment. This job will not be easy but I am confident that the war against Japan will demonstrate once more the high morale and esprit which has been common to all the Army Air Force personnel throughout the world."

Whatever the next move may be only a few men, under the command of Major Dolan, are left at that tree-lined air station in the English midlands.

To them, the old base seems mighty desolate now. When you wander through the empty barracks it is as though you are viewing the ruins of some ancient civilization, like Pompeii or Troy, trying to read a story in the few signs that are left. An old worn-out shoe, a crumpled envelope—.On one wall someone has drawn a crude picture of an American flag at half-mast, with someone's name scrawled beside it.

It is the name of a flier who was killed in action centuries ago—back in 1943.

In the War Room at station headquarters the strands of colored yarn hang limply from the pin that marks Grafton-Underwood on the huge wall map. You run the flat of your hand across the map's surface. It is smooth in Southern France and Russia, but Germany feels like a piece of heavy sandpaper. The roughness is caused by hundreds of tiny holes, each hole indicating the place where at one time or another a pin held one end of the colored yarn—red for the route in to the target, green for the route back.

You run your palm back and forth, over the Ruhr and the port areas and around Berlin, and you begin to get some idea of why the Allies won the war.

In a few days Pop Dolan and his handful of men will pull out and there won't be anyone left.

After two long years, an Englishman can walk into almost any pub for a serious game of darts, without fear of pinning some American's ear to the wall.

Yet there are still traces of the invasion. Although it may not be apparent on the surface, the Americans have left their mark just as surely as the Roman Legions did when they marched away fifteen hundred years ago.

For occasionally, in the villages around Grafton-Underwood, you'll still hear someone say "Okay, Joe!" instead of "Quite," and once in a while a native walks by humming "Take Me Out to the Ball Game."

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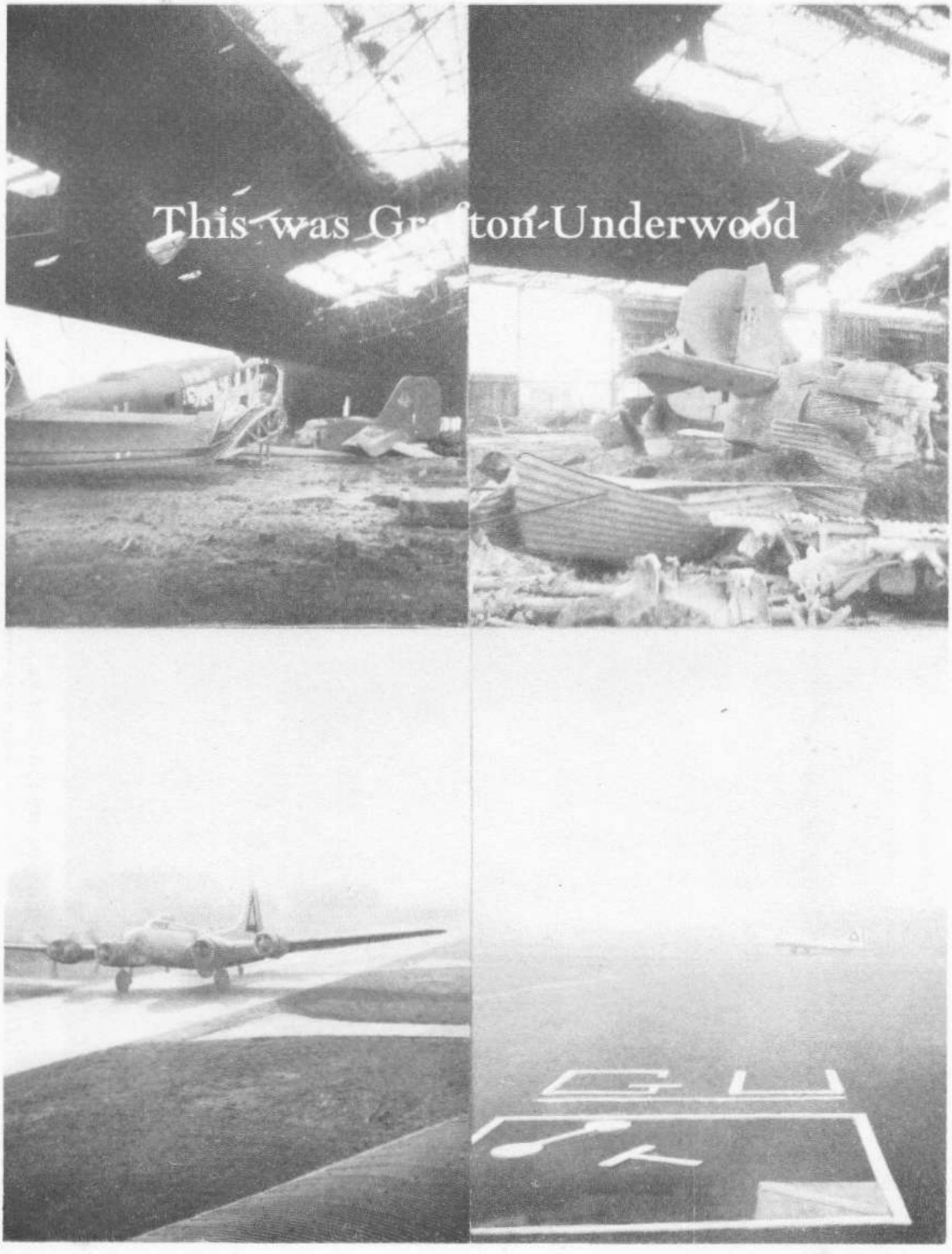
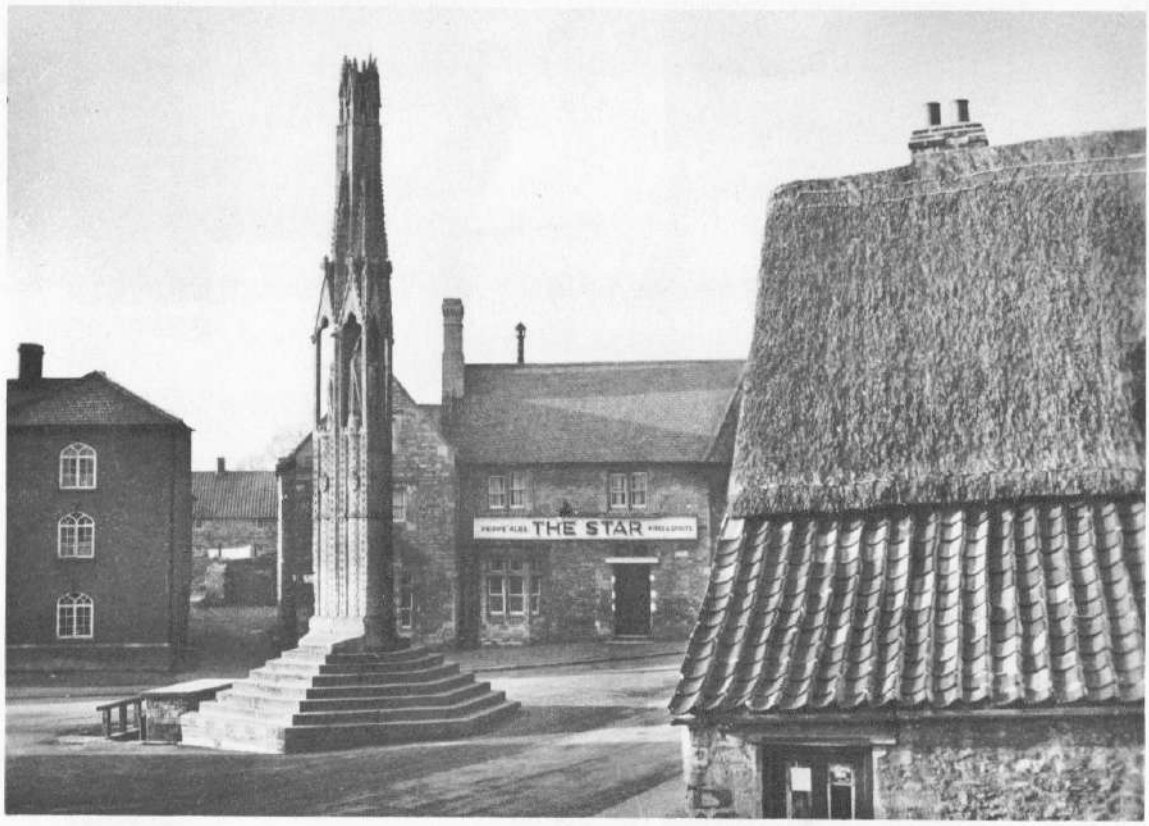

This was Grafton-Underwood

THROUGH QUAINT ENGLISH VILLAGES, SUCH AS BRIGSTOCK, HOME OF THE OLD THREE COCKS . . .



. . . AND GEDDINGTON, WITH ITS QUEEN ELEANOR'S CROSS, ITS PRIORY, AND ITS ANCIENT BRIDGE . . .

. . . ALONG THE CENTURIES-OLD CANAL, BETWEEN THATCHED COTTAGES, TO THE GATE . . .

THIS WAS GRAFTON-UNDERWOOD! IN SUCH A PEACEFUL SETTING IT WAS SOMETIMES HARD TO REALIZE THAT ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE CHANNEL . . .

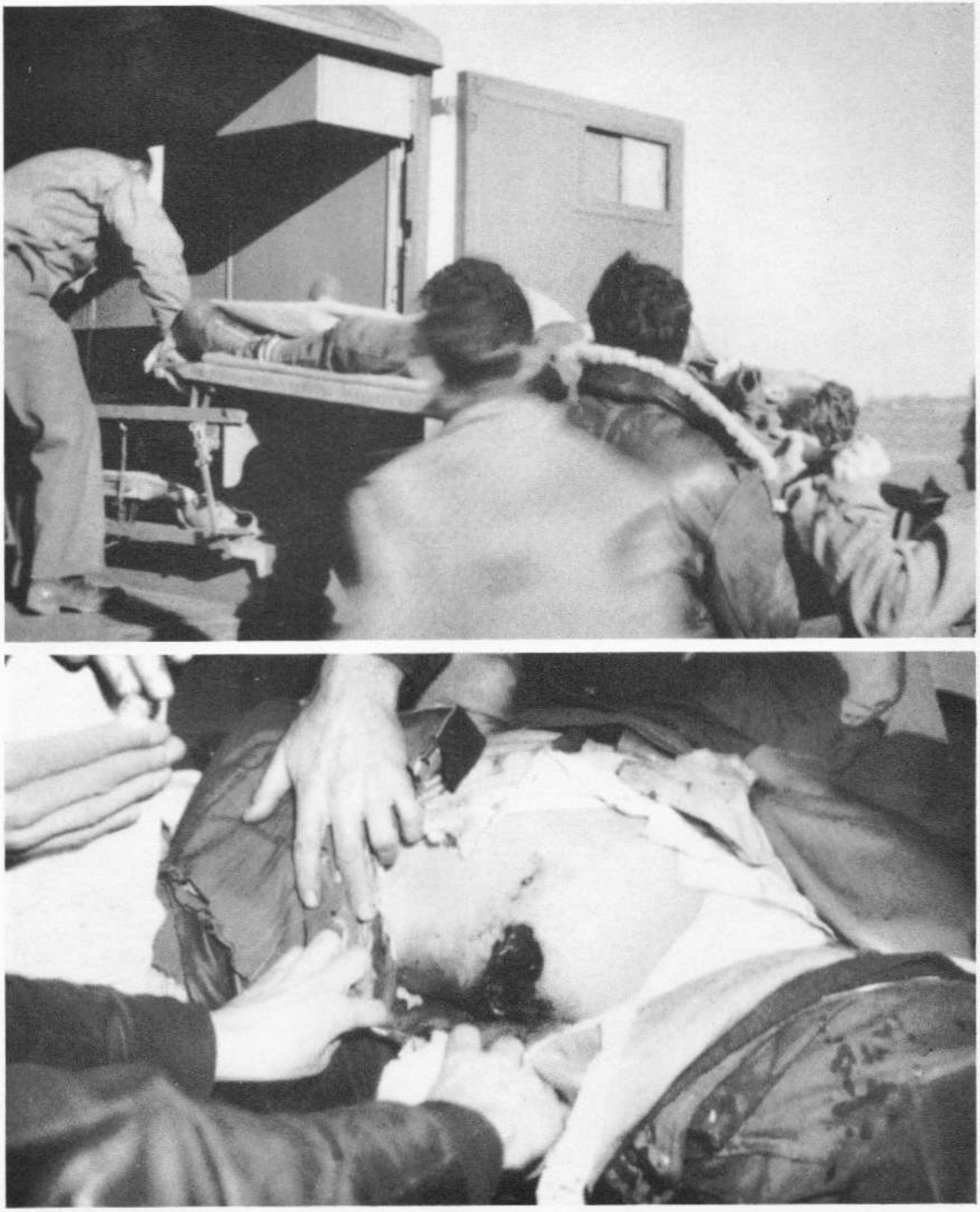
. . . OUR PLANES WERE GOING DOWN, VICTIMS OF FLAK OR CANNON, SUCH AS THIS ONE, THAT HAD HER TAIL CUT OFF OVER BERLIN . . .

IN SPITE OF SOMETIMES TERRIFIC LOSSES, THE FORMATION WOULD PLOD IRRESISTIBLY ON TO THE TARGET. AFTER "BOMBS AWAY". . .

. . . THE TINY PUFFS OF THE EXPLOSIONS FIVE MILES BELOW.
SOMETIMES THE SMOKE WOULD RISE THOUSANDS OF FEET . . .

IT HAPPENED 316 TIMES. WHEN THE FORMATION RETURNED THE GROUND MEN WOULD BE THERE, WAITING TO PATCH UP THE PLANES . . . SWEATING THEM OUT . . .

SOMETIMES THE FORMATIONS WOULD BE RIDDLED, BUT THEY WERE NEVER BROKEN
THERE WOULD BE A FEATHERED ENGINE, A GAPING HOLE IN A
WING . . . SOMETIMES A CRASH LANDING . . .



AT THE FIRST RED FLARE AN AMBULANCE WOULD BE TEARING AROUND
THE PERIMETER TRACK TO TAKE OFF THE WOUNDED . . .

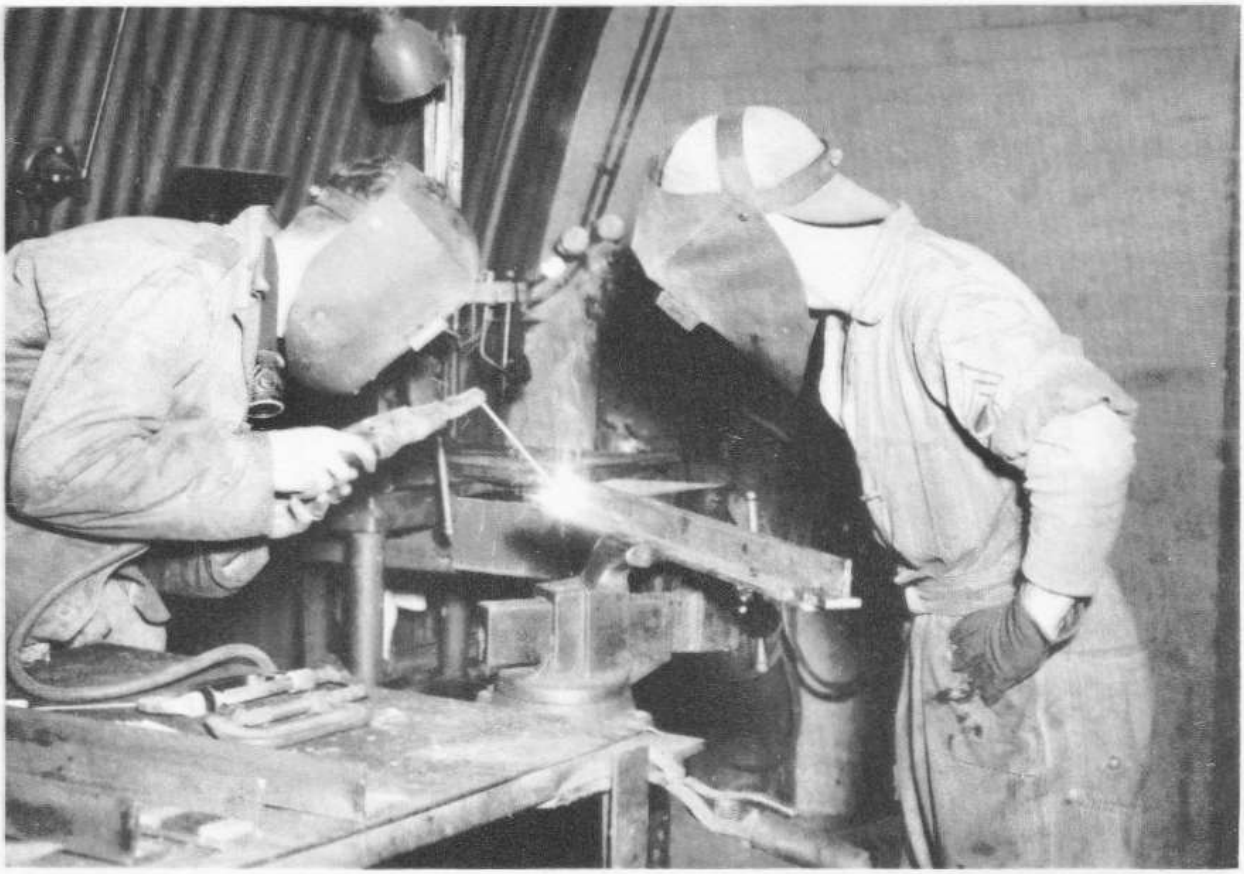
HOW DID IT GO? A FACE IN A HATCH WOULD TELL THE STORY. THIS WAS COL. PEASLEE'S AFTER THAT FIRST MISSION.

THE MEN WHO FLEW A COMPLETE TOUR OF DUTY WERE THE LUCKY ONES . . . HAD IT PAINTED ON THEIR PANTS . . .

"WE WERE HIT BY FIGHTERS, THREE PLANES WENT DOWN . . ." AROUND THE INTERROGATION TABLE, A CREW WOULD TELL THE STORY.

OCCASIONALLY A MISSING CREW WOULD RETURN, LIKE THESE FROM *The Sea Hag*, STILL WEARING THE SAILORS' PANTS PROVIDED BY AIR-SEA RESCUE.

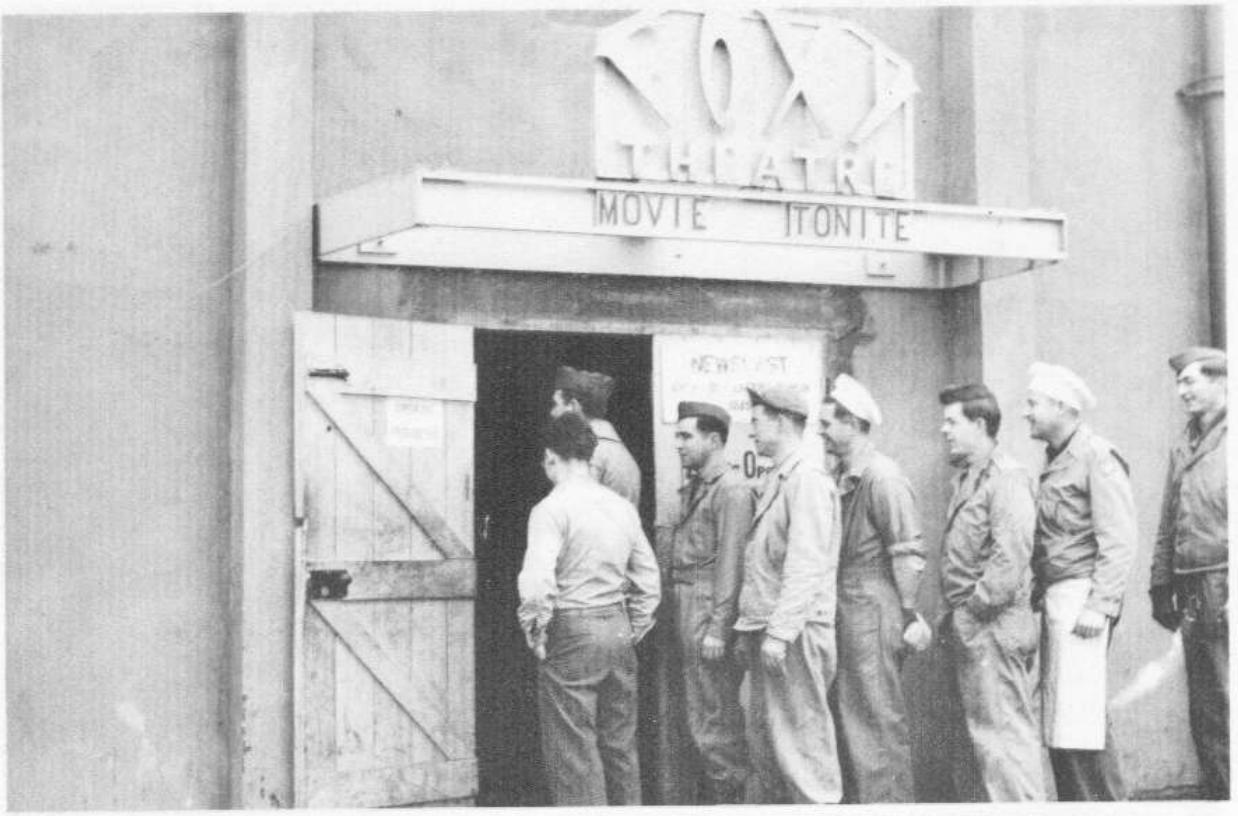
BETWEEN AND EVEN DURING MISSIONS, THE MAINTENANCE WORK WENT ON.
THE SUB-DEPOT MEN CLAMBERED OVER TIRED ENGINES . . .



IN THE PROPELLER SHOP, THE PARACHUTE WELL, THE INSTRUMENT SHOP . . . EVERYWHERE MEN WERE WORKING TO GET PLANES READY FOR THE NEXT MISSION . . .

IT WAS A LONG DAY, A LONG WEEK, A LONG TWO YEARS. EVERYONE PLAYED HIS DAILY PART, THEN BACK TO THE BARRACKS TO SHAVE . . . TO READ . . .

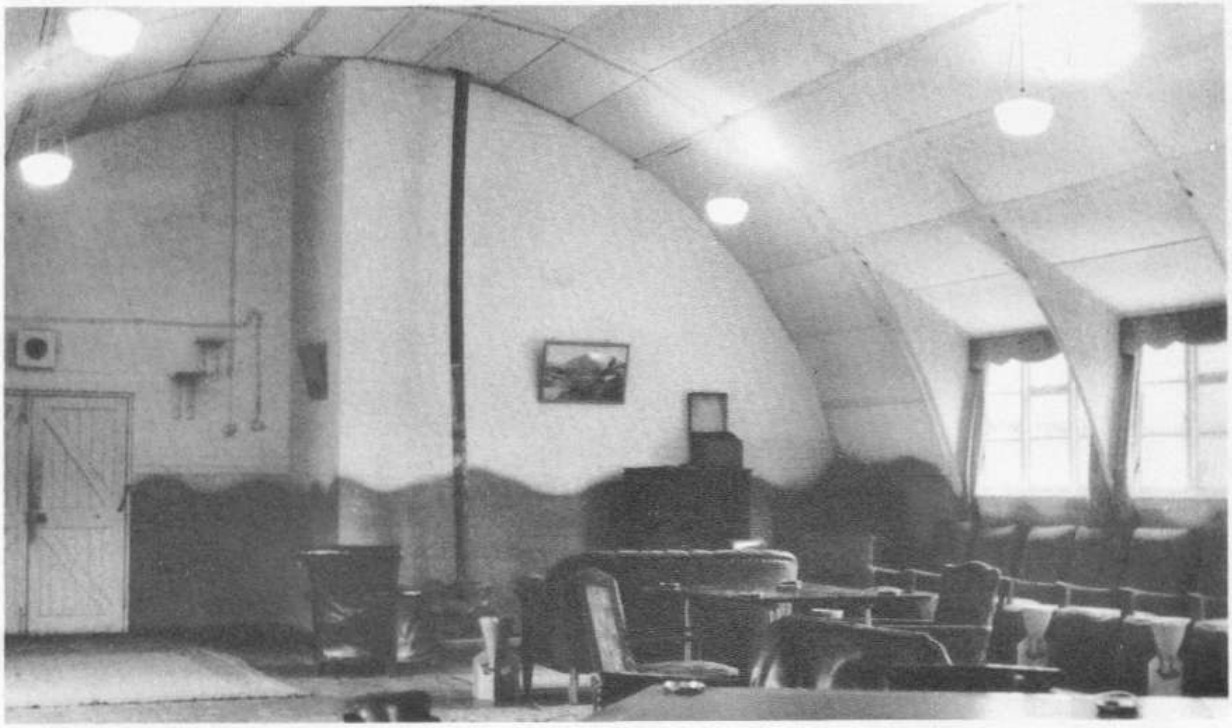
THERE WERE PLENTY OF INCONVENIENCES, SUCH AS WASHING MESS KITS AND SCROUNGING FOR COAL . . . BUT THERE WERE FEW ACTUAL DISCOMFORTS.



NIGHTLY MOVIES AT THE "FOXY THEATER" HELPED PASS LEISURE TIME, AND OCCASIONALLY THERE WAS SPECIAL ENTERTAINMENT . . . LIKE THAT TIME THE AIR CORPS BAND PLAYED FOR OUR 100TH-MISSION CELEBRATION . . .

. . . AND, IN SEASON, AMERICAN FOOTBALL, WITH THE PARAPHERNALIA OF WAR IN THE BACKGROUND . . .

FOR ENLISTED MEN THERE WERE THE AERO CLUB AND THE ZEBRA CLUB AND THE "PVTS. AND CPLS. BAR."



AND FOR THE OFFICERS . . .

. . . AND OF COURSE THE CHAPEL, BUILT BY THE MEN THEMSELVES . . .

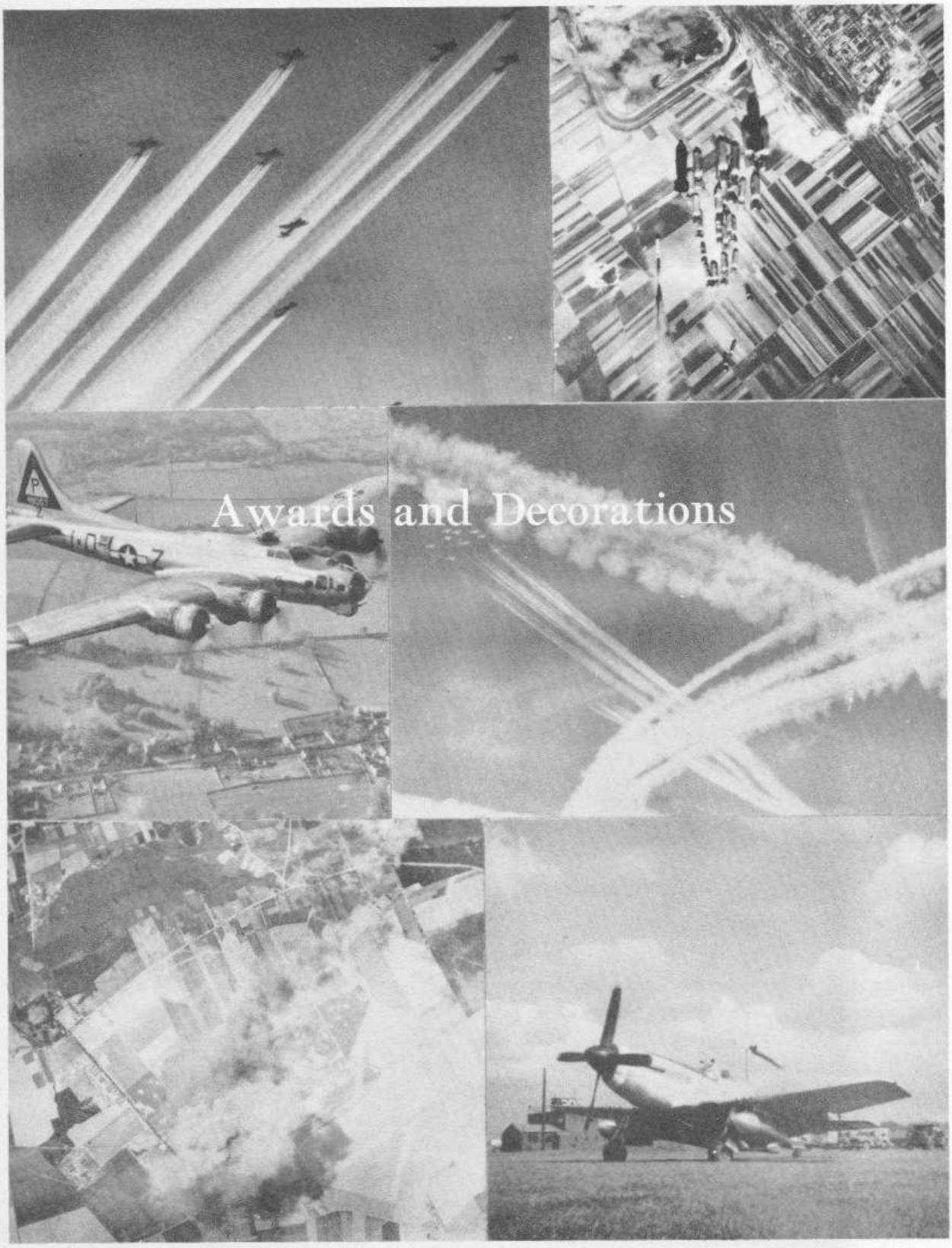
IN TWO YEARS THE 384TH BECAME AN INTEGRAL PART IN THE LIFE OF ENGLAND'S MIDLANDERS. THE SQUADRONS ADOPTED WAR ORPHANS . . .

. . . AND THEY HELD PARTIES FOR THE KIDS. IN THIS ONE THE MP'S WERE PLAYING "FATHER CHRISTMAS" AT GEDDINGTON . . .

. . . AND ONCE THEY FILLED THE BOMB BAYS WITH TOYS AND CLOTHES AND FLEW A MISSION TO NANTES, FRANCE, AFTER THE CHILDREN THERE HAD BEEN LIBERATED.

DURING THE STAY AT GRAFTON-UNDERWOOD THE 384TH SERVED UNDER FIVE COMMANDING OFFICERS: COL. BUDD J. PEASLEE (CENTER), COL. JULIUS K. LACEY, COL. DALE O. SMITH, COL. THEODORE R. MILTON AND LT.-COL. ROBERT W. FISH.

BUT IT WAS "POP" DOLAN, ONLY STAFF OFFICER TO SERVE THE GROUP THROUGH THE ENTIRE PERIOD, WHO WAS THE EMBODIMENT OF THE SPIRIT OF THE 384TH BOMBARDMENT GROUP.



Awards and Decorations

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Awards and Decorations

Although no 384th man won the Congressional Medal of Honor, the organization was among the most heavily decorated in this or any war. Well over a thousand men flying from Grafton-Underwood won the Distinguished Flying Cross. Three were awarded the Distinguished Service Cross and fifteen the Silver Star. In addition, six ground men were decorated with the Legion of Merit. The citations accompanying these higher decorations follow:

DISTINGUISHED SERVICE CROSS (posthumous). *MAURICE V. HENRY, 37205337, Technical Sergeant, Army Air Forces, United States Army.* For valor above and beyond the call of duty while participating in an operational mission over Germany on 26 November 1943. T/Sgt. Henry's display of courage, coolness, skill and self-negation in the presence of great hazard and uncertainty, with utter disregard of his own personal safety, made possible the rescue of seven members of his crew although by his actions he is missing and presumed to have perished. Approaching the target on its bombing run, T/Sgt. Henry's aircraft suffered an engine failure in two outboard engines and began to fall behind the formation. The crew jettisoned the bombs to lighten the load, and intercept the formation, but one fully armed bomb hung up in the racks. Despite intense attacks by enemy aircraft, evasive action, and the extreme cold, T/Sgt. Henry entered the open bomb bay and released the bomb. About that time the number three engine was set on fire and it was decided to run for a cloud bank some distance away. At this point, T/Sgt. Henry destroyed one enemy aircraft and damaged another from

his position in the top turret. Despite violent evasive action, the enemy fighter attacks increased in intensity and many damaging hits were made on the aircraft. The oxygen system was shot out, the pilot's aileron control and both pilot and co-pilot's rudder control were destroyed, and the entire electrical system including instruments and turret control were made inoperative. An incendiary shell struck the left side of the cockpit, slightly wounding the pilot and setting the cockpit afire. T/Sgt. Henry extinguished the fire although ill and vomiting from the acrid smoke. The enemy fighters were evaded in the clouds, but the aircraft was losing altitude and due to the failure of the inter-communications system T/Sgt. Henry made repeated trips through the ship to carry out orders of the pilot and to supervise the jettisoning of equipment to lighten the load. Breaking out of the clouds at 6000 feet directly over the city of Emden, the aircraft was immediately engaged and further damaged by heavy and accurate anti-aircraft fire, but by strong evasive action, escaped to the sea. By this time, the number four engine was completely out and it was impossible to feather the propeller. Number three engine had been started again but was giving only spasmodic power. Shortly thereafter, both number one and number two engines cut out and T/Sgt. Henry quickly and with great presence of mind assembled the crew in the radio compartment and prepared them for ditching. All radio equipment had been destroyed and it was impossible to transmit an S. O. S. A small boat was seen in the sea and T/Sgt. Henry immediately produced a flare and Very pistol with which to signal it. With no power, the pilot landed in the general area of the surface vessel, the aircraft breaking in two just aft of the radio compartment. T/Sgt. Henry assisted the other members of the crew to leave the ship and was himself the last to abandon it, renouncing all regard for his own survival. He delayed his exit further by searching for and finding the emergency radio which he took with him into the icy water. Due to the battle damage to the life rafts, the heavy swell of the waves, and the shock of entering the extremely cold water, members of the crew could do nothing to assist each other. T/Sgt. Henry, still grasping the emergency radio which he considered vitally necessary to rescue, and despite his valiant struggle, was washed away and lost.

DISTINGUISHED SERVICE CROSS. *CHARLES F. GOWDER, 0-754335, Second Lieutenant, Army Air Forces, United States Army.* For extraordinary heroism in action against the enemy, 25 April 1944. On this date Lieutenant Gowder was serving as pilot of a heavy bomber on a mission against military installations in Germany. As a result of repeated attacks by large numbers of enemy fighters before and during the bombing run, Lieutenant Gowder was wounded, the navigator was killed, the bombardier was wounded, and the airplane sustained heavy damage. In spite of his wounds and the difficulty of flying the damaged airplane, Lieutenant Gowder, displaying great courage and determination to bomb the target, continued in formation, directing the actions of his remaining crew members, and released the bomb load on the target by means of the emergency release. After leaving the target area he was forced by a lack of oxygen to fly at a low altitude. Despite further enemy fighter attacks, Lieutenant Gowder was finally able to reach a friendly base. The extraordinary heroism and devotion to duty displayed by Lieutenant Gowder upon this occasion reflect highest credit upon himself and the Armed Forces of the United States. Entered military service from California.

DISTINGUISHED SERVICE CROSS. *ROBERT E. STRAND, 0-810253, Army Air Forces, United States Army.* For extraordinary heroism in action against the enemy, 20 June 1944. On this date Lieutenant Strand was serving as co-pilot on a heavy bomber leading a group

on a mission over Germany. On the bombing run the plane was struck by anti-aircraft shells which killed the pilot and seriously wounded the navigator and Lieutenant Strand. Despite the pain of his wounds, Lieutenant Strand, determined to complete the attack, was able to control the plane and finish the bomb run, after which he led the group to an assembly with its wing. Not until the English coast was reached, more than forty minutes after he had been wounded, did he relinquish the lead and permit emergency first aid to be given to him. The outstanding courage of Lieutenant Strand and the determination to lead his group to a successful completion of its mission were inspiring to his fellow fliers and exemplify the highest traditions of the Army Air Forces. Entered military service from Michigan.

SILVER STAR. *RAYMOND P. GREGORI, 19128120, Staff Sergeant, Army Air Forces, United States Army.* For gallantry in action, while serving as tail gunner of a B-17 airplane on a bombing mission over Germany, 12 August 1943. Fifteen minutes prior to reaching the target, Sergeant Gregori was severely wounded by an exploding 20 MM shell burst in the tail compartment of the plane. With complete disregard for his painful wounds, Sergeant Gregori remained at his station fighting off determined enemy attacks until his guns were put out of action. Not once did he indicate that he had been wounded, until the attacks were over, when another member of the crew discovered his condition. The courage, skill and devotion to duty displayed by Sergeant Gregori serve as an inspiration to his fellow fliers and reflect the highest credit upon himself and the Armed Forces of the United States. Home address: Los Angeles, California.

SILVER STAR. *WILLIAM RUSSELL HARRY, 0-515826, Second Lieutenant, Army Air Forces, United States Army.* For gallantry in action, while serving as pilot of a B-17 airplane on a bombing mission over Germany, 30 July 1943. After being forced to drop out of formation, due to lack of oxygen, Lieutenant Harry's plane was subjected to repeated and determined attacks by enemy fighters. Though painfully wounded during the attacks he courageously remained at the controls of his ship and successfully out-maneuvered the attacking planes. It was only by violent evasive action and most skillful flying that Lieutenant Harry was able to bring his airplane back to England, where he accomplished a landing without further injury to any member of the crew. The courage, skill and devotion to duty displayed by Lieutenant Harry on this occasion reflect the highest credit upon himself and the Armed Forces of the United States. Home Address: Clearfield, Pennsylvania.

SILVER STAR. *SELDEN LONGLEY McMILLIN, 0-346838, Major (Prisoner of War), Army Air Forces, United States Army.* For gallantry in action, while leading his Group on a bombing mission over Germany, 25 June 1943. Major McMillin's Command was subjected to intense anti-aircraft fire and repeated and determined fighter attacks. Though his plane was heavily damaged he courageously continued on to the target area and made a successful bombing run. When his plane sustained further damage from enemy fighters after leaving the target, Major McMillin ordered his Wing planes to abandon him and seek the protection of other groups. The courage, skill and devotion to duty displayed by Major McMillin on this occasion serve as an inspiration to his fellow fliers and reflect highest credit upon himself and the Armed Forces of the United States. Home Address: Dallas, Texas.

SILVER STAR. *LORING CORWIN MILLER, 39840477, Staff Sergeant, Army Air Forces, United States Army.* For gallantry in action, while serving as right waist gunner of a B-17 airplane on a bombing mission over Germany, 17 August 1943. Prior to reaching the target, Sergeant Miller was seriously wounded and knocked down when his aircraft sustained a direct flak hit. Though suffering severe pain, he courageously returned to his gun and assisted in fighting off determined attacks by enemy fighters. Refusing help, he remained at his gun until the pilot ordered the radio operator to administer first-aid to him. The gallantry and devotion to d uty displayed by Sergeant Miller on this occasion reflect highest credit upon himself and the Armed Forces of the United States. Home Address: Stockton, California.

SILVER STAR. *JAMES RICHARD FIELDS, 37376011, Staff Sergeant, Army Air Forces, United States Army.* For gallantry in action, while serving as right waist gunner of a B-17 airplane on a bombing mission over enemy occupied Europe on 16 September 1943. During a determined attack by enemy fighters, a 20 MM cannon shell exploded in the waist section of the plane severely wounding Sergeant Fields and knocking him down. With complete disregard for his painful wounds, Sergeant Fields courageously returned to his gun and continued to fight off repeated attacks. Only when the attacks had ceased did he leave his position to receive first-aid treatment. The courage, skill and devotion to duty displayed by Sergeant Fields on this occasion reflect highest credit upon himself and the Armed Forces of the United States. Home Address: RFD #2, Williamstown, Missouri.

SILVER STAR. *PETER SENIAWSKY, 12060630, Staff Sergeant, Army Air Forces, United States Army.* For gallantry in action, while participating on a bombing mission over Germany, 14 October 1943, as waist gunner of a B-17 airplane. When he encountered extreme difficulties under most hazardous conditions, Sergeant Seniawsky, displaying gallantry and an indomitable will to carry on against great odds, successfully fought his way through the enemy. His gallantry, skill and fighting spirit serve as an inspiration to his fellow fliers and reflect highest credit upon himself and the Armed Forces of the United States. Entered military service from New York.

SILVER STAR. *WILLIAM FEATHERSTON GILMORE, Major, Army Air Forces, United States Army.* For gallantry in action, while serving as pilot of a B-17 airplane on a bombing mission over Germany, 26 November 1943. On approaching the target, two engines of his aircraft became partially disabled, making it impossible for Major Gilmore to remain with the formation. Enemy fighters were quick to take advantage and attacked in force, setting fire to one of the good engines. During the running battle which followed, Major Gilmore was wounded and his aircraft sustained such severe damage that it became almost uncontrollable. Using violent evasive tactics and taking advantage of all available cloud cover, he was finally able to elude the attacking fighters. While endeavoring to reach the coast of England, the last good engine cut out, forcing him to ditch his crippled bomber in the sea. When only one rubber dinghy released, Major Gilmore struggled in vain trying to secure another one, giving up his attempts only after being carried beneath the water by the sinking aircraft. However, he managed to escape from the submerged plane and sought safety in the dinghy. His gallantry, flying skill and devotion to duty on this occasion reflect highest credit upon himself and the Armed Forces of the United States. Entered military service from Georgia.

SILVER STAR. *EVERETT D. WOODARD, 38200025, Staff Sergeant, Army Air Forces, United States Army.* For gallantry in action, while serving as right waist gunner of a B-17 airplane on a bombing mission over Germany, 30 January 1944. Sergeant Woodard was severely wounded and the left waist gunner wounded to such an extent that he was unable to remain at his gun, when a cannon shell exploded in the waist of the plane. With complete disregard for his wounds, Sergeant Woodard manned both of the waist guns, firing first one and then the other and succeeded in destroying one enemy aircraft, probably destroying another and in warding off numerous vicious attacks. During a lull in the fighting, he administered first-aid to his wounded comrade. The gallantry, exceptional skill and devotion to duty displayed by Sergeant Woodard served as an inspiration to the entire crew. His actions on this occasion reflect highest credit upon himself and the Armed Forces of the United States. Entered military service from Texas.

SILVER STAR. *EDWARD A. FIORETTI, 0-802552, First Lieutenant, Army Air Forces, United States Army.* For gallantry in action, while serving as pilot of a B-17 airplane on a bombing mission over Germany, 30 January 1944. During a savage attack by enemy fighters, Lieutenant Fioretti was wounded and rendered unconscious and his aircraft heavily damaged. One engine was hit and set ablaze, three fires started inside the plane, most of the control cables severed and other serious damage inflicted. The blazing aircraft went out of control and into a steep dive, losing 11,000 feet in altitude. Recovering from his stunned condition, Lieutenant Fioretti, despite his painful wounds, assisted by the co-pilot, returned the plane to level flight. Just as it seemed everything was about in order and the fires had been brought under control by the crew, enemy fighters again attacked, trying desperately to destroy the already crippled bomber. Putting their aircraft into a dive, Lieutenant Fioretti and the co-pilot, working as a perfect team, eluded the enemy by taking advantage of cloud cover, but five members of the crew, thinking the plane doomed, bailed out. Having accomplished this, they flew their aircraft back to England and made a landing without further injury to the crew. The gallantry, devotion to duty and skillful airmanship displayed by Lieutenant Fioretti were an inspiration to all flying with him. Entered military service from Pennsylvania.

SILVER STAR. *SCOTT A. BRILEY, 0-751249, Second Lieutenant, Army Air Forces, United States Army.* For gallantry in action, while flying as co-pilot of a B-17 airplane on a bombing mission over Germany, 30 January 1944. Enemy fighters made a savage attack on his aircraft, wounding the pilot and rendering him unconscious, starting three separate fires in the plane, damaging most of the control cables and setting one engine ablaze. Though the blazing aircraft went out of control and into a steep dive, losing 11,000 feet of altitude, Lieutenant Briley tenaciously clung to the controls and assisted by the pilot, who regained consciousness, returned the plane to level flight. Lieutenant Briley then aided in putting out a fire in the cockpit and directed the crew in extinguishing the other fires. Just as it seemed everything was in order, enemy fighters again attacked, trying desperately to destroy the already crippled bomber. By putting their plane into a dive, the enemy was eluded by taking advantage of cloud cover but five members of the crew, thinking the plane doomed, bailed out. Working as a perfect team Lieutenant Briley and the pilot flew their aircraft back to England and accomplished a landing without further injury to the crew. The gallantry, determination and exceptional flying skill displayed by Lieutenant Briley inspired his fellow crewmen and materially aided in their safe return to England. Entered military service from California.

SILVER STAR. *JAMES E. WILLIAMSON, 20757305, Staff Sergeant, Army Air Forces, United States Army.* For gallantry in action against the enemy while on a heavy bombardment mission over Germany, 24 April 1944. Shortly after the bombing run, the pilot of the Flying Fortress in which Sergeant Williamson was serving as tail gunner was forced to leave the formation due to severe damage inflicted by hostile fighters. During these savage assaults, he manned his guns with exceptional skill and warded off repeated attacks on his position. While returning at "tree top" altitude, fragments of a bursting flak shell seriously wounded Sergeant Williamson. The pilot sent a member of the crew to the tail compartment to remove him from the turret and administer first-aid treatment. Though suffering extreme pain, Sergeant Williamson refused treatment and continued to man his guns against the enemy, leaving his turret only after the aircraft had returned to England. The gallantry, disregard for personal safety and devotion to duty displayed by Sergeant Williamson inspired his comrades and contributed to their safe return. Entered military service from Arkansas.

SILVER STAR. *MELVIN J. GRAMS, 37578218, Sergeant, Army Air Forces, United States Army.* For gallantry in action while on a bombardment mission over enemy territory, 12 September 1944. Serving as tail gunner on a Flying Fortress, Sergeant Grams received a severe bullet wound in his left foot when his plane was attacked by enemy fighters. Momentarily knocked unconscious, and suffering intense pain, he regained his position, and by sheer determination and will-power, fought off two more attacks. Still refusing to leave his guns, Sergeant Grams then applied a tourniquet to his leg, and for more than an hour remained on the alert. Not until they had crossed into friendly territory could he be persuaded to leave his guns and receive emergency medical attention. The fortitude, zealous devotion to duty and indomitable fighting spirit displayed by Sergeant Grams, inspired his fellow crewmen and contributed to their safe return. Entered military service from Minnesota.

SILVER STAR. *GENE R. GOODRICK, 0-760823, First Lieutenant, Army Air Forces, United States Army.* For gallantry in action while piloting a B-17 bomber on a penetration mission over Germany, 30 November 1944. Unable to observe the target on the initial run due to dense contrails left by preceding formations, Lieutenant Goodrick ordered the bombs held. Just after turning to make the second bomb run, an almost direct burst of flak exploded the oxygen tank under the flight deck and started a fierce fire. In the resultant confusion, the navigator, bombardier, co-pilot and engineer bailed out, but Lieutenant Goodrick remained cool, his only concern at the moment being to hold his position and perform his duty. Immediately after releasing the bombs, he left the formation, rejoining his unit later after the fire had been extinguished. Arriving at base after dark with the hydraulic and electrical systems destroyed, Lieutenant Goodrick exhibited a high degree of skill by safely landing the crippled bomber unassisted. His courage, skill and tenacity of purpose are worthy of the highest praise. Entered military service from Missouri.

SILVER STAR (posthumous). *GEORGE W. RICHES, 0-733727, First Lieutenant, Army Air Forces, United States Army.* For gallantry in action while piloting a B-17 aircraft over Germany, 25 June 1943. Encountering dense clouds and rain enroute to the target, Lieutenant Riches' Group was ordered to disperse and reform above the clouds. Only eight (8) planes were successful in getting through to the rendezvous point. After crossing into hostile

territory, approximately one-hundred and fifty (150) enemy fighters, quick to observe the Group's tactical disadvantage, attacked in such force that the small formation scattered. Refusing to seek the protection of friendly groups withdrawing from the target, Lieutenant Riches tenaciously held his course and bombed the objective. By this time enemy fighters and flak had set the plane afire, killed the co-pilot and practically severed Lieutenant Riches' right arm. Ordering the crew to bail out, he remained at the controls, using his one good hand to keep the plane in level flight. Before he could abandon the doomed aircraft it exploded in mid-air. Lieutenant Riches lost his life, but the courage, determination and devotion to duty he exhibited in completing his assigned mission, and in placing the safety of others before his own, will remain a constant source of inspiration to all members of his organization. Next of kin: Mr. Bryant W. Riches, Route 1, Deshler, Ohio.

SILVER STAR (posthumous). *ROBERT C. LONG, 0-778518, Second Lieutenant, Army Air Forces, United States Army.* For gallantry in action while piloting a B-17 aircraft on a bombardment mission over Germany, 3 February 1945. A few minutes before reaching the target, Lieutenant Long's plane was heavily damaged by flak and two (2) engines knocked out. At this point, he could have jettisoned his bombs and reached friendly territory with comparative safety, but he elected to fulfill his mission. During withdrawal, he was forced to leave the formation and upon reaching the Channel, ordered all equipment thrown overboard preparatory to ditching. Calmly directing and encouraging the crew he ditched the aircraft without serious injury to the members of the crew. In the heavy sea, Lieutenant Long swam forty (40) yards to an empty raft where he pulled himself aboard and collapsed. Hearing the other crewmen call that their raft was overloaded, he attempted to paddle towards them with his hands until he became violently ill. The fact that after the rafts were joined, Lieutenant Long continued to give instructions to the crew until he succumbed from exposure attest to his fortitude, courage and steadfast devotion to duty. Next of kin: Mrs. Oca Robinson Long, Pleasant Hill, Illinois.

LEGION OF MERIT. *ARTHUR E. GUILMET, 39388354, Master Sergeant, Army Air Forces, United States Army.* For exceptionally meritorious conduct in the performance of outstanding services as crew chief of heavy bombardment aircraft, from 22 June 1943 to 7 June 1944. Master Sergeant Arthur E. Guilmet, by his skill, leadership and untiring effort, has inspired his ground crew to an exceptional degree of efficiency. Because of the uniformly superior condition in which the five airplanes under the care of Master Sergeant Guilmet have been maintained, seventy-six combat missions have been completed without a mechanical failure. The efficiency and devotion to duty exhibited by Master Sergeant Guilmet have been a credit to himself and the Armed Forces of the United States. Entered military service from Washington.

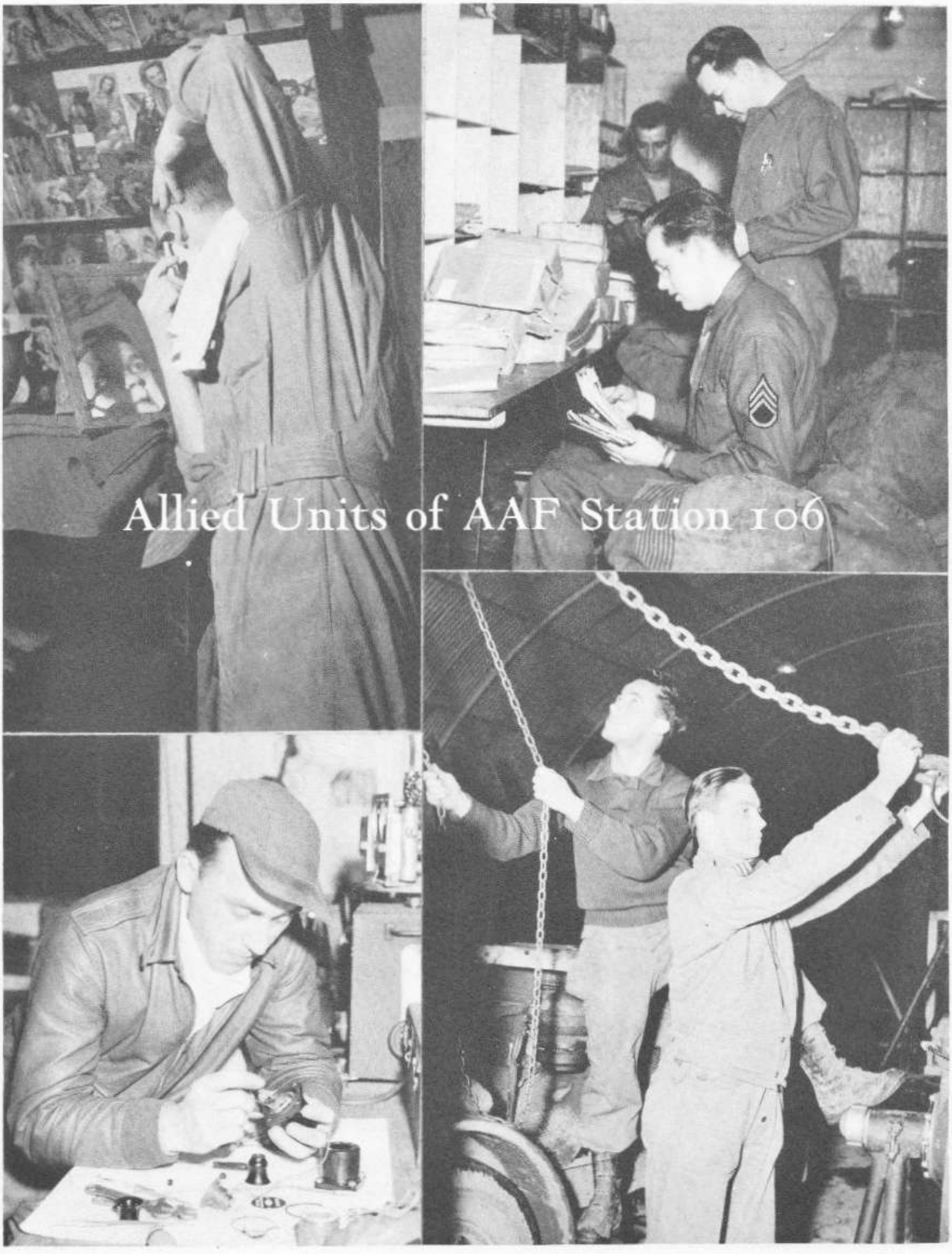
LEGION OF MERIT. *HUBERT P. KONZEM, 18082154, Master Sergeant, Army Air Forces, United States Army.* For exceptionally meritorious conduct in the performance of outstanding services as crew chief of heavy bombardment aircraft, from 24 December 1943 to June 1944. Master Sergeant Konzem, by his skill, leadership and untiring effort, has inspired his ground crew to an exceptional degree of efficiency. Because of the uniformly superior condition in which the three airplanes under the care of Master Sergeant Konzem have been maintained, fifty combat missions have been completed without a mechanical failure. The efficiency and devotion to duty exhibited by Master Sergeant Konzem have been a credit to himself and the Armed Forces of the United States. Entered military service from Texas.

LEGION OF MERIT. *LLOYD H. BERRY, 11033482, Master Sergeant, Army Air Forces, United States Army.* For exceptionally meritorious conduct in the performance of outstanding services as crew chief of heavy bombardment aircraft, from 28 June 1943 to 25 June 1944. Master Sergeant Berry, by his skill, leadership and untiring effort, has inspired his ground crew to an exceptional degree of efficiency. Because of the uniformly superior condition in which the eight airplanes under the care of Master Sergeant Berry have been maintained, sixty-two combat missions have been completed without a mechanical failure. The efficiency and devotion to duty exhibited by Master Sergeant Berry have been a credit to himself and the Armed Forces of the United States. Entered military service from Connecticut.

LEGION OF MERIT. *HOWARD B. PIERCE, 35406029, Master Sergeant, Army Air Forces, United States Army.* For exceptionally meritorious conduct in the performance of outstanding services as crew chief of heavy bombardment aircraft, from 5 December 1943 to 30 June 1944. Master Sergeant Pierce, by his skill, leadership and untiring effort, has inspired his ground crew to an exceptional degree of efficiency. Because of the uniformly superior condition in which the two airplanes under the care of Master Sergeant Pierce have been maintained, fifty-five combat missions have been completed without a mechanical failure. The efficiency and devotion to duty exhibited by Master Sergeant Pierce have been a credit to himself and the Armed Forces of the United States. Entered military service from Ohio.

LEGION OF MERIT. *WALTER J. GROUDIS, 16062753, Master Sergeant, Army Air Forces, United States Army.* For exceptionally meritorious conduct in the performance of outstanding services as crew chief of a ground crew responsible for the maintenance of bomber aircraft, from 22 June 1943 to 20 December 1943. On many occasions Master Sergeant Groudis voluntarily remained at work all night, in order that the aircraft for which he was responsible might be ready for operations on the following day. By his leadership, skill, efficiency and devotion to duty, Master Sergeant Groudis has so effectively maintained these aircraft that they have performed twenty-five missions without mechanical difficulties. Entered military service from Michigan.

LEGION OF MERIT. *WILLIAM E. WALSH, 11010610, Technical Sergeant, Army Air Forces, United States Army.* For exceptionally meritorious conduct in the performance of outstanding service in installing, modifying and operating a Bomb Trainer at a Heavy Bombardment Station between June 1943 and October 1944. During a great part of this time, Technical Sergeant Walsh operated this Bomb Trainer alone as both instructor and maintenance man, approximating ten hours daily for almost the entire period. The ingenuity displayed by Technical Sergeant Walsh, his personal skill and his working far more than the normally expected hours to develop the Bombardiers of his station has had a marked bearing upon the bombing results of the Group, reflecting the highest credit upon himself and the Armed Forces of the United States. Entered military service from Connecticut.


Allied Units of AAF Station 106

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AAF Station 106

The organizations at Grafton-Underwood were composed of the bomb group and a number of service organizations. Officially, Grafton-Underwood was carried on the Army directory as "AAF Station 106." In addition to the 384th Bombardment Group, which was the nucleus of the organizations at Station 106, there were the 443rd Sub Depot, the 1140th Military Police Company, the 854th Chemical Company, the 1119th Quartermaster Company, the 33rd Station Complement, the 203rd Finance Section, the 2023rd Fire Fighting Platoon, the 1774th Ordnance Company, and a detachment of the 18th Weather Squadron.

THE BOMBARDMENT GROUP

On 28 Dec 1942 a large number of officers and enlisted men of the 29th Bombardment Group, stationed at Gowen Field, Boise, Idaho, was transferred en masse to the new group that was going to set up housekeeping at Wendover. This cadre, still attached to the 29th for rations, quarters and administration, was composed of 27 officers and 225 enlisted men.

A few key men had been assigned ten days earlier—Col. Peaslee, Maj. Beckett, Capt. William Johnson, Capt. Dolan—but it was the mass transfer of Dec 28th that first made the 384th an organization.

Meanwhile, officers at various other stations were relieved of their assignments and ordered to Wendover, where they found the new-born 384th already functioning as a unit, with

the flight surgeon, Capt. Ralph E. Switzer, as acting commanding officer. (Col. Peaslee did not make a permanent change of station until 2 Jan 1943.) The initial assignment of officers was as follows:

Headquarters Detachment—Capt. Thomas P. Beckett, operations officer; 2nd Lt. Robert E. Langlois, assistant operations officer; 1st Lt. Warren M. Ringgold, materiel officer; Capt. Ralph W. Johnson, communications officer; 1st Lt. Clifford H. Crowe, Jr., adjutant; 2nd Lt. Clayton M. Olson, statistical officer.

544th Squadron—Capt. Alfred Nuttall, commanding officer; 2nd Lt. Thomas C. Peiffner, engineering officer; W/O Donald W. Williams, communications officer; 2nd Lt. Clarence H. Hesse, armament officer; 2nd Lt. Ray L. Lindsey, adjutant; 2nd Lt. Carrol S. Apt, supply officer.

545th Squadron—1st Lt. Raymond P. Ketelsen, commanding officer; 2nd Lt. Frederick Nowasad, engineering officer; 2nd Lt. Sidney J. Karol, communications officer; 2nd Lt. James H. Taylor, adjutant.

546th Squadron—Capt. George W. Harris, commanding officer; 2nd Lt. Edgar C. Campbell, engineering officer; 2nd Lt. Paul A. Hyndeman, armament officer; 2nd Lt. Paul A. Sodini, adjutant; 2nd Lt. James E. Chancellor, supply officer.

547th Squadron—Capt. Maurice S. Dillingham, commanding officer; 2nd Lt. John Priggins, adjutant; 2nd Lt. Julius Knapp, communications officer; 2nd Lt. John M. Palmer, engineering officer; 2nd Lt. George L. Smith, supply officer.

Two years later, fewer than a dozen of those "original members" were still serving with the Group. The only staff officer remaining was Maj. Dolan, known as "Pop" to officers and men alike.

By the time the war in Europe was over, the staff personnel had changed many times, as the following list will indicate:

Commanding Officers—Col. Budd J. Peaslee, 18 Dec 1942 to 1 Oct 1943; Col. Julius K. Lacey, 1 Oct 1943 to 23 Nov 1943; Col. Dale O. Smith, 23 Nov 1943 to 15 Nov 1934; Col. Theodore R. Milton, 15 Nov 1944 to 16 Jun 1945; Lt. Col. Robert W. Fish, 17 Jun 1945 through post-war assignment at Istres, France.

Deputy Group Commander—Maj. Selden L. McMillin, 3 Jun 1943 to 25 Jun 1943; Lt. Col. Thomas P. Beckett, 25 Jun 1943 to 13 Oct 1943; Lt. Col. William E. Buck, Jr., 13 Oct 1943 to 30 Sep 1944; Lt. Col. Robert E. Thacker, 30 Sep 1944 to 23 Apr 1945; Lt. Col. Thomas D. Hutchinson, 24 Apr 1945 through Istres period.

Executive Officers—Lt. Col. James A. Taff, 7 Apr 1943 to 15 Jul 1944; Lt. Col. Ralph W. Bond, 15 Jul 1944 to 31 May 1945; Maj. Harold Nelson, Jr., 1 Jun 1945 through Istres period.

Adjutants—Maj. William D. Smith, 12 Apr 1943 to 28 Aug 1943; Maj. Clifford H. Crowe, Jr., 28 Aug 1943 to 23 Nov 1943; Maj. Harold Nelson, Jr., 23 Nov 1943 to 31 May 1945; Capt. J. R. Wyatt, 1 Jun 1945 through Istres period.

S-1 (Personnel)—Maj. Clifford H. Crowe, Jr., 3 Jun 1943 to 28 Aug 1943; Capt. J. R. Wyatt, 28 Aug 1943 to 31 May 1945; 1st Lt. Thomas Titus, 1 Jun 1945 through Istres period.

S-2 (Intelligence)—Maj. William E. Dolan, 18 Dec 1942 through post-war assignment at Istres, France.

S-3 (Operations)—Lt. Col. Thomas P. Beckett, 18 Dec 1942 to 6 Jul 1943; Lt. Col. Alfred C. Nuttall, 6 Jul 1943 to 20 Oct 1943; Lt. Col. Thomas P. Beckett, 20 Oct 1943 to 26 May

1944; Lt. Col. George H. Koehne, Jr., 26 May 1944 to 2 Feb 1945; Lt. Col. Thomas D. Hutchinson, 3 Feb 1945 to 23 Apr 1945; Maj. Clarence L. Thacker, 28 Apr 1945 through Istres period.

S-4 (Materiel)—Lt. Col. Harry R. Page, 3 Jun 1943 to 19 Jan 1944; Capt. Warren M. Ringgold, Jr., 19 Jan 1944 to 19 Apr 1944; Maj. Nicolai Hansen, 19 Apr 1944 to 20 Dec 1944; Capt. John M. Palmer, 20 Dec 1944 through Istres period.

Communications—Maj. William Johnson, 18 Dec 1942 to 14 Oct 1943; Capt. Hobert W. Aiken, 14 Oct 1943 to 31 May 1945; Capt. Ivan S. Kendall, 1 Jun 1945 through Istres period.

Group Bombardier—Capt. Charles Bonnett, Maj. Joseph W. Baggs, Maj. Richard K. Crown.

Group Navigator—Capt. J. N. Foister, Maj. Ray Martin-Veque, Maj. Robert C. Chapin.

Squadron Commanders—*544th:* Lt. Col. Alfred C. Nuttall, from activation until 28 Aug 1943; Maj. William F. Gilmore, 29 Aug 1943 to 20 Oct 1943; Lt. Col. Alfred C. Nuttall, 21 Oct 1943 to 13 Sep 1944; Maj. Gerald B. Sammons, 14 Sept 1944 to 6 Nov 1944; Maj. Maurice A. Booska, 7 Nov 1944 through Istres period. *545th:* Maj. Raymond P. Ketelsen, from activation until 8 Apr 1944; Capt. Robert E. Langlois, 9 Apr 1944 to 13 Apr 1944; Lt. Col. Oattis E. Parks, 25 Apr 1944 to 29 Aug 1944; Maj. Arthur M. Stone, Jr., 31 Aug 1944 to 10 Jan 1945; Lt. Col. Alexander C. Strickland, 15 Jan 1945 through Istres period. *546th:* Maj. George W. Harris, from activation until 29 May 1944; Maj. Gordon K. Stallings, 29 May 1944 to 30 Sep 1944; Maj. Arthur E. Bean, Jr., 30 Sep 1944 to 14 Jun 1945; Maj. Philip Y. Williams, 15 Jun 1945 through Istres period. *547th:* Maj. Maurice A. Dillingham, from activation until 1 Dec 1943; Maj. Horace E. Frink, Jr., 1 Dec 1943 to 15 May 1944; Lt. Col. Robert E. Thacker, 16 May 1944 to 30 Sep 1944; Maj. Horace E. Frink, Jr., 1 Oct 1944 to 29 Nov 1944; Maj. Thomas D. Hutchinson, 29 Nov 1944 to 2 Feb 1945; Maj. Edgar E. Ulrey, 3 Feb 1945 through Istres period.

SUB DEPOT

The 443rd Sub Depot was created in the middle of November, 1943, with Maj. John H. Humphries as commanding officer. Actually, however, the organization was almost ten years old at the time of its birth. The unit from which it grew had been formed in the early 1930's. In 1937 part of that original organization broke off to form a separate outfit, which finally in 1942 became the 6th Service Squadron. Under that name, this organization of specialists arrived in the British Isles in mid-January, 1943. By the time the bombardment group came on the scene, four and a half months later, Maj. Humphries' organization was already waiting at Grafton-Underwood. With a number of "old Army men" as a nucleus, the Sub Depot became a highly efficient human machine for heavy repair work. It had shops for propeller, instrument, electrical equipment, engine, parachute and surface repair. There were carpentry, dope and fabric, and welding shops. When it was discovered that civilian jewelers were unable to meet the demand, Sub Depot even took over the job of repairing watches, an important function when heavy bombardment was meeting a precise, to-the-second, schedule on missions over Germany. The men under Maj. Humphries invented many tools and gadgets to simplify their tasks, and also contributed many inventions for heavy bombers, themselves.

MILITARY POLICE

On 27 Jan 1943, while the bomb group was just entering phase training at Wendover, the 1140th Military Police Company (Avn) was activated at Robins Field, Georgia. A few days later the company was transferred to Daniel Field, Augusta, Georgia, where it remained

until its transfer to the staging area, Camp Kilmer, N. J., 27 June 1943. The company embarked on the Aquitania 8 July 1943, arriving in Scotland on the 16th of July. Two days later the company arrived at Grafton-Underwood. In its first months overseas the company had a strength of three officers and 85 enlisted men, but in January of 1944 a Detachment "A" was formed and changed station to Podington, and thereafter the main detachment at Grafton maintained a general strength of 50 enlisted men and one officer. Just before coming overseas Lieut. Lester L. Osborne (later a captain) took over the company command from Lieut. Albert J. Lynch. Upon his discharge from the service in August of 1944 Capt. Osborne was replaced as commanding officer by Lieut. Patrick F. Plunkett (later captain), who had previously been serving the organization in a junior capacity. The 1140th M. P. Co. was disbanded on 15 April 1945.

CHEMICAL COMPANY

The 854th Chemical Company was activated 1 May 1942 at Fort George Wright under the command of Capt. (later Lt. Col.) John G. Harsch. 2nd Lt. Victor A. Ryan assumed command in August of that year and moved the company to Merced, Calif., and later to Reno Army Air Base. There were two more changes in command before the unit boarded the Queen Mary 1 June 1943. After landing at Greenock, Scotland, 6 June 1943, the organization proceeded to AAF Station 110, Polebrook. The company was divided into two detachments of 65 enlisted men and two officers each, one detachment remaining at Polebrook and the other moving to Grafton-Underwood. Lieut. Paul W. Simpson assumed command of Detachment "A," the segment at Grafton. The loading of incendiaries and sky-markers was the primary duty of the chemical company, inasmuch as they never had to perform the work for which they were intended, chemical warfare.

Q. M. COMPANY

The 1119th Quartermaster Company Service Group Avn (RS) was originally activated as the Det. QMC 3rd Supply, Avn, on 11 Feb 1942 at Florence Army Air Base, South Carolina. After twice being redesignated, it removed to Hattiesburg (Miss.) AAB as the 166th QM Co. Service Group in mid-August, 1942. That was still the unit's designation on 6 Jan 1943 when, after a brief stay at Camp Kilmer, it departed for overseas service. Nine days later it arrived at Army Air Force Station 110, in the U.K. On the 29th of January, while the 384th Bomb Group was still at Wendover, Utah, Hq. 166th QM Co., consisting of two officers and 38 enlisted men, was transferred to AAF Station 106 (Grafton-Underwood). A month before the bomb group arrived, the QM unit was redesignated 1119th QM Co. Service Grp., Avn, under the following officers: Capt. Vernon M. Bell, Jr., commanding; 1st Lt. Jack L. Frankel, 2nd Lt. Robert J. Lawler. By the time the bomb group arrived at the station, the 1119th listed its strength at three officers and fifty-four enlisted men.

33rd STATION COMPLEMENT

33rd Sta Comp Sq activated with cadre of six EM from 30th Base Hq & Air Base Sq Army Air Base, Charlotte, North Carolina. Cadre reported to Battle Creek, Mich., on 30 May 1943, and found Captain Bales detailed as commanding officer, with 2nd Lts. Arrington and Zettleman and 45 EM assigned. Major Otis K. Wright assumed command 9 June 1943, and was relieved 18 July 1943 by Captain Henry F. Beach. It was then assigned to Camp Shanks, New York, from Kellogg Field, Mich. Boarding HMT Aquitania 3 August 1943 the unit set

sail for overseas, arriving at Greenock, Scotland, on August 11th. The next day the Complement arrived at AAF Station 106, Grafton-Underwood, with a strength of nine officers and 109 enlisted men. During the period at Grafton it reached a peak strength of approximately 200 men and fifteen officers. Capt. Roland H. Bonnette became its commanding officer.

203rd FINANCE SECTION

The 203rd Finance Section Acc't. Disb. O. (Avn) FD was activated 17 January 1944 at Grafton-Underwood, the organization at that time consisting of two officers, 2nd Lt. John R. McKee, commanding, and 1st Lt. Joseph V. Scanlon, and thirteen enlisted men. Six days later, one officer (Lt. Scanlon) and six enlisted men were placed on duty at Kimbolton, AAF Station 117, as Detachment "A" of the 203rd Finance Section. An insight into the volume of work handled is given in disbursement figures for February, 1944, the unit's first month: Number of troops paid, 4400; number of officer's vouchers paid, 622; total amount disbursed $251,568.92. The unit had not only the responsibility of paying the parent organization, but also personnel of shifting SOS units in the vicinity. In the War Bond drive in August 1944 the Finance Section's tabulation showed that Grafton-Underwood had sold the greatest dollar amount of any Air Force station in the 1st Bomb Division, and ultimately the additional task of making payments to Italian Co-Operators in the area.

FIRE FIGHTERS

The 2001st Engineer Aviation Fire Fighting Platoon was activated 12 May 1943 at Bradley Field, Conn., with a strength of one officer and twenty-eight enlisted men. On the 27th of September this little group boarded a boat at New York, arriving at Liverpool, England, on October 13th and entraining for Grafton-Underwood the same day. A fire department already functioning on the field was relieved at that time, and 2nd Lt. Harold L. Bates was detailed as Station Fire Marshal. On 23 March 1944 the organization at Grafton became the 2023rd Engineer Aviation Fire Fighting Platoon.

ORDNANCE COMPANY

In November, 1944, the 1774th Ordnance Supply and Maintenance Company, Avn, already had eighteen months of overseas experience behind it. Its strength was listed as four officers and seventy-one enlisted men. Capt. Charles A. Baker had been the organization's commanding officer, but he was transferred to 384th Bomb Group Headquarters in December of 1943, Capt. Stanley C. Surratt taking over the ordnance company's command.

18th WEATHER SQUADRON

When the bomb group arrived overseas a weather station was already in operation at Grafton-Underwood, under the direction of Capt. Martin (later Lt. Col.) of the 18th Weather Squadron. Within a short time the duties were taken over by Capt. Alfred R. Westfall, who had come over with the 384th, but was not identified with the weather squadron. Capt. Henry G. Horak was head of the 18th Weather Squadron from October 1943 to late December 1944, when Capt. John P. Scarbrough took over the command, the latter remaining in that capacity until the end of the European war.

	NUMBER OF MISSIONS	AIRCRAFT CREDIT SORTIES	TONS OF BOMBS ON TARGET	OUR PLANES LOST	PERSONNEL LOST	ENEMY AIRCRAFT DESTROYED	ENEMY AIRCRAFT PROBABLY DESTROYED	ENEMY AIRCRAFT DAMAGED
JUNE 1943	5	72	92.7	10	100	5	3	7
JULY 1943	8	127	222.6	12	111	31	17	35
AUGUST 1943	6	102	119.3	11	111	20	2	12
SEPTEMBER 1943	7	111	264.3	9	80	15	1	5
OCTOBER 1943	7	116	220.5	9	80	39	2	15
NOVEMBER 1943	5	101	248.2	4	43	8	0	8
DECEMBER 1943	10	223	458.8	7	41	2	0	2
JANUARY 1944	8	139	383.8	6	66	26	3	4
FEBRUARY 1944	12	311	595.4	9	98	5	0	2
MARCH 1944	17	356	784.3	9	90	0	0	2
APRIL 1944	13	294	702.3	20	202	6	0	9
MAY 1944	23	537	1120.9	9	87	2	1	3
JUNE 1944	28	926	2094.0	2	20	1	0	2
JULY 1944	19	608	1337.2	7	81	4	5	8
AUGUST 1944	18	607	1397.0	1	30	0	0	1
SEPTEMBER 1944	16	549	1491.7	9	82	0	0	0
OCTOBER 1944	14	483	1253.0	4	40	0	0	0
NOVEMBER 1944	17	648	1735.7	4	47	0	0	0
DECEMBER 1944	14	527	1436.0	2	28	0	0	0
JANUARY 1945	15	473	1181.6	5	49	0	0	0
FEBRUARY 1945	15	544	1493.9	3	12	0	0	0
MARCH 1945	24	886	2378.5	4	49	0	0	0
APRIL 1945	15	558	1404.7	3	32	1	0	1
TOTALS	316	9348	22415.4	159	*1579	165	34	116

*This figure does not include men brought back dead with their planes or those killed in assembly crashes over England. The total would then be 1625.