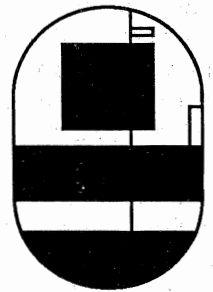




# PANTANELLA NEWS



JULY 1989

Published by 781st Bomb Squadron Association ©

NUMBER 17

## 1990 REUNION HOTEL SELECTED

Our Reunion 90 will be held at the Vista International Hotel in Waltham, Massachusetts. The following is a recent press release put out by the hotel.

### VISTA INTERNATIONAL HOTEL BOOKS FIRST FUNCTION WITH AIR FORCE BOMB SQUADRON

Dave Gerdes, sales and marketing director for Vista International Hotel Waltham (on left in photo), escorts Nancy and Ken Sutton, residents of Westborough, Mass., along a tour of the soon-to-be-completed Route 128 hotel.

Sutton, a former captain with the Air Force 781st Bomb Squadron, was viewing the future site of the squadron's 1990 reunion, scheduled for August 22 - 26. The reunion — one of the first major functions booked during the hotel's construction — will include accommodations, banquets, and ground transportation to nearby Hanscom Air Force Field for approximately 350 squadron veterans and their guests.

Vista International Hotel is part of the 80-acre Prospect Hill Executive Office Park on Fifth Avenue off Route 128 in Waltham. When completed in late fall of 1989, it will offer the amenities of downtown Boston hotels in a more convenient location for greater Boston travelers.

We are very excited about holding our reunion at this beautiful new hotel. And you can enjoy this luxury hotel at a price held within the price range that the majority requested - \$65. Yes, it is one half or less than you normally pay for a hotel of this class. Our early booking

and recognition to our WWII veterans organization made this possible.

Five major hotels were under consideration. Ken Sutton did a great job in checking out all hotels and making the initial contacts. He is now keeping tabs on the construction.

We will fill you in on more about the hotel and reunion planning in the next newsletter. In the meantime be sure to mark your 1990 calendars - August 23 - 26 for our next reunion.

## B-24 LIBERATOR 50th ANNIVERSARY REUNION

10,000 people attended this fantastic affair at Fort Worth May 17 thru 21. I arrived on the 18 and was engulfed in a sea of WWII B-24 fliers, factory workers, engineers, Rosie the Riveters, and anyone who had anything to do with that magnificent airplane. I never saw so many different caps and jackets designating their unit or affiliation.

All day action took place at the convention center where there were endless exhibits, movies, memorabilia, displays and a very happy crowd of attendees. It was quite a thrill to relive some of the times of over 40 years ago. Always someone willing to discuss a display or his experience with the B-24.

The 465th Bomb Group tail markings and listing for the two unit citations was displayed along with all the other units who flew B-24s. Some units sent in photos and the 465th was well represented with photos our squadron sent in including those of Lt. Col. Lokker's plane.

That evening two blocks from the center a street show took place. Music, dancing, a western show with shoot-outs and fun. While watching the affair I was greeted by Mike and Ida Deironimi, and Frank and Fran Jasicko, both from the Tipton crew. They invited me to join them for dinner and we had a very nice evening.

On Friday the Collings Foundation booth opened and I spent most of the day there as I was asked to help out. It was always crowded with

people wanting to know more about the "All American" and when it would fly. The T shirts were almost sold out this first day it was open and many contributions were made toward the restoration. At the booth I met other men from the 465th and another 781st - Spec and Billie Jean Christian. A total of about 15 men plus their spouses attended from the



465th.

In the afternoon there was great music by the Air Force band along with entertainment. That evening there was a B-24 symposium. It was one of the most interesting programs I have ever attended. I hope that some of the facts discussed about the B-24 will be available later on. There is quite a history to this plane that was designed and flown within one year.

Saturday afternoon was the show at Carswell AFB. The CAF B-24 (LB30) and Talechet's B-24 had flown in. Talechet's is in very poor shape and was not open to the public. There was a display of many Air Force planes and an aerial show.

Sunday was the memorial service and the grand banquet that evening. All in all a very well run program and it certainly gave a B-24 buff plenty of time to see a lot of history and meet many others there for the same purpose.



## MAIL CALL

**Robert M. Cross**, Secretary of Bowdoin College, wrote a letter after he forwarded a letter for me to Robert Bassinette. I had enclosed several newsletters and suggested he might want to read them before forwarding them on to Robert. Here is his letter, "It was good to hear from you and to have the material to send on to Bob Bassinette. If he gets as excited as I did by the material you enclosed, you will hear from him right off! I was stationed in Foggia and then in Florence with Detachment G of the Second Signal Service Battalion, attached to the 122nd SRE Company, and the newsletters brought back memories of those days. We were breaking and decoding German weather reports and furnishing them to the British and American Air Forces in Italy.

Thanks for sharing the newsletters with me, and good luck to all the members of the 781st and the 465th."

**Norman Smith**, the recipient of the last of the 273 WWII letters to be delivered wrote the following letter, "I would like to thank you for a day I will always remember, February 22, 1989, in Washington. Through your efforts, your association, and the help of so many involved, I have two letters which I will treasure as Buddy was and still is a part of my life.

Your concern and achievements were beyond belief. Our world today does not have enough people like you and your group, and also because our lives have crossed life will be more beautiful. You will be remembered."

*Buddy was his brother who was KIA on a B-17 shortly after he wrote his last letter. Norman added a P.S. to thank anyone in our squadron who may have helped in the last letter call. It should be noted that Pierre Kennedy spear headed the final search and did nearly all the work to locate Norman Smith. The ceremony in Washington was to honor the 781st for finding the last three families and to deliver the final one to Norman Smith.*

**William Tylavsky** (Engineer/Hurd) - When we got to Africa at Oudna Air Base (Rommels Headquarters) in February 1944, we started flying formation. Col. Rogers was our Group CO, Major McKenna was our Squadron CO. Some time in February or March our squadron gave up or transferred 8 or 12 planes to 98th Bomb Group in Italy. The reason - their losses were so great that they could not operate.

The Guardian Angel that came to Pantanella was the second one, the first going to the 98th. This Guardian Angel was returned to the U. S. and ended up somewhere in Oklahoma where it was abandoned and torn apart.

*We also know Rae Branch's plane was taken away in Africa. Any other crews have the same thing happen?*

**Ken Foden** (Ball Gunner/Tanenbaum) wrote the following letter, "Once again it was great receiving the Pantanella News. Because I didn't last very long in the squadron - arriving 21 May '44, shot down 6 June '44, I am learning many events from the "News" and reunions. Incidentally, we came out of the POW camp at Bucharest, Rumania end of August and departed Italy 12 September '44 and arrived in the USA 26 September '44.

When we arrived 21 May '44, Tanenbaum crew, George Harteloo was radar navigator. We ferried in a brand new B24H, radar equipped. I often wonder what happened to that ship.

Our aircraft on 6 June '44 was named "Patches," piloted by Ken Martin and co-pilot Rex L. Struble. We were on fire after leaving the Ploesti oil fields and all survived our bail out. Rex L. Struble, who has surfaced finally due to your efforts, might be able to fill in the final end of "Patches" from the front of the plane. I flew ball turret and we didn't see much of the officers after we were all captured. We were only a pickup crew that day and were strangers to all the officers.

I note Charlie Little (Tanenbaum Bombardier) has surfaced along with possibly Howie Shively (Tanenbaum Navigator). As a crew in Langley Field, Virginia, we flew radar equipped B-24's training future radar navigators. We all went to Howie Shively's wedding, I believe in the Army Chapel on the post.

The good job you and the others are doing is highly commendable. I may meet someone I know at one of our reunions before long.

I play soft ball (over 55 league) here in Florida with Jack Furnival, a pilot from the 782nd Bomb Squadron. He arrived in August 1944 and finished 50 missions. He is very interested in visiting the B-24 (at Kissimmee) and has sent in a large donation for his crew. We hope to visit this B-24 together in the near future. We better hurry before it leaves.

Thanks again for your great efforts and the other 781st men."

**Another request for help.** Since our search for the Postal Service we were contacted by a branch post office and recently I received a letter from a lady in Utah who is trying to find

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(415) 325-8356

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### **781st BOMB SQUADRON**

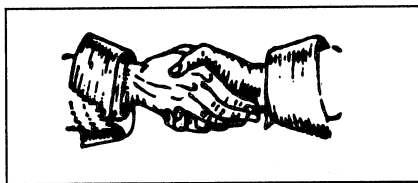
as part of the 465th Bomb Group, Fifteenth Air Force, flew B-24 Liberators from Pantanella Airfield located near Canosa, Italy, during WW11 (1944-45). During its 191 missions over Southern Europe it dropped thousands of tons of bombs, shot down 23 enemy aircraft (German) and received two Distinguished Unit Citations.

a WWII pilot, but she doesn't know his name!! She does have some particulars about him, but this one we'll take a pass on.

**Thomas B. Kyle** (Armament) returned his questionnaire and notes that he was chief power turret & gun sight specialist. In September 1944 he was transferred out and sent Mountain Home, Idaho for B-29 training for the South Pacific. Due to medical reasons he remained stateside for this tour.

After the war he joined the Wyoming National Guard, got a commission, and retired as Captain 18 years later. After working for the telephone company, then a major oil company, he has been a real estate broker for the past 23 years.

**FRED ABOUD** wrote about some of his experiences and reported that they brought the dog "Blechhammer" back with them and left her (or him) in Puerto Rico. Fred, when we get all the particulars on your return trip to the U. S. we'll make a report.



## WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

**Robert L. Bassinette**, (Bombardier/Blakita) 1 Asharoren Ave., Northport, NY 11768. After locating Robert Freeman I phoned him and during the conversation he mentioned that Bassinette had attended Bowdoin College in Maine. After hanging up I immediately began checking and located the city the college was in and called (Saturday), but they could not find a record. It was suggested that I call back on Monday to have the Secretary check it out. On Monday I reached Robert Cross, who remembered Bassinette very well and suggested I send a letter for Bassinette to him and he would forward it. The letter was sent and a week later Bassinette's reply was received.

He notes that a letter will be following, but he did fill in a few bits of information about him since Pantanella. He finished his tour of duty and returned to the U.S., got out of service in February '46 and returned to Bowdoin College and graduated. He spent his working years in the magazine publishing and is still active in it.

He took a sentimental journey with his wife of 35 years to Pantanella area in 1986. He has five children and is looking forward to seeing or hearing from old friends. I'm sure we will hear more from this friendly bombardier.

**OHIO ALERT** - I received a report that Ann Tanen replied to a talk show on TV. We're looking for Marvin Tanen (Tanenbaum) and he was living in Ohio. His wife was Ann Jackson from Ohio. Ohio men - check the phone books, he's there somewhere.

**BUFFALO NEW YORK ALERT** - Another report had Ray Hurd's name associated with a settlement in a suit. He still must be in the Buffalo area. Can anyone help?

## FOLDED WINGS

**Frank J. Dinkelkamp**, September 1988. Reported by Frank Clark. Also reported was that Dinkelkamp's wife, Robbeye, passed away within 32 days of Frank.

**Kenneth L. Tieden** passed away January 23, 1989, reported by Les Wheeler. Tieden was co-pilot on Wheeler's crew.

Our thoughts and prayers are with our fallen comrades and their families

## SICK CALL

**Walt Longacre** wrote that he has been on the inactive list following major surgery in early May. He comments that he is off booze for four weeks and that alone should make him well. Doesn't sound like Walt has lost his sense of humor. And the lack of new members located this past period shows that our star sleuth has been off the job. Walt also complained of poor response from some of you men - he threatens to mail some pens, paper and stamps.

We wish you speedy recovery Walt.

**LEO LUTRING** called regarding our plane numbers and informed me he had just been released from the hospital after having major surgery. He sounded great on the phone and reported that he is recovering very well.

We know there are others that are on the sick list. We wish you all well and hope for a speedy recovery.

## ADDRESS CHANGES

**Roy N. Byrd**, 1205 N. Adams, Fredericksburg, TX 78624.

**Francis M. Maccani**, 7853 Village Dr., Apt B, Cincinnati, OH 45242. Phone 513 530-9251

**Ken Foden's** new zip code is 34601.

**George Gaines, Jr.**, 1320 Mayflower, Melbourne, FL 32940.

**Ralph E. Maguire**, 53F Shore Drive, Peabody, MA 01960

**Robert H. Carr**, 2381 Springbrook Pky #508, Grand Rapids, MI 49506.

**Reno Ray**, Route 6 Box 233F, West Monroe, LA 71291.

## GROUP REPORT

I had anticipated that the group photo on page 9 in the last newsletter would get a reply from **Joe Tucci** (Group Sergeant Major). He reports that the man to the right is not he, but is M/Sgt. Blair Hutchinson from Group Flight Operations, who is now in Folded Wings. He was one of five who shared a casa with Joe.

Regarding the occasion Joe notes that it could have been the first plane to land at Pantanella. Joe feels he was still in Africa at the time since he was the only non-flight crew member to accompany the first cadre of aircraft to the staging area near Tunis.

Joe also made some kind comments on the newsletter and was happy that we are "bringing to life again that wonderful outfit of ours, The 465th Bomb Group (H), 781st Bomb Squadron." And he is looking forward to the reunion in Boston.

**Robert O. Daniel** (Group Communications) also wrote and confirmed M/Sgt. Blair Hutchinson as the man on the far right in the photo. He also commented on the motorcycle. When the group landed at Oudna they had to wait for a month for the weather to clear and the runway to be completed in Italy. Several of the men used their spare time to put together motorcycles from the piles and piles of captured German supplies and materials. He assumes the motorcycle in the photo is one of those.

**Ralph DuBois** (Group Intelligence Chief) also replied on the photo. He confirmed what the previous two have, that the identification of the man on the right is Blair Hutchinson. He also noted that he has been enjoying the newsletter and has just ordered the history book.

**Special Request from Group** - Although our history book is completed, our Historian, Harry Carl, is still accumulating historical data. What he is lacking is a set of group orders. Does anyone from group have a set??

## HISTORY BOOK

It was mailed on June 23rd. If you did not receive one and believe you have one coming check with O. J. Cowart. Orders were only sent to those that sent in a check.

We did order extra books, so it is still possible to get one by making out a check to the 781 Bomb Sqd for \$35 and mailing it to O. J. Cowart.

I am sure all of you that have received one are enjoying it. A thank you to the editor, Harry Carl is in order.

## THE MASCOT "ANGIE"

The first response with information on Angie was from Gene Janovich (Ordnance). He writes, "Angie was the Ordnance Section's pet. Notice the ordnance bomb truck in the background. She was often taken along by the work crews to the bomb dump and on the line.

I'm also sending along this picture of her sitting upright on a skeletal, a metal crate used for shipping the fins that attached to the bombs.

As I recall, we first had her at the McCook Air Base. I had previously sent to you a photo of the Ordnance Section at McCook and am almost certain that "Angie" is in that picture with us.

Morris Cohen, of our outfit, was mostly responsible for her trip from McCook to Newport News and then to Africa, and fi-

Angie was part of a small litter born in McCook. One day Morris came in with Angie and her sister whom he named Jessica. When we shoved off from McCook, the dogs were handed from one to another until we got rolling and then they had the freedom of the railroad car. Once boarding the USS Asa Gray at Hampton Roads, Morris put Angie in his duffel bag and conned me into carrying Jessica in mine. Both dogs made fine sailors and were fine until we dropped out of convoy near Gibraltar where the Navy boys began test firing their fore and aft guns. Then all hell broke loose as the dogs began yapping and created a real fuss. We had some cotton and I stuffed the ears of both dogs, then Morris and I put them in our field jacket to kind of deaden the noise.

After we got to Pantanella, Jessica disap-

peared and we never did locate her while Angie became the Ordnance group pet traveling back and forth with us to the bomb dump located down the road toward Canosa, thence back to the ship for loading the next days mission.

Morris had hoped to bring her back to the

USA but she met a small, well built red Italian dog and the last we knew she was in a family way. I don't remember how Morris found someone to take care of the dogs, but apparently he did and this Angie became a fond memory of Pantanella.

She was always on the line with us as evidenced by the bomb truck in her picture. In fact, both she and Jessica appear in the Ordnance Group picture taken at McCook which I know Harry Carl has and which will probably appear in the history book."

*Thanks men for all the details on "Angie." More on Angie in next newsletter when we hear from Morris Cohen.*

## B-24 RESTORATION

By the time you receive this newsletter All American, the name of the restored B-24, should be flying. July 15th is the date set if all systems are go. A roll-out party is planned at Kissimmee, Florida for all donors on that day. When it gets off the ground it will be the only restored B-24 in the world that is flying. The CAF is really an LB30 and the one at March AFB has not been restored and is in very poor condition. In addition there are only seven others known and they all are in museums on static display.

Most of you know by now that the 465th Bomb Group insignia will be on the right tail. The 781st and some of the Group men contributed over 90% of the 465th Bomb Group donations. Only one other group that served in WWII contributed more than the 465th. And only one other squadron beat the 781st. The leading group was stationed in England and will represent the 8th AF with markings on one tail and the 465th will represent the 15th AF with it's markings on the other tail. Our group and squadron will also be listed on the side of the plane.

Those sending in a contribution for a memorial of a comrade continues. **Bruce Miller** (Armament) wanted two of his good friends remembered. They were both Killed-In-Action and were from eastern Pennsylvania. One was T/Sgt Carl W. Gruber (O'Brien radio operator) who was killed on in a crash landing after returning from a mission. And S/Sgt Leo C. Stutzman (Griffith tail gunner) was killed in a plane crash on a mission to Maribor, Yugoslavia. Bruce knew Stutzman as a small boy in Valley View, Pennsylvania and recognized him when he arrived at Pantanella on a replacement crew.

Another ground echelon man, **Warren G. Carden**, has joined the Distinguished Flying Command. Warren was crew chief on Yellow J, Angel of the Sky. Additionally his contribution helps put the engineering section over the minimum so that the Engineering Section will be listed along with the memorial crews in the 781st squadron listing.

**O. J. Cowart Jr.**, from Communications, has also joined the Distinguished Flying Command. O. J.'s donation helped get the Communication Section also listed.

The first air echelon to join the Distinguished Flying Command is **John Layne**, Dahl Ball Gunner.

In addition to these individuals ten crews have become Honor Crews - **Jones, Dahl,**



Front L to R - Angie on fin, James Kipp, Frank Shonk, Joseph Ministrelli. Back L to R - Harold Thielke, Harold Schuster, John Zadrozny, Benedict Jacobs. Photo sent in by John Zadrozny and noted that it was taken March 31, 1945.

nally Italy. Of course he was abetted by the rest of us.

"Angie" was good for our morale. In a way she was a symbolic link to home and care-free youthful days.

And then a response from **Bob Freed** (Ordnance). "Pantanella News is always interesting but particularly so to me this time because of some of our boys are pictured on page 7 of the April 1989 issue. Also, directly above was a picture of our Ordnance pet "Angeline." While she was one of us, she actually belonged to Morris Cohen of Ordnance.



Dickey, Ellison, Martz, McKenna (Chief Jo-Jon), Shetterly (Sacajawea), Wilcox, Hendrickson (Princess Pat), and Althoff.

The 781st leads all other squadrons in Honor Crews and Sections.

For further information how you can help out contact the association office or the Collings Foundation, River Hill Farm, Stow, MA 01775. Phone 508-562-9182.

## REUNIONS

MCCOOK ARMY AIR BASE REUNION, Sept. 29 & 30, 1989. P.O. Box 29, McCook, NE 69001 for further information.

15TH AIR FORCE ASSOCIATION, August 13 - 17, 1989 at Las Vegas. PO Box 6325, March Air Force Base, CA 92518. It will be held at the Riviera Hotel for the low room rate of \$59. Bob Hope will be the star attraction.

LIBERATOR CLUB'S 50th Anniversary Celebration of the First Flight of the B-24 will be held September 20 - 24, 1989 in San Diego, CA. PO Box 15-2424, San Diego, CA 92115. This will be another affair similar to Fort Worth. The newly restored B-24, All American, will be the star of the show. It is expected to be flying by mid-July.

I will keep a list of anyone attending these reunions - if you will send me your name. Then if you contact me before the reunion I will let you know who will be attending.

## OUR SQUADRON'S B-24'S

In the request for more information on the 49 B-24's assigned to our squadron Leo Lutring wrote that he did not have any further information than what he had given us before.

In a request to David Orr he writes, "I regret that I left Pantanella with no records, a trait that has been uncharacteristic of me ever since. After having to destroy equipment and bury tons of hand tools I left there with a bad taste in my mouth."

*There have been various stories about closing down Pantanella. Parachutes and clothing was burned, and generally everything destroyed and all buildings bulldozed, except for the chapel and the Italian buildings that were there before the 465th. I suppose the engineering outfit that leveled the area would have the details, but does anyone else have any information?*

*Thanks to all of you who sent in serial numbers and plane names. We will publish a list later on.*

## THE SECOND BARI DISASTER

*An article was sent in by Milt Levinson from the 15 April 1945 Sortie, the Fifteenth Air Force publication, about the disaster. Milt also sent in a copy of a narrative of his memories of that day that he wrote for a class at Temple University after the war. The following is his story.*

"My story begins in the large seaport of Bari. A three day pass was tucked neatly away in my wallet - I had three days to relax with wine, women, and song.

My first stop was a barber shop in the heart of the old section of town situated on the water front. I instructed the proprietor, in broken Italian, how short I wanted my hair cut. He directed me to a large shiny barber's chair and selected a striped apron to cover me. I placed my duffel bag in the corner and sat down in the chair for my haircut. The barber wasted no time and swiftly went to work. I became tired of looking at the contents of his uninteresting shop, so I surveyed myself critically in the large plate glass mirror that covered the entire wall. A short period of time elapsed when suddenly a network of lines crisscrossed the surface of the mirrored wall! Next the huge plate glass window in front of the shop shattered into pieces. Two more seconds must have elapsed when an earth shattering roar filled the air. The blast reverberated several times while I sat dazed in the barber chair. Gathering my wits together I bolted out of the chair and ran to the door with several Italian patrons on my heels. The sky was filled with clouds of black oily smoke and a curtain of seething dust was settling over the streets. Windows and doors were hanging from their mountings. Broken glass covered the street and a fine drizzle of a black liquid had begun to fall like rain. It was oil! The people were pouring from their congested apartments and swarming onto the pavements. Old women in black clasped their hands together and screamed wildly. An additional explosion shook the ground. Little children with dirty faces, barefooted, clung tightly to their mother's skirts and cried. The white, panic stricken faces of the men did little to relieve the fears of their women and children. Many were crossing themselves and praying fervently.

A G. I. truck was parked in front of the barber shop. The driver was standing beside it, waiting for the explosions to cease. I was still wearing the striped barber's apron with

shaving cream on the side of my face. I ripped off the apron and dashed back into the shop to get my duffel bag. I recall throwing 15 lire over my shoulder at the barber as I dashed to the truck.

The driver was still standing in the street with a stunned look on his face. I approached him and said, "Let's get the heck out of here before something else blows up." He focused his eyes on me and blurted out, "Let's go."

We reached the outskirts of the city quickly and waited for an hour for the explosions to cease. The driver had some official business to attend to in Bari, so we returned to the city where he dropped me off at the dock area close to the barber shop. I asked the MP's what had caused the explosions and was told that a Liberty ship was being unloaded that had a cargo of aerial bombs aboard. Fire broke out and shortly thereafter the entire ship blew up. There was a huge loss of human life from the explosions. I saw long lines of ambulances returning from the dock area loaded with men, dead and alive, all covered with a thick coat of black oil.

It was a ghastly sight that I will never forget on that day in April, 1945 in southern Italy."

O. J. Cowart remembers Bari, "The harbor at Bari is a beautiful area. I lived in Bari for a month while attending intelligence School at Fifteenth Air Force Headquarters and observed the social activity of the Italians on the beautiful winding drive on the northern shore where many modern government business office building are located.

The dock area is on the southern shore. There were large apartment buildings five or six stories high surrounding the dock area. As I viewed the scene before me I thought it probably looked like some of the targets after our bombers had finished a mission. At the time I viewed the scene there was much rubble several stories high and with many bodies still buried. It must have been several days after the explosion because there was a most unpleasant smell. Apparently the bodies that were visible had been removed and many legs and arms without a body were still left scattered in the area.

The force of the explosion had lifted a large bow section of a ship out of the water and deposited it on the dock. I never did know what had caused the explosion, but presumed it was the same reason as the one that triggered the explosion at our Pantanella bomb dump."



Rear L to R, Ben L. Donahue, Pilot; Reuben L. Krogh, Co-Pilot; Harold Long, Navigator; Joseph Ormes, Bombardier  
Front L to R, Paul E. Poulin, Engr; Kenneth A. Koch, R/O; Richard L. Swanson, Ball Gunner; John R. Drinko, Nose Gunner; Robert Floyd, Top Gunner; Raymond W. Hill, Tail Gunner.

**THE DONAHUE CREW** - In each newsletter we will have the story on one of our squadron's crews. In this issue we will report on the Donahue crew.

Ben L. Donahue graduated from twin engine advance in April 1944 and took B-24 transition at Albuquerque in June 1944. From there he went on to the Repo' Depot in Leemore, California to pick up a crew for combat crew training. While there he was fortunate to meet Reuben Krogh. He had flown with Reuben during basic training in the BT 13 at Merced, California. Reuben was at Leemore as a co-pilot, so Ben, knowing his ability, asked him to join him on his crew and Reuben readily accepted.

After three days of assembling his crew they travelled by train to Tonopah, Nevada for combat crew training.

By mid October the training was completed and they were transferred by train to Hamilton AFB for assignment overseas. From here, again by train, they were transferred to Camp Patrick Henry, Virginia along with a large contingent.

Two days later they boarded a troop ship, part of a nine ship convoy. After nine days at sea they docked in Naples harbor. Then departing from Naples on a British troop ship they got off at Taranto, Italy. From there it was by truck convoy to Bari Italy.

On December 2, 1944 they arrived at Pantanella and were assigned to the 781st Bomb Squadron. They were assigned Ernie

Van Asperen crew's tent since Ernie had just moved in a new tufa casa that he helped build. Ben had selected that tent because it had some nice tile on the floor. He found out a few hours later that Ernie had a price on the tile - Ben recalls it was about \$100. Later on Ben constructed his own tufa casa and moved in it in mid January. And he took the \$100 tile with him so the new occupants of his old tent had no charges.

The crew's first mission was on December 17 with Ernie Van Asperen as pilot (see newsletter #2 the Candy Man). The target was Blechhammer.

The next mission the crew was on it's own and went to Maribor, Yugoslavia on the 19th of December. Griffith's crew went down and Donahue lost an engine on the bomb run and returned alone. With the engine out and running low on fuel they headed to Vis. His enterprising bombardier got them on a B-17 for a flight to Bari and they were back at Pantanella by midnight.

On January 20th Ben remembers it as a bad mission in Yellow K. Again low on fuel in this aging plane he made a crash landing on an unfinished airfield north of Ancona - not enough fuel to make Ancona and an unfinished runway is better than a water landing. Ben's full story on Yellow K will follow in another newsletter.

His first crew fatality was Joseph Ormes who was flying with Robert Jones crew as bombardier when they went in the Adriatic

and all were killed.

Another crew member was killed when the Martz crew went down over Nove Zamky, Germany. Harold Long was flying as navigator and lost his life near the target with nine other men on the crew.

Most of the crew who survived flew together with the average completing 27 missions before returning home after the war. With his crew and Gene Martis as navigator they left from Gioia on June 6, 1945 and made the 1489 miles to Marrakech. From there 1380 miles to Dakar, the next day the big hop across the Atlantic and 1800 miles to Natal. From there to Georgetown, New Guinea, another 1800 miles.

Over the jungles they lost an engine and made an emergency landing at Trinidad. Four days later, after an engine change, they flew to Puerto Rico and then on to Savannah, Georgia on June 16, 1945.

Ben's recent letter notes that 6 of the crew are still living and five attended the San Antonio reunion. The missing man, Robert Floyd, top gunner has not been located.

*Ben is a real aviation enthusiasts. He has been a member of the Aviation Pioneers for many years and helps do their newsletter. He is also active as a Board member of the American Aviation Historical Society. Ben has helped in the mailing of every issue of the Pantanella News and has served as Association Secretary. He was the second man called at the start of the association.*

## MISSION NUMBER FIVE *by*

*Francis Clark.* This is a story of a bombing mission in a B-24 Liberator bomber from a U. S. Army Air Corps base in Pantanella, Italy to a target in Germany in 1944.

I arrived in Italy, at the 781st Bomb Squadron, on September 15, 1944. I flew four missions as a navigator on Grant Benson's crew. The missions were to Casarsa and San Dona in Italy, Munich, Germany, and Scaramango Harbor in Greece.

This story concerns my fifth mission to an oil refinery at Blechhammer, Germany. The mission lasted quite a bit longer than anyone had planned.

Facts for this story are from notes taken by me in 1944-45 and to the best of my recollection are a factual account of my experience.

I was routed out of bed at four in the morning by the duty sergeant at Pantanella Air Base. It is Friday the thirteenth of October, 1944. I was not on the flying schedule, but George Gaines' navigator, Van Reynolds, was flying deputy group lead and I was chosen as the replacement in Gaines' aircraft.

At 1125 hours, after dropping our load of bombs on a refinery over Blechhammer, Germany, we were badly hit by anti-aircraft fire at 24,000 feet. The number three engine was knocked out and the prop governor is inoperative on number one. We were hit by many shrapnel in the wings and fuselage and are leaking fuel. Sergeant Ed Chapin was wounded at one of the waist gun positions. We changed course to fly to a friendly field in Russia, but are losing altitude at about five hundred feet per minute.

Chapin was wearing a chest type parachute and they snapped the pack on upside down so he could pull the D ring with his left hand. His right arm was badly mangled and he was suffering from shock. The pilot sounded the alarm to bail out before we had reached the Russian lines. Our altitude was about 2500 feet when we abandoned ship. Some of the crew helped Ed Chapin out the escape hatch.

I spotted nine chutes while I was in the air so everyone got out and all chutes opened. The plane crashed and exploded before I reached the ground.

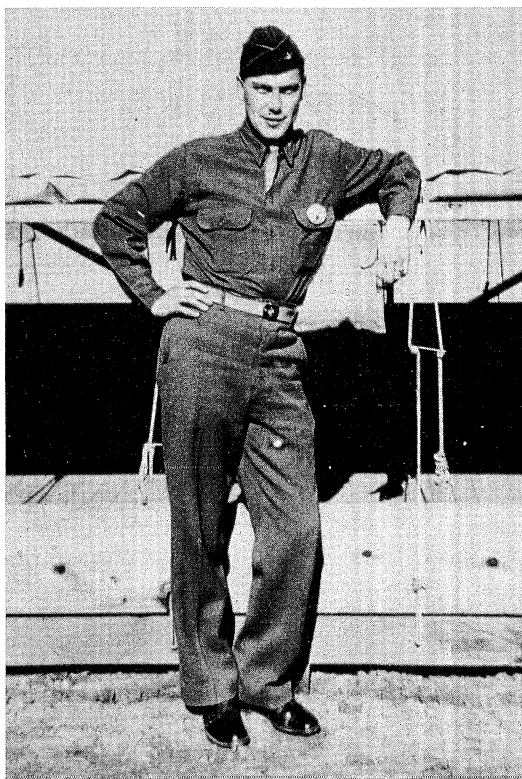
Before reaching the ground, I saw three armed German soldiers eagerly awaiting my arrival. One of them fired a couple rounds from his machine pistol, but didn't do any damage. Due to this distraction and some rocks on the steep hillside, I managed to break my left ankle as I landed. The Germans took my parachute, escape kit, and emergency rations, but left me with my watch and fountain pen. I was not carrying my .45 pistol which probably would have just gotten me in trouble. In about half an

hour two more soldiers brought Chapin to where we were.

One of our captors, who apparently had some medical training, made a splint out of tree branches for Chapin's arm. He was given a shot of morphine from the first aid kit. Fortunately, most of the bleeding had stopped.

Two of the guards put us in a horse drawn wagon and took us to the town of Tuchow, Poland, which was four or five miles away. The trip was far from enjoyable as the road was just a pair of ruts and the hard wagon magnified all the bumps. My ankle pained quite a bit and it was in a tight GI shoe and a leather flying boot, so I am sure that Chapin's shattered arm was really giving him a bad time.

We were taken to some type of Army



*Frank Clark in 1944*

headquarters at Tuchow, where two German officers tried to interrogate us. As they spoke no English, they didn't find out much. We were searched again and they put a bandage on Chapin's arm and a wire splint over my flying boot.

They took us to the local jail to spend the night. We were put in separate cells, three blank stone walls, a steel door with a small peep hole in it, and a stone floor. There was a pile of straw in one corner and a bucket in another and that was it. Later they brought us a slice of coarse, black bread and a tin cup of warm ersatz coffee. We hadn't eaten since about five in the morning, but the bread was too tough to chew. We didn't sleep too

well, partly because of the lice in the straw.

The next day, October 14th, we were joined by Flight Officer, Murray Knowles, the co-pilot, who had also spent the night in the jail. We were taken by military truck to the town of Tarnow. A couple of Polish civilians in the truck were in a work detail for the German Army. When they found out we were Americans they gave us some sausage and a cigarette out of their lunch buckets.

In Tarnow we were joined by three more of our crew members, Sgt. Louis Deslatte, engineer; Sgt. Tom McNew, tail gunner; and Sgt. Charles Murray, ball turret gunner. Still unaccounted for are Lt. George Gaines, pilot; Sgt. Karl Brown, radio operator; and Sgt. Larry Tiehen, nose gunner.

We were all questioned again, this time by a Luftwaffe officer who could speak English fairly well. As far as I could find out the only answers they got from anyone were name, rank, and serial number. When the German Hauptman (Captain) finished asking me questions with no results, he proceeded to tell me things I didn't have any idea he would know. The number of our bomb group, the name of our Commanding Officer (Colonel Lokker), and the fact that our group was building a new mess hall. I guess some of the Italian civilians working at our base are still quite friendly to the Germans. We spent the afternoon in a room with four guards for company. A Polish civilian gave the guards some apples and cigarettes for us.

That night we were taken by train, arriving in Krakow early the next morning. We had four guards for the trip and were met at

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**If you attempt to escape  
you will be shot and you  
will die.**

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the station by six more. One of the new guards spoke English, but not very well. He told us, "If you attempt to escape you will be shot and you will die." It sounded sort of funny but no one laughed. They loaded us in a truck and took us to the other side of town to what had apparently been a high school gymnasium.

This turned out to be our home for the next two days. We had flat wooden beds and one blanket, two bowls of soup, and four cigarettes per day. We also had two guards at all times with bayoneted rifles and hand grenades in their belts.

The morning of the sixteenth we left our charming little abode and went for another train ride. We disembarked at Lodz, Poland

that night and spent about two hours riding on half a dozen different street cars. We were lost and so were the guards, but we sort of enjoyed the ride through the city. We saw a lot of civilians and even a few pretty girls.

When the civilians on the streetcars found out we were Americans they smiled and seemed very friendly. They had suffered so much at the hands of the Germans and they knew we are trying to continue the fight against their enemy. I was carrying my left flight boot as I couldn't get it on over my wire splint. One kind hearted lady poured a bunch of fruit in it from her shopping basket. They tasted like plums and we all enjoyed the treat.

I forgot to mention that when we left Krakow we were assigned Luftwaffe guards who treated us a little nicer than the original Army guards. Finally, after wandering around Lodz on street cars for quite some time, the guards managed to get where they were headed. It was a Russian prisoner of war camp. We were put in with some Russian officers, quite a few were pilots who had flown the A-20. That was an American fighter-bomber plane and we had sent quite a few of them to Russia under the Lend Lease Agreement. They waved their arms like all pilots and kept saying "Boostone" (Boston) which was our designation for the airplane.

Our conversation with the Russians was by sign language as they spoke no English. Mostly words like "Americanski", "Roosevelt", "Stalin", and "Tovaritch" (friend). We had two blankets on a straw filled bag that night and more lice. The Russians got two meals a day, bread and ersatz for one and the same with a bowl of soup for the other. They did not have any tobacco. They ground up sticks by hand, toasted them on the stove and wrapped them in newspaper to make cigarettes. We tried them and though they were toasted like Lucky Strikes, that is where the similarity ends.

On the night of the seventeenth, they split up our group and took Ed Chapin and me to a hospital. The rest of the group were taken to prison camp. I left my heavy flying pants and my flight boots with the other fellows as I couldn't manage them with my leg in a splint. They loaded Ed and me on a train with two guards. We went as far as Poznan where we waited for a couple of hours, then we boarded a train for Wolsztyn, Poland. We arrived in Wolsztyn, which is about two hundred kilometers southeast of Berlin, in the forenoon of the eighteenth. We traveled from the train station a short distance to the prison hospital. Our means of transportation was a stretcher on a hand cart propelled by

two Polish civilians. We received a warm welcome from a couple of Polish civilian doctors who spoke fairly good English. They gave us some cigarettes, we had a tub bath, had our clothes deloused, and an orderly shaved us. This made us feel much better.

We were taken to a barracks and put in a nice clean bed. Already in the barracks were an American Staff Sergeant, a French Lieutenant, a French Sergeant, and a Norwegian Officer. It was about twenty four hours before the American would talk to us. He thought we were planted by the Germans to pump information from him. His name was Marcus Shook from Belmont, Mississippi. He was a radio operator on a B-17 from the Eight Air Force out of England. They had been dropping food and medical supplies to the partisans who were surrounded at Warszawa.

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## **They were shot down and the Germans machine gunned him on the way down in his parachute**

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They were shot down and the Germans had machine-gunned him on the way down in his parachute. This had happened in early Septemeber. Both bones on one leg were broken and he was in a cast up to his hip. Except for the Polish doctors, he hadn't heard any one speak English since he was shot down.

The Norwegian officer was an Engineer named Lt. Holtere. The Frenchmen were Lt. Cutay, and, I think the Sergeant's name was Delalande. Mark Shook was certainly glad to see Chapin and me. He said he didn't know the English language could sound so good. The Polish Dr. Jimbowski dressed Chapin's wound and put a splint on his arm. He bandaged and taped up my ankle. He was unable to put it in a cast because of swelling. It was all black and blue and about twice normal size.

Things are quite good here. After about three weeks we started getting one package per person each week from the American Red Cross. Our beds are clean and so far the barracks is fairly warm. A few days after we got here they moved the two Frenchmen to another camp. They were real friendly, but spoke no English.

The Frenchmen had been doing what cooking was done in the barracks and we are going to miss them. Chapin is the only one able to get out of bed and he only has the use of one arm. Joe, our Polish orderly, is a great

help. He makes us ersatz coffee in the morning and brings us the Kraut Ration of soup and bread around noon.

At night we try to cook something to add to the ration. The Red Cross parcels contain a can of potted meat or Spam, canned fruit, canned vegetables, cigarettes, cracker chocolate bars, pudding, etc.. We pool our supplies and try to have a decent meal once in awhile. We even bribe our German guards to bring us potatoes, vegetables, and fresh bread when we can. They have to sneak them in as the German officers take a very dim view of this practice. The guards really go for the American cigarettes and chocolate bars.

After about a week the swelling on my ankle went down enough for Doctor Jimbowski to put a cast on my ankle. It feels much better now and I can hobble around a little.

About the tenth of November, Lt. Holter left us and was moved into another barracks with the other two Norwegians. One was an Engineering officer and the other a Naval Commander. I will miss Lt. Holter as he has been trying to teach me to play double solitaire. The cards are German and have different markings than ours, especially the face cards. As Lt. Holter spoke no English and I didn't understand the game - we had quite a lively game. If I would misplay he would slap my hand and yell, "Nein," but I was slowly learning.

On November 13th they removed the cast from my leg and bandaged it up again. Still swollen and quite painful and a terrible color. From what I understand from the Polish doctor I had pulled some muscles and tendons loose from the bone. This same day five American officers arrived from Oflag 64, the officers prison at Altburgund, Germany. They were all patients under the care of an MD named Lt. Godfrey. The SAO (Senior American Officer) is Major Engles, a cub pilot and Liaison officer for the Field Artillery. According to the Doc, we can expect more patients from the Oflag.

Previously, I had written to the SAO at Oflag 64, trying to get some clothes, and toilet articles for us from the big camp. Apparently the Germans had delivered the letter, as a package arrived about November twenty-fifth. We each got razor blades, comb, shaving soap and a brush, a suit of summer underwear size 44, a couple of pairs of socks, towels and handkerchiefs. It made us feel almost civilized again.

On the sixteenth of December, I managed to come down with a case of diphtheria. I never did figure out where I picked up the



bug, as no one else was affected. I went to bed the night before feeling alright, but woke up in the night with fever and chills. The next morning Dr. Godfrey diagnosed it as diphtheria and put me in isolation in a small room alone to prevent any spread of the disease. I don't remember much about the next few days, but they told me the fever broke after six days. Our Polish orderly, Stanislaus Marecki, stayed with me all of the time and apparently was a real good nurse. The doctor says I am to stay in bed until further notice, which is no hardship, as I am too weak to do anything else.

Marecki was a Medical Orderly with the Polish army and had been imprisoned by the Germans back in 1940. He only knows a few words of English, but we can communicate quite well by sign language. He saw a movie one time with Sonja Heine and he thought she was the most beautiful girl in the world. He used to roll his eyes and say "Sonju Heene" and it would really crack you up. He had a picture of her taken from some magazine and pinned it up in my room while he was there. He couldn't understand why I didn't know her when we were both from America.

Christmas Day 1944 was quite unexciting in this part of the world. I was very weak and had a sore throat. I had porridge for breakfast, the Kraut soup ration at noon, and a dish of jello in the evening.

On January sixth we received our Christmas parcel from the Red Cross. All kinds of goodies, canned turkey, plum pudding, mixed nuts, canned fruit, and hard Christmas candy. It was quite a treat for us. I also received a curved stem pipe, a can of Prince Albert tobacco, and a deck of playing cards.

We have had a Lt. Morgenrath with us for quite a few weeks. He had had a severe case of dysentery along with other complications for quite some time. Dr. Godfrey has been after the Germans to let him move him to the civilian hospital in town, because he needs more attention and medication than is available here. The Germans have refused, probably because the Lieutenant is Jewish. He passed away tonight in the barracks. Our first American death here and it is real sad because we think with a little care he would have made it.

On January tenth, Captain Monroe and Lt. Hysick left on repatriation. They will be exchanged for some Germans that we are

holding. We envy them, but they have been looking through the wire for a long time and sure deserve it.

Today I left my bed for the first time in over three weeks. Really felt good to get up and move around like a human being. Still pretty weak but I can move around for an hour or so and then back to bed. Doc says it is verboten to leave the room.

It is now January twenty-first and there has been a lot of Luftwaffe activity around here the last few days. Their fighter planes have been flying real low over here heading east to the Russian front. We have had several air raid alarms, and we head for the slit trenches, but no bombs have fallen in this area. Quite a lot of civilian traffic, in old wagons and on foot, evacuating through here to the west. Scuttlebutt has it that the Russians are advancing westward quite rapidly.

There was a great deal of excitement around old Wolsztyn here on the twenty-third. Not only civilian traffic, but also military vehicles going through town



*The first reunion in 1986 was the first time these men had seen each other since going down 13 October 1944. L to R Louis Deslatte, Engineer - Edward Chapin, Ass't Engineer - Larry Tiehen, Nose Gun - Francis Clark, Navigator.*

headed back into Germany. We can hear the wheels rolling over the cobblestones all night long. The Deutsch camp officers were burning papers at the Commandant's office this morning. It looks like they may be getting ready to retreat.

I left my room for the first time since December sixteenth. The interior guards were missing, but we still have the perimeter guards and the dogs around the fence. Kolchek and I took a walk over to the Russian compound which joins us. There are several hundred Russian prisoners here and they are a sorry looking group. A lot of them are crippled and wounded and they all look like

they are about starved to death. We understand they only get about half the ration that we do and we are all losing weight on what we get.

Yesterday, the Germans refused to let Dr. Godfrey go to the food magazine where our Red Cross parcels are stored. Today we found out that the Germans had stripped it. Now we are out of cigarettes and the goodies again. They did leave a couple of the British Red Cross parcels. We can hear a lot of bombing and artillery fire, so we think the front is getting quite close to us. We feel the Russians are quite close as most of the Germans in the area have left. We still have guards on the fence and in the towers.

It has been an exciting day here on the twenty-fifth of January. About 9:00 P.M., we heard machine gun and small arms fire from the northeast. The sounds came nearer rapidly. The guards at the gate said it was only Polish partisans, but from the amount of firepower we hope it is a Russian spearhead. From 10:00 P.M. until about 2:00 A.M. we spend some anxious hours. The firing was

going on all around the camp and a few artillery shells landed so close we thought the barracks would collapse. The lead was really whistling through camp, but the postens (guards) wouldn't let us leave the building to get in the slit trenches, so we sweated it out in the barracks. We sure hope the Russians don't mistake this for a German Army camp.

At two in the morning we realized that the main concentration of firing had passed us and now was on the other side of town. A few shots still blazed out at the edge of the Lazarette, but we ventured outside to see what was going on. We could see the large castle just outside the fence was on fire. The Hitler Jugend had used it for a headquarters and the Wermacht

had used it for a storehouse. The ammunition there kept exploding until about noon the next day. We later learned the Germans had dynamited it before leaving.

A little after two the first of the Russian Panzer troops entered the compound. By this time the guards had all pulled out except three dead ones by the main gate. We learned later that the Russians had surrounded the town and that very few Krauts had escaped.

The Russians brought vodka into the camp and the Russian Kriegeres in the other compound were really celebrating. Three Russian officers, including one woman,

came to our barracks with a canteen of vodka. We drank a toast to Roosevelt and Stalin and did a lot of backslapping and laughing. They didn't speak any English. After they left we stayed in the barracks as the party was really going in the Russian compound and we didn't want any of Stalin's troops to mistake us for Germans.

On the morning of the twenty-sixth, we strolled down to the main gate. There were many Polish civilians and Russian soldiers and they were real friendly after we pointed to the American flags on our jackets. It looked good to see the main gate torn down and no guards in the lookout towers and no guard dogs. We had no intention of trying to go in to town as they were still digging out hidden Germans. Every once in a while we would hear a flurry of shots or a burst of machine gun fire.

That afternoon we weren't too happy as the Luftwaffe was strafing and dive bombing the town and the road near the Lazarette. No direct hits in the compound, but the ricochets came too close for comfort. We spent quite a bit of time in the slit trenches. FW 190's and ME 109's were doing the strafing and there were several Stuka dive bombers.

The planes pulled out about four in the afternoon and we went down to the main gate to watch the Russian Army roll through. We received quite a pleasant surprise. The tanks were Russian made but most of the other equipment was American. They had Studebaker, Dodge and Chevrolet trucks, American half tracks, Willys jeeps and Harley Davidson motorcycles. On the half tracks they had four 50 caliber machine guns mounted on a revolving base and used them for anti-aircraft guns.

There is much speculation about how soon we might be evacuated. Probably be a week or two as the Russians are pretty involved fighting a war and probably aren't going to be much concerned about us.

It is now the twenty-seventh and we are relaxing a bit. I racked up about ten hours sleep last night. Only had about three hours total the last two nights because of all the activities. My nerves feel a little better after a good night of sleep. The planes are still doing some strafing today and we have quite a path worn out to the slit trench. We think the Russkies shot down a Focke-Wulf 190 today. He made a low strafing pass and there was a lot of firing and he was pouring out black smoke as he went out of sight.

Colonel Shields, the two Italian Generals, and Bernard went into Wolsztyn today to meet with the Russian Commandant and

find out what their plans are for us.

The Russian soldiers are very friendly to us after they find we are Americans. I guess they appreciate all the equipment they have received from us through the Lend Lease Agreement. They certainly have a different feeling for the German soldiers. Today two of the Polish orderlies discovered twelve Germans hiding in town and blew the whistle on them. The Red Army smoked them out with grenades and made prisoners of the ten who survived.

The Russians sure do things different than our Army. They gathered up several hundred of their people who had been prisoners here, gave them rifles and a little equipment, and sent them down the road towards Berlin. Some had their arms in a sling, a lot of them with bandages, and all of them in real poor physical shape because of illness and malnutrition.

It is now the first of February and we are still here. Nothing very exciting to write about. We have been without lights for a couple of days, so when it gets dark we go to bed. Major Haggard left yesterday to try to contact the Russians about getting us out of here. The last we heard of Colonel Shields and the others they were heading for Poznan in a car with a Russian driver.

The procession of Red Army equipment (mostly American made) is still rolling through town. The front has finally moved a ways to the west. The other morning a group of Russian tanks parked by the gate. We exchanged waves with the crews and they kept motioning us to climb up on one of the tanks. Never having been near one before, another fellow and I clambered up on top. We got to look it over pretty well when all of a sudden someone blew a whistle and the machines started lurching down the road. We rode along about four blocks trying to find out where the convoy was headed. They kept saying "Berlin, Berlin," so we bailed out in the ditch.

The Russian rations are about the same as we had when the Germans were here. A bowl of soup each day and some bread. Soup is a misnomer, it's more like a liquid stew, mostly vegetables, sometimes some sort of meat. Usually quite gristly meat but it is filling. We used to have a sick joke when the Germans were feeding us. If someone found a good chuck of meat in his bowl someone always had to comment that he thought one or two of the guard dogs were missing.

The Russian soldiers are generally quite friendly to the Americans and quite a few have been coming into camp to see us. However, a few have come in all tanked up

on vodka and they are a different story. Lt. Gray and Stan Marecki have had their wrist watches taken away and the other night one poked his pistol in Mark Shook's face and took his away. Once in a while we will hear a shot in camp but as far as we know there have been no casualties.

It is now February sixth and nothing interesting happening. The front has apparently moved quite a ways to the west as we cannot hear artillery fire now. The planes we

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## **The planes we see now have Red Stars instead of Luftwaffe markings.**

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see now have the Red Star instead of the Luftwaffe markings. Captain Roszbach, who speaks fluent German, has been listening to the news on the radio at the civilian hospital in town. The Russians apparently have a 500 kilometer front on the Oder River. Berlin is being evacuated and trenches have been dug to defend the city. The Americans and British have made a couple of breakthroughs on the western front. The First Cavalry Division has entered Manila. It is great to hear some good news. We have been out of touch for a long time.

The other night we saw a large group of probably two thousand German prisoners being marched through Wolsztyn toward the east. Following the column was a group of French civilians including a woman and a small boy. They had been in Germany doing forced labor, and were put up for the night at the Lazarette. That night thirty-four men slept on the floor in the room next to Ed and myself. The woman and child were housed in the chapel. Yesterday they built beds for twenty-six next door to us and the others moved to the Italian compound.

That same night, three GI's arrived in camp. They had escaped from Stalag IIB at Hammerstein and came through the Russian lines. Sounds like they had an exciting trip and were sure glad to see some more Americans. We now have twenty-seven Americans here and I think we are all more than ready to be somewhere else. Nothing interesting in the way of food. Doctor Grantarski has been appointed Camp Commandant by the Russians, but he doesn't have much in the way of supplies.

It is the ninth of February and things are about the same here. We have been told several times that we were to be evacuated by truck, but so far nothing has come of it. We can hear train whistles in town now and

hope that when the trains start up again maybe we can get out of here. Our food ration is still pretty skimpy and we are out of cigarettes and tobacco.

Last night we could hear bombing and some artillery fire which sounded too close for comfort. We wonder if we are part of a Russian spearhead and if the Krauts should counterattack and take this area again we would really be in a bad way.

We now have Russian guards at the gate and we are supposed to get a pass from the Camp Commandant to leave the compound. However, there is a small hole in the back fence that the guards are not aware of and we can slip out there and wander into town. Ed Chapin and I took quite a walk today, slipped through the fence and kept away from the soldiers in town. We traded a package of British tea to an older Polish couple for some fresh eggs and a couple of onions. Tonight we had fried potatoes, onions and fried eggs with our hard, dark bread. It really tasted good. With our Red Cross food all gone we will be on Russian rations entirely from now on.

I went down to room number two today when a Russian officer and a woman came into camp. We have been seeing women soldiers off and on ever since the Russians came, but this one was quite attractive which is quite a change. Young, probably 18 or 20, and very nice looking. She was an Army nurse and he was a tank commander.

Brand new rumors here on the night of February twentieth. We don't know if there is any truth to it, but sounds favorable. Captain Rossbach is going to town to see the Russian Commandant and try to get passes for us so we can head eastward and get a little further from the front. We would be going on our own and the Russians would accept no responsibility for our actions. We hear that the Polish railway people have the lines repaired as far as Leszno. We plan to either catch a ride on a freight or hitch a ride on the highway. The plan now is to leave those unable to travel and take off in the morning. All we can take when we leave is what we can carry on our backs. This shouldn't be too much of a problem because we don't have very much stuff.

Well, our plans didn't work out. It is now the fourteenth and we didn't get to leave as planned. A Russian Quartermaster Lieutenant, who is in charge of the camp, refused to

give us passes to leave camp. Rossbach took off anyhow. Now we have a guard at the hole in the fence as well as at the gate. We can apply for a pass to visit town for a couple of hours, otherwise we are still prisoners. We have been here three weeks now since being liberated, and are getting anxious to get out of here. Seems like with all the American equipment these people have they could spare a 6x6 truck for transportation.

It is now the nineteenth and we are planning to take off on our own tomorrow. Several of the fellows have already slipped away.

It is February twentieth and we made good our threat to leave. Ed Chapin, Justin Ware, and I slipped through the fence about seven this morning. We went down to the railroad station at Wolsztyn and crawled into a boxcar on a train that is supposedly headed for Lublin, Poland. The car was full of Polish refugees returning from forced labor camps in Germany. The train pulled out about 1300 and finally got to Leszno at

spent most of the rest of the trip walking up and down to keep warm.

At five in the morning we arrived in Krotoszyn and were told that was as far as the train was going. We hung around a warm fire at the signal tower until about eight o'clock. We found out there was a Polish Red Cross station in town. They gave us a cup of hot barley water and a slice of bread and let us wash up. We found out there would be no more eastbound trains that day so we hung around the Red Cross and slept on the floor there that night. One of the volunteers at the canteen spoke English. She had come to Poland from Wisconsin some twenty years ago. During the afternoon we wandered into a bakery and the owner gave us each a fresh loaf of bread.

We left Krotoszyn about ten on the morning of the twenty-second in a third class coach. There were only three wagons (cars) and they were very crowded with refugees, but we did manage to get a seat. The train arrived in Ostrow at noon, we looked up the

Red Cross and were taken to their house for military men. We were the first Americans they had seen and they treated us real well. One of the girls took the three of us and a British flight sergeant to the keno (movie) in the afternoon. It was a pre-war Polish film; we couldn't understand the language but we enjoyed it anyhow. For an hour or so we sort of forgot the situation we are in.

We had planned to leave in the morning, but Justin wasn't feeling very well, so we stayed over. The British boys left during the forenoon. That night Ed and I spent the evening with a Polish family. A secretary at the Red Cross invited us to have supper with her family. One of her brothers spoke English and another brother was a pilot, so it was a busy evening.

The pilot kept asking us questions about our Air Corps and about our aircraft and the younger one was kept busy interpreting. We had a nice meal, ham, vegetables, bread and salad and even a glass of schnapps. We took their name and address and also the address of their father in Brooklyn.

On Saturday, the twenty-fourth we left Ostrow about seven in the morning. We were in a refugee coach and arrived at Lodz at two o'clock. We traveled with three Polish Army captains and one of them spoke English quite well. At Lodz we went to the Red Cross and they billeted us in an old German Army barracks that they had taken over. We had some soup, bread, spread with raw



*At the second reunion in Dayton in 1987 George Gaines, center, the pilot of the crew that went down, joins the four other crew members that met at the first reunion.*

1500. One of the Russian soldiers came in and searched all the refugees, probably looking for weapons. Maybe just looking for valuables as he took a watch away from a young girl and one from her mother. When he found out we were "Americans" he threw us a salute and walked on past us.

We sat on a siding in Leszno until about nine-thirty that evening when we started rolling again. At two in the morning our train pulled onto a siding and they unhooked the engine. So, we found another freight that was headed eastward. The car we had been in had a coal stove in one corner and some straw on the floor. The new car was an open top coal car, very dirty and very cold. We

meat and onions, and a cup of ersatz coffee. We caught up with the British fellows again. There are quite a few GI's here who are also on their way eastward. I met one fellow from Aberdeen, South Dakota who had been stationed in Fort Meade for three years with the cavalry. He told us he used to play with the Lawrence Welk band.

One of the Polish women at the Red Cross told us a real grim story about this town. As the Russian forces were approach

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## **The Jerries supposedly locked 300 Polish civilians and 100 Americans in a building, soaked it with benzine, and torched it.**

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ing the Jerries supposedly locked about 300 Polish civilians and 100 Americans in a building, soaked it with benzine and torched it. She said the bodies are still in the ruins but we declined the opportunity to view the debris. This is the same town where we stayed one night when we were first captured. I recognized the train station and also all of the street car lines. This is where we stayed in a Russian officers prison camp. Now the Germans are in work parties repairing war damage with Russian guards making sure that the work gets done. We hope to push on to Warszawa tomorrow.

We left Lodz at 0830 on a terribly crowded refugee train. One thing about these trains - they don't worry about selling or collecting tickets. If you can get on one you have it made. On this particular train a Russian Major got us into a car reserved for their military, or we wouldn't have gotten on. As it was, there was no place to sit, but at least we are moving in the right direction. We were with a Polish captain who spoke English. I sure envy some of these fellows who can speak about three languages. In a situation like this it is a real advantage. The British soldiers were also in this car. We arrived at Grodzisk about 1000, changed trains and left about half an hour later and pulled into Warszawa about two in the afternoon.

Warszawa is the largest city in Poland with a pre-war population of one and a half million. The Russian Major commandeered a GMC truck to take us to Praga, the town just across the Wista river. We traveled clear across the city of Warszawa and did not see a whole building anywhere. The city had been under siege by the Germans for months. They finally captured it after almost destroying it, then the Russians came along

and finished the destruction by taking it back from the Krauts.

We got to Praga about 1530. The Major was going to try to get us a ride to Lublin with the military, but was unable to line anything up. Finally a Belgian civilian invited us all to his house for the evening. There were the three of us, four British lads, and the Russian Major. When we got there we found his home was one room in the basement of a bombed out building. We had a meal which wasn't very exciting, but it filled us up. The Major brought out some vodka and some cherry brandy which warmed us up a little. We slept on the floor and there were some lice around so it wasn't too restful, but the price was right.

We got up about seven and had bread and tea for breakfast. We sure marvel at these people over here, they don't have much, but they certainly are willing to share with us. We went out and stood along the road to Lublin hoping to catch a ride. It was raining steadily and quite cold and in about an hour we were completely soaked. About 1030 we caught a ride on a Russian truck. There was no top on the truck so it was a pretty cold ride. I think these Russian soldiers must be the worlds worst drivers. We were sideswiped by another truck, which tore off one of our front fenders, but no one was hurt.

About two in the afternoon the truck reached its destination and the Major got us loaded on a bus. We had a lot more protection from the elements, but as we were all soaked to the skin we couldn't seem to get warm.

We arrived in Lublin about six in the evening and the Major took us to the home of some Polish friends. We got out of our wet clothes and had some hot tea and began to feel much better. That night we slept three in a bed which is pretty cozy. The lady of the house told us there are quite a few American and British ex-prisoners in town.

We located a group of Americans here on the morning of the twenty-seventh. There are ten officers and about ninety GI's in an old school building on the edge of town. They are hoping to leave by train to Odessa in the next few days. We are going to stay here with the group as we think the Russians will try harder to move all these men out than they would just a few of us. Food here is not too good, the same ration we had back at Wolsztyn, the beds are OK, sanitation facilities nonexistent. Justin Ware sold his Ingersoll watch for 500 zlotys, the exchange rate is five for a dollar. The watch isn't worth anywhere near one hundred dollars but inflation is terrible. A loaf of bread is 50z

(\$10) and one hundred grams of tobacco is 40z (\$8) and cigarettes 2z each (.40#).

On February twenty-eighth the camp here in Lublin had some very welcome visitors. Two American Red Cross representatives, an American Colonel, and a Doctor came down from Moscow. Their mission is to gather up all the Allied POW's they locate and get them to the seaport in Odessa, Russia. We all wish them lots of luck.

The Polish Red Cross brought us some supplies. They had one carton of cigarettes, a couple cartons of Life Savers, chewing gum, magazines, shaving cream, razors and a few combs. This was to supply one hundred and twenty men. Not-nearly enough of anything to go around, but these people are sure doing the best they can with the available supplies. The Colonel from Moscow brought a few copies of the London edition of Stars and Stripes. The most recent was dated February 1, and we sure enjoyed catching up on the military news.

Today I sold my Parker pen for 120 zloty and bought some tobacco, bread and candles. Not hungry enough to eat candles but most of these places we end up in have no lights. The grapevine says we are scheduled to leave at six in the morning.

The locals tell us the Germans had a crematory here in Lublin. They are supposed to have disposed of about two million people, mostly Polish and Jewish. Doesn't seem possible but they were supposed to have gassed them first and then burned the bodies. One of the officers here got some photos from a Polish girl who was forced to work at the crematory. She was on duty one day when her father was destroyed.

It is now the first of March. We got up early this morning expecting to be moved out. As usual the plans were Snafu (Situation normal all fouled up) and we didn't leave as early as planned. They finally formed a formation about two in the afternoon and we marched 3KM (2 miles) to the railroad station. We had seven boxcars waiting for us. Each car had a coal burning stove and a supply of coal so we should be able to keep warm. The only other accommodations were some large shelves at each end of the cars. We never did figure what they might have been used for.

I am in the third car with Lt. Ware and twenty six others including two British and two Belgium civilians who are going with us. It will be very crowded, but no one is complaining because it looks like we have some organized transportation at last. They tell us the trip will take from five to seven days. Russian rations for our car consist of



two and a half sacks of hard, black bread, sixteen 64 ounce packages of porridge (made in USA), four large tins of Spam, and some Rusky soup powder. How we are going to cook soup and porridge for twenty six men on this small stove with no water supply is a good question. The train finally started rolling about five in the evening. It didn't travel too far during the night as we stopped several times.

On March second we were put on a siding in a small town just across the Russian border at 0630. Lots of snow coming down with a high wind and very cold. We managed to get some straw in this town to put under us for sleeping. We stayed in the yards until about two-thirty when we were hooked on to a freight train. The USA made porridge is pretty good, but it is rather difficult to prepare. We have a couple of small pots that someone scrounged up somewhere, but the water is rather a problem. We can sometimes get hot water from the locomotive. Not too clean, but I don't think any of the water around here is too sanitary. We stopped at Lovel about 1800. The Russian Lieutenant in charge of the train said we would receive a hot meal in town later. Finally, about ten thirty that night we walked about a mile and a half through driving snow to a Russian mess hall in town.

We had a meal of soup, bread and weak tea. Hardly worth the walk to town. This town is almost completely destroyed and people are living in sheds and outbuildings. We got back to our train about two thirty in the morning.

I woke up about nine on the morning of March 3rd, and we were stopped again and our cars were sitting on a siding with no town in sight. We think every train in Russia has priority over us. Come to think of it they are fighting a tough war and we aren't really accomplishing anything. I walked about half a mile, got a pail of water and cooked some oatmeal for Chapin, Ware and myself. In town I talked (Kriegy Deutsch) to a civilian trying to find out where we are. This town is Rovno about 280KM from Lublin, and 480 Km from Kiev. If I am correct Kiev is about midway from where we got on the train to Odessa. At this rate it will be much more than a week.

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## **We broke the ice on a puddle near the train and washed up.**

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We broke the ice on a puddle near the train and washed up. That stings a little but it made us feel cleaner. We heated some

water on the stove and scraped off some whiskers and that also helps. We finally got on the road again about 1500. We hope we can make better time from now on. I sold my fountain pen so I am writing with about a half length pencil. On this bombed out and repaired road bed we really bounce around. Doubt if I can read these notes if we ever get out of this.

We didn't travel too far, stopped at 1730 and got under way again about 2130. Chapin traded a pair of gloves for five loaves of bread and Ware sold the top part of his winter underwear for 150 Rubles. We should have enough food to last us as we traveled quite a distance during the night.

We pulled into a large city about 1300 on March 4th. I didn't find out the name of it but it was practically demolished. We had a meal in a military mess hall, sauer kraut soup and boiled barley. These people surely eat different than we do. A burger, fries, and a milk shake would sure taste good.

According to our Russian Lieutenant we will make a straight run, with no stops, from here to Odessa. It has really slowed us up stopping and waiting to get hooked on to a different train. Most of the train now is composed of empty tank cars. These are to be loaded at the seaport and fuel hauled back to Poland and Germany for their military equipment. The man says we should reach Odessa some time tomorrow. We pulled out of here about four in the afternoon and there is about three feet of snow on the ground.

We stopped at a small station named Razdelnaya at 1100 on March 5th. It is only about 65 Km. from here to Odessa. Our fast trip has slowed considerably as we stayed here until 0300 the next morning. We arrived at the train station in Odessa at 0800 on March 6th. I sat up all night as the car was so crowded you couldn't sleep anyhow.

We all have terrible colds and no one is very healthy. I think I am in as good a condition as anyone and I know this cold and poor rations sure have me slowed down.

We unloaded about 1000 and marched to a Russian camp on the edge of town. It was a three story building that used to be some kind of a school. A real good deal here for the officers as we have beds with springs and sheets. There are 12 American officers and 6 British with our group. The men are sleeping on mattresses on the floor, which is still much better than we have had for a long time.

There are supposed to be about a thousand Americans here in another camp. The Russian Commanding Officer here says we should leave on a ship in a couple of days. Justin

Ware is ill and they put him in the infirmary. The food here is the usual, cabbage soup and bread. These Europeans seem to thrive on it, but it sure isn't what we are used to or care for.

About 1800 we walked 4 Km. and waited at a large building for a couple of hours. We finally had a hot shower and our clothes deloused. This really felt good, but the walk was long and cold for a bunch who are pretty much on the sick list. This is the first time I have been able to take a bath for three weeks and the first time I have had my clothes off for over two weeks. I got back to camp about midnight, had some black bread and warm tea and fell into the sack.

Woke up on March 7th feeling well rested. Surprising what getting cleaned up and having a good nights sleep will do for you. I had some vegetable salad and tea for breakfast. Sure could go for a stack of hotcakes, fried eggs and coffee. A rumor is going around that the Red Cross may bring us some supplies, but we are doubtful. This place has some new scuttlebutt going around every few hours. The Medical Corps Major brought everyone a pack of cigarettes and some food supplies for the kitchen. We had soup, potatoes and meat balls at noon, but were back to soup and tea in the evening. We are supposed to ship out in the morning and are confined to the camp.

The British troops left as planned on March 8th. Seems like this trip is lasting forever, but we have come a long way from Wolsztyn. The American CO here, a Major Hall, left camp just before we got here and has not returned. A new bunch of Americans came in about noon today. About 350 in all including 22 officers. Captains Rossbach, Larkin, Smith and Lieutenant Trainor from Wolsztyn were with this group. Sure good to see them again.

Major Hall, from the Moscow Mission, came into camp today. We expected him yesterday but he was busy loading 1200 Americans on a British ship headed for Alexandria, Egypt. He tells us the next British ship will leave on the fifteenth and will carry 3200 troops. Major Hall seems to be really on the ball and we feel better with someone in charge who seems to know his way around. He says he will get us some American rations today. He brought a pack of smokes for each man and says we should get some GI uniforms tomorrow.

Today is the ninth of March and Major Hall paid us another visit this morning. He expects to have rations, candy and cigarettes here this afternoon. He also told us that before we embark on the ship we will be

issued a partial payment of \$10.00 per man, so we can buy supplies at the ships canteen. I wrote a V-Mail letter home to the folks last night. Don't know how long it will take to get to South Dakota from this part of the world.

About 1600 Frenchmen came into camp today. They marched us about 4 Km. to another camp that is closer to the harbor. At least we are moving in the right direction. We are still eating Rusky rations. Quite a few more officers here, including Colonel Drury from Oflag 64 and Colonel Shields from Wolsztyn. The officers are living in a building with a stove but no wood to make a fire. It is very cold here, below freezing most of the time and there is a lot of snow on the ground. It will be nice to get on a ship, at least it should be warmer. A truckload of American supplies arrived tonight. Food and clothing, maybe we will eat better tomorrow.

On March 10th we had American coffee and meat and spuds for breakfast. The coffee wasn't cooked too well but the Russian cooks are used to making it out of barley or turnips so guess we can't blame them. The mess hall is about the same temperature as outside, so you sure don't dawdle over breakfast. I was issued a pair of O.D. pants and a shirt today. The clothes I have been wearing were about to fall off me, so I threw them in the stove and we got a little warmth out of them.

What do you know? We actually moved down to the ship on March 11th. The rumor was that we would go early this morning but it turned out to be 1400 before we got started. Because of my lame ankle I was able to snare a ride on the baggage truck. Good thing as it was about 6 Km. to the dock. It was snowing and there was a brisk wind blowing, so not too pleasant for marching. The Russians even furnished a band for the formation. Their favorite tune seemed to be the "Beer Barrel Polka", and they really played it loud if not well.

Things moved quickly after we reached the ship. They had the boarding roster all prepared and we moved on quickly. I was assigned to the Excess Officers Detachment (whatever that is) and was one of the first on board.

This ship is a British troopship the "Duchess of Bedford". 24,000 tons with a crew of 360 and a capacity of 3500 troops. There were about 450 Americans in our group. We understand they are going to load some Frenchmen a little later. Story going around that we are going to England but I can see no reason to take this group to England.

I am in a state room with seven other officers

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## **I don't know what thrills us the most, the beds, the warmth, or the clean latrine facilities.**

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on "A" deck. I don't know what thrills us the most, the beds, the warmth, or the clean latrine facilities. It is certainly going to be different than what we have been used to lately.

We were each issued 2 pounds and 10 shillings, (about \$10) by the British Officer in Charge so we could purchase canteen supplies. Our first meal was so good I saved the menu. It is the first really decent meal since leaving the States. Guess I spoke a little too soon about the meal. Seems like our stomachs aren't ready for decent food. About an hour after eating I had to head for the rail to feed the fish. Became real sick to my stomach. I sure wasn't alone because most of the group were doing the same thing. I will have to remember to curb my appetite. I haven't had a chance to weigh, but I imagine I have lost about 30 pounds.

I feel like a new person after a good night of sleep in a good bed in a warm room. We had a good breakfast and I made an effort not to over eat.

I bought some Life Savers, a necktie, and some shoe polish today at the ships store. We have been told that the ship will issue a chocolate ration later. The ships loud-speaker system broadcasts news reports and radio programs from the British Broadcasting Corporation. Sounds good to hear tunes like "Black Magic" and "Shoo Shoo Baby".

Today is the thirteenth of March and it has been five months since we were shot down. It has been a long winter but things are looking up now. We received a gift from the British Red Cross including, razor, razor blades, soap, hair brush, tooth paste, can of 50 cigarettes each. We don't really care for the English cigarettes, but we sure appreciate their kindness.

We drew some clothes from the ships store today. I got two pair of heavy wool socks, two suits of underwear and a British battle jacket. Also had a haircut, shampoo and a hot salt water shower. Almost beginning to feel like a human being. I saw the movie "His Butler's Sister" with Franchot Tone, Pat O'Brien and Deanna Durbin. I had seen it before, but it was real relaxing to watch the movie and forget about the last few months for a little while. The latest rumor is that we aren't going to load any Frenchmen and may leave on the fifteenth.

I didn't feel too good last night. I guess these rich foods are a little too much of a good thing after existing on soup for so long. Quite a few of the fellows are having the same problem. I skipped breakfast this morning, maybe that will help. The weather is a little better today, no wind so it feels a little warmer. I walked around the deck a few times.

It is Thursday the fifteenth of March. We had just been told that they weren't going to load any Frenchmen and today about two thousand of them came up the gangplank. Going to make it a little more crowded but I am sure they are as anxious to go home as we are. Several more American officers came aboard, including Colonel Millett, from Oflag 64. We are getting a lot of rank on the ship, two full birds, a light colonel, several majors and a number of company grade.

We left Odessa harbor at 1500. We are sure glad to see the last of the USSR. Sounds like we will have a long trip before we get where ever it is we are going, but at least we are on the way. Saw the movie "Lady In The Dark" with Ginger Rogers.

We are sailing southward on the Black Sea on the sixteenth. Out of sight of land, so not very much to look at and there is a lot of fog. We came through the Bosphorus this evening and anchored in Istanbul harbor about midnight. We expect to be here awhile loading supplies. Coming through the Bosphorus it seemed real good to see lights on both sides of the channel. This is the first city we have seen that wasn't blacked out since we left Italy.

We stayed in the harbor all day the seventeenth loading fuel, water and supplies. The scenery here is really beautiful, the city is built on both sides of the channel. There has been no war damage here and that is certainly a change. A Lieutenant Colonel, who is our Military Attache to Turkey, came on board with the British Military Attache and their wives. They brought an armful of magazines for us. The ladies took all the officers up to the sun deck and explained the scenery to us. They told us about the mosques and the minarets, some of which were built in the sixteenth century.

I was duty officer from 1100 today until the same time tomorrow. Not a very demanding job, but you have to be available full time. If any problem develops with the American military people I am supposed to be the problem solver. Sure hope everything stays peaceful.

We hauled up the anchor and got underway about six on the morning of the eighteenth. We could see land most of the day on

both sides of the ship as the Marmara Sea isn't very wide. We ran into some rain in the afternoon, enough to clear us off the decks. We expect to go through the Dardanelles this evening. We received a ration of 100 British Gold Flake cigarettes today. Yesterday we were able to purchase our weekly ration of free chocolate bars. We are supposed to receive another partial payment of \$10 before we dock. I could use it as my poker playing resulted in more outgo than income. We are sure enjoying the chow. We had bacon and eggs for breakfast and a small steak for lunch.

It is now the nineteenth. We sailed through the Dardanelles yesterday evening. We saw the Anzac Memorial, and the British Memorial and cemetery. Great Britain lost a lot of people here in the last war. We saw the place where Leander is supposed to have swum the Hellesport every night to be with his lover Hero. At least according to Greek mythology that is the story. We are really enjoying the scenery in this area, something vastly different than anything I have ever seen.

We reached the island of Malta about three P.M. on the twentieth. We steamed into the Great Harbor at Valletta. At one time during this war this had the distinction of

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**Malta had the distinction of being the most heavily bombed chunk of land - 120 square miles were hit by 3030 German and Italian air raids.**

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being the most heavily bombed place in the world. A chunk of land of about 120 square miles was the target for 3,030 German and Italian air raids. The government of Great Britain awarded the George Cross to all survivors for their courage in holding out against the enemy.

We unloaded all the British personnel here at Malta and they were loaded on another trooper bound for the British Isles. Needless to say they were a pretty happy bunch. Have gotten quite well acquainted with these chaps over the past weeks and we are going to miss them. The latest rumor is that the Americans and French will be taken to Marseille, France. That doesn't sound like too rough of duty.

We left Valetta Harbor about eight on Wednesday morning, and should get to France in about 48 hours. We are really seeing this part of the world but we are more anxious to get back to our own brand of

civilization than we are to take this cruise.

Today has been real uneventful. We cruised by an American destroyer on the Tyrrhenian Sea. It looked real good to see the Stars and Stripes blowing in the breeze, and see familiar naval uniforms again.

We docked in Marseille Harbor about 10 AM on March 23. There was quite a welcome awaiting the French POW's. The dock was covered with civilians waiting for the ship to arrive. There were several companies of French military in formation and a military band was blasting away. Everything was well organized, the men marched off the gangplank and into a waiting fleet of trucks and were moved out immediately. There are quite a few American ships in this huge harbor. We found out we aren't to unload here but are being taken to Naples.

An Air Corps Administration officer boarded here and will be our processing officer. I was told I would return to my old outfit in Italy as soon as I got off the ship. Hope they don't make me fly this mission over. I filled out some of the usual Army forms tonight. We loaded about 700 Polish soldiers here tonight. I don't quite understand the situation, some of them are wearing goon uniforms. Suppose maybe after the fall of Poland they were forced to serve in the German Army. We left France about 1800 and should get to Naples Sunday morning.

Saturday, and the sea is really rough today. We passed through between Corsica and Sardinia about 1100 so we aren't too far from our destination. Major Sommers assures us that all Air Corps people will be returned to their original outfits.

We docked in Naples Harbor about 0900 on March 25th. Major Sommers arranged for the Air Corps officers to be the first ones to disembark. An Army band was playing on the dock and it sounded real good. We hated to leave the ground officers as they were a swell bunch of fellows and we have been through a lot together. We loaded into a 6x6 and went to the 19th Replacement Depot at Caserta where I had spent a few days when I first arrived in Italy. That was just a few months ago but it seems like a lifetime.

I got settled down in a tent here at the Depot and received a payment of \$100 and some clothes. I am supposed to be flown to the Fifteenth Air Force Headquarters in Bari in a few days. After some processing there, I will fly back to the 781st for a few days and then hopefully back to the States. Sounds like a good schedule to me. Davis is to remain here until the Eighth Air Force decides where he is to go.

Monday I was issued a PX ration card. I purchased seven packs of cigarettes, five candy bars, three cokes and some toilet supplies. Seems like a whole package of luxuries. The chow is real good here, strictly GI rations but sure a lot better than some we have had this winter. We received some security instructions yesterday. We are not to write or talk about any of our experiences since liberation. The plan is for me to go to Bari tomorrow.

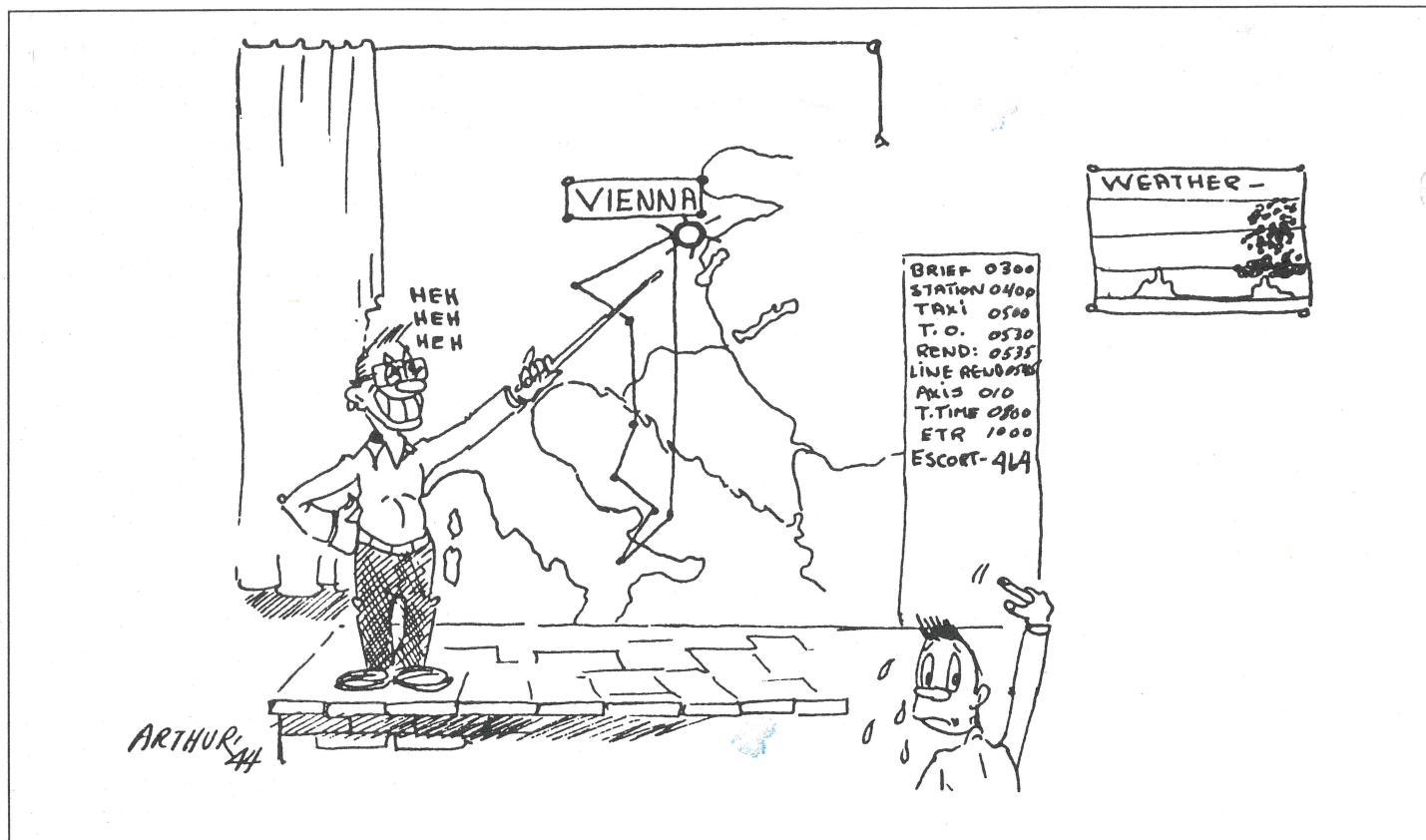
I flew to Bari by B-17 on March twenty-seventh. I was interrogated about my experiences since I went AWOL on October 13th, and filled out a fistful of Army forms. The next day I caught the courier plane back to the base at Pantanella. I spent a couple of days visiting the old crew and the rest of the gang. I found out we had lost quite a few crews since I had been gone. Our CO, Colonel Lokker and his crew were shot down over Blechhammer about a month after we were. I found out that George Gaines, the pilot, and Kurt Brown the radio operator, who were shot down with us, had survived and were back in the States. They had been hidden by the Polish people and were sneaked out of the country. It took them about four months to get back to Allied control. We were told that Sergeant Larry Tiehen had evaded the Germans for quite a while but had finally been taken prisoner. That pretty well accounts for the entire crew.

I flew back to HQ at Bari on April 1st. I was awarded the Purple Heart and the Air Medal and received a promotion to First Lieutenant. All in all not a bad day. I stayed in Bari until April 15th, then flew by RAF transport to the 7th Replacement Depot in Naples where I will await surface transportation to the United States.

This should about wrap it up for Mission #5. It lasted 167 days and covered approximately 5000 miles.

*The crew Francis Clark flew with on this trip to Blechhammer was the George Gaines crew. Clark was navigator on Benson's crew and Edward Chapin was nose gunner on Wheeler's crew. The rest of the crew was Gaines' crew. All the men survived the ordeal. Gaines and Brown escaped capture and had help from the Polish underground and returned to Pantanella after four months of evasion. All of Gaines' crew are located and survive except Mel Farber who was killed in a B-25 after the war.*

*We hope you enjoyed reading this account of one of our POW's. Francis kept a dairy all during the time he was POW. Although it was long we felt it was more interesting to keep it together.*



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