

My Experience in the Army Air Corps

During World War II

By

Carl E. Lind

May 2008

FORWARD

I began this project as a favor for my father-in-law. I knew it was something special. Something he wanted to leave mostly for the family, but I realized it may be meaningful to more than just us. Several friends have expressed a great excitement about the project and have asked to be allowed to read it.

I was expecting a war story, but found it to be a very interesting and at times sweet, account by a very special man, recalling one of the times of his life.

I think you will find this account of his experience to be a very different point of view from traditional war stories. I hope you learn things you never knew about the life of a soldier. I know I did.

Carl discounts himself as not being a hero, but I believe he is being too humble. In my opinion, anyone that has the courage to stand up, enlist and fight for their country and freedom, in whatever capacity, is a hero. He not only survived the war, but managed to thrive, build a life and a family. He raised a wonderful son that is the love of my life and for that he is **MY** hero.

It has been not only my pleasure, but an honor to be able to leave this legacy to the Lind family as well as anyone else who has the great fortune to read it.

Enjoy!

Michele Boisvert Lind

INTRODUCTION

This is a brief story of my 2 years serving in the Army Air Corps during WWII. Most of it was scribbled from memory after 40 years or more. A few records and photos I kept in my old foot locker helped recall the memories, but since recall is not always accurate, please excuse any errors or omissions.

This has been written mainly for my family and a few friends. It was typed by my daughter-in-law, Michele, who did a marvelous job of interpreting my scribbling and organizing the photos.

PROLOGUE

I had been working at the Ingersoll Milling Machine Company in Rockford, Illinois for three months after graduating from high school. It was an apprenticeship and the starting pay was 30 cents an hour. The daily hours had been long (nine and twelve-hour shifts), and it was my weekend off. I decided to go to Chicago with two friends.

Late Sunday morning we were on Maxwell Street, a Chicago ethnic indoor/outdoor market where one could “buy anything”. Noise and smells came from the crowded shops and street vendors eager to sell something to someone.

The year was 1941. The radios in the shops added to the noise, but we didn’t hear the news of the day. When we returned to the car, we heard the shocking news of the “Japanese attacks on Pearl Harbor”. It took some time to begin to understand what had happened and what it might mean for us.

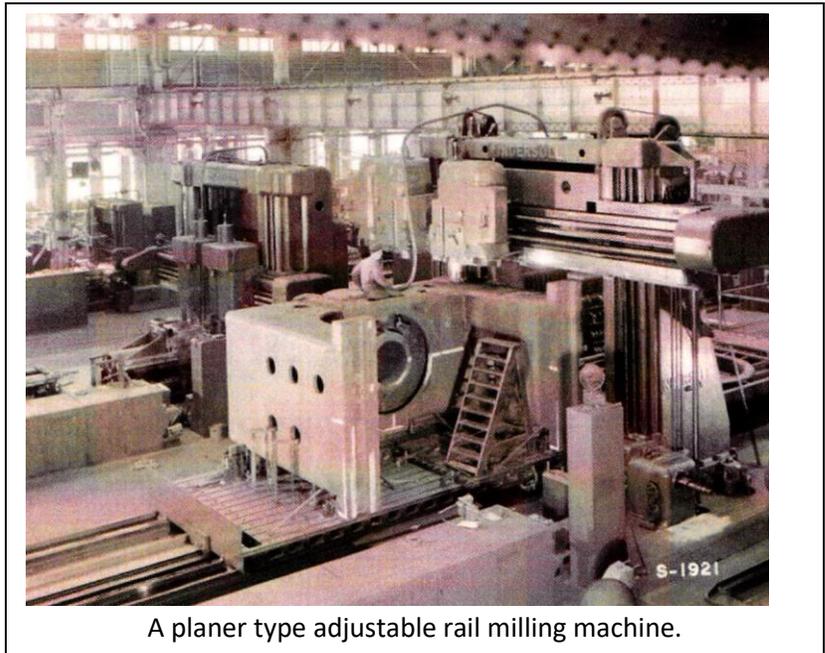
My Army Air Corps Experience

Early spring of 1943 I was near the end of a six-month deferment from the draft. I had been considering enlisting, but the job at Ingersoll was exciting and challenging for me (compared to high school). I enjoyed working 50 to 60 hours a week, running various machines for two or three months at a time and holding tolerances as tight as .0002 inches.

This was approximately 16 months after the United States had declared war on Japan and Germany on December 8, 1941. I had been told to expect another six-month deferment because Ingersoll machines were essential to the war effort. Many of the machines (special planer type milling, rifle & cannon boring machines) were sold to England in a lend-lease program.

Two close friends of mine from college had already signed up. They were Bob Thoren and Don Dunberg. Bob signed up with the Navy V5 program at Illinois Tech in Chicago and Don with the Army Air Corps at University of Chicago.

Another friend, Bernie Harvey, who was working at Woodward Governor, had just taken the Air Corps written test.



A planer type adjustable rail milling machine.

At the same time, I found out that my dentist's assistant was one of the people giving the Air Corps exams. The exams were administered in the evenings at the downtown post office. Both Bernie and the dental assistant encouraged me to take the exam. I did and was told I passed with "flying" colors. Three letters of character recommendation were also required. One of mine was written by Pastor Loreen from First Lutheran Church.

My eyes have always been sensitive to light and I didn't think I could pass the 20/20 requirement for flying duty. When reporting to Camp Grant for the physical

exam some weeks later, my right hand was heavily bandaged. This was the result of running a small grinding wheel into the back of my right hand. Seven to eight stitches were required to close the wound. A letter from the Ingersoll company doctor explaining the injury satisfied the examiners and I passed the physical. Bernie did not pass because he was color blind and he later served on limited duty.

The patriotic response of the United States at the time may be difficult for the ready to understand. Pearly Harbor and the loss of half the Pacific Fleet had quickly changed our previous isolationist attitude. I wasn't the first to sign up. A few of my high school classmates had done so even before graduation. When your friends are signing up you don't want to be left at home. One good friend was rejected from all branches of the service because he had suffered from rheumatic fever as a youth. I'm sure this rejection had a significant effect on his character in later years.

This reminds me of Don's mother, who would meet young men on the public street and ask them why they weren't in uniform. An embarrassing situation! During the war, all service men were required to wear their uniforms in public. It gained some respect and attention, especially from girls.

Although volunteering for the Air Corps Cadet program meant leaving a job that was satisfying to me, I now faced the challenge of becoming an aviator. This was exciting to say the least!

I was leaving a company that offered almost no benefits. We received only one day of vacation for every year of service. The Air Corps was offering free lodging, food, clothing and annual furloughs. These benefits along with the \$75.00 per month as a cadet were appealing, but insignificant to the thought of flying.

Some weeks after receiving a letter that I was accepted in the Air Corps I was notified to report in downtown Chicago at mid-morning on July 25, 1943. We were directed to bring a small suitcase with toiletries and no change of clothes. The suitcase was used to mail home the clothes on your back. The night before, I took the Illinois Central train to the depot on South Michigan Avenue and walked to the 8th Street YMCA. Rooms were \$1.00 to \$1.25 per night.

I reported to downtown Chicago along with a couple hundred others from the 5th Corps area which consisted of Michigan, Wisconsin, Indiana and Illinois. We

were quickly processed, “Sworn in”, and proceeded to board a “troop train” for an unannounced destination.

The train consisted of older coach cars with reversible upright bench seats, (we were given no pillows or blankets) and a box car that served as a mess hall. The cars were pulled by a coal fired steam engine locomotive as were all trains of that era.

Our train pulled out of the station (Dearborn?) in early afternoon on the trip of our young lives. Without air-conditioning, many of the windows were soon open for relief from the summer heat. Stops in small towns gave us a chance to communicate with mostly kids trying to sell snacks. Rumors started as to where we were headed.

Occasionally, we stopped in switching yards for an engine change, and sometimes we went through tunnels where we got a dose of smoke and soot through the windows. We were able to take apart the back of the seats to form a flat area between seats to lie down. We spent two full days and nights on the same coaches. Rumors were rampant the whole trip.

Basic Training

We arrived at Keesler Field, near Biloxi, Mississippi, at dusk on July 27. My tan gabardine trousers and white shirt were not looking too sharp by then. We were marched across a deep drainage ditch to hastily erected tents in an overflow area. We were issued blankets and pillows. Instead of receiving a GI issue of clothing the next day, we existed in the same clothes for five more days. We were then assigned to barracks.

The six weeks we spent in basic training was an adjustment, to say the least. We soon wondered why we had enlisted! The food was lousy, the drinking water was



Keesler Field barracks. I'm in my dress uniform standing in last row second from the right.

warm and sweet, and the Gulf air was hot and humid. I experienced constipation for the first time. We had close order drill constantly, were shown sex disease movies, and were restricted to the base the entire time.

Then there was KP duty two or three times a week, from 2:30 AM wake up until 9:00 PM. Every day the huge mess hall floor was scrubbed on hands and knees. This entitled us

to an extra half pint of milk.

About the second week there, a GI was seen on a cat-walk around the water tower in our area. He reportedly was threatening to jump, but was talked down after a couple of hours. Although many in our group were joking and waiting for him to leap, I think we could relate to his despair. Everything after we left this place was more to what we expected. After all, Cadet training was based on West Point and we would have to conform. I guess we experienced a typical basic training at Keesler. It was not a picnic.

After six weeks, we shipped out of Keesler by rail, and again we did not know our destination. Rumors had us going all over the country as we traveled. The coaches on this train were more comfortable and it was just an overnight trip. We arrived early morning at the Moline, Illinois railroad station. Then we were marched up to Augustana College, of all places.

The first thing after arriving, we were sent to the dorm dining room and served a great breakfast. Two lady cooks made eggs ordered to suit individual tastes. What a change from Army mess.

“Augie” was a great experience in many ways. We had classes in math, physics, English, military instruction, P.T., and 10 hours flight instruction at the Moline Airport in 95 HP Taylorcraft. P.T. is physical training that was typical Air Corps calisthenics, running and a tough obstacle course.

There were four or five female students from the First Lutheran Church back home, but we were restricted from talking to girls except in a commercial area on the edge of campus. We were told no socializing with coeds due to previous problems.

We usually had free time after 1:00 PM on Saturdays and all day on Sundays if we were not walking “tours” due to some fraction of rules. I never considered going home on a weekend pass because bus travel was more than six hours one way.

I never walked a “tour” during my year as a cadet; however, I was called on the carpet for telling a non-commissioned officer what I thought of him. Lucky for me, it was just two days before Christmas and the Lieutenant in charge must have been in the Christmas spirit. He only restricted me to our dorm for the Christmas weekend.

I had been invited by David Vickner, an intern at First Lutheran the previous year, to have dinner with him and his wife, Louise for Christmas Day. I was forced to call and excuse myself because we had orders to ship out Christmas morning for San Antonio Classification Center. Augie was a great time. Our class of 50 met annually for 25 years after the war; five times in Rockton, Illinois, at the Wagon Wheel. Everyone loved it there.

San Antonio was a short stay that included two full days of testing; psychological aptitude, coordination and whatever else. As I remember, the tests were mostly true/false and multiple-choice questions that were a snap for me. If they had required written answers, I might have struggled.

Results of the tests were posted on a bulletin board a day later and I was listed for pilot training (my choice). The next morning some of our group from Augie was required to report one at a time to a panel of five officers. They explained that,

although I qualified for pilot training with a “7”, my rating for navigation and bombardier was “9” for each. My coordination kept my rating down on the score. We were told a rating “5” was required to qualify for cadet school (scale of 1 – 9). A promise to ship the next day to navigation school persuaded me to agree to sign a release paper. Navigators were evidently in short supply and openings in pilot school could be months away. I’m glad now that I did change since those in my group who went into pilot training were still in training when the war ended.

We did ship the next morning to navigation/bombardier preflight at Ellington Field near Houston and became official cadets with special cap and insignia, plus a pay raise from \$50 to \$75 a month. We were the class of 44-4.

Preflight school was very rigid: inspection of clothing, shoes and brass buckles shined, bed made taut, no dust on bed frames. We scrubbed the barracks floor every Friday night. There was a formal pass in review every morning where your “flight” was graded. There were classes in plane and ship identification, military science, Morse code, map reading, etc. We “policed” the streets of cigarette butts, paper, etc. (yes sir, no sir) and more close order drill.

Since it was already planned to close the preflight school at Ellington, we were excused when we could receive 12 words per minute in Morse code. This was about the point when you started interpreting the rhythm instead of counting the dots and dashes. I was the third in our class to reach this goal. Some memorizing of Morse code in Boy Scouts certainly helped. As Cadets we were not assigned KP duty.

After eight weeks, we marched a mile or so to another end of the field to the “advanced” navigation school.

In some ways, we were experiencing a more relaxed atmosphere here. We still marched in formation everywhere we went, including between class rooms that were a couple of blocks apart; always singing with Gordon MacRae leading our flight in the right pitch.

Rumors about MacRae’s experience with “big bands” Horace Heidt began. On the PT field, we were excused from calisthenics occasionally if MacRae would, when asked, get on the directors six-foot-high stand and sing a solo acapella; “Night and Day”, “Begin the Beguine”, etc. The PT instructor was also the church choir director on the post.

Now we were getting intense training in aircraft navigation methods, weather, global maps, safety, etc. A lot of classes were about celestial navigation. After breakfast and a “pass on review”, we were in class from 7:30 AM until 4:00 PM when we broke for PT and then dinner. We spent evenings studying the sky to identify the 21 navigational stars.

We were assigned to 18 training flights all over the South, lasting four to six hours each. Ten of them were at night. We were flying in Beech craft twin engine BT, four students to a plane. One student sat in the co-pilots seat and the other three at desks in the cabin.

Advanced navigation was a fun and exciting experience. I believe as cadets we were getting double rations. The mess sergeant evidently loved his job. We had roasts, cakes, pies, even shrimp cocktails a few times. We could stop at the mess hall and pick up fruit and snacks on our way to a night mission. No other food in the service compared to this place.

A few in our class had “washed out” for various reasons, including inability to get over air sickness. The rest of our class (44-10) celebrated the night before graduation at a party in Houston, lasting late and then we were routed out of bed at 5:30 AM the next morning (7/22/44). Previously, we had been measured and fitted for our officer clothing, which we wore to the ceremony to receive our wings and bars as 2nd Lieutenant. Our pay now jumped to \$150.00 per month plus a 50% extra flying pay. It was an exciting time for all of us, but I felt a little envious since many of the men had girlfriends or family to pin on their wings.

After the ceremony, I went back to pack up and check on transportation to Rockford. I and most of our class were assigned to Westover Field near Springfield, Massachusetts for crew training. In route we had 10 or 11 days of leave, the first after a very busy year. Some of us took a bus to Dallas, taking a chance on catching a flight to Chicago.



At home August 1944 on my first furlough. (Not a sharp military position.)

Servicemen had priority and we got on a DC-3 flight leaving around 10 PM. I slept the whole trip, except I woke up for two minutes when the plane landed in Kansas City, Missouri. We arrived at Midway Airport early morning and I caught an Illinois Central train to Rockford, and then a cab home before noon. In my excitement, I didn't think to tip the driver. I regretted that later.

That summer, I spent some of the time at the Lake Geneva Highlands, an old hangout, with Thoren, Marine Ensign Paulson and the "girls of summer". Paulson had also just received a commission.



On the beach at Fontana; Walden, Lind, Hogfeldt and Harvey.



The "Girls of Summer". August 1944 at Lake Geneva Highlands. Thoren in back and Paulson in Marine uniform.

One day my cousin Edith Engberg had a luncheon in her backyard on Kishwaukee Street in Rockford. This was the same house my dad had lived in before marrying my mother. A second cousin, Bill Engberg, was also there in uniform. Sometime later that year (1944) he was injured in his first day of combat and came home a paraplegic. Bill had helped organize a dance band in high school and he organized the Bill Engberg Orchestra after returning to civilian life. He played both piano and drums as I recall. This band was reorganized again a few years ago with some of the original members and is still in business today (2007).

I reported to Westover Field near Springfield, Massachusetts, wearing a new pair of civilian dress shoes. A week later, I was in the base hospital to have an ingrown toenail removed. This delay caused me to be assigned to a newly formed B-24 combat crew. Most of my class members from Ellington were assigned to crews almost ready to ship overseas. This delay was a stroke of good fortune for me since the two and a half months of training built my confidence, and also saved me from some very rough oil refinery missions.

The training at Westover was much more than navigation. I had missed gunnery school in the Air Corps haste to get navigators into combat. There I spent time in

both top and nose turrets shooting live ammo at whitecaps on the Atlantic. We also shot film aiming the turret guns at P-47s simulating enemy attacks to shoot our plane down. The film was later critiqued. We practiced formation flying at low and high altitude with simulated bombing runs.

Almost every practice mission, some crew had to abort or land elsewhere due to mechanical failures. (These were older planes.) One night, our crew was listed as missing. They had cracked up on one of the White Mountains of New Hampshire. The only survivor, a gunner, had been sleeping in the back of the plane. He was rescued after two days, but suffered frozen feet and hands. I read years later that he was the only quadruple amputee during the entire war.

One night mission, after taking off, a crew member reported seeing a fire on the base. Upon returning near daybreak, we discovered our officer's barracks had burned to the ground. I recovered only a toilet kit, some underwear and personal items in my footlocker. I did have a dress shirt and a pair of trousers at the cleaners that allowed me to go off base. I was able to find a dress finger-tip overcoat in a Holyoke store. I contacted my original tailoring outfit in Indianapolis to duplicate my original uniform, on a rush basis. Time was limited, as we were scheduled for a furlough in a couple of weeks, and then be sent overseas.

We were told that the government would not compensate us for the loss, but to file a claim because a bill was pending before Congress. I did file and received a check for \$240.00 about one week before my wedding in September 1951. This story made for a fabulous honeymoon trip. (an equivalent amount today would be several thousand dollars)

I have pleasant memories of my stay in New England. One time my pilot, co-pilot and I took the train to New York City for the weekend. It became crowded with college gals sitting on their suitcases in the aisles. It was packed. I was on my own for a while in New York and went to the USO where I got a free pass, along with some Navy Ensign, to the Broadway show, "Voice of the Turtle", starring Margaret Sullivan.

After finishing crew training at Westover, we were given a series of seven shots and vaccinations. I found myself posted for more shots due to a mix-up in the records and a dental checkup claimed I needed a molar pulled. I avoided the extra

shots and talk to the dentist into letting my molar stay. The tooth was good for many years later.

Norm, Al Wylie (tail gunner), and I took the New York Central Railroad from Springfield, Massachusetts to Chicago to start our 11-day furlough. The train ride was 18 hours. The Pullman cars had the upper and lower bunks on both sides of the aisle. A porter made up the bunks and you either changed in your bunk or in a common washroom. Eating in the diner was a first-class experience.

I arrived home with a couple cartons of cigarettes available in the PX and gave (or traded) them to Dr. Olson (dentist) and his assistant, who were both smokers. They donated some gas ration stamps in return. My only real memory of this time was going out in farm fields with Bernie hunting for rabbits. We didn't see one rabbit but took a few shots at tin cans. We came home cold and tired to find mum ready two fry two rabbits donated by our late neighbor, George Graham. He had shot them down on a farm he owned. It was the only time I ever went hunting for game.

I took the Illinois Central back to Chicago and was in the waiting room with hundreds of others when I heard my name paged. There was a telephone call from Al Wylie's sister. I had never met her but fell in love with her sweet voice. She reported that Norm had located three seats on an Air Force plane flying back the next day. I turned down this chance and went back by train. Bad weather delayed the flight and they were AWOL for one day. Al's sister was a sweet pretty gal and was married when I saw her after the war. She died at the early age of cancer.

Back at Westover, we were shipped by train to Mitchell Field, Long Island, New York, on November 24, 1944. We were anticipating being sent to either the Eighth Air Force (England) or the Fifteenth Air Force in Italy. This could mean across by way of the Azores islands in the middle of the Atlantic between Newfoundland and Morocco or via South America, or via Iceland. We were assigned a shiny new B-24L and took a short flight to check it out and calibrate some instruments. We were issued electric heated flying suits less gloves and boots.

Expecting to leave within a week I shipped my new foot locker home and managed to make a one-day trip back to the "Big Apply".

Each crew member was allowed two barracks bags for clothing and personal items, to be loaded on our plane the evening before scheduled departure. Pilot Kramer

showed up that evening with two cases of assorted whiskey bottles and requested each crew member to pack a few in each bag. Seven cases of “K” rations (each K ration was a box approximately 4 ½” X 8” X 1 ¼” containing cheese, hard chocolate, ham loaf and crackers; maybe 30 to a case) and jungle parachute back packs (containing a first aid kit, various items to survive in a jungle and a folding machete I still have) were part of our loading for the north county. The plane was inspected for balance and for excess items after loading.

Grenier Field, New Hampshire was our POE (Port of Embarkation) where we received gift packs from some kind ladies. The next morning (11/29) a five hour flight to the northeast, across the St. Lawrence River, took us to Goose Bay, Labrador, where snow was piled high along the runway. The first ground crew members to greet us were offering to buy American booze at twice the cost. These offers got better the further we got from the States. We discovered that the dollar had less value to service men away from the United States. Poker games were not nickel, dime, quarter, but dollar, ten and twenty.

Colonel Bert Hassel of Rockford was the commanding officer at Goose Bay, but I did not see anything of him. I regret that I didn’t make an effort to contact him, since I knew his two sons, Vick and John. The family home was on Welty Avenue in Rockford, Illinois at the time.

We were weathered in for two extra nights before starting a parallel search mission on our way to Greenland. A Canadian built Mosquito, a laminated wood frame plane, had disappeared the day before. We were assigned to look for survivors. We flew at a low altitude of 500 feet in light rain, and heavy overcast. After a couple of hours, Kramer decided to get above the clouds. This required climbing to 17,000 feet, so we had to use oxygen. The rest of the four hours and 40 minutes flight we made good use of our new issue electric heated suits.

The wind at the higher altitude was stronger and blew us maybe 40 miles off course. Fortunately, we were able to pick up the BW-1 radio on our radio compass at about 100 miles out. It brought us to the mouth of the fiord we were to fly up. With a low cloud ceiling, it was almost like flying up a tunnel. The “BW-1” (Blue West One) base had one landing strip sloping up grade with a glazier beyond. As I remember, if one misjudged this landing, there was just enough room to circle left for a second attempt.

This base in Greenland was a cold and desolate place, mostly rocks, ice and water. No trees or girls were observed, though we were told that there were some nurses stationed there. The price offered for American booze was going up. This place was vividly described by Ernest Gann in his book, "Fate is the Hunter".

After a second night at BW-1, we had an uneventful four hour and forty minute flight to Meeks, Iceland. We spent two nights there in a cold, drafty Quonset barracks. It was cold the whole time.

The next flight of five hours and 15 minutes was to Valley, Wales. For the first time since training, I was able to check my "dead reckoning" position with celestial navigation. This was one of only two times I used "celestial" after so many hours working on it in training. We located our destination, despite enemy interference with radio signals, as we got close to northern British Isles.

We had been spending two to three nights at each stop because of the weather and Wales was no different. My only memory of this place was the strong and bitter coffee, if it was coffee!

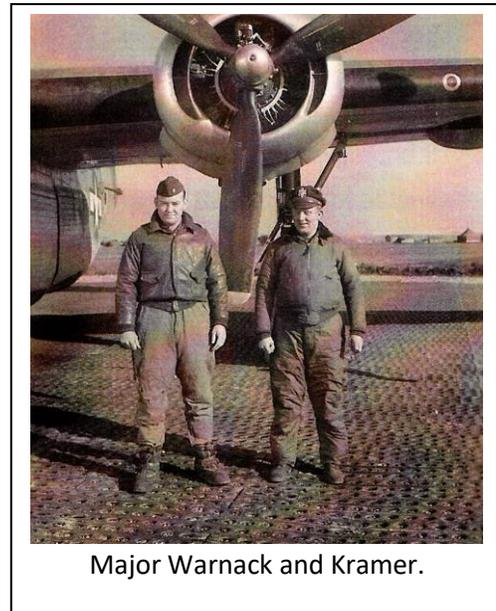
We left of Wales on December 10, 1944 on a night flight to go around Spain and Portugal to North Africa. After flying "dead reckoning" for an hour at an assigned altitude in light rain, Kramer decided to get above the overcast. While climbing, we started getting heavy icing on the wings. Kramer as for a heading back to England.

I gave him an approximate 180° turn around and an ETA to the southern English coast. England was blacked out during the war and we had no maps showing air bases. Our plane had a radio signal device that identified us as a friendly and plane. When we could tell we were over land we had to (SOS) call "MAYDAY" by radio for directions to an airfield. They turned on the runway lights on a field, but nobody on the crew can spot them. We called again and we were able to locate this field at a base outside the town of Neuquay in southwest England. This was after flying blind (no radio), so to speak, for two hours.

That evening, after sleeping all day in a hotel in town we decided to venture out to get some food. The whole town was blacked out and we went looking without a flashlight. A dim light in the window indicated bars and restaurants. We ordered hamburger off the menu and were served ground meat with potatoes and veggies. That was a learning experience.

The next morning we made a seven hour and 20 minute flight (being sure not to fly over neutral Spain or Portugal) to Marrakech, French Morocco. At the time, I remember seeing Casablanca as we approached the coast of Africa. The western sun shining on all the white buildings just beyond the blue ocean was a beautiful sight.

Leaving Marrakech, the next day we headed northeast past Casablanca to the Mediterranean coast and followed this eastward. Kramer offered me some “stick time” in the pilot’s seat. I sat there with maps in my lap identifying different towns of Fez, Oran, etc., while flying the plane, watching out elevation and air speed. I had already given an ETA for our destination of Tunis. England and the United States had taken control of North Africa previously from Germany. It was a sunny, clear, pleasant flight, in contrast to the poor weather across the north Atlantic.



Major Warnack and Kramer.

After two nights at Tunis, it was a short flight to the Gioia, Italy replacement depot, where we deposited our plane. Kramer made it a call to Major Warnock, the squadron CO of the 783rd Bomb Group. Warnock was a hometown boy from Oklahoma, Mississippi and had dated Kramer’s sister before the war. A plane was sent to pick us up and we arrived at Pantanella Air Base on December 16. This base was close to the small town of Canosa, which I believe was on an original Roman road to the southeast battlefield of Hamilton.

The 465th Bomb Group including the 783rd Squadron, was formed and trained at the army air base near McCook, Nebraska and left in February, 1944 to work their way eastward. Most personnel were sent by Liberty ship in a convoy of 80 or more vessels. Seventeen flight crews flew brand new B-24H planes across the southern Atlantic route. After spending some time in North Africa practicing formation flying as a group, they flew to Pantanella Air Field on April 24, 1944. The 465th Bomb Group shared this base with the 464th Bomb Group.

We were one of several replacement crews that arrived about this time, just before Christmas. We three officers on the crew were assigned to a squad tent with a

wooden floor about 4 inches off the ground, with Army cots and a rigged up “gasoline” stove. The tent had room for eight cots and a family of mice under the floor, so we were not crowded. I assume now that we replaced a crew that had either gone back to the United States or had been shot down and not expected back.

We were just entering a wet month (January) when few missions got off the ground. (Only three missions that month.) We got wet snow several times and managed to keep warm at times with our stove, a sleeping bag and six army blankets a piece. The stove was half of a steel barrel with a four-inch galvanized pipe up through the center of the tent. An aircraft oxygen can held fuel (100 octane gasoline) outside the tent. A copper tube led underground to the stove, a shut off valve controlled the fuel flow. There were two main faults with this arrangement. We couldn't keep the fire going at night since the stack clogged up with black soot after a few hours, and one had to be extra careful in lighting the gas since explosions and fires were possible.

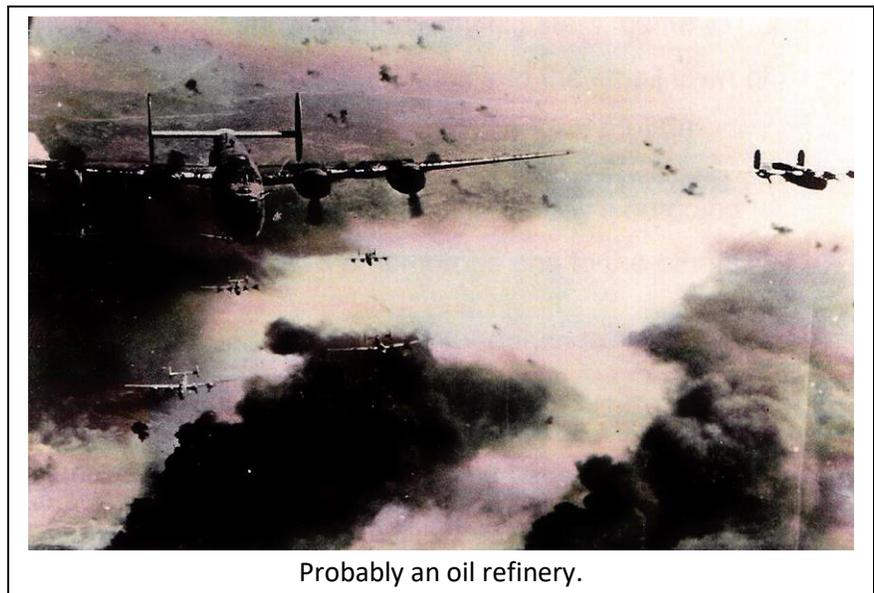
Christmas Eve came nine days after arriving, and Kramer invited the rest of our crew to our tent to share some of the booze we had all helped carry “across”. (There was not a strict separation of rank associating overseas.) There may have been parties in the clubs or even a church service. I remember consuming enough to become a bit happy. This might be considered a sinful way to celebrate a sacred night. Martin Luther, I'll quote saying, “if you must sin, sin **“BOLDLY”**”.

The photo below of the 783rd Squadron Officers taken near the end of the war gives an idea of the area. The tent in the background was my home for five months. The officers club and mess hall were close by to the left. The 465th group headquarters and three other squadrons were located on the hill in the background. Our briefing and theater barn, and “planned church” were located there. It was a muddy slippery walk wearing galoshes to get there on dark rainy nights. The two parallel runways were in the valley of the “Ofanto” River to the left. (I'm in the third row directly below the smokestack, looking down.)



We flew several formation practice missions in our first month in Italy. On January 15, 1945, the plane in the number four position (just behind and below the number one box lead) moved ahead of number one where he could not see number one. He pulled up some and had his twin rudders cut off by number one's props. We were in number three position (to right and behind number one) when the collision occurred. I was in the nose of our plane and watched as number four went down in a flat spin to disappear in a cloud bank. No one survived in Number four. The lead plane, number one, survived with only damaged props. I had played a few games of table tennis that morning with two of the lost crew. They were a couple of handsome, "cream of the crop" officers and had been great competition at "ping pong".

Keeping a diary of my experiences didn't enter my mind and the only personal records kept were in my log book listing date, plane, target and flying time of my missions. My memory of individual missions is blurred, but a few things stand out:



Probably an oil refinery.

The 783rd Squadron flew nine combat missions after we arrived until we flew our first one January 20, 1945 to Linz, Austria. Up to this time the 783rd was credited

with 130 missions losing 27 planes. Seventy more missions were flown after January 20 with only two planes lost. Arriving late in the war as we had, we missed raids to such notorious places as Blechhammer, Brux and Ploesti oil refineries.

Our mess hall food was nothing to brag about, but better than field rations. If I got hungry enough, I could always open a K-ration box, as I often did to satisfy the hunger pangs.

We enjoyed a ration of beer and candy bars fairly regularly. I had little taste for beer at the time so I gave most of it to crew members.

I usually traded my cigarette ration to a young Italian boy for almonds or eggs. We could fry or cook the eggs in a mess kit on our stove. (The gas wasn't rationed.) American cigarettes were a valuable commodity on the Italian market, so I'll bet the kid got them from me for a bargain price.

Hot showers with "warm water were seldom offered, and when they were it was on a rotating basis, but who could complain.

Movies at group headquarters offered a diversion in the evenings. Sometimes it was a slippery, muddy walk to get there. One day a USO sho, without any big stars, came to our base, but I was on a mission when it performed. We could bum rides into the small town of Canosa in the back of a truck (dusty), or to Cerignola, or to a Red Cross Club (dusty).

A couple of times Kramer, Lund and I were assigned to censor the day's outgoing mail. We would sit and lie on our cots and occasionally read a humorous one to the others.

Shooting "skeet" a few times helped us to understand the importance to "lead" when aiming at a fast moving target.

Poker parties at the club were normal, if we were not scheduled to fly the next day, but any games I got into were for low stakes. I often enjoyed competitive games of table tennis.

Mail from Home

Sometime in January I got the news that Don Dunberg was reported MIA. He had trained as a navigator, but also as a bombardier on a B-24, and was assigned to the south Pacific theater with the “Jolly Rogers” bomb group.

We had corresponded a few times after joining the Army Air Corps, and I still have a V-mail letter he wrote just a few days before his plane disappeared on a night flight over the Philippines. (January 10, 1945) His body was recovered a couple of years later and I served as a pallbearer at his funeral.

Then in February a letter from home reported the news that Bob Hogfeldt was listed as MIA. He had gone to Beloit College after graduation from high school in 1943. He was drafted into the Army and sent over to combat in Germany in December 1944. He became a POW on January 25, 1945 until the end of the war in Europe in May.

A Typical Mission

We would be awakened by a shrill “POLICE” whistle in our tent at 2:00 AM or 2:30 AM. This was the job of the “officer of the day”, an assignment I had once.

The mornings in January and February could be just above freezing with light snow on the ground.

I put on long underwear, wool trousers, shirt, wool sweater, felt electric socks, nylon electric suit, a lined flight suit and flying boots! We would have our GI shoes tightly laced to metal clasps we could hook to our parachute harness.

We walked over to the club for breakfast and then we were trucked to group headquarters for briefing of the day’s mission. The IP (initial point), target and route were shown on a big wall map. The commanding officers gave details as to what to expect in enemy resistance and weather.



They probably didn’t make it out of the plane.

Each navigator was given five to eight section maps covering the route. I would then draw with a pencil the route we were to take, being careful to be clear, since these maps often had pencil lines from previous missions.

After completion of briefing, a chaplain offered a prayer for our success and safety.

We were then trucked down to the flight line where we each picked up a “K ration”, a parachute and harness. Then we were taken by jeep to our assigned planes. Usually after a routine check of the plane by the crew, the four props were pulled through and engines started and checked. (Each of the four-blade props were rotated four times – the flight engineer was in charge of this.)

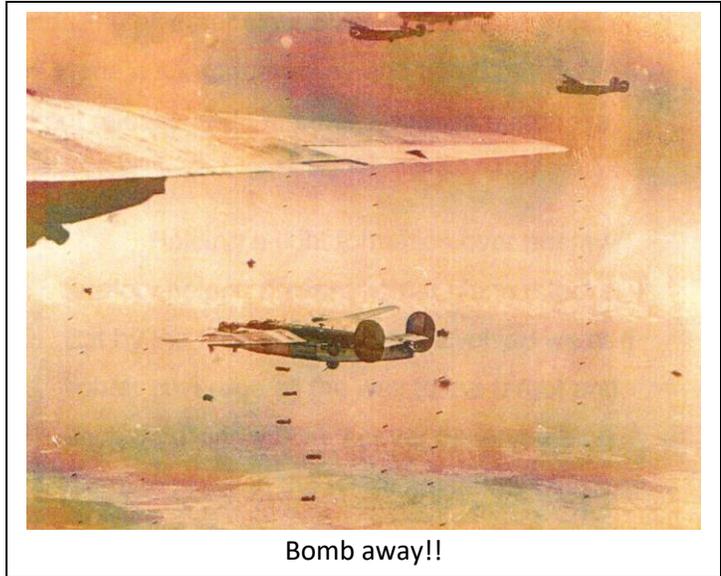
(Someone usually had to give o’weight Kramer a boost getting up to the flight deck through the bomb bay doors.)

We taxied in order to prepare for take-off on one of the two parallel runways. This gave us a minimal time lag. Soon after take-off, the squadron formed one or two box formations of six or seven planes each, then into a group formation of four squadrons circling the area up to 8,000 feet over the Adriatic Sea.

We usually hooked up our oxygen masks at about this altitude. It was my job to call for an oxygen check every ten minutes at higher altitudes, each member responding over the intercom. On one mission, the radio operator collapsed at his desk when the oxygen tube became disconnected. I was close by and reconnected it to quickly revive him. Oxygen was so critical at high altitudes that one could be incoherent after one minute and could die after three minutes without oxygen.

Missions over the Alps into Germany, Austria, etc., lasted from 6.5 to 7.5 hours. I usually was chewing gum to help relieve air pressure in the ears, especially when descending from 26,000 or 27,000 feet. (Unpressurized and drafty cabins in the B-24.) Chewing gum with an oxygen mask on for six hours meant tired jaw muscles. I flew a couple of missions with a bad head cold and the descent was extremely painful, taking maybe two days on the ground to clear the ears.

We increased our altitude at 250 or 500 feet per minute as we headed north over the Adriatic so that we were close to 21,000 feet in the Trieste, Italy area. This was high enough to get above the smaller guns. The route was zigzag in a way to avoid known heavy anti-aircraft guns and to confuse the enemy to keep them guessing as to what our target was.



At the IP, we would make a sharp turn in formation toward the target. The pilot (or co-pilot) would hit a toggle switch to open the bomb bay doors. The safety pins in each bomb (usually 500 lbs) would have been removed by engineer Gerstner.



The bombardier in the lead plane picked up the target either visually or with radar. The rest of the planes jockeyed to stay in formation.

On the bomb run, German anti-aircraft radar picked up our heading and altitude and flak was very heavy, intense and sometimes accurate.

The bomb run from the IP until we had turned out of the target area was usually a scary, but exciting matter of only minutes. We were observing the smoke from flak bursts around us, and sometimes the plane was bouncing from the percussion of the shells bursting. During this time, I was usually on the flight deck behind the pilot jotting down on a report our flight data and anything unusual observed. I'm sure this responsibility helped me by keeping my mind focused on the job at hand.

When the lead plane's bombs started falling, all other planes would drop their bombs. Almost immediately afterward, the squadron made a sharp turn away and the bomb bay doors were closed. Once in a while a bomb would not release and Gerstner would go out on the catwalk to give the bomb a kick to make it fall.



Holding a tight formation over enemy territory helped prevent fighter plane attacks. But by the time our crew was involved, we had fighter coverage all the way to the target and back (P-51s and P-38s). I never observed a German plane in the air on any of my missions.

If our plane didn't suffer obvious damage we could relax somewhat as we crossed back over the Alps, but the

danger from ground fire was still there.

After landing, we were debriefed crew-by-crew and then served coffee and donuts by Red Cross girls in a mobile unit. One girl serving us was from Rockford, Illinois. Her name was Harriet Savage. I tried to reach her some years later. A friend of hers told me she had moved to California. After reporting back to squadron headquarters, we were entitled to two shots of American whiskey.

My Credited Missions

* Number 1 – January 20, 1945

Target: Linz, Austria – 7 hours

Co-pilot did not fly and we were assigned an experienced pilot. For some reason, we turned back at the IP and did not drop our bombs on the primary target.

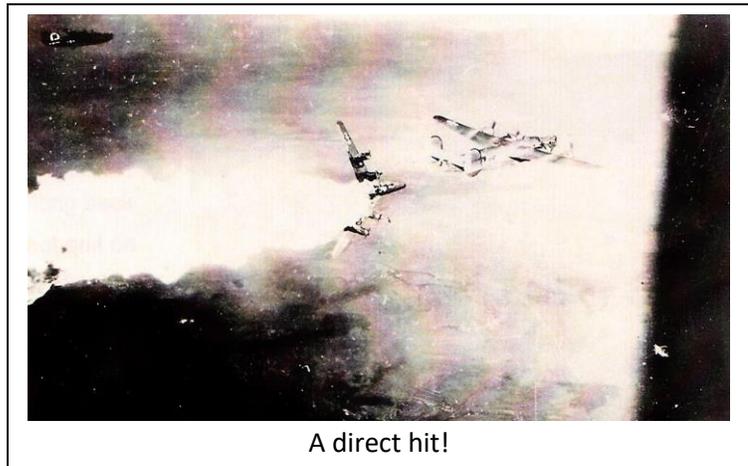
(Probably a run-away prop)

The IP (initial point) was a definite turn toward the target allowing time for the bombardiers to lineup the target visually or by radar. The plan was to hold this to a minimum since our speed was slower since bomb bay doors were now open, and we were on a straight flight path being an easier target for anti-aircraft guns.

* Number 2 – January 31, 1945

Target: Vienna – 6.5 hours

Our first mission as a complete crew was to rail yards in the Vienna area. The temperature at altitude was -64° Fahrenheit. We had been advised to have an Italian tailor take the wires out of our ankle high slippers and sew them in a pair of socks, allowing us to wear out GI shoes inside out flying boots. In case we bailed out, we needed good shoes to “walk home”. Radio operator Marshall froze his feet when his socks shorted out. (He received a purple heart.) We immediately got a new issue of slippers and tied out GI shoes together and added a heavy metal clip to each shoe. This allowed us to clip the shoes to our parachute harness if we had to bail out.



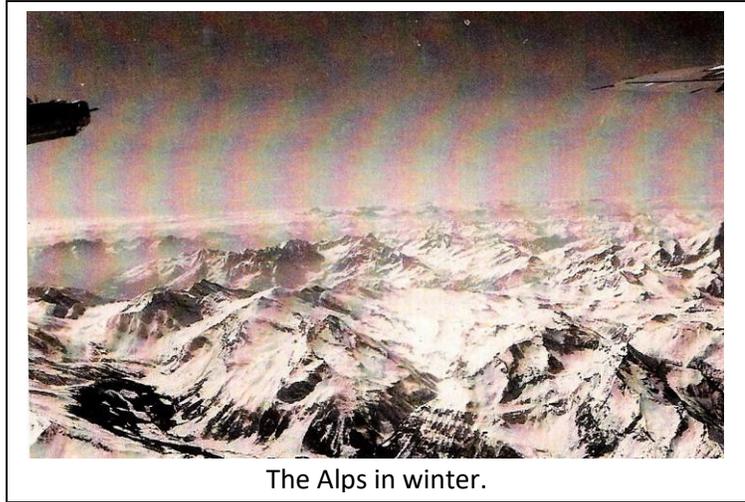
* Number 3 - February 5, 1945

* Number 4 – February 8, 1945

Targets: Regensburg and Vienna – 7 hours each

We had a solid undercast north of the Alps and relied on radar navigation and bombing. It was rather difficult to navigate under these conditions since the compass needle was swinging back and forth as the pilot jockeyed the plane to keep in a tight formation. Remember that the lead ship in the box is flying with radar and automatic pilot most of the time.

Number 5 – February 13, 1945



The Alps in winter.

Target: Graz – 6 hours, 5 minutes

During the bomb run, we had engines #2 and #4 hit by flak resulting in #2 being shut down and prop feathered. Number 4 showed oil streaking back over the cowling but it did not quit on us. In the excitement of dropping out of the formation, Kramer asked for a heading to Switzerland. I quickly responded and we turned. Then Kramer and Lund decided we could hold the altitude we had dropped to and could make it back over the Alps. We then headed back to base. The crew was ordered to toss our ammunition and removable guns to reduce weight so we could hold altitude. This had caused us to lose air speed and drop out of formation. We had to be aware because German fighters were more apt to attack a single plane.



Flak bursts: Intensive, heavy and accurate.

Number 6 – February 19, 1945

Target: Vienna – 6 hours, 50 minutes

On this mission we experienced a real strong headwind (70 MPH) on the bomb run causing us to turn downwind of the IP. Consequently we were sitting ducks for anti-aircraft guns for a long time! Some advantages to us were electronic devices to throw off German radar. We also dropped “chaff” (like Xmas tinsel) that was intended to confuse radar.

Number 7 – February 22, 1945

Target: North of Alps

We turned back because of adverse weather. We received credit as a mission because we had gone over enemy territory subject to flak and fighters.

Number 8 – February 25, 1945

Target: Linz, Austria (Ordinance Depot) – 7 hours, 25 minutes

Number 9 – March 1, 1945

Target: Moosebierbaum Railroad Yards – 6 hours, 55 minutes

(Hogfeldt may have worked here as POW)

Number 10 – March 12, 1945

Target: Vienna (Florisdorf Marshalling “Railroad” Yards) – 7 hours

Number 11 – March 14, 1945

Target: Nove Zamiky, Hungary – 7 hours, 10 minutes

Number 12 – March 15, 1945

Target: Graz (Marshalling Yards) – 6 hours, 30 minutes

***Number 13 – March 19, 1945**

Target: Muhldorf, Germany (Marshalling Yards) 6 hours, 20 minutes (milk run)

Number 14 – March 21, 1945

Target: Neuberg “Air Drome” – 7 hours, 5 minutes

Number 15 – March 24, 1945

Target: Neuberg “Air Drome” – 7 hours, 30 minutes

Number 16 – March 26, 1945u

Target: North of Vienna (Marshalling Yards) – 8 hours, 20 minutes

We turned back due to adverse weather.

Number 17 – April 2, 1945

Target: Graz (Marshalling Yards) – 5 hours, 55 minutes

Number 18 through Number 24 – April 5 – April 24, 1945

Targets: Northern Italy (Military Targets) – 5-6 hours each

We flew these seven missions supporting our 5th Army in various targets.

* All the missions we flew that are marked with an asterisk were on the same dates and targets as future Senator George McGovern. He was with a different bomb group. (See the book “Wild Blue” by Ambrose.)

Sometime near the end of April, after my 24th mission, our crew was assigned to a four-day rest leave. Kramer, Lund and I were flown to Rome to spend three nights in Hotel Savoia, a first-class hotel in downtown Rome. We were served great meals including wine and/or booze by men waiters. This is the first time I remember enjoying wine with a meal.

There were about six tours of Rome arranged by the Red Cross. I believe we went on two tours that included many ancient ruins, besides visiting St. Peters. (Coliseum, catacombs) History had never excited me in school and I’m afraid I didn’t appreciate the opportunity at the time.

While we were in Rome, the German Army in Italy had surrendered and there was a lot of partying, especially by Army personnel. We know the war would soon be over, but on returning to Pantanella Air Base, I found myself assigned to fly another mission. What a blow! The operations officer picked men who, with one more mission, would qualify for an air medal or an oak leaf cluster to their air medal. This meant flying as bastard crews. I was upset, but then the mission was cancelled.

The war ended on May 8, 1945 and plans were soon under way to return to the States. Our crew broke up. Kramer was assigned to be a General's aide in Paris. We flew two prisoners (GIs) to Naples and got to sight see a little – May 10th.

To my good fortune, I was assigned to another crew (Forsberg's) to fly one of our newer planes back to the States. After checking out the plane, we flew to an evacuated base (Manduria), where we loafed around for two weeks, sometimes getting a short rise to the Adriatic for salt water swims. To start back, we then flew a short trip to the Gioia POE base and left for home on June 7th. We were assigned to go to Marrakech, but on our final approach we got in a bad storm forcing us to head for Casablanca. This base was in heavy use by the Air Transport Command flying personnel home. We did land, despite their attempt to turn us away. We were getting low on gas after 9 hours and 20 minutes of flying. We did manage to get into the city of Casablanca for a short look, but had to go back to Marrakech the next day.

We then flew to Dakar (then West French Africa), where I saw the blackest Africans I have ever seen. I was up at night with GIs (diarrhea) before taking off to Natal, Brazil. On this flight I was down in the nose of the plane by myself, miserable with stomach has pains for the 9 hour and 20 minute flight. Regardless, it was a smooth flight and we approached Natal directly on course! Two ships had been stationed at sea for us to take a bearing part way across. At dinner the second night, I ran into Gunnard Franzen, a high school friend. He is now in our WWII Combat Flyers Group that has been meeting for breakfast for over 20 years.

Assigned to Georgetown (British Guiana then), Forsberg faked engine trouble and we landed at Belem, Brazil. He had heard that the PX there had a lot to offer. I bought an alligator skin purse, several pair of silk stockings and French perfume (Chanel #5). The only thing I was bringing from Italy was a small charm bell from the Isle of Capri.

After Georgetown, we went to Borinquen Field, Puerto Rico, a permanent base on the coast that resembled a resort.

A flight to Charleston, South Carolina air base concluded a very pleasant trip back to the United States. We had perfect weather all the way, except for the storm at Marrakech. A couple of the crew members got out of the plane and kissed the ground. (A good Swede will hide his emotions.) Remember that these guys had been missing-in-action, hiking out of Yugoslavia. Their stowaway pet dog from Italy had to be quarantined for only 24 hours.

What a great feeling to be back in the United States of America! There was no band to welcome us back, but consider that our return was a common daily occurrence at this base at this time.

After processing, my first move was to the PX for a chocolate malted. Then, later, we were served a good steak dinner. We were soon sent through Georgetown, South Carolina, back to Camp Grant by troop train. I called home and Jean and Mom drove out to pick me up. To surprise me, they brought Hogfeldt along; who I thought was still missing in action in Germany. It was quite a reunion!

I was starting a 30-day furlough and a lot of those days and nights were spent at a large home on Lake Geneva near Fontana. Hogfeldt's parents had rented the place for the summer. Bob's friends were made welcome.

Thoren had finished his degree at ITT and was serving as an engineer with the Sea Bees in the Pacific helping clean up.

After a great month, I reported to Drew Field at Tampa, Florida for reassignment. (Drew Air Field is now Tampa International Airport.) It was here we had a choice of discharge or continuing in the service until the war with Japan was over. I chose the latter.

Florida, in July, left me with a distaste as it was hot and extremely humid. The only air conditioned buildings were the PX and the officers club.

After one month, I was assigned with a dozen others to Barksdale Field, a B-29 training base, near Shreveport, Louisiana. We were traveling with civilians on a short train through a small town in west Florida when we noticed a fire engine with a banner proclaiming the end of the war. (8/14/45, although officially signing ceremony was September 2, 1945.) Our train had no club car or food service with alcohol to enliven our happiness.

Arriving at our new base early the next morning we couldn't find anyone at headquarters to report to. Everyone had been out celebrating the previous night. An MP suggested we come back **THE NEXT DAY!**

I and two others were assigned to be navigation instructors. We were told to report each day to a classroom to review three large manuals. We were soon bored and since we had enough "points" for discharge, I started playing golf on one of the two 18-hole courses on the base almost every morning.

Barksdale Field was and still is a permanent air base. Afternoons I often went swimming in the club pool, which had warm water. The club bar opened at 4:30 PM and I got to really enjoy draft beer, and then often eating a good steak dinner. We had maid service in our rooms for the first time.

I flew as a “passenger” once for four hours on a B-29 to qualify for flying pay for the month. Why I wanted this soft life is a mystery. However, many of us were thinking about a free college education, with an allowance at any college or university in the country.

After filling out forms for discharge, I was soon sent by train to Camp Grant to end my military career. I was not officially separated until two weeks after starting at Beloit College (2) weeks late. Discharged October 14, 1945

Reflections



My service in the Army Air Corps was an exciting time of my life. For a young man who had never traveled more than 150 miles from home it turned into a **GREAT** adventure.

I was fortunate to go through cadet training in one year to receive a commission and navigator wings. Then to finish combat crew training, fly over the north Atlantic in winter weather to Europe, fly on 24 combat missions without any crew members being injured, and finally, I got to see another geographic area of the world on our way back to the States.

I was one of the lucky ones, definitely not a hero, just doing a job I was trained to do.

My combat year was a different side of a war that involved some thirteen million men and women in the services of the United States. I didn't experience the "HELL" that it was for so many hundreds of thousands of service people and millions of others, including civilians.

For me, it was basically a day time job, sleeping on a cot in a dry tent at night.

I hope no one reading this has gotten the impression that I was cool and collected at all times. On missions I tried to be aware of the locations of my parachute chest pack, GI shoes, and first aid kit in case of need to bail out. If a crew member was seriously injured the primary care was to stop arterial bleeding, make them warm and comfortable and administer morphine if required.



Summer of 2007 at age 84

I made reference to alcohol and it was available. It helped get thoughts of combat and possible consequences out of ones mind. I'm thankful I never felt that I "had to have it". Beer, wine or a cocktail to me have always been a social relaxer.

Raised in the Lutheran Church, prayers to God were a regular part of this journey, but I'm sure most anyone in combat prays to some God.

My dress uniform, replaced after the barracks fire and seldom worn, was recently donated to the Midway Village Museum in Rockford, Illinois. It was put on display briefly in the aviation gallery with my photo. I believe this classifies me as a Historic Person!



Our crew at the first squadron reunion at the Air Force Academy (less pilot Kramer) September, 1983.

Sitting: Gerstner, Marshall; Standing: Lund, Lind, Guzioka, Wylie, Dubose. Michael George, our belly turret gunner, did not attend the reunion.





This Tale Ends Here



EASTER EGGS FOR HITLER. Ordnance men of a B-24 group, Fifteenth Air Force in Italy set to work with paint and brush to design Easter “specials” for a Nazi aircraft factory in Austria, April 1944. In its blasting of industrial targets in the rugged, mountainous terrain of southern Europe, the Fifteenth achieved a brilliant record. At the end of the first year (Nov 1944) its planes had flown a total of 150,000,000 miles to hit 620 targets in 12 different countries.

Navigational Star Charts

North Pole Projection

