

WWII Story of Freeman L. Smith

by Brian F. Smith

"We have shared the incommunicable experience of war." So, wrote Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr. about his experiences during the American Civil War. The American men who went off to fight in World War II shared that same experience. They were all young men, as only youth has the energy and bravado to risk their lives for such a cause. In this narrative I will attempt to relate the WWII story of my father, Freeman Lismore Smith. It is, however, not just his story but the war story of the whole crew of his B-24 bomber. The crew stayed together throughout their time in Europe, and basically, what happened to one, happened to all. Their story is by no means unique among the veterans of that war, but it might show how the shared, life-threatening peril he and his crew endured created a bond between those men that carried on throughout their lives. Also, how the uncertainty of what the men were going through ate away at those at home day after day while waiting for any news of their loved ones so far away.

Freeman grew up a poor boy in East Providence, Rhode Island. His father died when he was only twelve. He was the oldest of three children, having two younger sisters, Alpha and June. His mother worked at several jobs as she tried to keep the family together. Money was scarce and Freeman remembered some nights when dinner was nothing but bread soaked in milk. However, the family stayed together and in June 1938 he graduated from East Providence high school. He once said, "I graduated from high school before I ever had a pair of long pants." While in High School he met Mildred Wurtz, who was two years behind him, and they soon began going together.

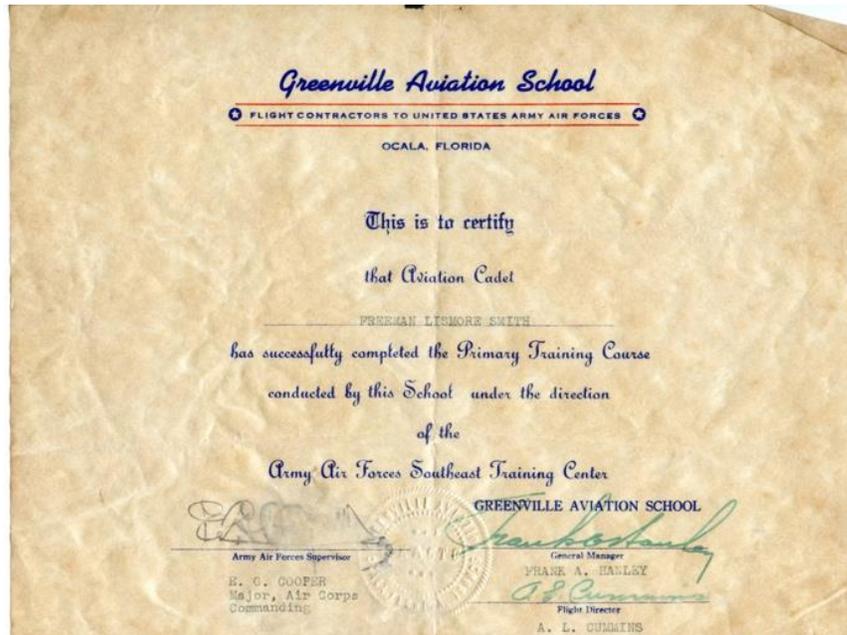
Out of school, and needing to begin to contribute to the support of his family, Freeman began working as a clerk in the American Screw Company in Providence, RI. Also, on October 15, 1938, to earn extra money he joined the 10th Coast Artillery Regiment based at Fort Adams, Newport, RI. The Coast Artillery was the beginning of his military experience and he served in it until June 26, 1940, when it transitioned to become the 243rd Coast Artillery. During this time, he petitioned Rhode Island State Representative Charles F. Risk for an appointment to the West Point Military Academy, and on January 15, 1940 he was named second alternate for that position. Unfortunately for him, the first appointee accepted the spot.

Freeman registered for the draft on October 16, 1940, shortly after he left the coast artillery. War was already raging in Europe, and in just over a year America would become embroiled in the conflict. He continued to work at the American Screw Company and to date Mildred as more and more of his friends joined up and went off to war. So, on October 6, 1942 he joined the Enlisted Reserve Corps as a Tactical Air Crew private. On January 27, 1943, Freeman entered active duty in the Army Air Force (AAF) at Atlantic City, New Jersey. There he met a lifelong friend, Harry Veyera, also an East Providence boy.

Identification Card—Enlisted Reserve Corps
This is to Certify, That Freeman Lismore Smith 6,116,072
was enlisted as * Pvt. A.C.E.R. (Tac-Air Crew)
Enlisted Reserve Corps of the Army of the United States, on the 6
day of Oct., one thousand nine hundred and 42,
for the period of Duration of War plus six (6) mos. year. When enlisted he was 24 years of age, and by
occupation a Office Clerk He had Hazel eyes, Black hair,
Fair complexion, and was 5 feet 6 inches in height.
Given at Headquarters 40 Fountain St., Providence, R.I., this
6 day of Oct., one thousand nine hundred and 42

FOR THE COMMANDING GENERAL: H. J. McKENNEY, Capt. Cav. R. & I. Adjutant General
* Insert grade, and organization or section, e. g., "Corporal, Company A, 301st Infantry," "Sergeant, Quartermaster Corps."
W. D., A. G. O. Form No. 166—August 1, 1932. 3-8330 U. S. GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE: 1931

After completing basic training Freeman was sent to the Greenville Aviation School in Ocala, Florida. The school was a flight contractor for the US Army Air Forces and there, he successfully completed the Primary Training Course as an Aviation Cadet.



Freeman hoped to become a pilot in the AAF and was appointed a sergeant in the Army Air Forces Pre-Flight School, Maxwell Field, Alabama, in August 1943, for Basic Pilot Training. While at the school he trained on the Boeing Stearman Model 75 biplane, also known as the Kaydet, which was the standard pilot training aircraft for the AAF during the war. Though making it through most of the school, he was unable to complete all requirements to graduate as a pilot.



By 1943, Freeman's mother was living at home alone. His two sisters were out of the house on their own and Freeman was away in the AAF. So, his mother, Bessie, decided to join the WACs, the Women's Army Corps. On March 11, 1943, Bessie became an Aviation Cadet. She went on to make a career in the Air Force, attaining the rank of Master Sergeant and working in the Pentagon.

After leaving the pilot training school Freeman began Aerial Gunnery School, Fort Myers, Florida in March 1944. This school was to train gunners for service on bombers. Gunnery school was an eight-week course and the men were classified as either turret gunners or flexible gunners. Turret gunners were the ball, nose, and tail gunners. Freeman trained as a waist gunner and continued on to Flexible Training School to learn his job. Gunners learned the mechanics of various guns and practiced firing, first from moving platforms and then from turrets mounted on vehicles. They practiced firing from the various turrets and waist positions, and finally how to sight and fire their guns at targets being towed by other aircraft while actually flying. Freeman qualified as an Aerial Gunner, MOS (Military Occupation Specialty) 612, with the rank of corporal.



With his formal training completed, Freeman knew that his days were numbered before he would be called to join the fight either in Europe or the Pacific. So, he asked his high school sweetheart, Mildred, to marry him. She said 'yes', and on July 19, 1944 they were married in East Providence, Rhode Island.

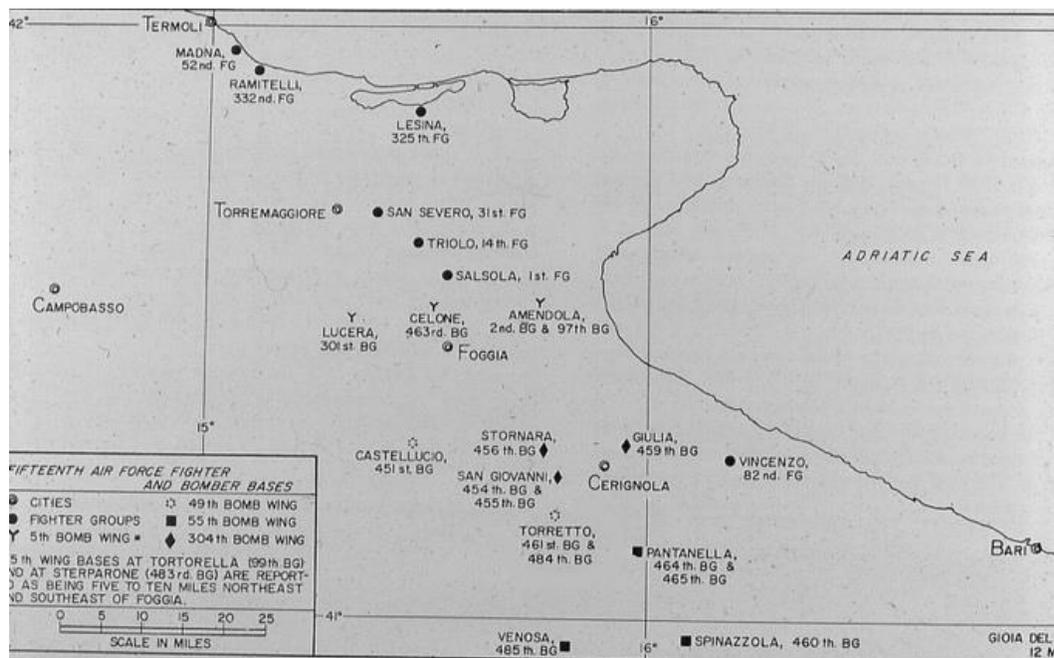


Soon, Freeman met the bomber crew that would share the experiences that would form the permanent bond between them, and together they left for the European theatre of war on November 12, 1944. They sailed on the French ocean liner *Columbie* that was pressed into service as a United States troop ship. It was a rough voyage on heavy seas, and they shared a cramped space on the ship's fantail. *Columbie* landed in Gibraltar on November 26th where the men took a British boat to Naples, Italy, then a second British boat to Bari on Italy's east coast.



SS Columbie

The crew was assigned to the Fifteenth Air Force, 55th Bomb Wing, 465th Bomb Group, 782nd Bomb Squadron, based at the Pantanella airfield which is 15km south of the town of Cerignola, Italy. Pantanella had the capacity to hold up to 150 heavy bombers between two bomb groups.





Pantanella airfield

The 465th Bomb Group and the 464th Bomb Group shared the same airstrip and were made up of entirely B24 Liberator bombers. The 465th and the 464th were both located on opposite hills with the landing strip in the valley between them. As fate would have it, Freeman's friend, Harry Veyera, was assigned to the 464th Bomb Group and they visited with each other frequently.

Freeman's crew was made up of the following men:

Italo (Chick) Gemmato, New York City, NY – Pilot
Norman (Stick) Stickney, Smithland, Iowa – Co Pilot
Lawrence Smith, Parkersburg, West Virginia - Navigator
William Snow, Middle Village, Queens, NY - Engineer
Leonard Day, Jr., Pontiac, Michigan – Armorer, Gunner
Robert Linsley, Sioux City, Iowa – Radio Operator
John Martin, Flint, Michigan – Gunner
Freeman (F.L.) Smith, East Providence, Rhode Island – Gunner
Irving (Ike) Eisenbaum, New Britain, Connecticut – Gunner, Bombardier

The B-24 Liberator was rushed into service at the beginning of the war and thus didn't provide many comforts for the crew. Entrance to the aircraft was limited to the bomb bay doors, nose wheel, or rear entrance hatch, while movement within the ship was tedious at best. There was no power assist steering and rudder control and the excessive bomb weight it could carry made it very hard to fly. Trying to keep the aircraft flying in tight formation through heavy turbulence, both from the weather and propeller wash from the other planes in the squadron, took its toll on the endurance of the pilot. It flew at an altitude of between 18,000 and 28,000 feet, and could make a round trip mission of up to 2,000 miles. The plane was not heated and temperatures could drop to -50 degrees, requiring heated flight suits that would plug into a heat source once in position. Over 10,000 feet, the crew had to wear oxygen masks. Maximum bomb weight was 12,800 lbs., and it could take 25 minutes to reach an altitude of 20,000 feet depending on the weight it carried.

As the men settled into their new home, life at Pantanella began to take on the routine that many thousands of American airmen were also undergoing throughout Europe. The enlisted crew all lived in the same tent and the men painted the names of the states that they came from on the outside canvas. There was a small oil heater inside that provided some heat through the cold Italian winter. At night, their wool lined, mummy sleeping bags helped to keep them warm.



Enlisted Crew Tent



Lenny Day Inside Tent



Bob Linsley Lighting Stove

About 2:30 to 3:00 on the morning of each day that the men were assigned to fly a mission they were awakened and went to an early breakfast. At 5AM they were briefed on the particulars of that assignment. Then they would board the aircraft they were assigned to that day and settle into their respective positions to wait for the whole squadron to get ready to take off. They then waited for either a red flare (mission cancelled) or a green flare (mission on). When the order was given that the mission was a 'go', the bombers would start their engines, sometimes 200 of them between the 464th and 465th bomb groups. They would rumble down the runway, one after the other, lift off, and circle in the air until the whole squadron was airborne. Then they would begin their flight to rendezvous with the other planes making up the missions for that day. Once together, the whole formation headed in the general direction of their bombing assignment. As they drew closer to the enemy targets each squadron would break off from the whole formation and head toward their individual destinations. The gunners were instructed to test fire their Browning .50 caliber machine guns to make sure they were in good working order. By that time of the war, enough forward fighter bases were active to allow fighter escorts to accompany the formation for protection. However, the Germans had perfected jet aircraft, such as the ME-262, and by mid 1944 they put its superior speed to use by flying them parallel, but out of gun range, alongside the bomber formation to radio its speed and direction to the German defense systems along the route.

The crew's first bombing missions, though nerve racking, resulted in no major mishaps. Most missions would take off over the Adriatic Sea and as soon as they flew over the European coast they would encounter enemy flak. The word flak comes from a long German word: *flugabwehrkanone*, that means a cannon shooting at fliers. The Germans were firing both 88mm and 105mm anti-aircraft guns. The men could tell the difference because the explosion of the 105's caused a burst of white smoke, while the burst of the deadlier 88's was black smoke. But, things took a turn for the worse when they were assigned a mission on December 20, 1944 to bomb the oil refineries at Blechhammer, Germany. Navigator, Larry Smith, described the briefing that morning:

One of the officers spelling out our destiny appeared more stressed than any of us, and he wasn't even going on the mission! But he had good reason to be upset; on the previous day he had lost half his crew in a "flak attack" over Munich. Upon returning to the base that night, he had drastically reduced the supply of liquor at the Officer's Club. His eyes were very red and his speech was very slurry. In view of his hangover, he was relatively brief.

He ended by saying that our mission to Blechhammer would be very long and very hazardous. He thought it unlikely that all of us would return. But our egos, fed by youth, left our crew members unabashed. He had to be talking about other crews who wouldn't be returning, certainly not us!

Blechhammer was an early morning mission, and, after that disheartening briefing, the crew was apprehensive as their plane picked up speed down the runway and slowly lifted into the air. The aircraft was heavily loaded with bombs and Chick, the pilot, struggled to continue to gain altitude. Finally, they cleared the coast and leveled out over the Adriatic. Then they proceeded north. Their flight path took them over Yugoslavia, then Austria, where they crossed the snow-covered Alps. They had been flying for several hours when Bob Linsley, the radio operator, began cussing over the intercom, yelling that he spotted enemy fighters fast approaching. As the men began to panic and tried to spot the enemy, Linsley realized that the fighters were actually American P-51 Mustangs there to escort the bombers. He said, "They are probably those colored aviators stationed at Foggia, Italy." Later, they found out that their escort was, indeed, the celebrated 'Red Tails': the Tuskegee Airmen.

Flying in a tight formation with the rest of the planes in their squadron, the mission remained free of enemy contact. But, as they approached the target they had a rude awakening. The German's were waiting for them and opened up with heavy flak. When a B-24 is about three miles from the target, it begins the bomb run and control of the plane shifts to the bombardier. The plane must stay on a straight course to the target and waits for the lead plane in the formation to jettison its bombs. Then the other planes follow suit and drop their bombs, as well. During their bomb run Freeman's plane took many shrapnel hits from the flak, though no one was wounded. They dropped their bombs, and as they started to return to their base they began to fall further, and further, behind the squadron due to the flak damage. After they crossed the Alps, Chick found it ever more difficult to maintain altitude. It soon was apparent that they would not make it back to their base in Italy. They were still in enemy territory and Chick could think of nowhere to safely land. Larry Smith, the navigator, remembered talking with a fellow airman who had been shot down in Yugoslavia a few days before and spent some time evading enemy troops. He mentioned an airstrip on the small island of Vis, in the Adriatic Sea, just off the coast and close to Italy, that had recently been liberated and had a short airstrip made for fighters. Possibly, it could be used for an emergency landing. It was agreed to try to make it to Vis and Larry quickly mapped a course to get there as quickly as possible.

Vis had been in control of the Italian army until the fall of 1943 when Marshal Tito's Yugoslavian Partisans, who were on the side of the Allies, seized it. The British built a short runway on the island to stage their fighters and to provide support for the partisans. Marshal Tito had his headquarters there, as well. The runway was 2,200 feet long and a B-24 normally needed 5,000 feet to land safely. But, Chick decided that it would be better to attempt landing on a short runway than to ditch in the sea because the chances of a B24 landing safely on the water was only about 25 percent. Most broke up when they hit the water, killing all the crew. B-17s and B-24s had landed safely on Vis in the past and there were U.S. aircraft mechanics and medical personnel on hand, if needed. What the crew didn't see was a number of crashed bombers on either side of the runway. Work crews on Vis would salvage what spare parts they could from the wrecks and eventually bulldoze the rest into a huge pile of twisted, destroyed, plane metal.

There were mountains on both ends of the landing strip and successfully landing meant coming over the first mountain and immediately dropping down to hit the very beginning of the runway. To make matters worse, they were attempting to land during a driving rain storm. As each member of the crew held on with white

knuckles Chick cleared the mountain and touched down right on the first part of the runway. Evidently, the plane's brakes had been damaged by the flak, and combined with the slick runway, they began to pick up speed rather than slowing down. They were quickly heading for a deep ravine so Chick steered off the runway and into rain-soaked mud. The mud was so deep that the plane drastically slowed down and eventually stopped 'nose down', with the tail of the plane sticking almost straight up in the air. Fortunately, none of the crew was injured. There were three B-24s landing on Vis right behind each other that day. The first one was Freeman's plane. The next was piloted by future senator George McGovern, which landed safely. The third went off the end of the runway and crashed directly into the mountain. Everyone was killed. After McGovern's plane landed copilot Stickney shook his hand and congratulated him on making a safe landing. The next day the crew was returned to their base in Italy and they ended 1944 without further incident.

The winter of 1945 in Pantanella began with snow and harsh winds. Freeman and his crew spent most of their off hours in their tent around the small heater trying to stay warm. There was also an occasional trip to Bari, Italy for some rest and relaxation. The 5,000th B-24 manufactured was assigned to their squadron. Named 'V Grand', it was signed by everyone who helped build it. The crew used it as a photo-op when they had free time.



Photo Op With the V Grand



He did recall that by 1945, Italy had been ravaged by years of war. Daily life was a struggle for most of the local people and he remembered children searching through the base trash barrels for scraps of food. Many stray dogs wandered about and some of the crews acquired temporary pets.



Norm Stickney, Larry Smith, and Angelo their 'pizan' with their pet dog



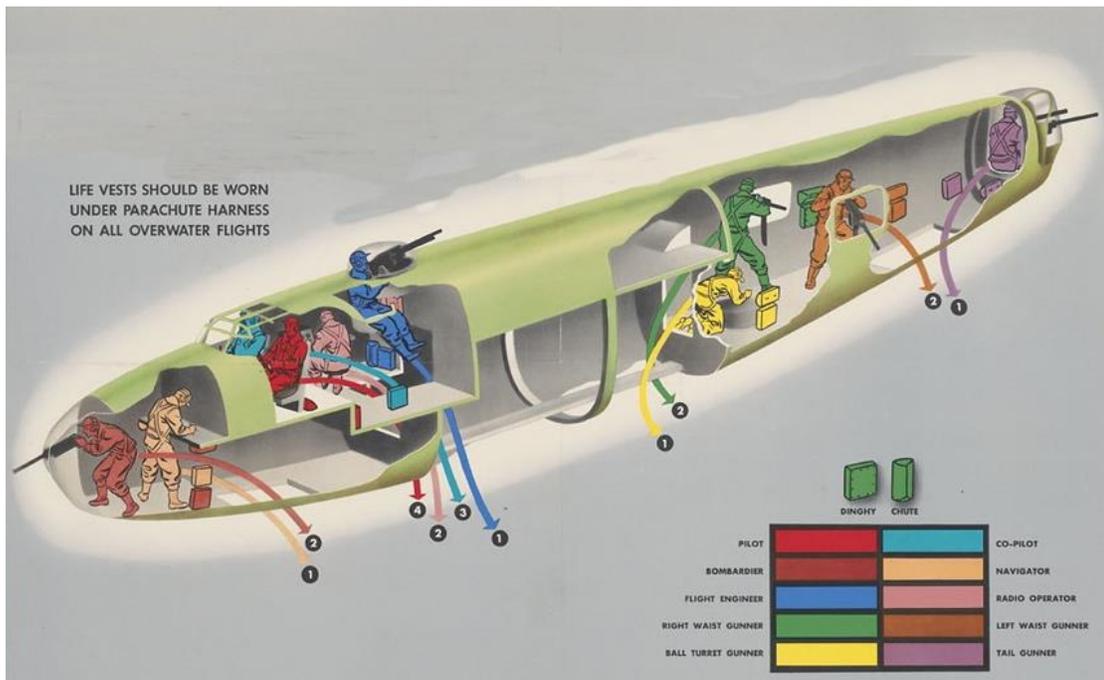
Freeman (2nd from left kneeling), and crew with Royal Engineer, Royal Navy, Australian Kiwi, and South African buddies on short R&R in Bari, Italy, January 1945.

Over the first few months of 1945 the crew flew on several missions that, fortunately, left the men and their aircraft unscathed. On the first of March they were assigned a mission to bomb the North Marshalling Yards at Linz, Austria, with a secondary target of Wien. Larry said, "Who ever heard of Wien?" It turned out to be the German word for Vienna, and they were to hit the marshaling yards the next day. Nothing unusual or ominous surfaced at the briefing and the men were not too apprehensive as they readied themselves for their task. They boarded their plane on March second, call sign 'White O' named 'No Love, No Nothin', and with the mission a 'go' they lifted off, heading for Austria.



**Back L-R: Larry Smith, Norm Stickney, Chick Gemmato
Front L-R: Bill Snow, Ike Eisenbaum, Lenny Day, Freeman Smith, John Martin, Bob Linsley**

It was about 3pm as they approached the target and there was solid undercast below them. As the flak began to explode all around the plane Larry said, "the flak was so thick and accurate we felt we could walk on it." It seemed as if every burst was going off at their altitude. The aircraft took several serious flak hits, and Chick was forced to leave the formation and head for home. Soon, they were flying all alone with two engines out. They barely cleared the Alps and Chick had to feather two damaged propellers to stop them from 'windmilling': the term used to describe how when a propeller stopped functioning, it would begin to spin faster, and faster, until it destroyed the engine, unless the blades could be turned to offer the least resistance to the oncoming wind. Training manuals stated that it was possible that the engine could catch fire, in turn igniting the fuel tank in the wing. Even one windmilling prop caused enormous drag on the plane, causing it to lose altitude rapidly. Two, doomed the aircraft. It didn't take long to realize that 'No Love, No Nothin' wasn't going to make it home, and wouldn't stay aloft much longer. Chick hit the button to alert the crew to prepare to bailout. That preparation meant that navigator, Larry Smith, determined the plane's position and forwarded it to radioman, Bob Linsley. Bob then sent out a distress message and their position. Chick reduced air speed and set the autopilot.



There are dedicated exits on a B-24 for the crew to bailout. The tail gunner and left waist gunner leave by the rear hatch – the actual entrance to the plane. The right waist gunner and ball turret gunner leave by the rear bomb bay doors. The top turret gunner/engineer, the radioman, pilot, and copilot leave by the front bomb bay doors, and the navigator and nose gunner/bombardier leave by the nose wheel bay. There was a narrow catwalk over the bomb bay doors, which opened like a roll top desk. If they failed to open electrically, they were designed to only withstand a small amount of weight before they opened up on their own. If a bomb or a person dropped on them, just that weight would push the doors open. A man crossing the catwalk had to be very careful not to slip or he would fall right through the bomb bay doors.

The bailout signal was given and the nine men quickly exited the plane. All nine chutes opened and the crew drifted toward earth. They were very near Zagreb, Yugoslavia. Larry Smith said that he opened his chute a few seconds after clearing the plane, then looked around to see who else made it out. He could see the chutes of the four men who jumped before him down below. There were still four more that hadn't jumped yet when he left the plane: Chick, Stickney, Freeman Smith, and Bill Snow. He finally was able to turn his chute around so that he could see the plane, which was in a crazy position. He didn't see anyone else, and just before he passed out from lack of oxygen, because they bailed out at such a very high altitude, he heard 'No Love, No Nothin' explode.

The last four men did bail out in time and because there was a solid cloud cover below them, no one could see the ground. A flood of thoughts ran through their minds. Would they hit water, trees, or even a mountain? They knew they were in enemy territory and maybe the enemy would be waiting for them, or shoot at them, as they landed. Before this mission, Larry Smith, laboriously put together an emergency kit that he felt had all the items that he would need should he have to bail out. When they got the order to go he grabbed it, tucked it under his arm, and jumped. All was well until he got the sudden jerk as his chute opened. His kit slipped from his arm and he watched it fall away, lost forever. Soon, the men had an unexpected surprise. As they broke through the clouds below them, they got soaked. The clouds were wet! Not only that, but the turbulence started them swinging like a pendulum. Now, a new fear engulfed them: would they hit the ground while swinging wildly? After about 45 seconds they burst through the clouds and could see the ground below them. The swinging stopped, but the ground was coming up at them fast. Freeman landed hard in a large, rocky field. In the rough landing he hurt his back on one of the rocks but was able to quickly get up and roll up his chute. Stickney, also, hit his head on a rock as he touched down, passing out, and suffering a concussion. Most

of the crew, though scattered, landed in that same field which was in the vicinity of Korenica, Yugoslavia. Almost immediately they saw some people hurrying toward them. To say that the men were scared would be an understatement. Were they about to meet their fate?

There were three political factions in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia during the war: the Croatian Ustaše who sided with the German invaders, the royalist Chetniks who supported the present regime, and the communist-led Partisans. The word was that a small band of the Ustaše were most savage and would take your clothes and kill you, while a larger group of them would turn you over to the Germans. The Chetniks, at first, were thought to side with the Allies, but eventually they began to favor Germany. Lastly, the Partisans, under Marshal Tito were firmly on the Allied side.

As the crew were desperately trying to free themselves from their chutes, the people arrived. Though communication was difficult, it was soon apparent that they were partisans. As the men began to relax a bit they noticed a young girl eyeing the chutes they were folding up and talking to one of the men in the group. Curious, Bill Snow asked why she was staring so hard at his chute. In what little English the Partisans knew, he was finally able to decipher that she and the man she was talking to were planning on getting married after the war and that the silken chute would make a fine wedding dress. Bill gladly gave it to her and received a huge smile. The partisans took the airmen to a farmhouse in the nearby partisan controlled town of Bihac'. All the crew were together except Larry Smith.

He had drifted due west and landed on a mountain away from all the others, twisting his ankle. At first, he was relieved that he landed safely, but, that was short lived as it sunk in that he was in enemy country. He began to walk on the mountain for a while when he spotted someone walking in the valley below him. Thinking mainly of his bail out kit, he neglected to take his pistol when he jumped. He quickly hid behind a clump of bushes hoping to see the man before he was spotted. However, he didn't see another man, on horseback, come up behind him. Realizing it was fruitless to hide any longer, he started walking toward the man on the horse. As he drew close the rider shouted in Italian, "Englasee." Larry shouted back, "Si, Si, Englasee," as he folded his chute over his arm to make the rider think he had a weapon. With pounding heart and shaking knees he saw that the rider did not have a visible weapon which eased his fear a bit until he saw the man's hat. The partisans wore a red star on their hats and he saw that this man, who was older, had none. But, he seemed friendly so Larry acted the same. The man only knew that one word in English and the two of them tried unsuccessfully to communicate for about fifteen minutes. Finally, the man who was walking in the valley came up to them and Larry broke out in a big smile. That man was younger and had a red star on his hat!

The younger man's father had been in the United States for a few years and had taught him a few English words. Larry told him, using a mixture of English and Italian, that he was American and that his friends had bailed out with him but he didn't know where they were. Soon, they began to walk to the farmhouse of the older man. His house was a fair distance away and Larry's ankle was hurting quite a bit. At last they reached the farm house, which was not much more than a shack, and he was welcomed warmly by the farmer's wife and children – two girls 6 and 14. The farmer's wife sat him by the fire to dry his wet clothes, and prepared a meal of fried eggs and goat's milk. He was given the best they had while they ate together out of a bowl of sauerkraut placed in the middle of the table.

Soon people started to arrive at the house and Larry had to keep getting up to shake hands. He said, "I didn't mind – they are such wonderful people!" One of the men that arrived had a chest plastered with medals. At first, he thought he must be a general, but later found out he was only a sergeant. He let Larry know that 25 partisans on horseback were out in search of the rest of his crew. That night Larry was given the farmer's bed while he and his wife slept on the floor. Next morning the farmer and Larry got into a horse-drawn wagon to head to the nearest town. His parting from the wife and children was quite dramatic as he recounted:

In the background stood their dilapidated shack which stood inside an enormous foundation that once represented the groundwork of a house – their house! The enemy had burned it down. Though her clothes were tattered and

torn she exhibited a picture of cleanliness and beauty. Her daughter, who looked like Shirley Temple when she was in her babyhood prime, was hanging to her dress by her side. She was shaking my hand in farewell, that is, the lady was, when she suddenly broke into tears, grabbed me, kissed me on the cheek and fled to the house.

Six partisans, the farmer, and a lady of about 40 years of age accompanied Larry into the town. They were all riding in the wagon except for the lady who was walking beside it. The mountainous terrain was very rough and the lady's shoes were giving her trouble so she took them off. The temperature was below freezing and there was a bit of snow on the ground. Larry insisted that she ride in the wagon, but was ridiculed by the partisans for even thinking such a thought. He said, "they treat their women rough, but the latter do not seem to mind."

The crew had already been brought to the town, Bihac', and were at partisan headquarters desperately trying to find out any news about Larry. The headquarters was one of the only remaining buildings in the town – the rest having been burned down by the Ustaše, who were considered more savage than the Germans. The entire town lined the road and cheered as Larry arrived, and finally the whole crew was reunited. The men celebrated with what they considered the happiest reunion of their lives. The next day they prepared to leave but were delayed because they got word that a small battle was taking place about two miles away. A partisan captain kept telling the men that they would leave in five minutes. Time dragged on and nothing happened. Later, they found out that they couldn't leave for the next town until the battle was won because the enemy was blocking the road. It was learned afterwards that the battle was only a small skirmish with an enemy patrol and the partisans wiped them out. It wasn't until 10 o'clock that evening that a caravan of trucks arrived. About ten old women got off of one truck and gave the crew their places. The men had to stand up because it was so cramped. They left for the next town, Lovenac – a four-hour ride – and the partisans sang the whole time. There were some partisan girls on the caravan with lovely voices who sang beautiful, but very sad, songs. The only song that the men recognized was *The Volga Boatmen*. The partisan girls fight just as fiercely as the men, only they work harder. Those sad songs haunted the men for a long time.

Around 2am the convoy arrived at a small village that had been reduced to just a few structures. One of the remaining buildings was a popular 'Yugo' watering hole. It served a locally made schnapps called Kraki, similar to very strong vodka. The partisans plied the men with their schnapps, and as the rounds continued the stories began from both partisans and crew. A few of the partisans had been in America at one time or another and liked to show off their English. They would tell of the atrocities of their sworn enemy: the Ustaše. "They comes to our house and city, burns down them and cuts the throats of the wittle women and childrens. No you be skeered, Joe – me take care of you. You likem beer, Joe? No good like American beer but you drink – make strong." It was a long night and the alcohol helped dull the pain the partisans felt, and that the crew felt for them. The American flyer was greatly admired by the partisans for what they considered to be their extreme bravery. As the men described bailing out from four miles in the air some of the partisans shook with disbelief. They were particularly in awe of the fact that the men had to combat enemy fighter planes. One of them had his body riddled with sixteen bullet wounds yet couldn't compare his bravery with that of the airmen. In a letter home, one of the men wrote: "Naturally, we told them we were not one mite scared. And naturally, we were out of this world with fright."

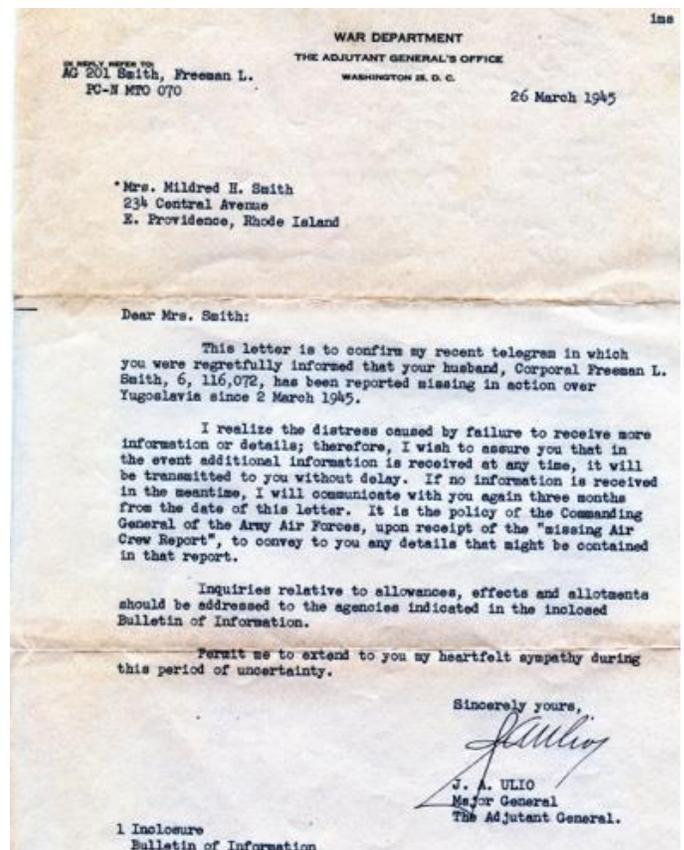
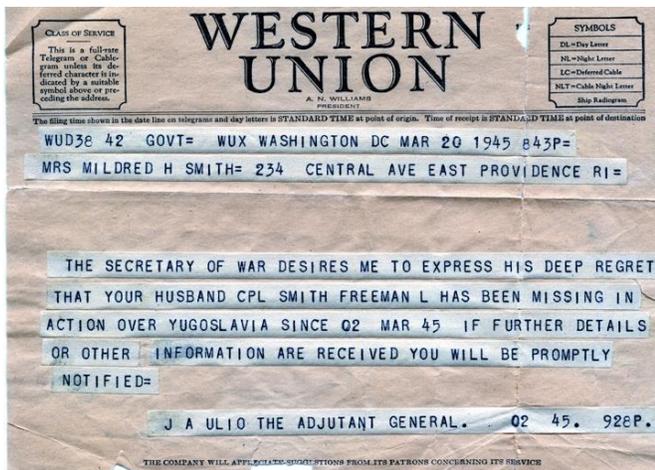
The crew split up and were directed to sleep in two of the buildings that were still standing. The partisans covered the floor with straw which the men soon found out was infested with lice. Not only that, but it was pitch black in the building and the men had to feel their way, stumbling over sleeping partisans, to find room enough to lie down. Several of the men, after finding a bare spot, laid down to scratch themselves to sleep and in the morning were amazed to find out that they had been sleeping between two female soldiers!

The caravan left the next day but did not travel very far – only to the next town, Grucac, where they remained for the rest of the day. Though no reason was given for the delay, the men suspected that there were enemy patrols in the area and the partisans felt that it was safer to wait until they moved on. However, on the following day, before they left, the partisan girl who Bill gave his parachute to climbed into the crew's truck and,

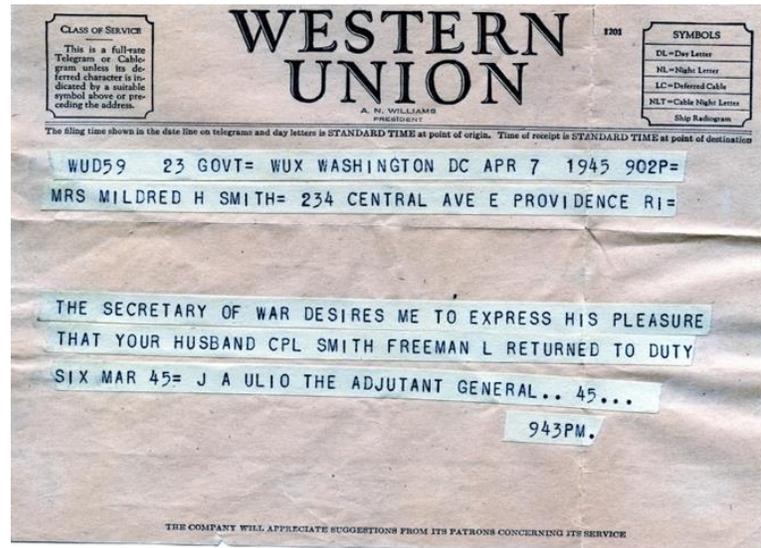
with a silver cigarette case, offered the men cigarettes. Freeman had taken some German in High School and was able to understand that she wanted him to pass the case around to all the men. Having done that, he handed the case back to the girl, but she wanted him to keep it, which he did. The caravan lead driver decided to make up time. He ordered the other truck drivers to keep up with him. Off they went, speeding over treacherous mountain roads with a drop off of several thousand feet just a foot and a half from the wheels. After traveling for several hours the caravan came to an abrupt halt. One of the trucks had hit a tree on the side of the road opposite the drop off. Several of the partisans were hurt, and one teenaged girl was killed. She was the girl who had offered the men cigarettes that morning and had the plans to marry after the war in a dress made out of parachute silk. The four partisans going to her aid appeared stoic about her death. They each grabbed a limb and, while singing a song, placed her in the back of another truck. The convoy moved on. As one of the men put it, "They were some tough hombres!"

Eventually, the crew reached the city of Split on the coast and taking their leave of the partisans were flown back to their base on a British C-47 plane. Apparently, at base operations there was talk of the crew being furloughed back to the States. But, in typical military style, that idea got lost in the shuffle. Chick had come down with a stomach bug from the food he ate during their evacuation and was sent to hospital in Bari. Norm Stickney also went to the hospital due to his concussion. Chick shortly returned and both he and copilot Stickney were sent to a rest camp. Larry made it to Capri on April 9th to recover, and the enlisted crew went off for R&R as well.

For the families at home during wartime, it is said that not knowing what is happening to loved ones far away is worse than knowing, even if that knowledge is of the worst kind. Mildred was living with her parents in Riverside, Rhode Island, while Freeman was gone, when she received the news that he was missing in action. As she opened that telegram, she became one of the thousands of wives on the home front who, receiving such news, had to experience the terrible desperation that they went through by not knowing if they would ever see their husbands again.



Fortunately, for Mildred, Freeman had made it back safely thanks to being found by those Yugoslavian partisans who cared for him and the rest of his crew. She soon received the follow-up telegram that, at least temporarily, slowed the beating of her heart and let her breathe again. Since being shot down, Freeman had been gone only four days. But, the war continued.



By the beginning of April 1945, allied armies were closing in on the German forces from the east, south, and west. The air war was continuing and Freeman and his crew were still being assigned bombing missions. However, there was time for some R&R in a special place – Rome. All too soon they were back in Pantanella.



l-r, Freeman, Bill Snow, Lenny Day, and Bob Linsley at the Sora Rosa Café, Rome, April 6, 1945

The crew had flown fifteen missions since they arrived in Italy the end of November 1944. Checking the assignment board for the next day’s mission on the evening of April 24, 1945, they saw that they had drawn mission number sixteen. April 25, 1945. At the morning briefing they were told that they were to hit the Main Station Marshalling Yard, Linz, Austria, a target that did not bode well for the men after their experience on March 2nd.

The men dressed as they had for all their previous missions: a regular GI woolen uniform with leather combat boots, a 45-caliber automatic pistol in a shoulder holster, and a thin satin suit with electric heating cords. Then, a heavy, lined flying suit and boots, fur lined gloves over thin electrically heated ones, an inflatable “Mae West” life jacket, a helmet, goggles, and finally, a parachute harness. The pilot and copilot wear their parachutes, while the men have theirs in a small chest pack, somewhat like a loaf of bread, that hangs at a

convenient location near their assigned positions and can be snapped in place quickly. Before climbing aboard their plane, "Easy Maid", call sign 'White V', Larry Smith took a photo of the crew. Ike Eisenbaum, who normally flew with them had been assigned to fill in as navigator on an adjacent plane that day 'White O'. John Chapman joined their crew as ball turret gunner.



**Back L-R: Unknown, Norm Stickney, Chick Gemmato, Bob Linsley
Front L-R: Freeman Smith, Bill Snow, John Martin, John Chapman, Lenny Day**

The green flare was fired, and 782nd squadron fired up their engines and found their place in line for takeoff. After passing through the turbulence from the plane that took off 20 seconds before them, "Easy Maid" reached their rendezvous point, maneuvered into formation, and headed north, over the Alps, for Linz. Shortly before 1PM, flying at 22,500 feet, they reached the IP (initial point) that was the final leg of the mission before the bomb run. There was no cloud cover below them and the ground was clearly visible. The bomb bay doors were opened in preparation to dropping their bombs, but a defective "salvo" switch released all the bombs at once, prematurely! Chick quickly got on the intercom and asked the tail gunner – who had the best view out the rear of the plane – where the bombs landed. Lenny Day replied, "we just bombed a huge meadow and probably killed about 50 sheep." Though it wasn't verbalized, most of the crew were glad the bombs were out of the plane before the flak started.

Chick decided to hold to the formation and pass over the target rather than leave the protection of the squadron. All went quiet as they began the bomb run. It was about 1:15PM when they approached the city of Linz and ran into heavy flak. Turbulence from the flak made the ride extremely rough. Suddenly, the plane was hit by many bursts, one of them in the number 3 engine, causing White V to lose about 1500 feet of altitude. That engine was the closest one to the cockpit on the right side and it caught on fire. That meant either the fire could spread to the fuel tank in the wing or the engine could break off and smash into the cockpit. Number 3 engine also controlled the hydraulic pump. Many controls and functions of the B-24 were controlled

hydraulically. There was an auxiliary hydraulic pump installed in the aft bomb bay, and it had been cited as causing fires or explosions if the pump's electric motor arced. With the hydraulics gone, Chick couldn't control the plane and he knew they had to bail out. Most of the crew heard a garbled message over the intercom about a fire and then the bailout command.

What happened next is best described by Ike Eisenbaum in a letter home to his sister:

April 26, 1945

Dear Sis,

Didn't write yesterday as I really wasn't in the mood for writing and here's the reason why – We flew Tuesday the 24th [actually April 25th] and our target was Linz Austria. If you can remember correctly that's the place we had to bail out over last time. I was flying with Lt. Osterhodt as his navigator and my old crew was flying right along side of us. Well, we hit the target and the flak was really heavy – just after "bombs away" my tail gunner shouted out, "Navigator, White V is on fire." Well, my heart stopped because I knew that my old crew was flying that ship and a fire aboard ship means disaster. I forgot about everything else and just watched that doomed ship. I could see my old pilot Lt. Gemmato fighting the controls and I realized that, that ship would never get home. All of a sudden, I saw the back escape hatch open and I knew that the fellows were again preparing to bail out. Then like a flash I saw Linsley, our radio operator dive out of the ship and I knew the order to bail out had come. I watched Linsley fall, and fall. And I began to wonder if his parachute would open. After he fell about 10,000 ft I saw a white puff of smoke and his parachute opened. Boy, I certainly was relieved. Then I saw Day leap out and his parachute opened immediately. Right after him came Chapman, the fellow who was taking my place on the crew. His parachute also opened immediately. Then 2 figures leaped out of the nose hatch and I recognized them as Larry Smith, the navigator, and Martin, the nose gunner. Their parachutes opened right up. That left 4 more men in the ship and I began to sweat them out. Suddenly Snow, our engineer and F. L. Smith, my close buddy, dived out of the ship and opened their parachutes immediately. Right after them came Stickney, the co-pilot and his chute opened right up. That left one more man in the ship – the pilot, and I started hollering for him to get out as the ship already was an inferno. It was a good 3 minutes later that he bailed out and I saw his chute open. I realize what took the pilot so long to bail out. He did the same thing he did the last time when I bailed out with them. He stayed with the ship and after every man had bailed out stood there and called every man at their station to make sure every one had gotten out. Then he left the ship. Believe me I've never seen a better guy than that. I watched all of them hit the ground and they all landed near the city of Linz, which we had just bombed. Then we were out of sight and I saw them no more. I certainly couldn't work all the way back as I really felt heartbroken. I only hope that they make for the Russian lines which aren't far from them at all. Or else stay hid until the Russians get to them.

Today I helped pack their clothes away to be sent home. Last night I wrote F. L. Smith's wife telling her exactly what happened and not to worry too much when she gets that telegram as he definitely is alive. That made mission no. 16 for me and it certainly was a hard way to get it. Everything else is O.K. Am feeling fine and expect to be home in 2 months.

Regards to Jack. Kiss Mom and the kids for me.

Your Loving Brother
Irving

When White V was hit, many of the cockpit controls were destroyed. Ike wrote that he could see Chick fighting the controls. He probably was attempting to put the plane on an even trim and activate auto pilot. Number 3 engine was on fire and smoke and fire was coming from the rear bomb bay, which might have meant

that the auxiliary hydraulic pump had caught fire as well. Norm Stickney's right foot was blown apart when the flak entered the cockpit. The men began bailing out and Chick helped Stickney, who was in shock, to the forward bomb bay. Freeman, who was top turret gunner that day, had not heard the bail out order and was still up in his seat in the turret. As Chick got to him, he grabbed his leg and motioned for him to bail out. The top turret being over the bomb bay, Freeman jumped out of his seat and then out the bomb bay door. Meanwhile, as Chick and Stickney got to the bomb bay, Stick's chute opened up in the plane and as Chick pushed him out the chute got caught on the bomb shackles. He hung there for about two minutes until Chick could free him and follow him out the bomb bay after making a final check that everyone had left the plane.

When the last man left the aircraft, they were about 30 miles northeast of Linz. In his official eye witness report Ike wrote, "The ship evidently was trimmed up, for at this time I could see no fire, just smoke billowing out. She made a turn to the left, flying level and I last saw it losing altitude headed directly towards the city of Linz." Apparently, after Ike looked away 'Easy Maid' exploded.

As Freeman floated to the ground there were planes, other parachutes, and smoke all around him. He could see men running toward where the rest of the crew was landing. They were men of the Volkssturm (a militia of old men and boys established in the last days of the war). These soldiers were firing at them as they helplessly came to earth. One of the shots grazed Bob Linsley's face, and another tore the emergency first aid kit off another man's back pocket, but, no one was seriously hit. Freeman hit the ground in an open area, unhooked his chute harness, saw a wood line not too far away, and began to run toward it. Suddenly, he could hear bees buzzing around him. Then it dawned on him that they weren't bees but bullets. He felt that he might not make the woods and that further evasion was probably useless, so he stopped and raised his hands in surrender. Meanwhile, pilot Chick, panicked when he landed in a tree branch that hung far out over the Danube River. He was dangling about ten feet above the water and being a non-swimmer, and afraid of the water, hesitated releasing his harness and falling. Several Volkssturm soldiers appeared on the river bank and began firing at him. Now, trembling with fear he tried to decide what he should do, hang there or fall into the water. Then a shot came close and he made up his mind to unfasten his chute and drop into the Danube. He later recalled that he somehow got to shore, but had no idea how he did it.

Larry Smith, also landed in a small tree and fell until a low branch stopped him. He released his parachute and dropped easily to the ground. He began to walk and finding a shallow creek, decided he should walk in it in case the enemy might be searching for him with dogs. He knew his location and thought he could evade being caught and make his way to allied lines. Soon, he sat down against a tree to rest and think about what to do next, when a large group of men came out of the woods shouting at him. He got up and raised his hands but the largest man in the group punched him hard on the cheek, knocking him to the ground. He later learned that the man who hit him had a close relative who was caught in the bombing that day. The men were Volkssturm and they took him to a small encampment where there were both soldiers and civilians. Larry had sprained his ankle again when he landed and was limping quite badly. He later learned that it was fractured. Soon, he was turned over to an old soldier who was to take him to the nearby town of Perg, Austria.

Norm Stickney landed about 300 yards from a peasant house. He applied a tourniquet to his lower leg and as he saw a soldier approaching, raised his hands in surrender. The soldier was Erwin Kump, a company chief in charge of guarding POWs for the Germans. He was on leave, recovering from his own wounds, and staying in the house with his wife. At the house, Kump's wife could speak a little English and Norm was able to convey how scared he was about both his foot and his predicament. The couple seemed somewhat sympathetic and calming a bit, he handed Kump his papers, what little money he had, and his parent's address in Smithland, Iowa which he scribbled on the back of his map. He hoped that Kump would send those items back to his parents as he was uncertain that he would survive. Kump made Stick his prisoner and sent for a doctor from Saxen, Austria, to treat the mangled foot. The doctor refused to help, and the mayor of Saxen, who was unliked by most of the townsfolk, even sent two men to shoot Stickney. But Kump, possibly knowing that would violate the Geneva Convention, countermanded the mayor's order, and both men obeyed him. The mayor was ultimately shot to death when the American forces entered Saxen. Fortunately, when Norm checked his first

aid kit, the morphine was still in it, so he gave himself an injection to ease his pain. Some people, who were in a foul mood due to the bombing of Linz, were gathering outside the house. Kump realized the danger to the captive airman and moved him away to another friend's house. Eventually, both a local Polish doctor and a military doctor removed part of Norm's foot and bandaged it well.

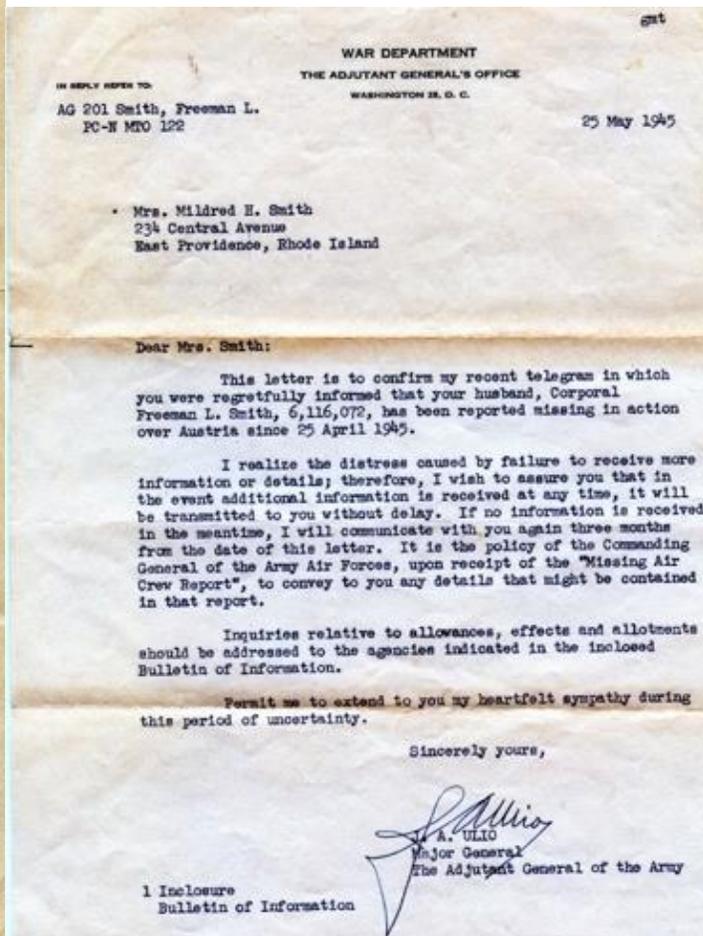
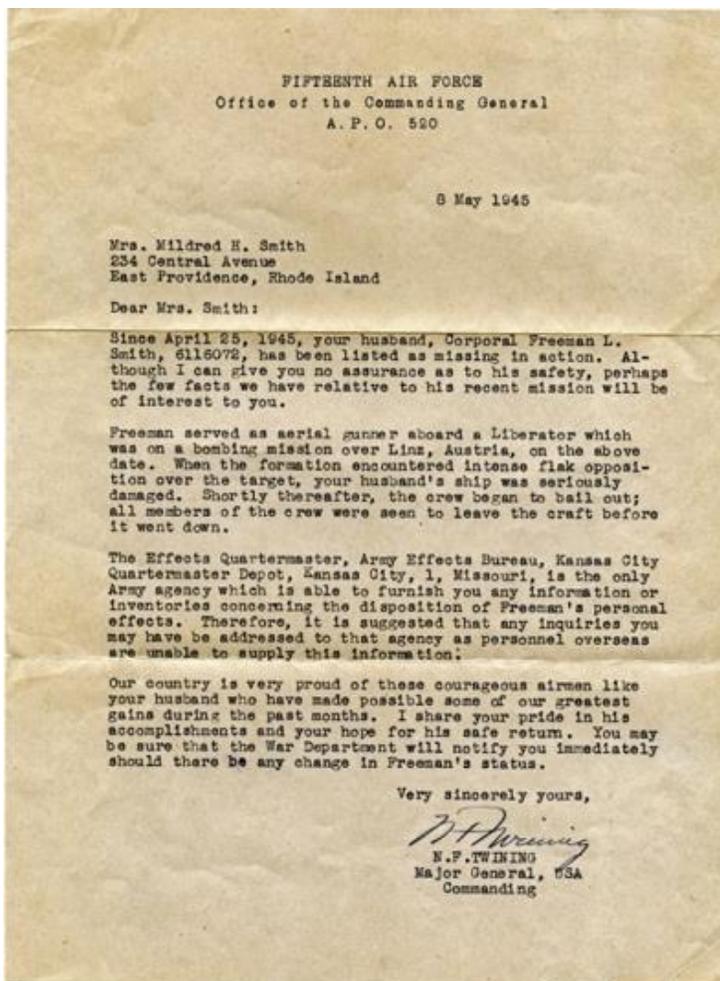
The military doctor then took him to the hospital in Perg where his whole foot had to be taken off as he had a high fever, his foot had become gangrenous, and they had no blood or antibiotics. Norm was treated kindly in the hospital and was placed in a small room with some Austrian and German wounded soldiers, and later an American soldier was brought in so that they both had someone to speak with. On May 7, 1945, American troops marched into Perg and took Stickney to a MASH hospital. That evening two JU-88's strafed the MASH unit, but were shot down. Norm was moved to the 1st General Hospital in Paris. He arrived back in the USA on May 30, 1945. Over a year later Erwin Kump did write a letter to Norm's parents telling the details of their time together.

The rest of the crew had been rounded up and brought to the local jail in Perg. Freeman, his fear and adrenalin subsiding, saw that he had pieces of shrapnel in one of his legs. Before then, he hadn't realized he had been wounded. Bob Linsley was in pain from the bullet wound in his face, so the men all checked their first aid kits for some morphine. Unfortunately, it was a common occurrence that the soldiers controlling the medical kits often removed the morphine to sell on the side. All of their kits were without morphine and Linsley had to sit, miserably, holding an old rag against his wound. He was eventually removed to the hospital for treatment. Chick had been interned separately, and at some time during his confinement, developed pneumonia.

When Larry was finally reunited with the remaining crew, they had all been placed in a twelve by twelve cell. At times, the ball turret gunner, John Chapman, would lead the men in prayer for salvation. A couple of times their praying was interrupted. Once, when some drunken civilian prisoners in an adjoining cell yelled at them to shut up, and another time when Russian planes bombed the town. Some of the bombs landed quite close to the jail. Their guards told the men "We are going to turn you over to the people of Linz." Some airmen who had been shot down over the target were hanged by the victims of their bombs. However, after a time, regular German army soldiers arrived to take the prisoners from the Volkssturm. The men were marched through the town to the jeers and abuse from the local residents. One woman spat at one of the men and a German guard hit her in the face with his rifle butt. At the center of town, they were loaded onto a bus. But, a German officer, waving his pistol wildly and shouting loudly said they weren't welcome and forced them back onto the street. Then, they were marched to a railroad station where they were placed on a train bound for Salzburg, Austria.

At home, Mildred received her second telegram informing her that Freeman was missing in action. Now that gnawing dread began once again.

As the days dragged on, a letter confirming that Freeman was missing in action arrived:



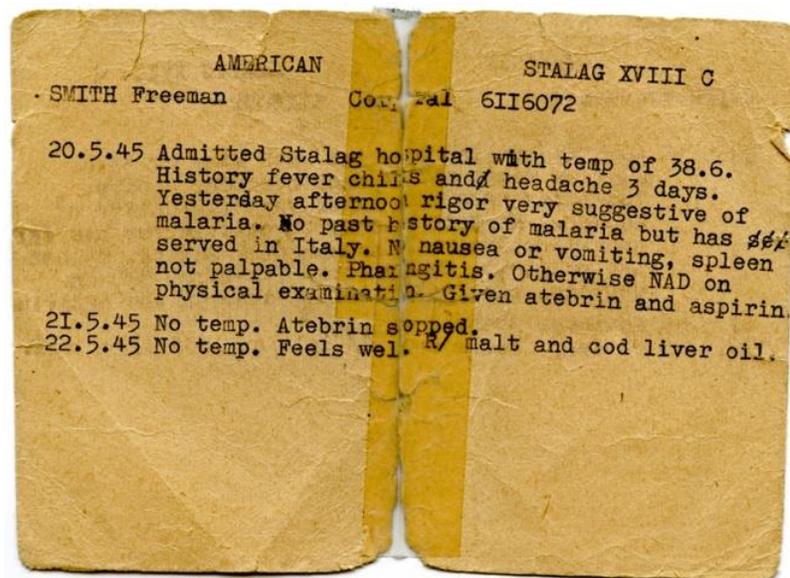
Salzburg was over 100 miles from Perg and the going was slow because a few times during the trip the train abruptly stopped and they had to get out and take cover in the undergrowth as Russian planes attacked the cars, sometime scoring direct hits. At one time they stopped and the men looked out at a large complex. Bill Snow said, "It was the blackest, most evil place I ever saw." It was Mauthausen concentration camp and there was discussion about putting the crew there. Instead, they were turned over to the SS soldiers to continue their journey. The war was nearing its end and the SS was trying to concentrate its defenses, and make a last stand in the mountains encircling Berchtesgaden, Hitler's lair. They felt that they might be able to use American prisoners as bargaining chips if things got tight for them. The train finally arrived in Salzburg. Once a beautiful resort city, Salzburg had suffered the ravages of war. Roads and buildings that they could see from the railroad station were severely pitted from numerous bombing raids, and all the commodes were overflowing, sending waste material spilling over in all directions. They did not stay long at that station and soon arrived at their final destination, the town of Markt-Pongau, and Stalag XVIIIIC, which was near Bischofshofen, Austria, and about twenty miles south of Berchtesgaden, Germany.

There were thousands of British and Russian soldiers in Stalag XVIIIIC, but only 535 Americans. The American and British prisoners were confined together, but the Russians were separated from everyone by a barbed wire fence. Though the crew tried to talk to them, their extremely weakened condition and language barrier made it next to impossible. One of the men said, "I will never forget how sad and emaciated they looked." However, despite the fact that they only got some watery cabbage soup every day, the British and American prisoners were in much better health. The British, having the largest number of prisoners, had taken

control. They held regular formations, held close order drill, observed the chain of command, and tried to carry on as normal a daily military routine as possible. At first, the German guards kept telling the crewmen, "Today we will take you out and shoot you." But, then the guards interfered with the men less and less. They were realizing that the war was nearly over and they had to plan their escape for when the end finally came.

Larry Smith, with the fractured ankle, went to sick call when he first got to the prison camp. The dispensary was run by both the Germans and British. The German dispensary commander was quite friendly and the picture of the Aryan Master Race. He treated Larry and gave him a beautiful cane for his injured ankle. Germany formally surrendered on May 7, 1945. Knowing it was the end, the German guards at the prison camp fled four days prior. Once they were gone, the prisoners were actually free to leave the camp, but they really had nowhere to go because they didn't know how far the Allied lines were or if the German army was nearby. One day a young British officer, who had been a prisoner since Dunkirk, asked Larry to go with him to a small town nearby the camp. He wanted to seize a car so he would have some transportation when liberated. He spoke fluent German, so he thought the task would be easy. But, the townspeople had disabled all their cars before they could be confiscated by the approaching Allied armies. Larry and his British buddy heard on a crystal radio set that the war was almost over and that the SS and Gestapo were making a last stand in the mountains right where they were being held. So, the two men almost passed out when they rounded the corner of a schoolhouse and saw hundreds of German soldiers. All eyes were on them, but no one moved. Finally, the British officer approached the German commander and they began to speak in German. The officer's attitude was quite subdued and he said that they were bivouacked and waiting to surrender. He hoped it would be to the Americans and not the Russians. Larry, the Brit, and the German talked for a long time about everyday things, the war, and the future. As a parting gesture, the commander gave each of them several dozen handguns. Having no interest in the guns, Larry gave them to the crew, keeping only one for himself, which he later sold in Paris for one hundred dollars.

Freeman fell ill and reported to the camp dispensary. At first, it was thought that he had malaria, but after treatment it turned out to be dysentery and he quickly recovered.



Several days later Larry's British officer friend invited him to see the highest-ranking British officer in the camp. When he arrived, there was another American prisoner there. Larry was introduced, and the British officer asked them both if they would obey his orders. They answered in the affirmative and he then said, "On the road there is a huge caravan of rescue trucks making its way to our prison camp. What I've told you must remain confidential until they get here. I have chosen you two Yanks to make sure all 535 American POW's, including those in the hospital, vacate the camp and board the trucks." Late the following afternoon, the trucks arrived

outside the camp gates in a cloud of dust. Larry said, "I had positioned myself just outside the gate to see what reaction the trucks would have on the prisoners – many had been captive for several years. I wasn't disappointed." What began as a few shouts from inside the camp soon became a thunderous roar of whoops, howls, and hollers. The sound was deafening. The men began running toward the trucks and Larry recorded, "They ran, fell, threw sand, prayed, cried, laughed – their day had come! Truly, a spectacle understood by only those who had suffered so long. A complete description is hard to set down."

The American POW's had already left their barracks and were heading for the trucks. On his way out, Freeman realized that he only had on soft flight boots and he didn't know if he would have to walk, or how far. So, as he passed a storehouse he went in and found a pair of German boots that fit, put them on, and looked around. He decided that he would take a souvenir with him and grabbed a German helmet from a pile in the corner. With that, and the luger that Larry had given him, he made his way to the waiting trucks.

Once all the Americans were on the trucks and accounted for, Larry returned to the front gate where his American partner was waiting inside. The men had heard on a British crystal radio set that their camp was the last POW camp to be liberated. They both realized why they were still standing inside the gates and looked at each other for a long time while the men in the trucks yelled at them to hurry up and get on board. The last one out the gates would be the last American POW to be set free in Europe. Larry had a British coin in his pocket and he tossed it in the air as the other fellow called his choice of heads or tails. The coin fell to the ground, and when they brushed away the sand, Larry had won the toss and was the last man out of the gates. All the American POW's in Europe had been liberated.

All of the crew except Larry were brought to the Allied lines. The men saw a Red Cross building and knocked on the door to get some help after their imprisonment. They looked in the window and saw the Red Cross worker in the back entertaining his girlfriend. After banging on the door, he finally opened it only to tell the men to go away because he wasn't open. Some British soldiers encamped nearby heard the conversation and said, "Yanks, come over here with us." They offered the men food, drink, and a place to relax. Meanwhile, Larry was sent to a U.S. Field Hospital near Munich, Germany. Within a few days he was sent to a hospital in Paris where his fractured ankle was cast. It later had to be re-cast because he had walked on it untended for so long. When it mended he went to Camp Lucky Strike on the coast of Normandy, France. It was a rest camp and distribution point for liberated soldiers.

The crew also were sent to Camp Lucky Strike to rest and await orders for home. The war was over and Freeman and the crew had all survived.

Back home in Rhode Island, Mildred, a dental assistant, was at work in Providence one day when her sister came rushing into the office. She said, "Have you seen the newspaper? Freeman has been liberated from a prison camp." It was the first time she knew what had happened to him since receiving the news of him being missing in action.

7

6 MORE SOLDIERS REGAIN FREEDOM

Four from State Liberated
from German Camps;
2 Found in Austria

Six additional soldiers from Rhode Island and nearby Massachusetts have been reported as liberated from German prison camps. They are:

STAFF SGT. PASQUALE J. CIMINO, 24, son of Domenico Cimino of 504 Sharon Street, Providence.

PVT. ANTHONY PALAZZO, 21, son of Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Palazzo, of 134 Pontiac Street, Natick.

PFC. BURTON M. TAPNER JR., son of Mr. and Mrs. Burton M. Tapner, William Henry Road, North Scituate.

CPL. FREEMAN L. SMITH, 26, husband of Mildred H. Smith, 26 Firglade Avenue, East Providence, and son of Mrs. Beatrix Smith, 62 Main Avenue, East Providence.

PFC. VICTOR D. BACON, husband of Mrs. Estelle (Duchesne) Bacon, 74 Bouvier Avenue, Manville, and son of Mr. and Mrs. Delphis Bacon, 126 Canal Street, Blackstone.

PVT. KACHADOUR AVEDISIAN, 21, son of Mr. and Mrs. Harry Avedisian, 54 Bucklin Street, Pawtucket.

Sergeant Cimino

Sergeant Cimino was liberated from a German prison camp April 20, his father has been informed by the War Department. He was reported missing in action in Luxembourg Dec. 18 and on April 12 his father received a card from him indicating he was a German prisoner. He was inducted Feb. 12, 1943, and went overseas the following October. A brother, Pfc. Carlo Cimino, was wounded in Italy last July.

Private Palazzo

Private Palazzo, reported missing in action in Belgium Dec. 21, has been liberated from a German prison camp by Allied troops and is now on his way to this country, his parents have been informed by the War Department and a letter from him. A member of an army engineer outfit, Private Palazzo had been overseas five weeks when he was reported missing. He has been in the army about two years.

Private Tapner

Private Tapner, an infantryman, who had been reported missing in Germany since Dec. 21 and was later reported a prisoner in Stalag 4-B, has been returned to military control, his parents were notified by the War Department yesterday. Private Tapner entered the army in May, 1943, and went overseas last October.

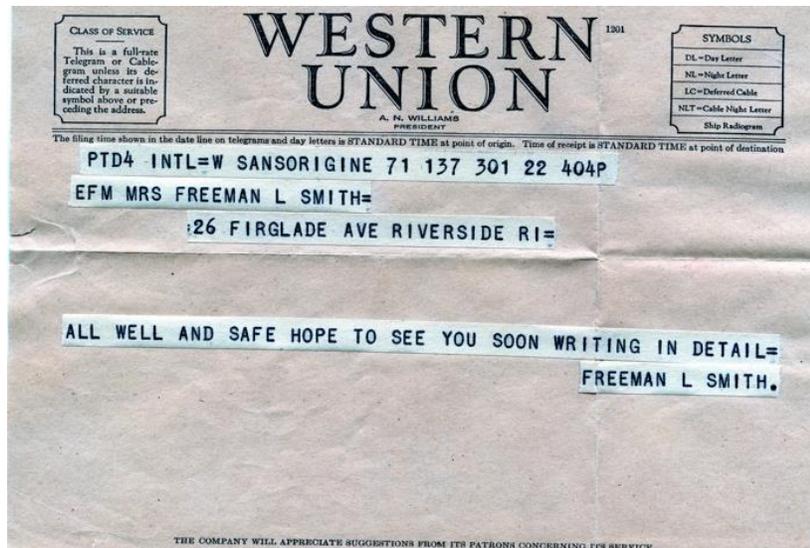
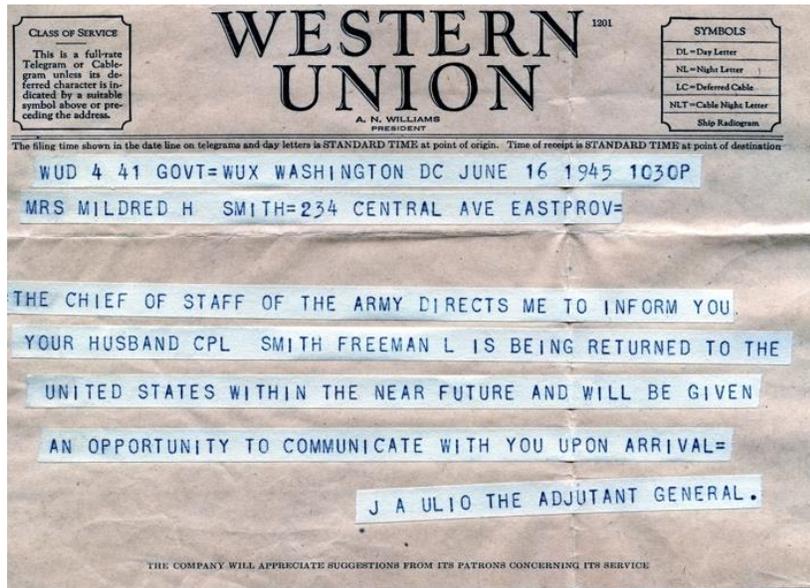
Smith and Bacon are included in a list of American soldiers liberated from Mark Pongau camp in southern Austria in a dispatch from Jack Bell of the Chicago Daily News foreign service.

Corporal Smith

Corporal Smith, who entered the service in January, 1943, graduated from flexible gunnery school at Fort Myers, Fla., in March, 1944. He married Mildred H. Wurtz in August of that year. There was no record of his having been taken prisoner.

Soon, the telegrams that Mildred had been waiting for began to arrive. Freeman's war was over and he was still alive. The mission to Linz that he and his crew made on April 25, 1945, was the last mission flown by the 15th Air Force in World War II.

<p style="text-align: center; font-size: small;">CLASS OF SERVICE</p> <p style="font-size: x-small;">This is a full-rate Telegram or Cablegram unless its deferred character is indicated by a suitable symbol above or preceding the address.</p>	<h1 style="margin: 0;">WESTERN UNION</h1> <p style="font-size: x-small; margin: 0;">A. N. WILLIAMS PRESIDENT</p>	<p style="text-align: center; font-size: small;">SYMBOLS</p> <table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr><td style="font-size: x-small;">DL=Day Letter</td></tr> <tr><td style="font-size: x-small;">NL=Night Letter</td></tr> <tr><td style="font-size: x-small;">LC=Deferred Cable</td></tr> <tr><td style="font-size: x-small;">NLT=Cable Night Letter</td></tr> <tr><td style="font-size: x-small;">Ship Radiogram</td></tr> </table>	DL=Day Letter	NL=Night Letter	LC=Deferred Cable	NLT=Cable Night Letter	Ship Radiogram
DL=Day Letter							
NL=Night Letter							
LC=Deferred Cable							
NLT=Cable Night Letter							
Ship Radiogram							
<p>The filing time shown in the date line on telegrams and day letters is STANDARD TIME at point of origin. Time of receipt is STANDARD TIME at point of destination.</p>							
<p>WUD11 23 GOVT=WUX WASHINGTON DC JUNE 12 148P 1945</p>							
<p>MRS MILDRED H SMITH=</p> <p>234 CENTRAL AVE EAST PROVIDENCE RI=</p>							
<p>THE SECRETARY OF WAR DESIRES ME TO INFORM YOU THAT YOUR HUSBAND CPL SMITH FREEMAN L HAS RETURNED TO MILITARY CONTROL DATE UNREPORTED=</p> <p>J A ULIO THE ADJUTANT GENERAL. 243P.</p>							
<p>THE COMPANY WILL APPRECIATE SUGGESTIONS FROM ITS PATRONS CONCERNING ITS SERVICE</p>							



As a former POW, when Freeman arrived back in the United States, the government sent him and Mildred on a two-week R&R trip to Atlantic City, NJ. They spent their time relaxing on the beach and meeting other POW's who had also been liberated. His personal effects eventually arrived and the German boots and helmet he took from Stalag XVIII C were among them, but the luger Larry had given him was gone. It must have become someone else's souvenir. When Freeman's good buddy Harry Veyera finally got home, and knowing that being shot down over the target sometimes ended in the airmen being hanged by the angry people just bombed, he called Mildred with a heavy heart to offer his condolences and to tell her what he knew about Freeman being missing in action. To his welcome surprise, she said, "Well, Freeman is right here, would you like to talk to him?" Though the old crew corresponded with each other over the years, they became busy making lives for themselves. Freeman went to work for New England Telephone, eventually retiring with over 30 years of service. Many years later, Freeman did get together with Chick, Stickney, and Ike at different times. Ike became a wealthy real estate developer in West Hartford, Connecticut, and in September 1973 invited the whole crew and their wives to a reunion. Many of those men hadn't seen each other since 1945. Ike hired out a whole floor of the Holiday Inn in Hartford, CT, and flew everyone in. In an interview about the reunion, Ike said, "Well, here we were 28 years ago, nine boys from different states and backgrounds and we shared feelings

that only facing hazard and death together can do. Time runs out on everyone and this may be the last time we can see each other.”



The Crew 1945

Rear l-r: Larry Smith, Norm Stickney, Chick Gemmato

Kneeling l-r: Bill Snow, Ike Eisenbaum, Lenny Day, Freeman Smith, John Martin, Bob Linsley



The Crew 1973

Rear l-r: Bill Snow, Bob Linsley, Chick Gemmato, Norm Stickney, Larry Smith

Kneeling l-r: Lenny Day, Ike Eisenbaum, John Martin, Freeman Smith

Years later, Freeman and Mildred took a tour to Germany and Austria. While there, Freeman mentioned to the tour guide that he had been a guest of his country during the war. The next day, the guide surprised him by making a detour to the town of Perg, Austria. They stopped at a small variety store in Perg across from the jail where the crew had been kept. The store owner, who had been in the German Army, closed his store and took Freeman sightseeing all around the area where he had been captured after bailing out.



Jail in Perg, Austria where the crew was kept



Shopkeeper who showed Freeman around Perg, Austria



Freeman being awarded the Ex-Prisoner of War Med

After the war, Freeman and Harry Veyera both came back to live in Riverside, Rhode Island. Harry stayed in the Army Reserve and was called up to serve in the Korean War. The two friends would visit each other, mostly on Saturday mornings. Harry eventually got divorced and became alienated from his family. He died December 26, 1966 and was buried in Arlington National Cemetery. Freeman was the only person at his funeral. One old veteran saying goodbye to another.

Freeman died on October 6, 2001, and one by one the crew of 'No Love, No Nothin' and 'Easy Maid' passed away. Bill Snow was the last one to go. Though many of them never met again after the 1973 reunion, sharing that "incommunicable experience of war" kept them always close in their minds and hearts.