

© Copyright 2009  
by John Katsaros

# **CODE BURGUNDY**

## **The Long Escape**

**by John Katsaros**

ISBN 13 978-1-57256-108-3  
ISBN 1-57256-108-4

Copyright notification: No part of this book may be duplicated in any form  
without prior permission from the author.

Oakford Media LLC  
617 Connecticut Avenue  
Norwalk CT 06854-1614  
(203) 899-1630  
[www.oakfordmedia.com](http://www.oakfordmedia.com)

2nd Printing

### DEDICATION

I dedicate this book in Honor of the WWII French Resistance, who saved my life during the spring of 1944 And To Mother, Father And Siblings, Sotiris "Sot", George, Ann, Madalene and S. Charles "Chuck".



From Left to right: Sot, Madalene, Mother, Father, Ann, George.  
Kneeling: John and Chuck. Photo taken 1931.

## Contents

Dedication.....	2
Contents.....	3
Introduction.....	5
Acknowledge Editor/Mentor, G. Steve Chirigotis.....	6
Chapter1: Code Burgundy -The Long Escape.....	9
Chapter 2: Pearl Harbor, Sunday, 7 December 1941.....	10
Chapter 3: Navy Air Cadet Program, 1942.....	13
Chapter 4: Army Life.....	18
Chapter 5: Air Crew Training.....	23
Chapter 6: Aircraft Engineering Training.....	32
Chapter 7: Combat Crew Training.....	34
Chapter 8: Emergency Orders.....	39
Chapter 9: Transition to the ETO.....	42
Chapter 10: Mission Briefing.....	53
Chapter 11: Mission to Frankfurt.....	63
Chapter 12: Combat De-Briefing & Interrogation.....	67
Martin Caidin's Combat Crews Concerns & Book, <i>Flying Forts</i> .....	75
Chapter 13: Mission to Leipzig.....	85
Chapter 14: Second Mission to Frankfurt.....	91
Chapter 15: Target: Berlin.....	98
Chapter 16: The Luftwaffe is Forced to Fight.....	107
Chapter 17: Final Mission to Frankfurt.....	110
Chapter 18: Bail Out & Capture.....	120
Chapter 19: Firefight & Rescue By the French Resistance.....	125
Chapter 20: Life Saving Surgery.....	129
Chapter 21: Loyalty Questioned, Special Operations Executive.....	131
Chapter 22: Easter Sunday, 9 April 1944.....	139
Chapter 23: At the Safe- House of Pierre & Julianne Demarchez.....	141
Chapter 24: Second Escape.....	148
Chapter 25: Café de Bourgogne.....	150
Chapter 26: Time to Move On.....	160
Chapter 27: The Pyrenees.....	165
Chapter 28: From the Pyrenees to Gibraltar & England.....	170

Jack Stead Relives his Journey.....	179
Chapter 29: Air Intelligence.....	199
Chapter 30: Returns to Home Base.....	207
Hitler's Stealth Bomber.....	217
Chapter 31: Homeward Bound.....	227
Chapter 32: Visit to France.....	242
Chapter 33: AFEES: "Air Force Escape & Evasion Society".....	261
Origin of AFEES.....	270
The Family.....	272
Addendum #1: What Happened to the Crew of <i>Man O' War</i> ?.....	283
Addendum #2: Dr. Bertranne Auvert, Dr. Andre Molhos, Lt. Ted Krol and the 401st Bomb Group (H).....	293
Accomplishments of the 401st Heavy Bomb Group.....	294
Lt. Jack Dunaway and Crew Citation.....	295
Acknowledgments.....	297
My Gratitude to the Members of the French Resistance.....	307
Memoires of Julianne Demarchez.....	312
S/Sgt. John Katsaros – Combat Missions.....	315
Café de Bourgogne: Connection.....	316
Linette Govin Deletang's letters and others.....	317
Freedom.....	339

## **INTRODUCTION**

By G. STEVE CHIRIGOTIS, COLONEL USAF, (RET.)

This is the story of John Katsaros, a twenty year old American airman who beat the odds and survived flying on dangerous air bombing raid out of England, as a gunner on a B-17 Super Flying Fortress Heavy Bomber of the 612th Squadron 401st Heavy Bombardment Group, 8th Air Force, during World War II; and on 20 March 1944, was shot down by ground 88mm guns, and .50 cal. machine-gun and 20 mm cannon fire from German Luftwaffe fighter aircraft, on a mission to disable an enemy aircraft factory at Frankfurt, Germany.

Severely wounded and unable to reach the “D” ring to release the parachute, he made his life-saving bailout in time, before he passed out, to see his aircraft exploding in a “Mountain of Flame”. The rapid parachute descent incurred a rough bone-breaking earth landing, compounding the shrapnel wounded body of the young American aviator, setting him up for capture by the enemy; and then the miraculous rescue and escape from the Gestapo by the courageous men and women of the Free French Underground. The battle to save his severely injured arm, his survival at the hands of the enemy and his health are at risk as he works his way south, slipping through the battlefields and enemy lines of France, ever cognizant of military targets seen in his travels, to scale the Pyrenees Mountains to reach Spain.

As a battle hardened veteran at his early age, he is grateful for the generosity and is overwhelmed by the bravery of the Free French Underground who day and night fight to free their enemy-occupied France. Over sixty-three years have passed, yet the memory of the carnage of war remains a graphic nightmare.

**ACKNOWLEDGING EDITOR-MENTOR  
G. STEVE CHIRIGOTIS, COLONEL USAF, (RET.)**

I would like to thank Steve Chirigotis, my editor; his help enabled me to complete this book that I began over three years ago, as otherwise it would probably have taken an additional three years to complete. Besides being a great editor Steve was completely knowledgeable about all aspects of what a bomber crewman had to endure. He experienced combat flying as a radio operator/ gunner on a B-24 Liberator Bomber on 50 combat missions with the 15th Air Force out of Pantanella, Italy during WWII. Names, places, bombing missions, experiencing daily dangers, etc., were second nature to him.

The extensive research undertaken gave *Code Burgundy – The Long Escape*, integrity and completeness. Steve retired with over twenty year's service from the USAF as a Full Colonel. He also retired as an engineering systems writer from a major industrial corporation.

Any errors or omissions in fact, committed are the responsibility of the author. The reader is reminded that this story took place early in 1943 and 1944, before the D-Day Allied Invasion of France 6 June 1944. I relied on memory, information provided by my former crewmen and from personal interviews with the French Resistance who helped to identify people, names, dates and locations.

Finally, I wish to thank Col. Chirigotis for his knowledge, kindness, input, understanding, and especially, patience in collaboration with me while writing my story.

John Katsaros



G. Steve Chirigotis, Col. USAF, (Ret.) & John Katsaros





**CHAPTER 1**  
**Code Burgundy - The Long Escape**  
**Sworn To Secrecy for Sixty Years**

This story is written for personal catharsis to reveal the inconceivable experiences and misfortunes of war to those individuals who clamored over the years for the whole story and to leave this narrative for posterity.

The facts, as written, are authentic and every effort has been made to tell the story as best recollected after these many years, as to events, times and places; and to insure honor to those individuals and groups of individuals without whom this story could not have been written. I am not a hero; the heroes, during World War II, are those killed or dead from wounds received engaging the enemy in mortal combat.

Sworn to secrecy by the United States Government on 15 June 1944, my experiences, and those of many airmen like me, have rarely been addressed. Because of the secrecy imposed by the government, my father, mother, a sister, and two brothers, now deceased, will never learn of my story. Now, with a sharp mind, I reflect on combat mission experiences, my aircraft being shot down by enemy fighter aircraft fire, being wounded, and suffering additional injuries on contact with Mother Earth. In my struggle to survive injuries and broken bones, I am captured by the enemy. A miraculous escape takes place but I am soon recaptured. In a second escape I confound the enemy and make my way through the battle lines and hostile territories of southern France, across the Pyrenees Mountains to the smell of fresh air and the feel of freedom in Spain.

Without the help of the French Resistance, this story could never have been told and my remains would be buried in France.

## CHAPTER 2

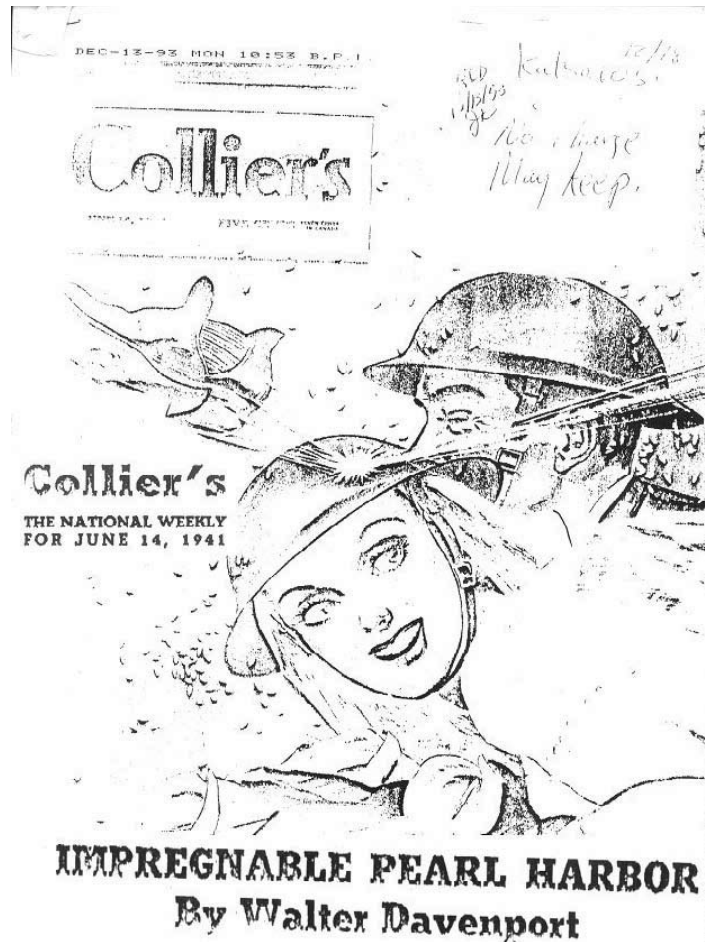
### Pearl Harbor, Sunday, 7 December 1941

It was spring of 1941; war was in full blossom in Europe. As a seventeen year old, a few months before my 18th birthday, I was working a shift at our grocery store, and during slow periods I looked through the latest issues of *Collier's* magazine dated 14 June 1941 and my favorite magazine *Life*. There on *Life's* front cover in amazing color was the assemblage of a total of eight or more of our Naval Battleships, birthed in pairs at Ford Island; with Heavy Cruisers, Light Cruisers, Destroyers, Mine craft, PT Boats and other auxiliary ships lined up at the docks, like ducks in a row. The caption at the top of the page, in large, bold print read: "Impregnable Pearl Harbor". Admiral Kimmel, as a precautionary measure, had removed the three aircraft carriers from Pearl Harbor and had taken them out to sea. The impregnability of Pearl Harbor was graphically laid out within the magazine pages in words and beautiful color, and black and white photographs. The whole magazine, showing the pictures of this great armada of ships was daunting to me then, and is today, as my memory recalls it vividly.

The entry of the United States into World War II began at Pearl Harbor with the surprise bombing of the harbor, minutes before 8 AM on Sunday morning, 7 December 1941, by fighter-bomber and torpedo bomber aircraft from the Imperial Empire of Japan.

I was a senior at the Haverhill High School and ambition burned in me, so my brother George and I opened the Katsaros Brothers, Emerson Street, Haverhill grocery store. It was my shift at the store that Sunday evening and like most people, in those days, I got my entertainment by listening to the radio shows. The radio, besides the movie theater, was the only source of entertainment and news. The interruptions to the radio program came at 7 PM and the announcer gave the news that Pearl Harbor, attacked at 8 AM their time, was bombed and strafed with cannon and machine-gun fire, and torpedo-bombed by aircraft identified as Japanese by the big red-painted sun-ball, the "Rising Sun", on their wings and on both sides of the aircraft fuselage. Damage to the harbor and ships were reported on the radio and in

the newspapers in the days to follow. I was excited as heck and telephoned to inform the family, who were unaware of the news. "Where is Pearl Harbor?" they asked. "Hawaii", I screamed. On Monday, the next school day, the high school principal, Mr. Earl McLeod had a student assembly in the auditorium where we listened to the President of the United States, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, address the nation: "Japan, Germany and other axis nations have declared war on the United States of America. Sunday December 7, 1941 is a day that will live in infamy." All classes, activities and social functions were dismissed for the balance of the day.



This *Collier's* magazine article dated June 14, 1941, nearly six months prior to the Japanese air raid December 7, 1941 at Pearl Harbor, was obtained through the courtesy of the Public Libraries at Haverhill and Boston.

### CHAPTER 3

#### Navy Air Cadet, 1942

Two days later, on Tuesday, 9 December 1941 several classmates and I decided to join the Navy Air Cadet program so we applied at the local recruiting office at the Haverhill, Massachusetts Post Office. After several days we were given a battery of intelligence tests and told to go home to await tests results.

In a few days we were notified, and told to report to the Navy building on Causeway Street, Boston. For two days we were subjected to additional intelligence tests, eye tests and physical examinations. I, with those that had favorably completed all the examinations, was sworn into the Navy Air Cadet program.

I now considered myself to be in the service of the U.S. Navy. However, due to the great numbers who joined the Air Cadet program, I was told to return to my home to await call-up.

My classmates and I while attending the senior year at the High School took advantage of our Trade School co-education, and went to work at a submarine building facility at the Portsmouth Navy Shipyards. George continued to run the grocery store until he joined the U.S. Army.

Several weeks later I was contacted by the Navy to report to a Navy Building at Boston. I was given another physical exam. An eye doctor gave me the Japanese *Ishihara* color test - a color perception test, consisting of many pages of colored dots on a page forming a number. I couldn't distinguish the numbers. So I failed the test, as did the six other applicants of the group. A high-ranking officer approached to tell us that all members of this group and I failed the admissions programming, and to return to civil life. The wind was knocked out of me as I was dumfounded.

I believed that I had been sworn into the Navy Cadet Program several weeks ago, so why was I not accepted for the regular officer training? "There is no second choice," the Navy said. "You did not pass the preliminary examinations."

I was very taken by James Bradley's book, *Fly Boys, A True Story of Courage* and also by his number one best seller, *Flags of Our Fathers*

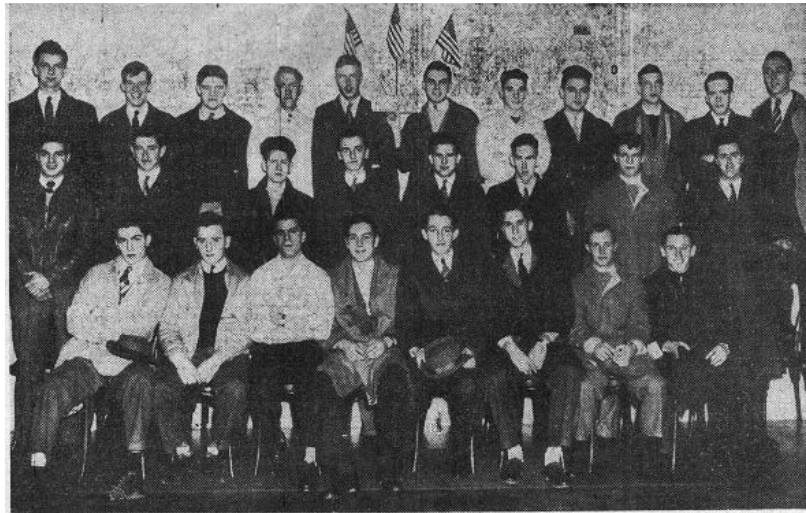


John Katsaros in front of Haverhill High School on graduation day May 1942.

and was certain that had I completed the U.S. Navy Air Cadet Program, won my Navy pilot wings and that I surely would have joined the fight against the Japanese Empire in the Pacific Theater of Operations.

Bradley wrote about the daring and courage of nine American flyers, Navy and Marine airmen sent to bomb, strafe and destroy the Japanese Communications Towers on the island of Chichi-Jima which had a large harbor, serving as the supply base for the Japanese forces on the Island of Iwo Jima. The nine American bombers and flyers were shot down by Japanese ground fire, and all but one, a Navy Lieutenant, were captured by Japanese soldiers. The Navy Lieutenant escaped capture by bailing out over the Pacific Ocean within sight of Chichi-Jima and was picked up by a U.S. submarine, minutes before Japanese in a small surface boat could reach him. The young Navy pilot who escaped capture, George H.W. Bush, was destined to become President of the United States.

The fate of the downed and captured flyers on that raid became known after WWII. The Japanese military had interrogated, tortured and beheaded all eight flyers. The Japanese officers ate the livers, the hearts and other body parts. I wondered what my fate would have been had I been selected for Navy Air Cadet training and followed the paths of these Navy Flyers.



(Gazette Staff Photo)  
**"REMEMBER PEARL HARBOR" GROUP**—Sgt. George F. Gagnon, Army recruiting officer, sent 27 men to Boston this morning for their final examination and induction into the Army. The group will be known as Pearl Harbor Avengers.  
 Front row, left to right: Martin W. Sullivan, Jr., Martin H. Donovan, Manuel Valavanes, Joseph A. Plouf, Jr., Walter D. St. Armand, leader; Wilbert C. Hardy, Jr., assistant leader; Russell E. Hall and Elmer G. Bailey.  
 Second row, left to right: Nicholas Valoras, Robert J. Viens, Bernard Gaudreau, George E. Warner, Albert B. Sayers, Kenneth N. Glover, John A. Hutchins, Jr., and John W. Small.  
 Back row, left to right: John Katsaros, Richard D. Sweeney, Everett E. Pickering, Robert W. Girard, William C. Curry, William E. Hirsch, Robert Minchin, Pietro A. Romano, Paul W. Hinch, Jr., Joseph H. Stapleton and Alan H. Noyes.

"The Pearl Harbor Avengers" Photo taken by *The Haverhill Gazette*  
 newspaper on 7 December 1942



ard. William C. Curry, William R. Hirsch,

## "PEARL HARBOR AVENGERS" LEAVE

### 27 Sent To Boston To Take Army Tests

Sgt. George E. Gagnon, of the Army recruiting station, postoffice building, today marked the first anniversary of Pearl Harbor by delivering 27 men to Boston Army authorities for final physical examinations and induction. The group, one of the largest sent from the station since war was declared, was also the last recruited before the executive order closing all voluntary enlistments.

The men leaving were: John W. Small, 25, 389 South Main street, regular army; Wilbert C. Hardy, Jr., 20, 539 Main street, regular army; John Katsaros, 19, 24 Forest avenue, air corps; Robert W. Girard, 19, 2 Benjamin street, air corps; Alan H. Noyes, 18, 40 Dalton avenue, air corps; Martin H. Donovan, 19, 62 Arlington street, air corps; Manuel Valavanes, 21, 32 Washington street, regular army; Martin W. Sullivan, Jr., 19, 99 Williams street, air corps; Joseph A. Plouf, Jr., 18, 14 Haseltine street, air corps; Robert J. Viens, 18, 63 Charles street, armored force; George E. Warner, 19, 15 Mechanic street, air corps; Everett E. Pickering, 19, 19 Welcome street, air corps; Albert B. Sayers, 20, 316 River street, regular army; Bernard Gaudreau, 18, 40 Ninth avenue, paratroops; William C. Curry, 19, 83 Kenosia street, armored force; Nicholas Valoras, 20, 69 Washington street, regular army; Richard D. Sweeney, 18, Merrimack street, Merrimac, air corps; Elmer G. Bailey, 20, Locust street, Merrimac, regular army; John A. Hutchins, Jr., 18, 2 East Main street, air corps; Russell E. Hall, 18, Highland street, Merrimac, air corps; Walter S. St. Armand, 19, Elm street, Salisbury, air corps; Kenneth N. Glover, 18, Elm street, Salisbury, air corps; William R. Hirsch, 21, Pleasant street, West Newbury, regular army; Robert Minchin, 18, 398½ Main street, Amesbury, air corps; Paul W. Hinch, Jr., 19, 428 Lowell street, Methuen, air corps; Pietro A. Romano, 18, 83 Oak street, Lawrence, air corps; Joseph H. Stapleton, 18, 5 Stafford street, Lawrence, air corps.

## CHAPTER

### 4 Army Life

The episode with the Navy Air Cadet program behind me, I returned home to Haverhill. Several days later with patriotism jumping in my veins to join the U.S. Army Air Force, I went to the local Army Recruiting Station and enlisted. The flying section of the Army in May 1918 had grown from the Army Signal Corps to the Army Air Corps, and in June 1941, the flying branch of the Army, was incorporated into and became the United States Army Air Force (USAAF). In September 1947, The USAAF became a separate component of the military, the United States Air Force (USAF) and together as do the Army and the Navy, reports directly to the Secretary of War and the President.

After graduation from high school, I still had my job at the Portsmouth Navy Shipyard and received mail to report on 7 December 1942 to the Army Recruiting Station so; I obtained a leave of absence from my job. *The Haverhill Gazette*, the local newspaper, took a photograph of the group of enlistees which was printed in the paper the following day with the caption: "The Pearl Harbor Avengers." We were eighteen and nineteen year old kids, "green" recruits who had no idea how to handle a gun or to fight a war.

As part of a group, I was transported by Army truck from the local Recruiting Station directly to Fort Devens, Massachusetts, where we all were given comprehensive physical exams and intelligence tests, called the Army General Classification Tests (AGCT), having successfully completed the exams, we received eye exams, consisting of identifying the solid colors in strips of yarn. Successfully completing the exams, we were assigned to the flying branch of the Army (USAAF). Those individuals not selected for flying duty were inducted into the regular Army (USA).

Forty-eight hours later as part of a group, I was loaded aboard a passenger train at Fort Devens with the destination to Basic Training Center #9 at Miami Beach, Florida. Security routed the train from Devens through Albany, New York, south to Miami, taking a circuitous route and several days to arrive at the final destination.

There were so many inductees that the Air Force had two Basic Training Centers in Florida: (BTC) #1 and #9. My brother Sot was attending Officer Candidate School (OCS) at Miami. Other training centers on the east coast were located at Atlantic City, New Jersey.

At Basic Training Center #9, I bunked with Alan Noyes and Martin H. Donovan, two Haverhill friends, at the Seascape Apartments. We bedded down on mattresses placed on the kitchen floor, in a duplex home, confiscated by the government for the duration of the war, and that homey atmosphere helped to make Army life more endurable. The Army had a name for servicemen such as Alan who could not follow orders. They called them "screw-ups". For example, he never made roll-call, the "line-up" outdoors for body count each morning scheduled at 0500 hours. When a flight officer called Alan's name, Alan would be in bed lying on his backside, and since it was still dark at this hour in the morning, the group would answer for him by yelling "here." One morning the officer in-charge warned the recruits of punishment if this practice continued, as he was aware that they were covering for Alan. From then on, when Alan's name was called, no one would answer. The game was over - each man had to take care of himself. Finally, Alan got the message but continued with his errant ways. His name was being called at the formation and Alan responded, "Here," from the bedroom window.

Alan's action did not fly with the flight officer and, as a result of Alan's misbehavior, the complete flight of about fifty men was restricted for the weekend. Alan was ordered to scrub the sidewalk with a G.I. brush. Instead, smart-ass that he was, he decided to use a toothbrush and personally extended the cleaning detail to the adjacent Group Headquarters building. When the Group General saw Alan, he asked, "What are you doing?" Alan told the General, "Sir, I was ordered to wash the sidewalk for missing roll call."

All hell broke loose, and the General placed the flight under restriction, no weekend passes. We were all pissed at Alan, he was in the "dog house" with many of us in the flight and it took some convincing to persuade the avengers not to physically harm him. Joseph Azzarito, another hometown friend, also had joined the Army Air Force and was stationed at Boca Raton, Florida, about an hour up the dusty Military Trail from Miami. The Military Trail, built several miles inland, west of US Route 1 by the Army engineers during World War II, was a dirt highway used for military

transportation and exists today as a paved eight-lane highway.

Joe Azzarito, Alan Noyes and I went through high school together, and, after the war, we were graduated from Boston University. After college we three worked at the Haverhill radio station (WHAV); Joe in sales, and Allan and I broadcasted football games for several years.

The saga of Alan Noyes endures. Upon separation from the U. S. Army Air Force, he continued his career in the Air Force Reserves, working his way to become a Commissioned Officer and was eventually promoted to Brigadier General and Assistant Adjutant General for Air, Vermont National Guard. Great going, Alan! Presently, he is Executive Director of Vermont Association of Broadcasters. Allan's son is the Deputy Adjutant General for Air, Vermont National Guard.

Whenever possible, I visited brother, Sot, at OCS, a few miles south at Miami Beach. Bernard "Barney" Gallagher, another friend from home, was also stationed at Miami Beach.

One day Barney was walking along the beach with us in a windstorm and was hit on the head by a falling coconut. Sot retrieved the coconut, put it away for safekeeping, and in 1995, some sixty years later, I presented it to Barney as a souvenir at their Haverhill Kiwanis meeting. Barney's career in the Air Force ended in the Pacific Theater of Operation at Okinawa, 7th AF Communications, and the first American Air Force to occupy the island. He was the official photographer and took the pictures of the B-29 bomber, *Enola Gay*, the 27 year old pilot Major Paul W. Tibbets Jr. of Miami that dropped the first atomic bomb 6 August 1945 on Hiroshima, Japan.

On one of my visits I told Sot how BTC #9 performed guard duty on the beach with a broomstick as a weapon. Sot was taken by surprise and asked, "Doesn't the military at BTC #9 realize that German U-boats are torpedoing U.S. merchant ships and oil tankers every night off the coast of Florida?" That weekend an oil tanker was seen to explode a few miles offshore. Upon returning to BTC #9, I complained about standing guard duty unarmed and gave the obvious reason for our request. The Commanding Officer immediately requisitioned a .45 caliber pistol and a carbine rifle for each airman on guard duty.

After WWII the *Palm Beach Post* wrote an article stating that twenty-seven American ships were sunk during WWII between Jupiter and Fort Lauderdale, Florida. Each sunken ship and the Captain was named with the number of crew members lost and the identity of the German Commander with the name and number of the U-boat credited was also given for the ship sunk. Research of the ships that were sunk continues to this date, and records reveal that the German submarines were supplied with fuel from a mother ship operating out of Brazil. It was also reported that English speaking, German sailors would come ashore by rubber dinghies at nighttime from the U-boats to purchase food and other sundries.



Private John Katsaros at Basic Training Center #9 Miami Beach, Florida  
December 1942

## CHAPTER 5

### Air Crew Training

Upon graduation from basic training, a choice was given to each trainee for selection in the Army Air Force. I chose flying duty, said goodbye to BTC #9, and was shipped to Buckingham Army Air Field, Fort Meyers, Florida for aerial gunnery training.

The army barracks at Fort Meyers each housed from 40 to 50 trainees and did not present the luxury and comfort of the confiscated sleeping quarters of three men to a room that were left at Miami Beach. The single level building was approximately 60 feet by 20 feet to accommodate all the single cots with rod space for each recruit to hang clothing, and a footlocker for personal belongings on the aisle side end of each cot. The Sergeant who stayed with a class night and day had a private room at the front of the building and at the rear of the building were the enclosed shower room with ten showerheads and the adjacent lavatory with ten hoppers and a urinal trough with constant running water. The “head” light shone night and day. Discipline was always at a high point when meted out by the Sergeant. He put us to bed with “lights out” and got us up for “roll call”, whatever the hour, and it was always on the double! Nobody ever wanted a run-in with the Sergeant because he had the power and the ability to discipline and destroy. He was not a mean guy - just firm and he was all business. That was his job and he was good at it.

My class consisted of about fifteen or twenty men. One day the group was assembled along the tarmac of the airport runway. An officer asked, who wants to be first to take a ride on a two-seater airplane the AT-6, called *The Texan*? I, the “brave-hearted one,” raised my hand and took my first ride in an airplane. The pilot was a Native American whose rank was Buck Sergeant. The pilot asked, “Do you want the works, John?” I said, “Yeah,” and was strapped in the back seat before takeoff. The Sergeant flew the AT-6 over the airfield and did thirteen consecutive barrel rolls and since I was enjoying myself, the pilot performed several trick maneuvers including diving and stalls.

When the plane landed, there were a number of green faces on the group



of the future gunners while I enjoyed my first airplane ride and told them so. Some of the guys could not believe this was the future they chose.

The classes were marched to chow, back to the barracks, everywhere- to study classrooms, and to the shooting ranges for trap, skeet, mobile base, B-B gun, and familiarization of a .30 caliber machine-gun. Trap shooting involved the shooting of a clay pigeon, using a 12 gauge double-barreled shotgun, ejected from a single trap house, on command, always away from the shooter. Skeet shooting provided the same shooting experience as that of trap shooting, with the exception that two trap houses, one high (10-12 feet) and one low (about 3 feet) on opposite sides of the shooter, ejected the clay pigeon on command. Mobile base skeet shooting was performed on a special circular oval track range where the shooter shot at clay pigeons released automatically by the 100 equally spaced trap houses as he approached on the flatbed of a 6 X 6 truck. The BB gun shooting range was housed in an especially equipped building, somewhat like an arcade, with metal rabbits and ducks and ships as targets.

The .30 caliber machine-gun familiarization training with live ammunition was the last step prior to testing a student's shooting ability in the air at a moving target, but not before learning the nomenclature of the .30 caliber and the .50 caliber machine guns and to strip down and re-assemble them blindfolded.

All these shooting ranges were not only good shooting training experiences but also a hell of a lot of fun. Scores were kept at each range for each student and as far as was learned, no one flunked out because of the shooting training. It was great preliminary buildup to the airborne firing of .30 caliber ammunition from the back end of the AT-6 at a target sleeve drawn at a distance by another AT-6 to test the individual's shooting ability in the air at a moving target.

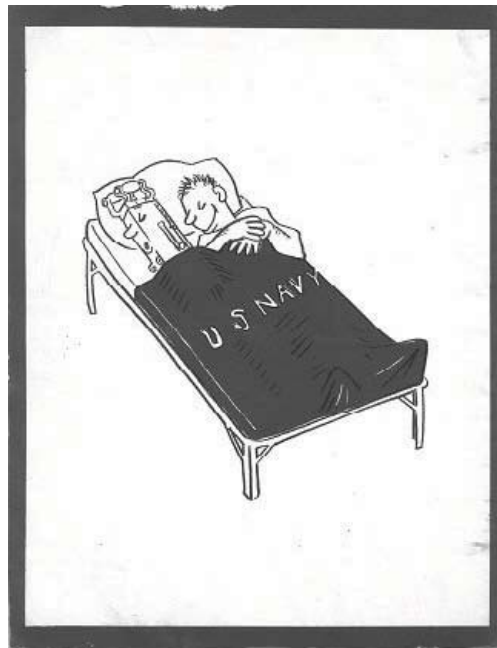
We were schooled in the use of Morse Code, learned the alphabet in code and practiced receiving messages from a mechanical sender, as well as learned to send and receive hand operated messages on the wireless, to include S.O.S. and weather reports. The radio operator, who was to excel in this form of communication, went through intensive training at a military radio operator school.

For aerial gunnery training, a parachute with harness was strapped on me, enabling me to stand in the open cockpit to fire the .30 caliber machine-gun using live rounds. Three AT-6 Texans flew in formation, two



airplanes consisted of a pilot and one gunner, and the third airplane, the target plane, dragged a long white sock at some distance from the plane allowing the gunners a clear target. Different colored .30 caliber shells were fired by each gunner, which identified the number of hits to be credited to him. Safety practices strictly enforced, there was no danger to the target plane or to the training gunner.

On the way to the target area over the Gulf of Mexico or over the Florida Everglades, the pilots would enjoy themselves, each taking a turn trying to tip the other airplane by placing the wing of one plane under the wing of the opposing plane, and with a violent flip try to upend the other plane.





Manual cover drawn by Theodor Seuss Geisel, better known to the world as the beloved Dr. Seuss, was born in 1904 on Howard Street in Springfield, Massachusetts.

As soon as the AT-6's reached the target area, the gunners fired at their intended targets and a split second after the last round of ammunition was expended, the pilot would turn the airplane upside down so that all bodies hung upside down in the plane, held only by a strap attached from the parachute harness to the floor of the plane. On the first such mission, I asked the pilot, "What would the consequences be if the strap did not hold and I was tossed from the plane into the Gulf waters, or the Everglades?" His answer was, "That is why you are provided with a parachute, and a Mae West if you land in water." Through my experience with flyers and their behavior, I learned to believe that antics such as this was one of the reasons all pilots were not officer material, and some were assigned to this duty instead of being sent overseas into combat. "I must give them credit for being exceptional pilots and I always enjoyed flying with them," ("Oh, to be that young again!") The gunnery training successfully completed, now these new aerial gunners knew they were destined to be flyers. Wow! Was I proud! Graduation day was 6 March 1943. As one of the graduating students, I was presented with Gunner's wings, sunglasses and an A2 leather flight-jacket; and was promoted to Sergeant with PCS orders (Permanent Change of Station) for shipment to a technical training school. Sergeant John Katsaros, that's me, was selected to go to aircraft mechanic school at Goldsboro, North Carolina. I liked that, all of it.



**AERIAL ANTIQUES** — A pair of World War II-vintage T-6 trainers take a practice run above Route 128 yesterday near Bedford's Hanscom Field, where they will be taking part in the annual air show this weekend.

Air gunners practiced with a .30 caliber machine-gun standing-up on the rear of this AT-6 Texan training plane.

HEADQUARTERS  
ARMY AIR FORCES FLEXIBLE GUNNERY SCHOOL  
BUCKINGHAM ARMY AIR FIELD  
Fort Myers, Florida

March 6, 1943

SPECIAL ORDERS

NUMBER 65 )

E X T R A C T

1. Pursuant to authority contained in AR 615-5 and letter from Headquarters, Army Air Forces, Washington, D.C., dated August 10, 1942, Subject: Flexible Gunnery Training for Enlisted Men, file 352.9, the following named Enlisted Men, AAFU, having successfully completed the prescribed course of instruction in Aerial Gunnery at this Post, are promoted to the grades indicated.

TO BE STAFF SERGEANT (TEMPORARY)  
Graduates of Army Technical School

Pvt. ADAIR, UELAND S., 14150043	Pvt. ADAMS, ROBERT F., 35318775
Pvt. ALBUNESI, HENRY F., 31128423	Pvt. ALEXANDER, ROBERT S., 14150049
Pvt. AUCOIN, JOHN J., 31080024	Pvt. BASWELL, Jr., HENRY T., 37217681
Pvt. BAUER, HERBERT F., 33187531	Pvt. BEAMS, HAROLD G., 11071294
Pvt. BEHRENS, AUGUST H., 38113414	Pvt. BELMO, Jr., JOHN A., 33247762
Pvt. BEHSINGER, Jr., NOLAN, 35366560	Pvt. BLACKBURN, LYNNWOOD E., 34357924
Pvt. BLALOCK, JOHN P., 34357580	Pvt. BOGACKI, EARLE F., 35316394
Pvt. BORN, JAMES W., 17060293	Pvt. BRIGGS, RAYMOND O., 34036067
Pvt. BROSMAN, CHARLES A., 31168777	Pvt. BROWN, Jr., GROVER C., 34037706
Pvt. BROWN, JAMES H., 35366441	Pvt. BUGANSKI, SIGMUND J., 35389312
Pvt. BURGESS, GEORGE C., 33222700	Pvt. BURGESS, JAMES E., 34357100
Pvt. BURNS, HUGH R., 32446765	Pvt. BURTIS, CHARLES F., 32427593
Pvt. CAMPELL, LANCELL Y., 34337705	Pvt. CAMSON, CECIL A., 15330829
Pvt. CANNON, JAMES E., 34333892	Pvt. CARTER, HENRY A., 32459662
Pvt. CASSABAUM, DAVID W., 37428173	Pvt. CHAFMAN, DAVID L., 31168534
Pvt. CIFALLI, GEORGE B., 32459370	Pvt. CLARK, Jr., WILLIAM J., 32405696
Pvt. COLAMONICO, MICHAEL (NMI) 32429421	Pvt. COLGAN, FLOYD C., 31155548
Pvt. COOK, EEB B., 11088169	Pvt. COONES, JOHN H., 31168570
Pvt. COPELAND, WILLIAM J., 34337788	Pvt. COREIN, RICHARD W., 35387868
Pvt. CRABTREE, RAYMOND A., 35436017	Pvt. CROFT, ARTHUR F., 31081018
Pvt. CRUSS, Jr., VASSIL W., 15331000	Pvt. DABBS, OTTIS J., 34284142
Pvt. DECKER, GILBERT R., 33331307	Pvt. DEMETRIUS, NICHOLAS F., 32429752
Pvt. DILLON, JAMES A., 33329319	Pvt. DISHONGH, Jr., JEFFERSON B., 34367792
Pvt. DOANE, DONALD D., 32394312	Pvt. DRAKE, BUEL T., 14108227
Pvt. ENGLEBERT, ROBERT T., 35336302	Pvt. ENGLISH, CHARLES L., 34209905
Pvt. FARLEY, JACK W., 38131074	Pvt. FANCETT, EDWIN (NMI) 12135328
Pvt. FERGUSON, ALAN H., 31082061	Pvt. FLOWERS, CHARLES H., 34311576

Special Order 1

S.O.#65 Hq., AAFGS, BAAF, Fort Myers, Florida 3-6-43 Par. 1 Cont'd.

Pvt. HOLMES, JOHN E., 11129856	Pvt. HOOVER, ALBERT L., 15383209
Pvt. HOPKINS, KENNETH C., 13143597	Pvt. HULL, DONALD L., 13135147
Pvt. JEFFRIES, GARLAND B., 35690218	Pvt. JOHNSON, CHARLES W., 15382635
Pvt. JONES, Jr., FRED A., 15382965	Pvt. KAISER, HENRY A., 15383197
Pvt. KATSAROS, JOHN (NMI) 11130671	Pvt. KEITH, DONALD W., 11127808
Pvt. KROLOVITS, ROBERT J., 15374311	Pvt. KURTZ, WILLIAM H., 13171002
Pvt. LAZZARO, ANTHONY L., 11103415	Pvt. LEBLOND, LEWIS L., 11103417
Pvt. MAZUR, RUDOLPH J., 33404863	Pvt. MAZZA, PAUL P., 13177279
Pvt. MELKEY, ROBERT C., 35347212	Pvt. MINTZ, ALBERT (NMI) 13171029
Pvt. MERI, JAERICO (NMI) 12047812	Pvt. NEWERTH, DONALD A., 15382655
Pvt. NICKLAUS, ROBERT A., 15382982	Pvt. NOBILE, JOSEPH A., 12157791
Pvt. PARNELL, W.C. (IO) 39685053	Pvt. PENNYPACKER, WILLIAM S., 13137693
Pvt. PHILLIPS, Jr., FLOYD A., 13171017	Pvt. POPIEL, ALEXANDER J., 11130468
Pvt. PRICE, WILLIAM H., 15382869	Pvt. FRUDEN, PATRICK F., 35719137
Pvt. RAP, NICK S., 13137642	Pvt. SCHNAUFER, GILBERT A., 33404867
Pvt. SEBELAS, PAUL E., 13171251	Pvt. SHUBAK, ALBERT J., 13171013
Pvt. SMITH, VICTOR E., 15383259	Pvt. SPENCER, LESLIE C., 15382854
Pvt. SPANGL, KENNETH W., 15383068	Pvt. STONER, WILLIAM L., 33494088
Pvt. STROTHMAN, FRANCIS J., 15383215	Pvt. TABER, BRUCE M., 15383167
Pvt. THOMPSON, HOWARD J., 13171274	Pvt. TRAINOR, Jr., JOHN M., 11111997
Pvt. TUCKER, DONALD A., 15383033	Pvt. TURK, WILLIAM J., 15383152
Pvt. VALINSKY, SIDNEY (NMI) 12193281	Pvt. VENIER, BRUNO J., 32369230
Pvt. WARE, JOSEPH M., 15383116	Pvt. WEISNER, WILLIAM J., 15383151
Pvt. WELCH, FRANK D., 39532232	Pvt. WILEY, NATHAN H., 13135106
Pvt. WILLIAMS, CLARENCE M., 12193147	Pvt. WINTFIELD, ELLI (NMI) 12193486

By order of Colonel SPIVEY:

H. W. ALEXANDER,  
Major, Air Corps,  
Adjutant.

OFFICIAL:

*H. W. Alexander*  
H. W. ALEXANDER,  
Major, Air Corps,  
Adjutant.

Special Orders 2 - It reads: "Pvt. Katsaros, John (NMI) 11130671"





Sgt. John Katsaros received his wings at the Headquarters Army Air Forces Flexible Gunnery School, Buckingham Air Base, Fort Myers, Florida, on March 6, 1943.

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **Aircraft Engineer Training**

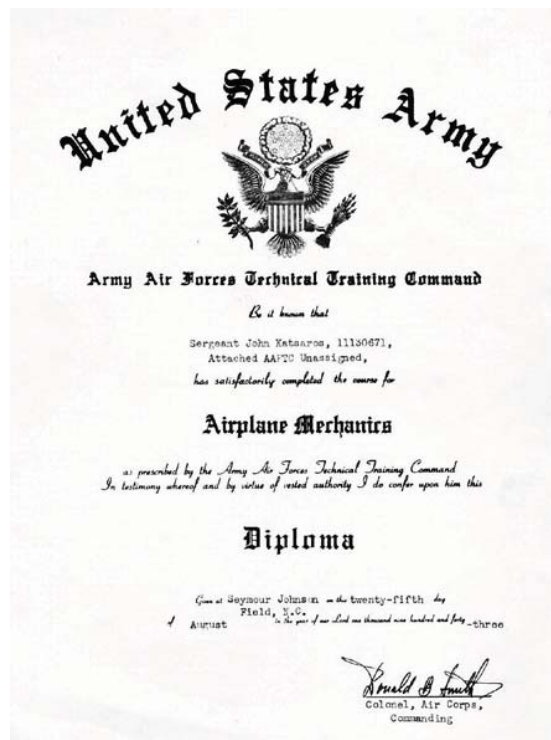
Many of the new gunners were transferred to Seymour Johnson Field at Goldsboro, North Carolina to attend the airplane mechanic course and as luck would have it, the summer was very hot with temperatures for a period of thirty days and nights remaining at over 90 degrees. There was no air conditioning in those days, nor were there screens in the windows and the flies bit incessantly. Sleeping hours were from 1700 to 2300 hours (5 PM to 11 PM). On weekends at a technical school, students were allowed 24 hour passes for a change of pace. As a result of this freedom, “short-arm” inspection, in the barracks by a medical doctor, was given in the middle of the night to insure the health of the students by keeping them “VD” free. Regular classroom hours were 1200 hours (midnight) to 0800 hours taken in a standing position to keep the students awake but they sometimes fell asleep on their feet. Breakfast was at 2300 hours. As a member of a student squad, I was marched for miles everywhere, at all times, always in formation, even to go to the dining room at the mess hall across the street from the barracks (sleeping quarters).

On Sunday morning, the Drill Sergeant would holler, “Church Call” and all those who had a mind for prayer fell out to be marched to church by the Sergeant’s assistant. Dinner (chow) was at 0600 hours after which the students are called out of the barracks to be lined up in formation for a march by a Drill Sergeant. Discipline was strict to get people to learn to follow orders, so it was march, march, march to the cadence of the Sergeant’s booming, sing-song voice -“Hup, two, three, four.” “Get in line; this is not a stroll in the afternoon sunshine. You are soldiers in the United States Army. Show some backbone. Ok, now, let’s pick it up - hup, two, three, and four! That’s better, you’re looking good.” When the Sergeant spoke, we all listened. If one man was singled out -man, he was in trouble. This strict discipline not only taught the new soldiers to follow orders by which we managed to learn in the classroom in order to pass the tests and to graduate, but in the making of men of them to prepare the students for the tough times to be faced in combat. Many of the students believed that the



technical education and military training, the use of firearms and military discipline was to prepare them for combat against the Japanese in the Pacific Theater of Operations. They later learned that their destination was the European Theater of Operations (ETO).

After eight grueling weeks of discipline and being “zombie” students, classes in aircraft mechanics were successfully completed. While waiting for assignment orders to ship us newly trained airmen to duty stations across the country for combat crew training, I and my new friends were issued weekend passes to give us a break from the military regimen. We visited tobacco plantations in Wilson, North Carolina and had a pleasant stay at the YMCA in Rocky Mount, N.C. where we were treated warmly to Southern hospitality. Military life does have its moments.



## **CHAPTER 7**

### **Combat Crew Training**

After graduation, the Air Force arranged a PCS cross-country train trip from North Carolina through Chicago, Kansas City, Denver and points west that took the new trainees to Salt Lake City where individual assignments were made. I was assigned to B-17 crew training at Peyote Air Base, Texas right in the middle of cattle country at the King Ranch, one of the largest cattle ranches in the country.

That night, I thought about the chow here at Peyote, "I had the best steak and eggs dinner that I ever had in my lifetime. The steak could be cut with a spoon, it was so great. I spent one month in Peyote and had steak and eggs at the mess hall every day. Food I had on the air base was the best I had of any mess hall while in the service".

The next day I was assigned to the Air Force Bombardment Group stationed at Peyote, Texas, where I was introduced to my new B-17 crew: pilot, Jack Dunaway; co-pilot, Henry Kane; bombardier, Ted Krol; navigator, William Mock; radio operator, Frank Mastronardi; ball-turret gunner, Walter Rusch; left waist gunner, Jack Crowley; tail-gunner, Marvin Benz; and the engineer, J. Nichols, top-turret gunner, (who was later replaced by Harry Horst). I was assigned as assistant engineer, right waist gunner and photographer.

Intelligent men are expected to train individually for their respective positions in the USAAF as aircraft engineers, radio operators, radio mechanics, armorers, hydraulics specialists. All are trained as aerial gunners before being brought together with men of a different training specialty than themselves, to form into combat crews for the purpose of training together as crews for the heavy bombers. Here the non-commissioned officers also met and trained with a pilot, co-pilot navigator and bombardier. As newly formed crews, they are expected to train together for several months to learn to work as a team in order to be transformed into a cohesive unit. I met all the members assigned to my crew at Peyote, Texas and learned that we are to train as a crew through three phases of air combat crew training. The first phase of this training at Peyote lasts three weeks; then we are shipped to

Dalhart, Texas for training phases two and three.

For experience purposes, during crew training, the gunners alternated stations to familiarize themselves with the aircraft. I became familiar with the ball-turret, tail position, the top-turret and was also responsible as the photographer. On simulated bomb runs, in turn, I used a K-20 and a K-24 camera; one camera took a picture every few seconds as the bombs dropped, and the other camera took pictures of the actual target and the bomb damage. A moving picture camera was issued and used extensively during combat missions over Europe, and especially over Germany.

Of course, these were only practice missions over cities in the USA. For example, if the simulated mission for the day was Albuquerque, New Mexico, no “dummy” bombs were actually dropped. However, attempts were made to take pictures of the target. Many times curiosity arose as to what the people in our cities would think if they knew that the bombers above were using their city as simulated targets.

On several occasions I would ask the pilot, Jack Dunaway, for permission, much to the dismay of co-pilot Lt. Kane, to fly the big B-17 once the airplane was taken up to the scheduled cruising altitude. I was enthusiastic about flying and wanted to be certain that I could handle the aircraft in the event of an emergency, to keep the B-17 flying while the crew bailed out. I had no prior flying lessons or experience, not even in a single-engine plane and here I was asking to fly the B-17 Flying Fortress with four powerful engines. Lt. Dunaway began to give me some instructions and one day, he called me up to the cockpit where I was allowed to sit in the left seat, the pilot’s seat, to fly the plane most of the way to Albuquerque, New Mexico. Fortunately, that emergency never arose, not even in combat, to require me to take control of the plane.

The pilot with the crew aboard and an instructor pilot went through instrument flying, flying blind with a hood covering the windshield and practiced landing on instruments. It was not uncommon to see or hear of a crew that “cracked up”, with all members lost as a result of this intensive training. On the ground the crew went through “ditching” procedures by releasing the water dingy and going through time schedules to evacuate the aircraft after sounding of the alarm bell. The men learned, as second nature,

by practice in flight, to handle their weapons, parachutes, use of the oxygen system and intercommunications system. The radioman, on other special flights operated the radio equipment sending and receiving messages by Morse code, to include the weather, with central communications in the control tower.

All crew members attended lectures and demonstrations presented by group headquarters operations and intelligence dealing with plane safety procedures on the ground and in the air. One such demonstration by a British RAF member with combat experience, how gunners should "lead" the enemy aircraft in firing of the .50 cal. machine-gun. The gunners were also given the opportunity to shoot their .50 cal. machine-gun at ground targets.

Upon completion of Phase 1, we, as a crew, were transferred PCS to Dalhart, Texas for advanced bomber crew training. Here, we were to complete Phases two and three which was to include more of the same intensive training as Phase 1 and heavy concentration in formation flying. As a result of heavy losses to the U.S. 8th Air Force in England, training phase number three was cut from the scheduled program. These training crews were destined to become replacement crews for bomber groups with shortages in combat crews and planes as a result of combat losses.

Training at Dalhart was arduous for all crew members, but Lt. Dunaway's confidence and skills in handling of the B-17 were noticeably elevated. He was put through a series of flight tests under the watchful eye of an instructor pilot. When the plane reached altitude, Lt. Dunaway was instructed to put the airplane into a vertical climb until the plane would shudder and almost stall. This test was first attempted with the four engines running, then with a series of two engines running after shutting down two alternate engines, causing a near stall-out and aircraft drop in altitude. On each occasion the engines recovered rapidly and the B-17 returned directly to horizontal flight. These exercises were excellent pilot training preparing the pilots for utilization of these skills, as needed on combat missions. The skeleton flight crew on this test mission consisted solely of four members: Pilot Lt. Dunaway, Co-Pilot Lt. Kane, the instructor pilot and Sgt. Katsaros, engineer. All crew members wore parachutes on this training exercise, and seat belts were always engaged.

Before leaving Dalhart, Texas our good friend and wing mate, Pilot Bid Fichette and his crew, decided to fly their B-17 under a bridge near San

Antonio, Texas. Bid tried this with the 100% approval of his crew. On his approach he realized too late, that they might hit the bridge. He pulled the plane up to avoid hitting the bridge, but one propeller blade hit a guy cable. Luckily they survived.

When all planes had returned to Dalhart, Lt. Dunaway was ordered to line up his B-17 along the edge of the runway next to several others. A line-up inspection of each aircraft, called by the General of the 2nd Bomber Group, revealed the damaged propeller blade on Lt. Bid Fichett's B-17. Lt. Fichett and his crew faced a Special Courts Martial and Lt. Fichett's crew taken from him. Other crews in attendance at the Courts Martial provided moral support, objected to the findings of the Court and threatened to refuse to fly unless command of his crew was returned to Lt. Fichett. The Court acquiesced with the provision that Lt. Fichett never be promoted beyond 2nd Lieutenant.



Lt. Jack A. Dunaway, Crew #56, U.S. Army Air Base, Peyote, Texas, 22 November 1943. From left to right: John H. Crowley, Walter R. Rusch, John Katsaros, Henry Kane - Co-pilot, Jack Dunaway - Pilot, Ted J. Krol - Bombardier, William G. Mock - Navigator, Marvin H. Benz, J. Nichols, Francis J. Mastronardi

## **CHAPTER 8**

### **Emergency Orders**

Rumors abounded concerning the tremendous losses the 8th Air Force had sustained during the daylight combat missions in the year 1943. An example of the losses reported by the 8th Air Force during the month of July 1943: eighty-eight Fortresses lost, nine hundred men killed, MIA or POW's on the air raid at Oscherslaben about eighty miles southwest of Berlin, Germany; the 100th Group (called the Bloody One Hundred) on one mission, lost all twelve airplanes. Waiting for the return of their airmen and planes, officers and ground crews were devastated when it became evident that none would return. Could anyone imagine how excruciating it had been to those on the ground, waiting and praying for return of their friends, hoping for the sight of returning B-17's, and not to be seen again. It was horrible! During October 1943, one hundred planes were lost in three days. The date 14 October 1943 became known to the 8th Air Force as "Black Thursday", as sixty-five B-17's were lost on a combat mission to Schweinfurt, Germany; five hundred and ninety-four airmen missing, wounded, taken prisoner or dead, seventeen returning Fortresses suffered category E battle damage, never to fly again. In these bombers fifty were dead and thirty-three airmen were wounded, 10 critically.

Major General Delmar T. Spivey, our Commander at Fort Meyers Gunnery School was shot down in the lead B-17 over Schweinfurt on "Black Thursday". He was the USAAF expert on aerial gunnery and was on this mission evaluating on how to improve gun turrets. He became the highest ranking Air Force officer as a German POW. It was a great loss.

From October 10 through October 14 in the year 1943, the 8th Air Force licked its wounds from the hammering it took in losses to aircraft and airmen, and rested the tired combat crews and ground personnel. It was more than the hardiest staff officers or generals could stand. The men who flew the missions were numb with fatigue and mental strain from facing death in one form or another - from hundreds of thousands of shrapnel fragments, cannon projectiles, bursting bombs, bullets, fire, oxygen

starvation, or a fall from five miles up to a sudden total destruction on the ground.

According to Martin Caidin, author of *Flying Forts*, “*The 8th’s planners worried their hair grey trying to resolve the complex and interwoven factors of the formidable German anti-aircraft defenses, the depth and efficiency of their radar and fighter-control operations, and the known skill and courage of the men who flew the German fighters.*”

The 8th A.F. had been accustomed to shorter mission flights in the area of France, and targets close enough for gasoline reach, but the mission to Schweinfurt was special, and suspicion prevailed that German Intelligence, fore-warned of this chosen deep penetrating target into Germany, had alerted the Luftwaffe. The British, opposed the 8th A.F. decision to bomb by daylight, preferred to bombing under the stars, as the belief was that the darkness cloaked the RAF with a mantle of protection.

Yet there would come a night when a swarm of the huge four engine Lancasters would strike deep into Germany and lose ninety-six of the finest bomber design to take wing.

The daylight bombing campaign by the 8th A.F. continued in high precision raids on industrial targets to cut short the enemies resources, while the RAF destroyed cities in saturated raids.

The 8th Air Force led by General Ira C. Eaker believed that daylight bombing would be successful because he had information that the bombers had firepower to go alone without fighter escort. Experimentation with daylight bombing in night raids took place on the mission to Schweinfurt Germany, much to the chagrin of the British Air Marshal, Hugh Traichard and Prime Minister Churchill who wanted the 8th Air force to be disbanded to join the RAF. Immediately, a clamor arose in the A.F. High Command to breach a gap in losses of aircraft and trained airmen to continue the air-fight against the enemy as preparation for the continent invasion. General Eaker was determined to keep the 8th A.F. intact and not be integrated with the RAF. He convinced Churchill at Casablanca January 1944 that with the British bombing at night and the 8th A.F. bombing in daylight, he would have “Round the Clock” bombing. General Eaker’s argument was a



reprieve to continue with daylight bombing. This saved the day temporarily from 8th A.F. disbandment.

This kind of war had no foxholes or dugouts, no hedgerows or earthworks, no place to hide, no place to run. It was a far different kind of conflict than man had ever faced before.

Since the third phase of our training was cut from the schedule, the Lt. Jack Dunaway crew was transferred to the air base at Kearney, Nebraska to pick up a brand new B-17. Lt. Dunaway signed for the aircraft. The handwriting was on the wall.

Brother, Sot, was stationed at Lincoln, Nebraska Air Base not far from Kearney. He had graduated from OCS in Florida and was now a 2nd Lieutenant. I phoned Sot and made a quick trip for an overnight visit. The Red Cross recorded our voices on a plastic disk and mailed it to our folks in Haverhill.

We spent two days at Kearney, and I flew with the crew to Detroit in our new B17 where the crew was disbanded. Each crew member was assigned to an Air Transport Command (ATC) carrier for shipment to England as individual B-17 crew member replacements. Now it hit us why our training was cut short at Dalhart - the Air Force needed B-17 aircraft replacements and crew members immediately.

## **CHAPTER 9**

### **Transition to the ETO**

Lt. Ted Krol, Walter Rusch and I were to fly to Presque Isle, Maine and to Gander, Newfoundland with final destination, Scotland. On the way to Maine, I requested the ATC pilot to land at Grenier Air Base in Manchester, New Hampshire, so I could visit my home in Haverhill, Massachusetts, about thirty-five miles south.

The excuse given for landing at Grenier Air Base was a possible oil leak. As one could imagine, the ATC pilot and co-pilot were very accommodating. Upon landing, much to the pilot's surprise, one of the engines was actually leaking oil. It would take at least a day to make the repairs.

The ATC pilot requested an overnight pass for me to visit with my family, but the Base Commander refused, basing his decision on security reasons. Yet, everyone involved, including the ground crews knew that we were to participate in combat in the ETO. Since the crew was going into aerial combat with little chance of survival, all had prepared for the worst; hence, I told the C.O. that I would go AWOL (absent without leave) overnight without a pass. The C.O. threatened imprisonment if I went AWOL.

That night, I phoned brother, George, who was on the verge of enlisting, and George drove his car up to Manchester, NH, to pick me up. I spent the night with my family, and the next morning George brought me back to Grenier Air Base. Without an overnight pass, I was not allowed re-entry on base by the MP's. Fortune smiled on me as Lt. Ted Krol was spotted heading for his morning shower in the latrine building. He quickly smoothed the situation, and the MP's allowed me entry on base. With the oil leak repaired, and the C.O., much to his consternation, satisfied to reprimand me orally, the ATC Pilot and co-pilot were free to put the B-17 into the air.

On take-off I requested another favor of the pilot: "How about buzzing my home town in Haverhill?" The pilot honored my second request, making

me very happy. He buzzed Haverhill, and my parents later told me that they saw the big B-17 with four distinctive sounding engines. Most inhabitants in this city of 50,000 had never seen a plane as big as this before. The excitement lasted several days.

The fun part over, the pilot pointed the ship's nose toward Presque Isle, Maine, where we RON-ed (Remained Overnight) and the next morning headed for Gander, Newfoundland. We landed at Gander on an ice-cold day, well below zero, and as soon as the engines were shut down, the heater trucks arrived to keep the engines and fluids from freezing overnight. A truck took us to the mess hall for a hot meal. While standing in the mess line, I felt a tap on my shoulder, and turned to see Arthur Mitchitson, a friend from Haverhill who was a permanent party at Gander and remained there for the war.

At mess, we met a Military Band, which had unknowingly been transported from Miami to Gander, still in summer khakis and without a change in clothing. They were highly "pissed."

The next day was not as cold but cold enough for ice-skating. Arthur and I borrowed a couple pair of ice skates and gave a try at a local lake.

We met two nice looking Newfoundland gals who were also on skates, but once they smiled us guys were taken aback as the gals had no teeth. The U.S. Army Air Force employed the girls, who were subject to employee physical examination. Apparently water in Newfoundland lacked the needed calcium, the ingredient necessary for maintaining strong teeth, and in order to be employed on the base they had to have their teeth extracted and replaced with issued dentures. This condition was prevalent with the majority of the local workers.

We stayed at Gander two days and guarded the aircraft day and night. Ready to fly, the next evening our plane lined up with a number of planes to take off for the flight across the Atlantic Ocean, with destination Prestwick, Scotland. The first plane taxied out to the runway and lifted for takeoff - an explosion and a huge ball of fire erupted. The B-17 blew up. All passengers and crew perished. The remainder of the flights were then cancelled for immediate stand-down inspection of all departing aircraft.

A British subject, a traitor, Lord Haw Haw, had a daily news program on German radio, and he announced that a German spy had infiltrated American defenses at Gander and successfully stored a bomb on that B-17 airplane; and all planes leaving Gander would fall to the same fate. The

information that he broadcast was astounding, giving the name of each pilot and the number of aircraft for transport that day.

The stand-down inspection completed, heartbeats ran rapidly as again the planes lined up for take-off. This time all planes took to the air without mishap.

I was the only flyer in the plane's waist section, while Lt. Ted Krol flew up front with the pilot and co-pilot, on the upper deck just behind the cockpit. All machine-guns and ammunition had been removed from the aircraft, to allow for extra fuel to be brought on board for the long flight across the Atlantic Ocean. Walter Rusch was transferred to another plane for the flight.

It was a beautiful night. The moon and stars were out in their glory. Since I had no responsibility during the early stages of the trip, I read a *Reader's Digest* condensed version of Charles Lindbergh's first successful solo flight from New York to Paris nonstop. The name of the book was *We*. Actually he named the book *We* because there was another passenger, a mosquito. Rather than swat the mosquito that kept buzzing around his head, Lindy decided to have it keep him company. He credited the mosquito for keeping him awake during the long, lonely flight.

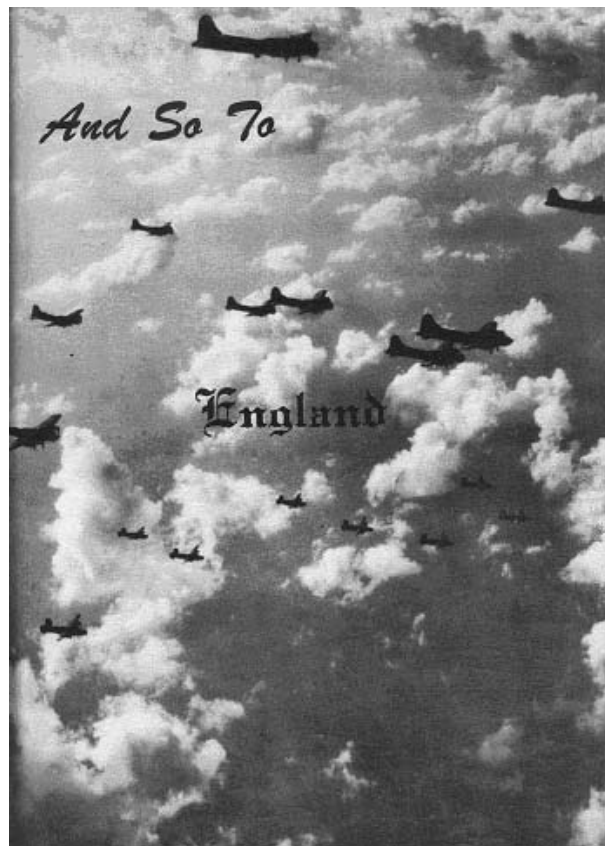
On nearing the completion of the flight, the pilot called me on the intercom, advising to keep a sharp eye for enemy planes. I was still alone and decided that the best vantage point for observation was in the tail section of the plane.

All went well and every B-17 flying out of Gander 19 December 1943 arrived at Prestwick, Scotland without incident. It was an uneventful and enjoyable trip for me to cross the Atlantic Ocean.

After short visits to Valley, Wales and to Stone, England, Lt. Dunaway and our crew were re-united and were assigned to the 612th Squadron, 401st Bomb Group, 94th Bomb Wing, 1st Division of the 8th Air Force headquartered at Deenethorpe, England, Station 128. I thought we were split-up forever. Deenethorpe, the most northerly Heavy Bomber Station of the 1st Division, was located east of Corby on high ground, south of Deenethorpe Village. The base had the standard AMDGW layout for a Class "A" heavy bomber airfield, with the usual 2000 and 1400 yard concrete runways with tarmac and wood chip surfacing. The USAAF standard for bomber stations was adhered to - two T2-type aircraft hangers and fifty hard stands for B-17 parking, spread around on the adjoining perimeter track.

The majority of the hard stands were in the shape of a frying pan. The main runway had been installed with Mark II airfield lighting equipment, and the campsite housing temporary buildings was located south of the airfield.

The 401st Bomb Group had moved onto the base at Deenethorpe in early November and began combat operations on 26 November 1943.





John Katsaros in Combat Gear, December 1943



General Henry H. "Hap" Arnold



General Ira C. Eaker.



COL. HAROLD W. BOWMAN  
Group Commander, June 1943-June 1944

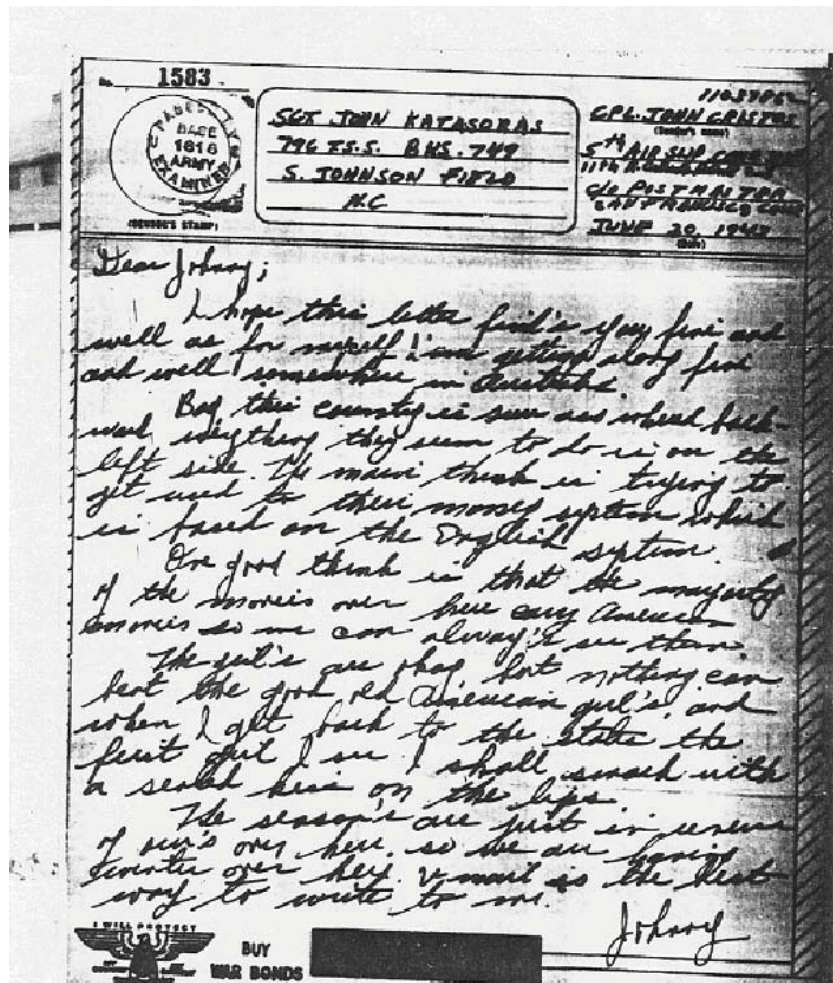
Colonel Harold W. "Hal" Bowman, 401st Bombardment Group  
(H) Commander, Deenethorpe, England 1943-44





MAJOR GENERAL ROBERT B. WILLIAMS  
*Former Commanding General, 1st Air Division*

Lt. General Robert B. Williams, Commander of the 1st Air Division, Eighth Air Force, England 1943-44.



A typical V-Mail letter reduced in size to conserve delivery storage space, during World War II. Note my cousin Cpl. John Cristos sent this V-Mail to me from an unnamed overseas location June 30, 1943, and it followed me to dozens of military installations before it reached my final station in Deenethorpe, England, December 1943, six months later.

The worst accident occurred in December 1943 when a Fortress, failing to lift off the ground, careened over the farmland and came to rest after crashing into a cottage on the edge of Deenethorpe village. The aircrew just had time to evacuate the wreckage and warn the villagers of the imminent explosion of the bomb load before it detonated, damaging many houses in the village. The blast was heard in Kettering, twelve miles away. None of the villagers was hurt.

[illegible]

**ENLISTED MAN'S IDENTIFICATION CARD**  
European Theater of Operations, U.S. Army

This is to identify  
**KATSAROS JOHN (NMI) 11130671**

whose description and signature appear hereon, as a member  
of the United States armed forces, serving in the European  
Theater of Operations.

Grade **SGT.** Assn. **11130671** Race **White**

Home address **24 Forrest Ave. Haverhill**

Birthplace **Haver Hill, Mass.**

Birthdate **6 July 1923** Height **5ft 8in. 58"**  
(Da) (Mo) (Yr) ft. ins.

Weight **145** lbs. **10** stones **5** lbs.

Color hair **BROWN** Color eyes **Br.** Complexion **Med.**

Scars or distinguishing marks **None**

*John Katsaros*  
(Signature of soldier)  
**11130671**

## **CHAPTER 10**

### **Mission Briefing**

At Deenethorpe, formation flying was practiced as required for bomber safety, strength in defensive machine-gun protection, and superior bomb pattern on target. The C.O., satisfied with the B-17 formation flying, gave the gunners opportunity to get in some air-to-ground firing with the .50 caliber machine-guns down at the "Wash", a summer beach resort. The crews were now combat ready.

The four officers on the Lt. Jack Dunaway crew, pilot, co-pilot, navigator and bombardier were housed in a Nissen hut, that had a concrete foundation and a round steel roof. The non-commissioned officers, the G.I.'s, had their own Nissen hut, housing eighteen aircrew men. A potbelly stove with a few pieces of coal provided the heat. Extra blankets were needed to keep warm. Coal was in short supply and was considered a luxury item but the English, a hardy people, kept a stiff upper lip, evoking great admiration and respect for the English from the American G.I.

A typical day of a usually tough combat mission was similar to our crew's first of three combat missions to Frankfurt, Germany. It began around 0400 hours, when a whistle was blown by the CQ (Charge of Quarters) who awakened the crew calling out names to report for duty. A truck ride to the mess hall for breakfast of real eggs and milk was always scheduled before every mission. On non-mission days it was powdered eggs and powdered milk. Not a tasty meal.

After breakfast the crew was trucked to a large Nissen hut with all the aircrews scheduled to fly that day for mission briefing. The 401st Bomb Group consisted of four Squadrons: The 612th, 613th, 614th and 615th. Each squadron scheduled nine or ten air worthy B-17's for the mission of the day, and when all assembled as a group totaled between thirty-six and forty aircraft.

Between three-hundred and sixty and four hundred officers and enlisted men were seated until the Commanding Officer of the group, usually Colonel Harold Bowman, entered the hut. The combat crews were called to attention and briefing for the day's mission began with a "Good morning, men."

Behind the C.O. was a map of Europe with a drawn shade cover. The mission route and target were visibly exposed when the C.O. raised the shade cover. A red ribbon indicated the flight path to target, and a red arrow pointed to the city of the selected target. Today, the target was an aircraft factory in Frankfurt, Germany. The intelligence officer briefed the group on enemy fighter expectations and the kind of strength of the ground anti-aircraft fire from .88 mm guns. The weather officer gave a briefing on the weather at take-off, the route weather, and the weather to expect at the target. Lastly, the C.O. revealed the type of installations to be attacked - a munitions factory, ball bearing plant, an aircraft factory, supply depot, an aerodrome or railroad yard. The targets were plentiful and are passed down to Division Headquarters from the 8th Air Force.

Each mission was flown to bomb military targets of war resources and not specifically to bomb German cities or the people. Of course, there was always the accidental collateral damage.

After the group briefing each crew member was issued a parachute, wired underwear for heat, a flak vest, and a "Mae West". A "Mae West" was a yellow inflatable floatation device to keep a water-ditched airman afloat for rescue. Each flyer had his own oxygen mask, heavy fleece-lined jacket, pants and boots. I snagged an English type chute, for which, later I was thankful to be wearing.

My faith is Greek Orthodox Christian and, during WWII, the Army gave recognition only to Catholic, Protestant and Judaism religions. My dog tags were stamped Catholic, so I decided to receive absolution before every mission from the Catholic chaplain, Major Joseph H. Burke, a Catholic priest in civilian life, from Haverhill, Massachusetts (as I was to learn some sixty years later, in a book *Guardian Angel* by Captain Paul Campbell, a pilot with the 615th Squadron.) Together with his junior partner, Captain Ward J. Fellows, the Protestant chaplain, they arose at 0300 hours each morning the group scheduled a mission, and rode their bicycles a mile to the briefing room. After the briefing, they witnessed the take-off and at the appropriate time, the return of the aircraft from their life-threatening mission.





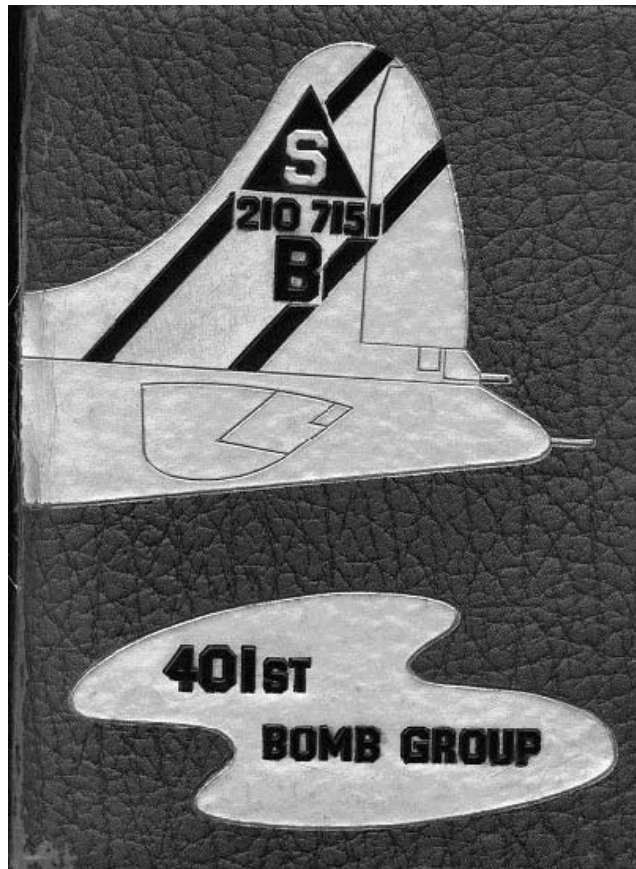
Catholic Chaplain Major Joseph H. Burke and Protestant chaplain Captain Ward J. Fellows.



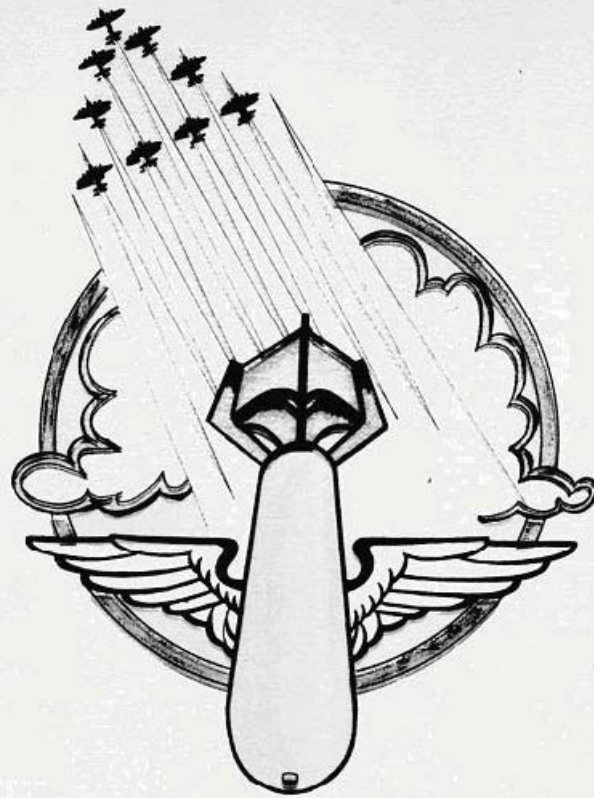
Catholic Chaplain, Major Joseph H. Burke, of Haverhill, MA



After picking up their flight gear, the airmen are trucked, as a crew, to their assigned aircraft for this mission, for as a replacement crew, they do not have a B-17 to call their own. My job, as assistant engineer, was to pre-flight the aircraft; check all visible parts and inspect to insure that the fuel tanks are filled. Each crew member was given a specific pre-flight job to accomplish and lastly the pilot and co-pilot followed through with a double check of the total aircraft.



Triangle "S" Tail Insignia



#### 612th BOMBARDMENT SQUADRON

A formation of B-17s, a bomb and the official Air Corps wings form the background for this insignia. This is the second insignia adopted by the 612th. The first contained a replica of "Mangler", squadron mascot.



#### 612th BOMBARDMENT SQUADRON

A formation of B-17s, a bomb and the official Air Corps wings form the background for this insignia. This is the second insignia adopted by the 612th. The first contained a replica of "Mangler", squadron mascot.



#### 613th BOMBARDMENT SQUADRON

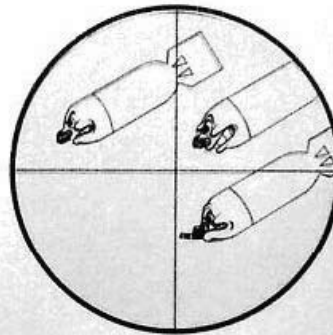
Drawn by the famed cartoonist, Walt Disney, this "punching bomb" is symbolic of a squadron which was "always right in there, punching!"



#### 614th BOMBARDMENT SQUADRON

"Lucky Devil's" head design originated with Mrs. I. J. Casagrande, wife of the squadron's first navigator, later a Prisoner of War in Germany.

All insignia officially approved.



#### 615th BOMBARDMENT SQUADRON

These angry bombs come from the pen of Milt Caniff, author of "Terry and the Pirates" and "Male Call". Faces represent Roosevelt, Churchill, Stalin.

Other Squadron Insignias - These were officially approved.

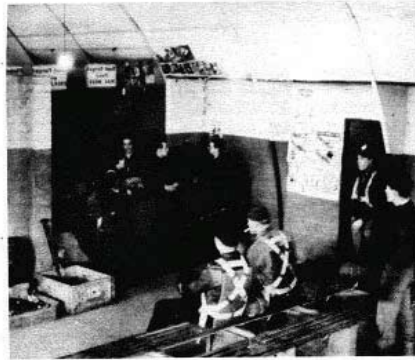


A-2 leather jackets with air-crew art.





Bottom R. "Lt. "Bid" Fitchett wearing his A-2



CREW MEMBERS CHECKING OUT EQUIPMENT

### *Equipment Room*



SGT. CHARLES R. WARELE helps Lt. J. Evans, navigator, don his parachute, flak suit, Mae West, etc.



CPL. Wm. J. BARLOW stores flak suits in the fliers individual bins.



CPL. FRED W. GRESCHENZ hangs electrically heated flying suits on the racks to dry in locker room.

## **CHAPTER 11**

### **Mission to Frankfurt, Germany**

On the early morning of 11 February 1944, Pilot Jack Dunaway and the crew of *Man O' War* sat through mission profiling as we prepared ourselves mentally for our first combat experiences - to carry destruction to an aircraft factory at Frankfurt, Germany.

The aircrew and I performed the pre-flight checkout procedures and boarded the aircraft, then the pilot and co-pilot went through the pilot check-list, started the engines and warmed them up to check their operation. Engines running smoothly, the aircraft was taxied to the runway and lined up as to pre-arranged instructions, prepared to take-off. The engines were revved up and the aircraft waited for the "go" signal from the tower. One behind the other, in thirty second intervals, the planes took to the runway, lifted into the air and assembled, like a flock of geese into the "V" flying formation at the predetermined low level. Once the formation organized, the lead plane took the formation up to flying en-route altitude.

The group, in formation, flew to 2900 feet over the English Channel, and when halfway across the Channel, the pilot gave his OK to test-fire the .50 caliber machine-guns, weighing sixty-five pounds and expelling 15 rounds per second. The knowledge of this information became very evident. The .50 caliber was mounted in the waist window on a gun mount, using a gun mount adapter. Apparently, I did not properly check out the gun mounting, and when the weapon was test-fired, the recoil hit me in the chest, knocking me on my ass. What a shock! The gun also fell back onto the floor and was pointed directly at Marvin Benz, the tail gunner. Instinctively, I recovered from my knockdown and flipped on the gun safety button, stopping a possible runaway machine-gun. This action averted killing the tail gunner, or destroying the plane and other planes in the formation. Faulty installation of the gun adapter by the armorer could have caused an irreparable catastrophe. The fright tapered down, I secured the gun properly to the gun mount using the gun adapter. The coast of France came into view. Whew! That was a scare! In retrospect, there was failure to inspect for proper gun mount installation.

*Gamoto* (Damn) “*Mea culpa*,” say I to myself.

Now, my concentration was put on the mission, the enemy guns and the warplanes. Soon enough reality awakened the crew as 88mm guns began pounding the sky, putting up black plumes of smoke as the anti-aircraft timer shells began exploding all around the ship. Sometimes, the flak cloud was so thick; it resembled a carpet to walk on. The German artillery units included female gunners who were also excellent at their jobs.

The flak stops. Within minutes, the German fighter aircraft, line abreast in formation, for maximum firepower, attacked the formation of heavy bombers. This was their first pass, as they came back, in single file to select and take down individual bombers. On one such occasion, an FW-190 on a pass by my window lined up for a straight short burst from my .50 caliber, hitting the tail section. The tail exploded. I saw smoke and the tail gunner saw smoke. The fighter suffered some damage and did not return to re-engage our guns. No credit for shooting a fighter down was given unless someone saw his plane crash or the pilot bail-out.

The I.P. (Initial Point) was the turning point of the flight path to the target because the bomb run was never directly to the target; this kept the enemy off guard as to direction of the final bomb run. The I.P. came up and from this turning point onto the bomb run the ack-ack guns gave us a welcome with a barrage of flak. No serious damage to the aircraft and no crew members were hurt, but the flak was high, accurate and intense, fracturing nerves.

*Man O’ War*’s combat experience was initiated on this bombing mission. Heavy enemy anti-air 88mm batteries trained their sights to shoot the bombers down over the target area with as many as 1500 guns sighted in box formation to the altitude of 20,000 to 27,000 feet, as radioed by their fighters. The bombers, empty of their bombs, assembled in a staggered formation, enabling the gunners to train their .50 caliber machine-guns at the attacking German fighter planes.

I spot a bomber in a spin down below off my right side and tell the pilot. “Any chutes?” “Yes sir, I count six.” “Keep your eye on them for more.” When all crewmen were on oxygen, my job, at altitudes over 10,000 feet was to periodically check by intercom with each crew member on his oxygen supply function. Minutes before the I.P. I checked with the tail gunner but got no answer. I looked to the tail section and saw Marvin Benz slumped over. I sensed an emergency situation with Benz and called on the



intercom to the pilot who agreed that I should crawl back to the tail section with a 10 minute oxygen bottle to assess the situation.

19 February 1944 Commendation reads:

*1. While flying on the operational mission to Frankfurt, Germany, on 11 February 1944, Sgt. John (NMI) Katsaros, left waist gunner, was called on the interphone and asked to check the tail gunner, who had not answered. The A/C, #9979, Was then at 27,000 feet and about 20 minutes before the I.P. Sgt. Katsaros carrying a walk-around bottle, found the tail gunner unconscious and with his mask off. Sgt. Katsaros gave him emergency oxygen and attempted artificial respiration. While making these attempts, the oxygen supply in the walk-around bottle gave out, since it had previously been used by the other waist gunner who was not sure of his main oxygen system. Sgt. Katsaros had to go to the waist to secure another bottle. When the tail gunner, suffering from anoxia, was partially revived, he became temporarily crazed and resisted efforts of Sgt Katsaros to assist him. Sgt. Katsaros was forced to wrestle with him for from (5) to ten (10) minutes. The pilot then ordered the navigator, Lt. William G. Mock, to go back to the tail to help. Lt. Mock and Sgt. Katsaros finally fully revived the tail gunner. By this time, however, the aircraft's oxygen supply had been dangerously depleted, and the supply in the tail was exhausted. Not being sure that the interphone system functioned properly, Sgt. Katsaros made his way forward without oxygen to inform the pilot. It became necessary to pass bottles to the rear from the forward part of the ship. In this action the radio operator and other members of the crew took part.*

- 1. In spite of the above mentioned difficulties, Lt. Dunaway and his crew bombed the target and returned safely from enemy territory. This was the first combat mission for Lt. Dunaway's crew.*
- 2. The devotion to duty and the determination to do their assigned job by these crew members is exemplary. It is desired that this commendation be included in the permanent records.*

*A True Copy -John M. Weidner, Captain, MAC Registrar  
Jere W. Maupin, Capt. Air Corps, Commanding*

The emergency is further developed in the following citation awarded to John Katsaros. This is a copy of the original document.

612TH BOMB SQUADRON (H)  
401ST BOMB GROUP (H)  
AAF STATION 128

19 February 1944.

SUBJECT: Commendation of Crew Members.

TO: : Commanding Officer, 401st Bomb Group (H), APO 634, U. S. Army.

1. While flying on the operational mission to Frankfurt, Germany, on 11 February 1944, Sgt. John (nm) Katsaros, left waist gunner, was called on the interphone and asked to check the tail gunner, who had not answered. The A/C, #9979, was then at 27,000 feet and about 20 minutes before the I.F. Sgt. Katsaros carrying a walk-around bottle, found the tail gunner unconscious and with his mask off. Sgt. Katsaros gave him emergency oxygen and attempted artificial respiration. While making these attempts, the oxygen supply in the walk-around bottle gave out, since it had previously been used by the other waist gunner who was not sure of his main oxygen system. Sgt. Katsaros had to go to the waist to secure another bottle. When the tail gunner, suffering from anoxia, was partially revived, he became temporarily crazed and resisted the efforts of Sgt. Katsaros to assist him. Sgt. Katsaros was forced to wrestle with him for from five (5) to ten (10) minutes. The pilot then ordered the navigator, Lt. William G. Mock, to go back to the tail to help. Lt. Mock and Sgt. Katsaros finally fully revived the tail gunner. By this time, however, the aircraft's oxygen supply had been dangerously depleted, and the supply in the tail was exhausted. Not being sure that the interphone system functioned properly, Sgt. Katsaros made his way forward without oxygen to inform the pilot. It became necessary to pass bottles to the rear from the forward part of the ship. In this action the radio operator and other members of the crew took part.

2. In spite of the above mentioned difficulties, Lt. Dunaway and his crew bombed the target and returned safely from enemy territory. This was the first combat mission for Lt. Dunaway's crew.

3. The devotion to duty and the determination to do their assigned job by these crew members is exemplary. It is desired that this commendation be included in their permanent records.

*John W. Maupin*  
JOHN W. MAUPIN  
Capt., Air Corps,  
Commanding.

A TRUE COPY:

*John M. Feidner*  
JOHN M. FEIDNER  
Captain, MAC  
Registrar

## **CHAPTER 12**

### **Combat De-Briefing and Interrogation**

The mission over and crews returned to base, we were all trucked to the briefing room for debriefing and, as individual crews, were interrogated by an intelligence officer. A double shot of scotch, set up by Captain Charles C. Henrie, medical officer, was offered to each crew member, for medical purposes, as a nerve settler, and to put feet back on terra firma.

The purpose of the interrogation was to learn about the experiences of the crew coming in contact with the enemy, i.e. the make and number of fighter aircraft, the attack procedures used, the observed competence of the enemy fighter pilots, and the location and the intensity of the flak. Observations were given of the condition of the group formation under fire, aircraft hit and falling out of formation, parachutes and ground location seen in the air, and a multitude of incidents seen with the naked eye, as radio silence was maintained over enemy territory. The K-20, K-24 and movie cameras containing the exposed film were turned over to an intelligence officer.

Exhausted, we returned to our Nissen hut for a much needed rest. Suddenly and without warning one of the gunners in our hut started rambling and waving his .45 cal. pistol around. We had no idea of what his intentions were when suddenly the weapon fires and the bullet penetrated the metal roof of the hut. I pulled my .45 from under my pillow, pointed my weapon at him and ordered him to drop the gun. He began to sob and cry and put the gun down on the bed. We notified the Military Police (MP's) who came and escorted him to the base hospital for observation. It appeared that the hazard of flying bombing missions had got to him, and he would not fly again, permanently grounded. I never saw this airman again.

In the event that the primary target could be reached or was not visible due to cloud cover, a secondary target was always given. The crew's first mission to Berlin as the primary target was deviated to the secondary targets at Kiel and Wilhelmshaven, Germany because of low oxygen supply.

The second mission to Berlin as the primary target was deviated to the secondary target, an aircraft factory at Augsburg, Germany, makers of the ME-109 fighter.

The temperature at altitudes of 25,000 to 30,000 feet reached between -60 and -70 degrees Fahrenheit (below zero). The so called waist windows on each side of the aircraft fuselage were uncovered openings where the .50 caliber machine-guns were mounted, and there was no shelter from the weather at those altitudes and without wind deflectors on the windows, the gunner was at mercy of the winds. Many times the gunners in the waist section of the aircraft wound up in the hospital with frozen limbs, hands, toes, feet, and exposed body parts.



Walter Rusch and I were treated for frozen hands and feet, after a Feb 1944 bombing mission to Germany, at this 401st Bomb Group Hospital.



401st Bomb Group, 612th Squadron, release bombs on target.





John at Right Waist Gun window.



Walking over the narrow B-17 bomb bay catwalk, circa 2007.



Heavy flak over the target at Schweinfurt, Germany.



FW-190 similar to the one I damaged on my first mission to Frankfurt, Germany.



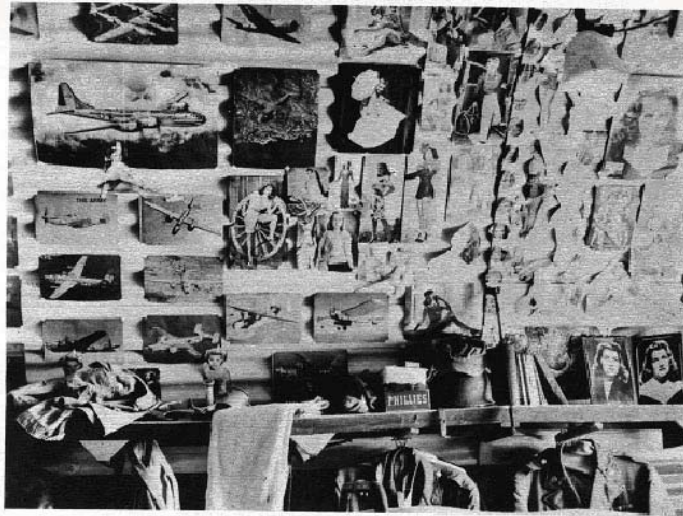
How did we ever fly in the B-17 ball turret?



K-24 Camera Gunners/photographers take still pictures on combat missions.



# NISSEN HUT "ART" GALLERIES



Nissen Hut "Art" Galleries.



**BOMBERS BACK TO BLIGHTY AFTER BLIGHTING BOCHE**—These flyers have just returned from a successful bombing operation over Germany. They are awaiting a jeep which will take them to the interrogation where they will enjoy "java and sinkers" while being questioned.



**Bombers Back To Blighty After Blighting Boche** -These flyers have just returned from a successful bombing operation over Germany. They are awaiting a jeep which will take them to the interrogation where they will enjoy "java and sinkers" while being questioned.

## **BOMBER CREWS CONCERNS**

**By Martin Caidin**

*Excerpt from the book, "Flying Forts", by Martin Caidin, will give you an insight into the life experiences of B-17 airmen on a mission to "Hell".*

*"The Flying Fortress was a big airplane. But, it was not one in which its crew could find comfort. It was a machine for making war; comfort took last place in the requirements for the combat mission. It was a noisy airplane, insulated only in a limited area in the forward section. It was bitterly cold inside, not only from the ambient cold at high altitude but because of the knife-like winds that stabbed through every narrow opening. Guns jutted from the open hatches. Bomb bay doors leaked and were often open. It's bad enough to be exposed to cold that would drop as far as 75 and 80 below zero; its worse when the wind shrieks demon-like and turns the cold to cruel pain.*

*Filled with the implements for waging war, the Fortress presented the crew with a maze of sharp projections and nasty objects against which one often stumbled and brushed. Even with the four big propellers synchronized perfectly there was so much equipment, from machine-guns to radio and oxygen bottles that it couldn't help but rattle and vibrate within. After a while the crews never felt it; it was the sound of flight and it became second nature. At high altitude, even without combat, every man was remote from his airplane despite his being linked through umbilical cords to its very fiber. A man didn't touch a part of that plane with his naked skin. That isn't wise with the temperature down to forty - eighty degrees below zero. In that cold simply exposing the hands to the ambient air can be disastrous. Placing raw skin against metal at that sub-zero temperature can mean leaving a patch of skin on the metal and drawing back bloody flesh. The crews were bundled in cumbersome, bulky flight garments, electrically heated, (Quite often the heated suits did not work subjecting the crews to frostbite); heavy fleece trousers with leather on the outside; jackets, boots, gloves, helmets; goggles to hold off the screaming wind, to keep a man's eyes from tearing when he most needs his vision.*

*A man in his flight attire was a clumsy, bear-like creature. His*

*parachute strapped over and around his body, heavy, binding and often distressingly uncomfortable, didn't make matters any better. And then there were the leads to connect oxygen masks on the face, strapped tightly, cutting against the skin to prevent the precious oxygen from escaping when a man needed it most. The mask plugged through a hose into the airplane, electrical leads to the heated flying suit, leads for radio and intercom to be plugged in. Symbiosis of ten men and one machine.*

*Those leads were life itself. Strange then that these men should be unable to secure themselves tightly to the machine to prevent stumbling, falling or being hurtled about. A bomber in combat can be a wild and flailing creature. There are air currents to begin with. Bursts of flak mean concussion, sharp blows of air rammed to the strength of steel. In formation flying, there is turbulence from all those propellers ahead, flailing the air with thousands of horsepower.*

*There are ten men in a Flying Fortress. In combat only two of them are seated, the pilot and the co-pilot to his right. That's all, just those two. Strapped in a seat belt and shoulder harness, they are snuggled tightly to the machine. But only they, who must be certain that they are not blown away by explosion or other disaster from the controls.*

*Ten men crewed the B-17E and its successors. In the nose, during battle, the bombardier and the navigator crouched like animals at bay, each grasping a heavy machine gun. Directly behind and slightly above them were the pilots. Immediately behind the pilots was the flight engineer top-turret gunner, standing in his complicated nest of steel and Plexiglas and machine-guns. Behind this man, past the bomb bays, stood the radio operator, leaning back awkward in his stance, swinging a heavy machine-gun through an aperture in the fuselage, trying to sight on fighters high above and slightly aft. And immediately behind and beneath him, the ball-turret gunner, bent into a half-ball of human stuffed into his round world of a power turret, his feet on level with his ears, his bottom the lowest part of the airplane. Still further back within the fuselage were the two waist gunners, two men who lived and fought from within a tubular world, with the walls, floor and ceiling made of thin metal skin and it's supporting heavy ribs that completely encircled them. Finally, the tail gunner kneeling and sighting enemy fighters behind twin .50 caliber machine guns.*

*After an encounter with the enemy fighters, the waist floor would be littered with the rain of empty machine gun shell casings, making the floor*



*a hazardous walking place. Back at the tail section, the tail gunner neither stands nor sits, but crouches, like a roll-up, as he rests on his knees to see to the outside and fire his twin .50 caliber guns.*

*The Fortress was the most rugged bomber ever built, but with an easy push a man could jab a screwdriver right through the thin metal that made up the skin of the airplane. Strength in the B-17 came from outstanding design.*

*Ten men in a machine five miles above the earth - sitting, standing, crouching, curled-up, and kneeling - that's how they fought the war, with winds up to 300 MPH in open gun positions.*

*The B-17's two waist guns each had 300 rounds of .50 caliber ammunition and the chin had 365 rounds. When the B-17 G arrived, the waist carried 900 rounds and the chin, 964 rounds. The B-17 G had a total fire power of 5770 rounds of .50 caliber ammunition and the B-17 G, when fully loaded, had a service ceiling of 35,000 feet with a much heavier bomb load than its predecessors along with many other improvements. Most of our combat missions were flown at around 200 M.P.H. with the open waist windows.*

*The B-17-F is tight on space, designed only for workstations and under conditions of stress when body maneuverability is necessary, care must be taken to prevent personal injury.*

*Bomber fighter protection by the 8th Air Force included the P-47 Thunderbolt that became operational in mid-October 1943 but its radius of action, 340 miles, limited its usefulness for long range, deep penetrating B-17 bombers. The P-38 Lightning, with its identifiable twin fuselage, a very effective fighter, capable of an extended range of 520 miles from home base, was greatly respected by the German Luftwaffe; the P-51 Mustang became the most favored escort because of its long range, 800 miles from base, and its great speed, maneuverability and climbing power."*

### **MARTIN CAIDEN'S *FLYING FORTS***

In his book, *Flying Forts*, Martin Caiden wrote as follows:

*"The break in the weather came on the 19th February 1944, and air planners hurried to put into effect their long-delayed Project ARGUMENT, "a series of coordinated precision attacks by the Eighth and Fifteenth Air*

*Forces against the highest-priority objectives, most of which by February 1944 were situated in central and southern Germany. The RAF agreed to make its night area attacks coincide with the daylight missions both in time and place.” The first assault was scheduled for the 20th February 1944.*

*That morning sixteen combat wings of heavy bombers rose like gigantic locusts over England and assembled into strike formations. More than one thousand heavy bombers took off of which 941 arrived over their targets. The RAF provided short-range escort with sixteen squadrons of Spitfires and Mustangs, while seventeen groups of American fighters -thirteen P-47's Thunderbolts, two P-38's Lightning's, and two P-51's Mustangs - flew with the bombers. Fighter escort for maximum range went to the bombers that would strike targets in central Germany, normally those most heavily defended. In all, the heavy bombers blasted no less than twelve targets critical to the aircraft industry of the Reich. The preparations were carried out with exhaustive care. The night before the big raid the British slammed Leipzig with a roaring assault, not only tearing up great parts of the city but also wearing out much of the night fighter force that would have been available to hit the Fortresses and Liberators. The routes were carefully chosen, the fighter escort assigned studiously, so that those fighters of shortest range were able to return to England, refuel, and take off at once to provide withdrawal escort for the returning bombers.*

*The mission proved to be an outstanding success. On 14th October 1943, against Schweinfurt, sixty bombers out of 257 were shot down. On 11th January 1944, out of 651 bombers carrying out sorties against multiple targets, another sixty bombers went down. Now, on the 20th of February, attacking many of the same targets, a force of almost one thousand bombers suffered losses of twenty-one heavies, barely two percent of the attackers. Even more cheering was the confirmation that a staggering blow, accomplished through excellent and accurate bombing, had been dealt the production capabilities of Germany's aircraft industry.*

*For the 23rd, the Eighth was assigned six major cities, as targets, while the Fifteenth would go after Regensburg. One major part of the B-17 force from England ran into trouble immediately. So severe was the weather over their fields that rendezvous and assembly of formations became impossible, and when several bombers collided in the air the bombers were ordered back to the fields. Many Fortress formations on that day were decreased from their planned sizes because of weather. The Liberators were strung out badly. The Fortresses from Italy found themselves facing German fighter forces much stronger than had been expected - mainly because the planned heavy strikes to the north had been so weak. The fighter escort had its own devil of a time trying to provide cover to bombers that had made a mockery of assembly points and of timetables.*

*This was the opening blow of a massive strategic operation that gained fame as the "Big Week". The Eighth had been prepared to accept losses as high as two hundred bombers for the first mission of the 20th February - and lost but a tenth of that number in return for spectacularly effective results of the bombings.*

*The next day another mighty force rose from England. Hopes for multiple blows, with the Fifteenth and Ninth Air Forces adding their weight to that of the Eighth, were thwarted by weather. On the night of 20/21 February the British came through with a terrifying strike by six hundred heavies against Stuttgart. The morning of the 22nd, despite the severe weather, the Eighth went out again in strength of nearly a thousand bombers. The weather frustrated the hopes for another decisive blow against the Reich; crews took solace by plastering secondary targets with high bomb concentrations.*

*The result was bitter fighting. In a long running battle the German fighters shot down forty-one bombers out of the 430 heavies of the Eighth that were credited with combat sorties. The Fifteenth lost another fourteen bombers, bringing the German score for the day to fifty-five. But the*

*American fighters, for their part, "had a field day." For a loss of eleven American fighters, they shot down at least sixty of the enemy.*

*On the 24th excellent fighter protection showed its worth in quality but lacking in quantity. Mustering all its available strength ("The Luftwaffe had all their planes up but their trainers," a gunner reported afterward.) The German Air Force struck with furious intensity against the many formations hitting widely dispersed targets throughout Germany. The task force of eighty-seven Fortresses that hit Steyr lost eleven. Sixty-one bombers had gone down in battle. The fighters, often outnumbered by the enemy, lost ten of their own and shot down thirty-seven German fighters; bomber gunners had claimed 108 kills. And, once again, there was no way of knowing how many fighters had been shot down by the bombers that were lost. On the 25th the Eighth and Fifteenth put up some 1,300 bombers, plus fighters sent out with the Eighth from England. Making the longest penetrations of the Big Week, they ran into heavy opposition despite strong fighter escort. The Fifteenth sent out 400 bombers, of which 176 made the deep penetrations to the Regensburg area. This force took a beating with thirty-three bombers- nearly twenty percent of the strike force - shot down. The Eighth had 738 bombers credited with sorties and lost thirty-one of their number, a percentage more to the liking of those who flew the mission.*

*The 25th February was the end of the Big Week. The next day the weather closed in over most of the bomber bases. It would remain bad for another month. In the meantime the crews rested and the strategic forces built up their strength.*

*A study of the Big Week produced impressive and satisfying figures. Most of these have been derived from German as well as American sources. First, the 8th Air Force, flying out of England on these five missions sent up more than 3,300 bombers, and the 15th Air Force, flying out of Italy, put another 500 heavy bombers into the air for a combined tonnage of bombs dropped on assigned targets.*

*The 3,800 bombers had hit their main targets dropped a tonnage roughly equal to the total bomb tonnage dropped by the Eighth Air Force in its entire year of operations - approximately 10,000 tons of bombs. Planners had expected losses to be heavy; they were considerably less than anticipated. The Eighth AF lost 137 bombers and the Fifteenth AF another eighty-nine, producing an overall loss ratio of about six percent of the strike armadas. Fighters from the Eighth, Ninth and Fifteenth Air Force flew, respectively, 2,548, 712 and 413 escort missions.*



*Twenty-eight fighters were shot down. Approximately 2,600 men were lost -taking into account killed, missing and seriously wounded. Added to the totals produced by these five heavy raids, the British during this same period sortied 2,351 of the giant RAF night bombers and dropped 9,198 (US) tons of bombs. Their losses were 157 bombers -about 6.6 percent of the attack forces. "This figure", notes the AAF, "Slightly higher than that of American losses, is most interesting in the light of earlier estimates of the relative costs of day versus night bombings."*

The U.S. Strategic Bombing Survey, after ransacking German sources, estimates that the 4,000-odd tons of bombs dropped on targets in the aircraft industrial system alone damaged or destroyed 75 percent of the buildings in plants that at the time accounted for 90 percent of the total German production of aircraft. The immediate reaction in the industry was one of consternation as they looked for better protection by the Luftwaffe. The German authorities, whose plans had hitherto rested on unduly optimistic foundations, now apparently for the first time showed signs of desperation. As a result of the bombing, the aircraft industry in late February received a formal order to disperse its plants...also bombings helped to precipitate a crisis in the overall organization of aircraft production which culminated in the shifting of responsibility from German General Hermann Goering's Air Ministry to a special agency operating within the Ministry of Armaments and Munitions headed by Albert Speer. The February campaign would have paid off even if it's only effect had been to force the enemy into an intensive program of dispersal. For that program not only accounted indirectly for much wasted effort and production loss, it also left the industry vulnerable to any serious disruption in transportation. The dispersal policy did, in fact, defeat itself when Allied bombers subsequently turned to an intensive attack on transportation. There is reason to believe that the large and fiercely fought battles of those six days, 20-25 February 1944, had more effect in establishing the air superiority on which Allied plans so largely depended than did the bombing of industrial plants. Claims of enemy aircraft destroyed amounted to a tremendous total, with more than a third of these victories credited to then fighter escort and roughly another third to the bombers of the Fifteenth Air Force, which enjoyed no long-range escort.

The simultaneous raids to Regensburg to take out the aircraft factory and

to Schweinfurt to take out the ball bearing plant on 20 October 1943 cost the 8th Air Force 60 bombers and 600 airmen that day and became known as "Black Thursday". During "Big Week" 20-25 February 1944, the 15th Air Force lost 90 aircraft and over 900 airmen. The summer of 1944, the 8th Air force sent up 2100 bombers and lost 900 aircraft with 9000 airmen, totaling 42.9% loss. During the same period, the 15th Air Force's losses totaled 1100 bombers and 11,000 airmen a figure higher than the 8th AF. In July alone, targeting the oil refineries at Ploesti, the 15thAF dropped 13,469 tons of bombs, denying the Reich of 1.8 million tons of crude oil at a cost of 350 bombers and over 3500 airmen. Between June and October 1944 with the new P-51 pursuit plane providing escort to the B-17 and B-24's, the Luftwaffe lost 70% of their fighters to the P-51 and the bomber gunners. It was a bloody air war not only for air superiority but for survival of the invasion.

The movie, *12 O'clock High*, depicted the heavy losses in bomber aircraft in the 8th AF and collapse of discipline due to the loss of morale. Yes, discipline was not "gung ho", spit and polish, but morale is in the character of the men and they are aware that the lives of hundreds of thousands of men in the Army who are preparing for the mighty invasion of the European Continent depends on their recapture of air supremacy. When an air crew went out to the flight line and boarded their aircraft, they knew that they had a job to do. They received a chaplain's absolution and prayer, for this flight was their last. The commanders aware of the "final mission theory", allowed harmless liberties to be taken by the airmen. So was born aircraft art, hut (sleeping quarters) art, and A-2 leather jacket art, which in no small way provided spiritual uplift and union among all the flyers and ground personnel. After all nothing like a pretty girl to lift their spirits and boost their morale.

The chaplain and ground personnel, the aircraft mechanics who checked out the airplane, the ordinance and armament personnel who loaded the bombs and cleaned and armed the .50 caliber machine-guns, the medics, the staff from personnel, operations, intelligence and supply - they were all there out on the flight line to see and to send their sons and brothers and friends off for the last time to do combat with the enemy; and they waited, eyes searching the skies over England for return of aircraft with their sons and brothers and friends, no matter what their condition, only to return. No, these Air Force personnel did not fly on combat missions, yet they waited

in anxiety and suffered the pain in loss for those airmen who failed to return and never to be seen again. "God, why do we have WAR?" It is a nasty gut-wrenching business. But we had our jobs to do. These men had great morale for men who took to the air on their "final mission." "God Speed."

Tears were common when a returning bomber shot up a red flare indicating wounded aboard or a ship lumbered to the air base with part of a wing or tail missing, only one landing gear visibly down or engines feathered and knocked out, coming in on a wing and a prayer. Hearts watched and prayed for the miracle landing.

HEADQUARTERS EIGHTH AIR FORCE  
Office of the Commanding General  
APO 634

25 March 1944

GENERAL ORDERS )  
NO. 209 )

I. Under the provisions of Army Regulations 600-45, 22 September 1943, and pursuant to authority contained in Restricted TT Message No. 2139, Hq USSAFE, 11 January 1944, the AIR MEDAL is awarded to the following named Officers and Enlisted Men, organizations as indicated, Army Air Forces, United States Army.

Citation: For exceptionally meritorious achievement, while participating in five separate bomber combat missions over enemy occupied Continental Europe. The courage, coolness and skill displayed by these Officers and Enlisted Men upon these occasions reflect great credit upon themselves and the Armed Forces of the United States.

\* \* \* \* \*

401st Bombardment Group (H)

JOHN KATSAROS, 11130671, Sgt. Haverhill, Massachusetts

\* \* \* \* \*

By command of Lieutenant General DOOLITTLE:

JOHN A. SAMPFORD  
Brigadier General, U. S. A.  
Chief of Staff.

OFFICIAL:

/s/ EDWARD E. TORO  
/t/ EDWARD E. TORO  
Colonel, AGD.,  
Adjutant General.

A CERTIFIED TRUE  
EXTRACT COPY:  
/s/ JACKSON M. PHIPPS  
Captain, Air Corps  
Adjutant.

TRUE COPY:  
*John M. Weidner*  
JOHN M. WEIDNER  
Capt., MAC  
Registrar

Air Medal Award.

### **CHAPTER 13**

#### **Mission to Leipzig**

The bombing mission on 20 February 1944, to take out the Erla factories, makers of the dreaded ME-109 fighter aircraft at Leipzig, Germany, was the beginning of a dramatic series of strategic operations called “Big Week.” Colonel Harold “Hal” Bowman, Commanding Officer of the 401st Bomb Group, was selected by Major General Robert Williams, C.O. of the 1st Air Division, to lead the 8th Air Force on the first mission consisting of 1,000 B-17 bombers carrying 10,000 airmen and 2,500 tons of demolition bombs.

It was a great day for “daylight” bombing and the 8th Air Force in delivering destruction to the German war machine. Colonel Bowman, as leader of the first of a series of missions for “BIG WEEK”, asked by General Williams, to speak at a critique held by General Williams, stated, “The mission was run as briefed; I have nothing unusual to report.” “Nothing unusual?” cracked General Williams, “Except that it was the largest and most successful mission ever run.” General Williams proceeded to award Colonel Bowman the Silver Star, and the 401st Bomb Group received the Presidential Unit Citation.

It was a great day for the 8th Air Force, General Bowman, later wrote in a book entitled, *Birds of a Feather*, from which excerpts of the bombing mission to Leipzig are listed below:

*“Due to the nip and tuck weather forecast, each group was provided with two Pathfinders, radar bombing crews and planes in case visual sighting was an impossible bombing mission. Weather in England and en route was overcast, and we had grave doubts about the possibility of seeing our targets. Flak and fighters met us in considerable force, but thanks to weather and to enemy misinterpretation of our destination - and of course to our effective escort - our losses were not as severe as might have been expected on such a deep penetration into enemy territory. Just before we reached the IP (initial point) for our bomb run, breaks appeared in the clouds below. As we turned toward the release point, Leipzig and the entire*

*area opened up for a clear run. The only factor reducing visibility was the smoke rising from the city - a reminder of the British raid the night before. Even that factor was minimal; the wind carried the smoke away from our objective. Although our fighters were doing a beautiful job fending off the enemy, some German fighters still got through. The flak was heavy, and we had to fly right through it to reach our target. Evasive action during the bomb run was impossible, as it would have significantly reduced the bombardier's accuracy. After spine-tingling moments we released our bombs on target and made a diving turn back toward England. Soon we were joined by other formations as we assembled for the long trek homeward."*



COLONEL BOWMAN . . . . . led the mission

Colonel Harold Bowman, Commander of the 401st Bombardment Group, led the 8 Air Force 20th February 1944 on the highly successful mission to Leipzig, Germany. The *Man O' War* crew with all flyers of the 401st Bomb Group was awarded the Presidential Unit Citation.

### **The William R. Lawley Jr. Took Place on That Day**

*“The ‘Big Week’ had also produced a name written in the archives of the VIII Bomber Command. ‘William R. Lawley, Jr.’, flew a Fortress on the 20th February in the strike against Leipzig. The mission had gone uneventfully until the moment of bomb drop - then bombardier Harry G. Mason gave the pilot distressing news that their bombs had hung up. The timing was, to say the least, unfortunate. No sooner had Mason made his report when a swarm of German fighters hit their formation, concentrating fire on their bomber. Almost at once the fortress was battered from nose to tail. A cannon shell exploding in the cockpit killed the copilot instantly and sent steel fragments tearing through Lawley’s body. At the same moment an engine exploded in flames. The body of the dead co-pilot slumped forward against the control yoke. Still stunned by the blast from the exploding shell, Lawley regained his senses slowly - to discover that one engine was on fire, the B-17 was in a howling dive, and he couldn’t see outside the airplane. The cannon shell in killing the co-pilot had splashed blood all across the windshield, blotting out the outside world. Lawley snapped his eyes to the instruments. To his dismay, these were also splattered with blood and could not be read. Mason, during this time, was struggling to salvo the bombs. Without their heavy weight, control of the Fortress would be easier. No one in the crew was aware of the dead copilot or the struggle that was going on in the cockpit, where the wounded Lawley was straining with ebbing strength to regain control. Desperate, convinced they were finished, he shouted on the intercom for the crew to bail out. The replies that came back were not reassuring. Eight men of the crew of ten, including himself, were wounded. Two men were in serious condition. Bailing out was unthinkable; they would never survive the jump.*

*There was no other way, Lawley fought with renewed determination to save the ship. He punched the extinguisher system to kill the burning engine - only to have another wave of attacking fighters set another engine ablaze. Despite their wounds, most of the gunners fought back. Lawley smothered the second fire. Abruptly he felt some of the pressure easing;*



*Mason had salvoed their bombs. Elated at their success, Mason climbed upward to the cockpit where he faced the gory scene of the dead copilot, the wounded and bleeding Lawley, and the blood-sprayed windshield and instrument panel. Lawley took one look at Mason, accepted that help was there, and passed out. The bombardier, although not a pilot, had flying training behind him. The crew helped in removing the body of the dead co-pilot and Mason climbed into the right seat, from where he held course for England. There were no further attacks, and Mason started a long descent. The moment he sighted an airfield the bombardier managed to revive Lawley. Despite his terrible pain, Lawley took over the controls and started the landing approach.*

*An engine sputtered, out of fuel. The ground came up to them. Another engine exploded into flames. The gear refused to budge. Lawley knew he couldn't hang on much longer. He bellied in the bomber, sending sparks back for hundreds of feet. It was spectacular but, after what they had been through, harmless.*

When we returned from Leipzig, at briefing we were informed of the misery our friends on Bill Lawley's crew went through. Gunners on our crew questioned me if the training by our pilot, Jack Dunaway, to fly the B-17, "Could you fly the plane back to the base and land?" My answer was, "If I was not severely wounded and with the help of our navigator Lt. Mock giving me a reading back to England and help from bombardier, Lt. Ted Krol to remove the wounded Pilot and co-Pilot, yes. I could keep the B-17 on course back, but had no ability to land. We would all be required to bail out over England, provided the plane remained aloft."

The raid on Leipzig had taken a toll on the 401st Bomb Group. 60 of the Fortresses in the Division were knocked down with a loss of 600 airmen. Aircraft stand-down was called by the group and liberty was permitted. Our Squadron issued three day passes to the airmen. Jack Crowley was anxious to get laid, so he and I caught a bus to Kettering RR Station, 90 miles northwest of London, boarded the train to London where we took in the sights and engaged in the pedestrian traffic in Piccadilly Square. Crowley immediately got hooked up with a street-walking, good looking prostitute. There were hoards of them, at all prices, looking to tie up with the horny free-spending G.I's. There were girls and prices to suit every pocket book. I enjoyed the sights this evening. We spent the night at the local Red-Cross Shelter right there in Piccadilly.



The next day we took in the sights. We visited the British Parliament, saw and heard Big Ben, and took in a movie and in the presence of the Queen viewed the motion picture *Mrs. Miniver*, with Greer Garson. At dusk Jack and I hit one of the many pubs in Piccadilly to put on the feed bag at a restaurant owned by a Greek I had befriended. He offered us “steak” that was rationed and extremely hard to get. We quietly ate it, thanked him and left. It was awful and tasted like “shoe-leather”! Hitting another pub for drinks, low and behold, we were fortunate to be under cover as London suffered another Blitz by German bombers.

We met a couple of nice looking heads at the bar and they invited us back to their home where we met the mother of one of the gals, a young, willing, thirties looking woman. She served us tea in bed the next morning. We spent a lot of time in bed as that was the only way to keep warm. Coal was in short supply and naked body heat was a wonderful way to keep the chill off our backsides.

About noon, we bid adieus, told them that we would look them up the next time we were in town, if we survived our missions on the continent. Little did we know a month later that we would be shot down on a raid to Frankfurt?

We spent the day hanging around Piccadilly where there were faces and nationalities of every description. So we returned back into the pubs where the beer was warm but tasty and as the Luftwaffe bombed us again, we huddled in the pub, downing the beer in a friendly atmosphere and sang patriotic songs popular for the wartime.

Crowley and I had our fill of beers, gals and visiting for this trip and after a night’s lodging at the Red Cross shelter, we caught the train for the two hour trip back to Kettering and the bus ride back to Deenethorpe.

By 14th October 1943, “Black Thursday”, few leaders of the Eighth Air Force doubted but that the Germans had seized a firm grip on air superiority. When the Big Week ended late in February 1944, it was becoming just as evident that the Germans had lost what they had struggled so tenaciously to attain. That became evident when the Luftwaffe switched its old tactics and adopted a new plan that had *caution* stamped all over it. The Germans could, when they made the effort, put up an intense and effective defense. They could batter a bombing force with deadly results. But they could not do, not any longer, whenever they so wanted. They

could not do so as a matter of policy.

The Germans, in effect, were defending their homeland on a partial basis, defending the most important war plants, abandoning other cities and industries to destruction by the massed Fortresses and Liberators. There were, and there would be, occasions when they would concentrate every plane available against a major raid. Other times the thousands of men in the bombers, and their escorting fighter pilots, would see only token defenders in the sky. Gunners one day might be forced to fight savagely for their lives - then for several missions they enjoyed the increasingly frequent milk runs. No one could predict when the Germans would explode in furious defense. But it was evident that the occasions were becoming increasingly rare. "In short," noted AAF, "the policy was one of conservation of strength and it conceded to the Allies the vital point of air superiority."

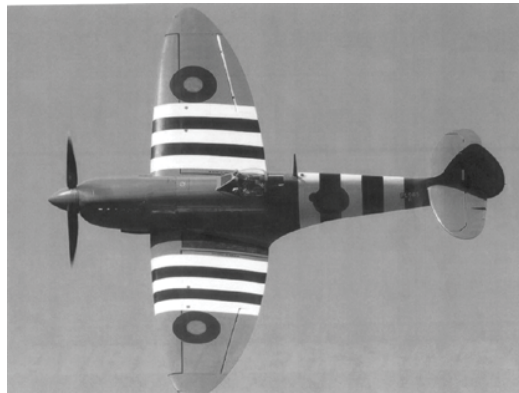
## **CHAPTER 14**

### **Second Mission to Frankfurt**

My second mission to Frankfurt took place on 2 March 1944, the week following “Big Week” which ended on 25 February. The 612th Squadron put eight B-17's into the air for this mission, fortunate to have that many aircraft ready to fly, even with the ground maintenance crews working ‘round the clock’, as the aircraft and crew member casualties were climbing, and there was a loud “howl” for replacements. Crews and aircraft were being scheduled as often as feasible, weather permitting. At 0600 hours, the 401st Group traversed the English Channel as part of the 1st Air Division, to pass over the coastline of France, and within minutes, flak was encountered in black puffs of smoke, which by the time they zeroed-in the altitude, the formation was out of range of those big 88mm guns. Now, a group of General Hermann Goering’s, yellow nose FW-190’s fighters entertained the formation of B-17’s with aerial ballet at a distance from our fighter escort. The friendly fighter escort departed for lack of fuel, and instantly the yellow noses attacked our formation. This was my first contact with the elite FW’s with the yellow painted cowlings and propeller hubs (spinners).

The yellow noses came at the formation directly from one o’clock high, in tandem, searching out the stragglers and any aircraft lagging the formation. Fortune was with the 401st Bomb Group as it was flying in tight formation ready to repel any intruder, so it was not on the enemy charts for attack this day. A straggler was spotted and hit with machine-gun and cannon fire. He didn’t stand a chance as the following FW’s, one after the other, pounced on the wounded, like tigers on a kill, seeking appetite satisfaction. Fire broke out on a busted engine and the wing. Soon white puffs of smoke punctuated and laced the sky as parachutes burst open: one, two, three, four - where were the rest? The I.P. is coming up; the flak had

increased in intensity, waiting to greet us on our bomb run. The FW-190 yellow nose, having done their damage, knew how many bombers they took down, headed for home. Explosions, fire, and white and black smoke appeared on the earth below from the lead plane having dropped its bombs on target. The flak was rough as *Man O' War* deposited its load of bombs to wing away with the squadron from the exploding aircraft factory. Not much to see with all the smoke cover, but the hits looked good. Soon the squadron left the flak area and the heart pumping eased off a bit, as the airmen caught a breather, before heading for the north coast of France, to run, again, the gauntlet of the enemy fighters and the coastal flak. The friendly withdrawal escort of British Spitfires came up to meet the formation on the Normandy coastline giving comfort for a safe return from enemy fighters. It felt great to get back to the quiet of the barracks and the sacks. It was a long day.



British "Spitfire" Fighter Escort, flown by USAAF fighter pilots.

## 401st BOMBARDMENT GROUP



Constituted as 401st Bombardment Group (Heavy) on 20 Mar 1943. Activated on 1 Apr 1943. Prepared for combat with B-17's. Moved to England, Oct-Nov 1943, and served in combat with Eighth AF, Nov 1943-Apr 1945. Operated chiefly against strategic targets, bombing industries, submarine facilities, shipyards, missile sites, marshalling yards, and airfields; beginning in Oct 1944, concentrated on oil reserves. Received a DUC for striking telling blows against German aircraft production on 11 Jan and 20 Feb 1944. In addition to strategic missions, operations included attacks on transportation, airfields, and fortifications prior to the Normandy invasion and on D-Day, Jun 1944; support for ground operations during the breakthrough at St Lo in Jul, the siege of Brest in Aug, and the airborne attack on Holland in Sep 1944; participation in the Battle of the Bulge, Dec 1944-Jan 1945, by assaulting transportation targets and communications centers in the battle area; and support for the airborne attack across the Rhine in Mar 1945. Returned to the US after V-E Day. Inactivated on 28 Aug 1945.

Redesignated 401st Bombardment Group (Very Heavy). Allotted to the reserve. Activated on 26 Jun 1947. Redesignated 401st Bombardment Group (Medium) in Jun 1949. Called to active service on 1 May 1951. Assigned to Strategic Air Command. Inactivated on 25 Jun 1951.

Redesignated 401st Fighter-Bomber Group. Activated on 8 Feb 1954. Assigned to Tactical Air Command and equipped with F-86's.

SQUADRONS. 612th: 1943-1945; 1947-1951; 1954-. 613th: 1943-1945; 1947-1949; 1954-. 614th: 1943-1945; 1947-1949; 1954-. 615th: 1943-1945; 1947-1949.

STATIONS. Ephrata AAB, Wash, 1 Apr 1943; Geiger Field, Wash, Jun 1943; Great Falls AAB, Mont, Jul-Oct 1943; Deenethorpe, England, c. 1 Nov 1943-May 1945; Sioux Falls AAFld, SD, c. 1-28 Aug 1945; Brooks Field, Tex, 26 Jun 1947; Biggs AFB, Tex, 27 Jun 1949-25 Jun 1951. Alexandria AFB, La, 8 Feb 1954-.

COMMANDERS. Col Neil B Harding, c. 1 Apr 1943; Col Harold W Bowman, Jun 1943; Col William T Seawell, Dec 1944-1945. Unkn, 1 May-25 Jun 1951. Col Walter G Benz Jr, 8 Feb 1954-.

CAMPAIGNS. Air Offensive, Europe; Normandy; Northern France; Rhineland; Ardennes-Alsace; Central Europe.

DECORATIONS. Distinguished Unit Citations: Germany, 11 Jan 1944; Germany, 20 Feb 1944.

DISTINCTIVE INSIGNIA: Unit Adopted World War II Class-C design.

On a silver shield divided bend sinister gold edged black a black triangle in dexter chief and edged white and bearing a silver letter "S".

Insignia design courtesy of: Mr. Ralph W. (Rainbow) Trout, the Secretary/Treasurer of the 401st Bombardment Group (H) Association.

401st Bomb Group Presidential Distinguished Unit Citation for raids against German aircraft production on 11 January and 20 February 1944.

## 612th BOMBARDMENT



LINEAGE. Constituted 612th Bombardment Squadron (Heavy) on 20 Mar 1943. Activated on 1 Apr 1943. Inactivated on 28 Aug 1945. Redesignated 612th Bombardment Squadron (Very Heavy) on 27 May 1947. Activated in the reserve on 26 Jun 1947. Redesignated 612th Bombardment Squadron (Medium) on 27 Jun 1949. Ordered to active service on 1 May 1951. Inactivated on 25 Jun 1951. Redesignated 612th Fighter-Bomber Squadron on 24 Nov 1953. Activated on 8 Feb 1954. Redesignated 612th Tactical Fighter Squadron on 1 Jul 1958.

ASSIGNMENTS. 401st Bombardment Group, 1 Apr 1943-28 Aug 1945. 401st Bombardment Group, 26 Jun 1947-25 Jun 1951. 401st Fighter-Bomber Group, 8 Feb 1954; 401st Fighter-Bomber (later Tactical Fighter) Wing, 25 Sep 1957-.

STATIONS. Ephrata AAB, Wash, 1 Apr 1943; Geiger Field, Wash, 4 Jun 1943; Great Falls AAB, Mont, 8 Jul-19 Oct 1943; Deenethorpe, England, 3 Nov 1943-20 Jun 1945; Sioux Falls AAFld, SD, c. 1-28 Aug 1945. Brooks Field, Tex, 26 Jun 1947; Biggs AFB, Tex, 27 Jun 1949-25 Jun 1951. Alexandria AFB, La, 8 Feb 1954-.

AIRCRAFT. B-17, 1943-1945. F-86, 1954-1955; F-84, 1954-1957; F-100, 1957-.

OPERATIONS. Combat in ETO, 26 Nov 1943-20 Apr 1945.

SERVICE STREAMERS. None.

CAMPAIGNS. Air Offensive, Europe; Normandy; Northern France; Rhineland; Ardennes-Alsace; Central Europe; Air Combat, EAME Theater.

DECORATIONS. Distinguished Unit Citations: Germany, 11 Jan 1944; Germany, 20 Feb 1944. Air Force Outstanding Unit Award: 1 Jan-31 Dec 1963.

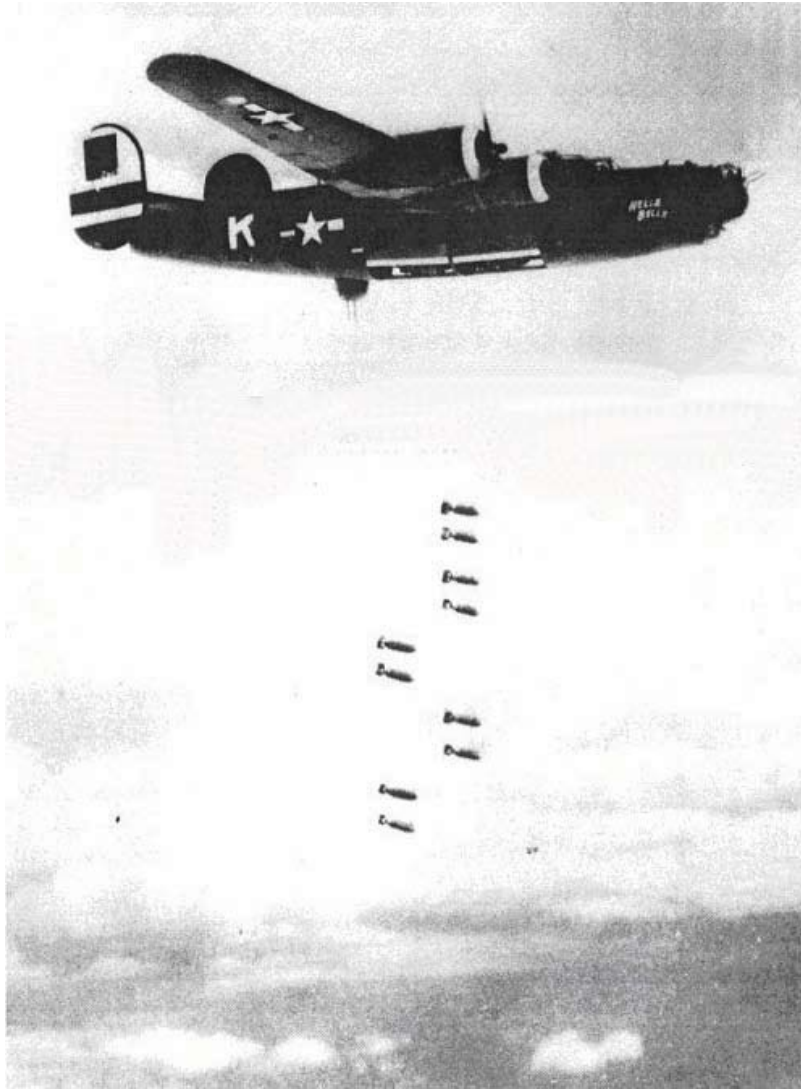
EMBLEM: Courtesy of Mr. Ralph W. Trout, a combat veteran of the World War II era 401st Bombardment Group.

A formation of B-17s in black profile overall trailing contrails of light blue. On a disc yellow, edged red and supporting a blue cloud superimposed thereon a green drop bomb winged silver.

NOTE: This is purported to be the 2nd unit insignia design. First one contained a replica of "Mangler", the squadron mascot. No insignia design of "Mangler" is on hand and according to Mr. Trout, the insignia was never used. Mangler was a bear.

According to Mr. Trout (now Secretary/Treasurer of the 401st Bombardment Group Association), contrary to Maurer Maurer, all of the squadron insignia of the 401st Bombardment Group was officially approved.

612th Bomb Squadron Decorations: Distinguished Unit Citations, Germany 11 January 1944 and 20 February 1944.



Col. Chirigotis' *Hell's Belle* flew with the 781st HB Sqdn. 15thAF, Pantanella AFB, Cerignola, Italy during WWII.





LT. GENERAL JAMES H. DOOLITTLE  
*Commanding General, Eighth Air Force*

Lt. General, James H. Doolittle Commander 8th AF.

Thursday, March 9, 1944

# Heavies Rain 360,000 Bombs on Berlin

U.S. Bombs Strike a Berlin Factory District



Did the American bombs hit their mark in Berlin? This photograph, taken during the Monday raid, gives the answer. The bomb bursts shown are right in the midst of one of the German capital's important factory districts.

## Over 850 Forts, Libs Set Capital Aflame In Great Fire Raid

Smoke Visible 100 Miles After Second Major Day Attack; Fierce Air Battles Deepen Gash in the Luftwaffe

Berlin got its second major daylight bombing yesterday. A force of American Flying Fortresses and Liberators estimated at more than 850 strong dropped more than 350,000 incendiary bombs and 10,000 high-explosive bombs on the German capital; and returning aircraft said the smoke billowing from the burning ruins could be seen 100 miles away. Thirty-eight American bombers and 16 fighters were lost in the operations, according to an announcement from U.S. Strategic Air Forces headquarters just before midnight. U.S. fighters claimed 41 enemy aircraft destroyed; bombers' claims have not substantiated.

The attack, third by American forces on Berlin in four days, was probably the biggest daylight incendiary raid in history, far surpassing the German attempt to set London afire on Sept. 15, 1940, at the start of the London blitz. A preliminary report from headquarters shortly before midnight said that the ball bearing plant at Erkner, 15 miles southeast of the heart of the city, was heavily hit and that "other targets in the area also were bombed successfully."

The Erkner plant produces half the minimum requirements in ball bearings needed by the Luftwaffe. It is second in importance only to Schweinfurt and Stuttgart, both heavily damaged by the USSTAF and RAF. Furious air battles, possibly matching those of the Monday raid on the capital, raged across Germany from the time the bombers passed Hanover, 150 miles from the capital, shortly after noon until they emerged on the homebound flight.

Mustang pilots returning early in the afternoon said that Berlin's defenses were just as fierce and determined as in the first major assault on the city. The Monday operation cost the Americans fewer than bombers said 11 fighters and the Luftwaffe 176 fighters, according to official figures at U.S. Strategic Air Forces headquarters.

THE STARS AND STRIPS

Thursday,

## Flak Over Berlin Earns a Double Scotch—at Least



Fierce firestorm rose through the flak-filled sky over Berlin during the great raid on the city Monday. Flak and enemy fighters brought down at U.S. heavy bombers of an estimated force of 850. Forts and Liberators and their escorting fighters destroyed 176 Nazi planes.

A post-Berlin double scotch is being served for S. Sgt. Donald C. Bates, of Montpelier, N.H., fastest turret gunner, after Thursday's raid. Bates is Sgt. Ray Paulsen, of Huntington, N.Y.

## Heavies Rain 360,000 Bombs On Berlin in 2nd Big Day Raid

(Continued from page 1)

Many enemy planes up there today that we were sure about who's ones we shot down."

Men in Ground's plane expressed the belief the Luftwaffe had been under orders to hold off until there was no doubt the target was Berlin. "They did not attack in force until the bombers were practically on their bomb runs, after which they came into the formations in twos and threes all over the sky."

In a several-pronged attack the bombers managed to slip through the flak and defenses to attack many vital targets in the city. One group which was almost sighted by bombers reported it sprang up along Berlin's industrial perimeter.

They said that bombs...

engine, cocking lights, aimed which the Germans put preceding single engines destroyed on the flak and above to cover them from our fighters. "These formations came to our bombers worked up just like that. They dove in and rolled right through our formation."

Sgt. George Wiegert, of Natick, Mass., said: "We were with the bombers for 50 minutes and saw very little stuff as the other side. For us today there wasn't anything to it. Important factor was that weather was clear all the way and that from high up bombing results looked excellent."

Natick Air Force Museum

## CHAPTER 15

### Target: Berlin, Germany

Jimmy Doolittle, the Commanding General of the 8th Air Force, was determined to succeed with this mission to Berlin in order to shorten the war by crippling the enemy at his resources. This was a full mission target for Berlin; that's right, four consecutive days of missions the 6th , 7th , 8th and 9th of March 1944, with the maximum number of bombers to insure demolition of the target. Not only was this a long, energy-sapping flight, and even if the aircraft avoided some of the flak areas by flying around them, the bomber formation could not avoid the enemy fighter aircraft and their blazing guns and cannon fire en route to target.

Having flown three consecutive days to Frankfurt, Wilhelmshaven and Cologne on the 2nd and 3rd , and 4th and to Berlin on the 6th , the crew of *Man O' War* were exhausted and not scheduled to fly on the 9th. So, we went out for a feed at the Wheatsheaf Restaurant at Benefield, England. After chow down, we spent the evening at a local pub where we let our hair down enjoying a few beers, and playing chug-a-lug. Happily relaxed, we headed for our "sacks". My happy mood came to an abrupt end when I was shocked out of my bed by the night CQ at 0400 hours to be informed that I was a replacement gunner on a new crew about to fly its first mission. At group briefing, the C.O. enlightened the warriors with news that the target destination is Berlin, and told us that General Doolittle selected a target route through the Ruhr Valley where there was a heavy concentration of 88mm *ack-ack* guns and enemy fighter aircraft to the target - the ball-bearing factory in the Erkner section of the city. No mention was made of potential heavy losses. It was a dream target and it would not fall cheap. A "green" pilot with no combat experience and not schooled in formation flying was always assigned as "Tail-end Charlie, Purple Heart Corner", the last box position in the group formation, a formidable position for the prop wash created by the big engines up front and especially by the B-17 ahead, and above, and being the last, the tag-along, he was easy prey for enemy fighters, so it took a well-seasoned combat pilot to fly the slot at the tail-end of the group formation.

Airborne, the group assembled like geese in "V" formation and crossed the

English Channel. I kept in mind that I was a combat veteran with seven missions under my belt and wanted to make it eight. I was concerned with our safety and called the pilot on the intercom from my right waist position to close up the formation. Instead of closing, our plane drifts further back from the group. I called the pilot a second time and asked if we had engine problems. His answer was, "No", so I asked to have the ship brought in closer with the formation. The formation reached France and knowing that we can anticipate trouble, I called the pilot a third time, "Better tighten up the formation, I can see enemy fighters climbing up fast from the airfields below." "Stop calling," he said, "or I will have your ass court-martialed when we get back." I was hot! Steam was coming out of my ears. I was concerned about the safety of my life and those of the other nine crew members aboard. I spew, "Damn it, get your ass in there, or I will come up and fly the plane for you." (The pilot has no idea of my flying ability). Within seconds of this brew-ha with the pilot, enemy fighters came out of the sun and made a pass at the nose of our ship. Bullets were spitting everywhere. Our aircraft took several hits. Luckily no crew member got hit.

The pilot now got the message. He quickly brought the B-17 in line with the formation and did not fall back again all the way to Berlin.

Filling in another crew's roster didn't make me happy, especially after a night of settling. The flak was heavy and the left waist gunner of the ship off our right wing gave me a wave. I waved back and as I was watching, his ship took direct flak hit and bits and pieces of his aircraft were all over the sky. The sight was unbelievable. Did that really happen? I had to settle down now because anything might happen on this bomb run and the fighters would be on us when we came off target.

The bombing of the ball bearing factory was successful, and the group reformed to a tight combat formation successfully warding off enemy fighter attacks. The plane was riddled with flak and bullet holes, but fortunately we made it without enemy pursuit back to Deenethorpe. No member of the air-crew was seriously wounded nor hospitalized.

When we land, I got down on my knees and kissed Mother Earth and gave thanks to God for our successful return. The pilot came over to me, apologized and thanked me. I responded, "Lt., today you became a B-17 combat pilot." I never met up with him again. The rest of my missions were flown with my regular crew except for one mission that I did fly as a

replacement gunner in a B-24 Liberator. I didn't need to relive these experiences with a "green" pilot.

The 8th Air Force began experimentation with daylight bombing, much to the displeasure of the British High Command, and on "Black Thursday" 14 October 1943, on a bombing mission to wipe out the ball bearing factory at Schweinfurt, Germany, the U.S. Air Force lost sixty B-17 Flying Fortresses to enemy fighters and anti-aircraft guns - the greatest single loss to date of aircraft in WWII. Six hundred trained air combat veterans were lost by the 8th Air Force, putting up a clamor for replacement aircraft and aircrews. Additional losses were counted in the crewmen killed or wounded in returned aircraft. The 8th Air Force had been accustomed to shorter missions, in the area of France, and targets close enough for gasoline reach, but the mission to Schweinfurt was special, and suspicion had it that German Intelligence, forewarned of this chosen, deep-penetrating target, alerted the German High Command. The British, opposed to the 8th Air Force decision to bomb by daylight, preferred to bomb under the stars as they felt that the darkness cloaked the RAF with a mantle of protection.

Yet, as previously mentioned, there would come a night when a swarm of great British Lancaster's - huge, four engine raiders, one of the finest bomber designs ever to take wing, would strike into Germany. On that night, ninety-six of the Lancaster's would fail to return to England. Essentially the 8th Air Force Bomber Command's program in Europe called for a sustained daylight bombing campaign carried out with high precision which rather than attempting to destroy cities in saturated raids would wreck carefully chosen industrial objectives.

Intelligence informed headquarters that the aircraft factory at Oscherslaben, Germany, 80 miles south west of Berlin was rapidly turning out nearly half of the FW-190 fighter's production in the Reich. On 11 January 1944, the 1st Division was assigned the target escorted by a limited number of American Mustangs with mechanical problems, from a single group, to cover the lead formation. (The British fifteen-hundred horsepower Rolls Royce Merlin engine mounted in the P-51B Mustang with a top speed of 425 MPH was not available until months later). Fighters and bombers were scattered all over the heavy clouded sky, unable to maintain formation due to the poor visibility. Fighter escorts unable to locate the bombers were returning back to bases in England. General Doolittle, Commander of the 8th Air Force, recalled the 2nd and 3rd Division due to the inclement weather.

However, General Robert Travis, of the 1st Division decided to carry the fight to the target, "Since we are closing in on the target we will continue the mission." This decision was a disaster for three of the groups of the 1st Division that suffered attacks by over 400 hundred enemy fighters for over three hours, sustaining losses of 42 out of 170 bombers shot down, at a loss of 420 crew members.

Colonel Bowman, Commander of the 401st Bomb Group, mission leader to Oscherslaben, initiated a report to General Doolittle, 8th AF Commander through the 94th Combat Wing and the 1st Air Division Headquarters citing witness, and testimony to credit the gallantry of Major James H. Howard, CO of the 356th Fighter Squadron, 354th Fighter Group, and his prowess in the protection of 40 B-17 Bombers and over 400 airmen of the 401st Bomb Group in singularly engaging 30 to 40 enemy fighters and took down at least six in a 30 minute battle, without aircraft loss by the 401st BG.

After further investigation to locate the previously unidentified pilot and verification of the events of that mission with the many airmen of the 401st BG; and in collaboration with General Arnold, Army Air Chief; General Marshall, Chief of Staff; President Roosevelt, and Congress, General Doolittle presented Major Howard the award of The Congressional Medal of Honor. Major Howard, was the only American fighter pilot in the E.T.O. to receive this high award.

On the last week of January, 1944, General Quesada, Commander of the 6th Fighter Wing, promoted him to Lt. Colonel and appointed him Commander of the 354th Fighter Group. On 7 April 1944 he was promoted to Colonel.

In March 1948 Colonel Howard was promoted to Brigadier General in the Air Force Reserves and took command of the 67th Fighter Wing, comprised of five fighter groups and one fighter training group. In 1966 he retired from the USAF Reserves. March 18, 1995 General James Howell Howard died and is buried in the Arlington National Cemetery.



## THE PILOT WHO FOUGHT THIRTY ENEMY PLANES

**W**HEN a wing of Flying Fortresses returned from the great raid over Central Germany last week their crews wanted to know the name of the Mustang pilot who single-handed had challenged 30 to 40 enemy fighters to protect the bombers.

Seated in the cockpit of his plane, giving the O.K. sign (the picture right), is the 6ft. 2in. pilot, Major James H. Howard, former "Flying Tiger," now C.O. of a squadron of the new long-range Mustangs.

★

His identity was revealed yesterday when his report was read out in the briefing room of a U.S. base to a full company of pilots of the new long-range fighter Mustangs.

Uneasily and in a small voice he told his story. He said:

"I scared some of the enemy away by 'stoosing' up to them suddenly. Others I gave a 'squirt,' which caused them to break away.

"On the first encounter,



which turned into a melee, my flight lost me. I regained bomber altitude and then discovered that I was alone.

I spent half an hour chasing and scaring away attacking enemy aircraft from 21,000 to 15,000 feet. I had five combat encounters during this time.

"For the first two encounters and combat all four guns fired. On the

third I had two guns, and on the fourth and fifth encounter only one gun."

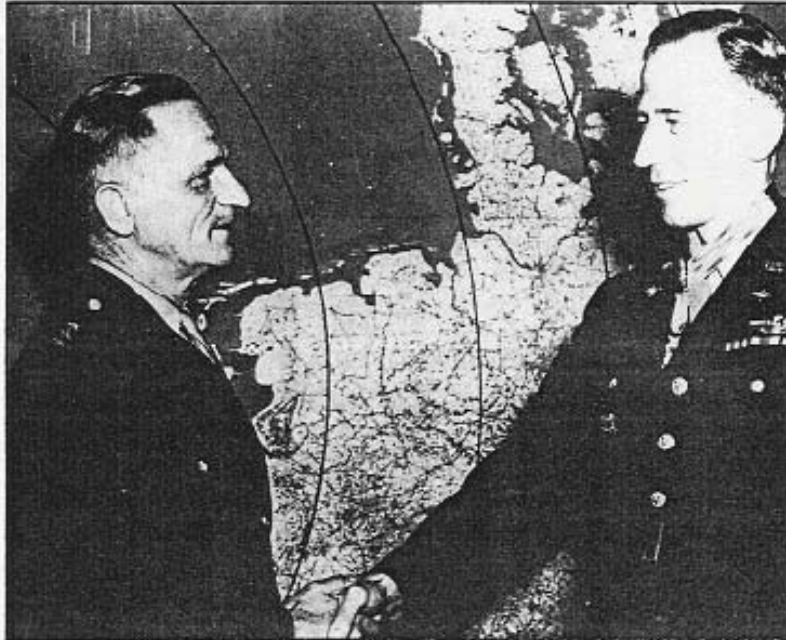
This is the lone pilot's official record of his fight: Two enemy planes shot down, two probably destroyed, two damaged.

On account of his height he has to have the footrests of his Mustang, "Ding Hao," moved forward and the seat back.

—From *London News-Chronicle*  
19 January 1944

Major James H. Howard





*General Spaatz congratulates fighter pilot Jim Howard, winner  
Congressional Medal of Honor on Recommendation of the 401st*

General Spaatz congratulates fighter pilot Jim Howard, winner of the Congressional Medal of Honor on recommendation of the 401st Bomb Group.



During "Big Week", the 8th Air Force, flying out of England, sent up more than 3,000 heavy bombers, and the 15th Air Force, flying out of Italy, put 500 heavy bombers into the air for a combined tonnage of 10,000 tons of bombs dropped on assigned strategic targets.



B-17 Flying Fortress nose art.



B-17 Flying Fortress nose art.



## **CHAPTER 16**

### **The Luftwaffe Is Forced To Fight**

By now the men who planned the air assault against Germany were more than primed to take every advantage of the sudden weakness in German defenses. Now they wanted the Germans to fight and they bent every opportunity to force the Luftwaffe into defending the Reich and its cities. The air strategists threw away their long-standing plans of protecting the bombers. Where they had planned missions to avoid the fighters, now they did their best to goad the Luftwaffe into battle. The AAF history notes, "Fighter escort, which hitherto had been held down to close support of the bombers, now was increasingly cut loose from strict defensive assignments with orders to seek out and destroy the foe. Whenever the role of the P-51 Mustang escort became a primarily defensive one, the extension of the P-51 fighter's range made it possible to send great fleets of escorted bombers all the way to Berlin."

This was the city that the Germans meant to defend. This was the target for which they would fight, in maximum number, with unbridled fury. Those who sent out the men in the Fortresses and Liberators knew that their policy of forcing the fight could produce severe casualties among the heavy bombers. They reckoned that the losses would be worth the damage inflicted on the enemy in the air. The invasion date was nearing and "it became correspondingly more important to force a higher rate of attrition on the German Air Force in being."

Intelligence informed headquarters that the aircraft factory at Oscherslaben, Germany, 80 miles south west of Berlin was rapidly turning out nearly half of the FW-190 fighter's production in the Reich. On 11 January 1944, the 1st Division was assigned the target, escorted by a limited number of American P-51 Mustangs with mechanical problems, from a single group, to cover our lead formation. (The British fifteen-hundred horse power Rolls Royce Merlin engine mounted in the P-51B Mustang with a top speed of 425 MPH was not available until months later.)

The first attack on "Big B" (Berlin) came on 4 March 1944. Severe weather limited results. Two days later the weather improved and Eighth

Air Force headquarters laid on the big strike. Six hundred and sixty heavies made it to Berlin to drop over 1,600 tons of bombs. The men who flew the mission knew it was going to be rough. More fighters than usual would be in the air to contest their presence. For several nights the RAF had failed to visit targets over central Germany.

The event justified their fears; the bombers “ran into exceedingly bitter and effective opposition.” Intense anti-aircraft flak claimed its share - and before day ended no less than sixty-nine bombers went down, along with eleven escorting fighters. Those bombers that returned claimed ninety-seven kills. The fighters, with gun-camera records to back up their claims, racked up eighty-two German fighters shot down in battle. There was no way of knowing the kills scored by the sixty-nine bombers and eleven fighters that were lost. Was the mission overly costly? Sixty-nine bombers could not be shrugged off. Yet the loss ratio, for a mission of such importance and range from England, could be accepted. It was “just such air fights that the American commanders hoped to provoke, confident as they were in the ability of the airmen to impose a ruinous wastage upon the enemy.” The moments when such fierce resistance could be offered would become even rarer than before.

Two days later four-hundred and sixty-two heavies again raided Berlin. A screen of one-hundred and seventy-four Mustang fighters escorted them to, over, and away from the target. The number of German fighters in the air was much less than on the 4th, while the heavy American escort which, included P-38s and P-47s, came to a record 1,015 sorties flown. During the day, five-hundred and ninety heavy bombers flew credit sorties. Flak and enemy fighters claimed thirty-seven of these. Once again, the Luftwaffe had suffered a battering. Losing seventeen of their own number, the escorts shot down nearly ninety German Fighters.

On the 22nd of March a force of six-hundred and sixty-nine heavy bombers returned to Berlin. Despite excellent weather for interception, few Luftwaffe fighters were up. Flak shot down ten bombers. One bomber went down from noncombatant causes. Total scored to German fighters: one bomber and that was over the capital of the Reich. At the close of March the Eighth Air Force noted that the Luftwaffe “could still hit, and hit hard; but it was no longer capable of that sustained counterattack which had at one time so nearly frustrated the entire Combined Bomber Offensive.”

In respect to its original goals, the Combined Bomber Offensive

“reached its legal end” on the 1st April 1944. Control of the strategic air forces of the AAF reverted from the British to the supreme Allied commander. The new phase of the air war was ready - the massed bomber fleets were now prepared to attempt to wreck the German petroleum industry and to paralyze the country’s transportation system.

How best to judge the effect of the air assault program to destroy the ability of Germany to fight in the air? It is not the intention of this book to review the matter in all its complex detail but the conclusion is undeniably clear. After February the Luftwaffe could no longer properly defend the Reich. Their ability to fight in the air had been greatly reduced by their losses in fighter aircraft. The program to destroy Germany’s fighting strength in the air had another goal – to gain air superiority to permit the invasion of Europe without molestation from the Luftwaffe.

On 6 June 1944, General Dwight D. Eisenhower made a statement to the invasion forces he was committing to the assault on German Europe “If you see fighting aircraft overhead, they will be ours!” He was right!



This is an exact model, two ft. wing span of the B-17 *Man O' War*, we were shot down in on March 20, 1944. Michael and Joseph Belmonte, Reading, MA. researched, built and presented it to me.



## CHAPTER 17

### Final Mission to Frankfurt, Germany

The mission began early on 20 March 1944 on a very cold, cloudy, windy day. Hundreds of bombers had tremendous problems attempting to complete their formations. Two bombers collided due to heavy cloud cover up to 27,000 feet. We continued over the English Channel into France then Germany - we had difficulty keeping formation. The 401st Bomb Group formation, flying over 27,000 feet altitude in a heavily overcast sky, was skimming through cloud cover and having considerable difficulty with the aircraft keeping in close formation.

Within minutes of the I.P. a bomb-loaded aircraft, out of control, fell from the formation above, almost wiping out *Man O' War*. Pilot, Lt. Jack Dunaway put our aircraft into a precipitous dive, to avert collision, with a pull to the left. Dunaway's quick thinking maneuver avoided an air crash and possible explosion of the two planes that would have caused many losses of planes and crews. The centrifugal force created by the planes dive and turns rendered the crew helpless, stuck to the fuselage, unable to move. The aircraft was now in a rough, turbulent downdraft as the plane dropped over several thousand feet before the pilot was able to bring the ship under control. The intercom buzzed, with crew members' concerns; "What the hell happened"?

Miraculously, once the pilot was able to straighten out the plane – breathing became easier! Now, the pilot had to regain the lost altitude to return to the group formation. The formation was nowhere to be found; the pilot decided to continue on to target with the expectation of meeting up with the group. At this time, while busy with lifesaving activity and observing radio silence, the pilot was unaware of the 8th Air Force recall due to bad weather conditions.

Navigator, William Mock, set the plane on course for the target at Frankfurt; the weather cleared giving a visible target. Bombardier, Ted Krol, sighted the factory through his Norden bomb sight, and set the plane on a steady run to drop the bombs for a direct hit on target. One B-17

bomber with 4,000 pounds of demolition bombs, all alone, was on a mission to hell!

Over the target the flak was heavy, accurate and intense, knocking out the two inboard engines, numbers two and three, and peppering the plane with a rain of steel fragments. The sight and sound of the exploding flak shells gave us cause to fear a direct hit. The Bombardier called out "bombs away" and saw a direct hit on the factory, makers of the dreaded FW-190. The pilot took control of the yoke and banked the aircraft away to the left from the target out of flak range only to be joined in the furor by attacking ME109 fighter planes. They pounced on our airship, and we were in a life and death firefight.

There were four or five of them, and their assault was vicious - guns and cannons blazing, determined and unrelenting. After one pass and doing considerable damage to the men and plane, they circled and returned for a second pass -this time hitting us on all sides timing their individual attacks. Thirteen .50 cal. machine guns trained on the attackers, poured out lead trying to ward off the chase. Bullets and 20mm cannon shrapnel fire was exploding all over the fuselage and ripping up the plane. Now, they attacked fast and at close range and caused grievous injury to the *Man O' War* and the crew members. We had no time to count the downed enemy fighters or assess our damage.

The weather cleared bright and German fighters continued their attacks from all directions, killing the tail-gunner and the top-turret gunner near Reims, France.

We were running low on ammunition and must fire only accurate, quick bursts. The fighters continued their onslaught. Shrapnel hit Crowley, left-waist gunner in the neck - severing a neck artery. Blood gushed from the wound.

Hot, rocketing debris and shrapnel pierced my body - penetrating my right arm, rendering it paralyzed and useless. Some of the fighters bull-dogged the stricken aircraft all the way back to Reims, France, chewing it up for target practice, wanting to knock it out of the sky. The right wing was ablaze with fire; the plane was teetering from damage and loss of two engines, and the pilot was having difficulty keeping the plane under control. I was aware of the injured and dead crew members. It was a miracle that more crewmen were not killed or wounded in this fire firefight, yet, the airplane was still able to fly. Now we knew these relentless, fierce and constant fighter attacks would continue and add to the number of the wounded and dead crew. We did not give up the fight but had accepted our fate!

Fearing an explosion, Dunaway gave the alarm to bail out. First there were dead and gravely injured men to care for. Crowley, the left waist gunner, was hit in his neck by flying shrapnel slicing an artery, and blood gushed from the neck wound, and even with the temperature 60 below zero, he was bleeding profusely. I received my wounds during the same onslaught and turned to see how Crowley was doing. At this time, I glanced back to the tail and saw Benz, the tail gunner, slumped on his back, spread-eagle, arms extended. I called Benz on the intercom, there was no answer. The plane got blitzed in the savage attacks, taking a pounding from the fighters, and with a direct hit in the tail section, Benz could not have survived. I turned my attention back to Crowley who without oxygen mask had dropped to the floor. Unmindful of the pain of my own wounds and my numb dangling right arm I had to look after Crowley who is bleeding like hell. So to hell with the spent shell casings and blood all over the deck, I baby stepped cautiously over to help Crowley, restored his lost oxygen mask to his face and made a bandage with my scarf and wrapped it around his neck. The blood flow ceased, and now the bleeding congealed quickly in the freezing cold, and he regained consciousness.

The intercom squawked, and the pilot announced that Sgt. Harry Horst, the top-turret gunner was killed during the last pass by the ME-109's. Horst received a direct hit by 20mm cannon fire and his severed head was blown into the bomb doors; his bloodied body lay on the forward deck.

The plane was on fire and the pilot, again gave the alarm to bail; and unaware that the crew was looking after the wounded and the gunner trapped in the ball-turret, set the plane with two feathered engines on automatic pilot and bailed out behind the navigator, bombardier and co-pilot.

Frank Mastronardi, the radio operator, rushed back to the waist section to see how the guys were doing and got hit by shrapnel; he gave me the OK sign. Frank and I ran out of ammunition, Crowley, severely wounded, could not fire. Walter Rusch, the ball-turret gunner, was now the only one firing his twin .50 cal machine guns. He couldn't have much ammo left.

Frank and I looked to the needs of Benz, the tail gunner, and to Crowley, the left waist gunner. I crawled back to the rear to assist Marvin Benz, replaced his oxygen mask and tried to revive him as he lagged unconscious. Hell, he was dead!

Two ME-109's continued their assault on the planes rear section, I mounted the two tail guns and expended whatever ammo remained; the fighters passed on.

In bad need of oxygen, I crawled back to the waist position, and clicked my airline to the rear supply. Walter Rusch was now out of ammunition and being wounded, complicated his ability to extricate himself from the ball-turret. Frank Mastronardi and I viewed the predicament of Walter Rusch, trapped in his damaged ball-turret unable to roll back the turret which was hung up by spent shell casings jammed in the gear track. Using my "good" left arm, I worked with Frank to remove the spent casings to free Rusch. Rusch rolled back the turret, opened the hatch and started to emerge. It was time to move. Meanwhile, Crowley remained slumped down, his back to the floor. The bail-out alarm had already sounded, the plane was on fire and in danger of exploding. Frank saw that I am badly wounded and yelled, "Get the hell out of here". I removed my heavy, shattered flak vest, which protected my body from flying shrapnel, and with Frank's help, I clipped the chest chute onto my body harness. I opened the right rear escape panel and tested the reach of my short left arm (32" sleeve) to the "D" ring, so I was slow to move. "Go", yelled Frank. As a man of faith, I said a fast prayer *Kyrie Eleison*, made the sign of the Cross over my body with my left arm and curled into a ball to avoid hitting the plane's rear horizontal stabilizers, and rolled out into space. Meanwhile, Frank had turned his attention back to Crowley who had regained consciousness, stood him up on his own two feet, snapped on the chest chute to his body harness and pushes him out the escape opening. As I twist and turn, waiting before attempting the "D" ring, I look back and saw the helpless plane turning slowly, in a sky of fire and fear for an explosion with the guys still in it. I murmured, "For god's sake, guys, get the hell out of there!"

Walter was not yet out of his ball-turret and Frank, seeing him half out of the turret removed a couple more spent casings blocking his exit. Walter managed to get out of the ball-turret and in his haste to get out of the plane; the "D" ring on his parachute got snagged, accidentally springing open his parachute and it blossomed all over the place. He busied himself with Frank to gather his parachute, then "Hit the silk". Frank, last to leave the plane, quickly followed Rusch, Crowley, and me out the escape opening. With seconds to spare I saw Walter and Frank bail out, the B-17 was engulfed in flames. Walter's chute unfortunately billowed - putting him into a head-long dive.

His descent was rapid, and the silk chute opened but hit a high tension wire. It skewed his ground approach and landed him on a picket fence, spearing him in the stomach. He was badly wounded, but miraculously, he was alive! A young French lad ran to assist Walter, put him in a wheelbarrow and to conceal him, took him 50 meters to a wood shed next to his home near Unchair, France. A trail of blood led the nearby German soldiers to his hide-out. The military transported him to a hospital in Reims for medical attention.

Jack Crowley, I later learned, landed near *La Bonne Maison* and Unchair, only to be captured by German soldiers and taken to a German hospital, because with warmer weather his neck bleeding started again. Jack's wounds proved fatal, and he died two days later.

Lt. William Mock, the navigator, bailed out and was killed by enemy aircraft machine-gun fire, as witnessed by a ten year old boy who saw Mock fall from the sky with a "candled" parachute. His body was recovered between the towns of Chery-Chartreuve and Courville.

Tail gunner, Marvin Benz, and top-turret gunner, Harry Horst, were killed at their stations by attacking ME-109's who were determined to take the plane down by hitting it from all sides, front, top, tail and waist with .50 caliber machine-gun and 20mm cannon fire.

Lts. Jack Dunaway pilot, and Henry Kane co-pilot, were captured near Breuell, France, held POW in Germany and liberated by the American Army. Dunaway died several years after WWII. Kane remained in the Air Force to fly as a pilot, attaining the rank of Lt. Colonel, and he died in an aircraft accident while flying the "Berlin Airlift" during the cold war of June 1948 to September 1949, transporting food, coal, clothing and medical supplies to the West Berliners.

I, John Katsaros, right waist gunner, was severely wounded, bailed out and incurred additional injuries and broken ribs as a result of my late parachute opening and hard landing. I was captured by the Gestapo, escaped from their hands twice, later held captive by a French Resistance cell and by the constabulary in Spain. My account of this horrifying adventure will be narrated later in this story.

Bombardier, Lt. Ted Krol, hit the silk and landed near Courville. Enduring the hurt of a painful leg injury, he stumbled and dragged his injured leg in a southerly direction to the town of Goussancourt, where he received help from the French Resistance.

Radio operator, Frank Mastronardi, the last to bail out, landed right in a German artillery camp, a few hundred yards from me, at *La Bonne Maison*. Several years later he was recommended for the Distinguished Flying Cross by Walter Rusch. He was written up by headquarters, and Frank was presented the DFC at the American Airbase at Alconbury, England. His crew mates, Ted Krol, Walter Rusch and I flew back to England from the states to view the honor bestowed on him.

A quick inventory of personnel damage revealed that the crew had taken a beating from the ME-109's: Horst, the top-turret gunner, and Benz, the tail gunner were killed at their stations by direct hits of exploding .20 mm cannon shells, from the ME-109's. Crowley, the left waist gunner, took a serious hit to a neck artery from flying shrapnel, causing spouting blood loss. I took shrapnel hits to my body and to my right arm breaking bones, rendering it useless. Lt. Mock, the navigator, was injured and helped by the bombardier to bail out when the alarm sounded. Lt. Krol, the bombardier, despite his injuries, bailed out safely. Lt. Dunaway, the pilot, and Lt. Kane, the co-pilot, bailed out safely - their injuries not known at this point. Mastronardi, the radio operator, although wounded, helped Jack Crowley and Walter Rusch to bail out. That accounts for the condition of the crew members at the time, but things did not go well after bailout and landing. Just about everyone received wounds during the attack.



ME-109



According to Jean Sirot, a French historian, John's parachute hard landing was fortunately on a recently plowed field in the approximate area indicated by the circle at *La Bonne Maison* farm. The flat land had been a WWI French Airbase. Frank Mastronardi and Walter Rusch landed near the areas marked by the arrows.





Crash of the Man-O-War and in the order of Bailouts: 1st to bail Lt Jack Dunaway and Lt Henry Kane, b. Lt. William Mock, c. Lt Ted Krol, d. Sgt John Katsaros, e. S/Sgt Frank Mastronardi, f. German Camp, g. Sgt Jack Crowley, h. Sgt Walter Rusch, a. Plane Crash with KIA's S/Sgt Harry Horst and Sgt Marvin Benz on board.

Approximate last route of your B.17.

A - Approximate landing place. When I've been to BREUIL, people could not show the exact place because it was too muddy.

B - The first to jump out of the plane fell there and was killed because his parachute did not open. I've met a witness who was 10 in 1944.

C - Ted landed somewhere in the area and then walked south (dotted line) to Goussancourt : about 10 miles !!

D - John KATSAROS LANDED BY PARACHUTE AT "LA BONNE MAISON"

E - Frank landed here.

F - Approximate limits of the german camp.

G - There landed the 5th to jump; badly wounded, he fell in trees.

H - Walter landed in this village, exactly where I've put a red dot.

Crash of *Man O' War* and order of bailouts.



**SGT. JOHN KATSAROS**  
... missing in action

## Katsaros Lost Over Germany

**Unheard From Since  
March 20 Raid**

Sgt. John Katsaros, son of Mr. and Mrs. Speros Katsaros, 24 Forest ave., an aerial mechanic attached to the U. S. Army Air Forces based in England, today was reported missing over Germany since March 20 by the War department in a telegram to his parents.

The telegram, signed by Acting-Adjutant Dunlop read:

"The Secretary of War regrets to advise you that your son, Sgt. John Katsaros, is missing in action since March 20, following flight over Germany. Letter follows."

The telegram arrived at the Katsaros home almost simultaneously with three letters from the airman, the last dated March 18, two days before the raid from which he did not return.

The letters told of his participating in seven missions over enemy territory and of the recent visit to London.

Sergeant Katsaros enlisted Dec. 7, 1942, and from Fort Devens was sent to Miami Beach, Fla., where he received his basic training. He was later transferred to the Flexible Gunnery school at Fort Myers, Fla., and was stationed for brief periods at Amarillo, Tex., and Salt Lake City, Utah, before going overseas late last year. He spent the Christmas holidays at his home, flying to England soon after.

He is a graduate of Haverhill High school, class of 1942, and before his enlistment was employed at the Portsmouth Navy Yard.

He has a brother, Sotiris, in the Army Air Forces, now a cadet at Harvard university, following basic training at Miami Beach. The latter is a former member of the English department of Haverhill High school.

## 116 Enemy Planes Downed

**U. S. Air Attack Blasts  
Bucharest Rail Yards**

By LYNN HEINZERLING

ALLIED HEADQUARTERS, Naples (AP)—Strong formations of U. S. Flying Fortresses and Liberators, in their first attack on Bucharest yesterday, caused considerable damage to the railway yards through which German supplies roll to the Russian front and left one third of the Rumanian capital covered with a heavy cloud of smoke, headquarters announced today.

First reports indicated that the gunners in the heavy bombers shot down 116 planes in a battle last

C. H. W. D. H.

Leins, February 6th 1989

Dear Ted, John, Frank and Walter

At last, I'm sending to each of you a letter about the end of your last flight and two maps with keys.

I've been a very lazy letter-writer since we met in October 1987 but, almost as zealously as Sherlock Holmes or Kojak, I've made inquiries (I even flew over the site of your landing and took some pictures, but you'll have to wait to get the pictures, the film-roll is not yet finished) and I'm now able to give you more informations.

I hope the three others won't mind but I'll start with a special message for Walter.

Walter, you landed in UNCHAIR, inside ~~a~~ a farm. I've seen the metal stake on which you got hurt when landing. I did not see the shed under which you were laying because it was destroyed two or three years ago by a storm. I met the lady on which you almost fell (the owner of the farm). She told me that you were repeating the same sentence in french: "Ce lieu est-il dangereux" (Is this site dangerous?). Her daughter married a man who was 9 or 10 in 1944 and who saw the first member of the crew to leave the plane falling with his candle parachute. I also met the little boy to which you handed the small bag (MARK-II - F) containing three maps printed on a sort of silk, a tin, compass and money. The man still keeps these things (I saw them) except the money which was given, after the war, to the Mayor of the village who used it to repair a class-room. Enclosed you'll find a picture he asked me to send to you. He wonders if you can recognize him (it was taken two years after your crash).

And now to the four of you. In BREUIL, I've met a man who was 24 at that time. He saw the plane flying very low (the right wing broke against poplars) and then crashing near the VESLE river. The german soldiers stationed in Breuil requisitioned him to search the wrecked plane: inside they found the bodies of the two pilots. On the following Sunday, children discovered a third body at about 200 yards from the plane: the man was dead with a severe wound at the head. All the witnesses I've met think that the pilot was doing the most he could to land correctly.

About ten years ago, the bed of the Vesle river has been cleaned and they found some parts of the plane, especially an engine and a propeller. I've seen this propeller in Breuil (I also took pictures) and I can tell you that a bullet went through one of its blades.

2/6/89 Sirot's Letter

## CHAPTER 18

### Bail Out and Capture

I bailed out at 25,000 feet and turned to take a last look at the plane, in a sky of fire turning lazily to the left. I took a long free-fall in the peace of a suspended air ride and felt great relief in removing myself from the stricken aircraft. I lost consciousness from lack of oxygen. Enemy fighters were not my concern now. When I opened my eyes, the ground was coming up fast. The free-fall was over.

Many bits and pieces of shrapnel had penetrated my body and my right arm putting it out of use. The ripcord of the parachute was on the right side, the same side as the useless right arm. With great strain, I managed with the short left arm to reach and pull the “D” ring, barely time for the parachute to blossom before mother earth came up to say “Hello”. The descent was too swift and I took a hard fall as I landed on the farm, *La Bonne Maison*, near the towns of Courville, Breuell, Unchair and Fismes. Luckily, the farm had been recently plowed for the coming summer crops and the fall to earth was cushioned a bit. I did sustain injuries, however, and now had six broken ribs, as well as a fractured left ankle, a badly twisted and sprained right ankle, severe head, back and leg contusions in addition to the busted right arm and the many shrapnel wounds. I wondered if I could survive my injuries.

I lay on the ground, hurting and exhausted, and a ME-109 German Fighter buzzed by overhead. My concern was that I may get riddled with machine-gun fire, but when the pilot came around again, he saluted, so I returned the salute left-handed. He made several passes, marking my position for German forces in the area. On one of his passes, the pilot’s face came into clear view, and I wondered if my ship had been his victim.

The English parachute harness with the quick release had been a fortunate choice for me. Twist the chest knob to the “red” marked position and punch the knob, “Bingo”, the harness and the parachute fell off. The American parachute requires the release of three clamps to free one’s self from the chute and harness. Surely being unable to do that with my mangled



right arm, the winds would have dragged me across the farm, incurring additional injury.

The flat, elevated surface of *La Bonne Maison* farm had a perfect layout for the French Air Force, which occupied the farm during WWI where a monument on an entrance wall to the farm was erected, commemorating the Number 1 French Air Ace, Capitaine Georges Guynemer, with fifty-three kills.

Now, two Luftwaffe ME-109 fighters returned, gave my position away by flying over me three times. I actually saw the face of the nearest pilot as he saluted me. I again, gathered up enough energy to return his salute.

Henry, a farm worker, witnessed my parachute descent landing to earth, and another young man contacted the owners, Mr. and Mrs. Jean and Yvonne Chauvin. When the occupants of *La Bonne Maison* realized I had been wounded, I was placed in a wheel barrel by Henry, an employee and taken to the farmhouse. They managed to carefully carry me into the house and laid my painful body on the dining room floor to administer medical aid when the Gestapo arrived to take me prisoner. A pretty little girl entered the room and stood by quietly watching the goings-on. I was laid out on the living room floor of *La Bonne Maison*. The Gestapo questioned me for two days and a German doctor wanted to amputate my right arm. I refused both.

The Gestapo began the interrogation immediately and much to their surprise I gave only my name, rank and serial number, and refused to answer any other questions. They immediately recognized the futility of trying to get any information from a so seriously wounded airman, whose state of poor health and mind had no concern to answer any questions, so they decided to seek medical attention for me before continuing with the interrogation. The Gestapo posted two German soldiers, and a nurse to tend to my wounds. I fell asleep or passed out, to be awakened by a German doctor who told me that my arm was in bad condition and that he would have to amputate it. The thought of losing my arm horrified me, and I made it known that there would be no amputation. Then I remembered in my drowsiness that I saw the doctor sprinkle a white powder on my arm and all over my body. The doctor got my message, and after treating me he departed to return the next day to once again tell me that the arm was in danger getting of gangrene. "It should be amputated," he said. "NO!" I

said. "Hell, No!" and the doctor understood that I was not to give in to his pleading.

I hurt all over and I wasn't going to give my arm...as a sacrifice for my life. I was now in critical condition and in severe pain and was not moved from the floor of the dining room. It seemed apparent to me that I was left in this condition to die. No other thought entered my mind, and I resigned myself to this fate by prayer and attempted to give myself last rites before passing out. My condition remained the same for a period of a few days. Was my mind playing tricks on me?



Mademoiselle Chauvin as a little girl witnessed the fracas at *La Bonne Maison*, March 1944.



Pierre Demarchez, one of the three French Resistance Fighters who rescued me from the Gestapo, is pictured here, in the re-enactment of the March 1944 rescue.



Days went by without medical attention, and the Gestapo made several attempts to interrogate me without success. My condition continued to worsen. I felt lousy. Fever set in and my wounded body gave me excruciating pain. I imagined myself on a “death bed”. The German guards paid little or no attention to me.



It is of interest to note that *La Bonne Maison*, on which I landed by parachute, is the location of a famous aerodrome of the WWI French Air Corps. At this particular base, the highly decorated French fighter pilot Capitaine Georges Guynemer was stationed and made his sorties against the German Luftwaffe. A plaque in his memory is attached to the outer wall at the entrance of this huge and beautiful farm.

## CHAPTER 19

### Firefight and Rescue by the French Resistance

Then, as if the Lord answered my prayers, I was awakened by gunfire. In a brief moment, I saw a man in civilian clothes enter with a pistol standing over me. Immediately, I thought that he was Gestapo and had come to threaten me, but the man winked and placed a finger to his mouth, making a silence gesture. The French Resistance, made aware of my capture, stormed the farmhouse to rescue me. They surprised and killed the guards, locked the nurse in the storage room, and carried me to their escape vehicle. On the get-away, a patrol of German soldiers blockaded our passage, and another firefight took place. The vehicle in flight sped by the patrol, shots blazing, and I took a hit in the back; none of my rescuers was hit in the skirmish. By pure luck, we got away. The patrol, on foot, did not pursue. I owe my life to the French Resistance rescuers, Jean Joly, head of the Reims Free French Underground, Pierre Demarchez, and Rene Felix. These men showed me, a boy, scared stiff, full of holes and too weak to stand, what courage was. Their actions, gave me strength, despite my wounded body, and they gave me hope for survival. The planned shock attack to rescue me was a surprise. I felt as though I was watching a movie - my rescuers were cold and calculating. They knew their job and had the courage to carry it out, willing to make the ultimate sacrifice. They feared not danger. They felt only love for France and Freedom. They hated *Les Boche*.

On the escape route, we ran into a second patrol. Several shots were fired on each side, and the German soldiers in their haste to take cover, gave the vehicle space to pass and the advantage of the time to accelerate away. No additional shots were fired, and no chase developed. Some distance from the patrol, I lost consciousness. In a daze, I recall being carried into a house. It was on the outskirts of Reims at the home of René Felix, one of the rescuers, and his wife, Madalene, 68 Rue de Bezannes. I had not received any medical attention for some time, perhaps five days now, not since the German doctor sprinkled the white powder on my wounds. My refusal to allow the doctor to remove the arm was vivid. My condition got worse, critical in fact, as I was continually falling into unconsciousness and emitting loud groaning noises.

This uncontrollable groaning in my sleep became a matter of concern to the rescuers who feared that I would give them away, and they considered turning me over to the Germans for medical treatment.

An English-speaking woman, Mademoiselle Ramoge, is contacted to come to the Felix house. When she arrived, she told me that medical treatment would be arranged for me in the morning. "You must stop the loud groaning", she advised. "Because the German soldiers are stationed next door and they will investigate the noise. Otherwise to protect themselves, your hosts will be forced to turn you over to the Germans. Would you rather have the Germans take over your medical treatment?" She asks. My immediate answer was, "Absolutely not! I'll stay with the Resistance". I asked her to place a muzzle over my mouth and to tie it around my head. The groaning was muffled all night as I bit down hard on the cloth. The muzzle worked, but it was a painful, sleepless night.

With the medical treatment arranged, the local taxi arrived in the morning consisting of a horse and buggy with driver, Polo. He drove me to a medical clinic located behind the Cathedral de Notre Dame in Reims. The taxi was a convenience to the local people, as autos or gasoline were not available due to war shortages. Polo with horse and buggy, easily recognized as the local taxi driver, was not stopped routinely by the German patrols.



René Felix and Jean Joly, are shown on the right of the picture; the French Resistance Heroes who stormed the farm house to rescue me from the Gestapo in March 1944. Pierre Demarchez (is not in the picture). René Felix is pictured at the bottom. Petitbon the butcher, (shown on left) supplied the resistance with the meager food he could spare.



Mr. and Mrs. Jean Joly, Head of the French Resistance  
Underground in Reims, France.



Madame Yvonne Chauvin and Henry, *La Bonne Maison* employee who saw my  
parachute landing and carried me to the farmhouse, with me and Pierre Dermachez,  
rescuer in my escape.