

MY TIME IN THE U.S. (ARMY) AIR FORCE
(February 9, 1943 -- November 25, 1945)

BY MERLE L. DOMMELL

I REPORTED TO THE BAILEY THEATRE LOBBY, 9:30 AM AND WAS TRANSPORTED TO FORT NIAGARA WHERE I WAS INDUCTED INTO THE ARMY FEBRUARY 9, 1943.

AFTER ABOUT A WEEK WE WERE ASSIGNED TO THE SIGNAL CORP AND SENT TO GOLDSBORO, NORTH CAROLINA. THERE WE COULD HAVE BECOME LINEMAN (WORK ON TELEPHONE POLES HANGING LINES). HOWEVER, WE WERE THERE ABOUT 3 WEEKS DOING NOTHING WHEN THEY DECIDED THERE WAS A MIX UP IN OUR ORDERS, SO WE WERE SENT TO ATLANTIC CITY, NEW JERSEY.

I WAS STATIONED AT THE MARLBORO HOTEL ON THE BOARDWALK FOR ABOUT 3 WEEKS. WE RECEIVED A NUMBER OF IMMUNIZATIONS, DID GUARD DUTY, MY PARENTS VISITED ME, AND THEN WE WERE RE-CLASSIFIED AGAIN.

WE WERE RE-ASSIGNED TO A CADRE TO ASSIST IN OPENING A NEW BASE IN BOISE, IDAHO. AGAIN OUR ORDERS WERE FOULED UP AND WE WERE SHIPPED TO SALT LAKE CITY, UTAH.

WHEN WE GOT THERE WE WERE GOING TO BE RE-CLASSIFIED AGAIN SO THIS TIME I ASKED TO BE RE-ASSIGNED INTO THE AIR FORCE.

I WAS RE-ASSIGNED INTO THE AIR FORCE AROUND MAY AND SENT TO RADIO SCHOOL TO BECOME A RADIO OPERATOR SPECIALTY CODE 2756. THE SCHOOL WAS LOCATED IN SALT LAKE CITY, UTAH. I LEARNED TO OPERATE TRANSMITTERS, RECIEVERS, AND TO USE MORSE CODE. I WAS ABLE TO TAKE 18 WORDS - PER MINUTE.

AFTER GRADUATION WE WERE SENT TO MOSES LAKE, WASHINGTON FOR GUNNERY SCHOOL. ON COMPLETING THAT, WE WERE SENT TO SEATTLE, WASHINGTON WHERE WE BOARDED A TROOP TRAIN. IT WAS A LONG, LONG RIDE TO TAMPA BAY, FLORIDA. THERE WE WERE ASSIGNED AS CREW MEMBERS ON THE B-17 FLYING FORTRESS.

WE FLEW MISSIONS DAY AND NIGHT AND GOT TO WORK TOGETHER TO LEARN OUR DUTIES. AFTER OUR TRAINING WAS COMPLETED, WE FLEW FROM TAMPA BAY IN A NEW B-17 (NO CAMOFLAGE) TO MIAMI. THERE WE GOT OUR ORDERS TO FLY TO FOGGIA, ITALY.

WE FLEW THE SOUTHERN ROUTE – DOWN THE COAST OF SOUTH AMERICA THEN ACROSS THE ATLANTIC OCEAN TO THE COAST OF AFRICA. TURNING NORTH ALONG THE COAST LINE, AND THEN OVER TO ITALY. WE MADE FUEL STOPS ALONG THE WAY.

OUR BASE IN FOGGIA, ITALY WAS HOME TO THE 15TH ARMY AIR FORCE. WE WERE ASSIGNED TO THE 353RD BOMBARDMENT SQUADRON, THE 301ST BOMBARDMENT GROUP. LOSSES AT THE BASE WERE HEAVY TO BOTH CREW MEMBERS AND PLANES. WE WERE TO COMPLETE 50 MISSION BEFORE WE COULD BE SHIPPED BACK HOME.

MY FIRST MISSION WAS TO SOFIA, BULGARIA MARCH 30, 1944. MY 50TH MISSION WAS TO BOMB THE GRENOBLE RAILROAD BRIDGE AUGUST 16, 1944. (SEE ATTACHMENT A FOR COMPLETE LIST OF OPERATIONAL SORTIES)

I SERVED IN THE FOLLOWING CAMPAIGNES; CENTRAL BURMA, AIR OFFENSIVE EUROPE, CENTRAL EUROPE, NORTHERN FRANCE, SOUTHERN FRANCE, GO 33 WD 45 AS AMENDED.

I EARNED THE AIR MEDAL WITH OAK LEAF CLUSTER, PRESIDENTIAL CITATION WITH 3 OAK LEAF CLUSTERS, AMERICAN SERVICE MEDAL, EUROPEAN AFRICAN MIDDLE EASTERN SERVICE MEDAL, ASIATIC PACIFIC SERVICE MEDAL, WORLD WAR TWO VICTORY MEDAL AND THE GOOD CONDUCT MEDAL.

SOME NOTABLE EXPERIENCES DURING THAT TIME:

MY SECOND MISSION WAS TO STEYER, AUSTRIA WHERE OUR LOSSES WERE VERY HEAVY. IT WAS MY INDOCTRINATION TO AERIEL COMBAT. I VOWED THAT IF I GOT THRU THIS MISSION, I WOULD COMPLETE MY 50 MISSIONS.

MAY 31, 1944 WE BOMBED THE POLESTI OIL REFINERY IN RUMANIA. THEY THREW EVRYTHING UP AT US BUT THE KITCHEN SINK. OUR LOSES WERE HEAVY. WHEN LEAVING THE BASE ON A MISSION YOU NEVER KNEW IF YOU MIGHT RETURN OR NOT. I PUT MY TRUST IN GOD AND HE GOT ME THROUGH.

MY BROTHER – STAFF SGT MILES (BUDDY) DOMMELL WAS STATIONED AT ROME, ITALY. HE WAS A FIREFIGHTER ON THE BASE THERE IN THE 1898 ENGINEER COMPOSIT PLATON F.A.F.C. ONE DAY AFTER RETURNING FROM A MISSION MAY 26TH, I WAS CLEANING MY 50 CAL WAIST GUN, WHEN I WAS TOLD THERE WAS SOMEONE OUTSIDE TO SEE ME. AS I EXITED THE WAIST DOOR THERE WAS MY BROTHER. WHAT A SURPRISE ! WE HADN'T SEEN EACH OTHER IN 16 MONTHS. IT WAS SOMETHING I'LL NEVER FORGET. HE CAME WITH HIS FRIEND DRIVING ACROSS ITALY IN A JEEP. WE SHARED A

COUPLE OF HOURS TOGETHER AND THEN HE HAD TO LEAVE TO GET BACK TO HIS BASE. LATER MY BROTHER WAS STATIONED IN CORSICA. ON A MISSION TO BOMB THE BEACH HEAD IN THE SOUTHERN FRANCE IVASION AUGUST 15TH, WE FLEW OVER COSICA AND LOOKING DOWN I SURE WISHED WE WERE TOGETHER AGAIN.

ABOUT HALF-WAY THRU OUR 50 MISSIONS WE WERE SENT TO A REST CAMP FOR 7 DAYS ON THE ISLE OF CAPRI. WHAT A BEAUTIFUL PLACE ! WE ALSO GOT TO SPEND SOME TIME SIGHTSEEING IN NAPLES, ITALY.

DURING THE ERUPTION OF Mt. VESUVIOUS, MY PILOT FLEW A GROUP OF DOCTORS AND NURSES OVER IT TO TAKE PICTURES. I WAS THE RADIO OPERATOR ALONG WITH AN ENGINEER ON THE FLIGHT. WHILE FLYING OVER THE CRATER WE WERE HIT WITH AN UPDRAFT VIOLENTLY SHAKING THE PLANE. WE GOT OUT OF THERE FAST.

ON ONE MISSION, RETURNING FROM A BOMB RUN WE LOST AN ENGINE AND WERE UNABLE TO KEEP UP WITH THE SQUADRON. ALONG CAME AN ENEMY FW-190 FIGHTER. HE FLEW ABREAST OF US OUT OF GUN RANGE. I WAS THE WAIST GUNNER AND I FIRED A SHORT BURST EVERY NOW AND THEN TO LET HIM KNOW WE WERE WAITING FOR HIM. HE FINALLY MADE UP HIS MIND AND TURNED TO MAKE HIS RUN AT US. I WAS THE ONLY ONE ABLE TO SHOOT AT HIM AS HE CAME IN AT US. OUR TRACERS WERE

CRISS-CROSSING EACH OTHER. MY ROUNDS FOUND THEIR TARGET CAUSING HIM INTO A STEEP DIVE AND CRASHING INTO THE MOUNTAINS BELOW. THE BALL TURRET GUNNER AND THE TAIL GUNNER FOLLOWED HIM DOWN TO VERIFY IT. I MANAGED TO SAVE THE LIVES OF ALL OF US. THANK GOD!

MY 50TH MISSION ON AUGUST 16, 1944 WAS TO THE GRENOBLE RAILROAD BRIDGE IN FRANCE. THE MISSION WAS 8 HOURS AND 30 MINUTES LONG. GETTING BACK TO THE BASE I CELEBRATED A LITTLE AND ABOUT A WEEK LATER WAS SENT STATESIDE. MY TOTAL OPERATIONAL FLYING TIME WAS 268 HOURS AND 25 MINUTES.

MY 50 MISSIONS WERE OVER, BUT I WASN'T DONE YET !

WE LEFT NAPLES ON A MERCHANT MARINE BOAT, SAILED THRU THE MEDITERANEAN, PAST THE ROCK OF GILBRALTER AND INTO THE ATLANTIC OCEAN. THE CROSSING TOOK SEVERAL DAYS. THEN COMING UP THE FLORIDA COAST WE HIT THE TAIL END OF A HURRICANE AND IT WAS PRETTY ROUGH ! FINALY WE CAME INTO NEW YORK CITY HARBOR, PAST THE STATUE OF LIBERTY. WHAT A SITE TO REMEMBER !

I WAS GIVEN A 2 WEEK FURLOUGH AND THEN WAS TOLD TO REPORT TO RENO AIR BASE - RENO, NEVADA FOR ADVANCED RADIO SCHOOL. UPON GRADUATION WE WERE RE-ASSIGNED TO THE AIR TRANSPORT COMMAND (ATC). THEY NEEDED MORE RADIO OPERATORS AND WE WERE THE LUCKY ONES (HA HA). THERE WOULD BE NO STAYING STATE SIDE FOR US.

WE WERE TOLD WE WERE GOING TO INDIA, THE CBI THEATRE (CHINA, BURMA, INDIA) TO FLY CARGO "OVER THE HUMP" (THE HIMALAYAS) MOSTLY TO KUNMING, CHINA.

WITH A CREW OF 5 AND A NEW C-47 WE WENT THE SOUTHERN ROUTE ONCE AGAIN. ONE OF OUR REFUELING STOPS WAS IN AGRA, INDIA WHERE MY BUDDY AND I GOT TO SEE THE TAJ-MAHAL. IT SURE WAS BEAUTIFUL ! FINALLY WE ARRIVED AT THE MISAMARI AIR BASE IN THE ASSAM VALEY OF INDIA. IT WAS THE BEGINNING OF "THE HUMP". WE WOULD BE FLYING C-46 CARGO PLANES MOSTLY WITH OIL DRUMS TO KUNMING, CHINA. FLYING WOULD BE IN ALL KINDS OF WEATHER - GOOD OR BAD. OUR GOAL WAS TO GET 500 HOURS FLYING TIME SO WE COULD BE SENT STATE SIDE ONCE AGAIN. ONCE COMING BACK FROM CHINA, WE LOST AN ENGINE. WE WERE LOOSING ALTITUDE FAST AND THERE WAS NO VISABILITY. WITH THE MOUNTAINS REACHING UP TO 12-13,000 FEET, WE HAD A MEETING OF THE

CREW TO DECIDE WETHER TO BAIL OUT AND TAKE OUR CHANCES, OR TO LIGHTEN THE LOAD ON OUR PLANE AND STAY WITH IT AND GET BACK TO THE BASE. OUR DECISION BEING THE LATTER THE ENGINEER AND I STARTED DUMPING OUR CARGO. WE HAD TO UNSHACKLE EACH DRUM, TIP THEM OVER AND ROLL THEM TOTHE OPEN WAIST DOOR AND KICK THEM OUT. THERE WERE 24 OF THEM. HAVING TO GET THIS DONE IN AS SHORT A TIME AS POSSIBLE, WE WERE UNABLE TO WEAR OUR PARACHUTES OR OUR OXYGEN MASKS. WE HAD TO BREATH SOME OXYGEN AND THEN WORK AS FAST AS WE COULD TO GET A DRUM OUT AND GET BACK TO BREATH SOME OXYGEN AGAIN. HAVING ACCOMLISHED THIS, WE WERE ABLE TO HOLD OUR ALTITUDE, NOT HIT ANY MOUNTAINS, AND MAKE IT BACK TO BASE. A NUMBER OF TIMES, IN VERY BAD WEATHER, WE ALMOST CRASHED INTO THE TREES, JUST SHORT OF THE RUNWAY. THANKS TO OUR GREAT PILOTS AND GOOD OPERATIONAL AIRPLANES WE SURVIVED.

THE WAR ENDED WITH JAPAN AND WE WERE EAGER TO GO HOME!

I ENDED UP WITH 490 FLYING HOURS.

WE WERE THEN SHIPPED TO THE PORT OF KURACHI AND WAITED ALMOST A WEEK FOR TRANSPORTATION HOME. I DID HOWEVER GET TO SPEND A LITTLE OF IT SIGHTSEEING IN CALCUTTA.

WE BOARDED A NAVAL VESSEL AND GOT TO GO THRU THE SUEZ CANAL, THE MEDITERANIAN, PAST THE ROCK OF GILBRALTER, ACROSS THE ATLANTIC, AND INTO THE NEW YORK HARBOR ONCE AGAIN !

WE WERE ASSIGNED TO FORT DIX, NEW JERSY. I WAS THERE ABOUT A WEEK AND WAS DISCHARGED FORM THE SERVICE NOVEMBER 25, 1945.

I TOOK A TRAIN HOME TO GOOD OLD BUFFALO, NEW YORK AND MY TOUR WAS OVER ! MY BROTHER WAS ALREADY HOME AND I THANKED GOD WE GOT HOME SAFELY.

TSGT. MERLE L. DOMMELL

(ATTACHMENT A)

353RD BOMBARDMENT SQ (H), AAF
301ST BOMBARDMENT GROUP (H), AAF
17 AUGUST 1944

CERTIFICATE

I HERBY CERTIFY THAT TSGT, MERLE L. DOMMELL, 32831208, RADIO OPERATOR, GUNNER, HAS COMPLETED 50 OPERATIONAL SORTIES AND HAS ATTAINED A TOTAL OF 268 HOURS AND 25 MINUTES (268:25) OF OPERATIONAL FLYING TIME.

MISSIONS	TIME
30 MARCH 1944 SOFIA, BULGARIA	5:45
2 APRIL 1944 STEYR, AUSTRIA (2 SORTIES)	8:00
4 APRIL 1944 BUCHAREST M/Y, RUMANIS (2 SORTIES)	8:30
7 APRIL 1944 TREVISO M/Y, ITALY	5:15
12 APRIL 1944 FISCHAMEND MARKET, AUSTRIA (2 SORTIES)	7:30
23 APRIL 1944 WIENER NEUSTADT, AUSTRIA (2 SORTIES)	7:30
25 APRIL 1944 CREDIT FOR OPERATIONAL TIME	5:00
28 APRIL 1944 PIOMBINO DOCKS AND SHIPPING, ITALY	6:25
30 APRIL 1944 MILAN/GRESSO A/C FACTORY, ITALY	7:50
12 MAY 1944 CHIVOSSE M/Y, ITALY	8:05
18 MAY 1944 BELGRADE RAILROAD BRIDGE, YOUGOSLOVIA	6:05
19 MAY 1944 LATISANA RAILROAD BRIGE, ITALY	5:55
22 MAY 1944 AVISIO RAILROAD VIADUCT, ITALY	4:25
24 MAY 1944 AVEZZANO, ITALY	6:00
26 MAY 1944 ST. ETINNE M/Y FRANCE	9:35
27 MAY 1944 AVIGNON M/Y, FRANCE	8:15
29 MAY 1944 WOLLERSDORF A/D, AUSTRIA (2 SORTIES)	7:00

30 MAY	1944	ZAGREB M/Y, YOUUGOSLOVIA	5:05
31 MAY	1944	PLOESTI, RUMANIA (2 SORTIES)	7:45
4 JUNE	1944	ANTHEOR VIADUCT, FRANCE	6:25
8 JUNE	1944	POLA SUBMARINE PENS, ITALY	4:50
9 JUNE	1944	MUNICH CITY, GERMANY (2 SORTIES)	8:00
13 JUNE	1944	OBERPFAFFENHOFEN A/D, AUSTRIA (2 SORTIES)	7:40
24 JUNE	1944	PIATRA RAILROAD BRIDGE, RUMANIA	6:15
14 JULY	1944	SHELL KODAJ OIL REFINERY BUDAPEST, HUNGARY	6:15
18 JULY	1944	MIMMINGEN A/D, GERMANY (2 SORTIES)	7:50
20 JULY	1944	MIMMINGEN A/D, GERMANY (2 SORTIES)	7:00
21 JULY	1944	BRUX OIL REFINERY, GERMANY (2 SORTIES)	8:45
25 JULY	1944	LINZ TANK WORKS, AUSTRIA (2 SORTIES)	6:45
31 JULY	1944	XENIA OIL REFINERY, PLOESTI, RUMANIA	8:05
6 AUG.	1944	VALENCES M/Y, FRANCE	8:00
7 AUG.	1944	BLECHHAMMER, GERMANY (2 SORTIES)	8:15
10 AUG.	1944	AMERICANO-ROMANO OIL REFINERY, RUMANIA	7:50
12 AUG.	1944	VADO GUN POSITION, ITALY	6:15
13 AUG.	1944	VADO GUN POSITION, ITALY	6:10
14 AUG.	1944	GUN POSITION, TOULON, FRANCE	7:20
15 AUG.	1944	INVASION BEACH NO. 261, FRANCE	8:20
16 AUG.	1944	GRENOBLE RAILROAD BRIDGE, FRANCE	8:30

CERTIFIED 17 AUGUST 1944

LEON M. PAYNE
1 LT. AIR CORPS,
OPERATIONS OFFICER

**268:25 HOURS FLYING B-17'S AND 490 HOURS FLYING
CARGO IN C-46'S. A TOTAL OF 758:25 FLYING HOURS !**