

Warren Ingham

**Personal Experiences While Serving in the  
8th Air Force During WW II**



This starts the beginning of the bombing by Japan of Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941 at 7:30 A.M. Eastern Standard Time. It was a sneak attack that bombed the navy base, Wheeler Air Force Base and Hickman Field, which destroyed a large portion of the Navy and most of the Air Corps. The United States declared war on Japan immediately and on December 11, 1941 Germany declared war on the United States.

I was 17 years old at the time and just a farm boy. From that time on I made up my mind as soon as possible that I wanted to join the armed services. I graduated from Waverly High School in June 1942. I wanted to enlist right after school was out, but my parents did not want me to go. They had to sign the papers so I could join and they felt they could get me a deferment because of the farm. I constantly wanted to go, but to temporarily appease them I got a job at the Eclipse Plant which was making defense material. Everyone I knew was going in the service and like a young kid it was a daily ritual about going into the service. In September of 1942 I received a notice from the Draft Board. I was classified 1A, which meant I would soon be drafted. The age of the draft was 18 to 45. Almost anyone who could walk was drafted because they could use them for something.

Shortly after the classification I received a notice that my friends and neighbors had selected me to represent them in the Armed Forces. The next night after work I stopped by the Recruiting Office in Elmira, New York to see if I could enlist in the service. My first stop was the Navy Recruiter who did not impress me very much so I left and went to the Army Air Corps Recruiter, which really impressed me. They gave me the papers to take home and get signed and return them as soon as possible. My parents were more willing to sign now because it appeared I would be drafted and they felt I would be happier if I went on my own. Once I turned in the

signed papers the recruiter notified the Draft Board and my papers were sent to Headquarters for processing. This took some time and I was the last of a group of young men my age (18) that would be allowed to enlist.

Word came soon that I was to report for induction into the Army Air Corps on December 11, 1942. Along with me were the last group to leave Elmira as volunteers. They were going to use the Draft for all branches of the service.

We took the oath of office at the federal building in Buffalo, New York on December 11, 1942 and were immediately taken to Fort Niagara. While there we were given a hair cut; those who had full heads of hair were given the crew cut which is quite short. Even those that told the barber how to cut it were all given the same treatment. We packed what civilian clothes we brought with us to send home. Everyone was issued G.I. uniforms. I wanted to be in the Army Air Corps as I thought I would get the opportunity to fly. We stayed at Fort Niagara until after Christmas 1942 and those who were assigned to the Army Air Corps would be sent to Atlantic City, New Jersey. The first surprise came when about half of the enlistment I left Elmira with were sent to Fort Benning, Georgia for infantry training. I was among the lucky ones and went to Atlantic City. We lived in the hotel along the boardwalk and those that were large enough to house thousands of troops. We would be taking Basic Training which consisted of close order drill and physical fitness training. Also, change your attitude to work as a unit and not individually. The hours of duty were up at 4:30 A.M., eat breakfast, line up in formation and march at attention out the streets to the beach where we marched in the sand. The day would end at about 5:00 P.M. We were required to sing on the way back from the beach. We sang the Air Corps song, Marine hymn and God Bless America along with whatever the Drill Sergeant

decided. They always told us heads up, look proud and be happy you are in the playground of the world. Sometimes when it would be raining too hard we trained in the Convention Hall where Miss America Pageants are held. We could not go out on the street at night and we stayed six weeks in Atlantic City.

While we were in Atlantic City we were given lots of tests and an opportunity to qualify for different schools. Also, we were asked if we had an interest in flying. When we graduated from Basic Training I was assigned to Airplane Mechanics School. They wanted to train you so that when you went overseas you would be able to repair the plane you flew in. I was sent to Seymour Johnson Field at Goldsboro, North Carolina. This was late February or early March of 1943. While I was at Seymour Johnson Field I took the air cadet exam and had a good mark, which would entitle me to go to pilots training. by now my emotions were running high. I really wanted to fly. Each day in school I thought I would get orders to report for pilot training. During our assignment at Seymour Johnson Field we were allowed a 24-hour pass to leave the base once each month. Several of us would take a bus ride to Rocky Mountain, North Carolina. There was a United Serviceman's Organization, better known as the USO. They had a building and provided various entertainment. Ping Pong - pool tables and in the evening a dance. They invited girls to a dance in the evening. It was a good time and, of course, played the songs of the time with the Big Band sound. Some of the songs were Long Ago and Far Away, Moonlight Serenade, Stormy Weather, to name a few. The girls were called Southern Belles and were friendly, and was a good morale booster.

The day I finished mechanics school, the first of July 1943, they asked for volunteers for Aerial Gunnery School. About 35 volunteered for the school and then we were separated from the

rest of the soldiers. We were told that this was our last chance to reconsider. The life expectancy was about 15 seconds in actual combat fighting. From the 35, eleven of us stayed. The course was six weeks in length and it was a chance to fly. The promotion would be good. You would be promoted from Private First Class to Sergeant. This meant an increase in pay from \$31.00 per month to \$96.00 per month, and when you obtained flying status you would receive an additional \$43.00 a month.

The next day after the eleven of us volunteers we were on our way to Ft. Myers, Florida for training. This included six weeks of vigorous training with no leave so we would be restricted to the base. We were awakened at 5:00 A.M. and did physical exercise, ground school which taught you how to identify enemy aircraft, both German and Japanese. We learned how to be expert shooters in the afternoon until dark. The targets we shot at with a shotgun were clay pigeons, which you had to track and break in mid-air. Before you could move on you had to break 23 out of 25 of these clay pigeons, one after another with rapid fire. Next, you were placed on the back of the truck in a round stationary stand and while moving in the truck which would trip these devices to release the clay pigeons and again before you advance you must break 23 out of 25 of the clay pigeons. Next, was the day I had waited for - I was going to fly. The first flight was in a trainer plane, AT-6 two seater. The pilot and I, and a mounted 30 caliber machine gun which would fire into the water in the Gulf of Mexico. This was my first time to fly and the pilot was an experienced, full-blooded American Indian. A real good man and as we went out over the Gulf of Mexico we talked about where we came from and then I fired fifty rounds into the water. We finished and the pilot said, "would you like to fly around for a while." I agreed and explained it was my first flight ever in an airplane. In hindsight, had I known what he was going to do I

probably would not have told him about not flying before. He took us up to about 10,000 feet and then we did some barrel rolls, flew upside down. He asked me if I was okay and I said fine, so next he put the plane in a dive and I think we came within a few hundred feet of the water in the Gulf of Mexico. We did stalls, flew with the plane spinning around and around, buzzed a small town on the coast and finally he said you should be alright to fly there is only one thing left for me to do with you and that is fly underneath a bridge. At this point I was almost sure he would try that, however he didn't and we went back to the base.

The last part of training at Fort Myers consisted of flying in a twin engine AT-18 with a turret which was equipped with two 30 caliber machine guns and you had to track what was called a tow target, which was hauled by a single engine plane several hundred yards away from you. The ammunition was colored with paint so they could evaluate how accurate you were. One day when I was flying in the At-18 and we were going to fire at the tow target, the instructor I had said fire and I informed him the one gun in the turret was lined up on the tail of our plane and I should wait for the plane pulling the tow target to pull up some. If the limit switches on the guns were not working properly I would shoot our own plane. he said I order you to fire so I had no choice and I pulled the trigger and shot the tail of our trainer plane. The instructor told me when we get on the ground you are finished. You will not be a gunner or fly again. I was ready to cry. This was my last practice before graduating. When we parked the trainer plane the pilot came to me and said do not worry about his washing you out. I will go right now to see the Commanding Officer with you. We went to see the Commander and the one who got grounded was the instructor. The pilot had trouble with instructors ordering students to fire and damaged the plane before. Anyway, I graduated and was promoted to Sergeant.

While at Fort Myers we were not allowed to leave the base. However, they always tried to bring some entertainment. Bob Hope, the Les Brown Band, and Doris Day came there with the USO and did a show from the base. I might add also that I have never had any desire to go to Florida since then. The six weeks I was there it was over 100 degrees every day.

I left Fort Myers, Florida the day after we graduated and went to Salt Lake City, Utah for assignment where they sent me to Pyote, Texas for phase training on a B-17. It was at Pyote where our combat crew was brought together. Also, shortly after I arrived at Pyote I received the orders that I had been accepted in the Air Cadet Program however, because I had graduated from Gunnery School and they needed combat crews I could not go. I would have to serve a tour of duty in a war theater before they would consider the cadet training.

Our crew would consist of ten people altogether. I will mention their names because we became very close like family. The pilot, Kenneth Simmonds, co-pilot, Henry Yates, bombardier, Wade Wilson, navigator, Everet Schumacker, flight engineer, Ormond Rolfe, radioman, Lester Conklin, left waist gunner, Charles Painter, right waist gunner, L. Jay Johnson, tail gunner, Robert Boyle, and ball turret gunner, myself. Unlike other branches of the service we addressed each other by our first names, or a nickname if you had one. The pilot was always called skipper and when I first went on the crew they thought I was Jewish, so I was called "Abe."

We flew together on a B-17 everyday from the time we got together in September until we finished what was called phase training. This consisted of night flights, bombing with fake bombs in the desert panhandle of Texas and mock runs over our cities, such as Denver, Colorado, Los Angeles, and San Francisco. This plane was equipped with a Norden bomb sight which our bombardier had to become an expert with. We, as gunners, practiced firing at tow targets and air-

to-ground targets with the guns in the B-17. There were 11 guns in the B-17 and they were 50 caliber the same as used in combat. Pyote, Texas was a small town with only a main street going straight through and small locally owned stores, so no one went to Town. There was entertainment on the base, movies, and once in awhile a dance. We did get a three day pass now and then and would generally go to Odessa, Texas which was sixty miles away. There was a night club and a little more to do than on the base and allowed us to see some of Texas. This training in Texas lasted until the end of December 1943. We were at Pyote during Christmas time and again they issued three day passes. Our pilot got married on the base two days before Christmas. All of our gunners and the radioman talked about what we would do with our three day pass. Fort Worth was about 300 miles away and if we went there we would spend most of our time traveling. Myself, Les Conklin and Charley Painter decided we would go to Sweetwater, Texas about 100 miles away if we could get a bus there. There was a women's pilot base at Sweetwater, so off the three of us went to Sweetwater. These girls were all officers and by military rules they are not supposed to associate with enlisted men. However, they were as glad to see us as we were them. They had civilian clothes with them so they went back to base and changed and we spent Christmas of 1943 with them. In thinking back, I believe we knew we would soon be leaving this country for combat, either in Europe or the Pacific.

After Christmas we finished our training at Pyote and on January 2, 1944 we were given seven days to leave to go home before we would be sent overseas. Coming from Pyote to the East where I lived in Waverly, New York meant that at the most I could spend three days, and the other four days would be travel time. I enjoyed the three days home and I believe my parents surmised I was going to leave the country even if we did not discuss it. When I returned to Pyote



the whole crew went by train to Grand Island, Nebraska to pick up a new B-17 to fly to England. We had the orders when we left Pyote, but they were sealed in a package that was not to be opened until we reported to the Commander at Grand Island, who told us where we were going. Our bombardier got sick in Grand Island, Nebraska so we could not leave there until February 20, 1944. The new B-17 we took had problems which forced us to land at Presque Isle, Maine. The runway at Presque Isle was icy and we nearly did donuts with the plane. Our pilot controlled it well and we were safely on the ground.

We left Presque Isle the next morning after repairs were made to the plane. We were airborne about two hours when again we had problems with the generator on the plane. This made it necessary to land at Goose Bay, Labrador. The weather at Goose Bay was 40 below zero and the snow that had accumulated and been cleared off from the runway with snow blowers was 20 feet high. The ground crew at Goose Bay made the necessary repairs and we asked if we could leave early the next morning. They agreed we could go whenever we wanted to. We prepared to leave at 5:00 A.M., however because of the 40 degree below zero weather we could not start the engine. About 8:00 A.M. the ground crew found us at the dining hall and said we thought you would still be here. After they had breakfast they hooked heaters to the engine and then we were again on our way. Hoping to go straight to England we were again airborne and shortly had more engine problems, forcing us to land at Reykjavik, Iceland. I should also say that Axis Sally, a German propaganda person was on the radio and we had tuned in to some nice American music, when she interrupted the broadcast and said the American crew that is flying from Goose Bay, Labrador to Reykjavik, Iceland "have a good flight so we can see you in a Prisoner of War Camp." While we were on the ground at Reykjavik the weather was warmer but it rained, sleeted,

snowed and hailed while we waited for repairs. These flights going to England were short hops because of the engine problems that developed. After we left Iceland we landed at Starnaway on the Isle of Lewis where we took on fuel and then a short hop to Prestwick, Scotland where we left the B-17. Our crew split up at Prestwick and the gunners, including me went to what they called the Wash. Our officers went to the airbase in England ahead of us. We had to take some training of about five days to sharpen our shooting skills. We left the Wash and met our officers at Bury St. Edmonds, northeast of London where we were assigned to the 8th Air Force 94th Bomb Group 332nd Squadron. This is where we were going to live until we finished our missions or lost by being shot down or killed. In England, we lived in Quonset Huts and received one bucket of coal for heat per day. We were to rotate home after 25 missions. I flew as the ball turret gunner which is underneath the B-17. As previously stated, we had a crew of ten and the B-17 was equipped with 13,50 caliber machine guns. Please note that the B-17's had been modified from 11,50 caliber to 13,50 caliber machine guns carrying a bomb load of 5000 pounds and cruising at a speed of 290 miles per hour. We arrived in England on February 24, 1944 at then we were at the air base at Bury St. Edmund on March 1, 1944. We had to fly every day to get familiar with the turbulent air over the British Isle. At under 10,000 feet the air was very choppy.

The first mission I went on was April 10, 1944. This was with a seasoned crew who had flown several missions over Germany with combat experience. We were awakened by a Clerk of Quarters at 4:30 A.M., with breakfast and a briefing room. This would let you know where the target was. In this briefing you would be told how many anti-aircraft guns were around the target and the number of fighter planes you could expect. Then we obtained the inside of our 50 caliber guns from the armor hut and installed them in the B-17. Our target for the day was Diest/Schafer,

Germany. Lots of anti-aircraft guns, "88 millimeter." The Germans were very accurate if the weather was clear and we had considerable damage to the plane, but it still flew okay. We did not encounter any German fighter planes on this mission. All of our crew flew with some other experienced crew on this mission.

April 13, 1944 mission number two, Augsburg, Germany. This time our crew flew together. We put 18 B-17 from our air base in the air. These airplanes were lined up and every 60 seconds each plane took off until they were all in the air. We would form over England into a combat wing which would consist of three groups of 18 planes each for this mission. This was called a "box" formation. They flew at different altitudes - the High Box 26,000 feet, Lead Box at 25,000 feet, and Low Box at 24,000 feet. The weather at these altitudes was 40 to 45 degrees below zero. We kept warm with, at first a sheep skin lined flying suite which was very cumbersome because of the bulkiness of it. On this mission we encountered heavy anti-aircraft and some ME 109 fighters. We had considerable battle damage. This was a long mission, about nine hours of flying time. Daimler Benson engine work target was well hit so the mission was successful.

On April 18, 1944 - the most dreaded mission of all. We were awakened at 4:30 A.M., went to breakfast, then to the briefing room to learn of the target. This day it was Berlin. While the pilot, co-pilot, bombardier, navigator and radioman got the details of the expected anti-aircraft and fighters, the rest of the gunners obtained the insides of the 50 caliber machine guns and installed them in the various positions for battle. We supplied 11 B-17's from our base and met two other groups over England to prepare for the flight to Berlin (Mission number three). This was to be our worst mission for loss of aircraft. We flew over water up the North Sea and then

made a ninety degree turn to approach Berlin. We first ran into heavy anti-aircraft fire and then as we left the target there were some clouds and behind the clouds waited German ME 109's and FW 190's. We all had severe damage from anti-aircraft and the German fighter planes were fierce fighters flying much faster than our B-17's and we lost our whole squadron, except our own plane. Our pilot saw another group of B-17's and we joined them. What we did not know was that the group had not made their bomb run yet and we had to go over the Berlin target again. We lost ten planes from our Squadron and to this day I do not know how we somehow survived. I know that God must have been taking care of us. There were 40 men that we were never to see again. I might add at this point that while you knew the other crews, you never became close friends because of the danger everyone faced. Our own crew were like our family and to this day the ones that are still alive are still close.

On April 20, 1944 (Mission number four) was Behen, France. We were awakened at 4:30 A.M. as usual for a mission. Obtained guns and installed them in the aircraft and waited for the pilot and co-pilot, bombardier, navigator and radioman and they would brief us on the target and to the expected German fighter and anti-aircraft guns. This target was a factory making war material for Germans and was a fairly short mission, about five hours and 15 minutes. Some damage to the airplane.

April 22, 1944 (Mission number five) was Ham, Germany, We woke up at 4:30 A.M., ate breakfast, obtained guns and mounted them in positions in the airplane. Soon the pilot, co-pilot, bombardier, navigator and radioman would arrive from the briefing room and fill us in on the expected anti-aircraft guns and fighter planes at the target. This was a railroad yard which moved German troops and war material to various locations. Target was well hit and at least would

temporarily stop the use of these railroad yards. Plenty of flak around the target and some fighter planes. We were able to run off the fighters and return without any casualties, except some damage to the airplane.

April 24, 1944 (Mission number six), Friedrichschafen, Germany. Wake up call at 4:30 A.M., eat breakfast, obtain guns and place in position and wait for the briefing on the expected anti-aircraft and fighter planes in area. This was a fairly long mission, about eight hours and 45 minutes of flying time and was on the border of Switzerland. We lost the propeller from the right inboard engine by a direct hit from an 88 millimeter anti-aircraft shell. We were able to fly some on three engines. This airplane would fly when it seemed almost impossible for it to stay in the air.

April 26, 1944 (Mission number seven), Brunswick, Germany - target was airplane parts plant. Woke up at 4:30 A.M., eat breakfast, obtain guns and install in airplane and then wait for the rest of the crew to brief us on the amount of flak and German fighter planes we could expect. I have previously stated that I flew the ball turret and I had a birds-eye view of what was going on around us. This ball turret was in the bottom of the B-17. This target was a factory that made parts for German aircraft. Our missions were all scheduled for factories that manufactured war material. This mission was seven hours and 15 minutes of flying time. We had plenty of flak damage and a few ME 109's returned safely.

April 27, 1944 (Mission number eight), Behen, France. Woke up at 4:30 A.M., ate breakfast, obtain guns and install in the airplane and then wait for the rest of the crew to brief us on amount of anti-aircraft guns (flak) and German fighters in the area. This target was a fuel depot for German forces. It was well protected by anti-aircraft and once you approached the target all three groups were flat and would drop bombs on the lead plane. Flak was very heavy

over the target, the sky was black with flak. The mission was a success as we blew up the entire fuel depot, sending flames nearly 10,000 feet in the air. We did not encounter any German fighter planes, but damage to our planes from flak was heavy. However, we still make it back home. Flying time was six hours and 30 minutes.

April 28, 1944 (Mission nine). Target was Cherburg, France. This mission was the worst for our crew. It was a short mission, about four hours and 40 minutes of flying time to destroy a V-2 Buzz Bomb. This was supposed to be an easy mission. German anti-aircraft 88 mm were all around the target. One nearly a direct hit exploded by the side of our plane and seriously wounded our co-pilot, Henry Yates and immediately another 88 millimeter shell exploded, hitting our pilot Ken Simmonds in the neck and head making him groggy for a minute. Our bombardier, Wade Wilson, ripped off his oxygen mask and crawled up into the cockpit. Flight engineer, Ormond Rolfe removed the co-pilot Yates and laid him in the catwalk in the nose. Bombardier Wilson took over the controls to fly us home. This all took place in a shorter time than it has taken me to write this. When we arrived over the base we fired red flares which meant you had wounded aboard. The bombardier Wade called the control tower and was told you cannot land the plane. He said to the tower, well take your pick it is me or one of the gunners. At this point our pilot revived enough to say I can tell you what to do. Wade made an excellent landing. We pulled off the runway as soon as possible and were met by two ambulances. Our pilot Ken was not severely wounded and was treated at the hospital and released. Our co-pilot, Hank was severely wounded and nearly died. He had 22 holes in his stomach and the surgeon said he could not live. However, an intern doctor asked if he could try to save him. They gave him permission and he saved Hank's life. Hank could not fly any more combat missions and was transferred back to the United States.

April 30, 1944 - target Clermont Ferrand, France. Our pilot Ken was declared ready to fly and we were given a new co-pilot, Mike Sabarra. This was a very easy mission which was a storage depot of German supplies. Heavy anti-aircraft and some flak damage to our plane, but we returned safely. This mission was six hours and 20 minutes. No fighter planes and for the first time we received our own P-51 fighter escort. It was like angels from Heaven to have them in the sky with us.

We always were awakened at 4:30 A.M. for missions. Every day, whether your crew flew a mission or not, we would wait at the runway for the crews to return and count the number of planes returning.

On May 1st we were made lead crew and moved from the 332nd Squadron to the 333rd. We were a visual crew using the Norden Bomb sight. The Air Corps had Pathfinder crews who would bomb in bad weather. These were the forerunner of radar but were not too accurate. Our bombardier Wade was an expert with the Norden Bomb sight. he could drop a wing 66 airplanes from 25,000 feet, in a 500 foot wide. As lead crew we were to fly every day even if we did not have a mission. They also extended our stay from 25 missions to 30.

May 7, 1944 - Berlin. We would lead the mission as our first lead which meant we would be the first over the target and must be accurate or else all 66 planes in our wing would miss the target. We woke up at 4:30 A.M. and when we found out the target was Berlin we expected to have a real fight. German anti-aircraft 88 millimeter and 105 millimeter were all over the place. One thing we had this time was our little friend, the P-51 fighter planes to help us with the ME 109's and FW 190's. The target was well hit and we returned with the loss of four planes and battle damage from anti-aircraft. Flying time was nine hours

May 8, 1944 - Berlin. We did such a good job the previous day as lead crew that we were again called upon for this mission. We also had a new B-17G and were able to provide its name which was Fortress Joker. This mission to Berlin was to be a maximum effort. Our base provided 66 B-17's and all together we put 1000 B-17's in the air for this mission. Targets were factories on the outskirts of the City of Berlin. We encountered heavy anti-aircraft but our losses of airplanes was low. We lost only 11 of the B-17's and literally devastated Berlin. We had P-51 fighter escort in case we needed help. The Germans sent up only a few ME-109's and they were shot down. These missions to Berlin were flown mostly over water, "the North Sea." One drawback to this was if you had to abandon the airplane you could only live about fifteen minutes in the water since it was extremely cold. Flying time was nine hours and took all the fuel we had.

May 9, 1944 - Mission Leon Athies, France. Awoke at 4:30 A.M.. This was a short mission to bomb an airfield that based ME-109 German fighter planes. Flight time was five hours and 30 minutes. Heavy anti-aircraft, the sky was black with the flak. The Germans got some of the ME-109's off the ground and our P-51 escort shot down several and we destroyed the remainder with our bombs. We returned safely with some battle damage to our airplane. It was a very successful mission.

May 11, 1944 - Target Brussels, Belgium, an electric powerplant used to supply electric to several factories making German war material. We also knew that in the same area was a fuel storage depot and railroad yards. They had planned to make three separate targets. As we made the approach to Brussels you could see for miles. The visibility was excellent. We were lead crew and our bombardier Wade decided to try and get all three targets on this mission. As I said before



he was the best visual bombardier in the group and he called me in the ball turret and said "Abe" watch our bombs, I expect to hit all three targets. The anti-aircraft fire was heavy but he never wavered and sure enough hit all three and wiped them out. When we returned to base and told them what Wade did they could not believe he was able to accomplish this. The pictures, when developed, proved we did and Wade was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross for the action.

May 13, 1944 - Target Canabruck, Germany. German airbase FW-190's flew from there. the airfield was surrounded with anti-aircraft and they apparently were able to scramble the FW-190's and we only destroyed a few that were left on the field. Flak was heavy but we destroyed the base. We had battle damage but all planes returned safely to our base. Flight time was six hours and 30 minutes. After this mission we received a three day pass to London for some rest. This was real fun. We met English girls, went to dances, and enjoyed our stay in London.

We also had a dance at our base once a month. They brought English girls to the base by bus. We would have live music and a good time. The English girls were either beautiful or rather homely, but were very friendly. They had no make-up or really anything in the luxury line. We always gave them gum and candy and they enjoyed our company.

May 28, 1944 - Mission Koningsbern, Germany, a ball bearing factory that made supplies for German ground forces and lightweight liftwaffel. Visibility was good and lots of anti-aircraft. The sky was black with flak, we had to fly through this to hit the target. The target was well hit and put out of business. I could see the bombs on the way down from the ball turret and also see the buildings collapse. Flying time for this mission was eight hours. We returned with a lot of battle damage, but no injuries to our crew. We were quite fortunate so far.

May 31, 1944 - Hamm, Germany, railroad yards used to move German troops and

German war machines for their ground forces. This target was well protected by both German 109's and FW-190's, plus surrounded by 88 millimeter anti-aircraft. This was also our second trip to Hamm but our first time as lead crew. We assembled from our base and some other 300 B-17's. We each carried two, two-thousand pound general purpose demolition bombs that were delayed action. This meant that they would burrow into the ground and then explode. We had fighter escort P-51's all the way and back. They took care of the German 109's and FW-190's, however on the bomb run they did not follow. The anti-aircraft fire made the sky black with flak which we had to fly through since you couldn't take evasive action or the Norden Bomb site would not work accurately. Again, Wade our bombardier dropped all 300 of the plane's bombs on the railroad yards. Nine direct hits that made huge holes in the ground and when they exploded they totally destroyed the railroad yards and they were unable to rebuild it for use. We lost a total of 11 B-17's as a result of flak on this mission. Flying time was seven hours and twenty minutes.

June 5, 1944 - Mission Bouvoir (Calais) France. This mission was bombing the coast of France to try and blow up the concrete pill boxes the Germans had built along the coast. We used 500 pound fragmentation bombs that were very destructive and while we hit the target very well because the concrete was so thick the pill boxes were not totally destroyed. This was a short mission, about five hours and 45 minutes and easy as far as anti-aircraft was concerned. We had no fighter casualties.

June 6, 1944 - Mission was to bomb the French coast, Caen-St. Lo. We were alerted for the mission at 11:00 P.M. on June 5th. This was unusual as we never flew night missions, however when we got our orders we were told that at 7:30 on June 6, 1944 is the land invasion of France and the continent of Europe. We must bomb and be out of the area when our ground

troops land. We went in waves of 66 B17's up and down the coast. We made two trips and by then it was daylight. As we returned across the English Channel it was full of navy ships and landing craft with our ground forces. Also, our paratroops had landed on the mainland of France. We were kept in the ready area in case the ground troops needed our help. Our actual flying time was six hours, but we remained on alert.

June 7, 1944 - Mission Nantes, France, pockets of German tanks and our ground artillery laid out pink smoke shells so we would not bomb our own troops. This was very delicate when you have your ground troops in the area. As usual, Wade the bombardier laid the bombs from the 66 B-17's right on the target. We flew past the area and made a complete turn to fly back over the target to make sure we destroyed the German tanks. We were successful and it freed our ground troops so they could advance.

June 12, 1944 - Montdidier, France - Mission to bomb fuel storage and German supplies. Six hours and fifteen minutes of flying time. this target needed to be destroyed so our ground troops could advance on ground. The invasion so far was successful. Our mission now was scheduled to help the ground forces. Anti-aircraft was heavy but no fighter opposition.

June 14, 1944 - Mission Florence, Belgium. German tanks were amassing for a counter attack on our ground forces and also there was some fuel storage. Target was well protected with anti-aircraft guns, but we were able to destroy the target. There was severe battle damage to Fortress Joker, our airplane, but we returned safely. A few ME-109's and German fighter planes, although we were able to defend ourselves and when our escort P-51's arrived they finished off the ME-109's. As we were returning to our base over England our flight surgeon was in the control tower and announced to our pilot Ken that our crew was going to rest home for ten days.

Our nerves were getting a little jumpy and the flight surgeon had the authority to ground us from flying.

We went on June 15 to Southport, England. This was a fun time and it was on the beach along the coast. There was plenty of recreation, such as sailing, swimming, horseback riding, and lots of night life. The radioman Les and I met two beautiful English girls and spent the remainder of our time at Southport with them. They showed us all the sights in the area and were just real good company. It was a great help to us in winding down a bit from the combat. As with any vacation, it ends too fast and we had to return to our base on June 25th for more missions.

I should now point out that now the Germans were sending V-2 buzz bombs over London every night. We no longer were able to go to London because of the danger. These buzz bombs had a certain amount of fuel and when it ran out they would crash and explode. They had no idea where they were going to land but they did cause a lot of property damage and some English casualties.

June 28, 1944 - Mission was La-Bourget, France, a suburb of Paris. German airfield with ME-109's and FW-190's on the ground. We were still the lead crew and this field was well protected with anti-aircraft. Once we started the bomb run the sky was black with flak. We flew right through it as we could not hit the target if we maneuver the planes. The bomb sight is not accurate when you take evasive action. The Germans now had a shortage of fuel and we destroyed the airfield and also the German 109's and FW-190's that were on the ground. Again, the mission is successful. All our planes returned, but with considerable flak damage. I need to mention how great our ground crews were as they immediately repaired the damage to the engine. They may have been needed the next day and they patched holes all night to keep them flying.

July 7, 1944 - Kalleda-Leipzig, Germany target, oil refineries. We had 30 B-17's on this raid, heavy flak and some clouds obscured the target somewhat, and some German aircraft, ME-109's were observed. However, our fighter escort P-51's took them on in a dog fight and they did not bother us. The oil refineries were well hit and sent smoke and fire ten thousand feet in the air. We returned to base safely, only losing one B-17 and with intense flak causing minor damage to all planes. Flight time was eight hours.

July 11, 1944 - Target Munich, Germany. This mission included diversified targets and we had a total of 1100 B-17's on this raid. We had an escort of 750 fighter planes and the targets were bombed with little opposition, though flak was heavy. We lost twenty bombers on this mission. Flying time was nine hours and forty-five minutes.

With all of these missions we were awakened at 4:30 A.M. in the morning and this made a day without food, but with the flak and watching for German fighter planes there was never a dull moment.

July 14, 1944 - Grocery Mission, French Alps. This mission was highly classified. We were dropping supplies in Southern France to the French Underground. We flew 500 feet above the ground and the French people were out in force to pick up the canisters of supplies. From the ball turret which was the position I could see the Frenchmen giving us the "V" for victory sign. The top of this mountain was a beautiful sight. The Frenchmen were underground and had three German divisions tied up trying to gain control of them. These canisters that were dropped contained guns, ammunition, blood plasma and food rations. This was an entirely different mission from that of dropping bombs and created a warm feeling of accomplishment.

July 18, 1944 - Cuxhaven, Germany. We were awakened at 1:30 A.M. We were

scheduled to bomb Kiel, Germany but the weather prevented bombing Kiel and so the secondary target of Cuxhaven, Germany was bombed instead. Flak was intense but only one B-17 was lost. There were no enemy fighters. Our cameras did not work and the observation from the ball turret we could see severe damage to the factory. This was a long mission but an easy one.

July 24, 1944 - St. Lo, France. This mission was in support of our ground troops and had to be visual and very accurate. The target was saturated with low hanging clouds and all 20 aircraft had to return with bombs aboard. We all made it safely, but with heavy flak damage which surrounded the target area.

July 31, 1944 - Munich, Germany. This mission was a return trip after the July 11th mission. Intelligence informed us that some of the factories we bombed on the 11th had been rebuilt. Five hundred B-17's took part in this mission and we dropped delayed action bombs. They would explode in different sequences and would destroy the whole area. These explosions would take place for six days. Intense flak was encountered in the target area, nine aircraft damaged and two lost, plus one had to ditch in the English Channel. This area was rescued, the water in the channel was so cold you could not survive for very long.

August 2, 1944 - Paris, France. The target was an oil storage facility five miles north of Paris. Twenty six aircraft took part in this raid. There was moderate flak but very accurate. One aircraft took a direct hit knocking out number one engine and radio room controls. It was able to make a safe landing on Normandy Beach. The oil storage was destroyed. We now had air superiority and because of our successful attack on the oil storage and refineries the German aircraft were primarily grounded.

August 7, 1944 - Compienge, France fuel storage. This required visual bombing as our

crew was visual and our bombardier Wade was so accurate we were scheduled for this mission. As usual Wade, our bombardier, was right on target and we destroyed the fuel storage area. We all returned safely with no damage to the aircraft.

August 18, 1944 - St. Dozier, France. This installation was a base for pick-a-back aircraft (ME-109 on top of U-88). The mission was accomplished and we destroyed the target with no flak or fighter opposition. It was a fairly easy day.

We are now given some rest, however we have to fly practice every day to stay sharp. More crews are arriving from the States and so we just stayed alert.

September 13, 1944 - Target is Mainz, Germany. The weather upon departure was good, however over Germany there were clouds, smoke and contrails. A stroke of luck came our way and we saw a marshaling yard (railroad yards in U.S. terms). Also, the clouds seem to disappear and we saved enough bombs to make another run on the primary target and destroy it. It was a very frustrating mission but we returned with all aircraft in good shape.

As we came into range of our air control tower our flight surgeon announced over the radio that Captain Simmond's crew, which was ours, has just completed your last mission in Europe and will soon return to the United States. After we landed at the base and were debriefed it was time to reflect on our stay in England. We were happy and yet sad. As we spoke of the crews we lost who would never have or see their sons or daughters grow up, to see them play baseball and take dancing lessons, there was not a dry eye amongst our crew.

Just a side note, 350,000 served in the 8th Air Force and 26,000 were killed. this is my recollection of the 33 combat missions we flew.

I left England on October 1, 1944 by way of a navy transport ship with 1,500 prisoners of

war. They were all German and spoke no English. We had to guard them in shifts consisting of 24-hours a day. This first night out of the war with Germany had not ended and a stray JU-88 German bomber tried to bomb our ship. We were in convoy with oil tankers and our navy ship was the only one that had guns to protect us. It seemed at first the JU-88 would ram our ship, however the navy crew was an excellent marksman and they fired just one round from the five inch gun and the German JU-88 was history. We were in the North Atlantic and the sea was very rough. The ship would hardly move as the waves were breaking over the bow of the ship. The navy crew was very experienced in rough seas and soon they changed course. There were 23 ships in this convoy and we were 23 days on the sea before landing at New York Harbor. We came right by the Statue of Liberty and what a sight this was to see. After docking in New York and after they unloaded the 1,500 prisoners of war we were allowed to leave the ship. There were buses to take us to Fort Dix, New Jersey. We stayed overnight at Fort Dix and then received a 30 day leave to go home.

I arrived in my hometown of Waverly, New York at about 5:00 A.M. in the morning. I had called home from Fort Dix and said I would be getting a Greyhound bus and would call when I arrived in Waverly. The 30 day leave went by real fast and I had a good time home, but had to report back to an airbase at Richmond, Virginia. There they started the process of reassignment. I went to Amarillo, Texas from Virginia and by then it was close to Christmas so they gave us seven days leave. Travel time was four days but I spent Christmas home. After I returned to Amarillo, Texas they sent me to Chanute Field, Illinois. They were not sure what they were going to do with us and it was now January 1945 and very cold in Illinois. I went to school at Chanute for electrical technician. this school lasted until about the middle of March. They decided it was



time to move and I was sent to Kingman, Arizona for Gunnery School on a B-29 so I could go to the Pacific. The Germans were nearly defeated by now. Six weeks at Kingman and I was sent to Biggs Field in El Paso, Texas for phase training on the B-29's. I was assigned a new crew and we flew everyday. We were nearly trained and ready to go to the Pacific. Then, I was called aside from the crew that I had been training with and told I was grounded and could not fly anymore. There was probably at least 200 of us who had been in Europe and we were told we would not be needed in the Pacific.

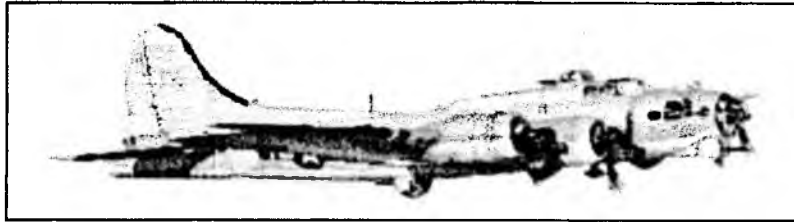
This was the last of June 1945 and that some day we were moved to another part of Biggs Field. The next day we were paid a visit by the President of the United States, Harry Truman. In his speech he told us they had developed a new weapon and he believed it would end the war. We were treated like royalty. We had German prisoners of war that worked in the mess hall and they waited on us like in a restaurant. We had leave every day and went into the City of El Paso, Texas. There was plenty to do as there were lots of beautiful Texas girls. We had some work to do at night because transport planes landed and we had to refuel them and make sure all their needs were met. The new weapon that had been developed was the atomic bomb. They dropped two bombs in early August and the Japanese surrendered on August 14, 1945.

I doubt I would be writing these memoirs if they had not used the A-bomb. They estimated an invasion of Japan would cost 500,000 American troops and would kill 2,000,000 million Japanese. I was discharged from the service on September 28, 1945. I was blessed as I never got a scratch. The one question I still struggle with is why I have been so blessed when the odds were against it and so many did not survive.

I received the following awards: Two Presidential Citations, five Air Medals,

Distinguished Flying Cross, Victory Medal World War II, European-African-Middle East Medal with four Bronze Stars, Conspicuous Service Medal from New York State, Certificate of Recognition from France, and a Good Conduct Medal.

## **94th Bomb Group**



### **Squadrons of the 94th Bomb Group**

331st Bombardment Squadron - Heavy  
332nd Bombardment Squadron - Heavy  
333rd Bombardment Squadron - Heavy  
410th Bombardment Squadron - Heavy

**Assigned 8th AAF: April, 1943**

### **Wing/Command Assignment**

VIII BC, 4 BW, 401 PCBW: 11 May 1943  
VIII BC, 3 BD, 4 CBW 13 Sep 1943  
3 BD, 4 CBW 8 Jan 1944  
3 AD, 20 CBW 1 Jan 1945

### **Combat Aircraft:**

B-17F  
B-17G

### **Stations**

BASSINGBOURN Mid Apr 1943 to 27 May 1943  
EARLS COLNE 12 May 1943 to Jun 1943  
BURY ST EDMUNDS 13 Jun 1943 to 12 Dec 1945

## **Group CO's**

Col. John G. Moore 15 Jun 1942 to 22 Jun 1943  
Col. Frederick W. Castle 22 Jun 1943 to 16 Apr 1944  
Col. Charles B. Dougher 17 Apr 1944 to 15 Mar 1945  
Col. Nicholas T. Perkins 16 Mar 1945 to 3 Jun 1945  
Lt. Col Ernest B. Maxwell 3 Jun 1945 to Late Apr 1945

First Mission: 13 May 1943  
Last Mission: 21 Apr 1945  
Missions: 324  
Total Sorties: 8,884  
Total Bomb Tonnage: 18,924 Tons  
Aircraft MIA: 153

## **Major Awards:**

Two Distinguished Unit Citations: 17 Aug 1943: Operations in Regensburg, and 11 Jan 1944 on Brunswick

## **Early History:**

Activated 15 June 1942 at McDill Field, FL. Nucleus established Pendleton Field, OR, on 29 Jun 1942 and engaged in initial training. Detailed training at Davies-Monthan Field in Arizona between 28 Aug 1942 and 31 Oct 1942 and at Biggs Field, TX, between 01 Nov 1942 and 02 Jan 1943. Final phase training at Pueblo, CO, from Jan - Mar, 1943. The ground element left for Camp Kilmer, NJ on 17 Apr 1943 and sailed on the Queen Elizabeth on 05 May 1943, arriving in Greenock (Scotland) on 11 May 1943.

## **Subsequent History:**

Scheduled for occupational air forces in Germany but plans changed in September 1945. Remained in the United Kingdom during latter part of 1945 flying 'Nickle' Project missions-dropping leaflets over former occupied countries and to displaced persons in Germany. Assigned 1 AD, on 8 Aug 1945. In November 1945 Forty-Five aircraft returned to the US or transferred to other units, and the squadrons were inactivated. Remaining personnel left Bury St. Edmunds on the 11th of December 1945. The group inactivated Camp Kilmer on the 21st of December 1945. Allotted to the US Air Force Reserve and established first as a light bomber group in 1949, and later as a carrier organization flying C-119.

- 1 Westschaffel April 10
- 2 Augsburg " 13
- 3 Berlin " 18
- 4 Weol " 19
- 5 ABBeville " 21
- 6 Hamm " 22
- 7 Friedrichshafen " 23
- 8 Braunschweig " 26
- 9 Metz " 27
- 10 Cherbourg " 28
- 11 Berlin 1924 7
- 12 Berlin " 8
- 13 Brussels " 11
- 14 Ostbrock " 13
- 15 Magdeburg " 28
- 16 Sacst " 31
- 17 Invasion coast June 5

Missions he flew

- 18 Invasion coast June 5
- 19 Nantes " 7
- 20 Mogddes " 11
- 21 Florence " 14
- 22 Paris " 28
- 23 Leipzig Volk 7
- 24 Munich " 11
- 25 Lebranz Mission 74
- 26 Copenhagen " 18
- 27 St. LO " 24
- 28 Munich " 31
- 29 Paris August 2
- 30 Champagne " 7

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Gravel with 15-18 85

Bill 3.5

Paul  
Hend

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Scott Field

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- 1 Westschand FFen APR 10
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1925  
Nacht " 9  
20 Magdeburg 112  
1924 " 14  
Paris " 18  
21 Leipzig " 19  
22 Bonn " 11  
23 Lebernberg " 14  
24 Osnabruck " 16  
25 Wehl " 19  
26 Markt " 21  
27 Invasion coast " 25

