

I was the youngest of four born 1/21/25 and had two sisters, Patricia born 3/17/18 and Virginia born 6/2/19 and one brother Theodore born 2/13/22. I was actually born at 49 Winter Street on Buffalo's west side between Massachusetts and Hampshire Sts. The street was only one block long. My siblings all were sick at the time with whopping cough. The family doctor was Carl Frost who advised my mother after they were married that she shouldn't have any children as the delivery channel namely her pelvic area was not large enough for a safe delivery. Needless to say she delivered four of us without any serious implications.

I was baptised at The Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary Church on Herkimer St. 2/8/25 by Rev. James Carter My Godmother was my mother's youngest sister Elizabeth Shifferens and my Godfather was my mother's brother-in-law married to Gertrude Shifferens, Leroy Gethoefer.

Although geographically we lived in Nativity parish we all attended Annunciation grammar and high school located on Lafayette Ave. and Parkdale Ave. Ted went to St. Joseph Collegiate for one year then ended up graduating from Burgard Vocational with a degree in printing.

My mother told us so many stories of how they use to watch from their front porch which faced Richmond Ave. and viewed the carriages on wheels or sleigh going down Richmond. She was only a teenager when the Pan-American Exhibition took place which was only blocks away from 17th. St. and what a sight that was with Buffalo (The City of Lights) showing off their great splendor as one of The cities of the Great Lakes with a great future for our country. She also remembered the assignation of President McKinley and the swearing in of the new President Grover Cleveland at the home located on Delaware Ave. at North Street. An interesting anti-dote: Many years later probably about 1945 this home became a popular restaurant named Catherine Laurences. The family had gathered there as a place for a Christmas celebration with my mothers sisters Genevieve, Mary and Elizabeth as our hosts. I had a movie camera which was an 8mm Eastman and mounted on a light bar with 4 high wattage bulbs, when I turned it on for a few pictures it blew the main fuze in the restaurant and the whole place went dark. That was the beginning and end of producer Larry Paul. Today this is a national historic home.

I can remember visiting my great aunt Susan Shifferens (sister of Grandpa William Shifferens). She lived on Main St near Allen. There we listened to the instrument which was really the forerunner of the radio called a crystal set. This was the state of the art of wireless communications of that time and was in the early 30's. You wore ear phones and had to locate a station with a wand probe only a few inches long and somehow reacted with a crystal on a little base.

You had to wiggle this probe around on this crystal until you located a transmitting station. programs were few and far between. I seem to remember hearing a program "Amos and Andy" which was later produced on the more modern device called a radio. The reception was terrible with so much static you could hardly identify what was being said. This was the crystal set not the radio. I do remember when my parents bought our first radio made by Stuart Warner. The clarity was much improved even though broadcasting was made on a low frequency station. We could now listen to broadcast originating from all over the world. I remember hearing the installation of Pope Pius XI all the way from Rome. Many of our families entertaining hours were spent listening to such shows as Jack Armstrong, the All American Boy, Fibber Magee and Molly, George Burns and Gracie Allen, Major Bowes, Intersantium and many more. This indeed was most families primary form of home entertainment.

I don't remember too much about the "Great Depression and Prohibition, but do recall many a night when eating our dinner, someone would knock at our back door looking for work to earn money for food. My parents never turned them away, not with money but always shared some of our food. My dad, who had a retail stationery store along with an engraving and printing business was located on 47 Allen Street. He had a partner, Elmer Shrader who did the engraving and dad was the printer. The depression put them out of business in 1933. Dad moved a printing press to our basement at home on 49 Winter St. He would go out selling printing such as wedding invitations, letterheads etc. during the day and come home and print orders with my mother's help in the evening. This was the way they survived through the depression years.

My dad had a model T Ford, the first car that I remember, it must have been in the late 20's, it was a beauty. The horsepower was so low that one time we took a trip to visit one of his brothers and sister-in-law. That was Joseph and Harriet Paul and they had two children Louise and Bernard. Ithica was about 135 miles away and it took most of the day to get there. Their house was at the top of a hill. In order to get up the hill we all got out of the car but dad. Then when he mastered the hill we all clapped his great accomplishment. When we would stop for gas, whoever was sitting in the front seat would have to get out. That was because the gas tank was under the front seat and the attendant measured with a wooden rule to see how much was left in the tank. Talk about sitting on a bomb! I don't think the car could travel much faster than about 35 mph. Of coarse it had no radio, no air conditioning, no power steering, no cruise control, just a basic automobile and did we think we were classy.

I also remember our street lights on Winter St. They were natural gas and every day around dusk a man would come around and light them and in the morning return to turn off the gas.

Our toys and games were all "state of the art", We played kick the can, stone school, nip, tap the ice box, marbles. hop scotch and even took roller skates apart and made a scooter monted on a wooden crate, out of them. We also played baseball without a bat and ball. You used jack knives and flipped it in the air on your front steps and depending how it landed would determine whether you got a 1st. 2nd, 3rd. base hit or a home run. All were very expensive and sophisticated. Can you imagine playing for hours and without even a computer to dial up. But it was lots of fun and I don't ever remember any of my buddies saying they were bored.

Another thing I'll never forget is our home furnaces. Most everyone used coal. If you were lucky the coal truck would come into your driveway and use a shute to get it into the basement. We had no driveway and they had to dump it into the street then with a wheel barrow bring it to a window and pour it in. Then of coarse the burnt coal would have to be shoveled out of the furnace into metal buckets and carried out to the curb for pick up. Boy was I ever happy when we got a gas furnace and all you had to do is go over to the thermostat and give it a flick. Wow that was truly one of the great inventions of the century.

Once in a while you hear someone mention the "Good old days" well I'm one of those people that like getting into my comfortable car with either heat or air conditioning and the radio playing some beautiful Fm music while the cruise control takes over the engine settings. Also the vacuum cleaner, entertainment center, toaster, micro oven, automatic washer and dryer, TV and on and on. Let's all appreciate what we have at this point and time. I wonder what someone reading these notes maybe 50 or 100 years from now will be saying? Wow!!

I graduated from high school in June of 1942 just six months after Pearl Harbor was attacked by the Japanese and entered Canisius College in the fall of '42. My college days were short lived as congress lowered the draft for men from 21 to 18 years of age. So by January of '43 I was eligible to be drafted. Rather than wait for the draft I elected to join the Army Air Force

I was sworn in at the Old Custom House on Elm St. March 31, 1943. I was ordered to Nashville, Tenn. for the Air Force classification Center. Here they gave both written and oral examinations to see where each potential cadet was best qualified and what there desires were in the program. I had a few days before leaving for Nashville. When the time came to leave from the old New York Central Terminal, besides my own family minus Ted who was already serving in the Coast Guard and away, there were the Shifferens aunts and a Oblate priest Fr. Gerald Sullivan. He had been a long time friend of all

the Shifferens. He gave me a small statue (about 4" tall) of Our Lady of Victory and suggested that I carry it with me and that Our Lady would keep me out of trouble. Well I did. Every combat mission she was in the upper pocket of my flying suit and believe me I called on her often. I still have her and cherish her very much. This was my first train ride and my first time away from home outside of a few days at the beach and boy scout camp.

At Nashville I had qualified for pilot training. I was assigned to the Southeast Training Command of the Army Air Force. My first step was Pre-Flight at the University of the Air at Maxwell Field located at Montgomery, Alabama. This first phase of pilot training was, as the name implies, ground school for preparation for flying. The courses were, meteorology, theory of flight, airframe and engine, morris code, aircraft identification, navigation and military law. It was very demanding both physically and mentally. The AAF had compacted a course of two years into about ten months because of the war and big demand placed for pilots. I loved every minute of it and was my first major challenge as an individual on my own. The cadet class system was in force at all levels of the program. We had one month as under classman and one as upper classman at each stage of school. There was a lot of pressure and if you weren't prepared, you would wash out of the program.

Upon finishing Pre-Flight we were moved to Avon Park, Florida to attend an Army AF Contract School (Primary) at Lodwick Aviation military Academy. This facility was located in the middle of the Florida peninsula just south of where Disney World was to be built. In fact we flew in that area many times on cross country training flights. Here we finally got into the nuts and bolts of flying. Six men were assigned to an instructor. We had an old bush pilot civilian who was probably in his 60's. He could make that biplane just about do anything, it was a Stearman PT17 trainer. He was extremely good and a tough seasoned aviator. In 65 hours from never in a cockpit to acrobatics and many precision maneuvers. His name was Thomas Bowe.

After our Primary flight training we were ready for a bigger and more complex plane. We were assigned to Cochran Air Base at Macon, Georgia. This was called Basic flying school and our plane was a Vultee BT13A a single engine 440 horse power low wing, 2 position prop plane. Here we would learn how to use wing flaps, changeable prop settings and night flying. Our instructor was now an Air Force person, Lt. McLeod. Very good and patient. I logged 75 more hours of flying and was then ready for Advanced Flying School.

When we finished Basic school we were asked if we wanted to go on to either single engine or twin engine advance flying school. I choose twin for two reasons, first if you get injured in a fighter plane you are all alone and no one to help, and if you chose to pursue flying as a career after the war, multi engine time is needed for airline pilots and this was a good way to build up time.

I was assigned to Moody Field at Valdosta, Georgia. It was located almost on the Florida state line. The plane we would be training in was a Beechcraft AT10 and my instructors' name was Lt. Art Lloyd. The AT10 was an intro to multi engine aircraft and introduced several more gadgets on the way to high performance combat aircraft. Such as retractable landing gear, radio compasses, dual flight controls, etc. We would also learn and received our instrument flying certificate. This required many hours in a Link Trainer which was a fixed simulated plane used solely for the instruction of instrument procedures and techniques. It was a great teaching tool but a long cry from the multi million dollar flight simulators of today.

Well graduation was here and on February 7, 1944 received my pilots wings and commission from Moody Field, Ga. After graduation we had earned our first furlough since leaving home. We all had plane reservations for returning home after graduation but they announced that they were all cancelled as we had no priority. So most of us after the ceremony went down to to small train station and took the first train going north. What a ride, so many families were there that I didn't get a seat all the way home. It was a long ride to say the least. But what a wonderful time home and seeing everyone for almost one year.

After earning my wings and commission my first assignment was to Mac Dill Field at Tampa Florida where I was assigned as a co-pilot on a B17 which was a 4 engine heavy bomber. Our 1st. pilots' name was Bill Meyran and was from Los Angeles California, he was 24. Our Navigator was Warren Davdson from Boston and was about six months older than I at 20. Our Bombardier was Bernie White from Rochester, N Y and was 22. Bill Tull was our flight engineer and top gunner, radio operator was Ted Barton, waste gunners were Vic Pietroski and Melvin Brown, belly turret gunner was Jack Kennedy and the tail gunner was Tony Perry.

It was very exciting getting our own crew and flying together, because I was the youngest crew member they called me junior. We became very close and felt like we had complete trust and were very comfortable with the qualifications and camaraderie we shared.

We transitioned into our new flying bird in about 3 months and were given extensive combat readiness besides. At the conclusion of this training we were ordered to Hunter Field at Savannah Georgia to pick up our own plane and fly it over to England. After we were there a few days they cancelled our orders and sent us to Camp Kilmer which was in New Brunswick New Jersey. We didn't know why the change but we were now going to England by ship. My dad came to the camp to wish me farewell even though it was for only a few hours. On June 15, 1944 we were trained to Jersey City and took a ferry to Brooklyn passing the Statue of Liberty which was quite a feeling. We boarded a troop ship named "USS Bilie Mitchell." This ship had approx. 5000 men aboard mostly infantry and about 500 air force. We had a state room only there were about 16 of us packed like sardines, but a heck of a lot better than bunking in the hole of the ship with several hundred bunk mates.

When we woke up in the morning we were at sea and after going on deck we find ourselves as part of a huge convoy of about 100 ships. Our flagship was the heavy cruiser USS Cleveland and had several destroyers and other naval escorts. It was quite a sight to see. We were allowed to stay on deck during day light hours but had to go below deck when the sun set. The Atlantic Ocean was fair game for the German U boats and it was very nerve racking knowing we could be a target at any time. We had evacuation drills almost every day just in case. We finally found out the reason our orderd were changed from flying our own plane over was that the invasion had begun in Normandy and they didn't want us arriving in the midst of this hugh military operation. Affer two weeks of this luxury cruise we find ourselves going down the Irish Sea and to Liverpool England. We had to sit in the harbor for about a day waiting for the red carpets to be layed for debarkation. We weren't welcomed by any royalty but did have a bit of cheers from some General from the United Kingdom.

We were also welcomed by the Red Cross with a cup of coffee and doughnuts just as we were sent off from NYC. The depot at Liverpool had its roof blown off during the Battle of Britain and gave the first glimpse of a combat stricken country. This county had already endured many months of extensive bombing from the German Lufwaffe.

We boarded trains ready for us for a ride to Stone, England. This was a replacement depot and we arrived at 11:30pm and it was still daylight because of the different longitude and it seemed so strange. The town itself after night fall was in complete darkness as was every town, village and city in England. The towns were very English and some how the calendar was if it turned back a hundred years, Homes and small shopes had several chimneys because they did not have central heating like most at home. Many roofs were thatched and certainly made a different look than we were use to.

The replacement depot was an area to indoctrinate us with England and the many differences we would be encountering. The monetary system was the most difficult. Going from dollars and cents to pounds, shillings and pences was rather strange and never became normal for most of us. Driving on the left side of the road was even more unusual even though most of us wouldn't actually drive a vehicle while we were in this country. At night the head lights on the cars were just a slit and you really had to be careful where you were walking. We also got our ration card as we would need it for purchasing such as treats, candy, toiletries, cigarettes etc. We could buy American cigarettes for only 5 cents at the PX's over there. In some cases we could get them for nothing as gifts from organizations such as Rotary Clubs, etc.

We were only at Stone three days when we were transferred to Bovington which was about 20 miles NNW of London. Here we would get some real good training about British navigational procedures, radio communications or the lack there of, land and sea air rescue and most beneficial the experiences of many men who had finished their tour and passed their expertise on to us. It started to hit home where we were and what are we getting into, what's with this word called Combat wow!

The base being so near London had alerts almost daily for Buzz Bombs. The Germans aimed them at London but a few of them made it past the city and would fall almost anywhere so you would never know when one might appear. There were bomb shelters where ever you may be or you would just take cover where you could find it. Going into town was a real experience even besides the buzz bomb threat. There was so much to see and take in, it was too bad this wasn't a nice grand tour.

We stayed at Bovington about two weeks and did learn an awful lot in such a short time. On July 17th we left there as we had our permanent assignment to join the 398 Bombardment Group which was located at Nuthampstead which was about 35 miles north of London and 15 miles south of Cambridge. We were also assigned to the 603rd squadron. Each field or bomb group had 4 squadrons of 12 B17's. The squadrons were dispersed around the field in different locations so as not to be a large target for enemy air craft. We lived in Nissan huts which reminded you of a large barrel cut in half and laid on its side. There were 4 officers from 4 different crews living in each hut or a total of 16 men in each hut. Unfortunately they forgot to give us adjoining baths and had to use a common one in the middle of the complex, which was fun getting to in the middle of the night, especially when there wasn't any hot water or pot belly stove going. They actually weren't bad, not exactly like The Radison but a hell of a lot nicer than the infantry soldiers had. The enlisted men lived in similar quarters but in a different area.

We had to walk to just about everywhere on the base as they also forgot the limos. We walked thru a wheat field to get to the Mess Hall, The Officers Club and The Base Chapel. The ordinance or bomb storage was on the other side of the field and our squadron room and briefing room were next to the control tower.

After meeting our squadron commander Lt. Col. Gene Miller and the other personnel in the ready room we were assigned our B17. Her name was "Stormy Weather" and already had flown on about a dozen combat missions. she also had a large Q as a call sign, so I preferred to call her "Queenie" We also meet the ground crew chief and other mechanics that took care of our "Queenie" A nice bunch of guys and people we will be entrusting our lives on. Most often these men worked all night just to get everything in good shape for the next mission. When we took off they went to bed as our missions started around 5 in the morning and generally didn't get back until late afternoon.

The next couple of weeks were time of meeting adjustments and adopting to so many new things.

Our squadron complex as was the whole air field was constructed in the middle of farm land. It was slightly rolling in spots (not the runway) but everything from vegetables to wheat had grown here. I found out some forty years later that one of the farm families lived near the end of one of our runways. They would watch us take off early in the morning, one plane after another for the wild blue heading for targets throughout Germany and occupied Germany. One of these men along with his wife took Marion and I as their personal touring guide not only around the base but around the area. We visited them on our 40th wedding anniversary and they couldn't have been kinder and more appreciative of what we did for them and England as a whole. Their names were Peggy and David Wells and were presently living right on the spot where our base offices were and a stones through from our squadron area. We also learned about two weeks after we had made that trip that David died suddenly from a heart attack.

Getting to know our fellow crew members was also a great experience. They were from all parts of the country and basically ranged from about 19 to 30 years old with about 75% being 25 and younger.

Practice missions were common, learning radio procedures, navigational do's and don'ts and just learning more about our own crews qualifications and personalities.

Our base Commanding Officer was Col. Frank Hunter and an easy man to know and respect. He was killed on a mission about one week after I finished my tour of combat missions. He was a graduate of West Point and lived in the D.C. area. I meet his wife at several reunion meeting in the later years. A very lovely lady indeed, her name was Evelyn and was here in Buffalo when we hosted the 398th. Bomb Group reunion in 1993.

Well my first mission arrived on Aug. 3, 1944. I will enter here the exact words from my diary describing the day. "I finally had my first mission today. It was really a wow of a one too. It was a freight yard at Saarbrucken in Germany proper. I was nervous on the whole trip wondering what there was ahead of me. We got quite a bit of flak (anti-aircraft fire) which was very accurate over the target, there I was really scared, it was the first time in my life that someone was trying to get my neck and by no means a pleasant feeling. We really hit the target beautifully making us very happy. No fighter attacked, we dropped 12 - 500lb general purpose bombs from 27,000 feet in a 36 plane formation."

Friday, August 4th was mission #2. The target was the experimental jet factory at Peenamunda, Germany. We had to fly up over the North Sea, Denmark then hitting the target which was east of Kiel well into Germany. This factory was where the Germans had developed the Buzz Bomb and V2 rockets that were constantly bombing London and other parts of England. We didn't know it at the time but Germany was also working on the atomic bomb at this location. I have felt since being there that we had a real involvement in preventing Germany from developing this bomb. If they had done so sooner, the end of the war could have been much different. We were in fact a real part of history.

The North Sea sky was beautiful, full of 8th Air Force planes that added in the hundreds. We didn't encounter any enemy fighters and we dropped 5 - 1000lb. general purpose bombs from 24,000 feet from our 36 plane formation. Two planes were lost.

Mission #3 was next day August 5th. A real quick beginning of my tour having 3 missions in a row. Today's target was an oil refinery near Hanover, Germany which was right in the heart of enemy territory. The mission was very successful and we had no flak or enemy fighters, Dropped 20 - 250lb. general purpose bombs from 22,000 feet from our 36 plane formation.

The next day was Sunday August 6th.

I do not intend to bore you with a daily account of my horrendous combat missions but will try to comment on different happenings outside the heavy stuff and just highlight the more important details. Well we finally had a break and were given a 2 day pass. It was great just doing nothing but the 3 r's rest, read and relax. Some of the fellows went to London but the rest of us decided to do nothing. A couple of the crew got a scotty dog and brought it back with them. We called it Scrub, as in scrub (cancel) a mission.

On Tuesday Aug. 8th our crew was not assigned to fly this day. We were disappointed as our Bomb Group went on a mission supporting our own troops and they thought it would be a milk run but turned out to be a bad one. We lost 4 planes and the ones returning had caught a lot of damage, so we were happy we didn't fly after all.

Saturday August 12th was mission #4 and was an airfield south of Paris. We flew over the English Channel and Cherbourg, France flying over many of the towns where major battles had been fought. My first view of Paris was clear, I even saw the Eiffel Tower in the middle of town. We didn't get much flak over the target and no fighter attacks either. We dropped 38 100lb G.P.(general purpose) bombs from 25,000 feet.

At this point in the war after successfully landing in France and gradually pushing the German army back in all directions we mainly hit bridges, marshalling yards and roads all escape routes for the enemy. For 24 hours our heavy, medium and light bombers blasted the entire area. We dropped 6 1,000lb GP bombs from 22,000 feet, 2 planes were lost.

On our next mission Aug. 15 we combined with the RAF and bombed Luftwaffe airfields in Germany, France, Belgium and Holland. We dropped 4 1,000lb GP and 4 455 lb incendiary bombs from 28,000 feet. On oxygen 6 hours.

On Saturday Aug. 19th we had a 48 hour pass and went to London. Very exciting to see the old and historic and battered area of the city. Subways had cots the remnants of the air battle of London. So much to see. We stayed at the Imperial Hotel and went to the Red Cross for supper then on to The Miami Club which was a very popular club for American GI's. The next day we went to the Cumberland Hotel which is located at the southern end of Hyde Park. It was strange seeing anti-aircraft guns on top the Marble Arch entrance to Hyde Park and AA guns throughout the park. We took in the movie "White Cliffs of Dover" at the Empire Theatre then had supper at The Blue Lagoon and stayed for the evening. I bought a battle jacket while in London the ones made famous by Gen. Eisenhower, they were very comfortable and we wore them most of the time off our base. We also heard several Buzz bombs overhead and made us very nervous. After all we were suppose to be relaxing. We finally headed back to our base and were tired from all the ventures.

By the end of August, the 30th to be exact I flew my 10th mission to Kiel Germany and the submarine pens. The clouds were solid under us or an undercast. It was strange as we couldn't see anything on terra firma, we had to bomb by radar through the clouds. Because bombing missions before which carried explosive bombs were not effective because of the bomb proof construction of the pens. The higherarchy of the air force decided to use incendiary bombs to burn out the installations. We dropped 8 500lb bombs from 26,000 feet and 36 plane formation. Because we could not see the target we had no idea of what damage we had done. However we learned on a later date that we did cause a lot of damage to the facility.

My 11th mission was to an oil refinery at Ludwigshafen Germany on Sept. 3rd. We went back to the same target on Sept 8th and 9th making it No 12 and 13. This was a large industrial area on the Rhine river and had many targets of importance to Mr. Hitler. On the 10th of Sept. we hit an aircraft assembly plant at Stuttgart Germany. On the 13th we hit an oil refinery at Merseburg, Germany which is just west of Leipzig. On the 19th we hit a marshalling yard at Hamm and on the 25th another marshalling yard at Frankfurt. Another railroad marshalling yard at Osnabruck on the 26th. and another at Cologne on the 27th, On the 30th we hit another rail yard at Munster, this was my 20th mission. We were constantly trying to block supplies to the German troops and hasten the end of the war.

Sunday October 1st began the start of our Flak leave. Each crew when they hit this number of combat missions flown had earned a week break for the head and nerves. Bill, Warren, Bernie and myself decided to go to Scotland. We went to London to get the train which left at 10pm and arrived at Edinburgh at 7am on Monday the 2nd. That day we went to the Edinburgh Castle which was built by Mary Queen of Scotts and meet a gal named Margaret Collie. Made a date to go to a birthday party the next day. The next day we toured around the city, very beautiful and very old. That eve I went to the party with Midge. it was a lu-lu but Midge was OK.

On Wed. Oct. 4th we went horse back riding and it was beautiful. We were quite high over the city and saw a great panorama of Edinburgh, lots of fun even though I hadn't had too much experience riding especially a Scottish horse. I don't think he understood our American dialect. That eve went dancing with Midge and had a good time. The next day we just went to a show and took it easy in the evening.

On Friday we took a train back to London and just went out to the Miami Club for some fun. Went to a show on Saturday and then back to our base on Sunday the 8th.

Our crew was not scheduled to fly at all the following week. Then a very traumatic day arrived. Bill Myran was asked to become a deputy lead squadron pilot. In the event the lead plane in our squadron was shot down or disabled enough as not be able to lead, the deputy lead would take over as lead. They took Warren, Bernie and myself off the flight so as to have personnel teach the routine of lead ship with lead experience. Their mission was to Cologne Germany. The visibility was bad at take off time and they crashed and the entire crew were killed. This was October 15, 1944. The findings were that they had lost power in one engine and with a full load of gas and bombs they never got off the ground. This day was Bill Meyran's 25th birthday and his last words when he left our hut that morning was, "boys this is my lucky day" as his grandfather had left him \$100,000 in trust and he was to inherit the first \$25,000 on this his 25th birthday.

Warren, Bernie and I were devastated. A week earlier we were in Edinburgh having a relaxing time and celebrating that we were better than half finished with our combat tour. Certainly a major example of being always prepared to meet our maker. It was also a sample of fate, when our day comes to be called home by our heavenly father, nothing will change it, but if it isn't your day, it isn't so don't go through life worrying about it.

We weren't sure what to do regarding notifying our families as our parents were corresponding with each other. When Bill's parents were notified by the Air Force that he was killed in action they would probably get in touch with our parents to get more information. Because of mail censorship we just couldn't write and tell them what happened. So we decided to telegraph them that we were well and safe hoping that they would get the connection. Well that all did happen and our parents were on pins and needles trying to fill the blanks. Within a few days we decided to write and tell them as little as we could but assuring them that we were OK.

On Tuesday, October 17, 1944 the boys were buried at the American armed forces cemetery called Madingly at Cambridge. It was a dark and rainy day and several other men were amongst those also buried. Their graves were dug by German prisoners of war. To say this was a very sad day would be the under statement of the war. Years later in fact May of 1989 Marion and I visited the cemetery which was truly beautiful. The pictures of the cemetery along with others will be found in our trip to Ireland and England photo album that we took on our 40th anniversary trip.

After the tragic crash and funeral we gathered our wives and were just anxious to complete our combat tour. Our squadron CO formed a new crew with the remnants of other crews with similar problems. A pilot named Ernest Spitzer was made our first pilot because he was 25 and I was only 19 and we

both had about the same B17 time. Ernie agreed that we could split the 1st. pilot time because of my 500 or so hours as co-pilot. The rest of the crew were a mix of others who still had missions to complete.

On Oct. 21st. Bernie (our Bombardier) was on a practice mission with another crew and was injured when his plane had a fire and they crashed on landing. He was very fortunate as the front of the plane was smashed and he actually walked out through the front nose section. He ended up with several cracked ribs and a bad cut on his forehead. He was in the hospital for a couple of weeks so he fell behind Warren and I as far as completed missions were concerned

On October 28th we had the first combat mission with the new crew. Ernie and I got along very well and had no real problems adjusting with our new crew mates. This was my 22nd mission.

On Oct. 30, mission 22 I felt very feverish most of the flight and at its completion went to the flight surgeon and complained that I should be grounded. After taking my temp and checking me out he put me to bed with a temp of 102 and a tonsil infection.

Things went along fairly normal (whatever that is) until Tues, Nov. 21. It was my 25th mission and by far my worse. Our target was a synthetic oil refinery at Merseburg, Germany. The clouds went up to 30,000 ft. we had dense persistent contrails, the flak was dense and accurate and 40 enemy FW-190 attacked us from head on in mass formation. Nine planes in our formation were shot down and we had to fly all the way back to our base from the middle of Germany with luckily a couple of P51 fighters that escorted us all the way.

Allen Ostrom our group public relations and Flak News editor wrote a very complete article on this mission in a publication he did of our group called "398th Bomb Group REMEMBRANCES" If you have a handkerchief handy you can check this My worse mission out for more details. otherwise go to next page.

The next several missions went along without any serious consequences until Christmas Eve day. It was mission 33. The ground war had been going very bad for the Allies with Hitler pulling a counter offense in Belgium. This was called the "Battle of the bulge." The entire 8th Air Force was shut down for several days because of bad weather. But high command ordered a maximum effort mission to help support our ground forces. This meant that every airplane available to fly would participate in a huge effort of supporting our troops. The only problem was that our weather was still horrible. We lost two planes taking off before our turn came. They never became air borne and crashed at the end of the run way. We never took off with such poor visibility. After forming our group in the air, we proceeded to our target at Coblenz Germany where we received some very accurate flak over the target. We lost one engine due to enemy fire but were able to get home OK. The only problem was that after all this, our air field was still socked in with the bad weather. We proceeded to land at another 8th AF base about 24 miles from ours. After debriefing we were driven back to our own field in personnel carriers. It was so icy that after such a bad day on the mission itself, I thought we would be killed on the bad roads. We did reach our base about 9pm Christmas Eve, What a Christmas present. I have always appreciated the peacefulness of Christmas ever since.

The last mission finally came on Wednesday the 17th of January 1945. It was the marshalling yards at Paterborn, Germany. Fortunately it was a real Milk Run, with no flak or fighters. Oddly enough the name of the plane we flew on the last mission was "Dodit". What more could be appropriate. I was so happy that coming in on the final approach I levelled off too high and made probably the worse landing that I made since flying. So I was able to finish my combat tour four days before my 20th birthday. Hurray I found out many years later that I was one of the youngest pilots of a B17 in the entire 8th Air Force.

So in review of these events I can sum it up this way. First mission was August 3, 1944 and the 35th was January 17, 1945. Our plane alone dropped 194,000 lbs of bombs. We were part of the largest air force ever assembled then and up to this writing in July 2003. No question the biggest and fastest growing up I have done in my life time. Scariest too. I had lost many men that I trained with and grown to love as a brother. They will always be in my prayers of thanksgiving for the happiness I have received because of their sacrifice.

As you can imagine, I kept a diary of my experiences in the 8th Air Force. As my family will well attest, this comes as no surprise. I have a hard time remembering what month it is let known date, time and specific names etc. From here on I am flying by the seat of my pants as we used to say in flying school.

There are many pictures that are in my photo album that my dear mother collected while in the service that are pertinent to my Air Force experiences. May I also recommend that you use the "398th Bomb Group REMEMBRANCERS" Book that I refereed to regarding our mission to Merseburg on Nov. 21, 1944. This book has much information about our Bomb Group from its inception in Rapid City North Dakota to deactivation in May of 1945.

After completion of my combat tour I just waited for orders to return to the States. One of the first things I did was give our chaplain Fr. Walter Sullivan an offering for Masses of thanksgiving for my safe completion of this tour. Secondly I informed my family via V-mail which was a common way that we corresponded to our homes and friends. This email is also in my photo album. All it said was, "I'm Finished", with the date and my signature. What feeling.

It took only about a week to get orders. I was to fly home, Halluah and was to leave from Preswick Scotland. The date was about the 5th of February 1945. We Left early via Air Transport Command DC4 (4 engine transport) and had our 3 meals in 3 different countries. Breakfast in Iceland, lunch in New Fondland and dinner in New York. How's that for an interesting day. Two weeks going over and 17 hours coming home. We landed at Laguadia air port and were to report to Fort Tutton to get additional orders. There were four of us and we decided to go into Manhattan and get a steak dinner first. We hadn't had one in many a moon. We asked the waitress to bring 4 of the largest steaks in the house. She responded sadly that it was meatless Tuesday. So much for that idea.

The happy news was that we got orders for a three weeks leave, from Feb. 13th to March 9th. 1945. One to go wherever we wanted and the other to be a guest of the Air Force at the Ritz Carlton Hotel in Atlantic City, N.J. Wow, who ever thought the military services would be like that?

After informing my family that I was on my way home, I got a train at Grand Central (as getting a flight without a priority was impossible) So happily about 8 hours later arrived at the New York Central terminal where I had left about two years earlier. It was great seeing all my family there to greet me. They were so excited I got a bloody nose from all the greetings. I might add the only blood I shed since seeing them after all my combat missions.

Needless to say this was a great home coming and had a wonderful stay at home with family and friends. I even was guest speaker at the West Side Businessman Ass'n and Kawanis Club.

The stay at the Ritz Carlton was something else, a real red carpet treatment from a very grateful country. It was unbelievable. While at Atlantic City we had our first physical exam. I learned that everything was alright except that I had developed an enlarged heart. This was attributed to being on full oxygen for so many hours and days. But the good news was they said it should be back to normal after a few weeks. I never had any problem since that time. I also learned that I was transferred from combat duty to the Air Force Air Transport Command and had to report to Gore Field at Great Falls, Montana. My new assignment was to ferry some of our fighter planes from the US to Russia. This was the 7th. Ferrying Group

After I was at Gore Field a week or so I had to go to Jackson Mississippi to be checked out in P47, P51's and the Bell P63's, fighters. This was exciting and great news as the rumor was that pilots and other crew members from the 8th, may be transferred to the Japanese theater of war and fly B29's in the 20th Air Force. Besides that I hadn't had a chance to fly fighter planes. I had flown many other single engine planes but not high performance fighters. I did finish my ground school training and did get to fly the P47 but unfortunately didn't get to fly those beautiful P51's or P63's. The fortunate news was the war had ended both in Europe and Japan and all orders were cancelled. So I headed back to Montana to wait for discharge. This was done by point system, Those who had combat time would get so many points and points for time in service, etc.

We basically had nothing to do but wait for our number to appear to go home. That's when I learned how to play golf, and we got paid for it besides.

On October 12, I wired my family to take the service flag out of the window their son was coming home. What a happy time it was.

When I did arrive home my brother Ted was there along with the rest of the family. I neglected to mention that when I was at Great Falls my sister Ginny was married to Ellery Niederpruem. I got a short furlough at the time to get home for the wedding. I couldn't get home by flying because you still needed a priority so I spent most of my furlough on a train.

Before going into the Air Force I was not going with any one particular girl. But time and distance changed my mind and a gal I had always had a special focus on and who went through Annunciation grammar and high school with started dating seriously from New Years Eve 1945 on. We fell in love very naturally and fast. Her name was Marion Kelly and my whole family loved her from the start.

After getting adjusted to civilian life I got back into Canisius College to finish my degree in accounting. My dad asked Ted and I if we would be interested in opening a retail stationery and printing co. with him. Neither of us had any plan outside of getting my degree so we said that sounded like a great idea.

A few weeks went by in planning just what and where we would locate. We decided to form a partnership. Ted and I had saved \$1,000. each while in the service and our dad threw in his printing press for his share in the new venture.

We opened a retail store on the corner of Main St. and Florence Ave. March 16, 1946. Our dad was the outside salesman, Ted had graduated from Burgard Vocational with his expertise in the printing field so he took over the printing end and I with my accounting became store manager.

We were quite successful but needed to expand as Ted and I wanted to get married and we couldn't support a family on the volume we were doing.

My other sister Pat was married September 5, 1946 to Francis Sheehan who also was a graduate of Annunciation High School. They went together for several years.

My brother Ted married Molly Johnston on June 26, 1948 and Marion and I were married July 9, 1949.

We opened a store at Central Park Shopping Center in 1958 but it only lasted a few years and we had gradually shifted our direction to the school market. We decided to close Central Park and change our Transitown location drastically focusing on educational material and down play the social stationery. We opened this new retail version in June of 1975 and renamed it "Paul's Teachers Pet. " I credit my brother Ted with the name. The idea really took off well and gave us a whole new impetus. We enlarged the store two years later and it became very successful.

Three years later my son Larry and wife Carol bought the corporation from Ted and I. They agreed to continue our employment as part of the Buy Sell contract. They went on to increase sales substantially by doubling sales volume in a few short years. Larry has done a wonderful job as CEO.

Unfortunately Carol died in a terrible fire early Christmas morning 2001. It was such a blow to our entire family especially Larry and their kids.

I certainly hope that all who read these comments of my military experiences will stop for a moment and remember my crew members and all who have given their lives for our wonderful country. It is a pleasure to bring these stories to all.

Thank you, and my God continue to bless our country.

MERSEBURG . . . DREADED MERSEBURG

This Target Would Prove Costly To The 398th

When Eighth Air Force veterans gather to talk about Nazi Germany's great cities and their military targets of World War II the conversation usually starts with such well-known names as Berlin, Schweinfurt, Cologne, Munich or Regensburg.

The "MPI" for the bombardiers were initials for ball bearing plants, munitions factories, aircraft assembly plants, bridges or other targets as seen through their Norden bomb sights.

These "Main Point of Impact" targets were bombed as often as the Eighth Air Force Bomber Command at High Wycombe deemed necessary. And at a predicted cost in men and aircraft they held to be "acceptable."

Thus, most combat airmen did not look kindly at seeing the long, colored yarn on the briefing room wall stretching from England, across the Channel, and zig-zagging across Germany to the likes of Berlin and Schweinfurt.

The air war over Germany, begun long before the first American GI was to set foot on Normandy, was to cost over 50,000 young men. Some of these were trained at Rapid City, SD by the original echelons of the 398th Bomb Group during 1943-44.

During the coming year of 1944-45 the 398th would show 760 casualties as killed in action, wounded, prisoners, escapees, liberated or rescued at sea.

And there would be 153 B-17's either shot down, abandoned on the continent or damaged so badly they would never fly again.

The 398th, while being the last of the B-17 groups to join the Eighth Air Force due to its crew training assignment at home, quickly found its share of dread at the mention of certain targets. And the sight of the long yarn.

But it would be a much smaller and lesser known city in eastern Germany that would bring on the deepest "groans" from the men of the 398th when the "target for today" was presented at briefing.

There was something special and ominous in the name "Merseburg."

Dreaded Merseburg.

It would take its toll in men and machines. Even more than Berlin, Munich, Hamburg, Kassel, Ludwigshaven. Or any of the others.

Merseburg, with its Leuna refinery, was an oil target. And ultimately, it was this denial of refined petroleum products that would be so instrumental in ending Hitler's pursuit of world domination.

The 398th went to Merseburg eight times. Six times there were empty spaces at the hardstands when the group came home.

A ring of 400 anti-aircraft guns, twice the number protecting Berlin, had been brought into the Merseburg refinery corridor in a desperate attempt to protect Germany's dwindling petroleum supply.

It was on November 21, 1944 that the 398th, especially the 603rd Squadron, would feel the full impact of this ring of protection. This was the day the German radio would beam the news toward England that Goering's elite FW-190 fighter group, known to American airmen as the "Abbeville Gang," had destroyed an entire squadron of B-17's from the 398th Bomb Group!

"We got them all," was the boast, reminding his listeners that the planes shot down carried a Triangle W on their tail.

The famed Luftwaffe fighters with the yellow spinners — plus four 20 mm. cannons — had found a lone, scattered,

separated 603rd groping in 9/10th weather. The Abbeville boys claimed the entire squadron. It wasn't quite true, but almost.

"Where are the rest?" asked Col. Frank P. Hunter, 398th commanding officer, as he approached Lt. Warren Johnson, leader of the three-ship "squadron" as they returned to Station 131 more than eight hours after taking off that morning.

"There are no 'rest,'" answered Johnson, as he identified his two wingmen, Lt. Ernie Spitzer and Lt. Harold Spangler.

At that point, completely spent after their long ordeal and narrow escape from fighters and flak, the trio was certain they were the only survivors of the day's mission to Merseburg.

Col. Hunter himself, along with Chaplain James Duvall, had stood at the end of the runway early that morning and waved to each crew as the group's 37 Fortresses took to the air starting at 7:51 a.m.

First off was Maj. Robert Templeman, 602 operations officer. He would be mission commander, with Capt. E.D. Scott in the pilot's seat. Next came the 601st, led by Command of Aircraft Capt. Merwin Genung and aircraft commander Robert Brown.

Lt. Ken Hastings, who was soon to receive his captain's bars, was the 603rd leader with pilot Ken Buzza. Others in the 603rd squadron that day were Lieutenants Joe Tarr, Staver Hyndman, Paul Rich, Robert Lehner, Fred Wismer, John Smith, John Aniello, Charles Howell and John Stevens. Plus Johnson, Spitzer and Spangler.

One of the pilots in Major Templeman's 602 formation was Lt. M.E. Boswell, who would retire from the Air Force in 1981 as Lt. Gen. Boswell, deputy vice chief of staff.

Another pilot in the same squadron was Lt. Bill Comstock, who would retire as Colonel Comstock and later become President Comstock of the 398th Bomb Group Memorial Association.

Howell was the last to take off (8:50 a.m.) due to engine problems. He did not slip into his position in the lead element until well over the North Sea.

For all three ships in the lead, plus one each from the low and slot elements, the mission would end at 12:15 p.m. One had to abort before reaching the IP when caught by a lucky flak hit, one had to find his own way home after being crippled by a flak burst, and two sustained enough flak damage to be forced into crash landings in France and Belgium.

It was in the area of Osnabruk that hints of things to come began to appear. First off, the leader's VHF radio went out, limiting his contact with the wing and division leaders. Weather also was becoming a factor, as the heavy clouds and contrails at the prescribed bombing altitude of 25,000 feet were making formation flying difficult and hazardous.

And the German anti-aircraft had made a lucky, albeit critical, hit on the B-17 being flown by Aniello. He was on his first mission. J. Gordon Blythe, who was Buzza's regular co-pilot, was in the right seat with Aniello when flak caught one engine. Blythe was able to feather properly, but when they discovered that half of their oxygen system also had been taken out by the flak burst, they decided to drop from the formation and return home.

It was now obvious that the weather was becoming "impossible."

Hastings and Buzza, in the 603 high squadron lead, had

trouble keeping Templeman's lead squadron in sight. Templeman ordered the group to "keep climbing" in hopes that they would break into clearer skies.

The 603rd broke out at 29,500 feet . . . all alone. The 601st and 602nd were nowhere to be seen. And to add even further complications to the critical situation, Hastings had lost radio contact with the group. Then more electrical problems.

Radar navigator Irv Laufer, a decorated veteran from the Italian campaign, reported that his radar had been blowing fuses. He had only one left and he was saving this for the run from the IP to the target.

Meanwhile, unbeknownst to the 398th, the other groups in the wing had dropped to a lower altitude to find clearer flying weather.

And now another from the 603rd was missing. Smith, with an ailing engine, couldn't keep up in the push for more altitude and had drifted out of sight. Luckily, he caught on with another group on the Merseburg run and tagged along as a grateful straggler.

Now nearing the IP at Nordhausen, still alone and with 11 still in a reasonable formation, the 603rd pressed on toward Merseburg. Now well within the ring of 400 guns, the sky began taking on an eerie, dark form as the 88's exploded in mass profusion.

"We could hear the flak burst and smell the gun powder," said one flyer. "Spent flak rained down on the planes like hail on a tin barn."

Stevens was the next victim of the flak barrage. No. 1 engine was hit, which feathered nicely. But when No. 2 went out and could not be feathered, the Fort began disappearing in the clouds below. This descent continued for three hours as Stevens and co-pilot Iz Rovinsky fought to keep their aircraft in the air while heading for friendly territory.

"We dropped the ball turret and every possible loose nut and bolt in hopes of saving her," said Stevens. "But finally, we had to belly in some 30 miles southeast of Paris."

Stevens recalled that "we flew those final hours at 110 MPH indicated, with No. 3 and 4 engines at 52 inches HG and 2600 RPM."

Engineer Bud Neidringhaus did his part in keeping his craft in the air by releasing all the bombs by prying them loose from the shackles with a gun barrel. Neidringhaus was killed in a crash of a C-47 at Chanute Field in 1947.

By now, Laufer had blown his last radar fuse and there was no hope of successfully bombing either visually or via PFF. Hastings, aware that the other squadrons might be beneath him in the clouds, asked navigator Oral Burch for a heading to a secondary target.

On the way to Erfurt, south of Merseburg, bombardier Chuck Wilbur discovered that his bomb bay doors were frozen shut, which he opened the hard way — manually. He scurried back to the nose and toggled the bombs. At least most of them. Three 500 pounders had hung up on the right side.

Wilbur again headed for the bomb bay. Straddling the cat walk, all the time considering a drop of almost 30,000 feet without a parachute, Wilbur released the inside bomb by hand, but needed a screw driver to pry loose the other two. One smacked him on the leg as it dropped.

Seeing the lead bombs go, the other bombardiers in the squadron followed suit.

If the 603rd was having problems, it was also nightmare time for Captain Genung and the 601st. By IP time, only seven were target bound, albeit hopelessly scattered. Five already had aborted for a variety of reasons, and the remaining took the "target of opportunity" route. They made their way home as best they could, with three making it only as far as Belgium and emergency landings.

Major Templeman's lead 602nd pressed on to the target and made its drop on Leuna at 11:30 a.m.

The drama of the day was still to come, however.

Charley Stankiewicz, engineer on the Johnson crew, was in the standard hand crank position with the bomb bay doors frozen open. He would soon be introduced to the business end of a 20 mm cannon shell.

Tarr, monitoring the crew intercom, couldn't get an oxygen response from either his waist or tail, so he dispatched ball turret gunner Harold Clyne for a look-see. Clyne helped Allison Dougherty switch his mask to the other side of the waist supply and then scurried to the tail where he found Bill Fleming "motionless and blue." Ice had clogged the tail gunner's mask, shutting off his life-sustaining supply.

The tail gunner soon "came to" and Clyne returned to the ball, where he would soon be looking at more trouble.

Pilot Tarr, realizing half of his oxygen supply was gone, brought extra walk-around bottles to the waist, just in case.

Fighter activity had been reported off and on for 30 minutes, first at 8 o'clock low and now at 2 o'clock high. The sky, murky as it was, was filled with criss-cross vapor trails, the unique signature of high altitude combat.

It was indeed aerial combat! A squadron of German FW-190's was having a head-to-head encounter with a squadron of American P-51 Mustangs.

As to whether the FW's had been stalking the Fortresses until flak activity had subsided, or whether they had stumbled into the formation as they scrambled out of their dog-fight with the P-51's remains a matter of conjecture. That the 190's left their mark on the 603rd is a matter of record.

Two waves of five or six fighters each slammed into the formation, the fighter-bomber wings almost overlapping in the split second exchanges. Many of those who survived recall seeing the iron crosses on the FW cockpits and even the faces of the Luftwaffe pilots.

All three planes in the lead element were hit by cannon fire. Buzza, his ship falling off to the right with one engine afire and Hastings fatally wounded beside him, ordered his crew to jump.

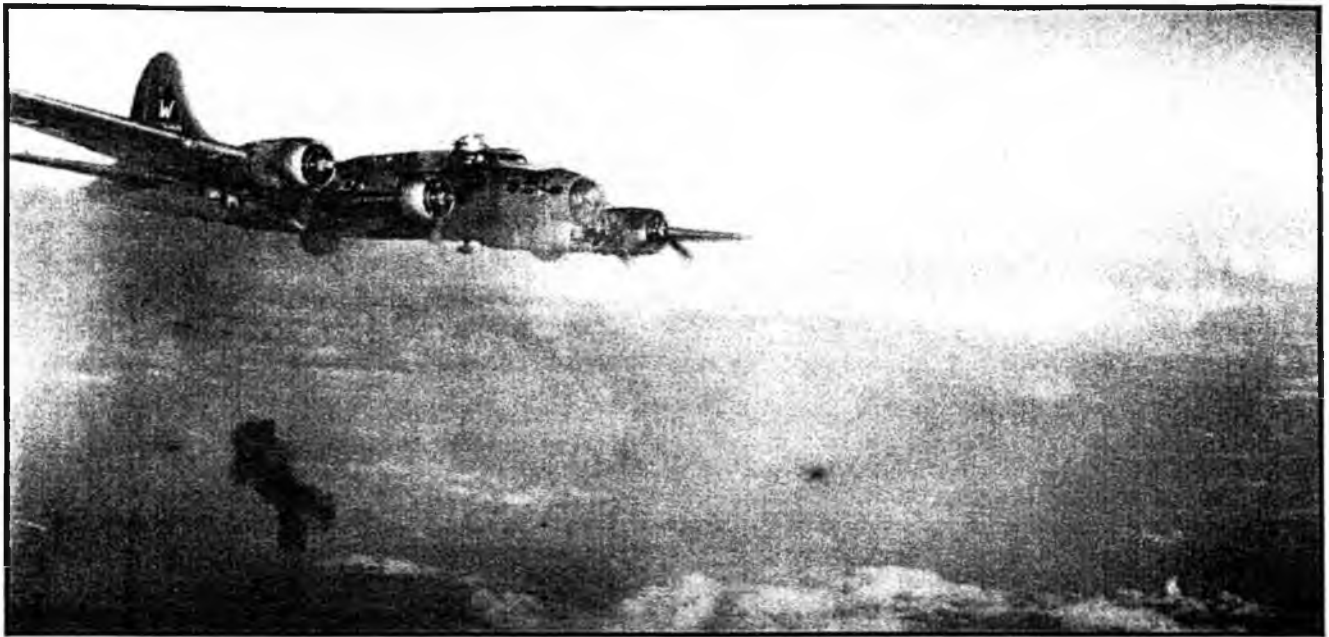
Hastings was found in the plane where it crashed near Eisenach. The Germans buried him in the cemetery at Moosbach. The other crewmen were captured, sent to PW camps and ultimately returned to the U.S. These included Buzza, Wilbur, Burch, Laufer, George Spraggins, John McMenamin, Jack Madlung, David Morgan and Eugene Minchoff.

McMenamin and Morgan effected escapes from one of the marches between camps and found their way to Brussels and freedom.

The deputy lead, piloted by Lehner, received 20 mm cannon hits in their right wing, sending their craft into a tight spin . . . and ultimate explosion. Lehner, killed in the cockpit, was the only crew member found in the wreckage near Erfurt. All the others were blown free. Some to safety. Others to their deaths.

Parachuting to safety were Ozie French, Kenneth Bachman, Rex Kellog, William Elliott and James Esterbrooks. Bachman, from his position in the ball turret, saw that a wing was ablaze and came into the waist and put on his chute. He was immediately pinned against the wall by the centrifugal force and soon blacked out from lack of oxygen. When he "awoke" he was tumbling in space, recovering just in time to pull his chute rip cord.

Killed as they fell without chutes, or possibly victims of angry civilians, were Virgil Register, Stanley de Lafayette and Henry Ference. German medical records reveal only two words, "found dead." All were buried at Zimmernspura.



THIS FLAK BURST was the beginning of the end for John Stevens' B-17 No. 390 X. With two engines out, the Stevens aircraft struggled to stay with the 603rd formation.

It was a three-hour, albeit losing, battle as Stevens finally had to crash land No. 390 in a field near Paris. The 603rd lost seven B-17's on this mission.

Howell, the third member of the lead element, also went into a violent spin with his left wing on fire. Only his radio operator, John Bahling, and two waist gunners, Jose Echevarria and William Landrie, managed to survive. Bahling suffered a fractured skull as he landed and Landrie a broken ankle.

Howell, William Bryan, John Leyden, Robert Gaynor, Ralph Glancy and Brooks Atchison were all summarily listed as "found dead" and buried at Trueleben.

Landrie and Echevarria, tossed about the waist as the ship overturned, witnessed the ball turret come tumbling into the waist. Atchison popped out of the ball, put on his chute as the plane leveled off momentarily and led the others out the waist door.

Landrie, being marched to the Erfurt Air Base jail, saw someone hanging from a tree at one of the intersections. A single parachute cord around his neck and a group of people standing around.

"To this day, I believe it was Brooks Atchison," said Landrie.

That Merseburg was a dreaded target had been quietly transmitted that morning to Bob Welty, co-pilot for Tarr. Welty met lead navigator Gaynor coming out of early briefing.

"I recall distinctly that his face seemed flushed," said Welty. "Where are we going?" I asked.

"You've been there before," he said.

Welty didn't have to ask again. He knew it was Merseburg. Dreaded Merseburg.

The second wave of Focke-Wulfs took out three engines on Wismer's B-17. Just one pass and it was all over. With no chance of remaining airborne all nine crewmen bailed out. All parachuted to safety and PW camp. Except one.

Waist gunner Marvin Clark was never seen again until his body was recovered from a common grave in Erfurt in 1948. Others on the Wismer crew included Eugene Reaves, Dave Levy, John Butler, Ahealeas Pares, Eldon Severson, Sam Luizzi and Herman Hager.

It was Hager, many years later, who would lead the way in developing the magnificent memorial at Nuthampstead which stands in memory of his buddy, Clark, and the many other 398th men who perished in the conflict.

Another B-17 caught in the second wave of the FW assault was piloted by frail-looking Paul Rich. Although small and very "youngish" looking, Rich had the reputation of being a gifted B-17 pilot.

Trailing in the slot element, Rich took a hit in his No. 2 engine and another in the oxygen storage, igniting a major fire in the cockpit and gangway. Veering sharply to the right and quickly exploding, only Robert Rasmussen and Earl Kearney escaped the fiery death plunge. Each man was blown free and each was fortunate enough to have had his chute partially hooked at the time of the blow-out.

Buried at Pferdingsleben were Rich, Don McCordindale, Robert Stuart, Clib Johnson, James Ault, Walter Miller and Milton Passmore.

Another 190 caught Hyndman's plane, wounding navigator Ken Carlson and knocking out two engines and the hydraulic system. Despite these afflictions, Hyndman nursed his Fort as far as Bruges, Belgium where he made an emergency landing at an RAF fighter base.

The Air Force took notice of Hyndman's action and awarded him the Distinguished Flying Cross in 1948.

Another of the second wave 190's bore in on high element leader Johnson and planted a 20 mm shell in the leading edge of the open bomb bay door, with engineer Stankiewicz in the hand-crank position. The shell splashed in the empty bomb bay, narrowly missing the engineer and radio operator Mario Procopio, but severing wires only inches away.

Co-pilot Robert Lucy, who was flying, had just pulled up at seeing the plight of one of the lead element ships. This maneuver saved the Johnson ship from taking cannon shells in the nose or cockpit. While one hit the bomb bay door, others passed harmlessly beneath the Fort.

The fighter passed within inches of Johnson's left wing, then flashed down toward Tarr, trailing in the slot element with Rich and Spangler. Welty said he counted four 20 mm. tracers as they whizzed over his windshield.

"This guy passed over us so close I thought for sure he was going to 'kamikazi' us," said the co-pilot. Also on Welty's mind during the attack was the out-of-control Rich aircraft, which was beginning to fall into his own flight path. Welty kicked the rudders for just enough slip to avoid a collision.

Tarr, making his way from the waist to the cockpit after delivering walkaround oxygen bottles to his waist gunner, almost wound up in the bomb bay as a result of Welty's plane-saving rudder maneuver.

With one engine feathered due to flak, his oxygen supply half depleted, and planes dropping from formation all around, Tarr scrambled back into the cockpit and immediately dove for the cloud cover below. With astute navigation from Walter Small, the crew returned along to Nuthampstead only 15 minutes after the "squadron" landed at 4:45 p.m.

After the second attack by the Focke-Wulfs, only Johnson, Spangler and Spitzer were still in their assigned

positions in the dismembered squadron. "Form on me," radioed Johnson, as he headed for cloud cover to escape the tormented scene.

If the FW's returned (or were happy to effect their escape from the P-51's) they found nothing.

"Give me a heading," came the order from Johnson to his 20-year-old navigator, Ike Thacker. And the trio struck out for home.

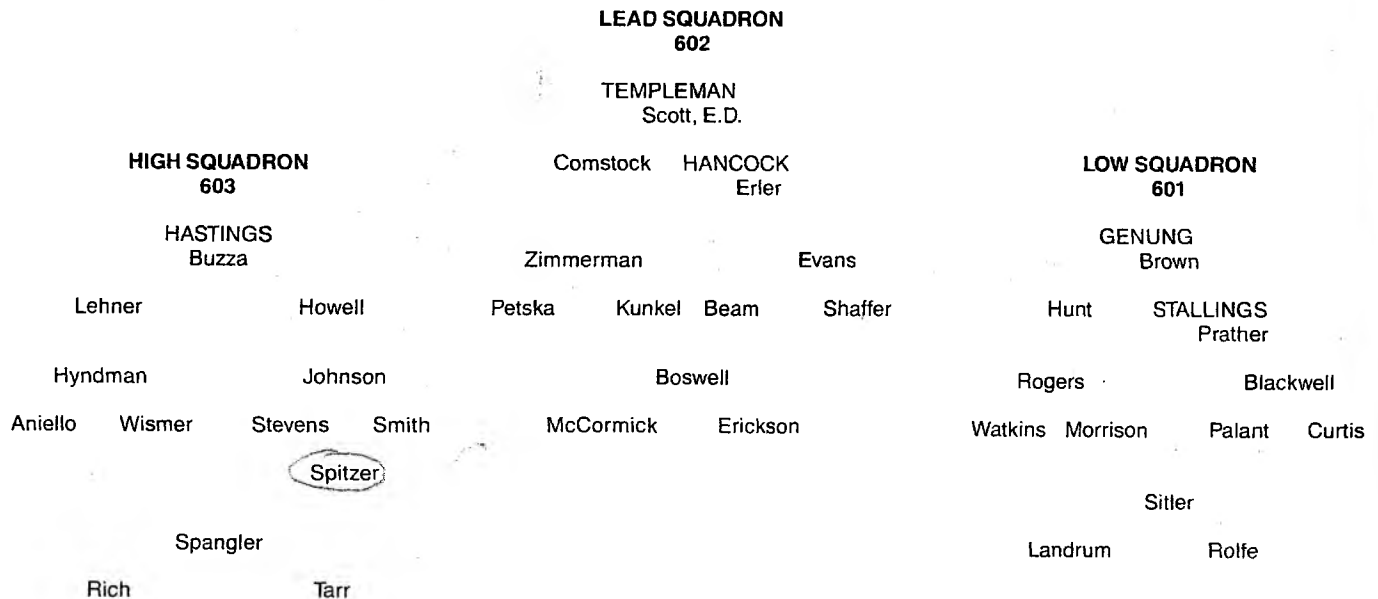
Larry Paul, co-pilot for Spitzer, flying one of the 603rd's venerable Fortresses — 469 Q — characterized the general condition of the three returnees with this description of old Queenie —

"We couldn't even taxi her off the runway. Both tires were punctured and we quit counting the flak holes when we got to 250."

For his part in leading the "little flight" back home to Nuthampstead as a squadron of three, the Air Medal was presented to Warren Johnson. That award came 41 years later, 1985.

Flak, fighters, courage, luck, fires, drama, gallantry, bail outs, sacrifice, weather, airmanship, death . . .

They all happened to the 398th this day.





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Subject: Our crew before 10/15/44:
.....

standing, Bernie White bombardier, Bill Meyran 1st pilot, himself co-pilot, Warren Davidson navigator, instructor unknown.

crouching, Charles Kennedy ball turret gunner, Vic Petrauskas & Melvin Brown waste gunners, William Tull, engineer & top turret gunner, Anthony Perry tail gunner. George Barton, radio operator was not in the picture.