

**The Tale  
of a  
Tail Gunner  
from  
Beginning to.....**

**By  
Richard F (Dick) Schneider**

**US Army Air Corp  
15th Air Force  
460 Bomb Group 763rd Bomb Squadron**

**Spinizzola, Italy**

**1944/45**

**June 2000 Residence  
Brewerton, NY**

**my thanks to  
my wife  
Shirley  
for  
the patience to type this from all my notes**



15th Army Air Corp.  
World War II Italian Theater of Operations



Black Panther  
460th Bomb Group  
763rd Bomb Squadron  
Spinazolla, Italy

Richard (Dick) F. Schneider  
Tail Gunner

# Army of the United States



## Honorable Discharge

*This is to certify that*

RICHARD F SCHNEIDER 12 240 152 Staff Sergeant

2519th AAF Base Unit

Army of the United States

*is hereby Honorably Discharged from the military service of the United States of America.*

*This certificate is awarded as a testimonial of Honest and Faithful Service to this country.*

*Given at* ARMY AIR FORCES SEPARATION BASE  
SIOUX CITY IOWA

*Date* 19 October 1945

*Lewis N Miller*  
LEWIS N MILLER  
Major Air Corps

# HONORABLE DISCHARGE

1. NAME (LAST, FIRST, MIDDLE INITIAL) <b>Schneider Richard F</b>		2. SERVICE NO. <b>12 240 152</b>	3. GRADE <b>S Sgt</b>	4. ARM OR SERVICE <b>AC</b>	5. COMPONENT <b>ATS</b>
6. DATE OF SEPARATION <b>19 Oct 45</b>		7. PLACE OF SEPARATION <b>AAF Separation Base Sioux City Iowa</b>			
8. ADDRESS FROM WHICH EMPLOYMENT WILL BE RECEIVED <b>410 Seward St Syracuse N Y</b>		9. DATE OF BIRTH <b>19 Dec 25</b>	10. PLACE OF BIRTH <b>Syracuse N Y</b>		
11. GRADE <b>See 5</b>	12. RACE <b>X</b>	13. HONORARY STATUS <b>X</b>	14. U.S. CITIZEN <b>X</b>	15. QUALIFYING DESCRIPTION AND NO. <b>Machinist 4-75.010</b>	

16. DATE OF INDUCTION <b>20 Nov 43</b>		17. DATE OF ENLISTMENT <b>11 Jan 44</b>		18. PLACE OF ENTRY INTO SERVICE <b>Syracuse N Y</b>	
19. NAME ADDRESS AT TIME OF ENTRY INTO SERVICE <b>1913 Graves St Syracuse N Y</b>		20. MILITARY OCCASIONAL SPECIALTY AND NO. <b>Aerial Gunner 511</b>			
21. BATTLES AND CAMPAIGNS <b>North Apennines Po Valley GO 40 MD 45</b>		22. ACHIEVEMENTS AND AWARDS <b>Pistol Cal 45 10m 44 Aerial Gunners Badge</b>			
23. DECORATIONS AND CITATIONS <b>Air Medal GO 3343 Hq 15AF 13 Sep 44 OLC to AM GO 4107 Hq 15AF 23 Oct 44 OLC to AM GO 700 Hq 15AF 15 Feb 45 OLC to AM GO 2477 Hq 15AF 18 Apr 45 Good Conduct Medal GO 2 Hq 400 B Co 5 Jan 45 1 Overseas Service Bar</b>					

24. SERVICE OUTSIDE CONTINENTAL U.S. AND RETURN		
25. DATE OF DEPARTURE <b>11 Aug 44</b>	26. DESTINATION <b>ETO</b>	27. DATE OF ARRIVAL <b>18 Aug 44</b>
28. DATE OF DEPARTURE <b>5 Aug 45</b>	29. DESTINATION <b>U S</b>	30. DATE OF ARRIVAL <b>15 May 45</b>

31. DESIGN AND AUTHORITY FOR SEPARATION <b>Convenience of the Government HR 1-1 45 (Demobilization) and AR 615-365 15 Dec 44</b>	
32. SERVICE RECORD ATTENDED <b>Aerial Gunner Harlingen Tex</b>	

33. PAY DATA						
34. GRADE <b>10</b>	35. MONTHLY PAY <b>300</b>	36. PAY ADJUSTMENT <b>100</b>	37. TOTAL PAY <b>None</b>	38. TOTAL PAY <b>59.70</b>	39. TOTAL PAY <b>230.40</b>	40. NAME OF DISBURSING OFFICER <b>W H Hutchinson No 1 PD</b>

41. INSURANCE NOTICE					
42. TYPE OF INSURANCE <b>X</b>	43. AMOUNT PAID <b>X</b>	44. DATE OF BIRTH <b>30 Sep 45</b>	45. DATE OF SEPARATION <b>11 Oct 45</b>	46. PREMIUM DUE <b>0 40</b>	47. INTENTION OF SEPARATION <b>X</b>

48. SERVICE (This space for copy which of above items or entry of other items specified in W. D. Directive)	
<p>Label Button Issued Inactive Service ERC 75 Nov 43 to 10 Jan 44</p> <p>(37) European-African-Middle Eastern Service Medal with 7 Bronze Stars</p> <p>(35) Typhus 15 Mar 45 Yellow Fever 29 Apr 44 Cholera 13 Nov 44</p> <p>ASR Score (2 Sep 45)-60</p>	

49. SIGNATURE OF PERSON FROM WHOM RECEIVED <i>Richard F. Schneider</i>	50. PERSONNEL OFFICER (Type name grade and classification - signature) <b>SAMUEL GROSSMAN MAJ USA</b>
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## The Makin of:

### A Tail Gunner from Birth to -----

It all has to start somewhere, so on December 19th, 1925 Edith and Fremont (Monty) Schneider gave birth to their only child (spoiled from the beginning) Richard Fremont Schneider in Syracuse, New York.

Both parents worked at the Franklin Motor Car Company that was renowned for its air cooled engine, which later came to be used as aircraft engines. There still are Franklin Antique Automobile clubs throughout the U. S.

The depression soon followed with no work to be found. We moved in with my maternal grandmother, who immigrated from Germany in the 1860's, working her way here as a cook on the boat. Grandma worked as a part time cook for several of the very rich people who lived up on James Street, about five blocks away from our well kept German and Italian neighborhood. Dad picked up odd jobs as he could, mostly working part time as a street car conductor.

Grandma, Mom and Dad were hard workers though and provided well on the few dollars they earned. We raised chickens and rabbits in the yard, grew vegetables for canning and had plum trees that provided fruit for Grandma's delicious prune kuchen. Dad and I would take the street car, which we rode free as Dad was a conductor, to the end of the line to pick mushrooms and puff balls that Grandma and Mom would mix in with their home made pasta and tomato sauce. Can still remember all of the kitchen and dining room chairs with tea towels hanging over them for drying the noodles.

On our mushroom and puff ball trips, Dad always managed to pick wild grapes and elderberries which we brought home in burlap sacks. Some of the fruit went to make jam, but most went to the hand press in the basement. Since prohibition was on, the resulting wine was, of course, for family consumption. There were a number of private clubs surrounding our neighborhood and Dad was known to supply a few bottles to them for a slight amount of money in appreciation of his efforts.

Dad started another project during this time that turned out to be the love of our family. He built an inboard motor boat of the Garwood style, one board at a time. Whenever he had an extra nickel he would buy another board. I was in Franklin grammar school at the time and all of my neighborhood buddies would come over to watch Mr. Schneider build his boat. The boat, when completed, was finish varnished by a friend who was partially blind, but did all of the fine finishing of only the most expensive Marcellus caskets, where he was employed. All was done by feel and you can imagine how proud Dad was of this gleaming new boat.

I had the advantage of working side by side with Dad and learning from a very early age how to do so many different things with wood and metal.

Mom worked as a secretary for Norman Vincent Peal when he was Pastor of a church in Syracuse and when he left she worked for a man who had a business repairing paper mill equipment and Dad would work nights doing the repair work. The man was a great salesman, but would go on a drinking binge for weeks at a time. Mom, in the meantime, would take orders and Dad would do the repairs at night.

Finally, in 1937 when the owner hadn't shown up for weeks, Mom and Dad borrowed \$100.00 from Grandma to buy a very large lathe that was used in World War I and started their own paper mill repair business. I pedalled the Syracuse Post Standard newspaper in the morning and in the afternoon and weekends Dad taught me how to sew and silver solder the fine mesh wire cloth to the large rolls.

When World War II started on December 7, 1941, which incidentally was during my mother and father's birthday party, they joined the war effort, changing their growing paper mill business into producing tools for aircraft maintenance and made parts for the top secret "Nordon Bomb Sight". I was going to high school by then and working in Dad's plant, learning the tool & die making trade.

I graduated from high school in June 1943 and was caught by the Army Air Corp. slogan "You young men of 17, join the Army Air Corp and win your silver wings as a pilot, navigator or bombardier". All of my buddies had left for the service and me, being the

youngest, was left at home. After months of teasing and much to their concern, Mom and Dad finally signed papers so I could join, but I learned that I wouldn't be called up until my 18th birthday but should be ready to go on 48 hours notice.

In the meantime, one of my buddies, Jack Engel, came home on leave from Navy boot camp and he had a date with his girlfriend, however, his twin sister, Shirley, wanted to tag along. He talked me into joining them so it would make a foursome and keep Shirley out of his hair. She was, I thought, a nice girl as far as sisters go. Surprising though, after Jack's leave was over, I called Shirl for a real date and by the end of summer we were quite steady and by December I gave her a ring.

When I turned 18 on the 19th of December, I thought the army would have contacted me, but no word. On Saturday afternoon, January 9th, 1944, a fellow from Syracuse called me and said he had just received travel orders for Monday the 11th and my name was the only other one on it from Syracuse. I went to the main post office and, sure enough, it was there, but because of so much snow, it hadn't been delivered. So much for 48 hours notice.

Mom, Dad and Shirley managed to get me through two feet of snow to the train station at 7:00 AM on Monday the 11th and after tearful goodbyes and promises to write every day, I was off to a great adventure.

From the small train station in Syracuse we arrived seven hours later at Grand Central Station in New York City. I'd never seen a place so big. I took a cab with the other fellow from Syracuse to Pennsylvania Station, which I knew of by the popular song, and it happened to be "about quarter to four". Our next train ride was to Fort Dix, New Jersey where I really was indoctrinated into army life. Hurry up and wait. By 2:00 AM Tuesday morning I was no longer a civilian. My civvies had been sent home, I'd been shot in each arm three times while bare naked, holding two armloads of GI clothing and shoes and finally to bed by 3:00 AM. Tough sleeping though as I couldn't roll over because both arms were sore from the shots, it was stifling hot in the top bunk in the barracks and I think I was a little home sick by then.

The army waits for no recruits; reveille was at 5:45 AM, calisthenics by 6:30 and breakfast by 7:30, then back on the frozen drill field, which by now the temperature had risen to 25°F. Saving grace was sun and no wind. The drill Sergeant quickly warmed us up, seeing who could keep up. I was pretty lucky though as I walked two miles to school, plus delivering papers every day and the poor guys that we ended up with from Brooklyn just weren't used to the pace.

The first army lesson I learned this day at Fort Dix was how to field strip a cigarette butt. To emphasize this, everyone had to bend over from the hips and police up every butt on the parade ground. To field strip a butt, you tear off the paper from the outside, shake the tobacco into the wind and then roll what's left of the paper in a tiny ball between your fingers and then throw it away. I didn't smoke at the time, but all who did got the message, "no butts on the ground".

We finished up about three days of physicals, then some more drilling, getting ready to ship off to basic training. The army food wasn't as good as my grandmothers and I ate only peanut butter and orange marmalade sandwiches. After about the third day my arms were better from the shots, but all muscles were sore from all the calisthenics, so deep sleep came early. Reveille was easy for me as I was used to meeting the early morning paper truck by 4:00 AM as all papers had to be delivered before 6:00 AM to be sure my customers had them before they had to go to work. Again, the big city guys had the most trouble getting up.

After a week at Ft. Dix most of us boarded a train for Biloxie, Mississippi, home of Keesler Field, reportedly the place even God wouldn't go. We arrived at Keesler Air Base on January 19th 1944 and were assigned to large pyramidal tents with about 18 GI's per tent.

We spent six weeks in basic training, starting every day we were on the base with an hour of calisthenics, then breakfast, drilling, weapons training, lunch, dinner and off to bed on canvas cots with olive drab blankets to keep us warm. Sleep for me came easy, but little did I know that almost weekly, between 2:00 and 4:00 AM we were awakened, told to strip down and report outside of the tent for "short arm inspection", dressed only in GI shoes, rain coat and helmet liner. It's cold in January and February in Mississippi and the clammy, plastic rain coat against our bodies didn't help, especially on nights it was raining.



Everyone lined up and the medics walked down the line with flash lights instructing each GI to open the rain coat, grab your penis, then "skin er back and milk er down". Next, turn around, bend over and spread your buttocks. Kind of embarrassing the first time, but it became routine after we were introduced to what was known as Mickey Mouse movies. They started off with the warning to "use a rubber and take a pro" before getting into showing all of the sexual diseases one could contract by having sex.

Morning reveille was my best part of the day, being an early riser, and I soon learned that I couldn't live on peanut butter and marmalade. Breakfasts were my favorite meal; hot oatmeal, eggs, pancakes, fruit and milk.

Every day we had marching drills and marched in platoons wherever we went. Each drill Sergeant had his platoon sing while marching and it became one of the competitions between platoons. Songs like "I've Been Working on the Railroad, She Wore a Yellow Ribbon" were some old time favorites, but also add jingles were popular like "Don't Despair, Use Your Head, Save Your Hair, Use Fitch Shampoo" or "Burma Shave, Burma Shave, No Brush, No Lather, No Rub In - Just Wet Your Razor Then Begin". These and others followed us forever.

Everyone got a taste of KP and some of us got suckered in by volunteering to learn to fly the "China Clipper". We soon learned this was the dish washer.

The big test was our first 20 mile hike to the target range where we slept in pup tents for four days. The preparation leading up to the hike was how to prepare your pack with everything you owned. The shelter half (one-half of a pup tent) was what made up the basis for the pack. All items were carefully placed on the shelter half and then neatly rolled up to form the pack. GI blankets and a heavy GI overcoat were nestled over the top and tied securely. Helmet, field jacket, sweater, wool pants and shirt were worn. Thank goodness I paid attention and found a buddy who did also, as we were to find out.

Actually, it took two GI's to make a pup tent, using their two shelter halves buttoned together to form the pup tent. Blankets and other gear are laid on the ground inside, but only after the construction of a drainage trench around the outside of the tent. Picking high

ground also helps. Some of this I had already learned in Boy Scouts.

The hike was tiring for a lot of the fellows. It was warm and sunny. That lulled them into a sense of security and they didn't take the time to properly set up camp. Some had also left their heavy wool coats back at the base because they were too heavy to carry. Mistake number one and two. That night it poured rain all night long; temperature dropped below 40°F and no way to get relief if you didn't prepare properly.

It drizzled off and on for all three days and it was lucky that we had set up on higher ground. I qualified for marksman with rifle and pistol on the first day and spent most of the next two days loading ammo clips. It was cold and handling the cold ammo by pushing them down in the spring loaded clips was hard on the fingers. We eased this somewhat by building a pit and burning the used ammunition cases to keep us warm. The Brooklynites got to like these upstate farm boys. The fourth day we broke camp and hiked the 20 miles back to the base. These four days took quite a toll on each platoon. What with blistered feet, sore hands, many head colds and fevers it kept the medics busy all the way back to the base.

My previous Boy Scout training and the large amount of walking I did in civilian life prepared me well for this field trip and I was buoyed up by the mere fact that there was a hot shower waiting when we got back to the base, along with a good hot meal. Was getting used to the food. My grandmother's saying "hungerish is a gooder cook" certainly is true.

I kept up my letter writing everyday and letters from home were the most excitement of the day. I missed Shirley and my folks and was looking forward to a leave after basic training.

We finished basic training and immediately spent several weeks on mental and physical tests, along with medical exams. We also finally got passes to go into Biloxi, Mississippi three times during this part of our training.

It made one feel human again just to see some civilians and my impression was that the people in Biloxi treated us pretty well in spite of the hoards of G.I.'s who visited daily.

By now it was late February and we were all waiting to see where we would be sent next. Bad news came first, that all pilot, navigator and bombardier training had ceased.

I believe some of our group were sent to radio school and others for flight engineering training, but the majority of us had secret orders and didn't know where we were going or what we would be doing.

We packed our duffie, boarded a troop train and were off to God knows where. We didn't travel far when the train stopped in New Orleans for the night, waiting for more troops. Since we were there for the night and no one said we couldn't, a few of us, under cover of darkness, wandered away into town. A few beers later we thought better and rushed back to the train.

We left later in the day and after riding all night I awakened to the smell of orange blossoms. On February 28th, 1944 I thought where in the world are we and I soon found out that we were at Harlingen, Texas at the army air base for gunnery school training. Goodbye "silver wings as a pilot, navigator or bombardier". The best surprise was that we were to live in barracks. Goodbye to the old pyramidal tents. I learned quickly to select a top bunk, as it was always available whereas, with the bottom bunk, someone was always sitting on it.

We even had foot lockers and places to hang our clothes. This all didn't come without problems, as the drill sergeants did white glove inspections for cleanliness and neatness. Those who didn't measure up got latrine duty and everyone got their chance.

Gunnery school actually was very interesting and I thought fun as we got to learn the complete makings and workings of all types of weapons. We learned how to field and detail strip 45 caliber automatic pistols and 50 caliber machine guns. The ultimate test was to strip

the 50 calibers blindfolded. Not easy, but we found we could disassemble and reassemble blindfolded in one minute. We trained in the art of leading a moving target by riding in the back of a stake body truck around a twisting and turning road, using 12 gauge shot guns to shoot at clay pigeons that were flung out of towers at all different heights and angles. This, to me, was great fun.

We spent many hours on the firing range, along the Gulf of Mexico, training with 45 caliber pistols and 30 and 50 caliber machine guns. The wind blew off the Gulf onto the range continually and with the sun and spent gun powder blowing back in our faces all day long, it lead to bad sun and wind burns. I saved my day using Noxema skin cream and chap stick, but those that didn't were a mess, with swollen lips and cracked cheeks that needed serious medical attention.

The operation of all of the hydraulically operated gun turrets was our next lesson. At first we used just ring and bead sights, but then we were given electronic sights with a super imposed ring like neon light on a sight that made it much easier to use.

Nose and tail turrets were used in stationary position in front of clay pigeon towers and had 12 gauge shot guns in place of machine guns. The turrets could turn and guns would raise up and down in order to follow and lead the target as the clay pigeons were flung out again at different heights and angles. They also had turrets set up on the back of the stake body trucks that would run the same course as when we shot off our shoulders. Again, lots of fun and it gave us good training on quickly picking up and leading a target.

Many hours were also spent on aircraft identifications using actual photos and mostly silhouettes, as this is actually what one would see in combat considering the distances involved. Fighter planes, Mitsubishi's, Zeros, Fock Wulf 190s, Messersmiths, Junkers 88's, Spitfires, P39s, 40s, 47s, 51s and the P38s all had their distinctive silhouettes, as did all of the fighter and heavy bombers, such as the A and B 26s, B-17s, B-24s and the British Havilands and Halifaxes.

We had all been away from home what seemed to be a long time by now, even though it was only about three months, but I missed my folks and Shirley. We had heard from others that there would be a "delay in route" leave to our next assignment, which eased the homesickness for most of us, but a few were basket cases.

We were finally issued passes for a days trip into Brownsville, Texas, a short ride from our Harlingen Air Base. Since there wasn't much to do in Brownsville everyone crossed the border into Matamoros, Mexico, but not before the famous "use a condom - take a pro" lecture and a re-run of the "Mickey Mouse" movie.

Once across the border i more fully understood the lecture. The streets were just dirt and dust blew over everything. Street vendors were hacking their wares every few feet and in between were bars where we could quench our thirst on "bottled" beer. There were little boys asking "hey Joe, you got chocolate bar" or "you likey my sister"? Prostitutes were a dime a dozen and girly shows were all over, that bared nothing imaginable. After drinking a few beers and watching a couple of girly shows, we were anxious to get back to clean and neat Harlingen, Texas.

We still spent a lot of time on the parade grounds and marching between classes and singing as we marched seemed to bolster the comradery between everyone.

Classes also were on the complete mechanics of all of the turrets, learning both the electrical and hydraulic systems and how to repair them. After learning all about the various turrets, almost everyone agreed that they hoped someone else would be assigned to the belly turret. I was not considered to be very big at 5' 11" and 135#, but I really had to roll up into a ball and scrunch down in order to get in the ball turret and close the door. It was not a place for anyone who was claustrophobic, which I was inclined to be.

The final phase of our training was air gunnery where we flew in an AT-18 twin engined plane equipped with pivot mounted machine guns in the waist. A similar plane, towing a target, would pass by and the assigned gunner would shoot at the towed target. The trick was not to shoot down the tow plane, which I heard had happened. The final and most fun was flying in an AT-6 standing up in the open cockpit and firing at the towed target with a swivel mounted 30 caliber machine gun, then diving down and strafing ground targets on the Gulf coast. Boy, what excitement. I lucked out with the pilot I had as we finished our

gunnery practice early and he asked if I'd like a real ride. I buckled up down in the open cockpit and we were off, doing stunts of all kinds which the AT-6 was and still is noted for.

Graduation day came in early April 1944 and we all had our bags packed in anticipation of our "delay in route" leave. Disappointment number two, as all leaves were canceled and we were to report directly to our crew assignment destination. I was assigned to Westover Field, Massachusetts, which was kind of a break for me as it was not far from Syracuse, my home town.

Our troop train ride from Harlingen took almost a week and one night we had about a four hour stop-over in Shreveport, Louisiana and we were next to another troop train heading west with a bunch of sailors on board. Everyone called out from each train asking if anyone was aboard from their home town. I lucked out again as in a car just down from ours I met an old high school buddy and we had a couple of hours to talk about our experiences in the service and catching up on other friends' whereabouts.

We were dying of thirst in the middle of the night in the center of a railroad yard and were saved by a boy who came along selling grapefruit. We both bought two and sat on the tracks eating them until our trains left.

We arrived at Westover Air Base, which is close to Holyoke, Massachusetts, mid-afternoon on April 1944 mid-afternoon, were assigned to barracks and given appointments the next morning for complete physicals. I guess they wanted to be sure we were combat capable before crew assignments.

After settling in and finally able to commandeer a phone I called my Mom and Dad at our home in Syracuse, New York, about 240 miles from Holyoke, Massachusetts. Since I missed out on leave, my Mom teased Dad (didn't take much) to drive to Holyoke to try to see me. I explained I was restricted to the base, but would try to see what I could do if they would plan to arrive on Saturday, to which they agreed.

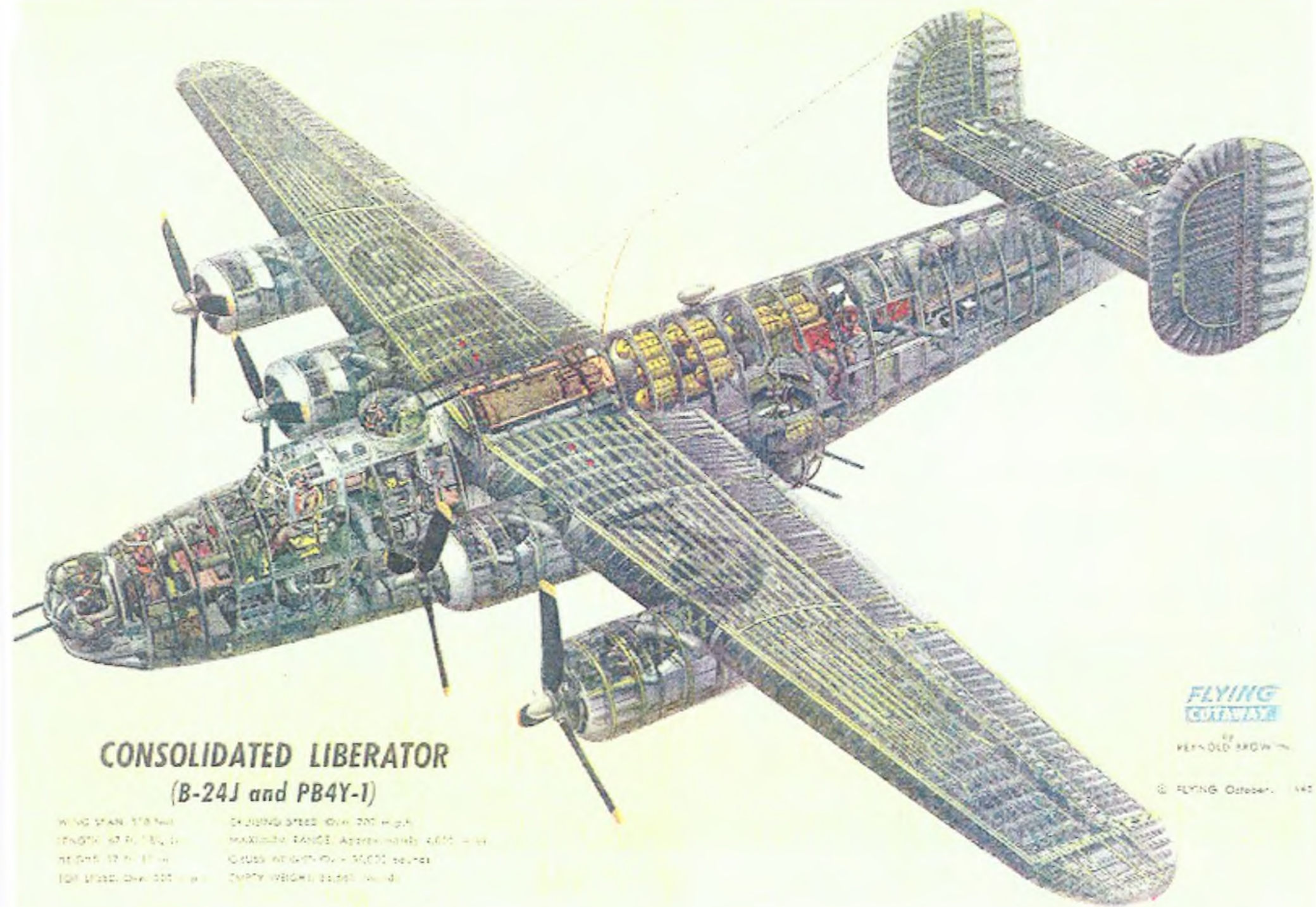
I had my physical on Thursday and got through with flying colors and was told I would have my crew assignment the next day. We had no idea of where we were going or what type aircraft we would train in, but were really anxious to get started. The next day, Friday, in early morning, the enlisted men met in a large auditorium and the officers in another area and we were all given our crew assignments and proceeded to the enlisted crew area. The first person I met was our Flight Engineer Dean A. Dixon, who was a tall, slim Texan. Little did I know at that time that circumstances would bring us into a close friendship. The rest of the crew arrived shortly after, including Richard Foley our Radio Operator from Brooklyn (couldn't seem to shake these guys), Rudolph Ely, Assistant Radio Operator from New England, Carl Rose, Armorer from Pennsylvania and finally Ford Wayne Miller from Kansas City. I remember trying to size up each person, wondering how we would perform as a crew.

By noon we all joined our officers led by our Pilot, John T. Bilek from Chicago, John Cassell, our Co-Pilot from Michigan, as close as I remember, Bob Wicks our Bombardier from Clinton, New York and our Navigator, Fred Scott, from New Jersey. Our Pilot, John T. as he would become known to me, gave us all a welcome talk and said we would all be on our own until we met up at our overseas training base, the location unknown until we arrive. John T. did tell us we would be in B-24s, which he had his final training in before he left flight school.

There was a very large forest fire burning for several days and Friday afternoon we were asked to back up the firefighters until more relief came. I can't remember who else was involved, but I was assigned to a crew to help with replacement fire equipment, finishing up about midnight.

The next morning, Saturday, nothing was scheduled so, even though we were restricted to base, I went to headquarters to plead my case for a day pass to Holyoke. The desk sergeant had deaf ears regarding passes, but he did ask the C.O. Since I had volunteered for fire backup duty, my parents were in town and I had not gotten a leave, he okayed a day pass.

I had made arrangements with my parents to meet at the "Turn Verien" a German-American Athletic Club, which we belonged to in Syracuse, and had clubs at that time throughout the north east. Mom and Dad were driving from Syracuse so it was fortunate that we all arrived about 2:00 P.M. It was great to see them again and we spent the rest of the day, and over dinner that night, talking about my experiences and getting brought up to date on what was happening at Dad's plant. Mom took care of all of the office work and even Shirley



## CONSOLIDATED LIBERATOR (B-24J and PB4Y-1)

WING SPAN 118 feet  
LENGTH 67 ft. 10 in.  
HEIGHT 32 ft. 8 in.  
TOP SPEED 346 mph  
CRUISING SPEED 306 mph  
MAXIMUM RANGE Approximately 4,600 miles  
GROSS WEIGHT Over 54,000 pounds  
EMPTY WEIGHT 33,000 pounds

**FLYING  
GENTLE**

BY  
KEN OLD BROW

© FLYING October, 1945



was working the Victory shift after her secretarial job in the day time. The plant was working seven days and, after a tearful goodbye, Mom and Dad drove back to Syracuse and I returned to the base.

We all boarded a troop train on Monday and were off to some place south which a day later, May 8th turned out to be Chatham Air Base in Savannah, Georgia where we would take our combat ready training. We were again stationed in barracks rather than tents and the whole enlisted crew was together with other crews.

The first few weeks were spent familiarizing us with the B-24 and each of our specific assignments. I was tentatively assigned as the ball gunner but was told each crew could determine the ball and tail gunner position. Since I was much taller than Ford Miller he chose the ball and I got the tail. Foley and Rose were the two waist gunners, Ely the nose turret and Dean Dixon the top Martin turret, which they manned when not busy with their other duties. The most important positions were Foley's as radio operator to keep us in touch with the group and Dean Dixon's as flight engineer. Dean was very conscientious about his job, saying in his Texas drawl "if I have to fly in this thing, I'm gonna know it's ready to go". He was pretty wild in other ways, but was the first one at the plane doing pre-flight checks on everything, plus in an emergency he could help fly the plane.

Rose was in charge of the bomb load, being sure the bombs were securely shackled into the racks and free to drop when the bombardier released them. I was the assistant armorer and it was our responsibility to ensure the safety pins were pulled prior to the bomb run so that, as the bombs were dropped, a wire attached to the rack would arm them for detonation on impact. If the safety pins were left in, the bombs would not arm as they dropped. We also checked all of other armament on the plane to ensure it worked properly and that the ammo racks were full. All turrets had two 50 caliber machine guns mounted one on each side of the turret and the manually operated waist guns were one single 50 caliber on each side. The machine guns could fire up to 1800 rounds per minute, however, they had to be fired in short bursts to keep the barrels from overheating. I found that, with carefully timed finger motions, I could fire one round at a time.

We continued ground training in all of our specialties while John T. and Cassell received more B-24 flight training and Scotty kept track of where they were and Wicks practiced bomb runs.

# Our B-24 Crew

Top row, from left to right:

John Cassel  
Co-Pilot  
Michigan

Fred Scott  
Navigator  
New Jersey

John T. Bilek  
Pilot  
Chicago, IL

Bob Wicks  
Bombadier  
Clinton, NY



Bottom row, from left to right:

Rudolph C. Elie  
1105733  
Nose Gunner  
New England

Dean A. Dixon  
18040855  
Flight Engineer  
and Top Turret  
Texas

Carl W. Rose  
13110012  
Armorer and  
Waist Gunner  
Geneva, OH

Dick Schneider  
12240152  
Tail Gunner  
Syracuse, NY

Ford Wayne Miller  
37529293  
Ball Turret  
Betley Gunner  
Kansas City, KS

Richard V. Foley  
12083208  
Radio Operator  
and Waist Gunner  
Whiting, NJ

We were finally issued all of our flying gear, oxygen masks, helmets, glasses and sheepskin flying jacket and pants. The heat and humidity at this time of the year in Georgia were quite bad, especially to us northerners and I wondered, why sheepskin clothing? Soon to learn it can get below zero degrees at high altitudes.

I was looking forward to my first flight in the B-24 and maybe a little nervous. Not too long into the flight and with my mask on and in the tail turret, I got air sick and thought I would surely die. But once back on the ground all was okay. I got worried, as this happened again on my next flight until I discovered first the odd smell that seemed to trigger the air sickness came from the rubber in the new oxygen mask, which I quickly fixed before the next flight by washing it thoroughly in mild soap and water. The second smell I discovered later was from urine. Relief tubes were placed at convenient places throughout the plane and, when one had to go, a funnel shaped end connected to a tube leading outside the ship was removed from the bracket and properly positioned for natural relief. Great for everyone but the tail gunner, as the urine washed down the ship, ending up on the tail turret. Phew, what a smell. Everyone agreed not to use them any more when I threatened to cut them all off. I don't think they knew I meant the tubes. This solved the air sickness problem.

After the first few weeks, with training progressing well, we were allowed our first overnight passes to town. Savannah was an old town with much history and it was a beautiful time of the year to walk around the quaint streets and small parks. We enjoyed having a few beers, whenever in town, at the Ogelthorp Hotel and the Drum Room, our favorite, in the De Soto Hotel, one of the most beautiful red stone buildings in town.

G.I.'s crowded the whole downtown area coming, not only from our base, but the Army's Camp Stewart, a Naval Base for Seabees, a Marine Base and sailors from naval ships docking in town. I found I could get away from the crowd by taking the trolley to the end of the line to a more residential neighborhood where I discovered a nice restaurant that had a pig roasting on the barbecue all the time. Great barbecued pork sandwiches. I also found that by bumming to Brunswick there were very few G.I.'s in town and we were more welcomed than in Savannah.

Our training proceeded with all of our crew finally flying together. We took daily flights, learning how to rendezvous with other planes over Jacksonville or Myrtle Beach to fly in formation, do bomb runs and practice gunnery. These flights built confidence in our crew and both Bilek and Cassell were big, capable guys who flew well together. We always

kidded John T. about his big feet, which in a size 13 shoe looked big until we saw him in the sheepskin flying boots. We were to learn later how this combination would save us. We also went on practice solo flights at low altitude, mostly over the Florida and Georgia swamps and I enjoyed just sitting in the waist window, watching the scenery go by.

Our big trip was flying in formation to Cuba, then landing close to Havana. We were spending the night and were given passes into town, but not before the usual "Mickey Mouse" movie and a talk by the Commanding Officer, where he stressed being careful in whatever we do and remembering we were representing the U. S. government. He also said "I know some of you will be looking for ladies of the street, but be careful, the top ladies charge about \$30.00. The ones who are not in the top charge \$15.00, some that are known to have had sexual diseases charge \$10.00 and I pity you poor bastards who get one for \$5.00 bucks. We visited "Sloppy Joe's", had some beers and good Cuban food and found an abundance of camera film which was very scarce in the states.

The next morning we left on a solo over water training flight where Scotty had to plot various coordinates to fly to, eventually getting us back to Savannah. The weather was perfect, bright blue sky and the ocean was so calm you could see the bottom. We flew low to our first turning point over some reefs and islands which were very picturesque, calm and peaceful. But not for long. The weather took a 180° turn for the worst into high winds, lightning, rain and hail. The B-24 was buffeted by high winds and it seemed the twisting torque was actually crinkling the skin on the ship. The lightning had a strobe effect that made the propellers look like they had stopped.

We all got nervous as the time approached when we were due into Savannah. It was dark and we were in thick, heavy clouds and we began to doubt Scotty's navigating. He reassured us that we would see Savannah soon. But, when that time came, nothing could be seen until all of a sudden there was a hole through the clouds and we could see the welding arc flashes at the naval ship building yard in Savannah. Scotty now had our full confidence as we landed at Chatham Field.

We were now reaching the end of our training and were looking forward to a furlough before shipping out for overseas, but were again told that all leaves are canceled and that we would ship out as soon as training was over. This was disappointing to all, especially Bob Wicks, as his wife and baby, whom I met several times, were staying in Savannah. My parents

were passing through, so they spent a weekend with me. John T. joined us for lunch at the Hotel DeSoto where Mom and Dad were staying.

Time passed quickly, but started to drag after training was complete, as we thought we would leave immediately. Hurry up and wait became the norm. I did get an overnight pass to Jacksonville where I met my Aunt and Uncle and baby while he was stationed at a Quartermaster Corp.

Orders finally came and on July 4, 1944 we reported to Mitchell Field on Long Island, just outside of New York City. Back in New York State, but no chance to get home. My parents, along with Shirley, took the six hour train ride to New York City and I was able to join them for a night in the big city for dinner and a movie. The movie was quite appropriate as it was "I'll Be Seeing You", named for the song of that title. A little sad, but nice under the circumstances. It was wonderful seeing Shirley again and Mom and Dad retired early while Shirl and I "tripped the lights fantastic" until my last train of the night left for Mitchell Field.

We were assigned a brand new B-24 to ferry to wherever we were going, so everyone checked out the systems they were responsible for. It was also our responsibility to guard the plane while on the ground, which we did in shifts around the clock.

More physicals and dental work. I ended up with an old Colonel who replaced all my fillings to ensure I'd have no trouble overseas. A couple of days later we flew to Dow Field, Bangor, Maine arriving on July 8th where we spent two days and then on to Gander Field at Gander, Newfoundland. After the first week of waiting at Gander for the weather to clear, John T. found out we would not be going to the 8th Air Force in England, as we had guessed, but to the 15th Air Force in Italy. During that time I met another one of my high school buddies who was a Master Sergeant and a member of the Sergeants Club. It's all in "who you know" as we were only Corporals, but he made arrangements to get us all in the club and also for Dixon and me to go on a day long canoe - fishing trip. The nights were freezing cold, but the days sunny and warm. We brought back a good catch of fish and the cook at the Sergeants Club cooked them for our dinner.



**Schneider Receives Air Medal in Italy**  
15th AAF in Italy. S/Sgt. Richard F. Schneider of Syracuse, NY is congratulated by Col. John M. Price, Commanding Officer, after being presented the Air Medal.



First official Air corp. photo



We carried this pair of photos to use on passports if shot down and evaded capture

Finally the weather cleared and the planes backed up in front of us were able to clear out and we were on our way to Lagens Field on the Azore Islands on July 17th; Marrakech, French Morocco on July 18th; and finally El Alouine Air Field in Tunisia on July 19th. We spent a day in each place, then flew to Cioro, Italy where we left our plane and were transported by Army trucks to Spinizola, which was to be our base for the duration arriving on July 20th.

The base was the 460th Bomb Group and we were in the 763rd Squadron. John T., Cassell, Wicks and Scott were together in a hut, but the crew was split up. Foley, Ely, Rose and Miller ended up in a tufa block hut and Dixon and I ended up in a six man pyramidal tent. It did have tiles laid over the dirt floor, so that was some consolation. Three bunks were occupied; two by a crew who were just about finished with their fifty missions and one by a ground crew chief William Moore from Louisiana. He was a little odd as all he could think of was returning home to his coon dog and hunting in the swamps, but he proved to be a big help later on.

It was July and Italy was quite nice, with pleasant weather and green farm fields. More training for everyone and especially John T. and Cassell learning to fly in a close, very tight formation. They also learned that the long, low approach that we used in the states wouldn't work in Italy, as every plane returning from a mission was low on gas and, since the B-24 dropped like a stone without power, the approach was done high and the landing became a quick swoop down to the ground. Scared the hell out of us the first time, especially the noise landing on the steel mesh runway.

The day of our first mission, on August 18, 1944, we were awakened at 4:00 A.M. for breakfast and briefing as to our target. I ate a big breakfast of hot oatmeal, canned fruit, scrambled powdered eggs, bread, spam, coffee and jam as we would get nothing else until we returned at about 5:00 P.M., per scuttle butt heard from other crew members. We all proceeded to the briefing room which was in an old, very large hay barn constructed of tufa block. (Tufa blocks were soft stone cut out of quarries with saws and were similar to our cast cement blocks, only solid all the way through).

The briefing room was under close security and only those going on a mission were allowed to enter. We were first briefed on weather and what to expect from base to return. Fortunately, the weather appeared good all day. The map to the target of the day was completely covered with a black cloth until the briefing officer began his description of the

days mission. The curtain was raised and, when everyone saw the general area there were many "oh, nos" in unison. The target was the Ploesti Rumanian oil fields that had become famous because of the intense flak, enemy fighters and the large number of B-24s and 17s that had been lost over the target.

We all were in one way anxious to get our first mission started but concerned that it was going to be to Ploesti. Since it was our first mission we had a combat experienced pilot along with John T. as co-pilot.

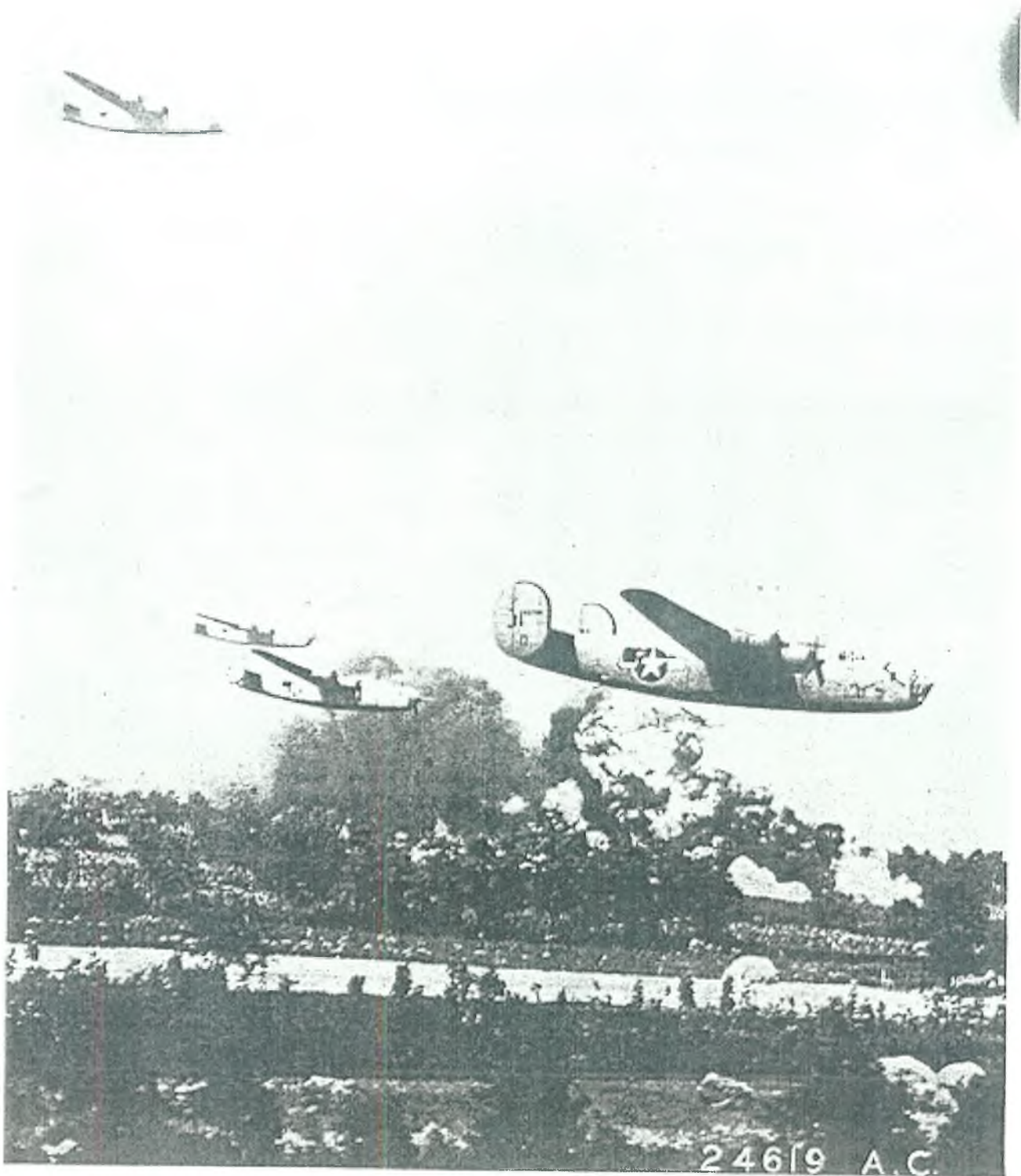
We took off rendezvousing with the formation and started crossing the Adriatic Sea. Shortly after, we lost one engine and had to drop out of formation and, since it couldn't be re-started, we returned to base. No credit for a mission today, but somewhat relieved that we had a good start and could successfully join the formation.

We were on stand down for several days and were able to get our first pass to visit Bari, which was Southeast of the base and on the Adriatic Sea. Being a lover of boats, I first visited the waterfront and harbor. It was quite a thrill to see a place hundreds of years old. The group also had a hotel in Bari that we could call our base when trying to meet anyone. There were also a number of maids and housekeepers who took care of the hotel who would love to marry a G.I. and get to the United States.

Dixon and I became very close friends and he and I traveled everywhere together and in Bari we visited all of the wine cellars and sampled food in all restaurants that looked clean enough. We also found that, by careful planning of time, we could take a train to Altamura and then bum a ride with anyone going from there to our base. It was a better trip than by G.I. truck all the way. We did strike up a friendship with the train master in Altamura and would bring him any surplus food items we could purloin from the mess hall. We were invited to his home several times and his wife would prepare a meal for us. Usually fresh eggs, potatoes and home made bread, but also fried peppers that were like Grandina made back home. His daughters were shooed away when we were there to keep them away from the big Texan who was well known as a ladies man and would pursue anyone in skirts.

While waiting for our next flight, I kept up my letter writing to folks back home and to my parents and Shirley every night. Mail call was our favorite part of the day and a place where one got a chance to meet everyone else on the base. This was where I first became aware that a close friend, Bob Schleret, who had gone through school with me, was on the base.





Colored B-24  
set against a  
wall of flame  
while burning  
at low target  
altitude over  
the Pacific,  
near U.S.  
Air Forces  
base

24619 A.C.

Also, I met Fred Dusse and Craig Williams, both from Syracuse. Packages from home were the best treat, although pretty crushed up at times.

We spent time fixing up our tent and installing a urinal outside. It was a hole dug in the ground about 24" deep into which we placed stones and a drain type pipe extending upward to "pecker" height.

On August 27th we heard the unmistakable squeaking brakes of the wake-up jeep stop outside of our tent. The tent flap opened and a flash light shown on our bunks. Okay Schneider and Dixon, your up this morning. We were up quickly, splashed water in our face, as we had no other facilities as yet on the base for getting cleaned up, and were off to breakfast.

On the last flight we had used heated flying suits from a crew who had returned to the states and, in the interim we were issued our own. I received an English flying suit that was a two piece brown woolen jacket and pants with heated inserts. This seemed to be more practical than the usual heated blue "union suit" type, as it could still be used as clothing in the event a bail out became necessary.

Briefing turned into another shocker as the target was the Bleckhammer Oil Plant in Germany. We had heard that this was almost as bad as Ploesti. We took off with our full original crew with Bilek as pilot in good weather, which held all the way to the target and were glad to see P-51s and P-38s flying cover for us, but they were no help as we flew through intense flak fire from the ground position during the turn into the "initial point" (IP) through the bomb run and after withdrawal. Several ships were hit and personnel injury by flak, but our luck was holding at least for this first combat mission. On return to the base relieved that our first mission was over, but starving, we were met first by medics who offered shots of whiskey to calm our nerves and Red Cross women who offered coffee and doughnuts to us while we were each de-briefed regarding our comments to report on the mission. We learned, as I had expected from what I saw from my tail position, that it had been a successful bomb on our targets.

We received a two mission credit due to the depth of penetration into Germany, but will need a total of fifty missions to complete a first tour of duty. Some missions we will receive only one credit, when there is shallow penetration.



John T. Bilek  
Pilot



John Cassel  
Co-Pilot



Fred Scott  
Navigator



Dean Dixon  
Flight Engineer  
and Martin Turret Gunner



Richard Foley  
Radio Operator  
and Waist Gunner



Ford Miller  
Ball Turret  
Belley Gunner



Rudolph Elie  
Nose Gunner



Our Mascot - Libby  
The only teddy bear  
to fly 57 missions



Dean Dixon  
How 'bout a date, babe?



Dean Dixon and Dick Schneider  
Ready for the Krauts - bring 'em on!

August 28, 1944, damn the squeaky breaks. Schneider and Dixon, your up. The whole crew was together again on this, our second mission to Szony Oil Refinery in Hungary. It was a long, but fairly safe mission as flak was quite light in comparison to Bleckhammer. This was a two credit mission. I by-passed the whiskey on return, but made up for it with coffee and doughnuts.

August 29, 1944, the jeep was back again for the third day in a row and we again had a two mission credit for bombing the South train marshalling yards and railroad bridge in Moravska Ostrava, Czechoslovakia. No serious flak and P-38s were there again providing cover.

August 30, 1944, the jeep didn't stop today and we got time to catch up on a number of jobs to be done around the tent. The two crew members who bunked in with us had finished their missions and left for the United States. We have now twenty-four replacement crews, including us, in place, ready to continue the air raids on Germany. Dixon, Moore and I were left as tent mates and this is when Moore became quite helpful as he procured some plexiglass and made a door and frame for our tent entrance while Dean and I obtained tufa blocks and, with the help of some natives, built a perimeter wall 4 ft. high around the tent, then raised the tent up 2 ft. to get the skirts off the ground and give us more head room. Our helpers also rebuilt our tile floor into a more solid level platform. Moore also scrounged up material from which we made a table for writing, cards or whatever.

Moore also helped some other guys set up a small generator and we helped string one light bulb per tent to four other tents. A radio operator got a radio from a downed plane and set it up so we could string wires to each tent to hook up our speakers which we made out of cigar boxes, earphones and paper cones. Boy, what luxury.

Our bathing at present was to walk to a water truck, get a helmet full of water and go back to the tent and wash up the best we could. Moore helped again when he showed up with a five gallon pail to store wash water in our tent. The one who used the last would refill it.

Our urinal worked well, especially in the middle of the night, but bowel movements were over hand dug slit trenches and, after use, you would use a shovel to put dirt over the top of the waste.

I kept up my letter writing, due to my promise, but mostly to ensure that I received letters back. No one knows how important this is, especially when morale gets low and you start getting home sick.

September 2nd, three days of rest and I'd forgotten about the squeaky brakes, but was brought back to reality this morning. At briefing we learned it would be a short trip, about 5-1/2 hours to the Mis Marshalling yards in Yugoslavia. The day was again clear and bombing was done visually with good success, destroying a good portion of the yards. We did not get much flak except right over the target where it was quite concentrated.

September 5th, we bombed the Szob railroad bridge in Hungary. It was a fairly low altitude mission, about 16,000 ft., compared to previous days at 24,000 ft. It turned out to be a one mission credit milk run.

We did not fly again for a week, but found we could catch up on reading, writing and I signed up for a mathematics course (actually some advance math in the event I returned to school when the war was over). Dixon and I made a trip to Bari and also stopped to see our friend in Altmura.

Shortly after the original crew that was in our tent left, we got some new mates, Vic Kuhns and John Corley. They were a good match for Dixon and I as we were all interested in the same things. Moore, on the other hand, was a loner who kept to himself almost all the time. We included him whenever we could and I think he was most appreciative of our friendship although he never outwardly showed it.

September 12th, ended our play time with a 2 mission credit to Wasserburg, Germany to bomb the jet aircraft factory. We saw our first enemy fighters, ME109 jets and some propeller aircraft off in the distance. Luckily, we had P38s and P51s flying cover and they kept the enemy fighters away from our group. This was a long flight at high altitude, but no appreciable flak was encountered. We did not have anything to eat from breakfast to dinner, but for this flight we did receive K-rations. After the target I was ready to eat anything, however, the rations were frozen solid in temperatures at 65°F below zero.

We did not fly on September 13th, but it was a day the war was brought to our tent. Corley and Kuhns flew on a mission to the Oswiecim oil and rubber plant in Poland. Their plane was damaged by an errant 50 caliber casing from another plane; they were hit by flak, lost an engine over the target, but tried to make it back to Italy. They finally lost all engines within sight of the Italian coast. They all bailed out but Vic Kuhns, along with two others, drowned in the Adriatic. Corley was saved by a tug boat, however, we never saw him again. I never really believed, nor I suppose anyone else did, that it would happen to me, however it could have been Dixon and me if the jeep had stopped for us instead of them.

September 18th, we were both nervous when we were alerted to fly today to bomb a railroad bridge in Budapest, Hungary. It was a one credit mission, there was intense flak over the target, but it turned out to be a very successful mission with bombs destroying the target. The target was covered with clouds, however, just before bomb release it cleared and from my tail position as we left the target I could confirm good hits on the bridge.

The next day we got a reprieve, due to weather, from a mission to Bleckhammer, Germany. Normally everyone stood by ready for take off, which was signaled by a green flare fired out of "Dolly Tower" which was the 460th's control tower. When weather looked bad, we hopefully waited for "paratecnique rosa" which in Italian was two red flares. They were fired off today to everyone's relief.

September 20th, an easy day if there ever could be one, with Germans trying to shoot us down, but our target at the Hatvan, Hungary marshalling yards was almost without flak and bombs scored good hits. Our nerves were more relaxed after this mission and we stopped dwelling on Kuhn's death.

Mail call was always welcome as we were able to meet other crew members and I got time to spend with Bob Schleret, my old school mate, and Fred Dusse.

We visited Bari again with all of our crew sampling many of the wine cellars. The only other alcohol that was available was cognac from Yugoslavia that tasted like burning celluloid smells.



*In memory of*  
**John Corley and Victor Kuhns**



We shared a tent together until they were shot down while on a mission to Germany and crash-landed in the Adriatic Sea.

John and Vic were together in heavy seas but became separated. John was eventually rescued by a fishing boat, but Victor Kuhns perished at sea.

We also visited the village of Spinazolla just outside of our base. Being September, the grapes were ready to be pressed and during the first few weeks we drank wonderful sweet grape juice that came out of tremendously large casks mounted in the walls of the winery. We also had movies at the briefing room and, on our way from tent city, we would cut through the grape orchards and pick large bunches of white or red grapes to eat at the movie.

September 23rd, we were dispatched to bomb the Casaras Railroad Bridge in Tagliamanta, Italy. Again, an easy one mission credit with no flak encountered and good hits on the target. Weather was turning bad and there were no more missions in September and only a few missions flown in early October. October 4th, was our next mission to the Avisio Viaduct, Italy with accurate heavy flak over the target and along the way.

October 7th, thankful for a few days rest the squeaky brakes were after us again, this time to bomb the Vienna oil storage tanks and marshalling yards where direct hits were made. Flak was moderate and, although we saw some German planes, there were no attacks.

October 10th, Piave Suseganna, Italy railroad bridge was our next target. We had to take two bomb runs as the clouds covered the target on the first run, so, with light flak it was decided to make a second pass. They had our range now and flak was heavy and accurate on the second run. After the bomb run where many were injured we ran into intense weather, high winds, severe icing and thunderstorms. Engines and wings were in ice up conditions that caused many planes to go out of control, requiring bail out by crew members. This is one of the days our two big guys, Bilek and Cassell, saved the day, forcing the plane to keep on course back to base. This was a one mission credit, but probably one of the scariest up to now.

October 11th, up and at them bright and early for a trip to the Vienna Oil Refinery. We dropped lots of bombs, but cloud cover obscured the target. Again a bad flak day, but our luck still held out as we were one of the few planes that survived damage. Another tail gunner was killed by flak, the fourth since I've been flying missions.

Photo by Staff 2nd F.C.H. Unit



Bob  
Wicks →

Dick  
Schneider

October 12th, the Stars and Stripes headlined this mission as a milk run to Bologna, Italy to bomb the ammo dump. "Wrong", as twenty of the thirty planes that took off were hit by flak, ours being one of them, with holes through the wing and tail section. They were getting close.

October 13th, Bankida Marshalling Yards in Hungary. This was the first day I flew as a substitute tail gunner with another crew. It was a two mission credit, bombs did not hit the target and there was little flak for which I was thankful.

October 14th and 15th, missions were cancelled; a relief after four straight days of flying. It wasn't only the stress of the mission, but the long hours, high altitude, cold and being on oxygen so long that took its toll. I did find that I could keep my K-rations from freezing by tucking them in between the electrical connection between my heated jacket and pants. The canned scrambled eggs and or cheese with bacon were okay, but the warm fruit bar was the best.

While we had been flying, new people moved into our tent who were all ground people and some misfits. One was very big, strong and wild and one night he came back drunk and stood peeing at the foot of Dixon's bunk. You can't do this to a Texan no matter how big you are and the fight was on. Dixon and I were not holding our own but when the drunk got knocked over onto Moore's bunk and he started in on him, it was the last straw. Moore got up, grabbed him by the neck and shoved him out the door. It was pouring rain and the mud outside was deep, but he came back in the tent, ready to fight again, whereby Moore again grabbed him by the seat of the pants and nap of the neck and threw him head first into the mud, then grabbed his duffel and threw it out on top of him. He got up, stole an M.P.'s jeep and the last we heard they caught him in Altamura and he was court martialed and sent to jail.

One of the other fellows was a medic who was assigned to hand out the whiskey to everyone returning from a mission. Since my stomach was too upset to drink on my return, he said, take it anyway and he would pour it in an empty bottle and save it. I got all who didn't drink to do it and soon we had a full bottle we could mix with grapefruit juice that was one of the plentiful items available at the mess hall. The whiskey mix made it more tolerable.

# Gigantic Bomber Attack Blasts Nazis In Bologna



## Raid Larger Than Those On Cassino

ADVANCED ALLIED FORCE HEADQUARTERS, Oct. 12—Black with bombers, the skies over Bologna rained fiery death on the Germans for many hours today as extraordinary forces of 15th AAF Liberators and Fortresses laid upon the key Italian city load after load of explosives in preparation for the 5th Army's expected assault on the area.

"A bigger job even than the bombing of Cassino," is the way veteran airmen described today's raid. It was the greatest attack, as to number of 15th AAF planes ever concentrated on one objective.

Barracks, bivouac areas, ammunition dumps and other vital military objectives were among the targets today.

The attacks from the air were a part of the Allies' answer to stiffened German resistance, reported recently by both Allied armies operating on the front.

October 16th, we were sent to bomb St. Valentine, Austria but the target was overcast so we hit the Graz-Neudorf Aircraft factory with good results, with intense, accurate flak over the target. One plane took a direct hit and it was like a direct hit by a shot gun on a clay pigeon. There was the large explosion and it seemed nothing was left but bits and pieces. No large sections as you would expect, just small pieces. This brought us all back to reality and I was thankful I was back flying with John T. and the boys.

Two more days of stand down, I believe to re-group and repair planes we have flown almost daily and even Dixon was getting leery of the planes. He would have felt better if we were assigned one plane to fly. Then he could do better checkouts and work closely with the ground crew, but we never knew which plane we would fly on the next mission. He was diligent though about doing his pre-flight check. He used to say "he was too mean to die" but he took all precautions to give him the best edge that he could.

The weather was really lousy now, with rain almost every day and the mud got deeper by the minute. We didn't have any heat in the tent and it was damp and cold. Dixon and I were trying to find a way to get some heat in the tent without blowing us up when I mentioned, if we had an empty barrel, some tubing, a valve and another barrel that we could store dissellent (fuel oil) in I could make a heater of some kind. Moore listened and the next day he showed up with a bunch of parts. We cut a square out of the side of the barrel, buried it half in the ground in the center of the tent and I bent and drilled the tubing to form a burner, hooked up the shut off valve and poured oil out of a gallon container into the tubing. Stand back, turn on the valve and throw in a match. It worked, but the gallon of oil didn't last long and it smoked badly, but it was warm for a few minutes. We had to find a way to get out the smoke and a larger container that we could pipe oil into the tent from outside. Moore listened, but never said a word.

That night Dixon and I reconnoitered a few field engineers stores that were recently attached to our base. We found a 10 ft. piece of 6 inch cast iron pipe just laying on the ground that would make a good chimney. With midnight requisitioning, one eliminated signing forms. Dean took one end and I the other over our shoulders and we were off through the mud, now up to the top of our G.I. shoes. Just before arriving at the tent, we slipped. Down went the pipe along with us in the mud. We got Moore out of bed and with his help placed the flange end over the bung hole in the top of the barrel and put the pipe up through the opening in the top of the tent. Enough for tonight. We cleaned up the best we could and hit the sack to get warm. I had stuffed my mattress cover with lots of straw doused with flea powder and, with a couple of G.I. blankets, it wasn't too bad.



Our tent -- notice  
the nice tile floor



Co-Pilot John Cassel  
Ready for take-off



Dick tries flying outside  
the tail turret rather than  
getting stuck inside



Check these two photos  
for weather change



Spinazolla never had snow till I got there.  
Notice the ladder we used daily to keep  
snow out of the chimney.

Moore was off before we got up but returned by mid-morning with a weapons carrier truck and a fifty five gallon barrel of fuel oil with a shut off valve already hooked up. We made cribbing out of the tufa blocks to get it high enough to free drain to our stove. The next problem was to get it from the back of the truck to the top of the blocks. Moore backed the weapons carrier to the blocks, jumped in the back of the truck and single handedly put the barrel on top of the blocks. He jumped back in the truck and drove off characteristically without a word. Dean and I finished the hook-up and by all miracles, it worked. We became the envy of all the surrounding tents. We could heat water to wash & shave, not to mention that it dried all the wet clothes and dampness in the tent.

October 20th, this was a black day for us and I'll recall it as I saw it, contrary to the group report. We were on our way to bomb a target in Germany and we were flying in the number three position on the left side of the formation with John T. at the controls. Lt. Galarneau was flying the lead position with my friend Fred Dusse in the nose turret and we were over the northern end of the Adriatic.

The plane in the number 4 position, which I could see clearly from my tail turret, flew under and up into the #1 ship. They hung together which seemed to be like stop action, then fell over toward our ship. Bilek turned to the left so that my turret was in clear view of what was happening.

The number 4 ship began to break apart, first at the waist and I could see the two waist gunners standing in mid-air, their yellow Mae West clearly visible and without parachutes. The #4 plane still close to number one and both coming in our direction began to break apart piece by piece. First one wing, the tail and the rest of the plane spiraled down out of sight. I saw three men bail out of Lt. Galarneau's plane as it rolled over and went straight down out of sight. I believed at that point that they had crashed into the sea.

Our crew at that time was way out of position and could not catch up with the formation. Scotty and Wicks picked a target of opportunity and we proceeded to bomb the harbor at Triest. It was a very clear day and we came in the coast from the North, headed South on the bomb run with Wicks controlling the plane with the bomb sight. We hit a few bursts of flak, but succeeded in dropping the full bomb load in the center of the harbor. Not really sure we hit anything, but it must of scared the hell out of them, seeing a lone B-24 dropping bombs. As soon as the bombs were away Bilek and Cassell did an immediate 90° turn that put us out over the Adriatic and on our way home.



After landing we found out that Galarneau had been able to right the plane and, although badly damaged, managed to keep it flying while the bombardier and navigator extricated Fred Dusse out of the crushed nose turret. By dropping their bombs and throwing out whatever they could, Galarneau and his co-pilot, although losing altitude constantly, eventually reached our base. I believe the plane collapsed once it reached the hard stand, not to fly again. Thirteen fliers were lost on this flight. This was a tough one to recover from and luckily there were no flights for the next two days. (See addendum at end for Fred's account to Jill Chandler and her newspaper article).

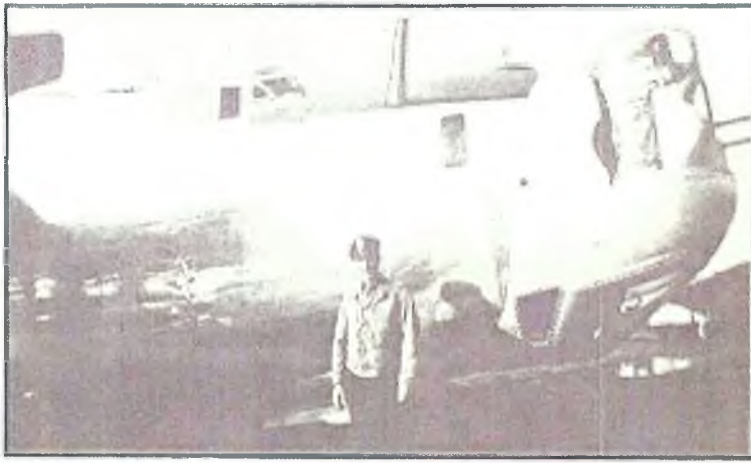
October 23rd, our mission was to Augsburg, Germany to bomb the diesel jet engine factory. Flak was encountered over the target, at Innsbruck and through the Brenner Pass.

Weather turned bad again and we were off for ten days. We further improved our heating system and found it was great cooking things received in packages from home. In the tent next to us, there was a gunner who had been the manager of a hotel in downtown Manhattan and he received packages when no one else received mail. He became a good supplier of gourmet meals to prepare on top of the stove. If the first one to the mess hall didn't return, we knew mess was okay. If he returned we went to our shared larder and cooked up a storm. Beer was rationed to about a can a week, but I bartered with cigarettes for beer and put that in our larder for special occasions.

November 4th, weather still bad but we managed to bomb Linz, Austria with little flak seen and returned safely to our base. With 30 missions under our belts and everyone up-graded in rank, we were feeling like seasoned veterans with only 20 more missions to go. But, alas, this was changed to 35 individual take-offs or sorties and double missions no longer counted. We now had only 19 sorties, which meant 16 more to reach the 35 requirement.

November 7th, bombed the Adige - Mezzocorona with fair results, but no flak to speak of. It was a quick mission and we would have received only one credit. 20 down and 15 to go. This count was always on everyone's mind and more so as it got closer to the end.

We were off now for about 20 days and got a chance to visit Naples for two days and were hopeful for a trip to Cairo to pick up booze, but all was cancelled. On our trip to Naples we wandered down Via Roma between Garibaldi Square and the San Carlo Opera House, visited the harbor and spent time at the Red Cross Club where one morning we had real eggs for



John Bilek

Ready to fly the B-24 Liberator



Our two Waist Gunners

Carl Rose and Dick Foley



We had fun in Naples  
October 1944

Dean Dixon  
John Cassel  
John Bilek  
Dick Schneider



I'll check the plane,  
then let's get flying.

Dean Dixon



Mount Vesuvius from Waist Window



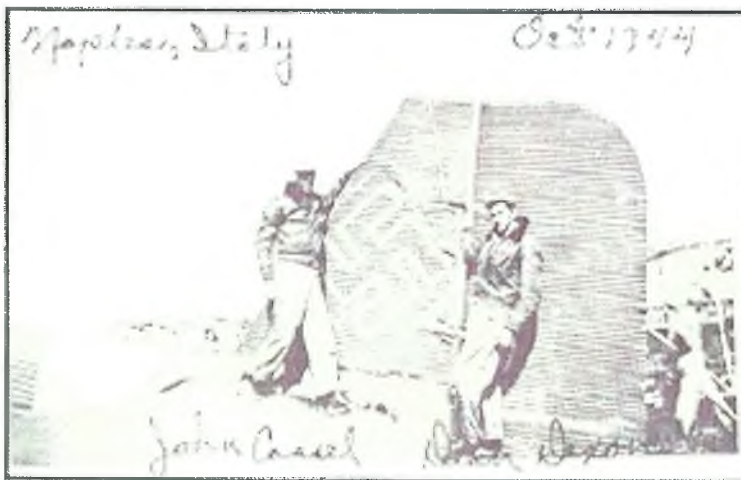
Scotty & Wicks  
Enjoying the Isle of Capri



Mount Vesuvius from the ground



Fred Scott and Bob Wicks  
Isle of Capri  
October 1944



German Tri-Motor  
John Cassel and Dean Dixon  
Naples, Italy  
October 1944



FW-190 German Fighter  
and Dick Schneider

breakfast along with home made sweet rolls.

I also met G.I. Infantry soldiers back from the front and after listening to their stories of being there a month in the cold, wet and muddy battle line, most of the time soaked to the skin, I felt pretty lucky and told them so, as I could at least come back to dry clothes and a bed most every night. But, one G.I. I talked to said he wouldn't trade places with me, the sitting duck and the Heinies shooting at me and I couldn't shoot back or do anything but sit there. He would rather see the guy shooting at him.

December 2nd, 1944, the squeaky brakes brought us back to reality and the briefing really brought us back, as our mission was back to the Blechhammer Oil Refinery. Always a long trip, deep into Germany and heavy concentrations of flak, not only at the target, but also along the way. This one turned out to be no different with heavy accurate flak damaging 27 of the 35 aircraft that left our field. Although German fighters were seen, we were covered by P-38s and P-51s. It was always comforting when the P-38s flared up to silhouette their twin booms for recognition. The mission was a success with bombs hitting the primary targets, but by the time we left the bomb run, the Germans were rebuilding again.

Many planes were lost this day and fliers killed or captured as P.O.W.s. Our plane was shot up pretty badly and we went into a flat spin. I reached for my door cable that would slide open two doors to my tail turret, but it was broken in two. The spin forced me against the side of the turret and I couldn't move. The thought going through my mind at that time was "so this is how it ends". There was no chance to get out of the turret unless someone could pry open my doors and that was unlikely under these conditions. What seemed like hours, but was probably only seconds, I relaxed peacefully, waiting for the end, when the forces pressing me against the turret changed and I felt like I was being squashed down into the bottom of the turret when "big foot" John T. and Cassell stopped the spin and in the process raised the tail causing the change in forces I was experiencing. Everyone was on the intercom instantly, checking status. Fortunately, everyone was okay and the old B-24 was still flying and it was Carl Rose who got my doors opened. Weather turned bad on the return trip and "Dolly Tower" advised our field was socked in and that we would have to pick an alternate field.

Each field we tried closed in, gas was running low and, as we approached Bari it began to close in and the tower waved us off, however, we were too low on fuel to comply with the wave off and we went in anyway. The wheels came down, but were damaged by flak and the tires blew half way down the runway, which by now was just a sea of mud and we looked more like a boat throwing a big wake rather than a B-24. The plane wouldn't stop on the runway and we went off the end, over a road and into an almond orchard, coming to a stop with the nose wheel buried to the hilt in mud.

The plane behind us was also waved off, but he didn't have a choice either and he followed us in. When we came to a stop I could see him still coming and all of us in the waist scrambled out, sure that the plane would hit us, but he ground looped and crashed into a B-17, just off the runway. Bob Wicks didn't fly with us today, as he had a bad cold and sinus infection. We were thinking he was lucky to miss this one.

Weather remained bad and we spent several days in Bari before getting transportation back to Spinazolla. We watched attempts to get our B-24 out of the orchard, but with three bulldozers, one chained to each wheel, it would not budge.

When we returned to the base we learned that Bob Wicks, now one of the lead bombardiers, was assigned in our absence to fly with another crew and on December 11th he was shot down on a mission to Vienna, Austria. It was reported that his plane was hit by flak over the target and when last seen it was heading East and losing altitude. Several of the crew were reported as P.O.W.s but Wicks was not included and was reported missing in action. This was quite a shock to our crew, having been together for so long.

Of the original 24 crews we started with at the end of July, there were now only 3 left and we were one of them but we were missing Bob Wicks. The rest of us have been quite lucky till now and with 21 sorties (35 missions) under our belts, could we last for 14 more sorties?

December 17th, Blechhammer again. The target was overcast so bombs were dropped by use of Pathfinder, but results could not be confirmed. Flak and German fighters were seen, but the good old P-38s and 51s kept them at bay.

December 18th, Blechhammer once again. Every group was bombing Blechhammer, but the Germans kept rebuilding with a vengeance. This mission successfully destroyed a good portion of the plant, which was quite a loss to the German war effort.

December 19th, my 19th birthday was celebrated by breaking open the beer larder and cooking gourmet food on our stove. Moore even joined in. One problem we did have with keeping food around was rats. I awoke one night with a large one crawling on my bunk and the next day I enticed a stray cat to visit our tent by giving him (or her) sardines from cans we had received from home. It worked and she stayed in our area for the duration. Moore also stored things in 5 gal. square metal tins under his bunk and when he would roll over at night you could hear the crinkle of tin. We got him to get rid of all food to help get rid of the rats, but couldn't convince him to remove the tin cans. We felt we could live with this one inconvenience since he was no problem in any other way and quite helpful at times.

We were told that we were not expecting a mission on Christmas Day and, since a new non-coms club had opened on our base and the engineers had built us a hot and cold shower, but not in a heated room (can't have everything) we took advantage of both, but fortunately hit the sack early.

December 25th, I couldn't believe the squeaky brakes were back on Christmas Day. The group decided on an all out mission, since the Germans would not be expecting us. The mission was to the Graz Marshalling Yards, just outside of Vienna, and by this time the Germans had begun to concentrate on the railroad mounted anti-aircraft 88s in that area. Consequently, we experienced more flak than usual and I saw one of our planes get a direct hit. It seemed to rise upward, then explode and it was gone. We returned safely to our base and, to our surprise, no one had Christmas dinner until we returned. It turned out to be one of the best dinners ever in the service with turkey, all the trimmings finishing with mince and pumpkin pie. Sleep came quickly that night.

I forgot to mention earlier that when I got stuck in my turret I decided that I would not close the doors again. It was not too dangerous leaving them open; it was only that I had nothing to lean against. I could stand this discomfort knowing I wouldn't be trapped again.

After hearing stories of people bailing out and their sheepskin flying boots snapping off when the chute opened causing them to land without shoes, I decided that I'd prepare a little better for when I had to bail out. I sewed two pair of socks inside my flying jacket, wire tied my extra pair of G.I. shoes to a shackle I could snap on my parachute harness and practiced doing a back flip out of the turret, picking up my chute placed at the point where I ended the back flip, snap it on and I was ready to go. I also included a small survival kit in my pack that could get me through a couple of days. It seemed from all who survived capture that the first few days were crucial to escaping.

December 31st, New Years Eve. Boy, what a party at the non-coms club. Our whole enlisted crew were there, along with many of our surviving friends. We had a little bit of everything, but the cherry brandy mixed with grapefruit juice seemed to be the most popular. That was the only way the grapefruit juice was palatable. New Years Day we all spent recuperating.

We flew no more missions in early January, 1945 and Dixon and I left about the 8th of January for R & R on the Isle of Capri. We flew to Naples, Italy and spent two nights in the Army Air Corps hotel, where Dixon was amazed by the bidet, kidding "it was awful small to take a bath in". It gave us a chance to visit more of the sites in Naples where most led off of Via Roma. The park by the harbor was where we had the best time as we could get a bottle of champagne for 2 cigarettes. Once a week we could buy a carton of cigarettes for 5 cents a pack, so I kept plenty on hand for barter. Dixon smoked most of his.

On the third morning we went to the harbor and boarded the ferry for Capri, but not before we got a couple of bottles of champagne to take with us. We were assigned a double room in a cottage with real beds and bathrooms. There were about ten separate rooms in the cottage and maids to clean and make up the beds. The drinking water, however, was collected off the rock hills and then stored in lister bags that were rubber coated canvas hanging outside. It tasted moldy and smelled of rubber and we both decided we would live on champagne for the next week. We paid the maids to wake us in the morning with a glass of champagne as it was the only thing to get us going in the morning after a night on the town. We partied all evening and wandered the hills of Capri, visited Tiberis' Castle where he would throw unwanted wives off the cliff into the sea, heard various lectures on how Capri was involved with early history before the time of Christ and took boat trips around the island visiting the various caves.



My girl Shir!



Maria and me  
Isle of Capri



Sunny Sands Italy  
TUFA Block/Tent City



Bob Wicks, Hunt Ethridge, John Bilek  
Our visit to Bob in Clinton, NY  
April 1947



My best trip was to the cave at the Blue Grotto where I fell in love with Maria. The entrance to the cave could only be made on the well of the wave and we would lie down together so we didn't hit our heads and Maria would carry us into the cave. Maria was well built, had the nicest round bottom and was responsive to a nice firm grip. I wrote about her to Shirley and got a "Dear John"s letter in return until she found out about Maria when I sent her a photograph of the two of us together. If you haven't guessed by now, Maria was the name of the boat I took to the Blue Grotto.

Rest leave was not to get rest, but to have a good time relaxing from the tensions of the war. I met a Red Cross girl from Syracuse and she and five others helped to entertain all of us while on Capri. Dixon and I ran into many old buddies and the gang of us had dinner together every night, with plenty of Chianti and some of the finest food prepared by chefs from the French Riviera. We had creamed Spam, Virginia baked Spam, Breaded Spam, Spam sausage, Spam meatballs and lots of other good Italian and French foods that could be prepared from their meager allotment of foods they received.

I found out Dixon's birthday was in a couple of days and we secretly planned a birthday party for him. We tricked him into thinking no one would be around that evening, but when he walked in we were all there and one of the Red Cross girls ushered him to his seat. We all had goofy presents for him, a great dinner and finally a birthday cake with candles and all the frosting. He was never emotional, but tears came to his eyes that night as he said it was the first birthday party he ever had.

We enjoyed the rest of our stay and returned to Naples to get our plane back to the base, but the weather was so bad on the East coast and over the mountains that they were cancelled. We waited almost two weeks when finally our names were posted to leave in the morning. We were anxious to get back to our home tent and, like it or not, back into action. The real reason for an "R and R".

February 8th, I'd forgotten about squeaky brakes, but there he was, bright and early to send us off to bomb the Marshalling yards at Vienna. It was a quick flight compared to Blechhammer and not much anti-aircraft fire today as, although it was accurate at our altitude, it was behind us. It was better me seeing it than Eli up in the nose seeing it, knowing we would still have to fly through the flak.

February 14th, a return trip to Vienna to bomb the Lobau Oil Refinery. There were a number of groups all hitting targets in the same area and it got very confusing for everyone. We lucked out; got in, dropped our bombs and got out with more flak damage. There were a large number of aircraft damaged, crew members killed and one B-24 straggler that couldn't keep up was shot down by fighters that were lurking just beyond range.

February 21st, off to Vienna again. It was good to see P-38s and 51s again since a B-24 was lost in our last flight by German fighters. Heavy flak was reported again in front of us, but it was avoided by a quick 90° turn. At the high altitude we were flying it was bright, clear and very cold and vapor trails from hundreds of B-17s and 24s could be seen for miles. It seemed that you could reach out and touch the snow covered peaks of the Alps as we flew by. I wondered how we kept from hitting them, especially when they were, at times, covered by clouds.

One of the nose gunners, Al Jankauskas, in the tent next to us had also been trapped in his turret and, as I, had decided not to close his doors again. His only problem was that he scrouched out and sat his fanny on the metal plate just behind his turret, where the slip stream at -50° F made it a chill plate. Al didn't realize it at the time, but in the middle of the night he awoke in pain with such severe frost bite in the cheeks of his fanny that he was sent to a hospital and then home. We kidded him as being the only gunner who got his tail froze in the nose.

Bob Schleret, my high school friend from home, was shot down on a mission to Vienna and his plane was seen to go down and some chutes were also seen. He is listed as missing in action.

March 12th, off to bomb Vienna again. This makes four times in a row. This mission was against the Florisdorf Oil Refinery with good results; flak was moderate at the target, but we kept being hit with flak at several points on the way and on return.

March 16th, back to Austria again to bomb the Amsetten Marshalling yards. We had a clear shot weatherwise and considerable damage was done in the center of the yards and the main choke point was fully destroyed. We saw what looked like ME-210s, but none attacked and no appreciable flak was seen. A nice easy trip and glad of it, since I wasn't flying with our crew today.

March 19th, back with my old crew for a trip to bomb the Muldorf Marshalling yards in Germany. This again was a pretty easy mission, but quite long and tiring, but without the stress of flying through flak. Still, the anticipation of it coming was there. Enemy aircraft were sighted, but none came in for an attack.

Under old rules this would have been my 50th mission and it would have been all over. Under the new rules it was my 30th sortie, leaving five more to go. Now the tension begins to mount as so many ran into trouble on their last few missions.

March 23rd, another Marshalling yard at Gmund, Austria to bomb. The Germans were pulling all their rolling stock North for what looked like a last stand. This also included their 88mm (3-1/2") anti-aircraft guns, all ready to fire at our formations. It was good to see P-38s as cover, since we had seen enemy aircraft previously. We missed the bomb drop on the first pass and had to do a 360° turn and try again, with good results. Flak bursts were light and it appeared "Jerry" was reaching the end of the road.

It was clear going through the mountains and again it seemed we could touch the peaks. All the previous missions would have been double credit. Too bad the rules were changed.

We were flying through the Alps one day in clear sunshine and we bumped into one outcropping after another and, although we seemed to be okay, I could hear the crinkling of the metal skin after each bump. This couldn't be happening on such a nice clear day and I must be dreaming, but no, I could clearly hear the crinkle of metal. I finally awoke when there was a particular loud noise and, yes, it was Moore going through a restless night, rolling over the tin cans under his bunk. This dream stayed with me for years.

March 31st, we bombed the Villack, Austria Marshalling yards with good results and moderate flak on the bomb run.

April 7th, off with another crew that was shy a tail gunner and we flew to the Brenner Pass to bomb Isarcoables. Weather kept us on the ground for about three hours. We finally took off to some miscommunications and we again were delayed in the air. When we reached the target it was completely covered with clouds and we were even flying through some of it at 23,000 feet. Since we couldn't bomb visually as ordered, we returned to base with a full bomb load.

April 11th, another crew without a tail gunner got me for a mission to bomb Vipitenio Marshalling yards in Northern Italy. It was a clear visual bomb run with excellent concentrations throughout the whole yard and at the important choke points at both ends. Flak was well sustained on and after the bomb run. Several planes had trouble and one crew had to bail out after the bomb run. One more to go!

April 12th, I drew a green crew this time and I was quite concerned, this being my last mission, but was relieved when I got to the plane and found John T. was the pilot, breaking in the crew. Our mission was to bomb the Ponte Di Piave Railroad bridge in Northern, Italy. We were told this was to be an all out maximum effort day for the full 15th Air Force and that all missions would be in support of the ground force of the 5th and 8th Armies. It was a clear day as we reached the Northern coast of Italy at the top of the Adriatic Sea and the target was just inland from the Gulf of Venice. The bombardier said he had a clear shot at the target and it was confirmed by the nose gunner. Bombs were away and John T. stood the B-24 on its wing for a sharp 90° turn out over the sea. Boy, what a great feeling. Number 35 turned out to be one of the easiest missions, but the most nerve racking. Out of the 35 take-offs (sorties) I actually accumulated 57 missions.

I was, as I remember, the first of our crew to finish my missions and it was hard to say goodbye to my crew mates and, of course, the loss of Bob Wicks. One of my fondest memories was us all singing over the intercom, lead by Scotty, "I Used to Work in Chicago", a diddy Scotty knew hundreds of verses to.

But, I was ready to go home to see Mom, Dad and Shirley, whom they took care of while I was off enjoying the worldly sights. They liked Shirley and I think they were afraid we wouldn't get together after the war.

My final task was to search through Air Force records to see if there was any final word on the fate of Bob Wicks and Bob Schleret that I could pass on to their families when I returned home, but there was nothing really new.

I left Spinazolla on April 24, 1945 and spent two weeks on guard duty at the 7th Replacement Depot before boarding the USS Maraposa, a cruise ship of the Matson Line before conversion into a hospital and troop ship on May 6th. The trip back to the states weatherwise was not too bad as far as I was concerned, but more than half of the troops got seasick. Service people on the ship organized shows among the returning G.I.s. I didn't know there was so much talent aboard. We were entertained all the way home. Of course, the card and crap games went on all over the ship wherever there was a place to lay down a G.I. blanket.

The war in Europe ended May 8th as we were on our way back to the states. We were the first troop ship to land in Boston harbor after the end of the war and what a welcome we received. All floors of the warehouses surrounding the ship had people leaning out of windows and open lofts, bands were playing and all of us were proud to be arriving on American soil, having helped in the European war effort.

We went to Camp Miles Standish near Boston on May 15th for debriefing and on to Fort Dix, New Jersey for reassignment before a leave, which I hoped we would get this time. I was assigned to report to A.A.F.R. Sqd. in Atlantic City, New Jersey on June 19th and everyone was told that they could bring their wives along if they made reservations now. I wasn't married, but thought it wouldn't hurt to make a reservation just in case.

The leave turned out to be for 30 days and I anxiously boarded the train to Penn Station, transferred to Grand Central, then just drank in the good old U.S.A. as we rode along the Hudson River and finally through the "choke point" of the Marshalling yard in East Syracuse (not even bombed out) arriving in Syracuse to the arms of Shirley, Mom and Dad.

It was great to be home, but I knew one of the first things I had to do was call Bob Wick's wife in Clinton. Before I could say more than my name when I called, she said she had just received a telegram that Bob was an evadee, having hidden out from the enemy and was liberated by the Russians. What good news.

Next was my call to Bob Schleret's home and again I was greeted with good news, that he had been captured, was a prisoner of war and liberated by the advancing troops. My grim duty had a pleasant surprise ending and it was time to get caught up with life in Syracuse.

Did the usual visits to family and friends; went to parties with my folks and Shirley and found time to spend alone with Shirley. I finally got the gumption to ask if she would be my bride. It was almost as hard as flying another mission, but ended well when she accepted. I hadn't told her I had already made reservations for my intended wife in Atlantic City, but the truth came out when I had to explain where we would go on our honeymoon. Bob Schleret got home shortly after I did and he agreed to be my best man. We were married on June 16, 1945 and had a good old fashioned wedding reception in Shirley's parents back yard.

We arrived in Atlantic City on June 19th for a fun week, except I had to report early every morning to replacement headquarters to see what was in store for my next assignment. It turned out to be training in B-32s for duty in the South Pacific and it was to be done at Tarrant Field in Ft. Worth, Texas and I was to report there on June 28th. That did give us time to spend together and we met some other great newlyweds while staying at the Ambassador Hotel, which was right on the beach. June is one of the best times of the year to be in Atlantic City.

Les Brown's Band played every night at the hotel and we enjoyed some great picnics where Shirley got some experience riding in G.I. trucks to and from the picnics. Shirly left for Syracuse and I was off to Texas only to find when I arrived that all B-32 training was cancelled. To find me something to do, I was assigned to handle all of the Air Force equipment being returned from all areas. I was to be there until the war was over and would be discharged.

Shirley decided to join me, although there appeared to be no place for us to stay, but after her arrival and a couple of days of her hunting for a place, while staying in a motel and I was on the base, she found a servant's quarters in a garage apartment behind a home of the first woman lawyer admitted to the bar in the state of Texas. What a grand old person she was and she was so good to both of us. We both enjoyed our stay in Texas, met great folks at the Sergeants Club and, since Ft. Worth was a dry county, we went "honky tonkin" to places on neighboring county lines. We felt like real Texans.

Downtown Ft. Worth erupted on V.J. day with parades of people, convertibles with barrels of beer and champagne just pouring out to everyone. I thoroughly enjoyed myself to Shirly's somewhat disgusted look, but she, without a driver's license, got us back to the apartment safely.

My discharge papers finally came through and Shirley left for Syracuse alone while I went to Sioux City, Iowa to be discharged. On return to Syracuse in mid November 1945 Shirley and I lived in an upstairs apartment over my Mom and Dad. I went to work at Dad's plant and Shirly worked as a secretary to the president of a paper distributing company.

In September of 1946 I started night classes at University College, a subsidiary of Syracuse University. Shirly was pregnant and I thought that going as a full time student was out of the question. Time quickly passed and our daughter, Wendie, was born on February 27th, 1947.

John T. Bilek called in April and said he would like to visit if it was okay. What a surprise and that he should even think to ask if it was okay. We spent a couple of days reminiscing, then drove to Clinton to visit Bob Wicks and his family; also meeting his brother-in-law, Hunt Ethridge.

Time seemed to fly by and there were a gang of ex-GIs going to school, so we started a night shift at Dad's plant, manned by mostly GI students. I joined the Air Force ROTC and began full time at Syracuse University working nights and weekends. In the Spring of 1952 when I had finished my ROTC training, I was called up for the Korean War, went to Rome Air Base for my flight physical and was informed I would be sent to flight school and would receive my orders shortly. They never came and the war ended.

I received my engineering degree in 1953 from S.U. while Shirley had been working part time when a sitter was available. Wendie was 6 years old when I graduated and, since I had a good machine background working for Dad and an engineering degree, I received an offer to work for General Motors in Lockport, NY. After two years it was not the work I was really interested in, Dad was not well, Shirley and Wendie were home sick, so we returned to Syracuse. While working with Dad, I designed a number of special machines for General Motors, General Electric and several paper companies.

In 1955 we bought a new home in North Syracuse, bought a new Chevrolet and Shirley became pregnant, all in one year. Our son, Rick, was born May 3, 1956. Dad's health wasn't improving and by 1958 he wanted to retire completely and move to Florida. I helped him close the plant and I went to work for a company that I had made their first packaging machines for in Dad's plant in 1946 and '47. This lasted for twelve years. When I got home one evening I told Shirl I had quit my job and would begin my own packaging company. April 21st, 1970 the first piece of equipment built by Schneider Packaging Equipment Co. was delivered to Mobil Chemical Co.

Wendie had moved out of town four years earlier and Rick was just turning 14, but had always been interested in working with his hands and he got the chance to learn more from my Dad who returned to Syracuse during the summers to work on property he owned.

Dad remarried after he and Mom were in a tragic pleasure cruise ship fire and sinking where Mom was lost at sea, November 13, 1965. Rick also began helping out in my business, as did Shirley who was back working as a secretary with the paper company. She would do all of my paper work and quotes while I designed and built machines. Rick graduated from high school and, not wanting to go on to college, he began from the floor up, working in our company.

Fortunately, I had a friend, Chuck Hawley, who was working part time with me who was a great trainer and he taught Rick how to run all of the machines, do welding and, since Chuck was an engineer, he had him also do some drawing. Rick had taken drawing in high school and took a machine design course at Community College. Rick eventually built and assembled machines and finally, starting from an order we had just received from Kodak, he engineered two complete, highly adjustable machines, made all the parts, assembled them, then did all of the pneumatic and electrical work. When finished he installed the machines and trained Kodak's people in the machine operation. From this start, he has been involved in the design of all machines since that time.

In the interim, our daughter, Wendie, lived in many of the southern states, working in the computer field, met her husband, Dennis, who was also into computers and they had two daughters, Stephanie and Jenifer. Wendie and Dennis divorced about the same time Rick married his high school sweetheart, Lynn. They also have two daughters, Lauren and Erin.



The years have gone fast, but my luck that got me through the war has lasted. The business has grown steadily, thanks to Rick's efforts. Shirl and I are semi-retired (only working 40 hours now) and Rick is President of the company that grew from 2 employees in 1970 to 115 now.

Wendie's daughters are all grown up, Stephanie married last year and we will become Great Grandparents in August. Jenifer is working with an environmental engineering firm and going to college part time. Both live in the Raleigh, NC area.

Wendie is living her dream on the Grand Manan Island in the Bay of Fundy, Canada where she is part of a company that takes people whale watching on a 50 ft. sailing vessel. They are building guest cabins for naturalists and people wanting to get back to nature during the summer season.

Rick and Lynn's daughter, Lauren, is going to Onondaga Community College, working at Schneider Packaging part time and will be attending Lemoyne College in the fall, majoring in accounting. We are quite proud of her being our third generation in the business. Erin will be starting her Junior year in high school at Christian Brothers Academy and she is our current horse woman. Wendie and Stephanie were first and Stephanie still teaches riding.

Shirl and I will be celebrating our 34th anniversary on June 16, 1999 and plan on just doing what has kept us going all these years. Shirl still enjoys working in the business more than anything else, but I do tear her away in the summer for long weekends on our boat, moored on Wellesley Island in the St. Lawrence River. We also get to spend time in the winter at our small condo on the Intracoastal Waterway in Juno Beach, Florida. Our home is on the shore of Oneida Lake, here in Brewerton. You can tell I've always kept my love for being close to water.

Jumping back to August 1980 we had what turned out to be an interesting encounter when we were coming in to dock our power boat for the night at Aubrey Island, a small Canadian Park island in the St. Lawrence River. The dock area is very small and I had to carefully crab the boat into the little cove to keep from hitting the surrounding rocks.

A man named Karl came off of a sail boat from the other side of the dock, took a line from Shirley and helped us tie up. He had a very decided German accent and he said he had immigrated to Canada from Germany many years ago. We thanked him for his help and went off to the picnic area to cook our dinner, which we loved to do on an open fire. We returned to the boat and, while Shirl was cleaning up the dishes, I grabbed a can of beer to relax on the dock and watch the sunset.

Karl came out of his sail boat, also with a can of beer, and joined me on the dock. We talked for a while and the talk turned toward the eruption the previous week of Mount St. Helens. I said to Karl the last volcano eruption I had experienced was when Mt. Vesuvius erupted when I was in Italy. Karl said "you vas in Italy den, so vas I" Karl asked what I was doing there and I said I was a tail gunner in B-24s. I asked what he did and Karl said he was a commander of an artillery battalion in Bologna, Italy. I said we had bombed Bologna and the anti-aircraft batteries had hit our plane, but not seriously. Karl said "Jeesus Christ, thank goodness I vas a poor shot. Dat calls for anudder beer. Let's have von togedder". We became friends and I saw him several more times at different islands. You never know how small the world is.

Shiri just finished instruction manuals for a machine we built for Eveready Batteries and, hopefully, like their bunny, we will keep going, going and going while still beating the drum.

Addendum

Newspaper article from the Eureka, California Times Standard regarding Jill Chandler's search for information on the mid-air collision that killed her Uncle Wayne Miller.

Letter from Fred Dusse to Jill about his experience that day of October 20th 1944.

"Ghosts"

A poem by Jill Chandler

Memories from WW II

Discharge - Gunner Wings

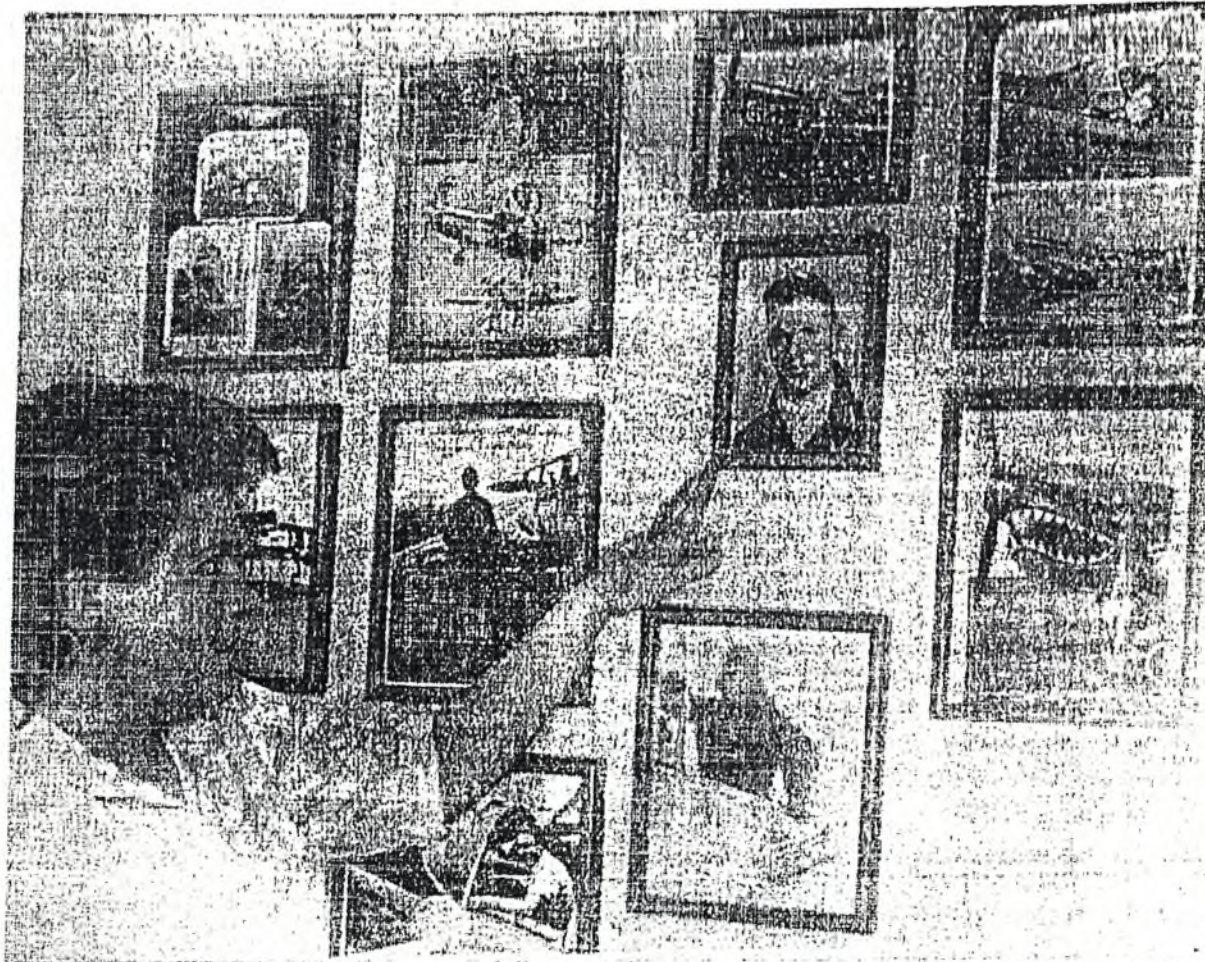
Dog Tags

Wrist Bracelet

Pieces Of Flak From Our Plane That Cut The Cable That Opened My Turret Doors

Battle Ribbons

U. S. Air Force Reserve ID Card



UPI Photo

Researcher Jill Chandler singles out the photograph of her father uncle from her collection of more than 700 pictures and personal histories of World War II bomber crew members.

## WWII death sparks research

### Niece tracks down fighter pilots' history

Glen Warchol  
 SPOKANE, Wash. (UPI) — After months of research and letter writing, Jill Chandler learned the story of her Army Air Corps uncle's death 44 years ago in the Pacific Sea.  
 "I spent the last year trying to find someone in the crew and I succeeded," said the 25-year-old college student. "The last survivor member of the crew called me in Michigan. Not only was he my friend with my uncle; he married his first-born son after the war."  
 Chandler's search for the details of her uncle's fate is a personal part of her on-going oral history of World War II bomber crews and their pilots.  
 The business student, who hopes to work someday as a professional researcher, writes more than a hundred letters a week to former pilots. The walls of her room are covered with black-and-white photographs she has received of young warriors posed in bomber cockpits and aviator sunglasses. Her uncle Wayne Miller seeks

out of one picture, a 23-year-old, square-jawed Army Air Corps gunner. After his B-24 collided with another bomber returning to Italy from a Balkan mission, Chandler's mother knew only that her brother and three other men didn't return.

Growing up with the stories of another aviator uncle, Fred Shaw, who flew in a Navy torpedo bomber, Chandler always wondered what happened to her handsome uncle Wayne. She tried to track his crew mates through burial, Air Force and Veterans Administration records.

"I hit dead end after dead end," she said.

Finally, working with a Veterans hospital, Chandler got a letter and a self-addressed envelope through to Ray Weber, the B-24's tail gunner, who now lives in Green Bay.

A few weeks ago, the envelope and a carefully printed letter came back.

"We were on our 23th mission (seven more to go)," Weber, 62, wrote Chandler, "when the plane in the slot position (just behind and under us) got ahead of us and then came up. We cut this plane into two pieces.

"I saw a head hit the side of our fuselage and guts tangled around the right wing."

Weber struggled to the shudder-

ing plane's left escape hatch where Miller was standing. Two other crew members dropped through the opening.

"I was about to jump. I looked around and Wayne was also gone," Weber remembered. But before Weber could get through the hatch, the pilot was able to level the plane and keep it in the air.

"I got on the intercom, but all I could hear was Fred Dussi screaming. He was jammed in the nose turret and couldn't get out," Weber said.

The plane limped back to Italy, but Chandler's uncle and the others who had bailed out were never found.

Weber and Dussi completed their last seven missions. But the other survivors from the plane were assigned to another bomber and were shot down over Yugoslavia, Weber said. "I don't know what happened to them."

"Wayne was the best friend ever," He wrote Chandler. "He treated me like a son and I loved him. I cry even as I write this letter. I cried a lot in the last 44 years. Losing Wayne was not even half of the pain. Every mission was a suicide mission."

"I always knew I'd find someone who knew my uncle," Chandler said, sitting in her room, where she carefully files the personal

battle histories of more than 700 airmen.

"My whole purpose is to keep their history alive," she said. "You see John Wayne in movies, but these are the guys who really experienced it. I encourage them to write me letters and tell me about their experiences."

"They were just kids then," she says, studying a framed photograph of a grinning bomber crew posed under the nose of a B-17. "They're getting old now, but they can still tell what happened to them."

If Chandler's interest surprises the fliers, her detailed knowledge of their missions and their aircraft wins them over. One of her special interests is the ferocious air battles over the ball-bearing plants at Schweinfurt, Germany.

She is also interested in contacting crews from the handful of B-24s that operated in the South Pacific.

The men Chandler contacts are usually shy and taken aback that a young coed is interested in their war memories. But they usually respond with a letter and a picture of themselves from the war.

"They tell me they're honored that I wrote them," she said. "But when I refer to them as heroes, they just say, 'We had a job to do and we did it.'"

"But some of them tell me they would just rather not remember."

March 9, 1990

Ms. Jill Chandler  
E 2120 Boone  
Spokane, Washington 99202

Jill -

Here is my recollection of that day in late October 1944.

We were housed in a typical Air Force tent. During that summer we employed native lads to build a cinder block wall up to a five (5) foot height. We then stretched the flaps on the tent to a somewhat horizontal position in order to give us more living space. We made a midnight requisition to another squadron's supply depot for a few bags of cement to produce a concrete floor.

Fourteen (14) cartons of cigarettes, visits to a few sheet metal workers and hard bargaining produced a sheet metal chimney for our home made furnace, a 55 gallon drum that burned 100 octane gasoline.

You could always tell when you were going on a mission. About 1:30 A.M. a jeep with squeaky brakes would stop in front of our tent, open the door, shine a flashlight into the tent and bark "OK guys, your on today". We would ask what the gasoline fill was, as 1900 gallons meant a short run to Yugoslavia, northern Italy or Austria. 2300 meant a target further distance away. 2700 gallons indicated a long mission into Germany or Poland. The Blechhamer refinery (a difficult mission) was but 90 miles from Warsaw and we could never understand why the Russians, already in Poland, did not send fighter bombers to destroy the refinery.

Briefing was at 2:30 to 3:00 A.M. following breakfast, which, after a few missions, was simply two or three cups of coffee and plenty of cigarettes.

A large map of Europe was at the head of our briefing room. Our base in Spinnazzola was marked with a large star and a 2-3" tape ran from our base to the target for that day, which happened to be Munich.

Just as certain teams have difficulty with other specific teams for no apparent reason, our missions to Munich were always rough ones.

Jill, my memory indicates this was our 27th and, while we had encountered several very bad missions (Ploesti, Vienna, Blechhammer and others), we had pulled through without a loss. Late October was a brisk fall day with sunshine. Since we were a veteran crew, we led the squadron of seven (7) planes.

Following take off at daylight, we climbed to about 7,000 feet and waited for the other six (6) B-24's to catch up. Each squadron consisted of seven (7) planes, each wing had four (4) squadrons or 28 planes. As I recall, this was a wing effort to Munich. When the squadrons had formed, we flew to the Adriatic to meet the other three (3) squadrons to make our formation of 28. We then headed up the Adriatic, climbing to altitude, usually 22000 to 24000 feet. Once we crossed into enemy territory, we put on flak vests and helmets. Gunners to their turrets.

Mine was the nose turret. As we approached the coast of northern Italy, I tested the twin 50 caliber machine guns; only one would fire and I remember that it was bitterly cold, even with my electrically heated suit - could not get warm.

We were in the usual tight formation -

1  
3 2  
4  
6 5  
7

Suddenly, in front of me were four(4) engines and a wing - didn't make sense, could not or would not comprehend what I saw. Bang, crash, we knew we were hit by another plane - one of our own- No. 4 to be specific. They were on their 4th mission. No. 4 position was extremely difficult to fly in tight formation. You have to constantly jockey the four (4) throttles forward and back to stay in tight formation.

Their pilot and co-pilot got too close to us, realized the danger and, in true Air Force action, gave the plane full throttle, but pulled up instead of pushing down, hence they pulled up and into us.

Our B-24 was being turned onto its side when our pilot and co-pilot also gave full throttle and pushed down on the controls. Our No. 3 propeller cut their B-24 in half. Our bomb bay doors were ripped off. The life raft inflated, three (3) of the crew bailed out.

A word about that. Several weeks prior at a general give and take with all our crew present, we discussed the perils of getting through thirty-five (35) missions. The pilot said that if we were in trouble he would try to give us as much warning as possible, but eventually everyone was on his own.

The collision jammed the nose turret and negated my ability to reach behind me, pull a set of chains to release the two (2) doors. Since we were still flying haphazardly and I could not

raise anyone on the intercom, I felt everyone had bailed out, that I was going down with the plane.

An eternity passed (actually a few seconds) and I noticed we were flying straight and level. Back on the intercom; this time Shorty, our bombardier and our navigator hand cranked the nose turret back to a central position so the doors would open and I could get out.

We then counted noses and learned who was still with the ship. It was shuddering and shaking something fierce. We were losing altitude and still behind enemy lines.

Shorty and I went into the bombay, stood on the cat walk and pried off each of the ten (10) 1,000 lb. bombs. Following their release, descending into lower altitude, plus using up gasoline, the plane was lighter and able to sustain altitude. We all agreed to go south over the Adriatic as far as possible. If we had to ditch, we could turn inland and ditch near the beach, hopefully past the enemy lines. If not, well, we would be POW's.

We kept going. The B-24 shook, shuddered, made all kinds of queer noises, but we finally made it back to base. Shortly after the collision, sent a MayDay, MayDay signal, only to learn later that our antenna was demolished, making for a very weak signal that did not reach anyone.

I still remember the incredulous look of disbelief on the face of our crew chief as we taxied onto our tarmac. No. 3 propeller was shot, bombay doors ripped off, holes and gashes all over the plane.

We had a short briefing, with each of us relating the preceding events.

Eight missions to go. Instead of giving us a few days to get rid of our anxieties and bad memories, the Air Force apparently felt the best thing was to send us up the next day. With our crew broken up, we were dispersed into flying as fill ins with other crews that were short a man or two. During the last eight missions, we lost our navigator on another run to Munich. Last seen, his plane had been hit by fighters, smoke pouring from the plane, a few parachutes floating down into the Alps.

The last member of the crew that was lost occurred when two (2) 24's failed to return when mission was aborted because of bad weather.

The last few missions were a terrible strain. We flew as fill ins on other crews, except for the last. Shorty, Ray Weber and I finished on a milk run to a target in Yugoslavia.

When we landed, the custom was to offer a shot of whiskey to guys finishing, so I had about eight (8) shots of booze and two or three cups of coffee.

We stayed at the base for about one month before shipping to Naples and then to the U. S. by military air transport. Naples to Oran to Casablanca to Dakar to Napal, Brazil and finally to Miami.


Stationed in Tennessee for about six (6) months - met my wife there - discharged in September 1945.

In the ensuing years have seen our co-pilot and Shorty the bombardier, otherwise no contact. Have been concerned about Ray Weber, as he was a very young man to go through those events. Certainly do appreciate your sending me his correct address.

My employer, Richard F. Schneider, was the tail gunner in plane No. 3 that day and I'm certain he would be pleased to give you his version of the events as they occurred. May I suggest you write to him direct.

That's it, Jill. Please let me know if you need additional information.

Sincerely,



Fred Dusse



## GHOSTS

There are ghosts that haunt my mind  
Not spirits from the present  
But those from forty-five years back in time  
They are ghosts of the men and planes  
that once owned the sky

Why they haunt me I do not know  
For some reason they will not let me go  
They fought ferocious battles over land and sea  
Even in death they have a lot to show

In a book I saw a photo of a man  
I thought I'd like to meet  
I later found out he met his death  
at 25,000 feet

He has probably been long forgotten  
My thoughts do not want to leave him behind  
He was once young like me  
Because of that man I am free

Tho the soldiers lie sleeping in their eternal nests  
And their great planes have been cast aside  
The ghosts of the air war cannot rest  
Most have forgotten about that day  
But with me the ghosts of the air war  
will forever stay

Jill V. Chandler  
October 10, 1988