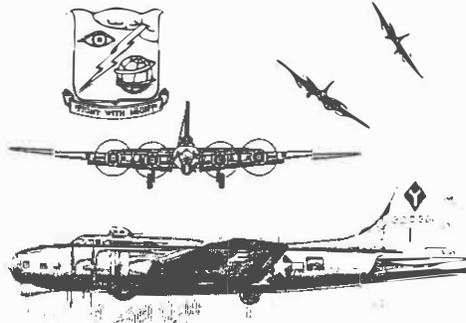


THE 99TH BOMB GROUP HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER



Jim Kirkpatrick
416th Squadron
Staff/Sgt., Tail Guns

The Group Flew B-17 Flying Fortresses
for A Total Of 395 Combat Missions From
North Africa & Italy To Bomb European
Targets During 1943, '44 & '45



Wallace Bush
416th Squadron
Flight Crew Member

Vol. 19, No.2

MAY 1999

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

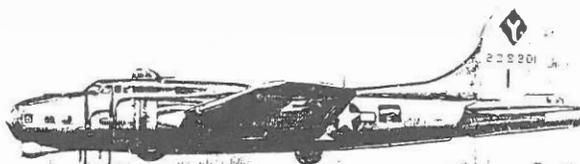
The time you read this Spring has arrived, Easter has come , and gone and your finery are put away till next year. If your memory is as good as mine, you wouldn't remember what you wore the year before. I know the women will.

I would like to thank Bill Sommer and Len Smith on the great job they did in getting our reunion in Tucson ,AZ. up. They have been keeping me up to date on their progress.

Bernie Barr reported that the plaque he is getting ready for the wall in the Fifteen Air Force Museum in March Field California is progressing well. In fact you may already sign it, since I am writing this message in March.

In talking to some of our members, its funny how our out look on live is changing. When we first got together it was who had the best out fit in the 99th. Then it was the grand kids and now its our ache and pains that hogs the conver-sations. to me that means we are all become good friends.

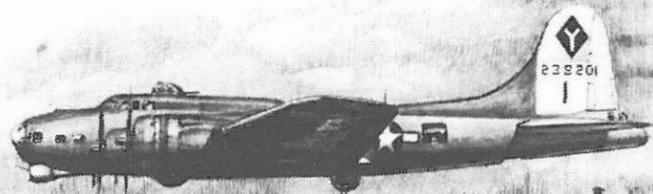
To all of you who are sick I wish you GOOD HEALTH,
To all of you that are sad I wish you HAPPINESS,
To all the rest I hope I see you in TUCSON AZ.



Bob



Robert Bacher Pres.



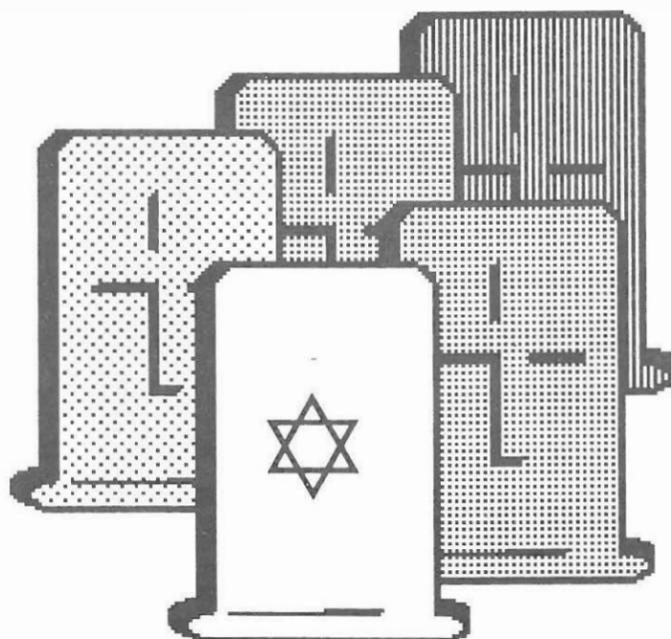
MEMORIAL DAY TRIBUTE

"They answered their country's
 call to arms,
 into battle they did go.
 Where their final destination was,
 No one will ever know.
 May their final resting place,
 Under some unknown sod,
 Be forever hallowed,
 For it is known only to God."

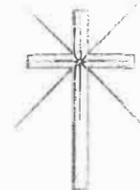
TMP



IN MEMORIAM



MAY OUR COMRADES REST IN PEACE



THE CHAPLAIN'S CORNER



Just awhile ago, earlier this morning, I got a phone call from our editor reminding me that 'it's time for your article'. A gentle reminder of the time table, and my 'due' for our 99th Newsletter. Bernie's call came at an opportune time, as I am just in the middle of Easter Week, and preparations needed for Easter Sunday. Things like sermons, bulletins, orders of service, and of course, the terrific music declaring the Good News of the Resurrection. This is a great time! A great time for Life! - for Love! - for Faith - and, greatest of all, - for Hope!

In these preparations, I came across two illustrations that kind of reached out and grabbed me; maybe they'll say something for you too. I'm always searching for examples and illustrations. Sometimes I can find them easily and in abundance, and other times they seem 'as scarce as hen's teeth'!

In the Easter section of my reading, I found:

"Winston Churchill had planned his funeral, which took place in Saint Paul's Cathedral in London. He included many of the great hymns of the church, and used the eloquent Anglican liturgy. At his direction, a bugler, positioned high in the dome of Saint Paul's, intoned, after the Benediction, the sound of 'Taps,' the universal signal that says the day is over. But then came the most dramatic turn: As Churchill had instructed, as soon as 'Taps' was finished, another bugler, placed on the other side of the great dome, played the notes of "Reveille" -- 'It's time to get up. It's time to get up. It's time to get up in the morning.' That was Churchill's testimony that at the end of history, the last note will not be 'Taps', it will be 'Reveille.!'"

And then:

"Michael Faraday discovered in 1831 the principle of electromagnetic energy. One day in his travels he came upon a pauper's grave in a Swiss cemetery. There was a rough board for the stone. Under the little roof that protected the place where the name was written on parchment, a caterpillar had stiffened into a chrysalis. The shell of the chrysalis had burst, the butterfly, light and beautiful, had gone on out to live its life, as a new creature among God's creation. Faraday broke into tears before this living parable. So great was the impact of the broken chrysalis upon him, that the reminiscence of it, was placed on his tomb. There we can see, today, the broken chrysalis shell, and the legend, etched in the stone: 'Nevertheless I Live'!"

You may know by this time I have been diagnosed as having multiple myeloma. I am taking chemotherapy, together with Aredia, which provides for pain management and calcium replacement. I feel well and am able to continue our interim ministry at Trinity United Church of Christ in south St. Louis city. Nel and I are grateful for your concerns and prayers on our behalf.

I would have wished to be with in Tucson, especially after all the work of Len and his team have done to make that a great week together. However, it appears best for me to pass this year's meeting.

Let me send this greeting as your Chaplain, with the words from the Old Testament in the Psalms, speaking to King David, God said:

Greater is He who is in you than He who is in the world." and
 "I will not die; instead, I will live and proclaim what the Lord has done".

God bless you and may you travel safely through your life! Chaplain Fran



Ford J. Lauer III
P.O. Box 203

Mr. Bernie Barr
7408 Vista Del Arroyo
Albuquerque, NM 87109

New Cumberland, PA 17070
(717) 657-9437

March 8, 1999

Dear Mr. Barr,

I ran across a 99th B.G. calendar for October, 1944, in my grandfather's papers. On this calendar is a photograph of "Lt. Col. Bernice S. Barr, Group Operations Officer." Are you and this Col. Barr the same person? If so, perhaps you knew my grandfather, Col. Ford J. Lauer. If you knew him, I would appreciate hearing (or reading) anything you may have to say about him.

I have many 8 X 10 photographs of 99th B.G. personnel taken during the war. They were in my grandfather's footlocker. I would be happy to give these photographs to the persons, their relatives, or friends, that would care to have them. The photographs have names and addresses typed on the back. I have listed those names and hometowns below. Please print this information in the 99th B.G.H.S. newsletter. They are as follows:

S/Sgt James S. Osborn
T/Sgt James D. Cooper
S/Sgt Marlowe G. Elliott
and S/Sgt S.F. Ludwick Jr.
1st. Lt. Daniel M. Jones
Cpl. Fernand A. Kironac
and Cpl. Thomas J. Magee
Maj. Allen W. Schroeder
Gen. Charles W. Lawrence
T/Sgt. James D. Cooper
Sgt. Frank Jarzombek
Sgt. Robert M. Shafer
Sgt. Denzil J. Chastain
Sgt. Kenneth A. Robertson
1st. Lt. Thomas N. Hunt
1st. Lt. James C. Metropulos
S/Sgt. David L. Hursh
S/Sgt. Edmund F. Sisko
Maj. C. Brent Katzenmeyer

Sgt. Walter A. Griffith
and Cpl. Harry Ebersole
S/Sgt. S.F. Ludwick Jr.
1st. Lt. Dewitt F. Brown
2nd. Lt. Lowell S. Houser
S/Sgt. James S. Osborn
S/Sgt. Marlowe G. Elliott
1st. Lt. Norris J. Domangue Jr.
S/Sgt. Robert L. Eigel
2nd. Lt. E. Lawrence Antinoph
Sgt. Paul E. Smith
1st. Lt. Daniel M. Jones
T/Sgt. Clyde E. Trace
1st. Lt. James C. Metropulos
Capt. Guy R. Dew
and S/Sgt. Jack R. Norvell
and Cpl. Paul C. Currin
and Cpl. Perry R. Jones
and Pfc. Chris M. McClure
Lt. Col. Bernice S. Barr

Take care, and I will try to find some interesting material for the newsletter.

Sincerely,

Ford Lauer

Note From Composition Editor: Dear Ford III: Don't be surprised if you get only a few requests for the personal photos you found in your grandfather's footlocker. We mail to fewer than 400 members these days, down from more than 800 members a few years ago. After your offer to send folks their photos has been in effect about 30 days I recommend you send the photos to Bernie Barr. Perhaps he will decide to print them in future news letters.

March 31, 1999

TO: Book Lovers and 99th. Bomb Group Members.

I attended an American Legion Party in Waukesha, Wi. on March 8, 1999. A firing squad member told me that my book, "Beyond Fighter Escort" was one of the best war books he had read. He then told me he sent it to a friend in another state to read. I then told him, "I'll bet you never got it back". He told me, "How did you know?" Others, including my brother, Augie, an Army veteran never got his back when sent to an Army buddy in South Dakota. Each of these books have been sent two years ago. I also became a victim. My doctor has two books given three years ago that he said were returned. I liked Tomlin's Crew written by our 99th. member Bill Smallwood and gave it to a member of the Eighth Air Force here in Milwaukee. That was a year ago. I forgot to keep track of his name.

My best reviews have come from two Eighth Air Force authors, Dr. Harry Crosby, (A Wing And A Prayer) and Dr. Frank Westie, (Ash Wednesday '45) They wondered where I got so much history for my book. General Fay Upthegrove sent me much of the rich history of the 99th. Harry Burrell's mother supplied very much too. They both sent me photos to compliment the text. Omaha World Herald and the Milwaukee Journal also allowed me to use stories about the Arabs and how one of our 99th. photographers promised one of our B-17,s to an Arab for supplying a dozen and a half eggs daily. When we moved from Oudna to Tunis that Arab saw his silver bird disappear over the Gulf of Tunis. The name, Mohammed had been painted on the rudder. The number shown by the Journal artist was 624606. Must have been a B-17-G.

The member of my American Legion Post 8 was a Navy baker.

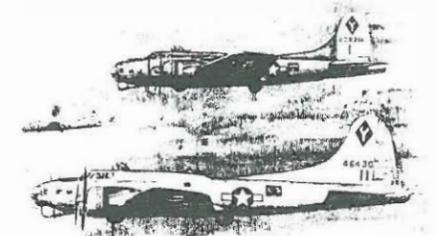
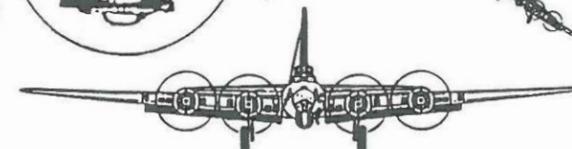
I do regret General Upthegrove passed away before I could send him his copy. I did send one to his Widow in 1997, but no acknowledgement. We saw her at the Rapid City reunion in Sept. 1997 then, she was not in good health.

Any member of our 99th. Bomb Group Historical Society can order the book for \$ 22.00 plus \$1.75 mailing. I am closing the P.O.Box 1224 in Brookfield. My home address, also in the Feb. 1997 issue is: 16645 Cherry Hill Drive, Brookfield, WI 53005-2716

My wife, Merlyn and I have our reservations and airline tickets for Tucson. See you there.

James F. Bruno
James F. Bruno, 347th

Arab story printed on next page.



I (Roy Worthington) found this an interesting story from a resident of Romania residing close to the Ploiesti oil refineries. It gave me an insight not acquired from the Ploiesti missions I was on. I

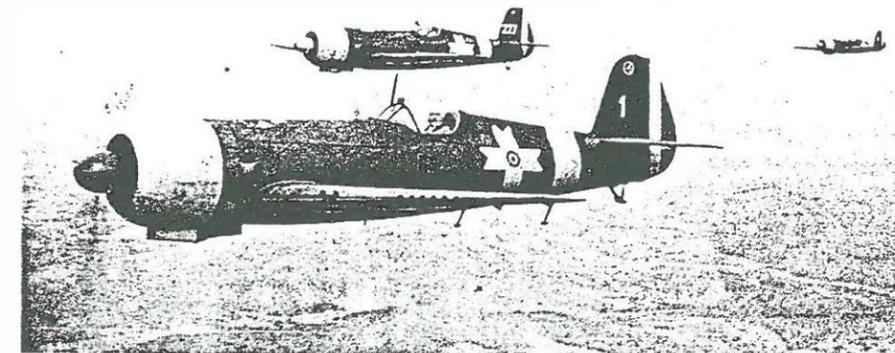
The Twenty Weeks of Ploiesti

by George A. Radulescu

This story begins fifty years ago in Ploiesti, the black gold city of old Europe, with its big oil refineries. The city with its adjoining oil fields is located in the Carpathian foothills less than 40 miles northwest of Bucharest, the state capital of Romania. The region of Ploiesti has an exceptional situation, underground lie the richest oil fields of Europe and overhead some of the most renowned vineyards, producing tasty grapes and flavorful wines.

Against the natural feelings and interests of our country, we were at war with Russia and the Western Allies on the side of Hitler's Germany. Therefore, Ploiesti kept feeding Hitler's war machine with a most vital commodity, the lifeblood of war; petroleum. Long strings of railway tank cars with gasoline and diesel fuel left the refineries daily, running east toward the Russian front and westward to Germany.

The oil refineries, along with the outlying tank farms, pipe lines, pumping stations, and the railway marshalling yards, were heavily protected against air attacks. Ploiesti was like a huge fortress. Its defense relied upon a highly efficient warning system to report inbound attacking planes, and on many hundreds of anti-aircraft flak guns and machine guns. Thousands of smoke generators, arranged in patterns to take advantage of the prevailing winds, raised a smoke blanket in less than half an hour, concealing the city and the area of the refineries. Blast walls, up to three feet thick, were constructed around processing plants, storage tanks, powerhouses, and pumping stations.



Romanian fighters sent up to defend against American bombers at Ploiesti. (Photo: Radulescu)

Thick concrete shelters scattered all over the refinery areas shielded the defenders on duty during air raids. For the night air attacks the Germans had built a fake Ploiesti, ten miles southeast, to confuse the enemy bombers. German units of fire fighters and reconstruction engineers, along with those of the refinery, were ready to return the refineries to production as soon as the bombers had left. The fighter aircraft strength, however, did not match the ground defense force, most of Hitler's planes having to cope with the Allied offensive over Western Europe.

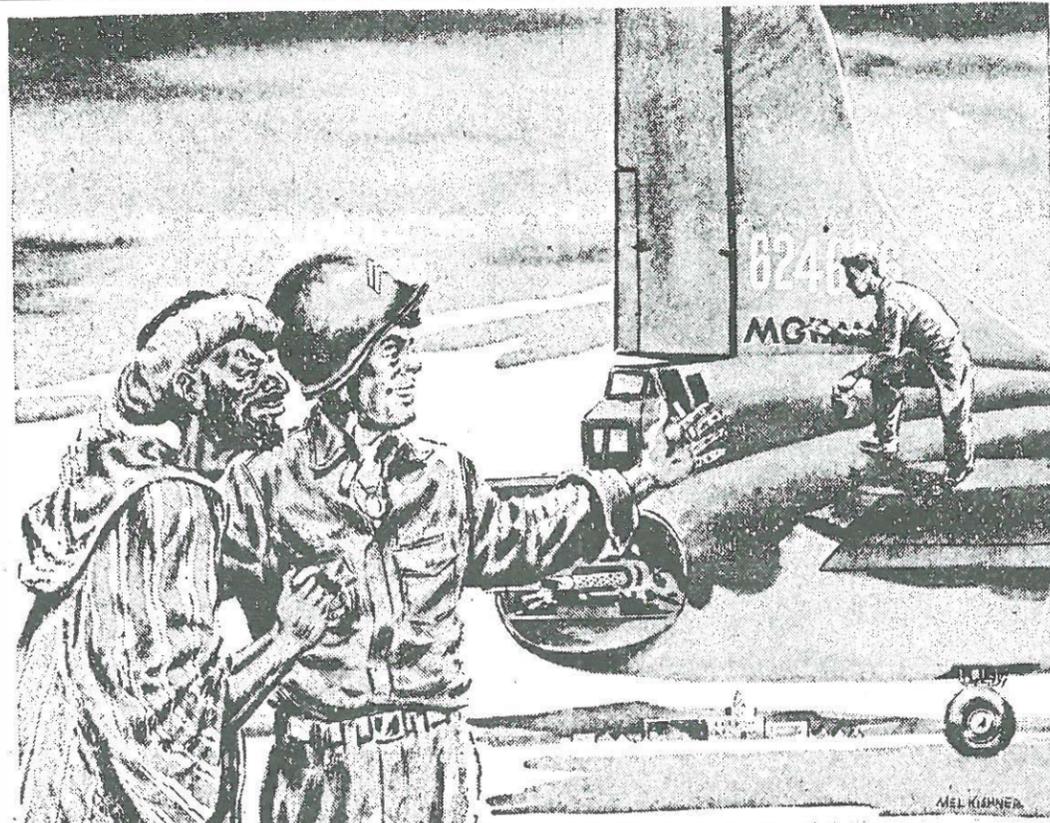
The fifth year of war life in Romania was easy for a number of people. The summer of 1943 had been generous, record crops produced plenty of wheat for the baking of white bread. Meat was also plentiful, even the days when its sale was prohibited. Ration cards were only a formality. Every kind of food was in abundance for those who could pay for it.

We were weary with practice air alerts. During the first ones we ran for the shelters which were located only a few hundred feet from the refinery installations. They were mere ditches covered with

boards and dirt. But, later on we yawned when the test sirens blew.

It started in the morning of April 4, 1944, when the air alert was sounded. We thought it was another test by the busy Germans, but we got obediently into the shelters, waiting for the cessation of the alarm. An hour later I heard unusual thuds from the sky and from the ground. It was something weird, which I never heard at any other exercise. After a while the sound became more precise. It began to be real; the war was reaching us.

When the alert was over someone told me that Bucharest had been badly bombed and that Calea Victoriei (the main street of the city) was in flames. I took a train in the afternoon being anxious about my wife who was home in our flat on the same street. Owing to the havoc the bombing did and to the general confusion, the train covered the distance in more than eight hours, and I arrived home at 2:00 PM to see big flames coming out through the windows of our flat. No one answered my sister's telephone when I tried to call (the house was bombed), but at last I found my wife toward 4:00 AM at the home of some friends. Since everything we



A GI suggested a contract whereby Mohammed would supply a dozen and a half eggs daily in return he would become the owner of sleek Flying Fortress.

The GI's vs. the 'A-rabs'

Veterans of the North African Campaign Can't Forget the Wily Tribesmen Who Gave Them Some Trouble and No End of Amusement

THE north African invasion on Nov. 8, 1942, marked the opening of the "second front," but more memorable for the participating American GI's, it marked the beginning of their acquaintance with the Arabs.

Many unpleasant memories of that campaign—the dust, the heat, the flies, the bitter cold of the desert at night—may fade with time, but not the soldier's recollection of his dealings with the dark skinned natives of French northwest Africa. However the dictionaries and the encyclopedias designate these peoples, to the garden variety, every day American soldier they will always be "A-rabs."

Statistics may make much of UNRRA aid to French north Africa, but any soldier who served there will maintain that it was unnecessary. The GI's argue, not without reason, that the native population should be able to live comfortably for at least the next decade on what they begged, bartered and "borrowed" from the liberating armies.

One victim of unofficial lend-lease was an American officer courier who, when billeted overnight in an Algiers hotel, made the mistake of removing his trousers for sleeping. Dead tired from a grueling drive from the front in Tunisia, and wanting to make the most of the unaccustomed good fortune of a bed, he undressed before dropping exhausted into its soft folds. His upstairs room, being on the downhill side of the building, was a good three stories above the winding, cobbled street, yet he awoke to find his trousers—wallet and all—missing. Sheepishly he sought out a supply dump next morning, attired in battle dress complete to helmet and combat boots, but minus his pants. He never forgave the Arab "human fly" who had humiliated him, nor did his friends ever permit the incident to be forgotten.

A mechanized cavalry troop patrolling the border between Spanish and French Morocco shortly after the invasion bivouacked in a cork forest near the village of Ain Defail. Following army directives that an attitude of friendliness be exhibited toward the natives, the troop com-

mander permitted a number of Arabs to wander through the camp accepting proffered cigarets, candy and "C" rations. At the edge of the grove a small tribe of the sultan's subjects squatted and stared.

Mess call sounded and soldiers who were pitching pup tents for the night ran for the chow line, leaving their equipment and extra clothing scattered about. They neglected to post a guard. Returning to their tasks after finishing their warmed up cans of hash, the troopers found their tents surprisingly barren. A group of heavily burdened Arabs was seen vanishing into the grove.

Only two of the culprits were overtaken, one of them an old man whose speed was handicapped by age. The other was a young man, but he was carrying too much. Beneath his robe were enough parts of uniforms to outfit half a squad of men. Even so, he might have outdistanced his pursuers had he not attempted to include two boxes of machine gun ammunition. The weight handicap was too much, and he lost the race—along with two front teeth.

(Story continued on page 13)

possessed had burnt with our home. I moved my wife to my parents' home in a small town outside of the threatened area. I continued to live in our refinery where I had a room in the bachelors' house.

Afterwards, the round-the-clock bomber offensive went on, with Ploiesti as its main target. Giant swarms of US four-engine "Liberators" and "FlyingFortresses" kept appearing in the sky several times in the week. These uninvited guests, many hundreds in strength, came in the morning from airfields in Italy. They were being spotted by the Germans when they crossed the Adriatic Sea, and an hour before they reached Ploiesti the air alert sirens were set screaming. At first we stayed in the refinery shelters so as not to disturb the production. But after a few air raids we took example of the refineries which were hit, and we ran away at the first sounds of the alert.

The exodus from the refinery was well organized: everyone had a place in a car, bus or truck. During the night raids, when we had to leave in cars, the drivers didn't stop

until they put some twenty miles behind them. When the alert was over, they were always reluctant to return. So I found that my bicycle was the best means to leave the refinery grounds when the daytime alarm was sounded. In an hour of time, before the bombers were over Ploiesti, I could be far away and return as soon as the cessation siren of the alarm was heard.

All through April and the first weeks of May, I lived in our refinery. It was an American property which had not been hit, probably owing to its peculiar location a few miles outside Ploiesti. The night air raids, although much less stronger and dangerous than the daytime ones, annoyed me mostly because I was abruptly awakened and had to fumble into clothes and shoes in order to catch the car. But the spectacle was imposing: over the Ploiesti sky there were firefly winks and delayed reports of flak bursting high in the air, while we dared not speak to each other. The alert lasted for less than two hours, but I couldn't go to bed again before daylight. In the morning I had to go

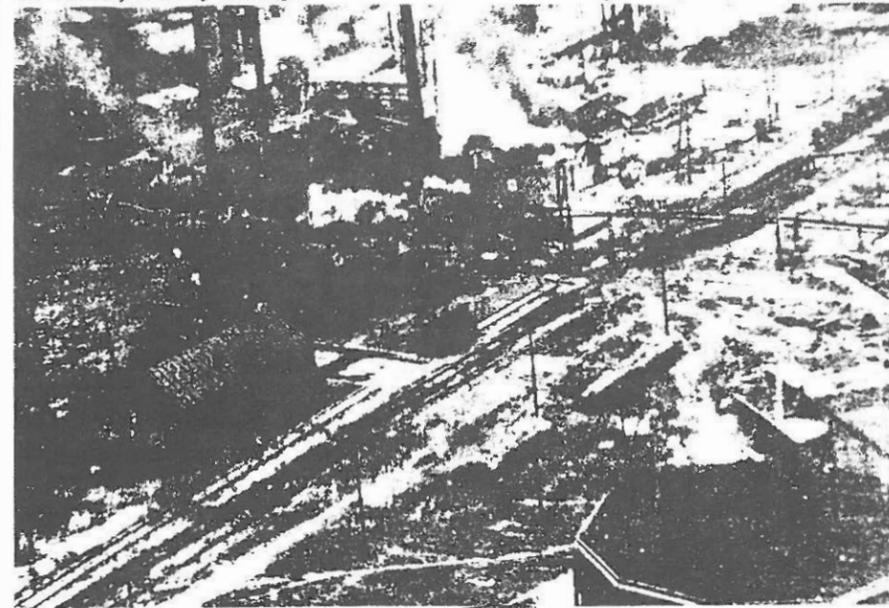
to work, and I found it difficult to carry on.

Late in May I took my wife and moved ten miles east of Ploiesti to join with some acquaintances who lived in a vineyard on a hill. Because the air alerts wasted too much of our time, the working day in the refinery was set between 5:00AM and 1:00PM. As the alert sounded each time around 9:00 am, we had only a few hours to work.

I felt secure with my bike. As soon as the sirens screamed I looked around and saw that everybody was leaving the building in good order. I was usually the last to leave. I used to study the conduct of people before and during the first minutes of the alert. Long before it started, one employee who came every day with a big attache case was giving signs of nervousness going to and fro. He was on the lookout already when the bombers were over Adriatic, being warned from the radio set the Germans had in the refinery. Since work was not to be stopped before the alarm was heard, I let him go unobtrusively to the refinery's gate so as other people didn't get panicky. His colleagues liked to talk about the experience he had in Constanta, on the Black Sea, back in the summer of 1941 when Romania started war with the Soviet Union. He went to that city to collect the rent from a tenant who had an undertaking shop. Being caught there by an air raid, he took refuge in the basement of the shop. He had to stay there for more than an hour among the coffins and other paraphernalia, the merchandise of his tenant, while deafening flak guns and bombs were bursting.

Laughter being the best medicine, many anecdotes were circulated in connection with the bombing of Ploiesti. One of these related about an old woman in a Bucharest shelter fervently pray-

Oil refinery heavily damaged after an American bombing raid. (Photo: Radulescu)



Romanian anti-aircraft unit defending the Ploiesti oil refineries. (Photo: Radulescu)

ing during an air alarm: "Good Lord, send them away, send them to Ploiesti".

Almost everybody got accustomed with the routine of the daily alerts and bombings. At the beginning, as the frightened people were leaving the refinery, many dogs ran alongside howling and barking. Now, after several air raids, the dogs became silent, and most of them ran away before the alarm was sounded.

On my bike I needed less than half an hour to reach my wife at the vineyard. The landowner had built a regular shelter between the rows of vines. Although several miles distant from the bombed area, the sound reverberations of the bursting bombs and flak guns made the place unbearable. In addition to the uproar, flak shell splinters were raining in the poultry yard and on the roof of the house nearby. Storks flew out of their nests in the trees, while chickens, the only beings not afraid of the bombing, were running at the falling splinters hoping to find feed grains.

During the next raids I went

not have picked a better place to look at the air and ground battle than the vineyard on the hilltop. As the exhibition declined, we drank the last glass of wine waiting for the alert cessation.

Toward noon I returned to the refinery and saw first hand the gruesome spectacle of the roaring burning tanks and bellowing flames from the processing plants. As a German fireman was fighting the fire at one tank, it got white hot and buckled, while the ladder collapsed and the man fell inside the burning gasoline. Usually the fire fighting took several hours, so most of the refinery's employees had nothing to do but gaze.

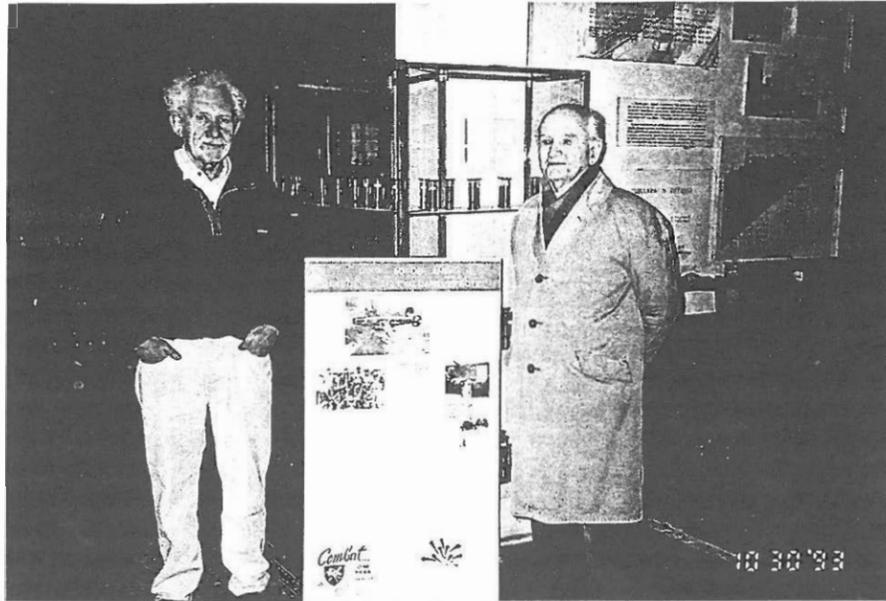
Home at the vineyard in the late afternoon, the apocalyptic event was forgotten, and dinner was a feast I waited for all day long. After the overwhelming sound of battle died away, the peace that followed, along with the generous wine, gave me a feeling of relief never met before. I slept blissfully and awakened refreshed at dawn.

Once, during the bicycle ride after an air alert, I broke a pedal crossing a small brook which was a few inches deep. I got down into the water and picked it up, continuing the ride with the other pedal. My wife was waiting for me anxiously as I was several minutes late. To our surprise, this time, the planes were already above us, a half an hour ahead of schedule. In the battle sky appeared a strange new type of plane, the twin-engined "Lightning," a fork tailed fighter-bomber that flew at tree-top height. My wife saw a pilot waving at her. We crept into a culvert, while the attackers swept over us, speeding west toward our refinery, away from the murderous flak fire. This unusual raid was made up of Lightnings, each carrying two one thousand-pound bombs slung on their bellies. Back in our refinery I saw that these planes came to bomb

the last plant of Ploiesti that had not yet been severely hit. One bomb ruined the bachelors' house where I kept my books and some other belongings.

The air offensive now grew in power and intensity, the bomber hordes became stronger and appeared more frequently. The attackers swept over every day, putting us under a test of nerves. Most of the people became terrified under these constant attacks, but I took delight in seeing Hitler's gasoline and diesel oil burning and seeing exploding jerry cans by the thousands. As the days and weeks wore on, the air raids became a great pleasure for me. I enjoyed them further as the greatest thrill of my life.

Early in August, during an alert when I was pedaling toward the gate. I was stopped by the refinery manager who urged me to come with him. Hiding the bike under a fir tree, I got into the car which drove us north of the city. Hardly ten miles away, we saw new U.S. fighter planes overhead at low height. The car stopped and we dashed into the nearby cornfield to safety, but to our surprise the fighters swooped down and started strafing us. Very soon we understood why: we had chosen to hide only a couple of hundred feet away from a flak battery. None of us got hit, but for the first time I was scared to death. Back at the refinery we contemplated the greatest devastation of plants, tanks and buildings. Great sheets of liquid were oozing from a big gasoline tank, and everywhere great fires



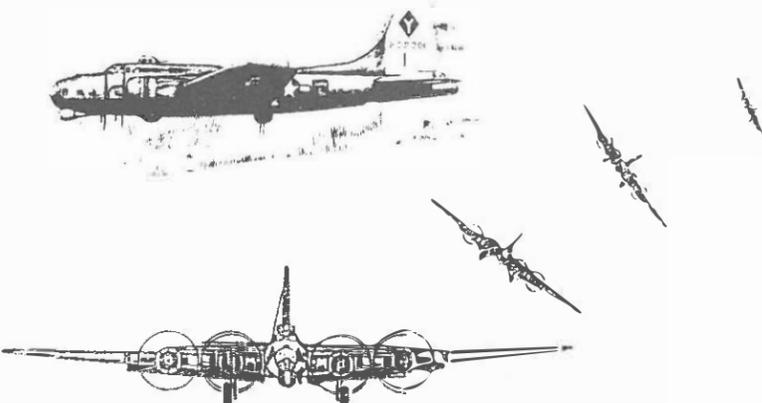
Author George Radulescu (right) stands with Benjamin Yedlin at the Petroleum Museum in Ploiesti (Photo: Yedlin)

were roaring. The firemen could no longer fight the blazing heaps of drums and jerry cans ready for dispatch to the approaching Russian front. To my astonishment on the place where I concealed my bike there was now a large bomb crater. From now on I was deprived of my independence, and at the first sounds of the alert I had to climb into a car. Fortunately, we could drive east to the place where my wife was awaiting me at the roadside. High in the hills we went into the vineyard to the usual luncheon with cheese, wine and new ripe tomatoes, gazing thunder-struck at the lethal game in the sky and on the ground.

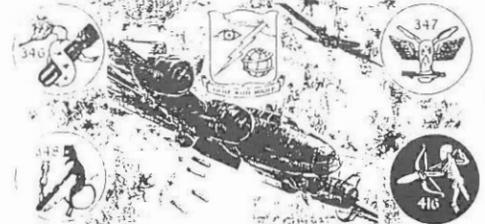
The situation was now rapidly deteriorating. Many soldiers in charge of the smoke generators

deserted their posts at the sound of the alarm. They were shot without judgement. Reconstruction work of damaged plants now took much more time. The engineer units were no longer as busy as in the first weeks of the bomber offensive. At the close of the 20 weeks of bombings, there was almost no plant, storage tank, pumping station, or building that had not been hit by the more than thousand bombs which fell on our refinery. We had no electricity. An artesian well remained luckily untouched and gave us some drinking water.

And then, thanks to the patriotic action of King Michael with the democratic forces of the country, on August 23, 1944, the aerial campaign against Ploiesti came at last to an end. ☸



99TH BOMB GROUP



In north Africa more than one American soldier was to learn from bitter experience the consequences of tanking up on too much wine. A luckless GI making his unsteady way toward barracks one night was held up by three Arab youths and relieved of his clothing to the last stitch. He reported to the nearest MP station clad only in his socks. With a borrowed raincoat and under escort, he made his way to camp, a chilled but sober and wiser man.

On another occasion, a mess officer on his way to the commissary with the day's receipts was seized on either side by two Arab thugs who ripped both front pockets away and made off with the mess fund. After a short sprint, the two "highwaymen" disappeared into the labyrinth of the Algiers Casbah—along with the \$500 in francs.

A soldier, left behind in the desert to guard his unit's surplus baggage, found himself constantly surrounded by a silent circle of squatting Arabs. Each time he dozed, a duffle bag disappeared. Awaking each morning, he discovered that the pile had grown smaller during the night. Obviously drastic action was necessary or he would have nothing left to guard, the sentry reasoned.

That night as an Arab was about to make off with a duffle bag, the soldier shot him in his tracks and buried the corpse in a shallow grave. Next morning a group of natives, spying the mound and thinking it was a garbage pit they had not previously excavated, began to dig. Suddenly they uncovered the body of their comrade. Pandemonium followed the gruesome discovery. There were no more duffle bags stolen.

Members of the 12th air service command, which had its headquarters in the Algerian capital, will never forget Abdul K. Isker, one of the most artful "feather merchants" to come out of the war. "Feather merchant" is the GI term for a black marketeer de luxe, a nefarious schemer.

A denizen of the Algiers Casbah, Abdul was a born swindler. Over a period of six months he gained considerable notoriety through his relations with first the Germans, for whose armistice commission he worked, and later with the Americans and British. Strictly neutral, he stole from them all. Despite his origin, Abdul acquired a considerable degree of polish through studious application at the University of Algiers, and spoke flawless French and Oxford English. Outwardly a suave gentleman, he was an accomplished rogue.

Abdul promptly attached himself to American headquarters as an interpreter following the hasty departure of his German masters. In no time he was hiring and firing all native help employed. He enjoyed a fabulous income from the tribute paid by the Arab laborers to get on and stay on the pay roll. The workers stole everything they could lay their hands on, turning over most of the swag to Abdul, who disposed of it in the fantastic black market. During his tenure the flow of supplies to the battle front ebbed noticeably.

There is no record that Abdul's hirelings ever "lifted" a tank or a plane, but unquestionably several of either kind of machine could have been assembled from the spare parts they pilfered. At length, as most criminals do, Abdul K. Isker grew careless and the Tommies caught him red handed. After a speedy trial he was incarcerated in one of the foulest colonial prisons deep in the Algerian desert.

Few of his former friends believe that any jail could long contain the ingenious Abdul. By this time, they insist, Abdul has established himself respectfully in Algiers as a merchant dealing in "surplus" army supplies.

American troops knew little about inflation when they sailed from home early in the autumn of 1942, but they were soon to feel its effects in north Africa. Within a few days, the "price" of eggs advanced from one package of cigars for a dozen to one package for a single egg.

The persistently shrewd Arab trader never displayed all his wares, and regardless of whatever item competing soldiers might be bidding for, it was never the last. From the inner recesses of his long, hooded burnoose, the native could always produce "just



one more"—be it a goat or a basket of eggs. From the mysterious folds of his robe, one Arab pulled a half basket of citrus fruit, four chickens and six baskets of eggs. In all probability, as an onlooking soldier remarked, he held a couple of hand woven rugs in reserve.

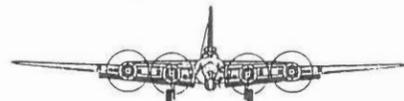
When the 99th bomb group moved to the airfield at Djeideida, near Tunis, it was welcomed by a motley delegation of Arab tradesmen headed by one Mohammed H. Muhatahat, who bartered in three languages. Mohammed offered eggs at 25c apiece.

A combat cameraman suggested that a contract be entered into whereby Mohammed would supply a dozen and a half eggs daily, in return for which he would become the owner of a sleek Flying Fortress. After careful scrutiny of one of the four engined giants, the Arab agreed. To seal the bargain, Mohammed's name was inscribed boldly on the tail of one of the newer B-17s.

Following his daily delivery of the prescribed count of eggs, the Moslem trader would walk around his private airship, regarding it with a satisfied gleam. Occasionally he would run his hand over its glistening surfaces. On his way home through the camp, Mohammed picked up whatever happened to be lying around. On one occasion it happened to be the complete baggage of the unit chaplain.

Late in August, 1943, Mohammed observed unusual activity at the field. Trucks were darting about, and planes were being loaded with much equipment not ordinarily taken on routine flights. However, he did not dwell upon it, for had not M. le Caporal personally assured him that the plane would be his in a very few days?

As he watched, the Flying Fortress bearing Mohammed's name rose majestically from the far end of the field to disappear in the haze high over the Gulf of Tunis. It was the last time Mohammed ever saw his "great white bird"—or his 45 dozen eggs.



Ford J. Lauer III
P.O. Box 203
New Cumberland, PA 17070
(717) 657-9437



March 31, 1999

Mr. Bernie Barr
7408 Vista Del Arroyo
Albuquerque, NM 87109

Dear Mr. Barr,

As promised, I have enclosed some photographs for you. I apologize for being so tardy, but have been traveling a great deal for work. The 8x10 is not in the best of shape, but considering it's age I suppose it is OK. It has also traveled thousands of miles during all those years I must say. I am pretty certain that it is you in the photo, as I compared it to the photo of you on the calendar we spoke of.

I also took the liberty of copying some of my grandfather's (Colonel Lauer) smaller photos for you. I am pretty certain that you are in these also, and thought you would like to have them. It was no trouble copying them, as I have a good computer with a great scanner and printer.

I want to prepare a short story of my grandfather's career for the 99th BGHS newsletter. He had a pretty interesting career, especially before the war. Beyond that, I guess I should introduce myself to the other members with a short piece in the newsletter. And I also want to scan some of the photographs I have of 99th BG scenes during the war, that I figure the members might enjoy seeing. Of course all of that is too much for a single issue. I'll send it to you and you can decide if any of it is worthy of being placed in the newsletter, and which issues it goes in.

It seems to me that you knew my grandfather better than anyone else in the group. I guess you were around him more than most of the others. I would really appreciate it if you could write down a few things for me that you remember about him. Please understand that I never had a chance to get to know him, and would love to learn everything I can about him. It doesn't have to be just flying stories, rather everything. What sort of personality did he have? Was he quiet, or was he a talker? Was he serious all the time, or did he have a comical side? I did get a telephone call from Mr. John Plummer, and he said that my grandfather "really got peppered by the Germans" on his last mission. I know it has been many years since you knew him, but I would treasure knowing anything you can remember.

I will get the stories to you soon. I hope that it is really you in the pictures, and that I haven't made any mistakes.

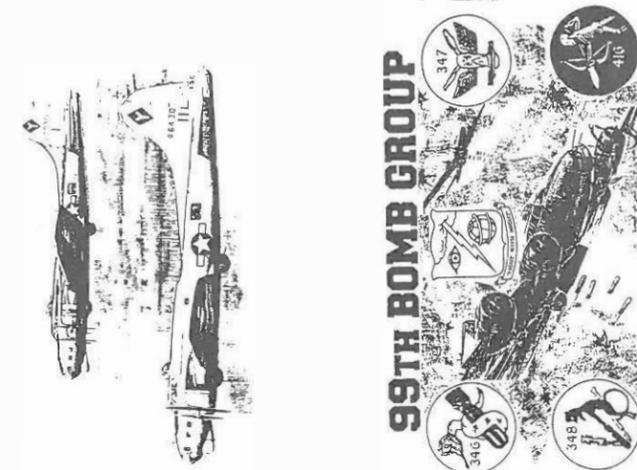
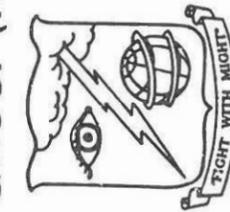
Sincerely,

Ford Lauer

Composition Editors Note: The photos on the following page are not identified. Does anyone have a clue? The tall, handsome Lt. Colonel in two of the photos may well be Bernie Barr.



99TH
BOMBARDMENT
GROUP (H)



Dear Walter:

Old 507 "Lady Luck" ran out of gas more than once. On Nov. 2, 1943, returning from Wiener Neustadt, we made it to Southern Sicily out of gas. Herman Bauer, pilot, decided to ditch off the coast. Preparing to ditch, we saw some planes in a field on the coast. Herman put her down, and the planes we saw were wrecked gliders. With them were about 4 or 5 brand new P-39's.

No one was around. Bill Walker, our co-pilot, fired one of the 39's and taxied it around the field. It was a pasture with a few sheep grazing. The planes were fully armed and fueled. Sometime later, area troops came and took us into a town. Herman and Bill gassed up 507 and took off. After picking up the rest of the crew, we returned to Oudna. We would have liked to bring back one of the 39's but checked out. We never did know why the planes were abandoned.



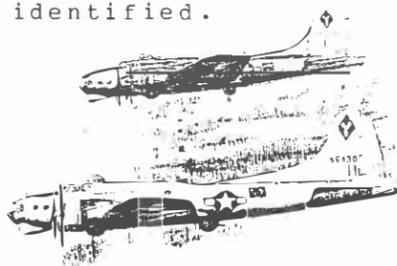
Travis Briggs Navigator

I am enclosing a few pictures you might use. Please return if possible.



Some of the Lady Luck Crew
(L. to R.) Back Row
Tony Brasacchio - Tail Guns
Al Lopez - Radio Operator
W.J. Walker - Co-Pilot
Jake Hastings - Engineer
(L. to R.) Front Row
Dan Ives - Ball Turret Guns
Lt. Miller - Bombardier
Dero Phillips - Waist Gun
Bottom Photo - Ajacci,
(L. to R.) Corsic
Phillips, Brasacchio,
Lt. Muro(?), Lopez.
Front Row (L. to R.)
Herman Bauer - Pilot,
Hastings, Walker, Ives.

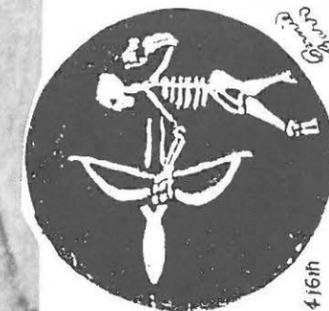
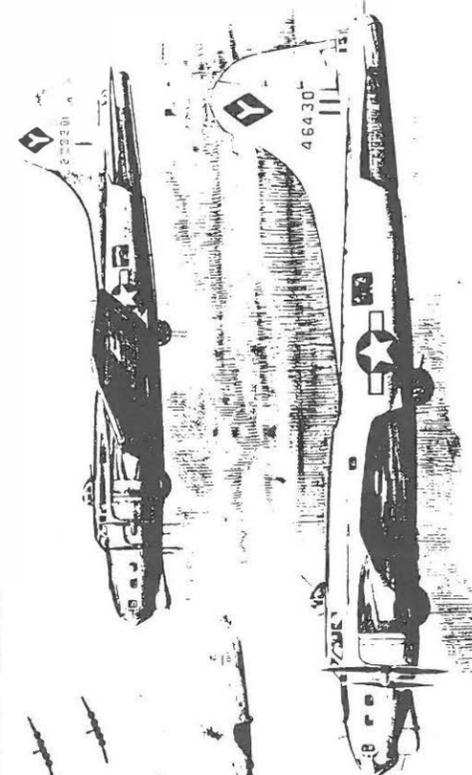
It appears Travis Briggs was the photographer for these photos since he is not in the photos. Lt. Muro's job in the Corsica photo is not identified.



416th Sq. Flight Line
Facilities - Name on
Request.



Tortoeilla Home For
Lt.(s) Herman Bauer,
W. J. Walker & Travis
Briggs.



11 March 1999

Howard E. Brown
103 W 1st St.
Trenton, IL 62293

Greetings Walter -
Enclosed are a few photos which
you might want to publish in a
future issue of the newsletter.

By the way your February '99
issue was terrific - as usual!

Hope to see you in Tucson.

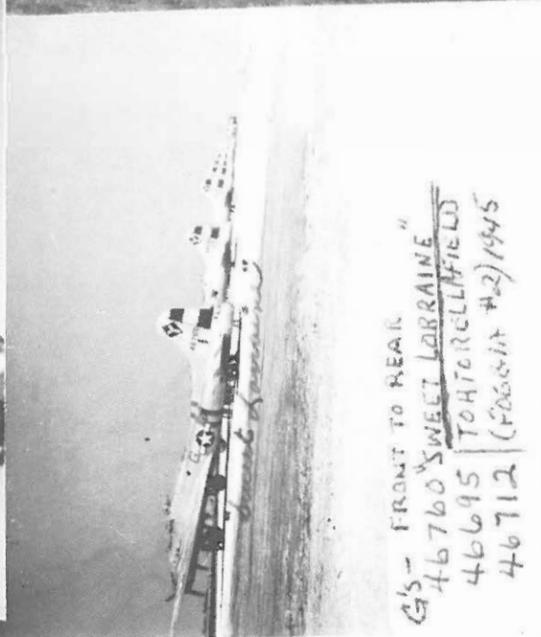


Best regards -
Howard Brown

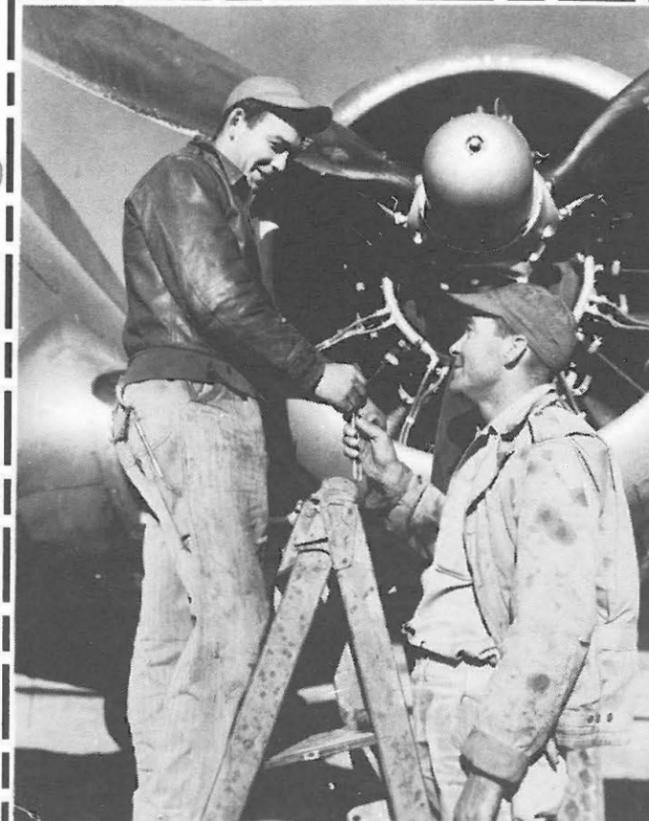
Anyone remember this?



'Jug' Change In Progress.
(L. to R.) Sgt. Billy Carter
& M/Sgt. Howard Brown.
Italy - 1944



G's - FRONT TO REAR
46760 "SWEET LOBBRAINE"
46695 TOHTORRELLFIELD
46712 (F000014 #2) 1945



Sgt. O. B. Carroll & M/Sgt.
Howard Brown working on B-17G
#42-23205 "Dinah Might", 1944

This photo taken the day
"Dinah Might" completed 77
missions with no early
returns. - B-17G #42-232055



Crew Chief M/Sgt. H. Brown

(L. to R.) Lt. Bartel &
Lt. McFee



(L. to R.) Sgt. Billy Carter, Lt. Hendrix, M/Sgt. H. Brown, Sgt. Chuck Redner.

Dear Bernice

March 28, 1975

I hope you can use these drawings for the next issue.

We (Earl and I) unfortunately won't be able to attend the next reunion. Please give our best to all the 99th members.

Sincerely,
Roselle Lewis

6036 Shirley Ave.
TARZANA, CA 91356



Drawings by Ed Karnes - 5707 Olive Hill Rd.
P.O. Box 54

OUR TENT Bonsall, CA 92003



Military real estate: no plumbing, no electricity, no A/C.



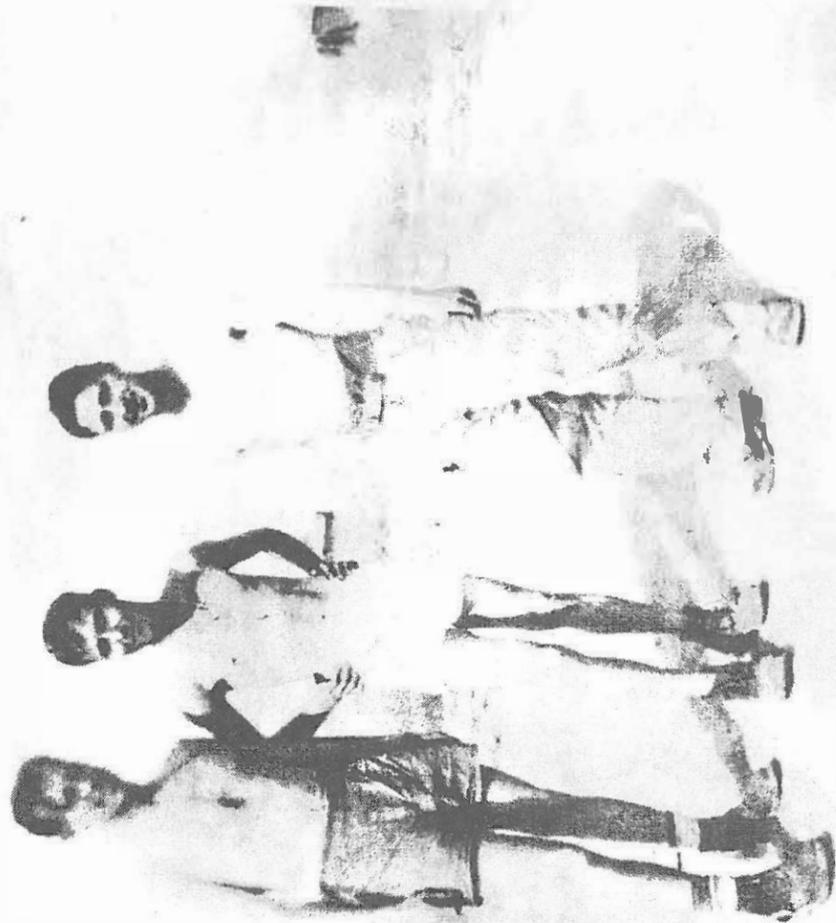
Ed, Earl & Chris

"Deciding", "Who'll clean up the front yard?"



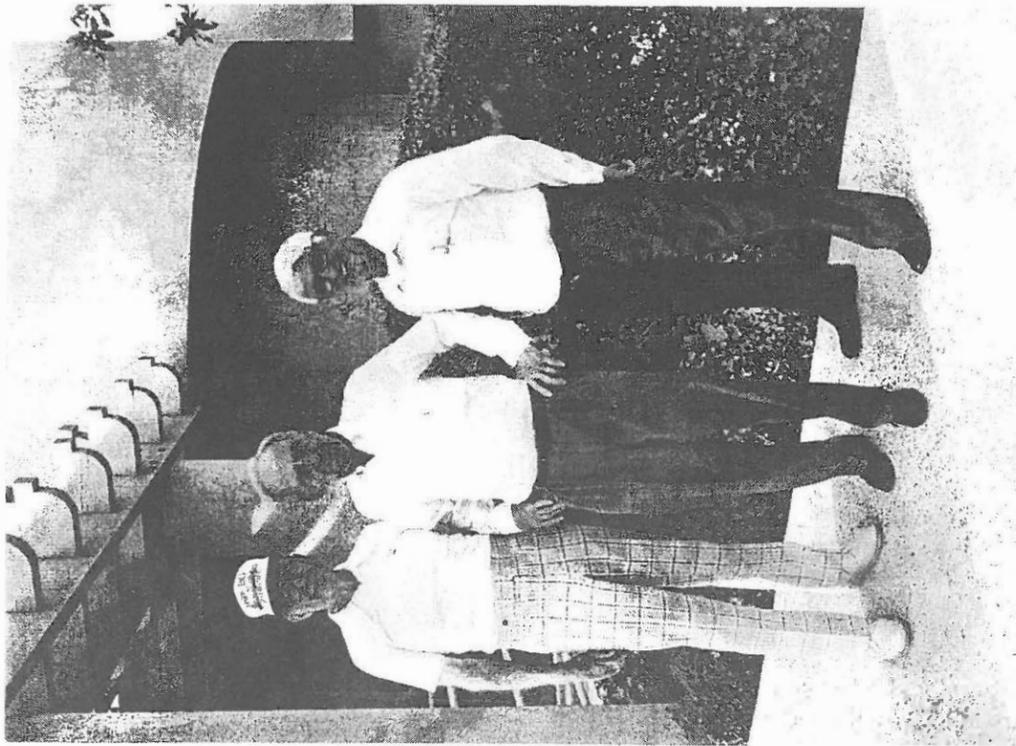
Interior decoration by the occupants in the popular style of 1944.

See page 34 for another Ed Karnes delightful sketch.



Ed Karnes, Earl Lewis, Chris Christiansen — 346th Squadron Torterella (Foggia) Italy, summer, 1944

At right: same group at Ontario, California reunion, October, 1993.



Experiences of a P.O.W. in Germany Part 2

by Robert C. Moser

[In the previous issue of the Friends Journal, Mr Moser relates his WWII experiences as a prisoner in Germany near the end of the war. Having bailed out of his dying B-17, he was quickly captured and was soon put with other POWs who were being transported to other parts of the country. This is the continued story of that experience.]

At 1:00pm someone shouted "ACHTUNG!" We all stood up. The man in charge wanted us in a line...a column of twos. We lined up. He got us over to the door and shouted, "Forward, march!" So we did. He marched us across the cinder track. *[Note: At this point Mr Moser and his fellow POWs had just arrived at Heidelberg where they were being housed in a school complex. Outside were athletic fields, and they were just ordered to file out into the fields. It appeared to the prisoners that they were being led out to be executed. Ed.]*

I looked up at this point and saw ten soldiers with rifles and a lieutenant with a saber. It was the firing squad. They lined up at the end of the field as we walked toward them. My chest was on fire! The turmoil was terrific. My hypertension started right there. I knew this was the place where we were going to be killed. My forehead was all sweaty. The sweat beaded up and ran down the side of my face. I said to myself that if this was it, I was going to take it like a soldier. I'm not going to run. They stopped us, and we faced them, but nothing seemed

to happen. Then the commander gave the soldiers a couple of commands, they brought their guns up, and I thought that this was going to be it. Then he gave another order. The soldiers put their guns on their shoulders, turned and marched away. We were directed to march along by them. What they tried to do was to make some of us break and run. We stood right there and took our medicine like we were trained. We were following orders, so there was nothing they could do.

I was told that the Germans had given Americans chances like that before. They would scare the prisoners into reaching for guns that were put nearby. The guns were not loaded. If someone made a break for it and tried to grab one of those guns, they were shot. It appeared they tried to play that same trick on us. There were several guns sitting in the back of a truck. I doubt they were loaded.

Next we were put on another train and headed north. We arrived at a camp where they took us in and bedded us down, and gave us some things that we didn't have. We would usually buddy up for these items. They would give one

guy a towel, another guy a razor, and another a razor blade for example. So we had to buddy up to do anything. They would give one of us a cake of soap, and another would get a washcloth. It was all stuff from the Red Cross that had been shipped in from Switzerland. We spent about four or five days at this place. While we were there, we saw a large camera factory get blown up by British bombers. This wasn't far from our camp. During the bombing, they wanted us all to get into some caves, so we wouldn't see what was happening. But, we did come back out and saw what a great job the British did. The factory was leveled.

Soon we were on the train again to our next stop. At about seven or eight in the morning we were stopped, sitting on a side track. It was the start of a beautiful, sunny day, and we were just outside of a small German town. Our train had the letters "POW" painted on top in big letters. About 10:00am we heard a roar...a heavy thunderous roar. We recognized the sound as being from B-17s. Their engines run so smooth. We saw them flying over, and we thought, "Boy, those lucky guys. They're going to hit

American POWs take a rest from their march, similar to the experiences of the author. (Photo: USAFM)



somebody today." It wasn't very long until we saw them coming back, and they started bombing where we were. They bombed the railroad yards and the station we were sitting near. We were in a boxcar, four cars back from the engine. We saw that the engine was laying upside down on its smokestack. The concussion from the bombing lifted the engine up and set it back down on its top. Stones, dust, and shrapnel were penetrating our boxcar. We could hear the noise of them going through. Everybody hit the deck and laid flat.

A second echelon of bombs followed the first. On this bunch of bombs our boxcar went up off the tracks and landed in the dirt. The guys grabbed the doors and ripped them open, knocked the guards over, jumped out, and started running. Right outside our door was a great big crater. It was so big it could have been used as the basement for a courthouse. I suspect it was made by a thousand pounder.

The guy I was with, another pilot, jumped out and turned his ankle. He couldn't walk on his foot, so I had to take his arm around my shoulder, and we hobbled across and around this huge hole in the ground. There was a ditch nearby. We didn't know if there was going to be another wave of bombs coming, so we laid down in the ditch. He couldn't go anywhere, so I stayed with him. I looked up and saw the guys running all over the fields away from the train. The guards were yelling, "Halt. They were shooting above the heads of the fleeing Americans. Finally, the Americans stopped and came back when they saw that there was no more bombing. When we got back to the railroad tracks we saw that the tracks were all bent up. The switch tower was torn to pieces. The bombers were very accurate



American POWs seek rest and protection in a trench. (Photo: USAFM)

in their bombing. The place was completely ruined.

Before we left the guards said, "All is kaput. We walk." So we lined up and started walking. As soon as we began to leave we saw a bunch of Russian POWs with carts. They were carrying axes and shovels. They were being sent in to fix the tracks. Soon we were put on another train and were on our way again. I was always afraid we would get strafed or bombed moving in the daytime. Daytime travel just wasn't safe. But, we made it to our next camp. They took us in and interviewed us. We stayed there for three days in a little cubicle not any bigger than a closet. We could see marks on every inch of the walls where previous prisoners marked days they were there. Heat was turned on for only a short time each day. The window was stained glass, so we couldn't see outside.

One day a fellow opened the door and came in. He was wearing a black suit. He said, "It isn't going to be long and this war will be over, and I will be back in the United States before you will." Then he asked me if I was out of Italy. I wouldn't tell him. He said they had ways of making me tell. I said that

I understood that he did, and that I hoped he didn't want to force me to tell.

He said, "You'll be going on to another camp. That will be your final camp. You will see some of your friends that were there." Then he left.

The next day they took me down to another office. There was a captain sitting there behind a desk. He got up and said, "Lieutenant." I said, "Captain." He told me to be seated. He asked me my name, and I gave him my name and serial number. He got up, walked over to a cabinet, pulled out a drawer, looked in and took out a manila envelope with my name typed on it. He opened the envelope and started going through the papers inside.

"Ah, graduated from Kenton High School, 1942. You went into the Air Force on December 7, 1942. You went into the Air Force Training Center at Nashville and went on over and..."

I thought "My land!" He knows more about me than I do.

He said, "Do you still carry an interpreter in the lead plane to monitor our fighter band radio?" I said I could not tell him that.

He said, "Do you still throw out chaff that fouls up the radar?" I said I could not tell him.

He said, "That's alright. We know."

He didn't make me answer his questions. He just told me a lot more than I knew. I couldn't understand how he knew all that stuff, especially about me. Later I understood that their intelligence was in our country and would take the newspaper clippings telling when we graduated from cadets and information like that. This gave them a psychological advantage.

We were taken to this huge railroad depot. They had every imaginable kind of war article one could want sitting on flatcars. They had airplanes with their wings off. They had boats and tanks. Everything was there. It looked like they were just getting ready to ship all this to where it was needed.

We started walking alongside the railroad cars when we heard engines. We looked up and saw two P-38s flying above. They were reconnaissance planes and were probably at about 25,000 to 30,000 feet up. They were taking pictures of all this military equipment. We

went on into our POW barracks. The next night sirens went off. We went to the windows to see what was going on. Search lights were lighting up the sky. In came a DeHavilland "Mosquito," and he dropped a flare. Then from every direction came British aircraft: Halifaxes and Lancasters. They dropped thousand pounders on the stuff we had seen. It blew the windows out of our barracks. Shrapnel was hitting the roof and rolling down. The concussion would blow us down if we stood there.

The next day bombs were going off all day long. These were bombs dropped the night before. They had long delay fuses on them. This discouraged the Germans from coming in and salvaging the military equipment that was bombed.

We did see a Lancaster get hit. Fire came out from underneath it. Then we saw one chute come out, and the plane went down. The guy who bailed out came into our camp a little later and gave us the news of how far the fronts were. The news spread throughout the camp, secretly.

Things were moving pretty fast right about then. The Germans

were telling one side of the story, and they showed that the Allies were way off, and the British told another side of the story. They showed the Allies as being almost on top of us. If we divided it in half, that's about where the line was. They would both overestimate, so we couldn't believe either of them. There might have been some propaganda in there. Probably was. We had crystal radios in the compounds, and we would get news from the BBC and from Germany.

To keep warm in the barracks we made "Smokey Joes." These were nothing more than a coffee can or a milk can on which we put louvers. It was ingenious how they made those things to blow heat. The guys in the barracks would tear down shutters from the buildings and take "2 by 6s" out of the loft to use for firewood. The Germans would go crazy trying to keep the guys from tearing up the barracks, but they couldn't stop them. They had fires going everywhere and cooking food out of the Red Cross parcels we received. We got some pretty good things from those.

The Germans were pretty good about getting the Red Cross parcels to us until they started driving these big white GMC closed trucks. They would go into Switzerland to pick up the Red Cross parcels. They would come back, empty the parcels and fill the trucks with ammunition and take it to where ever they needed it. Our fighters got wind of that, so they just started shooting at the Red Cross trucks, and the trucks would explode. Then the Germans would not drive them anymore. They were afraid they would get killed. So the POWs volunteered to drive the trucks. That's how we got our parcels started again. The POWs would not try to escape. They knew their buddies needed those Red Cross parcels, or else they would

POW camp, possibly Mooseberg itself. (Photo: USAFM)



starve. The Germans would only give us potatoes. They weren't cooked too well, and they had dirt in them. They also gave us black bread, but it formed gas something terrible.

We were on a starvation diet. I didn't feel like doing anything because my elbows were getting big, my knees were getting big, and my ribs showed. If it wasn't for the Red Cross, I would have died.

We sat around one day when we were out in the yard, and we were singing hymns. The guards came in there, and did they ever break that up! They wouldn't let us sing hymns at all. They said if we wanted to sing hymns, we had to go into the barracks where nobody could hear us. We couldn't sing hymns outside.

We had a Protestant minister with us. When we got news that President Roosevelt died, we were really down. Morale had dropped. But the minister brought it up again. He said, "Don't fear. The United States is a strong nation, and they've got leaders that will come in and follow Roosevelt and do every bit as good if not better. You will not need to worry about that." He helped us by picking up our morale.

With the war nearing an end, we were forced out of our camp. Patton was getting close, so we were put on a force march. We marched that first night until four in the morning. The guards started us and stopped us so often that we would run into each other in the dark. So we took out the little bit of toilet paper that we had and tied it around the guy's belt in front of us. When the guy in front started walking again, the paper would flutter, and then we would start up. When it started to go limp, we knew he was stopping. That's how we kept each other from running into each other. The next day we stopped in this field, and the Germans had a

soup kitchen there. They gave us some pea soup. That was heaven. That was the best meal I ever had. I got half a can of that. We sat down under a tree and went to sleep. We woke up all wet because it rained. Then we got out on the road and marched some more.

We were walking down this road with trees on each side when, all of a sudden, we heard someone yell, "Break, break!" A P-51 came speeding down upon us. One guy ran out with his toilet paper and formed the letters "P-O-W" and took a chance of being shot up. When the pilot saw that, he wiggled his wings and took off. They followed us every day after that. They knew right where we were.

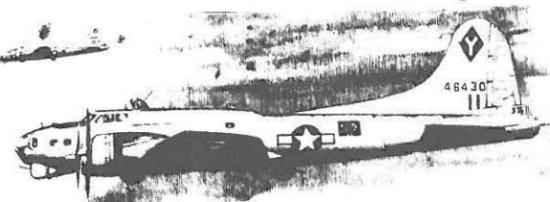
The Americans would watch us until the final day before we got to a camp. There were about four thousand of us then, marching down this road, parallel to the autobahn, a few miles into the Black Forest. We went down a road a little further when we came to a railroad overpass. We were ready to go under the overpass when here came some P-47 "Thunderbolt" fighters. They were up about 3,000 feet. The first one came down, and someone yelled, "Break, break!" We all ran off and just melted into the trees. I was running up along side of this great big pile of stones. I looked over and heard this chunk-chunk-chunk sound. Fifty caliber bullets were whizzing right past me. So I just threw my Red Cross parcels of food and jumped on this guy's back. He was hiding behind a tree. I just buried my face into his back. I gave him good protection. Then we heard "KER-WHUMP, KERWHUMP!" Both guns went off or both bombs were dropped from the P-47's wings. Five Americans were killed...three of them from concussion. The next plane came roaring down, but he didn't shoot or drop bombs. He just pulled up. The Germans were

shooting at him. The first plane must have told him that there were POWs down there and not to drop bombs. So, he didn't. The third plane also peeled off, but this was too late for some of our guys.

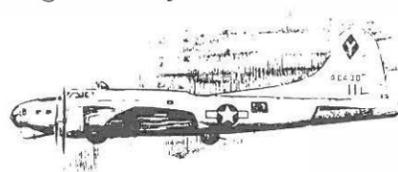
After the fireworks were over we formed back on the road again. We wondered why they were bombing there. When we got across on the other side of that track trestle, we saw why. There were train locomotives... lots of them. They had tree branches over them shielding them from being spotted from the sky. Well, the American planes could obviously see them. They weren't too well protected, I guess.

We set out again and arrived at our camp at Moosberg. That's where we ended up. We stayed out all night. Then we covered up with straw for a couple nights. Frost was all over us. It was really cold and damp! We slept in farm communities. All their farms are in groups, like a little city. The Germans gave us warning. Anyone caught stealing a chicken or eggs, or anything like that, would be shot. Despite that warning our guys were stealing chickens left and right, because they were hungry. I don't think any of them were caught. We had eggs, and that was about it. We went on into the Mooseberg camp finally and got into a barracks. We sat there for probably three weeks. One morning we heard a lot of commotion outside. There was a truck that was draining the sewage from the latrines. It started to drive up a hill when, all of a sudden, KERWHOOM! He just blew up. Patton's tanks were coming in, and they blew him to smithereens. The truck driver never had a chance. When we saw that happen, we knew we were going to be liberated pretty quick. Then we could hear the tanks moving.

And then it was quiet for a little bit. The Gestapo tankers were the toughest. They came into the camp



Page 26



and got our camp commander. They told him that if one guy stuck his nose out of the camp gate, they would shoot up the whole camp and kill everybody. So we would be darn sure that nobody got out. So then they started up again. They retreated as the Americans shot at them. For a while, bullets were flying all over the camp. I got into the latrine because the walls there were about three feet thick. Bullets would hit, but they did not penetrate. One guy was out in the street and got hit in the butt. He laid there wounded. He shouldn't have been out there, but he wanted to see it all. The Americans bypassed us and went on into Mooseberg. After they passed us we watched as a swastika flag came down and a "Stars and Stripes" went up. The tears just flew. I'll never forget it.

When the tanks broke the gate down and came in, guys would pull the drivers from the tanks, kissing and hugging them. They were going

crazy. They just wanted to thank them so much. Some of the guys had been in there as prisoners for five years. It just seemed like it was going to go on and on for them.

About an hour later a Red Cross gal arrived with a doughnut machine. She was pumping out doughnuts in the middle of the street. The line to the doughnut machine looked to be a mile and a half long. It was so good!

Then the guys got out of the camp and went into Mooseberg. The houses had American flags sticking out of them. The Germans knew what we were going to do and thought it might be better if they put out American flags. But, our guys started looting the houses anyway. It was awful.

The Russian POWs raped about 25 girls in the first hour they were out. They broke into a brewery and had all the beer they could drink. So the American MPs rounded them all up and locked them in the barracks. But they left the Russian

officers. They were something else. If we walked down the street on the sidewalk with them, we had to walk around them. They were really bad. They didn't like Americans. They didn't like anything that was going on. We didn't care for them either, but we didn't want any fights with them. We were too close to being liberated and being sent home.

The third day Patton came in riding in a command car, standing up in back with his pearl handled revolvers on his side, hands on his hips. He didn't care much for us being in this camp. He thought we all should have broken out and started fighting again to help him.

So we were free. I went back to the States. The Air Force sent me to Florida then flew me over to Randolph Field, Texas. They gave me the option of staying in the service. If I stayed, they were going to send me to Alaska and teach me how to fly helicopters. I didn't want that. I decided that I just wanted to go home. ☺



Dear Bernie:

Enclosed you will find 2 Mission Completion pictures for an upcoming Newsletter.

Names and Squadron numbers are on the back of the pictures.

Mike Johns and I have remained friends and in touch often thru the years since our Crew was formed in 1943.

I am also enclosing a SASE so you can return the pictures when you are finished with them.

Lou and I will be unable to meet you in Tucson this year but hope to make it next year.

Our Best to You.

E.W. "Tex" Morton
21 Kathryn Dr.
St. James, MO 65559



The photos of 'Tex' & Mike will appear on the front page of the Aug. or Nov. '99 issue.

Page 27

Bob Gockenbach's story starts here and concludes on mid-page 32.

The 50th mission in the M.E.T.O. normally considered the end of your tour for the airmen of the 5th Wing of the fifteenth Air Force, in southern ITALY. This is a brief account of mine.



The day before our last mission, my mind was a complete mess. There were so many thoughts about so many things, but that seemed normal before the last mission. Mac (Burt McKnight) and I had decided to finish our tours as we had started, Mac as the pilot and me as the co-pilot. Our flight crew was the one assigned to me when I checked out as 1st pilot, I was quite happy with them and most had flown extra missions so that they could finish with us. I seemed to calm down a little bit in the evening, possibly due to playing cards and losing, as usual.

H-hour didn't seem any different, but it sounded like the Sergeant was a little bit quieter and softer spoken. The morning it-self was soft and although still dark, the sky seemed to be beckoning. Breakfast, for those of us flying this mission was quiet and everyone ate fast. The ride to group for briefing was like breakfast, quiet and swift. Guess everyone was like me, wondering what target we had drawn for our last mission, and hoping it was a milk-run. However, it was the furthest thing from a milk-run I've ever encountered, for when they drew the curtain back, uncovering the wall map, the route ribbon ran off the top of the map. The target indicated was BERLIN and that is a long way from FOGGIA in southern ITALY. The rest of the briefing was as usual, flack intensity, fighters expected, etc. During the ride to the flight line I was in a world of my own, occupied with the prayer I normally said before every other mission, and the thought I had before each mission "if it was my time to go, there would be nothing I could do about it". My thoughts then turned to the current mission, especially the fuel we carried, would it be enough to get us back to base? I also had thoughts of tomorrow and how good it would feel not to have to sweat out the next mission.

I can't remember the number of the ship we flew that morning, but I do remember that it checked out beautifully just the way Sgt. Black, our ground crew chief, said it would. That made Mac and I feel much better, for we would have hated to turn around and come back, to go through all waiting and anticipation again. The ship did fly the whole mission (10-1/2 hours) without a hitch.



The mission was uneventful until we reached the head of the ADRIATIC where we picked up our fighter escort; sure was glad to see those P-51s. We did catch a little flack over the Udine area. The flack didn't amount to anything, no one in our group was hit. We had no other problems in crossing the ALPS or AUSTRIA. But we did encounter a B-17 just west of the Brux Oil Refinery area, heading south. They must have had a malfunction of some kind and were returning to base. However, they didn't make it, for they were attacked by three of Germany's new Jet fighters, the M.E.163 class which was rocket powered and very fast, about 590 miles per hour. We could see the tracers from the B-17 arching far behind the fighters on their passes. The B-17 did finally shoot down one of these fighters, but a little too late, for they had started to smoke and were headed down and I lost sight of them. The remaining two fighters headed our way, but must have thought better of it, for they didn't press their attack. They were either too low on fuel or our formation looked too formidable for them, as they left in a hurry.

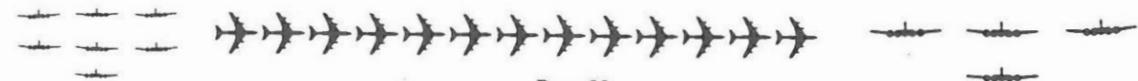
The mission did get more interesting from there on, because the first groups over the target were returning and were passing us headed south, some with feathered engines, some trailing smoke. They were all very fortunate because none of the German fighters were after them nor trailing them from the target. This seemed like a good sign to me. By this time we could see the flack bursting over the target area and we started putting on our flack vests and helmets. Soon after that was accomplished we were at the I.P. and turned on to it. The I.P. is the Initial Point to start the bomb run. Neither Mac nor I trusted the automatic pilot/bomb sight control hook-up, because the hook-up made corrections and maneuvers too erratic. Mac lowered his seat so that his eyes were level with the P.D.I. (directional instrument from the bomb sight that is located on the instrument panel) and flew the bomb run manually.

We were leading the group, which means we had the three other squadrons behind us. One on the right and slightly higher, one on the left and slightly lower. The third was directly in line with us only back and below. The formation was like a diamond. We started getting a lot of flack. I looked down and saw we were over BERLIN. I should have said a burning BERLIN, for the city was burning all over, just as if the Germans had tried to cover the city with their smoke pots. This city was really burning, and you could see the flames from 28,000 Ft. It has always been a common practice that fighters would select the lead ship of the formation as their prime target. However, when I looked back to see how the formation was doing, I saw one of Germany's new jet fighters closing in on us (the M.E.262, a twin engine jet fighter). This jet was as fast as the M.E.163 if not faster. I really didn't expect to see any fighters with as much flack as we were getting. Those German fighter pilots sure had a lot of guts to fly through so much of his own flack,

and our formation as well, to get in a shot at us. I could see the cannon in his nose blinking at us as he came in on us from five o'clock slightly higher than us and between our right wingman and our ship. All his effort was worth it for he did plant a cannon shell in our number 3 fuel tank. There were ten men aboard that day, and there must have been a least ten angels with us, for the cannon shell was a dud and did not explode.

The number three fuel tank is at the right wing root, where the right wing is attached to the fuselage. If this shell has gone off, the right wing would have been blown off and we would have spun into the heart of burning BERLIN, without having much chance to bail out of the aircraft. Mac didn't think we had been hit by the fighter, even when I pointed out that the upper skin on our right wing had peeled forward. If it had been flack the skin would have peeled from middle out all around the hit. After we had bombs away, I took over for Mac while he adjusted his seat and took a little break. I have never been one to dally around the target after bombs away, so when I took over I rallied off the target just as fast as I could with the group behind me. However, I didn't want to keep the group over the target any longer than I had to, so after I peeled off I lost altitude as well. I still had memories of the M.E.262 that hit us on the bomb run. I didn't know if there were any more around, so we got out of the area as rapidly as possible.

The flack thinned out rapidly as we rallied off the target, leveled off and headed for home. We didn't encounter any fighters on the way home and we certainly were looking for them after what we went through on the bomb run. The flack was very light and inaccurate on the route back. We did see quite a few stragglers with all kinds of damage and evidence of damage, i.e. feathered engines, smoking engines, flack holes large enough for us to see at our distance. At first I didn't think too much of our condition, as we didn't get too much flack damage, and after checking nothing important had been hit. However, about ten minutes enroute the right waist gunner was on the intercom telling me that he thought we were loosing fuel. As I looked closely at the damage the cannon shell made, I would see the stream of gas coming from the hole the shell had made in the wing surface. The sweat started to come our again because I had been worried about the fuel supply from before take off. However, the faith I had in our engineer paid off, for after a while he came up with the solution. The "after a while" was really only a couple of minutes - my sweat just made it seem eternal. The simple solution was to transfer the fuel out of the No. 3 fuel tanks until the siphoning stopped. We had to keep a very good watch on the engine fuel gauge for when it got too low we had to equalize the fuel in all four engines. That took the sweat off for a while.

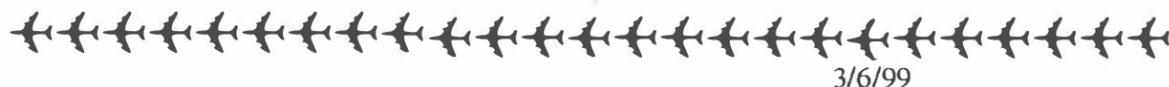


It was a great relief to remove our flack suit and helmets. We were still at an altitude where we couldn't remove our oxygen masks until we crossed the Alps. Once we had crossed the Alps we started to let down and again started getting flack over Udine area. We maintained our altitude for a little longer. When we ran out of flack this time, we were at the head of the Adriatic, and should not expect any more enemy action. It really felt great to get the oxygen mask off, light a cigarette and relax. We still had a problem though, and it kept us busy. We finally did get our fuel tanks leveled, as much as possible any way. We were very fortunate that we did not lose too much of our fuel, for our tanks were reading almost zero when we reached the western shore of ITALY, north of the spur. We were group lead and as such we would be the second squadron to get into the landing pattern. As we came onto the down wind leg, over the center of the runway, we checked our fuel supply and found we didn't have enough to do what we had planned to do. We had planned to pull out of formation until the group had landed, then we were going to buzz the tower and the whole base. Instead we landed, in turn, like nice little boys, and lost our only chance to buzz the field with an understandable reason. However we were so happy to be "home free" from our 50th and last mission, that the disappointment didn't mean too much to us. But to end our 50th mission with no one hurt, really did mean a lot.

There were quite a few of our friends at the hard stand to meet us upon our return, all offering congratulations, and to buy the first drink of the evening. Debriefing came first, all else had to wait till we had finished at group where it was held. We were hoping for a short debriefing session, but when they heard we had encountered an M.E.262 the questions flew for at least 30 minutes on just the 262. All the debriefing lasted about an hour and a half. When we got back to the squadron area the first thing I had to do was to get cleaned up, get out of those clothes that I had spent about the last fifteen hours in. After I had showered, shaved and changed, I headed for the "O" club. However I did stop by the operation shack to see if Mac was there, he was not. While I was there, Sgt. Black came in looking for me, said he had something for me. He handed me a shop towel and when I unrapped it there was the cannon shell that the German fighter planted in our # 3 fuel tank. The shell was clean and dull, with no scratches or marks but was odd looking. It didn't have a pointed nose but was rounded like a broom stick and a band of copper to accept the rifling in barrel of the gun. It had no visible fuse, the armament people later decided they wanted to investigate it. They did and sent it back to me in three pieces and I still have the pieces. They did tell me that it was new and the fuse was a gravity fuse. When it hit something the weight contained inside was driven into the firing pin, exploding the shell.



The let down was starting to set in after that, and I felt mighty tired and since it had been about 12 hours since breakfast, I was very hungry. The officer's club was crowded but Mac had saved me a place at one of the long tables. Everyone was buying drinks but I wanted food first, but for the rest of the evening I did not get to buy one drink. My navigator was a young looking guy and had grown a very good English handle bar mustache. He was blonde, and the mustache really stood out. He always said that he would shave the mustache off when he finished, today we did finish our tour. He came in and sat down at our table and all of us thought he was one of the new crew that had just arrived. I had never seen him without it so it really hit me. It took a long time for me to get use to that missing musache. It didn't take many of the free drinks, especially when the Doc was pouring, to put me under this night as tired as I was. However, I did remember to write to my wife, the letter consisted of the following. "Darling, number 50 is done. Love Bob". After I got it to the mail room, I hit the sack. It didn't take more than two minutes for me to get to dreamland.



3/6/99

Mr. Smith,

My name is Charles Livingston and I am interested in getting any information about the activities of the 99th Bomb Group, 15th Air Force.

I believe my father served with this group during WWII as a navigator on a B-17.

My father, Victor Livingston, entered the Army Air Corp during the spring or summer of 1944 and was discharged a few months(?) After the conclusion of the war.

Some of his training took place in Monroe, La, where he met my mother. They were married in Va. In Jan. Of 1945 before he went overseas.

I believe he went overseas with a flight of bombers being flown over, with a stop over in Brasil.

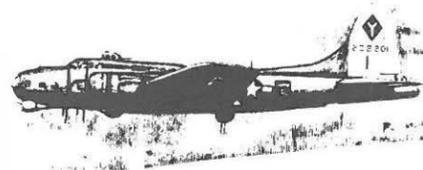
In any event, I know very little of his war record or that of his unit. I wonder if you might be able to give me some information. Or, some idea where I might get some information?



Regards
Charles Livingston
PO Box 643
Wallkill, NY 12589

On line at
chasvic@aol.com

14171 Desert Glen Drive
Sun City West, Arizona 85375
March 9th, 1999



Dear Mr. Livingston,

Received your letter inquiring about information regarding your father, Victor Livingston, who may have been with the 99th Bomb Group.

I do not personally have any Knowledge of your father's role with the 99th. However, Richard Drain, 99th Bomb Group Historian, may be able to assist you. His address is: 1715 Briarwood Terrace, Springfield, Ohio 45504-1511.

At our reunion in Tucson May 4th-9th I will post your letter in case one of our members might possibly know your father.

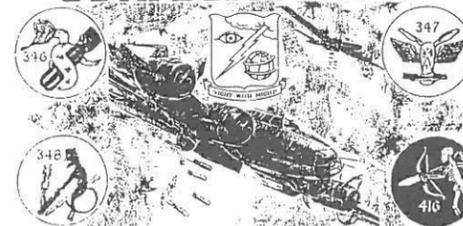
Good luck in your search.

Very truly yours,

Leonard Smith
Leonard Smith, 346th Sqd.



99TH BOMB GROUP



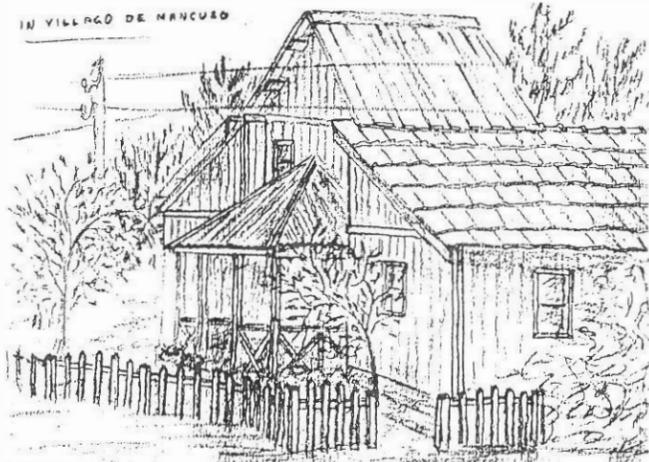
A Smile

It costs nothing but creates much.
It enriches those who receive, without impoverishing those who give.
It happens in a flash and the memory of it sometimes lasts forever.
None are so rich that they can get along without it, and
None so poor that they aren't richer for a smile.
Yet it cannot be bought, begged, borrowed or stolen,
for it is something that is no earthly good to anyone
until it is given away.



Bill Donahue sent the photo to the left of his crew just before leaving for Italy. Crew members back row left to right are: T/Sgt. Bill Donahue, Engineer; T/Sgt. John Batherson, Radio Op.; S/Sgt. Irvin Davis, Tail Gunner; S/Sgt. Scotty Davis, Waist Gunner; S/Sgt. Willis Simmons, Armorer; S/Sgt. Julius Agnell, Ball Turret. Front row left to right are: Lt. Leland Slane, Bombardier; Lt. John Doddridge, Pilot; Lt. Marcus Williams, Co-Pilot; Lt. Doris Beers, Navigator. Bill's story letter was printed on page 24 of our Feb. '99 issue.

IN VILLAGO DE MANCUEO



Sketch by Ed Karnes. More on page 20.

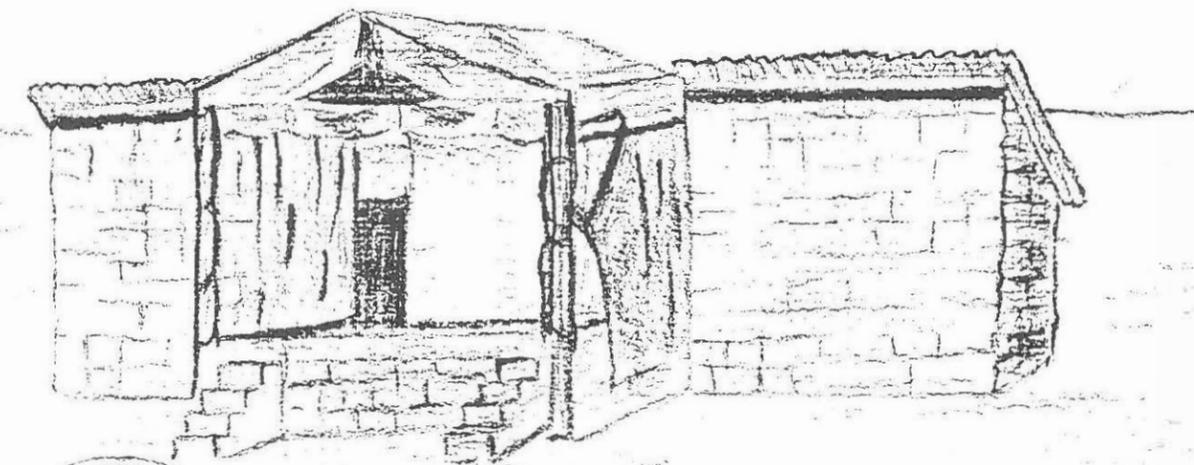
Was this there... or was it a dream?



See page 5 for accompanying Norris's letter.

(L. to R.) Guide Moses Maj.

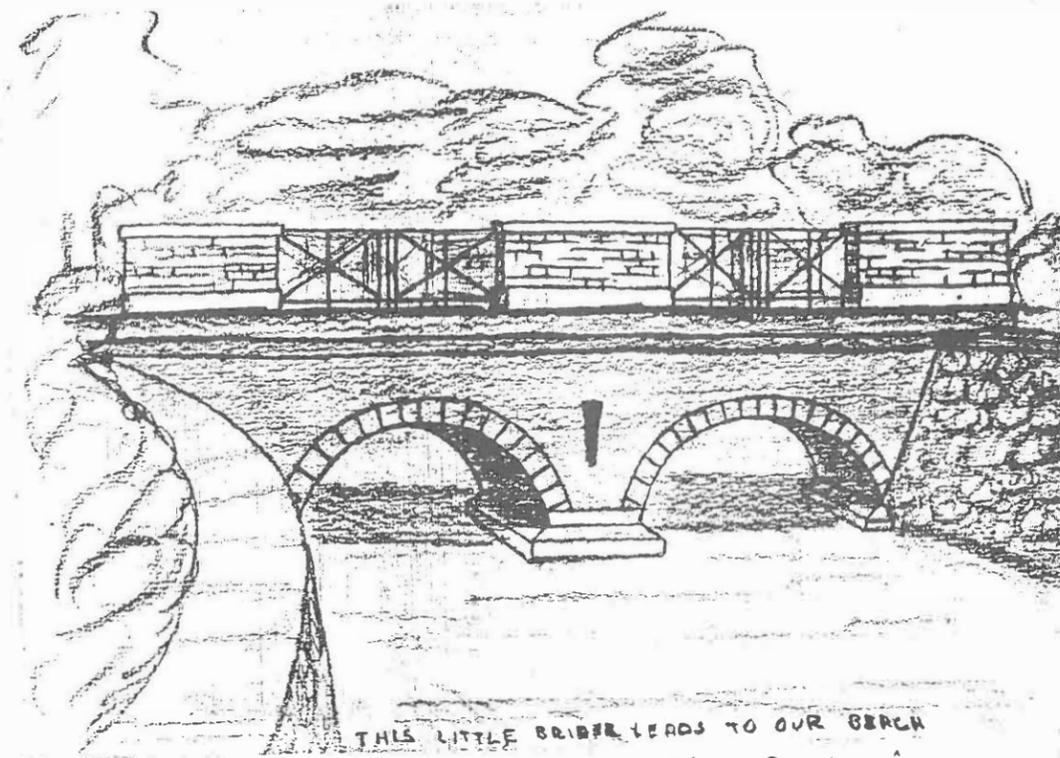
Katzenmyer
Lt. Gray
Maj. Seward
Lt. Domangue
Maj. Shull
Rt. Guide Sam



346th

GROUP'S "LITTLE THEATER"

Italian accordionists, tenors, jugglers; movies—ancient and modern. Ah, those nights under the stars!



THIS LITTLE BRIDGE LEADS TO OUR BEACH

On the road to Manfredonia

99th Bomb Group Historical Society
Walter H. Butler, Treasurer
8608 Bellehaven Place, N.E.
Albuquerque, NM 87112

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March 30, 1999

Dear 99th BGHS Members:

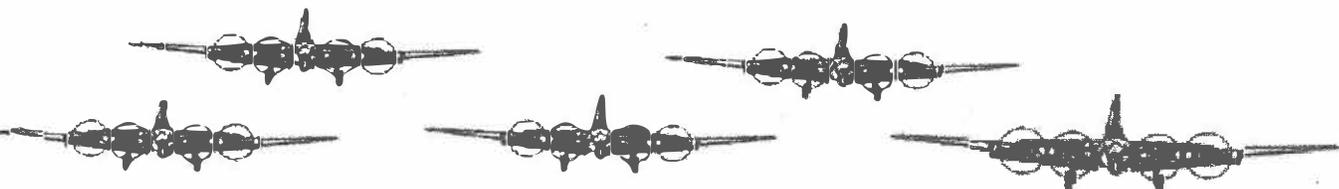
By the time this issue reaches you, Reunion '99 will be recent history. We were happy to welcome those in attendance and we say "THANK YOU" for their participation. We are confident they enjoyed the beautiful Tucson area, the activities offered, and the comfortable, congenial Hilton Tucson East.

We had approximately 200 members registered and over 200 attending the Saturday night banquet - many brought guests to enjoy the delicious dinner, music and comraderie.

Some of you missed this year's reunion for a variety of reasons. You were certainly missed - but we're hoping to see you in Y2K and encourage you to stay active in the 99th BGHS. This year we actually found some 99ers who were unaware that we existed - keep spreading the word so we can continue to be a viable, functioning organization.

Here's to many more reunions!

Sincerely,
Your Host Committee



Information to be included in your quarterly newsletters issued **February, May, August & November** must be sent to Bernie Barr or Walter Butler no later than the first of January, April, July or October.

Member information and stories are needed regularly to keep the newsletter interesting. Everyone has a story or information that our members would enjoy reading. Keep it coming! If at all possible send type written information, the darker the better.

Walter's address is in the top left corner above. Bernie Barr's address is: 7408 Vista Del Arroyo, Albuquerque, NM 87109