



35 TIMES

MY EXPERIENCES AS A B-17
BOMBER PILOT DURING WORLD WAR II

KEITH LAMB

To the Stern Family, September 1995:
This is the way it was in 1943 + 1945 —
Grandpa Keith

35 TIMES

BY KEITH LAMB

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FOREWORD

The story you are about to read is true. It is about my experiences, and those of my friends, from the time I received my second lieutenant's bars and pilot's wings at Brooks Field, Texas, to the time I returned home from Europe, thirty-five combat missions later. My story points no moral. It bears no social significance except for what you may care to read into it. The episodes which follow, many of which are humorous, document my experiences as a young American--in my early twenties--facing the obligation of performing thirty-five missions over Europe as a bomber pilot during World War II.

Discovering, remembering--and sometimes creating--humor in an otherwise deadly serious situation was a great help in coping with the daily realities of war. In most cases names are real, but some, of course, are fictitious. Dates and happenings were recalled from my notes.

This story achieved its final form in 1994, fifty years later--organized from that series of notes and a rough draft I made shortly after my return from overseas. The current interest shown in World War II by the younger generations--my grown children, my grandchildren, nieces and nephews--gave me a reason to preserve this little bit of personal history for posterity.

I'm dedicating my story to my mother, for without her inspiration I may never have made it back. I'm sorry she never got to read it.



*Aviation Cadet Keith W. Lamb
Primary Training: Cuero, Texas; Basic Training: Waco, Texas
Advanced Training: San Antonio, Texas*

December 5, 1943, I remember as the most thrilling day of my life. On that day I got my wings. On that day I became Keith Lamb, Second Lieutenant, U.S. Army Air Forces. The graduation ceremony was held in an old hangar which had been converted into a large barn-like auditorium. The class marched in at attention, trying to keep in step with the music of the band on stage. Our eyes were focused straight ahead, while the spectators, what few there were, gave us their full attention. This was wartime, Brooks Field, Texas, and I was 22 years old.

Assembly line methods graduated a class every nine weeks, about 150 strong; ours was number 43-K. The ceremony was over before we knew it. After a few short speeches telling us to continue in the glorious tradition of Brooks--to follow in the footsteps of earlier graduates such as Hap Arnold and Charles A. Lindberg--we marched onto the stage, where the Colonel shook our hands and pinned on our wings. We returned to our seats, sang the Air Corps Song, and it was all over. Some of the fellows who were lucky enough to have parents or sweethearts present rushed over to them to have their wings repinned according to sentimental tradition. It would have been wonderful if my mother could have come. She probably would have cried. But Sacramento, California, is a long way from San Antonio, Texas, and wartime travel wasn't easy for civilians.

I looked for Bob Reade in the crowd--my closest friend at Brooks. During Pre-Flight Training at Kelly Field almost a year before, I had looked him up after being told that a fellow from my home town was also at Kelly. After that we had been almost constant companions until I left for Primary Training in PT-19s at Cuero, Texas. Later, after I finished my Basic Training in BT-13s at Waco, Texas, we were fortunate in being reunited at Brooks, where, together, we completed our training in AT-17s. Graduation day I located him in the auditorium, and very solemnly we stood in the center of the building repinning our new wings on each other.

We skipped the party that night, thinking it would be too tame, and went to town. We wanted to do something wild to get rid of all the pent-up emotions we had kept under control during the last year of rigorous training and intensive study. About the only useful thing I did that weekend was to buy a seven-year subscription to *Colliers* magazine from a little blonde with big blue eyes in exchange for a date she never kept. I was still getting the magazine in 1945 as a reminder. The next day Bob Reade and I, along with Carlos Ricketson (Rick) and Bernard Jacobs (Jake), two more of my close

friends, were assigned to "further training in airplanes designated as twin engine fighters." When we read those words "twin engine fighters" we were really happy. That meant P-38s or A-20s. It was just what I wanted. I could picture myself in a sleek -38 doing barrel-rolls over a beautiful tropical island in the Pacific. I didn't know then that it wasn't destined to work out that way, so I went right on blissfully dreaming beautiful dreams. We were all very happy. Being assigned to P-38s meant we would be with the 4th Air Force stationed in California. Rick was from San Francisco, Jake from Napa, a small town not far from there, and I, from Sacramento. This meant that we would all be stationed close to home.

We had to wait around a couple of days for our orders, and when they came, to our surprise, they read "2nd Air Force, Salt Lake City, Utah." That didn't bother us too much, though, because along with them came orders for a delay en route plus five days travel time. That meant at least we'd get a week at home! I immediately went into town to borrow \$200 from the bank advertising loans available to graduating officers for leave purposes. I wanted one last splurge in Sacramento before going overseas. It would be my first Christmas home in three years. I had been in my second year at Sacramento Junior College, taking lower division courses in order to transfer to a university for pre-law studies, when on March 3, 1940, my California National Guard Unit--the 143 Field Artillery Regiment--had been activated and I found myself on active duty, enrolled in Artillery Training. Two years later I had become a section chief sergeant in charge of a 105-milimeter howitzer crew when I qualified for Aviation Cadet Training and left the Field Artillery. I called my folks and caught a train out that night for home.

That week at home was great fun--a constant round of parties and a lot of good times. I would get up around noon, get all slicked up in my brand new uniform, and meet Reade downtown. We usually met at the Senator Hotel Bar, where most of the pilots hung out from nearby McClellan and Mather Fields. Pretending we were old, seasoned P-38 pilots, we would go into long discourses on how a -38 handled in a crosswind landing or in a single engine stall. Of course we'd never been in one in our lives, and probably the other fellows knew it. One look at our shiny new uniforms told them that we had just graduated-- but that didn't dampen our spirits. The light was dim, anyway, and everyone was drinking beer. At that time there was a law in force that prohibited men in uniform from drinking anything stronger than 3.2 beer before four in the afternoon. Naturally, everyone became a veritable clock-watcher. Exactly at four, a small Filipino playing the role of houseboy would come out and strike a huge gong that could be heard all over the hotel. In spite of our bribes, he would never ring it earlier; but we always managed to make up for lost time.

By the time evening rolled around, Reade and I would be ready. I had a different date every night. Although I knew a lot of girls in town, sometimes for a change a friend would arrange a double date. I had never had a steady girl, or one that I took out often, in school or college. I couldn't have asked for a better time during my last week at home. Because my family knew that I would soon be overseas, they seemed to make allowances for my carefree behavior. I had everything my own way; my folks treated me like a king. They were proud of my commission, and I showed off for my younger sister, Jeanne, by visiting her class and giving a short talk. I also tried to date the teacher. She probably thought I was too young--only 22.

Mother cooked all my favorite foods and answered my father's joking comment that she was spoiling me, with: "It's too late now, at his age." I'm sure, though, she still thought of me as her little boy. Although everyone at home was aware that it would be our last time together before I went to combat, nothing was said about it until just before I left. Then my mother said, "Just do what you're told and nothing else." It was very good advice.

Reade and I were to report in at Salt Lake, December 22, 1943. Because that would mean I wouldn't be home for Christmas, the family decided to move their celebration up a few days, and we had Christmas together on the 19th. After a big turkey dinner, we gave out presents around the tree that evening. It was wonderful. The only thing that was different was the date.

The next day Reade and I took the train to Salt Lake--a good train with a club car where we spent most of the time. The first afternoon out we met a WAVE, who was stationed in Oakland, on her way home to Salt Lake for Christmas--about the only good looking girl on the train. Reade and I spied her, at about the same time, and argued for the rest of the trip as to who saw her first and who would take her to dinner and so forth. She was a good sport--a lot of fun--and entered right into the spirit of things. Also on the train was a group of Naval officers just back from the South Pacific on their way to Washington for a special assignment--a wild lot, looking for a good time, just as we were, so we joined them in the the club car for the rest of the trip.

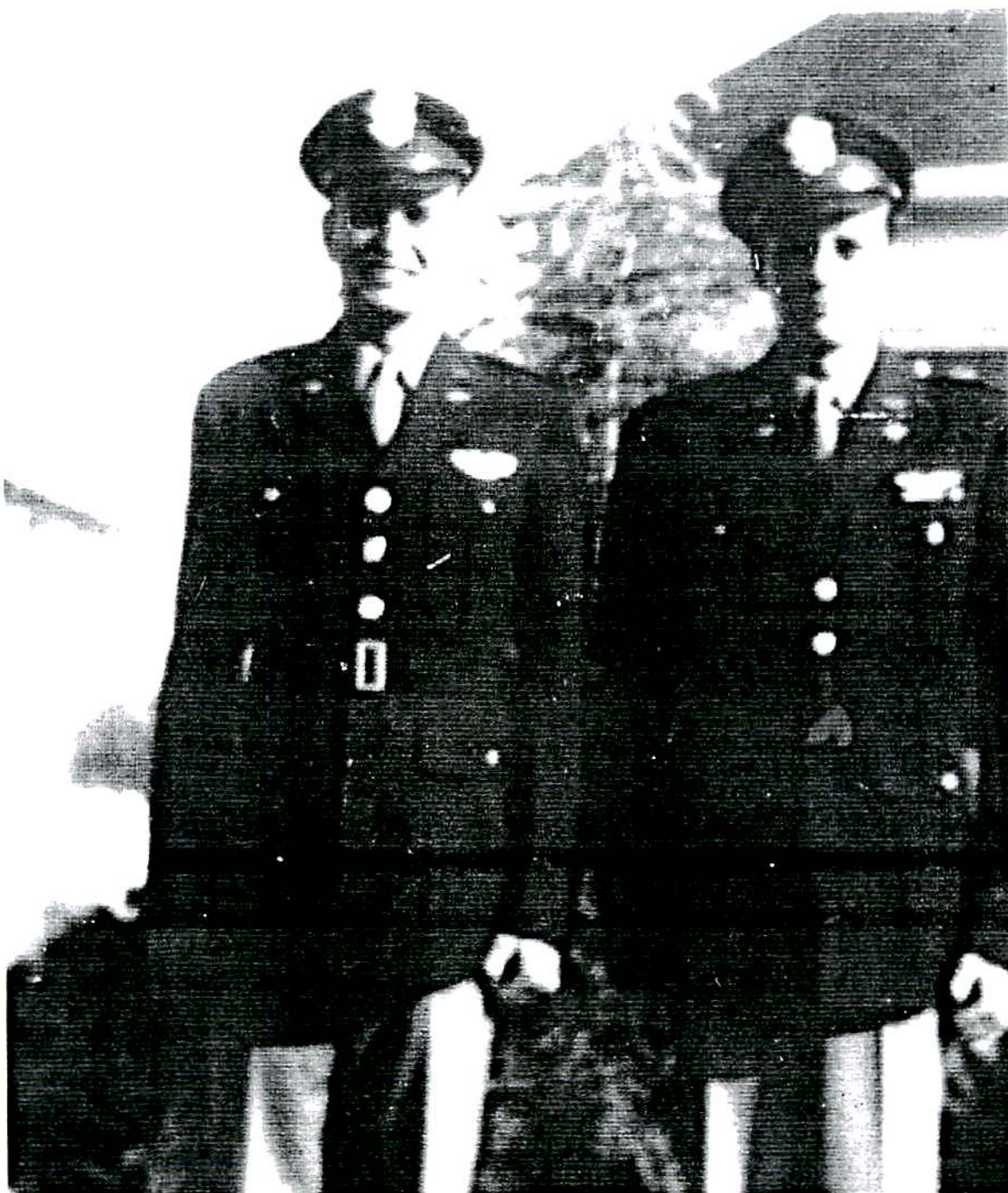
Early the first evening when the bartender ran out of ice ,I went back to the dining car to get him some. On my way back, noticing the WAVE sitting with a full colonel from the Military Police, I stopped and invited her to come back to the club car with me. I had a big chunk of ice in my hands, and every time the car would sway I would splash water on the colonel. He was a tough-looking character, and I could tell I wasn't making a very good impression on him. Finally he said to her, "For gosh sakes, go back to the club car with the lieutenant before I get soaking wet." She then laughed and came back with me to join us. From then on she watched out for Reade and me just like a mother. The next afternoon when the train stopped at Ogden she got off and looked around for us but couldn't see us. Rushing back on, she found us back in the club car again drinking Scotch- and-waters.

"Come on, you have to get off here," she said.

"No, this is Cincinatti," I argued. "We don't get off until Ogden

"You dope," she answered, "that's a sign for the Cincinatti Bread Company you are looking at. Come on!"

She found a porter who finally located our bags,and we got off the train just as it pulled out of the station. We transferred to another train and arrived at Salt Lake about two hours later. When she poured us off at the station her entire family was there to meet her. We must have given them quite a shock--the condition Reade and I were in. After she introduced us all around, her father insisted on taking us downtown to a hotel. Once there, attempting to appear sober, but succeeding only in looking embarrassed, we withdrew politely from our guardian angel and her family.



*2nd Lieutenant Bob Reade and 2nd Lieutenant Keith Lamb
shortly after graduation at Brooks Field, Texas*

When we registered at the New House Hotel (later on we referred to it as the Cold House Hotel) the only accommodation available to us was a suite of rooms on the mezzanine. On one side of us was located "The Blue Room," a sort of conference room. On the other side was a kitchen that was never used. Both were kept unlocked and came in quite handy at times.

After a bellboy took us upstairs, Reade went to bed, but I took a cold shower and decided to get something to eat. I followed a long marble stairway down to the main floor, but found the dining room closed. A dance was going on in one of the rooms off the lobby, though, and I started to go in but was stopped because I had no ticket. While I stood in the doorway I spotted a brunette across the room. Her dark hair hung to her shoulders and she looked great in her black evening dress. She saw me, and I motioned her to come over. No one was dancing at the time, so as she came across the floor toward me everyone was watching. We looked at each other silently for a couple of seconds.

"How about showing me a place to eat?" I asked slowly, "This is my first time in town."

She replied even more slowly, looking me straight in the eye, "Okay, I'll tell my father."

It was a Lodge Christmas dance, and she had come with him. She put on a white fur coat over her black evening dress, and I thought she looked even more beautiful. She went back across the room and whispered something into an elderly gentleman's ear. He looked surprised, then looked over at me, smiled and waved, murmuring something about "an old friend" just loud enough for the people around him to hear. The girl's name was Diane.

The next day when Reade and I reported in at the airfield, we learned that the field accommodations were all filled, and we were assigned quarters in a converted barn at the state fairgrounds on the edge of town. One look at the large building filled with filthy double-decker bunks, a big furnace on one side of the room belching coal dust and smoke over everything, made us decide quickly to keep our room in town--at least until our money ran out.

Salt Lake was just an Assignment and Classification Center; no training of any kind was done there. Although we were only supposed to be there a week or so, it was a month before we were transferred out. The first day as we were making the rounds checking in--Ricketson and Jacobs were there also, as well as Reade--I noticed the processing officers kept writing H.B. on all my papers and orders. We couldn't figure out what that meant. Finally it

dawned on me--Heavy Bombardment. All my dreams during the last three years of getting to fly P-38s were wiped out the moment I read H.B. on my orders. The biggest disappointment in my life so far. I would be copilot on a B-17 or a B-24--so would Reade, Rick, and Jake.

This was a terrible blow to the ego, as, unfair as it was, copilots were considered inferior to first pilots. It was just a matter of luck into which category you were placed. The only real difference was in training: A first pilot received three-months' transition training in the airplane he was assigned to, while a copilot had to learn from scratch. In many cases the first pilot, in order to secure his job and maintain the full esteem and confidence of his crew, would teach his copilot as little as possible about the airplane. This practice, I'm glad to say, was not usually continued overseas, because it took two well-trained, experienced pilots to handle a heavy bomber in combat.

This assignment was an especially hard blow to Reade; he had been an outstanding cadet all through training. In Pre-Flight at the San Antonio Aviation Cadet Center he had been Cadet Commandant, the highest ranking cadet of the 5000 who were there. Also, he had been top cadet at the other fields where we had trained. His previous ROTC training had given him a head start on the rest of us. He was fortunate, as well, to have good looks along with his intelligence. Tall and handsome, he had broad shoulders and curly brown hair.

That month at Salt Lake was the happiest I spent in the service. As brand-new officers, we had plenty of money--travel pay and so forth. We lived in town, had no duties, and it was the Christmas holiday season. Our sole responsibility was to report in at Classification Headquarters at the fairgrounds every morning at eight o'clock for roll-call. This took a half-hour; after that we were through for the rest of the day. The only catch was that we could not leave the fairgrounds to go to town until six at night except on week-ends, so our days were spent mostly sleeping or playing cards for lack of anything better to do.

Rick, Jake, Reade and I called ourselves the Four Alucard Brothers. That's Dracula spelled backwards. Rick was Ricardo Alucard; Jake was Romulus; Reade, Pendergastly; and I was Trafalgar Alucard. We would introduce ourselves this way to the young women we met in town--with a bow at the waist and a Victorian flourish of the arm. I imagine there are still a couple of women in Salt Lake City who think of me as Trafalgar Alucard (if they think of me at all) because they never heard me called anything else. The names were chosen because of the "Draculean" time-frame in which we were living daily. If you remember the story of Dracula, he slept in his coffin all

day and went out at night looking for beautiful young women. We called our cots, where we slept all day, our coffins, and as soon as the sun went down we went out on the town looking for "sweet, innocent young Mormon women" the rest of the night. As a matter of fact, I don't think we did see the sun more than once or twice our entire time there. The days were very short. In the morning when we reported in it was still dark, and by the time we got cleaned up and left for town after six that night the sun had already gone down.

We found the Mormon girls in Salt Lake City different from any other girls we had met in the whole country. Most of them didn't go to dances or shows, drink liquor, or smoke, but the few forms of entertainment remaining for them were pursued enthusiastically. Evidently they inherited a love of adventure from their pioneering ancestors.

Reade and I didn't stay in the "Cold House" Hotel very long. After about a week we moved into the Temple Square Hotel, where Rick and Jake lived, getting the room directly above them. Our room there would cost us less than the one we had--and the manager of the "Cold House" was glad to get rid of us because we made so much noise. The Temple Square suited us much better. Every evening there was a party going on in one of our rooms--people coming and going--and in spite of the loud noise, as far as I know, there was never a complaint.

I went out with Diane, the brunette in the black dress, a couple of times after our first meeting at her father's Lodge dance. She would borrow his Packard, which was a good deal. He didn't like me very much, though, right from the start, and even less later. After a wonderful dinner at her house Christmas Eve, we made the rounds of her friends' houses wishing them Merry Christmas and ended the evening at the Officers' Club. It was the only place in town where mixed drinks were sold--a very popular place. People stood in line for hours to get in; the number of occupants allowed at one time was restricted because of fire regulations. It had no connection with the field, being run by civilians. At any rate, it was a gold mine for the owners. To avoid the line, we often would sneak in the back door. If we were caught, they would take our membership cards away (but we could always get them back!)

Dianne left early that night, because her father was going to read Mass; they were very strict Catholics, a minority in this Mormon town. I spent the rest of the evening there at the Club, feeling very homesick, not unusual in those circumstances.

One night Jake and I decided to find a girl for Reade; we had been in town for three or four days and as yet he hadn't latched onto anything. We

met her on a street corner on her way home from work, and I recognized her as the elevator operator in the Utah Hotel across the street from us--a blonde with an outstanding figure. We convinced her to go back to our hotel with us to meet Reade, and it proved to be a successful meeting. Reade rose beautifully to the occasion, taking right over--quite a surprise to us, as his first reaction to new women was usually one of indifference. He went out with her exclusively from then on and she took care of him like a baby--even going so far as to darn his sox. She had a nice little apartment of her own (as well as, unfortunately, an absent husband, a major, from whom she said she had separated before he left.) Jake and I kicked ourselves for months for turning her over to Reade. It was too late to move in on her now; Reade was already firmly entrenched.

Jake and I had a well-worked out system for picking up women. We would walk down the street and decide on two that we liked. Somehow we would manage to get them stopped and talking; then Jake would say, "You can't do any better than us, can you?" Their mouths would drop open at our forthright approach, their expressions becoming incredulous at the mention of our names, Romulus and Trafalgar Alucard.

Then I would say, "Come up to our room and have a drink." Of course we knew we would get a negative response because most of them were Mormons and didn't drink. "Then come up and have a smoke," I would suggest. They did not smoke, either, of course. "Then come up and have a drink of water."

By that time one of the girls would usually agree, after asking her friend, "...if that's all right with you, Mabel."

Actually, this was about the only way to meet girls in town. At any of the night clubs or the Officers' Club they were required to have escorts, and there weren't many dances, bowling alleys, or other gathering places. You either met them on the street or occasionally at a restaurant or soda fountain. One night Jake and I were going into the hotel with a couple of girls. My date was about 25, but Jake's was definitely younger, 18 or 19--and very cute. My girl and I were already in the elevator, but Jake's friend suddenly stopped about 10 feet in front of it and said in a very loud, clear voice, "Where are you taking me?" It was very embarrassing. Everyone turned to watch. Jake tried to quiet her and hustle her into the elevator, but it didn't work, so we retreated outside and bid them both goodbye. I went out with my date a couple more times, but once was enough for Jake. When we returned to the lobby we got the horselaugh from the girl at the switchboard. We knew just

about everyone in the hotel by that time, and Jake had been trying unsuccessfully to get a date with the switchboard operator.

I met Wanda in the hotel coffee shop. Rick and I were eating breakfast late one morning when we saw her. She was dark-haired with olive skin and flashing black eyes, and it turned out that she and her younger sister were staying three doors down the hall from us. They were from Denver, and what they were doing in Salt Lake--except having a good time--and what they were living on, I'll never know. Wanda was one of the few girls I ever met who completely puzzled me. She was a born actress--in fact she acted all the time. I never knew whether she was telling the truth, lying, or just joking. The worst of it was, she was a strikingly handsome woman, who knew it and was very proud of it. Ethnically, she said, she was French, Spanish, and American Indian--about one-third Apache. I quickly discovered she was also wild-spirited, mean, underhanded, and cunning. She could make herself cry at a moment's notice and at the next minute be laughing.

Once I took her to dinner; I never liked to take her out, because she was the kind of woman all men watched, and she loved to make a fool of her companion in public. As we entered the dining room, she spotted an empty table right in the center of the room; naturally she wanted to sit there. Diane's father was sitting a couple of tables from us, so I nodded hello to him. When she asked who he was, I told her that he was just an old friend of mine.

She sensed that he was not exactly that, so in a few minutes she said, "Kiss me."

I replied, "Don't be foolish, I'm not going to kiss you here in front of all these people."

She said, "Kiss me, or I will cry."

I said, "Go ahead." Pretty soon big tears started to roll down her cheeks and what began as a soft wail became louder and louder. She continued looking right at me, with her head straight up. Everyone was watching us, and I heard the woman at the next table ask, "What did he do to her?" Finally I reached across the table and kissed her on the cheek.

"That's not good enough," she said, "it has to be on the lips." So--I got up, walked around the table, tipped her head back, and gave her a big kiss on the mouth like she wanted. Her crying was all over then; she smiled and was very happy during the rest of the meal. Incidentally, the next time I called my friend Diane for a date she said she would have to meet me uptown because her father had forbidden her to go out with me any more. Why, she didn't know. But I did.

Wanda had a split personality. When she was all dressed up and out in public, she acted very sophisticated (except when she decided to do something outrageous like the incident in the dining room). Tall and lithe, she wore her hair up on the top of her head, and the way she walked reminded me of a sinuous black cat. Around our rooms at the hotel, though, she was entirely different. She liked to wear a housecoat and let her hair hang down long and casual. She made the most of her athletic build and adopted a particularly youthful manner. From our room we would see her running down the hall just after we got in from the field. She would kick our door open and come bounding in. Then she would jump up and down on the twin beds and spring up onto the dresser, pretending she was a mountain lion. Sometimes she would come in and knock me over with kisses; then the next minute she would be cold and indifferent. Actually she was strictly a character. Maybe a "real nut" is a better description. The day I first met her in the coffee shop I had stayed home from the field. She came bursting into the room at about seven o'clock--after Reade had come in. She wanted to meet him, and I told her he was in the bathroom, so she opened the door and walked in, where Reade was soaking in the tub. She looked him up and down thoroughly and commented in her own inimitable style, "Hm, not bad."

Reade never liked her from the start. If she wasn't already in the room when he came in, he would be sure to lock the door to keep her out. She liked both Jake and me, and depending which one of us was back at the hotel, we would take our turn kidding around with her during the day. She certainly wasn't a one-man woman; she was more like a ten-man woman. When evening rolled around, though, we practically never took her out. (I, for one, had learned my lesson.) Sometimes she would have a date with another fellow, but Jake and I would usually be the ones to leave on dates, or go out on the prowl together. We were always leery about her potential for embarrassing us.

I did chance it once again, though, and decided to take her out to the Officers' Club. Unfortunately, we found ourselves standing in a snow bank in front of the hotel for close to two hours trying to get a cab. I kept wanting to give it up and go back inside, but she wouldn't hear of it. She was wearing light high-heeled sandals, toeless and heeless. A poor choice for standing in a snow bank even if she had been wearing stockings--which she wasn't. I knew she was catching cold, so I finally persuaded her to go back in and I took her up to her room. (Her sister was never there.) I put her to bed--her feet were like icebergs--and mixed her a hot toddy. She cried herself to sleep, and woke up the next day with a terrible cold.

When we left Salt Lake she wanted to go with Jake and me to Texas. We laughed at the idea then, but after we got to the barren, womanless desert of West Texas, we decided it wouldn't have been such a bad idea at that.

During those Salt Lake days--out at the fairgrounds--there were poker games and bull sessions going on all the time. We used to sit around on the bunks telling stories and jokes about previous cadet days. Reade used to tell a story about the major who went up with a flight instructor at Brooks Field to give him a periodical efficiency check. During the course of the ride, the instructor realized that the major, who was slouched way down in the cockpit, had fallen asleep, so he flew back to the base and very carefully landed to avoid waking him up. He parked the AT-6 on the ramp, shut off the engine, stood up in the seat, pounding on the side of the plane and yelling at the same time, "Bail out, bail out." The major woke up suddenly, and still in a daze, dove over the side of the plane head first; his parachute, of course, didn't do him any good. When he woke up he was in the hospital wanting to know what happened. The perpetrator of the joke was transferred overseas, which was probably what he wanted anyway, so it really wasn't too great a punishment.

One of the stories I told was about the time I came close to being washed out. In Advanced Training I was doing some night flying in a Cessna AT-17, a twin-engine trainer. There were two of us taking turns flying it, each having to shoot 10 landings before we could go back to the main field, check in, and hit the sack. After a night flight you had to get up at the usual time in the morning, so everyone was really eager to get through. There were about 10 other planes in the pattern at the auxiliary field, and the place was rapidly developing into a race track. Since no one had heard a peep out of our instructor's radio for the last 20 minutes, I figured he had probably dozed off. Each time we landed we would taxi around to the other end of the field as fast as possible for the next take-off.

I was following a kid by the name of White, who I knew well; he was in my barracks and had the same instructor. I was trying to pass him, as he was flying too slow for me, but I couldn't get by. I kept trying to cut him out of the pattern in the air, but couldn't do it, so I decided to pass him on the ground, taxiing. When he saw what I was trying to do, he raced me around to the take-off strip at the other end of the field. We both hit it at the same time, my plane a little ahead, with his right beside me--our wings interlocking on the 45-foot-wide take-off strip. I waggled my ailerons at him--the signal for a formation take-off--and he returned the signal; so off we went. It was dangerous enough to attempt a formation take off in the daytime (you were

not allowed to do it unless with an instructor), let alone at night. This was in complete disregard for the rules and meant a sure washout if we were caught, but we did it without thinking. We each gave it full throttle and took off.

Suddenly the radio, which had been quiet for so long came to life. "Ships making formation take-off, what is your number?" Neither White nor I said anything. The order was repeated several times. Still we kept quiet. I then dropped down low below White, thinking the instructor at the auxilliary field would lose sight of us in the pattern, but he didn't. He must have watched our lights all the way around and got our numbers when we landed. The next day when I went down to the flight line I was scared stiff. When we reported to Lt. Hill, our regular instructor, he took White and me and the other two fellows who had been riding observer with us aside, and said, "What were you guys trying to do, be beneficiaries of the Dead Pilots' Fund? You know what would happen if the chief flight instructor ever heard of this." He gave us quite a talking to, but that's the last we ever heard of it. I found out later that the instructor at the auxiliary field was a good pal of Lt. Hill's and he knew we were both his cadets, so instead of turning us in through regular channels, he just told Hill about it. This was a lucky break for us, because Hill was a really good guy.

I remembered, also, the time I just about killed myself in Basic Training at Waco Texas. I had been sitting around in the barracks one night listening to a cadet by the name of Hunter spout off about what a hot-rock pilot he was. "You haven't lived until you do a loop at night with your landing lights on," he bragged. The landing lights were for the benefit of the people on the ground who happened to be watching.

I told myself if he could do it, I could do it. I had my chance a few nights later while I was flying a night cross-country in a BT-13A, a single-engine, twin-cockpit job with a plexiglas canopy to keep the wind out. I waited until I was some distance from Waco, over a small Texas town. Flying at about 8000 feet, I turned on my landing lights, dove down until I hit 180 mph on my airspeed indicator, pulled back on the stick and went into a loop. As was to be expected, when I tried to loop the BT, the plane stalled out on the top of the loop and fell off into a spin. I looked over the side and thought I was going straight up in the air; I couldn't tell the difference between the lights of the town below and the stars above.

Panic froze me for a few seconds. I didn't know what to do. The little bit of instrument training that I had been exposed to had taught me how to pull the airplane out of a spin while flying blind; so I forced my head down in the cockpit and tried to concentrate on the instruments. In a few seconds--that

seemed like minutes--I had the plane flying straight and level. When I looked over the side I could see that I was just skimming the treetops. I turned off the landing lights and flew very carefully back to the field, scared to death.

I must have given the spectators below quite a thrill that night. They probably thought I was an experienced pilot doing all that on purpose. I landed OK and taxied up to the flight line. Later, I found out that Hunter had never done a loop at night in his life. Neither would anyone else who was sane, because of the possibility of getting vertigo, which is a pilot's worst nightmare. He loses all sense of direction and balance and can't tell up from down. This is very dangerous and causes many lives to be lost in night flying every year.

We talked about the buzzing we used to do in Primary at Cuero, Texas. One day I was doing S-turns in a PT-19 Fairchild, above a country road, quite a distance from the field, when I noticed a barefoot young girl swinging a pail as she walked along the road below me. I decided to tease her a little, so, since no other planes were in sight, I dropped down to within 20 feet of the ground, a short distance in front of her, and came skimming down the road toward her. She saw me coming when I was still some distance away and stopped walking, undecided about what to do; then she ran over to one side of the road. I pointed the plane in that direction by kicking a little bit of rudder, and she responded by running over to the other side. Finally, just before I got to her side of the road again she jumped into a ditch. I waited until she got out and resumed walking, and then I did it again.

After three or four times of this, I could see she was getting angry; she'd stamp her foot and shake her pail at me. This should have been enough warning. When I came down the road the next time, she stood her ground until I got within 100 feet; then she threw the pail high in the air toward me hoping I'd run into it. Well, I did. I pulled the nose up quickly but felt it hit the tail with a jolt. I thought I'd really had it now. I gently climbed to get a little more altitude, testing the controls on the way. I could picture myself trying to make a forced landing with no rudder--or an elevator torn off, but upon checking, I found everything looked normal, and things felt normal as well.

Having a few minutes left of my flying period, I had time to fly calmly around until it was time to go back. My landing was fine, and I taxied up to the flight line, anxious to check the tail assembly, but I found nothing wrong; the bucket must have hit the tail wheel without doing any noticeable damage. The lesson I learned from that experience was: Never buzz anybody-- at least not if they have anything to throw at you. It served me right.

When we weren't telling stories those afternoons at the Salt Lake Fairgrounds, we would just lie around reading magazines, which offered the perfect opportunity for perpetrating a practical joke now and then some more memorable than others. One of these times we were in Reade's room. He was lying on his side, reading, his feet on the floor and the rest of his body on his bunk and a guy named Halloran--who everyone called "Hollow Head"--was seated near Reade's feet. Hollow Head had a great passion for setting things on fire and usually carried around a bottle of lighter fluid just for that purpose.

As he was sitting there, we all saw him take out this bottle of lighter fluid and pour it all over Reade's shoes and the floor around them. To say that this was not a very good idea is definitely an understatement. Reade was wearing a brand new pair of expensive jodhpur boots and was very proud of them. We all kept talking, though, and, I'm sorry to say, didn't let on what was happening. Hollow Head took out a cigarette, lit it with a paper match, and threw the match on the floor. The lighter fluid blazed up all over Reade's shoes, and he jumped up trying to get them off but couldn't do it until most of the wax and polish had burned off. It seemed that his shoes were ruined. Reade sat back down on the bed with a hurt look in his eyes. He could have broken Halloran's neck with one twist of his wrist, but he didn't. He just sighed over and over,

"Hollow Head, Hollow Head, why did you do it?" A phrase we quoted many times during the oncoming months. I'm glad to be able to report that the local shoemaker managed to repair most of the damage, since it was limited primarily to the finish.

One morning when we were all at the fairgrounds, the orders came in assigning us to crews. The orders were arranged alphabetically through Jacobs and Lamb and on through the Os. We learned that we were assigned as copilots--to fly B-17 Flying Fortresses, but Reade and Ricketson were staying there. We were scheduled to leave early the next morning for Pyote, Texas, which meant we rushed around that day getting everything packed and checked out of the hotel. Reade and Rick checked out, too, moving their things to the fairgrounds. They left a few days after we did, for Blythe, California, to be copilots on B-24s. Although we didn't know it at the time, Reade and Ricketson would go to the South Pacific, while Jacobs and I would go to Europe.

We all went to town that night to the Officers' Club for a farewell celebration. Reade and I had a feeling that we wouldn't see each other again until after the war; we were both kind of down in the dumps. Because he was staying in town that night, we said our goodbyes right there. The last thing he

said was, "Have six bourbon-and-sodas waiting for me at the bar, I'll be thirsty when I get there." He told me about his dream--that we would both be shot down, but that I would get to heaven first. Usually when we met someplace I would get there first and have a couple of his favorite bourbon-and-sodas waiting for him when he arrived. I was supposed to do this for him in heaven. In this case he got there, but I didn't. He was killed in action in a raid over Formosa. That night at the Club was the last time I ever saw him.

Pyote was a hell-hole. As far as location went, it was the worst place we could possibly be stationed. The closest town was about 20 miles away, with a population of around 1500. Almost everyone stayed right on the field as there was nothing to go to town for. Pyote was located in the desert of West Texas, with nothing to obstruct the view for miles, just sagebrush and an occasional oil derrick. Most of the civilians around there worked in the oil fields, as the area was too dry for farming or raising cattle.

It was mostly work and not much play at the field, which was the only way it could be. We had a lot to learn and only three months to learn it in. After that came combat, meaning that what we learned here (mainly how to fly as a crew) would decide, in most cases, how long we lasted over there.

Jake and I had been assigned to crews at Salt Lake--10 men to a crew, 4 officers and 6 enlisted men. Jim Ransom was the name of the first pilot, a big, slow-moving, easy-going farmer from Casanovia, New York. I was the copilot. Waldman was our navigator, a handsome, quiet, religious fellow from Baltimore, Maryland. Our bombardier was Tex Daniel from Turnerville, Texas, a former cowboy and college student. Tex was the character of the crew. A former rodeo rider, he had been at Pearl Harbor on that eventful December 7th. He washed out as a pilot, and also as a navigator, but finally, with a lot of help, he graduated from Bombardier School. He was always in trouble--reported into Pyote two days late. Tex and Ransom were the only two crew members who were married, and they both had their wives with them. Felce from Los Angeles, the engineer and top turret operator, was the youngest of the crew. Schmidt, from Streator, Illinois, was the radio operator. He was an on-the-ball fellow, one of the best radio operators in our whole Group overseas. Benkowski and Albin, the two waist gunners, and Wargin, the ball turret operator and armorer, were all from the Chicago area. A tall, lanky, happy-go-lucky Texan from San Antonio named Bywaters was our tail gunner--in spite of the fact that he could hardly fit into the tail. He didn't complain; in fact he liked it.

Pyote ran on a 24-hour schedule. We might go to Ground School in the morning and fly that night, or go to Ground School at night and fly in the morning. We worked right through Sunday, just like any other day. Every 10 days there was a break in the schedule, giving us two nights and a day off. The field was in good shape, with a good club and theatre.

My first responsibility, in the area of flying, was to get checked out in a B-17 by an instructor pilot. My turn came at night, about my third night there.

As I sat behind the wheel and contemplated the maze of dials and flight instruments in front of me, on the ceiling and on the floor, I thought, with a sinking feeling in my stomach, "I will never be able to fly this big boxcar." I shot about six pitch-dark landings that night with my instructor, and everything went wrong. I couldn't hold my altitude and would forget which switches and dials I was supposed to check after take-off and landing--or else I would check them in the wrong sequence. The landings were terrible; I would bounce and skid half way down the runway. I probably would have done better if it had been in the daytime--but it wasn't, so I had to make the best of it.

The next day I went up with Ransom and the rest of the crew. I thought these guys were really going to think I was stinkaroo. But, surprisingly, I didn't forget anything really important. Ransom was a born teacher and in a couple of weeks I was doing OK. I considered myself very lucky to have been assigned to his crew. Having been a flight instructor for about two years, he just took me under his wing and taught me everything about the B-17 from the ground up. It was really a break for me. We took turns taking off and landing so that by the time we went overseas, except for lacking the experience, I knew how to fly a B-17 about as well as he did.

We had great fun flying there, going on long cross-countries, formation flights, and practice bombing missions. Every plane had a system called "Interphone", whereby you could talk to anyone on the crew, one at a time, or all at once, and we kept a steady chatter going constantly. When I wasn't flying, I would go back to the radio room or up in the nose. As a result, I learned every other position on the crew--particularly the top-turret. I figured that might come in handy sometime if anything should happen to Felce. I would only have to slide out of my seat and right up into the turret. The most difficult thing for me was to get down into the ball-turret. Wargin was a little guy about five-seven or -eight, but I'm six-two. I had to wrap my legs practically around my neck.

We did a lot of Altitude Bombings from about 20 to 25,000 feet using the famous Norden Bombsight. The planes were not equipped with heaters, and it was my first experience with extreme cold. I felt as if I were freezing to death waiting for Tex to drop all his practice bombs. The bombs would emit little clouds of smoke when they hit the target. A large clearing below, delineated by a 100-foot circle of lime, had the target shack centered within it. The object was to hit inside the circle--preferably the shack itself. Extra lime and tools were kept inside the shack on the premise that a direct hit there was very unlikely. Tex would claim every so often that he had hit the shack,

evoking a horselaugh from the rest of us, because we all knew it was just a matter of luck to even hit within the circle. I dropped the practice bomb a couple of times, but I was lucky even to hit the clearing. I did want to learn the mechanics of using the bomb sight, though, in case anything happened to the bombardier.

Gunnery was like a game to us, air-to-air, and air-to-ground. We had B-26s that would come cruising by towing a sleeve target and our gunners would blast away; that was air-to-air. Air-to-ground was even better, because you could see where you were hitting. I particularly liked to fly over the course. You flew at 1000 feet, but as soon as you turned over the target you'd dive down toward the ground; the chin turret and the ball turret would be the first to open up, then as you went by the target, the waist gunner would let go, then, finally the tail gunner. As you banked and pulled up at the other end, the top turret gunner would let go with a couple of bursts and the whole plane would shake and vibrate. Blasts from the top turret were deafening. Ransom and I would alternate flying and shooting and it was quite a challenge. We would have to be about 25 yards behind the target so that the momentum would carry the shots into the target. Every fifth shot was a tracer; because of that, and the stirred-up dust, it was easy to see how accurate the shots were.

Camera-bombing in formation was another exercise in which we participated regularly. A city, railroad yard or similar target would be designated for us to "level" with cameras. As we flew over the target the camera would work automatically off the bomb sight, photographing exactly where the bombs would have hit. Either on our way there, or on our way back, we would be hit by "enemy fighters," which were planes from an advanced single engine school equipped with cameras instead of guns. Our gunners would also use cameras, the adversaries exchanging fire as if we were participating in a regular air battle. It was valuable practice for us and also for the fighter pilots; the entire procedure was executed exactly like a regular combat mission, with briefing before and critique after. The only thing missing was some simulated flak which could have been thrown up off to our right.

The field was run by the old 19th Bombardment Group who had had two years in combat in the South Pacific, so we were being trained by real professionals with experience. All-in-all, we had about the best training possible. There were just a few things lacking: For one, no one taught us how to fly high altitude formation with a full gas and bomb load. The reaction of the flight controls was entirely different on a fully loaded plane than on an unloaded one. That was something we had to learn overseas, and being shot at during the process did not create the best learning environment, to say the

least. Also, the course was not quite long enough. If we could have spent that month we had wasted at Salt Lake--and the month wasted at Grand Island--at Pyote, getting more knowledge and experience, we would have been better off. We were supposed to have gone through three phases. What they were, I'll never know. Maybe they were: Work 1, Work 2, and Work 3.

When we did get some time off, Jake and I and our friend from Brooklyn, New York, Wild Bill Longa, whom we had met previously at Brooks Field, would go into town. Wild Bill's nickname was very descriptive. He had a wild streak that was difficult to suppress, which drove the navigator on his crew crazy. Toward the end of the war we were stationed together again as instructors at an Advanced Flying School at Marfa, Texas. There he put the finishing touches on the story concerning our flight instructor at Pyote.

This instructor was a first pilot who had been held over through a couple of classes because of being confined to the hospital. After his release from the hospital--before he was ready to fly--he was put in charge of our Flight. He was responsible for seeing that we got to all our assignments--our classes, link trainer, and bomb trainer, at the right time. He disliked us immediately, probably because of our cockiness; and we wasted no time deciding we hated him if for some reason anyone missed a class or was late, the guilty party would be confined to the area for a week. Mainly, it was this instructor's attitude that set us against him. He loved exercising his authority, and I'm sure he lay awake nights figuring out ways to make us miserable. Well, after our crew had all gone overseas to various Groups or organizations as replacements, he showed up with a crew in Longa's Group a couple of months later. The tables were turned. He was new to the Group--and scared--and Wild Bill Longa was in the perfect position to give him a bad time; which he did, perfectly, in his own inimitable way.

One early morning, at breakfast, before briefing of the target for the day (which was Berlin, or Big B, as it was called), the guy came in and sat down beside Longa. Wild Bill looked at him with a shocked expression and exclaimed, "No, it can't be. Not to Big B on your first mission! Why, that's impossible; it's the toughest target in Europe. It's suicide!" He laid it on so thick that by the time the guy crawled into his airplane he was a nervous wreck. Unfortunately, it did turn out to be a bad mission, as was always true of Berlin. A lot of planes were lost, and as fate would have it, one of them was his. He's never been heard of since. Wild Bill had a great time telling me about this in Marfa, Texas. Death was so commonplace overseas that it never made a story unless there was something unusual--or funny--about it.

Wild Bill went down once, himself, but he and the crew managed to almost make it to the Holland coast before they went into the North Sea. Luckily, they had been able to radio their position quite accurately before they ditched, but they had to sweat the night out in dinghies, expecting any moment to be picked up by a German patrol boat, which was not at all uncommon in that area. Early the next morning, though, they were picked up by a British Air-Sea Rescue Boat in a daring maneuver right out from under the noses of the Germans.

One evening at Pyote I joined a first pilot named Peck for dinner at the only decent restaurant in town. Texas-style steak was featured, along with lots of spaghetti, and the tables in the large dining room were filled with diners. As I was enjoying my dinner, I noticed that Peck was constantly bending over with his handkerchief up to his face, but I didn't give it much thought. Suddenly he started coughing and continued until he had everyone looking at him. (This was West Texas--where no one was embarrassed to be caught staring.) Then he tipped his head back and started picking at his nose, from which he withdrew a very long slender strand of white material. I, of course could tell it was spaghetti, but when the complete strand finally emerged and he held it up in the air, I heard gasps throughout the room. He then gently laid it on his napkin and continued to eat his dinner. Everyone stared at him in shocked silence. This was one of the incidents--the grossest one--that earned him the name, Peck's Bad Boy.

Here's another incident. A friend of mine and I were leaving a restaurant with Peck when he bumped into a young oil-driller. Quite a bit of animosity existed between the servicemen in town and the occupationally-deferred oil-drillers. This stocky 30-year-old didn't like being bumped by Peck, with the result that he and Peck went outside to fight it out; neither would apologize. We hadn't seen a good fight in years and followed them out in anticipation of a little vicarious excitement.

Peck took off his overcoat and his Air Corps blouse (what civilians would call a jacket), preparing to wage war. I stood there with my hands in my pockets and my mouth shut; I hadn't opened my mouth once during the whole incident. Wham! out of a clear blue sky the oil-driller let me have it on the chin with a right, while practically at the same moment he socked our friend, the other copilot, in the eye with his left. I got up off the sidewalk, quick but dizzy, and started to clout the guy for all I was worth--so did my friend. I was furious at the oil-man for hitting me when both hands were in my pockets, so I was giving him everything I had. Out of the corner of my eye I could see Bad Boy Peck, as he was called--the guy who had started

everything--slowly rolling down his sleeves, straightening his tie, and putting on his blouse. That made me madder yet. The oil-driller found he was no match for my friend and me; I would hit him in the stomach and when he was doubled over, my friend would hit him in the face. It didn't take long for him to land on the sidewalk half knocked out. Then Peck nonchalantly walked over to us and said, "Thank you for the assistance, boys." I could have murdered him right then and there, but we didn't have time. While the fight was going on, word travelled around the little town that a gang of "soldiers" were beating up on a poor lone defenseless civilian. I could see big, husky oil-workers start pouring out of doorways and alleys, so we took off in a hurry. I hate to imagine what they would have done if they had caught us. I know it was their nature to act first and talk later. My jaw was practically immobile for several days, and the other copilot nursed a black eye as a result of the fracas.

Pyote really was a tough town. One night Jake and I went to town to replenish our liquor supply, which customarily we kept at the Officers' Club. If you wanted a drink, you would pay a dime's worth of scrip and they would mix up a highball for you from your labeled bottle. The Club, like all the Officers' Clubs in the States, sold only 3.2 beer. We discovered that neither of the two liquor stores in town had any liquor left because of the extreme shortage in that part of the country, so we asked a civilian where we could buy some black market--or bootleg--whiskey. He told us to get in the car and he would show us. He took us down to the lower end of town, which was called "the colored section," and which was off-limits to servicemen.

He parked in front of a building that looked like a grocery store from the front, but upon entering, we stopped dead in our tracks. Ours were the only white faces in the mass of humanity packed into the place. A big pot-bellied stove burned in the middle of the room and big black bodies surrounded it, seated on packing boxes, broken rocking chairs, and anything else available. We were obviously out of place, and they did not appreciate our being there. We were wearing our expensive grey gabardine topcoats over our freshly cleaned and pressed uniforms, and our shoes were noticeably shined. Most of them were barefoot and dressed in rags, but there were also a few black soldiers.

We were probably the first whites to go in there since the whole area had been placed off-limits for us a couple of years before. Jake nudged me to back out, but I ignored him, starting toward a counter in the rear with him following me. Naturally no one moved an inch to get out of our way. The only movement discernible was that of their eyes, which followed us with

frightening persistence. Picking our way around them, we found our way to a woman behind the counter.

"We want to buy some whiskey," I told her. She said she could let us have two pints of "Black Gold". When I said OK she went out the back door, leaving us standing there. In the meantime, the men had moved into sort of a semi-circle around us, leaving the women and children sitting where they were.

"You white boys looking for trouble?" one of the men growled.

Jake, of course, said, "No!"

To which the man replied, "Well, you're liable to find it anyway!"

I was just about to pay for the liquor when two black MPs came running through the door--one with a gun in his hand. The crowd melted back from us, and with one MP on each side of us, we were escorted out through the door to the car with the warning, "Don't you ever come down here again. This is off-limits for whites."

The civilian who had brought us there had the car windows and doors locked and was reluctant to let us in. Jake yelled at him to open up or we would bust a window. It's my opinion that he just took us down there to see what would happen. The reason the area had been declared off-limits, we learned, was that two white soldiers had been severely beaten and knifed in a brawl with some blacks two years previously.

Our three months in Pyote passed quickly. We soon completed our training there and were off to what was called a "staging area" at Grand Island, Nebraska--our last stop before going overseas.

We expected to be at Grand Island a week--just long enough to get a brand-new airplane and new personal equipment. In reality, it was a month to the day when we finally took off for Bangor, Maine. The first week at Grand Island was spent rushing around like mad taking physicals, drawing new equipment, attending classes, making wills, setting up Power of Attorneys, and seeing that everything we didn't absolutely need was shipped home. Finally, we were all set to go. We were then assigned a brand-new B17-G--and it was beautiful. It was one of the first ones to go over without being painted. It shone like a new aluminum pot, and I thought, "Boy, the Germans are going to see us coming 100 miles away in that thing." We took a couple of flights around the area and everything worked like a charm. We were briefed concerning our first leg of the flight to Bangor and had our bags all packed when the weather closed in. It snowed and hailed for the next three weeks.

During that time we packed and unpacked three or four times--even went so far as to warm up the engines and taxi out to the end of the runway a couple of times. But every time we'd be called back. Because it was a ten-hour flight to Bangor, it was necessary to leave Grand Island before eight in the morning in order to arrive at Bangor in daylight. That was the problem: every morning it would be snowing, or there would be a low ceiling, or there would be a snow storm reported on the route; and none of this would clear up before noon. By then it would be too late. Tex and Ransom found this particularly hard because they had their wives with them. They would kiss them goodbye amid tears and cautions of "don't do this and don't do that" one morning and then do it all over again the next. It was a good deal for all the single fellows, though, who were having great fun in town, making up for all we missed in Texas. There were lots of girls and plenty of places to go.

The first week I was there I met Dottie, a well-built, rather short brunette about 21 years old. She knew how and where to have a good time around Grand Island. Although her folks lived out in the country, she stayed in town with her older unmarried sister. I always marvelled at her ability to hold down her job as dental assistant in spite of the fact that we were out every night until the wee hours of the morning; I don't think she averaged more than four or five hours of sleep the whole time I was there. After my first week there I was able to sleep all day if I wanted too, as there was nothing for us to do out at the field. I stayed in a hotel room in town, where I had the night clerk call me at five in the morning. I, in turn, would call the weather station at the field at which time the sergeant on duty would usually

say, "You can go back to sleep, Lieutenant, the field is socked-in and there's a big snow storm over the New England states."

One day the weather was perfect. We went out to the field, got briefed, took our weather maps and take-off list, cranked up our engines and lined up for take-off. I watched Jake and Longa hit the blue, but by the time it was our turn, it was too late in the morning to take off. The next time I saw Jake was a year-and-a-half later when he, Rick, and I, back from overseas, were stationed at Long Beach, California, ferrying P-38s and A-26s. By the time we got our wish to fly twin engine fighters, we were waiting to be discharged.

Ransom and I took turns revving up the engines every day and checking them. One day when it was my turn, Tex brought his wife out to show her the airplane. I always got a big kick out of her because, without knowing it, she was always saying something funny or completely off the subject. Anyway, he brought her up to the cockpit where I was sitting, and with a bewildered and amazed look on her face she asked, "Do you actually know what all these little gauges and dials stand for?" Tex and I both laughed, but before I could reply he hustled her down into the nose to show her his own domain.

We finally left Grand Island April 29, 1944. Dottie made me promise to write her as soon as I had a permanent address overseas, but I never did. That morning I flew low over the house where she was living and waggled the wings. That was our prearranged signal for goodbye. She probably thought we were lost on the North Atlantic trip. At that time, I just lived for the day--no serious commitments.

The flight was beautiful. We flew over Chicago and Niagara Falls, cutting over upper New York so that Ransom could buzz the farm where his parents lived. I could see his mother waving a towel and I could tell that Ransom was feeling pretty sad. He hadn't been home in a year--and it would be another before he got back. It wasn't much of a way to say goodbye. At Bangor, Maine, I was flying, and found the field closed in with cloud-cover. Unfortunately, the tower radio operator was a woman with an almost undecipherable English accent. Because our radio was having problems, she had a hard time understanding me, too, but she succeeded in getting our number, and told me to stay 500 feet on top of the clouds. The idea of waiting to make an instrument approach didn't appeal to me in the least, as our gas was low and it was late--we had wasted quite a bit of time on the way. It wouldn't be easy letting down through the clouds; I knew they contained ice because we had already picked up some flying through them on the way.

I told Ransom, "I'm going to find a hole and let down through it."

And he replied, "Suit yourself."

I finally found the hole and let down, slipping and skidding through the hole without picking up any more ice. During all this, the tower person was screaming over the radio, "Army 8563, are you still 500 feet on top?"

I said, "No, I'm parked right in front of you on the ramp."

She choked a little, but kept right on bringing the boys in. It took a couple of days to fix our radio before we were able to leave for Goose Bay, Labrador--time to buy candy, gum, and razor blades by the carton. I also loaded up on lipstick, rouge and powder at the PX. It came in handy to give the girls overseas. Our landing at Goose Bay, Labrador, was without incident; the weather had been good all the way. Most of our flight had been over Canadian wilderness, high rocky mountains, without a sign of a cabin or other human habitation for miles.

During our one-day stay at Goose Bay I saw my first Eskimo; he looked like an overdressed American Indian to me. The field was jammed with airplanes of all makes and descriptions, bearing Dutch, Polish, as well as English insignia. It reminded me of San Francisco Harbor, filled with ships from many different countries.

At ten o'clock that night we took off for Iceland--the most dangerous leg of the trip. If your plane became lost over the Arctic Ocean, no one would even bother to look for you. They knew you would probably freeze to death in about 30 minutes if you had to ditch in the ice-cold water. Only about one out of 100 planes was lost because of engine trouble or weather, so I figured the odds were too great to waste time worrying. We flew for hours over huge icebergs the size of battle wagons. We knew that there were emergency fields on Greenland where we could land with engine trouble--if we had time enough to make it there. Tex announced that he saw a submarine, and although the rest of us thought it was a whale, we couldn't convince him. He got our approximate position from Waldman, the navigator, and reported the sighting after we landed.

Our ETA, estimated time of arrival, at Meeks Field, Iceland, was nine o'clock the next morning. Nine o'clock arrived, but still no sight of Iceland. Iceland is a pretty small island and I began to get a little worried when 10 minutes, 20 minutes--then 30 minutes rolled by and still no Iceland. The thought occurred to me that maybe we had passed it. I knew we had enough gas for two hours after our ETA, but when one hour passed, everyone started to get jittery. The radio compass still said straight ahead, but there had been a lot of talk at Goose Bay about the fact that you couldn't put much faith in your radio while in the Arctic, also that the Germans would set up powerful

stations to lure you off your course. Finally, shortly after ten, we did spot Iceland. It was a relief to set foot on old Mother Earth again. The cause of our delay was the changing of the winds from what had been predicted; we had encountered a slight headwind which made us just an hour late.

Iceland seemed to us to be a funny little country, with its own language, part Scandinavian, part German--with some original Icelandic input. Earlier, the country had been pro-German, but now Iceland's loyalties had switched to the Allies. The illiteracy rate was low, and almost everyone went to college. It would have been a nice place to live before the war; now, with so many American soldiers around, it wasn't the same. Our boys called the Icelanders "Fishheads," I guess because of their diet. The girls, they called "Stukas," after the famous German dive bomber of that name. Not very nice.

Our second day there the weather didn't look very promising. The possibility of our leaving the next day seemed remote, so Tex and I decided to go into town that night. Reykjavik, the capital and largest city, with a population of about 50,000 was around 40 miles away. We hitchhiked a ride in an American army truck, arriving at about four in the afternoon. It was a strange town, boasting a few stray trees--the only ones in the country--and architecture that we thought was "funny". The people, however, were very friendly and directed us to a spot where we could get a steak dinner on the black market. The prices bore that out. Their idea of a steak cooked "American Style" had a fried egg on top. It was my first experience with that combination, but it proved to be very good.

The Icelandic girls, one of whom I met in their version of a drug store, were tall, broad-shouldered and blonde. The drug store carried a variety of things that were impossible to buy in the States at that time, such as famous-name cigarette lighters and fountain pens. I paid the girl for my pen with a 20-dollar bill, and the entire time she was trying to count the change out to me in kronen I was trying to get a date. She was very earnest about my knowing that I was receiving the right change, and I had to laugh. She would then start over, in broken English, explaining the monetary system to me in great detail. I really enjoyed it. I had her repeat the explanation two or three times while I watched her expressive big blue eyes.

I succeeded in getting a date with her that evening and met her in front of the store in an hour. She suggested we go to Tripoli, a place that sounded to me like it should be in another country. Every time I would ask where she wanted to go she would reply, "Tripoli." I finally asked an MP what she meant, and he explained that there was an American fighter base by that name on the edge of town that had a good Officers' Club. He was just cruising

around, so he took Tex, me, and the girl out there. It really was a nice place--and they had Canadian Whiskey in Imperial Quarts. You had to buy \$5 script books at the office, which was OK until our money ran out. The girl at the office made the mistake of thinking we were permanent officers newly assigned there and was very obliging, saying all we had to do was to sign for the books. I signed "Jack Johansen" the rest of the evening, and Tex assumed another alias, yielding us about 10 books during the remainder of the evening, with which we bought drinks for everyone in the house. Quite a party. I often wonder if a Jack Johansen ever turned up to be confronted with the bill.

We walked most of the way back to the base that night, getting there about four in the morning. We had no sooner gotten into our Nissan Hut--hadn't even taken off our clothes--when we were informed the weather had cleared and we were scheduled to take off for Ireland at 5:30 AM. By the time we arrived the next afternoon I was pretty well rested up as Ransom flew all the way and I slept.

The British Isles were beautiful--the greenest place I had ever seen. On our flight over the channel between Scotland and Ireland we flew under the clouds, affording us a view to remember. Our radio informed us that we should land at Prestwick, Scotland, instead of Ireland, a route that took us over dozens of beautiful little islands with familiar, romantic-sounding names, such as The Isle of Man and The Isle of Wight. Cutting over then toward Scotland, I was reminded of the tales of Robin Hood and King Arthur that had given me so much pleasure in my youth.

After our landing at Prestwick, we were briefed on the schedule of coming events. We wouldn't see combat for a month, and we learned that the airplane we had flown over wouldn't be ours; they had used us to ferry it over, thereby killing two birds with one stone--getting both the plane and us over there. This was a disappointment to all of us, as the plane had flown like a dream and we felt a definite kinship with it. The possibility that we would be assigned a real clunker worried us, and as it turned out our worries were not unfounded.

The next morning we were scheduled to take the train to Stone Distribution Center, which was in central England. We slept that night in an old castle, which our Air Force had converted into an officers' billet. I spent at least an hour wandering around the landscaped grounds and wonderful old buildings; I was impressed by the fact that everything had been so well-maintained. It was hard to believe the buildings had survived hundreds of years and remained in such good condition.

We found Stone a dreary place--rain most of the time. I was assigned as one of 20 mail censors for the two weeks we were there. We were mostly second lieutenants whose job it was to censor the outgoing mail of the enlisted men. Officers supposedly censored their own mail by each simply signing his own name on the front of the envelope. All of the mail was then spot-censored before it left the country. Later I helped censor the outgoing mail of our crew. I didn't think much of the idea, but I did get to know the fellows much better. I soon knew their brothers and sisters and girlfriends by their first names. When I did Schmidty's--he was the radio operator--I would add postscripts on the bottom of his letters to his girlfriend and she would answer them in her next letter to him.

After Stone we were sent to Bodington, just outside of London, to take a ground school course in tactics and emergency procedures. The next move would be to our combat Groups. While we were at Stone, and at Bodington,

too, a lot of buzzing went on. Just before we left Bodington I was watching a superb job of buzzing over the field by a P-38. The pilot would come skimming along the runway, pull up just enough to clear the wings and finish up with slow rolls. After a few minutes he started to come in to land. This was carrying it a little too far, as he was sure to get caught as soon as he landed. He came in purposely about 200 feet too high over the end of the runway. Then he lifted one wing up close to 90 degrees in a bank and started to slip the plane down. Just as it seemed the bottom wing was going to crumple up into the ground, he straightened up, gave it a little throttle and--plunk-- set the plane right in. A perfect landing. Those of us watching were so impressed we just about clapped in appreciation of the good show. Exhibiting more nerve than good sense, I thought, he taxied right up in front of the tower and parked. I found out later I shouldn't have worried. The pilot was Lieutenant General Jimmy Doolittle.

When it came time to get our assignments, I decided that there were only a couple of Groups that I hoped to escape being assigned to. One of these was the 100th Bomb Group. It had the reputation of losing the most planes of any Group in the 8th Air Force. It was called "The Bloody Hundredth"-- or "The Vanishing Americans" for good reason. It was the most talked about Heavy Bomb Group in the European Theatre of Operations; even fellows in the South Pacific had heard of it. Fighter pilots and ground crewmen would argue among themselves about the Bloody Hundredth. It was rumored that an American pilot had lowered his wheels while flying over Germany--following the custom that in the early days of the war meant a signal of surrender. Three or four German Fighters came in close to escort him in. When the escorts became easy targets for the B-17s' 50-caliber machine guns, the supposedly crippled American bomber opened up and shot down the Jerries. One lived to tell the tale, however, and from then on the Germans would pass up Group after Group to tangle with the treacherous Hundredth--the boys with the large square D painted on the tail. Can't say I blame them if the story was true.

Ransom looked for our orders at headquarters and there we were--at the head of the list of the 100th Bomb Group, Heavy, 3rd Division, 8th Air Force. My heart sank. My first thought was I'd never survive to see good old Sacramento again.

The next day as we got on the trucks for Diss, which was our destination in England, the fellows wished us goodbye as if they were attending our funeral. But if I were in that position again, I would volunteer for the Hundredth. There was a fierce loyalty among the combat crews, and because

of our reputation, we made ourselves fly better formation than any of the other Groups. There was a complete lack of jealousy--no bickering between the Air and Ground personnel, which wasn't always the case in other Groups. We had by far the best maintenance, and were stationed at a regular RAF base, with great facilities.

I never believed the story about the pilot letting down his wheels and firing on his would-be escorts. I blamed our exceptional losses on plain bad luck and on the fact that we were usually chosen for the most difficult and dangerous assignments. The shuttle raids to Russia and the Zebra Mission into France were examples of this. Perhaps in the early days of the war, enemy fighters were lucky one day in shooting down an exceptionally large number of our planes. From then on they probably remembered our insignia, the Square D, and when they had their choice between hitting us and another outfit, they would hit us. The Hundredth shot down a total of 261 enemy fighters, I found out later, so it wasn't at all one-sided.

With the Hundredth, we were stationed at a British field called Thorpe Abbots, located in East Anglia about five miles from the little town of Diss. Twenty miles north of us was Norwich, a city of two to three hundred thousand. Ipswich was 60 miles away, and London about 120.

We were assigned to our quarters when we reported in. The field was widely dispersed to make bombing it more difficult. English civilians lived all over the field and farmed between the runways. We had to cross a pasture to get to the mess hall, and the enlisted mens' barracks were even farther away, which made it necessary to go around a couple of farm houses and walk through several barnyards to get there. This not only conserved land but provided camouflage as well.

Each Group consisted of 3 Squadrons, with 10 to 20 crews to a Squadron, plus a Company each of Engineers, Military Police, Maintenance and Administrative Personnel. The entire personnel consisted of about 1000, around half of which were air crew combat men. Our BOQ--Bachelor Officers' Quarters--was a small one-story cement building with steel-framed windows, partitioned across the center, with a door at each end, making it practically two separate barracks. In front of each door was a ditch which served as an air raid shelter. Twelve fellows slept on each side of the building, usually the officers of three crews. About the only ones you got to know--or wanted to know--were the ones in your side of the barracks. Even those, you didn't get to know too well. It seemed better to just run around with the people on your own crew. When you heard the names of the crews that "went down" it didn't bother you so much if you didn't know them personally.

The truck let us off in front of our barracks. Hesitantly, we walked inside. Several men were sleeping; a couple were playing blackjack at a table at the back. "Here come the new replacements!" they shouted. That was the start of what we considered a particularly cruel initiation, which lasted for the next couple of days. Their aim was to thoroughly frighten us, and they related a lot of wild bloody tales to achieve their purpose. I took most of it with a grain of salt; it couldn't possibly be that bad. Unfortunately, we four took over the beds of a crew who had just been shot down. Most of their things were still there--pictures of girlfriends and wives with children. Old letters were still scattered about and some things were still in the drawers. I kept some of the stuff I thought I could use, such as sheets, pillow, toothpaste and shaving cream and turned in the personal items.

After completing a few Ground School classes, we flew a couple of practice missions and were ready to go. Our first real mission was on a Sunday, June 4. Following the plan for a typical mission, we were awakened at three in the morning, had breakfast at four, briefing at five and took off about seven. Missions usually lasted around nine hours, which meant that we got back about two or three in the afternoon. Debriefing and gun-cleaning followed, which, with time to eat, took another couple of hours. By that time we were exhausted and ready to sleep for a full 12 hours. We flew missions about every third day. The following day would be ground school. The first mission was an easy one--a good one to get broken in on. We hit Boulogne, France, the "Invasion Coast." No enemy fighters, just a little flak over to one side. I would have liked to fly over a little closer just to see what it was like.

The second mission, June 5, 1944, was relatively easy, too; we participated in the pre-invasion bombing. Our primary destination was Abbeville, France, but because of bad weather we hit Boulogne again. Flak was worse that day giving us a couple of holes in our left wing. The 8th Air Force flew in Groups of 18 ships each, consisting of a lead, high, and low squadron. Our squadron, the 351st, had 15 crews, which was the reason I flew about every third day. We would fly to the target in Wing-Formation with two other Groups. Each Wing was made up of three or more Groups, each Air Force, having three or more Wings. The 18 planes in our Group would be stacked very tightly together. The Groups within the Third Wing would alternate positions, as would the Squadrons within the Group. The Hundredth might fly Lead position one day and Low the next, or a Squadron might fly High one day and Lead the next. By alternating this way, everyone got an equal chance. In fact, the Wings would also alternate in leading the Air Force.

Sometimes we would be Lead Group in our Wing, with our Wing leading the Air Force. That meant we were leading the whole 8th Air Force that day, a situation that occurred about every two months. Positions in the Squadron never alternated, however. Your position, in this case, was determined by seniority. You started out as "Tail-End Charlie," the hardest position to fly--and also the most dangerous because of the Germans' habit of picking off the stragglers. From there you worked your way up with the possibility of leading the Squadron.

There was much speculation concerning the upcoming invasion of Europe by the Allies. The Barracks' strategist had predicted exactly when it would be coming off and odds were quoted and bets were laid. We were carrying 45-caliber pistols, supposedly to protect against possible German parachutists or saboteurs who would be arriving to disrupt the invasion plans. We

didn't have long to wait; we had arrived just in time. On the night of June 5, I had hardly fallen asleep after hitting Boulogne that day, when a jeep drove up to our barracks with the Sergeant, who announced there would be an 11p.m. briefing. Even the old-timers considered that unusual, never having had a briefing that early before. I rolled over intending to go back to sleep, which prompted the Sergeant to respond,

"You, too, Lieutenant."

"Uh-uh", I protested, "just came back from one this afternoon." He then explained that this was a M.E.--Maximum Effort. Everybody would go--in any ship that could make it into the air.

The Hundredth would put up a whole Wing, itself; our Squadron would put up a whole Group which would be known as the 100-A and 100-B and 100-C Group. As it turned out, our Squadron put up 18 ships and we were called the 100-B Group. Ransom and the rest of us moaned a little but not for long. When we got down to briefing we soon forgot about complaining and found we were actually glad it was M.E.

The Colonel got up and said, "This is it. Tomorrow is D-DAY. H-Hour for our boys to land on the French Coast is 7:45 a.m. We will bomb coastal installations consisting of tank traps, barbwire, and so forth at 7 a.m."

We took off at 3 a.m., and this was murder, assembling in the dark. Bombs were away at 7:03. The Channel was covered with clouds, so we couldn't see the landings. In the air our heavy bombers were in front of us and as far behind us as we could see. Below us were the medium bombers and fighters--underneath the overcast. The RAF and 15th Air Force from Italy were also out in full strength. Altogether, more than 11,000 airplanes were over Normandy. It was impossible to fly without getting into prop-wash. Prop-wash is generated by the plane ahead. You feel it if you are following so closely that you are flying in the air which has been disturbed by the plane ahead. It is very rough.

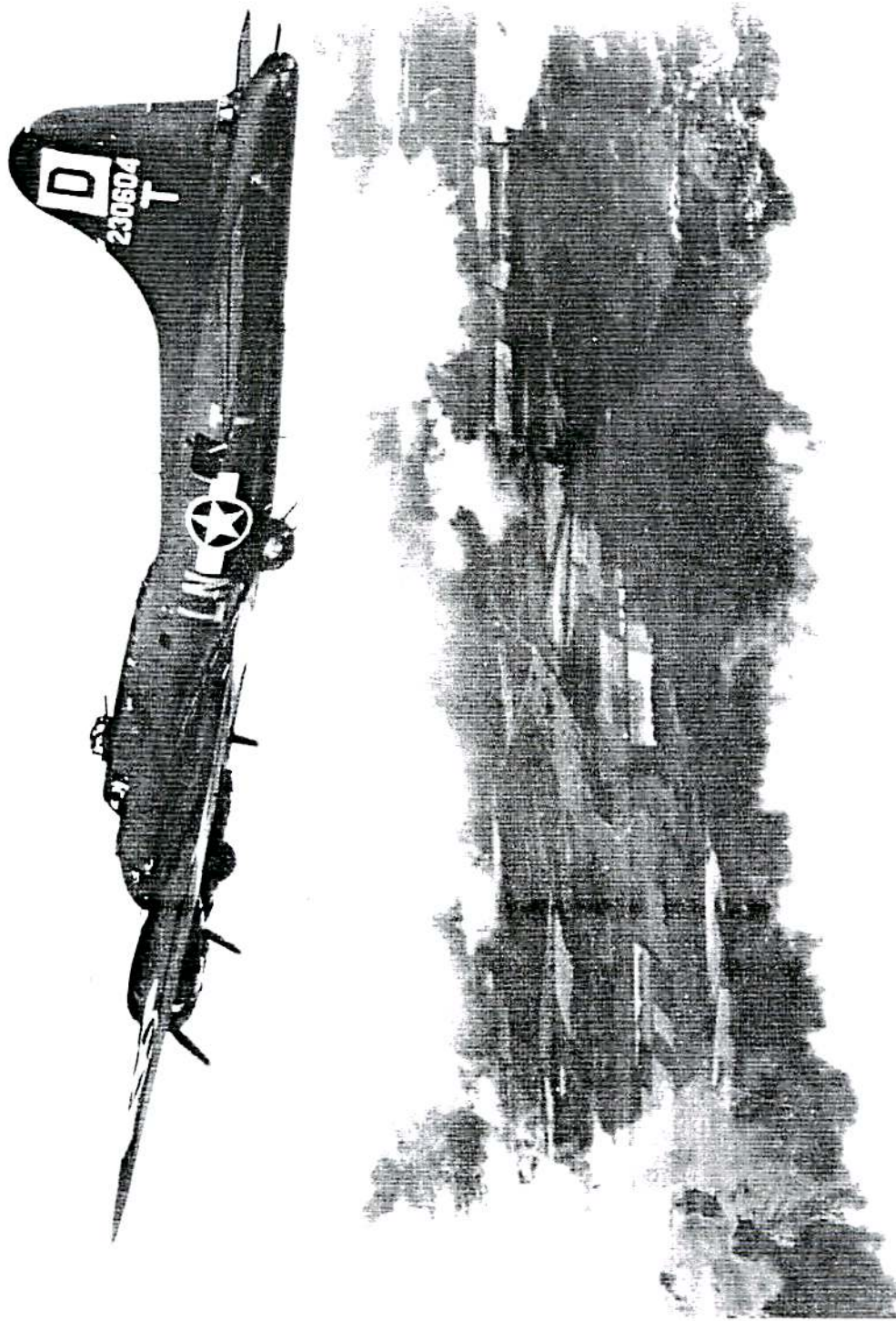
The 8th Air Force had a system of one-way traffic set up so we wouldn't run into each other. We had to fly over our prospective targets, then fly straight on to a previously designated parallel, make a turn south to a certain point and come back parallel to the ingoing course. The configuration of this maneuver resembled a huge elongated race track. Along with providing a solution to the traffic problem, it also guarded against German B-17 attacks. These B-17s were our planes which had been shot down over Germany, put in flyable condition by the Germans, and used against us in the air. It was estimated that the Germans had about 100 of these and they were expected to be used against our landing troops. As a result, if any Allied plane was off its

course, or flying against the "Bomber Stream," it would be shot down by our anti-aircraft guns. We didn't see a single German Fighter, but there was some light flak visible--and a few rockets.

I used to like to watch the rockets. Although they were ineffective, they were quite awe-inspiring to watch. You could see them coming up from the ground, leaving a trail of smoke, bursting at a predetermined altitude with a red flash--like a July Fourth skyrocket. The smoke would remain in the sky for 10 to 15 minutes, being blown into a zigzag course by the varying air currents and different altitudes. This was deceiving in that the rockets were perceived as being even more erratic than they were. I saw a plane get a direct hit from one; it just disappeared--nothing left but a cloud of smoke.

My fourth mission was the same day. When we returned to the base at 10:30 in the morning, we found the mess hall had prepared a hot lunch for us which was waiting at our parking stall. After our lunch Ransom, Tex, and Waldeman, the navigator, went into Briefing. A copilot's job is similar to an executive officer's job on a Navy ship: he sees that the pilots' orders are carried out. So I stayed with the rest of the crew and saw that the plane was gassed, guns oiled and checked again, and that everything else was ready for a return trip. This time there were fewer clouds and we could see the beaches lined with landing barges. Nearby towns were burning. We were to drop our bombs on crossroads to prevent enemy tanks from approaching our troops. Again there was a solid wave of heavy bombers as far as we could see, in front and behind--about 80 miles wide, we figured. A Group off to our right was hitting Caen and we could see them getting very accurate flak; I saw three go down. When we started back to our base it was already starting to get dark. It takes a capable, alert pilot to fly a bomber in formation at night, and both Ransom and I had been 40 hours without sleep. It's a wonder we ever got back. We came across England very low under the usual overcast and I would watch the ground when Ransom flew. As we were Low Man in the Low Squadron, whenever we came close to a tree or a hill we would have to pull up over it, being careful not to run into the guy above us. On the way back we met the RAF who were just going out as we returned to our base at 11:30 that night.

We rolled out of bed late the next day for our fifth mission, June 7. A late afternoon mission, the target was a railroad bridge at Nantes, France. The ball turret man saw several of our 2000-pound bombs land directly on it. Flak was very accurate. A large piece about the size of a baseball ripped through the radio room, tearing up the liason set, coming very close to Schmidty. He



*Square D visible on the tail of this plane designates it as belonging to my group, the 100th.
I was told it was actually my plane.*

got quite a scare that day. We lost one ship, which I saw catch on fire and slowly spiral down. I counted three parachutes coming out.

After we landed, a Jerry JU-88 flew over, strafing our field. I was just crawling into the truck to go back to debriefing when I heard a 50-caliber open up very close to me. I stood up in the back of the truck with my head up over the canvas to see what was happening and saw a JU-88 boring right down on top of us--spitting lead. Tracers were passing about six feet over my head. I jumped from the bed of the truck to flatten out on the concrete. After this guy strafed the field a couple of times he disappeared. The Germans had followed us back that evening and were raising Cain all over. A group of our B-24s were trying to land at their base right next to us, and a bunch of Focke Wulf-190s were shooting the devil out of them. I saw three blow up. They were too low to parachute, but guys were jumping out anyway; the pilots were trying to land anywhere--wheat fields or highways, anything to get out of the way of the Jerries.

It was a great day for the Germans. Later, I heard they got nine -24s from the field next to us. The attack was a complete surprise. Most of the gunners had already unloaded and disassembled their guns. If the Germans had been five minutes earlier it could have happened to us. From then on, our crew made it a practice never to unload their guns until after we were landed and in our parking stall.

We rested for three or four days before the Eighth was put back onto strategic missions in Germany. We had been doing tactical missions, helping out our troops in France for three or four weeks. The objective of my first mission to Germany was to hit the railroad marshaling yards located in the northwestern part. We had started out for Hammer, but it was covered with clouds. The bombing-through-the-clouds technique was not thoroughly developed at this time, so we went to our secondary target, the marshaling yards. Although there was some flak, we didn't get hit. Enemy fighters attacked Groups all around, but for some lucky reason kept overlooking us.

Our seventh mission (supposed to be a lucky number) is one I'll never forget. Every time I take a shower I see the scar to remind me of it. On that mission we bombed docks and harbor facilities at the mouth of the Kaiser Wilhelm Canal. Their flak was very effective--105-milimeter solid red balls of fire. Burst after burst seemed to explode about 10 feet in front of our nose--so close that you could hear them going off. The sound of fragments hitting the plane was like a gust of rain splashing on a tin roof. We all wore flak-suits and steel helmets and I was further protected by sheets of armor plate in the back of and under my seat. Also, the cockpit was encased in bullet-proof

glass. That's why I'm here today. When a burst went off right in front of the number 3 engine, I instinctively knew that this one would hit me. It tipped us way up on one wing, and I felt as if a red-hot poker had gone into my thigh. It was a piece of flak with my name on it that had penetrated three steel braces before entering my leg. Another was stopped by my flak suit before entering my chest. A third just grazed my helmet. The one that hit my leg must have hit a nerve, because my entire leg tingled as if it had gone to sleep. I thought it had been shattered, which brought a picture to my mind's eye of my return to Sacramento--my getting off the train with one leg gone and my entire family (lined up according to height) waiting there to meet me--my father, my mother, my three older sisters, my older brother, and my younger sister.

Actually, it turned out to be much less serious than I thought. A small piece of flak about the size of a dice cube had buried itself into the fleshy part of my leg. It didn't bleed, and I was able to do my share of the flying back to the field. Doc Kinder, the Flight Surgeon, dug it out, poured on some sulfa powder, and then slapped on a cheap band-aid. I thought at least it deserved to be wrapped up, but he said, "No, you're as good as new. You qualify for the Purple Heart, though. Do you want it? I will put you on the list." I told him no--maybe I would really deserve it next time. He then poured me out a big shot of whiskey for my nerves and said OK, he'd see me at the Club that night. I still have that piece of flak; I always intended to make a ring out of it, but never did.

The Doc was a great guy. Earlier in the war he had received the Soldiers' Medal for saving the life of a tail gunner who had been pinned in his seat under a live bomb which had been dropped from a plane above his. The pilot had safely flown the plane back to his base and landed it. In spite of the fact that the bomb was set to detonate at the slightest jarring, Kinder rushed out to the plane, pried up the bomb, and pulled the gunner free.

Our first four or five missions had been easy, but now things were different. I began having wild dreams at night and had trouble sleeping. We usually played poker until late every night, until someone would say, "Well, I'm going to bed and 'sweat out the jeep'." Sweating out the jeep was the hardest part of the mission. We'd lie there quietly with the lights out--every one of us restless--not able to sleep until we would hear the jeep turn off the highway and approach our barracks. I don't think I consciously prayed, but I hoped very hard that it wouldn't stop in front of ours. Finally, when the jeep would stop, the sergeant, an orderly from Squadron Headquarters would enter noisily, going from bed to bed getting up the guys who were supposed to fly. I'd say to myself,

"Don't stop here, don't stop here." When he did stop, I'd do as we all did--I'd make him shake me a couple of times before I pretended to wake up, yawning as if I'd been asleep all night. Then I would announce to those who didn't have to go, "I heard last night that this was going to be a 'milk-run', today."

"Oh yeah", they'd reply, "it's 'Big B' or Merseburg," which was even worse. The Catholics would rush down to the chapel, where a special Mass was held for them. The rest of us would take our time shaving and getting down to breakfast. I always put on clean clothes because I might have to be wearing them in some prison camp for the next year--or longer.

After our breakfast of fried eggs, bacon or ham, and fruit and cereal, we were given a candy bar and gum for the trip back, to which I would add an apple or another piece of fruit. Loud and boisterous, we'd file into briefing--trying to cover up that sinking feeling in the pit of the stomach. At the proper time, an Intelligence Officer would announce from the front of the room, "Well, men, you're going to have an 'easy' today," which never failed to elicit boos from the men. Then, dramatically, he would pull back the curtain to reveal a huge wall map of Europe, where there would be a red tape leading first to a designated point and then, finally, to the target. If it really was an easy mission, which we called a "milk run", everyone would breathe, "Ah...", "But if it turned out to be a rough one, everyone would groan. A person standing outside in the hall could tell where we were going by the noise coming from the room. We would be told where we would pick up our escort, the amount of flak to expect at the target and other relevant details. Finally, came the Colonel's or Executive Officer's pep talk: "Let's have a good formation, today, men. Fly safely--" and all the rest of the usual admonitions.

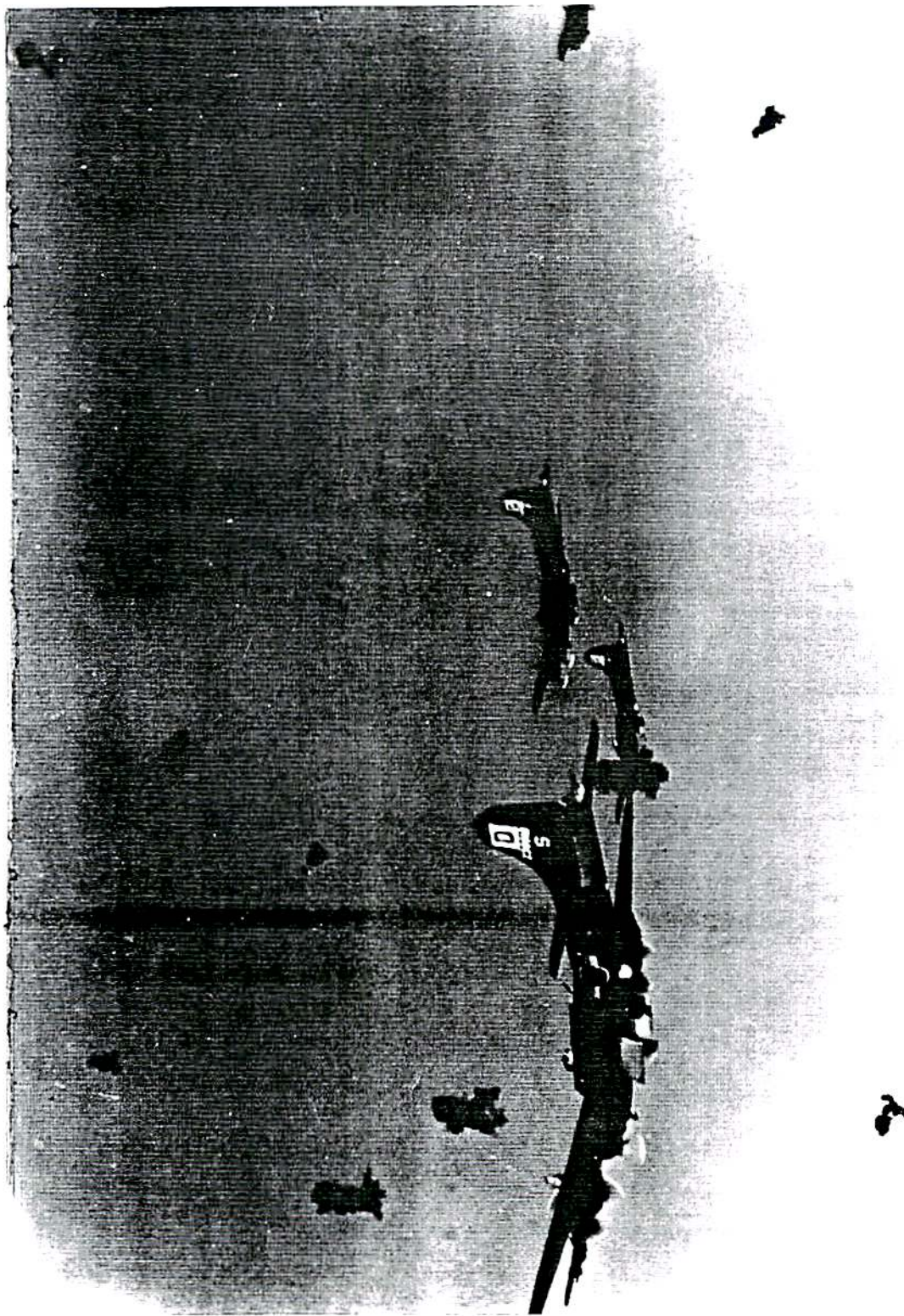
At debriefing after the mission, if it had been a good one and we hadn't lost any planes, everyone would be happy--which resulted in a lot of joking and horseplay. But if it had been a bad one and we had lost several planes, everyone, of course, would be glum. The same auditorium, where we were briefed 10 hours before, was the site of our debriefing. After our coffee and doughnuts, courtesy of the Red Cross, it was time to line up in front of the Flight Surgeon's desk for our "nerve tonic"--or "sleeping potion". We could choose from the best bourbon, Scotch or rye--half a water-glass full, straight. The crew would then sit down at a big table to relate a tale of woe to an Intelligence Officer: Did you hit the target? How many planes did you see go down, and where? Were there any parachutes? Were you hit by German fighters? If so, where? What kind of flak was there and how accurate? How many, if any, enemy planes did you shoot down...?

We started out on our next mission June 20, 1944. Our target was the Volkswagen factory near Hanover, which was manufacturing tanks. About half way across the North Sea a supercharger broke down on our number one engine. Doing a foolish thing, we decided to go on with the engine anyway, even though we had to use full power to stay in formation carrying a full load of gas and bombs. This proved to be too much for our old engines and two of them burned out just before we got to Hanover. We started to go down fast. Immediately after feathering the prop we dropped our bombs. Some farmer probably got a real surprise when he saw his corn field erupt into the air.

We were at 25,000 feet, losing about 300 feet a minute. Ransom and I were so busy trying to get the maximum power out of the two remaining engines without burning them out that we neglected to watch where we were going and flew right over a German town. Knowing that we were in trouble, they waited until we were directly over their immediate area and then opened up with everything they had in the way of anti-aircraft. Ransom did some fancy diving and turning, but we still lost a lot of precious altitude. I thought we had had it. We had a long way to go on two engines with no escort--and German Fighters in the area, but Waldman, our navigator, gave us a course back to avoid most of the flak.

When we got down to 8000 feet we were able to get enough power out of the number one engine that had the supercharger trouble to hold our altitude and get us back to England. I let down over England and buzzed all the way back to our base. I scared the dickens out of our engineer as well as the English people on the ground. They could see we were in trouble by our feathered engines. They waved towels, the kids jumping up and down, as they ran futilely after us.

Every two weeks we'd get a 48-hour pass, which to Tex and to me automatically meant London. Most of the rest of the crew would alternate between Norwich, Ipswich, and London. Ransom usually stayed back at the base. I went to London every chance I got; it was the entertainment center of all England--the only place with any decent night life. If you had the money and knew the right people you could get all you wanted to eat and drink. I would take 30 or 40 pounds, which was worth about four dollars to the pound, and after two days go back broke. That's easily understood when you realize that a bottle of Scotch cost 4 pounds--16 dollars. This was in the summer of 1944 at the height of the buzz bomb era so we never had any trouble finding accommodations, because many people had moved out to the country.



My plane, in medium flak, photographed from another plane flying in our formation

Before the buzz bombs started coming over, London had been terribly crowded, but now most of the remaining civilians were government workers, defense workers, and utility maintenance personnel. The only service people who could go there on pass were members of combat crews such as ours. I usually stayed at the Park Lane Hotel, but once when I was staying at the Picadilly a couple of the top floors were blown off by a buzz bomb--so I went back to the Park Lane.

There were lots of available women to meet in London--blondes, brunettes, blue-eyed, brown-eyed, civilian, military--someone to suit everyone. I belonged to a couple of Clubs, which were similar to our American night clubs except that you had to pay a membership fee in order to get in. One night at the Miami Club, Tex, being in a particularly happy mood, grabbed a saxophone from one of the musicians, jumped on top of the piano and started playing "Deep in the Heart of Texas."

About half way through he suddenly stopped and shouted. "Stand at attention! The national anthem is being played." So we all stood at attention--men, women, English, French, Polish--while he finished with the help of the rest of the band.

We had good times at these clubs, especially if the buzz bombs were coming over pretty thick. The party would get a little wilder every time a buzz bomb would hit. The closest I ever came to being hit by one was in the Liverpool Street Station. We had just got off the train when we heard one coming--you could tell when it was going to be close by the sound, so everyone--so everyone hit the muddy, sooty floor. The clothes I was wearing had just come back from the cleaners, so I stayed standing. The bomb hit close, about a block away, and the station was filled with dust, flying glass, and anything else that wasn't tied down. Luckily I wasn't hit by anything, but after that I made it a practice to hit the dirt--clean clothes or not. When the V1 and V2 rockets started coming, though, you never knew it until they hit--and then it was too late.

Our ninth mission, June 21, 1944, was a shuttle mission to Russia; we thought it would be a really good deal. We were excited about it, as we would be the first to go from England, bombing Germany and landing in Russia. Then we would bomb Hungary or a similar target on the way back, landing in Italy. From there we would bomb France and finally, back to England. It was also designed as a good will gesture toward Russia, so we were instructed carefully regarding protocol--what to say and do. The Colonel took along 30 cases of bourbon to reinforce the "good-will" part. We received identification passes and Russian dictionaries to use in case we were forced down inside Russia. We couldn't fly our own ship, the Melancholy baby, had an engine out from our last mission. I had named the Melancholy Baby after the popular song of that name. The plane had been given to us after about our sixth mission, and Ransom had given me the privilege of naming it. I was sorry it was not available to us for this mission, but we were assigned another just as good.

Our target was Berlin. We could see the flak forming a solid black cloud over the city before we got there. Ransom and I stared fascinated, knowing that we would have to fly through it in a few minutes. It was rumored that there were 700 or more flak guns in Berlin and it seemed that every one was delivering its maximum output. It would have been so simple to turn and fly around it, but nobody ever did. In fact the 8th Air Force had the record of never being turned away from the target by enemy opposition. Once they started for it, they always got there.

As we got over Poland we were jumped by some ME-109s. Our P-51 escort that had come all the way from England with us took care of most of them, and the few that got through into our formation were taken care of by our tail gunner. Our P-51s, which were to go the entire way with us, started getting low on gas as we got over Russia, so they left us and went on to their destination in Russia. In spite of that, they logged more than eight hours in the air and when they landed, had to be lifted out of their cramped quarters and walked around by the Russians. We were supposed to meet Russian fighters in the air to escort us, but because of the weather, we missed them. A Jerry reconnaissance plane which followed us to see where our base was located could have been chased away by the Russians if they had been there. We had no choice but to head straight for our field as we were all short on gas. As it was, we lost 5 ships out of our Group of 18--3 to the enemy and 2 because they ran out of gas.

We were staying at two fields in Russia, the two largest they had. That night the field next to ours was raided by Jerry bombers destroying 60 of our B-17s on the ground. Although they came over our field, they didn't drop on us. The Russians shot up plenty of flak, but as far as I could tell they didn't get any of them. Because of the weather, we stayed five days in Russia, but everyone was having a good time and in no hurry to leave. The next afternoon we left our field, Mirograd, for Karkov--to get away from the enemy bombers, which were expected again that night. After a three-day stay there, we moved to another field for the same reason. We saw plenty of Western Russia, which reminded me of midwestern United States. The townspeople were wonderful. Every place we went they would meet us with bouquets of flowers and there would be a big celebration.

At Karkov we stayed at a Russian Rest Camp for soldiers--both men and women--just back from the front. The women were of a stocky build and well-developed, to say the least. Most were in their early twenties, and some were very good-looking in a clean, wholesome way. They all looked so healthy compared to the pale, thin English girls. I met Ira (pronounced "Eara") at a dance they held for us our first night there. I got acquainted with her by trading one of my gold lieutenant's bars for the red Russian star she wore on the center of her cap. She was dressed like all the others, in soft leather boots with the tops rolled down so they wouldn't be too tight on her muscular calves. Over a little short skirt, she wore a long, heavy sack-like blouse which strained across her chest, trying to contain her ample figure. A wide leather belt gathering the blouse in at the waist created a curvy look. She was quite a good-looking girl. From then on, I was with her most of the time until we left. The decoration she wore meant that she had personally killed six Germans. A regular Infantry soldier, she was with an outfit that followed the tanks, cleaning out the resistance that they had missed. We had a hard time understanding each other, but I had a translation book that was given to me by our liason officer, and we spent most of our time talking with it. I would point to a question in English, then she would read the Russian after it. She then would look through the book to find the Russian answer and I would read the English translation. She asked me a lot of questions about the United States: if I was married, what the US girls wore and did, if I'd bombed Berlin, etc. I told her I was a "pilota," had bombed Berlin four or five times and said "Berlin Kaput", which made her very happy. I offered her some lipstick which I had brought from the States. From the way she tried to put it on, I believed it was her first time. She said it made her look silly and wouldn't take it.

During the day we would go for long walks around the countryside or in the city. The city was pretty badly beaten up because the front lines had moved back and forth through it four different times. She had fought there. One time in the country we were walking down a narrow dirt road when we encountered a deep puddle covering the entire road. As I was wearing my low-cut dress shoes, I couldn't very well wade across. She noticed my predicament immediately, and, because she was wearing sturdy boots, motioned for me to get on her back--which I did--and she waded right across. A singular occasion.

At night we would share a small bottle of vodka that she would usually bring to the dance at the Rest Camp. On one such occasion, we encountered a loud argumentative Russian soldier, whom she advised me to ignore--as he was a Communist. She told me she was not a member of the Party, but the Communists ran the government and that was that. The people had no choice; the voting was a joke. We brought most of our own food, which the Russian women cooked and served for us.

One time in the chow line, a fellow ahead of me looked down at the food in the kettle and remarked, "Nothing but these God damn shitty C-rations again. The Russian girl serving him just smiled. She must have memorized exactly what he said and knew it had something to do with food. After I was served, the next man behind me in the line, trying to be friendly to her, looked down at the food and asked,

"Well, what have we got to eat?" She gave him a big smile, and looking him straight in the face replied,

"Nothing but these God damn shitty C-rations, again."

Much too soon we went back to Mariograd, loaded up with Russian bombs, and took off for Italy. On the way we bombed an oil refinery in Romania which was picked for us by the Russians. Flak was moderate and we made it OK to our base in Italy, flying over Poland, Romania, Yugoslavia, and across the Adriatic Sea to Foggia in central Italy. We stayed nine days there, going on one easy mission with the 15th Air Force--a marshaling yard in Romania. We could understand now why the Fifteenth had to do 50 missions while we had to do only 35. Ours were much longer and harder resulting in many more casualties. The number was determined back in Washington, where losses were analyzed. If we were lucky enough to live through our ordeal we got the Distinguished Flying Cross--which the Fifteenth didn't.

Foggia was a dirty, starving town. They said that Rome was better, but Naples was even worse. Tex and I were walking down the street when I stopped to buy a dime's worth of apricots. We had time to eat only a couple of them when we were besieged by a mob of little kids holding out their hands, begging, "Please, Joe..." I started to pass them around, but decided it was no use, so I laid the whole sack down on the cobblestones in the center of the street and we backed away. That was a mistake, because what followed was the meanest, most savage fight I ever saw--kids biting and kicking each other. I had to pull one little girl about nine off the back of a little boy about six, who was face down on the cobblestones. She had her two hands wrapped in his hair and was bashing his face into the street. On July Fourth a rodeo was held at the Benito Mussolini Fairgrounds. It was strictly American style, and the Italians got a big kick out of it. I talked to a tall brunette for about a half hour, kidding around, until I noticed that the tight-fitting fuzzy red angora sweater she was wearing had two noticeable areas in the front where the fuzz had been completely worn off--in the most obvious places. That really turned me off. I cut that conversation short.

One afternoon I talked Tex into coming with me to a little spot on the Adriatic coast where we could look at the boats in the harbor; watercraft has always been of particular interest to me. As we wandered along the waterfront checking out the numerous fishing boats and also an Italian destroyer which had been bombed and beached, we came across a small tavern which had a sign in the window proclaiming "Vino." So, naturally, we decided to get ourselves a bottle.

The English occupied the front about 40 miles directly north of us, so that the place was jammed with English soldiers. At first we were all very

simpatico, buying each other bottles of wine, toasting the Allies, King George, President Roosevelt and anyone else we could think of. During the early part of the evening we got into a couple of mild arguments concerning the relative superiority of the English and the Americans as fighting men, which escalated with Tex's statement that the English never got any place without our help--or without our pushing them. Then the party got a little out of hand.

Fortunately, I managed to get Tex, who always seemed to carry a chip on his shoulder, out of there before anything drastic happened. Once outside, Tex announced, "Let's go up to the front and show these Limeys how to fight." And I agreed. After walking only a short way to the north, up the coast, we caught a ride with an English supply truck which took us as far as their supply dump. From there we could hear the artillery at the front and could see a few casualties coming back. I began to lose interest in the adventure really fast but didn't want to admit this to Tex, so we followed the road toward the noise. By this time it was pitch-dark. After a mile or so I saw a Jeep approaching us. When I hailed it down, a flashlight came on, straight in our faces.

I responded to this with a meek, "How do we get to the front?"

An American voice answered with a string of cuss words, ending in, "What the hell are you doing up here?"

The voice belonged to an American liaison officer, a major, who had immediately recognized our uniforms. Mumbling something to the effect that the Air Corps had more guts than brains, he loaded us into the Jeep which was carrying two other high-ranking officers--English--who enjoyed every minute of the encounter. After taking us to one of the headquarters near there, he got us an English command car and told the driver to take us back to our base at Foggia.

As we left he shouted, "If I ever see you up here again, I'll have you thrown in the clink!" He thought a while, and added, "Worse, yet, I'll take you up to the front. With your training, you'd last about two minutes." Needless to say, he never saw us again.

On the way back to England we hit a marshaling yard in Southern France, where a large concentration of Germans were entraining for the Normandy front. No flak to speak of at our target. We watched the Fifteenth bombing of Marseilles and saw two B-24s go down in flames. On the way we were attacked by FW-190s, but our P-51s kept them from getting close to us. I witnessed a couple of memorable dogfights that day.

Our thirteenth mission was to an oil refinery in Leipzig. We were expecting enemy fighters in this area, and there were plenty there. Luckily for us they hit Groups ahead of us and let us go. Our bombers and escort together shot down 117 of them, but we lost three ships from our Group to flak over the target. One that was flying off our wing went down in flames, but we destroyed the target. Our plane had about 50 small holes in it, but no one was hurt.

July 8 we really drew an easy one: a tactical mission to Normandy--a railroad junction, no flak, no fighters. This was a good deal. I wished for about ten more like this right in a row. No luck. The next one was a tough one. The objective was Munich, and it was a long haul. When we got there the place was covered with clouds, but we bombed through them with the Pathfinder equipment in the lead ship. We couldn't miss Munich because of the large concentration of flak bursting around us above the clouds. The job of throwing out the "chaff" fell to the waist gunner, Benkowski. The chaff consisted of a long strip of tinfoil designed to confuse the enemy's radar. I would get the command over the radio from the Wing Leader, who would say, "Rainy day, rainy day." Then I'd tell Benny to let her go, and he'd start throwing the stuff out like mad. Soon the command would come over the radio, "Dry up, dry up," and I'd have him stop.

He took this responsibility very seriously. One night when Tex and I were coming home from the neighborhood pub, we met Benny coming down the road pumping as fast as he could on a bicycle with two flat tires. He was higher than a kite and had a box of chaff on the handlebars, which he must have taken from the plane. He was shouting at the top of his voice, "Rainy day, rainy day," and throwing the stuff all over the street. Although we tried to stop him as he went by, he made it up over the hill, still throwing out the chaff and shouting.

Over Munich that day he threw out bushels of the stuff in the air, but it didn't seem to do much good; we lost four ships out of a Group of eighteen. One blew up right in front of us; it must have been a direct hit right in the

bomb bay. We lost one engine over the target, feathered it and started back on three. It was a long way back to England. Switzerland lay off to the right, just a short distance away and we could see the Swiss Alps sticking up out of the clouds. I had a tremendous urge to land there. It would have been a nice place to sweat out the war. We had heard a lot of tales about the easy time our boys had who had landed there. They ate good food, and could even go to college.

I pointed to Switzerland, looked at Ransom, and said over the intercom, "Looks inviting, doesn't it?" By looking out the window, he could see that one engine was completely shot out, and focusing on the instrument panel, he noticed that the oil pressure in another engine was fluctuating wildly. After discussing the situation, though, we came to the conclusion that we would try to make it back to England--or at least to a point behind our lines in France. Ransom was determined to finish up and get back to the States where he would be sent to fly B-29s in the expected upcoming invasion of Japan. He used to talk about them all the time.

By this time we had dropped down below the formation, but we were keeping up with them. I heard someone calling "Little Friends..." that was the code name for our fighters. I heard them come back with, "All Big Brothers (that was us) stay in the stream. We'll take care of you there." The bomber stream was the path that everyone followed back to England. We stayed right in it while Group after Group would catch up with us and pass us by overhead. With one engine gone and another one throttled back, we couldn't make very good time. But whenever a Group would go over us we would stick along underneath them for a while, then drop back to the one behind. In this way we made it safely back to England. Ransom never did go on to -29s after we got back to the States. I imagine his wife laid down the law to him: No South Pacific for you! The last I heard from him was that he was an instructor in Florida, but I never did learn in what kind of plane.

July 14, 1944, French Bastille Day, our Group was picked to go down into southern France to drop supplies to the French Maquis--the Underground. We carried 10 large cylinders filled with guns, food and ammunition. Each cylinder had a parachute attached that would automatically open when the cylinder was dropped. This was my kind of mission. Naturally, there was no flak; our only regard was for enemy fighters. Even they didn't worry us too much because we were so far south. We could see the three bonfires that the French had burning on the side of a hill, and we went over them at 3000 feet dropping the supplies. The hillside was covered with people waving towels and coats at us. I guess it was an especially happy Bastille Day for them.

There were three or four Groups of us involved--60 airplanes sailing over them in tight formation--giving them a real thrill, as well as much needed supplies. After we dropped, we flew close to the ground, buzzing a couple of the nearest neighboring towns. This mission was called a Zebra Mission, meaning it was top secret. It was one job we did that never got in the papers until quite a bit later.

One memorable thing happened, though, that made it a mission I will never forget. We had taken off over England under "instrument conditions." This happened in about eight out of 10 missions. In other words, we had flown up through the solid clouds, starting at about 500 feet, usually climbing up to around 14,000, then assembling on top of the clouds in Group formation. Instrument flying had become second nature to us, but the hard part was finding the right Group to join when we got out on top. Of course, if we got close enough we could identify the planes by the different colored flares that the Group Leader shot off--or by the tail markings of the plane. Frequently when a pilot couldn't find his Group, he would tag onto the nearest Group and go on to the target with them in order to get credit for a mission. This wasn't a very good practice, however, because the Group might be going to a target farther away than the one the pilot had been briefed on. Often a pilot would find that he had followed the Group to an exceptionally hard target. Of course this could work both ways. If he was headed for Berlin and joined a Group going on a diversion raid into France, naturally he lucked out.

On this particular day, a plane carrying a full bomb load of 500-pound bombs tagged onto our Group, being unaware of the purpose of our mission because it was top-secret. He accompanied us right into Southern France, the destination of our "mission of love"--the drop to the French Underground. We thought the plane was from another Group carrying supplies as we were. After flying over the bonfires, letting down and lining up, we opened our bomb bay doors. He did the same. I have a vivid picture of what might have happened if he had released his bombs: He would have wiped out all the unsuspecting leaders of the French Underground. Our State Department would have been faced with the impossible task of explaining to the French our mistake in leading them into such a horrible trap. Such an incident might even have changed the entire course of the war. Fortunately, though, this fellow had sense enough to realize that something different was going on; so he held his bombs. I'll bet he was thankful when he looked back to see the parachutes that the rest of us had dropped peacefully floating down. On the way back, over the Channel, we saw him open up his bomb bay and drop his bombs.

That's how everyone came to know the story. We spent a lot of time theorizing about the different ending the story might have had.

Our seventeenth mission was to bomb German rocket gun installations in northern France. This was something more personal to us, an opportunity for revenge, so to speak. In addition to causing us many close shaves in London, a couple of German buzz bombs from an installation such as these had hit close to our field. Today would provide us with the opportunity to get back at the Germans. We bombed a wooded area, which didn't provide us with much excitement, but the trip back made up for that. On the French coast we ran across some "tracking flak." Although we didn't see the first burst, we felt it hit our ship. We couldn't shake the Jerries; they had us down perfectly--our lead navigator's mistake. Bad flak was to be expected over a target; it was unavoidable, but getting it on the way back when we weren't expecting it, was too much. We lost one ship, and when we got back we had to have both our outer wing panels changed, because they were so badly riddled with flak.

Our next mission was to Schweinfurt--our target, a ball bearing plant. We got numerous small holes in the ship, but nothing serious. One piece of flak put the ball turret out but didn't hurt Wargin, the ball turret operator. A pilot in our Group called on the radio, said he was bailing out, and asked for someone to tell his folks and those of the rest of his crew members that everyone had gotten out OK. He kept talking and talking, his heart-rending speeches being interspersed with comments from the Group Leader telling him to get off the air or he'd have the whole Luftwaffe after us. He would have been better off if he had taken the advice. As he continued talking, his plane spun down in a burst of flames, and the message his family received was quite different from the one he had planned.

July 20 we went to Leipzig again, with a synthetic oil refinery as the target. Again, ample flak. Ransom and I were leading the Squadron then. Our left wing man went down on that one. About that time I had a change of heart about combat flying in a bomber. For the first 10 missions or so I had considered it a lark--nothing but a lot of fun. During the next 10, I gave up all hope of ever coming out alive. The odds were too much against me; we were losing too many planes. I was spending my money as fast as I got it and living from day to day. That was when our tour of duty was extended from 25 missions--first to 30 and then to 35. The story was that replacements were not available quickly enough, and since this was such a crucial time in the war, it was decided to extend the missions of those already there. I would have bet ten-to-one that I would never see Sacramento again--but I wouldn't have found any takers. The 8th Air Force's average losses were four percent a mission.

That meant 25 missions and your time was up--but you still had 10 more to do. The last 10 you were living on borrowed time. I was never able to find out our official Group percentage of losses, but I knew it was high, just by keeping track, myself.

Around the twentieth mission, my attitude began to change. I had had so many close shaves and narrow escapes that I began to believe that I led a charmed life--that nothing could kill me, no matter what. I tried to figure out what made our crew different--why we were getting by while others weren't. I came to no definite conclusion. The statement has been made that there were no atheists in foxholes, well, there were none in airplanes either--at least none in the 100th Bomb Group, that I knew of. Men who had never been to church in their life, if they think they are going to die, will try anything.

As a young boy, I would pray to God to do something, to show me something, to perform some little insignificant act to prove to me that there was such a thing as a Divine Spirit. I finally asked our minister about it, and he said, "My boy, just look around you at the grass and trees and that ought to be enough." But it wasn't enough. After being exposed to the theory of evolution in college, I became even more undecided. On a particularly hard mission one day, I prayed--the only time I ever did on a mission. I said, "God, if you get me through this one, I'll never doubt you again." He got me through it all right, and I have never doubted him since. This feeling of leading a charmed life, though, had nothing to do with religion. I just felt I couldn't be killed. It worked out to my advantage. I may have taken more chances than necessary, but I slept better and gained back some of the weight that I had lost. Of course I didn't stop spending all my money; I didn't carry it that far.

On my twentieth mission, to Regensburg, we went through a large bank of clouds. When we finally emerged from them, there were only five of us left in the Group; so we proceeded to circle, in an effort to reassemble. It was rumored that there were many enemy fighters in and around the clouds in which our Group was floundering, so naturally our Group Leader began to get excited. Ten miles off to our left was a large flak barrage, which he figured all of our planes could see--even if we couldn't see the rest of our formation. So he radioed us to assemble over the flak area. It was a drastic idea, but it worked. Everyone could see the flak bursting, and after we had flown around in it and over it a while, we had our Group back together. After that, he took a lot of kidding to the effect that the Germans had to send up "black-black" flares for him to get his Group assembled. We used to assemble a lot on "red-yellow" flares or "red-green" flares, but never before on "black-black." After assembling, we started out for our target, but the Group Leader

decided we no longer had sufficient fuel to get there and back to England; so we flew back to the same flak in which we had assembled and dropped our bombs, knowing that there was something of importance underneath. That's gratitude for you.

We bombed another oil refinery near Merseburg July 28 through a complete undercast. I thought at the time that we had missed the target because we didn't get much flak--it seemed to be all off to one side. On the way back we heard over VHF (very high frequency radio) that a great air battle was in progress with the enemy fighters just three Groups behind us. None of them hit us, but about 40 of them to our right looked over our formation.

The next day we returned to the same target, and as there was no undercast, this time we really smeared it. Our Group was hit hard by both fighters and flak, though, and we lost eight ships out of our eighteen. We were pretty lucky in our ship, although the tail was shot up badly and also the left wing. Ransom was flying over the target and all I could do was sit and watch our left wing get peppered full of holes. One minute it was clean and the next minute there were a couple of holes. I kept staring at it and the holes kept multiplying--seemingly for no reason. The same thing happened once before to the right wing. I felt so detached and hypnotized--just sat there dreamily watching the aluminum erupt in miniature volcanoes. It was too surreal to be frightening, I guess.

Our twenty-third mission was to Munich again, so we knew what to expect. We conserved our gas for the long trip ahead. On the way in we were told by VHF that enemy fighters had been seen in the vicinity of the target, but our escort must have taken care of them, because when we got there there were none to be seen. Although we didn't lose any ships, we saw two blow up in the Group ahead of us. Then, August 2, 1944, we went into France and knocked out a railroad bridge--a mission called for by General Eisenhower. Strictly a "milk-run"--no flak or fighters. The next day was another easy one, this time a railroad yard.

August 4, our twenty-sixth mission, was to Hamburg. We could have gotten quite a bit of flak, but the enemy was busy shooting at another Group, giving us the opportunity to sail over and drop before they could get to us. We did miss the target, but learned later that it had been knocked out the next day. That was the day we went on our seven-day "flak leave." Our orders assigned us to a rest camp at Edinborough, Scotland, which, reportedly, was a beautiful place--delicious food, boats, horses, everything free. That night we went to London, from where we would catch a train to Scotland in the morning. That was a big mistake. When we got to London, I had such a

good time that night I decided to stay right there. The rest of the guys went on to Scotland. I found out that the Chase National Bank would cash checks from any American bank; as a result, I had a great time for seven days, amid the buzz bombs--with no money problems.

When the leave was up, back at the field, the Flight Surgeon checked us all out. It had been his idea to send us; all of us had been getting a little jumpy--some of the boys were pretty bad. It was obvious to him that I was in worse shape than when I left. The buzz bombs and the Scotch had left their mark.

"You didn't go to Edinborough, did you, Lamb?" I shook my head. He said, "I could turn you in for being AWOL. Those were definite orders that you disobeyed." He didn't do it, though. In fact he kept the whole crew off flying status until I got rested up.

August 14, our twenty-seventh mission, we went to Ludwig-Shaven, our target being the Faben oil refinery. Although flak was pretty heavy and we picked up a few holes, bombing results were excellent. We did lose one ship out of the Group. Ransom and I moved up from Squadron Lead to Deputy Group Lead. We were getting someplace now; Ransom made Captain and I was promoted to First Lieutenant. I was offered the opportunity to check out for first pilot, but I turned it down. I thought I was getting along so well where I was I didn't want to change my luck. I might be assigned an incompetent crew--or a lousy plane--or something else just as bad. One of those things could have cost me my life, so--remembering my mother's good advice not to volunteer but just do what I was told--I decided to maintain the status quo for the time being. Later, though, I did get checked out as a first pilot.

August 15 was a bad day for the Luftwaffe. Our 8th Air Force sent over 1200 heavy bombers to bomb enemy airfields in Belgium and Holland. We also had 1500 fighters and fighter bombers, plus 500 medium bombers and dive bombers from our 9th Air Force. The RAF joined us with 1000 heavy bombers. You could see for miles in the bright, clear atmosphere. I could count seven airfields going up in smoke. Flak was very light at the target and the German Fighters were afraid to come up, resulting in a relatively easy time for us. At the same time that we were doing our bombing, the Allies were landing in southern France.

Accidents in a combat area are frequent, mostly caused by nervousness and fatigue in the personnel and by weakened and worn out equipment. Almost every one was involved in at least one minor accident, and I was no exception. I smashed up a brand new B-17--a beauty with only six missions

on it. Although it had been shot up quite badly, it certainly could have been repaired before I wrecked it. Returning from a particularly hard mission, we encountered a stiff 90-degree crosswind on the runway as we came in to land. The landing was mine; Ransom was back in the tail taking it easy. I succeeded in getting the plane down on the runway only to find that a strong crosswind was blowing us off; a B-17, with its huge, billboard-like tail, is hard to handle in a strong wind.

Flying for ten hours, dodging enemy fighters, had made me nervous and tired. Wanting the plane to sit down faster, I reached over to pull up the flaps to make it easier to handle. Instead I pulled up the wheels. It sat down all right, the four props digging up furrows in the runway until it skidded to a stop. No one was hurt, but the frame of the plane was sprung out beyond repair. They used it for spare parts; that was all it was good for. Ransom joined me in the cockpit; we were both shocked into several moments of silence. Then, looking down at the instrument panel, we discovered that I had unconsciously used one finger to lift the bright red switch cover labeled with the word "danger" while another finger flipped the switch. Everyone exited fast, fearing fire, but I slowly gathered up my stuff and left, thinking, "Boy, will I get it for this!"

Our Squadron Commander made his way through the waiting fire trucks and ambulances to watch the plane being pulled off the runway to make room for other landing planes.

"What happened?" he asked. To which I simply answered, "I hit the wrong switch." He gave me a sympathetic look and quietly said, "Go up and fill out an accident report." He had not been a particular favorite of mine until then, but from that time on he was OK with me.

Again, I was flying during an early-morning assembly, and again, Ransom was back in the waist. Because it was still quite dark, I had Bywaters, the tail gunner, in the cockpit with me to watch for other planes. We were leading the High Squadron that day and were already in position following the Group Leader as he circled the field waiting for everyone to get into position. Suddenly he cut under the Group just ahead of us, not dropping low enough to leave room for us--the High Squadron--to follow above him without catching the propwash from the Group ahead, which we took with full impact. This tipped us into a 90 degree bank, forcing us down into the Lead Squadron. Kicking back on the rudder as hard as I could and pulling back on the stick with all my strength wasn't enough--even with Bywaters pulling along with me. We couldn't budge the stick. At that precise moment the

plane below moved over for no apparent reason--they couldn't see us--.giving us just enough room to go down between that plane and the next one. Since all planes were carrying full gas and full loads of bombs, the slightest bump would have blown us out of the sky.

Another close call occurred with Ransom taking off through solid clouds with only about 20 feet of visibility. Concentrating on the instruments, he was climbing at exactly 150 miles an hour, 300 feet a minute, on a specific heading for an exact number of minutes. Then he would turn to another heading for a prescribed length of time, and then to another, until we finally broke out on top. Even though we couldn't see them, we knew that hundreds of airplanes were filling the sky over England at that moment, starting out on an important mission. But as long as every pilot maintained his concentration and followed his exact instructions, there would be no accidents. On the other hand, if someone was careless with his speed or his timing, he might run into another plane as he broke out through the clouds. Every day we would hear a report of a mid-air collision. I think the degree of danger we experienced flying in the "soup" over England easily matched that of the pilots flying supplies over the "Hump" in Burma, and their weather was admittedly about as bad as it could get.

On this particular morning as I relaxed, smoking a cigarette and following the timing of each leg on the instrument panel, I gazed absently out of the window and froze in terror. There on our right was a B-24, with its nose straight up, sliding sideways directly toward us. The pilot must have just seen us and pulled his nose up hard. I grabbed the wheel, banked our plane steeply to the left, pushing our nose down at the same time. This cut off the B-24 from our view, and for the next few seconds I waited for the definitive sickening thud. To my great relief, all I felt was a minor jerk on the tail, and at the same time heard a slight scraping sound. He must have barely grazed us. Ransom could tell by one look at my white face and my shaking knees how close we had come. This was the first time I had experienced the "shaking knees" that I had heard about. I had never really believed one could be frightened enough to be unable to control the shaking. That incident really convinced me: Being taken by surprise, and confronted with a terrifying situation is what it takes. If we had hit, there would have been nothing left but a cloud of smoke; I knew it--and my knees wouldn't stop. My knees only shook that one time; and that was enough.

Returning from a mission, everyone was usually relaxed, listening to the radio or making conversation on the interphone. Relaxation had its drawbacks, of course. Like when the pilot of one of our end ships let his plane

slide over and bump the plane next to his. As a result they both went down, taking a third plane--and a half million dollars worth of equipment--with them into the water that morning.

The worst accident that I remember--one that caused a lot of consternation on the base--happened on my next mission, to Brest. Our troops had bypassed Brest, where the Germans still remained penned in, and our job was to bomb the Germans out. We went in low at 12,000 feet to avoid hitting any of our men, who were just a couple of hundred yards away from our target--that small portion of the city in which the Germans were holed up. It was a beautiful day; everything was going perfectly--just like a practice mission--except for one thing. When we crossed the Channel, we got the order from the Group Commander to "clear the guns," which meant that the gunners, bombardier and navigator were to shoot their guns to be sure they were in good working order.

Naturally, they were not supposed to hit anyone else in the formation, but someone always came back with 50-caliber holes in his plane. These were usually discovered after a battle with enemy fighters, so no one was sure where the holes came from. Because we were leading the Low Squadron that day, I had a good view of what happened. As the boys were blasting away with their guns, I suddenly saw the number 4 engine of a plane ahead of us catch on fire. Someone had filled it with 50-caliber slugs. To avoid taking anyone else down with it in case it blew up, the plane dropped quickly out of formation. The fire was increasing in intensity, and I could see that it was burning behind the firewall, a metal partition between the engine and the wing, which held the gas tanks. That meant there were just 30 seconds remaining before it would blow up. I counted three chutes bail out--but that was all. About the time the plane should have blown up, the engine fell off, carrying with it most of the wing that was on fire. The plane went into a sharp spin, and at our low altitude, hit the water, carrying the seven other men with it. That was a terrible experience.

Back at the base that afternoon, the Colonel called a special meeting of all the people who had been on that mission. It would have been impossible to determine which gunner had been responsible, so he didn't even bother. But he succeeded in making any one of them who could have possibly been guilty suffer a great deal before we got out of there that day.

Our gunners were a slap-happy, trigger-happy bunch, anyway, often shooting first and identifying the plane later. Of course, you could hardly blame them; when it came to aerial combat it was the guy who shot first that usually came out alive. For example, the commanding general of our Wing

was shot down, as he was flying a P-47 over Germany, by a B-17 gunner in our Wing. The general, a brigadier, was checking the formation and came in too close. The fellows used to joke about this back at the field. Death was so commonplace that it was only the very unusual incidents that were remembered. It took a sense of humor to maintain one's mental health. Later we heard the general had fortunately landed behind our lines and was brought back to England.

It was fun to watch the Spitfires come in to escort us. The English (R.A.F.) pilots would take no chances with our gunners. They would use what they called direct support, which to my way of thinking was more effective than what our fighter pilots provided us. We would very seldom see our fighter pilots. The Spitfires would come in close to sit right on top of us, ready to pounce on anyone that dared to approach. They would also locate another Group up high to provide lookout. The Squadron Leader, who came in first, would identify himself by lifting his wing to display its elliptical shape before he was close enough for us to fire if we had mistaken him for the enemy. He would repeat this every hundred yards until we could also identify his RAF markings. Then he would radio the rest of his planes that it was safe enough to come in. They, also, would approach us carefully, not taking any chances.

It was reported that we shot down three of our own P-51s one day, although I didn't see them go. We had been recalled from a mission into northern Germany, and just before we got to Denmark, over the North Sea, the weather turned bad. Since we couldn't go high enough to get above the clouds, we tried to go under them--through the torrential rain. Finally the Group Leader received the order from 8th Air Force Headquarters to come back. We were on the alert for German fighters which were reported to be thick in the area when suddenly dead ahead, at our exact altitude, there appeared through the rain a cluster of fighters headed straight for us. None of our gunners thought twice; they just opened up with all they had. None of the fighters fired back, and as they sailed through our formation we could all see that they were our own escort of P-51s which was supposed to meet us over Denmark. Apparently they had not received the recall order.

September 5th, our thirty-first mission, we went to the Daimler-Benz engine factory at Stuttgart, which we hit right smack in the center. The flak was relatively mild; only one ship in our Group had its engine knocked out. We flew near enough to Paris on the way home to see the Eiffel Tower.

On the 9th, we finally went to the Ruhr; at last we'd see what "Happy Valley" was like. We could see the flak for about thirty minutes before we

reached our target, an arms factory at Dusseldorf; it was as bad as we expected. One of our ships blew up just before "bombs-away", but losing only one out of our Group made us feel very lucky. Just about every ship had been hit, but B-17s seemed to be able to take more punishment and still fly than any other plane built. I saw one come back so riddled with flak that when it landed it broke right in two. But still it came back.

The next day we bombed a tank factory at Nurnburg, Germany. After flying through a severe weather front to get there, we found it clear at the target. We got a good look at the Swiss Alps on the way and found them even more beautiful than we expected--the most beautiful mountains in the world. Flak was particularly heavy; the crew chief was able to count over a hundred holes in the plane when we got back. It seemed a miracle to us how many times flak could hit a plane without hurting anyone inside, but when you consider how much armor plate everyone is protected by, plus flak suits and helmets, you can understand why. By this time Tex had so much armor plate around him in the nose of the plane it was like a battleship; we could hardly get the nose off the ground on take-off. Later I made him take some out, which almost started a mutiny.

Each crew member would salvage pieces of armor plate from grounded or wrecked planes to fix up his portion of our plane. Beside the big piece located behind me, there was a piece under my feet--and another that I sat on. That was the one that saved me. A chunk of flak about the size of a baseball came up through the bottom of the plane, through my seat, and hit the armor plate square in the center. This stopped it, but it bounced me up in the air and really stung my fanny. I couldn't sit down comfortably for a week. When we got back, I actually kissed the armor plate, and thanked providence for seeing that I had put it there. We got back that day without losing any ships at all.

The Germans would send up different kinds of flak. It was easy for them to determine what our target was, and they would put up a solid sheet of flak over it, knowing that we would have to fly through it. We used to call this "box-flak." If we were flying at 26,000 feet, the flak would start at 24,000 feet and fill the air all the way up to 28,000 feet. Each gun in the city would have a specific spot at a specific altitude and they would all fire as fast as they could. If you were hit by this type of flak, it was just your bad luck, as no one was shooting at you specifically. Since this was the most effective kind, it was the one used more often than any other.

Sometimes instead of using box-flak the Germans would pick out one particular Group and pepper it all the way across the target. Because their range-finding equipment could tell them our Group's altitude and airspeed,

they were very accurate in knocking down a lot of our planes. This was called "tracking- flak" and was most effective when directed against one particular Group. It was used along the coast, in particular. When we were faced with this kind of flak, usually the next two or three of our Groups in line could pass over without getting shot at.

Since practically the whole Atlantic Coast of Europe was ringed with guns, there were only a few places where we could pass over safely. Some of those German anti-aircraft crews along the coast were really hot; they never wasted a shell. Of course, they had had actual practice every day for a couple of years.

Sometimes we would see red flak, sometimes green--and even blue, once. We were never able to figure out what the colors meant. They must have been a signal of some sort to their own fighters or other flak crews. Our fighters were deathly afraid of flak and you couldn't blame them. One little piece of it in their single engine would bring them down. Because we didn't have to worry about speed in our big bombers, we could put in more armor plate than they could afford to use. They would accompany us all the way to the edge of the flak, then after leaving us to go around it, they would pick us up again on the other side. We used to kid them about that, and they would retaliate by calling us "nothing but flying targets."

In World War I the fighter pilots had the hard time, and the bomber pilots had it easy. But in World War II it was just the reverse. I knew of fighter pilots in the European Theatre of Operations who put in their whole tour of combat without ever seeing an enemy fighter. They flew the P-51s who escorted our bombers. The P-47s and other fighter-bomber planes saw plenty of action and took terrible beating as they afforded close Infantry and Tank support to our troops on the ground.

September 11, 1944, was a dark day for the Hundredth. We lost 14 ships to enemy fighters. For several prior missions, instead of sending out the usual 18 planes in a Group, we sent out only 14 at a time, but sent them more often. This time the entire Group of 14 had been lost--every ship. This was the third time we had lost many ships on one mission, and was responsible in part for our being called the "Bloody Hundredth." But they didn't go down in vain. On that day our Group shot down 175 enemy fighters. Luckily, our crew missed this mission; we were on pass to London. It was a terrible experience the next day to walk into our almost empty barracks. If it hadn't been for the pass, we probably would have been with them.

We had what we called "scavengers"... or "buzzards" in our Group. These fellows used to hang around the Operations Office to hear which crews

went down on the mission that day. Or, if they had gone on the mission themselves, they would rush out of briefing as soon as they could--up to the barracks of the deceased--to get first chance at his personal belongings before the supply officer could send them home. They would take things like his pistol, electric razor, radio, or bicycle. Only money was considered "verboden". I had an agreement with Tex that I would get his pistol if he should happen to be killed. It was a personal, sleek, western-style 38 with a honey of a holster that I loved. But, of course, I didn't want to get it under the necessary circumstances. This wasn't always the case: for instance if one person owed another a large poker debt, sometimes he would just as soon that person didn't come back. You couldn't borrow money under any circumstances around there. Too many fellows had lent someone a large amount of money, only to have him get shot down the next day before he could pay it back.

It wasn't all work and no play at the Hundredth. Beside our passes to town and our flak leave, there were dances at both the Officers' Club and Enlisted Men's Club every weekend. We would send out trucks for miles around the countryside to pick up the girls who wanted to come, and it seemed as if they all did. To my knowledge, none of these affairs ever ran out of Scotch or beer; we always had all we wanted. As a result, at the end of the evening there was usually a fight or two--and some would start breaking up furniture--or have a bicycle race around the dance floor. The condition most of the participants were in resulted in a crash at almost every corner of the room. Lots of excitement. Another favorite pastime was to race around the "perimeter" outside in swiped Jeeps. The perimeter was a paved taxiway connecting all ends of the runways and was the closest thing to a race track you could find anywhere.

A lot of horseplay went on around the barracks, as you can imagine. At night instead of turning out the lights with the switches, we would shoot them out with our 45s. Naturally it didn't take long before a stop was put to this game; we were running out of light bulbs. Our barracks were on the side of a hill, overlooking the Officers' Mess Hall--a large quonset hut--which was in a small valley about a half-mile away. After it was filled for the evening meal we would bounce slugs from our 45s off the tin roof, and the resulting noise from the ricocheting would send everyone pouring out of the mess hall. We thought that was hilarious.

Matches were scarce in England, so everyone carried a lighter, which necessitated keeping a jar of 100 octane gasoline in the barracks to use as fluid. It also came in handy to set other people's barracks on fire. Near the

ceiling, in the wall between our part of the barracks and the part at the other end of the building were two large air-vents. A perfect location for making small bonfires on which we would throw gasoline so that a flame would come shooting out on the other side of the wall. We kept up a running feud with our neighbors through these air holes. Sometimes we would shoot out their lights through them, in which case we would have to barricade our doors and windows to keep our light bulbs from being stolen in return. It was also necessary to keep the holes plugged up to prevent being shot back at. At night we would drop flares down their chimney into their stove, or throw gasoline on their floor and set it on fire. It was a miracle no one got seriously hurt; we played rough. But we thought we had a great time.

The bar in the Officers' Club was beautiful--circular, and in the center of the room. Made of double glass brick, it contained plants which grew up inside. The enlisted men's bar was just as nice, but sometimes Tex, Bywaters, Schmidty and I would go to a neighboring pub for variety. For the English, the pub is the center of family activity, and you can find one at almost every crossroad. The customers sit around gossiping with their neighbors, sipping "haf and haf" or "mild and bitters," with the everpresent dart game going on in a back corner of the room.

While I was stationed in England, The Hundredth celebrated its 200th mission since its arrival. That called for a big party--a huge celebration which lasted three days. During this time we were "stood down", which meant no missions. We chartered a special train to go to London to pick up 1000 girls, who were all tested for venereal disease when they arrived at the base. Those who tested positive were of course sent home that same day. Special barracks guarded by MPs were set up for the girls, but most of them didn't sleep there. When I left the base two weeks later the MPs were still trying to get rid of the last ones from the barracks. One fellow in our barracks had hung a blanket across one corner of the room to provide night-time privacy for his girl. To her credit--the first and only time our quarters got cleaned was when she did it. After a night of pretty heavy drinking, her boyfriend crawled into the wrong bed--with another one of the guys--and let out a screech that must have woke the whole base. You couldn't blame the girls for making the most of our inviting them out to the base; It was the first time they had all the good food they wanted to eat in three or four years.

At our 200-mission party, neighboring English civilians were invited to join us--and eat and drink all they wanted, free. Everything was free: beside food, a carnival for the kids, ice cream and cokes, and airplane rides for anyone who wanted them. Three bands kept three dances going nightly. General

Doolittle, the 8th Air Force Commander, and other dignitaries were issued special invitations and gave speeches, but no one was able--or cared--to pay much attention to them because of the noise and general levity. It was a great party and served to confirm the opinion of the locals that we were truly "crazy Americans."

I had only two more missions to go. Number thirty-four was another shuttle to Russia. We received orders issued from the Canadian Conference between Roosevelt and Stalin to drop supplies to General Borr and his beleaguered Poles in Warsaw. Our first instructions ordered us to go in really low, as we did when we dropped to the French. But, over Warsaw, that would have meant suicide. The Germans controlled the city, and the flack guns they had available were as many as at Berlin. Finally a compromise was reached between the 8th Air Force and the Canadian Conference; we would go in at 14,000 feet. This was still low, but it was as high as we dared to go to maintain any accuracy with the dropping of the the supply parachutes. As it turned out, the mission was a flop. Warsaw was as spread out as Los Angeles, and our target was a railroad station in the center of the city. Our low altitude made it possible for us to get shot up pretty badly before we even got there. They shot everything at us: real light stuff, close support antiaircraft, as well as 88s and 105s. As usual, our fighters wouldn't come in because of the flak, but, again, we were lucky because the Germans concentrated on the Groups behind us. The enemy lost a lot of planes. One of their 109s broke through our formation, passing close to our nose, and one of us got him. We couldn't tell whether it was one of the gunners from our ship or someone from another ship. According to General Borr's account of the mission which I later read in his book, he could only see what was happening directly overhead, through a hole in his dugout. Most of the supplies were dropped too soon, and the Germans probably got more of the supplies than the Poles did.

From then on it was an uneventful trip into Russia escorted by Russian Yaks and Stormovicks. They took great pleasure in showing off to us. As we landed in Mirograd again, I was reminded of our last landing there, with only ten minutes of gas left--about 50 gallons from the 2780 that we began the mission with. This time we had plenty, and the Group didn't lose a single ship that day. We stayed in Russia only that night, just long enough to get a bottle of Russian Champagne, some Russian money, and a drink of vodka.

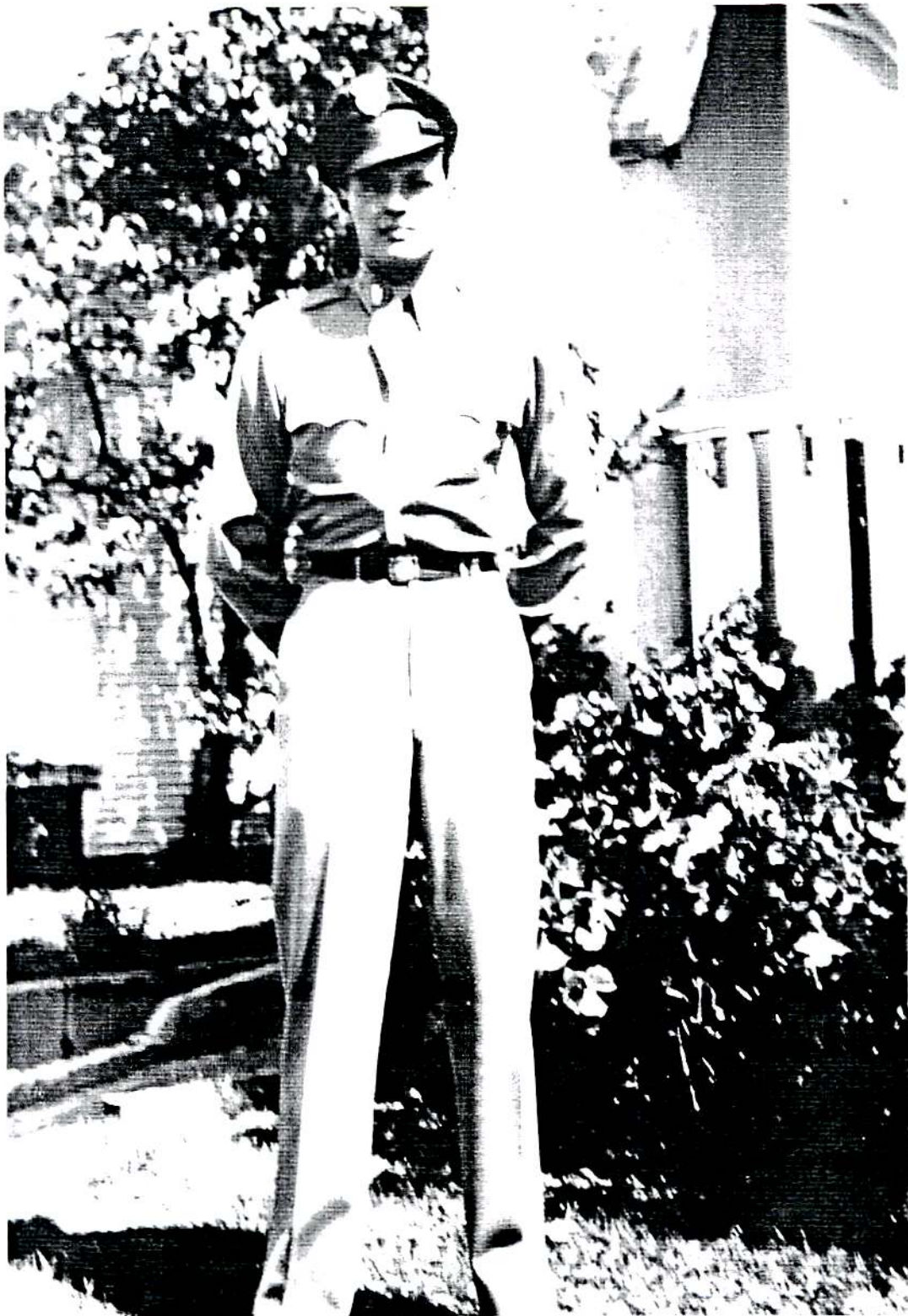
Next, September 19, 1944, was the mission we had been waiting for: Number Thirty-Five. The target was picked by the Russians, a marshaling yard in Romania. No flak, no fighters--and I think we missed the target. After landing in Italy, we gratefully drank the Russian Champagne to celebrate completing our last mission.

On September 22, we took off for England independently, our only objective being to enjoy the pleasant airplane ride over Allied territory at a low altitude. The rest of the Group went on a combat mission to Germany that day. Without us, we were happy to note. We had done our job 35 times and were on our way back to England.

Back at Thorpe Abbots we spent a few days checking out--then on to Stone for a couple of weeks waiting to board the Queen Mary: destination New York. During the six-day trip I made \$600 playing poker, which I promptly spent during three days of being AWOL in New York. When I reported into Fort Dix, I found I had forfeited my plane flight as a result of my unauthorized leave and had to endure a seven-day train ride to Monterey, California.

Further punishment included being made "car commander" of the railroad car that I was assigned to. I had to see that the car was kept clean, and oversee about 40 combat veterans, mostly enlisted men. This was no easy task. The train had no "track priority," which meant we were often shuttled off to a siding to allow other trains to pass. If this siding happened to be near a railroad station, everyone would run into the station--or to a nearby store--and buy the place out. When the track was clear, the engineer would blow two long blasts of the whistle and almost everyone would run back to the train. Some would choose not to make it back--deciding that the war was over for them. When we reached Monterey, I was short six men.

I had been overseas just six months, seeing as much combat as the average ground soldier saw in a year and-a-half. I was being sent home for a rest, but faced with the prospect of reassignment to the Pacific Theatre to fly B-29s, I didn't waste much time resting. Fortunately, before I could be assigned to my next tour of duty, the war in the South Pacific started to wind down. While everyone was preparing for a land invasion of Japan, the A-Bomb was dropped, relieving the United States of the necessity of invading, and avoiding many possible casualties. My remaining obligation to the United States, as far as Japan was concerned, was wiped out, eliminating for me the possibility of becoming one of those casualties. I was glad I was through tempting fate. Thirty-five times was enough.



1st Lieutenant Keith Lamb home in Sacramento after 35 combat missions

Sacramentan Brings Plane In Twice With Engines Missing

Three times out of 35 missions First Lieutenant Keith Lamb of Sacramento brought his battered Flying Fortress home with either one or two engines missing. Once, said Lieutenant Lamb, now home on leave, it was "doubtful" whether his fortress would get back.

"We had thrown everything we could out and prepared to abandon the plane in the North Sea," he recalled, "but we managed to nurse it along and finally land at an emergency field along the English coast."



Lieut. Lamb

On that raid two of the engines were out, one being hit by flak just over the target and the other knocked out by fighter planes on the trip back.

The Sacramentan numbers among his experiences participation in the first shuttle raid from England to Russia, then to Italy and back to England. He remembers with pleasure the reception accorded American airmen by the Russian people.

Lieutenant Lamb said he believes missions over Germany are becoming tougher now that the enemy's defenses have been drawn in closer.

"There now appears to be a greater concentration of anti aircraft guns and the flak is sure plenty thick," Lieutenant Lamb asserted.

Lieutenant Lamb has had experiences with the robot bombs and he declares they cause a lot of nuisance as well as a great deal of damage. The bombs, Lamb stated, landed quite frequently near where he was stationed.

The Sacramentan, son of Mr. and Mrs. L. M. Lamb of 1415 Twenty First Street, has the distinguished flying cross, the air medal with four clusters, a presidential citation, and three battle stars in addition to campaign ribbons.

Lamb went overseas in April. He secured his commission last December. During his Grant Union High School days the lieutenant played on the basketball five. He attended the Sacramento College in 1940 and 1941.

*Sacramento Bee
Article
November, 1944*

AFTERWORD: 1994

After returning to the United States, before I was finally discharged, I attended Instructors' School at Stockton, California, after which I was assigned as an instructor in AT-17 Advanced Trainers. Being stationed at Stockton was a break for me, as it was close enough to Sacramento that I could go home every weekend. During this time I met a classmate from Junior College days who I had known only slightly before: Marian Doyle, a Sacramento girl, who was working as a graphic artist, in advertising, after receiving her degree from UCLA. We were married at Long Beach in June, 1945.

When I was discharged, in November, 1945--four and a half years after my induction--we returned to Sacramento, where I started back to college on the GI Bill of Rights. After finishing my undergraduate work, I continued at the University of San Francisco College of Law, where I earned my LLB and JD. The day I received my law degree was another of the most memorable days of my life, ranking right up there with the day I was awarded my pilot's wings at Brooks Field some seven years previously. Then, I had been successful at becoming a pilot; now I was a lawyer, just as I had always hoped to be. I had briefly considered continuing flying by becoming an airline pilot--and was offered the opportunity--but chose the Law. I did receive my commercial pilot's license, though, because of my wartime experience flying the B-17s.

I rejoined the California National Guard, serving first on flying status, and then as Commander of both Artillery and Infantry Units. I also served as State Director of Selective Service for a number of years. At the time of my retirement I had attained the rank of Brigadier General, with more than forty years of military service.

During this time I was a practicing attorney in Sacramento, first as Public Defender, and then as a partner in my own law firm, where I practiced general law and litigation. I have been retired for several years as I write this, in 1994.

Marian and I have two grown children, Christine and Scott, and three grandchildren, Alison, Zachary, and Kevin, who are looking forward to seeing this book in print.



*Brigadier General Keith Lamb, 1994,
in front of a B-17G on display at the Napa, California airport*