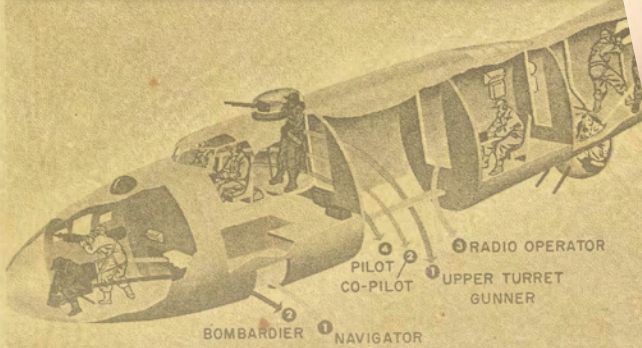
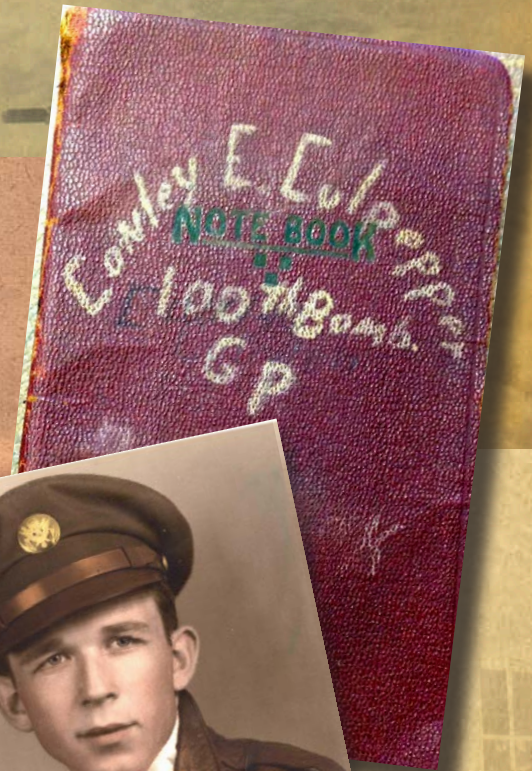




THE STRIPES
 100th Anniversary of U.S. Armed Forces
 1917-1945

SOME WAR STORIES TOLD IN SHORT, CONTROLLED BURSTS.



Procedure When Wearing Conventional Seat or Back

When an emergency develops in the air and it becomes necessary to bail out of your airplane, there is no time for confusion or second guessing. The procedure must be automatic. The instructions below and the diagram show through what holes and in what order crew members should make their exit. Ground drills based on this procedure will help you obtain the maximum PILOT—Exit from the forward end of the bomb bay. (Alternate exit is from entrance door.) NAVIGATOR—Exit from the forward end of the bomb bay. CO-PILOT—Exit from the rear of the bomb bay. BOMBARDIER—Exit from the rear of the bomb bay. UPPER TURRET GUNNER—Exit from the forward end of the bomb bay.

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“... They taught us to fire in short, controlled bursts [in gunnery school] so we'd learn how to conserve our ammo for when we'd really need it. In fact, that's pretty much how we all learned to live our lives - in these short, controlled bursts. ...”

- Conley E. Culpepper

"The fighters are our salvation
but the bombers alone provide
the means of victory."

- Winston Churchill

Dedicated to the memory of Conley E. Culpepper, and in honor of his service to his country during World War II alongside James C. Adair, Milton Brucker, Michael D. Dalgarn, Benjamin J. Goddard, James E. Hendrix, James H. Horny, DeWitt P. Meley and Elmer G. Wesala – and the thousands of other brave men of the 100th Bomb Group.



"Adair's Crew" stuck together through 35 combat missions. (kneeling L-R): Ben Goddard, navigator; Jim Horny, flight engineer/gunner; Milton Brucker, bombardier; (standing) Mike Dalgarn, tail-gunner; Conley Culpepper, flight engineer/gunner; Jim Hendrix, ball-turret gunner; Jim Adair, pilot; Elmer Wesala, co-pilot; and DeWitt "Barney" Meley, radio-operator/gunner. Photo from Culpepper's collection.

Compiled by C.C. ("Chip") Culpepper over many years, and originally shared only with family during Christmas 2013. This third edition, with substantial updates and additional information from Adair, Brucker, Dalgarn, Goddard, Hendrix, Horny, Meley and Wesala family sources was prepared for the 100th Bomb Group Reunion of October 2017 held near Washington, D.C.

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As it turns out, that little book was a big key to unlocking pieces of a largely 40-year silence about Dad's personal experiences in World War II. Unknowingly, I was holding his personal notebook from the time he'd spent as a flight engineer/gunner aboard a Boeing B-17G "Flying Fortress." In that notebook, among names, addresses and autographs of family, friends and acquaintances, he'd also scribbled down entries about each of his 35 successful combat missions over Nazi-held Europe while serving in the 349th Squadron of the 100th Bomb Group in the famous 8th Army Air Force. The handwritten notes included dates, the day's target and an occasional personal note about a particular mission.

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After that day, Dad often spoke with me about his time in the service. I was interested and asked a lot of questions, and maybe enough time had passed that he was able to share from a bin of comfortable topics – and maybe a few less-comfortable ones as well. Perhaps he thought I was old enough to hear them. Maybe it was because I was exactly the same age as he'd been when the war found him. Then again, maybe he was just finally ready to talk more openly.

It never failed to amaze me how he could recount an entire mission as if it had happened only days before. He would laugh about various crewmembers' exploits and personalities. He told me bluntly of his nightmares that *always* seemed to involve a place called "Merseburg" or

Eventually, after graduating college, and particularly after Dad's first heart attack, I started keeping notes about those conversations. I've *finally* collected them in this document, the best I can. I'm truly sorry (and more than a little embarrassed) that it took so long. I don't have any excuses.

Most of our talks about the war, or his crew, his training, or the planes he flew in were brief chats that bounced around from one story to another. Once I had a video camera, and even later on, convinced a reporter/friend to actually

interview Dad and a couple of other men from his crew for a feature news story. Like most veterans, they ended up telling a stranger some stories they likely hadn't told their own families.

What follows are those notes, transcribed letters, newspaper articles and other documents related to Dad's service, as well as recaps and snippets of conversations had or overheard with him or fellow crewmen together and separately. I've tried to capture them as accurately as either my notes or recollections possibly could. Also a few stories have been paraphrased, but all have been organized by topic with additional research included to add some context.

I was privileged to meet three other members of Dad's flight crew. The first I can recall was Milton Brucker, the bombardier. Brucker brought his wife and daughter (and the coolest boat I had ever seen) to our house and we all went skiing and swimming at Lake Ouachita when I was not yet in my teens – too young to ask him anything about the war. I became reacquainted with Brucker at a 1993 reunion of the 100th Bomb Group in Little Rock. By then I was old enough to speak with him about the war. He was remarkably candid in his responses.

Also attending that reunion was Jim Adair, the crew's distinguished pilot. He was also its final survivor. In the months leading up to that reunion and for several years afterward, Adair and I corresponded and spoke on the phone quite a number of times. He attended Dad's funeral in 2000. My brother "Chuck" also had the opportunity of knowing both Brucker and Adair quite well, and visited with them both near Houston at Adair's home a few times over the years.

Doing some initial research about Dad's unit before the reunion, I compiled a large photo album for him to take to that event. Those photos sparked a few more stories. Using those photos, newspapers, Dad's notebook, and several other documents from Adair, I also made some small hardbound books titled *35 Days Over Germany* for Dad and his remaining crewmembers as keepsakes of their reunion. Both Adair and Brucker signed my copy there – I can't say why I didn't ask Dad to sign it then, too. I've long regretted that oversight. Years later, Dad used that photo album and his copy of the book when he was asked to speak to different history classes as a guest at Fountain Lake High School, and shared them with his Sunday School classes at Owensville Baptist Church. It seems that toward the end of his life, he had finally become comfortable enough to share his story and perspectives of the war with others – particularly young people.



"Huckleberry"

It was at the time of Dad's death that I had a single brief conversation by phone with Mike Dalgarn, the crew's tail-gunner. Adair gave me Dalgarn's number and I called to inform him of Dad's passing. He appreciated the call, and said, "Your father was a good man. I hate to hear he's gone. We didn't really stay in touch all that much, and I *don't know why*, except that we all probably tried pretty hard to forget the war. I'll always remember him as a good, *good* man. We all counted on him. ..."

The only other crewmember I ever had the chance to meet in person was DeWitt "Barney" Meley. Unlike Adair and Brucker, who were officers, Meley was a "noncom," a sergeant like Dad. Meley was the crew's radio operator and he was also Dad's closest wartime friend. He was quite a character and made Dad laugh a lot which, needless to say, made me like him, too.

Meley showed up at the house – again, while I was in high school – though I'm not sure if that was before or after the red notebook turned up. Seems that

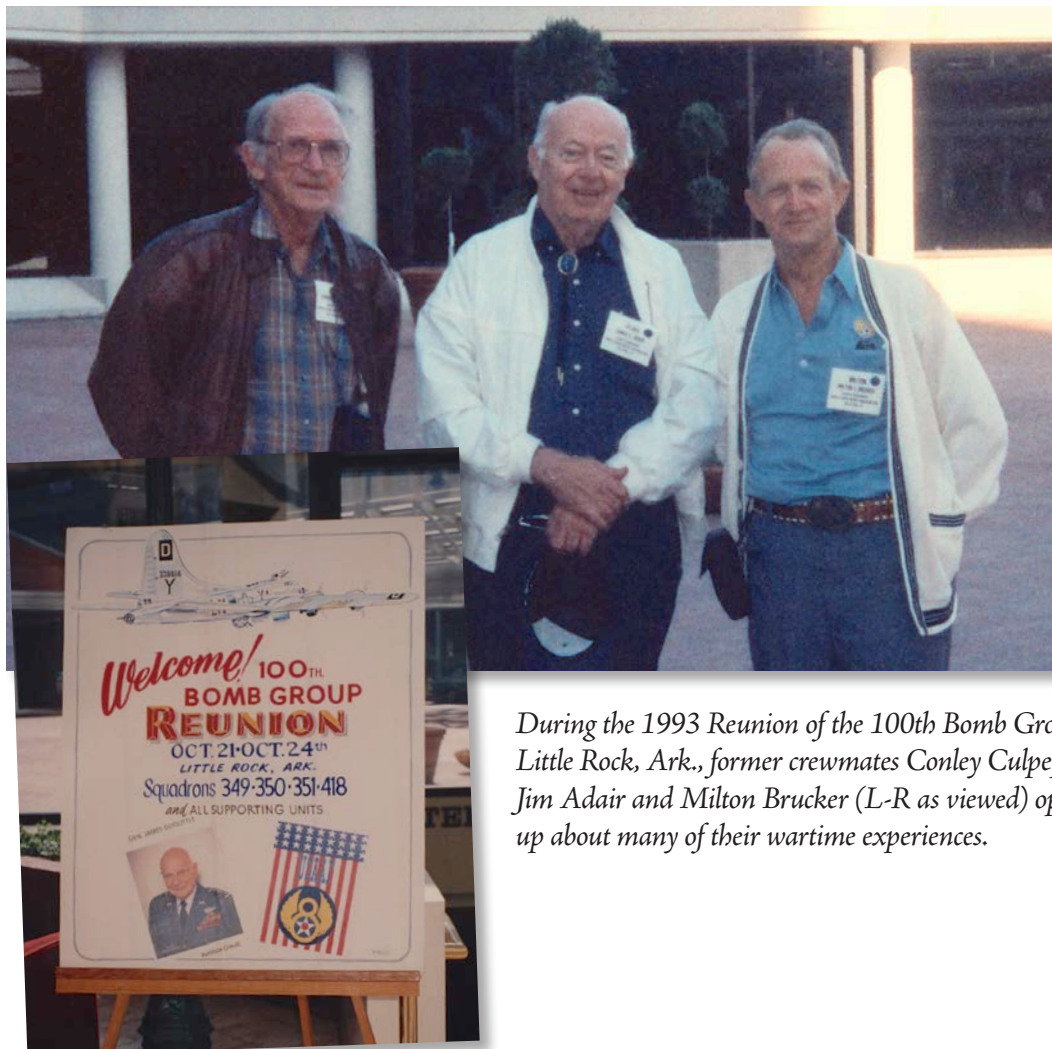
Dad wasn't really expecting him. He teasingly referred to Dad as "Huckleberry" – Mark Twain's ultimate country boy – much to Dad's discomfort.

Meley passed along this anecdote that I wrote down a few years later:

"Your Dad was quite a prize back then. We drew straws just to see who'd get to pair up with him on the ground if we ever had to bail out. See, we all figured if anybody could live off the land inside hostile territory long enough to make it out, it'd be Huckleberry." He then stuck out his chest and proudly claimed, "I won that rascal. I drew the winning straw! Of course, we never did get shot down. But *we sure came close* a time or two."

In 1993, Meley shared his intentions to come to the reunion in Little Rock, but wasn't up to the trip when the time came. Dad was genuinely disappointed his old buddy couldn't make it.

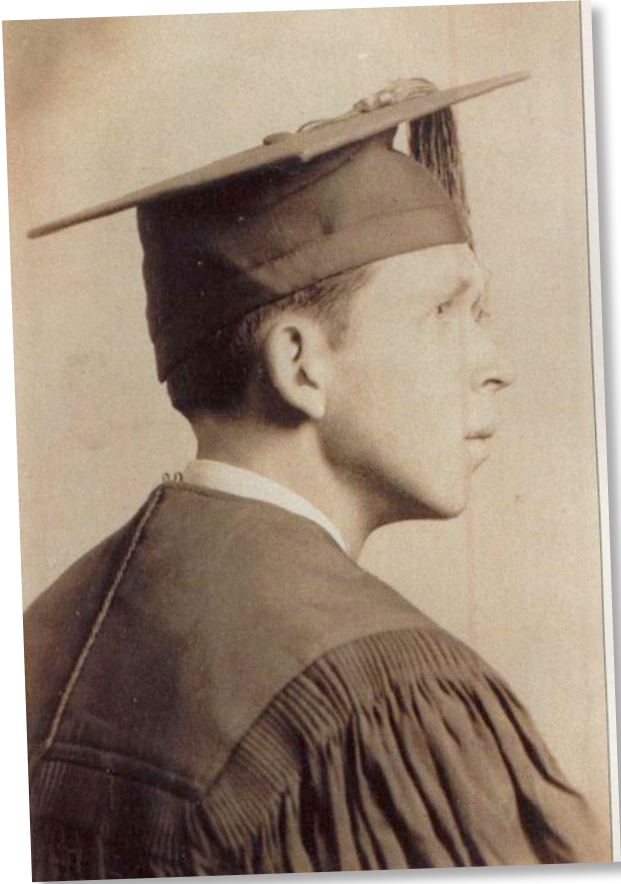
It was a couple of years later that I designed a cedar box to display Dad's uniform, and went to the house to work on it one weekend. (Dad *thought* I was building something for Karen, my wife, so he helped me with it – even though I tried to keep him from doing so – and frankly, he was *pretty put out* with me when I ended up giving it to him.) While we were in the woodshop, he told me that he'd been thinking a lot about Meley the previous few days; he said he hadn't been able to get Meley off his mind. I told Dad he should call, and kidded him that Meley would probably like to hear from his "ol' buddy Huck." When we took a break for lunch, Dad made the phone call to Illinois. Bev Meley answered, and in tears, grateful for his call, let Dad know Barney had been in a coma. He died a short time later. I like to think Dad's old radioman was still sending messages to his best buddy.



During the 1993 Reunion of the 100th Bomb Group in Little Rock, Ark., former crewmates Conley Culpepper, Jim Adair and Milton Brucker (L-R as viewed) opened up about many of their wartime experiences.

Before going to war:

Conley Culpepper was a senior at Sheridan High School in December 1941 when Pearl Harbor was attacked. He remembered the superintendent playing President Roosevelt's defining "date that will live in infamy" radio address over the school's intercom on Monday, December 8. He and the other schoolboys soberly sat in classrooms and understood war was headed their way.



Conley E. Culpepper, Sheridan High School, Class of 1942

The next spring, his cap-and-gown graduation photograph was shot as a distinctive profile due to the fact he was wearing a bandage over his left eye following a car wreck. That photo carries a rubber-stamped date on its back: April 13, 1942. On that very date, he was also sent a postcard and graduation gift from his friend Tom Senyard. (Two years before that, Tom had insisted that Conley accompany him to a "sissy party" in exchange for an agreement to go hunting at a later date. It was at that party that Conley met Mom, Miss Delphia Ashley).

When I interviewed both Mom and Dad to write up their 50th wedding anniversary program in 1995, he told me all about Tom Senyard, and also that after graduating from Sheridan High School: "Oscar [Conley's older brother] had got me on at the [Pine Bluff] Arsenal where he was working. I'd been working as a mechanic at the old Grider Field [also in Pine Bluff] where the Army was training up pilots for the war. ... I liked working on the airplanes. It was something I felt I was good at, had a knack for."

He volunteered for the Army Air Corps on June 3, 1943, after receiving his draft notice.

According to a U.S. War Department furlough dated June 14, 1943, Conley had been employed as a Grade-7 Chemical Plant Worker at the Arsenal earning 68 cents an hour. He was granted the furlough to enter active military service. Classified as a "vital defense worker," he could have just as easily had his draft deferred and sat out the war employed at the Arsenal instead.

Conley applied for his National Service Life Insurance policy at Camp J.T. Robinson, near Little Rock, Ark. The \$6.50 in premiums he agreed to have deducted from his monthly pay would provide \$10,000 to his mother and another \$10,000 to his father in the event of his death.

In a letter dated January 1, 1944, Grant County Judge John R. Mathews, W.L. Crutchfield, the county/circuit clerk, and Dr. O.R. Kelly attested:

"... Conley Edward Culpepper, formerly of this place, but now in the United States Air Corps ... [is] honest, conscientious and trustworthy ... and that his loyalty to his country is unquestioned by those who know him ... and sure that he will make good in any assignment that is given him ... and will make good if given a chance. ..."

On training:

As a child during the Depression, Conley split his time (and later school years) between Pine Bluff where his father was a city police officer, and the family farm outside of Sheridan, but even so, when it came time to go away for basic training at Amarillo Army Air Field in Texas, reality dawned upon him:



*"Expert" Marksmanship
Badge earned at Amarillo
Army Air Field, Amarillo,
Texas*

"... I'd probably never been more than 50 miles or so from home before that. I'd say I got pretty homesick."

"... I was sent out to Amarillo, Texas, where the Army had a school for airplane mechanics. ... I'd never really seen much snow before then, and I guess I didn't know what it was really like to be cold in my life before getting out to Amarillo."

He spoke of the challenges of learning the B-17's various systems: "It was a mechanical marvel. Had better than 16,000 moving parts. ... At first, I couldn't believe how complicated it all was. But I got to know her pretty well, though. Mechanics. Hydraulics. Electrical. You name it."

Then came a tale of his unusual selection criteria for aerial gunnery school as he finished up in Amarillo:

"The sergeant came in and yelled, 'All you Southern boys and farm boys line up over here.' And then, 'All you city boys go line up over there.' They took our names down. As it ended up, us country boys had all just been 'volunteered' for aerial gunnery school. We pretty much all looked and sounded exactly alike. ... Somebody probably figured we already knew about guns and how to shoot birds on the wing and such, so they didn't have to teach us all that much about leading our targets. When you think about it, that was actually pretty smart, *especially for the Army*. The city boys, well, some couldn't jump a ditch without finding water. Most of 'em went on to ground crews, as chiefs, mechanics or armorers. Those fellas all had a long war. They were on bases for the duration. Those who got to fly, well, at least we knew there was a chance we might could get home sooner. That is, if we lived long enough. ..."



*Images from Amarillo, Texas,
where Conley (at left) attended
both basic training and
airplane mechanics school*



Aircraft mechanic's tab



Conley's aerial gunnery school was at Kingman, Arizona, starting in April 1944:

"That part I actually enjoyed. Was already a good shot, but had never flown before that in my life. Had always wanted to but never had been up in an airplane. We flew in T-6s [single-engine trainer aircraft] modified with turrets at the back of the cockpit. Depended on the plane, but they had either .50s or .30-cals [machine guns] mounted in 'em. ... Another plane towed a target, and we just got to shoot that sucker up. It was actually pretty fun; wasn't all that hard to do; it was *different* – and

they warned you to be careful so as not to shoot off parts of your own plane. ... They taught us to fire in short, controlled bursts so we'd learn how to conserve our ammo for when we'd *really* need it. In fact, that's pretty much how we all learned to live our lives – in these short, controlled bursts. ..."

According to his Personal Flight Record, Conley had eight flights with the sum total of 15 hours and 10 minutes of actual flying time while at Kingman Army Air Field undergoing what was called flexible gunnery training:

"Boy, I'll tell you what, we were *all* proud of those [aerial-gunner's] wings.

We'd earned 'em. I admit I stood a little taller and my chest probably puffed out *just a little bit* with those pinned on."



Laughing at photos of himself in shorts and t-shirt at Kingman Army Air Field, and

weighing in at maybe 130-140 pounds at the time:

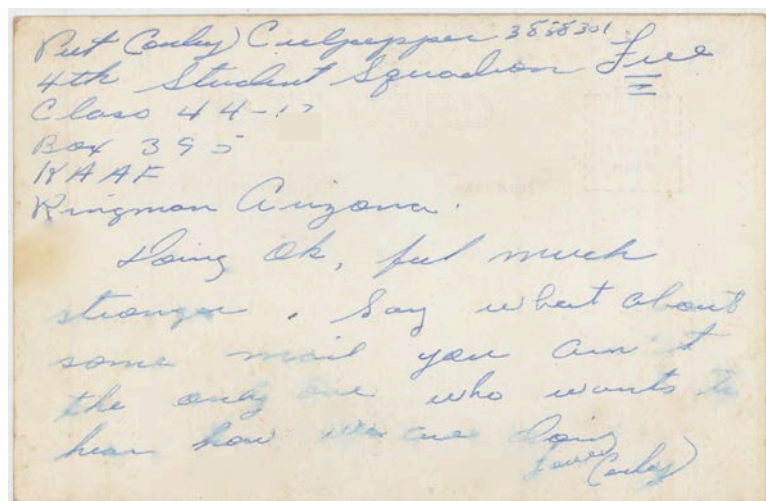
"I had the habit of getting a milkshake just about anytime the chow hall was open. You can see I was *fairly* skinny, and figured that might just put some meat on me. Never did, but I sure kept trying. I think all you boys might could relate to that."



Conley's t-shirt bears the logo of Kingman Army Air Field

Kingman was not all fun and games for Conley, however. He (and many other airmen there) contracted Scarlet Fever, and he was quarantined for several weeks in the base hospital, and from all accounts, was quite sick. The following is the transcript of an undated, unaddressed handwritten postcard Conley sent from Arizona. It must have been mailed inside another letter:

"Doing OK, feel much stronger. Say what about some mail you ain't the only one who wants to hear how we are doing.
Love Conley"



After gunnery school in Arizona, Conley was sent to Sioux City, Iowa, for his B-17 crew training, flying aboard Fortresses for the first time:

"That very first flight with a full crew, that was the *first* and *only* time I ever got airsick in my life. Guess I got pretty lucky I wasn't stuck with a nickname right then and there that I'd have to live with for a while. ..." (It could've been *much* worse than "Huckleberry")

"... We were sort of all thrown in together. There were some guys there I'd trained with and recognized [basic training, aircraft mechanics or aerial-gunnery classmates], but we were on different crews. ... James K. Roberts and I ended up pal'n around for the most part. ... [We were] the same age on the same crew and bunked in the barracks together and had our meals. ..."

"There were accidents. Sure. Things happened and people got hurt; planes crashed, and not just at our base. I heard about one [B-17] crashed near to Sheridan [Ark.]. ... You should know that men died just *training* for war. ... While I was there [Sioux City], there was one crashed – burned up – and those poor guys never had a chance to get out. We flew and you saw the big burnt, scorched place where they'd hit. That's a terrible thing to see and to know had happened. It was hard to think about that back then, but you did. You sure did. Saw a lot more of that sort of thing later on. ..."

In a letter Conley wrote at Sioux City dated June 2, 1944, he described that training accident:

"... Did you hear about the crash we had? It was all that was on the radio around here for two days. The fellows that went down happened to sleep across the isle (*sic*) from me. There was only one of the crew that was left behind because of a cold and now you should see him. I think he will have to quit the business. ..."

On May 17, 1944, at Sioux City, Conley completed and signed his official "Form A" Army-issued *Last Will and Testament* that named his father as his executor and both parents as his beneficiaries.

He spent May-August 1944 training with his *original* crew. With these men, he earned his aircrew member wings.



One out of a dozen similar postcards from Kingman, Arizona, in Culpepper's collection

Crew #5529 at Sioux City:

2 Lt Carl J. Klenke
2 Lt Edward W. Aubuchon Jr. (later served as pilot in 100th Bomb Group)
2 Lt Adrian H. Siereveld
Sgt Clarence O. Storm
Cpl Dayan C. Adsit
Cpl Conley E. Culpepper (later served as flight engineer/gunner in 100th Bomb Group)
Cpl James K. Roberts (later served as radio operator/gunner in 100th Bomb Group)
Pfc Harry H. Barber
Pfc Herbert R. Petty

On deployment:

After completion of the final-training phase, Conley's crew, commanded Lt. Carl Klenke, was set to deploy overseas. The crewmen were all given seven-day passes to go home to say their good byes. Upon returning back to Sioux City, Conley and the rest of Klenke's crew were stunned by news they were given. In a letter dated July 28, 1944, from Sioux City, Conley explained to his hometown sweetheart, Delphia Ashley:

"... During the 7 days home, things have happened to our crew. The skipper [Klenke] had an operation and was unable to take us out, so they have disbanded our outfit. The navigator [Siereveld] has left with another crew, and the rest of us have been pooled to be sent out later. Sure hate to leave the fellows go. There won't be a one of us who will be lucky enough to leave together. ..."

Conley, who trained as a top-turret gunner and engineer, was put into the "spare-gunners pool" along with the other gunners of Klenke's crew. Eventually, he was shipped –alone – to Lincoln Army Air Field at Lincoln, Nebraska. There, he was "thrown in" with another crew that was almost ready to go overseas. In a letter, sent from Lincoln, dated August 28, 1944, Conley wrote to Delphia that there he'd witnessed some trouble within Adair's crew:

"... our waist gunner and ball turret gunner just had a fight and that ain't good. ... (I was neutral in the hostilities). Sounds worse than a broken record. ..."

The new crew, commanded by Lt. James C. Adair was also assigned a brand-new B-17G to shuttle overseas, as Conley later recalled:

"... We flew up to New England somewhere – I forget the name of that place [Grenier Air Field, New Hampshire].

They had Fortresses and Liberators [B-17s and B-24s] from all over staging there, ready to make 'the hop' overseas. ... We flew to Newfoundland to Iceland to England. When we landed [in Wales Valley, Scotland], they took a picture of us – that's that '10-man crew' photo you've seen. ..."

Pilot Adair, in a 1996 letter, dated the photo's origin to Lincoln, Nebraska, just prior to leaving the U.S. In either case, it's the only photo that shows all 10 men who made the hop together.



The "10-man Crew" included Glenn Babcock at bottom left. Photo from Culpepper collection.

By late 1944, the Army Air Force had refined the protective formations B-17s were flying, and long-range fighter escorts for the bombers had altered defensive tactics. Because of these developments, and weight considerations in order to carry more ordnance, one of the two waist-gunner positions had been eliminated, which dropped the crew count from 10 to 9. This was also a necessity as men were still being lost in combat, and replacement gunners were in great demand.

Conley finished his 'hop' story:

"... After we got to England, Adair says to me: 'The crew voted. We'd like for you to stay with us.' But what I *didn't* know was that also meant that another man on the crew had been voted out. So, there I was taking the spot of a guy on what ended up being a lucky crew – a crew that got to go home. ..."

In time it became clear to me that Conley quietly carried an enormous burden of guilt about this episode for the rest of his life.

Once, I rather absently asked him the name of the “10th man” from Adair’s original crew. Without hesitating, he answered: “Glenn Babcock.” He didn’t even pause to think about it. The man’s name remained top-of-mind to him decades later. Dad’s body language changed instantly. His discomfort was evident.

It dawned on me right then that neither Conley nor his crewmembers *ever knew* what had happened to young Babcock, if he had lived or died. Unfortunately, I was never been able to locate anything about him during Dad’s lifetime. Conley felt profound guilt for bumping him off a “lucky crew” even though he’d played no part in that decision.

The men who voted to keep Conley aboard most likely felt the same guilt later in life. And although he never cast a ballot (or even knew a vote had been held until after it was over), Dad was positively haunted by the idea of Glenn Babcock’s death.

The episode from Conley’s letter, in which he’d described the “fight” between two men on Adair’s crew, may help explain the group’s decision. Babcock was the waistgunner and James E. Hendrix, the ball turret gunner, who were involved in the fracas.

Only in early 2015, did I discover that Babcock went on to serve as a gunner aboard a B-25 bomber with the 310th Bomb Group, 428th Bomb Squadron, flying his missions out of Corsica. He served with distinction and amassed more than 50 combat missions – and survived the war. I was also able to confirm that Dad’s old friend and training mate James K. Roberts ended up as a radioman in Conley’s very own 100th Bomb Group on yet *another* “lucky crew” that completed its allotment of 35-missions. One other member of Conley’s original training crew also survived service in the “Bloody Hundredth.” An officer, Edward W. Aubuchon Jr., flew 13 missions as a pilot in the unit starting in February 1945 (just as Conley was winding up his tour of duty). So far, I’ve been unable to find what happened to the rest of Klenke’s crew that was broken up in Sioux City and dispersed among other units.

Adair’s logbook explains another, more practical benefit of keeping Conley, a second, highly trained aircraft engineer (along with James Horny) on board his aircraft:

“... September 1944, the crew was sent to Lincoln, Neb., to pick up a new B-17G. From Lincoln, flew to Syracuse, N.Y. to fuel, then onward to Grenier Field, N.H. From there, departed for Presque, Newfoundland. Had to return to Grenier Field after detecting a faulty fuel pump. Waited 8 days for a replacement to come in. ...”



100th Bomb Group (Heavy) Headquarters, Thorpe Abbots Airfield, winter 1944.
Photo from Culpepper collection.

Then with his original engineer – *and a spare* – aboard, Adair continued: “... Finally left September 12th for Goose Bay, Newfoundland (5 hour, 40 minute flight). Stayed overnight, left September 14th, flying to Meeks Field in Iceland (8 hr Flight). Stayed at Meeks Field overnight (nothing but C-rations for food). Left Iceland September 16th, heading for Wales (5 hours 40 minutes). ... Takeoff from Iceland was extremely hazardous due to

the strong cross winds and boulders along side of the runway, Very Scary!!! Had to take off at 70mph substantially less than usual take off speed ... Pilot told control tower of the dangers in that particular runway hoping there might be a better choice for future takeoffs. ..."

Conley's adoptive crew landed in Great Britain on September 16, 1944. They handed over their shiny new B-17G, with its even newer fuel pump that had just proved airworthy during a transatlantic trip with more than 19 hours spent flying.

On September 23, 1944, the crew, then pared down to nine, got their combat assignment. They were going to the 100th Bomb Group, dubbed the "Century Bombers," but more commonly known as "The Bloody Hundredth."

There is a legend that surrounds this unit. The story basically goes (in one version or another) that since the B-17 was the most advanced aircraft in the European theater, and since it carried a secret weapon: the Norden bombsight (popularly held to be accurate enough to drop a bomb into a "pickle barrel" from 20,000 feet), the Nazi high command wanted to capture an intact Fortress. That opportunity is said to have come when a badly damaged plane from the 100th Bomb Group, which had the group's distinctive "Square-D" insignia clearly painted on its tail and wingtips, couldn't keep up with the rest of its protective formation and dropped to a lower altitude. As Luftwaffe fighters swarmed in to finish it off, the B-17's pilot lowered his landing gear: The equivalent to raising a white flag of surrender. The German planes then pulled alongside to guide the captured Fortress to a German airstrip in order to claim their prize. As the altitude decreased, the B-17's engines slowly recovered and soon the pilot polled his crew to ask if they wished to spend the rest of the war as prisoners, or try to fight their way back to England alone. The crew voted to fight. The pilot raised his wheels. The B-17's gunners then trained their guns on the escorts and blew their German captors from the sky. It's been told and retold that this incident served to mark all Square-D planes for death: That Luftwaffe pilots would pass up other groups of bombers and concentrate their attacks without mercy on the planes of the 100th Bomb Group. Whether true or a work of fiction, the story was widespread by the time Conley reached the English countryside.

Conley summed up the crew's sentiments:

"We got assigned to the 'Bloody Hundredth,' which wasn't exactly welcome news. Men going out on the trains broke down because they were being sent to the Hundredth. It was pretty much known for some 'hard luck' [high losses of planes and crews]. Stories of fellas going AWOL rather than report. ... Meley said he had a feeling then, just *knew* it was all over for us. 'Course it wasn't."



Preflight checklist by pilot Jim Adair and ground crewman. Photo from Culpepper collection.

"We rode the train out to our base [Thorpe Abbots Air Station #139]. The stop was at a little village called Diss in [Norfolk] East Anglia, that 'bump' on England's east coast. ... There were guys on that train who were pale as sheets knowing where we were going."

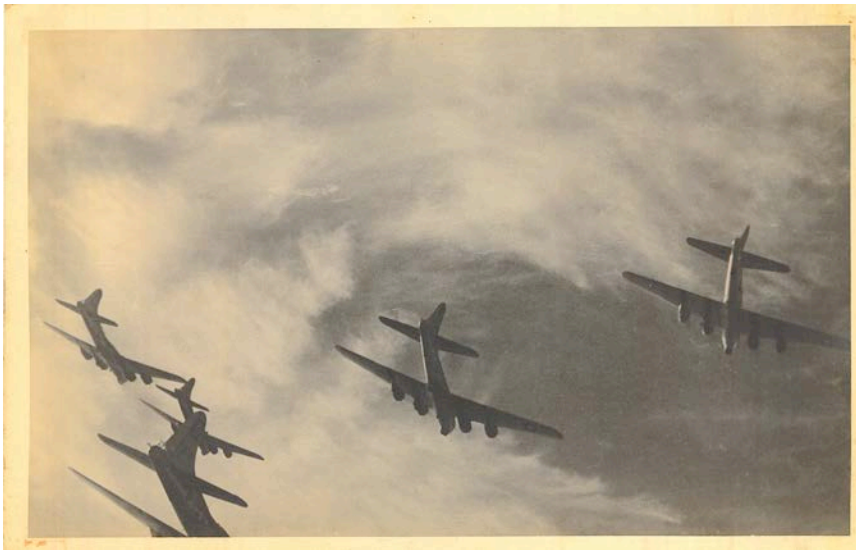
As for the aircraft Adair's crew shuttled over on their transatlantic flight, that brand new plane – B-17G 43-38480 – was assigned to the 493rd Bomb Group, and exactly two weeks after arriving in England, it was lost in combat on September 30, 1944. It was hit by large fragments of another B-17, and both planes crashed near Bielefeld, Germany. Eight men aboard #38480 were killed. The sole survivor was taken POW.

About Thorpe Abbots Army Air Field:

Today, outside of the small village of Diss, England, the control tower at Thorpe Abbots Air Field and a handful of buildings remain as some of the last intact reminders of the American bomber crews' presence. It is also the official home of the 100th Bomb Group Museum. It's a place that's on my personal "bucket list" of spots I hope to visit one day. I'd like to walk the grounds and listen to the echoes of that place.

An excerpt from Adair's log:

"... We boarded a train for Thorpe Abbots Air Base. Beginning October 5, 1944, Practice missions 30-minutes to 3-1/2hrs in length were scheduled. ..."



B-17 bombers in formation. Photo from Culpepper collection.

"... I've decided not to ever grow old. The very oldest of these English ride bicycles, so buy a bike and stay young. Mine has only set me back 4 lb. (no oz.) with sore legs ..." Within days, on Oct. 4, 1944, Conley wrote in dismay: "... Some skunk done stole my bike. ..." Then, in a letter of Nov. 15, 1944, he elaborated: "... A bit for the life here on the post: missions are missions, for once over the enemy target the aircrews paint a bomb on their plane. So, to even the score, the ground crews have started painting a beer mug on their bikes for each trip to the nearest Pub. ..."

Despite his kidding, Conley had tremendous respect for the ground crews. He later stated, "By the time we got there, most ground crews had been there the better part of two years. Those fellas would work all night if they had to, but had time on their hands once the planes took off. ... They had the machinery and skills to make most anything. They even had little souvenir shops set up for aircrews. [Dad bought a necklace for Mom: a small heart, shaped from a piece of aircraft windshield, with inset-metal wings that dangled from a chain with machine-drilled British coins added between its links. He also picked up a set of salt and pepper shakers for his mother that were crafted by adding Plexiglas bases to drilled-out .50-caliber shells]. ..."

In later years, Conley spoke about Thorpe Abbots: "We bunked in metal Quonset huts. Pretty much all the buildings were like that except for the tower. ..."

"The whole countryside had just been a bunch of farms that they made into a base. There were woods here and there and streams. It was pretty country. Some fields still had crops in them, and some guys who'd been there awhile even had little gardens ... It was a big place. Everybody rode bicycles. That's how you got around."

Upon arriving at Thorpe Abbots, Conley wrote to Delphia in a letter of Sept. 26, 1944:



Del's sweetheart necklace.

Conley also stated, "... I bargained with a machinist to do up my flight jacket. He probably made a pretty good living doing that sort of thing. He painted an eagle on the back, with its wings spread out and arrows in its claws. ... After the war, somebody *took that jacket* out of my jeep when I was working in the woods [for Dierks Forestry]. That really upset me. Can't imagine anybody low enough to do that. Just flat-out reached in *and took it*. Somebody who'd do that didn't know or *have* what it took to *earn* a thing like that. ..." In a letter dated March 15, 1945, he described the jacket artwork to Delphia: "Oh, boy! You should see the paint job I have on my leather jacket, it's out of this world. I'd try and explain the main features on the front; left hand side I have my name ... on the right side comes the 8th insignia with 'Century Bombers' around it. Now for the attraction [on the back]... I have the eagle fashioned from a quarter with my 35 bombs below it. ..."

In 1984, I introduced myself to a Boy Scout leader at Camp Tula where I worked many summers, a man named Ray Camp from Little Rock, who immediately asked me who my father was. As it happens, Mr. Camp was a forester who told me his first job was working for Dad at Dierks.

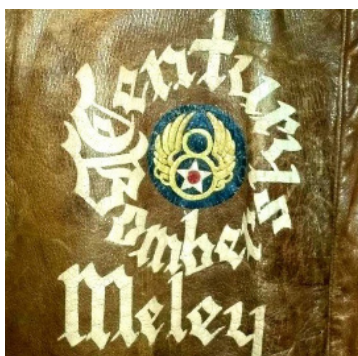
Then Mr. Camp told me this story:

"The first time I ever saw Conley Culpepper, he rumbled into the logging camp driving an *ugly* yellow Army-surplus jeep. He *flew* right past us; drove up a steep embankment; pushed in the clutch, and let 'er roll back down the hill and parked next to a loader – just as pretty as you please. He bounced up out of that jeep with a big grin and said, 'Sorry about that, but it ain't got any brakes.' He was wearing a painted leather bomber's jacket and a coonskin cap with the tail tucked around his neck like a scarf. He certainly made a big impression on us kids right off the bat!"

When I relayed Mr. Camp's tale to Dad, all he had to say in his own grumbled defense was a derisive:

"It weren't a *coonskin* cap. It was a silver fox."

Based on his description and a rough sketch he doodled out on a piece of lumber, I "did up" another leather A-2 flight jacket and gave it to Dad in 1992 (and later added a blue background based on his feedback). Admittedly, it was a poor replacement attempt for the one he'd earned, but I know he wore it to view the B-17 *Nine-O-Nine* that visited Hot Springs, and later to the '93 Little Rock reunion of the 100th Bomb Group.



The front, right breast of crewmate Dewitt Meley's A-2 jacket bears the same 8th Army Air Force and "Century Bombers" artwork that Conley described were on his own jacket. Crewmate Jim Hendrix's A-2 was also painted in this very manner.



Dad boarding the B-17 "Nine O Nine" through the forward compartment hatch.

Dad waiting with Mom to board "Nine O Nine."

On fears and isolation:

Not the most demonstrative man under ordinary circumstances, at times, Dad spoke with surprising candor about his feelings:

“... There were different crews in each hut: just enlisted men. Officers had their own quarters. At first, we were pretty much friendly with guys we bunked in with. After awhile, it got so you didn’t pal around much with anybody outside your own crew...”



*Flak peppering the sky around planes of the 100th Bomb Group.
Photo from Culpepper collection.*

The unimaginable stresses caused by returning from a mission to see or hear that the personal possessions of a man or an entire crew that hadn’t returned had already been gathered up and removed from a barracks, understandably must have had a chilling psychological effect:

“... It got so you didn’t want to make friends ‘cause you didn’t want to know them when they didn’t make it back. I guess that was part of how we managed.”

The following excerpt, from the diary of a replacement crewmen, Sgt. Donald A. Decker, a tail-gunner with a crew that joined the 350th Squadron of the 100th Bomb Group on Feb. 3, 1945, appears

on the 100thbg.com website, and reflects the perspective of the newcomers and demonstrates just why the more experienced crews didn’t want to get too close:

“... We were assigned to quarters ... which turned out to be quite a luxurious little shack with G.I. bunks & a stove. Naturally we were rookies & felt kinda out of place with the guys already in them – so it took time to get warmed up to us. Right away you could tell the difference between us – they were sullen & morose & didn’t talk ... But no matter what a man’s been thru he’s always eager to hear news from the States & find out if anyone’s from his town or even part of the country...”

Just weeks later, young Sgt. Decker was killed in action March 21, 1945, along with seven other men aboard his plane. SOURCE: www.100thbg.com

Another apparent coping mechanism was a sense of fatalism Conley (and probably other fliers) felt:

“If you were gonna get shot down, you were gonna get shot down. There’s not a whole lot you could do about that. But I worried about getting shot down *and* picked up by *civilians* [instead of German military]. You heard stories about fliers getting pitch-forked or lynched by people angry about American bombers. If you got shot down, you sure wanted to avoid German civilians. Spending the rest of the war in a POW camp wasn’t bad considering the alternative. Of course you heard all types of things. Don’t know how many were true. It *was* the Army after all, and a base runs on scuttlebutt...”

Speaking of rumors, Conley told one of his favorites:

“... There was an ‘ack-ack’ [German anti-aircraft] battery on the Zuiderzee [a shallow bay near Amsterdam]. Word was that one of the gunners was a woman, and she would



Photo from Culpepper collection.

fire off three bursts and *hit her target*. If that was true, then she must've been one heck of a gunner. If you made your approach from the North Sea, you had to cross over those guns, and darned if you didn't catch yourself looking hard at flak plumes *just to see* if they were clustered up in bunches of twos or threes."

Adair also wrote in his pilot's log that one of the worst missions to him was his very first, in the skies over Bremen: "We discovered there was real flak out there and realized we could get killed!!!!"

Adair, as the aircraft commander, experienced other stresses:

"... The worst part for me, other than flak, was assembling after take-off to get into formation with the rest of the squadron and the group. Lots of times we were flying blind in thick cloud or fog or in the dark well before daybreak. We were loaded down with fuel and bombs, flying a set pattern on instruments: so many minutes or seconds on *this* heading at *this* altitude, then turn and climb for so long on another heading. We flew this choreographed upward spiral with dozens, sometimes hundreds, of other bombers *already in the air*, just a few seconds ahead of you and behind you, and all doing the same thing. Ginning out tremendous prop wash. And all of it *completely blind* in the soup. ... Planes would rub – some exploded or crashed – just trying to reach the assembly point. ... Sad when you heard about those. You thought, 'Well, that's some tough luck for those guys.' And you felt bad for *thinking* that and for being glad it wasn't *your* plane. That it wasn't your command, your men, your responsibility. ..."

To illustrate Adair's fears, 100th Bomb Group Intelligence Officer Maj. Marvin Bowman's Headquarters Diary has this entry from 20 Nov. 1944:

"... This morning the weather ships piloted by two veteran combat pilots ... crashed just after take off. The aircraft was destroyed by fire and all six aboard perished. ... There was a terrific explosion ... Occurred at 0600 hours."SOURCE: 100thbg.com

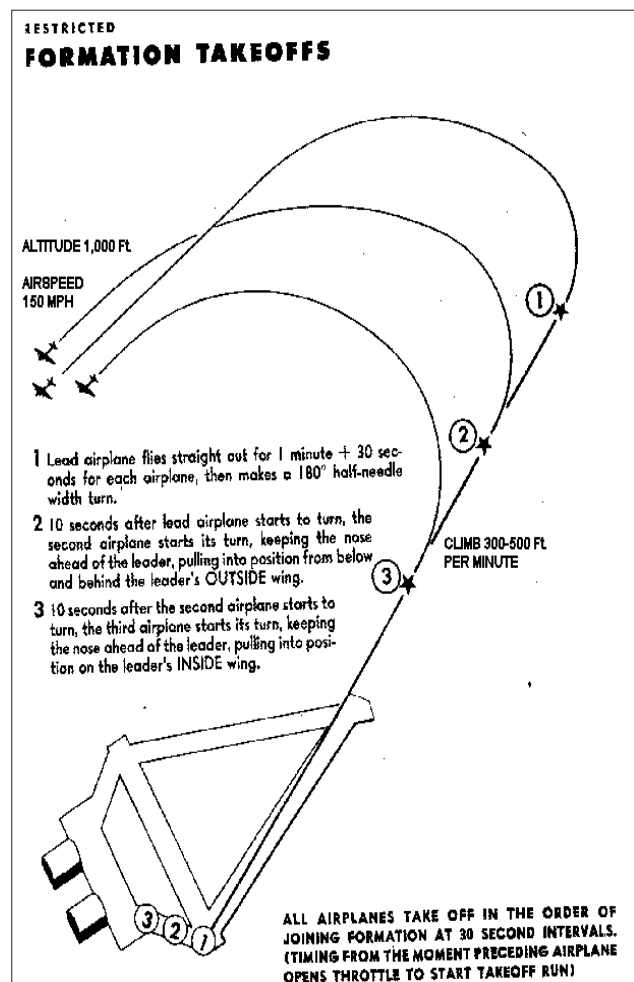
In 1993, Brucker, who sat in the clear Plexiglas nose cone as the ship's bombardier, talked about flak and his unobstructed view of the deadly cloudbursts of burning metal chunks and high explosives his plane would have to fly through:

"... Flak absolutely terrified me. There was no place you could hide from it. I had the best seat in the house for the horror picture show."

Dad had his own brand of terror, and its name was the V1:

"You'd be in your bunk at night and you'd hear them: 'Buzz bombs.' Dreadful things. You'd lay there and keep quiet and listen and if you kept on hearing that engine running, *'gurrrrrrrrr'*, you might go back to sleep. But if that engine cut off, you'd have to bail out of your bunk fast for cover 'cause it *was* coming down *somewhere* close by. ..."

The V1 was a Nazi "vengeance" weapon. A drone aircraft, it was essentially an early jet-powered, unmanned flying bomb. Each was equipped with a gyroscopic stabilizer to maintain



straight and level flight. Once it reached a preset distance, the engine shut off and the vehicle fell from the sky, hitting anything gravity forced it to along the course it had been launched to follow. These weapons came into use only a few weeks before Conley reached England. A short time later, the Germans developed the V2, the first long-range ballistic missile system. They rained greater terror and destruction on British targets. Capable of carrying a larger explosive payload, the V2 also flew much higher and faster than the V1 could, and without being able to hear their approach, people on the ground were often caught unaware. The V2 rockets were too fast for any aircraft of the time to intercept.

Conley continued:

“... One night in particular several came over and I guess they'd figured our range pretty good, because they all quit about the same time and fell around our base and another just down the tracks. We were outside when the engines cut out, and one hit the ground before we even found cover back of the dining hall. Shook the whole of the countryside something terrible. They got to where they'd mostly launch them at night because the RAF got pretty good at shooting down those V1s during daylight.”



Final preflight on B-17 48532 “Little Sweetheart.” Photo from Culpepper collection.

The pilot of another crew in the 100th, Lt. Joseph Ricker, serving in Conley's own 349th Squadron described the buzz bombs in his journal:

“... [Each] one made a terrible noise. It was so noisy you could feel a vibration in the ground. It sounded like a large group of bombers coming over very low with a deafening roar. When the engine cut off, the whole thing fell to the ground like a rock and the explosion-blast was like an earthquake.”

SOURCE: www.100thbg.com.

These entries from the 1141st Quartermaster Company's logbook (100th Bomb Group's supply unit), by T/Sgt Vernon Sheedy (following entries now posted at 100thbg.com), shows just how frequently the V1 “buzz bombs” and later V2 rockets were seen or heard around Thorpe Abbotts Air Station 139:

Sept 30, 1944: “... Three Buzz Bombs went over today and landed somewhere near here. This place is really getting to be “Buzz Bomb Alley” for sure. One of these days we are going to be getting nervous in the service.”

Oct 3, 1944: “We had two more explosions during the day. Everyone is arguing whether they were V-2's or Buzz Bombs. We had another loud explosion tonight and as always it was a question whether it was V-2 or a Buzz Bomb. Whatever it makes you sit up and take notice alright.”

Oct 4, 1944: “We had another explosion around 1500 hours this afternoon. Also an explosion at 1740 hours, but again no one knew definite whether it was Buzz Bomb or V-2. One thing for sure they shake the building around here.”

Oct 5, 1944: “Today seemed to be the worst yet for the V-2 or Buzz Bombs ... explosions at 0130, 1100, 1615 and 2000 hours.”

Oct 6, 1944: “Again today we had explosions at 0930 and 1450 hours ... making us Buzz Bomb happy.”

Oct 7, 1944: “Explosions today ... 0800, 0930 and 1030 – thought to have been V-2's.”

Oct 8, 1944: “Pirtle was on Guard Duty from 1800 to 2200 tonight and at 2000 hours he said a Buzz Bomb went over, Red Alert called.”

Oct 9, 1944: “We had more Buzz Bombs or V-2's at 0039, 0530 and two at 1045 hours today.”

Oct 10, 1944: “Most all of the boys were up or at least laid in bed and heard the three Buzz Bombs go over this morning around 0500 hours. It is a funny feeling to lay there and wonder whether they will keep going or not.”

Oct 14, 1944: “Had three Buzz Bombs go over around 2145 hours last night and they were very low. Another one came over at 0330 hours this morning and was really low and going slow, too darn low and slow. ... Tonight around 2000 hours when Pirtle and I were coming from the Sergeant's club we saw quite a bit of ack-ack going up in the air over near Great Yarmouth, at least in that general direction, and watched until we saw a big explosion. They must have hit a Buzz Bomb because there was a big explosion in the air. Really was a sight to see.”

Oct 15, 1944: “We have been talking about V-2 landings around here lately, but to date the British Air Ministry have not released to the Press that the Germans are using it. We know for sure that one V-2 landed in England, because it really shook all of us.”

Oct 19, 1944: “Station 137 – Lavenham, had quite a time yesterday when a Buzz Bomb landed right beside their base and

shook things up. Conway called and told us about it and from his report it was rather close.”

Oct 25, 1944: “Tonight around 2000 hours you could see anti-aircraft gunners shooting at the Buzz Bombs coming over the Coast. We saw one Buzz Bomb hit in the air and explode – really made a big flash.”

Nov 4, 1944: “Three Buzz Bombs went over around 1930 hours.”

Nov 10, 1944: “One Buzz Bomb around 1930 hours, shook the buildings.”

Nov 14, 1944: “Explosions at 1900 hours – had seven Buzz Bombs over today. One went over very low and fast.”

Dec 10, 1944: “Dance at the Officer’s Club. Buzz Bomb went over base at 1845 hours.”

Dec 18, 1944: “Six Buzz Bombs early this morning and it is a funny feeling to lay in bed and hear them go over. One landed very close to the base.”

Jan 3, 1945: “First basketball game with Hq. 100th – called off because of an alert. Four Buzz Bombs low and close by. Did not land though.”

Jan 13, 1945: “Buzz Bomb over field at 0630 hours. We were standing in chow line watching it go over.”

Jan 21, 1945: “Dance at the Sgt’s. Club tonight, the base orchestra played – as usual the boys had a good time. Buzz Bomb over the field at 0800 hours. We are getting use to them now and always hope they just continue on their journey – leave us alone. The basketball schedule all off – something always comes up to cancel the game. ...”

Conley wrote, in the most censor-friendly manner possible, on Dec. 21, 1944, “... There has been some buzzing goin on that has me ducking, wish the little thing would make its mind up and go away. ...”

What clearly started as a major “event” every time one of the flying bombs came over the base became a common occurrence, but even so, they still managed to bother Conley greatly as he later said:

“... Even after I got back home, I could never go to sleep in a place until I checked to see where all the doors and windows were – *just in case* a buzz bomb came over. I knew it couldn’t *possibly* happen, but still – I *had* to have a plan in my own head for how I was gonna get out of that room, wherever it was, and take cover. I know that sounds peculiar, but that lasted a long time. *Years* afterwards. ... And, this is hard to say, but for the longest time, I didn’t want a gun or a knife in the house for fear I might hurt your mom or one of your boys.”

Today, those potential symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder would likely be recognized. But back then, Dad would have been told – or told himself – to “be a man” or “get a grip.” Neither of which could silence the echoes of those buzz-bombs’ menacing growls he heard as commercial jets began to fly overhead more and more frequently – day and night.



Bomber formation. Photo from Culpepper collection.

On superstitions:

Dad joked about his and his crewmates' foibles:

"[Mike] Dalgarn had read a story in *Stars & Stripes* [Army newspaper] about a Fortress that got cut in half in flight. The tail section sort of spiraled down like a feather, and the story was that the tail-gunner was still in it and walked away from it while the rest of the crew was killed. After that, Dalgarn wouldn't let *anybody else* fly in the tail. I flew missions and parts of missions at every other gun position, except for the tail because of that."



Dalgarn, Goddard, Culpepper, Hendrix, Horny, Meley (Wesala, bending down), and Brucker. [Culpepper photo]

Dalgarn was right. Apparently he read an account of B-17G 42-31324 that, while on a training flight above the Las Vegas desert on February 25, 1944, was cut in half during a mid-air collision with an AT-6A trainer aircraft. Both planes exploded and one student gunner, Cpl Thomas K. Mang, was trapped in the severed tail section of the bomber that fell from 8,000 feet. Although injured, Mang survived, riding down in the tail through the crash, while 12 others aboard the bomber – as well as the pilot of the smaller plane – were all reportedly killed. SOURCE: warbirdcrash.com

The average life expectancy of a bomber crew was brief. Pragmatists like Conley understood that:

"After we flew 12 [missions], we got set for number '12-B' because nobody wanted to call it '13,' [chuckling] *except maybe me*. Thirteen has always been good – been lucky – for me. But once you'd flown that many, you figured you were flying on somebody else's time, though. Borrowed time."

"... As we got closer to 25 missions, where guys early on in the war got to go home [such as the crew of the famous *Memphis Belle*], we probably all doubted we'd ever make it to that, much less get to the 35 we needed for a ticket home. We all probably *thought* that but *nobody* ever talked about that. ..."

"To me anyway, when we'd finally gotten to 20, you thought about number 21, not 25. When you finished 30, you thought about 31 and didn't let yourself think about 35. It wasn't until we *landed* that last one – that's when I believed it. Up until then, there were times when it sure felt like everybody in Germany was trying their best to kill us and the Army was trying pretty hard itself to send you back up just to let you get killed."



Dalgarn, Culpepper, Hendrix, Adair, Wesala, Meley (front) Goddard, Horny, Brucker. [Culpepper photo]

A list of "Lucky 13s" kept by Conley in his notebook:

Class 9-13-43 AAAP	(Amarillo Army Air Field)
Class 44-13 KAAF	(Kingman Army Air Field)
Class 4-13 SCAAF	(Sioux City Army Air Field)
13th Combat Wing	(of the 8th Air Force)
13 Days on the S.S. <i>Marine Robin</i>	
Docked 13th of May 1945	

Somehow, he left out that his trusty B-17G literally bristled with 13 individual- and twin-.50-caliber machine guns.

After the war, Conley E. Culpepper was issued his forester's license. It was Arkansas Forestry Commission License #13.

On close calls:

Conley told a few stories about his more memorable moments on missions:

“... We had heavy flak jackets to wear over our nylon heated flight suits. Well, you couldn't really move around in those, and [as a flight engineer] seems I always needed to move around, so, first thing I'd do was spread mine out on the floor and stand on it. All the flak was coming up from the ground anyways, so that just made sense to me. ...”

“... The flak had been heavy and accurate. We'd got bounced around pretty good. Lots of shrapnel penetrated the plane. ... When we got back to England I found this chunk of metal had made a direct hit and buried up into my turret, *just* behind my head. It hit along the metal band of the turret – and this *one little bolt* – no longer than my thumb – had stopped it. That bolt was sheered off and had pushed clean into the turret *all the way to the end* except for maybe one or two threads that still held on and had stopped that piece of shrapnel from coming on through the plexi and taking my head clean off. If it had hit *anywhere else* – a fraction of an inch one way or the other – there wasn't anything to stop it. The good Lord was lookin' out for me that day. ...”

Every year of my adult life, I would call Dad on Veterans Day. He always appreciated and recognized that day, but he also never failed to celebrate his own personal holiday – “Merseburg Day” – every November 2nd: “Nothing else compares

to Merseburg. There was *nothing* that was any worse than that. Just the prospect of having to go back there frightened me more than anything else. ... German fighters of every kind were out there ... whatever they had that could fly – and they kept coming. Soon as they peeled off, ack-ack was *everywhere*. Flak so thick you could've walked back to England on it. Stuff looked like rain clouds. Worst you ever saw.

I had nightmares about Merseburg. The kind you wake up sweating with your heart pounding. Bad nightmares – for years – for a long time after that.

We did our job. Hit the refineries. It was a real show when those went off, but that was the worst it ever got and the worst any of us could've imagined. We never did go back there, but I'm not so sure any of us ever really left that place. ...”



Flak bursts. [Culpepper photo]

Back on Nov. 2, 1944, practically speechless from the fresh encounter, Conley wrote down only one word next to the name Merseburg in his little notebook: “Wow!”

The region around Merseburg was at the heart of German oil industry and was among the most heavily defended areas inside Nazi Europe. Flak guns mounted on railcars pounded the bomber formations for miles on their way toward the target. It was only the sixth mission Adair's crew had ever flown. According to a *Stars & Stripes* article written at the time, an 8th Air Force *all-time record* of 134 enemy fighter planes were shot down by American bomber crews and their fighter escorts that day. Forty B-17s – with 360 young American crewmen aboard them – also went down on Nov. 2, 1944, a date Conley never forgot. More reflective, in his letter of Dec. 11, 1944, Conley wrote to Delphia: “... There is a little town with a funny name in Germany – that when I get home, all anyone will have to do to keep me away is instead of writing ‘beware,’ is place the name of that town where I can see it ...”



Bombs away! [Culpepper photo]

Apparently, Conley wasn't alone in his fear of returning to Merseburg. In a phone call, I asked Adair about that city as a target, he told me: "Well, I will own up to it that in briefings, as they pulled back the curtain, I'd hold my breath to see where the line on that day's map led to, and say a quick prayer that it wasn't going to be Merseburg."

A young Lt. Adair also made this note in his flight log in 1944: "Merseburg ... refinery heavily protected by flak guns brought in by rail ... witnessed one of our planes go down in flames."

In 1993, reporter Tim Taylor was dispatched by *Active Years* to cover the reunion of the 100th Bomb Group being held in Little Rock. Tim was (and remains) a friend. At the time, I arranged for a certain group of three men at the reunion to meet with him.

The following is an excerpt from Tim's article that appeared in the December 1993 edition of that Arkansas-based news magazine: "... James Adair attended the reunion with two of the six surviving members of his nine-man crew, Conley Culpepper of Hot Springs, Ark., and Milton Brucker of Houston, Texas. ... Remarkably all nine members of Adair's crew survived their assignment to the 349th Bombardment Squadron, braving exhausting conditions and the constant pounding of enemy flak guns to assault some of Germany's most strategic military positions. ...

... The crew distinguished itself during a bombing run of Ludwigshafen, Germany, in which Adair's aircraft served as the squadron's 'chaff ship,' flying in the lead position while releasing aluminum strips, or 'chaff,' to provide interference for ground-based radar units. For its role, the crew was nominated for the Distinguished Flying Cross [the armed forces' third highest award for heroism]. ..."



Adair and Brucker visit with reporter Tim Taylor as Conley shares photos with Delphia Culpepper (in red) and Geneva Adair

Privately, Dad found humor in an episode from that particularly memorable mission:

"Meley had stacked up the chaff all around himself ... like a wall. All you could see was the top of his head. Said it made him feel safer to have it *snugged up* around him like that. Understand now that chaff is just thin strips of aluminum – practically tinfoil – wouldn't have stopped a hot knife.

He was responsible for pumping that stuff out the bottom of the aircraft to confuse enemy radar signals and help cover all the planes trailing in behind us.

As we got closer in [to the target], flak started hitting closer and closer to us, and I could see Meley *getting in a rhythm* with those flak bursts. When one would hit, he'd bob up and down faster and faster pushing more chaff out. Those boxes got in his way, and he was shoving at them with his elbows so he could get the chaff out faster. He said, 'I wish somebody would tell me *what in the hell* this stuff is *supposed* to do – because the more I push out, the *closer* they get to hitting us!'"

Dad laughed that he'd never seen Meley work so hard *before* or *after* that – and the radioman never built any more little 'forts' around himself again either.

In December 1944, on their 14th mission, the crew drew the ultimate target: 'Big B' – Berlin. At that time, it's been written that more anti-aircraft guns protected the capital of the Third Reich than any other single location in the world. Conley took part in a massive raid that included more than 1,200 American bombers of different types in the air. He said:

"That's when I had no doubt we would win the war. As far as I could see ahead of us and as far as I could see behind us, from horizon to horizon were planes: *Our* planes. That was something to see."

That Berlin mission could have also proved fatal for Conley and two other crewmembers if not for his quick thinking. The unpressurized B-17 typically operated at altitudes around 20,000 to 35,000 feet. Such heights meant oxygen masks were needed in order to breathe. The altitude also made for bitterly cold conditions. Layers of clothing restricted movement. Silk glove-liners were worn underneath electrically heated gloves simply to ensure bare skin didn't touch metal aircraft surfaces. Should flesh come into direct contact with freezing metal, a man would find himself firmly stuck to it by the intense cold. In his gun position in the top-turret, Dad often found himself unplugging his air hose, holding his breath, and making his way into the craft's interior spaces to make in-flight repairs or adjustments. By necessity, he would plug into the air supply of other crewmembers or auxiliary tanks along his line of travel. While unplugged from oxygen, he was also disconnected from the aircraft's interphone. It was this sort of environment in which the following events took place in the skies over Berlin.



This is the unified story with details I heard at different times from Dad and retold by Adair. The content was consistent each time:

On the way back, after striking Berlin, Jim Hendrix (ball-turret) and Jimmie Horny (engineer/gunner) manning the waist guns, weren't responding to calls over the intercom. Elmer Wesala (co-pilot) sent Conley back to check to see if communication lines were cut. Given this order, Conley disconnected his air/coms lines and made his way aft, crossing the empty bomb racks along a narrow catwalk. He reached the radio room and paused at an oxygen bottle to take a few deep breaths while Meley readied himself to watch the portions of

sky that Conley had been surveying from the top-turret. Conley, untethered, made his way further back. He spotted Horny slumped against the wall of the plane at his gun position. Unsure if Horny was wounded, Conley dragged him back to the radio room, where he and Meley quickly check the unconscious man for injuries. Finding none, Horny's facemask was connected to an auxiliary oxygen supply.

Conley then understood the oxygen system to the mid-section of the plane was damaged. He also knew that Hendrix could be dying from anoxia in the ball-turret, a hydraulically controlled metal sphere suspended under the aircraft's belly. Again he filled his lungs, unplugged, and worked his way back to the ball-turret. Conley took off his heavy outer gloves, opened the small hatch and reached inside to see if Hendrix was alive. Conley pulled his arm back out and bit down on a finger of his silk glove liner to slip his hand free so he could feel for a pulse along Hendrix's neck. Blindly he felt around to locate Hendrix's face, then slapped him hard across the cheek and pinched him. Groggily, Hendrix moved. In doing so, he activated the ball-turret's hydraulics, which triggered the ball to rotate. The machinery bit down, pinching Conley's arm in place. Instinctively, Conley reached inside Hendrix's heavy coat and with skin firmly against skin, grabbed a handful of the man's armpit and pectoral muscle that he proceeded to twist with *all his strength* – all the while without oxygen – *and* fighting the crushing hydraulic trap that held him pinned to the floor of the aircraft.

Hendrix reacted to the pain and stopped pushing down on the pedals long enough for Conley to free his arm. He was then able to rotate the ball and pop the hatch completely open to pull Hendrix from the turret. He helped Hendrix to



the spot near the radio room where Horny had recovered enough to help him. Still without replenishing his oxygen, Conley started along his path back across the catwalk. Lightheaded, he slipped on the narrow footpath and fell – *almost* dropping into the empty, but closed, bomb bay, but managed to tumble backwards. He fell onto the floor – right on top of the two men he'd just left there. Gathering himself, he finally gulped down a few breaths of much-needed air, and made his way back to the top-turret.

As Adair told it, Conley then calmly reported to the cockpit that both men seemed to be unhurt, but just as soon as one of the men was able enough to come up and relieve him at his guns, he needed to go back again to “rig some sort of fix” for the oxygen and “wanted to look in on Dalgarn in the tail.”

In Dad's notebook, there is no mention of any of this, but Adair, who spoke about it with pride after Dad's death, did note the barest bones of it at the time in his log: *“Hendrix & Horny passed out from anoxia.”*

In an email of March 11, 2014, from Sharon Hendrix Enos (Jim's daughter), she confirmed the story as told by her father. He said that, “He realized he was starting to pass out, and he had no oxygen. He tried to call on the intercom and the push-to-talk switch was literally in pieces in his hand. He had pushed on it so hard, he shattered it.”

As it turned out, this wasn't the only bout of oxygen-deprivation Conley suffered. He said that once he'd also: “... Got hung up by a strap on my [parachute] harness crossing the bomb bay catwalk. Couldn't get it loose. About the time I was gonna pass out, I guess I finally pulled and fell forward and fell all the way through my position [top turret] and hit the floor hard. [Where] Somebody pulled my mask off and put theirs on to me.”

The work of an in-flight “Mr. Fix-It” for Culpepper and Horny was anything but routine. Over Mainz, on Dec. 18, 1944, when temperatures at altitude reportedly hit a brutal -50° F, Brucker, the bombardier, tripped his toggle-switch to release his 6,000-lb. payload of high-explosive ordnance. Instead of giving his expected call of “Bombs away!” Nothing happened, and Brucker immediately shouted for Conley to “kick 'em out if you have to!” During the bomb run portion of a mission, the bombardier actually controlled the aircraft. And at that moment, Brucker wanted to know what had gone wrong – and needed it fixed quickly – so the mission might be completed. Conley used a common tool and some uncommon acrobatic/aerobatic moves to take on the challenge. He said:

“I grabbed a long screwdriver and flopped down on my stomach on the catwalk to try to free up the release to drop those bombs. ...”

It's important to understand this – by his own description, Conley was spread out across an open bomb bay, anywhere from 20- to 25-thousand feet up – flying somewhere around 200 m.p.h. in freezing air. There was no such thing

as a “safety harness” on a B-17, and frankly, I’ve stood inside the bomb bay on the catwalk, and it’s a whole lot like standing on a 2x4 piece of lumber – or walking a balance beam that spans a distance of 10 or 12 ft. There’s really *not much* to hold on to – especially if you’re on your stomach – wearing heavy gloves – holding a screwdriver in one hand – pushing against a rack full of bombs. You get my point. I’m not sure I can wrap my head around what that must have been like. But, I’ll let Conley finish his story about the release mechanism:

“... It wouldn’t budge. We had to go home and land with a belly full of bombs. We sure tried to drop them in the [English] Channel before we got back, but I still couldn’t kick ‘em out then, either.”

Then there was the time he had to use a knife – during an all-around nail-biter of a mission to Frankfurt:

“We’d pretty much been beat up, and had to drop out of formation and get low. That’s a *lonely* feeling. Between the flak and all the bouncing around, our rubber raft got knocked loose from its compartment, had inflated and was flapping along the fuselage. ...”

The raft, large enough to hold 12 men, was still secured by a line to its emergency equipment compartment that was located on top of the plane, just behind the top-turret, in a void above the bomb bay. The twisting, flapping raft made it more difficult to control the descending aircraft, and there was a very real danger it could become tangled in the ailerons of the tail. Conley had to cut the line and lose the raft. Remember, the men aboard the plane still had to cross the English Channel and were without a life raft in a plane that was in rough shape.”



To hear Conley retell it: “... We were losing fuel. Main hydraulics were gone. Electrical was shot up. Meley and I took turns on the hand pump transferring as much fuel as we could from one wing tank to the other. ...”

The fuel transfer was not only necessary, but was further complicated because: “... The tip of one wing was gone, and there was a big hole in the other. ... We only had the one engine [out of four] that was working very well. Got down to the treetops, then, over the Channel were wave-hopping. We cranked open the bomb bay doors by hand. Dropped our guns, tools, any ammo, and anything that wasn’t bolted down to lighten the plane. ... Everybody sat as close as they could to the edge of the bomb bay and had on their ‘Mae Wests’ [inflatable life vests]. If we’d had to ditch, you could drop in without a chute we were so low. By the time we caught sight of the [English] coast, we were cuttin’ it pretty close on gas.

We had made for Woodbridge [and made an emergency landing]. ... That was about as fine as you could cut it. I think we all kissed the ground after that one.” Jim Hendrix apparently told his daughter about the raft episode, and said it was the only time he ever say pilot Jim Adair angry

– not at his flight crew, but at a maintenance man who was berating the flyers for “letting the raft get loose and beat up ‘his’ airplane.” Adair apparently overheard the exchange and immediately dressed down the mechanic telling him to, “Never talk to my crew like that again!”

Adair’s crew wasn’t alone in its troubles that day. According to the Group’s daily log kept in their headquarters by the intelligence officer, Maj. Marvin Bowman:

“... Target today was the marshaling yards at Frankfurt. Excellent bombing results. 12 planes aborted – six landed in France – six other unaccounted for – hopefully in France somewhere. Most other planes came home almost out of fuel. ...” SOURCE: 100thbg.com

Adair’s crew was one of the missing six – not in France – but barely 15 miles away from Diss at Woodbridge, close to the coast.

Note: Woodbridge was a Royal Air Force base that was specially prepared and designated for emergency landings. It was even equipped with FIDO (Fog Investigation and Dispersal Operation) underground, pressurized pipes with spigots that burned petroleum to heat the atmosphere around the field and literally “burned off” fog. The emergency runway was 250 yards wide and 3,000 yards long (covering 160 acres in concrete), and had specially prepared areas around it to help stop damaged or runaway aircraft.

Talking about that frightening low-level flight over the Channel reminded Dad that he and his fellow crewmen welcomed the sight of the famous white cliffs of Dover that could be seen at altitude as a beacon of the English coastline. He also said that his, and other crews, kept an eye out for damaged low-flying bombers, like his had been, in danger of ditching into the Channel – or the frigid North Sea – so that rescue efforts could be dispatched as quickly and effectively as possible.

“... If you went into the North Sea without a raft, you wouldn’t last 5-10 minutes at the most, if you were lucky. Even with a raft, there were no guarantees.”

As Adair and Conley told the reporter for *Active Years* in 1993, the crew also encountered the future of aerial combat when they came face to face with a German Messerschmitt Me-262 jet fighter:

“... ‘At first we thought it was a B-24 [Liberator] on fire. If they got in trouble, they’d come in and get in formation with us,’ remembers Adair, who was piloting one of the 36 planes in the air at the time. The German pilot’s objective was apparently to slip in unannounced and terminate his target, the squadron’s ‘slot’ aircraft, before quickly slipping away. ‘You could see the pilot’s face, he was so close,’ says Adair. ‘He was gone before we could blink an eye,’ recalls Culpepper. ...”

At the time of the encounter, Adair made note of it in his logbook:

“... German fighter plane (ME 262) flew through our formation undetected due to heavy contrails.



Culpepper photos



He flew close enough to our plane for us to see his face. Our gunners shot at him but he was probably flying 120 miles an hour faster and vanished in an instant. ..."

Adair also sent me a copy of an Army-issued "civilian-morale" clipping that was published in his hometown newspaper alongside a photo of him that reads:

DEBUNKS JETS.

Lieut. James C. Adair, son of Mr. and Mrs. Henry A. Adair, route 2 Urbana, and a former U. of I. student says the Nazis' jet-propelled Messerschmitt fighter plane is no more effective than other types against bomber formations. Adair, who is 22, flies with the 100th bombing group, cited by President Roosevelt for its historic England-Africa shuttle bombing raid on Regensburg.

Chip,

This shows how the news media can change things around.

Your dad & I would not agree with this,
Jim Adair

DEBUNKS JETS



Lieut. James C. Adair, son of Mr. and Mrs. Henry A. Adair, route 2, Urbana, and a former U. of I. student, says the Nazis' jet-propelled Messerschmitt fighter plane is no more effective than other types against bomber formations. Adair, who is 22, flies with the 100th bombing group, cited by President Roosevelt for its historic England-Africa shuttle bombing raid on Regensburg.

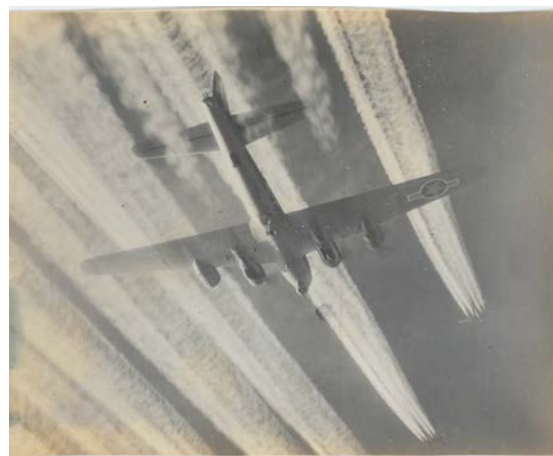
On combat:

It's apparent that Conley stayed focused on what tasks needed to be done in order to get through the stresses of every mission. Even years later, he still detached himself somewhat from stories by often telling them in third-person, almost as if he were a witness but not a participant in some of them. But, in a rare first-person confession, he may have also shared a clue for his detachment when he said: "I think a little bit of me died inside every time we went up."

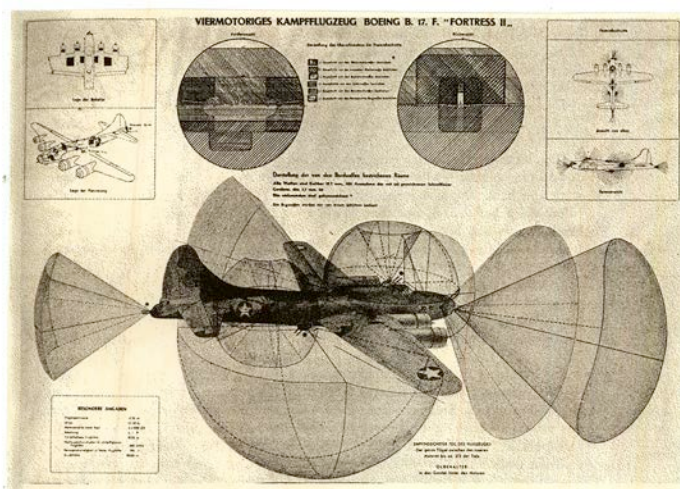
Conley ultimately discovered an odd beauty in the things he saw only in combat:

"There's something I've always remembered. This is probably gonna sound odd, but I don't recall colors ever being so *bright* as they were then, and I don't know why that is. Flak was blacker than black. When it exploded, the cordite streaks in it were the brightest red and orange you ever saw. It was sort of *beautiful* in a way."

"At high altitudes, and the air was so cold your engine exhaust formed contrails behind you. They were pretty, but you sure hated seeing them. They were like big arrows in the sky pointing *right at you*, and German fighters or ack-ack gunners could just follow them straight to where you were. Their fighters and spotters could fly up to the contrails without ever engaging us or our escorts and know our *exact* altitude, and then call in to let their [anti-aircraft] gunners dial us in."



Contrails forming at high altitudes. Culpepper photo



Luftwaffe training posters shows a B-17's fields of defensive fire.

the point where the wings joined the aircraft's spine. All these structural elements (as well as the 'command and control' represented by the very human pilot and co-pilot) were primarily defended by the top-turret gunner from above and the ball-turret gunner from below in a wingtip-to-wingtip attack such as Dad described.]

"... Those jets would come right up the contrails. You couldn't even see 'em coming. They hit fast, and then 'whoosh' they were gone."

"We were all briefed that German fighter planes had started making runs from the front just to draw our attention, and that's when their jets [Me262s] would be slipping up from behind with those big nose canons ready to blast away at you."

He also knew the dangers those German fighter pilots posed: "Their fighters were well trained how to attack us. They knew our vulnerabilities. If you saw the escorts break off to go chase one, well, that's when all his buddies were going to try and hit you from wingtip to wingtip from above or below. We couldn't bring but a couple of guns to return fire if they did that. They weren't dummies."

[Note: B-17s were designed with fuel tanks within their wings. The main oxygen supply – itself a potentially explosive target – along with the high-explosive or incendiary bomb loads carried within the bomb bay, were all located at the center of the plane at

And he felt the potential dangers American bomber crews could inflict on their own:

“... I did a preflight armament check. Then went and got a thermos of hot coffee. Got back, and the boys were all hollering and worked up in a lather because some yahoo got on MY plane after we’d already hauled all the equipment and ammo to the flight line to ready our plane, and took all *our* firing pins for *our* guns to another plane. Here we were fueled, loaded up with bombs and getting ready to take off completely unarmed because of that so-and-so.”

Milton Brucker shared his thoughts on his unique area of expertise in 1993:



Bombardier's station

“The Norden sight was an excellent piece of engineering. It was really a type of early computer. ... I entered data, some I got from the navigator [Goddard], some I took from my own instruments and observations. Those settings then made calculations that adjusted the crosshairs for things like wind and drift. It certainly wasn't *nearly as accurate* as the propaganda would have you believe, but it *was* a superior tool, particularly considering the times. ... I had orders that I intended to follow – and I took an oath to do – that if the plane was going down, before I exited the aircraft I was to destroy the bombsight. There were a couple of ways to do that [one was a thermite grenade built into it]. ... We all carried .45-caliber pistols, and personally, I kept a round chambered in the barrel of mine because I didn't want to take a whole lot of extra time shooting that bombsight up if I needed to get out of a burning aircraft.”

For whatever reason had started it, our old next-door neighbor, Art Tuma, was giving Dad a hard time across the fence one day. Art was going on about how “easy” the “fly boys” had it compared to *his* infantry slogging it out on the ground, and how airmen “... always had hot chow and a soft bed with clean sheets to sleep in at night.” Dad didn't even nibble at Art's bait. All he said was, “Once that flak started, I'd have traded anything for a little wet foxhole to get into and dig a little deeper down into the mud.” That comment pretty much ended the debate.

At the 1993 Little Rock reunion, Adair, Brucker and Dad sat and reminisced together. Not all of their back-and-forth banter made Tim Taylor's article. The clarity of their shared memories of one particular event astounded me, and seemed to trigger physical responses in the men, as well:

Adair: “Remember that FW190 that jumped out at about 2-o'clock level?” [*Adair points to his right as if he sees it happening*]

Culpepper: “Yeh. I fired a burst. He rolled right and cut back left across our nose [*Both hands holding remembered gun grips, then his right hand makes a sweeping 'S' turn*]. Coming out of that turn, all his guns were blinkin' and winkin' at us.”

Adair: “That fella sure was determined to kill us. As he banked, the sunlight glinted off his canopy – nearly blinded me.” [*He squints*]

Culpepper: “He got close enough to touch.”

Brucker: “Don't care what anybody says, that guy had freckles and blue eyes!”

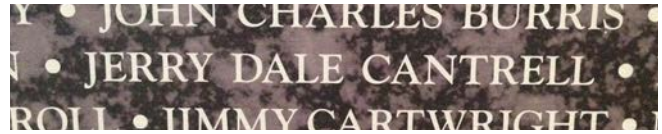


At Brucker's quick wit, all three men laughed out loud.

Dad told me that he was grateful none of his sons ever had to experience combat as he had. He said that just the possibility of it happening deeply worried him all through the Vietnam War, and afterward as each of us got closer to draft eligibility and new conflicts inevitably popped up somewhere in the world. He had anxiety at the thought that one, or more, of us might end up having to go to war. He didn't want that for anyone. He talked to me about an old neighbor from rural Highway 9:

"... You know his daddy, Pres Cantrell, but you may be too young to remember Jerry Dale Cantrell. When he was killed in Vietnam, well that, that nearly killed Pres. It *would've* killed me to lose one of you boys like that. Don't know how he managed, but to me, he wasn't ever the same. ... Broke his heart and more. ... *Nothing* good comes from war, ever. Young men die. That's all. Nothing but loss. I've prayed none of you ever know that kind of loss. ..."

[Note: Preston "Pres" Cantrell was one of Dad's employees and a close friend from when we lived at the District Unit (Office) of Dierks Forestry between Crows Station and Paron, Ark.]



Detail from Vietnam War exhibit at MacArthur Museum of Arkansas Military History in Little Rock

In the Cantrell family plot at Gravel Hill Cemetery is his gravemarker:

Pfc Jerry Dale Cantrell
August 15, 1949 - July 30, 1969
U.S. Army / Company C / 11th Infantry, 5th Division
Purple Heart / Bronze Star / Killed In Action Vietnam

Several years later, Dad corresponded with another neighbor, a young Marine, also named "Jerry" – Jerry K. Nobles – who served in combat during the first Persian Gulf War. Jerry was a gunner aboard a Marine Sea Stallion helicopter from the U.S.S. *Iwo Jima*. He went on to fly as a member of Marine Helicopter Squadron One, the "President's Own," (the white topped ones that fly from the White House – when one of them is designated as "Marine One" once the president is aboard). He later served in U.S. Embassies and Consulates around the world. The now-retired Gunnery Sergeant was kind enough to share this letter he got from Dad only a few days before the shooting started in Kuwait:

January 11th 1991

Dear Jerry:

Yes the unknown fear that face men when they are about to put their life on line is the greatest mental anguish I know of.

To dispel the anxiety, we have comfort in knowing David's 23rd psalm when he stated "Even though I walk in the valley of the shadow of death I fear no evil" yet to completely be not fearful would not be human and also that fear places our attitude on alert to survive.

You have in your young life achieved goals which have prepared you to take advantage of crises where a lot of men would falter; your community, church, school and yes Scouting will be a plus on your side.

We have for sometime had you and other Owensville boys on our Prayer List, not only in home but Church, (Masonic) Lodge and Eastern Star Chapters.

You can see why veteran's of war get so upset when someone wants to burn our flag!

It is our hope & prayer that all be settled without conflict.

The congress is debating today on what powers to give the President, I hope no wrong signals will be sent to the enemy.

All of our people are behind you men & very few anti war remarks are heard.

Jerry, I know it sounds foolish but if there was a way to take your place I would; my life has smelled the roses & all the accolades of men are nothing but vanity & vexation of spirit anyway.

Take care, stay alert!

Your friend

Conley

January 17th 1991

Dear Jerry:

yes the unknown fear that face men when they are about to put their life on line is the greatest mental anguish that I know of.

To dispell the anxiety, we have comfort in knowing David's 23rd psalm when He stated "Even though I walk in the valley of the shadow of death I fear no evil" yet to completely be not fearful would not be human and also that fear places our attitude on alert to survive.

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your friend
Conley

Conley Culpepper
RT. 7, Box 535
Hot Springs, AR 71901

Sgt. Jerry K. Nobles
HAM-461 MAG-40 4th M
FPO NY 09503-030



On the crew:

If his crewmates called him “Huckleberry” because of his country-boy traits, there’s a list of nicknames and/or (more likely) inside jokes Conley jotted down on the final page of his notebook that’s potentially enlightening to the wartime personalities of his fellow aviators, too:

“I check ‘em out Adair”
“The women love me Wesala”
“Flak me up Goddard”
“Bolt stud Brucker”
“I sweat ‘em out Meley”
“Prop wash Dalgarn”
“I know you don’t Horny”
(There is no name listed for Hendrix)



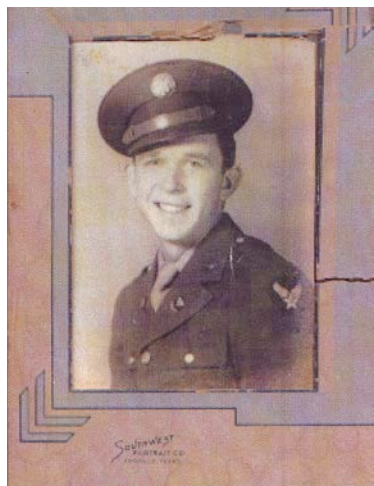
Lt. James C. Adair

Adair had this to say about the men of his crew in 1993:

“... I think back now and we were really all just kids. Ben [Goddard, navigator] and Milt Brucker were married men. Only a couple of us had even been away to college.” [Goddard married in 1942 and was a father with a young daughter; Brucker had married in May 1944 just months before being deployed.]

In 1944, Adair wrote in his log that his original crew (with Babcock and before Conley joined them) had trained at the same base Conley had been:

“... Assignment and Training of the Crew were in Sioux City Iowa from 6/44 to 9/44. Crew members were previously trained for their positions at various bases. Milton Brucker came from a bombardier training base in Texas. ...”



Culpepper at Amarillo

Once again, Adair spoke about his crew, and in particular, Dad, by phone around Christmastime 2000, only a few months after Dad's death:

“... We had an outstanding crew. Every last one of them was a professional in his job. Relied on all of them every day we went up. ... Conley was special. Our ground crew, Jim Horny, and your father got us up, and *kept* us in the air. Anything could happen, but we had confidence Conley would handle whatever got thrown at us, and he did. Time after time, if something big or something small broke, or got torn up or shaken loose, he was Johnny-on-the-spot with a fix. That was something I didn't worry about with him on board, and with everything else going on during a typical flight – and really *none* of them are what you could call *typical* – that was a comfort. We all counted on him. He never let us down. ... We *all* grew up extremely fast over there. ... I miss him already. Conley was as fine a man as I ever knew. Wise, and kind, and talented. I believe anybody who ever met him felt the same way. ...”

From a September 2008, phone call with Geneva Adair (I called to check on her during the nighttime landfall of Hurricane Ike):

“... My Jim thought the world of Conley. When it [Alzheimer's disease] took most everything else, he'd walk by the cedar chest and touch it and smile and tell me, 'Conley made that.' He always remembered that. ...”

This excerpt from the official *B-17 Pilot's Training Manual* issued by the U.S. Army Air Force probably helps to explain the close relationship that pilot Adair and engineer Culpepper shared. Then again, Adair had the luxury of two engineers with Jim Horny:

“... Size up the man who is to be your engineer. This man is supposed to know more about the airplane you are to fly than any other member of the crew.

He has been trained in the Air Forces' highly specialized technical schools. Probably he has served some time as a crew chief. Nevertheless, there may be some inevitable blank spots in his training which you, as a pilot and airplane commander, may be able to fill in.

Think back on your own training. In many courses of instruction, you had a lot of things thrown at you from right and left. You had to concentrate on how to fly; and where your equipment was concerned you learned to rely more and more on the enlisted personnel, particularly the crew chief and the engineer, to advise you about things that were not taught to you because of lack of time and the arrangement of the training program.

Both pilot and engineer have a responsibility to work closely together to supplement and fill in the blank spots in each other's education. To be a qualified combat engineer a man must know his airplane, his engines, and his armament equipment thoroughly. This is a big responsibility: the lives of the entire crew, the safety of the equipment, the success of the mission depend upon it squarely.

He must work closely with the copilot, checking engine operation, fuel consumption, and the operation of all equipment. He must be able to work with the bombardier, and know how to cock, lock, and load the bomb racks. It is up to you, the airplane commander, to see that he is familiar with these duties, and, if he is hazy concerning them, to have the bombardier give him special help and instruction.

He must be thoroughly familiar with the armament equipment, and know how to strip, clean, and re-assemble the guns.

He should have a general knowledge of radio equipment, and be able to assist in tuning transmitters and receivers.

Your engineer should be your chief source of information concerning the airplane. He should know more about the equipment than any other crew member – yourself included.

You, in turn, are his source of information concerning flying. Bear this in mind in all your discussions with the engineer. The more complete you can make his knowledge of the reasons behind every function of the equipment, the more valuable he will be as a member of the crew. Who knows? Someday that little bit of extra knowledge in the engineer's mind may save the day in some emergency.

Generally, in emergencies, the engineer will be the man to whom you turn first. Build up his pride, his confidence, his knowledge. Know him personally; check on the extent of his knowledge. Make him a man upon whom you can rely. ..."

In 1993, Brucker matter-of-factly agreed:

"Your father was very good at his job. He pulled us out of more than a few seriously tight spots."

Likewise, once prompted, Conley talked about his crewmates at the reunion and afterward: [Conley on Jim Adair, pilot] "Adair was always fair. Some officers *weren't*, but Adair was *consistently* fair. He'd listen to you, hear you out before deciding something, and he always trusted – and expected – you to do your job."



Jim Adair. Culpepper photo.

"He was just an all-around outstanding pilot. Never once got rattled that I knew of. No matter what happened to us – or the plane – Adair got us home and landed smooth. I don't ever recall a rough or bad landing with him."

"I'd say Adair held us together. ... A good man. One of the finest I've ever known."

[Conley on Elmer Wesala, co-pilot] "... Wesala was particular about how things went – how he *wanted* them to go or thought they should be – could be pretty picky, but that makes for a good pilot, that attention to details."



Brucker and Wesala. Culpepper photo.

"Wesala didn't like it much when Brucker called him 'Curly,' so *naturally*, Brucker usually called him 'Curly.' ..."

Interestingly enough, it was Adair who said this in a phone call referring to Wesala:

"... 'Curly' was an excellent co-pilot, probably as good as any first-pilot in any other aircraft. ..."

[Conley on Milton Brucker, bombardier] "... To me, Brucker had the hardest job of any of us on the crew. It was him had his finger on the trigger. ... I respected him. Smart guy that Brucker. ... While we were on station, he kept at it until he knew as much about the plane as *any* engineer or mechanic ever did. It was like having *another* flight engineer aboard, in my view."

[Conley on 'Barney' Meley, radio operator] "Meley was usually grinning – been *up to something*. He could be a prankster. Took his job seriously, but I think back now that he was trying to ease the mood for the rest of us best he could. Maybe himself too. ... At the time, he was sort of like a big brother to me and I guess for most of us. ..." (*All records found for Meley show him to be born in 1915 – making him 28-29 years old in 1944 – significantly older than his crewmates, except Goddard, who was born in 1916.*) "... He [Meley] would listen for our splashers all the way home. Sometimes with his eyes squeezed shut to *listen hard*. Then get a big grin and give a wink or thumbs-up once he had it dialed in and it got stronger." [The radio beacon or 'homing signal' for Thorpe Abbotts Field was *Splasher Six* which is also the name given to the 100th Bomb Group Association's postwar newsletter].



Culpepper and Meley. Culpepper photo.

[Conley on James Hendrix, ball-turret gunner] "... I flew inside there a few times, but you had to have the right frame of mind down in that tight space and I was never really all that comfortable in there ... He

[Hendrix] seemed to like it. Guess it suited him. Could sit all curled up in there with his knees in his chin for hours. ... He was fairly shy and didn't say a whole lot when I first met him."

[Adair on James Hendrix, in a letter to Sharon Hendrix Enos of Aug. 30, 1996] "... Jim was probably the most steady dedicated guy on the crew – always there, no complaints. I didn't learn till we finished our missions that he developed air sickness on most of the training flights at Sioux City. ..."

[Conley on Jim Horny, waist-gunner] "... Could always count on him to lend a hand with whatever needed done. ... Not a real big guy, but he *didn't know that* and it didn't matter for anything any way. He's

from Texas ... with his up-bringing and training, he was always real handy around the plane. Friendly with anybody. ... He and Hendrix were pretty close."

[Conley on Mike Dalgarn, tail-gunner] "... Easy goin' guy. Liked him a lot. A real-life cowboy, and I mean



Adair's Crew #12. Culpepper photo.

the *genuine* item. The 'Marlboro Man' couldn't be any more my image of a cowboy than him. ... Didn't talk a whole lot back then, but when he did, *you listened* to him, because it was probably important and needed said, and needed to be heard. ... What is it they say, 'the strong and silent kind'?"

[Conley on Ben Goddard, navigator] "Goddard was pretty quiet ... but fun to be around ... a good officer and excellent navigator. ... When you think about it, he died fairly young after we got home [in 1958]. But while we were over there he was pretty much a grown-up to me. He was married and had a little girl already – and *she* [Paula] – was the reason we called the plane that we flew most of our missions on the 'Little Sweetheart.'"

[Adair on Goddard, in letter to Sharon Hendrix Enos, Aug. 30, 1996]: "[He] furnished the name for our plane, 'Little Sweetheart' for his daughter ..."

Not everyone agreed that the aircraft, #48532, was named "Little Sweetheart." In fact, in his letter of Feb. 8, 1945, well into their missions, Conley states, "...we have been rackin our brains for a name for our ship – no we haven't named her yet, in all these many missions ... we won't agree on anything. ..."

Ball turret gunner Jim Hendrix's A-2 flight jacket, in fact, bears an image of a B-17 with the tail number 48532 painted onto it, with the name "Sweet Sue" written above. Radioman/gunner DeWitt Meley's A-2 is adorned with the exact same aircraft, but written above it, the name reads, "Mr. Lucky."



Ben Goddard. Culpepper photos.



The "Little Sweetheart" staged on hardstand #15 at Thorpe Abbots Air Station. Culpepper photo.



Hendrix's A-2 courtesy of Sharon Hendrix Enos.



Meley's A-2 courtesy of Kim Meley DeBerge

On “the job”:



Trails of smoke show where aircraft where to drop bombs. Note “sticks” of bombs dropping in clusters below remaining B-17s . Culpepper photo

Conley and his crewmates described their mind sets on the daunting tasks they faced and responsibilities they felt. As he put it: “You had a job to do. If you did your job, the war would end sooner. If the war ended sooner, fewer people died.” It all sounds simple when put that way.

Brucker was direct when he shared an unvarnished personal motivation in Little Rock, 1993:

“... We gave maximum effort every day. Men we ate breakfast with in the morning died before dinner. So, *the next day*, you got up and you went back to work. You owed that to them to go back out and do the best *you* could do that day. They’d already done theirs. That’s what soldiers do.”

Adair, in a phone call in 1998, related the following:

“We might learn in briefing that the target was in a more residential area to conceal it. That stuff made you sick.

But there was a job to do, and it was *the Germans* who had responsibility for putting a factory nearby to a school or houses.

Our responsibility was to hit it to the best of our ability. ... It was hard to reconcile. It was hard.”

Another candid comment from my father has always stayed with me:

“We all knew our bombs had hurt and killed men and women and children as much as they destroyed factories or railroads. Up in the air, it could all be *impersonal*. We never saw their faces, but still, that kind of knowing hurt your heart.”

Conley told *Active Years*:

“... The average mission was 8 ½ hours, and the planes were full every time we took off. We could carry 6,000 pounds of bombs. ...”

In 1993, a somber Brucker told me matter-of-factly:

“... Where *our* bombs went, that was *my responsibility*. That degree of responsibility costs a great deal of sleep. At that time *and* later on.”

Brucker also shared a surprisingly emotional memory:

“After we finished our tour, I was assigned to Group Intelligence to analyze after-action strike photos. They had a handful of us [former combat bombardiers] check to see if our boys were hitting targets. I was able to get my hands on copies of strike photos from each mission we flew. ... Once, we had a foreign exchange student visit: a lovely young woman from Cologne. I guess my guilt got the better of me, and I asked her about the war, about the bombers. Said she remembered a Sunday when the bombers came while she was at mass and hit the railroad next to her school. She told me that no one in the church was hurt, and since it was Sunday, no one was at school. I was stunned. I got my strike photos out and found the one from our trip to Cologne that happened *on a Sunday*. We’ll never know if it was *our Sunday* [Oct. 15, 1944] that she remembered, but with a magnifying glass, she was able to point out her school, and her home, and the church. She said all three had survived the war. Then, that sweet girl told me she was sorry the bombers had to come. *SHE* apologized to *ME* about me bombing her home. *Can you believe that?* I hugged her and just cried with her. I gave her that photo. It’s the only one missing from the set. ...”

Conley spoke of his amazement when a target once presented itself and then eliminated itself in a most unusual way:

"It was a Sunday morning. In solid overcast the whole way, which was good because that meant the flak gunners couldn't see you, but it also meant you couldn't see the target. As we closed in, you looked down and there was a hole in the clouds, a perfect circle, like it had been cut out. It was the *only* break in the clouds and sunshine was pouring through it. We all saw it – that hole was *directly* over a church – the steeple, bell tower was lit up. We all knew people, civilians, were inside that church. Adair came over the interphone and said, 'Boys, we're gonna push on to the secondary.' And what do you know – but *every other* plane with us did the same thing – just flew right on over that hole without dropping a bomb. There's no doubt in my mind whatsoever *that* was God's hand."

Pilot's logbook entry for a second mission to Cologne on Sunday, Jan. 7, 1945, comes close to describing this event: "Drove over primary (Cologne), hit secondary (Limburg airfields). The 100th Bomb Group Headquarters' Diary (100thbg.com) also mentions this date/target as heavily overcast and the Limburg airfield was a 'target of opportunity' that was located and bombed by PFF (Pathfinder) radar. However, some have shared recollections that the Christmas/Easter holiday might have been mentioned as part of this story, although that element is not reflected in my notes, simply that this event occurred on a Sunday. The crew did fly a mission on Sunday, Dec. 24, 1944, to Biblis. Official 8th Air Force records show that date/target was a "Maximum Effort" mission with a record 2,034 bombers dispatched in good weather, visible bombing conditions, and reported excellent results on all primary targets. Adair's crew flew a total of eight missions on Sundays, including the two mentioned above. In 1945, Easter Sunday fell on April 1, well after the crew's final combat mission on February 25.

I asked Adair if he recalled the "hole-in-the-clouds" mission, although I failed to ask him specifically what the date/target was. He had this to say:

"That's one I've thought about quite a lot. It was a sure enough hole – a real circle. And there was a Catholic church with tall spires *right there* in the middle, shining. It was Sunday morning. When you see a cathedral from the air like that, the building itself is shaped like a cross. There was never an order given by the lead plane or anyone to hold off for the alternate. But not a plane even opened up their doors [to the bomb bay]. We all just flew on past. I said to the crew, essentially told them, we were moving on and not dropping our payload there that day. Nobody said anything to object. ..."



Culpepper photo

On the 'little friends':

Any fighter escort was a welcome sight to a bomber crew. Adair's crew talked about their "Little Friends" who helped fend off Luftwaffe attacks.

In 1993, Brucker said it clearly:

"We loved having fighters along. Those guys saved bombers. It's really that simple."

Conley described the types of fighter aircraft that shared the air with the bombers:

"I'd say early on, there were some 'Jugs' [P-40s], but mostly Thunderbolts [P-47s] and Mustangs [P-51s] escorted us. Especially later. They sure were nice to see coming in."

Once, when I teased him that I'd heard he'd actually *hugged* his brand-new neighbor, Ken Moreland, a former P-51 pilot, Dad shrugged it off and replied:

"Never met a fighter pilot I didn't want to hug."

As fate had it, the longer Conley and Mr. Moreland visited, the more they came to realize that Moreland's tour of duty had overlapped almost perfectly with Dad's own, and that Moreland himself in a shamrock-adorned P-51 of the "Irish Eyes" 339th Fighter Group had actually been alongside Conley and the Square-D bombers of the "Bloody Hundredth" on a great many missions.

I never met Mr. Moreland, but he published his memoirs, *A Piece of Cake*, in 1992 in which he described with swaggering bravado his fighter-pilot days. In it, he had this to say about escorting the bombers that he and his fellow fighter jockeys often ribbed as being "old women" because they flew slower and more sluggish aircraft not designed for evasive maneuvers:

"... If you sat up there, as I did, and watched miles of bombers fly straight and level over an enemy target, with the sky so black with flak you sometimes lost sight of the bombers, you would realize they might be 'old women,' but they had more plain, old-fashioned GUTS than anyone I know. ..."

Once, I had the privilege of meeting Lt. Col. Woodrow "Woody" Crockett, retired P-51 pilot with the famed "Red Tails" 332nd Fighter Group – the Tuskegee Airmen – an all-black unit that escorted bombers of the 15th Army Air Force. A fellow Arkansan, Crockett was being honored by the MacArthur Museum of Arkansas Military History. As I introduced myself, I shot him Dad's line, telling him that my late father, a B-17 crewman, told me that he'd never met a fighter pilot he didn't want to hug. The old colonel smiled and said, "Well, let's give him one then," and squeezed me with a proxy hug for Dad.

In a 1995 phone call with Adair after telling him I'd flown at the controls of a B-17 (the *Aluminum Overcast*), he told me:

"I'm glad you experienced that and that we have that in common. But, I feel I must warn you. Be careful, now that you've earned your wings on the 'big bird,' you're going to find yourself *dreaming* about flying something really *fast*: One of those sleek P-51 fighter jobs. Sure know I did!"



Me with Tuskegee airman,
Col. Woody Crockett

On leave:

Flight crews found countless ways to escape the rigors of combat. Dad said the base had an Officers' Club as well as a Sergeants' Club that offered "diversions" for stressed-out crewmen. He also said the girls from the Red Cross, the so-called "Donut Dollies," always listened and chatted politely and smiled at the men as they handed out their namesake fresh, hot donuts. "They probably got at least a hundred marriage proposals a day," he joked.

When on-base recreations weren't enough, Conley said his crew did get a chance or two to get away from the grinding daily routine:

"We did get passes and saw London on leave. Meley and I took in the sights best we could: Piccadilly Circus. Buckingham Palace. Meley ordered up scotch and water. They brought out scotch in *one glass* and *water in another!* I tried it and it *burned*, but Meley seemed to like it well enough. ..."

"In London, I woke up when I heard some coins drop on the floor and there was a fella in my room holding my uniform trousers I'd left on the chair back. He said, 'Never mind, Yank, don't get up I'm just leaving.' And by the time I got out of bed, he'd run out of my room and was *gone*. Fortunately, he left my pants."

"... They sent us out to a 'flak hotel' one time. It sure was nice to be out in the country. It was quiet. I got to fish a little. Walked out in the woods. There was a beach, but the woods were better." [One photo of Conley with Meley sitting perched atop a wall is marked "Bournemouth" on the back – a beach resort along the extreme southern coast of England.]

In his memoirs, Ken Moreland included this passage about resting at a country manor that he referred to as a "flak home," where he and a few other fighter pilots shared some welcome downtime with the officers from six bomber crews:

"... A 'jumpier' bunch of guys you have never seen. If you slammed a door, every one of them would jump five feet in the air. They really needed to rest for a few days. ..."



On the 'Flying Fortress':

The Boeing B-17 "Flying Fortress" is arguably the most iconic bomber of World War II. As a long-range weapon, it has been credited with helping turn the tide of war in Europe. The planes were instrumental in accomplishing daring daylight raids of German industry and were frankly also dangled as "bait" to draw the Luftwaffe's fighters up where American fighters eventually decimated German air power. The plane is well-documented for its durability and reliability. For all those reasons and more, Conley and his crewmates held the plane in highest regard.

In 1992, when a B-17 Fortress (the *Nine-O-Nine*) and a B-24 Liberator (the *All American*) landed at Hot Springs Municipal Airport, I took Dad and Mom out to see them. It was the first Fortress Dad had seen in person since returning from the war. As we approached the plane, a group of old men was already gathered at the B-17's tail door. Obviously a bunch of old "fly boys," their apparent ringleader bellowed out to Dad, "What's your unit, soldier?" Dad simply responded, "Hundredth." The group reacted as one: they all raised their heads to size him up, then nodded their approval. Their ringleader then gave voice to what the others were thinking when he said, "Hell, I didn't think there were any of you boys left," and vigorously shook Dad's hand.

As we stood in line that day to take a tour of that B-17, I carried a video camera in hopes of asking Dad a few questions on camera. He walked up to the aircraft and silently ran his hands up and down a propeller as if he were shaking hands with an old friend. As it turned out, a gentleman from nearby Arkadelphia in line ahead of us began talking to Dad about the airplane and asked about his service. In a rapid-fire monologue, Dad started spouting off facts and figures about the plane that only a flight engineer would know: Things like the sheer number of moving parts, its 300,000+ rivets holding it together, fuel consumption rate, payload, operational ceiling, engine thrust, armament, effective range, and *on and on*. I simply stepped back and rolled camera and let this stranger ask more questions. Dad certainly had gotten to know his B-17s very well after all.

Later, as we climbed up into the nose hatch, we made our way to the top-turret. His memories were thick inside the aircraft. Some of the stories in this document were relayed inside the plane as muscle memory aided their recall. Dad chuckled, "It sure helped being 19 or 20 years old," as he bent over and moved around the plane's cramped interior, slowed but not deterred by rheumatoid arthritis.

While we stood in his old gun position inside the top-turret, we could see the Liberator parked at our "4 o'clock" position, he said:

"You know, if you fired these twin .50s [machine guns], and your target cut across your tail, one gun would stop firing and then the other and then start up again in sequence as you tracked that target – that way you couldn't shoot off your tail in the heat of the moment. Somebody pretty smart must've figured that out. Not so sure I could think to stop shooting."

I pointed to the other old plane and asked Dad if he wanted to tour that B-24 once we finished up on the Fortress:

"Nope. Not interested. The guys who flew 'em loved 'em. But every time I saw one it seems like it was on fire or breaking in half." He went on to say, "When we got orders to go home, they told me I could fly home on a B-24 and be home in two or three days, or I could go on a troop ship and be home in two or three weeks. Well, two weeks later, I stepped off the gangplank of the S.S. *Marine Robin*" [arriving 13 days later on May 13, 1945 – two of his Lucky 13s].



Another brother, Mark, who joined up with us on the tarmac in Hot Springs that day recalls Dad saying that while aboard the troop ship, he'd tossed his .45-caliber pistol overboard – as did practically everyone else – because Military Police were searching all the soldiers aboard for guns that were supposed to have been turned in.

While touring that B-17, Dad reminisced at times about the plane's durability:

"She could take a lot of punishment and still fly. A very forgiving airframe and platform. I think any one of us could've flown her if we'd had to. *Maybe not land*, but fly for sure."

"... We'd come in all peppered up with dents and holes, some you could put your fist or head through. [The crew chief] Bailey would just shake his head and say, 'What'd you boys do to *my* airplane?!'"

"B-17s came home missing big chunks. Entire control surfaces would just be *gone*: no tails or no nose or wingtips to speak of – but they came back. That plane would get you home if you could just give her half a chance. ..."

From that *Active Years* article by Tim Taylor in 1993:

"... 'That old B-17 was something else,' says Culpepper wistfully, recalling some of the more adventurous missions he and the crew lived through. ..."



"Bailey, Asst Crew Chief." Culpepper photo.



The ground crew. Culpepper photo.

"... 'Of course, we're biased, but [the B-17] was a well-built plane,' says Brucker, the crew's bombardier and somewhat of an expert on aircraft construction, having worked for the Boeing Co. prior to enlisting. ..."

In a 1995 phone call with Adair, he echoed those same feelings:

"We loved that airplane. Any pilot worth his salt would probably say the same about his if it brought him home safely, but we were pretty biased toward the 'Forts.' Rock solid all around. ..."

"Reliable, powerful engines. ... Easy enough to fly, but you really had to be on top of your game in the

formation. Seven, eight, nine hours of flying formation took a toll – mostly mental. Seems I was sore *all the time* from it, and *simply exhausted* from the mental part."

In 1995, I bought a ticket for Dad to take a flight on another B-17 in Little Rock (the *Aluminum Overcast*). I called to extend the invitation, and asked, "What are you doing this weekend?" He replied, "Well, I'm going turkey hunting in Missouri." Understanding then just what I was up against, I said, "Oh, you can go hunting any time. How would you like to come fly on a B-17?" Then ... no response ... just seconds of dead silence, when Dad finally came back he said, "Son, I've flown on a B-17. Tell you what: I'm gonna go hunting. But you go fly her and tell me all about it when I get back."

I did. It was more than I could have imagined. He was right; it would've helped being 19 ... especially moving around inside the aircraft in flight. But it seemed to me that Dad was with me that day. So was the rest of his crew. I could picture Meley grinning and pumping chaff out. Dalgarn curled up in his safe spot way back in the tail. And Horny

slumped by his gun in the waist, and Hendrix just happy to be alive in the ball. I took my turn in the left seat Adair had vacated for me, flanked by Wesala on the right. Dad wasn't kidding: it *was* a forgiving platform that *even I* could fly ... maybe not land, but certainly fly.

Down below, in the nose, I could envision Goddard the navigator working out our flight path and my friend Brucker with hands busy dialing in his trusty Norden sight. On the horizon, a formation of planes appeared as specks that slowly drew closer. Thoughts of Messerschmitt 109s or Me262 jets soon gave way to the reality of a flight of C130 cargo planes from the Little Rock Air Force Base as they sidled up to take a look at the old "war bird" and ceremoniously dipped their wings in tribute as they flew past us in single file.

Man, I only wish Dad had been there to see that.



Mission to Hamm, Germany, 26 Nov 1944. Culpepper photo.

After landing, I bumped in to Cindy Goodman, a lady I'd met while arranging media coverage for the Little Rock reunion. She, a fellow Arkansan, had since been elected to a post in the 100th Bomb Group Association, and like me was a sucker for seeing a B-17 up close. At her request I wrote up my experience aboard the plane that day, and I was honored when it was published in an issue of the association's *Splasher Six* newsletter.

Over the years, I've learned a lot about just how fortunate I and my brothers are to be here, and what an immeasurable debt we owe the men who served with Dad in World War II. The life expectancy of an American bomber crew in Europe was around 15 combat missions. Dad and the rest of Adair's crew completed 35.

Their unit, the "Bloody Hundredth," endured disproportionate losses that drove the overall average down to that 15 number. The odds were against him, his crew – and James K. Roberts – ever making it home. The 100th flew missions in which they suffered losses exceeding 90% of the planes they sent out. The story of a Luftwaffe vendetta may or may not be real, but the loss of life certainly was.

The command:

United States Army Air Forces
8th Air Force
13th Combat Wing
100th Bombardment Group [Heavy]
349th Bombardment Squadron

Crew No. 12:

Aircraft Commander/Pilot:

Co-pilot:

Bombardier:

Navigator:

Engineer/Gunner (trained with Klenke):

Engineer/Gunner (trained with Adair):

Radio Operator/Gunner:

Ball-turret Gunner:

Tail Gunner:

1st Lieutenant James ("Jim") Craig Adair

2nd Lieutenant Elmer G. Wesala

2nd Lieutenant Milton J. Brucker

2nd Lieutenant Benjamin Jacob Goddard

Technical Sergeant Conley Edward Culpepper

Technical Sergeant James ("Jimmy") HubertHorny

Technical Sergeant Dewitt Provost ("Barney") Meley

Staff Sergeant James ("Jim") Engle Hendrix

Staff Sergeant David Michael ("Mike") Dalgarn

The commendations:

Adair's crew never was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross they were recommended to receive. In a letter dated Jan. 22, 1945, Conley wrote: "Yes, the boys on crew 12 in hut 18 aren't such hot rocks afterall. We were turned down on the D.F.C. Guess we will have to do the trick again and let the Col. see it for himself (personally his truly will take his spam ribbon and be happy to return to the States all in one piece). ..." Of note, James H. Horny was individually awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross in May 1945 for his ingenuity and actions, although unknown if it was for an action taken while serving with Adair or possibly flying with another crew, in which he somehow managed to repair and operate his top-turret guns using only a screwdriver – and downed an enemy fighter plane in the process.

Conley, and his crewmates did earn the Air Medal for "meritorious service" while in flight. Conley's and Adair's records show 5 oak leaf clusters (Hendrix's records show 4), each marking another action deserving of being separately awarded the Air Medal again; as well as the European-Middle East-Africa Campaign Medal (a.k.a. "Spam ribbon," with three battle stars: one each for the individual campaigns of Rhineland, Ardennes/Alsace, and Central Europe). He also received the Army's Good Conduct Medal, as well as a Presidential Unit Citation ribbon earned by the 100th Bomb Group in its entirety for their multiple visits to Berlin (the heroic actions required for this award are equal to the level demanded of an individual to earn the Distinguished Flying Cross – the Hundredth earned it twice). It's doubtful that Conley or his crewmates ever knew it, but they were also entitled to the French *Croix de Guerre* with Palm (for bomber actions from 25 June – 31 December 1944). As a uniformed soldier during the war, he would've also been eligible for the World War II Victory Medal, another he never received.

But the biggest and most remarkable award of all may be that only one man on Adair's incredibly "lucky crew" came away with a Purple Heart. According to his daughter, Tamara, David Michael Dalgarn was embarrassed that he was wounded in "his backside" (buttocks) by flak. Dalgarn's own notebook and a letter from Culpepper confirm Dalgarn being hospitalized briefly in November of 1944.



Air Medal



Army Good Conduct Medal



European-Middle East-Africa Campaign Medal with 3 Battle Stars



World War II Victory Medal



Croix de Guerre (France)



Presidential Unit Citation with Oak Leaf Cluster

The missions:

Put into historical context, Adair's crew found themselves at an extremely dangerous juncture in the war.

The crew arrived in England in mid-September *after* the Normandy invasion of "D-Day" on June 6, 1944, and the resulting Allied push inland. They came at a time when the bombers were pushing deeper than ever into enemy territory in broad daylight. In fact, the likely reason for this crew's assignment to the 100th Bomb Group as a replacement crew is the fact that the 100th lost 109 crew men (50 KIA) in a single action on September 11th in a running air battle, without fighter support, over the Ore Mountains located in what is now the Czech Republic. These missions during this phase of the war were critical in disrupting Nazi munitions and oil production, communications, morale, transportation and reinforcement efforts – particularly once the Germans executed their stunning Ardennes counteroffensive that culminated in the "Battle of the Bulge" of December 1944 through January 1945 – that fell smack in the middle of Dad's tour of duty. Frankly, Dad's crew and their fellow bombers flew missions in conditions that had legitimately grounded planes in previous winters. They flew that winter of 1944-45 out of sheer necessity – and they did it on pure guts.

And even though Luftwaffe fighter opposition was generally lighter and less successful against the bombers during Conley's tour than it had been earlier in the war, those German fighters had not just gone away. They were still an effective fighting force.

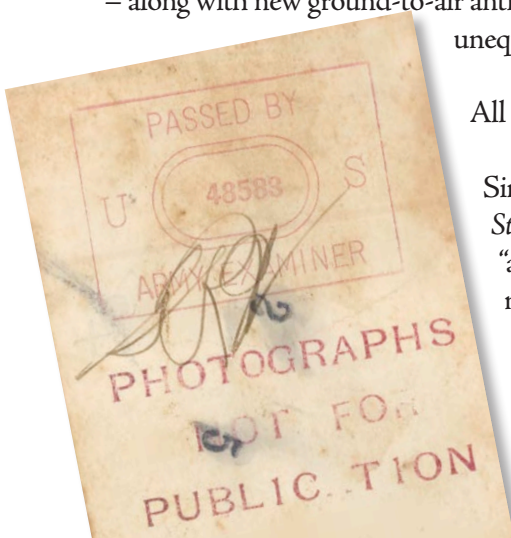
With the benefit of history, we now know that British and American military strategists and commanders at the highest levels had agreed to use unwitting American bomber crews as so much "bait" to draw out German fighter planes in hopes that newly developed escorts such as the P-51 could further reduce the ability of German aircraft to strike American ground troops. The bombers and their crews were declared "expendable" and deemed to be "acceptable losses" if they could be traded for similar losses of German aircraft.

Conley's personal nightmare mission over Merseburg on November 2, 1944, where a record of 134 enemy fighters were reportedly drawn out and shot down is a result of the "expendable bomber" plan: Out of the 1,174 B-17s sent out in two waves to Merseburg that day, 40 were shot down, and 583 of those bombers reported damage, two of them were deemed "beyond repair" (more than half the bombers sent ended the day shot down or damaged). In addition, 15 U.S. fighter escorts were also downed. Four crewmen on B-17s were reported killed in action with another 26 wounded, yet another 540 air crewmen were listed as missing – unaccounted for – likely POWs or dead on the ground. Even though the petroleum production center of Merseburg was a valuable strategic objective, the *real* target was the Luftwaffe fighters and their pilots. The men aboard the B-17s were sent in two separate waves to allow those German fighters not shot down during the first raid time enough to refuel and reload in order to come up again to take on a second round of bombers. Dad was right when his intuition had told him that the Army was actually trying pretty hard to let him get killed.

On top of all those considerations, as you've read, strikingly new and frighteningly powerful weapons were being introduced by the Germans during this period of the war. Several revolutionary jet-propelled fighter planes and V1s – along with new ground-to-air anti-aircraft missiles and the intercontinental V2 rockets presented very real, and unequalled, threats.

All in all, it must have been a dizzying time to find oneself flying in combat.

Since military censors would read outgoing mail, Conley started sending the *Stars & Stripes* Army newspapers home to his sweetheart, "Del" Ashley. Since it was already "approved" news, the censors didn't pay much attention to them. Conley would make little pencil or pen marks next to stories he'd been involved in. She kept the papers and around 200 of their wartime letters. In the transcribed articles that follow, words that Conley pointed out are underlined in the images.



By pairing those newspapers with notes from Adair's flight logs, and from notebooks kept by Culpepper, Hendrix and Dalgarn we are able to fill in some extra details around missions and what was happening on the ground.

Adair also gave me a copy of his logbook as part of our correspondence over the years. Beyond his little red notebook, Dad's service records, including his Personal Flight Record, were also used to compile the list of missions and flights. A few other primary sources from inside the 100th Bomb Group dating to that dizzying six-month period Dad spent in combat while based at Thorpe Abbotts Field were also used to add context and shed some additional details of those missions, and the conditions he faced in his daily life.

Transatlantic Shuttle Flights ("The Hop")

September 12, 1944: Leg I (Hours): 5:40 – New Hampshire to Newfoundland

September 14, 1944: Leg II (Hours): 8:00 – Newfoundland to Iceland

September 16, 1944: Leg III (Hours): 5:40 – Iceland to Wales – The shuttled aircraft, B-17G 43-38480, was subsequently assigned to the 493rd Bomb Group and was lost in combat on September 30, 1944.

September 23, 1944: Adair's crew assigned to 100th Bomb Group (Heavy)

Training Flights

October 5, 1944: Flight Duration (Hours): 2:10

October 6, 1944: Flight Duration (Hours): 2:10

October 6, 1944: Flight Duration (Hours): 0:30 Nighttime (Hours): 0:30

October 7, 1944: Flight Duration (Hours): 3:30

October 8, 1944: Flight Duration (Hours): 3:40

October 10, 1944: Flight Duration (Hours): 2:45

October 11, 1944: Flight Duration (Hours): 3:10

Combat Mission #1 – Bremen, Germany

Date: Wednesday, October 12, 1944

Objective: Industrial Ball Bearing Factory

Aircraft: "Grumblin Gremlin III" – 338681 XR V

Flight Duration (Hours): 6:20 Pilot's Note (Adair's Log): "FW 190 Parts Factory."

Tail-Gunner's Note (Dalgarn's notebook): "Bearing Factory and our first mission"

Ball-Turret Gunner's Note (Hendrix's notebook): "Flak was light no holes in plane. I was expecting flak to scare me but it wasn't to [sic] bad"

Training Flight

Date: Thursday, October 13, 1944

Flight Duration (Hours): 3:30

Combat Mission #2 – Cologne, Germany

Date: Sunday, October 15, 1944

Objective: Rail yards

Aircraft: "The Reluctant Dragon" – 338011 XR H

Flight Duration (Hours): 6:10

Ball-Turret Gunner's Note (Hendrix's notebook): "Flak was moderate but very accurate. We had about 20 holes in plane. Everyone had a close call but the Bombardier [Brucker] and me. A piece cut Horny's pants leg."

Combat Mission #3 – Mannheim/Ludwigshafen, Germany

Date: Thursday, October 19, 1944

Objective: Oil Production

Aircraft: "The Little Skipper" – 31987 XR A

Flight Duration (Hours): 7:45

Pilot's Note (Adair's Log): "No. 3 Engine burned out. Bomb bay doors stuck open."

Engineer's Note (Culpepper's Log): "Feathered one engine (No. 3) due to damage."

Tail-Gunner's Note (Dalgarn's notebook): "Oil dump. Come out of flak with no 3 eng. out, and bomb bay doors would not close. Lost formation and came in alone, 2 hrs after formation"

Ball-Turret Gunner's Note (Hendrix's notebook): "Flak was moderate. A piece bounced off the bombardiers [Brucker's] helmet. I guess it will be my turn next. No. 3 engine was shot out. Couldn't get the bomb bay doors closed. Had to drop out of formation and come back alone, P47 [American fighter escort] buzzed us over England"

Training Flight

Date: Saturday, October 21, 1944

Flight Duration (Hours): 3:15

Combat Mission #4 – Munster, Germany

Date: Sunday, October 22, 1944

Objective: Rail yards

Aircraft: "The Grumblin Gremlin" – 338215 LD P

Flight Duration (Hours): 6:50

Tail-Gunner's Note (Dalgarn's notebook): "Rail yards and pretty easy"

Ball-Turret Gunner's Note (Hendrix's notebook): "Heavy overcast. Flak was light, the flak hit the group ahead of us and the group behind us. We didn't have any holes in the plane."

Mission Recalled

Date: Wednesday, October 25, 1944

Pilot's Note (Adair's Log): "Recalled after assembling for Heligoland."

Aircraft: no name – 338211 XR R

Flight Duration (Hours): 3:20

Combat Mission #5 – Hannover, Germany

Date: Thursday, October 26, 1944

Objective: Half-track factory

Aircraft: unnamed – 338535 LN O

Flight Duration (Hours): 7:15

Tail-Gunner's Note (Dalgarn's notebook): "My birthday, and the dam Jerries [perjorative for Germans] shot at us all the way from target to SiderZee [sic: Zuiderzee]. I got drunk that night."

Ball-Turret Gunner's Note (Hendrix's notebook): "We bombed PFF. [via Pathfinder radar] through a heavy overcast. The flak was medium and we had only one or two holes in ship. I almost passed out from anoxia [oxygen deprivation]."

Training Flight

Date: Tuesday, November 1, 1944

Flight Duration (Hours): 2:30

Combat Mission #6 – Merseburg, Germany

Date: Wednesday, November 2, 1944

Objective: Oil refineries/petroleum production

Aircraft: "The Little Skipper" – 31987 XR A

Flight Duration (Hours): 8:00

Engineer's Note (Culpepper's notebook): "Wow!"

Tail-Gunner's Note (Dalgarn's notebook): "I was in the Hospital" [apparently wounded (buttocks) during Mission #5]

Ball-Turret Gunner's Note (Hendrix's notebook): "This is the roughest target in Germany. The flak was very heavy and there were fighters in the target area but our P51 escorts kept them out of our way. I saw two planes go down and they were plenty I didn't see. We were damm [sic]. lucky those fighters are wonderfull [sic]."

Group Intelligence Officer, Maj. Marvin Bowman's Headquarters Diary: Nov 2, 1944: Merseburg today – flak very heavy – one tail gunner killed. Bombing by PFF with not observed results. [PFF is the abbreviation used for the specially equipped "Pathfinder" B-17s that carried an early onboard radar system, typically used in bad weather or heavy cloud cover.] SOURCE: 100thbg.com

Combat Mission #7 – Ludwigshafen, Germany [Crew recommended for Distinguished Flying Cross]

Date: Sunday, November 5, 1944

Objective: Chemical Plant

Aircraft: "Once in a While" – 31986 XR N

Flight Duration (Hours): 7:25

Pilot's Note (Adair's Log): "Chem. Plant, Chaff Ship, Landed at [CENSORED] because of strong winds"

Engineer's Note (Culpepper's Log): "Chaff Ship"

Tail-Gunner's Note (Dalgarn's notebook): "We were chaff ship. I was still in hosp."

Ball-Turret Gunner's Note (Hendrix's notebook): "The flak was very heavy. We were chaff plane and could take evasive action and didn't get much damage. We landed at a different field for ours was closed because of weather and crack ups."

Combat Mission #8 – Neumunster, Germany

Date: Monday, November 6, 1944

Objective: Airfield/Marshaling yards

Aircraft: "White Cargo" – 46295 EP B

Flight Duration (Hours): 7:20

Tail-Gunner's Note (Dalgarn's notebook): "I was still in hosp got out that nite."

Ball-Turret Gunner's Note (Hendrix's notebook): "Flak was light and fighters were in area, but our escorts take care of them and they didn't get into us. No damage to the ship."

Mission Aborted – Saarbruchen, Germany

Date: Thursday, November 9, 1944

Pilot's Note (Adair's Log): "Hole in No. 2 exhaust stack, half power on No. 2."

Flight Duration (Hours): 0:00

Aircraft: Not identified

Air Medal awarded to Conley Culpepper (and presumably to entire crew): November 11, 1944

Training Flight

Date: Wednesday, November 15, 1944

Flight Duration (Hours): 4:15

Combat Mission #9 – Aachen (Langerwehe), Germany

Date: Thursday, November 16, 1944

Objective: German troop positions along the Siegfried Line

Aircraft: "Lil Butch" – 338313 XR S

Flight Duration (Hours): 8:00

Pilot's Note (Adair's Log): "Ground support near Aachen. Landed with 120 gal. of gas."

Tail-Gunner's Note (Dalgarn's notebook): "Siegfried line. Lot of flak."

Ball-Turret Gunner's Note (Hendrix's notebook): "Aachen front lines. We were bombing for the infantry. A hole was opened and the infantry broke through the next day for a good gain."

Group Intelligence Officer, Maj. Marvin Bowman's Headquarters Diary:

Nov 15 & 16, 1944: Stood down on the 15th. On the 16th flew ground support Micro-H mission. Appeared fairly successful.

Weather closed in and crews had a terrible time landing, 95th was diverted. Took the 100th nearly two hours to land.

Lt. Kramph's crew missing. SOURCE: 100thbg.com

[Micro-H was a technique that used both airborne (H2X) and a ground-based beacon (in France) along with a plane's navigator and bombardier's observations and calculations to determine an airplane's position relative to its target]



Stars & Stripes • Friday, November 17, 1944

1,200 Heavies Aid Doughboys

More than 1,200 U.S. heavy bombers went all-out in the support of American ground attacks north of Aachen yesterday.

And also during the day over 1,150 RAF heavies escorted by upward of 250 fighters, pounded three more towns east and northeast of Aachen.

The heavily-fortified towns of Duren, Julich, and Heinsberg, east and north-east of Aachen, were pounded by the RAF heavies.

Over 450 P47s and P51s escorted the American Fortresses and Liberators. At the late hour last night losses had not been announced.

Yesterday's blow was the Eighth's second large-scale tactical assault in a week, comparable to the crushing bombardment which preceded the Normandy breakthrough at St. Lo and Caen, as well as the Metz offensive of Sept. 9.

Many thousands of 260-pound fragmentation bombs were spread over an area north of Eschweiler and south of the village of Langerwehe, west of Duren. German defense included flak and barrages from field-gun batteries, as well as "anti-aircraft" fire from troops in foxholes, and from strong points. There was no fighter opposition.

On the way home, two Mustang groups, led by Capt. Henry S. Ville, of Paradise, Calif., and Dale E. Shafer, of Dayton, Ohio, strafed rail targets in the vicinity of Frankfurt and Geissen, shooting up 20 locomotives, 92 freight cars and three trucks.



Mission Aborted/Recalled Coblenz, Germany

Date: Monday, November 20, 1944

Pilot's Note (Adair's Log): "No. 3 turbo went out, wiring failure."

Flight Duration (Hours): 2:15

Aircraft: Not identified

Combat Mission #10 – Osnabruck, Germany (alternate target)

Date: Tuesday, November 21, 1944

Objective: Rail yards

Aircraft: unnamed – 338535 LN O

Flight Duration (Hours): 6:35

Engineer's Note (Culpepper's Log): "Last resort target from Merseburg."

Tail-Gunner's Note (Dalgarn's notebook): "Last resort target from Merseburg. Railyards."

Ball-Turret Gunner's Note (Hendrix's notebook): "Heavy clouds over Germany. The flak was light. It was a long ride. We started for Merseburg but bombed the secondary target. I was glad of that."

Group Intelligence Officer, Maj. Marvin Bowman's Headquarters Diary:

Nov 21, 1944: Group set out for our "bete noir" – Merseburg with 12x500 GPs aboard [twelve 500-pound general purpose bombs]. Ended up bombing Osnabruck by PFF as clouds built up to 30,000 feet over Merseburg. All back safely – several aborts.

Lt. Sharrard landed in France with out incident – there were no injuries. SOURCE: 100thbg.com

[NOTE: "bête noire" – French. Detested; Something especially hated or dreaded; a bugbear]

The now-you-see-it, now-you-don't Luftwaffe came up in strength yesterday for the first time in three weeks, and preliminary reports last night indicated that Eighth Air Force fighter-pilots shot down more than 60 enemy fighters and destroyed six more on the ground.

Not since Nov. 2, when Eighth pilots racked up their record one-day bag of 130 Nazi craft in the air, has the Luftwaffe shown itself in any strength.

More than 1,100 Eighth and Ninth Air Force Mustangs, Thunderbolts, and Lightnings flew with more than 1,250 Fortresses and Liberators of the Eighth.

This was one of the largest combined U.S. bomber-escort forces ever dispatched in a single day.

The heavies plastered oil industry objectives at Hamburg, Harburg, Leuna synthetic-oil plant at Merseburg, while Libs pounded the Deutsche and Rhenania oil refineries at Hamburg and Harburg.

Maj. George E. Preddy, of Greensboro, N.C., a P51 squadron commander in the 352nd Fighter Group, shot down one FW 190. He is the top active Eighth fighter-pilot in the ETO, with a score of 30 ½ enemy planes destroyed, 25 ½ in the air and five on the ground.

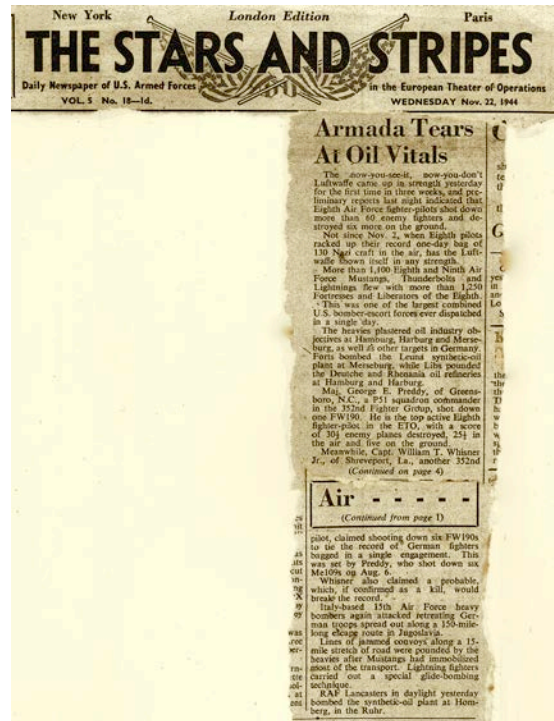
Meanwhile, Capt. William T. Whisner Jr., of Shreveport, La., another 352nd pilot, claimed shooting down six FW 190s to tie the record of German fighters bagged in a single engagement. This was set by Preddy, who shot down six Me109s on Aug. 6.

Whisner also claimed a probable which, if confirmed as a kill would break the record.

Italy-based 15th Air Force heavy bombers again attacked retreating German troops spread out along a 150-mile-long escape route in Jugoslavia.

Lines of jammed convoys along a 15-mile stretch of road were pounded by the heavies after Mustangs had immobilized most of the transport. Lightning fighters carried out a special glide-bombing technique.

RAF Lancasters in daylight yesterday bombed the synthetic-oil plant at Homberg, in the Ruhr.



Training Flight

Date: Friday, November 24, 1944

Flight Duration (Hours): 2:40

Training Flight

Date: Saturday, November 25, 1944

Flight Duration (Hours): 2:30

Combat Mission #11 – Hamm, Germany

Date: Sunday, November 26, 1944

Objective: Rail yards

Aircraft: "That's All Brother" – 338073 XR L

Flight Duration (Hours): 5:50

Ball-Turret Gunner's Note (Hendrix's notebook): "We were carrying six one thousand pounders [bomb load]. Flak was light. We had trouble with the bomb bay doors. I think I saw a Jet plane in the distance. The P.F.F. ship almost hit us as it aborted. A B-24 [American bomber] exploded right behind us on the way back."

Stars & Stripes • Monday, November 27, 1944

Luftwaffe Up, 8th Fighters KO 110 More

For the second time in six days the Luftwaffe yesterday took to the sky in force and, according to preliminary reports, Eighth Air Force fighter-pilots recorded another banner day by shooting down at least 110 of the enemy fighters.

Another 12 Nazi craft were shot down by the heavies' gunners. The pursuits destroyed another seven enemy planes on the ground in a strafing attack.

Last Tuesday Eighth fighters shot down 73. The record bag of 134 Nazi craft was established Nov. 2.

In two large-scale operations over the weekend more than 2,100 heavy bombers of the Eighth hammered oil and rail objectives in the Reich.

Yesterday over 1,100 Fortresses and Liberators, escorted by about 700 Mustangs and Thunderbolts, struck at a large oil refinery at Misburg, near Hanover; a railway viaduct at Bielefeld; rail yards at Hamm, and other targets in northwest Germany.

Saturday's assault on the synthetic-oil plants at Leuna and Lutzkendorf, near Merseburg, and rail yards at Bingen, a communications center west of Mainz, was carried out by more than 1,000 Forts and Libs, shepherded by over 1,000 Mustangs, Thunderbolts and Lightnings of both the Eighth and Ninth Air Forces. There was no enemy fighter opposition.

Eighth losses in Saturday's operations were 12 bombers and five fighters. Yesterday's U.S. losses were 37 heavies and 13 pursuits.

Yesterday, 1/Lt. J.S. Daniell, Eighth P51 pilot from Birmingham, Ala., in the 339th Fighter Group, scored his first victory over the Luftwaffe and became a fighter ace in one day, blasting five Jerries out of the sky. He was top individual scorer for the day.

This outfit, led by Capt. Archie A. Tower, of Winthrop, N.Y. bagged a total of 25 in the air.

However, the day's group honors went to the 355th Fighter Group, another P51 unit led by Maj. E. Larry Sluga, of Belle Valley, Ohio, which shot down 27 Nazi craft.

The Mustang outfits led by Lt. Col. Donald A. Baccus, of Los Angeles, and Capt. John Duncan, of Bradenton, Fla., shot down 22 and 19 respectively.

Ninth Air force aircraft flew 1,000 sorties Saturday in support of the U.S. First, Third, Seventh and Ninth Armies, and the French First Army.

U.S. Fighter Box Score

Following are numbers of enemy aircraft destroyed by U.S. Eighth Air Force fighters on days of heavy aerial fighting in the past:

DATE	TARGETS	
Nov. 21, '44	Merseburg area	73
Nov. 2, '44	Merseburg, Bielefeld, Rheine	134*
	*Fighters also destroyed 25 others on ground.	
Sept. 11, '44	Merseburg, Lutzkendorf	117
Sept. 5, '44	Munster area	28*
	*Fighters also destroyed 143 others on ground	
July 7, '44	Lutzkendorf, Bohlen, Bernburg, Ashersleben	75
May 30, '44	Dessau, Oschersleben, Halberstadt	58
May 19, '44	Berlin, Brunswick	72
May 3, '44	Berlin, Brunswick	59
Apr. 24, '44	Munich area	66
Mar. 16, '44	Ulm, Friedrichshaven	77
Mar. 8, '44	Berlin	83
Mar. 6, '44	Berlin	83
Feb. 22, '44	Bernburg, Oscherleben	61
Feb. 20, '44	Leipzig area	61
Feb. 10, '44	Brunswick	55
Jan. 30, '44	Brunswick	45
Jan. 29, '44	Frankfurt	42
Jan. 11, '44	Oschersleben, Brunswick, Halbertstadt	28
Oct. 8, '43	Bremen, Vegesack	12
Oct. 3, '43	Emden	5
Aug. 17, '43	Schweinfurt, Regensburg	33

NOTE – In missions from January to July, 1944, U.S. Ninth Air Force fighters often accompanied eighth Air Force fighters and bombers whenever large forces were employed. Ninth Air Force fighter claims are included in the figures.

Combat Mission #12 – Coblenz, Germany

Date: Saturday, December 2, 1944

Pilot's Note (Adair's Log): *"Mission recalled after crossing sortie line."*

Aircraft: *"Grumblin Gremlin III"* – 338681 XR V

Flight Duration (Hours): 5:40

Ball-Turret Gunner's Note (Hendrix's notebook): *"It was a recall but we were over the lines so we got a mission. Col. Jeff was leading us. The B-24s went on in to the target and they were hit by enemy fighters. They didn't have sense enough to turn back on account of weather was terrible over Germany."*

Stars & Stripes • Saturday, December 2, 1944

Bomber Loss Cut by 16

While adverse weather grounded Eighth Air Force aircraft yesterday, later reports of Thursday's large-scale operation announced that 16 bombers and 17 fighters, previously reported lost, were safe, this leaves 40 heavies and 13 pursuits missing, of which eight fighters were believed safe in friendly territory.

Meanwhile, it was disclosed that the Brenner Pass – the Germans' main route from Italy to Germany – was cut a month ago by Allied bombers and that continuing raids had kept it impassable by trains.

Combat Mission #“12-B” (a.k.a. #13)– Freidburg, Germany (resort target from Giessen)

Date: Monday, December 4, 1944

Objective: Rail yards

Aircraft: “The Little Skipper” – 31987 XR A

Flight Duration (Hours): 7:20

Ball-Turret Gunner's Note (Hendrix's notebook): “We were loaded with 12-500 lbs [bombs]. We hit the edge of the yards. It was very clear over the target. Fighters were reported in the target area. We flew the diamond and it was rougher than hell.” [‘diamond’ (or ‘slot’) aircraft, is the fourth plane in the formation flying directly behind and slightly below the lead aircraft]



Stars & Stripes • Saturday, December 5, 1944

1,200 Heavies Hit Nazi Rails

Approximately 1,200 Fortresses and Liberators of the Eighth Air Force, escorted by about 1,000 Mustangs and Thunderbolts of the Eighth and Lightnings of the Ninth, yesterday hammered rail yards and industrial objectives in the Reich.

The heavies stuck at Kassel, Mainz, Giessen, Soest and Bebra and elsewhere in western Germany.

Also in daylight yesterday RAF Lancasters continued the offensive against the railways of the Ruhr district with a concentrated assault on Oberhausen.

“German targets are due for the greatest weight of bombardment they have ever received, and winter weather will not protect them,” Lt. Gen. Ira C. Eaker, Mediterranean Allied Air Force chief, said, predicting the success of new cloud-bombing techniques.

He described Ploesti as “the bloodiest air battlefield of the war,” where U.S. losses were 350 bombers and more than 1,400 fliers. But, he said, “It was worth the cost.”

Eaker said a Rumanian official had told him that when the Ploesti attacks started the Germans were getting 26,000 tons of petroleum products daily from there, and when the attacks ended production had been

cut to 3,505 tons daily.

Ninth Air Force fighter-bombers, in action on the U.S. First and Ninth Army fronts Sunday, attacked fortified villages and artillery concentrations near Duren, troops and fortifications north of Julich, and rail yards at Grenenbroich.

On the U.S. Third Army front, Thunderbolts bombed the town of Zwiebrucken.

Combat Mission #14 – Berlin, Germany

Date: Tuesday, December 5, 1944

Objective: Half-track factory, tank factory, ammo dump

Pilot's Note (Adair's Log): “Hendrix & Horny passed out from anoxia”

Aircraft: “The Little Skipper” – 31987 XR A

Flight Duration (Hours): 7:40

Ball-Turret Gunner's Note (Hendrix's notebook): “The flak was light because enemy fighters were in area. The flak really hit the group behind us. I was out over 10 minutes from anoxia. Meley revisied me and Horny helped him then he passed out and I helped Meley revive him. We had one hell of a time. Adair made 1st Lt. today.”



Stars & Stripes • Wednesday, December 6, 1944
Berlin Raided by Heavies
Luftwaffe Loses 80 in Air Battles

Eighth Air Force fighter pilots slugged it out with the Luftwaffe in the skies over Berlin yesterday and shot down more than 80 enemy fighters.

More than 800 Mustangs and Thunderbolts covered more than 550 fortresses and Liberators of the Eighth in attacks on industrial targets in the Berlin area and railway yards at Munster.

Berlin was last attacked by Eighth heavies on Oct. 6. The capital was once the most heavily-defended area in the Reich.

The 357th Fighter Group, a P51 outfit led by Maj. Joseph E. Broadhead, of Rupert, Ida., bagged 20 Nazi craft, while the 470th Fighter Group, another P51 unit led by Lt. Col. Kyle L. Riddle, of Decatur, Tex., knocked down 16.

Maj. William Hove, P51 squadron commander from Crookston, Minn., in the 355th Fighter Group, reported shooting down 5 ½ Jerries.

Pound Tegi Munitions Plant

Fortresses, comprising the bulk of the bombing force, pounded the Tegi munitions plant in the suburbs northwest of Berlin and other objectives in the capital itself.

Several formations bombed visually through breaks in clouds.

RAF Lancasters in daylight yesterday blasted the railway yards at Hamm.

Losses from Monday's large-scale operations by the Eighth were 12 bombers and three fighters.

Monday night RAF heavies dropped more than 3,500 tons of bombs on the important railway and industrial centers of Karlsruhe, in the upper Rhineland, and Heilbronn, 40 miles east. RAF heavy bombers sent over Germany starting in the afternoon numbered 1,150.

Ninth Air Force Marauders, Havocs, Invaders and fighter-bombers flew more than 15,500 sorties in November, attacking over 100 of the fortified towns and villages which constitute the German defensive system east of Aachen. Eleven bombers and 119 fighter-bombers were lost.

Training Flight

Date: Wednesday, December 6, 1944

Flight Duration (Hours): 5:20

Training Flight

Date: Saturday, December 9, 1944

Flight Duration (Hours): 3:30

First Oak Leaf Cluster to Air Medal awarded: December 9, 1944

Training Flight

Date: Sunday, December 10, 1944

Flight Duration (Hours): 2:15



Combat Mission #15 – Darmstadt, Germany

Date: Tuesday, December 12, 1944

Objective: Rail yards

Aircraft: "Little Sweetheart" – 48532 XR G

Flight Duration (Hours): 7:30

Pilot's Note (Adair's Log): "Second Element Lead"

Engineer's Note (Culpepper's Log): "Low on Gas."

Tail-Gunner's Note (Dalgarn's notebook): "Lower than hell on gas, really sweat the [English] channel."

Ball-Turret Gunner's Note (Hendrix's notebook): "The load was 10-250 and 2-M-17 [bombs]. We missed the target. There was no flak but my guns froze and fighters were reported in the area. I felt like a fool with no guns. We had less than ten minutes of gas left when we landed. The soup [cloud cover] was really thick."

Mission Recalled

Osnabruck, Germany

Date: Wednesday, December 13, 1944

Pilot's Note (Adair's Log): "Low Element Lead"

Flight Duration (Hours): 5:15

The Germans launched their Ardennes Offensive on December 16, 1944. The ensuing siege of Bastogne and the "Battle of the Bulge" lasted until January 28, 1945. The brutal conditions of that winter suffered by American infantry and paratroopers are well documented. German planners had counted on severe winter weather to keep Allied air power grounded, too. Instead, the heavy bombers kept flying, launching critical strikes on Nazi lines of supply and communications. Adair expressed particular pride that more than 3,000 American bomber crews, his included, flew these vital missions in horrible weather and bitter cold to keep the Germans from being able to consolidate their positions on ground gained in their shocking winter counteroffensive. Ironically, the miserable weather is at least partially responsible for keeping German fighters on the ground, which left the skies relatively unguarded for Allied bombers and their trusted escorts.

Maintenance Flight

Date: Thursday, December 14, 1944

Flight Duration (Hours): 2:00

Combat Mission #16 – Mainz, Germany

Date: Monday, December 18, 1944

Aircraft: "Little Sweetheart" – 48532 XR G

Flight Duration (Hours): 6:45

Pilot's Note (Adair's Log): "Brought bombs back"

Engineer's Note (Culpepper's Log): "Failed to drop bombs"

Tail-Gunner's Note (Dalgarn's notebook): "Didn't drop bombs."

Ball-Turret Gunner's Note (Hendrix's notebook): "The soup was very thick, and we didn't drop our bombs. My guns froze again. We lost our escort fighters in fog. There was no flak."

Combat Mission #17 – Bibliss, Germany

Date: Sunday, December 24, 1944

Objective: Airfield

Aircraft: "Little Sweetheart" – 48532 XR G

Flight Duration (Hours): 7:45

Second Flight Nighttime Duration: 0:30

Pilot's Note (Adair's Log): "Airfield – Plastered."

Tail-Gunner's Note (Dalgarn's notebook): "Airfield, we really blowed hell out of it."

Ball-Turret Gunner's Note (Hendrix's notebook): "We were bombing the German Fields which were furnishing air support for their big counter attack. It was clear and we really plastered the field. Flak hit a B-17 off our left wing a slight distance, and it went down, one chute opened. That flaked me up."

Combat Mission #18 – Kaiserlautern, Germany

Date: Monday, December 25, 1944

Objective: Railyard over lines

Aircraft: "Little Sweetheart" – 48532 XR G

Flight Duration (Hours): 7:00

Pilot's Note (Adair's Log): "[CENSORED] No. 5"

Engineer's Note (Culpepper's Letter Home, Dated 29 December 1944): "We spent Exmas over a target (25,000 ft and 46° centigrade below, wow the flak was red too)."

Ball-Turret Gunner's Note (Hendrix's notebook): "It was very clear all the way into the target. We hit it hard, we got a oil or ammunition dump. The flak was light but pretty accurate. Our planes were bombing everything in sight behind the lines of the big push."

Group Intelligence Officer, Maj. Marvin Bowman's Headquarters Diary:

Dec 25, 1944: Our second Christmas in England. While the air echelon hit Kiaserlautern again - the paddlefeet enjoyed a magnificent turkey dinner.

SOURCE: 100thbg.com

[Note: "Paddlefeet" is an airman's term of derision for ground eschelon soldiers whose feet never had left the ground]

Stars & Stripes • Wednesday, December 27, 1944

150 Heavies Hit Nazi Rail Lines

Escorted by more than 300 P47s and P51s, approximately 150 Fortresses and Liberators of the Eighth Air Force pounded two rail yards in the Coblenz area and rail bridges between Coblenz and Bonn yesterday. Most of the bombing was done visually.

(For a complete account of the weekend air activity, see page 2.)

Meanwhile, 15th Air Force Forts and Libs struck German synthetic-oil plants in Oswiecim, in Poland, and Blechhammer and Odertal, in Silesia.

Also in daylight yesterday, RAF Lancasters and Halifaxes attacked German troop and armor concentrations in the St.Vith area.

[NOTE: Page 2 is missing]

Combat Mission #19 – Coblenz, Germany

Date: Thursday, December 28, 1944

Objective: Rail yards

Aircraft: "Little Sweetheart" – 48532 XR G

Flight Duration (Hours): 6:45

Pilot's Note (Adair's Log): "[CENSORED] No. 5"

Ball-Turret Gunner's Note (Hendrix's notebook): "We bombed P.F.F. through a heavy overcast. Flak was pretty light and inaccurate. Were escorted by P-51's"

Stars & Stripes • Friday, December 29, 1944

1,200 Heavies Out 3rd Day

For the third straight day, Eighth Air Force heavy bombers – numbering more than 1,200 Fortresses and Liberators, covered by about 700 Mustangs and Thunderbolts – yesterday continued the bombardment of choke-points and rail routes carrying supplies and reinforcements for German counter-attacking forces.

The heavies struck the area between Saarbrücken and Cologne in adverse weather, smashing at rail yards and bridges in the vicinity of Neukirchen, Kaiserlautern, Coblenz and Bonn. There was some visual bombing.

Neither bombers nor fighters encountered enemy fighter opposition. However, the Eighth lost four bombers, presumably to flak. No pursuits were lost.



Photos taken during Wednesday's operations in favorable weather indicated some severe damage in the jammed rail yards at Fulda, northeast of Frankfurt, and Euskirchen, southeast of Cologne.

RAF Bomber Command also kept up its offensive against railway objectives on the Western Front yesterday, a strong force of Halifaxes and Lancasters striking at the rail workshops of Opladen, 12 miles north of Cologne.

Over 1,000 planes of the U.S. 12th Tactical Air Force again lambasted enemy troop concentrations on the western end of the Italian front and communications in northern Italy, with more than 4,000 sorties flown in the last three days.

Heavies of the 15th Air Force pounded Brenner Pass rail lines and scattered oil targets in Czechoslovakia.

Combat Mission #20 – Frankfurt, Germany

Date: Friday, December 29, 1944

Objective: Rail yards

Aircraft: "Little Sweetheart" – 48532 XR G

Flight Duration (Hours): 7:15

Pilot's Note (Adair's Log): "No. 3 in Low. [CENSORED] life raft on Ele. [elevator] came back with."

Ball-Turret Gunner's Note (Hendrix's notebook): "The bombing was visual and they really hit the target. The flak was medium and very accurate. I watched two of Furriers men bail out [read: Lt. John K. Furrer]. One was on his last mission. Life raft came loose and lodged on the stab [stabilizer] It vibrated for a long time."

Stars & Stripes • Friday, December 29, 1944

Bomb Deluge On the Supply Lines Goes on

More than 800 Fortresses and Liberators, escorted by upward of 700 Mustangs and Thunderbolts, yesterday carried the Eighth Air Force assault on rail facilities, bridges and other supply channels feeding Rundstedt's forces into its seventh straight day.

Some of the heavies, which have dropped 14,750 tons of bombs in the seven-day period, struck at Frankfurt and Bingen, to the southeast of Aschaffenburg, to the southeast. The weather was favorable and returning crews reported good results.

Most of the formations attacking small communications targets near the battle area released their bombs through solid cloud with aid of instruments.

There was no enemy fighter opposition for the second straight day and the only days of the seven in which the Eighth has not encountered the Luftwaffe. Yesterday's losses were ten heavies and three pursuits.

Thursday's account of Eighth activity erroneously stated that it was the third instead of the sixth successive day in which the heavies had slashed at enemy supply and communication lines linking Germany with the attacking Nazis.

Hammer at Communications

Meanwhile 15th Air Force heavy bombers hammered communications in Germany and Austria and bombed the Brenner Pass railway for the fourth straight day, while 12th Air Force Thunderbolts battered bridges behind the German Army between Laspezia and Massa on the west coast of Italy.

An AP dispatch reported the Allied Air Command disclosed yesterday that Mosquito night-fighters had been operating in northern Italy in recent weeks.

RAF Second Tactical Air Force pilots shot down 19 German planes yesterday during more than 700 sorties over Germany, between the Rhine and Munster, carried out in fog.

Separate forces of RAF Halifaxes and Lancasters attacked two marshaling yards at Coblenz in daylight, while other Lancasters loosed 12,000-pound bombs on the E and R-boat pens at Rotterdam.

On the U.S. Third Army front, Ninth Air Force Thunderbolts and Lightnings attacked two railyards and a communications sector flying about 90 sorties up to noon yesterday in adverse weather. No enemy fighters were encountered and all planes returned safely.



Combat Mission #21 – Kassel, Germany

Date: Saturday, December 30, 1944

Aircraft: no name – 48230 XR A

Flight Duration (Hours): 6:00

Pilot's Note (Adair's Log): "Aborted. No. 1 Engine burned out, diamond in Low"

Engineer's Note (Culpepper's Log): "Mission aborted."

Tail-Gunner's Note (Dalgarn's notebook): "Abortion. We got credit for it."

Ball-Turret Gunner's Note (Hendrix): "We blew a cylinder just over the lines and turned back. We get credit for it."

Second Oak Leaf Cluster to Air Medal awarded: December 30, 1944



Stars & Stripes • Monday, January 1, 1945

Rhine Bridges Hit

1,300 Heavies Out in Year's Final Blow

In their final blow of 1944 – the ninth in as many days – the Eighth Air Force yesterday dispatched more than 1,300 heavy bombers, escorted by upward of 700 fighters, to smash at a variety of strategic and tactical targets in Germany, including six rail bridges over the Rhine and Moselle in the Coblenz area.

Other targets were oil refineries, rail yards, airfields and communications, as well as U-boat pens.

Yesterday was the second straight day in which the Eighth sent out more than 1,300 Fortresses and Liberators. Saturday's large-scale operation saw the heavies, covered by over 650 Mustangs and Thunderbolts, strike at German communications lines behind the battle-front for the eighth consecutive day.

In the first enemy fighter opposition encountered by the 8th in four days at least 52 German planes were shot down by 8th fighter-pilots.

Bombers Bag 26

The bomber-gunnery claimed shooting down an additional 26 enemy fighters.

The Eighth lost 35 bombers and ten fighters Sunday, but some of the losses were eight heavies and three fighters.

The 364th Mustang Group, led by Maj. Samuel J. Wicher, of Sanford, N.C., who destroyed four Jerries himself, and Robert Lacy, of San Diego, Cal., bagged 26 in dogfights in the Hamburg-Hanover area.

In 200 sorties up to noon yesterday Ninth Air Force fighter-bombers attacked enemy rail installations at Bastogne, Trier, Neukirchen and Zulpich, shooting down five German aircraft, including a jet-propelled fighter, against the loss of one fighter-bomber.

Enemy rail lines and gun positions in the Bastogne area were hit. A rail bridge across the Prum River 13 miles southeast of St. Vith, was knocked out and the St. Vith area bombed.

Also in daylight yesterday a force of RAF Lancasters pounded marshaling yards at Vohwinkel, almost due north of Solingen.

Targets for the heavies yesterday were oil refineries at Hamburg, Harburg and Misburg (near Hanover), the first strategic objectives hit in the nine-day period; U-boat pens at Hamburg; Me262 jet aircraft factories at Wenzendorf, just south of Hamburg; two rail yards in the southwest Ruhr; six rail bridges over the Rhine, Moselle and other rivers opposite the battle area in the Coblenz area, and four detaining points and communications centers handling traffic for German forces.

Six bridges and six marshaling yards in western Germany, including the rail yards at Kaiserlautern, Mannheim and Kassel, were attacked Saturday.

Unopposed by enemy fighters, Ninth fighter-bombers flew 500 sorties Saturday, attacking armored columns and communications and knocking out 32 German tanks and damaging 28. Pilots reported the destruction of 200 rail cars and 17 locomotives. More than 160 motor transport vehicles were destroyed.

The day's Ninth losses were five fighter-bombers.

Saturday night, RAF Halifaxes struck at the Kalk-Nord marshaling yard in Cologne, and Lancasters attacked concentrations of German troops and armor near Houffalize, ten miles northeast of Bastogne.



December 31, 1944 – Ball-Turret Gunner's Note (Hendrix): "We didn't go today, but the rest did and were hit by fighters. We lost 13 out of 38 bombers. Got 30 out of 58 enemy fighters."

Culpepper's letter home, dated 3 January 1945: "We were going on flak leave, until the bloody hundredth had a little setback and now it will be another week before we get off. All the crew except the tail gunner [Dalgarn] have gotten our 3rd oak leaf cluster with the air medal."

Maintenance Flight:

Date: Monday, January 1, 1945

Flight Duration (Hours): 1:15

Combat Mission #22 – Fulda, Germany

Date: Wednesday, January 3, 1945

Objective: Rail yards

Aircraft: "Little Sweetheart" – 48532 XR G

Flight Duration (Hours): 8:00

Ball-Turret Gunner's Note (Hendrix's notebook): "We bombed P.F.F. and there was no flak. This is the first time no flak. We were escorted by P51s all the way."

Combat Mission #23 – Frankfurt, Germany

Date: Friday, January 5, 1945

Objective: Rail yards

Aircraft: "Little Sweetheart" – 48532 XR G

Flight Duration (Hours): 9:30

Pilot's Note (Adair's Log): "Low Element Lead"

Engineer's Note (Culpepper's Log): "Just made the coast. Landed at Woodridge."

Tail-Gunner's Note (Dalgarn notebook): "Sweat the channel again, just made it across and landed at a base on the coast."

Ball-Turret Gunner's Note (Hendrix's notebook): "We bombed supplies headed for the Ger. front lines. It was visual over target and flak was moderate. We landed at Woodridge to refuel. We just got across the channel before gas gave out."

Maintenance Flight (same day)

Date: Friday, January 5, 1945

Flight Duration (Hours): 0:20

Stars & Stripes • Thursday, January 4, 1945

Heavies Hit Supply Lines for 12th Day

The 8th Air Force's relentless assault on supply lines feeding Nazi forces in the Ardennes salient thundered into its twelfth straight day yesterday as over 1,100 Fortresses and Liberators, protected by some 600 Mustangs and Thunderbolts, smashed road and rail centers at more than a dozen different points.

Striking deeper into Germany than on Tuesday the heavies rocked communications centers northwest of Karlsruhe and some near the Belgian-German border. Marshaling yards in the Cologne and Frankfurt areas took a beating. Bombing was mostly by instrument.

Evidently still on the floor after taking the count from allied air might Monday, the Luftwaffe remained notably absent.

Three bombers and nine fighters, seven of which were believed to have landed in friendly territory, did not return from yesterday's mission.

The present offensive is the longest series of concentrated attacks made by the Eighth in three winters of bombing the enemy. Over 18,000 bomber and fighter sorties have been flown during the drive, and 26,000 tons of bombs have been deposited on Nazi targets. Fighter pilots and bomber gunners have reported 386 German aircraft destroyed by their fire.

A Reuters dispatch last night disclosed that in the first 16 days of the German offensive Allied air forces alone destroyed 1,647 Nazi planes, not counting ack-ack successes.

Houffalize, southwest of St. Vith in the center of the salient, was attacked by medium bombers through thick cloud, 21st Army Group headquarters reported.



Combat Mission #24 – Limburg, Germany

Date: Sunday, January 7, 1945

Aircraft: "Little Sweetheart" – 48532 XR G

Flight Duration (Hours): 7:15

Pilot's Note (Adair's Log): "Drove over primary (Cologne), hit Limburg

Engineer's Note (Culpepper's Log): "Last resort target from Cologne. Co-pilot left harness"

Tail-Gunner's Note (Dalgarn notebook): "Curly [nickname for Wesala] forgot his harness, and he sure as hell sweat."

Ball-Turret Gunner's Note (Hendrix's notebook): "We were carrying 6-1000 pounders and were briefed for a bridge outside of Cologne but weather was to [sic] bad over the target and we bombed Limburg P.F.F. we were escorted by P51 and flak was light."

Stars & Stripes • Sunday, January 7, 1945

1,000 Heavies Defy Ice, Fog

Hit Nazi Rails

Despite bitter cold, ice, fog and thick clouds which have stepped in as foes of the heavy bombers in the absence of opposition from the Luftwaffe, better than 1,000 Fortresses and Liberators of the 8th Air Force, protected by approximately 650 Mustangs and thunderbolts, yesterday hit rail facilities in the area stretching south from Hamm, northeast of the Ruhr, to Rastatt and Achern, southwest of Karlsruhe.

The blows followed Saturday raids by the 8th and RAF the latter's 11th successive night of heavy bombing when 800 Fortresses and Liberators shellacked marshaling yards at Cologne, Coblenz and Ludwigshafen and bridges across the Rhine at Cologne and Bonn, and the RAF's Halifaxes and Lancasters struck at the railway center and industrial town of Hanau, ten miles east of Frankfurt.

On both Saturday and Sunday the 55th Mustang Group dropped to the deck to shoot up locomotives and freight cars.

Saturday's strafing also included an airfield in the Stuttgart area, with enemy planes reported destroyed, four by 2/Lt. Albert J. Ramm, of Jamaica, NY. No enemy fighters were out either day and the rough weather obviously bothered Nazi ack-ack crews. Flak was only moderate Saturday, and returning pilots yesterday described it as meager. Temperatures upstairs hit a frigid 50 below, yesterday.

Seven bombers and nine fighters out of an escort of some 550 Mustangs did not come home from Saturday's mission. Losses yesterday were nine bombers and one fighter.

Thirty Marauders of the 9th Air Force hit a highway bridge at Prum Saturday afternoon in the only operation of the 9th for the day.



13

Third Oak Leaf Cluster to Air Medal awarded: January 12, 1945



Combat Mission #25 – Heilbronn, Germany

Date: Saturday, January 20, 1945

Objective: Rail yards

Aircraft: "Little Sweetheart" – 48532 XR G

Flight Duration (Hours): 7:15

Pilot's Note (Adair's Log): "Deputy Lead"

Ball-Turret Gunner's Note (Hendrix's notebook): "We carried 6-1000 [bomb load] take off at 7:30 A.M. landed at 4:30 P.M. It was 60 to 65 [degrees] below zero at altitude. My oxygen [sic] froze up and I was out for a few minutes Conley [Culpepper] pulled me out, and after that I sat in the radio room. We had P-51 for escorts. Light flak in dist."

Combat Mission #26 – Mannheim, Germany

Date: Sunday, January 21, 1945

Objective: Rail bridge across the Rhine River between Mannheim and Ludwigshafen

Aircraft: "Little Sweetheart" – 48532 XR G

Flight Duration (Hours): 6:45

Pilot's Note (Adair's Log): "Low Lead"

Ball-Turret Gunner's Note (Hendrix's notebook): "It was cloudy all the way but visual over the target. Flak was moderate and accurate. Conley [Culpepper] broke oxygen [sic] line so I rode in nose. P51 were escorting us. No fighter opposition. Light damage to plane."

Combat Mission #27 – Kassel, Germany

Date: Monday, January 29, 1945

Aircraft: "Little Sweetheart" – 48532 XR G

Flight Duration (Hours): 6:45

Pilot's Note (Adair's Log): "Second Element Lead"

Engineer's Note (Culpepper's Log): "Bielefeld Rail yards vs. Kassel Tank Factory Assembly"

Ball-Turret Gunner's Note (Hendrix's notebook): "We had a little excitement when a jet job [German jet fighter] came through our formation. Mike [Dalgarn] thought it was a P-51 and didn't shoot, so I didn't."

Combat Mission #28 – Weimar, Germany

Date: Friday, February 9, 1945

Objective: Aero Engine & Armor Factory

Aircraft: "Little Sweetheart" – 48532 XR G

Flight Duration (Hours): 7:15

Pilot's Note (Adair's Log): "Second Element Lead"

Maintenance Flight:

Date: Saturday, February 10, 1945

Flight Duration (Hours): 3:25

Combat Mission #29 – Chemnitz, Germany

Date: Wednesday, February 14, 1945

Objective: Communications

Aircraft: "Little Sweetheart" – 48532 XR G

Flight Duration (Hours): 8:30

Pilot's Note (Adair's Log): "Second Element Lead"

Engineer's Note (Culpepper's Log): "Russian Offensive"

Ball-Turret Gunner's Note (Hendrix's notebook – Mission #28 for Hendrix having missed mission of 9 Feb '45): "We were bombing for the Russians. They requested. We bombed P.F.F. so couldn't see the results. Escorted by P-51's Target was communications lines."

Combat Mission #30 – Cottbus, Germany

Date: Thursday, February 15, 1945

Objective: Communications

Aircraft: "Little Sweetheart" – 48532 XR G

Flight Duration (Hours): 8:30

Engineer's Note (Culpepper's Log): "Russian Offensive"

Ball-Turret Gunner's Note (Hendrix's notebook. His mission #29): "We went within 12 miles of the Russian lines. Target was teh town itself. But we hit oil or something for smoke and flame came 12,000 feet in the air."

Combat Mission #31 – Nuremberg, Germany

Date: Tuesday, February 20, 1945

Objective: Tank Factory

Aircraft: "Little Sweetheart" – 48532 XR G

Flight Duration (Hours): 8:15

Ball-Turret Gunner's Note (Hendrix's notebook. His mission #30): "Rail Yards and Tank Factory was the target. I think we hit it. Soupy nearly all the way. Escorted by P-51's."

Fourth Oak Leaf Cluster to Air Medal awarded: February 20, 1945



Combat Mission #32 – Nuremberg, Germany

Date: Wednesday, February 21, 1945

Objective: Communications

Aircraft: "Little Sweetheart" – 48532 XR G

Flight Duration (Hours): 7:30

Ball-Turret Gunner's Note (Hendrix's notebook. His mission #31): "Nurnberg. 25,000 alt. City and rail repair equipment. We went back to get the repair trains that were called in after yesterday. Hit target I think. Were escorted by P-51s flak was accurate moderate tracking."

Combat Mission #33 – Treuchtlingen, Germany

Date: Friday, February 23, 1945

Objective: Marshaling yard

Aircraft: "Little Sweetheart" – 48532 XR G

Flight Duration (Hours): 8:30

Ball-Turret Gunner's Note (Hendrix's notebook. His mission #32): "15,000 alt. Railyards and trains. The other Sqd hit target. We missed. Were in prop wash [turbulence caused by other aircraft] most of the time. Were briefed for 9,000 but weather interferred [sic]. Escorted by P51s. Led 8th AF. [8th Air Force]"

Combat Mission #34 – Bremen, Germany

Date: Saturday, February 24, 1945

Objective: Railbridge across the Wasser River

Aircraft: "Little Sweetheart" – 48532 XR G

Flight Duration (Hours): 7:00

Combat Mission #35 – Munich, Germany

Date: Sunday, February 25, 1945

Objective: Marshaling yard

Aircraft: "Little Sweetheart" – 48532 XR G

Flight Duration (Hours): 8:00

Pilot's Note (Adair's Log): "Munich & RETURN FINIS"

Engineer's Note (Culpepper's Log): "That's All."

Tail-Gunner's Note (Dalgarn's notebook): "The sons-a-bitches supposed to send us on an easy one. That's All."

Adair later wrote: "... No 35 Munich: This was our last mission. Heavy Flak trailed us just 200 feet to one side during a long bomb run. A plane just above us caught fire on #2 engine. The bombardier jumped out immediately – afraid of an explosion. The pilot of his plane made it back to base. The Bombardier ended up a POW – it was actually to have been his last scheduled mission. ..."

Fifth and final (silver) Oak Leaf Cluster to Air Medal awarded: March 2, 1945



Even though Conley had completed his combat missions, he still flew a few more times while in England, recording flights on March 5, two on March 9, April 2, and April 4, 1945. His five post-combat flights totaled 13 hours and 30 minutes in the air. In all, he logged 492 hours and 40 minutes of time in the air aboard his trusted B-17G Flying Fortresses.

Coming home:

On April 10, 1945, Conley (along with Adair, Dalgarn and Hendrix) received their much-awaited orders to report to Army Air Station No. 594 (the 8th Air Force Replacement Depot at Stone, Staffordshire, England) to "... await T to the Z of I ..." – or in civilian parlance: "await Transportation to the Zone of Interior" – *interior* being the United States.

As mentioned earlier, Conley was apparently given the choice to fly home aboard a B-24 Liberator or board a transport ship for a more leisurely return home. He chose the ocean voyage. The *S.S. Marine Robin* troop transport dropped him on the U.S. eastern seaboard on May 13, 1945.

On May 17, 1945, Conley was granted a 30-day leave to go home before he had to report to Santa Ana, Calif., where returning airmen were expected for reassignment. Conley's travel orders routed him through Fort Chaffee, Ark., where apparently he had to find a way to get home to Sheridan.

One of the addresses Conley carried in his little notebook was that of Delphia Ashley: "Box 244, Jacksonville, Ark." This address marked a one-bedroom house she shared with her three older sisters while they all worked different shifts at the Arkansas Ordnance Plant, a munitions factory making bombs, shells and detonators.

Immediately after getting home, Conley borrowed his sister's 1936 Chevrolet. Big sis, Joyce, also packed him a picnic lunch, and he picked up "Del" for a date at Jenkins' Ferry, although one minor detail remains in question:
"I don't exactly recollect what Joyce put in that picnic basket."

The menu didn't matter much. By June, Delphia and Conley were engaged.

Other than securing his fiancée, Conley's brief stay at home also led to a big surprise once he reported to his base in California:

"[His not-quite 17-year-old nephew] Aubrey Culpepper just *showed up* out in Santa Ana at the guard shack at my base. He'd hopped a freight train. He only stayed a short time, and I told him to get on out of there because I figured *somebody* was looking for him. The guards weren't exactly hospitable either. They sure weren't gonna let him stick around long."

A few weeks later, Conley's reassignment/processing trail led him to Chanute Army Air Field near Rantoul, Ill., where he wrote this letter postmarked 11 July 1945 (original spelling/punctuation is shown):

"Dear Mom an Dad
Hey I'd better not be for wanting to come home Aye? Dad would you really turn the 410 [*shotgun*] loose on me? I didn't think it would be bad but if things go on maybe it won't take long huh?
Brrr it's cold up here. I was up looking for cover last night.
Well I feel much better my nerves have quieted down a lot – I'm on the road back
Well I need a milkshake so guess I better get down before everything closes
bye now
Love Conley"

Then, in another letter, postmarked 25 July 1945:

"Dear Dad an Mom
Well I'll drop you a line just to say hello no news as yet except a rumor going all men with over 70 points wont get anymore school – so I may get shiped out for permant station – in a way I hope so I've had so many place to hang my hat in the last two years I'd like to know how it feels once more to go somewhere an not have to pack up for awile
Say did you even get the \$60.00 I sent home from Santa Ana
Well Bye Now
Love Conley"

While stationed at Chanute Air Field, Conley managed to get to the nearby city of Rantoul, Illinois, where he bought a wedding ring.

Soon, Conley was reassigned to duty at Frederick, Okla., in the 2520th Army Air Force Bomber Unit, Squadron C. He was training as an engineer/gunner aboard the B-26 "Marauder" medium bombers and preparing to be shipped out to face combat in the Pacific. Before he could ship out, two B-29s "Superfortresses" dropped atomic bombs on Japan, the *Enola Gay* (on August 6, targeting Hiroshima) and *Bockscar* (August 9 on Nagasaki) that hastened the end of World War II.

On August 24, 1945, Miss Delphia Ashley married T/Sgt Conley Culpepper in her parents' home at Sheridan, Arkansas.

August 27, 1945 • Sheridan, Arkansas • *The Headlight*

Miss Ashley Is Bride In Rites Friday

Mr. and Mrs. D.E. Ashley of Sheridan announce the marriage of their daughter, Delphia Jane, to Technical Sergeant Conley Edward Culpepper, son of Mr. and Mrs. C.C. Culpepper, also of Sheridan.

The ceremony was solemnized in the home of the bride's parents on Friday night, August 24 at 9:00 p.m. Rev. L.D. Foreman, pastor of the First Baptist church, officiated. Flowers were arranged to form a background for the single ring ceremony. Miss Cleo Goolsby was maid of honor and Joe Crook, uncle of the bride, served as best man. Miss Dorothy Ashley, sister of the bride, was in charge of the bride's book.

The bride wore a white silk peplum suit with navy accessories. Her corsage was orchids. Her only ornaments were a single strand of choker pearls and matching earrings.

A reception followed in the dining room. In the center of the table was a huge wedding cake, encircled with small yellow and white flowers. At one end was the punch bowl and at the other end was a colorful bouquet of yellow marigolds. The bride and groom, in age-old tradition, cut the first piece of wedding cake.

After the reception, the couple left for a short trip to Pine bluff. They will reside in Oklahoma where the bridegroom is now stationed.

Among the guests were Mrs. Joe Crook, Mrs. C.C. Culpepper, Mrs. Vincent Luine, Mrs. Moore, Aubrey Culpepper and Ira Appling.



Leaving their wedding, and while on the road to Pine Bluff, Conley was driving his brother Oscar's Plymouth Coupe when Del spied a suspicious "lump" under a blanket on the floorboard of the back seat. It was the notorious stowaway Aubrey showing up unexpectedly once again. Conley said:

"I just pulled over and put him out on the side of the road and drove away. Never even looked back."

Unfazed, Aubrey showed up later, courtesy of a girlfriend with a car of her own, to "serenade" the honeymooners at The Pines Hotel. Not long afterward, the young couple finally found some measure of privacy living in an on-base duplex apartment for married personnel at Frederick, Okla., where their neighbors were newlyweds Guy and Mildred Turner from Ashland, Ohio.

On September 2, 1945, Japan formally surrendered. "V-J Day" (Victory over Japan) was celebrated as the practical end of World War II. Dad immediately – and actively – started working to get out of the Army. His anticipated separation orders arrived on October 6, 1945. He was told to report immediately to Sheppard Army Air Field, at Wichita Falls, Texas, to claim his honorable discharge.

On Monday, October 8, 1945, Del sent this letter to her new in-laws:

“Dearest folks,

Hurrah! We're CIVILIANS at last! I still can't believe it, but Conley left for Shepherd Field this morning to get his discharge. We hope to be home by Friday, but it may take longer.

Conley wants you two to save something for him to shoot at – I think he would like to catch up with Oscar. And I might accidentally get a hit again – if I tried long enough.

I'm so tickled that I can't think of anything to write about. Guess that one bit of news means more than a book would though – I know it does to us.

I washed today and I will iron tomorrow – and wash some more – then pack. I can see where I'll be busy.

Bye now and be good and we'll be seeing you.

All our love,

Del & Conley

P.S. Hope “daddy Cape” is well by now.”

T/Sgt Conley E. Culpepper got his final discharge papers issued to him on October 11, 1945. Two weeks later, on October 26, with the help of the new “G.I. Bill,” he was studying forestry and enrolled as one of 100 students on the campus of Arkansas Agricultural & Mechanical College at Monticello (now the University of Arkansas at Monticello). He used his “Mr. Fix-It” skills to improvise a system to run water to the trailers that were brought in for married students.



Families

James Craig Adair

Wartime address: Rural Route 2, Urbana, Illinois

Born: March 11, 1922 – Burlington, IA

Married: Geneva “Gen” _____ – 1946

Died: August 13, 2008 – Bellaire, TX

Burial: Houston National Cemetery – Houston, TX

Children: Carrie (*m. Parham?*), Stephen (deceased), Dr. Maureen Adair (*m. John Hertenberger*), Lori (*m. Kenny*), Jeff

Milton J. Brucker

Wartime address: 705 So. Pershing, Wichita, Kansas

Born: October 5, 1922 – Canton, KS

Married: Elizabeth Ann “Libby” Harsin, May 23, 1945 – Wichita KS

Died: February 5, 2002 – Houston, TX

Burial: Houston National Cemetery – Houston, TX

Child: Paula (*m. Steven Rehfield – Harper, TX*)

Conley Edward Culpepper

Wartime address: Route 3, Sheridan, Arkansas

Born: March 26, 1924 – Grant County, AR

Married: Delphia Jane “Del” Ashley, August 24, 1945 – Sheridan, AR

Died: August 30, 2000 – Hot Springs, AR

Buried: Center Grove Cemetery – Grant County, AR

Children: Eddie, Kent, Jack, Scott, Charles, Mark, and C.C. “Chip”

David Michael “Mike” Dalgarn

Wartime address: Egbert, Wyoming

Born: October 26, 1925 – Casper, WY

Married: Virginia Cooley, September 13, 1945 – Lubbock, TX (deceased 2011)

Died: December 6, 2001 – Gillette, WY

Burial: Oregon Trail Veterans Cemetery – Evansville, WY

Children: Victoria (deceased), Rebecca (*m. Richard Austin – Casper, WY*), Annette (*m. Chuck Rouke – Gillette, WY*), and Tamara (*m. Steve Moyer – Katy, TX*)

Benjamin Jacob “Ben” Goddard

Wartime address: 424 Mt. Whitney St., PO Box 705, Klamath Falls, Oregon

Born: July 29, 1916

Married: Olinda Florence Mehling, October 1942 – Seattle, WA (deceased)

Died: January 9, 1958

Burial: Klamath Memorial Park – Klamath Falls, OR

Children: Paula (*m. Mel Chow – Honolulu, HI*), John (*Klamath Falls, OR*), and Ramona (*m. Mekkers – Bellevue, WA*)

James Engel Hendrix

Wartime address: 657 Isabel St., Los Angeles, California

Born: August 27, 1924 – Scott County, Arkansas

Married: Pauline Lucille _____, August 6, 1947 – Los Angeles, CA (deceased 2013)

Died: May 19, 1996 – Covina, CA

Child: Sharon (deceased 2015) (*m. Chris Enos – Chino, CA*)

James Hubert "Jimmie" Horny

Wartime address: Box 383, Goliad, Texas

Born: March 3, 1925

Married: Charlene Nance, 1947 (deceased 2000)

Died: May 26, 1987

Burial: Holy Cross Cemetery – Goliad County, TX

Children: Jayne (m. Carol Hoff), James W. (deceased), Gail (m. Randall Turley – Goliad, TX), and Sharon (m. Charles Taylor)

DeWitt P. "Barney" Meley

Wartime address: 450 W. Mt. Airy Ave., Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 0217

Born: November 21, 1915

Married: Beverly "Bev" Tollin

Died: August 1, 1995

Burial: Village Presbyterian Church – Northbrook, IL

Children: Thomas (deceased), and Kimberly (m. DeBerge)

Elmer G. Wesala

Wartime address: 1681 Laurium St., Calumet, Michigan

Born: circa 1923

Married: Berniece Waisanen, April 4, 1947 – Angola, IN (deceased 1997)

Died: June 5, 1982

Burial: Lake View Cemetery – Calumet, MI

Children: Judith (m. David DeNardis – Sterling Heights, MI), and Erik (Troy, MI)

Obituaries:

JAMES (JIM) CRAIG ADAIR, age 86, passed away on Wednesday, August 13, 2008. Jim was born March 11, 1922, and was one of the nine children born to Ida and Henry Adair in Burlington, Iowa. Jim served his country during World War II as an Air Force Captain, B-17 pilot, in the 8th Air Force, 100th Bomb Group, 349th Squadron. Following his military service, he attended the University of Illinois and graduated with a BS in Engineering. Upon graduation Jim worked for Schlumberger and retired from Shell Oil Company in 1985.

Jim was preceded in death by his son, Stephen Adair and son-in-law, "Bear" Parham. Jim's unconditional love will be missed by his surviving family, wife of 62 happy years Geneva; sister, Frances (Sue) Cross of Attica, Indiana; children, Carrie, Dr. Maureen Adair and husband John Hertenberger, Lori and husband Kenny, Jeff and wife Ona; grandchildren, Stephen, Rachel, Sam, Kelly, Katy and husband Ferron, Kristy, Karly, Madison, and Jim; great-grandchild, Myles; step-grandchildren, Alex and Derik.

Visitation: 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m., with a 7:00 p.m. Rosary, Monday, August 18, 2008, at the Earthman Bellaire Funeral Home, 6700 Ferris, Bellaire. Mass of the Resurrection: 12:30 p.m., Tuesday, August 19, 2008, at the Holy Ghost Catholic Church, 6921 Chetwood Dr. Rite of Committal will follow at the Houston National Cemetery.

The family would like to extend a special thanks to Tracy Longoria and Ruby Richards for their love and support. In lieu of flowers, memorials may be made to the charity of your choice. SOURCE: *The Houston Chronicle*

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**HOT SPRINGS, ARK. – Conley Edward Culpepper**, 76, passed away Wednesday, Aug. 30, at his Garland County Home. Born March 26, 1924 in rural Grant County, near Sheridan, Ark., he was the youngest of the large family born to the late Capos Conley Culpepper and Lou Anna Augusta Atchley Culpepper.

A career forester and a naturally gifted botanist, he earned his degree in the fledgling forestry program at Arkansas A&M (now University of Arkansas at Monticello) under the benefits of the G.I. Bill. He supervised the logging crews that harvested timber on land which now forms Lake Ouachita.

During World War II, he served in the 100th Bomb Group of the 8th Army Air Force. He completed 35 combat bombing missions over Germany as flight engineer and top-turret gunner aboard a B-17G "Flying Fortress" heavy bomber. He achieved the rank of Technical Sergeant. Along with his aerial gunnery wings, he was awarded the Air Medal and the Europe-Middle East-Africa Campaign Medal.

He was a member of Owensville Baptist Church where he served as a Deacon and Sunday School teacher for many years. A 32nd Degree Mason, he was also an active member of the Order of the Eastern Star.

He is survived by his wife of 55 years, the former Delphia Jane Ashley and their seven sons and six daughters-in-law, Eddie and Susan Culpepper of Hot Springs Village, Kent Culpepper, Jack and Janie Culpepper, Scott and Mary Culpepper, and Charles and Theresa Culpepper, all of Hot Springs, Mark and Angela Culpepper of Lonsdale, and C.C. "Chip" and Karen Culpepper of Little Rock. He is also survived by his brother, Oscar N. Culpepper of Little Rock, and a sister, Joyce West of Waxahatchie, Texas. Other survivors include 12 grandchildren; and six great-grandchildren; numerous nieces, nephews, other relatives and friends. He was preceded in death by his parents; and by brothers, J. Harry Culpepper, W. Jay Culpepper, and Sid Culpepper; and by sisters, Lillian Williams, Ruby Moore and Opal Culpepper.

Pallbearers are Mark DeLinde, Tommy James, Rick Merryman, Bob Nichols, Andy Westerman and Bruce Westerman. Honorary pallbearers are Ray Lawson, Art Tuma, Roy Murphy, Paul Dahl, Harold McAlpine, Jerry Billings, George Johnston, Ted Chancey, Bob Gierow, Jerry Bryant and James Adair.

Visitation will be this evening, Sept. 1, from 6-9 p.m. at Ashby Funeral Home in Benton. Funeral services will be held Saturday, Sept. 2, at 10 a.m. at Owensville Baptist Church on Highway 5 in Saline County. Interment will be at Center Grove Cemetery in Sheridan.

SOURCE: *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette* • September 1, 2000

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**Ben J. Goddard**  
**Death Claims KF Attorney**

Ben J. Goddard, prominent young Klamath Falls attorney, member of the law firm of Maxwell and Goddard, Attorneys, and resident of Klamath Falls for 30 years, died unexpectedly about 8:30 a.m. today at his home, 1630 Eldorado Avenue. He had not been previously ill. Death apparently followed a heart attack.

Mr. Goddard was dressing in his bedroom to appear this morning in circuit court when death came. He was 41 years old, a native of Mountain Home, Idaho, born July 29, 1916.

Following graduation from Klamath Union High School, he attended Pacific University in this state and received his B.S. and LLB degrees in 1948 from the University of Oregon Law School. He was affiliated with Phi Alpha Delta, law fraternity.

Mr. Goddard served in World War II with the Air Force, was commissioned in June 1944, and discharged in October of 1945 with the rank of first lieutenant.

He was the recipient of the Air Medal and four Oak Leaf Clusters.

He served as Klamath County deputy district attorney from 1949 to 1951 and affiliated with Richard B. Maxwell, this city, in May of 1951. He was a member of the American Bar Association and the Oregon State Bar Association Klamath Lutheran Church; Lodge No. 1247 BPO Elks; Kiwanis Club; Yacht Club; Chapter No. 14, International Footprinters Association; Aerie No. 2090, Fraternal Order of Eagles; Association of Insurance Attorneys and was currently a member of the Klamath County Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors.

Survivors include his widow, Mrs. Olinda Florence Goddard; two daughters, Paula and Ramona; a son John, and his mother, Mrs. Dora Goddard, longtime associate in the office of Klamath County Sheriff Murray Britton, all of this city; three sisters, Mrs. Rosmond Brannan and Mrs. Maxine Anderson, Klamath Falls, and Mrs. Mariam Kerr, Los Angeles; also one brother Edward P. Goddard, Oroville, California.

Funeral arrangements will be announced by Ward's Klamath Funeral Home.

SOURCE: *Klamath Falls News* • January 9, 1958

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**James Horny**

GOLIAD, TX – Funeral services for James Hubert Horny, 62, of Goliad who died Tuesday, will be held at 11 a.m. Friday at the Immaculate Conception Catholic Church in Goliad with the Rev. Gregory Deane and the Rev. Arnold Anders officiated. The body will lie in state at the church from 10:30 a.m. until the time of services.

Burial will follow the services in Holy Cross Cemetery under the direction of Colonial Funeral Home.

Pallbearers will be Jeff Urban, Gary Bego, Bobby Byrne, Mickey Sullivan, Lloyd Friedrichs, J.D. McGuill, Elroy Loest and Garland Smith.

Honorary pallbearers will be Randell Turley, Carol Hoff, F.B. Byrne, Walter and Joe Nance, Burkett Curtis, Julian Flores, W.C. "Dub" Riggs, Steve Goynes, Kelly Rader, all members of the Goliad Hermann Sons Lodge No. 212 and all close friends and relatives.

In lieu of usual remembrances, contributions may be made to the American Heart Association, or charity of the donor's choice.

SOURCE: *The Victoria Advocate* • May 29, 1987

## **James Engel Hendrix**

*Notes/emails from his daughter, and only heir, Sharon Hendrix Enos.*

I started reading your book last and I am really enjoying it. I knew that my Dad had passed out from anoxia and been saved by your Dad but I didn't know the part about him hitting the pedals and rotating the turret, trapping your Dad's arm. My God, that must have been so scary for your Dad. I owe him a big debt of gratitude, if it wasn't for him then I wouldn't be here either! I think it was that incident my Dad was referring to when he told me that as he was starting to pass out and realized they had no oxygen, he tried to call on the intercom and when they found him, the push-to-talk switch was literally in pieces in his hand. He had pushed on it so hard, he shattered it. I also remember him telling me that the bombs dropped out right in front of his nose and he would count them as they dropped to make sure they all went.

The only "fight" I ever heard that my Dad was involved in was obviously not the one described in your Dad's letter. The one I know about was when he was put in charge of serving some chow item that was a rare commodity (don't remember what it was but something like real eggs or fresh milk instead of powdered) and was told to make sure each person only had one serving until everyone had a chance to get some. Well, some officer (so the story goes) told Dad to put a second one on his tray and Dad told him politely that his orders were one to a customer until everyone had been served. The officer didn't like that, reached out to get his own second helping, Dad grabbed his hand to stop him...and the fight was on. Dad said Adair had to pull some strings to get him out of the brig on that one :)

But what you found in that letter certainly sheds light on why the crew kept your Dad and voted out the other guy. Could be the guy they voted out just didn't "mesh" with the rest of the crew somehow and that's just bad news, given how much they had to rely on each other and how long they were cooped up together on those long flights. I know that my Dad thought the world of "his" crew.

My parents didn't meet until after the war so I can only imagine what a treasure trove of memories and stories must be in those letters between your Mom and Dad. You are lucky to have them, so much of that kind of thing gets lost or tossed out when someone dies and we lose another little piece of their story every time that happens. I am glad I found you. My Mom passed away last year, she was 91. I have stage 4 cancer, so I'm not sure how long I'll be around either. After my Dad passed away, I received a lovely letter from Jim Adair. He told me that my Dad got airsick every time they flew.

Did you know that my Dad was originally from Arkansas? He was born there and his family moved to California when he was a boy. Also, I have my Dad's little notebook, a bunch of generic B-17 photos, the crew photo we've all seen, his medals and his old bomber jacket! Do you have any idea where I could send that stuff where it will be appreciated? I am the last one of my Dad's bloodline and an only child, so there's no one to pass these things on to.

Reading this of yours book has brought back a lot of memories of things my Dad told me or that I overheard on the few occasions when he told 'war stories' with his friends. I remember he said that when the life raft got hung up they tried to shoot it off but the safety stops on the guns wouldn't let them hit it. He also said that when they landed that day, one of the ground crew was berating them and wanted to know what idiot had deployed the life raft and at that point Adair stepped in and told the man what had happened and said "don't ever talk to my crew like that again!" Ah, "Little Friends" :) Dad said sometimes the fighters would get banged up and not able to keep up with the rest of the fighters, so they'd join a bomber formation..."Little Friend to Big Friend, is it okay if I join you guys?" would come the call over the radio. And then after getting the okay, the fighter would carefully move into position, being careful not to point his nose directly at any of the bombers, and join their formation. My Dad used to get a kick out of being able to look out from his turret and wave at them. I can just see it too, heck, they were just kids, barely out of high school even, each flying in their own war machine and probably waving and grinning at each other like fools. When I send you Dad's little notebook, I'll



transcribe it for you. His writing is not the easiest to read. There's not much in there, mostly just dates, target for the day and maybe a comment like "heavy flak" or whatever. Dad wasn't much of a writer, that's for sure.

Do you have any thoughts about how to pack the bomber jacket and send it? The leather on there is so brittle that if you fold or bend it, I'm afraid it will crack and flake off. No one ever took care of the jacket and put anything on it to keep the leather from drying out. I didn't even know it existed for years and years and by the time I saw it, I was afraid to try anything on it for fear of destroying the leather and the artwork. I have a plain leather jacket of my own that I've always cleaned with saddle soap and kept it oiled and conditioned but Dad's jacket is as dry as a bone.

For your records, my Dad was born August 27, 1924 in Scott County, Arkansas and he married Mom on August 6, 1947. Dad was from the Bates/Waldron area of Arkansas but I think he had kinfolk in Heavner, Oklahoma too. And he was extremely shy when he was young, just as your Dad described him :)

*Sharon Hendrix Enos died in 2015. She willed her father's A-2 "Sweet Sue" jacket to me, "Chip" Culpepper, and I'm truly and deeply humbled.*

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*The News-Palladium*  
Benton, Michigan  
19 Feb 1945 • Pg 10

## **AN EIGHTH AIR FORCE BOMBER STATION, England**

Staff Sergeant Walter Rudecki, 19, of New Buffalo, Mich., tail gunner on an Eighth Air Force B-17 Flying Fortress, has been awarded the Air Medal for "meritorious achievement while participating in heavy bombardment missions in the air offensive against the enemy over Nazi Germany." The presentation was made by his squadron commander, Major John W. Hammett, of Kansas City, Mo. He is the son of Mr. and Mrs. Mike Rudecki, Route No. 2, New Buffalo, Mich. Prior to his entry into the AAF, November, 1943, he was employed by the Allis Chalmers Corp., Laporte, Ind. Sgt. Rudecki is a member of the 487th Bomb. Group commanded by Colonel William K. Martin, 3rd Air Division cited by the President for its now historic England-Africa shuttle bombing of the Messerschmitt airplane factories at Regensburg in southern Germany, August, 1943.

A 20-year-old navigator from Coloma, Lloyd J. Hathaway, and 21-year-old **Elmer Wesala**, co-pilot, of Calumet, have been promoted from the rank of second lieutenant to first lieutenant. First Lt. Hathaway, son of Mr. and Mrs. Lloyd Hathaway, 346 Paw Paw street, Coloma, attended Michigan State college, and **1st/Lt. Wesala**, former student of Calumet High school, is the son of Mr. and Mrs. Elmer Wesala, 1681 Laurium street, Calumet.

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*Daily Globe*  
Calumet, Michigan  
Monday, June 7, 1982

**CALUMET – Elmer G. Wesala**, 59, Warren, former Calumet resident was dead on arrival at an Inglewood, Calif., hospital Saturday following an apparent heart attack.

The funeral will take place Thursday at 11 a.m. at Erickson-Crowley Funeral Home, Calumet, with the Rev. Rodney Johnson officiating. Burial will be in Lakewood Cemetery. The funeral home will be open for visitation Wednesday from 2 until 5 and 7 to 9 pm.

(#Missions) AircraftDispensation

|                                         |                                                                                                       |
|-----------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| (20) 44-8532 <i>Little Sweetheart</i>   | Survived – decommissioned at Kingman, Ariz.                                                           |
| (1) 43-8313 <i>Lil Butch</i>            | Survived – decommissioned at Albuquerque, NM                                                          |
| (1) 43-8011 <i>The Reluctant Dragon</i> | Damaged Merseburg 11/30/44 returned to base – salvaged<br>– crew survived                             |
| (1) 43-8073 <i>That's All Brother</i>   | Damaged – Merseburg 11/30/44 landed at Air Station #74,<br>Cambrai, France – salvaged – crew survived |
| (2) 43-8681 <i>Grumblin Gremlin III</i> | Damaged – taxiway accident on base 5/14/45 – salvaged<br>– crew survived                              |
| (1) 42-31986 <i>Once in'a While</i>     | Lost – Saarbruchen 11/9/44 crashed in Luxembourg: 1 KIA, 2 WIA                                        |
| (*) 43-8211 <i>Miss Gail Lynn</i>       | Lost – Merseburg 11/30/44: 6 KIA, 3 POW                                                               |
| (4) 43-1987 <i>The Little Skipper</i>   | Lost – Hamburg 12/31/44: 3 KIA, 6 POW (“Piggy-back” crash)                                            |
| (2) 43-8535 <i>Unnamed</i>              | Lost – Hamburg 12/31/44: 5 KIA, 4 POW                                                                 |
| (1) 43-8215 <i>The Grumblin Gremlin</i> | Lost – Hamburg 12/31/44: 5 KIA, 4 POW                                                                 |
| (1) 44-6295 <i>White Cargo</i>          | Lost – Berlin 3/18/45 crashed in Poland – crew survived                                               |
| (1*) 44-8230 <i>Unnamed</i>             | Aircraft's final dispensation is currently unknown                                                    |
| (**) 43-8480 <i>Unnamed</i>             | Lost – Bielefeld 9/30/44: 8 KIA, 1 POW (with 493rd Bomb Group)                                        |

(\*) Mission aborted and counted toward total of 35, or was recalled before crossing sortie line and not credited to mission total.

(\*\*) Transatlantic shuttle flight

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*On October 8, 2014, a photo of Adair's Crew accompanied me and my son, also named Conley Culpepper, as we flew aboard the B-17 "Sentimental Journey." The date was 70 years (almost to the day) of this crew's first combat mission. My son, age 20 at the time, the same age of his namesake grandfather 70 years before.*

