

GROUND CREW TRAINING

Written b W. W. Hill

When the 91st was formed in Florida there were parades on Saturday morning, detailed to picking up butts, and occasional a ride on a B-17 local flight. There were probably theatre meetings on VD. The game was to make yourself unknown and out of sight.

In preparation of the move to Walla Walla, Washington, we had outside meetings and were told all the essentials such as dress, packing the A bag, and B Bag. The A Bag contained our every day stuff as razor, toothbrush, work and dress shoes, changes of underwear, socks, fatigues, and most important a roll of toilet paper and mess kit. A bottle of booze was fragile and risky.

At Walla Walla Washington, working on a couple of B-17's was general maintenance training, and engine changing. We had two maybe three sifts of maintenance men. Seems like the night shift went from dinner to breakfast time. At that time, the flight and ground crews lived together in the barracks. During this time the crews were off either flying the couple of B-17 or some flight associated training that included shooting on the range.

The flight and ground crews lived together at Walla Walla, Kimbolton, and for a while at Bassingbourn. Although we lived together, we went our separate ways for training and flying. The ground crews mostly had been to Engine Maintenance, Sheet metal, Electrical, Prop, and other Schools. As a result, there was little aircraft training; I guess you could say the Walla Walla was hands on training.

Once we got to England, the ground crew was very rarely brought as a group to a part of a training program. The crews, however, did practice shooting with a shotgun from the back of a truck. The ground crew did their shooting with a "borrowed" shotgun at night looking for hares. They were big rascals and could go like the blazes.

Before the group was ready for combat the ground crews that did not have an assigned aircraft, and there was no battle damage to repair, went through a base security training and mock exercises protecting the base from invasion. It was better than doing nothing, and the weather was grand.

Several months before the end of the war, the base Training Officer managed to get a piano or two and a woman from the London Symphony to come up and give piano lessons. That went ok, but the war ended and I never became a Paderiski.

I will remember my basic training in the base theatre at Wichita Falls Texas. The Chaplain got up and gave us the rundown about being good citizens, going to church, and to remember that our soul belonged to God. Then the Base Commander go up and said your soul may belong to God, but don't forget if you get the clap, your ass belongs to me. A shocker for a church boy to hear in front of a Chaplain. To keep us awake, they would periodically call the group to attention, or to catch those sleeping would advise those of us awake with a soft voice that when he called "ATTENTION" we were to remain in our seats. It was surprising the number of noders who would jump up and get caught. To beat the game, I made it a point to be the last one to get up whenever they called Attention.

As for the Daily Reports, by the 91st, I never saw one. I wonder if one was made when the B-17 I was flying as flight engineer on a local flight, when a fire broke out in the Bomb Bay on approach. We continued and landed. We (the Pilot, Copilot, myself, and three Army Officer joy riders, all got out safely and watched it burn up to the waist door. Although there were no bombs, there never was an explosion from the gasoline that poured freely as the

lines burnt through. The event turned out to be good training for the Base fire department, as they didn't know the first thing about a B-17.

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