

CHRISTMAS EVE

Written by Joe Harlick

DECEMBER 24, 1944 Memories of Joe Harlick

It was even more of a chore if our airplanes were forced to land at another air base, because of the weather. (Fog mostly). We would have to transport Cameras, film and other equipment to the next base and prepare the planes for the next mission. The English roads are very narrow and winding (and they drive on the wrong side of the road) so just to navigate to another base in the dark is a challenge.

The one time I remember more than others turned out to be a narrow escape. It was Christmas Eve, December 24, 1944. The mission that day was to Merausen and Kirchgons. Our base was completely fogged in so the B-17's from the 91st. were directed to land at a base about 70 miles away. The Photo Lab people had been saving Christmas goodies and any beverage they could trade for. (Remember – Photographs was very good trading material) This looked like the perfect " down day " so we planned a Christmas Eve party.

About 1:00 A.M. the phone rang and we were alerted for a mission on Christmas Day. Our Photo Officer, Captain Ray picked Bill Pulliam and I as the most capable. The motor pool furnished us with an open reconnaissance Jeep and a driver. We loaded our camera gear and took off in that freezing pea soup fog. Also remember that for black out purposes, all vehicles had the headlights restricted to a small slit if light, ½ inch by 2 inch. Since we were going to another. base they had no way to service our planes as well as their own, so everything had to be convoyed over in trucks and trailers.

We couldn't keep the ice off of our windshield so we took turns urinating on the ice. This melted the ice and the salt kept them clear longer. Since we were restricted to a two inch slit of light from the headlights, visibility was very limited. Unknown to us, a bomb carrier driving ahead of us, had lost a 500 pound demolition bomb in the middle of the road. We hit it broadside with our reconnaissance Jeep, stopping us in our tracks. It didn't explode, (or I wouldn't be writing about it) we rolled it to the side of the road and continued on our way. You talk about a sobering experience, this was the ultimate. Once we found the base with our planes, we also found the flight crews sleeping in them, because there were no empty barracks. We proceeded in getting them ready for the mission the next day. After spending the rest of the night installing camera equipment, the mission was scrubbed. (cancelled that is)

The loose bomb was picked up on the return trip, by the armament people.

As a 324th Photographer, I will never forget CHRISTMAS 1944.

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