

THE GENERAL

Written by Paul Chryst

RE: General Arnold; I have no memory of his presence in England during 1944. I do recall; that before we "troops" left Hoboken, NJ on a transport (July 1st, 1944) - the obligatory number of heavy, daylight, bombing Missions to be flown (IF you survived) was set at 30. During the 13 day crossing to Liverpool and until we had completed our new Crew training period - it was dear General Jimmy Doolittle who re-set the minimum standard up to 35 Missions.

Once we reached that point, (thank you, Lord) we were given the choice of 30 days leave, first; then the opportunity of return to your favorite unit of assignment (your old Bomb Group) - OR- be re-trained to fly in B-29's in the SWP for another Tour?!?!?!?! Great choice, huh!

The closest General we had was a Brigadier Gross, who placed himself in the Co-Pilot's seat of our B-17 early one morning. As the Bombardier, I usually entered the plane from the back door, checked the Waist Gunners as OK, Ball Turret Gunner, ready for take-off and the Tail Gunner. Then; I open the Radio Room door to re-check the RO, opened the plywood door to the Bomb bay and checked each bomb to assure that they were loaded properly. (everyone in place and secure)

From there, I walked to the Top Turret (twin-50's) and squeezed by the Flight Engineer, dropped down to my knees and crawled to the console of (instruments). There was a very small opening between Panel and the Co-Pilot's rudder pedals for one to be able to "crawl" into the "nose section" where the navigator sat (to the left) at his table and this Bombardier to crawl to his little stool at the Norden Bombsight.

My great Co-Pilot was a Swede named Kermit (Burman) and I found that his left leg was "blocking this opening" for me to be able to crawl through. SO: I smacked his lower leg with the back of my gloved right hand to force him to move it out of the way! Something patted the top of my leather helmet and as I turned my head to the right to see who it was (?) I saw the BIGGEST Silver Star on the left collar of his shirt!!! It was the FIRST time I had ever been that close to a General in my young life and how embarrassing for me! I just "whacked" his left leg a good shot (to get it the Hell out of the way AND I'm also on my knees - unable to snap to "Attention!"

The very polite Co-Pilot 'patted me on top of my helmeted head, looked down on me and softly said, "I'm General Gross flying with you as your Co-Pilot today. You do your job and I'll do mine to "check you out". That was all. But; I must have turned six different colors, managed to say, "yes, Sir" and squeezed through the small opening to get up front, close the Bomb bay doors and radio the Pilot, "OK to start engines".

P.S. I did re-meet the General later, one night at the Officers Club. I kinda steered clear of him at the Bar until after I had my first Scotch. Then I approached him to "re-introduce myself to him and repeated the story of my "meeting" him in the cockpit of our Fortress. I tried to apologize for my lack of military behavior, under those circumstances, but he replied, "What the Hell, I would have done the same thing as you did". He bought me my next Scotch and I still remember him nearly 60 years later.

- - - - -

THE ABOVE STORY IS THE PROPERTY OF THE AUTHOR AND MAY NOT BE REPRODUCED WITHOUT THE AUTHOR'S CONSENT

www.91stbombgroup.com