A SOLDIER'S STORY

This is a story about the three years that the writer spent in the military service during WW II. I am documenting this now, while I am still able to recall the events, and because I think it might be of interest to my children and grandchildren.

When the United States entered WW II, the day after the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor and other American bases in the Pacific, on December 7, 1941, I was a senior in Cochranton High School. Our family had just moved onto the Steere Farm, located near Cochranton, on November 15, 1941, from the McCullough farm, located between Blooming Valley and Saegertown. I had completed my junior year at Meadville High School, and was enrolled there as a senior until our move in mid-November. A few of my friends at Meadville High School enlisted in the Marines immediately following the United States entering the war. I had not made many new friends at Cochranton High School in the three weeks that I had been enrolled there, but to the best of my knowledge, none of the students at Cochranton High School quit school to enlist. I was not old enough to enlist, as I was still 17 years of age.

I graduated from high school in May, 1942. This was a busy time on the farm, and since I was still 17, I knew I could not enlist without my parents consent. Sometime during the summer, Bus and I went to see a movie entitled "I Wanted Wings", starring Ray Milland and William Holden. It glamorized the Army Air Corps pilot training program. Although I was not aware of it at the time, this movie was in fact a recruiting film, shot mostly at Randolph Field here in San Antonio. After seeing this film, I was convinced that I wanted to become a pilot in the Army Air Corps.

On September 28, 1942, I celebrated my eighteenth birthday, and became eligible to enlist in the Armed Forces, without parental consent. Just a few days later I read in the Meadville Tribune that the Army Air Corps would be administering the written test at Allegheny College in Meadville for men interested in enlisting in the Aviation Cadet Program. I immediately made plans to take the test. This was in mid-October, 1942. I mentioned to Mom and Dad that I planned to take the test, and that if I passed it, I would be entering the Army. They said very little, and there was no more mention of it. The day of the test arrived, and after doing my morning chores, I changed out of my work clothes and asked Dad if I could have the car to drive to Meadville. After his OK, I drove to Allegheny College in Meadville, arriving late. The test had already started. The recruiter, however told me to have a seat and he provided me with the test materials and told me he would let me know when my time was up separate from the rest of the men being tested, as this was a time limited test. After completing the test, since I was one of just a few men left in the room, the recruiter told me to wait just a few minutes, and he would tell me whether or not I had passed. After grading my test results, he told me I had made an excellent score. He then told me to go home and wait for a letter that would tell me when I was scheduled to take my physical examination.

About the middle of November, I finally received a letter instructing me to present myself at an address in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania for my physical examination on November 30, 1942. The letter instructed me to be there at 8:00 AM. My cousin, Howard Poly, was at that time attending a drafting school in Pittsburgh, and I made arrangements with him to travel to Pittsburgh with him and several other men who were from the Cochranton area and home for the weekend. On Sunday night, November 29, we traveled to Pittsburgh, and I spent the night with Howard who was living at the YMCA in Pittsburgh. On the morning of November 30th, I presented myself at 8:00 am at the designated place and along with several hundred other enlistees and draftees we proceeded to be probed, poked, blooded and otherwise examined to determine our suitability for

service in the Armed Forces of the United States. Most of the day we were running around stark naked, carrying paper work from one station to another. Finally, around 4:30 PM, those who had passed the physical exam for the Aviation Cadet program were lined up in two columns and we were sworn in to the Army. We were then instructed to go home and await further orders. I returned to Cochranton on the bus that same night.

Everyday I watched the mailbox for my orders. After a wait of about 45 days, I received orders directing me to be in Pittsburgh on February 3, 1943. The orders said I should bring a minimum amount of luggage and clothing, as everything would need to be sent home upon receiving Army issued clothing. One of the things I recall, is buying my first razor, a Shick injector which had recently been introduced, as I had been borrowing Bus's or Dad's razor whenever I needed to shave the few whiskers I had. After looking around at what I might take to carry my few possessions, I selected and purchased a small toilet articles kit. It was probably no larger than twelve inches long by six inches wide and four or five inches deep. I was able to carry my newly acquired razor, a small jar of underarm deodorant, a comb and small bottle of Vitalis which I was using at that time to hold my hair in place, one change of underclothes, and an extra pair of sox.

I recall being very excited about my departure on what I considered a grand adventure. My parents, on the other hand, saw my departure as the possibility that they might not see me again. Consequently, I was excited and could hardly wait for February 3rd to arrive, while they were walking around with long faces, dreading the idea of my leaving. I recall that on Sunday, January 31, when our family went to Mass at Sts. Peter and Paul church at Pettus, I approached Father Kerin, who was our pastor, and asked for his blessing. One of his admonitions was to find my friends at the altar rail. Many of my friends during my time in the service were Catholics. Both of the men who were with me on the day I met my future wife for the first time were Catholics.

Finally, Wednesday, February 3, 1943 arrived. I got up as usual and helped milk and feed the dairy herd, just like any other day. After breakfast, I went back to the barn and cleaned the stables and did the other chores which I did on any other day. My orders said that we would depart Pittsburgh by train at 7:00 PM for our first duty station, but did not mention where we were going.

I recall the day as being very cold and there was a lot of snow on the ground, although it did not snow that day. My plan was to ride the bus, which I had to board in Cochranton, which would get me to Pittsburgh at around 4:30 PM. Finally it was time to say my goodbyes to my Mother and my sister, Adelaide and my brother Bus. The rest of my younger brothers and sisters, except for Rodney, who was four years old, were in school, and we had said our goodbyes before they left for school. I believe it was about 11:00 AM, when I was dressed and ready to have Dad drive me to Cochranton, to catch my bus. I walked into the kitchen , having come down from upstairs, and found both Mother and Adelaide crying. I quickly hugged and kissed Adelaide and then turned to my Mother to do the same. But Mother would not let me go. I was not used to being kissed and hugged by either parent, as they were not demonstrative in showing their love either to us children or to each other. Finally, my Mother released me and I quickly turned and went out the door where Dad was waiting for me in the car. I didn't want my Mother to see the tears rolling down my cheeks. Dad and I did not have much to say to each other during our brief drive to Cochranton. We did not have long to wait for the bus. We were standing in front of Isaly's dairy store and as the bus turned the corner just a few yards away, my Dad grabbed me and hugged me

tightly and kissed me directly on the mouth. I noticed tears rolling down both his cheeks, but he quickly turned and walked toward his car as the bus came to a stop. I was the only passenger boarding, and was carrying only my small shaving kit, so there was no need for the bus driver to step off the bus. As soon as I was seated, the bus started up. I looked out the window and watched my Dad sitting in the car as long as I could see him. All kinds of emotions and thoughts were running through my mind. Would this be the last time I would see my family and my community? Would I be a pilot the next time I came home? Why were my parents so demonstrative when they had never been so before?

The bus arrived in Pittsburgh about 3:00 PM. I walked to the place where my orders directed me to report. Several other men who lived outside the Pittsburgh area, as I did, were already there. We were told to report back at 6:00 PM, so we decided to see a movie to kill a couple of hours. We also decided to eat dinner before we reported. Finally the time came to report. We were bussed from the processing center to the railroad station where we boarded a special train. It was made up of coaches and a dining car. There were 750 men who boarded the train. We still did not know our destination. We decided it might not be very far, since we were not provided with sleeping accommodations on the train. That turned out to be bad logic. The train finally pulled out of the station around 9:00 PM. Some of the men who were familiar with the area and the railroad system announced that we were headed west. This turned out to be correct, as we arrived in Cincinnati, Ohio after midnight. This was our first stop, and some of the men jumped off the train to buy cigarettes and whisky. Since I had been awake since 4:00 AM, I was trying to find a comfortable position on the coach seats and get some sleep. I'm not sure this is true, but I heard there were two men who missed the train when it departed. I would not be surprised if this were not true.

Our train headed south from Cincinnati. We passed through Nashville, Tennessee, Birmingham, Alabama and then headed southeast. Rumors were flying about where we were headed. Finally on Friday afternoon, February 5th, we arrived in Miami, Florida. We detrained and boarded busses and were taken to Miami Beach. We were assigned to hotels. I ended up in The Collins Hotel located at the corner of 10th and Collins. This area of Miami Beach is now called South Beach and many of the hotels extant at that time have been destroyed and replaced. We were two blocks from the beach, and our hotel was considered a resort in 1943. There were two of us assigned to the room I was in. We had good beds and a private bath. By the time we were assigned to our rooms and had dinner it was quite late, and I fell into bed exhausted, as I, like most of the men, had not slept much during the two nights on the train.

We were up fairly early and walked to a nearby restaurant that had been converted to an Army mess hall. We returned to our rooms and were then shown how to make up a bed, army style. We thought that since it was Saturday, we would have a couple of days off to explore the area. However, the drill instructors assigned to indoctrinate us into the Army lifestyle, reminded us that there was a war going on and we would not get many days off. So they set about to show us how to march. The very basic things, like starting off on the left foot, how to do an about face, left face, right face, keeping the line straight when marching, etc, etc. It didn't take long for most of us to get the hang of it. But, as is always the case, there were a few guys who just couldn't tell their right foot from their left. They were made examples of how not to do it, and although it would probably not be condoned today, they were laughed at and jeered, until through sheer persistence, they got it right. We were encouraged to sing as we marched, as it helped us keep in

step. I recall, that after we had been in Miami Beach for a week or ten days, there was a letter to the editor of the Miami paper, concerning our singing being bothersome to some of the winter residents at hotels that had not been taken over by the Army. The editors response was an editorial chiding the letter writer for being unpatriotic and encouraging the cadets to sing as loudly as they could. Some of the old soldiers who were our instructors, knew some pretty salty songs which they taught us and we sang them out loudly as we marched.

By Monday we still had not received our Army Issue clothing. And some of the men, who had brought not even a change of underclothes were griping pretty loudly. It was a matter of volume. The Army Air Corps had brought thousands of men to Miami Beach within a matter of just a few days, and only so many men could be processed through the clothing issue center each day. We did finally get our turn on Tuesday, February 9th. We marched to the clothing issue center and received most of our Army clothing. We received two of most everything. Two pair of high top shoes, two sets of underclothes, two khaki shirts and pants, two olive drab bath towels, four pair of socks, two olive drab coveralls, one olive drab wool blouse and two pair of matching trousers, and other assorted goodies. We also received two barracks bags to pack every thing in. After returning to our hotel we were told to put away our clothing, change into our army issue coveralls, shoes and pack our civilian clothing to send home. They even provided the boxes. We then marched to the post office and mailed our boxes home. We had now severed our last civilian ties and were fully the property of the United States Army Air Corps. For the next two weeks, it was march to the infirmary to receive our inoculations and our dog tags, (I still have one of my original dog tags.), march to a theater that had been taken over by the Army, for testing and more testing, and even still more testing. We also marched to the beach where we had daily calisthenics. We marched to the mess hall three times each day. We marched to theaters where we watched training films about venereal diseases, and a myriad of other subjects. We were kept busy from 5:00 AM until sometimes as late as 8:00 or 9:00 PM.

As I recall, we were given an address where we could receive mail about the second or third day after we reached Miami Beach. Of course most all mail moved by train in those days. By the time my first letter reached home and Mother's reply reached me, I had been gone for about two weeks. In my very first letter from home, Mother related to me the details of Bus's accident which had occurred on February 5th, the same day I had arrived in Miami Beach. Bus had gotten his hand caught in the corn husker shredder and had injured it quite badly. He was unable to help with the farm work, especially the milking and work around the cows and stable which was the priority work in the winter season when the cows are inside full time. Mother wrote that she was helping Dad with the farm work. This news was devastating to me. I felt quite guilty, as though I had let my folks and Bus down. I thought that if I had been at home Bus would not have had the accident. Unknown to me, Mother was five months pregnant with Mike at this time.

We spent about three weeks at Miami Beach. During the last week of February, we were told we would be shipping out to another location. We boarded a train and just a few hours later arrived at the University of Florida, located in Gainesville. At that time Gainesville was a sleepy little town of probably only two or three thousand people. The campus was almost deserted, as nearly all of the college age men were in the Armed Forces. There were 750 of us assigned to the 62nd College Training Detachment. The last name of every man assigned began with the letter C. I guess the folks who made the assignments took a master list of all the men assigned to Miami Beach and said this first group goes to such and such a place. We were assigned to rooms in the

dormitories. It was a very pleasant lifestyle. We ate in the University Cafeteria (the food was excellent), and attended classes basically as if we were college students. We did not have to march to class, but we did have a parade every afternoon, where we marched in formation. My recollection is that it rained on us almost daily, especially during the summer months, or rainy season. We were assigned four men to a suite of two rooms. We had three quarter width beds with inner spring mattresses. There was a lavatory in each room and showers and toilets at the end of the hall on each floor. My room was on the third floor and my roommates were Bob Curry, Don Crookham, and Ray Collins. All three of them were from the Pittsburgh area.

In mid April, I began to experience pain in my groin, especially during Physical Training. I finally went on sick call and the civilian doctor who examined me said he thought I had a hernia. The following day I traveled by GI ambulance to Camp Blanding, Florida. Camp Blanding was a huge, sprawling infantry base located near Starke, Florida , about 30 miles from Gainesville. As I understood, it had been a base used mostly by the Army National Guard for active duty training. By the time I arrived there, there were several thousand mostly draftees training to be Infantry soldiers. There was a large Field Hospital on the base. The hospital was made up of one story buildings connected by a covered walkway. Each building was about 25 or 30 feet wide and 60 or 75 feet long. Some of the buildings were wards and contained probably twenty hospital beds for patient care. Other buildings connected by the covered walkway were surgeries and laboratories and administrative offices.

After arriving there, I was examined by several doctors, some of whom felt that my hernia was not bad enough that it required surgery. However, the chief surgeon finally examined me , and decided that because I was in the Air Corps pilot training program, it was essential that my hernia be corrected, as I would be subjected to tremendous "G" forces in flying and I could not afford to have a hernia that might give me problems. So I was scheduled for surgery and the chief surgeon performed the surgery, commenting just before I went under the anesthesia that he wanted to be sure it was done properly. He started calling me "Tailspin Tommy", and he always called me by that name whenever I saw him, which was a number of times during my 50 days in the hospital. In those days, it was normal practice to keep a patient in bed following surgery, as opposed to the practice today of getting the patient up the same or next day following surgery. I spent twenty one days in bed following my surgery. During those days, I developed a very bad case of tonsilitis, and a decision was made to remove my tonsils since I was unable to be returned to duty. After that long period of being restricted to staying in bed, I was very weak and unsteady on my feet when I was finally able to be ambulatory. It did not take very long however before I was strong enough to help with caring for other patients in the ward. It was standard practice that all ambulatory patients were required to help answer the call bells when patients needed a bedpan or glass of water. We even had to mop the floors and make up beds. Each time I saw the doctor I pleaded with him to allow me to return to duty. However the doctor had talked to the Commander of the College Training Detachment at the University of Florida, and had decided that I must be fully able to return to the full range of duties prior to my release from the hospital, as there was no light duty status possible.

After about 45 days after my surgery, the chief surgeon decided that it would be acceptable for me to go home on recuperation leave. I was released from the hospital and returned to The University. The group of cadets that I had arrived with had already shipped out to Nashville, Tennessee to continue their training. All of my clothes had been turned in, and before I could go home on leave, I had to be issued new clothes and have orders cut authorizing me to travel home

on recuperation leave. I rode the train up the coast through Washington, DC and into Pittsburgh, where I caught a bus to Cochranton. The trains were absolutely packed, with standing room only. After a few hours of standing I began to experience some dizziness and nausea. I guess I had not completely recovered from my long stay in the hospital. There were two Military Policemen riding the train, I guess to keep all the Military guys on their best behavior. These two MPs befriended me after checking my orders, and invited me into their compartment where I was able to sit down and rest. They rode the train all the way to Washington, DC, and allowed me to spend most of my time in their compartment.

When I arrived home, I found that Mother was still in the hospital. Mike had been born on June 3rd, and Mother had undergone some surgery to reattach her bladder, as I recall. I went to visit Mother in the Hospital the same day I arrived home. I believe Mother was released from the hospital the next day or so. Dad had had to hire a young man to help out on the farm, as Bus was still unable to use his severely injured hand and the skin graft from his stomach to his hand was still in progress when I arrived home. I spent about 25 days at home and then rode the bus and trains back to Gainesville and the University of Florida. We spent some very wonderful times during July and August. Quite a few weekends we spent at Silver Springs near Ocala, Florida. At that time they allowed swimming in the crystal clear water of the huge springs located there. In early September, we learned that we would be shipped out to the classification center where it would be determined whether we would be pilots, navigators or bombardiers. On September 12, we entrained for San Antonio, Texas.

Almost immediately after arriving at what was then called the San Antonio Aviation Cadet Center, but is now Lackland Air force Base, we started all kinds of tests. Our eyes were tested for color blindness, for night vision, for our ability to distinguish aircraft shapes and every other kind of test imaginable. Our ears were checked. Our feet were checked. We were interviewed by psychiatrists, psychologists, to see if we were stable under pressure. Finally lists were posted indicating who made the grade for each of the aviation cadet training regimes. My name appeared on the list for pilot training. In early November, we moved from one side of Loop 13, to the other where the Pre-flight training took place. It was a nine week program, and we were scheduled to move on to primary flight training in early January. After we had been in Pre-flight for about two weeks, we received our first pass to go into San Antonio. City buses picked us up on the base and deposited us on St Mary's Street across the street from the Gunter Hotel. Two friends and I had decided to rent an automobile, but not just any automobile. We had decided that a convertible would be the best vehicle to impress the girls. It was on this day that I met the girl whom I would marry four years later. We were cruising around, with the top down on the convertible, and were driving slowly along Travis Park. We saw a young lady walking toward Houston Street. She was very petite and as we drove up along side her we "wolf whistled" at her trying to attract her attention. She just kept on walking and refused to even look at us. We started asking questions of her, like "What is there to do in this city?" Finally, upon reaching Travis Street, she had to wait for traffic, and she responded to our questions. First she told us her Mother had told her to never talk to strangers or soldiers. We responded that we were not soldiers, but aviation cadets, and once we introduced ourselves, we would no longer be strangers. After a brief exchange, in which we asked her what she would be doing in about ten days, a Sunday, which would be our next chance to be in town, she told us she would be in church. We found out where she went to church and ten days later we showed up at the Mass which she was attending at St Gerard's. She invited us to lunch at her house at 1505 Virginia Blvd. Of course,

the young lady is the person I have been married to for 53 years, Betty Jane Carter. We ended up going to a movie downtown with Mary Ann Carter, Rita Hoffmier, and Betty Jane Carter.

The other two cadets who were with me that day shipped out to Primary Flight Training at El Reno, Oklahoma in early January, 1944. I had failed to pass the visual Morse Code test, and was held back for another four and one half weeks. Betty Jane and I had probably three or four dates, we would meet for lunch, or see a movie together. One Sunday, we spent the day together and her Dad offered to drive me back to the base. Otherwise I had to take the Iowa bus from their place downtown, and walk from Market Street to Houston Street and St Mary's Street where I caught the bus back to the base. On February 7, 1944 I completed Pre-flight training and shipped out to Primary Flight Training at Mustang Field located at El Reno, Oklahoma. At last, after being in the service almost exactly one year, I was finally going to do what I had enlisted to do. That was to fly!

Mustang Field was a civilian flying school. The aircraft used were PT-19s. It was a single wing, two place, open cockpit aircraft. We started flying about the second or third day after we arrived. I loved it. It was what I longed to do. All of our instructors, for both ground school and flight training were civilians. We had only a dozen or so military officers at Mustang Field. We had military Pilots who gave check rides when a cadet was having difficulties and there was a question as to whether or not he should be "washed out."

The first few flights were devoted to becoming familiar with the airplane, practicing take-offs and landings, and recovery from stalls and resulting "spins". I had some queasiness in my stomach, but never came close to up chucking as many of the cadets did. On all flights with the instructor, the student sat in the rear seat and the instructor in the front. After we soloed, whenever we went up without an instructor, the students sat in the front seat where visibility was much better.

On about the fourth training flight with my instructor, after he had me shoot several landings, he told me to taxi the airplane over to where several other instructors were standing. I was pretty confident that this meant he was going to allow me to solo. When we arrived where the other instructors were standing, he climbed out of the front cockpit and standing on the wing root next to my rear cockpit, he asked me if I thought I was ready to solo. I was obviously quite nervous, but I felt pretty confident that I could handle the airplane by myself. So I responded that I thought I was ready. He jumped down onto the ground and waved me to go ahead. Was I surprised when the aircraft literally seemed to jump into the air. The PT-19 was a small airplane and when the payload was cut in half, as was the case when my instructor exited the aircraft, it was as though the airplane take-off distance was cut in half. In addition, the rate of climb was astonishing. My instructor had not prepared me for any of this. He had told me to stay in the traffic pattern on my solo flight and that meant flying a square pattern at 500 feet altitude. Because of the rapid rate of climb with only me in the rear cockpit, I suddenly found myself at 1000 feet altitude and still climbing. I finally found the trim wheel and trimmed up the airplane and got it back down to 500 feet. Within just a few minutes, I was on my approach for my first solo landing. I bounced a couple of times, but didn't do too badly, and as I started to taxi over to where my instructor was standing, he waved me on and I made another go around and did much better at controlling my altitude and performed a better landing. He had me go around two more times before he climbed back into the airplane. As he climbed up on the wing to enter the front cockpit, he extended his hand to shake mine, and congratulated me on soloing after only four flights and about five hours of

instruction. I was elated and probably grinning like a cat that just swallowed the canary. It was a momentous day. Many of the cadets did not solo until after six or more flights with their instructor pilots.

Shortly after I arrived at Mustang Field, Betty Jane and I had started a correspondence and when she found that I was close to Oklahoma City, she urged me to call her close friend Erma Barton, whose family had previously lived in San Antonio. Erma's Dad had worked at Kelly Field in San Antonio and had been asked to transfer to Tinker Field when it was designated as an overhaul depot for the Army Air Corps. When I called Erma, she invited me to her family's home for Sunday dinner. On one of my first passes, on a Sunday, I rode the interurban (a trolley-like means of transportation) into Oklahoma City and had dinner with the Bartons. El Reno was about 30 miles west of downtown Oklahoma City. The entire Barton family was very kind and treated me like a long time friend.

Our schedule rotated so that one week we would fly in the morning and attend ground school in the afternoon and the following week it would be the other way around. Some days we were scheduled to fly with our instructor and solo as well. The goal was for each cadet to accumulate 65 hours of flying time during the nine weeks we were in primary flight training. The time passed very quickly and soon we were talking about the next step in our flying training regime, which would be basic flight training in the BT-13. This would be at another base, perhaps Garden City, Kansas or Okmulgee, Oklahoma.

When we arrived at Mustang Field, I had been designated as Flight Captain of "B" Flight. I had attempted to avoid this assignment, as I wanted to be able to devote my full energy to being the very best pilot that I could possibly be. But because I had been a student officer at both the University of Florida and at Pre-flight School at San Antonio, the executive officer, Lt. Scott insisted that I accept the responsibility of Flight Captain. Later in this account you will understand how this responsibility came to be my downfall.

I loved the flying part of our training best of all our training activities. The objective was for each cadet to accumulate 65 hours of flying time. About one third of these hours were with our instructor pilots and the other two thirds were solo hours. I loved the solo hours, as I was able to practice all of the maneuvers, which my instructor had taught me. Some of these maneuvers included stalls and the resulting spins and recovery therefrom, snap rolls, slow rolls, loops, and of course take offs and landings. We had several prominent landmarks that we used to maintain our orientation as to where we were in relation to the airfield. Just south of Mustang Field was the South Fork of the Canadian river. There was a railroad bridge over the river just to our west and there was a cement plant along the river whose tall smoke stack we used to know what direction the wind was blowing. This was important when ever our instructor simulated an engine failure and we had to set up for an emergency landing, as we had to make our final approach into the wind.

About ten days before we were to depart for our next phase of flight training, Flight "B" was on across country run. This was a four mile run around a full section of land. Oklahoma was laid out in square mile sections when it was surveyed for the Great Oklahoma Land Rush. Two or three of the cadets in the Flight cut short the four mile run by cutting across one corner. I was not aware of this as I was bringing up the rear of the Flight and running with some of the slower cadets and encouraging them to keep running when they wanted to walk. When I arrived back at

the barracks and was showering, a call came over the intercom, that I was to report to the Executive Officer, Lt. Scott, on the double, and right now. I immediately toweled off and ran, on the double, to his office. His secretary sent me in as soon as I arrived. I saluted and said that I was reporting as ordered. It was obvious that he was extremely upset. He shouted that he wanted the names of the cadets that had taken the shortcut during our crass country run. It seems that one of the Officers had been flying and had seen the cadets take the shortcut. He then told Lt. Scott about their actions when he landed. I told Lt Scott that I was not aware of the actions of those cadets who had taken the short cut, but that I would ask them to identify themselves and would return as soon as possible with their names. I returned to the barracks and called the men of Flight "B" together and told them what had happened and what Lt. Scott had demanded of me. The guilty cadets did not immediately identify themselves as I had anticipated. Someone pointed out that the guilty parties would be walking a lot of "tours", and would probably not get to go to Oklahoma City the following Saturday Night for our graduation dance.

Let me explain what I mean about walking "tours". We had a demerit system in place and after ten demerits, a cadet had to walk a one hour "tour" in the courtyard in front of the headquarters building, carrying a rifle. A cadet could earn demerits for all kinds of violations of the rules and regulations. For example, our clothing had to be hung and/or displayed in a very precise order and manner. Lt Scott conducted a daily walk through inspection, and any violation resulted in demerits being assigned. An infraction such as taking a short cut on a cross-country run would result in a large number of demerits and the guilty parties could expect to walk lots of "tours."

Now back to what to do about the demand that Lt. Scott had placed on me, specifically to return with the names of the guilty cadets. Someone, I don't recall his name, suggested that I return to Lt. Scott and tell him that the guilty cadets had not been willing to identify themselves. It was suggested that since the officer who had seen then had not been able to identify them, there was no way that their identity could be determined. I did not feel good about this suggestion, but realized that there seemed to be a kind of consensus forming, and so I reluctantly agreed to try this response on Lt. Scott. I returned to the office of Lt. Scott and related to him that the guilty cadets had not been willing to identify themselves and that I really did not know who they were. Wrong answer! He went ballistic! His reaction really scared me. He screamed at me that he was relieving me of my position as Flight Captain, and that he would wash me out as being unfit to be an officer and a gentleman. He told me to return to my barracks and tell my Flight Sergeant to report to him as he would be appointed to fill the position of Flight Captain in my place. At this point, I was not especially concerned, as I was in excellent standing in both my flying proficiency and my ground school. In addition, I had not had to walk a single tour in my eight weeks at Mustang Field. And so mistakenly, I did not worry too much about Lt. Scott's threat.

The very next day when I returned from flying, I found my bed torn up and my clothes out of order in my clothes locker. On my bed was a copy of a demerit slip with a large number of demerits noted indicating that Lt Scott had found my bed improperly made up and my clothing out of it's proper order. Every day when I returned from flying or ground school I found the same thing. I was piling up the demerits like crazy. I started walking my tours, thinking that I would try to comply with all the rules and that since we had less than ten days until we would be gone and out of Lt Scott's control, that I would be OK. Bad assumption!

The following weekend, our last at Mustang Field, our graduation dance was held in the

Skirvin Ballroom in the Skirvin Hotel in downtown Oklahoma City. Most of the cadets of Flight "B" attended the dance. I was among those attending. We spent Saturday Night in a hotel in Oklahoma City and returned to Mustang Field Sunday afternoon. When I returned to my barracks, I found on my bed a notice that I was to appear before a washout board on Monday morning. I still was not unduly concerned. I still mistakenly thought that my record would be sufficient to protect me from being washed out. There were, as I recall, five Military Officers in the room when I walked in at the appointed time. Lt Scott read the charges against me. I don't recall all that he said, but I was amazed at the charges. All of the demerits that I had received in just a few days were made to sound like I had become a real slob. In addition, Lt Scott made it sound as though in my time as Flight Leader I had been a very inept and lousy leader. He made the one incident, where I was unable to identify the three cadets who took the short cut on the cross-country run, sound like an act that was a terrible reflection on my inability to be an officer. I was not allowed to respond to the charges. I was then advised by the chairman of the board that I was being washed out as being unfit to be an officer and a gentleman. I was told that I would be eliminated from the aviation cadet pilot training program and would depart the following morning for Lowry Field in Denver, Colorado. I was dumbfounded! I could not believe what I was hearing. I went to the Commanding Officer's office to ask for his review of my case. His secretary told me that he was on leave (I found out later that he was Duck hunting) and that Lt Scott was acting in his place. So, I had nowhere to turn. Lt Scott had accomplished exactly what he had threatened that he would do. That same day I was handed my travel orders to travel by train to Denver, Colorado.

I was absolutely devastated. I don't think I slept much that night. A lot of the cadets in my old flight were as unbelieving as I was. Some of the cadets avoided me, and I have to assume that they were the ones who had cheated on the cross-country run or at least knew the guys who had done so. And so that afternoon and evening I turned in my flying clothes and parachute, said my goodbyes and packed my bags for the trip to Denver. The Charge of Quarters awakened me early the next morning and I rode in a staff car accompanied only by the driver to the Railroad Station in El Reno. As I was about to board the train, my civilian instructor was disembarking as he returned from a trip to visit an ill relative. He had departed about a week or ten days prior and before any of the actions had taken place which resulted in my being washed out. He asked me what had happened, and although we had very little time, I related to him very briefly what had occurred. He was astounded and found it hard to believe. He told me he was sorry that he had not been there to put in a good word for me. And so, I boarded the train and departed just three days prior to the day that the rest of Class 44-H departed for Basic Flight Training.

The train ride to Denver still stands out in my memory as one of the low points in my life, at least up to until that time. I think I cried most of the way. I tried to think of what I should or could have done differently to have avoided my elimination from the aviation cadet program. I thought about what I would like to have happen to Lt Scott. I was angry with the Army Air Corps, with myself and with the cadets who had started the whole episode by cheating on the cross-country run. I decided that since the Air Corps had reneged on making me a pilot and since that is what I had signed on for, that I would try to get out of the service as a means of "getting even". I think I knew that it was very unlikely that they would be willing to release me, but I decided I would try.

I had to change trains in Amarillo, Texas. I had ridden the Atchison, Topeka and Sante Fe from El Reno to Amarillo and changed to the Denver and Rio Grande for the ride on to Denver.

I arrived in Denver late that evening and was met and given a bus ride from the Railroad Station to Lowry Field where I was assigned a barracks and told to go get some sack time. The next day I found out that I would eventually be going to armament school and would be an aerial gunner. There was, however a backlog of students awaiting openings in armament school classes. And so, in the interim we would be pulling all kinds of details. These details included the dreaded "KP," policing up the grounds, guard duty, charge of quarters, and other not to difficult to perform Duties, designed to keep us busy and out of trouble. We were required to be present for roll call every morning. If we were not scheduled for one of the a-fore mentioned duties, we were free to leave the base and go into Denver on a Class "A" pass. The very first day at roll call, I recognized several of the guys who had washed out of aviation cadet program at Mustang Field for valid reasons. They were all amazed to see me at Lowry, and wanted to hear what had happened to me. Of course I was still very angry and found it difficult to even talk about my bad experience. I don't know if the term "self esteem" had been invented yet, but my self worth or self esteem or what ever it might have been called, was at an all time low. I felt that I had somehow failed. Another washed out cadet helped me immensely by helping me come to terms with the idea that it was not my fault that I had been washed out. And gradually my feelings about myself began to improve as I came to accept the fact that I had done nothing wrong. At this time, I decided that since the Air Corps had not held up their end of the deal to make me a pilot, I would request that I be discharged from the service. I completed all the necessary paperwork and submitted it. Of course my request was denied. I think I knew it would be, but I did go through the motions. Mother always said that I did not like being in the military service. I believe she drew that conclusion from the fact that I had tried to get out of the Air Corps. In fact, I enjoyed my life in the service. I was just very disappointed that I had been thwarted in my desire to be a pilot.

Since we had very limited duties and were not in school, we spent a lot of time in Denver. There was a public swimming pool where a group of us spent a lot of time. On June 6, 1944, three of us had spent the night in a small hotel in Golden, Colorado. We were awakened by church bells ringing , so we called down to the desk to ask what was happening. We were informed that the invasion of Europe had begun. In less than one year, the war in Europe would be ended, but of course we had no way of knowing that at that time.

Finally in late July, I was notified that I would be starting Armament School. As I recall, this was a six-week course. Our studies included disassembling and reassembling the fifty-caliber machine gun until we could do it blindfolded. The fifty caliber machine gun was used in just about every turret in every bomber used by the Air Corps. We also studied all the turrets used in the B-17. Upon completion of Armament School, we were immediately placed on orders to attend the Flexible Gunnery School at Las Vegas Army Air Field located at Las Vegas, Nevada. As best I can recall we departed Lowry Field on September 12 and rode a train to Las Vegas. We did not have to wait to start training in gunnery school. We had classroom training on how the gun sights worked. Then we would go out in the field and riding in the back of pickup trucks, we would fire at clay pigeons as they were launched from pits along the road. Each clay pigeon came from a different angle, and we had to apply what we had been taught about sighting in the classroom as we fired shotguns mounted on tripods in the back of the pickups we were riding in. The last week of gunnery school we spent at an Army Air Field called Indian Springs. Here we flew practice missions in B-17s and got to fire the turret or guns of the position we were training for . We fired at targets towed by other aircraft and we also fired at ground targets. This was a chance for the students to apply the knowledge they had learned during ground school. In early

October we had completed our training and about 750 of us were ready to graduate. We were all seated in the base theater and an officer came on stage to make some remarks. After congratulating us on completion of our training he announced that there were some awards to be presented. I was totally surprised when my name was called and it was announced that I was being presented with a sterling silver watchband as the academic champ for the class. I still have the part of the band that has the inscription on it. It is inscribed as follows: LVAAF (Las Vegas Army Air Field), Class 44-42, ACADEMIC CHAMP, FLEXIBLE GUNNERY SCHOOL. On the other side it has my name inscribed. I had not been told that I was being recognized before hand, so it came as a complete surprise to me and all the other students. In addition, we were all promoted to the rank of Corporal.

As I recall, that meant an increase in our monthly pay from fifty dollars to sixty-two dollars. But in those days that meant we actually had twelve dollars more to spend each month. We were also told while in the theater that we would all receive a fifteen-day delay en-route to our new duty station. From Las Vegas to Meadville is a long train ride, especially when you are riding coach. However, when you are twenty years old you can handle almost anything. It was good to be home again and see all the family. I stayed home about eight or nine days and then left for Lincoln Army Air Field located near Lincoln, Nebraska. We stayed there only a couple of weeks and were assigned to B-17 aircrews. We met our other crew members and were immediately shipped off to Dyersburg Army Air Field near Dyersburg, Tennessee. We arrived at Dyersburg in early November, 1944. We started flying almost every day. We were being trained as replacement crews, and no matter where we might be sent, just about all bombing was done in formation. So, we spent many hours flying in formation. Because our pilots were all just out of pilot training, and relatively inexperienced, we had several bad accidents. On one occasion, one B-17 got into the prop-wash of another B-17, and they both crashed. As I recall, only one or two crewmen were able to parachute to safety. The nose gunners on both crews were men that had gone through armorer school at Lowry Field in Denver with me, and had also attended gunnery school at Las Vegas in my class. The amazing thing, is that the Air Corps just said move on, "Keep 'em Flying," or some such words, and we never missed a beat. We just kept right on flying and getting better each day. Another time, as we were lining up for take off on a night-time mission, the aircraft that took off just ahead of us exploded just as it turned out of the traffic pattern at the end of the runway. Those of us who were looking forward out of our aircraft actually saw the fireball as the B-17 exploded. We later learned that all aboard were killed. Our pilot radioed the tower and asked for instructions, anticipating that we would be instructed to return to the parking area. Instead, he was instructed to proceed with our take off.

We stayed at Dyersburg for about three and one half months. Shortly prior to completion of our training regimen, it was announced that the crew rated as the top crew would get to fly to New York City for a three-day holiday. Our crew came in second, and we received a three-day pass. We decided to go to Cairo, Illinois where there were no military installations, as we figured the people would welcome us and the girls would fawn all over us. I still recall one incident that happened while we were in Cairo. We had gone to a nightclub and were partying and having a perfectly good time. The club had a black cat as a kind of mascot. One of our crew, Thomas Mifflin Jones the Fourth, (that really was his name,) was really a goosey kind of guy. The black cat rubbed up against his leg and Tommy reached down and grabbed the cat by the tail and flung him against a wall. Thank goodness the cat had at least one more life left in him as he howled

and ran off. We were asked to leave the club without further ado. After we returned to Dyersburg, we shipped out and went back to Lincoln Army Air Field.

We spent only a couple of weeks at Lincoln, while we waited for our orders to move overseas. While we were there, as I was walking down the street one day, I heard someone shout my name. It turned out to be someone from Frenchtown, Pennsylvania. The amazing thing is that I never saw him again until 1994 when he walked up to me at Adelaide and Clarence's 50th Wedding Anniversary celebration and asked me if I recalled our chance meeting of almost 50 years previous. I am embarrassed to say that I do not recall his name. After we had been at Lincoln only a couple of weeks, we received our orders to proceed to the Port of Embarkation at Camp Kilmer, New Jersey. We traveled by train, and for the first time in all my travels in the military, we had sleeper cars. Of course they were military sleepers. But, they were better than traveling coach. We spent only two nights at Camp Kilmer. One night we went into New York City, the next night we were boarding the troop ship that would carry us to France and England.

We boarded the troopship U.S.S. William Wiegle in New York harbor and steamed out to sea in the dark of night. German submarines were still prowling about the North Atlantic and preying on ships traveling alone, and so all crossings by ship were still made in escorted convoys. We joined a large convoy comprised of other troopships, oil tankers and ships carrying all kinds of war materials, foodstuffs and supplies for the ongoing war in Europe. As the first day at sea dawned, and we walked on deck, we could see ships in every direction. There must have been twenty or more vessels that we could see. The troop ships were near the center of the convoy, I presume for maximum protection from the German submarines. The convoy could travel only as fast as the maximum speed of the slowest ship, and we soon decided that the slowest ship was an oil tanker off to our port side that seemed to have its decks awash because it sat so low in the water. The first two days out of New York were not too bad as we began to settle into our routines. The swells of the North Atlantic made some of the troops seasick, but most of us only experienced mild nausea and were able to carry on with our activities including eating three meals per day.

About the third day out of New York one of those infamous North Atlantic storms caught us. The waves and swells were suddenly gigantic. Everyone on board, it seemed, became seasick. The sleeping areas smelled strongly of vomit and unwashed bodies as many of the troops lay in their bunks, to ill to attempt any kind of activity, including eating. I had been fortunate when I came aboard the ship and claimed, quite by accident, a bunk that had an air vent just above my head. The bunks were just canvas strung between pipe racks and were four high. My bunk was the top one, almost against the ceiling of the compartment. In fact, the closeness, when everyone was in their bunk was almost claustrophobic. It became quite dangerous to even attempt to walk on deck as the decks were awash as the waves constantly broke over them. All day and all night the bow of the ship would rise on the huge swells until the center of gravity shifted and the bow would plunge into the next swell and the stern would be so high that the ships screw or propeller would come out of the water and the entire ship would resound with very loud "plop-plop-plop" sounds as each blade of the propeller reentered the water. To those of us unfamiliar with ships and the sea, it was almost terrifying. For those of us who were not too ill to try to eat, eating was a very difficult endeavor. As the ship inclined from side to side and bow to stern, the metal trays that the meals were served on would slide from side to side on the galley tables, which, thank goodness, were bolted to the floor. This meant that we had to hold onto the tray with one hand while using the other hand to eat.

Finally, after about five days and nights, the storm moved past us, blew itself out, or did whatever North Atlantic storms do. Most of the men who had been seasick recovered quite rapidly and the ship was soon cleaned up and smelling much better. The U.S.S. General William Wiegle was equipped with a five inch gun on the fantail or stern deck. There were also several fifty caliber machine guns mounted in gun emplacements on both sides of the ship. One day, with two of the escort vessels nearby, our ship moved to the edge of the convoy to allow the gun crews to get in some target practice. A balloon about four feet in diameter was released and the gun crews tried unsuccessfully to shoot it out of the sky. The balloon finally drifted out of sight to the applause of the troops on deck watching the whole episode.

The next day was Easter Sunday. The Catholic servicemen on board the USS General William Wiegle had asked around and determined that there was no Catholic Chaplin on board our ship. We assumed, many of us with keen disappointment, that we would not have an Easter Mass to celebrate the Resurrection of Our Lord nor the opportunity to receive Holy Communion, a quite traditional practice of Catholics at that time. The skies were overcast and the seas were still quite rough and angry looking, adding to the gloom that many of us were feeling. As we walked on deck, we noticed another ship in the convoy sending a message to our ship with a signaling lamp. We assumed the ships were observing radio silence to avoid giving away the convoy's position to enemy submarines that were quite likely monitoring the radio waves. As we watched, the ship that had been making the signals came alongside our ship. It turned out to be another troop ship almost identical to ours. When the two ships were traveling at the same speed and approximately one hundred feet apart, a small line was shot from the superstructure of the other ship across to the superstructure of our ship. This line was used to pull a larger line across the expanse of open water and that larger line was used to pull still a larger line across from one ship to the other. This third line was secured to the super structure of both ships and a breeches buoy was rigged on this line that was probably 30 or 40 feet above the water. A breeches buoy is a device suspended on a pulley or wheel that travels on a line between two ships and can be used to transfer mail, supplies or personnel between two ships at sea as they are underway. By now the deck was quite crowed as many of the troops gathered to watch the operation. As we watched, a man on the other ship was helped into the breeches buoy. The breeches buoy with the man on board was then pulled from the other ship toward ours. As the breeches buoy with its passenger reached close to the halfway point between the two ships, the ships inclined toward each other as they moved through the still rough seas. This natural inclination, plus the weight of the man being transferred caused the line and its cargo drop or sag toward the water. Just as it appeared that the man would be dunked into the extremely cold waters of the North Atlantic, the ships' inclination reached the maximum in one direction and began their return to a normal attitude. The line tightened and the man was saved from what had appeared to a certain dunking. He was quickly pulled the rest of the way to our ship and willing hands helped him from his precarious perch onto the safety of the upper deck of the USS General William Wiegle.

Word was soon passed around the ship that the man transferred to our ship was a Catholic Chaplin coming aboard to say Mass for the Catholic servicemen on board. A galley table was converted to a makeshift altar right on the deck. And it was announced that Mass would begin immediately. The Chaplin announced that since it would be impossible for him to hear the individual confessions of the hundreds of Catholic servicemen on board, he would give a general absolution so that everyone who wanted to could receive Holy Communion. This meant that each of us would be required to go to Confession at the earliest opportunity after we disembarked

from the ship. The Chaplin also asked for volunteers to serve as Altar Servers and assist him in saying Mass. It was amazing to see the large number of hands shoot up when he asked for volunteers for this duty. The Chaplin, whose identity I do not recall, proceeded to say Mass and distribute Communion to the Catholic personnel aboard the USS General William Wiegle .

When he had finished the Mass, the Priest announced that he would be transferred to yet another ship to bring the Word of God to the Catholic personnel on board that ship. As many as possible of the troops on board our ship crowded the decks and watched with admiration and awe as this priest uncomplainingly put his life at risk to carry the Word of God and the Sacrament of Communion on this greatest of feast days in the Christian Church to young service men who might be in combat in just a few days. This priest's willingness to risk his very life to do the work of his calling made a deep impression on me, and I'm sure on the thousands of other men on board the ships in this convoy. The realization came to me then that not all heroic acts during war take place in combat or on the battlefield. Every Easter I am reminded of that gallant Priest.

About three days later our ship docked at Le Havre, France and the hundreds of replacement infantry troops disembarked. We spent less than a day docked at Le Havre and the ship then proceeded to Liverpool, England where the balance of troops, mostly aircrew personnel disembarked. We loaded onto a waiting train and proceeded to Stoke. We landed at Liverpool on April 5,1945. We spent only a few days, perhaps ten days at Stoke and received our Bomb Group assignments. Our crew along with a couple of other crews that we had trained with at Dyersburg, Tennessee, were assigned to the 91st Bomb Group at Bassingbourn, a tiny village at that time, not far from Royston. We left Stoke by train and traveled to Royston where we were met by 91st Bomb Group personnel and traveled to the base where we received our barracks assignments. The quarters were quite modern, of brick construction in the shape of an "H". The latrines were located in the crossbar of the "H". Our living quarters were in the arms of the "H". Our mattresses were British and were comprised of three biscuits each of which covered one third of the bunks in which we slept. If you were lucky you received three biscuits that were of approximately equal thickness. Fortunately, they had quite a number of them and we were able to be selective in picking out three that were about equal in thickness.

The first two weeks or so after we arrived at Bassingbourn, we were kept very busy being indoctrinated in how things were done in the 91st Bomb Group, being trained in escape and evasion techniques, (in case we were shot down or otherwise had to parachute or ditch over enemy territory). We also were issued our flying clothing. This included electrically heated suits and boots that had not been available to us during our training in the states. After we had been at the 91st Bomb Group for about two weeks we were declared ready to fly missions with the other crews. Each afternoon when the next day's crew alert list was posted we would check to see if our crew was on the alert list. I recall that we all talked as though we were really anxious to fly our first mission. When our crew was alerted to fly the next day's mission, I think we all had some butterflies or maybe even some worse feelings. Most of us had been in training for at least a year or more (I had been in the service for over two years) and the culmination of all the training and preparation was that we would drop bombs on Germany very likely killing civilians and that possibly, even quite likely we would be shot at and even possibly be killed. I recall that I did not sleep especially well that night. I also recall that I suddenly remembered that the priest who had given us absolution on board our troop transport had reminded us that we should go to Confession as soon as possible and I had not yet done that. So that evening I went to the chapel and went to Confession.

You must realize that we still did not know where we would be bombing the next day. We would find out where that was during the mission briefing the next morning. The Charge of Quarters clerk came through the barracks the next morning at about 3:00AM waking the crew-members that were alerted for that day's mission. Most of the alerted crews were old hands, and had been on a number of prior missions and consequently were a little more restrained than those of us going on our first mission. We all headed for the latrine where we shaved, showered and then returned to our bunks and lockers to get dressed for our mission. First we put on our long underwear. Over that went the electrically heated suit. The next thing was a flight suit and jacket with fur collar. We then went to breakfast. Everyone had told us to eat hearty, because the next meal would be late that day after we returned from our mission. I don't think that our crew-members ate very much for breakfast that day. Just too many butterflies and other feelings that left one's stomach in turmoil. After we completed breakfast, we gathered in the briefing room at about 4:00 AM. As the briefing team took the stage, they unveiled the briefing boards that displayed where we would be going. Our target would be the Railroad marshalling yards at Munich. The briefing lasted for over an hour. It covered such things as where the 91st fit into the overall scheme of things, engine start times and take-off times, routes to and from the target, weather en-route and over the target, altitudes we would fly and bomb from, assembly points and altitude for our group, fighter escort both in terms of quantity and location in relation to where we would be flying, our bomb loads and innumerable other subjects. Finally the mission briefing was completed and the Chaplains then came in to give us their blessing. We then loaded into trucks, busses and whatever vehicles were available and proceeded to our aircraft. Each B-17 was parked in a revetment that had sand bags between it and the next airplane. This was to preclude several aircraft from being damaged or destroyed by bombs, V-1 or V-2 rockets launched by the Germans. Our assigned aircraft for this mission was "The Old Battle Axe." Our pilot, Lt Garland, would fly in the copilot's seat for this mission and a seasoned pilot would fly in the pilot's seat. Our assigned waist gunner, Thomas Mifflin Jones, IV, would not fly with us, nor would our co-pilot, George R Lucas. In addition to the clothing earlier described, we also each wore our parachute harness, inflatable life vest and flak jacket, and each of us carried a loaded forty-five caliber automatic pistol. Our parachutes, snapped onto the harness with two D-rings, and were located near the exit doors that we would normally use if we had to abandon the aircraft in-flight. We met as a crew outside the aircraft and since all of us were on our first mission with the exception of the pilot, he gave us some advice, speaking from his experience. We did our ground walk around inspections. Each gunner checked his turret and made sure the ammo was loaded and fed freely into the guns. As armorer and togglier, it was my responsibility to remove the safety wires from the bomb fuses after we become airborne and return with them at the end of the mission. The crew would not be credited with a mission if I did not turn in the safety wires to correspond with the number of bombs we dropped. Finally, it was time to load up and start engines. But first we had to walk the propellers through. With a radial engine the oil from the crankcase leaks past the cylinder rings and can easily cause a blown cylinder if the propellers are not walked through to slowly push the oil from the bottom cylinders back up into the crankcase. Walking the propellers through is not rocket science work. You grab onto a blade of the propeller and start walking and pushing it until the next blade can be reached by another pusher and continue the effort until all three blades of the propeller have been pushed twice.

Finally the pilot tells us this is the last chance to relieve ourselves before we enter the aircraft. All of us do so and enter the aircraft. During training, in the states, all crew-members

except for the pilot, co-pilot and engineer took up ditching positions for both take-offs and landings. This will not be the case now. We each take our regular positions with the exception of the ball-turret gunner. He will not enter the ball-turret until we are airborne. Each crew-member hooks up his intercom, plugs in his electrically heated suit and checks his oxygen flow to make sure that everything is functioning OK. At 0540 hours it is time to start engines. The ground crew stands fire-guard while the pilot and co-pilot go though the start engines procedures. Each of the Pratt and Whitney radial engines comes to life with its' throaty rumble. A member of the ground crew removes the wheel chocks and we get the signal to taxi. We get in line behind several other aircraft. Then it is take-off time. The first airplane starts down the runway and before he has gone very far the next aircraft is in place and ready to roll. As soon as the aircraft ahead breaks ground, the next one starts its take-off roll and finally it is our turn. We line up on the runway and as soon as the aircraft immediately ahead of us is off the ground we start our take-off. The aircraft are all heavily loaded. We have a full load of fuel and twenty two hundred fifty pound bombs in our bomb bay. We use just about the entire runway and even when we get airborne our climb out is very slow. In fact, it seems to me that we are skimming the treetops as we very slowly begin to climb to our assembly point. We climb through an overcast sky and finally breakout into the clear at about three thousand feet altitude. There are airplanes everywhere. In all directions and at all altitudes there are aircraft trying to find and assemble on their leaders. There are very large logos on the vertical tail of each aircraft. Ours is a large triangle with an "A" in the center of the Triangle. Each Bomb Group has a different logo to make identification easier. We look for and find other Triangle "A" aircraft. We are able to slowly form up in a loose formation and head for the English Channel. We leave the English coast at 3,600 feet altitude. We arrive over the continental coast before 0700 hours at just above 8,000 feet. Our position today is on the left wing of a diamond formation. As we pass through 9,500 feet altitude, our pilot tells the crew to go on oxygen. It is my responsibility to perform the oxygen check for the crew. This means that every five minutes I press my intercom switch and announce "oxygen check." Each crew-member in a specific order comes back and says his position and check. For example, the pilot goes first and says, "Pilot, check," then the co-pilot says, 'Co-pilot, check," etc, until the tail gunner completes the ritual. This is terribly important, because at 29,000 feet altitude, where we will be cruising and from where we will be bombing, oxygen deprivation can cause unconsciousness in minutes. We have all gone through the altitude chamber in training and are aware of the danger.

While we were over the Channel, partly visible through a breaking up cloud deck, the pilot tells the gunners to get ready to test fire their guns. Since we are a novice crew, he reminds us to be very careful about where our guns are pointing when we test fire them. The test firing is completed by each gunner firing a very brief burst from the fifty caliber machine guns in his turret. By now, the ball turret gunner has entered his turret and will stay there until we are over the channel on our way home, which is still several hours away. The pilot reminds me that it is time for me to remove the safety wires from the bombs. I will be off the intercom for several minutes, and the pilot tells the navigator to perform the oxygen check while I am away from my position. I unplug my intercom, my heated suit, and change from aircraft oxygen system to a walk-around oxygen bottle and climb back through the narrow passageway from the nose of the aircraft to the pilots compartment and open the door to the bomb-bay. There is a narrow catwalk through the center of the bomb-bay and I stand on that catwalk as I remove two safety wires from each bomb. There are two fuses in each bomb. A nose fuse and a tail fuse are activated by a small

propeller that must make a minimum number of turns after the bombs fall away from the aircraft. In armament school at Lowry Field in Denver, I learned how many turns, but I have not retained that information. Even after I remove the safety wires from the bombs, there is another safety wire to keep the small fuse propellers from turning until after the bombs are dropped. This wire will be pulled from the fuse as the bomb falls away. If the bombs are dropped with either of the safety wires still in place they will not be armed and will not explode upon impact. I return to my position in the nose section of the aircraft and after re-connecting everything I report to the pilot that I have completed my chore and I return to making the oxygen checks. We fly for several hours and the mission is pretty much uneventful during that time. Of course, the Allied Armies have overrun much of Europe and the Germans are on the run. Although we do not realize it, the war in Europe will be over in about fifteen days.

The pilot finally announces that we are soon going to be over enemy territory and that we should all be alert for the possibility of enemy fighters that might attack us. At just about that time we see black puffs of smoke several hundred feet below us and realize that what we are seeing is anti-aircraft shells exploding. It is commonly referred to as flak All of a sudden, I am not sure I am so anxious to be in combat as I have been thinking and saying. Very soon the pilot announces that we will be passing our aiming point for the bomb drop. We have been at 29,000 feet altitude for some time now. The lead bombardier uses his Norden Bomb Sight to determine when to release his bombs. I watch the lead aircraft in our formation and when I see smoke from a small smoke bomb released ahead of the bomb drop I activate the toggle switch to release our bombs. A device called an interval-o-meter releases the twenty bombs from our bomb bay milli-seconds apart so there is no possibility of two bombs colliding in their free fall. After the bombs are released, I ask the radio operator, who is located immediately aft of the bomb bay, to look and make certain that all twenty bombs have been released from their shackles and have cleared the aircraft. Upon receiving his response that the bomb bay is clear, I ask the pilot to close the bomb bay doors. It is about 1040 hours when we are coming off the target. There are broken clouds beneath us, but I can see bomb bursts on the ground. Because we are at twenty nine thousand feet altitude and the clouds it is impossible to tell whether the bombs were on target. As we come off the target the formation begins a gradual turn toward home. We have not seen any enemy fighters. We continue to see some flak, but it is not at our altitude. We can see the snow covered Alps to the south of our formation.

As we continue our turn back toward the Channel and home we become more aware of the huge Armada of airplanes that we are a part of. There are aircraft strung out for miles behind and ahead of us. I recall that there were eight hundred aircraft that bombed Germany that day. I don't think we all bombed the railroad marshalling yards at Munich.

We are soon over territory occupied by the Allied Armies, and we are able to relax some, as the likelihood of being shot at from the ground or being attacked by German fighters is just about zero. Our pilot still cautions us to stay alert and be watchful. I continue my oxygen checks, as we are still flying at 29,000 feet altitude. As we approach the channel we begin our let down and finally pass through 10,000 feet altitude as we begin to cross the Channel. We are able to remove our oxygen masks. This is a very welcome relief and we are able to eat some of the chocolate bars we each have stuffed in our pockets. At long last, we arrive over our base and begin to set up for landing. A couple of our aircraft ask to land first as they are experiencing engine problems or they have an ill crewmember who needs medical attention. There are no battle-damaged aircraft or wounded crew- members for which we are all thankful. Finally it is

our turn to land. We touch down and taxi to our revetment. It is 1540 hours. We all have different thoughts about our first mission. We have been gone from take-off to landing about nine and one half hours. However, our day is not yet done. Now comes the de-briefing. We are taken directly to the de-briefing area from out aircraft. The intelligence people are anxiously awaiting our arrival and interview each crewmember. They ask about whether we saw any enemy fighters, whether or not we could see the target at the time of our bomb drop, and any apparent damage. They also wanted to know about the anti-aircraft fire, and where it appeared to be exploding in relation to our flight level. There were many other questions, and the de-briefing probably lasted for upwards of forty-five minutes. An interesting aside that I still recall quite vividly, was the fact that the military chaplains were walking around and offering a shot of whiskey to each of the aircrew members as they were being debriefed. By the time that we had finished our de-briefing, it was close to 1700 hours.. We returned to our barracks and removed our flight clothing, went to dinner and fell into bed exhausted. It had been a very full day with lots of adrenaline flowing and all kinds of new experiences to keep us on the edge of our seats, so to speak.

Our bomb group was not alerted to fly the next day. It was alerted to fly a mission the day after that, but the mission was scrubbed. We were told that the Allied Armies had overtaken the target, or were so near the target that we might drop the bombs on our own troops. Just four days after our first and what will turn out to be our only mission, the last mission of the war in Europe was flown on April 25, 1945. It was a mission to Pilsen, Czechoslovakia. Our squadron was on stand down on that date. The other three squadrons of the 91st did participate in the final mission to Pilsen..

Our crew did get a three-day pass at about this time and we elected to go into London. We caught the train at Royston, and rode it to Paddington Station. The USO had arranged places where US service men could sleep while on leave in London and we reserved beds for our selves for two nights and then headed out to tour some of the famous landmarks of London. As best I can recall, we hooked up with a tour group and spent the first day of our leave touring places like Buckingham Palace, (of course we could not go inside), Westminster Abbey, designed by Sir Christopher Wren and where all the Coronations of English Monarchs take place. Here we did get to go inside and had a very thorough tour with a very proper Englishman as our guide. We also got to see the Tower of London, Big Ben, the Parliament Building, London Bridge and other places that I have long ago forgotten. We were also driven by areas where the German Bombing campaign had literally destroyed large areas of the city. Many of those areas had not been cleared of the rubble. Interestingly, we were able to find a restaurant where we had an excellent meal . Our servers looked as though they might be at least seventy or more years of age. Of course, we should have expected this as all the younger men were off somewhere fighting the war. We thoroughly enjoyed our three days in London. By this time there were rumors flying that the War in Europe was about to end and that the Germans were about to surrender. When we returned to our base at Bassingbourn, we found that our Bomb Group had not flown any more missions while we were in London.

Victory in Europe, or VE Day as it is normally referred to was May 8, 1945. I have to assume that our base commander was alerted ahead of time that VE Day would be announced, because we saw preparations being undertaken to lock down the base about twenty four hours ahead of the actual announcement. No passes to travel off the base were allowed. All of the vehicles from the motor pool were parked very tightly bumper to bumper and the ignition

systems were disabled by removing the rotors from the distributors. The only vehicles in commission were the ambulances from the base hospital, a few jeeps used by the Military Police, and the fire engines. Also all aircraft were grounded. The celebration started early and never stopped. Many of the men had brought whiskey from the states that they hoarded and planned to open only when the war ended. Now was the time. Everyone was excited and there was lots of talk about going home. Many of the ground crew had been in England ever since the 91st Bomb Group had arrived in September of 1942.

A few of us stayed sober enough to be observers of the boisterous goings-on all around us. We could see the NCO club from our barracks, and as we watched, we saw an ambulance from the base hospital arrive. Two medics jumped out, pulled a stretcher from the back of the ambulance and went inside the club. We were curious as to what might have happened that required an ambulance, so we started walking toward the club to get a better view of who might be carried out on the stretcher. Imagine our surprise when the two medics came out carrying the stretcher with a keg of beer on it. They loaded it into the ambulance and drove back to the base hospital. Even the patients too ill to be released from hospital got to participate in the celebration of VE Day due to the ingenuity of the medics.

A few days later we were briefed on a program referred to as "Rubberneck." The way it worked was as follows. A nine-man flight crew along with ten ground-crewmen would be allowed to fly at low level over the European Continent to get a look at the battle damage. Our crew flew one Rubberneck mission. I got to fly in my normal position in the nose of the airplane, with probably the best view of any position in the airplane. I believe we crossed the channel at about 5,000 or 6,000 feet, and then let down to about 1,500 feet after we were over the continent.. The devastation was unbelievable. There were bomb craters or shell craters from artillery fire in just about every acre of land. The buildings in every village or town that we flew over were blasted to bits. At one point, our pilot called me on the intercom and asked if I would like to fly the aircraft. One of our crew had told him that I had washed out of pilot training. I told him I would love to have such a chance. And so for about fifteen minutes I sat in the left seat and flew a B-17 at about 1,500 feet altitude. I tried a few gentle turns and changes in altitude and then turned the airplane back to the co-pilot and returned to my normal position. I do not recall the date of this flight, but it was probably around May 20, 1945.

Just a few days later and we were told that we would be some of the first to return to the United States, and that we would be going to Burtonwood by truck convoy where we would pick up a War Weary B-17 being readied to fly back to the United States. I believe we left Bassingbourn on about May 28 or 29. We were to carry ten ground-crewmen along with our nine-man aircrew. There were about twenty-five or perhaps more aircraft that departed Burtonwood and flew to an airfield in Wales as I recall. During our landing we hit very hard and bent one of our main landing gear. The maintenance people assigned to the base called an Engineering Officer to inspect the bent gear to determine whether or not we would be able to continue our flight. All of the crews were scheduled to spend the night at that base, Rather than going to bed, our crew spent most of the night helping the base maintenance people jack the airplane and cycle the gear several times. The Engineering Officer finally decided that the airplane was safe to fly and we finally got to bed sometime after midnight.

The following day was June 1st, and all of the airplanes took-off one after the other and we flew to Reykjavik, Iceland. I believe this was an eight or nine hour flight. We flew below 10,000 feet altitude, as the ground-crewmen on board were not equipped with oxygen masks.

One thing that stands out in my memory about our arrival at Reykjavik is how strong the wind was blowing. We were not one of the first arrivals and so we had to park a good distance from the terminal. As we walked to the terminal, it seems that our bodies were almost horizontal with the ground as we leaned into the wind. We spent the night at Reykjavik and departed the next morning and again flew for about eight or nine hours and landed at Bluey West Number II, Greenland. Because the prevailing winds are from west to east over the North Atlantic the only way to cross in a B-17 was to make three legs on a Great Circle Route. Again we spent the night and departed the next morning for Manchester, New Hampshire. This was also an eight or nine hour flight. At Manchester, we relinquished our airplane to a ferry crew that flew her to Walnut Grove, Arkansas. We rode a train to Ft Dix, New Jersey and from there we were sent on thirty days leave. As I recall , by this time it was about June 5, 1945.

I spent all of the thirty days at home with my family near Cochranton, Pennsylvania. On July 6th, we were all back at Ft Dix, wondering what we would be doing and where we would be going. Our entire crew shipped out to McDill Field at Tampa, Florida. We traveled to Tampa by train. I guess the Army Air Corps was trying to decide how to use us in the war in the Pacific. The B-17 did not have sufficient range for the long missions in the Pacific and they finally broke up our crew and sent us in several directions. This decision was made after we had been at Mc Dill Field only a few days, perhaps two weeks. Some of us, including myself, were sent to Buckingham Field at Ft Meyers, just down the Florida coast from Tampa. Buckingham Field trained Central Fire Control Gunners for B-29 crews. It became obvious to us right away as where we would be end up eventually. Because so many short time crews were returning from England and Italy, there was a waiting list to get into B-29 Gunnery School. In the mean time, we were free to go into town on a Class A pass. This meant that you were free to be off base as long as you did not have duties and as long as you were present for roll call every morning. About August 3rd or 4th, my name appeared on a list to begin Central Fire Control Gunnery School. Classes were to start on the 10th or something like that. However, on August 6, 1945 the United States dropped the Atomic Bomb on Hiroshima, Japan and three days later another nuclear weapon was dropped on Nagasaki, Japan. Japan surrendered on August 14th and in a matter of a few days all training ended and men started shipping out to other bases, many of them who had been overseas longer that I had been were sent to separation centers. I remained at Buckingham Field until it was almost ready to be shuttered. Those of us who were still there were asked to perform just about anything that needed to be done. In mid-September we were told that a hurricane was approaching and we were evacuated from the base and moved into a citrus processing warehouse. We spent one night there eating K-rations as our only sustenance. Many of the barracks on the base lost their roofs due to the hurricane.

On about September 30 I departed Buckingham Field with orders to report to Maxwell Field at Montgomery, Alabama. I had asked for, and received a ten-day delay en-route to Maxwell Field. Since I had been home for thirty days in June, I decided to spend my delay en-route with Betty Jane Carter in San Antonio. We had been corresponding since I left San Antonio in February of 1944, and I felt pretty strongly that I wanted to marry Betty. I wanted to spend some time with her and see if she was of a similar persuasion. In addition, I knew that her birthday was coming up on October 3, and I had purchased a watch that I planned to present to her on her birthday. We had six or seven idyllic days together and when I left I was more convinced than ever that I wanted to marry her. Which, of course I did after I moved to San Antonio in January of 1947. We were married on November 22, 1947 and have enjoyed over 53

years of married life together.

After my trip to San Antonio, I reported to Maxwell Field. I was assigned as the Non-Commissioned Officer In Charge (NCOIC) of a separation center being operated there. We discharged about 500 men per day. The processing took about two or three days. Each man had to have a physical exam, his records had to be brought up to date, his mustering out pay determined and paid, and a myriad of other tasks had to be performed for each man to be separated. I was responsible for all of the administrative support. Keeping the supply of all the various forms required, getting broken typewriters repaired and solving hundreds of little bottleneck problems as they developed each day.

As Christmas approached, I asked my boss, who was a Major, if I could have some leave, as Betty Jane and her family were going to be in Evansville, Indiana over the holidays. I hoped to spend some time in Evansville and then travel on to Pennsylvania and be with my family as well. The Major said absolutely not. He was going on leave and someone had to be available, and that someone would be me. Well, necessity being the Mother of invention, I waited until the Major went on leave, and I knew his schedule as I had typed up his leave form, then I typed up a leave form for myself, signed his name and took off for Evansville and Cochranton, Pennsylvania. I just made sure that I was back at Maxwell before his return. It was kind of dumb on my part, as I could have been charged with an AWOL (Absent With-Out Leave.) However, Nothing ever developed and the Major even acted kind of nice to me when he returned from his leave, telling me he was sorry that he had to deny my leave request.

I must relate one humorous incident that occurred while I was stationed at Maxwell Field. I had made friends with another Sergeant, who worked in the communications room at Base Headquarters. He had shown me how the outdoor communications system worked. Each day an automatic system played reveille at 6:00 AM and taps at 10:00 PM. There were speakers mounted on utility poles around the parade ground and it was also possible to play martial music during parades or other functions held on the parade grounds. My friend showed me how to disconnect the record player from the outdoor speakers that would then allow me to play records, of which there was a very generous supply on hand. Recordings by Glenn Miller's Orchestra and many other top ranked big bands were available. In the evenings, when I wanted to write letters to my girlfriend or to my family, I would play records while writing. The only thing I had to do was to cue-up the recording to play taps at 10:00 PM and turn the outdoor speakers back on before I left the communication room. On one occasion, I had not been paying very close attention to the time and I looked up at the clock and saw that it was already a few minutes past 10:00 PM. I very hurriedly went thru the set-up procedure and turned out the lights and left the building. As I walked to my barracks, imagine my surprise and amazement when, instead of hearing taps, I heard reveille played. In my haste, I had cued up the record in the wrong spot. I went back and cued-up the record to play reveille the next morning. But the funny thing was that I never heard from my friend that he got in trouble over the incident and no one ever mentioned the wrong bugle call being played that night.

About January 25,1946, I noticed that the men we were separating from the service had less points than I did. Immediately I told the Major that it was time for me to be separated. He started to tell me that I could not be spared and would have to stay for until a replacement for me could be found. I told him I wanted to see the Colonel that he reported to. He started backpedaling right away and on January 28, 1946 I was processed through the separation center that I had been operating. Instead of the two or three days that processing normally took, I

processed out in one day. But, of course I knew all the people who did the processing and knew all the shortcuts. I drew my mustering out pay and took a train to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania where it had all started almost exactly three years earlier. From Pittsburgh, I took a bus to Cochranton and had the bus driver drop me off at the top of the driveway to the Steere Farm.

I can truthfully say that I enjoyed my time in the Military Service. Clearly, I was extremely disappointed when I was washed out of pilot training. I can now look back on my career in the service and say it was my fate to be washed out. Possibly, being washed out saved my life. Clearly, I will never know that to be the case, however, if I had been commissioned and received my pilot's wings in August of 1944 as scheduled, I would probably have entered combat sooner that I did as a B-17 crewmember. How that would have played out, only God knows.

END

Here are a few facts about the 91st Bomb Group, which I was a part of for less than two months. The airplanes of the Group flew 9,591 sorties in 340 missions from November 7,1942, when they flew their first mission, until April 25,1945, when they flew their last mission. During that time the Group lost197 B-17s to enemy action. They destroyed 420 German aircraft. In so doing, 1,010 airmen were lost. 899 were killed or died as a result of their wounds. 111 were missing in action. 960 were captured and ended up as Prisoners of War. One aircraft assigned to the Group, "Nine-O-Nine" flew more missions than any other B-17 assigned to the Eighth Air Force, a total of 140 missions.