

A Pilot's Diary: William H. Arthur

Edited and Annotated by Lowell Getz

Although discouraged from maintaining personal diaries for security reasons, many 8th Air Force crewmen kept a record of their missions and other activities during their combat service. A few have expanded these journals into published books describing their experiences. Most such diaries, however, were stashed away, along with other mementos of the service years, in the back recesses of attics or basements. All too frequently, these records are thrown away by family members in the haste of cleaning up the house when the crewmen pass away. From those few accounts that do see the light of day, we are able to get an insight as to the day-to-day experiences and feelings of the crewmen--how they endured and how they coped with the dangers and stresses of air warfare.

What follows is the complete combat diary of a pilot, Captain William H. Arthur, who flew 35 missions over continental Europe with the 91st Bomb Group during July-October 1944. I have edited his entries only to add punctuation and capitalization. Bill wrote his notes in 3 x 5 inch pocket books, typically with dashes separating sentences or comments.

I have annotated the beginning of each entry to provide details of the mission for that day, including the plane he was flying, the crewmen who were aboard, the briefed target, and his position in the formation. Although Bill included some of this information in his entries, his terminology varies from entry to entry. In particular, crewmen used different terms regarding the formation pattern. Often the term "Squadron" was used in place of the three plane "Element", "Group" instead of "Squadron" and "Wing" in place of "Group." I have used the more standardized method of describing the Squadron and Group formations (see page 2 and the diagram on page 27). Following each diary entry (which is in italics), I explain and elaborate upon some of Bill's comments and provide general information regarding the mission.

Bill Arthur was born in Orchard Park, New York, seven miles south of Buffalo, on 20 September 1916. His father, William G. Arthur, owned and operated a hardware store, a furniture store and a gift shop, along with related service businesses in Orchard Park and nearby towns. Bill grew up and attended grade and high schools in Orchard Park, graduating from Orchard Park High in 1934. That fall Bill enrolled at Cornell University where he majored in business administration and mechanical engineering. He also enrolled in the Army ROTC program from which he was commissioned a Second Lieutenant in Field Artillery. Artillery at the time was still horse-drawn and Bill liked being around horses. After graduation in 1938, he returned to Orchard Park to work in the family business.

In May 1941, Bill was called to active duty. Field Artillery had become mechanized by then and he would not be working with horses after all. Bill, therefore, volunteered for training as an air observer in the Army Air Corps. Upon completion of the Air Observer school, he was assigned to submarine patrol duty along the East Coast. During this service Bill was promoted to First Lieutenant and later, in September 1942, to Captain. On the 19th of May 1942, Bill and Lois ("Loey") Redley were married.

When the opportunity arose in 1943, Bill volunteered for pilot training and was accepted into the flight program. After obtaining his wings in November 1943 and completion of advanced flight training in February 1944, Bill was sent to Avon Park, Florida for crew training in B-17, "Flying Fortresses." It was there that Bill's crew was put together. These included: John M. Henderson, copilot; Robert H. Boyd, navigator; William J. ("Flip") Swindell, bombardier; Jimmy E. Yanzick, flight engineer and top turret gunner; Milton Ehrlich, radio operator; Charles

E. Lee, waist gunner; Charles Chamberlain, waist gunner; Michael J. Sesta, ball turret gunner; John P. McCann, tail gunner (see page 26 for a crew picture).

On the 27th of May, their training completed, Bill and his crew left Avon Park to begin the long trip to England. The first stop was Hunter Field, Georgia where they picked up a new B-17. Then it was on to Grenier, New Hampshire. On the 9th of June they flew to Gander, Newfoundland. Two days later, at 1100 hours, the crew left Gander for England, arriving at Valley, Wales at 0800 hours local time on the 12th. From there the crew was sent by train to the Replacement Depot at Stone, where the men marked time until being sent on to Bovington on the 19th.

At Bovington, Bill and his crew attended classes 9 hours a day, in preparation for combat. This continued until the 1st of July, when they were sent to the 91st Bomb Group at Bassingbourn and assigned to the 401st Squadron. After arriving at Bassingbourn, Sgt Chamberlain was transferred out of the crew. Because of lessening danger from German fighters, two waist gunners were no longer needed and the flight crews were reduced to nine men. If attacked by fighters, the radio operator would come back to the waist to man the other gun.

The crew drew their combat equipment, attended more classes and flew a practice mission the 5th. Bill and his crew were ready for combat.

Mission 1. All newly arriving first pilots would fly at least one or two missions as copilot with an experienced crew so as to familiarize themselves with the stresses of combat. Bill flew his first combat mission with 1Lt Carl M. Melton's crew. They flew in the No. 2 position in the Second Element of the High Squadron. Their plane was No. 610, "Zootie Cutie" ("Zootie Cutie" survived the war and was returned to the States to be recycled). The target for his first mission was the rocket-bomb ("V-1", "buzz bomb") launch installations near Pas de Calais, France.

July 6th.

Well, had my baptism of fire today. Raided Pas de Calais area of France--flying bomb installation & got 80% hits on target. Piece of flak hit tail gun position and fell into gunners compartment. 5 hours. Flew as copilot with 1st Lt Melton.

A total of 689 B-17s and B-24s took part in this mission to Pas de Calais. Three B-24s were lost to anti-aircraft fire. No B-17 was lost. Most of the 91st B-17s received at least some damage.

Mission 2. Again, Bill flew as copilot with Lt Melton's crew in plane No. 610. They flew No. 2 in the Lead Element of the High Squadron. The target was the Mockau aircraft factory 3 miles north of Leipzig, Germany.

July 7th.

Well, here we go again--this time to Germany—Leipzig, to hit airfields and aircraft assembly plants. Not successful as lead bombardier messed up. A lot of flak, pretty accurate--one of our 17's blew up--5 chutes came out. Flew with Melton again. 8 1/2 hrs--5 hrs on oxygen. Am awfully tired but must have a get together with my crew as tomorrow morning we start out on our own.

The Lead plane accidentally dropped its bombs between the Initial Point (“IP”, the beginning of the bomb run) and the target. The Lead plane of each Squadron had a 100 pound smoke bomb that left a trail of smoke (“smoke streamer”) as it fell from the bomb bay. The bombardiers in the other planes toggled their bombs as soon as they saw the smoke streamer from the lead plane, thus laying a carpet of bombs on the target. However, in this case, they all dropped before the target. The plane Bill saw blow up was No. 508 of the 603rd Squadron of the 398th Bomb Group. Two of 2Lt Boyd A. Nisewonger’s crew were killed. All 91st planes returned safely. One of the indicators of the duration of stress on a mission used by the crews was the amount of time they had to fly with their oxygen masks on (“on oxygen or O2). The crewmen “went on oxygen” when the aircraft climbed above 10,000 feet and continued to use their oxygen masks until they let down below this altitude on the return.

Mission 3. This was Bill’s first combat mission as an aircraft commander with his own crew. They flew No. 2 in the Second Element of the Lead Squadron in No. 504, “Times A’ Wastin” (“Times A’ Wastin” was shot down on 8 April 45, on her 98th mission; only the flight engineer and radio operator survived). The target for the 8th of July was once again the rocket-bomb launching sites near Pas de Calais. The code name for missions to the rocket launching sites was “Noball.”

July 8th.

Sure enough--called at 0130--breakfast at 0230 and stations at 0330--went on raid to Noball target in Fleury, France. Top turret’s oxygen line broke but he saved most of oxygen & breathed off copilot’s system. Only 4:35 hours today--very little flak--no fighters. Good formation, no casualties. In fact it was just a cross country--couldn’t bomb because of bad weather. We carried delayed action bombs that couldn’t be brought back so had to jettison in Channel on way home. Rested during day and went to Cambridge in evening--bought a cap at last.

“Stations” (“hardstands”) referred to the location of the bomber the crew was to fly that day. On this mission, No. 173, “Take It Easy” of the 323rd Squadron was hit by flak and crashed about 80 km west of Paris. The bombardier, 2Lt Milton Gastwirth, was killed in his chute was hit by flak or machine gun fire from the ground; the other eight crewmen became POWs. Delayed action bombs could not be returned to base for fear of a crash-landing. If in some manner or other the bombs became armed in such a landing, rescue and emergency crews would be subject to risk of delayed exploding bombs.

Mission 4. For this mission, to Munich, Bill and his crew flew in No. 610, “Zootie Cutie”. They flew No. 3 in the Second Element of the Low Squadron.

July 12th.

4th mission. Up at 0630--stations at 0800 and take off at 0900--land at 1840, 9 hrs 40 min today--7 hours on O2 Raided Munich today--complete overcast, PFF bombing. 1200 ships in air--mighty long trip, am very tired. Jack Leslie got shot up again today by flak. He’s had more flak. We haven’t had a bit so far (knock, knock).

2Lt John (“Jack”) Leslie had gone through crew training with Bill at Avon Park, Florida. Jack was flying as a first pilot in the 324th Squadron. “PFF”, Path Finder Force, referred to the use of the radar bomb sight, rather than the visually operated Norden bomb sight, in the Lead plane when the target was clouded over. The term “PFF” had its origin earlier when radar-equipped planes were supplied to the Groups for each mission from special Path Finder Force

Squadrons. Most Groups now have their own radar bombsight-equipped aircraft. The term PFF is used when referring to these aircraft.

Mission 5. Beginning with this mission, Bill and his crew were assigned B-17 No. 069, "Round Trip Topsy" as their primary plane. "Topsy" had been named by 1Lt Richard T. Pressey after the nickname of his wife, Travis Orbeck Pressey. Lt Pressey was flying in No. 042, "Liberty Run" on 27 May, while "Topsy" was being repaired. When an engine went out, Lt Pressey had to make a forced landing in Switzerland. Lt Pressey and his crew were interned by the Swiss government. Lt Pressey soon walked away from his captors, eventually making his way across German occupied France to Spain and back to Bassingbourn, arriving on 16 October. The Swiss government was afraid the Germans might accuse it of letting interned American crewmen escape to fly again. There also was a possibility of compromise of the French escape network, if shot down and captured by the Germans. Thus, Lt Pressey was not allowed to fly combat again. After being flown by a number of crews, "Topsy" was assigned to Bill's crew ("Topsy" would be destroyed by fire on 26 November 1944 following a crash landing after receiving severe flak damage over Altenbecken, Germany). For his 5th mission, once again to Munich, Bill flew No. 2 in the Second Element of the Low Squadron.

July 13.

5th mission. Same mission exactly--ran into bad flak over Munich & got a few holes in nose of our ship--a darn long haul. 9:15 min with about 7:30 on oxy. Had bad weather all the way. Took several pictures, including contrails & Melton's ship dropping bombs on rail yards in Munich. We apparently have been very successful. Very bad weather at base & had difficulty landing--couldn't see out windshield & hit a lot of prop wash.

Because of dense cloud cover over Munich, the bombing was by radar. Four of the 601 B-17s that went over the target, one each from the 303rd, 351st, 398th, and 401st Groups were downed by flak. An additional eight crewmen were killed in the air. All of the 91st Group planes and crewmen returned safely.

Mission 6. Sgt Charles Chamberlain, originally assigned to Bill's crew was aboard as waist gunner, filling in for Sgt Lee. The target for the day again was Munich. They flew "Topsy" in the Lead position in the Second Element of the Low Squadron.

July 16th.

Went to bed last night at 2250 and was called this AM at 0030! Briefed for Munich again! This is my 3rd trip over there in 6 missions. Instrument take-off--visibility about 5 feet! Had no trouble forming. 91st flew lead group and low group of the Wing. 381st flew high group. We were first Wing over target with 4 Wings following us besides many Wings hitting Sarbrucken, etc. Briefed to get motor assembly plant outside Munich as visual target. I led 2nd element low squadron low group--Tail End Charlie again! Weather going out good but at target had to climb to 26000' to get out of very dense clouds. Very difficult formation to fly & had lot of trouble overshooting squadron leader, crowding, etc. Bombed by PFF because of weather--rail marshalling yards in center of Munich. 10:05 hours--another 7 hr oxy job. Getting awfully tired of going to Munich. Ran very low on gas on way home & cut RPM down to 1400 on let down. Sure welcomed the bourbon at (de)briefing. Fighter support was very good & flak was light but damnably accurate. Got aileron trim tab badly damaged & big hole in left wing near cockpit. Moved to Pilot's house. In room with Green & DeBolt--very quiet & comfortable. Have good orderly service.

Although three Groups comprised each Wing (the 91st was in the 1st Wing, along with the 381st and 398th Groups), all Groups did not necessarily fly each mission. For this mission, the 398th Group was not sent out, so 91st Group planes were used to form two Group formations. The 1st Bomb Division (1BD) Munich Strike Force included two Groups in the 40th Wing, two in the 1st, one in the 94th, and two in the 41st Wings. The 91st Group planes were in the rear of the 1st Wing, with four Groups following in the Strike Force. The remaining six Groups of the 1AD had Stuttgart and Ougsburg as their primary target. The entire 2BD, except for the 491st Group, 407 B-24s in all, struck the marshalling yards at Saarbrucken on the 16th. The 3BD went to Stuttgart. Typically, the No. 3 plane in the last element of the Low Squadron was referred to as "Tail End Charlie." However, the crews often used the term when they were flying in the lowest Squadron in the Group formation. No. 640, "Liberty Belle", flying in the 322nd Squadron, was hit by flak over the target and could not make it back to England. The pilot, 2Lt Don DeLise, put her down in the Channel. All the crew were picked up by an Allied vessel and returned to base. As the older pilots were lost or completed their missions and went home, the newer pilots, if they survived, moved from their dorm type billets to houses with accommodations for 3-4 pilots.

London.

After having flown several missions and when scheduled for a stand down from flying combat for a couple of days or so, crewmen were given passes to get away from the war and relax for a while. Most went to London. I have included Bill's accounts of his two leaves to London to provide another dimension of the lives of the combat crewmen. The crewmen were faced with a mental dilemma--what was real, life as existed on the ground in London, or the terror and sudden death in the air over Europe?.

July 18.

No mission--wrote to Mom--off to London on 2 day pass. Stay Regent Palace--"Lift" operator asked if we had our "Kie" for our room--couldn't understand her! Rode on top double decker busses. Saw Big Ben & Houses of Parliament--Saw Downing St, Piccadilly Circus. 7 buzz bombs came over--could hear engines stop and then "Ka-whump". Have seen a lot of bomb damage. Stood around Piccadilly Circus & watched all the women peddling their "wares"--never seen anything like it. Even newsmen sell rubber goods very openly & loudly.

July 19.

Our 22 month wedding anniv. today. Bought clothes in PX today. Saw River Thames. Lots of spare barbed wired placed in strategic spots as are concrete blocks, etc. Had breakfast with RAF officer who's been in India for 12 years, home on leave. Food here is very scarce & not good. Ate two dinners last night. No one pays any attention to alarms--they say just roll over & go back to sleep after a bomb crashes. Had pigeon for lunch in Pegent Pal restaurant--not too good. Ask Mom to get baby spoon in Gorham. Cigarettes are 2/8 here! That is 56 cents! You can't spend more than 5/ for a meal and only 3 courses! Saw result of F (flying) bomb explosion 8 hrs afterwards--still digging out corpses. So much for London--met Henderson in morning & we took train back to Royston--arrived 1300 on July 20th.

July 20th.

Came back here & got 9 letters! Found the boys gone on another long mission to Leipzig. 401st lost 4 ships today. Knapp (Jones went down with him) had wing blown off--Van Ausdall, Capt Martin, operation officer, and Fusco, who has had trouble before. Heard that Capt Holmes--"Sig" and crew went down under control. Hope to hell he made it. Am on schedule for tomorrow's trip.

Bill's entries regarding prices were "shillings"/"pence." The mission of the 20th of July 1944 to Leipzig was one of the worst of the war for the 91st Bomb Group. A total of eight bombers went down, with 19 crewmen KIA and 54 POWs. Several of the crewmen had been at Avon Park with Bill: 1Lt Donald R. Knapp, 1Lt Raymond E. Jones, Cpt Francis S. ("Sig") Holmes, 1Lt Charles E. Van Ausdall, Cpt Bill H. Martin, and 1Lt Frank Fusco. Lts Van Ausdall and Fusco were killed in their planes. The others survived to become POWs.

Mission 7. Bill and his regular crew flew "Topsy" in the No. 3 position in the Second Element of the Lead Squadron. This was a tactical mission to the St. Lo region of France to prepare for General Patton's Third Army break-out of the Normandy beachhead. The bomber stream approached the target perpendicularly from over the American lines rather than on a parallel course in front of the lines, as the Army had requested. The Air Force did not want to subject the bombers to the expected high intensity anti-aircraft fire by having a low altitude bomb run entirely over German-held territory.

July 24th.

Up at 3:00 AM had breakfast & were all set to go to France when mission was scrubbed. So we were wakened again at 0700. Flew no. 3 in high Sqn lead Gp & bombed St. Lo area enemy concentration there. Apparently Allies are going to drive thru there. Heard that some groups dropped short of target!! Only 6 hr mission & only over enemy territory 11 minutes--very light flak & no fighters. Amused at poor scared rabbit trying to run across runway when we gunned up to take off--couldn't figure out what those big noisy things were.

One of the Groups (not the 91st) accidentally dropped its bombs a little early, causing them to fall into the American lines. Twenty US soldiers were killed and more than 60 wounded.

Mission 8. Once again the 8th Air Force flew a tactical mission to the St. Lo area in France to aid General Patton's break-out. At the briefings, the various Bomb Groups were cautioned to make certain they dropped only behind the smoke signals laid down by the front-line troops. Bill flew "Topsy" with his regular crew as Lead of the Second Element of the Low Squadron.

July 25 Tuesday.

St. Lo again--8th mission but only 5:45 hrs thank goodness. Led second element of low Sqn low Gp & did pretty good job--had a couple of compliments. Surprising how just 6 hrs will drag a person out tho. I look as tho my eyes were about to pop out of my head & am tired. Had a very difficult trip home as we had to let down to 1000 ft & was it rough! Had great deal of difficulty at the field trying to land--so many ships & such prop wash, whew! Fortunately made a perfect 3 point despite bad approach. Radio reported 3000 planes used--not surprised--we saw so many. Clear weather & crew saw a lot of the fighting below. We bombed just over our own lines. Allies are putting on big push according to radio. Heard that our artillery spotted any flak guns that fired at us & fired on them--good deal. Bombed at 11,300'!!

The first Groups over the target area dropped their bombs in the designated areas. However, the smoke and dust thrown up by the first Groups drifted back over the American lines from an in-blowing breeze. As a result, some of the subsequent Groups became confused as to the target area and again dropped on American lines. This was more disastrous than the previous day. One hundred eleven American troops were killed, including General Lesley J. McNair, Chief of the Army Ground troops, who was at the front to observe the bombing and break-out. Four hundred ninety Americans were also wounded.

Mission 9. Once again Bill and his crew flew in “Topsy” as Lead of the Second Element of the Low Squadron. The target was the Taucha Aero engine plant at Leipzig.

July 28th.

9th mission--Briefed to hit 1st priority oil refinery at Merseburg but hit target of opportunity at Leipzig. Had very heavy & very accurate flak--saw bursts all around us and very close. Never seen anything so accurate. Got big hole in wing near #2 gas tank & one very near #4 oil cooler from which we picked a big “souvenir”--two holes in horizontal stabilizer--but no casualties. Flew lead 2nd el low Sqn low Gp. 8:50 fly time. 7 hrs O2--carried 10-500#. Swindell got to laughing over the target when flak was at it worst. Broke all tension and everybody felt better. Sure like that fellow. Maj Lord told Flip and me that our crew was definitely headed for group lead because “navigator one of best to come over here, radio very good” & because of Flip and my experience. Sure am proud of that crew.

“10-500#” referred to the bomb load, ten 500 pound bombs. Major Marvin D. Lord, Commanding Officer of the 401st Squadron, had flown his original combat missions with the 381st Bomb Group. In December 1944 Maj Lord became 91st Group Operations Officer. On 3 February 1945 Maj (then LTC) Lord was killed in action leading the 91st Bomb Group on a mission to Berlin. Bill and his crew were transferred from the 401st Squadron to the 324th Squadron on 18 August, before they could become a lead crew in the 401st. However, they flew a number of missions in the 401st as Deputy Lead before being transferred.

Mission 10. Bill’s crew was aboard “Topsy” in the No. 2 position of the Fourth Element of the Low Squadron to the Leuna synthetic oil refinery at Merseburg.

July 29th.

10th mission (only 25 to go!). Briefed to Merseburg again, carrying 14-250# and two cartons of pamphlets (I kept one for a souvenir). Beautiful sunrise but trouble finding formation--Melton led 2nd element low Sqn low Gp & we were right wing. Had to go thru top of a front but otherwise fairly easy trip out. Flak over target was moderate but accurate--got 5 holes in ship. One piece thru Plexiglas nose hit bombardier on the knee but luckily his flak suit had slid down as he watched the bombs drop--he wasn't hurt. One hole #3 gas tank sealed itself & hole in right wing touched spar but no real damage. One piece came thru tail gunners position missed him--went out thru canvas gun covers! Another just missed tail wheel! Saw big oil fires in Merseburg & think we hit it this time. God was truly with us yesterday--hope we never see flak like that again. Had very bad weather in England & flew at 500' all across Island with rain & vis practically nil--good landing tho. About 6 1/2 hrs on O2. Stand down tomorrow thank goodness.

Although the Leipzig defenders put up heavy concentrations of flak, Merseburg was especially infamous for its intense flak. This was one of the most feared targets during the latter stages of the war. Merseburg was to the crews flying in 1944-1945 as were the submarine pens at St. Nazaire, France during 1942-1943, "flak city." In addition, 60 German fighters hit the Strike Force this day, but none went through the 91st formation.

Mission 11. For this mission Bill's crew flew in No. 851, "Qualified Quail", while "Topsy" was being repaired from damage to the landing gear incurred when a new crew was flying a practice mission in her yesterday. ("Qualified Quail" was badly damaged by flak over Cologne on 14 January 1945 and crash-landed in France; she was placed in salvage). For their eleventh mission, Bill's crew flew No. 3 in the Third Element of the Lead Squadron to the Schleissheim Airfield at Munich. The copilot for this mission was 2Lt Richard N. Broughton, a first pilot flying his first combat orientation mission.

July 31st Monday.

Called at 0530. Briefed for airport at Munich primary & city PFF. Had Broughton as copilot--checking him out. Carried nothing but "nickels" propaganda pamphlets--light load. Stayed in formation on climb with 2200 RPM--32"! And brought back 800 gal of gas! 8:45 min fly time. About 7 hours on 02. Flak moderate and inaccurate--only 2 holes in ship. Flew K King as our N Nan had broken drag strut as a result of new crew flying it. Only 2 flak holes today.

The bombers were often identified by their individual radio call letter, with the phonetic pronunciation of the letter following to avoid confusion. Thus, "K-King" for "Qualified Quail", whose radio call letter was "K". The radio call letter for "Topsy" was "N." "Nickels" was the term applied to propaganda leaflets carried by a bomber and dropped over the target on most missions. Sometimes the entire bomb load of a given plane was "Nickels"; other times one or two bombs were replaced on one or more planes with boxes of "Nickels." The primary target was clouded over so the Group dropped by radar on the marshalling yards in the city. Because of the light load (leaflets obviously were lighter than bombs), he took off and climbed with lower RPM and manifold pressure than would have otherwise (normal climb with a bomb load was 2,300 RPM and 38 inches manifold pressure). This, combined with less weight, resulted in low gas consumption on the mission. No. 304, "Priority Gal", of the 323rd Squadron was hit by flak over the target and went down in Germany while attempting to make it to Switzerland. All nine crewmen survived as POWs.

Mission 12. Bill and his regular crew were in No. 563, "Winged Victory", on loan from the 323rd Squadron as No. 069 was still being worked on ("Winged Victory" was shot down by fighters on 2 November. The copilot was killed; the remaining eight crewmen became POWs). Bill's crew flew as Lead of the Fourth Element of the Lead Squadron on the 1st of August. The target was the airfield at Chartres, France.

Aug 1st Tues.

12th mission--called at 0630 but not off till 11000 because of weather--instrument take off to 2500 ft. Flew lead 4th el lead Gp. Our Gp bombed Chartres airport & hit it pretty well. SW of Paris. One ship 322rd Sqn, Stevens, got direct hit by accurate flak & spun down & crashed--one chute came out. He was high group--on 5th mission. We got flak hole in nose that would have hit bombardier's arm but for steel in altimeter paneling. Flew OR U today as N Nan is still laid up with broken landing gear--some new pilot checking out broke it!!!! Carried 18-250#'s & got 5:45 fly time--3 hrs on 02. Saw red flak again.

In this entry, Bill used the Squadron letters in combination with the aircraft radio call letter to identify the plane. "OR" were the call letters for planes assigned to the 323rd Squadron. Those for the other three Squadrons were: "LG" for the 322nd, "DF" for the 324th and LL for the 401st. No. 879, a 324th plane on loan to the 322nd Squadron, with 2Lt Arthur L. Stevens' crew aboard, took a direct flak hit just after the IP and exploded a few minutes later. Only the tail gunner, Sgt Lawrence E. Doyle, survived to become a POW. When the crews could see the "red", in the flak bursts, they were very close to the plane.

Mission 13. Bill's crew was back in "Topsy" for a mission to the military vehicle plant at Brandenburg on the outskirts of Berlin. They flew Lead of the Fourth Element of the High Squadron. The 324th Squadron led the Group, with Cpt Immanuel J. ("Manny") Klette and LTC Lewis P. Ensign in the lead aircraft. LTC Ensign had recently arrived at 8th Air Force in England. He was assigned temporarily to the 91st Group to gain experience in air operations before assuming command of the 398th Bomb Group on 25 January 1945. The Group carried 100 pound incendiary bombs on this mission.

Aug 6th.

13th mission. 9:40 min--12-100# incind bombs (M47). Brandenburg Germany--led 4th element High Gp today. Bad flak over Berlin--our leader took us too close to Big B & we got a big hole in the fuselage near main entrance. Fuse of shell came thru & hit tail wheel assembly. Another big piece went thru right wing & hit #4 tank. Whew-! Flak was really accurate! Saw B-17 spin down smoking, then flames burst out & second later ship blew up--one chute came out. Very poor formation ships going every which way.

"Big B" was the name given Berlin. As Bill indicated, flak was especially heavy over the target area. Most of the B-17s of the 91st received flak damage--two of them major. In addition, a large number of German fighters hit the bomber stream. Eleven B-17s (99 crewmen) were lost from the 1st Air Division alone. The fighters made only one ineffective pass through the 91st formation, thanks to the protection provided by the escorting P-51 mustangs.

Mission 14. The regular crew was aboard "Topsy", as Lead of the Second Element of the Lead Squadron for a trip to Munich. Since the 401st Squadron was Lead Squadron today, Bill was Deputy Group Lead and would have taken over Lead of the Group had the Lead aircraft not been able to continue.

Aug 9--14 mission.

7:20--briefed Munich again but weather turned us back over Germany & we picked a target of opportunity--barracks I think. Turned around in bad visibility & almost hit another Wing. We flew lead of high sqn of lead Gp. 10-500's on board. Got 14 flak holes--leak in Tokyo lines--shot up eng sump & radio compass. Found out later we had close to 50 holes in ship! Thank goodness for self-sealing tanks!.

Because of heavy cloud cover over the primary target, the Strike Force dropped on military installations at Eisenborn, Germany. This was another bad day for the 1st Air Division. Twelve aircraft were shot down and 102 crewmen lost. The 91st came through relatively unscathed. "Tokyo" tanks were extra outer wing tanks added to the original design of the B-17 to extend the range of the plane. The "engine sump" was a small sump, similar to an oil filter in function, located below each engine into which impurities drained. By turning a small lever at the bottom of the sump the impurities were drained out by the ground crews during routine maintenance.

Mission 15. Once again the crew was in “Topsy”, Lead of the Second Element of the High Squadron, Deputy Squadron Lead. The target was gun emplacements at the Brest Harbor, France.

Aug 11th (15th mission).

Called at 7:40 as usual & told briefing at 9:15--gentlemen's hours! Briefed to Brest to hit gun emplacements but couldn't get off ground until 1320 due to bad weather at target. When we got there weather was CAVU-beautiful. Flew squadron lead & deputy Gp lead of high Gp. Had to go over target twice as leader's bomb bay doors stuck! Picked up minor flak 2nd time around. 6:40 min today--back home about 1900!

“CAVU” was the acronym for “Ceiling and Visibility Unlimited”, meaning a perfectly clear sky, with the target clearly visible from bombing altitude. As Bill indicated, this mission was a relatively short routine flight--a “milk run.”

Mission 16. Bill and his crew flew this mission in No. 552, “The Peacemaker” while “Topsy” was being worked on (No. 552 crashed on a one and one half hour test flight to check out a newly installed engine on 12 April 1945. All six crewmen aboard, including the Ground Crew Chief, M/Sgt Lester Culp, were killed). On the August 14th mission, Bill's crew flew Lead of the Second Element of the High Squadron to the airfield at Metz/Frescaty, France.

Aug 14th.

16th today--Metz airfield S.E. France. No flak at all--beautiful weather--very good hits--flew Deputy Wing lead. 7:40 hrs. 11-500's, 1 smoke bomb. Got my air medal today--also had my picture taken by Acme News Service just after mission today. Flew E Easy today.

Another milk run. See picture on page 40. This picture received widespread distribution at the time and continues to appear in publications and publicity documents for the 8th Air Force, and the East Anglia Tourist Board.

Mission 17. The crew was back in “Topsy”, flying Lead of the Second Element of the High Squadron to the Ostheim airfield at Cologne.

Aug 15th.

17th mission. Dept Gp lead Hi Gp again. 4-1000# and 5-500# IB's with one 100# Smk. Hit Airfield at Cologne, Germany & really plastered it. Extremely clear weather & very heavy flak over target but no holes. Made a very sharp turn off target before bombs hit. One waist gunner very badly injured in 324th ship. 7:35 min. Tremendous explosions at airfield & saw 5 different targets blown sky high and smoke and dust rising to about 10,000'. O2 system went out with a leak in Pilot's system--came back on walk-arounds! Heard today the Allies invaded S. France.

“Topsy” carried a smoke bomb since Bill was Deputy Squadron Lead. Had the Lead Plane not been able to drop, Bill's plane would drop, releasing the smoke streamer, upon which the remaining planes in the Squadron would drop their bombs. “Walk-arounds” were small portable oxygen tanks mostly used by the crewmen when they moved around the aircraft and had to unplug their oxygen lines connected to the outlet at their positions. On this mission the crew had to use the walk-arounds when the main oxygen system lost all its oxygen. The waist gunner,

Sgt. Luther L. Carico, on 1Lt Phillip L. Collin's crew in the 324th Squadron, died in the air before his plane arrived back at Bassingbourn.

Mission 18. Bill flew in "Topsy" as Deputy Squadron Lead on this mission to the Siebel aircraft factory at Halle, Germany. The 401st was the Low Squadron. Bill's crew was Lead of the Second Element, Deputy Squadron Lead (He used other terms in his diary, "High Lead of the Low Group"). The pilots apparently had been led to believe the Group would be stood down on the 16th. The records do not confirm such. However, the 303rd Bomb Group did lose nine B-17s, with another so badly damaged it had to be salvaged, on the 15th; the 358th Squadron lost seven of the thirteen planes it sent out. Thus, the 91st may have been added to the Strike Force in place of the 303rd, which did not fly this mission.

Aug 16.

18th mission. Supposed to be stood down today so not much sleep last night, 'cause unexpectedly called at 0215! Another Gp got pretty badly shot up so we had to go today. Aircraft manuf plant and adjoining airfield at Halle, Germ--makes wings for JU88's. Flew H lead of low Gp again--Dep lead. Carried 12-500 # IB's & one 100 # smk & full gas load. Hard formation to fly--saw about 20 fighters at 3:00 o'clock & thought they were P51's--turned out to be ME109's and FW 190's! The next thing we knew we saw little white puffs at 09:00 o'clock & thought it was new kind of flak--it was 20 mm shells bursting around us fired by 109's and 190's on our tail--4 attacked the High group & shot down 7 out of 13!. I looked up to see a 190 stick its nose under one ship & hang there spraying bullets--I think it was Jack Leslie's ship--he went down in flames & 6 chutes came out. My ball turret scared off an attack from below on us and hit him--tail gunner saw a 109 go down in flames. P51's came to rescue. Very heavy flak just after fighter attack. Bombed factory and got a lot more flak--came home without a scratch! 8:45 time. Flew N Nan again--cabin heat went out--was very cold--but after attack I wasn't cold! Moon Mullins got back okay after being hit in top turret & tail & having turbos shot out. In going back he was attacked by a jet prop plane--first such attack in this war.

"Ju 88" was the Junkers 88, twin-engine fighter aircraft the Germans used mainly to lob 20 mm and 30 mm cannon shells into American bomber formations. This was another particularly bad day for the 91st. Six B-17s from the 324th High Squadron were shot down by German fighters in a period of about 40 seconds; another badly damaged aircraft crash-landed in England and had to be salvaged. The puffs of white smoke were 30 mm cannon shells with timed fuses, set to explode within the formation as the fighters fired while still out of range of the machine guns of the bombers. The plane attacking Lt Reese Mullin's aircraft, No. 938, "Betty Lou's Buggy" was the newly deployed Me 163 rocket plane. For a description of this mission, see the story beginning on page 119.

On the 18th of August Bill and his crew were transferred to the 324th Squadron as replacements for losses incurred on the 16th.

Mission 19. Bill and his crew flew in No. 515, "The Wild Hare", for his first mission in the 324th (No. 515 was shot down by German fighters on 26 November 1944; four of the nine crewmen survived to become POWs). For the mission on the 24th of August Bill flew Lead of the Second Element of the Low Squadron. 2Lt Carl R. Pifer was Bombardier in place of Lt Boyd. The primary target was the Kolleda airdrome in Germany.

August 24th.

#19. Went on no. 19 today--and again to Leipzig area!! Called at 0350 and briefing was at 0410--so no time for breakfast--in fact it is 1800 and I haven't eaten a mouthful today! My first mission with the 324th Sqn. Flew same position Jack (John Leslie) last flew with this Sqn--deputy Gp leader, high Sqn low Gp. Carried 5-1000#'s and one 100 # Smk bomb. Flew DF M Mike, "Wild Hare". Had trouble with right mag of #2 cutting out before take off & was late as we attempted to get another ship but M Mike worked okay. Formed at 6000' & had excellent weather over target--hit secondary--airfield at Goslar, Germany. No Flak no Fighters!--8:00 fly time. Boyd was sick & Pifer took his place--seemed funny to fly without him. Heard Rumania fell last night & will fight for the Allies. Paris fell too--war's sure going swell. We were supposed to hit Kolleda airport but something went wrong in the lead ship & didn't drop bombs so hit the secondary target. Lead Gp hit Kolleda's hangers & did a good job. Squadron party in evening--went to bed early. Had 3 Grps of 51s route support.

Although the 91st suffered no losses, this was a bad day for the 1st Air Division. Sixteen B-17s in other Groups were lost on this mission.

Mission 20. The crew was assigned their permanent 324th plane for this mission, the newly arrived B-17 No. 220. Bill's regular crew was aboard for the mission to the synthetic oil plant at Gelsenkirchen, Germany. They flew No. 3 in the Fourth Element ("Tail End Charlie") of Lead Squadron.

Aug 26.

20th mission today to Gelsenkirchen to hit oil refinery 6 mi north of Essen--in "Hell's Kitchen"--or "Happy Valley" or "Flak Alley." Anyway Ruhr Valley where one is really in the middle of Germany's industrial area & of course the largest concentration of flak. Carried 8-500 # bombs and 2780 gal gas. Flew DF L Love our new ship & its a honey, even have armor plate in my seat! 8:15 min. Bombed at 29,000 ft! Had heavy and accurate flak, no fighters. Flew left wing 4th element lead Gp. Saw B-17 go down. Had rack malfunction & only 4 bombs went away--got rid of them tho. Had very bad prop wash & almost dipped wing on landing. Went around then second time overshot! Finally got her down okay! First time I've overshot since transition! Found out later we landed downwind--almost everyone overshot to some extent. Damned control officers. Had 250 mile ground speed heading home after target--I love that!.

Named our new ship tonight--"Lady Lois" & picked out picture to be painted on her side. So damn glad to be able to name our own ship & especially that name. 3rd Div went to Brest again--damn B-24's always get the soft ones. Got Flak hole in wing & one in horiz stab & one in top turret. Should have seen Henderson jump when a piece hit the windshield in front of his face! It hit the brace on the knockout window so didn't come thru! Had 3 fighter groups, 51-47's.

"Transition" referred to the advanced flight training school where pilots learned to fly multi-engine aircraft. Bill's new plane (which he named after his wife, Lois) received only minor damage from the very heavy and accurate flak over the target. However, eight planes in the 91st Group received heavy damage; all returned to Bassingbourn. Bill forgot that the 3rd Air Division flew B-17s; it was the 2nd Air Division that flew B-24s. The 3rd AD went to Brest on the 16th.

Mission 21. Bill flew "Lady Lois", starting out as a "Spare" in the rear, "diamond", position of the Second Element of the High Squadron. He moved over to the No. 3 position of the Second Element when 2Lt Robert J. Flint, flying in No. 988, "The B.T.O.", had to abort.

Aug 27th.

Called at 0530. Gentlemen's hours! Briefed to hit JU88 factory 10 miles SW of Berlin. Located at airfield. We were supposed to be 6th Wing over target--41st A & B, 94 A, B & C, 1st A,B,C, then 91st C. We carried 10-17 IB bombs (500#). Assembled at 5000 ft. We were spare ship flying in # 4 in high squadron high Gp, but filled in #3 same squadron. Had very hard formation to fly as leader made lots of turns and changed airspeed. Got into bad weather near Germany & scouting force reported that we couldn't get thru. Got separated from rest of Wing and flew over Heligoland--small island off North Germany--which threw the flak book at us! Hope to hell we got credit for a mission. Brought bombs back & made beautiful landing. Formation was doubly hard to fly 'cause one of our flaps kept creeping down! Couldn't figure out what the trouble was for a long time. Flew our DF L again.

Had following schedule today.

Stations 0820.

Taxing 0900.

Take off 0920.

Leave base 1017.

ETR 1910 !.

I'm beginning to think that prop wash, some of the formation flying and weather are our worst enemies in the war--with flak and fighters a close second.

The bomb load was 10 M-17 Incendiary Bombs, each weighing 500 pounds and containing 110 4-pound magnesium incendiaries. The 91st was the third Group in the 1st Wing, following the 381st and 398th, on this mission.

London Revisited

Bill was given another pass for London, three days this time, after completing his 21st mission. These are his notes from that trip.

Aug 29th.

Started on Pass at 1100 & took off for London, arriving there about 1400--bus to Piccadilly & went to Jules Club (American Red Cross officers club) but they were full up--directed me up Duke St to Reindeer Club ARC--passed Dunhill's exclusive shop on Duke St & stopped in--bought napkin rings for Loey's birth gift & piece of stone from Parliament building that was knocked down in blitz of May 1941--made into ash tray--for Mom's birthday--tried to buy cigars for Pop (Lois' Dad), but a box costs ú5!! Bought him some tobacco instead. Went then to Reindeer & got a bed for the night. Walked around Oxford St to PX & bought gloves, tie, sox & tried to buy field jacket Mom gave me for birthday, but couldn't get my size! Bought film on Oxford Street--Westminster Photo Exchange at 111 Oxford. Walked down to Piccadilly Circus & had dinner at big restaurant there & went to see Bing Crosby in "Going My Way". Went back to Red Cross & had late snack there.

Aug 30th.

Up at 0900 & breakfast in Red Cross & arranged tour around city for afternoon. Took long walk down the Mall & saw Lady Astor house, old German Embassy, part of which is destroyed by bombs & down to Buckingham Palace. Took several pictures in vicinity. Walked by the gates of the Palace & the resplendent Coldstream Guard stopped his pacing, did an elaborate left face & even more elaborate and very snappy salute--I felt flattered. Several citizens stopped and explained things to me purely voluntarily--people are very friendly & helpful. Walked thru St James gardens back to State buildings & Big Ben--up Whitehall. Stopped & chatted with Bobby guarding entrance to Downing St. He slipped me in real close to No. 10 & I got a good picture. Walked on up & took pictures of Trafalgar Sq--of Nelson's and King George IV's statues. Ate ice cream at a milk bar on Trafalgar. Proceeded up past Piccadilly to Berkley Square where I found Charles St and the English Speaking Union, from which tour was to start. A Mrs Weatherly conducted another officer--Capt Simons, med off--and me in a taxi driven by an old man (probably 70 anyway) around the city. She was most interesting, altho a trifle too old for anything but historical interest--started down St. Jame's Place & saw famous exclusive men's clubs--around Piccadilly--down to Trafalgar Sq where she pointed out St. Martin's Church--one of Sir Christopher Wren's churches (he built about 50, incl St. Paul's & West Abbey), first Church to broadcast over air. Up the Strand which used to be bank of the river (Thames, of course). .

Saw Savoy Hotel, Fleet St (or Barrister's Alley!) & all the extensive damage done in that area. Here was one of Sir Chr Wren's churches which has been completely gutted by bombs during blitz. Saw St Paul's Cathedral from outside--beautiful large structure made much more visible now that buildings around it have been bombed down for quite a distance. Traveled across London Bridge & back across Tower Bridge to Tower of London--where Henry VIII's wives all lost their heads! Saw all the guards in their Medieval uniforms around. Came back to St. Paul's & looked inside. Saw Lloyds of London & several big banks--then to Guildhall--famous meeting place of all the guilds in the old days and place where important banquets are still held. First Americans to arrive for this war were feasted there--that was last banquet held there. Guide showed us crypt & what is left of remainder of building after blitz--beautiful old place was almost ruined entirely. Saw Richard Whittington's window--made of bottle glass & still with same hinges & catch after all these years. Drove down the Thames to Big Ben & then to Westminster Abbey where we saw many graves & tables to notables such as Disraeli, Longfellow, Hardy, kings & queens, etc. That was end of tour so I went back to Red Cross & cleaned up & ate supper there. Then went to see Gary Cooper in "Story of Dr. Wassel." Stopped in at Oddeum's Bar for a rum & lime--good--first rum I've had over here. Got to talking to a good looking fellow who insisted on buying me one--we flipped & he lost--so another rum. So home to bed after another snack. Very few Buzz bombs.

Aug 31st.

Dad's birthday today--he'd be 62. Up at 0900 & breakfast at Red Cross. Then taxi to Kings Cross for train. Met Henderson quite by accident at the station & we rode back together. John & Bob got their promotions today--they are 1st Lieuts.

Bill's father had died in July 1943.

Mission 22. Back from leave and in "Lady Lois" again for a flight to the Opau synthetic oil plant at Ludwigshaven. Bill flew Lead of the Fourth Element of the Lead Squadron.

Sept 8th.

Well a mission at last--No. 22. Up at 0400--briefing at 0500 for Ludwigshaven, to hit the big chemical plant there with 6-1000# bombs. Flew lead 4th element Lead Gp. Entered thru France & sure seemed good to cross France as friendly territory for a change. Saw lots of airfields and towns that had been heavily shelled & torn up. Went in near Le Harve & down just N of Paris & across German border--no flak & no fighters so far--high front to go over. Made instrument approach & visual run on target--bombed thru clouds. We were 5th Wing to hit target. The flak was extremely dense and very accurate, both barrage and tracking--88 mm & 105 mm. Biggest bursts I've ever seen with very red clusters and a terrific concussion upon explosion. Deputy Wing lead was hit & started burning just above & to right of us & I got picture of him (found out later pilot was O'Toole of 324th--was hit in foot & also elevator control cable was cut & he finally landed on AFCE!). Flak was worst I've seen--very intense. Many ships were hit and one--pilot McCarty of 322nd blew up. Weeks of 324 (lived in room next to me) spiraled down out of control. Beasley--flying my left wing was hit in head--down from top--by fragment of 105 mm & it pierced his flak helmet & flying helmet & into his skull. He's paralyzed now but may live. Our lead ship's Mickey navigator who we'd been kidding before take off about being "Mr 5' x 5" was hit in the leg rather seriously & a gunner on same ship (not 50' from us) got flak thru one shoulder but will recover. We had 30 hits (about 50 holes) in our ship but no casualties, thank heavens. Bob Boyd's cap which he had hung over the drift meter with his headset was badly torn by a hit in the nose & his headset's wires were cut. Had 3 hits in gas tanks--thank heaven for self sealing tanks. One hit cut the deicer system lines in the right wing. Another came into radio room & smashed desk in front of the radio operator, but no casualties. God is truly with us. Lee was riding in the ball turret today. He got so mad at the flak he fired the ball's guns at the flak guns 25000' below him! Had to laugh at that. Tail gunner reported that Beasley's ship missed us by inches when he was hit & careened off. Another ship with a fire in #4 came down on top of us & top turret was on the ball & warned me so we got out of his way. Lady Lois is sure a good ship--climbs beautifully. Ambulances were really busy when we came back--many casualties. Henderson made perfect landing--he's been doing very well lately. Had four letters when I got back--one from Loey, one from Marty (Tom & Jack) and two from Wheye Brewer. I developed film tonight--came out beautifully. Will print tomorrow if no mission. Flew 7:35 min today. Found out later that Lady Lois was laid low for 3-4 days by hits in tanks which necessitated complete changes. The temperature was 38o below zero!.

"AFCE" referred to the Automatic Flight Control Equipment", i.e., "autopilot" of the plane. "Tracking flak" referred to the German anti-aircraft guns aiming at a specific plane, typically closing in from the rear. Alternatively, the flak batteries would perceive the route of the bomb run and throw up a concentration ("barrage") of shells exploding at the altitude of the planes and through which they would have to fly to the target. The flak over Ludwigshaven the 8th was the worst the 91st had encountered in its 227 missions to date. Most planes received some sort of damage, many major. 1Lt David McCarty was flying Deputy Lead in the Low Squadron when hit; seven of the nine crewmen, including Lt McCarty were killed. The copilot, 2Lt Gilbert B. Willis, of Lt Week's plane was killed by a piece of flak that went through his neck. It would be several weeks before the Micky Operator (the radar bombsight operator), 1Lt Gordon H. Lowe, would be able to fly another mission. "Lady Lois" was so badly damaged she would not fly another mission until the 21st of September.

Mission 23. Since "Lady Lois" was being repaired, the plane assigned to Bill this day was No. 333, "Wee Willie", on loan from the 322nd Squadron ("Wee Willie" was shot down on 8 April 1945 while on her 128th mission. Only the pilot of the nine crewmen survived). Bill's crew flew No. 3 in the Fourth Element of the High Squadron for a return trip to the Apau synthetic oil plant at Ludwigshaven .

Sept 9 (Sat).

23rd mission. Carried 12-500# IB's or 6000#. Flew LG W 'cause Lady Lois is incapacitated from yesterday. Before take off we listened to a German news broadcast in English which gave the names of several Am. Prisoners of war. Ordinary take off & climb. Flew straight line from England to same target as yesterday--Ludwigshaven--same chemical works. We were left wing on 4th el of high Gp. The 324th had only 6 ships in commission today and 4 of those didn't fly yesterday! All was well to the IP--then hell broke loose. The last minute Col. Berry (leader) decided to bomb by individual groups instead of by Wing as previously planned--so they all had to scramble to get positions--our element leader got thrown very wide on the sharp turn & didn't get back in till too late to get position & we were left high and dry all by ourselves. Had been seeing a lot of planes in area--fighters--so I peeled off from him & took out under full power for the low group & flew the lead of 4th element. Don't know what became of their regular 4th el. Stayed there for rest of mission. Flak was very bad over the target but evasive action helped a lot. We missed the target completely I think--couldn't see the ground tho. Then made turn to get back in Wing formation. Over the target Flip moved back to near Nav's position & when he knelt on chin turret he was thrown up in air by a burst of flak right on our nose. A big piece came thru heavy metal cheek gun support & down thru his oxygen panel--would have hit him right in the ear had he been in his usual position & would undoubtedly have killed him or injured him seriously! Again God was with us as He has been every time we've flown. Had eight hits on ship but none serious. Caught some flak on way out but no damage. On way home we saw the hedgerows that we've been reading about all thru France. Heard an Eng. news broadcast while we were over France on the way out describing our mission!! Saw & took picture of Dunkirk beach & city. Seems that all of France is pot-marked by shells & bombs! When we got back we heard that Weeks, downed yesterday, crashed in France & altho copilot was killed rest of crew is okay. Also Art Hultin who went down with Capt Bill Martin is a PW. We were 3rd Wing of 11 Wings over target. Hope the others did better than we! Got 5 letters. 6:45 min.

As had been experienced on the 8th, heavy flak was encountered over the target. No. 594, "Strictly GI", of the 323rd Squadron was hit hard by flak after the target and went down, exploding in midair three minutes later; five of the nine crewmen were killed. Another six aircraft from the 91st received major damage.

Mission 24. Bill's crew flew in No. 298, "White Cargo" for this mission ("White Cargo was shot down 2 November 1994; six of the nine crewmen were killed). The 324th and 322nd Squadrons joined a Squadron from the 381st Group, flying out of Ridgewell airbase, to form a "Composite Group" in the 1st CBW. The 323rd and 401st Squadrons were to fly as the High Group of the 41st Combat wing. However, the 401st was delayed from taking off because of ground fog at Bassingbourn. The Squadron failed to catch up with the 323rd and returned to base. The 1st CBW went to the Daimler-Benz works at Stuttgart, Germany. Bill's crew flew No. 2 in the Second Element of the High Squadron in the 91st formation.

Sept 10.

24th mission. Today this Group put up two groups--one joined 41st (Combat Wing) for their high Gp and we joined Ridgewell (381st Bomb Group) for their high Gp in 1st A Wing. Assembled late as we had a very dense ground fog & couldn't take off. Finally got into formation just before leaving base. Flew rt wing of 2nd Sqn, H Gp. Crossed into France & over to near Ludwigshaven to hit Daimler Benz factory 12 mi SW of Karlsruhe. Assembly plant for trucks and tractors, tanks and ammunition. Blew the damn thing sky high--literally! We saw smoke rising rapidly in a column at least 10000 ft high! We were 4th Wing over target--excellent weather--carried 12 M-17 IB's again--6000#. Saw only 4 bursts of flak myself--there was much more but

all below us! No one in our formation was hurt. We didn't get a hole in our ship. LG A (Lady Lois is still laid up. Had to change 3 gas tanks & 2 leading edges as well as glass, panels, etc). It was 380 below zero up there. We really hit that target. Saw a B-17 go down in flames & 6 chutes came out (from another formation). We saw artillery shells landing in a town near Metz & Nancy--where Gen Patton's forces are fighting on the Moselle River. Leader stalled us out over the field just before landing. Got 6:40 time today.

The 41st CBW was recalled because of bad weather over the target. The 1st CBW, including the 324th Squadron, was able to drop on its target.

Mission 25. The crew was in No. 552, "The Peacemaker", to the synthetic oil plants at Lutzendorf, Germany. They flew No. 3 of the Fourth Element of the Low Squadron, "Tail End Charlie." The 322nd Squadron, with Cpt Jerrold Newquist flying as copilot, and Group Leader, with Cpt Karl W. Thompson in No. 562, "Evenin' Folks How Y' All", led the Group.

Sept 11.

25th mission. Four missions in as many days--wow! Am very tired as can easily be imagined. Went to 30 mi W of Leipzig (again!) 13 mi SW Halle to hit oil refinery there. We were 8th CBW over target carrying 10--500# (5000#) and flying left w 4th el low Gp. Took us 7:20 min today. Had good trip over & no flak until target. Fighters in area but we didn't see them--sky full of P51's thank goodness. Lots of flak over the target but Gp leader made very good evasive action and excellent sharp turn off target after bombs away so we escaped any damage. Got some good pictures of flak, bombs away etc. Element leader screwed up & got in too close & we had some very narrow escapes from hitting other ships etc. Hard formation to fly. Had to laugh at Swindell's remark about the evasive action he takes in the nose! Top turret went out on way over, but Yanzick was on the ball as usual & fixed it--bad relay switch. Crossed over Leige and Aachen not knowing that Americans had just taken Leige & were pressing on Aachen. Went over Luxemburg too & then read in today's Stars and Stripes that Yanks had entered there. Figured out--today we've dropped over 57 tons of explosives on Nazi's plus nickels--have flown 190 combat hours--an average of 7.5 hrs per mission! That's about 125 hr of oxygen! Radio says 130 enemy fighters were shot down by our fighters today--don't know how many our bombers got. We caught a little flak at 14000' just off the Belgian coast on the way home--must have come from a ship.

In spite of the heavy flak over the target, the 91st had no losses. However, was a bad day for the 1st Air Division in general. Thirteen B-17s, eight from the 92nd Bomb Group alone, were shot down on the mission.

Mission 26. "Lady Lois" was available for Bill and his crew for the mission to the marshalling yards at Mainz. They flew No. 2 in the Second Element of the High Squadron.

Sept 21.

Hey, I'm a Father. "Lois Anne born both fine" greeted me when I got home from today's mission. Wow!!!! Had a good flight today. Instrument take off and climbed 7000ft thru soup--very thick. Carried 3000# of pamphlets to Mainz, Germany for my 26th raid. Flew #2 on high Sqn high Gp for 6:35 min. Hit rail marshalling yds & really hit them good at 27000'. Had to make inst let down from 6000ft when we got back--soup was very thick & vis was only about 1/2 mile! Let down to 800' & had terrific rat race with a million other B17's in pattern. Couldn't see them til right on top of them. Relied on flares at end of runway to see runway. Couldn't make a normal approach--had to go a round 3 times because of the other ships. Then when we came

around 4th time we had to follow a ship in & he missed runway entirely & went around. We saw runway off to left & made a quick turn over with full flaps & no power & set down after 2 sharp turns lining up for a perfect 3 point landing!!! Crew congratulated me on the excellent landing. Lee said "you've sure got what it takes in tight pinches." I sure didn't want to go around again in that airplane saturated soup! Our trucks didn't pick us up for a long time so from fatigue and nervousness from the landing ordeal & then waiting a long time at the plane, I was in fine shape. Then came the big news & I was on top of the world!! Seems as if the whole base knows about it now! Everyone's congratulating me on becoming a pop. Even John Henderson smoked a cigar!!

Because of the frequent dense low clouds and fog, take-offs and landings in East Anglia were often almost as dangerous as were the flights over the continent. A lot of planes and crews were lost before leaving England or after surviving the fighters and flak on the mission. On one of his approaches today, Bill saw at the last minute a B-17 coming directly at him. Only his quick reflexes avoided a collision that would have killed everyone on both bombers.

Mission 27. Once again in "Lady Lois", as Lead of the Third Element, Low Squadron on the mission to Frankfurt.

Sept 25th.

27th mission--flew lead 3rd Sqn Low Gp. Carried 12-500#. 6:00 hrs. Went to Frankfurt & bombed PFF on city. Only two small flak holes. Flip discovered mal arrangement of bombs before take off thus eliminating wasted mission--good boy.

A milk run.

Mission 28. In "Lady Lois" in their now usual position in the Squadron formation, Lead of the Third Element. For this mission to the Ford Motor factory at Cologne, the 324th was the Lead Squadron .

Sept 27th.

28th mission. Led 3rd Sqn in Lead Gp. Flew DF L as usual--good ol' Lady Lois. Carried 12-500# to Ford Plant 7 mi NW of Cologne--PFF tho & had to hit city. Yanzick discovered bad rip in tire before take off & wheel had to be changed. Had good--excellent--formation. Easy to fly. Received several compliments on good formation & made an excellent landing--hardly knew myself that we were on ground. Short mission again--6:05 hr.

Yet another milk run. Bill's missions seemed to be getting more and more routine. Only a total of two B-17s had been lost from the entire 1st Air Division on Bill's last four missions. However, the 445th Group of the 2nd AD lost 25 B-24s shot down and three others that were destroyed when they crash-landed following damage from enemy action.

Mission 29. Still in "Lady Lois" as Lead of the Third Element of the High Squadron. The primary target was the synthetic oil plant at Magdeburg.

Sept 28th.

29th mission. 8:00 hrs. 10-500#'s. Lead of 3rd Sqn in high Gp. Col. Berry led again so it was a rough job. His last one thank goodness! Briefed to hit oil refinery at Magdeburg. Lead & low bombed primary but missed very badly. We didn't drop so went to secondary & dropped on PFF of lead Gp. Don't know what we hit. Hard formation to fly. No flak damage & didn't see

any fighters. Altho that's the fighter area & other Wings were attacked. Heard that B24 Grp lost 28 out of 36 planes yesterday! Lost to fighters--B24s are such good protection for us! Found out later we had flak hit in supercharger manifold of # 2. Boy if that had been 1 inch lower, it would have blown up the bucket wheel--with 12 tons force on each bucket!!.

A malfunctioning of the radar ("Mickey") bomb sight on the Lead Plane caused the Lead and Low Squadrons to miss the target. The 324th Squadron recognized the problem and held its bombs. The 91st dropped on the airfield at Eschwege, Germany. This was an exceptionally bad day for the 8th Air Force. The 1st Air Division Strike Force was hit hard by fighters. Twenty-three B-17s were lost, eleven from the 303rd Group and seven from the 457th Group. Fortunately for the 91st, the P-51 fighter escorts engaged the German fighters approaching the Group. Only a few went through the 91st formation. B-24 bombers could not withstand as much structural damage as could B-17s. Thus, German fighters were thought to go after any B-24s in the Strike Force before attacking B-17s in an attempt to maximize the "return" from their attacks.

Mission 30. In "Lady Lois" in same position in the Squadron formation, with the 324th flying as Low Squadron. Target was Munster, Germany.

Sept 30th.

30th mission! The ninth this month--only five to go! Briefed to lead 3rd Sqn low Gp to Munster to hit two bridges there with 6-1000# bombs. Assembled at 20000' & had real good formation--saw no flak!! PFF over target area but our mickey operator messed up and we didn't hit the PFF target either, which was rail yards in Munster. Lead ship developed fire in cockpit & had to abort coming home. Capt Thompson from Avon Park was flying deputy & brought us home--made damn nice 3 point landing. 5:35--short mission--would like 5 more of same.

Although an easy mission the bombing was ineffective. Maj Karl W. Thompson, in No. 562, "Evenin' Folks! How Y' All", was the Group Lead. Cpt Walter W. Thompson, in No. 754, took over the Group Lead when No. 562 had to abort the mission.

Mission 31. In "Lady Lois", as per usual, again as Lead of the Third Element. This time the 324th was the Lead Squadron. Target was the tank factory at Nurnberg.

Oct 3.

31st mission--gettin' on toward end now. Went to Nurnberg to hit tank factory but it was PFF so we hit big rail station in city--really hit it, too, according to my ball turret who could see it after we passed over. Quite a long mission 8:55--longest in some time. Had excellent fighter support & very little flak for us as we were first Wing over target leading Division but succeeding Wings caught Hell. Flew lead of 3rd Sqn in Lady Lois and carried 5-1000#ers. Weather bad so we assembled at 20000ft & didn't let down again til French coast--about 7 hrs on O2. Only two flak holes today. Beasley came back here today from the hospital with his head shaved and an ugly scar on the top of it--he'll be all right, tho despite flak hitting very close to his brain. He was paralyzed for awhile but up and walking around now. Sure glad to see him.

Although Lt Freeman Beasley eventually recovered from his head wounds, he continued to experience neurological problems and did not fly again. Lt Beasley passed away in December 1996.

Mission 32. In "Lady Lois" and normal position in the 324th Squadron, flying this day as the High Squadron. Target was the aircraft factories at Neubrandenburg, Germany.

Oct 6th.

32nd mission. A long haul today--Neubrandenberg in North Eastern Germany to hit & demolish (& we did) JU88 factory and airfield. Crossed North Sea at 5000ft & climbed across Denmark to 20000. Other groups preceded us across our target and on. Heinies probably thought we were all going on & came out of their foxholes just as we smacked them. Excellent visibility & excellent results. 9:40 min today! No flak & no fighters on us. Flew Lady Lois on her 12th mission. Heard that Jack Leslie's ball turret op & radio op have been heard from & are PW--so Jack ought to be okay. Also Ray Jones & Knapp are PW. Only 3 hours on O2 today--seemed good.

The bombing results were the best the 91st had achieved in the 241 missions flown to date. Bill would learn after the war his friend, Jack Leslie, was killed when his plane exploded in the air on the 16 August mission.

Mission 33. A long mission with the primary target the synthetic oil plant at Brux, Czechoslovakia. In "Lady Lois", as the usual Lead of the Third Element in the Low Squadron.

Oct 7th.

33 missions! The end is in sight!--in fact the end (the wrong end) was in sight today--the leader of the Group (formerly called Wing) got lost and lead us all over the worst flak area of Germany. Went to Czechoslovakia today! Briefed to hit Brux oil refinery as prime visual target. Leader gave us a very difficult formation to fly--turn all the time. Got to the target area & he decided to hit secondary as clouds were over primary. Well he couldn't find secondary so we toiled all over & finally hit a target of opportunity (or tried to--missed rather badly) and the leader being last took us up North of Leipzig & consequently we caught a lot of flak from that area. It's the old fighter area, too, but we didn't see any thanks to a good formation. But, it was an awful lot of damn hard work keeping in formation. So after our Sqn leader called the Gp leader and gave him fixes & told him which way to turn we finally got back to the Division's line of withdrawal after collecting miraculously little flak damage considering all the guns trained on us. Had a long haul--8:15 carrying 10-500# Gps. Had to let down thru overcast from 5000 to 1500' using instrument let down procedure. Came out at 1500 west of field. Doubled back & came in on an 07000 runway heading, Spotted field & made a straight in approach, but just before touching down saw a red flare go up & the tower called that our ball turret wasn't stowed. Found out later that the guns were about 6 inches off runway when I gunned it & went around! Made excellent landing--very smooth--hardly knew I was down. That was DF L Love (Lady Lois)'s 13th mission! And only two flak holes--minor. Everyone's bitching about a very screwed up & wasted mission. Found out later that there were 5000 Allied planes out today--a record!.

The 91st eventually dropped on a target of opportunity, Freiberg, Germany. In spite of the confusion on the mission, all 91st Group planes returned safely. However, losses in the 1st Air Division were especially high on this mission; a total of 20 planes went down. Cpt Jerrold L. Newquist, in No. 562, was the Group Leader for this mission. Cpt Immanuel J. Klette led the 324th Squadron.

Mission 34. The target for the 9th of October was the ball bearing factories at Schweinfurt, Germany. A year earlier, this had been one of the most feared targets on the continent. There had been two disastrous raids on the ball bearing factories there in 1943, 17 August and 14 October. The Eighth Air Force lost a total of 120 planes on these two missions. The 91st was the Lead Group on both missions. The 91st lost 10 aircraft on 17 August and one on 14 October. For

today, however, it was just a typically long mission deep into Germany. Bill and his crew were again in "Lady Lois" Leading the Third Element of the Low Squadron.

Oct 9th.

34th mision. Eeyow--nearly finished! Had a beautiful mission today--excellent formation & easy to fly. Flew the same old spot--lead of 3rd element with good old Lady Lois. Went to Schweinfurt to hit ball bearing plant or city if PFF. Bad weather with undercast all the way so bombed PFF. Flak was barrage type & due to our good chaff was inaccurate. However, one burst was close--hit the supercharger cooler on #3 engine just missing the vulnerable bucket wheel. Another particle just missed hitting the tire & bounce off the rim of the R wheel! I felt it hit. Had a little bad luck in getting stuck in the mud at side of taxi strip before take off. Thus, we were last ones off as we had to be pulled out by cleat truck but we were early in formation. Got 7:15 hrs today. Carried 10-500# GP's which we dropped on PFF target & I believe we had good results. Had fighters reported at Koblenz, but our formation was very good and we had good fighter support by P38's. Were briefed for 51's & 47's (5 Gps--300 planes) but somehow P38's got there too--more the merrier. Major Klette (just got his majority today) squadron CO complimented us again on our lead of # 3. We were good if I do say so myself. 3 of our first pilots finished up today & I finish next mission. That leaves the squadron with few experienced pilots & big shortage of copilots--don't know whether John will fly 1st pilot or not on the last two. Had to let down thru overcast from 5000 to 1200'--same on take off--but vis was good under clouds. Lady Lois had to have a whole new rudder after our last mission. I have the flak that ruined the old one.

Although "Lady Lois" received major flak damage over the target, no planes were lost from the 1st Air Division the 9th.

Mission 35. For his final mission, Bill was in his "Lady Lois". The ground crew for "Lady Lois", Luther Heimbaugh (Crew Chief), Alvin Robbins, Charles Blauser, and William Moore had done an excellent job of getting her repaired in time for this mission. 1Lt Robert R. Hunt was bombardier in place of Lt Swindell for Bill's last mission, as he flew the usual Lead of the Third Element, this time in the Lead Squadron.

--FINISH--.

October 15th

Am tired but happy tonight. Flew my 35th mission today & now I'm all finished up! We went to Cologne at 27,000' & bombed PFF thru just about the worst flak yet. Flew Lady Lois of course--6:00 hop with 14-250# GP & 2-500 incendiaries or 4500#. Lead 3rd element again. Had easy climb to target area, but as we started to turn on IP flak started to come up. It was very, very accurate despite total lack of visibility on the part of the ground crews (maybe that's the new secret weapon Germany has promised us for Oct 15). Just as we neared the target my two wing men disappeared. Capt Tufty on right wing was hit bad & fire in no. 4 eng. He called his crew to be prepared to bail out, but four of his crew bailed out over the target!! He meanwhile told his copilot to feather #4, but copilot got rattled and feathered two of the wrong engines. Anyway they had quite a time of it and finally got back & landed in South England. The other wing man got hit pretty bad & he came home alone too. McDowell in the 4th element got a direct hit just aft of the ball turret that very nearly cut the ship in two. The ball turret op was jammed in the turret & they couldn't get him out. He was cut up but miraculously not seriously injured but nearly froze to death riding all the way back to base in the blown open turret. The waist gunner had his foot cut off across the arch. Pilot did not have full control of the plane but did a

wonderful job of bringing it back. Some of the control cables were shot out & AFCE was out. Believe he'll get the Silver Star for his excellent job. Capt W. W. Thompson (Avon Park) got hit pretty badly. One piece coming thru the radio room killed the radio operator instantly, flak hitting him in the thigh & going up through his body to his heart. He was T/Sgt March of the 322nd Sqn. 8 men were wounded today & I killed. All ships came back but that is a miracle. Two made forced landing on the south coast. We got about 20 hits in Lady Lois but none very serious. A Tokyo tank was punctured & an oil line in #3 eng was cut. Had 3 holes in Plexiglas nose, one big one in radio room and a big one under the navigator that hit and demolished the relief can there. One came thru the right waist window and hit the waist gunner in the back--on the flak suit--no damage. Lyons finished today too. He & I started together the same day July 6th & finished the same day Oct 15th. Flip didn't fly today as we had to have a lead bombardier 'cause if visual we were going to bomb by 6 ship Sqns & I'd led one. I have flown a total of 262:40 combat time.

A rather wild and dramatic finish to Bill's combat career. However, a safe return for him and his crew. For an account of this mission and Lt McDowell's return in No. 770, "Little Miss Mischief" see page 7. 1Lt Joseph R. Lyons, a copilot in the 401st Squadron, had trained with Bill at Avon Park. Lt Henderson flew as first pilot with the rest of Bill's crew for their remaining two missions.

Bill had lead a charmed life as a first pilot. Although the plane in which he was flying received flak damage on almost every mission, major damage on five of them, not a single crewman flying with Bill was wounded. During his 102 days at Basingbourn, the 91st Group had 25 planes shot down, with 103 crewmen killed in action and 131 becoming POWs. Of the ten planes in which he flew, only "Zootie Cutie" and "Lady Lois" survived the war. Five of the planes eventually were shot down, one crashed on a training flight and two were salvaged after crash-landing because of severe battle damage; 33 crewmen in these planes were killed, 18 became POWs. "Lady Lois" went on to fly a total of 74 combat missions (see her story, beginning on page 1).

Bill returned to the States in October 1944. After a 30-day leave, he was assigned to Sebring, Florida. His wife, and daughter, Lois Anne, accompanied him to Florida. He was then sent to Denver, Colorado to attend a bombsight school for three months. Soon after returning to Sebring, Bill was discharged. Bill and family returned to Orchard Park where he ran the family business until retiring in 1990. Bill retained his pilot's license, but flew only for pleasure.

Bill passed away the 23rd of March 1999. His wife Lois, "Lady Lois", now resides in a retirement home in Williamsville, New York.

