

WE WERE THERE



*World War II Stories written by and for
the Residents of Paradise Valley Estates*

WE

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By Residents of Paradise Valley Estates Retirement Community
Fairfield, California
November 2004

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	iii
FOREWORD	iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iv
PART ONE --- HOME FRONT	1-1 through 1-11
PART TWO --- WORLD-WIDE FRONTS	2-1 through 2-34

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INTRODUCTION

For our PVE program and recognition of Veterans Day 2004, we have chosen a theme of the World War II period and all the activities and people in that great struggle. An influence on that choice was the dedication and completion of the World War II Memorial on the Nation's Mall in Washington, D.C. earlier this year. Another influence was in remembering that 16 million men and women wore the uniform of our country during that conflict, while another 144 million people manned our home front. In all the efforts---on the home front, on the transport and supply lines, or on the front lines, the people of our nation were united in an exceptional manner. In the spirit of that unity, we come together to celebrate this Veterans Day 2004. This booklet, "We Were There", is one of the items of that celebration.

Patriotic Holiday Committee

November 2004

FOREWORD

This past summer, when we (the Patriotic Holiday Committee) started planning for our Veterans Day 2004 program, we thought that a few memories of the World War II Era by residents would be great program material.

A FEW??!

We have been almost inundated with wonderful stories! Many of residents served in activities around the world with a variety of experiences. Others were at the home front where they dealt with the absence of loved ones, rationing, shortages, and the many difficulties of daily activities that resulted from our nation's single-purpose support of the struggle. Some residents submitted one story, others sent up to a half dozen, all worthy of our initial planning and use. But - - - -?

HOW TO CHOOSE??

We realized that the WWII population is dying at the rate of thousands per day and our country is losing stories from those memories with the human loss. We recognized that the memories we are collecting are history too valuable to lose a single page or word. In this booklet, with one Part describing life at the home front and a second Part relating military tales, here are the many memories we received.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

All the PVE residents who wrote and contributed their stories.
Margaret (Marge) Gruber for creating the cover art.
Lise Hansen and Liz Maxwell for their contribution to the booklet
production.
All others who gave their encouragement and their time.

PART ONE

Home Front

TWO RECOLLECTIONS OF WORLD WAR II

I can remember the day Hitler invaded Poland. I was nine years old. My mother and some other friends and their mothers were staying at a beach cottage on the Canadian shore of Lake Erie. All of the husbands/fathers had been on a two week fishing trip on a lake further north in Ontario. Many of these men had served in World War I, and I was always fascinated by the war stories they would tell. They all arrived at the beach cottage on the day Hitler invaded. They were talking about it being on the other side of the ocean and were speculating how long before America would be at war. I can remember standing on the beach at the waters edge and thinking that the war was going on, on the other side of the water, and I was hoping that the Germans could not get to America. It didn't dawn on me until some time later, that I was standing on the shore of Lake Erie and on the other side of the water was New York State, not Europe.

My second remembrance was during the Battle of Britain and for a couple of years after. I was in grade school and one of the things that everyone was doing, boys and girls alike, was knitting 6 inch by 6 inch wool squares. Some teachers taught us to knit, and many times had to get us started or help on the last row so that the square would not unravel. These were then collected and taken to where they were sewed together to form blankets. These "Bundles for Britain" were then shipped to be distributed to the British to help keep warm. I was relating this story one evening at a dinner party in France where there were two other British couples as guests. They said they remembered receiving some of those blankets and thanked me profusely for helping them to stay warm during the war. One person said his mother still had one as a souvenir from the war. I asked about the color coordination of the squares as we knitted them in what ever yarn was available. They said some were quite well coordinated while others were very gaudy. But that did not matter as they still curled up in them to stay warm.

Fred Montanye

MUSIC MAN

When I was a brand new 2nd Lt. in the spring of 1943 I met Glenn Miller. An hour later I'm sure he had completely forgotten me, but obviously I did not forget him. This happened in a crowded bar – nite club in Southern Pines, No. Carolina. Where I was out for the evening from Camp McCall – now part of Ft. Bragg.

The irony of this story is that Glenn Miller had what most people considered a pretty safe job, leader of an Army band. I became a paratrooper with the 101st A/B div. In Dec. 1944 an airplane carrying Glenn Miller was lost with no trace over the English Channel. I am alive today, 2004, and able to write this little story.

Stephen Myers

"BOOTS, BOOTS, BOOTS MARCHING OVER AFRICA"

One Sunday evening in February 1942, my family sat listening to a radio program called Gabriel Heatter and the News. His signature greeting was, "There's good news tonight," even if the war news was terrible.

Mr. Heatter opened the program by announcing, "Rationing will commence immediately. Food, gasoline, shoes...."

I gasped. "Shoes? How will I walk to school! My feet grow fast, you know. And what about my tap shoes? And my Easter shoes?" I whined.

My mother sighed. "Mary Elizabeth, think about your brave uncles for a minute. They are fighting to make the country safe for you to grow up in. How can you be so selfish about something like your *shoes*? You should be proud to be able to do something to help the war effort."

I looked at my feet, warm and snug in blue wool slippers, and tried to imagine Uncle John and Uncle Jimmy gratefully putting on dry leather boots somewhere in Africa, and thanking their brave niece who had to curl her toes under in outgrown lace-up brown school shoes.

Liz Wildberger

"CARE PACKAGES"

My grandmother sent two of her four sons to the Army, and proudly displayed a service Flag in her living room window with two blue stars. And she baked dozens of cookies and cakes, which she wrapped carefully and sent to my uncles, pleased that they would have a "taste of home" to see them through the war. The cookies were of tooth-breaking toughness and the cakes never more than two inches high, even though they had three layers, plus icing. But V-mails from various bases in the US and abroad, included praise for her baked goods along with the details of military life. "Well," my grandmother said, "I guess an Army really does travel on its stomach!" My sister and I refrained from suggesting that one or two of her weighty cookies might indeed bring a brave soldier to his knees.

Liz Wildberger

DECEMBER 7TH, 1941

The Young People's Fellowship at my Episcopal Church in Andover, MA were scheduled to have a dance on the evening of December 7th, 1941. Our pastor announced that we wouldn't be able to have the dance because Pearl Harbor had been bombed. As I remember, we young teenagers had no idea why this would have anything to do with our not dancing. Such innocence!

THANKSGIVING 1944

As a Freshman at Wheaton College, Norton, Ma in 1944, I experienced my first Thanksgiving away from home. There were restrictions on traveling more than 50 miles. So the parents of one of my classmates who lived in the Greater Boston Area invited a group of us for Thanksgiving Dinner. We were so grateful to have a Home cooked Thanksgiving Dinner and not have to eat in the College dining room. (The food there left a lot to be desired in those War Years)!!

Constance Gum

DRIVER DELIVERS THE GOODS

In 1943, I lived in Cambridge, Massachusetts while my husband attended Officer's Candidate School of the Army Air Corps. I applied for the Red Cross Motor Corps, passed my mechanic's test and the rigorous driving test, in preparation for emergency calls. Three runs qualified me for a challenging drive.

Near midnight, a phone call gave me instructions to convey a young, pregnant G. I.'s wife to a Boston hospital. I followed my map, located the girl, and settled her into my passenger's seat while assuring her we'd make it in time. Soon sirens wailed. All traffic pulled to the curb. Headlights and streetlights extinguished.

My passenger grew hysterical in the BLACKOUT. I feared intervention by police, but I followed my orders. The almost-full moon miraculously substituted for headlights. In the last mile, we acquired an irate police escort.

A healthy boy cried within three minutes of my passenger's disappearance into the delivery room.

Margaret Gruber

HOMECOMING

My husband, Major Otto Vasak, returned to me and our two-year old daughter, Nancy, less than a month after D-day. He had orders for a months leave, a month R&R, and another assignment in the Pacific.

I knew none of this when I answered the phone one evening and heard his voice for the first time in a little over two years. He said he was at Bradley Field, Connecticut, and was on his way home. We all exploded with anticipation and excitement.

A few days later he got out of a taxi in front of the house, and we happily welcomed him.

Later that evening, he recounted his trip in a B-24 from Prestwick, Scotland: Via Iceland; Goose Bay, Labrador to Bradley field. He said that twelve or fifteen heavy bombers, both B-17s and B-24s, with their crews that had completed their missions, were returning to the States that day, and bringing some passengers. As he talked about the weather they encountered as they flew across the North Atlantic, he said three of the planes went “down in the drink”. He had seen so much loss of life, plane crashes, planes that never returned from their missions, that it seemed to me that he just took it for granted that such things happened.

But I was a wife whose husband had just safely returned home; a wife who had known each day for over two years that I might get a telegram saying, “We regret to inform you...,” but instead, I had him home again. “You could have been on one of those planes, and you wouldn’t have been here now,” I said, as the awful thought struck me. “I know, he said, “but I wasn’t, and I’m here,” and he hugged me and kissed me.

Just the same, as I thought about those three planes that went “down in the drink”, I thought of the wives and families of at least thirty young men; thirty young men who had safely completed their dangerous bombing missions and were on their way home to be with their loved ones, and in my heart, I wept for them.

Elly Vasak

DALLAS, HERE WE ARE

I was en route from the east coast with my wife and new baby to a west coast duty Station. The baby was in a bassinet on the back seat of the little Ford convertible. We were traveling toward Dallas with a reservation at a hotel there and it was already nightfall and I had nudged the throttle up to over 60mph when a cop came to the driver-side window; he told me I was within the Dallas city limits and he would have to give me a ticket. With that my wife leaned back in the dark and pinched the baby and of course she started to holler. I told the officer our situation and that the baby was tired and hungry. With that the cop climbed on his bike and motioned for me to follow him and he escorted us to the hotel entrance.

Steinkraus

FINDING MENEES

Who is Menees? You don't know? He was Ralph Menees, who went overseas as our Group Navigator in the 351st Bomb Group. He became a good friend of mine. Just before the 351st Bomb Group went overseas in April of 1943, a problem developed with our Group Navigator, and he had to be replaced. Because we needed a Group Navigator in a hurry, General Olds made his personal navigator available who was Ralph Menees.

Ralph completed his tour of 25 missions during a time when only 3% of the crews were completing theirs. Ralph was subsequently returned to the States for R&R, then volunteered to do another tour with our group. This tour he also completed and became one of our highly decorated flyers – being awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross with Oak Leaf Clusters (OLC), the Presidential Unit Citation with OLC, the French Croix de Guerre and many more medals.

In 1987, Elly and I were visiting our long time friends, Ruth and Bob Hessler in Westlake Village just north of Los Angeles. Bob was in the terminal stages of cancer, and we wanted to see Bob and Ruth before it was too late. I remember the particular sunny Sunday afternoon with Bob lying on their living room sofa – and I sitting close by talking with him. Someone had dropped off their church's, Sunday bulletin, which was now on the coffee table. I picked it up saying, "I want to see how this bulletin compares with our church bulletin" – since we both belonged to Presbyterian churches. On the inside were listed some committees with their chairpersons. I noticed that one chairperson was Betty Menees. I said, "I knew a Ralph Menees", and with that Ruth called from the kitchen and said, "Her husband's name is Ralph". I then explained who the Ralph Menees was that I hadn't seen since World War II. Ruth hastily got out their church pictorial directory, and we looked up Ralph. I put my finger over his forehead and said, "If he had more hair, that's the Ralph I knew".

The Menees' lived about two blockes away from the Hesslers. Ruth called Betty on the phone and I spoke to her – telling her that I was trying to confirm that her husband was the comrade in arms whom I knew during WWII. I said, "Was your husband with the 351st Bomb Group?" Betty replied, "I don't know, but he was at a place called Polebrook". "That's it", I said – "That was the name of our air base in England". She then told me that Ralph wasn't home, but was at the lumber yard buying material to repair their fence.

A short time later Ralph phoned – and then came over to the Hesslers, where we visited for a couple of hours. Ralph didn't realize that our Bomb Group had a reunion organization and hadn't heard from anyone since his discharge from the Air Force. I found out that Ralph had gone back to school after the war and received a degree in Electrical Engineering. Elly and I invited Betty and Ralph to go to the annual reunion that very same year. We all had a great time together. Through a very amazing sequence of events after 42 years we found Menees.

Otto Vasak

NCO OF THE STRAWBERRY PATCH

Early in the year 1944 when recruiting was at its peak 650 women from Northern, Central & Southern California were inducted into the Marine Corps. A small group from the Los Angeles area were delayed in boarding the train to boot camp because Ginger Rogers, who was briefly married to a Marine at that time, wanted to show her patriotism by sponsoring a group of women Marines. This was a great publicity gimmick for her premier of "Lady in the Dark". We became the Ginger Rogers squadron & were sworn in on the steps of the City Hall, which made the front page of the L.A. Times. Later we were given a tour & sworn in again at RKO Studios. The night of the premier we were sworn in in the lobby of the Pantages Theater in Hollywood amid Klieg lights & celebrities. Finally we received orders to board the troop train at the Los Angeles depot & head for boot camp at Camp LeJeune, North Carolina.

None of us ever dreamed that boot camp was going to be a piece of cake & it wasn't. The male DIs (drill instructors) acted not too pleased with a bunch of females invading the Corps. But we survived & at the end of our training could elect to take immediate mess duty or wait to enjoy it upon arrival to our duty station. I elected to take mess duty before leaving. We were asked where we would like to be stationed. I said, "Send me where you think I can do the most good." Later I learned I was the only one in our contingent sent back to California. Stationed at the Marine Corps Air Station at Goleta just north of Santa Barbara about 100 miles from home. My job was to be Navy mail clerk in the base Post Office. The young man I was to relieve to fight hadn't left yet. In the interim I was to join a group of 4 new female privates from Brooklyn, Boston & Pennsylvania assigned to Bldgs & Grounds.

When the Air Station property was loaned to the Marine Corps for an indefinite period of time the land also encompassed a large grove of citrus trees & about ½ acre of strawberries, all of which had to be maintained & returned to the city in the same condition in which it was received.

Lo & behold I became NCO of the strawberry patch which was located way down on the other side of the road adjacent to the water tower. We made 2 round trips daily by cattle car. It was a back breaking job picking suckers off of strawberry plants. When the berries were ripe we picked basket loads to deliver to the officers mess. But we munched our fill as we whistled while we worked. The fatigues became burdensome & one day our petite Marine from Brooklyn, an excellent swimmer, suggested we wear our bathing suits underneath & shed the fatigues after the cattle car rounded the bend. Sporting magnificent tans we noticed the aircraft kept flying lower over the strawberry patch on the landing approach around the water tower.

I kept hounding the female Lt. in charge of the post office to let me in. I shook hands with the young man I was relieving to fight as he wanted furlough before shipping out. Then I became a bonded Navy mail clerk & soon learned that they wouldn't break a bond for temporary duty elsewhere. I never had to do mess duty again.

Jean Petersen

A TALE OF VIENNA

A narrow winding staircase leads into the dank basement. Throat constricting dust lingers in the air from a pile of coal in one corner. In the center, brought from the attic in the nick of time, stands an old-fashioned woodstove, now cold and filled with ashes – ashes left behind by documents, photos, pictures, insignia they burnt a while ago. Hardly a shimmer of light warms the women and children huddled under blankets and heavy coats. They shiver from the cold and from their dread. The constant rat-a-tat of machine gun fire has ceased; an ominous silence hangs in the air and makes the children cling to their mothers even more tightly.

The basement door creaks open. In the daylight that now penetrates they see a pair of supple leather boots descending. Fascinated they stare at the baggy khaki-colored pants above the soft leather, then a wide belt holding together a voluminous khaki blouse; paralyzed by fear they observe the red star on the collar: the enemy is descending the stairs, descending, descending. He looks into their eyes, takes in their terror, sees the trembling of their hands, hears their half-suppressed sobs. Then there is dead silence.

Never letting any of them out of his sight, he slowly reaches into the bag he carries slung over his shoulder. Slowly, slowly he extracts a long, shiny knife. They gasp. A child shrieks. Then he reaches into the bag again. He now slices a round, dark loaf of bread.

I bite into my slice. It's moist, granular, and tasty, oh so tasty.

Charlotte Montandon

WARTIME VAGARIES

In late autumn of 1944, about 400 of us Niseis (Japanese-Americans) finally completed our basic training at Camp Shelby, Miss. What a hot, humid, miserable place that was. After a short furlough, we again re-assembled at Camp Shelby for shipment overseas to join our parent organization, the 442nd Regimental Combat Team fighting somewhere in Europe.

As a group, we were sent to Camp Shanks, New York for final processing. This camp, as I remember, was located in the outskirts of New York City. After receiving our immunization "shots", we lined up to get our new "wardrobes" in the latest Army style including the new hi-top combat boots. Little did we know that we were going to walk a little short of the "million" miles in France and Italy in those new boots.

(continued)

Wartime Vagaries

During our short stay at Camp Shanks, we noticed each evening groups of "non-English" speaking men boarding Army busses for New York City. This aroused our curiosity so the first chance I had, I asked a sharp looking "GI" about these men. What a surprise to learn that they were Italian POWs who were captured in Europe and shipped to the U.S. for internment in a camp adjacent to Camp Shanks. Now in late 1944, they (POWs) were free to roam the streets of New York City as long as they had their passes.

Several of my buddies said that the irony of all this was that they were going off to fight a war in Europe while members of their families remain incarcerated behind ten well guarded, barbed wire enclosures scattered throughout the western half of the United States. Why? All because of their ancestry!

Ted Miyagishima

WW II BLACKOUT COURTING

In 1943 as a junior submarine officer, I served in U.S.S. Sailfish (SS-192), stationed at Pearl Harbor for distant operations into Western Pacific. There on October 9th I found true love. It was a torrid romance with Pat working almost around the clock as a civilian Top Secret Army Cryptographer.

Recreational transportation was scarce. Oahu was under a 10 p.m. blackout and curfew, allowing only vehicles and personnel on official business on the streets and roads. In the gloom, vehicles traveled with only hooded head lights containing a small vertical illumination slit. Curfew breakers were subject to arrest but seldom were.

We saw each other daily if humanly possible. When together after curfew, we had little trouble as we were able to show her shift schedule which somewhat fitted into our nightly travels. Frequently I kissed her good-night and faced the nine mile trip back to the ship without transportation. Most of the times I could "thumb a ride" in a blacked out vehicle. One night the best I could do was Rodgers Field and had to walk the distance. Another night, having gotten a ride to Hickam Field, I endeavored to climb the 10 foot chain link fence into the Naval Shipyard where we were in No. 5 dry-dock. I was apprehended in a most compromising position straddling the barbed wire at the top, I ended up in the barred Naval Base brig. Then, there was the black night that I took a short-cut through the submarine Base torpedo restricted area and was fired upon at short range by a nervous neophyte sentry almost bringing the wartime romance to a graven end.

B. C. Jarvis

GO TO THE TOP

At one time during Earl's Navy career he was the Executive Officer at Geiger Field which was located next to Fairchild Air Base near Spokane, Washington. One of his sisters and her family had a summer house at Twin Lakes, also near Spokane.

One warm summer day while getting in his flight time he flew out to Twin Lakes and, as probably every pilot has been known to do, greeted his sister by flying rather low over the lake once or twice. When he returned to Geiger a telephone call was waiting for the Executive Office. He took the call from a rather irate man complaining about the pilot who was "buzzing the lake" and creating such a disturbance. Earl assured him he would find the pilot and put a stop to the foolishness. He did.

Freddi Miller

CIVIL DEFENSE, BREMERTON, WASHINGTON, 1942

After Pearl Harbor we all expected an invasion from Japan and as we lived on the bay 6 miles north of Puget Sound Naval Yard in Bremerton we were quite worried. The first thing that happened was the Army took over every vacant lot, part, and playground around Bremerton to set up defenses from air attack. These consisted of an anti aircraft gun, searchlight, barrage balloon and smudge pots for smoke. Of course we all taped over our windows for black out and taped over the headlights of our cars. There were block captains with Civil Defense helmets and buckets of sand for incendiary bombs. Of course nothing happened but the night skies were well illuminated by searchlights and the barrage balloons were hovering over the city.

One morning we had a bit of excitement. We had waterfront property and woke up one morning and found a barrage balloon floating off shore. My good friend, Sticky Wilder, who built boats in his dad's garage immediately took off and towed the balloon to shore where the army gratefully recovered it.

Raymon E. Lawton

GILA RELOCATION CENTER – NOT A SANTA BARBARA RESORT

After spending a few months in the Tulare Assembly Center, we arrived by train at the Gila Relocation Center in Rivers, Arizona, in the middle of summer of 1942. An old bus picked us up and as we drove into the desert, we saw nothing but huge cacti and sagebrush. As we approached the camp, we saw rows and rows of barracks in the scorching sun. Coming from a coastal town with mild weather where I lived all my life, it was unbearably hot in the middle of the desert. The camp was enclosed with barbwire fences with armed sentries high up in the watchtowers. Armed guards were also patrolling the enclosure. We lived in barracks, which were divided into four sections. Since our family was so large, we were assigned the end section. Frequent dust storms were almost unbearable and the fine sand would come through every little crack in the barracks, making life miserable.

All our meals were taken in a central mess hall. The mess hall served many kinds of food that we had never seen before, for example, grits, powdered eggs and all kinds of animal organ meats.

What I dreaded the most living in the desert, were scorpions, rattlesnakes and sidewinder snakes, to name a few. We had never seen these back home in Santa Barbara County. Someone caught a gila monster, a large venomous lizard and had it in a cage. We all went to see the poor creature, but it was truly an ugly beast.

One thing I remember was the nice, clear, beautiful nights. The stars were so bright and seemed so close that you could reach up and touch them. Those clear, cool nights and endless stars were the only positive thing I can remember about the detention camp called Gila.

Grace Miyagishima

THE DAY DADDY CAME HOME

My husband, Otto, went to England with his B-17 Bomb Group in April of '43. Nancy, our daughter, was born in June. Daddy was notified by cable, courtesy of the Red Cross, and a cable and a dozen red roses arrived from him, expressing his delight. I remember how I buried my face in the fragrant dewy roses, wishing I was burying my head in his neck.

Two years later, on the eve of Nancy's birthday, Otto came home. I could hardly stop her from jumping up and down as I dressed her in her new pink flowered pinafore. Her bright eyes shone as I braided her shiny dark hair, and she kept repeating excitedly "Daddy come home, Daddy come home!" We waited and waited and finally Daddy arrived in a taxi cab. I was surprised at how different he looked. His mother later put it this way. "He went away a boy and came home a man". I don't know what Nancy was expecting – but she soon lost interest in her Daddy. He really didn't know how to play with her, and he was more interested in Mommy than her.

The next day, her 2nd birthday, was an adult affair, with Grandma and Grandpa Vasak there, and Grandma Grove, my mother, with whom Nancy and I were living. The Vasaks, who always made a great to-do about their grandchild – did an about face, and were understandably more interested in their son that day. My mother and I really tried to slant the birthday part toward Nancy – but she couldn't help feeling like "second fiddle".

Later in the evening, I tucked her into bed, pulled up her pink fluffy blankie, and told her what a wonderful 2-year old we had. I said we were so lucky to have Daddy come home for her birthday. She held my hand very tightly with a questioning look on her precious little face, and said "Daddy go bye-bye now?"

Elly Vasak

PART TWO

World-Wide Fronts

A WWII EXPERIENCE NEVER TO BE FORGOTTEN

Although 60 years have passed since I flew-B-25, Medium Bombers, over Italy when that country was occupied by the Germans, I shall never forget the risk.

In June 1944, I had completed 51 combat missions over Italy and was scheduled to return to the USA. However, the Squadron Ops asked me to fly one more mission due to a shortage of combat pilots. Acceptance of the 52nd Mission was a grave mistake. After “Bombs Away” and coming off the target, my B-25 was hit by Flack! My right wing fuel tank was pierced and gushing 90 octane fuel on to the engine exhaust stacks ignited and we became a flaming torch! I gave the order to: “Bailout”! We quickly departed this stricken ship!

On June 3, 1944, I became a MIA behind enemy lines. I was not captured but three of my crew were. The country people befriended me for 30 days, and later I made contact with the Italian Under Ground who placed me in a safe house in Florence, Italy. When that city fell to the Allies, I became a free man after two and a half months of hiding. I thank God for his guidance and care.

Cole Sellers

AN ARMY NURSE

From August 1944 until June 1945, I served with the 112th General Hospital, situated in the hills outside of Newton Abbott, in Devon, England, very close to the southwest English Channel coast. It was a tent and “hut” hospital; our job was to “patch up” the wounded, and send them back to battle. Those needing further care were sent “Stateside”. The most memorable days were during the “Battle of the Bulge”. Every night at 12:30 A.M., we would greet the Army trucks from the Exeter U.S. Airbase, and unload their muddy cargo of 101st Airborne soldiers; some on crutches, some walking, and many on stretchers. The Germans had machine-gunned them as they parachuted down. Even so, I’ll never forget their shouts of “American girls!!” when they saw us. We then quickly brought them to the proper units, to clean up, ease their pain, and start treatment.

It was my good fortune to be a member of this Army hospital until the German surrender sent us home for a 30 day furlough, and further duty.

Julie Thomas

DON'T BET ON A MULE

I was one of the 382 men specifically trained at Camp Shelby, Miss. as replacements for the 442nd Regimental Combat Team (RCT) an all Japanese American infantry unit.

The RCT was only about half strength with over 2000 men in various hospitals in Europe. It had taken quite a loss rescuing the "Loss Battalion" of the 36th Infantry Division in the Vosges Mountain.

Now in late 1944, the RCT was in Southern France on the French Riviera waiting for replacements and wounded to return from the various hospitals. The units primary task was to protect an area that had a front of about 18 miles.

The 2nd Platoon, "G" Company where I was assigned, was located high in the Maritime Alps at an elevation of over 4000 feet where the snow had already settled down for the winter. From our position, we can look down and see the bright lights of Monaco. There was no war there!

Stubborn mules were the only sure footed way of transporting equipment, rations and mail to our position. Every two or three weeks your turn came to lead the mules down to company headquarters. We all looked forward to that trip for it meant hot meals, shower, change of clothing, and sleeping on a cot in a real tent.

When my turn came, I was ecstatic. I started the trip down but finding the rifle, gas mask, and my helmet weren't made for traveling on a narrow trail leading an anxious mule, a brilliant flash hit me. Why not tie these cumbersome equipment on the mule. I stopped the balky beast and tied the three impediments onto the mule.

Suddenly, the mule bolted and literally shot down the steep mountainside. I charged after it, but found it impossible to catch the dastardly beast. My brilliant idea changed quickly to a vision of me being court marshaled. We had been warned that the enemy can be anywhere, and also that your rifle is a part of you and it stays with you where ever you go.

About an hour later, I finally reached Company Headquarters. I sheepishly entered the Company Headquarters tent expecting the worst. The First Sergeant looked up from his desk and said, "Oh! Ted, pick-up your equipment they're over in the corner, and go the mess hall tent and get something to eat."

Ted Miyagishima

WWII CONVOY TALES

My first assignment as Ship's Transportation Officer was aboard the Italian MS SESTRIERE, (Little Star). She was a beautiful modern diesel Cargo Motor Ship. She had been recently launched in Genoa, Italy and her skipper who had seen the "Handwriting on the Wall", knowing the war was going badly for Italy and the Axis in general, wisely took his ship, crew and cargo and defected to the Allies. She was sent immediately to New York to join in the massive buildup preceding the Invasion of Europe.

I was fortunate to draw her as my first assignment for convoy duty. Only a few members of the crew spoke or understood English. Luckily the Skipper, the gunnery officer and the 4th mate spoke reasonable English. The food was outstanding.

After some difficulties getting stowed and staffed we left Halifax in a three knot, 100 ship plus convoy.

Immediately upon leaving Halifax we encountered the conjunction of the Cold Labrador current with the Warm Gulf Stream. This is the perfect recipe for heavy dense fog. We were on the Newfoundland Grand Banks which are well known for their Codfish, fogs and ship wrecks.

The second night out from port we were enclosed in fog so dense that the lookout posted in the prow could not be seen from the Bridge. It turned out further that the lookout couldn't see the stern light of the ship ahead of us. That light was supposed to be our guide and would keep us in line and prevent us from ramming the ship ahead of us.

The Sestriere was used to traveling at over twenty knots speed at sea and this made running her at three knots very difficult. In fact it became impossible. After a very long night in fog bound isolation, the sun rose, the fog cleared and much to every ones surprise not a single ship was to be seen. Over 100 ships had completely disappeared and we had no idea where they had gone.

We were not left wondering for long. Over the horizon came a fast Destroyer Escort ship with a signal light flashing furiously. She pulled alongside and hailed us with a blistering question as to, "Where in the Hell we thought we were going?" With a last, "Follow me", we were escorted back to the convoy and to our place in the rear of the most starboard column.

Somehow we had gone through the entire convoy and had ended up far ahead of the convoy and way to the left. How we had accomplished this without seeing or ramming another ship was a mystery. How the Escort Ship had managed to find us was another mystery and why we were not attacked by enemy subs was still a third unanswered question. We had been extremely lucky in all three counts. The convoy continued on course and arrived at its destination in England without any further mishaps.

Dick Clawson

MY MOST UNFORGETTABLE MOMENT IN THE ARMY

I had received my commission in the Infantry Reserve when I left college in June, 1933. Following the natural course of events, I was living quietly and contented with my family in Tulsa, Ok., when I received a letter from Military district headquarters in Oklahoma City. It directed me, and twelve other officers to report for one year active duty on Friday, June 13, 1941. I am sure some clerk in Headquarters had a great time figuring out that move. Thirteen officers to move on Friday the 13th. The orders specified that we would be relieved in time to arrive home on June 12, 1942. After some refresher courses at Ft. Sam Houston I was sent to Ft. Benning, Ga. for the Infantry communications course. Upon returning to Ft. Sam I was told that I was going to the Philippines to help train the Philippine army that Gen. Macarthur had been authorized to recruit.

I sailed from San Francisco the day after the second Thanksgiving day that year. The trip was uneventful to Honolulu, but from there we went south, in convoy, crossing the equator on Saturday, a week later. Pearl Harbor was bombed that day and we wound up in Australia, where we set up Headquarters and opened for business. Personally, I was assigned to a staff position, where I stayed until July, 1945, when I rotated back to Land of the Big PX.

In January, 1942, I had to make an emergency telephone call to my wife. After days of haggling, we finally made the connection.

Before I shipped out we made a plan that was fool proof. We had a three year old son and decided we wanted a sister for him. She was to be named Sue Anne. I am not sure how many monitors were on during our conversation. They were to cut off the call if I said anything I was not supposed to. I could tell her that I was in Australia, but couldn't say that I was in Melbourne. As we were nearing the end of our conversation she said Sue Anne is coming. In the excitement of the phone and all, I completely forgot about our code and said WHAT? I never could understand what she was talking about when one of the monitors cut with "SHE SAY SHE'S PREGNANT". That's how I heard about my coming daughter. She arrived on August 1, 1942 and I got to meet her in person June, 1944. We began living together in August, 1945.

John Stickle

BEST FRIENDS

Dave Zabriskie was my closest friend all through grammar and high school. He was elected president to our class at Hollywood High School and I was elected vice-president. Dave played football at the Naval Academy and after graduation he advanced to become Commanding Officer of the submarine, S. S. Herring in WWII.

That boat was lost in June, 1944 off the Kurile Islands, north of Japan. I had heard of the loss, but none of the details. After the war Japanese records verified that the S.S. Herring had sunk two Japanese ships but was the only U.S. submarine to be destroyed by enemy shore fire.

Even though I spent 4 ½ years in the army during WWII, my fate was not like that of my very best friend and his crew.

George Wyman

LAST MISSION

In early 1943 I was transferred from my job as Engineering Officer in the 508th squadron to Group Engineering in the 351st Bomb Group. During this period, bomber crews were required to fly 25 missions to complete their tour of duty in the 8th Air Force. After this tour of duty, the crews were rotated back to the States. In late 1943, one of our crews was flying its 25th mission. We all had our fingers crossed since only 3-5% of the crews were completing a tour.

The commander of this crew was a red headed pilot who had a big moustache similar to what we called a RAF style moustache. The crew was a quiet one – never complaining, never missing a mission, or aborting one. On this particular day, all planes had returned and landed at Polebrook, or had been accounted for – except for “Red’s” plane. At the time I was in our two-story flying control tower with our Group C.O. and some of the operations officers.

All of a sudden we first heard and then saw a B-17 skimming the tree tops and headed for flying control. He was “buzzing” the tower, which was completely out of character for this conservative crew. We all hit the deck as the Flying Fortress pulled up right in front of us – just missing the tower. He made a second pass at the tower, and we thought we were going to be wiped out. This was a dangerous maneuver, because extent of possible battle damage was not known. A wing spar could have been shot out. However, “Red” landed safely and taxied to the plane’s hard stand.

Up in the Flying Control Tower, Colonel Hatcher angrily burst out, “Put that pilot on report”! Somebody said, “But that was the crew’s 25th mission”. After a few seconds, the Colonel said, “O.K., forget it. It was their last mission”.

Otto Vasak

FIRE IN THE INCINERATOR ROOM

As a new Ensign, I was assigned as Junior Officer of a Deck Division on the Assault Transport, USS Highlands (APA119). Goof-Offs, individuals that get by with as little productive work as possible and frustrate their superiors, were not uncommon in the military. A Classic is the character Beetle Bailey in the Comics. Our Division Goof-Off, we will call Seaman "Smith" was regularly "Present and Accounted For" at 0800 Muster. But on work details "Smith" was often not present and accounted for. The Division Senior Petty Officer, Boatswain Mate "Jones", thought he had a job for "Smith" where it was simple to keep track of him, and might give him some sense of responsibility. The job was operating the ship's incinerator which was used to dispose of all combustible trash. (The incinerator was also used by the Communications Officer to dispose of Top Secret and other classified material.) "Jones" gave "Smith" instructions on the proper operation of the incinerator and left him to his new duties. Some time later "Jones" returned to check on progress and found the steel door to the incinerator room closed and hot to touch. "Smith" was gone, and a large pile of cardboard boxes and other trash piled much too close to the incinerator door was going up in flames. "Jones" turned in the alarm and the PA system blared FIRE IN THE INCINERATOR ROOM.....THIS IS NOT A DRILL.....FIRE IN THE INCINERATOR ROOM.....THIS IS NOT A DRILL. The flames were quickly extinguished with only minor damage. When "Smith" was found by "Jones", he was put on report and ordered to Captain's Mast (the Navy's judicial handling of minor offenses). I do not recall the sentence, but I believe "Smith" spent several days where he was present and accounted for, namely in the ship's brig.

Fred Schaffer

IT WAS A DARK AND STORMY NIGHT

The five bases in China were soaked in. We began our return to India over the "hump". We had plenty of fuel because we still had our full load of 100 octane. We were, however, short of one man on the crew, our navigator, but the bombardier would take his place.

The weather was bad and getting worse. Ice began to form on the props and the wings. In using the prop boot, some of the ice would fly off and hit the sides of the plane with a jolt. Soon the ice began to build up on the props and this was trouble. The crew was told of two choices. Find a place to land or bale out.

We finally got a response to our call which led us onto a landing strip and we were able to put down.

The next morning we looked around us and were amazed to see that we were completely surrounded by 2000 – 3000 ft. mountain peaks. How we were guided to this small field in the middle of the Himalayas will remain a wonder.

Lorne Hillier

SUGAR

As I dumped a ton of sugar into the Pacific I thought of people on the Home Front where sugar was one of the precious commodities that was rationed. Our Assault Transport had several cargo holds in addition to the bunk spaces for troops. In Combat Loading, cargo with lowest priority went to the bottom of the hold, and most needed things on the beach went on top. As we approached the final phase of unloading at Iwo Jima, a cargo net with about 20 bags of sugar, 100 pounds each, was set on the deck. The winch crew said “Mr. Schaffer, what are we going to do with this, it’s all contaminated with diesel oil?” In loading, there had been insufficient space in the flammable storage hold for gasoline and all the diesel fuel, so quite a few 55 gallon drums of diesel, some of which leaked, ended on top of the sugar. It was obvious that the sugar was useless. We rigged a scrap of rope so that the cargo net could easily be emptied when hung over the side of the ship. At that point in time the Marines on shore were far too busy to be concerned about a lack of sugar, so my thoughts turned to Home Front as I cut the rope scrap.

Fred Schaffer

MEETING IN KNUTSFORD

Does “Meeting in Knutsford” sound exciting? It may not have been exciting, but it was special. Knutsford was near Manchester, England and was General Patton’s headquarters prior to the D-Day landings during World War II.

Early in 1944, I learned that my brother, Corporal Francis Vasak, was stationed in Knutsford. He was with an engineers unit attached to Patton’s outfit. I contacted Fran to see if he could get a two day pass and visit my airfield at Polebrook. I thought it would be interesting for him to see how the 351st Bomb Group ran their Flying Fortress operations. I planned to take him to early morning briefing, witness mission take-off, watch the B-17’s return, go through the after-mission interrogation room and accompany me during my tour to assess battle damage.

These plans did not materialize, because Fran’s Company commander would not give him a two day pass. So – I took a two day pass and went to visit my brother. On arrival, Fran introduced me to his Company C.O. – and to our surprise, he not only gave Fran a two day pass, but also gave us the use of a jeep for two days.

We rented a room for two nights above the Rose & crown pub – almost every English town has a “Rose & Crown”. Our two days together was a memorable event, and we reminisced every time we got together after the war.

Otto Vasak

A DAY TO REMEMBER

On June 6, 1944 I took 40 men and four 50 cal machine guns on to Utah Beach. (thank God it was Utah). We were the first anti aircraft artillery on the continent. We set up on the beach to protect it from Strafury Luftuwffe planes. They never came (thank you, U.S. Army Air Corps). We expected to be digging in the dirt and living in holes in the ground.

That afternoon I met a young man my age in a uniform just like mine – wool pants, leggings, wool shirt, field jacket and steel helmet, but he wore 2 small gold bars on his shirt collar. He was an Ensign F.O. (forward observer) probably from The Nevada. He could call naval gunfire that was fantastically accurate. His big complaint was that he had joined the Navy to have a clean bed – not a hole in the ground like me, to have meals cooked in a galley not K rations – and not to live in a dirty wool uniform for weeks. And here he was no better off than a lowly soldier!

Stephen Myers

A WORLD WAR II MEMORY OF JAMES SHIGLEY

Among my father's memories of World War II was an experience he had in 1957, while serving in Poitier, France. At that time a man appeared at his bas wearing a French Foreign Legion uniform claiming to be an American soldier. Upon investigation it was learned that he was from New York City and had served in the U.S. 100th division in France. After two intense battles in December 1944 he had been wounded and apparently suffering from shock, was lost by his unit. Remaining in Europe after the war he had joined the French Foreign Legion. He was sent to war in Indochina, participated in the defeat at Dienbienphu and had twice been awarded the "croix de guerre" for bravery. After being released from capture he was sent to fight in Algeria. It was at this time that he reported to the nearest U. S. Army unit in France.

My father relates how his appearance in Poitier made quite an impression. In addition, it placed the U. S. Army in the awkward position of trying a decorated French war hero for desertion. While he was eventually found guilty he was given the lightest sentence possible.

My father was impressed with his contact with the life of this young man from New York thrown into the furnace of World War II.

Submitted by Bill Shigley, Son of James Shigley

NIGHT OF THE HALIFAX

The Halifax was a four engine bomber used by the British Royal Air Force (RAF) during World War II. Some of the other aircraft used by the RAF to bomb continental Europe were the Sterling and the Lancaster – both four-engine planes. Twin engine planes used by the RAF were the Wellington, often referred to as Wimpy – and the Mosquito, used for low level bombing and path-finding. The engines on these planes were not equipped with superchargers like the U. S. Air Force planes. Because of this the British planes had a maximum ceiling of about 16,000 feet – while the American Flying Fortresses (B-17) and Liberators (B-24) in the Eighth Air Force could bomb from altitudes of 25,000 to 30,000 feet. Based on these facts, it was agreed that the RAF would bomb targets on the European continent at night, and the Eighth Air Force would do the daylight bombing. Flying at higher altitude would take the planes out of range of some of the anti-aircraft (flak) guns. In this way the U.S. Air Force could concentrate on daylight precision bombing.

It was a clear night when an RAF Halifax bomber landed at Polebrook Air Station – the home base of the 351st Bomb Group. The Halifax was returning to England from a night bombing mission over Germany. The crew claimed that the plane was short of petrol (gasoline) and needed refueling to reach their RAF base. My maintenance crew serviced the plane while the plane's crew went to one of our mess halls to get some food. Word had gotten around many of the Bomb Groups that the food at Polebrook was about the best in the Eighth Air Force – and definitely better than anything served at the RAF bases. This information even filtered down to some of the RAF Bomber Command Stations. On refueling the Halifax, we found that the plane had plenty of petrol to get back to its RAF base. The stop at Polebrook was an excuse to partake of some decent food.

After the refueling and eating stint, the Halifax took off without its landing lights on. This was the normal procedure at night because of “black-out” restrictions. There were dim blue lights along the runway to guide the plane. Shortly after this take-off, I received a call from our Flying Control (control tower) that they had received a message from the Halifax pilot. They reported that they felt a “thump” while going down the runway – and that we should check the runway. To our dismay, we found four of our maintenance men dead on the runway. These men had been working into the early morning hours on their Flying Fort and were on their way to the mess hall for something to eat. They were riding their bicycles and taking a short cut by riding down the main runway. They did not hear the Halifax on its take-off run because of all the noise coming from engine run-ups at the parking hard-stands around our perimeter track. Engines were being repaired and checked out by running them up, and the noise was considerable.

This was costly lesson. It did give reason to why we had rules that no one was to walk or ride bicycles or other vehicles down the runways. This was a sad night indeed.

Otto Vasak

MY FIRST EXPOSURE TO RUSSIANS

During WWII, I was in the Navy as apprentice seaman in the V-12 program at Villanova College in Pennsylvania. The program was designed to supply the Navy with officers. We went to school twelve months a year. Engineers and pre med students attained a degree by squeezing a four year curriculum into two years and eight months. Non engineers would take half that time, receive no degree, and go on to midshipman school and a commission.

We did get a little time off from our year around schedule, Christmas week, and a few days off at Thanksgiving and in the summer. After the war the Navy gave us a government bond for the leave time we had not used. I don't recall the exact number of days they credited me with, quite a few, but it was not much money, based on my \$50.00 per month pay; further, the bond only paid three percent interest.

One of my rare times off was late in the war. My Dad had recently been transferred from the South Pacific to the Norfolk Naval Shipyard. Here was my first opportunity to see my parents since June of 1943. So, I was off, trying to find the fastest and cheapest way South. Obviously, space available on a military aircraft was the answer. My flight from Philadelphia Naval Air facility to Washington D.C. was uneventful. From Washington on was something else. A big Naval Air transport was heading in generally the right direction. With the exception of a lone U.S. Marine officer all passengers were Russian aviators! These pilots had come from Russia via Siberia, Alaska and across the country. They were to pick up Catalina Flying Boats – PBYS, at a base just across the Virginia – North Carolina line, and fly the great circle route across the Atlantic home.

To this day I have never seen such a grim, depressed group. They were all in neat, squared away uniforms, but the look on their faces was frightening. They all stared straight ahead, stern, didn't smile, didn't show any feeling or emotions. One of the Navy flight crew tipped me off not to try to communicate with them, it was futile. I took all this in as a part of life. After all, these men were in the middle of a heavy duty war and about to make a very long and dangerous flight. I didn't know until after that their leader, Dictator Joe Stalin, had an intense hatred of the Westerns – America in particular – and persecuted those who had been exposed to Western influence. Even those under orders, such as these aviators, as well as former prisoners of war, were later subjected to mistreatment. I doubt that the aviators knew of that impending danger.

This tense and trying atmosphere made me anxious to see the flight end. Yes, there was a certain fascination in being with a group of Russians. Sure, I was just a naïve young man but I had not just “fallen off the turnip truck”. I was not completely unworldly. I had lived in Haiti, visited France a number of times and a year before, at Swarthmore College. I had had a Chinese Naval Officer, a Lieutenant (jg), as a room mate. He was one of fifty sent to Swarthmore to polish up his English.

(continued)

Exposure to Russians

Would anything break the tension of all those hard, expressionless faces? Low and behold, the door to the forward crew compartment popped open and unceremoniously entered a Wave, yes, a female flight crew member. She was young, attractive and looked sharp in her trim blue slacks and blouse. There seemed to be an explosion of feeling. At once, all the Russians were talking, smiling, even laughing. It was like going through a time warp, from being on the hinges of hell and flashing over to a Bob Hope USO show with his bevy of beauties and his famous one-liners. I only wish that the Wave had made her appearance earlier in the flight.

E. M. (Mike) Michael

"AIRBORNE ALL THE WAY"

In Jan 1943 I was sent to Camp Edwards Mass to a just activating 40 mm Anti Aircraft Gun Battalion. Our non coms were just coming in from old Seacoast units in Panama. I didn't like the CO or most of his staff. I was basically unhappy. The only way to get out of a rapidly expanding anti aircraft corps was to volunteer for the airborne. It was the foreign legion of the American Army. Anyone stupid enough to volunteer could go. They too needed men. I volunteered, & they sent me to join the just activating 11th Airborne Division (this is the unit Jack Albrecht fought with all thru the Pacific Theatre) I loved the airborne. We weren't the USMC but the closest thing to it esprit de corps wise in the drafted American Army.

After the Sicily invasion the 82nd A/B Div needed replacements. Nine of us Lts were ordered to Europe to replace people lost. We all got to England, & the Army completely lost track of why we were sent. I, like the others were all sent to ordinary straight leg (non airborne) Anti Aircraft Units. Again I was unhappy. (not that the Army cared) & I tried all the legal ways to get back to the Airborne. My requests never got past Battalion HQ. They too needed men.

One weekend I got a 48 hr pass to London. SHAEF was there. I spent little time chasing girls or drinking. I was trying to find someone who would listen. I finally found a personnel Sgt Major. He listened. He said "Lt, are you really sure you want to get back into the Airborne?" I said Yes. He said, Lt, go back to your unit & very shortly you will get orders from this headquarters to an Airborne Unit, & they can do nothing about it. I got orders to the 101st A/B Division with whom I fought the whole European Campaign.

Stephen Myers

UNFORGETTABLE GRANDMOTHER

After several days and nights of combat, our company was placed in reserve from one late afternoon to early the next morning. We were in a fairly large mountain village that had suffered a little damage from artillery fire.

There was a water spigot and an animal watering trough in town so we were able to put our tooth brushes and K-ration soap to good use, and I felt like a human being again. Our platoon Sgt. received word that a few of us had been invited to sleep overnight in their homes. My quick response paid off, for I was one of the few "chosen" ones.

A dear old grandmother and her elderly daughter had just returned from their mountain hiding place, and had kindly opened their home for two of us squad members. The interior of the house was a little dusty from the "shellings", but the large bed with only bare springs looked inviting. After so many nights grabbing snatches of sleep in fox holes and slit trenches, the two of us hugging our rifles slept back to back quite comfortably. To show we weren't uncivilized, we at least removed our combat boots.

Our Sgt. made sure we are awake at the crack of dawn. How did he remember the house where we were staying? Grandmother was already up and smilingly handed each of us one soft boiled egg. What a surprise and what an unforgettable breakfast. To this day, I wonder where in the world did she find two eggs when obviously there were no food, fowls or animals anywhere in the village.

We hurriedly said our "molto grancies" for the unexpected breakfast and for being invited to their home. However, the ultimate emotional surprise came to me when the dear old grandmother with tears brimming from her eyes, hugged me and kissed me on the cheek and said, "Buono Gortuno" (good fortune or good luck, I think), then quickly disappeared into the house.

I will always remember that sweet charming Italian grandmother because I believe she brought me all the luck in the world for I survived the wars in Europe and later Korea without a scratch.

Ted Miyagishima

ONE WHEEL LANDING AT POLEBROOK

I was a member of the 351st Heavy Bombardment Group at Polebrook Airfield (Station #110, Code “Newflick”) in England from April 1943 to June 1945. We were a B-17, Flying Fortress, group in the 1st Air Division of the Eighth Air Force.

I was both the Group S-4 and Station S-4 officer. The S-4 function was known as “Materiel” and encompassed Engineering, Maintenance, Armament, Communications, Ordnance, Air Corps Supply – as well as Quartermaster Supply.

Since I had been an Aviation Cadet in Engineering and had a formal engineering degree, I concentrated my activities in the engineering and maintenance areas. I had capable assistants to cover all the other areas of the S-4 responsibility. After all, we had to keep the ninety six big birds combat ready and flying.

I was always in the control tower (also known as “Flying Control”) during bombing mission take-offs and landings – to take care of any emergencies that might arise.

On the return of one of our missions, I noticed that one of the B-17s on final approach, had his landing gear retracted. I turned to our Group Commander, Colonel Burns, and said, “Bob, S-Sugar has his wheels up”. Bob put the binoculars on the plane and radioed, “S-Sugar, your wheels are up”. S-Sugar replied, “I know it. We’ve got battle damage and can only get one wheel down. We’re going to make a belly landing”. Bob replied, “No you’re not. Go around” – and turned to me and asked how much repair would be involved after a belly landing. I said, “We’ll salvage the plane and remove useable parts. Hopefully none of the crew will get hurt”. Then Bob asked, “What repairs would be involved if S-Sugar makes a one wheel landing?”

This was a tough question to ask of a non-flying officer. However, I said, “If he keeps his wing up as long as possible, he’ll eventually ground-loop when the wing tip touches ground. Hopefully he won’t run into the fuel dump or the bomb dump. Then repairs most likely would entail changing the wing tip and outboard wing panel – and the two engines, whose props hit the ground.”

Bob got on the horn and said, “S-Sugar you will make a one wheel landing”. My heart was in my throat. Bob talked S-Sugar down, and when the plane’s wing finally made contact with the edge of the runway, it ground-looped just off the runway. Nothing was hit, and the crew deplaned safely. Maintenance repairs were exactly as I predicted – to my relief.

Subsequent to this incident, we had one other one wheel landing – and it was equally successful.

Otto Vasak

"TO ERROR IS HUMAN"

Although I was a member of one of the best crews in the 505th B. G., I did see some mistakes made while I served on the island of Tinian. Our B29 was the third plane to arrive on Tinian on the 22nd of Dec. 1944. I was the last member of the crew to leave the island on Oct. of 1945.

Now to get to the point of the story. We had gone on a night incendiary mission on May 16th. The early part of the flight was routine with a normal take off and the steady drone of the engines for six plus hours on the way to Nagoya. As the plane was being flown on auto pilot, there was not too much to do except keep an eye on the engine instruments and occasionally make a slight course correction. I passed the time by staring out the window at the total black darkness of the sky and ocean. The only thing to break up this monotony was to watch the flame coming from the #three engine exhaust. This reminded me when one of my fellow cadets had bailed out of his BT13 on his first solo night flight when he thought that his plane was on fire. As it would be a long 1500-mile swim in the Pacific, I decided to stay with the plane.

As we were approaching the Japanese coastline after midnight, we could see the flames from the city of Nagoya. At this time every one on the plane was on the alert and ready to do their assigned job. Sykes, the navigator, gave us the final course correction to bring us to our IP. Elbright, the bombardier, starting getting his bombsight ready for the bomb run. On the final bomb run, Higgins the A/C was flying the bomber, and this left me with nothing to do except watch the flames, the many search lights and the bombs bursting in air. At times like this I crossed my fingers to put a double whammy hex on the flack gunners and the night fighter pilots.

The Japanese night fighter pilots usually flew with a blue light in their cockpits, so all of us were on the look out for one or more of these blue lights. About the time that we were leaving the target area one of the side gunners spotted a blue light in the distance off the left side of our plane. We wanted to keep the fighter plane at a distance so I gave the order for Lubisch, the left side gunner, to fire a few tracer rounds to keep the Jap at a distance. The blue light kept following us and Lubisch kept firing a few tracer bullets. This situation continued for a half hour or so, and it finally dawned on all of us that a fighter plane could not follow us for this long a period without running out of gasoline. Then the truth of the whole blue light came on all of us at the same time.

We had been trying to shoot down the planet Venus. Fortunately, we missed and I still see Venus when I go out after dark. But, I always think of this night over the Japanese Empire.

1st Lt. Stanton "Bud" Child (Brother of Dan Child), Pilot, 482nd Sq. 505th Bomb Group

FINDIN A MESS SERGEANT

In July 1942, the 34th Bomb Group (H) moved from Davis Monthan Field in Tuscon, Arizona to Geiger Field in Spokane, Washington. I was Engineering Office in the 4th Bomb Squadron, and my personnel were maintaining both B-17's and B-24's. We were training air crews on. The 34th Bomb Group was also spinning off new Bomb Group cadres- and we all knew that we would eventually be assigned to either a B-17 or B-24 cadre.

In November 1942, the 351st Bomb Group (H) was formed and a cadre selected. I was initially assigned as Engineering Officer in the 508th Squadron of the 351st Bomb Group – and later became Group Engineering Officer (S-4). Keith G. Birlum was the first Commanding Officer of the 508th.

In the course of getting staffed, the 508th Squadron was being assigned a mess sergeant from the 4th Squadron of the 34th Bomb Group. In fact he was a technical sergeant from my maintenance group in the old 4th Squadron. They were apparently trying to get rid of him. He had been a “greasy Joe” type of mess sergeant on several previous occasions. I told Keith, “We can't take him. There two buck privates in the 4th Squadron engineering crew – and either one would be better. Let's go and see Major Crimmins, CO of the 4th squadron, and try to get Charles Orban. I understand that he has been chef in a New York hotel for several years”. Keith agreed, and he and I went to see Major Crimmins. After a lot of arguing, Crimmins agreed to let Orban go. What a bonanza for the 508th !

One day our 351st Group Commander, Colonel William Hatcher, had a meal with the 508th Squadron and decided he wanted Charles “Chick” Orban as mess sergeant for the Staff Officers Mess. The Staff Officers Mess prospered and within a year, Chick was a master sergeant. He did wonders with limited supplies and dehydrated foods. In England he would use some of his 48 hour passes to visit chefs in London hotels to find better ways of utilizing and preparing our food – especially dehydrated eggs.

Chick Orban was a friend of mine and we talked about food a lot. He said, “Captain, we have a professional baker on K.P. in the staff officers kitchen. If we had a proper oven, he could bake something every day for the officers' mess”. I said that I would check the engineering personnel files to see if we had a mason on board. We did find one, and he built an oven in the kitchen – and the officers' mess had some fresh bakery every day. Next Chick came to me and said that if we built an oven in every enlisted men's kitchen, the baker would train men to bake in each mess. This we did – to the satisfaction of everyone. Chick Orban located a very small ice cream making facility in Peterborough – 14 miles away. It was no longer operating during the war, but was made available to us one day a week. With dehydrated eggs and milk, plus sugar and chocolate – some good ice cream was made and enjoyed by the troops.

Otto Vasak

FOR IT WAS MARY, MA-AR-RY

She was a leader and prominent in almost anything she attempted. On our Mount Vernon troop ship from LA to Bombay, she was a livewire among the 153 Red Cross girls during the 30-day trip to the CBI Theater. Being young and attractive, she easily got the attention of any male in the area. The girls were assigned to various bases in India. Mary and two other RC girls were soon assigned to our new U. S. Army Air Base being constructed west of Calcutta for the first B-29 operations. At first, Mary and the girls provided their Red Cross support with doughnuts and coffee from a tent. As native bashas were built, the RC got a building with a game room and reading room and also a jeep with trailer they used to take refreshments out to the maintenance and flight lines. Mary and the girls planned activities for all the men in our 40th Bomb Group and they became a valued part of our base operations. Unfortunately, the Red Cross could not provide their support to our Advanced Base in China, but we at Base A-1 heard from flight crews about them.

In May of 1944, I returned to India after we ceased operations in China. I soon became one of the many admirers of Mary and her activities. One day, Mary was driving to a local Maharaja's palace to arrange a tour by men from our base. On a dirt road, Mary and her driver rounded a curve and saw a native oxcart stopped in the middle of the road. The driver swerved to try to miss the oxcart and the jeep skidded. The wheels caught on the loose dirt, rolled the jeep, and threw Mary against the dash breaking her leg. Both Mary and the driver ended up in our Army Hospital at a base nearby.

I didn't want Mary to be lonely in the hospital so I drove over to see her. As I walked towards her room, I could hear voices and laughter and several men were standing at the door. I soon saw that the room was jammed full of men, 18 or more, all trying to pay attention to Mary. She was sitting up in bed with a huge cast on her upper right leg, and cheerfully talking to everybody at the same time. As I tried to push my way into the room and get closer to Mary, I heard one Sergeant ask: "Mary, you are so generous and do so much for all of us, how did you decide to spend your life in this way?" The room suddenly got very quiet as Mary answered without hesitation: "In recent times, there have been many articles in magazines that have talked about the effect of wartime losses on life after the war. Women have been advised that there just would not be enough men to go around on a one-for-one basis and women would have to be prepared to share their men or go without after the war. Well, I decided to start practicing that sharing right here so I would be prepared!" The room practically exploded with shouting and laughter, and Mary just smiled.

C. Nelson

NAKED IN NORMANDY

In August, 1944, Patton's Third Army broke through the German line at the left edge of the Normandy Peninsula, made a right turn down the main road south past the famous abbey of Mont St. Michelle and into the town of Avranches. There was a little boy of 12 years standing on the roadside and waving an American flag. This I was told after the war. I did not see him but did see many, many French civilians along the way offering flowers and drinks and thanks for our coming.

I was a Second Lieutenant in an Anti-aircraft Artillery unit and we were setting up our guns in a field near Avranches. That night I was off duty and decided to take a spit-bath using my helmet as a receptacle. It was a beautiful moon-lit night. Suddenly the Krauts dropped flares which lit up our position like we were on a Broadway stage and catching me "en flagrante" which is French for "naked as a blue-jay"! I don't know whether the Germans were encouraged by this sight but they kept coming on. Lt. Singer said he thought that I had been put out there for a target! After the night was over, I was told that our battery had knocked down five planes. Captain Carico, our Battery Commander, thought the Germans were so convulsed with laughter at the sight of me that they forgot their real mission-offered to suggest to Corps that they use me again in this role! I demurred!

Fifty years later I was reading the San Francisco Chronicle in which a man named John Lehodey, who owned the Sofitel Hotel Chain, invited all veterans of the battle of Avranches to a reunion at all of his hotels nationwide. Turns out he was the little boy on the curb-side who watched us enter his town. Accordingly I called in and Lil and I attended a very special party on June 6th 1994 in Redwood City. There were 300 or so present as we gathered for the reception cocktail party. After presentation of the American and French colors by the Veterans of Foreign Wars, and the singing of the National Anthems of both countries, we sat down to a five-course gourmet dinner with French wines, of course.

At the conclusion of the feast, a 12 piece orchestra played dance music from the 40's. I was really flattered when a young lady of about 14 asked Lil if she could dance with me! As a memento, we were all presented with a poster made up by the children of "Ecole Elementair d'Avranches" with twenty signatures and the words "Merci". Quite an evening for us and it made me feel better about being caught "Naked in Normandy"!

Arthur "Bal" Balensiefer

ADVANTAGE IN NAMES

We became friends because of our surnames. The Army way was to line up for anything according to you last names. Both he and I had surnames beginning with the letter "M". From our basic training days to being assigned to the 2nd Squad, 3rd Platoon, "G" Company, either he would be in front of me or I would be in front.

In the early spring of 1945, the 442nd Regimental Combat Team, The all Japanese-American unit was back in Italy. The mission was to drive the Germans rest of the way up to the "boot" of Italy. Looking at a map of Italy, we were now well above the "knee".

A Squad in an Infantry company (in WWII) was the smallest unit consisting of 12 men. If a squad were to move in a line, the first two positions were scouts. The third position was the all important Browning Automatic Weapon (BAR) man. He could put-out a lot of fire-power. I was one of the scouts and my buddy was the BAR man behind me. We learned early that the BAR man was the primary target of enemy snipers for obvious reasons, so we all kept a protective eye on him.

Early one morning, we found ourselves in the thick pine grove on a ridge of a high mountain. Because of the heavy growth of pine and sporadic firing from the enemy, we found ourselves crawling under the pines. Suddenly, I heard a loud metallic sound behind me. I quickly turned around and saw that my buddy's helmet had been completely torn-off his head. His face was buried in the soft fallen pine needles. I knew he was gone.

I remembered watching war movies when the hero's buddy is killed, the hero literally "tore-up the screen" with emotional outbursts and shedding buckets of tears. Strangely, when it actually happened to me, there was an immediate feeling of relief followed by "guilt" because in my mind I'm repeating, "It could have been me---it could have been me!"

I often recall what the battle hardened "old timers" from Hawaii often said during short breaks in combat, "If the bullet has your name on it, there's nothing you can do!" I guess the old German ammunition maker couldn't spell my name.

Ted Miyagishima

UNEXPLODED BOMBS

It must have been about September of 1944 at the 351st Bomb Group's home base at Polebrook Airfield in England. I was in Flying Control with Colonel Robert Burns while our B-17s were taking off for a bombing mission over the European continent. They were flying on instruments through a fog from 250 feet to 14,000 feet when one of the planes went into a spin and crashed. The flying control officers determined the location in short order, and Bob tried to get his driver to take him to the site. The driver could not be located so Bob said, "Come with me Otto. I'll drive the command car". And drive he did. We raced at 70 miles per hour on winding cobblestone streets through little hamlets until we reached the site of the crash.

The plane that crashed was No. 42-31238 from the 511th squadron. It was named Devil's Ball. All the planes in Lt. Colonel Clint Ball's squadron had "ball" in part of their names – such as Linda Ball, Odd Ball, Black Ball, Eight Ball, etc. As we drove up the country lane to the site, we could see British firemen and local farmers standing on the road. Out in a turnip field, we could see smoke rising from the burning wreckage. The plane had buried itself in the ground. Bob said, "Come on Otto, let's go out to the crash". We went through the hedgerow to the crater that the plane had made. Little did we know that most of the plane's bombs had exploded on impact. As I looked into the crater, I said, "Bob, there's some unexploded bombs in the fire. Let's get out of here". We hurried back to the road and talked to the by-standers. One said, "A few bombs exploded after the crash". A few more went off after Bob and I left the site. We should have talked to the by-standers before venturing out in the turnip field.

The only survivor of the crew was Sgt. Donald Holigan, tail gunner. In a letter to his mother, he stated the plane started to shake, went into a snap roll and then a spin. He managed to get to the escape door, and the slip stream helped to pull him out of the plane. He bailed out at about 250 feet and landed shortly after the plane hit the ground and exploded. The rest of the crew couldn't move or get out of the plane because of the centrifugal force developed in the spin. Farmers picked up Sgt. Holigan and got him to a hospital and subsequently to a rest camp. He died in Michigan in 1989.

The senior staff at the 351st Bomb Group felt that the pilot of Devil's Ball may have experienced vertigo while flying through the fog on instruments.

In any event, Bob and I were lucky to be able to walk away from the burning wreckage before another bomb exploded.

Otto Vasak

A CLOSE ENCOUNTER

In March 1945, we departed the Maritime Alps of Southern France and found ourselves back in Italy. The 442nd Regimental Combat Team (442nd RCT) was finally back to its full strength of about 4500 men composed exclusively of Japanese-Americans from Hawaii and the mainland.

Fortunately, I was a member of a platoon known for its combat prowess. An Infantry Platoon consists of 40 men and one Officer. The Platoon Sgt. had received a Distinguished Service Cross (DSC) the second highest award for valor. The Assistant Platoon Sgt. had won his DSC for knocking out a tank with a "bazooka" shot while forcing another to withdraw. Our Platoon Leader was a 1st Lt., a young blond blue-eyed Caucasian. To me, he looked awfully young, and I wondered if he had yet shaved. Originally, all officers in the Regiment were Caucasians as stipulated in the original orders to form the 442nd RCT.

In one particular tough battle in the mountains of Italy, we were held down by a stubborn machine-gun nest located in a clump of trees above us. The objective was to take that hill so that the rest of the company can continue its mission.

After what seemed like an endless firefight and dodging from tree to tree, we finally reached the machine-gun nest. I remember two or three young blond German soldiers suddenly standing-up with their hands up in the air. I didn't see the sneaky one behind the others. As he stood up raising his hands, he simultaneously threw a "potato-masher", a German hand grenade at me. I hit the ground as the grenade exploded. I found myself on one side of a dead log lying on the ground and the exploding hand grenade on the other.

The concussion must have knocked me out momentarily, but before the dust had settled, I jumped up and with my M-1 pointed directly at a young blond guy, I yelled, "Shoot that son-of-a b----!" Before I could fire-off a round, my blond, blue-eyed Platoon Leader, waving his arm yelled, "TED! DON'T SHOOT – DON'T SHOOT – IT'S ME – IT'S ME!"

Ted Miyagishima

MY WWII "MEMPHIS BELLE" MISSION

Except for our airplane being a B24 Liberator and the movie of a B17 Flying Fortress our mission on the morning of 1 September 1944 was almost identical to the Movie. It was 5 AM that morning at our 451st Bomb Group target Briefing that our Group Comdr. Col. Leroy Stefonowicz started the briefing in his usual way. "G'morning gentlemen, today we are having another attack at the Huns our target will be the Rail Bridge in the Po Valley" in Northern Italy.

After breakfast and a routine 7 AM takeoff from our Base near Foggia, Italy and at 22,000 feet 3 hours later, we reached our Bomb Run. Just as in the movie we found our primary target completely overcast as we were being hit by Flak and fighters. My #2 engine was hit losing oil pressure and ending up with a runaway propeller that couldn't be feathered. I had visions the propeller might break off leaving me and my Copilot in a cockpit without a plane...wow! Fortunately, it finally broke off and fell to the ground.

Our Group leader just as in the movie said we'd have to turn around and make a second run to the main target. This time my #4 engine was hit by flak and I didn't have enough power to keep up with my Squadron so we were forced to leave the formation. As we had some clouds and as we were losing altitude we were able to stay in the clouds to avoid the fighters. We soon found a target of opportunity and dropped our 1000# bombs. Since we were still losing altitude with only 2 engines, I called my crew on the interphone and asked that they throw everything overboard that wasn't needed. Shortly after, my Waist gunner called me back and said the other Waist gunner threw out his parachute...just what I needed to hear at that time. Ha.

By this time we were down to 10,000 feet so I asked my copilot to call Big Fence, which was the code name for our Emergency station, to find the nearest airport where we could land our B-24. He wasn't able to get thru because so many of our planes were shot up and calling in. However a voice in perfect English came thru our radio that said "Big Fence can't read you may we help". We said "sure"...our heading at the time was 178 degrees heading almost due south. The station asked us for a long count...0 to 10 and back to 0. They came back and said "we now have you on or radar scope...please take a heading of 355 degrees and in 10 minutes you'll see an airport where you can land." At the time we were still at 6000 feet and I was not about to turn back. It was obviously an enemy station. Shortly after, Big Fence came in and we were given a heading just a few degrees off our heading at the time. 15 minutes later we reached a British Air Base at Pescara, Italy on the Adriatic just a few miles from the Front lines (and incidentally, only 60 miles East of where I was born in 1919.)

We were still about 1000 feet in altitude when we reached the British Base where we to make a safe landing with only our two remaining engines. I was told later that our bomber was so damaged that it would be cannibalized for parts. The first thing my Crew did when they got off the Bomber was to kneel down and kiss the ground....Just as in the Movie "Memphis Belle."

Dominic Battistella

MY RUSSIAN CONNECTION

On June 21, 1944 the 8th Air Force conducted a massive bomb attack on Berlin. However, just before reaching Berlin, two wings consisting of 75 B-17 aircraft left the bomber stream and bombed a Synthetic Oil Refinery at Ruhland, Germany 50 miles south of Berlin. I was flying Deputy lead. After attacking the target, the two wings continued east across Germany, Poland and all aircraft landed safely at Poltava, Russia which was in the middle of the Ukraine.

Poltava, before the war, was a city of about 100,000 people and had a pilot training school called the Randolph Field of Russia. Our quarters consisted of tents lined up near the ramp. About midnight we were awakened by what sounded like a Fourth of July fireworks display. When I looked out of the tent, it was almost as bright as day. Flares were drifting down, anti-aircraft guns were firing and I could hear the whistling and the tearing sound of falling bombs, as well as the explosions. I told the crew, "Lets get out of here." So we grabbed our shoes and took off. At the edge of the field was a woods where we found a small hut, so I recommended that we go inside, because the trees wee not much protection from falling shrapnel. We looked out the window and watched the show, which lasted two and a half hours. The Germans dropped everything they had on that airfield. After it was over, we went back to the tents and found they had been strafed and were full of bullet holes. Later in the day we found that all but six of the 75 B-17 Aircraft had been destroyed. I knew then what it was like being on the receiving end of an air raid.

Cal Samson

NEAR ENCOUNTER WITH A BUZZ BOMB

In the latter part of WWII Hitler became desperate for a super bomb that would turn his disastrous efforts into victory. His scientists had given up on the Atomic Bomb after our commandos with the Norwegian Underground had scuttled his heavy water plant.

The best his rocket scientists could come up with were the Buzz Bomb or the V-1 and later the V-2. The V-1 was unleashed against civilian targets with London being one of the Prime Targets.

My ship was in convoy heading for a dock in the Thames River. When we were two days out we received a wireless message telling us to reroute to the Bristol Channel. It seems a ship preparing to leave our assigned dock had taken a Buzz Bomb or V-1 in its number one hold, sinking it at the dock. We were very lucky. Two days later and we would have been the ship that was sunk. Such are the fortunes of war.

Dick Clawson

BUSTED BOOZ ON THE FLIGHT LINE

The weather was miserable at Pisa, Italy on February 2, 1945, so no combat missions were flown. The Group Commander directed that two P-47 Thunderbolt pilots of the 346th squadron take off on a dawn "weather recce" patrol and climb through the clouds to determine the thickness of the overcast. When Lt. Robert Morrow broke out on top of the clouds he called his wingman, Lt. Thomas Gomez, to pull on up and join him. In the thick, dense clouds, Lt. Gomez aircraft had drifted right under the P-47 flown by Lt. Morrow so when he pulled up, the two aircraft crashed together. Lt. Gomez was killed but Lt. Morrow was able to bailout of his P-47, landing safely.

We had an unwritten rule in the squadron that if you had to bail out and were saved by the parachute, you would deliver your once a month ration of Three Feathers Bourbon whisky to the man who packed your parachute. This monthly ration had great value with the troops and was considered adequate compensation for saving a live – even though the whisky was lousy.

We had experienced sergeants working the control tower – directing air traffic on the field – accompanied by a pilot officer in the tower. When the March, 1945 ration of a few beers and the bottle of bourbon was distributed to the pilots, I happened to be the pilot officer on duty in the control tower. The sergeant who packed the parachute for Lt. Morrow was also on duty in the tower that day. As was the custom, Lt. Morrow began climbing the outdoor winding stairs to the top of the control tower – to personally deliver his precious bottle to the parachute packer. Just as Lt. Morrow climbed the last step up to the tower, his foot caught, he stumbled forward and dropped that bottle.

Our eyes were popping out as we watched the booz bottle tumbling down and crash on the cement below. The sergeant parachute packer exclaimed in a tortured voice "Lt., you dropped my bottle of whisky!" He had to wait another month, and hope Lt. Morrow would still be around to make good on his reward.

Glenn A. Dow

THE KING AND I (not the movie)

13 November 1942, and I was stationed in England, flying a B-17 "Flying Fortress" against Nazi German targets. We were not scheduled to fly, and had been told to be at our aircraft, ready for a possible visit by a dignitary (for security reason, no name). Standing by our aircraft, I saw a caravan of cars arriving, led by one flying the British flag, out of this car stepped King George VI of England. It was my honor to greet the monarch, introduce my crew to him, briefly discuss combat, and talk about the kindness of the British people to us Americans.

John Regan

EVERYTHING BUT THE KITCHEN SINK

The late spring of 1945, the enemy was in full retreat moving up highway one along the Ligurian Coast of Italy. We can clearly see them from our positions in the high mountains.

Finally feeling free from gunfire and explosions, the mountain villagers were gradually returning to their homes. I saw one woman coming down the steep mountainside with a heavy treadle sewing machine expertly balanced upside down on her head. However, the most astounding sight was a rather stout woman coming down a trailless mountain slope with a large family dining table perched upside down on her head. It was quite a sight watching the four table legs bobbing up and down as she maneuvered down the rocky hillside. There was to be dinner on the table that night!

Ted Miyagishima

ARE THESE TRIPS NECESSARY?

"Join the Navy and see the World!" For a recruiting poster, it was the best. I'll bet thousands of young guys signed up just to "see the world". Well, I'm signed-up too, but my story is a little different. Twenty-four hours a day like clock-work, I depart France and visit Italy. This process is repeated come snow, rain, or shine, and I'm not talking about the postal workers neither. Even better than the travel incentives are the sights I see every night. Far below me, I can see the beckoning lights of Monaco, the gambling capital of the world. By day, also looking down, I can see the pristine white beaches of the French Riviera, and the beautiful city of Nice, the renown playground of the world. The war has taken its toll but from my lofty peak, the city look picture card perfect.

Where am I, and what am I doing here? Well, I'm a "GI" and I'm up here, and the glitter and glamour are down there, and the numerous trips I make from France to Italy are on "orders". My temporary "residence" is on the reverse slope of the snow-covered, steep and rocky Maritime Alps which separates southern France from northern Italy. At least twice a night, I'm abruptly awakened to take my turn on guard duty. The only way to find the well concealed "look-out" post on the forward slope of the summit is to grasp the field telephone lines (several strands so they won't break) and follow the lines up the steep incline. When the summit is reached, the telephone lines are wrapped around the base of a huge cross. From the cross, I follow the line to the camouflaged bunker on the other side. To return, the process is simply reversed. During my earlier sojourn to the forward outpost, I learned that the huge cross at the summit could be seen for miles in every direction. It is the actual border marker indicating France on one side and Italy on the other, so in fact I am traveling back and forth between the two countries. Well, no "sour grapes" but the Navy guys can travel and see the world, I get sea-sick anyway, besides from my lofty perch, the view day or night can't be beaten!

Ted Miyagishima

ON THREE ENGINES AND MANY PRAYERS

I have read about and heard of many "first, one-of-a-kind, shortest, longest, etc." but this incident that I'm writing about is one that I have never heard of ever being done in a B-24. So, until someone says otherwise I'm going to consider it a "first" and a "one-of-a-kind".

It happened the latter part of December, 1944 in the Southwest Pacific. I had remembered it as happening over New Years Eve but my Form 5 does not bear me out...it says December 23 and 24; also, there are other specifics (names of people, bases, etc.) that are a bit hazy and fail to come to mind as you will note further along. However, the incident did occur and if there are any who read this and can fill in some of the blanks I would be happy to hear from them....my memory isn't the best in the world and 40+ years is a long time.

It started from Morotai and I was a pilot in the 394th Bomb Squadron, 5th Bomb Group, 13th Air Force. I was 21 at the time of this happening although I looked like I should still be in High School and early on the other crew members had nicknamed me "Kid". One of our B-24's had to be ferried to a base (was it Finschaven?) on the lower part of New Guinea for a major overhaul..some rear echelon maintenance. A makeup crew was gotten together to make the flight....I was the pilot, a Lt. Giles the co-pilot, the navigator was Charles "Chuck" Messmore. The name of the crew chief escapes me but also along on the trip was another navigator by the name of Dag Larson.

The flight began December 23 uneventfully enough but as we cruised along Chuck make mention that he knew some nurses stationed at the Army General Hospital at Milne Bay, New Guinea, not too far past Finschaven.

One thing led to another and before you knew it we had decided that to come so close and not to visit Milne Bay overnight would certainly be a shame "especially since it was the Holiday Season".

So we winged along bypassing what should have been our destination and headed for the Army Hospital at Milne Bay which had a landing strip that wasn't the longest in the world since it's primary purpose was for smaller air-evac aircraft. It was after having gone more than halfway toward our new destination that it happened....oil began to spill out of our right inboard engine and it had to be feathered.

The question then arose "Do we go on or turn back to Finschaven which we should have been heading for in the first place?". Of course the decision was to go on....The "reasoning" being that we were so near, and, losing a little oil wasn't all that bad; that it was probably a minor thing that the ground crew at the Milne Bay airstrip could undoubtedly take care of first thing in the morning and we could then head back to the repair depot after a night of frivolity and no one would be the wiser....that strong strange drawing power of the fairer sex had prevailed.

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On Three Engines and Many Prayers

We had a great time that night (as best I could remember) and the next morning bright and early we headed for the airstrip although we were suffering terribly from monumental hangovers. Talking with the line maintenance chief didn't make us feel any better...repair of the engine was out of the question and it would necessary to change it for another. The only thing wrong with that was that there were no spare engines there for a B-24, and, even if they did have one, the right type of equipment to handle the job wasn't on that airfield.....everything including a maintenance crew would have to be flown in! Visions of a court-martial and a Statement of Charges for 1 each B-24 floated before my eyes! Not wanting any part of that, the only thing left to do was to take off on 3 engines (hopefully) and fly the plane back to where it should have gone in the first place. I don't think there was too much enthusiasm on the part of the crew but I managed to convince them that it could be done. How did I know that it could be done? Well, I didn't really but I was sure going to give it a try! (Some of us youngsters had more guts than brains!)

As I remember, almost everything that was loose in the plane was taken off...only enough fuel to make the trip was on board. About this time I discovered that the co-pilot was so bad off from the night before that there was nothing to do but stretch him out in the rear of the aircraft. Needing someone to give a hand on the controls for take-off and climb-out I "drafted" the navigator, Chuck Messmore....the expression on his face was priceless! I thought for a moment that he was going to back out but he didn't and came through with flying colors!

The airstrip was in somewhat of a valley and at the end of the relatively short runway an immediate buildup of hills and jungle began. I had two choices in taking off...one was to push forward both outboard engine throttles and then when some semblance of rudder control had been obtained bring in the good inboard engine full throttle. I was afraid the latter would use up too much runway and reduce the chances of getting airborne and over the hills so chose the second method which was to pour the coals to it with all three good engines right from the start. Some might disagree with that decision but it worked. I had to tap the brake on the one side a couple of times to keep her on the runway and fight her all the way but she came through and didn't let us down. Neither did Chuck...he was right there helping on that rudder pedal until we were airborne, over the hills, and had enough altitude to ease back off of the emergency power and re-trim her to hold on her own.

I remember seeing out of the corner of my eye, as we lumbered down the runway, what appeared to be more than the usual number of ambulances as well as medical personnel on hand...I often wondered whether they all were there to wave good-bye to us and wish us good luck. Or, to pick up the pieces in case we didn't make it....a little bit of both, I guess. There weren't too many there when we first got down to the airstrip that morning but soon after the decision to take off on 3 engines was made the work spread quickly and we had quite a cheering section.

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On Three Engines and Many Prayers

As we neared our destination, I called in for landing instructions advising them that we were on 3 engines but letting them think that it had happened a little way out. This wasn't too far from the truth since it HAD happened "a little way out" only it was the day before!

Wanting to avoid any trouble, the whole crew agreed not to mention anything about our little episode. However, a day or so after getting back to Moratai, I was walking through our squadron area and ran into the Operations Officer, Captain Herb Glass. With a little smile on his face he said, "Say, I understand that a B-24 can be taken off on only 3 engines." Someone had let the cat out of the bag (Chuck, could it have been you?) but that's all I ever heard about it.

How about it? Was that 3-enging takeoff on December 24, 1944 in a B-24 from a short strip with hills at the very end of it to get over the "first" and also the "only one"?

I have never heard nor read of another.

Bruce R. Heilman, LTC USAF Ret.

LAST OF THE DAYLIGHT RAIDS

The sky was clear with a bright sun shining. It was early autumn in England in 1943, when I was cycling to Mrs. Edward's small brick house. She and her husband were tenant farmers. She did a barracks bag of my laundry every week for five shillings, the equivalent of one dollar in those days. Our Flying Fortresses of the 351st Bomb Group were on a mission over the European continent, and would not be returning to Polebrook Air Field for many hours. I took advantage of this open time to take care of my personal laundry.

While cycling down the narrow Macadam road, I heard the roar of low flying aircraft. I looked up and saw a German twin-engine bomber flying at tree top level. It was a Heinkle He-111. He passed immediately overhead. I could see the pilot. I thought he could see me, but he had other things on his mind. He was racing for the British coast, actually in the direction of The Wash, which was north of and closer than the coast of East Anglia. Right on his tail were three RAF Spitfires. I wondered what was going to happen.

After taking care of my laundry delivery, I bicycled back to our air base and went to the Flying Control Tower. I reported on what I had witnessed. The personnel in the tower said that they had just heard the German bomber was shot down before it reached the coast. This must have been one of the last daylight raids by German bombers over England. I often thought that if the Heinkle pilot saw me, I was probably the last person he every saw.

Otto Vasak

A V-TALE FROM WWII

I was fortunate to have many people who sent me mail while I was stationed overseas in distant countries during WWII. Especially my relatives' letters were welcome. One cousin used the V-Mail system frequently and those letters came through even to our Air Corps base in Western China. Each single-sheet form was sent as a separate letter and included a full address of the receiver. At one time, that cousin wrote a two-page letter to me with a full APO address on each sheet. I received page two from her letter so I knew who sent it and I enjoyed the ending although somewhat mystifying by itself. But, I never received page one!

Cletus Nelson

FOR WANT OF A SHOW -----

Our platoon was in a single file noiselessly and very cautiously moving up a narrow path surrounded by trees and under-brushes. Suddenly, two Italian partisans jumped out of the bushes waving and yelling about something. Lucky it was broad daylight and they were recognizable or they would have been full of holes. They were quintessential guerrillas, dirty and disheveled with vintage weapons and bandoliers casually slung over their shoulders. If a Hollywood casting director for a war movie were to see these two characters appear for an audition, he would have immediately signed them to long term contracts.

Our platoon Lt. and the Sgt immediately quieted them down. What I could determine, they were going to lead us to a German bunker. The signal was given for us to continue as we were before the interruption. The Lt. must have taped the partisans' mouths for they were unusually quiet.

A short time later from our higher vantage point, we could see a small shack below us. Since the entire area was forested, we formed semi-circle in preparation for battle. Finding themselves surrounded, a once white handkerchief tied to a stick waved from the doorway. Surprised and out-numbered, the two German Officers and several men surrendered without a firefight.

What I saw next was unbelievable, and the scene could have been in a movie. The two partisans, again arms waving and yelling, literally tore-off the dusty but still polished, leather boots from the captured officers in exchange for their dirty, sorry looking remnants of shoes.

Ted Miyagishima

MARINES FROM THE PHILADELPHIA

In 1944 I was a lowly Ensign in the Gunnery Department of the cruiser Philadelphia (CL41) in the Mediterranean, but my story is about the detachment of Marines who were assigned to our ship, whose battle stations were in turret 3, and who never expected to come closer to German soldiers than five miles off shore.

However, there came a time during the invasion of Southern France when they had the opportunity to land as a unit and capture 850 Germans. Well, not exactly "capture" but rather, accept their surrender. These were the garrisons of three fortified islands guarding the approaches to Marseilles, all of whom refused to surrender to anyone other than Americans.

The three islands were Ratonneau, Pomeques and Chateau D'If (of The Count of Monte Cristo fame.). Our "landing force" went ashore in the small harbor of Frioul. The Germans were taken directly to a transport and so I saw only a few who were brought aboard for interrogation by Admiral Davidson's staff.

Days later our Marines went ashore again to lead the victory parade along the principal avenue of Toulon with Lieutenant Edwards and Lieutenant Schlichte in command. I was there to see their "ticker-tape" welcome, which was just a prelude to the roar of rejoicing when the landing force of free-French sailors came in sight following the Americans.

Bill Gum

SHE WAS NO GODIVA

It was a beautiful May morning in sunny Italy. The year was 1945 and we finally had the German Army marching backwards dragging with them their remnants of armor.

Passing through a once well established town, I saw a small crowd of citizens gathered in the town square. There was a great deal of arm waving, shouting and gesticulating. They were all bunched around a "lady" and they were tearing away at her clothes. When she was down to her "charms", they immediately started "chopping" away at her hair. What I saw was the most terrible case of dandruff one can ever imagine. As they kept yelling and clipping away, all I could see was a snowstorm of dandruff floating around her head like a large radiant halo.

Her crime was that she was a collaborator for she had "bedded down" with the enemy. All I can remember of that eventful day in May is seeing a defiant, shoeless lady marching out of town with a snow flurry of dandruff trailing behind her.

Ted Miyagishima

SUICIDE PRECAUTIONS

Despite elaborate preventative precautions during the Nuremberg war trials, Goering escaped hanging by using a cyanide capsule 2 hours before his scheduled execution.

Accordingly during the Japanese war crimes trials, a security officer was appointed whose primary duty was to use his imagination to counter any such attempts by Tojo or any of the 25 Class A prisoners.

A Japanese military suicide manual had many suggestions, but none exceeded one brought to me by our security officer for a solution. The Class A prisoners were each allowed to receive typed suggestions from their defense lawyer under the watchful eye of a guard.

“What if the lawyer soaked the paper in a cyanide solution and dried it before typing? Could Tojo soak the paper in water from the bathing tub in the cell block and consume enough cyanide to kill himself?”

I told him that this would require a quantitative analysis chemical study beyond our lab's capability but he insisted that he be provided with a CYA answer. Accordingly I took the problem to the 8th Army laboratory. The major in charge took one look at the request and said “I don't have time for that; give me your paper, I'll sign that it can't be done.”

John Kersten

"MELICAN NO LIKE FLIED LICE"

My husband, Jim Gordon was in the 3474th Bombardment Squadron. I learned of Jim's dislike of rice after we were married and the reason.

He described the meals he was served when he was a aircraft mechanic in the Army serving in Kung Ming, China. It was the late 1930's and early 1940s when China and Japan were at war the men were guests of the Chinese Government and were fed and housed by them.

The meals consisted of rice (I believe twice a day). It was sort of a gray color and occasionally a stale egg was added or a non-descript gravy.

When they could beg a can from pilots who landed there of spam or even English "Bully Beef" it was a real treat. Jim claimed he was the only one who gained weight at O.C.S. Those who have attended OCS would understand. He used to stuff food under his shirt and eat it later.

Bee Gordon

JEEP BLACK-OUT LIGHTS

Small rectangles of light on the front of Army vehicles were to show an object in front permitting a stop from 15 miles per hour. As usual after our B-29 missions, our airbase went under a "two-ball alert" from the native Chinese "bamboo circuit" warning system. I was checking my maintenance men at the parked B-29s along the far taxiway when we went to a "four-ball alert" signifying immediate enemy bomber attack. Off went my parking lights and on went the black-out lights as I drove. Then, in front of me and approaching fast I saw two tiny pinpoints of light getting bigger. I whirled the wheel to my left and skidded in that way. Amazingly, the oncoming jeep also went to his left with a skidding turn. We swished past each other within five feet and I recognized the men. They were from a secretive and visiting heavily-modified and antenna-loaded B-24 Liberator operated by the OSS which we could not go near. I continued with my duties now bathed in a sweat as I thought about the close call.

Cletus Nelson

MY FAVORITE SERGEANT

When I was a young 2nd Lt. (& I was a 2nd Lt. forever) I had the very good fortune to have had two wonderful platoon sergeants. One was with me the day we both saw our first shots fired in anger.

However probably the platoon Sgt who impressed most was a real old timer, when I was in an ordinary straight leg anti anti-aircraft unit when the Army had lost me (so what else is new?) between airborne assignments. Sgt. Ruffman was a WWI veteran about my father's age, & like my father, fighting his second World War. He was an old Seacoast Artilleryman (where I got my early training) & had been at Corregidor, Panama & Ft Scott in San Francisco. After the battle of Singapore, someone realized that Coast Artillery was obsolete, & proceeded to make anti-aircraft artillerymen out of all the old Seacoast men. Sgt. Ruffman knew the Army. He knew men, he knew officers & he knew how to solve all the personnel problems which never end.

Sgt. Ruffman would put his hand on my shoulder and say "Lt, I would do it this way, or don't be too hard on PFC Smith, his wife is having a baby 5,000 miles away, or present it to the Captain this way & he'll probably go along. I'm sure he didn't teach me all he knew, but he sure tried.

In the pre-dawn hours (England December 1943) he would report "all present or accounted for Sir." The rest of the time He called me Son.

Stephen Myers

MOMENTS NOT FORGOTTEN

Twenty-three very short-short stories pulled from my memories.

The day I first soloed in a plane.

"NIGHT LOCAL" during cadet flight training at night.

Seeing my first plane crash (Basic Training) and a cadet killed.

Graduating from flight training as a cadet and receiving my WINGS as a pilot and my GOLD BAR as a 2nd Lt. in the Air Force.

Dozing off at the controls of a B-24 and suddenly coming awake with the plane diving towards the ground high in the Rockies!

Seeing my first enemy fighter (Jap Zero) coming in at 12 o'clock high. (He could have been after the flight a mile away but I would have sworn he was looking me right in the eye!)

Our flight leader going down with his tail chewed off by the slot man and almost taking us (his right wingman) with him.

Taking a shower in the rain on a Pacific island and waiting for the next thunderstorm to come by to rinse the soap off.

"Coming to" the "morning after" under a palm tree...a falling coconut would have bashed my brains out!

Waiting in line for takeoff on the longest B-24 strike against the oil refineries of Balikpapan, Borneo and watching another heavily laden B-24 taking off, stalling out, crashing and exploding.

Standing in the bomb-bay of our B-24 waiting to break thru the cloud cover and bail out after being shot up over Borneo. Fortunately, as we did break through, there in front of us was an advance fighter strip that could be used as for emergency landings by bombers. After landing, the dipstick showed the gas tanks empty!

Losing an engine and falling out of formation but nursing the B-24 along all by ourselves in order to hit the target and not lose credit for a mission.

Skimming the waves and waving to the natives living in huts built on stilts out over the water.

(continued)

Moments Not Forgotten

Flying through a thunderstorm over the Phillipines and being lifted several thousand feet and turned 180 degrees in a matter of seconds!

During the last month or so of my combat tour, flying as command pilot and nursemaid to new green crews going on their first mission.

Heading back to our home base and flying alone after a long mission and having the crew chief of the new replacement crew who was flying his first mission come to tell me he had never flown in this latest model B-24 and "Did I know how to transfer fuel from the auxiliary tanks in the bomb bay?" I told he and his pilot to get their asses back to the bomb bay and neither one to come back til they had figured it out!

Making a 3-engine takeoff in a B-24 off a short strip in New Guinea with a Navigator as Co-pilot. I've never heard of such a feat.

Enjoying a 2 week "cruise" on the Liberty ship bringing me home from the Pacific after finishing my combat missions.

My first night in San Francisco as an Air Force Captain after arriving stateside, and, having the maitre-de at the "Top-of-the-Mark" make me prove that I was old enough to drink!

Three nights before being sent to Germany meeting the Air Force nurse in Greensboro, N. Carolina who was to become my wife 3 days after my return months later.

Our first child, a girl, to be followed over the years by 4 boys.

Receiving orders to return to active duty after 5 years of TB hospitalization and temporary Disability Retirement.

Over 40 years later seeing old WWII buddies of the 5th Bomb Gp., 13th Air Force. Being again with those crew members I had flown combat with was something very special...there were none better.

Bruce R. Heilman, LTC USAF Ret.

"THEY WILL NEVER FORGET"

My husband, Bud Holderness, flew 142 missions as a "JUG" P-47 pilot, in Europe. At a squadron reunion in Dole, France, some forty years later, a young Frenchman attended and recalled those war years when he was just a youngster. This is what he told the men – "There are events in life one never forgets. I shall always think with deep respect and gratitude of you valiant young men who crossed the seas to fight and return to us the liberty we had been deprived of for four years. I might have been only a boy then, but I was fully aware of what your presence and efforts meant for France. Oh, how we youngsters gave our hearts to you guys and your beautiful machines. Did you know that we helped wash your windshields, load your guns, even anchor those bombs under your wings? Did you know that hidden on the river banks, we watched you take off in those grand formations? You never knew how ardently we prayed that you would all come back, and how many tears we shed when we realized some were missing on your return. Thank you for coming back to France. Thank you for the opportunity to let you know that we shall never forget."

Jan Holderness in memory of her husband.

GOURMET DELIGHTS OF WWII

After a few days of combat situations, survival instincts kick-in and you begin to wonder if you are becoming more like an animal. My senses like "sight", "hearing", and especially "smell" became extremely acute. For example I knew that the enemy had passed through a particular forested area. They left behind a very faint but recognizable odor of fish. Later I learned that the German soldiers fighting on the Italian front had been surviving exclusively on canned fish. Could that have been the reason?

There was one sense faculty that completely abandoned me. Thankfully, it was the sense of "taste". In some perverse way, I was enjoying eating "K-Rations". Maybe, I knew that starvation was the alternative. Among the fine selections of K-Rations, by far the worst was the special breakfast packet. It contained the "never to be forgotten" Ham & Eggs. Imagine, Ham and Eggs coming in a tiny olive drab can? When opened, the top had a jelly-like substance that shimmered in the early morning glow. Hungrily digging deeper with whatever tool you had handy, you reach the "piece de resistance" in all of its glorious shades of green. Unfortunately, I am color blind so I wasn't able to fully appreciate the indescribable hues found in every can.

I strongly believe that the brave soul who had the audacity to create this colorful concoction should have been awarded the ultimate medal for excellence, and then taken aside and shot. Just jiving, of course!

Ted Miyagishima