

Oral History and Documents

War Diary by Preston P. Clark, Jr.

Tail Gunner/Right Waist Gunner
410th and 333rd Bomb Squadron
94th Bomb Group (Heavy)

That's The Way It Was Fortress Leading Lady and Her Crew

Preston P. Clark, Jr.

PREFACE

These are pages from a gunner's diary. They were written at a U.S. Air Force base in England during the spring, summer and fall of 1944. The story actually began in November, 1943 when ten Americans in their teens and 20's, trained in various specialties of aerial warfare as practiced on heavy bombers, were brought together as a combat crew for training at Dalhart Army Air Base, Dalhart, Texas.

Unfortunately, the diary does not date back to those days at Dalhart. Let it suffice to say that it was snowing cats and dogs when we got there, we were snowbound on Christmas day, and we saw nothing but snow all the way to Nebraska when we flew away in February.

At the Point of Embarkation, Kearney, Nebraska, they gave us a new crew number - 165 - another clothing check and several more health, security and survival lectures. It was blowing up a snow storm when we taxied out and took off from the Kearney strip headed for New England. We called at Grenier Field, N.H. and Presque Isle, Maine, then hopped up to Goose Bay, Labrador, across to Iceland, and then over to Prestwick, Scotland.

We left our airplane at Prestwick and rode an English train down to a U.S. Air Force staging base, "somewhere in England." The whole

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crossing from Dalhart to England covered only about a week even with the time lost eating, sleeping and briefing at the various way stations.

The enlisted men were sent from the staging base to The Wash, over on the southeast coast, for a bit of brushing up on 50-caliber machine gun marksmanship. We never did find out what the officers were doing those two weeks, but general consensus was that they were holed up in some swank London boarding house, enjoying their last, fast-fading days as non-combatants.

We finally got a reprieve from The Wash and headed south again, arriving some five hours after at the typical little English town of Bury St. Edmunds. The picturesque hamlet got its name from the boy King of East Anglia. Name of the town was switched from Beodericsworth ("full of happiness and prosperity") to St. Edmund's Bury when St. Ed was laid to rest there in 807 A.D.

The officers must have grown tired of London, or wherever they'd been. We found them awaiting our arrival at the base, some six miles or so out of Bury, at a little wide place in the road called "Rougham."

We found that we had become Crew 69 of the 410th Bombardment Squadron, 94th Bombardment Group (Heavy). We were assigned bunk space in one of the Nissen huts, which looked like giant oil drums cut in half down the middle with the oval side up. The 94th was scattered about over some eight or ten square miles of thickly wooded southern England. We thought at first we'd landed in the middle of Sherwood Forest. It was a beautiful place, at its freshest and greenest when we arrived.

We didn't have much time to enjoy the scenery. They put us right to work. We got there in March, just when the cold days of English winter were fading into the good-flying weather days of spring. We arrived about the time they started sending the heavies over in lots of 800 to 1,000, with an equal number of fighters to go along for protection. Every time the weather was clear enough they were sending out a maximum effort - all the ships they could put into the air. The idea was to destroy German resources and to weaken the enemy in every way possible so that the invasion of the Continent, which came four months after our crew reached England, would have the best possible chance for success.

We started out flying an old olive drab-colored Fortress named "The Erie Ferry." It was number 653. Then we flew a couple in number 180, "The Eagle's Wrath," before we were assigned an airplane of our

own. They gave us a shiny silver new B-170. It was the pride of the U.S. Air Force (notwithstanding opinions of the average B-24 crew member to the contrary) and they called it the Flying Fortress because it fairly bristled with 50-caliber machine guns - 12 of them. The Fortress could carry 10 tons of bombs and had a range of better than 3,500 miles. Her wing span was 103 feet 9 inches; her height 19 feet 1 inch; and she measured 74 feet 9 inches from nose to tail. Loaded, she weighed 65,000 pounds, and empty approximately 35,000. She got the tremendous power to carry all that weight from four 9-cylinder, 1,200 horsepower Wright Cyclone engines (never let an airplane engine be called a motor). Her top speed was 300 miles per hour; she cruised at about 225 most of the time.

When we started trying to choose a name for the new 17 it was about as big a problem as naming a new baby. We surveyed the ships around us and noted these names: Tuff Eddie, Idiot's Delight, Airborn Spare, Mighty Warrior (Gagon 's crew), The Gimp (Stopulos' crew in the 94th), Dutchess, Frenese I and II, Gremlin, The Shady Lady, Fortress McHenry, Morgan's Raiders, My Asam Dragon, The Rebel Queen, Mission Mistress, Flak Buster, Rosie, Joker, St. Christopher's Kids, Friday 13th, The Latest Rumor (Baytos' crew in the 100th), Nick's Place, Shack Bunny (385th), Puddin, The Better Half and Old Hound Dog.

By the time we got a ship of our own, we had been shifted to another squadron as a Pathfinder (lead) crew. That's what really suggested the name we chose for our new ship, number 668. We christened her the "Leading Lady," and had the name painted on both sides of her nose in script two feet high. We flew her on a lot of rugged raids and she took a lot of battle damage, but she was still operational when we left England. Last we heard of her they said she'd gotten too old to lead the way so they took the Mickey (radar) equipment out of her and made her a wing ship in the 385th Bomb Group. After the Lady had given up the best flying hours of her life and sustained terrific battle damage, they had to stick her back in the rear end of a strange squadron in a strange group. With "Leading Lady" painted on her nose in letters two feet high.

One more paragraph of preface, and then the diary. The members of the crew about which the material was written were:

V. Allan Wertsch, pilot, Delevan, Illinois.
 Ralph S. Taylor, co-pilot, Grande Lodge, Michigan .
 Richard P. Getz, navigator, San Diego.
 Mari J. Counihan, bombardier, Iron River, Michigan.
 John S. Stepanski, Jr., Mickey navigator, Detroit.
 Fred , Arthur Muehler, engineer and top turret gunner,
 Pacific, Missouri.
 Cecil R. Mahathey, assistant engineer and left waist gunner;
 Winston-Salem, N.C .
 Lloyd Elliott, radio operator-gunner, Bakersfield, California.
 Preston P. Clark, Jr., gunner, Abilene, Texas.

In addition to these there was a lad named Alfred Beacom, a Bostonian, who was a member of the original crew, from Dalhart until about the time we reached England. He was replaced by a Polish boy named Ted Kosinski, who was with us from Wash days until we became a lead crew. Then there was a kid from Staten Island on the original crew whose name was Lawrence Dunn. We never called him anything but Larry. He was the ball turret gunner and stayed with us till we became a lead crew and got the radar hat in place of the ball turret.

The diary is reproduced on the following pages, just as it was first written. It is the mission-by-mission account of the Operational Tour of the "Leading Lady," a great airplane, and of the crew who flew her, a great bunch of guys.

The Thirty-Two Missions

Easter Sunday, April 9, 1944
 MISSION 1. Warnemünde, Germany

On April 9, 1944, the nation observed its third wartime Easter. For many U.S. servicemen, it was a day of war, rather than one devoted to the remembrance of Christ.

On Easter Sunday, 1944, we flew our first combat mission as Crew 69 of the 94th heavy bombardment group, U.S. Eighth Air Force.

From a base near Bury St. Edmunds in West Suffolk, southern England, we took off before dawn for a daylight raid on five targets in northern Germany and Poland. In one of the deepest penetrations made

by the 8th Air force up to that time, an estimated 500 to 750 American B-17 Flying Fortresses and B-24 Liberators with nearly 1,000 escorting fighter planes made a wide sweep over the Baltic Sea.

The Forts and Liberators bombed aircraft factories in Posen, Poland and four other cities north and northeast of Berlin. Pilots or the escorting Mustang, Lightning and Thunderbolt fighter planes reportedly shot down 20 Nazi planes in an air battle and destroyed others on the ground at German airfields.

For Crew 69 it was a nine-hour mission, four hours on oxygen at 25,000 feet, five hours over enemy territory. We got some close flak over the target - an aircraft factory at Warnemünde - but some of the more experienced fliers termed it "just medium."

We had good fighter escort all the way and saw no enemy fighter planes. Other bomb groups which made the deeper penetrations to Posen, Poland; Gdynia, the Polish port near Danzig; and Marienburg told of fierce opposition in some instances and placed the number of enemy interceptors at about 600 planes.

Posen, about 150 miles east of Berlin, was the site of large manufacturing plants for Focke-Wulf fighter planes, relocated there from German cities to escape destruction. German military men had claimed the city was out of reach of allied bombers. It had never been attacked.

A communique issued by Lieut. Gen. Carl A. Spaatz' Strategic Air Forces headquarters said that Focke-Wulf plants in all five of the target cities were bombed in clear weather. The plants were described as interrelated factories that constituted a vital production complex for single engined fighters of the Luftwaffe.

To reach their targets the American bombers crossed and re-crossed the most heavily defended parts of Germany and proved that hardly an acre of Hitler's fortress was safe from daylight bombing raids.

After nine hours in the air, Crew 69 landed back at its base in England with one mission completed and 31 more to go. The United States that day lost 31 heavy bombers and eight fighters. Some 318 American fliers were dead or missing in action. Many others were wounded.

We had no way of knowing how many Germans were dead or injured because of the bombings. That was Easter Sunday, 1944.

April 10. MISSION 2. Diest-Schafften, Belgium

This was a lot easier than the first one, a six-hour flight. We were only over enemy territory about two and one-half hours. The overcast caused us to miss the primary target and we unloaded on the secondary, an aircraft assembly plant. Flak was light. We were briefed for 33 guns at the target but received no battle damage to "The Erie Ferry."

We encountered no fighter opposition, had very good fighter escort and saw no ships go down.

April 11. MISSION 3. Stettin, Germany

Today we had it rough. Our primary target was Posen, Poland. We missed it and hit the secondary, an aircraft assembly plant in Stettin, northeast Germany.

The fighter support was inadequate, with no help from the Danish coast to the target and back to the Danish coast. Just before bombs away we were attacked by 12 M.E. 110's. They made two frontal passes, sweeping under our formation. They did not knock down any of the ships in our group but a plane went down from the group directly behind us.

Flak was heavy over the target - 60 guns - but our ship received no battle damage. We were flying zero-one-three, one of the 332nd squadron's ships.

As we entered Germany one of our Forts aborted for Sweden with number one and number two engines knocked out by coastal flak.

On the way out Vaughn's ship went down. He just made the Danish coast but two of his boys bailed out over the Baltic Sea. A fire was seen in the middle of the ship.

Donald Cash's crew that we trained with at Dalhart, went down on this one, we learned a few days later. They came across and started flying the same time we did, so it must have been one of their first five raids. On that crew were Lt. John E. Harris, pilot; Lt. Milton Y. Wilson, co-pilot; Flight Officer John Marchetti, navigator; Lt. Jim B. Goodner, Jr., bombardier; S/Sgt. Thomas O. Obechina, engineer; S/Sgt. Clinton M. Gill, radio operator-gunner; Sgt. Edward A. Braun, gunner; Sgt.

Jennings A. Ball, gunner; Sgt. Roger W. Fuller, gunner: and Sgt. Donald L Cash, gunner.

Some time later Fred received a clipping from his folks, taken from the PekinTimes (Illinois), concerning this crew, this raid and this war. The clipping carried a two-column picture of Cash's crew, taken at Dalhart, and a sort of editorial which read:

*Sometimes I wonder if we appreciate the SIZE of the battle that is
NOW going on over Europe.
I mean the air war.
The world was shocked by Tarawa.
Worst death toll in Marine history.
Even a book has been written about it.
Say - a battle as costly as Tarawa is going on nearly every day in
the air over Europe.
See that picture above?
Take a good look at the man standing on the right hand end of the
line.
He's a Pekin boy, just 21.
Sgt. Roger Fuller. .
Last week. his parents, Mr. and Mrs. Dwight C. Fuller, 1220
Charlotte Street, got word that he had been "missing in action
since April 11."
We checked up in back copies of the Times and found that 61
bombers had been lost by the U.S. Air Force alone that day.*

April 12. MISSION 4. Augsburg, Germany

This was to be a tough one but the mission was abandoned just after we got over France, because of bad weather and low thick clouds.

We went to bed thinking we would get credit for the mission. When we went down to the operations shack the next morning, however, there was a notice on the bulletin board: "No credit for mission of 4-12-44." Third Division Head quarters had rescinded the credit.

But on April 16, four days later, another order came through giving us credit for the mission after all. We were very glad to hear this.

April 13. A Close Call For Crew 69

The thirteenth was an unlucky, or in another sense, a very lucky day for Crew 69. On the way to Augsburg again, we got hit by three 50-caliber machine gun bullets. Some guy in another 17 in the formation was a touch careless with his test firing. We always test fire the guns soon after leaving England.

One of the slugs came through the nose of 493, barely missing Counihan and ripping through Getz' pant leg, grazing the skin.

Another bullet knocked out a quarter of the ship's oxygen supply.

The third was a tracer bullet. It started a fire in the wing, which put itself out a little later. If the tracer had been the one which tore into the oxygen system we might have blown up, they said.

We aborted from about half way across the Channel, therefore received no credit for the raid. McMeekin's crew, who shares Hut A with us, claims that Lt. Wertsch is bad luck for their ship, 493. He flew his first mission in it as Mac's co-pilot with Mahathey flying left waist. They caught a lot of flak and lost the hydraulic system. It was in the hangar for a couple of weeks and then we happened to get it the day it came out. We really fixed it up good this time. Since the left wing cannot be replaced they have decided to junk the ship. A lucky day for Getz and Crew 69.

The boys from the PRO - Public Relations Office - took Getz' picture with his pant leg ripped open to show what a close call he had. The picture appeared in lots of stateside newspapers, especially in sunny Cal. The caption they wrote for the picture was dramatic as hell, even if it didn't pay a great deal of attention to humdrum facts. The caption read "... A bullet from a German fighter plane cut the leg of his trousers and heated flying suit and put a slight bump and scratch on his leg."

April 16. McMeekin's Crew Goes Down

Everything went right today for Crew 69, but the same cannot be said for some of the other guys.

A practice mission for the morning was scrubbed. At noon we learned that we had been given credit for the mission of 4-12-44. This meant the difference in making staff by May 1 for Ted and Cecil.

We left on a 48-hour pass to London at 4:20 p.m. Took a taxi tour, and saw all the crumbly old sights; the bomb holes from the Blitz and lesser, current air raids; and London's streams of humanity, including that flowing through Picadilly Circus.

We returned to the base on the afternoon of the eighteenth, just as the group was staggering back from Berlin.

On April 18, combined operations cost the Eighth Air Force only 19 heavy bombers lost. But of those 19, ten were lost by the 94th, three of which were from the 410th Squadron. They ran into swarms of M.E. 109's and F.W. 190's square over the target, and their fighter escort and fifties weren't enough protection.

Pomerance, McMeekin and Brinkmeyer didn't get back. They carried all of Milio's, Scotty Davis', Darby's, Martin's, Workman's and Curt's clothes and stuff away from the hut before we went to bed.

They were on their twenty-fourth mission with only four to go. Chris, the bombardier, was on his twenty-seventh.

April 19. MISSION 5 Werl, Germany

We were pretty shaken up about losing the ships, especially Mac's, on yesterday's Berlin raid when we took off on this one. It turned out easy, although long. It was about an eight hour mission.

We encountered no fighters and no close flak, and had excellent fighter protection from P-38 Lightnings, P-47 Thunderbolts and P-51 Mustangs. It seems that we always have extra good fighter cover the day after we lose a lot of ships to German fighter attacks.

The country we flew over, at the edge of the Ruhr Valley (flak alley) and through Belgium, was very pretty. This was our Air Medal Mission.

April 20. MISSION 6. Abbeville, France

We had heard about how some guys make a lot of "no ball" missions and how easy they are.

We made one of them today, and although we were over enemy territory for only 20 minutes, it was a rough go. The flak was as close and as thick and as much as we've seen to date.

We left Lt. Getz at home, much to his disapproval, and used U. Kacusuta's tail gunner in the nose. He was a fair fill-in but the crew was not quite the same without the navigator. Intercom trouble almost caused us to have to turn back.

We bombed by squadrons. Bartos' navigator and bombardier suffered minor injuries from flak fragments. Ace, Bartos' right waist gunner and one of our buddies, said it was his closest call yet in 22 raids.

We encountered no enemy fighters and had good fighter cover. We flew over London, the world's largest city, on the way out. Some sight from 18,000 feet.

April 22. MISSION 7. Hamm, Germany

We took off for Target Germany on April 21 but the mission was abandoned before we hit the Channel because of very bad weather over the Continent.

On the twenty second we flew a circle around the Ruhr Valley to rack up our seventh raid. We hit a rail marshalling yard at the edge of the Ruhr. American fighters provided good protection and we saw no bandits. Flak was heavy and our ship, "The Erie Ferry" (now assigned to us) received minor battle damage.

A Fortress in the group just behind us caught fire and exploded - no chutes.

Bartos was hit bad, caught fire, and lost his interphone and oxygen systems. Ace bailed out over Germany along with the left waist gunner, who was on his first mission (Manning's left waist) and the radio operator.

Bartos brought his airplane and the rest of his crew back okay on the deck.

We saw all three chutes open. Anyone would probably have jumped under the circumstances that Ace was under. You can't stay alive very long without any oxygen. We found out that the tail gunner (Shapiro) and the ball gunner became anoxiated, which probably kept them from bailing out. They regained consciousness when Bartos took the ship down on the deck. You can get along without the oxygen masks

anywhere below 10,000 feet. Lt. Manning flew co-pilot for us. Taylor stayed home.

Rodery, Bartos' regular left waist gunner, stayed on the ground, letting the new boy make his first trip with the seasoned crew, which is standard operating procedure. Rodery later finished 30 and stayed in the ETO in order to stay out of the South Pacific. Would he have jumped had he been at Bartos' left waist position today? Quien Sabe?

April 23. Some Air-War Terminology

After two hours sleep we were awakened for an early morning mission. It was scrubbed at 7 o'clock because of bad weather. You have to be wise to the bulletin board lingo to know what is going on around here. "Scrubbed" means marked-off, cancelled. "Two balls" means a 30-minute delay. "Strike" means a 1-hour delay, and "mission scrubbed" generally gets three cheers from the restless crowd. "Ball game today" means we are flying forth to do battle .

"Stand by til 2300 hours" means maybe. A "no ball" target is a very easy mission, sometimes called a milk run.

But the thing we'll probably remember most and longest is the way the C.Q. - charge of quarters - comes stomping in at the midnight hours, turns on all the harsh lights in the hut and bellows like a wild bull: "WERTSCH'S CREW - MUEHLER, ELLIOTT, KOSINSKI, MAHATHEY, CLARK. BRIEFING AT 2:30. BREAKFAST AT 1:30. YOU AWAKE?!?!" Who in the E.T.O. could sleep through that, especially if they are a light sleeper? It was weird and a little nauseating at first, knowing we were going back into the flak again and again and again until we went 30-odd times. Finishing up is a shore dimly seen; in fact, not seen at all. All we can see is the endless expanse of our operational tour. It is a kind of a feeling of futility, with a touch of amazement that we have gotten this far, and hopeless speculation on how much longer the luck will last. We got used to the feeling, however, and now each time the C.Q. rolls us out it is a little easier to go than the time before.

April 24. MISSION 8. Freidrichshafen, Germany

We had another rough one today. A nine-hour mission six and one half hours on oxygen at 23,000 feet, 30 degrees below zero temp, and four and one-half hours over enemy territory.

We flew clear to the Swiss border to bomb a ball bearing works at Freidrichshafen in southwestern Germany.

Lt. Taylor stayed home again and Lt. Miller flew his first mission as our co-pilot. We also took along a photographer, a guy named Hanlon, who was on his seventh mission. The flak at the target was heavy - 90 guns - but we received no close bursts. We didn't run into any German fighters and had excellent cover by P-47's, 38's and 51's. Passed within sight of Brussels on the return trip.

April 25. We Get a New Ship, and a New Job

No ball game today. We caught up on a little much-needed sack time, all except the skeleton crew.

Major Stevenson is grooming Lt. Wertsch and Crew 69 for a group lead job. That is likely to mean a captaincy for the pilot, silver bars for Getz and Counihan and the title of "spare" for Taylor and me. I'd hate to quit flying with Fred, Lloyd, Cecil, Ted, Dunn, Getz, Counihan, Wertsch and Taylor, but they say that spare isn't such a bad deal at all. Everything happens for the best, anyway. We were assigned a new ship today. No name yet.

April 27. MISSION 9. Abbeville, France

The job we did at Abbeville on the twentieth of April wasn't completely satisfactory so they sent us back there again today. We carried 16 500-pound demolition bombs.

The ack-ack was heavy and thick again and Crew 69 had a pretty close call. We caught enough flak to send the ship to the repair depot for a new left wing. There were no fighter attacks and we had ample fighter support.

We took off at 7 o'clock and got back on the ground at 12 noon. Had chow and took off again at 2:30 on our tenth mission. This was the

first "double attack" (in a single day) of the Eighth Air Force of the war. We're expecting them to be frequent occurrences in days to come.

April 27. MISSION 10. Luxemburg Airfield

This was our second raid of April 27. Our primary target was a pilot school and airfield in Luxemburg but 9/10 cloud coverage caused us to miss it, so we unloaded on another airfield on the way home. We carried 36 100-pound fragmentation bombs.

Had we flown the briefed course all the way and hit the primary target we would not have seen any flak at all. But as it turned out we flew right past the flakless primary and then got samples, it seemed, from every ack-ack crew in Luxemburg and Belgium.

The target we hit must have been important because we got a lot of flak there. Then we got into more of the flack bursts as we crossed the coast coming home.

The 447th Bomb Group was leading the wing and it seemed that the lead ship got the whole formation into trouble. As we crossed the coast the flak almost got us and got one of the ships in the 447th. A direct hit on their number two engine sent them into a shallow spiral. The ship was enveloped in flames for about 15 seconds and then blew up. As she blew up we saw about six chutes blossom, seemingly blown open by the explosion. Those men were over the Channel when their chutes opened but they were carried back onto the Belgian coast by the wind. We saw no fighters bearing swastikas - only Thunderbolts and Lightnings.

We got another cluster for the blue and orange Air Medal today.

April 30. A New Squadron

We have not flown a mission since April 27. Missed the one to Cherbourg the twenty-eighth. Big B. on the twenty-ninth and the long one today to some spot in southern Germany. They did not give us the 48-hour pass which we had counted on getting this weekend. We have been transferred to the 333rd Bomb Squadron, which under a new set-up is to be a Pathfinder squadron altogether.

We had to leave Larry Dunn back at the 410th as a spare, since the Pathfinders do not carry ball turrets. They carry radar hats instead.

We will fly group lead every fourth mission the group makes, and deputy group lead on rare occasions. Also, we may be called upon now and then to lead another group.

When we fly deputy group lead I will fly tail gunner and Lt. Taylor will fly co-pilot. On days when we lead the group, Taylor will fly tail and Ted, Mahathey and I will take time about staying on the ground, the two who fly going as waist gunners.

We have a new man on the crew - Lt. John Stepanski, a radar specialist. He is called the Mickey Man. The radar equipment, located in the radio room. just aft of the bomb bay amidships, is called the Mickey set.

The 333rd doesn't seem to be as good an outfit as the 410th was, but we will probably soon get used to the changeover. The crew that was to move out of the hut which we moved into was not able to do so. The supply sergeant moved them out. They went down yesterday on their third raid, the rugged one to Big B. Seems that every time we move into a hut the former tenants get shot down.

May 19. MISSION 11. Berlin, Germany

We figured we would have to go to Big B. sooner or later, but we kept hoping it would be later - say two or three years later. Since we've been lying around and haven't pulled a mission since April 27, it was a blow something like a sharp right in the stomach when we heard the briefing officer say very solemnly "your target for today is the center of the city of Berlin."

We went and we got back. There were quite a few M.E.'s and F.W.'s over the target area, but we brought "603" back almost undamaged.

We saw some ships in other groups go down when German fighters broke through our protecting formations of P-51's and 38's, and we also saw some of the German fighters go down. Our group lost only one ship, which was flying number seven position in our squadron. The tall radar man was riding in this one - the Tech Sergeant. Instead of getting hit by flak or fighters, this one went down when the B-17 just above it dropped one of the 500-pound demolition bombs on its stabilizer. It was a new crew, first raid. What a hell of a way for them to go down.

This was a nine hour mission, three hours over enemy territory and four and one-half hours on oxygen. Lt. Taylor flew as gunnery officer in the tail. It's a hard proposition for a man who's been piloting 17's to just ride along in one as a tail gunner, but the co-pilot seems undisturbed.

Ted has gotten a transfer back to the 410th. I am now the official right waist gunner of Crew 43. We got a new crew number when we transferred to the 333rd.

We are still sweating out our second pass. The pilot made First Lieutenant on May 5. Fred and Lloyd now have two rockers and Cecil and I have made Staff.

May 24. MISSION 12. Berlin, Germany

After this one we came to the conclusion that our crew is officially checked out as group lead for all Berlin raids. We had sack time for four days after our first visit to Big B. while the group made three easy ones. One was to Kiel with Captain Gagon and Company leading the 447th. Then came the day for another Berlin [mission], the time for Wertsch's crew to take to the blue - simultaneously.

Instead of going by way of the Danish Peninsula and the Baltic Sea as we did on the nineteenth, we went in between Hamburg and Kiel and came back out the same route. This trip we didn't see any bandits and had good fighter support all the way. The flak was about the same as on our other Berlin raid, a lot of it as far as the eye could reach in all directions but none close enough to damage our ship. We flew "595" and brought her back with only three small holes in the wings.

Our group took off with 21 ships but we went over the target with only 14. We didn't lose any, they just turned back and scooted home for first one reason and then another, aborting a dangerous practice. There is considerable safety in numbers, and German fighters like nothing better than to spot a 17 hightailing it for home alone.

We led the 94th but salvoed with the wing lead. Had about 6/10 clouds over the target. Lt. Taylor flew the tail and Captain Scarrum flew co-pilot. A ship from the high squadron threw a small scare into us, almost ramming down on top of our ship just before bombs away.

May 26. A Toast To The Host Of Those Who Fly

Here is a poem, written by the keeper of this record more than a month ago, when we had about four missions behind us, a couple of days after McMeekin's crew went down over Berlin.

After yesterday's Berlin raid, following our May 11 flight to Big B. and possibly preceding more of the same, it seems appropriate that the verses should be included at this point. The poem reads:

A toast to the host of those who fly ... To the ones who will live, and to those who die ... To the ones who go down, and to those who come back ... To the ones who fight M.E.'s and sweat out the flak.

A toast to the skipper, the man at the stick ... He keeps her tucked in when the fighters are thick ... To the kid in the stinger, the boys in the waist ... Who've seen buddies go down to the death they have faced.

To the radio man and the engineer ... And the dropper of demos, the bombardier ... To the man who maps and plans the course ... Into whose hands is trusted the mighty force.

The ball turret gunner, the co-pilot too ... Indispensable members of every crew ... A toast at the end to the crew as a whole ... A toast to the teamwork of every soul.

A toast to the host of those who fly ... To the ones who will live, and those who die... Drink a toast, say a prayer for the next of kin ... For your target today is the heart of Berlin.

May 27. MISSION 13. Karlsruhe, Germany

Today we made what most of the boys prefer to call their "12-B" raid, but for us it was lucky 13.

We saw the Alps again, as we did on April 24, the day we went to Friedrichshafen.

The 94th led the wing and we flew deputy lead. There were no clouds over the target, a rail marshalling yard, so we were able to bomb visually. Looked as if we did a good job. The Germans, able to track us visually, also did very well.

We all agreed that we would rather ride out Berlin's flak any day than what we encountered over Karlsruhe. However, we were lucky to get only slightly shot up over Berlin, while others were being shot down.

On today's raid we got 12 sizable holes in "634," including one through the left waist window, which just missed Mahathey, and one through the side of the radio room, which missed Lloyd just enough to scare the fool out of him.

Our group lost no ships. Taylor saw a plane in a wing behind us get a direct hit by AA, just as we crossed the coast going in at Brest, France. We came out between Ostend, Belgium and Dunkirk, France, missing the flak of both cities.

Our fighter support wasn't as good as usual but we luckily did not see any bandits on the whole trip. Major Chambers, fresh from Second Air Force desk duty, flew as our co-pilot to get his fifth mission.

Lt. Taylor flew as tail gunner-observer again but he is now getting credit for co-pilot time even when he flies tail position.

It was about an eight hour mission, five and one-half hours on oxygen, three and one-half hours over enemy land, 23,000 feet altitude and a temperature of minus 20 degrees - very cold for May.

It looks as if we are going to get that pass we've been waiting on for a month and a half now - tomorrow. It will be our second pass, a 72-hour one starting Sunday at 7 p.m. We may have to check the Mickey set in our ship, the "Leading Lady," tomorrow afternoon before we go - T.S. We hate to check it, but we darn sure like for it to work when we need it to steer us out of Germany.

May 31. Gagon's "Mighty Warriors"

We finally did get another pass of 72 hours duration. We went to London, all except Lt Wertsch. There didn't seem to be as much to do this time as there was the first.

I will take some space at this point to mention a few of our close comrades-in-arms - Captain Gagon's crew.

At Dalhart we were Crew 720 and Gagon's bunch was 738 so we knew them pretty well from classes and flying together there. Also, Dunn and Stienhorst and Fred and Mac were old pals from Tech School days. We also bunked with them at Kearney, along with Harris' crew that went down April 11.

After flying away from Kearney we did not see the boys again until April 28, on which day both our crew and theirs were transferred to the 333rd Squadron - they from the 447th Bomb Group and we from the 410th Squadron of the 94th. We were surprised to see them, and even more so when we found that we were to be billeted together in Hut 80. It is a very small war after all.

Gagon's crew named their ship the "Mighty Warrior."

Hut 80 is a gunner's madhouse. We get along swell and have a lot of fun horsing around, playing six-pence limit poker, volleyball, sabotaging each other's sacks, going to movies together, making toasted cheese sandwiches late at night with stuff borrowed from the messhall, and dreaming up other activities designed to reduce the old E.T.O. boredom. The officers' hut is about 500 yards away, through the trees.

June 2. MISSION 14. Pas De Calais, France

We were surprised to learn at this morning's briefing that we, a Pathfinder crew, would only be over enemy territory for ten minutes on this one. The entire Eighth Air Force went to the coast of France to pound the invasion coast and blow up as many of the Germans big guns as possible. We went to the French coastal town of Pas De Calais, pronounced "Paddy Kalay" by local airmen.

We led the 94th's B Group in ship 668, the "Lady," and were to bomb by PFF - radar. As bad luck would have it, however, our Mickey set went kablooey and since there was a 10/10 layer of clouds blanketing the coast line preventing us from bombing by "GEE" [a radio navigation system] or visually, we brought our high explosives back to the base.

We saw very little flak, none close. No enemy planes. We were afraid we wouldn't get credit for this one, it was such a milk run, but we did.

As soon as we landed they gassed and loaded the ships again for another stab late in the afternoon. Same target, the French coast.

Gagon's crew flew deputy leap with the 385th. Kilpatrick stayed home. We took Major Chambers again and also captain Hauk as observer. Lt. Taylor may transfer back to the 410th so he can fly the rest of his raids in the co-pilot's seat, instead of the tail end of a Fortress.

Talk of an invasion of France gets stronger as the days pass, over here and in the papers and reports that reach us from the states. To

the folks back home the invasion of the Continent seems imminent and inevitable, but some of the guys in the E.T.O. have been sweating it out for so long they're beginning to wonder whether such an invasion is actually going to come off at all.

Today the Eighth Air Force concentrated all its striking power in a two-mission assault on the big guns along the French coast. This afternoon a large force of C-47's, towing gliders, flew over our base. A few days ago in London we saw quite a lot of paratroopers and airborne infantry. Now, all overnight passes for all G. I.'s and officers have been cancelled. Indications all point toward an invasion all right.

June 3. An Abortion

Today we were briefed to bomb Pas De Calais again, and there we went. That is, we went to within ten miles of the target. Then we pulled out and came home 30 minutes ahead of the others. Abortion Lead Ship, we were.

Gagon and crew were briefed to do the same as we, but they were luckier. Their lead ship had Mickey trouble and turned back and they took over the lead. Another milk delivery - no flak, no fighters.

Winging over the Thames River at 10,000 feet today we were aware of a big increase in the number of naval vessels thereon. Also, the Eighth Air Force made another all-out assault today on the invasion coast. Looks as if things are heating up.

June 4. MISSION 15. Pas De Calais, France

Today we led the 100th Bomb Group to the invasion coast for another easy "no ball" mission. Our target was a battery of heavy coastal guns above Boulogne.

We were to bomb by PFF but our Mickey set went haywire again just before the LP. Nevertheless, we went on in to the target on our "G" set and Counihan bombed visually through 8/10 clouds. We were only over the coast about ten minutes and encountered no enemy fighters and only meager flak. A major from the 100th flew as observer and didn't make too good an impression. Bitched about the bombing or something.

June 5. MISSION 16. Boulogne, France

On this one we flew deputy lead for the 94th. We were briefed to hit a "no ball" airfield in northern France, on a trip that would keep us over enemy territory for only 45 minutes. But 10/10 clouds prevented visual bombing so we came back across the Channel, and using Beachy Head as I.P. we hit the invasion coast again, just above Boulogne near the Sea.

We were over enemy territory about ten minutes and didn't catch even a single burst of flak. No fighter opposition. If we keep getting targets like this we may finish 30 yet. Someone jumped from another ship over the Channel for no apparent reason. One chute. Taylor flew co-pilot and Lt. Koener flew as tail gunner-observer.

This was the fourth day in a row we've pounded the French coast. We got a good look at the coastline from 24,000 feet. All we could see was bomb craters everywhere.

We read in the Stars and Stripes today that there was a false report sent to the states by a British broadcasting station yesterday saying that the invasion of France was under way.

Tonight everyone on the field is restricted to base. If there is going to be any invasion of the French coast, it will no doubt be very soon.

D DAY, June 6. MISSION 17. Caen, France

"MUEHLER, ELLIOTT, MAHATHEY AND CLARK
BREAKFAST AT 11:15, BRIEFING AT 12. THE TRUCKS ARE
WAITING."

It was late on June 5, eve of the invasion, when we were roused out of our bunks by these loud-shouted words of the C.Q. We'd heard them often before - the same words the same way - but never quite this early before mission time. We'd never before had a midnight briefing.

Overhead we could hear the constant drone of aircraft, and there was a light pattering rain on the roof of Hut 80. It was cold midnight, and it was tense, and there was a lot of running about and nervous excitement. The air was "charged" as they say. There were other noises too- racing jeeps, squealing brakes and the whispering, fast-talking, grim

voices of men around us. Someone said "this is it" and someone else said "yeah, today's the day." There was warm water in the wash room.

Fred, Cecil and I were worried about Lloyd, who was last seen at 11 having a couple at the N.C.O. Club. None of us expected to be rolled out before 2:30 at the earliest. And there we were eating the powdered eggs at half past 11.

Pushing on to Ops we found that Elliott had showed up at briefing in his Class A uniform. He was probably the best dressed enlisted man on today's mission.

Our ship already had its guns mounted, which was another new twist. We always clean and mount the guns ourselves, for every mission. We went to the 333rd equipment room and got our gear and went out to the ship. Elliott came out about 30 minutes later and gave us the word. We were to takeoff at 3:00 a.m., and blast the invasion coast at 7:15 at Caen, France. The first invasion troops were to hit the beach at 7:25, Paratroopers were already dropped and dug in behind the German coastal defense area, Lloyd said.

It was 1 o'clock on the morning of June 6th that we heard the invasion word. We wondered what our folks back home were doing as darkness fell on Illinois, Texas and California. It was still early the night of June 5 back there. We felt awe inspired and maybe a bit pompous knowing that we were among the small segment of the earth's people who knew right at that moment that the great invasion was being thrown at Adolph Hitler's Atlantic Wall, at least I did.

Instead of carrying an officer as observer in the tail we took along a spare gunner named Smith. He flew right waist and I rode the stinger.

We took off at 0300 hours, assembled quickly in the darkness and left the English coast at 0620 hours. Although we had very little practice in night formation flying, our pilots got the formations together real well. The sky was lit up like a Fourth of July fireworks show with formation lights, field lights, flares, aldis lamps and twinkling stars.

We were expecting to get a look at the big push but our vision was stymied by 10/10 clouds. We had ringside seats at 11,000 feet and couldn't see a thing but snowy white clouds below us. No fighters, no flak. Every gun and every plane the Germans have was brought to bear on the Allied troops that hit the beaches this historic bloody morning.

The Order of the Day from Five-Star Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower, Supreme Commander of the Allied Expeditionary Force, was distributed to assault elements after their embarkation and read to all other troops by their commanders. It was a masterpiece of morale boosting and exclamation points, aimed at filling the troops with enough self-confidence to get them out of the barges onto the beaches. It read:

Soldiers, sailors and airmen of the Allied Expeditionary Force!

You are about to embark upon the great crusade, toward which we have striven these many months. The eyes of the world are upon you. The hopes and prayers of liberty-loving people everywhere march with you.

In company with our brave allies and brothers in arms on other fronts, you will bring about the destruction of the German war machine, the elimination of Nazi tyranny over the oppressed peoples of Europe, and security for ourselves in a free world.

Your task will not be an easy one. Your enemy is well trained, well equipped and battle hardened. He will fight savagely.

But this is the year 1944! Much has happened since the Nazi triumphs of 1940-41. The United Nations have inflicted upon the Germans great defeats in open battle, man to man. Our air offensive has seriously reduced their strength in the air and their capacity to wage war on the ground.

Our home fronts have given us an overwhelming superiority in weapons and munitions of war, and placed at our disposal great reserves of trained fighting men. The tide has turned! The free men of the world are marching together to victory!

I have full confidence in your courage, devotion to duty and skill in battle. We will accept nothing less than full victory!

Good luck! And let us beseech the blessing of Almighty God upon this great and noble undertaking."

Back home, President Franklin D. Roosevelt led the nation in prayer. In Abilene a community-wide prayer service was held at the First Baptist Church at 9 o'clock on the evening of D Day, with a radio installed so the assembly could join with the President. Text of the

prayer, printed in probably every stateside newspaper, included the following paragraphs:

Almighty God: Our sons, pride of our nation, this day have set upon a mighty endeavor, a struggle to preserve our Republic, our religion and our civilization, and to set free a suffering humanity...

These men are lately drawn from the ways of peace. They fight to end conquest. They fight to liberate. They fight to let justice arise; for tolerance and good will among all Thy people. They yearn but for the end of battle, for their return to the haven of home.

Some will never return. Embrace these, Father, and receive them, Thy heroic servants, into Thy kingdom ...

With Thy blessing, we shall prevail over the unholy forces of our enemy. Help us to conquer the apostles of greed and racial arrogancies. Lead us to the saving of our country, with our sister nations into a world unity that will spell a sure peace - a peace invulnerable to the schemings of unworthy men. And a peace that will let all men live in freedom, reaping the just rewards of their honest toil.

Thy will be done, Almighty God. Amen!

June 8. A Word About Pathfinders

The invasion, now in its third day, is going strong but we are pretty much in the dark as to how things look for our side. According to the Express, the Daily Mail and other English newspapers it seems that the British Army, Royal Navy and RAF are fighting bloody, courageous, victorious battles - and the Americans are also taking part.

We had crash alarms - air raid alerts - throughout the night just past and this morning we heard some washroom rumors about German aircraft coming over and shooting up the surrounding area. For the past three weeks all personnel on the base have been under orders to carry a weapon. Most of the ground boys are toting carbines or M-1's. Most of the combat crewmen have 45's. We have been warned to be on the lookout for attempts, especially by airborne troops, at counter-invasion.

So much for the invasion. Here are a few notes on PFF, which means Pathfinder Force and applies to airplanes that can find their way by radar navigation when the earth is hidden by clouds.

Back in April Major Stevenson, C.O. of the 410th Squadron, was casting his eye about for a squadron lead crew to replace Koval's crew which was about to finish up. He picked our crew.

About the same time, G.H.Q. was making changes in the Eighth Air Force Bomber Command. They called upon the 410th to transfer its next squadron lead crew to the 333rd to fly as a Pathfinder.

Since we had just put in ten missions in the past 18 days, the prospect of a four-week layoff was as welcome as a warm day in December. We moved over to the 333rd, lost Larry and Ted and added a Mickey man, Lt. John Stepanski. The PFF radar equipment is referred to as the Mickey set and the operator as the Mickey Man.

Stepanski started out as a navigator and had nine missions in when he was pulled off his crew and sent to bone up on the new radar navigation equipment and technique.

From April 27 to May 19 we didn't fly a single combat mission. We missed some tough ones, including the one that came back from Czechoslovakia all shot up to hell. We flew a practice mission almost every day, checking the Mickey set and practicing flying lead position. A lot of times though, Cecil and I stayed home - when they took only a skeleton crew. Fred and Lloyd didn't like this too much because they were always part of the skeleton.

On May 19 we flew our first Pathfinder mission to Berlin, and on May 24 our second to the same city.

Since we'd understood that Pathfinders would fly only on the long hauls, and since we hadn't had a pass for six weeks, we were pretty much teed off. But when the invasion drew near we started leading the Forts to the French coast and got in four easy missions in a row, which we considered fair compensation.

Everyone says we are gonnors as a lead crew because the Germans always aim their 88's at the lead ship and Jerry fighters are always out to get Pathfinder planes. A PFF ship is as easy to spot straggling home solo as it is at the spear head of an air wing. The radar hat is a dead giveaway. The hat is a large white sack-like object which protrudes from the ship's belly in place of the ball turret. It sticks out like a sore thumb wrapped with white gauze. And having a radar hat instead of a Sperry lower ball turret with twin 50's doesn't add any to our firepower protection from belly attacks by German fighters.

The Mickey set is the only thing that could have been used by the heavy bombers, it seems, to prepare the French coast for, and assist in, the invasion. The coast has been blanketed by a thick cover of 10/10 clouds for the past two weeks, making visual bombing impossible.

June 11. MISSION 18. Pas De Calais, France

Today, Sunday, was our first raid since D Day. It was another easy one to the French coast and we saw no flak, no fighters.

Anyway, it doesn't make much difference how tough or how easy they are from here on out, if the rumor we hear is true that General Doolittle has raised the finish mark from 30 to infinity.

The coastline was visible today, but we did not see any of our troops because we were over the Calais area.

We had breakfast at 12, took off at 4:45, and got back at 8:15. Captain Hawk flew as our Command Pilot, with some new Lieutenant going along as observer. We used Captain Butler's ship, 633, and she was exposed to enemy ack-ack for only five minutes of the three and one-half hour trip.

June 14. MISSION 19. Florennes, Belgium

Breakfast at 12, briefing at 1, take off at 4:20, ETR 9:20. The C.Q. has started giving us the estimated time of return when he rousts us out. That way we can speculate on the duration and destination of the raid as we take on the midnight breakfast.

We led the wing to a German airfield deep in Belgium and did a fair job, judging from all accounts at the post-mission cross examination by Intelligence, called G-2 for short.

This business of interrogation after each mission is all very interesting. Crew members shuck out of their heated suits, take their equipment and put it up, and then pedal over to the operations building. There someone has been thoughtful enough to have a lot of nut butter and jelly sand-wiches and gallons of hot chocolate all ready. We are really fagged and starved after 6 to 12 hours of flying, especially mission flying. These sandwiches and cups of chocolate they give us would be good any time you were even just normally hungry, but after a mission they seem to be the best food and drink you've ever tasted.

The crew all goes in and sits down around a large table with the Intelligence officer, and some bartender-like enlisted man brings in a tray-load of double shots of Scotch whiskey, one for each crew member. Some drink the Scotch and some don't, and some drink several.

Then the G-2 officer asks the crew all about the raid. He asks the bombardier how well we hit the target; and the navigator about the course and if the flak briefing was correct and if the Germans have any new flak emplacements; and the gunners about bandits that attacked the formation and about ships they saw go down; and the pilot about how well the formation stuck together; and so on. It's all very interesting and they use this information in planning future raids, keeping the flak maps up-to-date and for other purposes.

But back to the Florennes mission. Getz steered us around the flak towers and right square over the target then safely out again. Lt. Col. K.S. Steele, the Command Pilot, wanted to tack on to a group ahead of us on the way out, but Lt. Wertsch convinced him that we should rely on the calculations and decisions of our own navigator. This saved us from going over some flak areas that the group ahead of us flew dangerously close to.

The ground was visible from our 18,000-foot-high "Leading Lady." They put some new parts in our Mickey and finally got it to working again. Lt. Counihan had the target in his bombsight for about ten miles before bombs away.

The Germans missed the best chance they've had yet to put our crew out of action. The gunners who were firing at us today must have been all women and kids, the way they missed us when we were so low and so plainly visible. There was an acre of flak but it was all way off to our left even though we passed right over the airfield.

The Eighth Air Force set a new record today as to number of planes sent out on one raid - 1,500 heavies.

Ted made his twenty-third mission, with Manning in number four position of our element. Dunn flew with Moak off our left wing tip for his fourteenth. Gagon's crew, taking time about flying with ours, stayed home and practiced.

We were approached by the duty sergeant with an 18-sortie form yesterday. Fred, Lloyd and Cecil signed up to stay here as instructors. I signed up for another theater.

There was an awards presentation the day before yesterday at which we all got an oak leaf cluster for the Air Medal and Gagon's bunch got the medal itself. We are running just a few missions ahead of them.

Getz made First Lieutenant June 6. That should be easy for him to remember.

June 19. MISSION 20. St. Jean, France

We didn't do so hot today. The PFF is just fine for bombing the coast line and sizable cities through 10/10 clouds, but it's no good on pint-size airfields. You have to see an airfield to be able to bomb it with any degree of accuracy.

When we were about 30 minutes inside of France we got the word from a Mosquito pilot that the primary target was blanketed with 10/10 clouds, but we droned on down to within 50 miles of Spain so the major in command could "get a better look..."

We were briefed to fly and bomb at 18,000 feet, but we had to climb to 28,000 coming back to get over a cloud layer. Even then our low group got lost and came home alone.

We couldn't see a thing but snow-white clouds below but we made two dry runs on where we thought the target was. Then the major said that we were just wasting gas and that we might as well go home. So we came home, through only one flak area, thanks to Getz and Step. We were leading the wing in 668, the "Lady."

There was good fighter cover and we saw no enemy aircraft. We went on a 48-hour pass when we got down.

An Operational Tour is now 35 missions, officially, but there is a pro-rata clause now which takes care of crews, like ours, which started when the limit was 30. We have to fly 33.

June 23. MISSION 21. Epernay, France

There's not much to write about this one. We brought our bombs back again.

We crossed the French coast just above Caen and were able to see the naval action near and on the beach, for the ground was plainly visible there. We were too high to see any gun flashes or troops but a

couple of smoking ships and many columns of smoke rising from the town and surrounding area were grim reminders of what was going on below. P-38's were swarming over the deck like hornets, buzz-bombing, strafing and raising sand in general.

Our flux-gate compass and our magnetic compass were both haywire and our Mickey was very weak but we went deep into France and out again without getting hit by flak. Neat coordination between the two navigators was no small part of our success.

We were leading the wing in 663 and had Col. Steele along as command pilot. The weather man was wrong again and we found 10/10 clouds at the target. It was a rail marshalling yard at the edge of Epernay in northeast France, too small to blast by guidance from PFF. Our bombardier had no chance to bomb visually and there wasn't much sense in riding out the ack-ack so we turned off the bomb run and headed for our secondary target, Florennes.

When Col. Steele saw that the 10/10 clouds made the secondary also immune from our bombs he asked Getz for a heading back to England.

We were headed straight for a flak area at Charleroi so Getz told the pilot to correct 10 degrees left. About a minute later the wing ahead of us called back over VHF that they had flown over Charleroi's flak and advised us to side-step it. One of their ships received a direct hit. The flak kept coming but we were at a safe distance off to the left of the smutty bursts.

We now have three first-lieutenants on the crew. Counihan swapped his gold bars for silver ones on June 24.

June 25. MISSION 22. Zebra

We feel that if we haven't been doing so much good for the cause on our last eight missions we made up for it somewhat today, with a raid called "Zebra."

We flew to the Alps mountains, let down to 1,000 feet to drop parachutes with supply canisters containing ams and ammunition to the French guerrillas, and then climbed on course back to 16,000 feet and came home.

We were flying lead for the high group. The low group dropped their chutes from 500 feet. We were too close to the wooded

mountainous slopes for comfort. It was very thickly settled country, with houses and villages on every slope, every hill, every valley - very picturesque.

Some colonel flew with us as observer and when we let down he came back through the ship taking snapshots with his candid camera. He acted as if he hadn't had so much fun before in his life. He even operated Fred's upper turret.

Captain Scarrum flew with us again as command pilot. Since we were flying 310, not a Mickey ship, we used Bloom in the ball turret.

June 29. MISSION 23. Wittenberg, near Leipzig, Germany

We were to get a 48-hour pass starting at 6 p.m. today but that didn't keep us off the Leipzig leading list.

We went in over the Zuider Zee and came out the same way. Caught no flak going in until we got to the target. Then it seemed that they had turned all the flak guns in Germany on us. The bursts were like Berlin's in intensity and Abbeville's in accuracy.

The sound of those flak bursts is deadly and frightening, as if each burst is the last one you'll ever hear. It's hard to say exactly what they sound like because we've never heard anything like them before. It is something like being inside of a barn with a galvanized roof, with someone throwing big shovelfuls of sand down onto the roof. It is a doom-like ka-RUMpp, ka-RUMpp, ka-RUMpp with the accent on the middle and the whole thing a sort of muffled, thunderous blast. It is very bad when you can see the black, greasy puffs getting nearer and nearer your wingtip. The worst is when you hear the ka-RUMpp deafeningly loud and you hear the shrapnel tearing and ripping metallicly through the ship's Alclad covering. Then you know the bursts are very close and the next one may go off three feet beneath where you're crouching, or perhaps right in the middle of the bomb bay.

Then you know that the flying shrapnel is close enough to kill a man instantly, or tear his stomach open or his leg off and leave him suffering, dying slowly, or permanently crippled or disfigured.

We were leading the 94th and bombing by groups. Our target, a synthetic oil refinery just below Leipzig, was already ablaze as we made the turn on the I.P. Lt. Counihan was just about ready to punch the button and send the tons of high explosives carried by the 8 ships in our

group crashing down upon the oil storage tanks, but about a second before he would have said bombs away, the flak closed in like an intense hailstorm. As if the Germans were aiming their 88's at our trigger finger, a piece of steel tore into the ship's nose and jarred the bombsight hilter-kilter. There was no command for bombs away, and we rode out the flak with the 500-pounders still slung on their racks in the bomb bays.

Captain Butler, riding with us as command pilot, called on Getz for a heading that would take us to the secondary target, a nearby airfield.

There was no flak at the secondary, although we had been told there would be. We had good results there, scoring hits on many of the buildings and revetments. It was a long haul home but we made it all right, around, between and past the flak barrages. We didn't see any of the Luftwaffe and had ample help from P-38's, 47's and 51's all the way. We caught up with the wing and came home with them.

We saw one flamer go down over the primary target, and one chute got out. It was an eight and one-half hour mission, six and one-half hours on oxygen and three and one-half hours over enemy territory. We were all too tired to go on pass so they moved it up a day.

July 7; MISSION 24. Kolleda, Germany

Our primary target for today was a synthetic plant 20 miles west of Leipzig. A very effective smoke screen laid down by the Germans prevented our bombing it and we unloaded on our secondary, an airfield on the route out.

The wing ahead of us must have reached the target before it was covered by the smoke screen, as there was a great column of black rising through the screen. Over the primary target there was a very intense, concentrated flak barrage. There was another terrific barrage off to our left. We flew directly between them, at a safe distance from both. We were briefed to catch flak at the secondary but not a burst did we see.

Captain Lewis, who led the 447th over the primary, received considerable battle damage, including a hole in his number-one gas tank. He lost all of the gas out of that tank. Both of his wingmen were shot down by anti-aircraft guns at the target.

There were enemy planes in the area which attacked our formations, but none attacked our group. We had good fighter cover.

Going in over the Zuider Zee and coming back out the same way, we were over the enemy territory three and a half hours; in the air eight hours. Col. Riva, our new C.O., flew with us as command pilot.

Just after we passed over the Zuider Zee I saw a peculiar thing that might be some kind of German anti-aircraft rocket. I was watching a bunch of Forts way out at 3 o'clock level when all of a sudden there was a brilliant flash of fire very much like an airplane exploding, but there was no plane there. Maybe it was just a single flak burst.

A couple of 17's ran together because of prop wash in another wing. It was Mahathey's twenty-fifth mission.

July 8. MISSION 25. Paris, France

We went within 16 miles of Gay Paree on this one. The flak was ample - we got about ten holes in 634 and were very lucky at that. One piece in at the tail door, missing Lt. Taylor's posterior by a scant foot. Four ships in our group brought back wounded men, and one co-pilot was killed and his pilot badly wounded. One ship returned with a flat tire, another with no hydraulic system and several with feathered props. We saw one ship get a direct hit going in and another got it over the target. The first one was off to our right It never did explode, just spiraled down and hit the ground burning.

Colonel Dougher was riding with us and we got along fine with him. We led the wing again.

It was like old times back in the 410th, flying two days in a row. We had good escort and encountered no German fighters. After riding through the heavy Oak at the primary we bombed the secondary and found no flak there. This makes three times in a row that we have gone to the secondary.

Just as we left enemy territory a group of B-24's almost dropped their bombs on us, as they were jettisoning them in the Channel.

July 16. MISSION 26. Stuttgart, Germany

Before taking off today, we heard two announcements that didn't boost our spirits one particle. The first was that we were going to take a load down to Herr Hitler's favorite beer town - Munich.

The second was that we weren't going to get any flak leave, which nearly all crews get after about 25 missions-one week with pay at some swank English plantation run by the American Red Cross.

Lloyd stayed home and sweated us out, grounded for a couple of days. After powdered eggs at the little cafe they call the mess we took off at 4 a.m. We were on oxygen six hours, over enemy territory about five, and got back at 1 p.m.

We led the wing to the I.P. for Munich, then ran into a cloud bank we couldn't get over or under and had to head back toward England. We blasted Stuttgart on the way home.

Col. Dougher rode with us as command pilot. First thing he did when he got back on the ground was to congratulate Getz on the navigating. When we couldn't bomb the primary, the colonel chose Stuttgart from a list of opportunity targets Step called off to him which included Augsburg, Karlsruhe, Ludwigshafen and others. It had to be a large German town that we could bomb by PFF.

There was heavy and intense flak at Stuttgart and we got about ten holes in our ship. We had to switch to spare 633 just before take-off, because we couldn't start number two engine on 634. We weren't attacked by German fighters, and had good support by 38's, 47's and 51's. Munson, Melton's radio operator, flew with us in Lloyd's place.

No flak leave - what a lousy deal.

July 21. MISSION 27. Regensburg, Germany

Quoting from the Stars and Stripes on this one, since their report was fairly factual:

"An entire Fortress wing, which recently took part in bombing attack on German aircraft assembly plants at Regensburg, was directed over the target by a navigator whose wounds had been bleeding steadily for two hours, and who collapsed soon after the bombs were released. "We were hit by flak as we crossed the enemy coast, and our navigator

was wounded in the leg,' 1/Lt. Verner A. Wertsch of Delevan, Illinois, the pilot, related. 'We wouldn't turn back because we were the lead plane.' "

That's the way our favorite newspaper summed up the action of July 21 in its column "Notes From the Air Force." We left the English coast today with an 18-ship group, leading the Fourth Combat Wing to Regensburg. We got to the enemy coast with 17 ships. In a short while two more planes aborted, leaving us 15. We kept boring into Germany, and everything went smoothly for a while. It was only a short while though, and suddenly tail gunner Taylor's voice jumped out at us harshly from the intercom: "We're getting flak right on us!" We looked toward 6 o'clock and saw the jet black bursts. very close and creeping closer. It was very startling, like getting stung on the ankle and suddenly realizing you are standing in the middle of a red ant bed. The first few bursts blossomed in the midst of the formation just bellow us. At Lt. Taylor's warning our pilot started a turn to the right. He said "Okay, I'm starting a turn to the right," as cool as ice water.

The Germans corrected their aim and let go another salvo of 88's. This time they got a direct hit on our left wingman, a 332nd pilot named Gregg who had flown seven missions. At the same moment, a chunk of steel tore into Getz' left leg, right at the ankle bone, and our right wingman lost his number two engine. Gregg went down in flames and the right wingman - F.M. Smith who was flying deputy lead on his twenty-eighth and last raid - turned back for home.

This left us with 13 ships. and in the next five minutes two more aborted. We kept ploughing on toward the target and led the 447th and 385th over Regensburg with an 11-ship group.

Getz lost a lot of blood but even though he spent six torturous hours at altitude he never lost consciousness, contrary to the S&S write-up. Counihan and Fred stopped the bleeding after about 15 minutes and made the navigator as comfortable as possible. He refused morphine. You could see his point in wanting to stay conscious in case we had to bail out.

Step took over the task of navigating the wing to the target with the Mickey set. In spite of being over the heaviest flak areas in Germany for five hours we didn't get any other flak except at the target. Col. Steele flew as command pilot.

Although the clouds were heavy most of the way down, the weather was CAVU - ceiling and visibility unlimited - over Regensburg. We bombed the target, a Messerschmidt factory, visually. There was quite a lot of flak there but we'd evidently been through our share of hell for the day. We slipped through the target defenses okay.

Didn't run into any German fighters and had good support from Mustangs and Thunderbolts. The flight was eight hours long, six and one-half hours on oxygen and five over Naziland.

The doc said there was no bone broken in Getz' leg and that he will be okay in a few weeks. The piece of steel they took out of the leg was about an inch and a half square and a quarter-inch thick. He was lucky it hit him in the ankle instead of the head. We may fly without him for the next few. We may even get a bid to the flak house rest home.

July 27. Flying Rumors

We haven't flown any since the rough one to Regensburg, but there have been plenty of rumors flying. Every time anyone goes away from the hut they come back with the latest rumor. We even have a ship named "The Latest Rumor."

Scuttlebutt, the Navy calls them.

Here are some of the very latest on the general theme that the group is going to soon depart from the European Theater of Operations.

1. The paymaster is going to pay us all off in U.S. currency on July 31 - U. States, here we come!
2. They're making carpenters out of kitchen police - manpower to build boxes to ship our equipment out in. Where to? How in hell should I know?
3. They're cutting stencils with Chinese addresses on them, for the boxes they are making for the trip we'll soon be taking. Looks like we're on our way to the CBI.
4. Headquarters just sent down an order to take an equipment inventory of all stuff on the base.
5. And old Joe says he knows a Pfc. who has a brother up at headquarters. Well, this brother's best pal works for a lieutenant who says he saw the orders for the 94th to go back to the states.

6. Headquarters just got in six typewriters that type nothing but Chink.
7. And they just got in a bunch of bomb bay tanks on the field.

We are enjoying balmy British summertime. Playing a lot of volleyball. Generally we play our crew against Gagon's crew, and sometimes enlisted men against officers. We have a lot of fun with our officers because there is none of that class-system crud that they have to put up with in other branches of the service or in some chicken-sections of the AAF. Sure doesn't do the old esprit de corps any harm, as they say in France.

July 29. MISSION 28. Merseburg. Germany

Of all the combat raids we have flown and the five yet to go, we'll most likely remember the mission over Merseburg as the one on which we came closest to being blasted into eternity.

It started off like any other mission - breakfast at 1, briefing at 2.

Elliott came out to the ship about 3:30 and asked how we'd like to take a run down to the Leipzig area to see if those hot shot flak throwers were still there. We said nothing would please us less, and began mounting the guns.

Before we got to the I.P. we could see those same greasy black puffs that we saw on June 29 and July 7. The target was a synthetic oil plant at Merseburg, and this was the second day in a row for it to be blasted by the Eighth Air Force. There were no clouds, but the Germans had laid down a fair smoke screen.

We started the bomb run with yellow flares, expecting Step to hit the target with Mickey, but as we got closer Counihan spotted the target through breaks in the smoke screen and was able to bomb visually.

We knew we'd hit something when we saw three columns of heavy black smoke rising about 5,000 feet in the air. Our strike photos later gave proof of good hits.

The anti-aircraft fire was the worst we've ever gone through. We started getting hit ten miles before bombs away, and kept getting hit five miles afterward. We got about 25 holes in the "Leading Lady" and

brought her back with a propless number four engine and a feathered number two.

Actually, we came in on one and one-half engines, about the minimum power a Fort can hobble along with. Lt. Wertsch was the only crew member to stop a piece of flak, and it was luckily a small spent piece which just grazed and bruised his left hip a little.

We had to drop out of formation and come back by ourself because the old "Lady" could only limp along at 120 miles per hour, which isn't much better than stalling speed. We tossed out beaucoup equipment over the North Sea in order to lighten the ship's load, and in preparation for ditching.

This wasn't our day for a North Sea soaking though. We finally crossed the English coast, the beautiful English coast, and shortly afterward touched the limping "Leading Lady's" wheels down back at base.

Col. Riva was our command pilot. Major Blount flew as observer and Lt. Vincent Bahl took Getz' place in the nose. Bahl is Samerdyke's navigator. Getz is fairly okay but won't be able to fly for months, if at all again.

We had good fighter escort all the way home, and caught no other flak after that at the target. Col. Riva was well pleased with the crew and the mission and promised that we could go to the rest home Tuesday.

The mission over Merseburg was told in greater detail in an official account released to stateside newspapers by the base public relations office, as follows:

AN EIGHTH AIR FORCE BOMBER STATION, ENGLAND, July 29 - Leading on Eighth Air force Wing Formation over Germany today, the B-17 Flying Fortress Leading Lady flew into a fierce flak barrage, and although three of its engines were hit refused to take evasive action until the formation had dropped its bombs on the vital oil plants at Merseburg.

A lead plane, upon which the bombing of the entire wing depends, the Fortress carried the formation command er, Lt. Col. Daniel F. Riva, 1024 East Illinois Ave., Spokane, Washington; and Major James E. Blount, 438 Fulton Ave., San Antonio, Texas, second-in-command.

The bomb run completed, and with one propeller spinning so wildly that the vibration almost shook open the seams of the metal fuselage, Leading Lady peeled off from the formation and struck a desperate course for England. Half-way across Germany, one of the three crippled engines began to disintegrate in a shower of sparks and flying pieces of molten metal. The screaming propeller whirled off in mid-air.

'That prop was red hot from half an hour of violent wind milling,' Col. Riva said. 'It shook the plane so hard that the instruments were dancing and we didn't know which direction we were going-up, down, or sideways. When the prop shook off it took half the engine with it. It dropped down to about 100 feet, still spinning, on my side of the cockpit, and then suddenly, just like a boomerang, it zoomed up and whirled back over the wing. If it had ever touched the plane again, we wouldn't be here now.'

Piloted by First Lieutenant V. Alan Wertsch, of Delevan, Illinois, the Fortress ran into its first anti-aircraft barrage as it started the bomb run that meant success or failure for the formation's attack on the Merseburg plant.

'We ran into a wall of flak that followed us all the way in and out of the bomb run,' Lt. Wertsch said. 'There was no way of avoiding the flak without missing the target, so we just kept on plowing through it. I could feel the stuff hitting the plane and could hear the explosions. It was more than enough for us.'

Major Blount, who flew in the co-pilot's position, had several narrow escapes from flak as he helped steady the stricken Fort.

'Flak was flying all through the cockpit,' he said. 'There were pieces jumping between my legs, and I think my legs did a little jumping on their own.'

The three damaged engines were hit almost simultaneously. One, after being hit in the prop governor and spinning at breakneck speed, finally steadied itself. This engine and the one undamaged engine brought the Fortress home. The prop on the second damaged engine was cut out after a violent struggle.

Several times during the hectic return to England, the crew prepared to bail out, but each time decided to stick a little longer. Over the North Sec, SOS signals were sent out by the radio operator, Sgt.

Lloyd Elliott, 52012 Chester Ave., Bakersfield, California, in preparation for a forced landing in the water.

While lightening the plane to help maintain altitude over the North Sea, 1st Lt. Mark J. Counihan, of Iron River, Michigan, the bombardier, opened the bomb bay doors so that flak suits and helmets and other loose equipment could be tossed out. Fearful that the hydraulic mechanism of the doors had been damaged by the storm of flak through which the plane had passed, Lt. Counihan did not open the doors all the way as he thought they could not be closed again.

When it was found that equipment tossed down the bomb bay was too large to slip through the partially opened doors, Radio Operated Elliott and T/Sgt. Fred A. Muehler of Pacific, Mo., engineer and top turret gunner, volunteered to clear the debris.

Holding by his hands from the catwalk, Sgt. Elliott kicked some of the equipment clear. Then, while Lt. Ralph S. Taylor, 1702 South Pennsylvania Ave., Lansing, Michigan, co-pilot who flew as formation control officer in the tail gun position, held him by the feet, Sgt. Muehler eased the rest of the debris through the partially open doors with his hands.

Following a course plotted by 1/Lt. Vencent E. Bahl, Route 2, Dubuque, Iowa, the navigator, Leading Lady struggled back to her base through rain and clouds to land in weather conditions so bad that pilot Wertsch had to make two approaches to the field before he could come in.

Other crew members were 1/Lt. John S. Stepanski Jr., 13235 Mackay, Detroit, Michigan, instrument specialist; Sgt. Cecil R. Mahathey of Hamptonville, N. C., left waist gunner; and Sgt. Preston P. Clark Jr., 766 Sycamore Street, Abilene, Texas, right waist gunner.

August 1 through 8. Rest Home Respite

When we got back from Merseburg the Colonel (Riva) said we had earned a rest at the flak house so we went there three days later, on an English train. We went to Spetchley Park, near Worcester, which is near Stratford-on-Avon. The officers went to another rest home down around London.

When we arrived at Worcester a Major was waiting for us at the station in a jeep. They took us right on out to Spetchley Park, an Olde

English manor house, complete with butler, room service and every type of recreational facility and activity known to the American Red Cross, which runs the haven.

Fred beat me a set of tennis, 6-2, and then we teamed up to take two sets from a couple of boys who had "Chatterbox" painted on their A-2 jackets.

We went swimming at Worcester sea bathing lido (a salt water pool) three days in a row. Mahathey beat us all tossing horse shoes and we spent some time shooting bows and arrows. One day we went horseback riding with hardly any saddle at all.

We had a softball or volleyball game, sometimes both, every day. The last day we were at Spetchley a bunch of casualties back from Normandy, who were recuperating at a nearby hospital, came over and played our teams in both sports. They beat us 14 to 11 in softball and two out of three games of volleyball. Some casualties!

They were a real swell bunch of guys and they were, the same as we, scheduled to go back to combat when their rest leave ended. We won't forget Steph, the paratroop captain, or Mary Ann, the army nurse. They were a sort of handsome, romantic twosome, thrown together by the war gods like the characters in some book like "A Farewell To Arms."

Then there were Martha, Margo, Alice, Mickey and Joyce, the American Red Cross girls who were the hostesses, teammates for the games, dancing partners and friends to the restees. And Ted, the typical English butler who came whistling or humming in every morning at 10 sharp, bringing a glass or fruit juice for each of us. Like bloody rich tourists.

Fred played a round of golf on the Worcester course and we all knocked the balls around on the Spetchley lawn. There was a hamburger-and-beer bust one evening on the spacious lawn with a bunch of English girls out from Worcester as guests.

We had six meals a day-three squares plus tea and crumpets at 10, 4 and 10. Shot considerable skeet and filled in the few spare minutes with ping pong games. We also jeeped over to Stratford on the Avon for a tour of Shakespeare's home place. We saw "The Taming of The Shrew" for eight shillings, sixpence at the Shakespeare Memorial Theater, and visited Ann Hathaway's Cottage and the home of the old bard himself.

E.C. Maxum, "Max" as we called him, the purple heart convalescent from Beaty's crew, went along with us and proved to be a very swell guy. He was about 22 years old and had married shortly before coming overseas. He was as true and sincere and genuine as a man can be, and he was killed in action October 6.

August 9. MISSION 29. Nuremberg, Germany

We got back from the rest home at 11 o'clock on the night of August 8, got to sleep at about 12 o'clock. and got up at 2 this morning for a mission to Nuremberg. No rest for the weary wicked.

We led the division and took Col. Martin along as command pilot. Lt. Bahl flew again as our navigator. He is very competent and likeable. Gagon's crew flew with the 447th. Weather over the continent was the worst we've seen yet. We flew through a lot of heavy clouds before we finally turned back at a point just below Kassel.

The mission would have been a tough one - 150 flak guns at the target - and long if we had gone all the way. The recall should have turned it into a "piece of cake," as the English airmen call a milk run, but it didn't. We came very near getting shot down.

We had just passed over a rugged flak area when we decided to turn back. We had been to the right of it, but still our high group caught a few bursts. When we turned we made a wide arc to the left and came right back over the center of that same flak patch. The reason we turned that way was that we couldn't make the turn any other way or time. We would have lost our whole wing in a cloud bank just ahead. We had to turn right around and give the Jerry gunners another chance at us, like a deer trapped in a box canyon.

That flak was very deadly, but the wing got through it without losing any ships. We got about 15 holes in 776 and lost number one engine. Counihan got some plexiglass in one eye, but it was nothing serious.

We had another awards presentation when we got back on the ground. Wertsch, Counihan, Cecil and I got the Distinguished Flying Cross, pinned on by Col. Castle. The general orders read "for extraordinary achievement while serving ... on numerous bombardment missions against German-occupied continental Europe." We got the DFCs for so-many missions, not for any individual feats.

August 11. An Old Friend Visits

Had a pleasant surprise today. F. C. (Frankie) Lobasso was lying on my sack when we got home from a practice mission. He had come to our base to visit a cousin of his and heard I was there. We were good friends through gunnery school and phase training, and parted company at Kearney, Nebraska, the Point of Embarkation.

We spent a lot of time together in the Las Vegas Gunnery School swimming pool, along with a kid named Robinson from Dallas. He knew nothing of Robinson's whereabouts but gave news of some other old acquaintances. Andy Anderson finished up in Frankie's group and is waiting to go back to the states. Gerald C. Meyers also. Frank still lacks three.

I told Frank about seeing another of our gunnery school mates at Spetchley Park, a kid named Howard Pippenger who was with us from Shepperd Field to Las Vegas to Salt Lake City. He came to the rest home the day before we pulled out, and said he had flown twenty-seven missions.

Howard had told me about a lot of the lads we trained with. Parks had 20 the last time he'd seen him in London. Johnson went down. Freel was well along on his tour. He said that the big blond Sgt. Hollingsworth, who washed out of pilot school with me at Uvalde, had gone down.

I really enjoyed Frank's visit. It's nice to talk about old times that way. It is also grim, sitting around casually separating the dead from the living of a bunch of guys you were with in the states only six months back.

August 13. MISSION 30. Troop Support Northwest of Paris

We were briefed to catch a lot of flak at 15,000 feet today, on a flight that would have kept us over enemy territory for about one and one-half hours. But for the first time since the trip to the bottom of France eight months ago we didn't get hit by any flak. We did see six ships go down, however, from fighter attacks and flak combined.

We broke up into three-ship elements to bomb, each element having its own special target to go after. Ours was a crossroads.

Counihan put the 100-pound general purpose bombs of our three ships right on the bullseye - visually. An element off to our left went through some flak after bombs away and a 332nd ship went down.

Our element was ignored by German fighters. There are so many allied planes in the air over the Second Front, and so many fighters shooting up the German ground troops, Goering just doesn't have enough Luftwaffe to cope with the situation. Also, our fighter-bombers are destroying an amazing lot of German aircraft both on the ground and in the air. Then too, consider all the damage we've dealt, with strategic bombing, to the Germans gasoline and oil supply, rubber supply, ball bearings and other parts supply, aircraft factories and airfields, and rail, communications and transport during these spring and summer months.

We have the Germans on the ropes and they're cut and bleeding and tired and the last round is coming up fast and there won't be any rest periods for them until the end.

They are the fagging, weary underdog, and we are the strong, relentless pursuer. Considering it in this light you get to feeling sorry for them and then you see a Fort blow up with a direct hit from the German 88s and you aren't sorry for them any more. You are then sorry for the guys in the Fort, but you can't help being glad it was the wingman and not your own ship that got the direct hit. That boosts your own chances for survival one notch higher, from the law-of-averages standpoint.

The crossroads that we blasted was just ahead of the advancing Allied armies, which are strung out along a 400-mile front northeast of Paris. We couldn't see much of what was happening on the ground, even though we were down at the unhealthily low altitude of 15,000 feet.

Major Healey flew as command pilot and Lt. Bahl as navigator. We went in over the Cherbourg Peninsula and came back out over La Havre St. Lo, from 15,000, looked like just a rock pile, a mess of shambles.

August 24. A Sad Day for Gagon's Crew

We have just had a 72-hour pass and I went up to visit Bob by Morrison at his Marauder base. We had a nice time talking over old times at McMurry in the era B.I. - before induction. He put me up at the home of a couple of English ladies, "Lil and Gert." I had a feather bed to sleep on and fresh fried eggs for breakfast.

Some German V-2s, buzz bombs as they are commonly called, hit very close around the B-26 base while I was there. It is just out Chelmsford, about 20 miles from London, at which most of the buzz bombs are aimed.

The buzz bombs, which look like small racer airplanes with short stubby wings, drone along with a monotonous, pulsating sound, like the buzz of a bumble bee magnified about a thousand times. It is a stomach-sickening sound, but as long as you can hear it you're safe. When the motor cuts out, that's when to dive for the nearest air raid shelter, because that means that the bug has run out of fuel. She can not do anything then but glide in for a landing, and when she lands the 500 pounds of dynamite inside her fuselage can be very destructive, depending on where it happens to fall. The V-2s have scared some of us out of going to London on pass, but the natives who weathered the Blitz aren't very impressed or frightened by the doodle bugs.

Bobby promised to come down to see Eddie Lowe and me as soon as possible. Eddie's a co-pilot over at the 385th.

Gagon's crew led the 447th to Brux, Czechoslovakia yesterday. The flak was heavy and accurate. An 88 shell came up through the base of the top turret, practically tore one of Frank Santistevan's legs off, and went on out the side of the ship without exploding. Frank died soon after they landed back at base. We felt pretty dazed and miserable and sorry around the hut. Everyone liked Frank very much. He was as good as the very best guy you ever knew.

Our pilot made captain on August 22.

August 25. MISSION 31. Moritz, Germany

We took off at 7:30 this morning and got our wheels back on the ground at 4:45 p.m. after a long drawn-out mission. It wasn't a very rough one, but could have been. Bahl and Step took us between and around the rugged flak alleys over the Danish Peninsula Penamunde and finally around Stettin. Flak at the target was fairly accurate but we were only in it for about three minutes and only got one hit, a fist-size hole in the radar hat.

Our target was an airfield just north of Berlin, the Germans biggest experimental airfield, referred to by our briefing officers as "Germany's Wright Field."

We expected to encounter a lot of enemy aircraft, including some of the Germans' new M.E. 163 jet-propelled fighters, but they did not come up. Our fighter protection wasn't as good as it has been in past missions. We had a scanty screen of Mustangs going in and a few Thunderbolts coming out. As things turned out, the fighter cover was sufficient.

Major Jones flew as our command pilot and we liked him. He was well pleased with the crew and especially with the bombing results. The strike photos were on the bulletin board at interrogation and proved that the 94-A Wing, which we led, had plastered the target in sharpshooter style. We saw plenty of smoke, including the black kind that comes from burning oil, rising from the airfield as we headed back for England.

This mission reminded us a little of the third one we pulled, on April 11, to Stettin. We remembered especially how it seemed that we would never finish crossing over the islands and the Danish Peninsula. It was the same yesterday. Those Forts seem about as fast as sick old turtles when you are over enemy territory. You spot a landmark out at 2 o'clock on the patchy earth and it seems that you watch it forever before it slides past and fades away at 5 o'clock. Sometimes it seems that the German anti-aircraft gunners must be all blind not to be able to blast every single one of the sitting duck 17's out of the sky. Looks as if it would be easy as shooting big fish in a small barrel. Lucky for us, the Germans do not find it that simple, because actually we are very high and we are within the range-of their guns for only a very brief time, at an average speed of better than 225 miles per hour.

As on the April 11 mission to Stettin, it seemed that each time we passed from a patch of land to water we had broken out of enemy territory. But then up ahead would be another patch of green and brown. Finally we broke out of the flak noose and started the long haul across the North Sea. It takes forever to get across the North Sea, but it is a great relief to pass out of enemy territory into the no-man's water.

One more raid will make 33 for Captain Wertsch, and will finish him up. And we have been told that when he's through, we're through also. We have hopes for a short one. They usually give you a short one to finish up on.

September 1. MISSION 32. Recall from Frankfurt

The short, easy one to some undefended French bridge that we were counting on for a finale turned out to be a long haul to a factory in Frankfurt, defended by some 90 flak guns. At least that's what we were briefed for, but it wasn't in the cards for us to fly to Frankfurt today.

We were not overjoyed about the day's prospects when the C.Q. roused us out of the warm sacks at 2:30 a.m. He told us that we were scheduled to deliver mixed demos and incendiaries to somewhere inside Der Fuehrer's domain that would require 800 gallons in the Tokyo tanks. That meant an extra long haul.

It was to be a ten-hour raid, six and one-half hours on oxygen. We were to fly down below Paris and head east. A 100 mile-per-hour tail wind was to take us over the Frankfurt factory at 300 miles per hour. And with our ground troops pushing farther and farther into France we were supposed to be over enemy territory for only one hour and forty-five minutes.

When we reached the middle of the English Channel we ran into the rottenest weather we'd ever seen. But we kept boring on past Caen, climbing above the cloud bank which was solid from 14 to 17,000 feet.

When we got almost down to Paris we ran up against a cloud bank we couldn't go over so we made a 360 degree turn, found a layer of sky in which we could see all of our ships and those in the low group, and kept going. The high group was lost from view in the clouds above us, and it was pretty scary not knowing exactly where they were and speculating on the possibility of their suddenly dropping right down on top of us or sliding into us from the side. All we could see about 20 yards past the wing tip and above was blinding white clouds. It is slightly dangerous to fly that way, especially with a formation of 36 B-17's. The thick clouds and not being able to see the rest of the airplanes scared me about as much as flak. It was a feeling akin to claustrophobia, added to the apprehension that you have on the last mission of a tour - the finish-up or finish-off raid. You can never consider yourself safe and lucky until you land on the last one, just like a gambler can't call himself winner unless he dies winner.

We made the 360 degree turn right over Paris, and now and then we would get a glimpse of the city through slight breaks the thick white

clouds below us. You get the impression of tremendous speed when the clouds are close to you that way, just as you do when landing or taking off, because you're close to something which indicates the swift motion.

The weather was getting worse and worse, and visibility on all sides less and less. Col. Creer, our Command Pilot from Group Operations, finally got a recall over VHF and turned the wing back for England. We had not reached enemy territory, so we figured we wouldn't get credit for the mission. The trip home was glum-nothing like what we'd expected the return from the final combat mission to be. We figured we had one more to go.

We got down, cleaned our guns and hit the sack about the middle of the afternoon. At 6 o'clock we headed for the mess hall, dropping by the orderly room to check for mail.

"No credit for today's mission, eh Jake?" someone asked rather tiredly, half-hopefully.

And at that moment old Jake made us the happiest boys in the E. T. O. Very casually, not knowing the relief his words would bring, old Jake said "Yeah, you got credit. What did you think, you wouldn't get credit?"

Fred, Lloyd, Cecil and I went down to the chow hall and ate a hearty roast beef supper together. We felt very good. For the first time since Easter Sunday, April 9, it seemed that we might well expect to outlive the duration and six.

Our Operational Tour was over.

Post Script

September 16. A Visit From Dinah Shore

The last time I wrote in this book was on September 1, the day we finished our Operational Tour. A lot has happened since then.

Cecil is on his way back to the states. We received a letter from him a few days ago saying that he was at the 18th R.C.D. at Stone. He'd seen Alfred Beacom, one of the original members of our crew at Dalhart. Beacom was returning to Boston after 31 missions with the 457th Bomb Group. Cecil also reported that he was doing k.p. and clean-up chores while waiting to ship home.

Lloyd left few days ago with the enlisted men of Simonds' crew. They went to the 15th R.C.D. Gagon's crew has finished up and gone home.

Fred and I are staying on a while longer. He is working on the flying line, crewing a B-17, and I'm working in the squadron supply room. Only thing disagreeable about the supply room work is picking up guys' equipment and belongings that go down. We were both allowed to keep our flying status and the extra cash that goes with it, and we can take off for the U.S.A. whenever we please. We are still available to fly our thirty-third mission if they call on us, but that is very unlikely.

Cate has one more to go for his pilot to get 33. Munsen finished on the last one. Waters has only three to go. Lt. Taylor has to fly one-more.

We have some new boys in the hut since Cecil and Lloyd moved out. Freemont E. Wood, Ed Herzog, Bob Grebner, Mark Cordell and Dan Nicodem. Good boys. They brought their dog, a black-and-white spotted pup appropriately named Flak, with them. Flak is whip-smart and very playful, just what we need around the hut.

Glenn Miller's band and Dinah Shore played a swell concert and dance in Hangar One last night, climaxing the 94th's gala 200th Mission Celebration. The group flew its 200th raid on August 27, a rugged one to Berlin. The 94th's first mission was flown May 13, 1943, to St. Omer; and its 100th was to Frankfurt, March 20, 1944.

The 200th Mission Celebration was a complete success. We turned in about 1a.m. this morning and slept in till 11. We go off double British summertime tomorrow and there will be no more blackouts.

September 17. Taylor Finishes Up

Melton's crew finished today, with my friend Cate flying his thirty-first (last) mission. Lt. Taylor finished also, flying waist gunner with one of the crews. They bombed just ahead of the new invasion troops in Holland, ran into a mess of flak and got a couple of 410th gunners hurt.

All of the bunks in the squadron are being double decked, crowding things up considerably. A lot of men are coming to the base on detached service to study the functions and procedures of a Pathfinder squadron. Rumor has it that even if the 94th goes back to the

U.S. or to another theater, the 333rd will remain a training squadron for future Pathfinder crews and personnel. Sounds likely.

October 7. Two Bad Days For the Ninety-Fourth

Fred and I took our furlough on October 1, flew to Blackpool in a B-24, visited the Gartside's at Number 35 Carleton Avenue, spent the last four days of our pass in London, and came back to the base yesterday.

Yesterday was a bad day for the 94th.

The Eighth Air Force - 1,250 heavies and 1,000 fighters strong - went to Berlin.

Wilson and Colestro flew with Davis' crew and Major Blount flew as their command pilot. Davis' crew was hit badly over the target but somehow struggled back to the English Channel, requesting permission to jettison their bomb load. Later they signaled that they were preparing to ditch. Waves on the North Sea were 40 feet high yesterday. The rescue crew found Major Blount floating dead near an overturned dinghy. We have heard unofficially that the others were found this morning, washed ashore.

The entire 385th Bomb Group, including Batty's crew, went down over the target. From what we hear they must have been caught by swarms of F.W.190's. Every ship in the group went down before the fighter escort showed up.

Elwood C. Maxum, the boy who got the Purple Heart over Leipzig and paid for it with two months in the hospital, the boy who spent an idyllic week with us at the Spetchley Park rest home, the boy who flew waist gunner for Captain Batty - Max, we called him - finished his Operational Tour and his young life 18,000 feet above Berlin today.

And Fields, Batty's engineer, who had only two to go to finish. And Denicola, the radio operator.

It was Colestro's last one. Colestro was a friendly Italian, about 21 years old. He got screwed up by an experiment and his crew finished up ahead of him. He saw Salvani and Richtmeyer, two other gunners of his original crew, off to the states just a couple of weeks ago. This was his last mission - that is, the last one he would have been required to fly, had he returned. It was his last one any way you look at it.

And there was Wilson, the boy who had a good ground job in the Armament Section until he decided he wanted to fly combat. He had about five to his credit.

Well, yesterday was a bad day. Today was a worse one. The 331st put up a group and the 332nd put up a group. The 332nd pulled a milk run.

Not so with the 331st. They took an 11-ship group over the target - Merseburg. Three of the 11 ships got back.

They ran into fighters again - someone said M.E. 109's. Davis was leading and Mark Cordell was flying waist with him. We heard they were last seen flying level with one wing on fire. Some say that four chutes got out, some say ten. Mark, one of our hut mates, was another fellow who came over as a ground man and then requested flying duty. This would have made him 12, so you might say he wound up with 11½ missions.

Singletary, the gunner on Davies' crew who did 50 missions in the Aleutians on the "Old Glory," should have stopped at 50. He had about 10 or 15 over here.

Johnson was another guy who wasn't satisfied to keep his feet on terra firma. He was on a crew in the 331st on his 22nd mission. He was learning code, procedure, transmitters, receivers and machine guns when we got here in March. Made his first one about the first of June, and finished up today. Another friendly fellow.

Some of the folks back home, we hear, seem to think it's all over but the celebrating. Maybe even some of us here in England have toyed with that misconception. Ask any man in the 94th Bomb Group and he'd tell you a different story tonight. The Luftwaffe, though perhaps low on planes and fuel, is still very much in business. Goering's generals are no doubt having an awards presentation tonight, and celebrating a very good day's work.

You look at what happened today, and you wonder how anyone ever comes through 30-odd combat missions over German-held territory alive. You realize you were plenty lucky, and you see how appropriate it was that you received, when finishing your Operational Tour, a certificate of membership in the Lucky Bastard Club.

The certificate is a photostat of a ghastly gray piece of parchment, charred around the edges as though it had been jerked out of a blazing inferno. It has a couple of four leaf clovers; a large horse shoe,

and "94" in smokey gray shadow across its face. Covering the whole certificate, in Olde English style lettering, is this legend:

On this 13th day of August, nineteen hundred and forty four, the Fickle Finger of Fate finds it expedient to trace on the roll of the LUCKY BASTARD CLUB the name of S/Sgt. Preston P. Clark Jr., Tail Gunner of the Leading Lady, who on this date achieved the remarkable record of having sallied forth, and returned, no fewer than thirty risky times, bearing tons and tons of H.E. Goodwill to the Fuehrer and would-be Fuehrers, thru the courtesy of Eighth Bomber Command, who sponsors these programs in the interest of government "of the people, by the people, and for the people."

In the lower left corner of the certificate is an Eighth Air Force shoulder patch. The document is signed by C.B. Dougher, Commanding Officer; K.S. Steele, Air Executive; W.E. Creer, Group Operations Officer; James E. Blount, Squadron C.O. (killed in action yesterday) and B.C. Bivins, Squadron Operations Officer. The artist has recorded his signature - Polson --in the lower right hand corner of the diploma.

November 10. The Last Entry

A month has passed since I wrote last in the diary. Much has happened. A lot of us are getting ready to head back for the states. They are streamlining the T.O. and we either go back now or stay with the group for the duration and six.

First it was me, then Frank Toth, who got wounded and didn't get to finish with Stopulous. Greb, the gunner who was in the hospital when his crew (Davis) went down, is going, and Fred has decided he'll go too.

We got Woodie, Grebner and Ed Herzog all excited about the prospects of being home for Christmas, so they are going with us.

The fast approaching, bone-chilling English winter also had a lot to do with our - at least my - decision to pull stakes.

Captain Wertsch is staying on for a while longer, helping out in Group Ops. Taylor wants to get back home to see an infant son who was born about the time the co-pilot finished his missions. He also wants to

fly some fighters, to fulfill his longest-standing service-connected ambition. Getz is on his way back to a hospital in the states, with the old sore ankle promising to give him more trouble than was at first anticipated. Counihan will probably stick around England till his captaincy comes through, and Step is staying on a while longer.

This diary will probably have to be sent to some place for safe-keeping - security purposes - until the war's end, whenever that will be. The fanatical Japs seem determined to keep it going for another five years, or as long as they can. Good-bye Diary, hello States.

November 10, 1944

In Retrospect
One Last Word About The War

That's all there is to the gunner's diary. He got back home okay, spent 9 more months in the service, serenely irresponsible at a stateside radio school, and was discharged from the army routine at Scott Field, Illinois, in September, 1945.

The following February he returned to college, on the G.I. Bill of Rights, to resume his education, One day in a literature class he ran across a poem addressed to soldiers. More or less copying the style and meter of the verses, he wrote a few rhyming lines of his own, summing up memories of nightmarish experiences and his hopes that there would be no repetition of those experiences - the senseless hell-on-earth called war. Those lines are submitted below, as one last word.

*Airman rest, the mission's over... Think not of the fearful raid...
Dream not of the flak filled heavens ...Chaos, dead, your bombs have
made;*

*Gunner rest, your work is done... Your fifties served their deadly
worst... A Jerry barreled in from the sun ... And crashed aflame from
one short burst.*

*Pilot rest, you landed safe! ... You, every duty, have done well...
To bring a Fortress back from Leipzig, torn by flak and cannon shell...
Crewman rest, the mission's over... Say a prayer for friends who died...
And be thankful you are living... Thanks to Him who was your Guide.*

*Airmen rest, the war is finished... But remember its sharp pain...
Use your wisdom and your knowledge... Never let it come again.*

Editor's Postscript: Preston P. Clark, Jr. submitted a questionnaire with permissions, attachments, and a copy of his diary to the East Anglia Air War Project on August 29, 2003. He passed away January 25, 2012 in Austin, Texas. He was 86 years old at the time of his death.