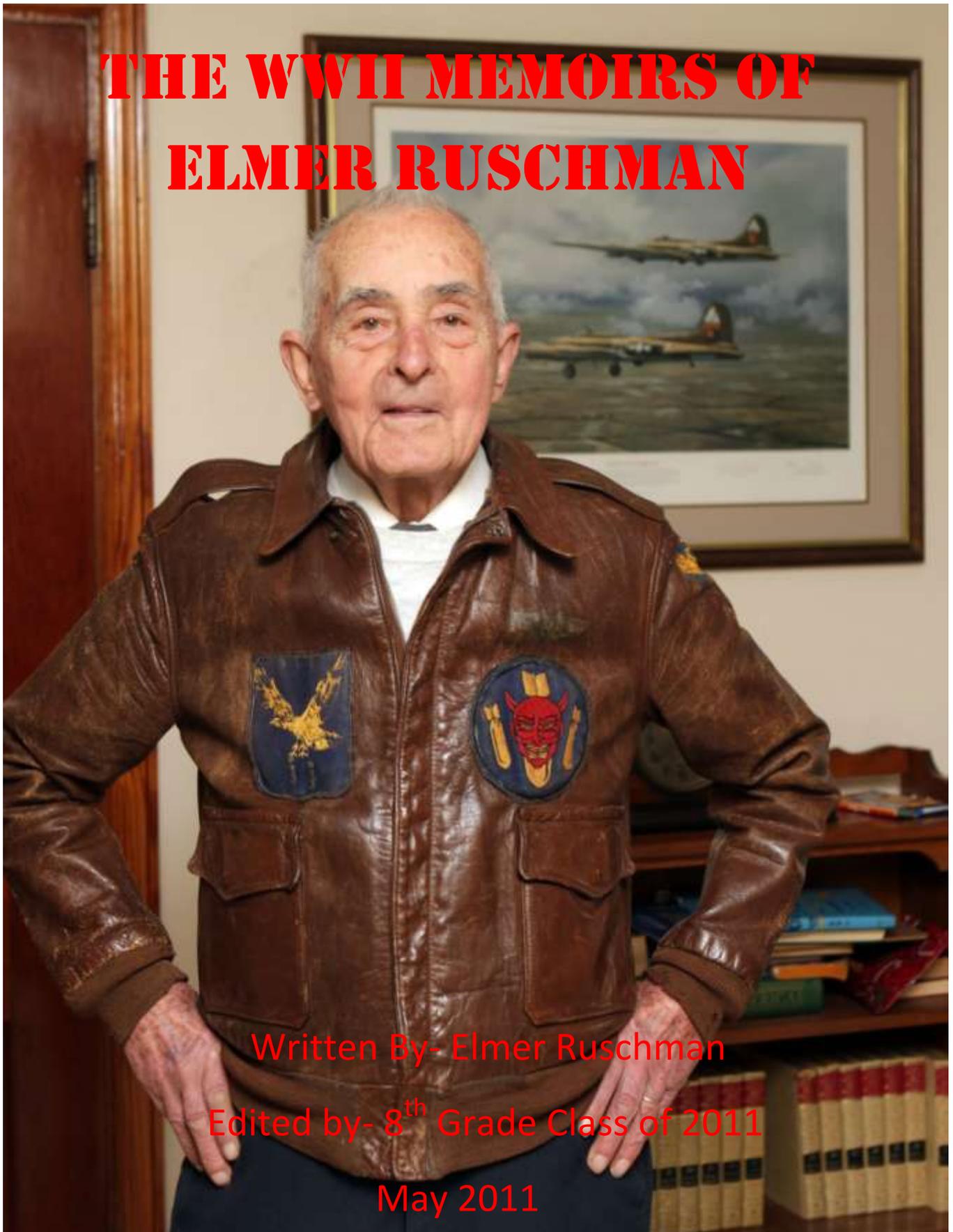


THE WWII MEMOIRS OF ELMER RUSCHMAN



Written By- Elmer Ruschman

Edited by- 8th Grade Class of 2011

May 2011

Ruschman World War II Account

Leaving Home for WWII

My brother, Amos, and I were drafted into the Army October 1, 1942. It took a two week stay to take care of necessary needs. Then we reported to Ft. Thomas, Kentucky. We were allowed to come home each night for almost a week. On October 21st, I was notified that I would be shipping out. In the late afternoon we were taken to Newport where we boarded a train. The engineer was Perry Collier, so I figured we would go east.

This would be a sad night for me as I knew I would be going past my hometown of Melbourne, Kentucky. In the late evening we began our trip. No one knew our destination, the train windows were open and I had a good seat. My heart was breaking with homesickness. We



went past the home office where I worked, then the drug store owned by Doc Elbert who gave me a job at age fifteen.

Later we passed our house, but I could not see it because of trees. I had a newspaper, got up from my seat and went between the cars to watch for my father who worked at the Massy Concrete Company.

I stood over the steps and leaned out, he looked up from his work. I waved the paper and he waved back. I was so downhearted, I felt this would be the last time I would see him. I could not go back to my seat for sometime as tears flowed down my cheeks. "Real soldiers" don't cry, but I sure did.

Our ride would end in Atlantic City, New Jersey. After I sent my address home, the first letter from my sister, Vi, said that my father saw the waving newspaper and knew it was either Amos or me.

The next few weeks of Army life were so different from the average way of life. We awakened very early, made the bed, shaved, and ate breakfast, marched for miles, drilled for

50 minutes and rested for 10. After that, you started all over again. We were all lonesome and wished we were back home. We marched on the famous boardwalk in Atlantic City, New Jersey, past fancy hotels now used by soldiers. We used the Convention Center for marching on rainy days. This is the place where the Miss America show takes place each September.

One day, as I worked on K.P., something went down past the window, another worker saw it also. We opened the window and looked down. A soldier laid face down on the concrete sidewalk. He jumped to his death. We learned later that that he was from Northern Ohio. There were quite a few men who did this or slashed their wrists in attempts to kill themselves. I was lonely and unhappy, but not that bad.

When I say “lonely,” I don’t mean that there wasn’t anybody around. I mean that all of the people were strangers. Most of the men were from the east coast, and they seemed to speak in foreign tongues, they were hard to understand.

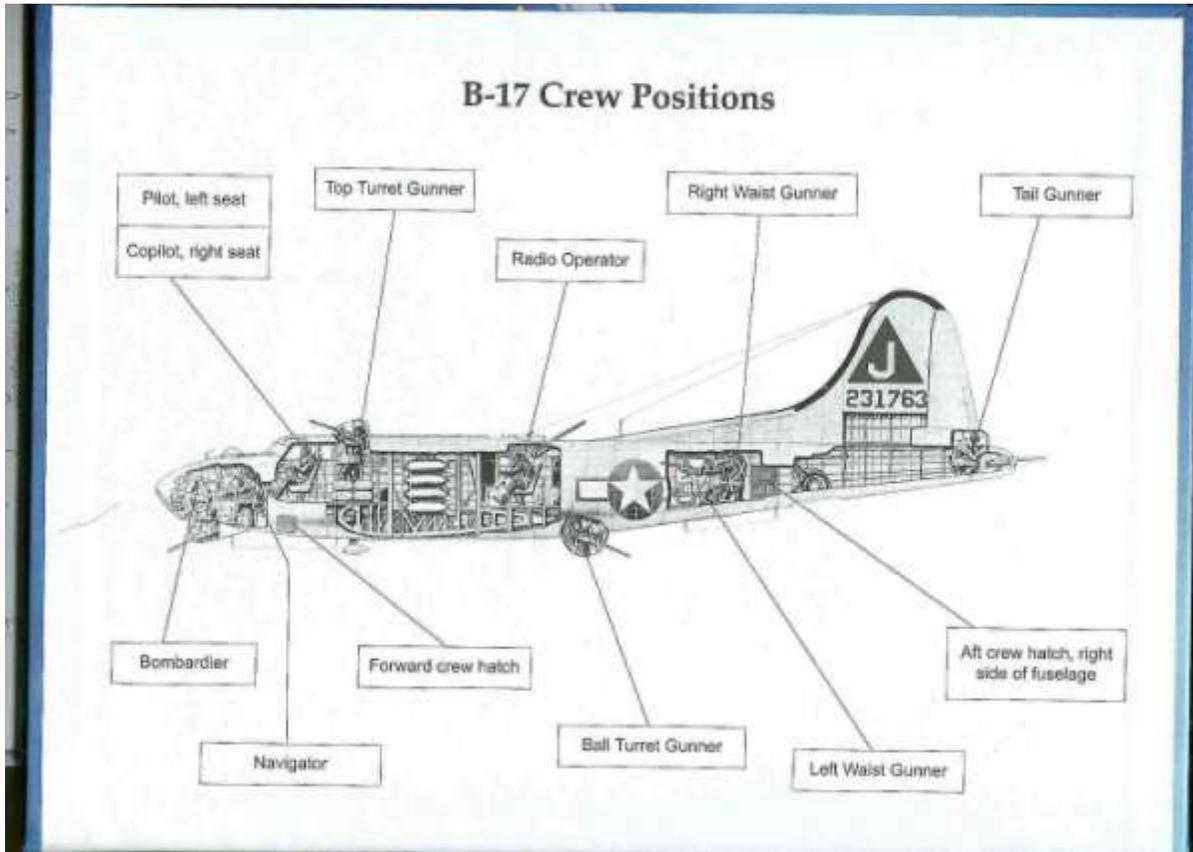
One of the fellows who came there on the same train was tall and thin, but his face showed signs of being too young to be in the Army. After we trained for a week or two on the long marches, he was getting tired of this new life and made a remark that he was going back home. Of course, we knew there was no way that this was going to happen. If so, we’d sure like to know how. It turned out that he was only 14 years old and he had lied about his age when he enlisted. He got out.

When we were issued clothing at Ft. Thomas, one of the men received a raincoat that he could not open. It was stuck together and could not be worn at all. He complained and was told to get exchanged at the next camp. Every day the bulletin board would list the “uniform of the day” and this particular day it called for a raincoat. This man told the officers the story about his raincoat, and he was told to carry it in his hand even if he couldn’t put it on. While the rest of us were protected from the rain, he got all wet and it wasn’t his fault. I don’t know if he ever got a different one.

In Training

The first part of this story I tell about our plane going into a spiral dive. We were still in training and our duty for today, September 12, 1943, was for our pilot to learn how to drop the bombs in case something should happen to the bombardier in combat. Some of the gunners did not have to fly on such a practice run, we had the regular pilot, a copilot, who was a stranger and I never saw him again, the bombardier, navigator, assistant engineer, and myself.

I was alone in the back part of the plane.



After we reached our altitude, the pilot set the plane on automatic pilot; this is the normal thing to do while dropping the bombs. He then went down to the nose section and the engineer sat in his vacant seat. The bombs that we used were only smoke bombs, when they hit the ground smoke would mar the area where they hit. I watched through the open bomb bay as the pilot tried to hit a large white circle. After he dropped a few of them, I heard him say on the interphone, "Give it a hard left turn." I don't know who controlled the switch at that time, but the plane made a very sharp left turn, almost turning over in the air. The words of my regular engineer once told me came to my mind, "If you happen to turn over in a B-17, it's very possible that you can regain control." He continued, "If you go into a nose dive, you cannot get out, it is almost certain death." He flew for a few seconds in wide turns, and then we went into a spiral dive. I had my parachute on and I stood at the open door entrance, waiting for the pilot to tell me to jump. I waited too long. The earth and sky were spinning so fast and the turns grew shorter and the forces of gravity took over. I tried to jump, but my feet were stuck to the floor. All I had to do was to get over a step and I couldn't move them at all. We were spinning faster and faster and the ground was getting closer and closer. I even stooped over, put my hands around my knees and tried to pull them loose from the floor. The pressure was even worse when we began to feel as though we were pulling up. I watched the wings as they



were bending to their fullest extent and I thought they would break off from the terrific strain they were under. I even called out loudly to each wing, "HANG ON, OH HANG ON!"

My young life flashed before me and I knew I was a dead man. I wouldn't see my family again. I saw my funeral at St. Philip's church and suddenly, instead of being frantic, a feeling of peace and calmness took over my body. By this time, we were very close to the ground; the spinning stopped and we cleared the earth by what seemed like only a few feet.

The pilot told us later that he knew what went wrong, the gyro overthrew itself, and he left the nose and started to return to his position. By the time he got to the entranceway, his back was on the floor and the forces of the spiral dive held his body to the

floor, the same as it did to my feet. He could not reach the necessary controls so the co-pilot could have manual control. He told the co-pilot which switches to throw and we eventually regained control. Our regular co-pilot was a big man who was strong enough to overcome the automatic control system, but for some reason he wasn't along this day.

There was another B-17 in the area and they saw us fall from the sky, they radioed our base and told them to bring the ambulances. I'm sure there would have never been any survivors after our crash. We eventually got back to Cutbank Airfield and were taken to the hospital for checkups. We also got a shot, not in the arm, a much needed shot of whiskey to calm us down a bit. I thought for sure that we would crash and I still tell my bombardier that I would have lived a little longer life than him. The nose section would have hit first, thus I might have lived a millionth of a second longer.

A very exciting day and we weren't in combat as yet, just in training.

$10,000-3000=7000-3000=4000-3838=162\text{ft.}$ (cleared by)

You can bet we were much closer, due to the two inexperienced men in control, even if you clear by an inch it's enough.



Important Dates and People

– Elmer Ruschman

- June 17- 43
My first ride in B-17, (we ran off the run way.)
- June-20-43
Our complete crew
- Pilot- W.A. Okaser
- Co-Pilot- Gus Fesarini (replaced Linostom)
- Nav.- B. V. Gaiyn
- Bomb- J. A. Ducheanou
- Eng.- Omer F. Therouh
- Ass. Eng- Ermard Beterdt
- Radio Of.-Elmer F Ruschman
- Ass. Radio- Bill Faylor (replaced Bushko)
- Armoker- William Lamb
- Ass. Arm.- Ivey B. Hellander
- June –9-43
Left Ephrata and went to Great Falls, Montana
- July -13-43
My sister's baby was born, Mary Esther
- July-26-43

Moved to Cut Bank Montana

- July-30-43
Raser let me have the controls of our plane.
- August-5-43

Votary fun laughs and toes off far home arriving.

- Sept-12-43
While flying over the bomb, ran jut me got out of control and almost crashed.
- Sept-13-43
Was advised to Staff Sergeant.



Spiral Fall August 12

At Ephrata, Washington, I was about to be assigned to a crew. We were living in a tent. It was raining and only one other man was there. We were both writing letters. When I finished mine, I got up to take it to the mail room. The other man asked if I would take his along. I mentioned that my letter would go to Kentucky. He said, "So is mine." "I live in Melbourne," I replied. He said, "Highland Heights." I gave my name. He was Bob Hildebrand and his family's property lines joined my Uncle Joe Ruschman's property. We tried to get assigned to the same crew, but we were told that if two men went down from the same area, it was bad publicity. We were put on different crews and we never met again. During the war, his plane was shot down and he was killed.

There were many men who lost their lives at Ephrata. Everyone was new at their jobs. Some crashed into mountains at night and many crashes were seen on the field. I witnessed a plane coming in for a landing and as he rolled down a runway, a truck loaded with gasoline crossed in front of him. They hit and an explosion occurred. Flames and shells were going in all directions. These were dangerous days. On our first ride, the brakes failed on one wheel after we landed. The pilot hit the brakes but only one side worked. We veered to the side, the wing scraped the runway, and we were stuck in the mud. No one was hurt.



Cut Bank, Montana, September 12, 1943: This is the day that is hard to forget. Our practice today was to let the pilot learn the bombardier's job in case of an emergency. We had onboard the pilot, a co-pilot (not our own), a navigator, an assistant engineer, and me. I was the only one in the rear of the plane. The rest of the crew remained on the ground. While the pilot was in the

nose, dropping smoke bombs on the target area, the plane was flying on "automatic pilot." The engineer sat in the pilot's seat. Everything was going okay. The bomb bay docks were open, and I could watch the results of the bombing. After the pilot dropped one of the bombs, I heard him say, "Give it a hard left." Our plane almost upset. We flew

in a circle for a few seconds and went into a spiral dive. I put on my parachute on and waited for the word to bail out, but no one spoke. The turns became tighter and I knew it was time to go. I was standing right in front of the bomb bay door, the earth and sky reeling before my eyes. My feet were glued to the floor and I knew we were going to die. The pressure was so bad I even put my hands under my knees, trying to pry my feet off the floor. They didn't come up. I could see my young life before me, my funeral, my family and loved ones. There was no way out and I was clam, just resigned to death. We began to pull a little. I watched as the wings were bending and it seemed they would tear off. I wondered if we had an enough height to overcome our fall to earth as we were close by now. The pilot knew what went wrong and hastened back to his position. When we went into the spiral dive, his back was held to the floor the same as my feet were. He could not reach the necessary switches to get manual control, but he told the co-pilot what to do and they managed to bring us out of the spin and give us a new lease on life. Another crew saw us as we sped to earth and called for ambulances. We couldn't have any use for such a thing. We would have been scattered all over the hills of Montana.



Oct.-26-43

Left Bangor, Maine, landed at Stephenville and Gander, Newfoundland.

Nov.-13-43

Left Gander, flew over the Atlantic Ocean and landed at Belfast, Ireland.

Nov.-15-43

Left Belfast, landed at Polebrook, England where we were transferred from the 401st to the 351st Bomb Group.

Mission #1

Date- Nov.-26-43 on Bremen, Germany. Target: Ship Factory. Oldenburg was secondary target. Plane-237714 "Bone".

Pilot- Raser-Co-pilot-Cesar

Nov.-Gwyn-Bomb.-Duches

T.T-Therough-Radio-Ruschman

B.T-Taylor-R.W.-Betereit

L.W.-Lamb-T.G.-Hullender

Remarks

Got 21 miles off of English because we couldn't find the formation. Landed without pins in the bombs. The rest of the boys hit their target.

Did not count ASA missions.

We stayed at Gander, Newfoundland, for 17days. During this time, we waited for good weather before leaving. One day as we were at our plane, a pilot came down in a parachute and landed only a few feet away from us. We looked up and saw his plane just before it crashed. Another plane, a PBY, headed towards a small hill out of control. The planes had crashed in midair. The PBY crashed into the hill and burned. I think there were 11-12 men aboard. There were no survivors, except the one who parachuted close to us.

During this period of time, we made at least two attempts to fly across the Atlantic, and



we were called back to base due to bad weather ahead. We finally left in the late evening on the 13th. As we waited for our turn to take off, a B-24 cut in front of us on the runway so we had to wait for him to leave. This was a break for us because, as he made his attempt to take off, a jeep crossed the runway in front of him. The plane killed two men in the jeep. The landing gears on the plane were damaged and the crew had

to go back to Canada for landing so as not to delay the rest of us from leaving.

We flew across the Atlantic Ocean that night. One man on one of the many crews opened the rear door and jumped out into the cold water. He did not want to go across and get killed in combat. I often wonder what he was thinking of as he neared the water and no one was around to help him in any way.

The next day we landed in Belfast and, as we made our approach to the field, a sudden snowstorm caused us to almost crash into some high tension wires, but our pilot pulled up in time. I remember the code name for the day we landed was "Rancor Love." We needed this

The weather in Belfast was about 33 degrees, and it felt much colder. Some of the crew went to town, but I was glad to stay on the base.

When we landed in England, we should have gone to a field called Deanthrope. This field was not ready for us as yet, so we landed at Polebrook. This field's group came over in April of 1943 and had already seen a lot of combat. In a few days we were told that 34 crews of the 401st BG were transferred from the 351st. Our crew was one of them. We were lucky to be in a barracks with seven other crews that we knew real well. We were told that we might see combat in a few days. We would watch the planes in the early mornings as they left and count the ones that came back. Some were not damaged but some returned with engines out, large holes in the fuselage, men injured or dead. Believe me; it would make you think of what can happen because our turn was coming soon.

It came on the 26th. Bremen was the target with my mother's hometown as the secondary. From the time I was put in the Air Corp, I thought there might be the possibility that I might have to bomb her town, but I didn't expect it to be my first mission. Four more times our crew was briefed to bomb Oldenburg and each time, 5 in all, the mission was called off or something happened. I never had to bomb her hometown that she left when she was a young woman.

After we were in the air, we could not find our group. We flew for quite a while and could not find any of our



. We returned to Polebrook and our pilot really caught heck.

Mission #2 Cancelled

Dec. - 15-43

Berlin's Air Ministry 239835

Raser, Cesarini, Gawyn, Duchesneau, Theroux, Ruschman, Taylor, Lamb, Betereit, Hullender.

Remarks

(Mission Scrubbed)

Mission #3

December-16-1943

Bremen's industry factories. 239835- Raser, Cesarini, Gawyn, Duchesneau, Theroux, Ruschman, Taylor, Betereit, Lamb, Hullender,

Remarks

(Got almost to enemy coast and mission was scrubbed.)

December 24- 43

The Crew bombed rocket installations in northern France. Hullender and I were grounded.

December 30-43

Adamack's crew lost while ditching

December 31-48

Bender's- Peter's- Saville's

Major Blaylock and Col. Hatcher went down while bombing Bordeaux, France. We are still on a pass. Coneyak Col. Hatcher- Bender's are prisoners of war, Anderson of benders crew escaped and was back in Peterborough on March 2. I was the second man he knew since his escape.

If the mission of December 15, 1943 had been flown that day, it is doubtful if many of us would have returned. Just think of how many enemy planes and factories were put out of

action from this date until the first daylight raid on March 6, 1944. There were days that missions were planned and, later, called off due to weather or other matters. When we had spent hours of preparation and waiting, take off, we were all set to go and would rather have continued the mission. But on this particular mission, I didn't hear anyone complain. We were all happy that it was scrubbed.

The December 30th mission took the lives of five men from our barracks #14. Their plane was on fire as they returned to England. They bailed out, but they were too close to the ground. Their chutes never opened. It was very sad to see five empty beds where good friends once slept.

Our crew was on a pass for the December 31st raid. Our group lost seven planes that day. It was a very bad mission. Not one plane returned to the base. The ones that came back to England landed at any base they could find. Our Group Commander, Hatcher, was shot down. We lost a good leader. Bender's crew also shared our barracks. There were two crews lost out of our eight when we began. That's a 25 percent loss and we were there in combat for only five weeks. One of the men from Bender's crew was sick that morning and, when his crewmates did not return, he was lost. In time, he had to move out due to another crew moving in. Adamaik and Bender's crew had lived at the opposite end of the barracks from us. Bender was on their 5th raid when they were shot down.

After they were replaced and their replacement crew had completed their 4th raid, some of the fellows told them to beware of the next raid. Sure enough, the crew was shot down and replaced. This next crew was again shot down on their 5th mission. That was three crews that were lost on their 5th mission. You can bet that no one out of the barracks wanted to move in to their spot. The next crew to move in broke the jinx, although they were in store for some close calls.

After a crew was lost on a mission, their belongings were separately listed – everything they had – money, photos, equipment, etc., by a special group of personnel. These things were sent home to the family. The equipment was kept on the base to be used as needed. I spoke to some of these men in later years who said the exact money they had when they were shot down was sent to their home. It's good to know that we had honest people in charge.

Mission to 2 for I.e.

Jan-21-44. After being briefed two mornings in a row we took off again for the rocket installation in northern France near St. Omer and Abbeville. We flew 229925 "The Duchess" at 18,000 feet.

Raser- Cassini Montgomery-Gyun- Duchesneau- Theroux –Ruschman- Taylor-Peteroit-Campbell-Hullender.

Remarks: Lamb still grounded. Heavy flak near St. Omer but our group didn't get any T.O. 1050. Landed 13:25.

Jan-24-44

Factories at Frankfort, Germany. We flew 239835.

Raser-Crocett- Gyun-Duchesneau- Theroux-Ruschman-Taylor-Peteroit-Campbell

Remarks: We couldn't keep up with our group so we circled over the North Sea waiting for a different group. For the meantime we were called back to our base. Some boy saw flak. We went on a pass the same afternoon. We visited Newport and Cambridge.

German V-1 Buzz Bomb June 1944 Very deadly weapon Londoners called them "doodle bugs", flew over head of plane at low altitude and made a distinct sound on timing mechanism.

This January 21st raid was a short one to Northern France so we didn't have to get up so early. These rocket installations looked like long ski jumps. In later months, they were used to launch the rockets, "Buzz Bombs," that Germany sent across the English Channel to hit the London area.

The Germans never sent any of these "Buzz Bombs" to London until after D-Day. Our crew happened to be on a pass at that time, and we spent some of the time in London. All of the English were not over six or seven floors high, and most of them had flat roofs. Many of the anti-aircraft guns were mounted on the tops. I remember that the hotel we chose was located on Gernymn Street. We thought "We should be safe here."

After we retired that night, we were awakened by the anti-aircraft fire from the rooftop plus the "Buzz Bombs" falling from the skies. This continued through the night and, at daybreak, we decided to leave London and head back to the airbase where we were safe. As we headed for the train station, I remember the newspaper man on the corner showing the front page which had four big words on it that took up the whole page. It read, "Pilotless Planes Bomb

London.” This was enough to put a scare into anyone. Just think of this: Now the Germans can push a few buttons and send these weapons without losing a pilot.

When we arrived at the train station, there was standing room only. It seemed as though everyone wanted to leave the big city.

Feb-4-1945

Factories at Frankfurt, Germany. We flew 239835. Raser, Crockett, Miller, Duchesneau, Theroux, Ruschman, Taylor, Peteroit, Fonticello, Campbell.

Remarks: Take off at 0833 got to 13,000 feet, temperature at twenty below zero. Got off the English coast and aborted because Fonticello got sick. The rest of the boys hit the target and seen an awful lot of flak but all got back safely.

Feb-5-1944- Airport at Chateauroux, France. 239835-Raser, Forsaith, Gyun, Duchesmeau, Therouk, Ruschman, Taylor, Petersit, Meighan, Campbell.

Remarks: Take off at 0833 to 16,000 feet, weather was clear. Didn't see much flak. Hit the target very good. An enemy plane shot 20 shells at us and almost got us. There were quite a few enemy fighters around but we didn't get hit once. We landed at 1400. We flew near Orleans, France where Joan of Arc was born.

Everything was going along fine on this raid to Frankfurt, but it was cold up there. I listed it 25 degrees below at 13,000 feet. We continued to climb higher and kept up with the rest of the group. When we had crossed the coast of England, one of our gunners {Fonticello} said that he was sick. The pilot told me to go back to him; he was sitting on the floor and was holding his stomach. He had “the bends”. This sometimes happened at high altitudes. It never happened to me, but I could see that he was in great pain. I reported to Raser that he thought he could not continue on. He wanted to return to the base.

This put Raser in a bad situation. Should he continue with the bombing raid and risk this man's health? In a short time, he pulled out of the formation and returned to Polebrook Airfield. He was again reprimanded by the group officers in charge.

The next day {February 5th } at the briefing, the officer in charge reported to all present that a crew came back to the base because of a man being sick. He continued, “Here is what that pilot should have done. Ask the man if he can continue the mission. If not, put the chute on him, toss him out of the hatch, put the radio man in his place, and go on the raid. Never come

back for such a small thing as that. We have plenty of men. We lose them every day and new men continue taking their place.”

These were harsh words, but that was the answer we were given. Almost all men present knew that our pilot was the one the officials were talking about. We all felt sorry for Raser. He probably wondered what would have happened if he had continued on the raid and the man died on that plane. They probably would have criticized him for that, too. We had never been told previously what to do in a case like that.

Mission #7

- Feb-20-1944- Planes and airway at Leipzig, Germany-239721 Raser, Crockett, Johnson, Duche, Thereuy, Ruschman, Taylor, Patroit, Lamb, Hullender, Ramarks
- Take off at 935. Not much fighters but a lot of fighter attack. Lamb and Hullender claimed to see the fighters.
- Landed at 1806. Target ums was destroyed.

“The Big Week” February 20th, 1944, Mission to Leipzig, Germany. This was a very rough one. As many as 40 enemy fighters attacked from various directions. Some in groups of 6 to 12 planes would come to into the groups at high speed. Our plane flew off on the right side of the lead squadron plane. The plane on our left side was piloted by Lt. Nelson. No more than 15 to 20 feet from us, they were on their second mission. When a new crew flew their first mission the crew is piloted by an experienced piloted by an experienced pilot so that at least one person on the crew has been in combat before. The pilot from that new crew would fly as a co-pilot of a crew with experience. Thus, this Nelson crew was on their first raid as a complete crew.



We were still some distance from our target when we were attacked by the fighters. A couple of ME-109's swooped down from above and fired at the nelson B-17with 20 mm cannon shells. They shattered the overhead window and exploded in the cockpit. The co-pilot, Bartley, was killed instantly due to decapitation. Shell fragments struck the pilot, knocking him unconscious. Both

pilots slumped over the control columns. These things are written in our history book of our 351st.

The following is what I witnessed. I knew that the Nelson crew was beside us. Only two days previously, I was a radio operator on a flight in the skies of England. They checked out the engines of their plane for four hours. We were supposed to come back to Polebrook before dark but found that we had to land at an English airbase. We returned to base the next day. When Fighters were seen by crewmembers, they were reported over the interphone system and all personnel could listen and knew where they were coming from. You had to speak fast and clearly due to time being brief.

I saw them get hit seconds later. The bomb bay doors opened and their bombs were dropped even though we were not to the target (this is done due to emergency). The bombs left the plane to lift up due to the loss of weight. Seconds later, I saw a man bail out of the front section. It had to be the navigator or the bombardier. In a few seconds, it left our formation and disappeared from my view.

The final outcome of the Nelson crew was that they made it all the way back to Polebrook alone. The plane was flown by three men who took turns at the controls. Over the field, they were told by the tower to put the plane on automatic pilot and let it go down in the North Sea. They reported that the pilot was still alive and they wanted to try to save his life. None of the men had ever landed a plane before. Some of the crew bailed out over the field leaving the navigator, Lt. Truemper and Sgt. Mathias, the engineer, alone. They came over the runway twice. Each time they were too high. On their third attempt, they crashed in an open field killing Truemper and Mathias. Nelson survived the crash, but died later in the hospital. Truemper and Mathias were awarded the Medal of Honor, posthumously. Carl Moore, top turret gunner, was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross. Joe Rex, radio gunner, was awarded the Silver Star. There were seven men who received Purple Hearts. Of course, some of these men received more than one medal. They became the most decorated crew in the whole 8th Air Force, and there were thousands of crews that flew. Who would ever have thought that a man from Melbourne, KY, would have flown with the most decorated crew in the whole 8th Air Force.

Mission 21

May-8-1944- City of Berlin. We flew A-560. Raser-Summers-Graham-Magness-Theroux-Ruschman-Taylor-Lamb-Petersit-Hullenden.

Remarks

Air borne at 06:35. Plenty of flak over the target but it was inaccurate. A few enemy fighters. None of our planes lost bombs away at 11:42 at 27,500 feet. Landed at 14:35.

May-9-1944- Oldenburg, Germany but weather was bad and raid was scrubbed when we got out over the channel.

Mission 22

May-11-1944- Railroad yards at Luxemburg, Lunenburg. We flew S-121-Raser-Summers-Theroux-Ruschman-Taylor-Lamb-Petersit-Hullender.

Remarks

Airborne at 15:15. No flak or enemy fighters. Bombs away at 18:46. Altitude was 19500 feet, target was hit well. We landed at 21:08

May-17 -Airfield at Paris

May-8, 1944: Another run to the big city and an easy one. The next raid was to Luxemburg. To fill in this page, I'll tell a story since I can't recall memories of these raids.

In the 1990's, an article in our Polebrook post was written by a man named Robert Johnson who had recently found that we have an active organization. He seemed to be so happy to possibly find old friends again. He said that he flew with the 510th Squadron and was a navigator who began to fly in early 1944. I checked my diary and a "Johnson" had been with us on a few missions. {There were many Johnsons there, and I wondered if this was the right one}. I sent a letter to him saying I was on Lt. Raser's crew and, if you are the same Johnson who flew on our mission to Leipzig, Germany on February 20, 1944, you might remember something that happened outside of our plane after we landed.

Within a week, I received a letter from him, and he told me about two men getting into a fight so I knew it was the right Johnson. The problem between these two men was a misunderstanding, I think. One asked the other, "Did you see me shoot down that enemy plane?" The other replied, "Yes, but it was one of ours." I imagine they were both all keyed up from the excitement of the raid and they fought. It really wasn't much of a fight because the man from our crew knocked him down with a few punches.

I kept in contact with Johnson, sent him various rosters, photos, etc. His last letter to me he wrote that he married an English girl during the war. They spent 6 months in the U.S.A. and, in winter, they lived in England. He asked me to keep writing and gave the address to me. He added, "We will meet each other at the reunion next year."

A few months later, I received our newsletter and it showed that he was listed in the loss of life column. I could hardly believe it. I called and talked with his pilot. He said that Johnson died of a heart attack as soon as he arrived in England. He seemed so happy to be able to meet some of his old friends again.

More than likely, he met more of them in heaven than he would have here on earth. May God bless him.

Mission #23

May 19-1944- Center of Berlin, but weather was bad so we bombed the city of Kiel, Germany. We flew F-124-Raser-Summers-Hanson-Craig-Theroud-Ruschman-Taylor-Peteroit-Lamb-Hullender. What a sad sight to witness as you watch a plane falling out of formation and see that they cannot control their flight. This happened many times, and there was no way for us to help.

In the earlier days, a few pilots left the formation and followed friends who were on their way down. It is only natural that you would want to help a friend – maybe help protect them from enemy fighters. The higher up officials frowned on such a thing saying that, when you do that, you are taking away fire power from the group. The ones who were going down could be replaced – stay with the group.

Remarks

Airborne at 0929. We flew over the North Sea. Flak was so plentiful and accurate. One B-17 got his nose and tail blown off. Altitude was 26,500 ft. Bombs away at 1345. Landed at 1618.

Mission #24

May-24-1944- Center of Berlin. We flew 196-M. Raser-Londer-Johnston-
Theroud-Ruschman-Taylor-Lamb-Peteroit-Cruse.

Remarks

May-24-1944- This became an exciting mission. Since our co-pilot, Gus Cesarini, became a pilot of his own plane, we flew with various men who did a good job. Some time ago, our pilot had taken the pilot of a new crew to show him what to do in combat. Today we had a man that my diary shows as “Londer.” Actually, his name was “London.” As we were flying through heavy and accurate flak, our plane was shattered with a hit behind the co-pilot. The

plane shuddered in the air, and we began to fall from the formation. Usually the pilot would ask everyone to check in and then ask where the damage was and how bad it was. By then we were in a gentle dive and I had seen cases just like this. Planes would show smoke and flames and then blow up. We tried to contact the pilot who wouldn't answer. We were further away from the group and still going down. We were lucky that there were no fighters around. I began to think that maybe both our pilot and co-pilot had been hit. I finally decided to go to the rear of the plane and bail out. By the time I got back there, the tail gunner, ball turret gunner, and two waist gunners were ready to go. The waist gunners still had their headsets on. Finally, the plane began to come under control and the pilot spoke for the first time. He asked, "Is everyone still back there? Get back to your positions."

He would not tell us what was wrong. We finally caught up with the group. About a week later, the pilot told us that he had just turned the controls over to London when we were hit. "London was so scared that he froze at the controls. His eyes stared straight ahead and his arms were stiff. He was taking us down. I hit him on his arms, trying to get control, to no avail. I fought him with a few slaps to the face then I finally busted him with a good one to his head and got his attention."

This man never flew again. If he had been with his crew, he probably would have taken their lives.

Many years after the war, an ad on television showed the inside of a B-17 with the pilot and co-pilots in their seats, the exact scene we had seen that day. The co-pilot froze at the controls, but this pilot was prepared for emergency. He calmly reached for a bottle of shaving lotion, put some on his hands and patted the co-pilot's face. It brought him out of the trance, and he said, "Thanks, I needed that." I think it was an Aqua Velva ad. I remember telling my good wife, Mary, that I should write to them. We had the real thing.

Remarks

Airborne at 0700. Weather was pretty bad at times, but over the target was clear. We hit the target at 1140. Flak hit a big hole next to our co-pilot. It was his first raid and Johnston's 30th. Altitude was 22,500 feet. We landed at 1529.

May-28-1944- Lost McClellan and crew along with Duncan who was on his 30th. Anderson also went down.

Mission 25

May-27-1944- Railroad yards at Ludwigshafen, Germany. We flew M-196. Raser-Forsaith-Hanson-Finn-Therough-Ruschman-Taylor-Peteroit-Lamb-Hullender.

Remarks

Airborne at 0829. Flak was light on the enemy coast. Twenty minutes before the target, at least 200 enemy fighters jumped us. Our group lost six ships- Peters and Hopkins from our squad. Bombs away at 1237 at 126,000 ft. Flak over the target was accurate and our dyjon system was shot out leaving a large hole in our tail. Landed at 1534. Fighter-Finn-1-Hanson-1-Therough-3-Taylor-1-Lamb-1-Hullender-2.

Mission 26

May-29-1944- Folke-Wolfe factories at Sorau, Germany. We flew L-725. Base-Wrisberg-Hanson-Kelder-Therough-Ruschman-Silver-Peteroit-Hullender.

Remarks

Airborne at 0837. I flew left waist while over enemy territory. Flak was pretty heavy and accurate. We've seen about 20 enemy fighters and were attacked once. I saw 4 ME-210's and a P-51 flew behind them and shot them all down before they even knew what had happened. I saw about four fortresses go down and only a few boys got out. P-853 went down with Ncal's crew. Bombing was excellent. Bombs away at 1251 at 14,200 feet. We landed at 1812.

The Day Before Thousands of Young Men Would Die

By Elmer F. Ruschman

As the month of June, 1944 approached, I was a 23 year old radio operator-gunner on a B-17 bomber crew based at Polebrook England, Station #110. Our airfield was located near Peterborough, about 70 miles north of London. Our group was the 351st Bomb Group (H), and I was in the 510th Squadron. My 28th mission was flown June 3rd, only 2 more to go and my tour



of duty would be over. To me it seemed unbelievable to have gone this far without some drastic thing happening to me and I was thankful for still being alive.

The weather in England is hard to predict. It might be clear at the base, but the rest of Europe might be covered with clouds, so no missions could be flown. On days such as this we would fly practice missions, slow-time jobs, or fly to other airfields to bring back some of our planes that had been forced

to land at various fields, unable to make it back to Polebrook. On this last type of flight two “skeleton” crews were necessary, each crew consisted of a pilot, co-pilot, navigator, engineer and radio operator. One crew would fly both crews to the necessary base and would return to Polebrook after leaving the other crew to bring back the plane that had been forced down earlier.

Now, as I write memories of those days I am 73 years old, one day in particular stands out in my mind. As I sat on my bunk writing letters, an operations clerk told me that I had to fly with a skeleton crew to pick up one of our 510th planes which had been forced down at another base. You can bet that I wasn't just too happy about it, I'd much rather would have stayed on the base. On flights such as these I never entered into my diary so I don't know who I flew with as my crew, but we were to witness sights that later became history.

We were flown to an airfield in Southern England, our crew got out, and also a few ground members who were to repair the plane that we were to fly back to the base. As I looked around I could hardly believe my eyes. We were on the shores of the English Channel; you could see the Calais area of France, 22 miles across the Channel. The area was full of activity, ships of all sorts, some being loaded, men marching aboard, trucks and vehicles of all kinds moving here and there, it was like a beehive. Many planes were being painted with white stripes across the wings. It seemed like they used wide brushes attached to poles as they pulled them across the wings. As I viewed all of this activity I felt as though I didn't belong here, I should not be seeing these things. Another thought entered my mind, if I could see France I could surely see all of this, then the Germans in France could surely see all of this, how can we ever surprise them? In a matter of time our plane was ready to leave and we were ready to climb aboard. Suddenly an officer confronted us with words similar to these: “Whatever you think you might have seen here, forget it. Remember, you never saw a thing. Whatever you thought you saw, keep it to yourselves.” I was pleased that the officer spoke as he did, at least they were trying to keep ‘D-Day’ a secret.

I did not remember which plane we flew back to Polebrook, but a few years ago I was lucky enough to receive a copy of Edgar L. Matlock's diary. Captain Norman S. Snyder was our 510th engineering officer, Matlock was a clerk in Captain Snyder's office and he kept a day by day account of almost everything of any importance. I received my copy from Walter Skinner and it is a manuscript and a fine piece of history.

Here are the words he wrote for June 4, 1944: "The mission today was a late afternoon raid of targets at Palaiseau, France. We furnished five ships and five crews, 478-McIntyre, 082-Adamiak, 560-Borchert, 038-Walker and 077-Crockett. All completed their mission and returned safely. 077 was the only plane to return to the base. The weather was very poor and the other planes had to land at other fields due to poor visibility. 038-Walker had an accident in landing at Friston and an aileron and flap were damaged. 077 had some battle damage, and a Tokyo tank was hit by flak. The weather was unfavorable all day.

There was an overcast all morning which grew heavier in the evening and was accompanied by showers.

June 5th, 1944 - Our planes and crews who landed cross-country last evening returned to the base today. A ground crew was flown down to Friston this afternoon and repairs were made to 038 and the ship was brought back to the field this evening. We were assigned a new airplane today, 43-37512. We were given notice this evening there has been considerable activity at the group headquarters, surveys for available planes and crews, something is brewing. No doubt, something big.

June 6, 1944

The first news we heard this morning was that today is D-Day. The invasion of the European continent by American and British troops got underway this morning. The first news we received was an announcement by the German radio in France, then later the BBC announced that the invasion was on. Our part in the big show today was to send nine airplanes and ten combat crews, as follows: 509-McIntyre; 478-Cesarini; 515-Walker; 252-Austin; 196-Raser; 955-McCluskey; 124-Neal; 028-Wrisberg; 057-Olsen, and Dennis' crew in a 509th ship on a raid on enemy coast installations on the "Invasion Coast" of France. All our planes and crews returned safely from the mission. We were immediately alerted for a second mission, then there was a loading, the crews were briefed, but the mission was finally scrubbed. The weather started off favorably. It was partly cloudy and sun shining until mid-morning then there was an overcast which later in the day closed in and in the evening there were scattered showers."

As I said earlier, I didn't know which day in June it was that we saw all of these activities taking place, now I find it to be June 5th, 1944, so we didn't have to keep our little secret a very long time.

We were awakened very early on June 6th, and Colonel Ball told us it was D-Day- "Target was to be pill boxes on the French Coast."

Our pilot was RASER, co-pilot STRATAKIS, navigator HANSON, bombardier DUCHESNEAU, engineer THEROUX, radio operator RUSCHMAN, ball turret SILVER, right waist PETEREIT and tail gunner HULLENDER.

Our planes were reloaded and a second mission was planned- the weather closed in and this second mission was cancelled.

We all returned to the barracks and listened to the news on the radio and we prayed for the safety of the men on the ground. I surely would not want to trade places with them at any time and especially not on this day.

If anyone who made this flight from FRISTON on June 5th, 1944, is still alive, I would appreciate any letters from you, so as to refresh my memories of this very special day.

See! If I had stayed in the barracks, I would have missed a very special flight.



Mission 31

June-8-1944- Target was a city just south of Paris, France. We flew S-512 and flew with a different crew. Caughlan-Forsaith-Port-Copt-Ruschman-Devolin-Cotterman.

Remarks

Airborne at 504. He flew to the target which was overcast so we came back. Just before we got to the coast we saw all sorts of invasion craft on the coast and a lot of boats in the channel. Landed at 1058.

Mission 32

June -10-1944-Target was airfield at Gad, France. We flew M-196- Raser-Stratakis-Hanson-Duchesneau-Theroux-Ruschman-Kascaloney-Peter-Lamb-Hullender

Remarks

Airborne at 0502. We flew over the invasion coast. I flew over the invasion coast. I flew the ball turret for Red because his heated boot burned out. We saw some flak as usual. Bombs away at 815. We landed at 1040.

This was to be our worst mission. Le Bourget Airfield was where Lindbergh had landed in 1927 after he flew the Atlantic Ocean alone. We were only 12,000 feet high and approached our target that was clouded over. A strong headwind was against us. The navigator said our ground speed was 80 mph. We were sitting ducks for the anti-aircraft gunners. We went around for a second run and the headwinds were hindering our progress. There were enemy fighters around but did not attack us.

Shortly after we dropped our bombs, the plane on the left of the lead plane was hit in his #2 engine and flames spread across his wing. One man jumped from the nose section almost immediately. The impact of the flak, plus the loss of the engine, caused the plane to rise and then fall below my field of vision. We cared for the safety of this plane. The pilot was Gus Cesarini who used to be our co-pilot, now a first pilot with his own crew. Before Cesarini went down, a blast of a 155mm shell exploded just under the open bomb bay door of our plane. It knocked out our #3 and #4 engines and also shot a large hole in the section behind me. It came through the bottom, took off the control cables on the left side, and then shattered the window where Lamb, our waist gunner, was located. We began to fall to the earth. The plane rode very roughly due to no control cables on the left side. Raser got some control after a short time, but

it seemed that we might have to bail out. Bill Lamb had fallen to the floor. The pilot sent me back to see how bad he was hurt. The shattered plexiglass window hit on his face, but did not cause any blood. He was scared as he could be. Raser told me to take his position until he calmed down. The engineer cut off our trailing wire antenna and spliced some of the severed cables, making it easier for the pilot to control our plane.

We were not with our formation, but they were still within in our view. Another plane in trouble was close to us as we began to cross the English Channel. Raser ordered us to throw out all radio equipment, flak vests, all our excess clothing, anything to lighten our load. Of course, we saved the guns until we came closer to England.

By then, the group was far ahead, and we were losing altitude all the time. Raser said to throw the guns and the ammunition out. A possible ditching in the Channel seemed necessary. The other plane was in trouble suddenly exploded. No one got out.

As we neared the English coast, we were very low in altitude and wondered if we had enough height to land or if we should ditch the B-17 on the shore line of the Channel. Raser spotted an emergency landing strip and we headed inland. In a short time, we landed rather roughly at the small English base. Our plane was so badly damaged that Raser called the base for someone to pick us up. We were fed and given plenty of drinks to calm our nerves. We wondered if Cesarini made it safely to earth.

We found out about 20 days later that Gus died when his plane crashed. What a fine man to have died so young.

Part Two Mission #32

Mission #31

June -8-1944- Target was a city just south of Paris France. We flew –S-5.12- flew with a different crew. Cauglan – Forsaith- Port – Copt - Ruschman.

Devlin- Cotterman.

Remarks

Air borne at 0504. We flew to the target, which was overcast so we came back, just before we got to the coast we seen all sorts of invasion craft on the coast, and a lot of boats in the channel. Landed at 1058.

Mission #32

June-10-1944- Target was an airfield at Gad, France. We flew M-196 – Raser – Stratakis – Hanson – Duchesneau – Theroux – Ruschman – Kasicaloney – Peters – Lamb – Hullender –

Remarks

Air borne at 0502. We flew over the invasion coast. I flew the ball turret for Red because his heated boot burned out. We saw some flak as usual. Bombs away at 0815. We landed at 1040.

June 8, 1944

Another easy raid. Someone must be feeling sorry for me in my attempt to finish up.

June 10, 1944

I used to fly the ball turret position while in training. This was the only time I did so in combat. The ball isn't the most comfortable place on the plane. You have to sort of curl yourself into a ball. Your feet have to fit into the front part of the turret. Your back has to be bent so the door will close behind you and your view is a small, rounded window that is placed between your feet.

To get out of it later, you have to reach behind your back with the guns to the rear of the plane, then the door will open inside the plane. I don't remember if I mentioned this before, but it happened once in a while, and I've seen it on T.V. History Channel.

The turret rotates on a circular cogged rail. It is operated and powered by hydraulics. If the cogged rail happens to get hit by enemy fire, the cogs will not mesh and you cannot move the turret properly. If this happens when the guns are in the wrong position there is a possibility that the man cannot get out.

The History Channel showed a case like this when the hydraulic system was shot out and the landing gears would not come down. The ball turret gunner could not move his turret. This meant that the plane would have to land with the wheels in the "up" position. The ball turret would be hitting the runway or grass with the man inside. The pilot told the man what he had to do. He understood his position and replied, "Do what you have to do."

What a sad thing to happen to the poor young fellow. War is like that.

Mission-33

June-14-1944-Target was on airfield just outside of Bais, France. We flew T-75 Raser-Sherd-Hanson-Therous-Rushman-Petereit-Lamb-Holbänder

Remarks

Air force at 448. Flash was very accurate and justify of it. Lamb got hit in the eyes. Control calls were shot off and oxygen shot out. We got drunk at an English bar. We landed at 132. TANGMERE 12,000 feet

June-18-1944

Our crew got a 4 day trip to London. While gone Stony got hit by flash over Hamburg 6/18/44



Coming Home

After the mission on June 14, 1944, we were given a few days off to try to forget some of our sadness of losing Cesarini. We had been flying often lately. While in town, the M.P.'s stopped anyone who wore wings and notified them that if they had more than 30 raids they could go back to their base and probably get to return to the U.S.A. "Your tour of duty is over," if you chose to, you could go back very shortly, but you had to fly home in a 'war weary' B-17 and some of them never made it all the way across the Atlantic. Your other choice was that you would be assigned a job of some sort on the base and wait for a ship. Since we flew over to England, we chose to wait for the ship.

I was given a job in the radio section, my job was to set up and calibrate the radios on incoming new planes for the various frequencies we used in England. I had to move out of the combat barracks and move up in a wooded area nearby. Before I moved out, we decided to go to town for a celebration of being a free man and no more combat.

When we got to Peterborough we bought 4 or 5 bottles of Scotch Whiskey, ran out of that, bought some wine and beer, we were really celebrating and in time we went to a dance. I never could dance, but I could drink. When the dance was over, we had to walk downstairs. One of the men, who we met by accident was a hometown friend of one of our men in our barracks. As all of us were ready to go down the steps, this fellow decided to jump, which he did. While he was in midair two of the English Policemen had just entered the doors, ran to help him up, he wasn't hurt at all.

The police said they would take care of him, let him sleep it off, and no charges against him and would take him back to his base. I told the police that I would see that he got back to the base, they agreed and went out of the doors and the last thing I remembered was those two high fuzzy hats that they wore disappeared in the fog of the night.

The next morning when I woke up I didn't feel just too full of pep. I asked some one, "Ok, who brought me home?" They replied that I made sure everyone got on the last bus. I didn't remember that. After awhile I checked my clothing, found my billfold with an extra billfold. This one belonged to the 'jumper', his name was listed and his A.P.O. number. He was from a different base. I went to headquarters to find out which base he belonged to. He was an officer in the 40 1st bomb group, a 5 mile ride on a bicycle. In time I found him and told him there was no money in the wallet. He replied with words that I was happy to hear, "There wasn't anything in there when I met you men." I asked, "Why did you give it to me?" He said, "Because you were the only sober one there." I sure had him fooled, as well as English policemen, and myself.

The job in the noncombat area was not near as exciting as I had when I flew. I was still on flying status and could collect flight pay, but I decided to stay on the ground and didn't want to take chances of getting killed in a crash. The days seemed to be longer than before and I was anxious to go home again. I left the airbase on a train September 12, 1944, and arrived in Warrington, England, for processing. On September 30th we arrived in Glasgow, Scotland. On the 1st of October we boarded the Queen Elizabeth Ocean Liner. Almost everyone had a job on the ship, mine was to be a sgt. of the guard on a certain section. I was in charge of 12 men. This was an easy assignment, some had K.P., rank didn't mean a thing, our ship left Scotland at 2315 hours on Oct. 3rd.

The second night we ran into a pretty bad storm, waves were high and the ocean was rough. While on duty a few nights later, one of my men called for me saying that a man in one of the rooms was sick. When I saw him I thought he was dead and called for the medics. This man was from Jamaica, he was one of the ship workers. He did die and was buried at sea the next day, a military funeral. Very sad to see his body bound and it was the first time that I witnessed a burial at sea.

A few days later we had an alert of an enemy submarine in the area, but I think it was a drill and a little excitement for us. During WWII all ships at sea zigzagged across the ocean instead of a straight course, this was done so that we distracted the subs.

On the morning of October 10, 1944, we were told that we were getting close to New York Harbor. Eventually we could see the outline of the tall buildings. The weather was clear and warm. Unless it happens to you, there is no way that you could know the feeling of joy and happiness in your body to know that you have returned to America again. The many ships in the harbor blew their horns. We saw the Statue of Liberty. The small towboats alongside to shove us to the docks. At 12:15 p.m. we docked at Pier 92 on 51st street. What a day to remember.

It took a long time before our feet touched American soil again. Of course, the war wasn't over yet. But for those of us that had finished flying our missions, it was over as far as combat duty was concerned. The Salvation Army, the Red Cross and other organizations gave us food and drinks. I spotted a line that had a liquid that I had not seen for a long time, it was called "MILK", it was cold and I think I drank two quarts; it was a real treat for me.

By the time we left the harbor on a ferry boat to Camp Shanks, N. J; it was dark and we arrived at one a.m. on the 11th. I forgot to say that long lines were formed at the pier for men to use a phone to call home. What a pleasure it was to dial the home phone number, to hear it ring and tell them that I returned safely. On the 12th of October we were on a train headed to Camp Atterbury in Indiana. Left there on the 13th, arrived at Cincinnati Terminal at 7:30 p.m. A cousin, Larry Ruschman, took me to our home next to St. Anne's Convent; it was 8:45 p.m. and time for a very happy celebration. "Home Again" for 21 full days.

Those 21 days seemed more like 2 or 3 as time went so fast. Before we left our airfield in England, one of my crewmates, Bill Lamb, told me that his mother died before he went into the army. Since then, his father remarried to a woman that Bill was not too fond of. He said, "I don't know what kind of a furlough I'll have." I told him, "Bill, if you don't have a happy time, take a train to Cincinnati and call me." He spent his last 10 days with me and then we had to report to Miami Beach, Florida. It was here that our crew was broken up and we were assigned to other bases in the U.S.A.

My orders were that I was to be sent back to Great Falls, Montana, the same city where our crew trained with the 401st bomb group. I was pleased to return there. The people were very good to the service men, the city was clean and they had a lot of saloons. My duty there would be to fly with the air transport command.

A few days after I arrived I reported to an officer in the radio section. There were three or four women working, doing typing, filing, etc. I spotted an attractive, dark haired young lady

that caught my eye. Something told me that she would be mine someday if she was still single. Later, I asked one of the men if she was married, his reply was, "Don't worry about it. She won't go with any of us fellows." I thought to myself, "She must be a good girl to be around." A few days later I saw her typing and asked, "What are you typing, Mary?" "Weekly notices to airmen." I was familiar with this report and asked her, "Where do you have to send it?" She replied, "Headquarters, Cincinnati, Ohio, Lunken Airport." I replied, "Gee, I live about 5 miles east of that on the other side of the Ohio River." These were our first few words. We were married for over 51 years until her death in 1996. We had a great life together and I miss her so very much. Enough of this – It's back to Great Falls again.

Our duty was to fly new planes from various factories to airfields here in the U.S.A. and bases overseas. A crew consisted of a pilot, copilot, navigator (If we went overseas), engineers and a radio operator. It was seldom that you flew with the same men twice.

We usually flew airlines to where we would pick up the new planes at the factory. We were told that we had high priority and could not be bumped from the airline except for a congress man, a representative or Roosevelt's dog, 'Fala'. On one flight we stopped in Salt Lake City. Overnight a heavy snow fell and everyone wanted to get away. The flight clerk had a desk at the hotel and would check to see what each man's orders called for. Among the crowd was a major who was sounding very loud and important. He spotted me and he said, "I'll roll that tech Sargent over there." The flight clerk asked to see my orders, and then said, "No you won't, major." I wouldn't have cared if he did.

I made some deliveries here in the U.S., but most of my flights were flown to the South Pacific, so now I saw both sides of the war, but no combat in the Pacific. We would fly to islands such as Saipan, Eniwetok, Bikini Atoll, Kwajalein, Johnson Island, the Hawaiians, the farther away one was to Guam with a B-29. I went as far north as the Midway Islands, so you can see I got around pretty much.

When we landed on Midway in a B-24 we were surrounded by soldiers. We wondered what was going on. We found out that they thought we were the mail plane and they were anxious to receive letters from home. A sad day for them. It was here that we seen the "Goonie Birds". You talk about something funny to watch. These are also called the Albatross. They are very graceful in the air. They can stay up for days at a time and when they return to land and hit the ground they are anything but graceful. Their feet hit, they roll and tumble and you just stand and laugh at them.

While in Hawaii, we used to land at John Rogers Airfield or Hickum Field, close to Pearl Harbor. The scar from the attack still showed on the barracks and the sunken ships still laid in the harbor.

While on the trip to Guam the war was almost over, they didn't really need the B-29 that we delivered. We finally got an officer to sign for it so we could leave. We always came back from trips in the Pacific by military planes. Had I been in the U.S. I would have been out of the army earlier because I had plenty of points.

I went into the army in October 1942 – overseas to England in October 1943 – returned to U.S.A. in October of 1944 and back to be a civilian in October 1945.

I have never regretted that I had to serve my country during WWII. I did not enlist, I stayed out as long as I could because I knew I would get killed, so why be in a hurry. I met many new friends from many states and still get to see some of them at reunions. Many were shot down, this is sad; there was nothing we could do to help them. The air war is different, you can't stop the plane. The ground fighters can help their buddies, but ours would go down in flames. All we could do is pray for them and hope that our plane would return safely.

After the war was over it was over it was time to return to be a civilian once again. Previous to our marriage Mary had agreed to live here in Kentucky. There were very few jobs out west and I had worked for the C.T.O. Railroad before my days in the service. This would also make it possible to travel to her people at least once a year on a pass.

We rented an apartment for 5 years, built a new home in 1950, a daughter, Beth, born in 1951 and a son, Tom, born in 1953. Beth married a fine man, John Finn. They have 3 children, Sarah, William, and Julie.

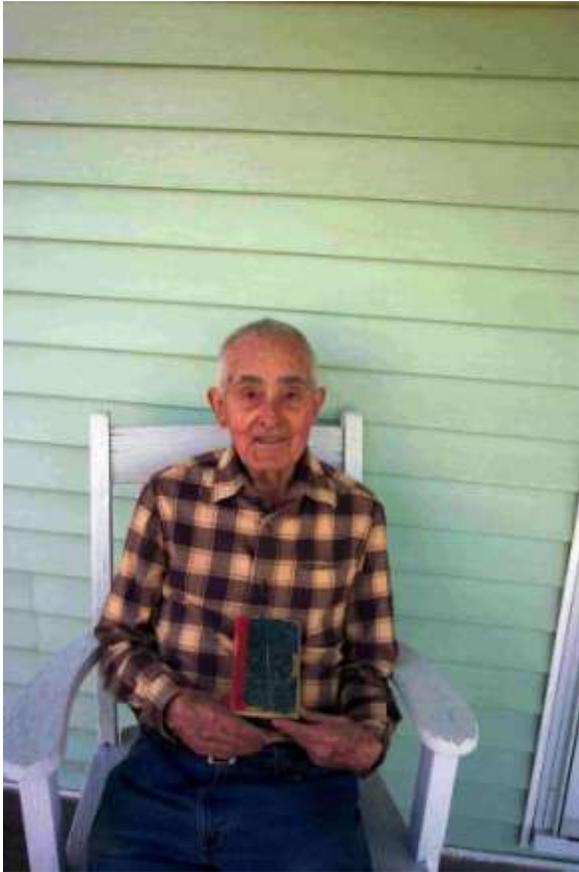
After I returned, Mary and I visited some of the European countries. We found the home in Germany where my mother had lived as a young girl. Also visited the old airfield in England where I was based during WWII. We went to most of our air force reunions, Mary was as well known as I was, she was very outgoing.

Our life together ended on September 21, 1996 as she took her last breath in that early morning here at home. Things will never be the same. We had many days together and thought it would never end. I miss her so very much and wait here until we meet again in the Eternal Life; God has been good to us, blessing us with two children and 3 grandchildren who we love very much.

Finished December 11, 2000

Thank you, God

Elmer F. Ruschman



This Book is Special to a Local Man

On February 18, 1944, I flew with this crew in the skies over England. We were sent up to check out the engines for 4 hours before the plane could be flown into combat. We found that the winter darkness began to fall and we had to land at an English Airbase and stay overnight. (The airfields were not permitted to use landing lights during the war). We returned to Polebrook the next day.

The next day, February 20, we were awakened in the very early morning to prepare for a mission to Lipzia, Germany. Little did I know that this Nelson Crew would become the most Decorated Crew in the Whole 8th Air force and that I now flew with my own crew and with Nelson next to us.

We were attacked many times by German Fighter Pilots. One of them made a pass and decapitated the co pilot. Shell fragments from his Armour plate veered off and struck the pilot, both men's bodies now fell on the controls and I seen them as they fell toward the Earth.

I've seen many of them fall, good friends, and there is no way to aid them in the air except to pray for their safety. Flying in combat is so different than being on the ground.

Our war seemed like a giant movie in the sky and the camera was ALWAYS on your crew. Things happen so fast that there is hardly time to think, you just react as well as you can and hope you do the right thing.

Elmer Ruschman Timeline WWII

10-1-1942- Sworn into army- Ft. Thomas, Ky.

10-15-42- reported for duty

10-21-42- sent to Atlantic City, N.J. into the Army Air Corps

11-16-42- sent to Scott Field, ILL- Radio

12-4-43- to Laredo, Texas Gunnery School

5-31-43- To Salt Lake City

6-9-43- To Ephrata, Wash.

6-11-43- To Great Falls; Montana with 401st B.G.- 613th Sr.

7-26-43- To cut Bank Mont,

7-30-43- Left me fly B-17

8-12-43 Spiral Dive from 10,000 ft. Finally under control with about 100 feet from Earth

10-7-43- To Scott field

10-10-43- back to cut bank

10-18-43- Great Falls to Scott Field

10-21-43- To Syracuse, N.Y.

10-22-43- To Bangor, Main.

10-26-43- To Stephenville then Gander, Newfoundland

11-13-43- Across Atlantic Ocean to Belfast, Ireland after 3 attempts

11-15-43- to Polebrook, England then transferred to 351st BG.

11-25-43- flew 33 missions- Last one on 6-14-44 Exactly one year after our first flight co pilot killed

9-12-44- To Warrington, England

9-30-44- To Glasgow, Scotland

10-1-44- Boarded the Queen Elizabeth Ship

10-3-44- Left Scotland

10-10-44- Arr. N.Y. Harbor 12:15 p.m.



When World War II was over, we survivors returned to our homes and went on with our lives, happy to be alive. We mourned for our friends who lost their lives in combat at a young age and we didn't take time to write things down for the next generations. In the 1970s we started to have an 8th Air Force reunion and met some very close friends from my barracks. It was so very special to see them again and to recall memories. In later years we formed our own 351st

reunions and met many more men and things that were kept inside of us now seemed easier to speak out openly.

We had newsletters where we could write our stories for others to read and recently a documentary was made and shown on the History Channel. It showed the film 'Combat America', made by Clark Gable who was assigned to our base in England. The last half of the film tells the story of a crew that became to highest decorated crew in the whole 8th Air Force. This flight took place on February 20, 1944 on a raid to Leipzig, Germany. I flew with them in the skies of England on the 18th and the 19th as their radio operator, and they flew off of our left wing on the 20th as I was now flying with my own crew, Lt. Raser was my pilot.

I witnessed the attack, seen them get hot and later watched as they began to fall from the formation, and I never expected to see them again. On our return to our base we had to land at a nearby base, due to the Nelson crew trying to land their plane now being flown by the navigator and the engineer. Their co-pilot was dead and the pilot was injured badly, but still alive. Eventually, they crashed, killing the two men who gave their lives trying to save their pilot who survived the crash but later died in the hospital. Their story was told in history books, but they never got the honor the deserved. In later years two young men took up their story and while one researched, the other wrote the book. If it had not been for a boy, of 12 years old when he read about the crew became so interested that he vowed that one day he would let the world know what these men went through, this book would not be written and the documentary would never been on the History Channel.

This is the story that Rick School has put together for all of us.

I have mentioned that combat in the air is much different as the soldier on the ground. The following lines tell the story that I read in a book some years ago.

"Combat in the air is very different than fighting on the ground. Your field of vision is only as far as the next hill or valley or a clump of trees. As your plane gains altitude above these obstacles your view becomes as far as the horizons. Being high in the air, you can watch your bombs drop and explode as they hit the Earth. If a plane is hit in your group you can watch him fall, watch to see if chutes come out and open, watch the plane helplessly, see the final crash, watch the smoke and flames as it burns. You can watch the enemy planes coming at your plane at fast speeds and you can tell from the flash of their guns which planes they are attacking. The whole scene is similar to a giant movie in the sky, withal of the things going on in split-second moments and your own plane is the center of attractions. Your war was there right before your eyes and you could see the final results. Large cannons on the ground were able to shoot for miles, but the damage they caused might not be known for days until you advance to that area." The enemy fighter planes would put a scare into you as they attacked at high speeds and

hard maneuvers, but at least you had a chance of shooting them down. The antiaircraft shells being fired from the ground was something that we had no defense or control over. There were times that the skies were almost black and it was only luck that we got through it. You can bet that there were many prayers being said by this old radio operator.

There was nowhere to hide up there except for a cloudy day and even then you had to come out sometime. Every mission was voluntary we could quit any day we wanted to; the penalty was losing your rank and flight pay. Suppose I had decided to quit during that time, and now I'm an old man who watches the History Channel on T.V. might say "I had a chance to be a gunner on a B-17 but I quit." I sure would have missed many exciting days that I now cherish to the fullest.

As I write these lines in October 2002 only 3 of our crew is alive.

Pilot- WM. R. Raser from- Duxbury Mass. Died 3-17-1986

Co- Pilot- Augustus J. Cesarini from- Bronx N.Y killed in action 6-14-1944

Navigator Billy V. Gwyn from- Mt. Carmel, IND. Died 7-28-1963

John R. Duchesneau – Bombardier from- Chicago, Ill.

Engineer – Omer L. Theroux from- So- Hadley Falls, Mass. Died 3-30-1985

Radio- Gunner- Elmer F. Ruschman from- Melbourne, Ky.

Ball Turret- WM. R. Taylor From- Worcester, Mass. Died 7-26-1987

Right Waist- Bernard E. Petekeit from- Yakima, Washington

Left Waist- WM. Lamb. Jr. from- Indianapolis Ind. Died 7-27-1974

Tail Gunner- Ivey B. Hullender From- Gastonia, N.C. Died 3-9-1992

The ten men of our crew got along very well as crewmates. We had to because every man's life depended on the other while in combat. There were many exciting times that we thought we would not return and may quiet times to thank God for letting us return to Polebrook safely from our missions.

There were lonesome night thinking of home and tracing in my mind every bend in the road from Ft. Thomas to my home in Melbourne, Kentucky next to St. Ann's Convent. There were many night that sleep didn't come easy as I laid in my bunk and heard the ground crew

rev up the engines preparing our planes for another mission. Another time to put out young lives in danger. Never in my wildest dreams did I think that I would ever come back alive, maybe it's better that way.

I was 22 years old when our first raid took place and 23 when I finished my missions. As of now I am 81 years old and seldom does a day pass that my mind doesn't return to England and the exciting days of WWII.



Photo Taken By: Patrick Reddy – Kentucky Enquire – March 2011

Reference Materials

Airfield Focus

48: Polebrook

The 351st BG in WW2

The Duty to Remember

acronyms, terms, descriptions

WWW....

And

398th Bomber memorial Assoc website

B-17 the B means bomber

P-38 the P means Pursuit

CA means command of aircraft

Pilot sits on left side, considered 1st pilot

Flak=German shells from antiaircraft

Short Snorter= paper currency signed by a group of friends to commemorate bonds of friendship, also informal drinking club.

“Bombardier was trained in all the technical phases of the dropping of the bomb task. It was his job to operate the bomb

sight in his plane to drop the bombs on target. However, when it was decreed by 8th AF headquarters that all 36 planes in a Squadron formation would drop their bombs simultaneously, only the bombardier in the lead plane ran a bomb sight and functioned as a true bombardier. All the other 35 planes dropped when he did. The job of the bombardier in all the other 35 was to Trip the bomb release switch in his own plane when the lead dropped his bombs. This method/technique was intended to concentrate the bomb pattern for maximum destruction. So, when there were personnel shortages, some enlisted crew members were selected to sit in the bombardier's position and timely trip the switch when the lead plane dropped his bombs. That job was called togglier."

GUN POSITIONS

"The right waist gunner was stationed at and fired a gun from the window just behind the right wing. The left gunner stationed on the other side of the fuselage. There was also a tail gunner stationed in the tail, the ball turret gunner was stationed below the plane fuselage and the top turret was on top behind the pilot. The bombardier and the navigator also fired gun from the nose section.."

MISSION #	PLANS NUMBERS	MISSION TYPE	NAME OF PLANE	TO	MISSION # FILED	PLACES HISTORY LATER	FROM	DATE		
1	42-29849	TU-E	'AMATOL'		27	RETURNED USA	APRIL 1944	ROCKET SITES (FRANK) NEAR ABBEVILLE FRANCE	JAN 19 - RASER	
2	42-29925	TU-L	'THE DUCHESS'		39			ROCKET SITES (FRANK) ST. OMER, FRANCE	JAN 21 - RASER	
3	42-29835	TU-N	'KNOCK ABOUT' 'WANT' SPAN'		15	TRANSFERRED TO 387TH BOMB GROUP	JULY	MANY PLACES AROUND FRANCE	JAN 24 - RASER	
4	42-29850	TU-G	'GREMLINE CASTLE'		28	RETURNED USA	JUNE	PIEDMONT & POOR BIRNENWICK, GERMANY	JAN 30 - RASER	
5	42-29850	TU-G	SAME		28			WILHELMSTRASSEN, GERMANY	FEB 3 - RASER	
6	42-29935	TU-N	'KNOCK ABOUT'		15	TRANSFERRED TO 387TH BOMB GROUP	JULY	PORT FLEURY - LIGHT PLANK CHATELAIN, FRANCE	FEB 5 - RASER	
7	42-31721	TU-S	'BLACK MAGIC'		35	MAY 28 - 44		FROM OUR BARRACKS BY ST. OMER, FRANCE	FEB 24 - RASER	
8	42-29925	TU-L	'THE DUCHESS'		39	RETURNED USA	APRIL 1944	GERMANY	FEB 24 - RASER	
9	42-38032	RQ-X	(NO NAME)		17	MARCH 18 - 44	LT. NEUBERG	SHOT DOWN MIA	MIA	
10	42-31975	TU-O	'QUEEN OF THE AIR'		28	MAY 27 - 44	LT. HOPKINS	SHOT DOWN MIA	MIA	
11	42-31899	TU-B	'CHAPTER BOX'		18	MAY 27 - 44	LT. PETERS	SHOT DOWN MIA	MIA	
12	42-97492	DS-B	'SLOW BALL'		50	AUG 3 - 44	LT. BRACKENS	SHOT DOWN MIA	MIA	
13	42-29831	TU-H	'THE INVADER'		40	RETURNED USA	APRIL 1944	MUNSTER, GERMANY	MIA	
14	42-39827	NO RECORD								
15	42-38038	TU-R	'APRIL GIRL'		113	RETURNED USA	JUNE 9 1945	ST. OMER, FRANCE	APR 7 - RASER	
16	42-97196	TU-M	'BOBBIE ANNE'		53	OCT 7 - 44	LT. EVANS	SHOT DOWN MIA	MIA	
17	42-97196	SAME	SAME		53	SAME	SAME	SAME	MIA	
18	42-39028	TU-R	'PAPPY'S PRIDE'		36	JULY 12 - 44	LT. IRWIN	SHOT DOWN MIA	MIA	
19	42-38650	BS-M	NO NAME		39	FEB 14 - 45	LT. KIRLAND	SHOT DOWN MIA	MIA	
20										
21	42-31560	TU-A	NO NAME		60	SEPT 8 - 44	LT. SHERA	SHOT DOWN MIA	MIA	
22	42-31721	TU-S	'BLACK MAGIC'		35	MAY 28 - 44	LT. MCGILLAND	SHOT DOWN MIA	MIA	
23	42-107124	TU-F	'MOLLIE MULE'		75	RETURNED USA	JUNE 9 - 1945	MANY PLACES	MIA	
24	42-97196	TU-M	'BOBBIE ANNE'		53	OCT 7 - 44	LT. EVANS	SHOT DOWN MIA	MIA	
25	42-97196		SAME		53	SAME	SAME	SAME	MIA	
26	42-31725	TU-L	'LIL GINNY'		34	MAY 30 - 44	LT. HICKS	SHOT DOWN MIA	MIA	
27	42-97196	TU-M	'BOBBIE ANNE'		53	OCT 7 - 44	LT. EVANS	SHOT DOWN MIA	MIA	
28	42-97252	TU-R	'DEVIL'S MISTRESS'		92	RETURNED USA	JUNE 8, 1945	DANNES, FRANCE	JUNE 8 - RASER	
29	42-97252		SAME						JUNE 6 - RASER	
30	42-97252		SAME						JUNE 7 - RASER	
31	42-37512	TU-S	'TRADE WINDS'		115			MAY 1945	STAMPE, FRANCE	JUNE 10 - RASER
32	42-37512		SAME						JUNE 10 - RASER	
33	43-37705	TU-T	'THE LITTLE ONE'		71			MAY 5 - 1945	VERY BAD - HARDLY MADE IT BACK	JUNE 14 - RASER

THIS IS A LIST OF MISSIONS I FLEW WITH THE 381ST BOMB GROUP BASED AT ALLBROOK, ENGLAND DURING WWII. SOME WERE EASIER THAN OTHERS - SOME WERE SO BAD THAT WE THOUGHT WE WOULD NOT RETURN. SCOT DID NOT COME EAST AT NIGHT. BESIDE THE EXCITEMENT OF THE DAY, WE WOULD HEAR THE ENGINES REVVED UP FOR A RAID AGAIN IN THE MORNING. THERE WERE MANY MIA THAT I SAID I WOULD AND IN MY MIND I TRAGED EVERY BOMB IN THE ROAD FROM FT. THOMAS TO OUR HOME IN MELBOURNE, KY. AND THOUGHT I WAS HOME AND FAMILY. I THANK GOD FOR LETTING ME LIVE AND ENJOY THE YEARS AFTER THE WAR. FOR MY GOOD WIFE, ALICE, MY 2 CHILDREN, BOB AND TOM, JOHN - SARAH - WILL AND JULIE. I AM A VERY LUCKY PERSON TO HAVE SURVIVED.

Elmer T. Ruschman April 8, 2000

A Chronicle of the 351st Bomb Group (Heavy)
Polebrook, England • Station 110
1942-1945



Painting by Samuel J. Crooks, 351st B.G. 510th B.S.



**351st
Bomb Group**



**508th
Bomb Squadron**



**509th
Bomb Squadron**



**510th
Bomb Squadron**



**511th
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351st Bomb Group
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THE 351st BOMB GROUP in WWII

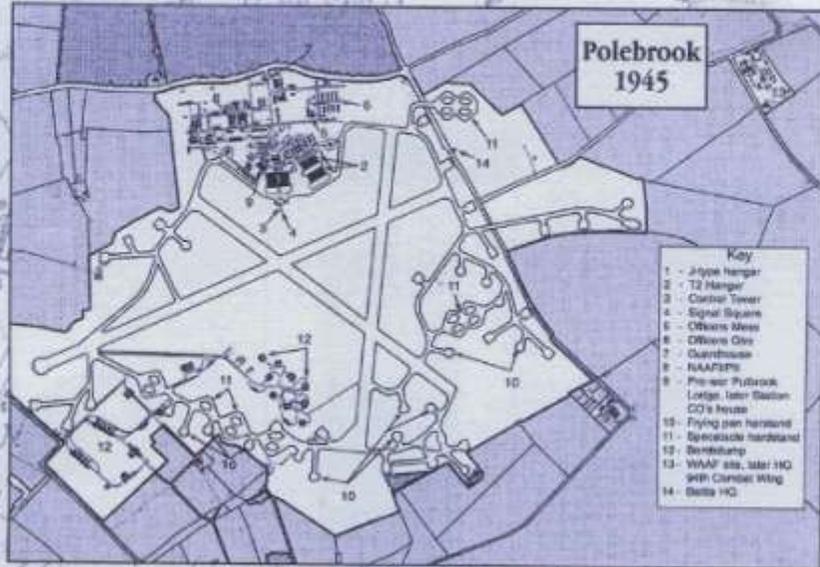
The Duty to Remember



Ken Harbour
Peter Harris

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AIRFIELD FOCUS

48: POLEBROOK