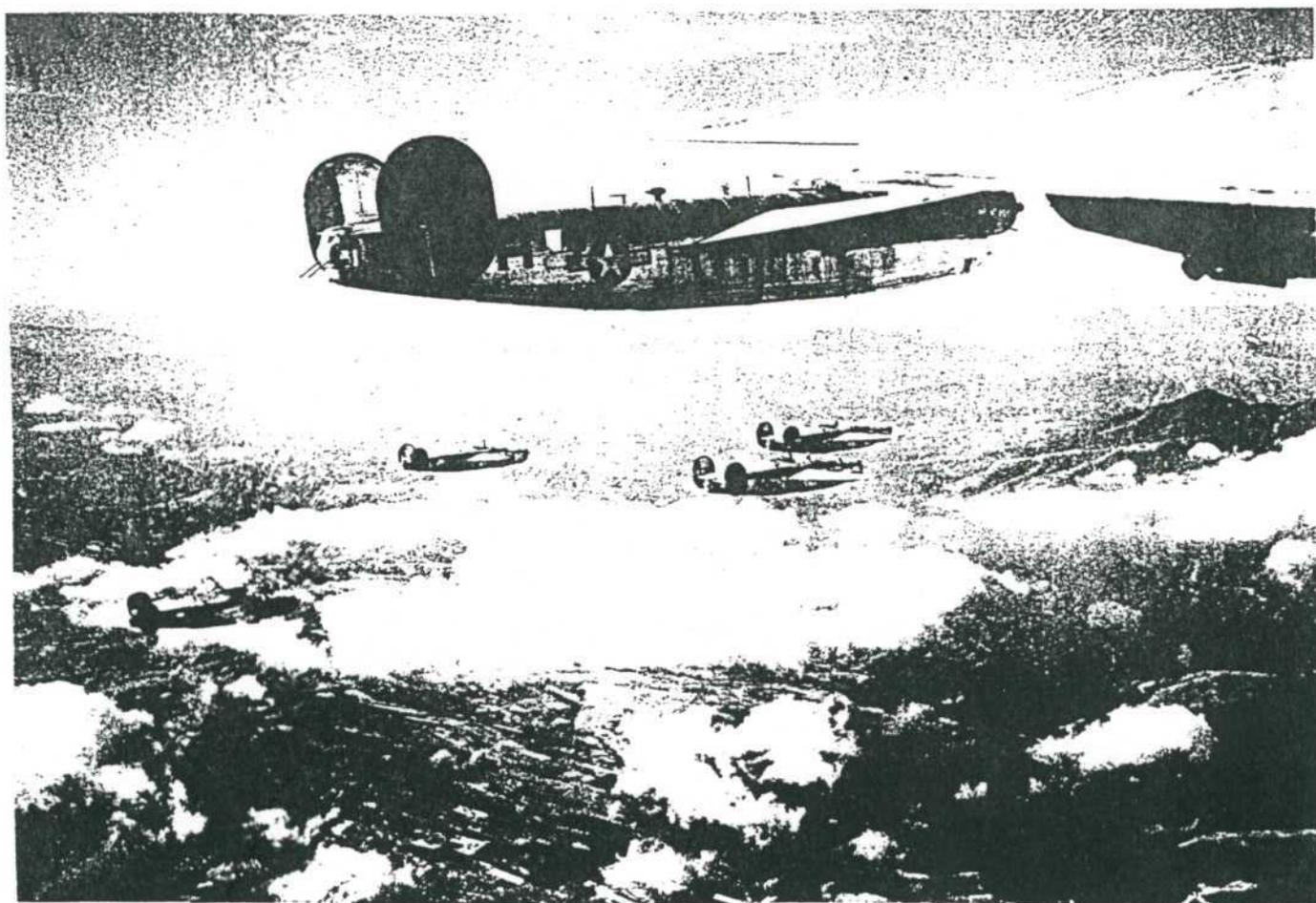
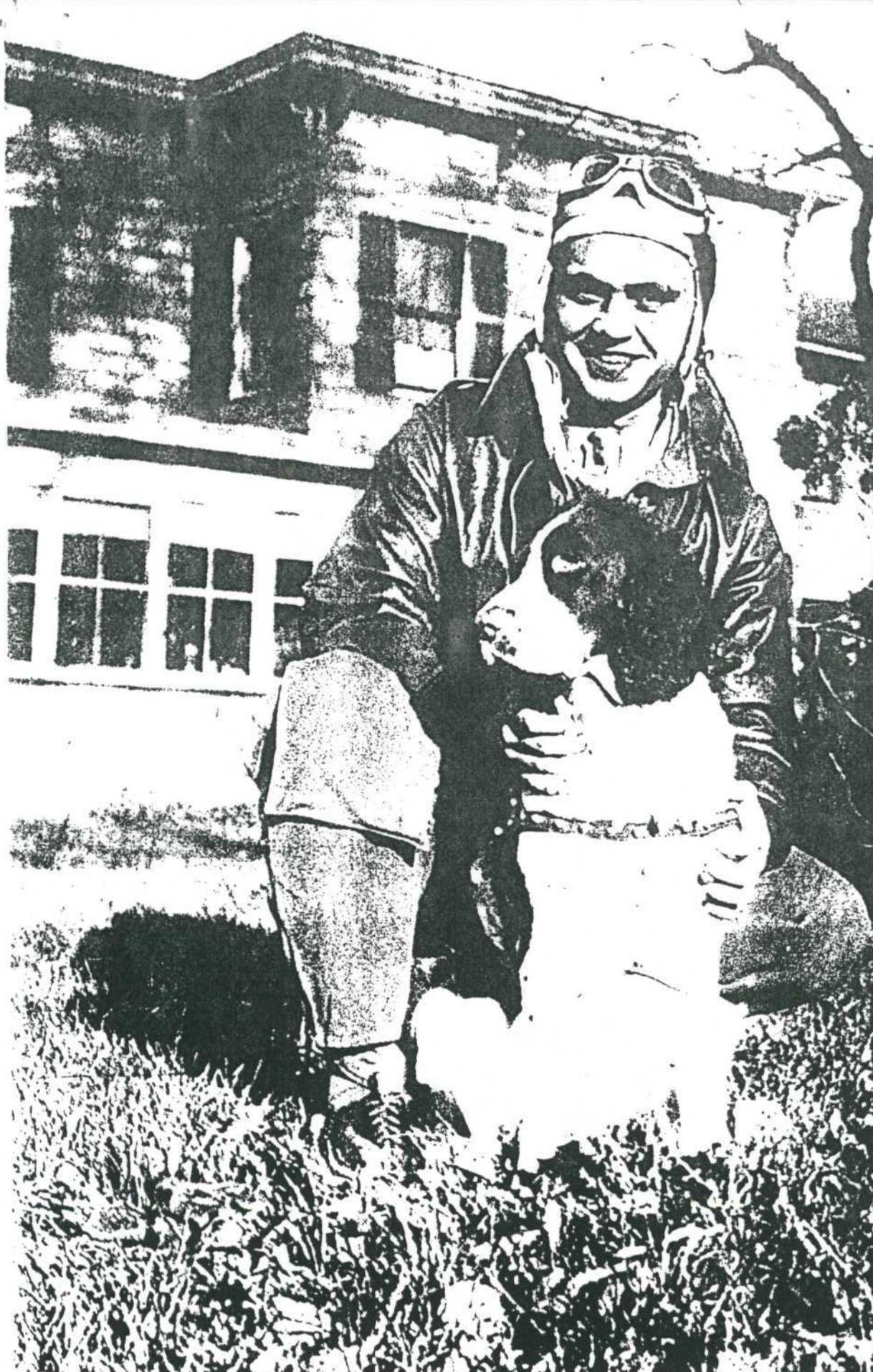


S SGT DONALD C STEVENS
WW II MILITARY EXPERIENCES

JAN 43 — OCT 45





EVENING RE

Staff Sergeant Of Canajoharie Listed Missing

CANAJOHARIE, July 15.—A telegram received from the War Department, Washington, D. C., Friday morning, by Mrs. and Mr. Ralph Stevens of Moyer Street, advises that their son, Staff Sergeant Donald C. Stevens, Army Air Corps, had been reported "missing in action" June 30 over Austria.

Staff Sergeant Stevens, who was an armorer gunner with the crew of a B-24 Liberator bomber stationed in Italy, had recently been promoted. He had also been awarded the Good Conduct Medal, and the Air Medal with two Oak Leaf Clusters for his achievements in aerial flights against the enemy. He had made more than 30 missions and a number of the flights had been over the Ploesti oil field in Rumania. The last letter received from him was written June 29.

Sergeant Stevens was employed in the office of the Beech-Nut Packing Company following his graduation from the Canajoharie High School with the Class of 1939 and was inducted in the army forces in January, 1943. At Camp Upton he was assigned to the 4th Corps and received his training at Miami Beach Air Field, Fla., Buckley and Lowry Fields Colo., Kearney Field, Salt Lake City, Utah, Clovis Air Base, Clovis, N. M., and the Gunner's School, Fort Myers, Fla. He was stationed at Mitchel Field, L. I., before he went overseas early last Spring. He was in a hospital in North Africa recovering from burns caused by the explosion of a gasoline lantern, before he was sent to Italy, where he rejoined his crew.

JAN 43 - OCT 45INTRODUCTION

This is an account of Don's life in the service of his country as he vividly remembers it as of Sept 1999, and as he described it to Tom Planck who wrote it down. Some details were taken from his records and his photo album and his book "460th Bomb Group History". His time in service was 32 months, of which 12 months was in the United States and 20 months was overseas including 11 months as a prisoner of war in Germany.

A detailed account of his 36th and last combat mission over enemy territory was shown on 4 pages in the book "460th Bomb Group History". Copies are attached since it is so graphic. He was trained as a tail gunner on a B-24 Liberator aircraft and held no other position.

He was born March 3 1924 and graduated from Canajoharie High School in June 1941. When he entered the Army as a Private at Utica on Jan 23 1943 he was 18 years old and turned 19 2 months later in March 1943. He received very minimal gunnery training before he was sent overseas. This was common at that time of rapid armed forces buildup after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in Hawaii on Dec 7 1941 when the United States was caught by surprise and unprepared for war. His fiancée Marion graduated from Canajoharie High School in June 44 and waited for his return. It was a long and anxious wait, but they were finally married on Aug 4 1945 a few months after his rescue from prison camp and return home in May 1945. His health was not too good when he got home, but he gradually came back to normal. He was discharged in Oct 45 and returned to work at the Beech Nut Packing Co.

Looking back, when he left home, he was sent to Long Island NY, then to Florida, then to Colorado, to Utah to New Mexico to Georgia to Cuba to New York to Florida to Trinidad to Brazil to Tunisia (north Africa) to Italy to Yugoslavia to Hungary to Romania to France to Austria and to Germany before he came home 32 months later.

The initial idea for this military biography came from Ron Planck and then was written down and typed by Tom Planck. The intent was for the benefit of Don and Marjans children and grandchildren in future years.

Thalen Mattice - farmer not in service
 Don Stevens - U S Army AF Germany POW
 Gerald Morrell - not in service-medical reason
 Dick Schutter - U S Navy mine sweeper
 Howard Bellman - U S Army company clerk
 Harry Van Arsdal U S Army POW in Italy
 Ken Barnes flew as gunner 8th AF flew hump Ind.
 Bill Schutter B-17 pilot killed in plane accid
 Leon Van Arsdal U S Army infantry scout



INDUCTION AND MILITARY TRAINING

I received my notice to appear for a physical exam to Dr Rathbun in Canajoharie on Dec 10 1942 from the selective service local board 385 in Fort plain. I passed and was sworn in the Army as a private in Utica and told to go home and wait for furthur orders. I received these orders from the local board to report for active duty at Fort plain at 7:30 am Jan 30 1943 whe I was sent by train with a group of others to Camp Upton, Long Island where I received 2 weeks of Army indoctrination. The weather was miserable cold and had to wait a couple of days for Ar clothes to be issued. We stayed in 8 man tents and burned soft coal for heat which was dirty smoky, sooty. It was very cold and rainy and in general a dirty mess. We finally got called 2 weeks later and boarded a train to the usual unknown destination. We all sat in the same seats for 4 days and I came down with strep throat. We got off at Miami Beach and were told we were in the Army Air Force. My sore throat was so bad I was sent to a medical unit in the Greenbria Hotel temporarily. We were given 10 days of basic training instead of the normal time which wa much longer. This included calesthenics on the beach and close order drill. I was promoted from Private to PFC in order to go to armorer school where you had to be a PFC to enter. I was then shipped to Buckley armorer school in Denver for 10 weeks. I came down with measles plus an acu and painful sinus infection in the middle of this training period and was put in quarrantine, which meant I had to start training all over. We learned how to load and arm bombs and fix 50 cal machine guns. I never did handle a rifle, and never did in my whole Army AF career.

Then I was sent to Lowry Field, also in Denver, which was my first good deal. I went to class every day and was given a class A pass and was free to go anywhere as long as I returned on time. My mother and my Aunt Lucy White and a Mrs Eckler came out by train to see me and we rented a car and went sightseeing. After graduation, I got called in to talk to a Colonel (we all did) about whether I would like to volunteer to go to aircraft gunnery school. HE made some veiled threats about if I did not volunteer. I was also asked if I wanted to be a Pilot, so I had a physical for that, but they said my eyes weren't good enough. Then when I had a physical for gunner, my eyes were suddenly much better, and I passed including my weight and low oxygen and air pressure tests.

I was shen shipped by train to Fort Meyers Florida to flexible gunnery school. The weathe in this place was miserable as I remember. We were sent first to the skeet range to learn how to lead a target from a stqnding position, and then from the back of a moving truck inside a big iron ring using 12 ga shotguns against skeet targets tht popped up. We then moved to turre mounted on trucks driving around and around. We were also sent to malfunction range to learn to fix any problem with 50 cal machine guns. From a standing position we fired at moving targets on a moving unmanned jeep using 50 cal machine guns with a score kept of hits in order to pass this test. Only once did we fire a 50 cal from an airplane. We learned to assemble and dis assemble all parts of a 50 cal gun blindfolded. I graduated and got my gunnery wings in Ma 1943 and was promoted to buck sgt (3 stripes) and then shipped to the 18th replacement Wing in Salt Lake City for 1 or 2 weeks and then on to Clovis NM AAC base and assigned to the 460th Bomb Group which was activated 29 May 1943. I was given a 10 day delay en route. This was my first furlough. My 700th Squadron was one of 4 squadrons in the group and was then sent to Chatham Field Ga near Savannah in Oct 1943 to get flying experience as combat crews We flew various

INDUCTION AND MILITARY TRAINING (cont)

training missions including one to Cuba in formation flying practice with each gunner getting qualified above 20,000 ft altitude. Valuable experience was gained learning from complications and mistakes, plus the importance of flying in tight formation. There were 70 crews and all completed very minimum requirements as combat crews. One bomber (not mine) taking off for Cuba skidded down the runway on its nose because the nosewheel had retracted. Another had a forced landing with 2 engines out, grazed a tree and burst into flames.

I was then shipped from Chatham Field in Savannah Ga to Mitchell Field on Long Island by train with my crew and assigned to a new B-24 Liberator bomber. The pilot had to sign a receipt for it (copy in my file). We had to put some flying hours on it, so the pilot flew it to Middletown NY Schoharie Co because our navigator was from there. We flew around upstate NY and then to Wilkes Barre Pa where I remember we landed at a very small airport and as we landed a man came running out and yelling "You can't land here, you are too big" as we landed. Then he took us to a diner to eat. Pilot Cresswell then took off again, knocking over runway markers at the end of the runway trying to get up in the air and flew back to Mitchell Field. After that, we flew around for a few more days. My parents and Marion came down to Evelyns who lived nearby, to meet me for one day. I may have come home for a day in Jan 44 but I can't remember for sure.

DEPLOYMENT OVERSEAS

From Mitchell Field, which was a port of embarkation (POE) for overseas we flew to West Palm Beach Fla and from there on to Trinidad and then to Dakar Brazil then across to north Africa to Tunis, Tunisia where we had a standown because the field in Italy was not ready for us. Our navigator got us lost flying from Dakar to Tunis over the Sahara desert. We looked down and saw a foreign legion type of fort with a landing strip so we landed in very soft sand but we landed OK but couldn't take off again. A jeep full of legionnaires pulled up and started asking questions in French which we could not understand. A crew member Sgt Criteau came up and interpreted for the pilot. It was like an old movie. The commandant gave us lots of wine and food. They had a radio so we notified Tunis Hq and reported in and they sent a C 47 over to get us. The pilot and copilot and engineer finally got it off the ground and flew to Tunis after getting correct bearings. In Tunis we slept in tents. One night I was taking a bath out of a steel helmet when I accidentally knocked over an oil lamp on myself (100% German gas) catching my clothes on fire. My tent buddies grabbed their heavy flying jackets and wrapped them around me and got the fire out, leaving the tent pitch dark. I thought I was OK but after about an hour it was really painful so the medics put bandages on. The next morning I was really in pain, and the Dr looked at it in daylight and said it was bad so he sent me by Army ambulance into Tunis to an Army hospital emergency room where they stripped me and the nurses peeled the skin off without anesthetic & washed my whole leg in soap and water using sashcloths which hurt real bad. Finally, the Dr said it was as good as he could make it and sprinkled it with sulphur (the only healing drug at the time). He melted vaseline and poured it on the bandages and dressed my leg. A female movie star came around going from bed to bed with the Dr by the name of Louise Rainer who wrote a note on my letter I was sending home and talked to many patients. One patient I remember had to be circumcised for some reason while this movie star was there, and the whole ward roared with laughter. After they unwrapped my leg, it was very tender and real red. I was then sent to Bari Italy after my crew had flown on ahead. I had no clothes of my own, so I got a new uniform in Tunis before I left. It hurt when my leg rubbed against my pantleg. From Bari I hitchhiked to my outfit at Spinazzola air base in Italy and tried to hook up with my crew, but all crews were spread all over so I got in with other crews and flew on a few training missions.

COMBAT MISSIONS

My first mission with my crew was on Mar 30 1944 and didn't amount to much. It was also my 20th birthday. Our plane was tail end Charlie (last in the group) when I saw 4 bursts of flak at 7 o'clock anti aircraft fire and told the pilot. We were 1 of 33 bombers over Mostar Yugoslavia. We saw no enemy aircraft. It was announced that calisthenics and close order drill would take place on days when crews did not fly, but this never came to be.

My second mission on April 3 was a 5 hour flight to Yugoslavia without flak or enemy planes. 34 of our bombers dropped 73 tons of 500 lb bombs with 54 plotted hits within 1000 ft of target. My pilot Cresswell went AWOL so was grounded on his return. I was then assigned to Lt White's crew who needed a tail gunner. His tailgunner lost a leg in an accident. A month later I was asked if I wanted to fly with Lt Cresswell again and I and the rest of the crew said no because we had no faith in him as a pilot. I moved into a tent with my new crew but was still friends with my old crew buddies.

My 3rd mission on April 6 went to Zagreb Yugoslavia where we dropped 48 tons of

COMBAT MISSIONS (Cont)

cluster frag bombs on the airdrome. One of our bombers went down and was lost in the Adriatic sea but 6 men were rescued and 4 others drowned.

My 4th and 5th missions (one mission was counted as 2 if very dangerous) went to a Budapest aircraft plant. 28 bombers dropped 54 tons of 500 lb RDX bombs with 57 hits scored within 1000 ft of the target. Besides flak, there were 19 German fighters (12 ME 410's; 3 FW 190's and 4 JU-88's) of which 2 were shot down. This was considered a heavily defended target so we got credit for 2 missions if we made it back to base.

My 6th mission on April 16 went to the marshalling yards in Romania in support of Russian troops. 66 tons of 500 lb bombs were dropped. There were 10 enemy aircraft but none attacked and no planes were lost. Gunners on 3 aircraft fired bursts at 5 fighters over Yugoslavia.

My 7th and 8th mission on April 23 went to Weiner Neustadt Nord airdrome with 31 bombers. We were a half hour late at our fighter rendezvous due to heavy headwinds. The group dropped 36 tons of frag bombs from 23,500 ft. 25 German fighters were observed of which 8 to 12 attacked. One of our planes went down and crew captured within an hour. Another plane was attacked by 6 ME-109's and went down in flames with only 3 parachutes seen to open. 7 were killed, 2 became POW's and 1 escaped and made his way back to base and returned to duty July 1. Flak was heavy and 25 additional German fighters attacked until 10 minutes after target.

My 9th mission on April 29 in 39 bombers to bomb harbor installations in Toulon France. We were met by an escort of fighters in the target area for protection and dropped 74 tons of 1000 lb GP bombs from 20,500 ft altitude. We had to wait for another group to pass over the target before we could bomb. Photographs showed a concentration of bomb bursts at the junction of the railroad and highway north of the harbor. 24 enemy fighters attacked but were generally not aggressive. Flak was observed from ground batteries and 2 flak ships in the harbor which threw up a barrage. 9 of our bombers were damaged. We ran out of fuel and had to land at Corsica. There were no aircraft losses.

My 10th mission on April 30th went to Castel Maggiore marshalling yards. Our fighters rendezvoused with us near the target but only 2 enemy fighters were observed which did not attack. 9 of our bombers were damaged by flak. A gunner in one plane bailed out when it caught fire. 28 bombers dropped 69 tons of 500 lb GP bombs from 21000 ft.

My 11th mission on May 2 went to the Parma marshalling yards in Italy with a fighter escort part of the way. 29 bombers dropped 58 tons of 500 lb GP bombs from only 15,000 ft due to low clouds. The roundhouse and repair shops were hit and the railroad cut. No enemy aircraft were seen and flak only at a distance.

My 12th mission on May 13 was with 35 bombers to the marshalling yards at Modena Italy with fighter escort. 34 aircraft dropped 60 tons of 500 lb bombs from 21000 ft. 4 ME 109's attacked from the 4 o'clock position and one broke away trailing smoke. Then 3 FW-190's attacked from 10 o'clock high opening fire at 800 yards closing to 300 yards. Then 3 FW-190's attacked from 6 o'clock each peeling off with tail gunners returning fire. There was no damage observed and no flak. Before this mission started, one sgt was awarded the "iron cross" for single handedly grounding one B-24 by accidentally shooting up a tail turret while loading guns on another ship.

My 13th mission on May 17 went to the Piombino marshalling yards with fighter escort. There was flak over the target. 30 bombers dropped 84 tons of 500 lb GP bombs from 22,000 ft. No enemy aircraft were encountered.

My 14th and 15th mission on May 18 went to the Ploest oil refineries with fighter escort. 68 tons of 500 lb bombs were dropped with much flak. About 20 enemy fighters attacked with 1 destroyed and 2 probably destroyed plus 3 damaged. Later another group of enemy fighters aggressively attacked and concentrated on stragglers. Returning planes were scattered all over the sky which was lit up by red flares (read pages 41 - 45 in the bomb group history for a vivid account including what happened to other crews).

My 16th mission was on May 22 to Valmontone by 39 bombers with fighter escort, but we could not drop our bombs due to bad weather. 11 aircraft were damaged by flak.

COMBAT MISSIONS (cont)

My 17th mission on May 23 again went to the Valmontone target with 39 bombers and fighter escort and dropped 95 tons of 1000 lb bombs on a town believed to be Paliano. There were no encounters with enemy fighters although 3 were seen. Intense heavy flak was encountered.

My 18th and 19th missions on May 24th went to an airdrome in Austria with fighter escort. 33 bombers dropped 65 tons of 100 lb incendiary bombs on the town of Neukirchen which was mistaken for the primary target due to poor visibility. Heavy flak was encountered over the target and no enemy aircraft seen. 3 aircraft were damaged by flak.

My 20th mission on 25 May went to the marshalling yards at Amberieu France and was a long 9 hour mission with 39 bombers. A second bomb run had to be made because another group was over the target when we got there. On the return trip 4 enemy fighters attacked aggressively 2 of which we shot down and another probable and another damaged. One pilot bailed out. 4 bombers were damaged by flak.

My 21st mission on May 27 bombed the marshalling yards at Nimes France. 63 tons of 500 lb bombs were dropped from 22000 ft and the target was hit successfully with little flak seen and only 2 attacks by enemy aircraft. One enemy fighter was shot down over target and another near the coast of France. German fighter pilots in southern France were found to be eager but inexperienced.

My 22nd and 23rd mission was on May 31 to the Ploesti oil refineries but had to bomb an alternate target due to an effective smoke screen over the refinery. Photos indicated that some bombs hit the refinery and others a munitions factory with black smoke rising to 16,000 ft. There were no enemy aircraft but 27 bombers were damaged by flak and 2 crew members injured. One bomber was hit and went down with 4 crewmembers being captured and 8 killed. 30 out of 36 bombers made it back to base.

My 24th and 25th mission was on June 2 to Romania with 37 bombers and fighter cover to drop 67 tons of 500 lb bombs over marshalling yards. An aerial photographer bailed out north of the base because of no oxygen mask.

My 26th mission on June 5 went to the marshalling yards at Faenza Italy with 39 bombers and fighter cover. 74 tons of bombs were dropped and all planes returned to base.

My 27th and 28th mission on June 6 went back to Ploesti with 38 bombers to bomb an oil refinery with fighter escort. A column of black smoke rose 15,000 ft in the air which indicated some success. Barrage type flak was experienced with 20 aircraft damaged. We had no encounter with enemy aircraft although some were seen.

My 29th and 30th mission on June 9th with 39 bombers bombed the Allach Motor Works in Munich Germany with fighter cover. 71 tons of 100 lb incendiaries were dropped on the alternate target of marshalling yards due to bad weather from 21,000 ft. Flak was encountered and 1 fighter attacked. 9 bombers were damaged but all returned to base.

My 31st and 32nd mission on June 13 went to Milbertshofen ordnance works with fighter cover. Some enemy fighters were seen but did not attack. Barrage type flak damaged 9 aircraft. One bomber lost oil pressure and landed in Switzerland where the crew was interned except 4 who escaped and returned to Italy.

My 33rd and 34th mission was on June 23 to bomb oil installations in Romania with 39 bombers and fighter protection. 60 tons of 1000 lb bombs were dropped with 5 bombers getting lost in bad weather and joined another group and bombed their target. One was attacked on return to base and badly damaged with the tail turret shot out and holes in the wing fuel tank but made it back to base with no injuries.

My 35th mission on June 25 to an oil refinery at Sete France with 32 bombers and a fighter escort. Flak was heavy with 29 bombers returning to base plus 5 to other friendly airfields.

My 36th and last mission is described on the four copies of pages excerpted from the book "460th Bomb Group History", on pages 56, 57, 60 & 61 attached which gives a detailed account.

BAIL OUT AND PRISONER OF WAR

I remember on the last few minutes of my last mission, the sky was heavily overcast and we had to fly up through it and our whole formation fell apart. My aircraft and 3 others had just come out of the clouds when suddenly about 40 or so german and hungarian fighters attacked. They came in after us 4 abreast in 10 waves. I opened fire and kept firing and got through it OK. Over the intercom I kept hearing "tailgunner, one coming in at one o'clock; or one coming in at 7 o'clock etc" and they were coming from all sides. I couldn't see everything that was going on. In previous missions I learned what went on when we got back to base and the crew was debriefed, but after that, these missions were seldom discussed. I can remember they came in to me with a straight line of fire (muzzle blasts) coming from two machine guns in each wing. The next thing I remember I got blown out of my turret. There were doors behind me in the turret that closed like curtains but I didn't close them as I was supposed to in case I had to make a fast exit, and if I had I wouldn't have made it out for lack of time. I was laying in the turret when I came to and looked around and saw the other gunners were gone and the escape door open. I couldn't wear my parachute in my turret but it was nearby so I clipped it on and bailed out. There was a lot of smoke inside the aircraft I remember. After I bailed out I counted to 10 to give time enough to clear the plane and then pulled the rip cord. My chute opened, my mind was clear about this, and on the way down I noticed many flashes below me which was sunlight reflecting off pieces of the plane floating down around me. I couldn't see any chutes of my crew anywhere going down. The plane blew up just after I bailed out and there were still a few in it. The navigator was never heard from again. The ball turret gunner Johnny Blake went down with the plane and his body was found by the germans. I remember some hungarian women held a burial ceremony for 3 (I think) crewmen. One was pitchforked to death before german army soldiers could grab him. 9 of us in the crew survived. Only 2 didn't make it. I realized the plane blew up only seconds after I got out, probably because the oxygen and fuel lines had been hit and this mixture (100 octane) was very explosive. The bombs had not yet been fused so they probably did not blow up. On my way down in my parachute I swung so wildly I thought I would tip over and I thought something about the parachute caused it, but it was me. I looked down and saw a farmer beating his horse and landed in a field. I looked around and saw 10 or 12 people running towards me from all directions. I slipped out of my parachute harness and realized there was something wrong with my foot, so I took my flying boot off and saw a piece of shapnel had torn through my foot. A young girl (15 or so) ran up with a 22 rifle (or something similar) and kept saying "hands up---Hands up" and I reached up and pushed the barrel away from me and then she looked very guilty. Other people ran up and started hitting me with a hoe and searched me and I made them understand I had to get my first aid kit out of my flight suit I was wearing. They let me bandage my foot up and then took everything away from me except an ID bracelet with Marians picture inside. They took Marians class ring off my finger. I was not hurt from the beating. I put my flying boot back on but not my shoe. I can't describe my feelings of being scared and maybe a little in shock.

We went to a little Hungarian village the size of Ames and to a house where I saw Gisseli the bombardier in one corner and top turret gunner Cockroft on the porch. A lot of people were milling around. They sat me down and bought out a basin of hot water and soap and washed my wound. I found out my pilot Capt White also got blown out of the plane but came to on the way down in time to pull the rip cord on his chute and landed OK. He was in the process of pushing Cockroft through the escape hatch (he was a big man) when the plane blew up. There were 5 of us but Gisseli was kept separate because they thought he was a Jew, which he wasn't. One group of people came and were going to hang us all and threw ropes up into the trees to do it but just then a german army jeep came up with two soldiers who took over and saved us and took us and shoved us in a small building along with all our gear to hide us until the next morning when another german jeep came up and took Capt White and myself to another small village where there was a Dr. This Dr looked at my foot and said he couldn't do much and rebandaged it. For 3 or 4 days they took us to different places along with a Lt also shot down. My leg began to swell up and had a bad bruise on the calf of my leg. With my bad foot I couldn't stand on it and walk. This Lt who I never knew and never saw again, picked me up and carried me many places. They took us to jail and interrogated us but my memory is very hazy about that.

Then they put 3 of us on a train in a small compartment with a guard outside the door and ended up in Budapest, Hungary, which had just been bombed the night before. 6 or 8 german soldiers guarded us to protect us from enraged civilians and then put us on a truck with drawn curtains and told us not to look out. We came to a hospital where the nurses were nuns and german and hungarian girls and they put me in a room with 2 other americans., I got no sleep at all. I got in bed the next morning and they told me I slept all the next day and night and part of the following day without waking up with a german soldier guarding the door who was not in much better shape than us. An american officer had a badly infected head cut and another a broken collarbone. They treated us real well. We had fairly good food considering the circumstances. They used some kind of lard they called schmaltz instead of butter, which tasted really awful but we were so hungry we ate it. There was an air raid one day and they took us to the bomb shelter. Next door to us there was a dormitory for german nurses who had a record player and kept playing an american record song "ragtime cowboy Joe" over and over again, and also the British "Lily Marlene" song which they liked also and had hungarian aides bring cigarets to us from german nurses. Then one day they put us on a bus - my foot was pretty well healed but my leg was still yellow which made the Dr think it was jaundice, but it wasn't - and took us to a big regular german prison for a few days. They took me to a german officer for interrogation and tried to get me to talk but all I would give is my name, rank and serial according to the Geneva convention rules. so they sent me back to my cell. After about a week they took me (us) to the railroad station and put me in a car with a loaf of black bread which is what the germans ate, along with a 14 in or so sausage. We were packed in like sardines and stopped once a day for toilet. We had no food for many days but were not too hungry because most of us were still in a state of shock. We finally came to a stop somewhere and they took us out and gave us a bowl of soup. It tasted very sweet and we didn't like it but ate it anyway. We got back on the train again and the hunger was building up along with other cars filled with other prisoners. We finally got off and they started us up a road using dogs to guard us, and I could not move fast enough because of my foot so the german guard sicked the dog on me and bit me in the calf of my leg forcing me to walk faster. I still have the scar from this. We walked 3 or 3 miles to a prison camp which was stalag luft 4 near the baltic sea. This was for airmen only, as officers were put in separate camps. We were really hungry and they gave us bread and jam (made out of coal) and assigned us to rooms in barracks. There were 3 tier bunks and I got a middle bunk. There were 24 of us in a room built for 18. They gave us each a mattress stuffed with wood shavings which was like laying on a board. The bed had 4 slats and the mattress went through easily but we got used to it. We were fed twice a day. In the morning we got hot water (nothing else). The red cross sent packages but the guards kept some of it and punctured cans with meat paste so we couldn't save them. The basic food was boiled potatoes. They had huge big vats and boiled everything in these and just dipped it out. Sometimes we had a turnip like vegetable which we called alfalfa soup. It was barely enough but nobody starved but we were always hungry. We each got a fifteenth of a loaf of black bread. They used sawdust in place of grease. Each room had a pail and when they yelled chowtime, one of us went to the kitchen and got it filled up for all of us. Each day one room would get an extra pailful.

At this point Don stopped and said it was very painful to tell this story and the sensations of seeing friends die etc so we took a break. His stomach did shrink he said.

In January the Russians were coming in from the east so a couple thousand of us were moved out along a road where they kept splitting us up and we walked and walked and stayed in farmers barns at night in groups and ate up all the food he had, mostly potatoes dumped raw in boiling water. We stayed in big tents in a prison camp for a few days. We had a blanket roll tied up on our shoulders with everything inside..... We were de loused between Jan and May usually in a farmers barn and never in a house, because we were badly covered with them. One time they put us on a train and got off at a prison camp where they gave us a shower and de lousing powder and then marched us out again away from the russians. We finally came to the Elbe river. All we had was one blanket in the middle of the winter. Our shoes were all worn out so they gave us german hobnail boots. When any-

BAIL OUT AND PRISONER OF WAR (Cont)

body got sick they would take a wagon from a farmer and used that and eventually sent it back to the farmer and took one from the next farmer. Our guards were old men, not soldiers, by this time. On May 1 they put us in a barn at night and the next morning we went out in the barnyard and saw tanks coming down the road. Somebody said they were Canadian so we ran out and a Canadian officer in a command vehicle stopped and told us he could not stop now but was under orders to keep going. Another airman and I grabbed a chicken and boiled it up and ate it. A bunch of surrendered german army soldiers came down the road later so we took good clothes off of them. They still had their weapons so I stopped one german soldier and took his bayonet from him which I still have in my home. Then a german truck came along with unarmed german soldiers so we stopped it and took it over and piled in and drove up the road to a german village where there was a small engineering outfit under the command of an American Lt who was surprised to see us and wanted to know what in hell he was supposed to do with us. After a couple of days he managed to bring in a de lousing outfit with big tents and powder and clothes and a hot shower. We took over civilian houses in german villages and helped ourselves to contents with guys going through everything.. Finally some army trucks came in and took us to a german air base where we got better clothes and some good food. We were not there long when some C-47 aircraft flew in and took us out in groups to LeHarve France on the French coast to catch our ship home. The camp we were in was called camp lucky strike. We had all the egg nog we wanted plus eggs and head lettuce which we hadn't seen in a long time. One day we lined up according to home state to get us organized and to question us about our records because our records were lost. They had to establish new records for each of us and get us identified etc. Then we all got new decent fitting uniforms. I remember a USO troupe came in and entertained us and sang a new song, "don't fence me in" over and over. I sent a telegram home. We got on our ship home and one day somebody spotted a mine so the Captain stopped the ship and a 20 mm cannon fired at it but couldn't explode it. Hundreds of men dug out their confiscated german rifles and pistols and also shot at it and it finally sank.

One day I remember since I was a staff Sgt they gave me 20 men and told me to go below and take all the gum out of the K ration boxes because gum was found stuck in little places all over the ship and the Captain didn't like it. My men gradually disappeared and that was that.

We pulled in to New York harbor past the statue of liberty which we were very happy to see with fire boats shooting water high in the air and boat whistles blowing and we finally docked near a big warehouse. The red cross gave us coffee and doughnuts and we asked for fresh milk and got it right away and it went fast. We had powdered milk for so long it tasted good. From there we were sent to Fort Dix separation center and were all interviewed to get information about missing men etc. I got my discharge and called Evelyn and told her I would like to come over and get the news from home because I was not too sure what news to expect. She told me how to get to the train station near her house and she met me there. She told me about Bill Shutter being killed and about my grandmother Stevens death the day before so I called home. I waited a couple of days until after the funeral and took the train home getting off at Palatine Bridge.