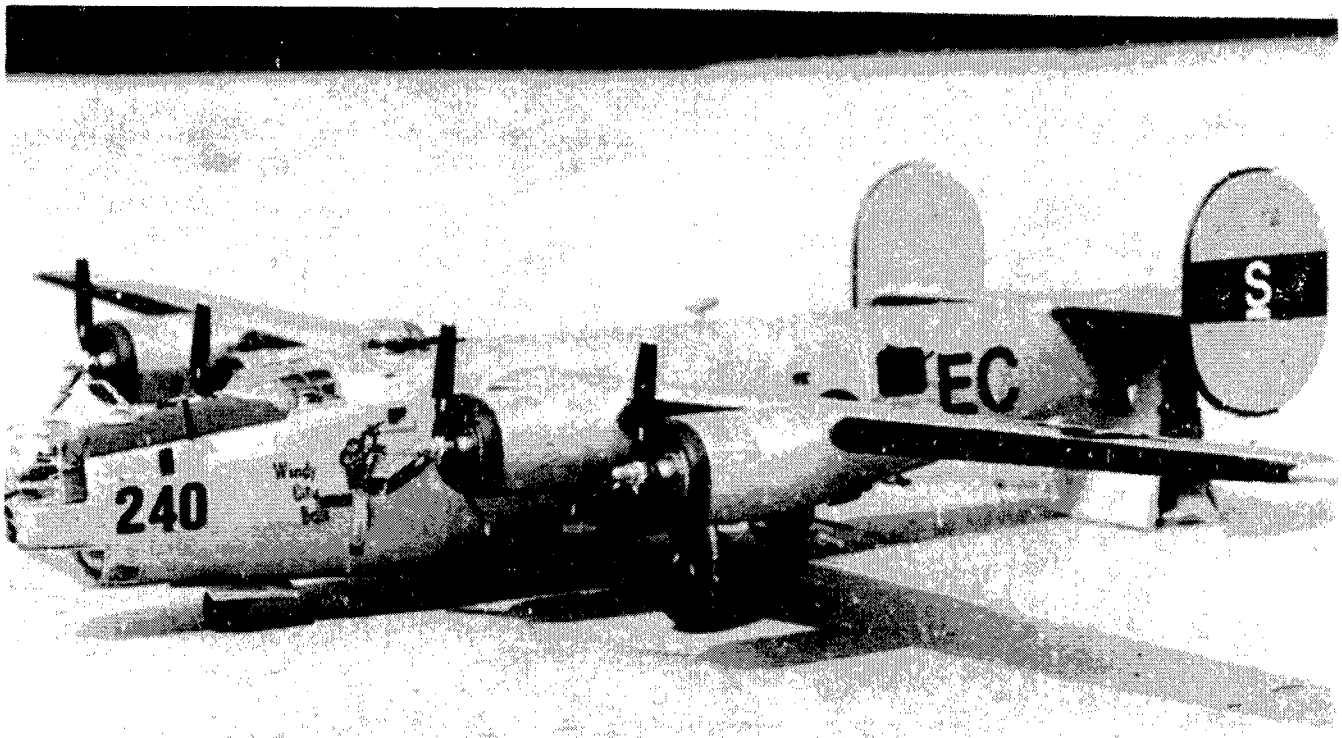
MY ARMY AIR FORCE STORY



OAK MACKEY

TONOPAH ARMY AIR FORCE BASE 1944

Top, l.to r. Jack C. Clarke, Oak Mackey, Robert C. Lowe, Clyde B. Eaton

Edward C. Brunnett, Jay T. Brown, George R. Peer, Ralph C. Heilman, John K. Heckman, Kevin B. Killea

Front Cover: "Windy City Belle" Consolidated B-24J flown by the Clarke on many combat missions from the 392nd Bomb Group Air Base near Dereham, England.

Crew Chief: Ernest H. Barber, Lincolnton, Georgia

FORWARD

MY STORY was written 60 plus years after my discharge from the Army Air Force with help from several sources. Mama kept every letter I wrote home while in the Army and those letters were a great help in jogging my memory of events and addresses at the various air bases where I was stationed. While stationed in England with the 392nd Bomb Group I kept notes about each of my combat missions, after returning home in May of 1945, I wrote a larger version of those notes in a booklet titled "My Life in the Service". There is history of the 392nd BG called "The Liberators from Wendling" written by my good friend Robert E. Vickers which gives more information on missions flown than my personal notes which helped a lot. My personal flight log books are a record of every flight while in the service, plus I have a copy of the official flight records kept by the Army Air Force. www.b24.net is a web site version of "The Liberators from Wendling" plus much more information about the 392nd BG. From the all the above and from my own memories this account of "My Story" is fairly accurate.

MY STORY

Oak Mackey

Let's start in August 1934 when I was 12. A barnstormer pilot had landed his yellow bi-plane in Tony Novotny's hay meadow a mile east of town (Okemah, Oklahoma) and was selling rides the coming week-end. On Sunday Papa announced he would like to see the airplane, would anyone else like to go? Amos and I quickly volunteered, as did Alice. I don't recall why Mama and Otto didn't go. So off we went in our Model A Ford sedan to Novotnys. After watching two or three flights, Papa stepped up to the pilot and bought tickets for Amos and I. We ran to the airplane and the pilot helped us up on the lower wing and directed us to the front cockpit where he strapped us in with the one seat belt. He got into the rear cockpit, his assistant pulled the propeller through and the engine started with the most wonderful roar. We taxied out to the north part of the field and took off to the south. After bouncing along for awhile the airplane was airborne and the ground was falling away. WE WERE FLYING! The pilot turned right to the west and flew all the way around town. Amos and I marveled at the little houses away down there and the little cars on the roads and how we could see for miles around. We were likely no more than 500 feet above the ground. Approaching the field the pilot cut the power and the engine roar became a whisper and the wind whistled through the struts and wires between the wings. We touched down with a little bump, rolled along a ways then taxied back to where the crowd was waiting. Papa then bought tickets for Alice and himself and they went for a ride. What a surprise, and I am quite sure that was Papa's only airplane ride in his 94 year lifetime.

Did I then and there decide to become a pilot someday? On the contrary, it never entered my mind. Airplanes were a real rarity in this part of Oklahoma. Tulsa and Oklahoma City had regular airline service, but we seldom saw an airplane near Okemah, so aviation was another world as far as I was concerned.

The next year, 1935, Spartan School of Aeronautics from Tulsa brought three airplanes to Wright's hay meadow just one mile west of Papa's farm. One was a single seat acrobatic airplane and they flew it to demonstrate spins, loops, inverted flight, etc: One was a bi-plane with open cock-pits somewhat like the one Amos and I rode in the year before, the other was a big single engine monoplane with an enclosed cabin that could carry maybe five people and I had a ride in it, I don't remember who else may have had a ride. Papa hadn't really enjoyed his airplane ride the year before so he stayed on the ground. Also, there was a parachute jump which was a big event in those days. Parachutes were not steerable then and the jumper landed about a half a mile away. He rather forlornly walked back to the crowd carrying his parachute, for he had intended to land nearby. Again, no ambition to become a pilot, that would come later.

Aviation Cadets

In August of 1939 the German Armies invaded Poland. England and France declared war on Germany. World War II was on its way and would last six long years. Of lesser note, I graduated from Okemah High School in May of 1939. July 22 was my 17th birthday. Papa bought his first tractor in August, a John Deere Model B. I was overjoyed for I did not like to work horses as they were slow and under-powered. Papa was a very hard worker and could do many things extremely well, but he was not mechanically inclined. The tractor was for me and I couldn,t be happier. For the next three years I did all the plowing, tilling, cultivating with the tractor. Papa seldom hitched up a team of horses anymore, he planted the corn and cotton with a horse drawn planter and that was about all.

December 7, 1941 was a Sunday and I had driven over to Henryetta, the next town east of Okemah, just for something to do. I was eating a sandwich in a café there when the news came over the radio. The Japs had bombed Pearl Harbor. President Roosevelt had declared war on Japan immediately. The next day, Germany declared war on the United States. There had been bitter controversy between Roosevelt and many members of Congress for some years over whether to go to war. On Dec. 7 that controversy ended, the United States became truly united, everyone would pull togather to defeat Japan and Germany as soon as possible.

In May, 1942, Amos graduated from high school. On June 13 he was 18. He and I were now both subject to be drafted into the Army or Navy. The County Draft Board had a unwritten policy that one son of a farmer would be considered an essential worker because he was producing food for the war effort and would not be drafted. Since I was the oldest it was most likely me who would be drafted, and Amos was very willing and pleased to take over my job as Papa,s tractor driver. I wanted to enlist since nearly all my friends were in the service by now, but I did not want to be drafted, for then you lost all control over where you might be sent. The problem was, I didn't know which branch of service I wanted, so I enrolled in the University of Oklahoma at Norman, which is 30 miles south of Okla. City. I knew the draft board would leave me alone there for at least one semester. After about two weeks of school I could see this was not something I wanted to do.

One day, Leon Ford and I were discussing the various branches of service and one of us mentioned the Merchant Marines. Leon was also from Okemah and had enrolled at O.U. for the same reasons I had. The shipyards were turning out record numbers of new ships and sailors were needed. This was a draft exempt job and the pay was much better than the Army or Navy. You sailed across the oceans to various exotic countries and the more we talked about it the better it sounded. So it was that we drove to the recruiting offices on the second floor of

the Post Office in Okla. City the following Sunday. Well, the Merchant Marine Recruiting Office was closed on Sunday, we had driven up from Norman for nothing. For years the Aviation Cadet Program was open only to those with at least two years of college, but recently that requirement had been changed and high school graduates could enlist after passing a entrance examination. Leon and I had discussed the Aviation Cadets as a possibility before, but we had doubts about passing the exam. Nevertheless, we walked over to the Cadet recruiting office where we learned they were going to give the exams to a class of about twenty men at one o'clock. The exam would last four hours. We were welcome to take the tests, if we passed we were not required to enlist, it only demonstrated that we were eligible to enlist. There were tests on math, English, history, geography,physics, and others. Each test was given separately and there was a time limit on each test. You were not permitted to leave the room, if you did, it was an automatic flunk There was a possible 150 points, below 80 points was a failure. The tests ended promptly at five o'clock, I rushed from the room, my bladder was about to burst. We had been told to hang around for awhile after five as it would take some time to grade the tests. After 30 minutes or so, we were called back into the class room and my name was the first one called, I had the highest grade of the day at 109 points. Well, I was flabbergasted and estatic. I told them I would be back next day to enlist. What a deal, the Army was willing to pay, feed, clothe, and shelter me while teaching me to fly the best airplanes in the world. Leon had passed but was undecided if he would enlist or not. We drove back to Norman but I never went back to class at O.U. Think about it, the fickle finger of fate had steered me away from the Merchant Marine, which I would have hated, and pointed me to the Aviation Cadets which I had avoided because I did not think I could pass the exams.

Next day, in early October of 1942, I went back to the Aviation Cadet Recruiting Office and enlisted. As the paper work was completed, I was told there would be a waiting period of a month or two before I would be called for active duty. Furthermore, my first assignment would be Army Basic Training which every new recruit must take. So I drove home to Okemah wondering just what to do until being called up for duty. Well, Amerada Oil co. had a seismograph crew working in the Okemah area and I got a job working for them. Basically, a drilling rig drills a 3 inch diameter hole 30 feet into the ground at selected locations. Ten sticks of dynamite are exploded in the hole to create a mini-earth quake. The recording truck records the vibrations on strips of recording paper for geologists to study. My job was to pull long electric cables (1/4 mile) to which sensors were attached which sent the vibes to the recording truck. After Christmas we moved to southwest Arkansas near El Dorado. It was there on January 26, 1943 that I received orders to report to the Recruiting Office in Oklahoma City by 7:00 AM on January 29.

Well, there was more paper work, another physical exam,lectures, etc: on that day. The next evening January 30 the train left Oklahoma City, on board were 102 new recruits, including myself. All had passed the entrance exams required

to enlist in the Army Air Corps Aviation Cadet Program. All were on their way to Sheppard Field near Wichita Falls, Texas for Army Basic Training. Aviation Cadet Pre-flight School was still a long way off. First, the Army insisted we would learn to be soldiers, then we would be introduced to airplanes. It was a long ride, it took the train 11 hours to go the 225 miles from Okla. City to Sheppard Field. We arrived in the early morning, not long before sun-up, and were greeted by sergeants, corporals, and various other drill instructors. We got off the train and were told to line up in a column of fours, which none of us understood. We were told what a sorry looking bunch we were, how by the end of basic training our looks would improve and we would look like and be soldiers in this Army. After some confusion, we did form some semblance of a column of fours and marched off to our assigned barracks and told to freshen up and be ready to fall out in one hour for breakfast, the best news yet. The rest of the day is a blur, there were some lectures about what we would be doing in basic training. Also, we were reminded we were in the Army now and subject to military law as well as civilian law.

Hut, tup, tree, fo' is the unending cadence of the drill instructors for close order drill is the main event at Basic Training. We drill every morning for four hours and it is confusing the first day or two, then things begin to fall into place and the squads of twenty men or so begin to all march in step to the cadence. Another event is the obstacle course which we run every day, first a high wall to climb over, barb wire to crawl under, grab a rope and swing over a big mud hole, run and step into a bunch of tires in a zig-zag course, and I forget what else. Run a mile, march five miles, calisthenics. Those are the things we do. Never do you walk anywhere alone, always in a column of fours from barracks to mess hall, to the drill field, to the barber shop, to the px, always to the cadence of hut, tup, tree, fo'.

Sometime at Basic Training we all took another written exam to determine who would go directly to Pre-flight School and who would be sent to a college for more college education. This was a tough exam and only ten per cent or so were expected to pass, those who did all had one or two years of college. I was not among those who passed, so after Basic Training was over late in February, 1943, I was among the 500 sent to Southwest Texas State Teachers College in San Marcos, Texas.

We arrived in San Marcos February 27, 1943 and were delighted to find that we were to live in the school dormitories, four soldiers to a room. There were no other students there, the Army had acquired the entire college just for us. There was a cadre of Army Officers there, a Captain and two Lieutenants, plus some enlisted men to do the work. The teachers were professors who were there when the school was in civilian hands. The school cafeteria was our mess hall. Our classes were typical freshman, English, history, trigonometry, physics, etc: plus physical training, and more close order drill practice. Every Saturday morning the officers made an inspection of all the rooms. Beds made properly, floors cleaned,

waxed and shined, windows washed, class A uniforms must be worn, freshly cleaned and pressed. Saturday afternoon was for relaxation, study, write letters, likewise Sunday. Now San Marcos was a nice looking town, we could see most of it from our location up on a hill to the west, but we couldn't get a pass to go there, at least not at first. This College Training Detachment (C.T. D.) idea was a new program and there was no set amount of time we would be here before moving on to Cadet Classification Center, then on to Pre-Flight School. So it was that after a month here 100 with some college departed, and were replaced by 100 more from Sheppard Field. After three months at the end of May I and 99 others had completed the college curriculum. There was a small civilian pilot training school at San Marcos and at some time while we were in C.T.D. someone had decided this 100 soldiers who had completed their college work would get 10 hours of flying time at this school. We were estatic, this was something we had not expected. The airplanes were Aeronca Champ trainers, two seats, 65 horse power engines. My instructor was a patient young man, name Robert H. Allen, my first day of flight training was June 8, 1943 and I did poorly. With much help from Mr. Allen and hard work on my part there was improvement and I passed my check ride at the end of the course with another instructor with an overall grade of 82 per cent. This unexpected training would serve us well later on at Cadet Primary Flight School. Well, that's it for C.T.D. at San Marcos, the next stop is Cadet Classification Center near San Antonio.

Cadet Classification Center

The train from San Marcos arrived here sometime on July 3, 1943 and we marched off to our new quarters, standard WWII style barracks, no individual rooms here, one big open room downstairs, another upstairs, plus an adequate latrine to serve each room. The next day was Sunday, Independence Day, we celebrated by scrubbing the floors, windows, latrines, and anything else that could be scrubbed. Orientation lectures followed on Monday morning plus calisthenics for an hour or so. During the afternoon we had written exams, much the same as the entrance exams before enlisting, and exams on personal history. During the days following, we had thorough physical exams, and tests on machines to check muscular and visual coordination. We had psychological tests including a short visit to a psychiatrist. The physical exam revealed a need for some dental work and I went to the Dentist for some fillings. The x-rays showed one tooth beyond repair and it was pulled. During the exams we had an opportunity to choose between, pilot training, navigator, or bombardier. As it turned out we learned the Army had a surplus of navigators and bombardiers, so just about everyone was selected for pilot training, including myself. All of the above took about a week, so for now there was very little to do, we had calisthenics every day, some short marches of five miles or so, close order drill now and then, and Saturday morning barracks inspection. Mainly, we were waiting for a class to graduate from Pre-flight School which was just across the road. Somehow, I was assigned a cushy job of sitting in the Orderly Room six hours out of every thirty, so I was exempt from KP, Guard Duty, or any other assignments. My duties there were minimal, answer the phone, answer questions , and very little else.

Thursday, July 22, we all got a pass to go to downtown San Antonio and trucks were provided for transportation. It also happened to be my 21st birthday, what a nice surprise. The first destination in town was the Alamo. It was not as large as expected, there is a very nice museum there and a grassy park all around. I was now of legal age to step up to the bar and order a beer and it was now lunch time so four or five friends and myself found a suitable place for a good civilian steak and all the fixings. We had to be on the trucks at five o'clock, so there was some time for sight-seeing. There were many army bases near San Antonio so downtown was crowded with soldiers on pass, not many girls and each had two or three soldiers hanging around. It was great to get away from the base for a day but by five o'clock we were tired and ready to board our truck for the ride back to the barracks.

August 1, 1943 was moving day again. We moved across the road to Pre-flight School, we were finally and officially Aviation Cadets.

Pre-Flight School

It has been ten months since I enlisted in the Aviation Cadet Program. Today,I can put the Cadet insignia on my uniforms, pay will increase from $50 per month to $75, school will start early tomorrow morning. Each phase of cadet training is scheduled for nine weeks, so we will be here until the end of September. Military discipline becomes very evident here, we go in formation every where, to class, to the mess hall, and there are three parades a week, class A uniforms and white gloves required. Classes include math, physics, naval ship indentification, aircraft indentification, geography, maps and charts, morse code, P.T. and cross country running, and other stuff I have forgotten.

We had classes on Sunday the first two weeks, plus night classes if needed. With the parades and keeping the barracks ready for inspection, plus study at every opportunity, there was no spare time. Morse code was a requirement because the radio stations used for aircraft navigation transmitted their identification in morse code. The other courses were not difficult for me, morse code was another story. I had to take extra classes for practice before I could take eight words per minute, which was required. Failure in any class at pre-flight meant "washing-out" of cadets and being assigned to some other branch of the army. Actually, very few "washed-out" at pre-flight, but morse code was a squeaker for me.

By mid-September our work load slacked off a bit. By then we had completed the work in some classes, the parades had been reduced to just one on Saturday morning. Now those parades were something to see. There were over 2000 cadets at this pre-flight school, all on the parade ground at the same time, marching in step to military music broadcast over loud-speakers, passing the reviewing stand in front of the Base Commanding Officer, who was a Colonel. There were sometimes visiting Generals as well. It was kind of fun and by now we were getting good at it, each of the Groups passed the reviewing stand in proper order, everyone in step, all the long lines were straight, we were becoming soldiers.

Late in September we actually got a day off and could go downtown. Not a lot to do there, but we lucked out somewhat. Jack Teagarden and his Orchestra was performing at an auditorium there and I enjoyed that and a casual beer or two. We would be leaving for Primary Flight School in a few days and everyone was totally excited about that. We had no idea where we would be going for we would be split up and sent to different schools, but we didn't care, just get us out of here and into those airplanes. We wanted to go fly, that's what we had enlisted for.

Primary Flight Training School

On October 2, 1943 260 Cadets arrived at Pacific Air School, Gibbs Field, Ft. Stockton, Texas for Primary Flight Training. It has been exactly one year since I enlisted. All primary flight schools were civilian owned, the instructors were professional civilian instructors. The Army Air Corps provided the airplanes, Fairchild PT-19 low wing monoplanes, open cockpits, 175 horsepower engines. Our days would be divided, ½ for flying, ½ for ground school. Our quarters were single story buildings divided into rooms, 16 cadets to a room, plus classrooms, offices, mess hall etc: After going to our assigned rooms we could go to the flight line to see our new airplanes. The PT-19s looked much larger than the Aeronca Champs we flew at C.T.D. and everyone was excited and ready to get started. This is what we all had enlisted for, this was our goal.

The next day was Sunday and ground school and flying instructors did not normally work on week-ends so we basically had the day off to get unpacked, write letters, or just goof off. Monday morning, ½ went to ground school, ½ went to meet their flight instructors. Ground school would include Theory of Flight, Navigation, Aircraft Engines, Meteorology, and , as always, Phys Ed and Drill. My flight instructor would be Mr. John Gallagher, a pleasant man in his late twenties who had been an instructor for a long time. There would be no flying today, some orientation lectures from the Director of Flying on what we could expect in the days to come, always address your instructor as Mr. or Sir,do as you are told to do, never be late, etc: Each instructor would have four students, so until we soloed, we would get less than an hour of flying a day. The maneuvers we would be learning included turns in level flight, climbing turns, descending turns, all at varying airspeeds, varying bank angles. There would be S-turns across a road, figure eights across a road, approach to stalls, power on and power off, three turn spins, simulated forced landings, chandelles, eights around a pylon, and acrobatics, including loops, snap rolls, slow rolls, barrel rolls. All of the above and more, but the first thing would be take-offs and landings, and flying in the traffic pattern which must be precise and alert for there was no control tower to keep traffic flowing smoothly. My first flight was Tuesday Oct. 5, we practiced taxiing and Mr Gallagher demonstrated take-offs and landings, the flight was for only :24 minutes. Next day was a repeat of the first except I had my hands on the controls more and actually made a landing although I could feel Gallagher on the controls with me. We leave the traffic pattern on the third day, and I make turns left and right, climbing and descending, I must learn to relax, not be so tense, add power when starting a climbing turn, reduce power in a descent. We return to the airport to practice take-offs and landings, again I feel the instructor on the controls as I land the airplane. We taxi back down the field for take-off, climb to exactly 300 ft, make a precise 90 degree turn to the left while climbing to 500 ft, maintain exactly 500 ft on the down-wind leg, fly past the field aways, judge the proper distance to turn onto the cross-wind leg, throttle back to engine idle, start descent, turn left to line up with the sod runway, maintain a proper glide to keep the speed a few MPH above stall speed, cross the airport boundry with nose high, allow the speed to bleed off so that the airplane touches down at stall speed in a three point attitude. Sounds easy, but level off high and when the stall comes the airplane will drop to the ground with a definite thump, touch down with to much speed and the airplane will bounce back into the air then stall and come to the

ground with the big thump. This time I did not feel Gallagher on the controls, I crossed the airport boundry at proper speed and attitude, the landing was not perfect, but good, just a little bump, and I was careful to keep the airplane going straight ahead on the landing roll. In the days that followed we practiced more air-work and take-offs and landings. On Oct. 19 we were at the auxiliary airfield and I had a total of 8:28 hours by now. We practiced a landing or two and Gallagher asked me to taxi over to side of the runway where he got out and told me to make a take-off and landing alone. This was the big moment, this would be my first solo flight. I taxi back to take-off position at the end of the field, line up precisely, advance the throttle to take-off power, let the airplane fly itself off the ground at 75 mph, fly a precise traffic pattern and make a satisfactory landing. As I roll by Gallagher he is waving then points back to the end of the airfield, he is telling me to take it around again. Again a precise pattern, another passable landing, I come to a stop nearby Gallagher, he gets in and we fly back to Gibbs Field. I have made my first solo flight, I am now officially a pilot. Gallagher extends his hand in a sincere congratulation, my work is done for the day, he picks up the next student. In the days that follow I have more flights with Gallagher where he will teach me more difficult maneuvers in the curriculum, then I have an airplane assigned to me so I can go out and practice those maneuvers alone.

Another facet of all flight training is the check-ride. Soon after 20 hours each student pilot flys a check-ride with an instructor other than his own. By Nov. 8 I had amassed a total of 29:00 hours. Upon arriving at the flight line that day I was told I was scheduled for a check-ride with our Flight Commander Mr. W.B. Wallace. My legs immediately turned to jelly, my brain turned to oatmeal, I had a serious case of check-it is, a temporary disease common to all flight trainees. Wallace came into the ready room soon after and introduced himself to me. He was a friendly guy and we went over what would happen during the check-ride, the maneuvers would be the ones Gallagher had taught me, he tried to put me at ease, just fly the airplane as if I were on a practice flight and every thing would be okay. It turned out to be a long check-ride, 1:38 according to my log book. After it was over he had some comments and criticisms but I had passed, he said keep on working hard and every thing would fall in to place.

Ft. Stockton was a typical west Texas cow-town, population around 4000 friendly people. We could get passes to town Saturday or Sunday as there was no flying or school on those days. There was a restaurant that had a bar, juke box, and a little dance floor upstairs which was always crowded on Saturday nights, closed on Sundays. There were a few local girls and many cadets, so getting a date was near impossible. There was a room at the library with lounge chairs and tables where we could relax and read, and the local ladies provided soft drinks and snacks free of charge. Evan so, I don't recall going into town more than maybe three times.

Mr. Gallagher found a better job flying for the Air Transport Service and he was gone. My new instructor was Mr. Fred Lewis, younger than Gallagher and not as experienced but a pleasant fellow easy to get on with. We are into the second half of our flight training here and the maneuvers now include spins, loops, snap rolls, slow rolls, steep turns and such. We flew a cross country flight solo north 53 miles to Monahans,

southwest 40 miles to Pecos, southeast 52 miles to Gibbs Field. Not a difficult flight, just follow the highway between the towns, but it was fun to take an airplane and go somewhere instead of just going up to practice maneuvers. On Nov. 12 I had my second check-ride with Mr. Gonye which I passed, by now I had logged almost 40 hours. We are now into the final phases and I fly more solo than with Lewis. Before graduation the last check-ride must be with a leading instructor and mine was on Nov. 23 with Squadron Commander Lloyd McAdams. Again a severe case of check-it is, but McAdams notes my condition and puts me at ease, you have passed two check-rides, you have done well, let's go out and fly as if this was a practice flight. I say okay, Sir. But I know this is no practice flight, this is for all the marbles. As we get into the flight the check-itis subsides, I perform the maneuvers well enough to pass and the flight is over in an hour. So, there will be no more check-rides here but I still need more flying time to finish the required time and I have two short flights with Lewis and I fly six hours solo in the next week. On Dec. 2, I finish Primary Flight Training. My log book total is 65:05 hours and I'm ready for Basic Flight Training. All the other cadets of Class 44D are finishing also and we speculate on where we might be going. Goodfellow Field at San Angelo, Texas is the most likely location, we will know very soon.

Some Friends at Primary Flight School

Michaelson, Norris, Miller R. A., Masters, Kurth, Mackey, McGraw, Miller R. O., McCray, McConnell.
Miller R. L., Knight, McCarty, Mansfield, Milner, Lambert

Basic Flight Training School

The rumor about Goodfellow Field was true, the train carrying 220 Cadets from Gibbs Field arrived there at 12:30 am on Dec. 5, 1943. Beginning the next day we became very busy with orientation lectures, ground school assignments, familiarization with our new airplanes, etc: The Vultee BT-13 was a larger and more complicated airplane than the PT-19s we flew in Primary. The two cockpits were covered with sliding glass canopies, the cockpits were fully equipped for instrument flying and radio navigation, the engine was 450 horsepower, top speed of 150 mph, wing flaps to allow a slower landing speed, adjustable pitch propellor, low pitch for take-off, high pitch for level light. Also there was a control tower here to maintain a smooth flow of traffic around the airport. The instructors were all army officers, most were 2nd Lieutenants and had graduated from Cadets not so long ago and most of them really didn't want to be instructors. My instructor would be Lt. Ammerman, he wanted to go to fighter airplane training and off to combat, he did not want to be an instuctor.

My first flight with Lt. Ammerman was on Dec. 11 and according to my log book lasted just :45 minutes. Our schedule was ½ day flying, ½ day ground school, so until we soloed our flying would be limited to flights with the instructor. I soloed on Dec. 17 after just 4:05 hours in the big BT-13. During that time we practiced a lot of take-offs and landings, and did some air work also. I learned right away to do the very best I could because Ammerman was very critical of mistakes and poor work, and its difficult to learn while being yelled at for every minor indiscretion. The aerial maneuvers were much the same as at Primary, but the airplane was very much more complicated and did not react to control inputs as well as the PT-19. Also there would be some night take-offs and landings, there would be four hours of formation flying, and there would be more and longer cross-country flights. The first six weeks would be with Ammerman, the final three weeks would be instrument flying with another instructor. By Jan. 16, I had flown 20:00 hours with Ammerman, and had 23:00 solo hours. There had been two check rides. Now I am ready to learn instrument flying.

From the beginning at Goodfellow Field we had classes on Instrument Flying, as well as classes in Theory of Flight, Meteorology, Air Craft Engines, Navigation, Phys. Ed, and Drill. We still moved from barracks to the flight line,to the mess hall, to ground school in military formation. There was a Saturday morning inspection of our barracks which were now typical army barracks like those at Pre-flight School, and there was the Saturday parade on the parade grounds. Also from the beginning, we were introduced to the Link Trainer, an early form of a flight simulator. It was a box on a pedestal which could bank, simulate a climb or descent, and turn 360 degrees. To get in, you lifted the lid on the box, sat down and closed the lid. It had a control panel like an airplane, including turn and bank indicator, artificial horizon, directional gyro compass, climb and descent indicator, altimeter, airspeed indicator, etc: On a nearby table was an indicating device which recorded your movements on a large sheet of paper. It really was a unique device for teaching instrument flying techniques. Each cadet flew the Link Trainer a minimum of 10 hours, which saved flying that much time in an airplane, so it was an economical device as well as a good trainer.

Lt. S.R. Higdon was my instrument flight instructor. He had been to a special instrument flight training school, he enjoyed teaching, he was patient, never raised his voice, he was the best instructor I ever had, and in my lifetime I have had many. To practice instrument flying in an airplane a hood is installed in the students cockpit which comes from behind, above the head and attaches to the top of the instrument panel. With it in place you cannot see outside the airplane. In the beginning, we did gentle turns to a new heading in a 20 degree bank in level flight. At 150 mph in a 20 degree bank the airplane turns at the rate of 3 degrees per second, so to turn from north to east is 90 degrees and would take 30 seconds, 180 degrees takes 60 seconds or one minute, a complete circle of 360 degrees takes two minutes. Then came climbing turns and descending turns at a constant airspeed and a constant rate of climb or descent. This requires precise throttle adjustments to maintain say 140 mph at a climb or descent rate of exactly 400 feet per minute. Instrument flying requires intense concentration on the part of the student, a kind and patient instructor such as Lt. Higdon is worth his weight in gold. In the Link Trainer we had learned to fly a square pattern, each side of the square was two minutes always in a climb or descent at a specified speed and rate of climb or descent, one of the corners of the square was a simple 90 degree turn, the other corners required turns as much as 720 degrees, always climbing or descending. We learned to fly the same square pattern in the airplane. We also learned steep turns at a 45 degree bank angle which doubles the rate of turn, a 360 circle takes one minute. We turned 360 degrees to the left followed immediately with a 360 degree turn to the right at a precise altitude and a constant airspeed. We learned take-offs while under the hood, there were no runways at Goodfellow Field, the instructor headed the airplane into the desired take-off direction, I set the directional gyro at precisely at that direction, advance the throttle to take-off power, maintain the heading, let the airplane fly off the ground at the correct speed, use the artificial horizon to keep the wings level while letting the speed build up to climb speed and maintaining the desired climb rate, at 500 feet leave the airport traffic pattern.

By the first week of February 1944 instrument flight training was completed, it's time for the inevitable check ride. We are in the ready room and the instructors are busy trading students when in strides a Major, the Squadron Commander. He points his finger first at me, then two other students. He says, " You three will take your check ride with me." "Yes Sir" we say in unison. He says to me "Get your parachute, you will be first." We go out to the assigned airplane, I do the pre-flight procedures, call the control tower for taxi clearance, and taxi out, line up the airplane to the take-off heading, pull the hood over me, get take-off clearance and start the take-off roll. Now, I am scared to death and very tense, we get off alright but in the climb I get the nose to high, the airspeed is decreasing which is not good. I feel the Major apply a little forward pressure on the control stick so I too apply a little pressure and the Major lets go and I continue to climb at the proper climb speed. By not yelling at me nor saying something critical, but simply adding a bit of pressure on his control stick, the Major has put me at ease. We make climbing turns left and right to a suitable altitude and I fly the square pattern, then demonstrate the steep turns at the 45 degree bank angle, and the check-ride is over. I call the control tower for landing clearance and I land and taxi to the ramp, park the airplane and get out. The Major doesn't tell me if I passed or not, he just says, "Send out the next student." Later

that day I learned from Lt. Higdon that I had passed. Also, I learned the other two had failed. They had a re-check next day with an instructor and passed okay, so they weren't washed out. The date is Feb. 6, 1944 and this concludes Basic Training. Lt. Higdon wrote a very nice letter to each of his students and wished us well in the future. A copy is the next page, the original is in the album containing my letters home. I know that I will go to single engine training in Advanced Training flying North American At-6s and that was my preference which was turned in some time ago. Most cadets who train in the AT-6 go on to fighter planes or light twin-engine bombers. As of today I do not know the location of the advance training school, it could be Foster Field at Victoria, Texas.

Vultee BT-13 and Me

To
Lt. Higdon's students —

Perhaps this should be a military letter, but I'd rather it would be a little more informal. I'd like to see you all personally, but that's out.

Suffice it to say that I've enjoyed working with you as much as a poor old instructor could enjoy work with students. You've been good boys, and I want to wish you all the luck (good) there is.

If you ever feel the urge, I'd like to hear from you — just address it to Goodfellow Field and I'll get it. Perhaps one of these days I'll be flying on your wing or as your co-pilot, slapping Japs. That's O.K. with me.

Until we meet again, good luck, and give 'em hell.

D. K. Higdon
2nd Lt., AC.

Advanced Flight Training School

The train departed Goodfellow Field the evening of February 8, 1944 and went all the way to Houston before turning back west to Foster Field near Victoria, Texas where it arrived around noon. Now this is a very nice place, green grass everywhere, the barracks are painted white with green roofs and are divided into small rooms with five cadets in some and three cadets in the smaller rooms on the corners. I was in a corner room, my room mates were Wilbur Mansfield and Robert McCarty. We had time in the afternoon to go to the flight line to see our new airplanes, North American AT-6s,600 HP, retractable landing gear, wing flaps, constant speed propellers, top speed over 200 MPH, and other features well above the BT-13s we flew at Basic. Flying these was going to be fun. Another nice thing about Advanced, we no longer went everywhere in military formation, the army now thought we were mature enough to find our way individually to the mess hall, class rooms, flight line, etc: The Gulf of Mexico was just 40 miles south so the weather was warmer than San Angelo, this was going to be a very nice place.

My instructor was near my own age, he had recently graduated from flying cadet training himself and we got along very well, but I cannot remember his name. We flew togather until I soloed after three hours and I never saw him again. My next instructor was also a recent graduate and from him I learned instrument flying on a radio beam to the radio station and descent to the airfield, all under the hood. Also, there was radio beam orientation in the Link trainer, we logged ten hours in that ancestor of the modern simulator. To practice instrument flying, we often doubled up, another cadet rode in the back seat to watch for other airplanes while the cadet in front was under the hood. But this airplane was not about instrument flying entirely, it was about maneuverability, speed, quickness, and acrobatics. It was our introduction to flying a fighter airplane. It was fun to fly, sensitive to control inputs, a fast rate of climb over 1500 feet per minute, multiple loops, slow rolls, barrel rolls, snap rolls, chandelles, lazy eights, anything you wanted it to do. It could be tricky to land in a cross-wind, but we were all now becoming mature pilots with over 140 hours in our logbooks. We did not fly a lot of time with instructors, my logbook shows only 16:35 dual and 53:25 solo. We had flown a bit of night flying at Basic, just a few take-offs and landings. At Advanced we flew some night cross-country flights, one as far as Austin, 150 miles north of Victoria. It was a bright moon-light night and as I flew north to Austin I could see the beacon light at the San Marcos Airport where I had my first flights in the little Aeroncas nearly a year before. On my way back from Austin I decided to fly over to San Marcos just for fun. This made me a little late for my scheduled time back to Foster Field and from about 40 miles out the control tower was calling my airplane call sign. They thought I might be lost, I answered their call, told them I had the Foster beacon in sight and would be there soon. I was the last one to land from that cross-country flight and it was fun.

Soon after we arrived at Foster Field a salesman and tailor from the Kahn Tailoring Co. of Indianapolis came to take our orders and measurements for officers uniforms. This was quite a large job, there would be about 200 cadets graduate as second lieutenants on April 15, 1944 and they would all need and want their new uniforms by then. Officers pay for their own uniforms. The bill for a winter and a summer uniform plus shirts came

to about $150, a lot of money as we were making only $75 a month as cadets. We did keep the uniforms issued at Sheppard Field when we entered the army. They could be used for every day but not for dress.

Someone, somewhere in the army decided shooting skeet would assist in learning aerial gunnery. Therefore, we were scheduled for 14 hours on the skeet range shooting at clay pigeons with automatic 12 guage full bore shotguns. From a letter I wrote home, I broke 13 out of 16 targets the first day. A shotgun was not a stranger to me, I had often hunted ducks, geese, quail, rabbits, etc: with papa's shotgun at home. Its doubtful if skeet shooting helped with aerial gunnery, but it was fun.

Many days we could not fly because of the bad weather that blew up from the Gulf of Mexico. We were learning formation flying and that requires sunny days and good visibility. Also, we had aerial gunnery in the airplane with cameras instead of machine guns. We flew the airplane at the tow target and took pictures, much safer than using machine guns. This also requires good weather, so we got behind in our flying, but there was some improvement in late March and we flew week-ends and managed to catch up and complete training in time for graduation.

Graduation ceremonies were on Saturday morning, April 15, 1944. We put on our new uniforms, then we assembled at the end of the parade grounds in a big formation. We all looked sharp, and we were proud, very proud. We had passed through the Cadet Aviation Flight Program and it had been tough going at times, and it had been fun, and it had always been hard work. In the past year, I had learned more than in any year before, and I think more than any year since. The band struck up, we all came to attention then marched in perfect formation down the parade ground to the reviewing stand. There our Commanding Officer, whose name escapes me, gave a congratulation address for about fifteen minutes, then we were dismissed. Now, we could go back to the barracks and put on the second lieutenant gold bars on our uniform jackets and the silver pilot wings above the left breast pocket. We were now officially officers and pilots of the U.S. Army Air Force.

Foster Field was also a fighter airplane training base and the Curtis P-40s flew among the cadet AT-6s. About ½ of this graduating class would come back to Foster Field for P-40 training and were to report by May 1. In the meantime, they were free to go home on furlough. It was then I learned I would not be returning to Foster Field, I would be assigned elsewhere and my orders were delayed temporarily. I was disappointed for I had always wanted to fly fighter airplanes. In two or three days my orders came, I was to report to the Army Air Base at Midland, Texas on May 3 where I would fly Beechcraft AT-11s while bombardier cadets learned to drop bombs on the target. This gave me time to go home for the first time since entering the army over a year ago. I had reserved a seat on Braniff Airlines to Oklahoma City on April 16 but because my orders were delayed I missed that flight. So, I rode the bus home.

After the long bus ride, I was tired but it was so good to see Mama and Papa, and Amos and Otto. We all had a lot of talking to do. Also, while I was home, Abner got a leave to

come home before going overseas to Europe. He was a doctor and had been drafted into the Army in late 1942. Doctors automatically become Captains when drafted and he looked great in his Captains uniform. The next Sunday Mama cooked a big dinner and my sisters Ruth, Ethel, and Alice were there along with assorted husbands, nephews, nieces, etc: It was just wonderful to be home if only for a short while. The next thing to do was to go into town and see all my old friends there. This was a disappointment, there were no friends. All the boys I used to know were in the service, like myself. All the girls were married, in school, or working away from home. I did manage to have a date or two, but with whom I don't remember. The days just flew by, all to soon it was time to board the bus to Midland. I wouldn't be home again for another year.

Midland Army Air Force Base

Midland is in the west part of Texas 100 miles northeast of Ft. Stockton where I had attended Primary Flight School just seven months before in October, 1943. Since then, I have completed aviation cadet pilot training and am now a second lieutenant. Upon arrival at the air base I checked-in with the proper authorities and was assigned a room all to myself in the Bachelor Officer's Quarters (BOQ). I ate the evening meal at the Officer's Mess and found the food much better than in cadet mess halls. This being an officer was going to be great. Next day I drew flying clothes and equipment and filled out all the required forms. Ground School on the Beechcraft AT-11 would start Monday, May 7 so I had the next day off. I went down to the flight line at first opportunity to see the AT-11. It's a twin-engine airplane with a wing span of 45 feet, the engines are Pratt-Whitney 450hp each, the same engine that was on the BT-13 at basic flight training. There's an enclosed cabin with seats for seven. The nose is clear plastic so the bombardier student can get a good view of his target. The cockpit is set-up for a single pilot, no co-pilot required which I like. The bombs are 100 lb. practice bombs filled with sand, the explosive charge is just enough to make some smoke to mark the location of the strike. The targets are large circles on the ground with the aiming point in the middle. Well, this won't be so bad, just fly the cadets over the target so they can learn to be bombardiers, a good way to build up a lot of flying time. This would be a good thing because in the back of my mind were thoughts that some day I might want to make a career of flying.

Ground school had hardly started on Monday when a corporal walked in and called off a list of twenty names, mine included. We were given orders to report to Hammer Airfield in Fresno, California by May 12, 1944 and were provided with train tickets. Among the twenty there was only one other person from Foster Field and that was Jim Rohe. I had not known him very well there, cadets were assigned barracks in alphabetical order so he was not in my barracks. Even so, we quickly recognized each other and sat togather on the train to Los Angeles. It took the train 24 hours to L.A. and we were tired on arrival in the afternoon. We found a hotel not far from the train station and checked-in. After a good meal at a restaurant and a beer we were ready for bed. Next day we rode the train on to Fresno and checked-in at Hammer Army Air Force Base which was a Replacement and Redistribution Center for the Fourth Air Force, a training air force for the west coast region. We were a day early and had time to go to downtown Fresno for a look around, some drinks and try to get acquainted with some girls. Not much luck there, but it was neat to be out and away from a air base and on our own for awhile. At this time, we did not know which airplane we would be assigned, we did not know which air base would be our next home, we were in limbo for now. We had a physical exam and shots for yellow fever, typhus, and cholera. That told us we would be going overseas when we finished training at whichever air base was our new assignment. We assumed that since we were on the west coast we would go to the Pacific.

Tonopah Army Air Force Base

After all who had been ordered to Hammer Field arrived, got their shots and physicals, we were loaded on to a troop train destination Tonopah Air Base near Tonopah, Nevada. There were 400 men aboard, or 40 air crews. We would be training on B-24 bombers, 10 men to a crew. It was now that I learned I had been assigned as Co-pilot on a B-24 crew. When the train arrived in Reno we had about two hours to go downtown and look around while the train took on water for the engine and food supplies for us. A big sign arched above the main street read " The Greatest Little City in the World". Beyond the sign were casinos and hotels all glittering with neon lights like nothing any of us had ever seen. There was just time for a quick look then back to the train, it was 200 more miles to Tonopah.

Tonopah Air Base was a desolate place, that's the only way to describe it, no trees, no green grass, a scrubby bush here and there, sand and gravel soil everywhere. It is now May 15, 1944 and we would only be here until the end of July. Next day we assembled in a big auditorium to meet the members of our crew. The 400 names were called each man assigned a seat. When this process was finished I was seated with my crew, we would train togather, we would fly combat missions togather, we would become brothers. For now it was essential to become acquainted. There was Jack C. Clarke, Pilot, from Macon, Ga., Oak Mackey, Co-pilot, Okemah, Ok. Clyde B. Eaton, Navigator, Monrovia, Ca. Robert C. Lowe, Bombardier, Chicago, Il. Edward C. Brunnette, San Antonio, Tx. Engineer and Top Turret Gunner, Jay T. Brown, Radio Operator, Folsom, NM. George Peer, Waist Gunner, Pennsylvania, Ralph C. Heilman, Indiana, Nose Turret Gunner, John K. Heckman, Chicago, Il. Waist Gunner, Kevin B. Killea, New Jersey, Tail Turret Gunner. The pilots, navigator and bombardier were second lieutenants, the enlisted men were all corporals except the tail gunner, Kevin was a fun lover and had committed some minor indiscretion and had been demoted to private.

It is now time to get acquainted with the Consolidated B-24. Compared to the AT-6 trainer it is big, very big. The wing span is 110 feet, it's 67 feet long. There are four engines, 1200 HP each. There are positions for 10 .50 caliber machine guns, two in the nose turret, two in the upper turret, two in the belly turret, one each for the waist windows, and two in the tail turret. The two bomb bays are large and can carry up to 8000 lbs. of bombs. Every thing about the B-24 takes time. There is a check list before engine start, starting 4 engines takes time, there is a after engine start check list, a taxi check list, before take-off check list. From engine start to take-off always takes at least 15 minutes. I am used to flying the AT-6, hop into the cock-pit, start the engine, taxi out to the runway, push the throttle up and go. To fly the B-24 is going to take a change in attitude. As always there are ground school classes, manuals are issued, there is much to learn, a lot to study. I had wanted very much to fly fighters, not bombers. Well, that's not the way it turned out, I made up my mind I would learn to fly this big B-24, and I would learn to fly it very well.

Jack Clarke had graduated from cadets in class 44A in January, 1944 three months earlier than I. From there he was at B-24 transition school at Liberal, Kansas where he had

flown over 100 hours. It was up to me to learn all I could from him. Early on at Tonopah an instructor pilot would sit in the co-pilot seat giving instructions to Jack, I would sit on the jump seat just behind the pilots and observe and learn. Soon Jack had passed his check-ride and we didn't see instructor pilots, we were on our own. We practiced instrument flying, we had bombing missions so Bob Lowe could practice his bombing skills with the Norden bomb-sight. There were long cross country flights and Clyde Eaton could hone his navigating skills. There were gunnery practice flights where the gunners fired at tow targets. We flew by day, we flew at night, and we learned to fly in squadron size formations. We knew we would go to a Port of Embarkation from here, go over seas to combat, we didn't know if we would go to Europe or the Pacific.

Sometime in early June there were aircrews who had completed their training and were moving on. Someone in one of those crews owned a 1932 Plymouth sedan and he wanted to sell it for $50. I bought it immediately. It wasn't much to look at, the sun had bleached it to a indeterminate color, the upholstery was tattered and torn, the engine ran good. It was a good mile from the barracks to the flight line, others walked, our crew had a car. Tonopah was eight miles away and there was bus service from the base, but it was nice to have a car to drive to town, no waiting for the bus. It had a population of 1500 or so, there were two casinos, a restaurant, and not much else. The casinos were a new experience, we had never been in one before. Needless to say, they were raking in the dough for none of us young men knew anything about gambling. Later in June we got a three day pass. Eaton had not been home for a year so he and I drove to L.A. I dropped him off at his parent's home in Monrovia, I drove on to Redondo Beach. Inez Matlock lived there, she was C.L. Matlock's older sister. C.L. was a good friend from Okemah, we had gone through school togather. I found Inez soon and we had a good visit, she was a few years older than I, plus she had a steady boy friend, so she got a date for me with a friend. We went out for some drinks and dinner and a movie. It was a fun evening, we all had a good time, but I was getting tired for it was a long drive from Tonopah. I checked into a hotel there at Redondo Beach and got a good night's sleep. Next morning, I picked Eaton up in Monrovia and we headed back to Tonopah. Somewhere near Bishop, Ca. we needed gas but it was late night by this time and all the gas stations were closed. Eaton slept on the back seat, I on the front. After daylight we found a gas station then drove on to Tonopah. We were a little late but had not missed any flight assignment or anything else, so it was okay. Sometime in July we got another three day pass, so I decided to drive to Las Vegas. Now, Clarke and Lowe were married and their wives were staying at a hotel in Goldfield which was about thirty miles south of Tonopah, which had no hotel, and they wanted spend their leave time with their wives. Eaton didn't want to go to Las Vegas, so I went alone. Las Vegas was not a big town in 1944, the Strip was not there then, there was one main street through downtown and that was it, there were glittering lights on the casinos, but nothing like today, there were just two hotels and I checked into one of them. After eating at a suitable restaurant, I made a walking tour of downtown just to see the sights. There only about five or six casinos and after looking them over, I went in one to play some black-jack. Even though I knew very little about the game I had a lucky streak for awhile and the chips started stacking up, when I counted $80, I quit and walked out with a profit. Next day I drove back to Tonopah.

We continued our training in the big B-24 through July and at the end of the month on July 31, 1944 orders came for 55 crews, or a total of 550 men, to proceed by troop train to Hamilton Air Force Base, which is located 40 miles north of San Francisco.

Hamilton Army Air Force Base

Our train arrived at Hamilton AAF on August 4, 1944 after an uneventful ride from Tonopah. It was a relief to see green vegetation and water again, this is wine grape country and vineyards are everywhere. The base itself is located on the north part of San Francisco Bay and is a very old army air base. The barracks are permanent structures of brick and stone. Each officer has his own room, the enlisted men have to make do in larger rooms, perhaps ten men to a room. We are here to draw flight suits and equipment to take overseas, a Colt .45 caliber automatic pistol is included. This is getting to be serious business. We have not had a clue as to where we are going, so we assume we will be assigned to an air force in the Pacific. We do know we will be here for only a few days.

By the afternoon of the second day equipment has been issued, individual shot records have been checked, etc: and we are free to take the bus into San Francisco, winter dress uniforms are required. Though it is quite warm here temperatures are cool in S.F. The bus let us off on Union Square, right downtown. None of my crew had come along and I don't remember why, so I was with whoever was on the bus. The Fairmont Hotel was right across the street so some of us went there to check out the bar. It's mid-afternoon and the bar is nearly empty. It is a really fancy place, much nicer than any of us were used to, so we all ordered a beer and found out that it was .50 cents a glass, twice as much as most places. Our next stop was the Mark Hopkins Hotel so we could visit the Top of the Mark, a restaurant and bar on the top floor of the hotel, and a must see place when you go to S.F. In 1944, it was the tallest building in S. F. and from there you could see clear over to Oakland and all around town and including the new Golden Gate bridge which we had just crossed on our way from Hamilton Field. We found the price of drinks the same as at the Fairmont and it was getting near supper time but we didn't want to eat here, to expensive. Our group had dwindled down to four or five and one of them who was familiar with S. F. suggested an Italian restaurant where the spaghetti was excellent. We took him at his word and went there and he was right, the spaghetti was delicious and reasonably priced. From there, I believe we sort of went bar hopping and somewhere along the way we met a nice lady who was quite a few years older than any of us, she may have been 35 or so. She said her husband was a Major and was overseas, and she invited us to her apartment nearby for coffee, soft drinks and snacks. I expect she was well aware that we were also on our way overseas. It had been a most enjoyable day and it was time to go catch the bus back to Hamilton Field. Next day we were told to pack our bags and be ready the following day to board a train to Camp Kilmer, New Jersey.

The Train to New Jersey

Early in the morning on August 7, 1944 we all boarded the train. In all, there were 55 crews, 10 men to a crew, or a total of 550 men, all had just completed combat training at Tonopah. We were going to combat and we were ready, we could fly the big B-24, we were well trained, cocky, and ready to take on Hitler and his bunch. Camp Kilmer is near New York City and we knew we would be boarding a ship there to either the 8th Air Force in England, or possibly to the 15th Air Force in Italy.

The train was equipped with Pullman cars which were old but comfortable, we joked that President Lincoln had slept here. There were porters on board to help us with the beds, we would eat in the dining cars in shifts. This was going to be an extraordinary trip and a lot of fun. Our route would take us across California, over the Sierras to Reno, across Nevada through Salt Lake City, over the Rockies through Denver, across the Great Plains and the Midwest through Chicago, then Indiana, Ohio, Pennsylvania, into New Jersey to Camp Kilmer. Officers had no duties on the train, some enlisted men would be selected for KP duty in the kitchens on a rotating basis, someone had to peel the potatoes, even so, no one had KP for more than a few hours. We all mostly just enjoyed the scenery, read, played cards, wrote letters, etc: The Sierras were scenic from the train windows, we had seen them while flying from Tonopah. We were surprised to see patches of snow on the highest peaks in the Rockies west of Denver. The wheat had already been harvested in Colorado and Nebraska, the hogs and cattle were fat and the corn was 10 feet tall in Iowa. Unlike the other troop trains I had experienced going from one base to another, this train did not stop on sidings to let freight trains go by, this train had a clear track all the way and we traveled day and night. So it was that we arrived at Camp Kilmer late in the evening of the fourth day. We marched from the train station to our barracks, trucks followed with our luggage.

Camp Kilmer was a Redistribution Center where troops were collected to be loaded onto the ships which took them overseas. The barracks were standard WWII style, no individual rooms here, upper and lower bunks, one latrine upstairs, another down. It was humid and hot. We had no duties except some lectures on getting along with the English people, what to expect aboard the ship, etc: There were all sorts of soldiers here, infantry, artillery, engineers, para-troopers, air crews, and others. The greatest thing about Camp Kilmer was that we would be here only a few days before boarding the Ile de France.

The Voyage to England

The Ile de France was a large French ocean liner about the same size as England's Queen Mary. When the German armies over ran France in the summer of 1940, she had escaped to England. She was then out-fitted as a troop transport ship operated by English sailors and was put into service to transport American soldiers across the Atlantic. Her top speed was over 30 knots and the German submarines couldn't catch her, therefore it wasn't necessary to travel in a convoy.

It was probably August 19, 1944 when we started loading on to the ship, a process that took all day. First, there was the 50 mile train ride from Camp Kilmer to the docks in New York City. We had put suitable identification tags on our luggage which was carried to the ship in trucks, except for one piece carried by each of us for items necessary aboard ship. At the docks, we got off the train to wait our turn to board and there was quite a long wait. When the loading was done there would be 10,000 troops aboard so the process did take quite a long while. The officers were put in the staterooms, enlisted men in the cargo holds below. In a stateroom for two in peace time, there were eight officers in upper/lower bunks. In the holds the enlisted men's bunks were bolted to the vertical stanchions in stacks of as many as ten. This was our first contact with the British and we found them friendly, polite, and efficient. We stayed aboard at the docks the first night and had our first taste of English cooked food. It was good but somehow different, more bland and not seasoned as much as we were used to in the army mess halls.

Sometime next morning, the tug boats pushed the Ile de France away from the dock and out into the Hudson River. We were free to go up on the top deck to see the sky-scrapers of downtown fade away, we all cheered as we passed the Statue of Liberty, we were young and didn't think about it then, but we were on our way to make sure that Statue stood there for a very long time. As we reached open water we could feel the ship gain speed, by afternoon we were out of sight from any land, it would be four days until we saw land again. To pass the time away, we ate at our appointed time, slept the night through and then some, and walked around the top deck for exercise and fresh air, this was a unique experience and we were having fun. Bing Crosby was on board with his USO troupe. He happened to be the same deck as I and my room mates. If he passed by our open door he would always wave and say hello. Every night in the ship's auditorium, he and his troupe put on a show, he had some young Hollywood starlets for singers and dancers that would knock your eyes out. There was no way the auditorium would seat everyone aboard at one time, we saw it on a rotating basis and I don't know if everyone got to see it.

There were life boat and life preserver drills soon after land disappeared. There were not enough life boats for all on board so it was essential to know where to get a life preserver and how to get it on. I don't recall ever seeing another ship all the way to England even though they had to be out there somewhere. This was a big ship but in rough water it did roll and pitch some but none of the guys in our cabin were seasick. We had spent the last year tossing around in an airplane, so we were used to it. It was after dark on the forth

day that we sailed up the Firth of Clyde and docked at Glasgow, Scotland. The trains were waiting for us and the unloading process began right away. Just about all the ground troops would take trains all the way to sea ports in the south of England where they would board ships to take them across the Channel to France, Belgium, and Holland. They were loaded on the trains first. It would be early morning hours before the 55 aircrews from Tonopah loaded onto a train. The train cars were smaller than American cars and were divided into compartments with seats for ten or so, the steam engines had a shrill high pitched whistle unlike the low, lonely sounding train whistles in the good old US of A. By daylight we had arrived at a large Army Redistribution Base near the village of Stone, located about 50 miles southeast of Liverpool in Staffordshire. We unloaded from the train right on the base and walked to our assigned barracks, then to the mess hall for some very welcome breakfast.

Stone and Northern Ireland

The date is now August 26, 1944, it has been nearly a month since we left Tonopah and we have not seen an airplane. There are no airplanes at Stone either, this is a Redistribution Center and we won't be here long, perhaps about a week. We have no duties here, there will be plenty of time to take it easy and get ready for whatever comes next.

We are free to take walks in the country-side and get acquainted with England. The farms are all neat and well kept, the fields are smaller than in Oklahoma and are not laid out in squares. All are irregular in shape and many have hedge-rows and trees for borders. Oat harvest is in full swing and I have never seen oats like these. At home fifty bushels to the acre is a bumper crop, these look to be more like one hundred bushels to the acre. There is a surprising amount of pasture land in these rolling hills, some have sheep grazing in them, others have cattle, both dairy and beef breeds. There aren't many horses and that's another surprise. I expected to see horses pulling farm implements, not so, every farmer had a tractor to till his land. It comes to my mind that these farms have been tilled for literally thousands of years and they are all still extremely productive. Already I am beginning to admire these Brits.

The village of Stone is only one mile away, just a short walk after supper at the mess hall. England is in the same latitudes as Alaska so summer days are long and its still daylight. There are two pubs and this will be the first chance to sample some English beer. There are different kinds, ales, lagers, milds, bitters, stouts, and none are all that good. The lager is the closest to American beer. The British men in the Pubs were all older than us, the young men were away serving their country. We found them friendly but not very chummy, they mostly wanted to be left alone, after all, young Yanks had been through the Redistribution Center for a couple of years now and all were brand new to England and all were excited and noisy. There were girls of all ages in the streets, in the shops, and in the pubs and they were friendly. They knew we had folding money in our pockets and they were ready to be friends. Now we had been fenced away from any female company for a long time now so this was a win, win situation for all. England had been at war for five years now and there was a shortage of everything including ladies stylish clothing, so they were plainly dressed, but we didn't care. They were friendly and wanted to have some fun, so we did.

After a week at Stone the officers of the Tonopah bunch were transported to the docks at Liverpool, the enlisted men were sent off to gunnery school somewhere. At the docks we learned we were on our way to something called 8th Air Force Indoctrination in Northern Ireland. After a long wait until late afternoon, we were loaded onto a small ship and sailed away for an all night voyage to Ireland. I don't recall where we landed, but trucks took us to an Army Air Field in the interior not close to any city or town. The barracks were Nissen huts and twenty of us were crowded into each one, double deck bunks and no place to put stuff. We had the rest of this day off, its now September 4, 1944. We are restricted to base here, but there is no place to go anyway. We would be here two weeks, no flying, some lectures for all, and the navigators would learn a new system of

navigation called G.E.E. by the British. No need to get technical here, it was a new system of radio navigation and was very accurate. The lectures were on how to get on with the British, how to conduct ourselves when off the base, how to travel on the trains which went everywhere in England. There was one lecture which got our attention, it was delivered by a fighter pilot who had been shot down over France about a year ago while it was still occupied by the Germans. He had lucked out and was hidden by the French Resistance people who passed him through their network into Spain from where he was able to return to England. He told us how all this was accomplished, what to do if we ever had to bail out over enemy territory in France. That was all well and good for him in 1943 but by now France was almost all back in Allied hands. His only advice to anyone who bailed out or landed in Germany was to surrender to the Army or Police as soon as possible, and avoid civilians. They might kill you.

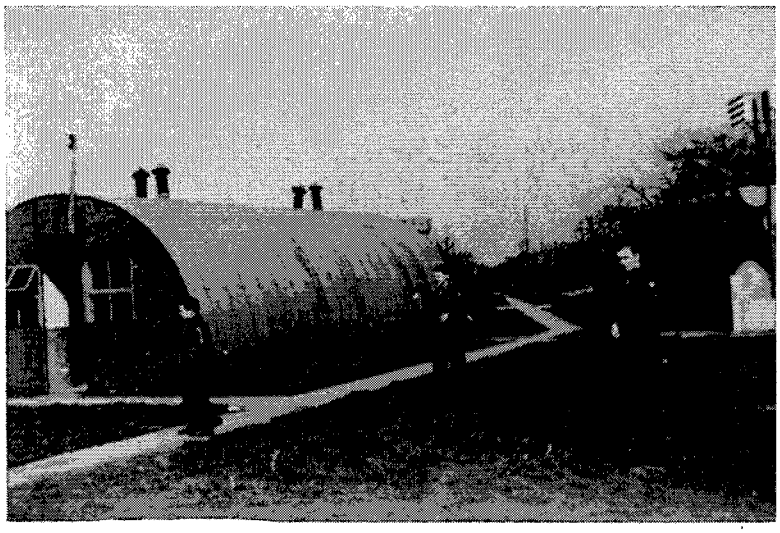
We have been here for two weeks now and the Navigators have all mastered the GEE navigation system. Eaton is all excited about it because it is so accurate and easy to use. It is now September 20, 1944 and B-24 bombers began arriving at the airfield from various Bomb Groups in England to fly us back to our assigned Group. It is now that we learned the Clarke crew, that's us, were going to the 392nd Bomb Group near Wendling. Also going to the 392nd BG were the Cieply crew, the Peterson crew, and the Markuson crew. Other crews from the Tonopah bunch would be going to their assigned bomb groups. All sixteen of us boarded the two B-24s from the 392nd BG and took off to our new home away from home where we would be until we had flown 35 combat missions, or until the War ended. It would be nice to stay put in one place for awhile, since leaving Tonopah at the end of July we had moved five times.

After take-off our B-24 turns to an easterly heading and in a few minutes we are over the Irish Sea. It is great to be aboard an airplane again, we have not been aloft since Tonopah. The Isle of Man is in view as we cross over the sea and we enter England in the vicinity of Liverpool. The weather is good and we are flying at about 2000 feet, the view of England is spectacular as we pass over the farm lands, forests, and cities. After two hours we circle for landing at the 392nd BG Air Base. Trucks meet the airplane as soon as it parks at the hardstand. The Clarke crew has been assigned to the 579th Squadron, the Markuson and Peterson crews to the 576th , and the Cieply crew to the 577th. We will learn this base has separate living areas for each squadron in order to spread living areas over a wide area for protection from possible bombing attacks. The Clarke crew scrambles aboard a truck and we leave the airfield past the control tower, the base hospital, headquarters, the officers club, past some farm buildings, to our nissen hut which is divided into four rooms. Lowe and Eaton will share a room, Clarke and I will share another. There are officers from another crew in the other two rooms. As Jack and I enter our new quarters we see two bunks, a small table, two chairs, and a small stove which burns coal or coke for heat. There is a steel pipe across the back of the room where uniforms and clothes can be hung. To our surprise and concern we see uniforms already hanging there and there are two footlockers also. We tell the truck driver and he immediately gathers the foot lockers and uniforms and loads them on the truck. They were the property of the previous occupants of the room who were shot down on a mission the day before. Well, this was a shocker to Jack and I, and to Bob and Clyde. Flying from this place was not going to be a joy ride, it was serious business, a crew could fly away and not return. Lives could be lost, or a prisoner-of-war camp some where in Germany was possible. We never did learn what happened to the previous occupants of our room.

People from other crews came over to get acquainted and help us settle in. From them we learned the food was terrible, there was never hot water in the bath house, English weather was always bad, and there was no chance we would ever complete a tour of 35 missions. We took all this information with a grain of salt for this was standard procedure to greet new comers to any army base like-wise. From them we learned the bath house was near the Officer's Club and was the only place to shower and shave. Also, there were small latrines in the squadron area, each with one toilet. After cleaning up, we donned our class A uniforms for the evening meal, not required but we wanted to look good on our first visit to the officer's club. Contrary to previous information, the food was excellent and lots of it, including ice cream for dessert on selected nights. We met Major Myron Keilman, Squadron Commanding Officer there. He was a friendly, but no nonsense kind of guy, we liked him right away. He told us to check the bulletin board at the squadron site guard-house for our assignments on the following day.

Lowewas to meet the Squadron Bombardier at Headquarters, Eaton to meet the Squadron Navigator, Clarke and I are to check in at Keilman's office for a training flight after the combat mission had departed, if there was an airplane available. There wasn't, and it was Sept. 27 before we went flying. There was a check pilot with Jack and I who sat in the co-pilot's seat while I sat on the jump seat to observe. He gave Jack a combination training and check ride. We had not flown since the end of July at Tonopah but Jack was a good pilot and there were no problems. The next flights were on Sept. 30 and Oct. 1, both included formation flying practice. This was essential because the squadrons flew in 10 airplane formations on combat missions. There had been some formation flying at Tonopah but not much. Here a much tighter formation was required because the bombs dropped from the entire squadron simultaneously when the bomb sight in the squadron lead released the bombs from that airplane and a radio signal released the bombs from the other nine bombers. Therefore a tight formation insured greater bombing accuracy. Also, German fighter planes were reluctant to attack a good tight formation, they preferred to attack stragglers. Also, Jack and I had some time to practice some take-offs and landings, and practice instrument approaches on the Instrument Landing System, something very new which gave very precise directional and glide slope information to the runway. September, 1944 is gone and the Clarke crew has been approved for combat missions.

Home Sweet Home Away from Home



Bob Lowe, Oak Mackey, Jack Clarke

Sometime during the afternoon of Oct. 1 Jack and I checked the squadron bulletin board and there it was, the Clarke crew was scheduled for a combat mission the next day. We immediately passed the news on to Clyde and Bob. We talked about it for awhile, went to dinner, got a fire going in the stove for it was chilly in England now, talked some more and went to bed for we would be awakened very early. At three o'clock I feel the orderly shaking me and saying, "Lieutenant wake up you are on a mission today". Jack gets the same treatment and we struggle out of bed. The fire has gone out and its cold. The long john underwear feels good, we put on our old uniforms, the ones we wore as cadets. No need to dress up for this event, besides, the heavy flying clothes will go on over our uniforms. The next stop is the bath house for a good shave because whiskers under an oxygen mask causes an uncomfortable itch. Breakfast is a pleasant surprise, fresh eggs anyway you like 'em, toast or pancakes, any kind of juice, fruit, and coffee, milk, or tea. It's a about a mile to the big briefing room nissen hut near the control tower so we ride our bicycles. The briefing room is a fairly large auditorium, there will be 32 crews briefed for this mission, or a total of 300 men. There is a stage and podium in front and a large map of Europe covers the front wall, which is covered by a large curtain at this time. Jack checks to see our enlisted men are present and they are. At 08:00 Colonel Lorin Johnson steps up to the podium and announces the target is the railroad marshaling yards at Hamm, Germany. The curtain is pulled back from the map now and a large red ribbon extends to Hamm to show the route. The formation of 32 airplanes will assemble at 6000 feet over the airport buncher (English for radio navigation station). Each crew is given a time to start engines, a time to taxi onto the perimeter taxi-way, the Group lead crew will take-off at precisely 10:30, all others will take-off at :30 second intervals in proper sequence behind the lead plane. Gunners are reminded to delay test firing their guns until over the North Sea. General briefing is over now, navigators go to their special briefing for precise enroute information, bombardiers go their special briefing where they will receive photographs and precise maps of the target. Jack and I go next door to the big nissen hut where crew flying clothes and equipment are kept in individual lockers each with a combination padlock. We had been issued this equipment soon after arriving at the 392nd BG. First, we empty our pockets of billfold, money, or any personal possession, dog-tags remain hanging around our neck for identification. Next, we don the electric heated flying suit over the uniform, shoes come off and sheep skin lined flying boots go on, then comes the two-piece winter flying suit over the electric suit. (this is not the very bulky sheep-skin lined flying suit, those went out when electric suits became available). We are issued escape kits and escape maps, are careful to collect our Mae West, oxygen masks, and parachute. Now, we shuffle out to a waiting truck and the driver takes us to our assigned B-24. The enlisted men are already there, they have all been promoted to sergeants now. Edward C. Brunnett is the flight engineer and top turret gunner, he and Jack are checking with the Crew Chief about any problems with the airplane, Jay T. Brown, radio operator is checking the long range radios, Jack Heckman and George Peer are checking the waist guns, Kevin Killea is checking the tail gun turret, Bob Lowe is the bombardier, but only squadron leads and deputy leads carry bomb sights, Bob is going on this mission as nose turret gunner. It is my job to make sure everyone has checked their oxygen mask, everyone has their mae west and parachute, the

armorers have brought the flak suits and everyone has one. It is getting near time to start engines now and Jack and I get into the cockpit, adjust our seats, plug in headphones, mikes, and electric heated suits. I read the "Before Engine Start" checklist and Jack checks the appropriate control, switch, instrument, etc: for proper position or setting. At exactly our assigned engine start time I depress the # 3 engine start switch and as the prop starts turning I depress the # 3 primer switch which squirts gasoline into the intake manifolds. The engine coughs, belches black smoke from the exhaust pipes, coughs again a time or two then settles into a steady roar, Jack moves the "Idle Cut-off" lever to the "on" position. # 4 is next, then # 2 and # 1. I read the "After Engine Start" checklist and all is well. B-24s are taxiing on the perimeter taxiway now and our time to leave the hardstand and taxi out is just minutes away. The bomber we are to follow taxis by, Jack releases the brakes and our B-24 waddles out onto the perimeter taxiway. I start the "Before Take-off" checklist and Jack checks each item as I read. He cocks the airplane at an angle on the taxiway now to run-up the engines so the airplane behind us will be out of the prop-wash. Each engine is advanced to take-off power to set the superchargers for take-off, the two magnetos on each engine are checked for normal performance, wing flaps are extended to the 15 degree take-off position, we are ready for take-off. Away up ahead we can see the Group Lead B-24 on the runway and at the appointed take-off time we can hear his engines roar as the throttles are advanced to full take-off power and he starts to roll down Runway 25 and when his wheels lift from the runway the Deputy Lead B-24 starts his take-off roll, when his wheels lift # 3 starts to roll, and so it goes. We are # 30 to take-off, new crews fly the tail-end "charley" positions. When our time comes, Jack taxis into position on the runway, applies the brakes to hold in place, and advances the throttles to clear the engines for they have been at idle for a long time. The B-24 ahead lifts off, Jack pushes the throttles to take-off power, releases the brakes and we are rolling. I adjust the throttles individually to exactly 48.5 inches of HG and 2700 rpm, the prescribed settings for take-off, and I'm looking at oil temps, oil pressures, cylinder head temps, etc: After lift-off Jack gives the signal and I raise the landing gear lever to retract the landing gear, as speed increases Jack signals for wing flap retraction and turns to the assigned heading of 330 degrees. As speed increases to 140 mph Jack calls for climb power and I set manifold pressure at 45.5 inches hg and 2550 rpm. I read the "After Take-off" checklist and everything checks, we are on our way on our first combat mission. It has been exactly one year since I arrived at primary flight school at Fort Stockton, Texas for aviation cadet flight training, I am 22, Jack is 23, the old man on the crew is Pappy Brunett, the top turret gunner and flight engineer, he is 32. Waist Gunner Jack Heckman is barely 19.

We continue climbing on a heading of 330 degrees to 5000 feet and are still not on top of the overcast. Procedure now requires a turn to 150 degrees and continue climb, we break out at about 6000 feet, the radio compass gives us the direct heading to the "buncher". The rest of the Group is there circling until all 30 B-24s have arrived, three squadrons of ten airplanes each. The two spare airplanes now return to the airbase, those crews had been briefed and were to take the place of any crew who had to abort the mission due to mechanical malfunction. We slide into our place on the left wing of the low left element of the low left squadron, the normal location for a new crew sometimes called "tail-end charley". The Group formation is complete now and at the appointed time the lead

squadron turns northeast on a radio compass bearing towards the "splasher" (British for a radio navigation station with a stronger signal than a buncher) near Cromer. The high right squadron takes position above and to the right slightly behind the lead squadron, the low left squadron is below and to the left of the lead. At Cromer the Group will make a right turn toward the "splasher" at Great Yarmouth. The navigator in the Group lead determines they are running :30 seconds late for the appointed arrival time at Cromer so the lead squadron cuts across the corner so as to arrive at Great Yarmouth at the proper time. The 392nd BG is leading the 14th Wing today. The other two Groups of the Wing, the 491st BG and the 44th BG leave Great Yarmouth in trail of the 392nd, spaced about a mile apart. The 2nd Wing, the 20th Wing, and the 96th Wing have already departed Great Yarmouth, each Wing composed of three bomb groups. These four Wings make up the entire Second Air Division of the Eighth Air Force, today they are launching 360 B-24s to targets in the Hamm area. Somewhere else from England the First Division, and the Third Division of the 8th AF are sending their B-17s to targets in Germany, a total of over 1000 heavy four-engine bombers on today's mission. This is not a maximum effort mission, the 8th AF can and has sent over 2000 bombers to Germany.

Our route will take us across the North Sea, across Holland and into Germany to Hamm, located near the Ruhr Valley, about two hours from England in a B-24. Over the North Sea the gunners test fire their 50 caliber machine guns being careful to not aim near other airplanes. As we near the Holland coast we are joined by our "little friends", P-51 fighter airplanes who can and will chase away any German fighter airplanes. They are a most welcome sight as they s-turn above and to side of our formations. All to soon we arrive in Germany and Hamm is not so far away. As we approach our "initial point", a prominent navigational feature where the Group formation will make a turn to enable the high right and low left squadrons to fall in trail of the lead squadron. We are now about 50 miles from the target and the bursts of flak are plainly visible. This is the real stuff and it is scary, there are strange feelings in the pit of the stomach, this is not a good place to be, yet we will be over the target in a few minutes. There is a another bomb group over the target now and Jack sees a B-24 take a direct hit and explode, he sees no parachutes. We are in formation to the left and slightly behind the airplane next to us which makes it easier for me to see from my right window so I am flying the airplane and don't see the B-24 blow-up. The bombardier in the lead airplane of each squadron sight on the target, when the bombsight releases the bombs from that airplane a smoke bomb is also released and the nose gunners in the other nine airplanes of the squadron flips a toggle switch to release their bombs so it is necessary to maintain a tight formation to put the maximum number of bombs on target. We are very near the target now and the flak is popping all around and I am very busy keeping this big B-24 in a tight formation. The squadron lead airplane's bombs go and Bob Lowe immediately flips the switch to release our bombs, 12 bombs five hundred pounds each. Now the airplane is suddenly 6000 lbs. lighter and easier to fly. The squadron lead turns to the left and descends to get away from the flak as soon as possible and to take up position just behind and to the left of the Group lead. Our P-51 escorts left us just prior to the target, no need for them to fly through the flak, and they descend to locate strafing targets on their own, they love to shoot up locomotives and trains. Also, airfields and airplanes on the ground, bridges,

trucks, etc: Another wave of P-51s meet us soon after the target area to escort us home, again a most welcome sight.

Jack takes the airplane now, we normally trade off every hour or so. We were flying at 22,000 feet over the target where the temperature was –40 degrees. I discover my oxygen mask is full of sweat, my clothes are all sweaty although I have turned my heated electric suit completely off, my hands are shaking when I turn loose of the wheel, in fact I am shaky all over, this has not been a fun trip. Flying a B-24 in formation is hard work and we are not welcome over Germany. Over the North Sea we descend and at 10,000 feet the oxygen masks come off, cigarettes are lit, and everyone is relieved this mission is nearly over. The P-51s leave us at the English coast, we fly on to home base at Wendling. After landing all get out of the airplane chattering about flying over the target, how scared we were, how lucky to not get hit by flak at all, one mission done, only 34 more to go. Next stop is the de-briefing room where most of the crew has little to tell the Intelligent Officers, Jack tells of seeing the B-24 in the Group ahead taking a hit and exploding. There is a bottle of 100 proof Old Overholt rye whisky available and the sergeant in charge poured a shot for anyone, including myself. After leaving our flying clothes at our lockers, its on to the Officer's Club for dinner for it has been a long time since breakfast. There we learn Cieply's airplane had an engine shot out and Markuson's crew counted 12 holes in theirs. All 30 of the 392nd BG airplanes returned safely though 19 had some battle damage.

New crews often fly combat missions on consecutive days so I check the squadron bulletin board. There I learn the Clarke crew is not scheduled tomorrow, but Cieply's crew is and I am to fly co-pilot. Their regular co-pilot, Lee Brooks, is sick with a very bad cold. So I repeat the routine of the previous evening and get to bed early for wake – up call will be at 0200. After breakfast I meet Cieply and his crew at the briefing room. I have known him since May, 1944 at Tonopah but have never flown with him. The target is an engines factory near the small town of Gaggenau in southwest Germany. It will be a long mission, over eight hours. The route will take us over France most of the way. At the airplane we go through the checks as on the day before but it takes just a little longer. Procedures are standard but Cieply and I are not used to each other, even so we taxi on to the perimeter taxiway on time in the proper order. After take-off we climb to meet the Group formation at the buncher, take our assigned place and at the assigned time, the Group departs to the splasher at Cromer, then turn to the splasher at Great Yarmouth and leave the English coast there on a southeast heading. The fighter escort meets us over France and the flight on to the target was uneventful. The target was covered with clouds so the bombs were dropped using H2X radar for guidance, not as accurate as using the visual bomb-sight, but some of the bombs are certain to hit the factory. There was no flak at all and all B-24s return to Wendling safely. After de-briefing and supper I checked the bulletin board and learn the Clarke crew is not scheduled for a mission the next day, Oct. 4.

Clarke and crew were scheduled to fly on Oct. 5 and the target was an airfield near Lippstadt. Same routine as on the previous two missions, there was no flak at the target, bombed the airfield with very good results and all 30 airplanes returned with no battle

damage. We had the next three days off and on Oct. 9 the target was the railroad marshalling yards at Koblenz on the Rhine River, not a long mission. The target was covered by clouds and bombs were dropped by H2X. There was some flak but our luck held. Our airplane had no damage, two others had some minor hits, all returned safely. The target on Oct. 12 was the marshalling yards at Osnabruck, just a short distance beyond Holland into Germany. The 392nd BG sent only 21 airplanes on this mission, again cloud cover required H2X for bombing guidance, the flak was moderate and we counted 12 small holes in our airplane upon returning to Wendling, our first battle damage. Nine other airplanes were also damaged but all returned safely. The Ford Motor Co. at Cologne was the target for Oct. 15, again a short mission. Again clouds covered the target and bombing was by H2X. Flak was moderate, a small piece punched a small hole in the plexiglass window by my right shoulder. I felt it hit but it was so spent it didn't even tear my jacket. Three airplanes received severe damage, one landed in Belgium, the other two at the emergency landing airfield at Woodbridge, England. We counted seven small holes in our airplane. Mission #7 was back to Cologne again on Oct. 17. Flak was light near our squadron, bombs released by H2X, one B-24 had to land in Belgium, all others returned to Wendling safely. We had no battle damage. On Oct. 22 the target was again the railroad marshalling yards at Hamm, same as our first mission. The target was covered by thick clouds, bombs released by H2X radar directions to the lead bombardier of each squadron. Flax was meager, 2 B-24s had some slight damage and all 30 returned to Wendling. The last mission in October for the Clarke crew was on the 25th to the airfield near Neumunster in southern Germany. After a routine departure from England it was a long flight for the 30 bombers from Wendling, the target was cloud covered, bombs were released by guidance from the squadron lead airplane's radar equipment. Flak was very light and all B-24s returned to base safely.

It has been over a month since the Clarke crew arrived at the 392nd BG and we are due for our monthly pass away from base. So it was on Oct. 26 we were transported to the train station in Kings Lynn where we got on a train to London. It was great to get away from combat missions for five days, get some R&R (rest and relaxation), see the sights in London and have some fun. After nearly four hours our train arrives at the Liverpool Street station. Now the Army has some rules that make very little sense. Its okay for officers and enlisted men to fight together aboard a bomber flying combat missions, it is not okay for them to mingle together socially on a five day pass. The four of us, Jack, Brad, Bob and myself enjoy our first London taxi-cab ride from the train station to the junior officer's mess at 8 Audley St. in downtown near Hyde Park. The enlisted men go their separate ways. In the officer's mess is an ample bar, I order a Guinness stout, Brad orders a soft drink for he does not imbibe alcohol, I don't recall what Jack and Bob ordered. It is now near time for dinner and we go upstairs to the dining room which is large but crowded. We find a table and find the menu is much like the ones in good old USA, good food and plenty of it. We all had a steak with all the fixings and ice cream for dessert. The next move is to take a taxi to a Red Cross hotel and check in. The Red Cross had been assigned a number of small English hotels where soldiers could stay in London and in other English cities as well. Our hotel was not far and after checking in we go to our room. The normal hotel furniture has been removed and army cots fill the room, the bathroom is down the hall. That's okay, we are used to cots and the room only

costs a few pence per night. After dropping our B-4 bags we decide to go for a walk and find our hotel is in a residential area of apartments and its very dark outside for London and all English cities have been blacked out for years, since the Battle of Britain in 1940. After stumbling around in the dark for awhile its time for bed.

We have been briefed by older crews at Wendling on things to do in London, so after breakfast in the small dining room at the hotel, we hail a taxi, they seem to be everywhere. We tell the driver we would like for him to take us on a tour of all the prominent sights in London for this was our first trip to London. " Aye lads, 'op in, I'll take ye all about." The four of us get in the spacious rear, the seat is ample for three plus there are two jump-seats that fold from the front divider between the driver and the passengers. We have agreed upon a fee for the tour and its quite reasonable, likely about one pound apiece, in 1944 one pound equaled four dollars. We drive by Hyde Park which is connected to Kensington Gardens all together ½ mile wide and a mile long, fronting along the east end are the classiest hotels in London including the Grosvenor House, which is now reserved by the U.S. Army for use by high-ranking officers on official business. Lieutenants are not welcome except in the lobby area. The next stop is Buckingham Palace, home of King George V and family. It's a large square building about four stories high situated in a large park surrounded by a high fence of decorative steel. Through the fence the palace guards are visible in their sentry boxes in their red uniforms and bearskin hats standing there at stiff attention. At the appointed time each hour the two of them step smartly forward, shoulder their rifles, march the length of the palace, about face, and march back to the sentry boxes. From the taxi our driver points out the Houses of Parliament and Big Ben and we stop at Westminster Abbey where we will get out and spend about an hour. At the Information Desk we find some pamphlets of information and are astounded to learn that construction had started before 1200 A.D. Most of England's Kings and Queens coronation ceremonies have been held here, and many are buried in the walls. Also, many eminent English men and women are buried here, in the walls and the floors. There is a special place called Poet's Corner where prominent poets are buried. Another surprise, church services are held here on a regular basis and all are welcome. Our visit has been brief and we will return here at a later time. As we drive along the Thames River our driver points out the many bridges including London bridge (the same one that was later moved to Lake Havasu City in Arizona). We note that there are many barges and smaller ships on the river but no big ships. Those dock further down river beyond the Tower of London Bridge. We cannot enter the Tower of London as it is closed for the duration of the war. The driver stops and relates some brief history. It was built as a prison beginning in the 13th century and King Henry I lived in a small palace there at least part-time. Noble people have been beheaded here including two of Henry VIII wives, Anne Boleyn and Catherine Howard. Now we back-track a bit to St. Paul's Cathedral, a slightly more modern building. Construction started in 1675 on the site of a previous cathedral which burned during the Great London Fire of 1666. Here we get out of the cab and go inside. The interior is much more spacious than Westminster Abbey and the dome rises 300 feet above the floor. Sir Christopher Wren designed the Cathedral and is buried here as is Lord Nelson of Trafalger fame. It is now mid-afternoon and we have had no lunch so we have the driver drop us off at 8 Audley Street for something to eat. This time I have a stein of ale, the stout I had the previous

evening was not to my liking. After another good meal at the junior officer's mess and its time for more sight seeing. Its still day light and we walk to Piccadilly street and follow it to Piccadilly Circus where we find the American Bar in the basement of the Regent Palace Hotel. Its full of officers and soldiers on leave and its noisy and loud. We stay awhile for a drink then go for a look see around Piccadilly. It has been a long day and its dark now, we find a taxi and go to our Red Cross hotel. The following day I decide to return to Westminster Abby, Bob wants to go for a ride on the Underground, Brad wants to find the British Museum and Jack goes with him. We agree to meet at the hotel some time in the afternoon, eat at the officer's mess and go from there. After dinner Jack and Brad go back to the hotel, Bob and I go to Piccadilly to party and have some fun. So ends the second day. More sight seeing on the third day and we are getting a bit tired of London. Next day we take the train back to King's Lynn and on to the base at Wendling, its actually good to get back. So ends October, a most eventful month.

NOVEMBER 1944

Our first mission of November was on the fourth to a oil refinery at Misberg, near Hannover. The strategy was to drop on the target, make a sharp left turn to avoid the flak guns protecting Hannover. Due to difficulty locating the target because of clouds the lead bombardier overshot and we came into some very accurate and heavy flak. We were flying through the puffs of black smoke from the bursting shells and the airplane was bouncing in the concussions making staying in formation difficult. One flak shell burst just off our right wing so close I could hear the explosion and see the red flash. Fragments from that shell ripped through the right rear fuselage area with sounds like throwing hands full of gravel up on a tin roof. The interphone to the waist and tail gun positions was shot out and the radio operator was sent back to see if everyone was okay and they were. The airplane next to us took a hit in an engine and dropped out, went into a spin, we later learned the pilot was wounded in a leg and the co-pilot regained control of the airplane. They were able to land at a airfield in France. Another B-24 was hit , lost altitude, one parachute was seen, the fate of the rest of the crew was unknown. The squadron lead airplane suffered engine damage to #4 engine but was able to stay in position. The deputy squadron lead had damage to the hydraulic system causing the nose and right landing gear to fall down and he had to drop out of the formation but made it back to England. The airplane off the left wing of the squadron leader had an engine damaged and shut it down and he was also able to return to Wendling. After landing we counted sixteen holes in our airplane, most were small but one chunk of flak had penetrated the leading edge of the right horizontal stabilizer and cut two of the main spars, we nearly lost our tail. 21 of the 30 airplanes suffered battle damage and the bombs missed the target, not a good day for the 392nd Bomb Group.

Next day the target was the railroad yards at Karlsruhe along the Rhine River in southern Germany. There was a complete cloud cover in the target area, bombs were dropped by H2X, and the flak was meager and inaccurate, a milk run.

Nov. 6th was our 12th mission and the third in three days. It was to bomb viaducts over the Weser Canal at Minden in northern Germany. Again clouds covered the target, bombs dropped by H2X and the results not observed. Another milk run.

Our next mission was unusual because it was a troop support mission near Metz, France. Prior to World War II the French had created strong fortifications in eastern France called the Maginot Line to thwart any German attempt to invade France. In the Spring of 1940 the Germans simply ignored the fortifications and quickly occupied all of France. Now, in 1944, it was the Germans who occupied the Maginot Line and were slowing the advance of the American and English armies toward Germany. Troop support missions were normally flown by the Ninth Air Force stationed in France with their medium bombers and fighter airplanes. To help General George Patton break through the Maginot Line the entire Eighth Air Force was sent to blast the fortifications with 2000 pound bombs from their B-24s and B-17s. The target on Nov. 9 for the 392nd BG was

near Metz, the weather was clear, the bombs hit the target, we could actually see the bombs from our squadron exploding, and could feel concussion from them at 22000 feet. There was no flak, no enemy fighters. Later General Patton sent General Doolittle a letter praising the effectiveness of the mission. The German troops who survived were shell-shocked, scared and easily taken prisoner.

Nov. 16 brought another troop support mission, this one to Aachen, Germany near the French border. In the target area there was some confusion and the 44th BG slid beneath the 392nd causing our bombs to be dropped late, missing the target. On returning to Wendling the airfield was closed due to dense fog and we were diverted to Benson Airfield, a RAF fighter plane base west of London. Like most fighter bases it had no paved runways, a superb drainage system kept the field dry, and with no runways the fighter planes could take-off quickly in formation. So the 392nd landed 30 B-24s there with nearly 300 men aboard to enjoy the Brits limited resources. This was a permanent RAF base and the barracks were masonry building of two stories, somehow quarters were found for everyone, I really lucked out with a room of my own, a real bed with sheets, and maid service in the morning. It is now late afternoon and the officers gathered at the bar by the officer's mess, the enlisted men to their mess (after all this is still the Army). Well, we had a Party. These Brits were very friendly and hospitable, we had a great time trading stories, they were all Spitfire fighter pilots who we envied oh so much, they marveled at our big clumsy B-24s. We drank all their beer, whisky, gin, etc: and ate most of their food, then wobbled off to bed. After a good English breakfast the next morning someone checked the weather at Wendling, it was still closed with dense fog, we were told to stand-by until the weather improved. We stayed near our airplanes through the day until evening and there was no improvement in the weather. We were ordered to stay at Benson until the next day, so the Party continued for a second night. Somehow our British friends had replenished their supplies and there was plenty for all. Brits are most generous hosts, the second night was a repeat of the first. By mid-day of the second day weather improved at Wendling and all returned by evening. I shall always marvel at how well we were treated at Benson Airfield!

The last mission in November was to the railroad yards at Bingen, a small town in southern Germany. The weather was so poor over England that we couldn't locate our own group formation but did find the 446th BG and flew this mission with them. Over France our P-51s went after a lone German plane and shot it down. No doubt he was a German reconnaissance airplane out to monitor our formations. There was no flak at the target, our bombs were dropped on a radio fix and the result unobserved because of the weather.

The next day, the 26th, we got our monthly pass and took the train back to London. More good food at the junior officer's mess at 8 Audley St., more sight-seeing and pub crawling, it's a real relief to get away from the base for three days. By now we could navigate around London on "the tube" as the underground trains were called so we seldom took a cab anywhere. Also, most of the major attractions are within walking distance of each other which is fine in the day time, but the 'blackout" makes walking at

night difficult. Again we had a fun time here and have seen it all. We are planning to explore some other place on our next pass in December.

Back at the base the weather is poor and it will be Dec. 11th before the Clarke crew is scheduled for there next mission.

Windy City Belle

Clyde Eaton, Bob Lowe, Jack Clarke

DECEMBER 1944

December 2 was a tragic day for the 392nd BG. They would lose six B-24s and crews to enemy fighter airplanes. The Clarke crew did not fly on this mission to Bingen in northern Germany. The weather was very poor in the target area, however the lead and high right squadrons were able drop their bombs with fair results. On the bomb run the low left squadron encountered clouds and the squadron became scattered. As they broke out of the cloud over the target the bombs were dropped with poor effect and they were immediately attacked by about 50 German fighters. In just fifteen minutes six B-24s were shot down including Cieply's. Because the squadron was so badly scattered there was very little information at de-briefing after the mission as to the fate of those six crews. As noted before, Cieply's crew was one of the four who arrived at the 392nd BG in late September from Tonopah, so they were our good friends. As time went by to the end of the war there was never any word from the Red Cross that any of them had been captured and sent to German prisoner of war camps. Apparently they died in the crash of their airplane.

The first mission for the Clarke crew in December was to Hanau, a town just east of Frankfort, on Dec. 11th. The target was the railroad yards and 31 B-24s dropped bombs through the clouds by H2X. There was no flak and no enemy fighters.

Through a stroke of fantastic luck our December passes started on the 23rd and we had decided to go to Liverpool. It took a long day to get there for it was twice as far as London and we had to change trains twice. We checked into the Red Cross hotel and went to the nearest pub for food and a beer, then on to bed for we were tired. We spent the next day exploring Liverpool. It is a much smaller city than London the sights are all within walking distance, no need to take a taxi-cab here. Earlier in the War during the battle of Britain in 1940 the German Air Force had bombed the loading docks very thoroughly. The port was open for business now but much of the loading machinery, cranes and such, had not been repaired and was lying all about in disarray. Otherwise there wasn't much to see or do here and much of our day was spent taking it easy at the hotel reading and writing letters. There was a small restaurant in the hotel and we ate there on this Christmas Eve. I went for a walk after dinner for exercise mostly, like all British cities Liverpool was blacked out, no lights at all, so my walk was short as there was nothing to see and very few people were out. We all slept late on Christmas Day then did some more sight-seeing but most places were closed, so it was back to the hotel for more rest and relaxation. The restaurant did serve a very good Christmas dinner and since we were the only Yanks there we got special attention. There was soup for starters, then turkey, potatoes, brussels sprouts, good English bread, and cake for dessert. I made a date with one of the girls who worked there and the restaurant closed at five o'clock. Her name was Vera Withnal, we walked down the street and found a pub open, I had a pint of ale, she had a soft drink. I could see she wasn't at ease in the pub so we left. She suggested we walk to her house which was about a mile away and I could meet her father. I was eager to do that for I had not been in an English home yet. He was reading in the front room when we arrived. After introductions we all chatted for awhile, about how the war was dragging on, how the English winter had been more severe than usual,

he asked where I was from and he wasn't familiar with Oklahoma, I told him north of Texas which he understood. After a half hour or so he excused himself and went to another room. Vera went to the kitchen and came back with a snack of turkey and scones which were left over from their Christmas dinner. I admired the lace curtains in the windows, all English houses seem to have them, and we talked about this and that until it was late. Back at the hotel I went to bed right away for we would be boarding the train back to Wendling early in the morning.

It was in mid-December when the Germans had launched an all out counter attack in south-east Belgium which later would be called the Battle of the Bulge. The weather had been just terrible in fog, snow and cold, both on the Continent and England. The Ninth Air Force in France and Belgium could not fly because of the fog, likewise the Eighth Air Force in England. It was so frustrating because our ground troops were facing the Germans alone, our air forces could not help them because of the foggy weather. Dec. 23 the forecast was for clearing weather the next day. The Ninth got their P-47 fighter-bombers in the air for close work against the Germans near our troops, the Eighth launched a maximum effort mission of over 2000 B-17s and B-24s. The 392nd BG sent out 47 crews on this day, they used every B-24 available. The targets for these five squadrons were the railroad yard near Ruwer, and a road junction in the town of Pfalzel, both towns not far from the front lines of the battle. Next day, Christmas, the fog closed in again in England, the Eighth could not fly. All this had taken place while the Clarke crew was taking it easy in Liverpool.

Our first mission after returning from Liverpool was troop support mission on Dec. 27 to bomb the railroad yards at the small town of Homburg near the front lines. The target was visual and the bombs hit with good effect. There was no flak and no German fighter planes.

On Dec. 29 we flew another troop support mission bomb the railroad yards at Neuweid. There was considerable flak and two 392nd B-24s were severely damaged and there were two casualties on Lt. Walker's crew. Both airplanes managed to land at airfields in Belgium. None of the flak exploded near our squadron and we had no battle damage.

This was our eighteenth mission and our last in 1944. Seventeen more missions to complete our tour of thirty-five. If our good luck holds we will be okay.

JANUARY 1945

The weather on this New Year's Day was very poor in the target area near Koblenz, the aiming point was the Kronprinz bridge across the Rhine River there. The lead squadron managed to find the target with radar and dropped bombs with results unobserved. The lead navigator of our squadron never located the target and bombs were not released, we brought them back to Wendling. Truly a fouled up mission. There was no flak and no enemy fighter planes.

On January 3rd the target was an ammunition dump near the railroad yards at Landau. The weather again was very poor and the bombs were dropped by H2X. Later reconnaissance determined the bombs hit with good results. Very light flax, none hit our airplane.

The target on the 5th was the railroad yards near Kirn. Take-off at Wendling was in poor weather and light snow. The target at Kirn was covered by clouds, but the railroad yards at nearby Neunkirchen were visible and were bombed effectively. No flak, no enemy fighters.

All these missions in early January were to targets not far from the Battle of the Bulge taking place in southeastern Belgium to assist our troops there. On Jan. 8th the target was in the Dasburg area only ten miles beyond friendly battle lines, this was very close and we certainly did not want to drop bombs on our own troops. The cloud tops in the target area were at 27,000 feet where the outside air temperature was –52 degrees. We were actually flying formation in and out of the clouds when the bombs dropped with the guidance of radar. Reports came back from the battle front that our bombs had fallen in the target area with good effect. All 392nd BG B-24s returned safely.

Jan. 10th (read the next chapter "Crash Landing at Seething".

Jan. 21st. The target was the railroad yards at Heilbron in southern Germany, a long mission. The lead B-24 of the high right squadron developed engine trouble and returned to England. We were flying deputy lead crew and moved over to the squadron lead position. The visibility was poor due to contrails from the Group ahead, however we did manage to keep in proper position slightly above and behind the lead squadron. Clouds covered the target area, bombs dropped by H2X radar. Major Myron Keilman was flying as Command Pilot of the 392nd on this mission. On returning to base, he had high praise for Jack for keeping the high right squadron in position in difficult weather. Squadron deputy lead was our permanent position on all our remaining missions.

We went back to London on our leave late in January. Same routine as before, enjoying good food at the Junior Officer's Mess at 8 Audley Street, sight-seeing by day, bar-hopping in Piccadilly by night. We always managed to have a fun time for we were young, it is always a relief to get away from flying combat missions for a few days.

Crash Landing at Seething

The date was January 10, 1945, a bad day for the Jack Clarke crew at the 392nd Bomb Group of the Second Air Division of the Eighth Air Force. I, Oak Mackey was the Co-pilot, Brad Eaton, Navigator, Bob Lowe, Bombardier, E.C. Brunette, Engineer, J.T. Brown, Radio Operator, Bob Heilman, Nose Gunner, George Peer and Jack Heckman, Waist Gunners, and Kevin Killea, Tail Gunner, perhaps the best crew in the 8th AF. We were awakened at 02:00 am for briefing at 04: 30 am. The target was Dasburg in the Bastogne area to support our ground troops there. The weather was absolutely atrocious, through the night there had been a combination of freezing rain, sleet, snow showers and fog. The runways and taxi-ways were covered with sheet of slippery ice. At briefing we learned our usual B-24 was not available and we were assigned the squadron spare. We were a deputy lead crew and we would be flying off the right wing of the lead plane of the leading squadron. Upon reaching our assigned airplane we found it had not been warmed up, the engines were cold and very difficult to start, only after much cranking, priming, and cussing were we able to get them running. We were supposed to be number two for take-off just after the lead airplane. By now most of the entire Group had departed, we made our take-off, climbed through the overcast to on top of the clouds and had the rest of the Group in sight. At this time the #3 engine propeller ran away probably because of congealed oil trying to pass through the propeller governor. This is a serious problem because of the engine over-speed the engine might turn to junk, or the propeller might come off the engine and pass through the fuselage or hit the other engine on that side. Jack told me to shut-down the engine and feather the propeller. I reduced power to the engine and pushed the feathering button. It immediately popped out again for it is its own circuit breaker. Brunette was sitting between Jack and I on the cock-pit jump seat as all good engineers should. He pushed the feathering button in and held it there which caused the secondary circuit breaker to pop open, which he immediately held down with his other hand, a risky procedure as it could cause the feathering oil pump motor or associated wiring to catch fire. Oh so slowly the prop blades turned to the feathered position. With one engine out and a loaded airplane there is no way we can stay with the Group, we are now in the vicinity of Great Yarmouth, so we flew out over the North Sea and dumped our bombs. We left the arming safety wires in place so the bombs could not explode. As we turned to go back to our base, the #2 propeller ran away compounding our numerous problems, we got the engine shut-down and propeller feathered with less trouble than we had with #3. A B-24 can not maintain airspeed and altitude with two engines out and full fuel tanks and we gave careful consideration to bailing out, but decided to stay with the airplane for awhile and conserve altitude as best we could. The weather at Wendling had not improved, but we had little choice but to try to return there. We are now about due south of Norwich ten miles or so when we spotted a airport through a hole in the clouds, our first good luck of the day. We descend through the hole and have gone through the before landing check-lists, lowered flaps to the landing position, lowered the landing gear, and are turning to line up with a runway from west of the airport when the thick bullet resistant windshields and side windows iced up, a common occurrence when descending in cold weather in a temperature inversion. We cannot pull up and go around with gear and flaps down, we are committed to landing. Jack and I cannot see through the iced up windshields, we must continue our descent to

keep airspeed above stalling. Through a small clear place on my side window I see men running at full speed, I also see we are about to touchdown. I assumed those men are running from a building of some sort and we are lined up to hit it. Without any thought and perhaps with instinct, I pushed full left rudder which caused the airplane to slew around to the left and we touched down in a side-ways attitude. The landing gear snapped off, the two outside engine propellers broke off and went cart-wheeling across the airport. We slid sideways on the fuselage for a long way on the ice and snow, it seemed like forever. The fuselage was broken behind the cockpit area and the nose tilted up which enlarged the window to my right a bit so that I was able to go through it with my back-pack parachute on, likewise Jack went out the left cockpit window. I ran along the right side of the airplane, stopped at the waist window to look in to see if everyone was out, continued around the tail and there they were, all nine of them and nobody had a scratch. We had landed at Seething, the home of the 448th Bomb Group and we had missed the control tower by only 100 feet or so. An ambulance pulled up in a few minutes and took us to the base hospital where the doctor looked us over to be certain there were no injuries. For medicinal purposes, someone brought in a bottle of 100 proof rye whisky. We took our medicine like real men. Also, someone called our base at Wendling and a truck would come for us in an hour or so. So ended a bad day for the Clarke crew. It could have been much worse!

There is a wonderful sequel to this story. Fast forward your mind to May 1997. The Second Air Division Association is having their annual Convention in Orange County, California and I have been elected President. Also, there is someone selling books at a table in the lobby of the hotel and my wife, Maxine, has bought me a copy of Steve Snelling's book, "Over Here". Steve's book is about the relationships between the Yank soldiers and the British people, about the friendships that endure to this day, about the mutual respect, about the memories of those days in 1942 through 1945. Steve started his writing career as a reporter for the Eastern Daily Press in Norwich in 1974 and he is still employed there. A chapter in his book is called "The Tragedies of War" and is mainly about B-24s which have crashed for various reasons and there are pictures and stories of each. Under the picture of the B-24 on the top of page 125 there is no story, the notation there says, "Unhappy landing. A salvage team clamber over a B-24 at Seething which has come to grief in a sea of mud". Well, it may have been a sea of mud when salvage crew arrived to remove the airplane but it was all ice and snow when the Jack Clarke crew left it there on January 10, 1945. When I got time I wrote Steve a letter and related to him the story of how that 392nd BG B-24 happened to crash at Seething, and in due time he answered and thanked me for the information and told me how he had received that picture from Mrs. Patricia Everson. The old control tower at Seething had recently been renovated and restored to like new condition and was now a Memorial to those 448th men who had lost their lives while serving there. It was open to the public on the first Sunday of each month and Mrs. Everson was the leading volunteer worker there. I wrote to her to enquire if she had more pictures of this B-24, and she replied she did and offered to mail me copies. By this time, sometime in June, I had received a letter from Mr, Ted Inman, Director of the Duxford Air Museum, which invited me to attend Opening Ceremonies of the new American Museum building at Duxford on August 1, 1997. Queen Elizabeth and others of the Royal Family would be there. Naturally, I eagerly

accepted his invitation and also determined to go to Seething. I wrote to Mrs. Everson to tell her I would be at Seething on August 3, and I could get the pictures then.

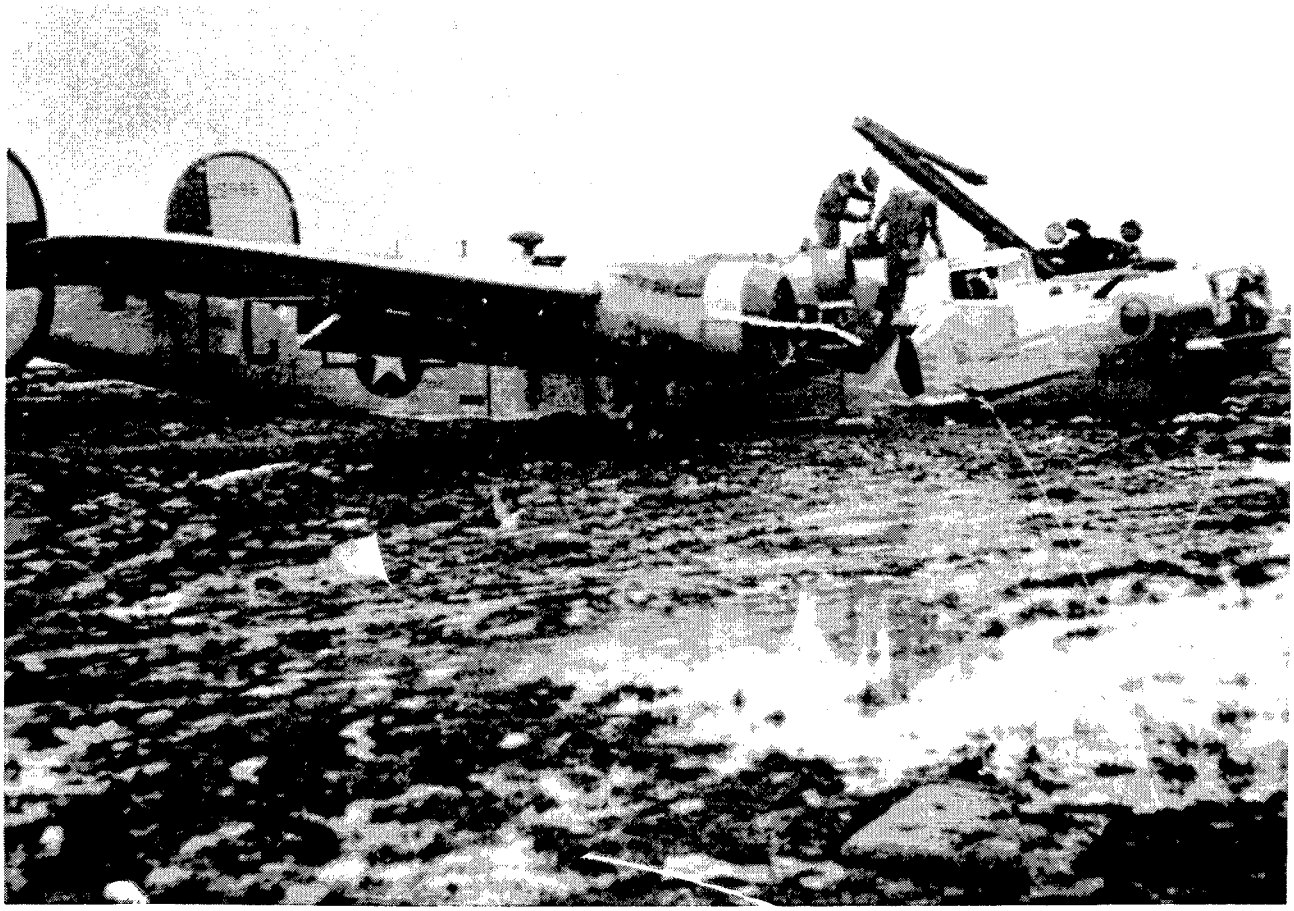
Maxine and I did indeed attend the ceremonies at Duxford on August 1, 1997 and had a most wonderful time. After Queen Elizabeth concluded her speech, she mingled with the crowd in front of the speakers platform and she spoke to Maxine , as she did to many others. Also, I had the opportunity to speak with Prince Phillip and shake his hand inside the new American Museum, which houses 21 American airplanes dating from WW1 to the present time, including a Boeing B-52. Well, this was a most momentous day and is a story alone, but has nothing to do with the crash at Seething in 1945.

Next morning, Raymond and Marjorie Mackertich collected us at our hotel in Cambridge and drove us to their home in East Dereham, which is not far from the old 392nd BG airfield. We had stayed at their home on previous trips to England and we are very comfortable there, they are most gracious hosts. Next day was Sunday and the new Control Tower Museum at Seething was open and the MacKertich's drove Maxine and I there where the first person we met was Mrs. Patricia Everson. She gave us an exclusive guided tour of the Museum, the amount of artifacts, memorabilia, and photographs is really astounding. She gave me more pictures of the B-24 the Jack Clarke crew had left there on Jan. 10, 1945. I was able to walk out to that very spot and look around. All the buildings of 1945 are gone now, only the Control Tower remains, the memories come flooding back of that desperate day of so long ago. The Seething Airport is still active and a Mr. Bob Majoram had his restored 1943 Piper Cub on display by the Control Tower. It was painted in camouflage colors as it would have been during WW11 when Piper Cubs were used as artillery spotters. Mrs. Everson asked Bob to give me a ride around the airport which he did, for he was a very generous man. We flew around for thirty minutes or so, including landings from west to east so I could view the airport which I could not see when we landed there in 1945. Also, I was able to take aerial photos of the area and the airport and the control tower to send to Jack Clarke and Brad Eaton, the only other members of the crew still alive in 1997.

A remarkable day, a day which occurred only because Maxine bought a copy of "Over Here" by Steve Snelling. What a coincidence, life takes curious turns, don't it.

Oak Mackey

May 10, 2005



FEBRUARY 1945

The Battle of the Bulge has ended and the Germans pushed out of Belgium and Luxemburg so the 8th Air Force can again turn its attention to strategic targets deep in Germany. For the B-24s of the Second Air Division the oil refining facilities just north of Magdeburg were the primary targets in February. So it was on February 9th the Clarke crew was scheduled to fly a mission to that city. The forecast was for clear weather and good bombing, but tall cumulus clouds built up to 25000 ft in the target area and bombing was by H2X radar again and results unobserved. There was considerable flak and three airplanes of the 392nd BG were severely damaged. Two landed in Belgium, the other was last seen over the English Channel turning back towards France and was never heard from again, presumably crashed landed in the cold waters of the Channel.

Bob Lowe, our bombardier, came down with the flu after our mission on the 9th so we became a deputy lead crew without a bombardier. B-24s that landed on the Continent after a mission were repaired by 8th Air Force mechanics sent over there for that purpose. After repairs air crews were sent to fly those airplanes back to their bases in England. Since we had no bombardier, the Clarke crew was placed on "detached service" status and was sent to France. Only Jack and I and the navigator, Brad Eaton, Pappy Brunett, flight engineer, and Jay T. Brown, radio operator went along, we had no need for gunners. I believe it was on Feb. 14th that a truck took us to an airbase down near Cambridge where we got aboard a Douglas C-47 (military version of the DC-3) and were flown to Merville Air Base in the far northeast of France near Lille. Now this had been a German air base prior to the Allied landings on June 6, 1944 so our quarters had been occupied by German airmen just a few months ago. We were shown to our rooms and told to standby for an assignment in a day or two. There was no assignment next day so I decided to walk the mile or so into Merville. The airport hangars had been bombed and strafed and were just a pile of wreckage. Supplies of German bombs were still stacked on either side of the road into town. In the town many of the stores and shops were closed with signs in the windows saying "Off Limits to U.S. Military Personnel" for these shops had fraternized with the Germans. There were very few people out and about so after a look-see around the town square I walked back to the base. There Jack told me we were going to Brussels, Belgium early next day by truck. That was great news for we could sight see along the way.

After breakfast at the mess hall next morning we loaded onto a truck with a cover over the top so we could only see out the back but that was okay as there were only five of us. Brussels was about 90 miles away but these G.I. trucks were slow and the road narrow and winding and it would take most of the day to get there. It is now early Spring and grass is turning green along the roadside, a few trees had began to leaf out, and a few farmers were out

tending to their livestock and getting fields ready for planting. The landscape was much like England, small fields, some separated by stone fences or hedgerows. Somewhere about halfway to Brussels, our driver stopped in a small village in front of a little café for lunch. We went in and the owner came out of a back room, saw us and was obviously quite alarmed. Remember, these Belgians had suffered under German occupation for four years now and it could be alarming to have five military men come stomping into your café unannounced, friendly or not. We put him at ease by smiling and ordering beer. In a few minutes he brought big steins of the best beer I had ever had anywhere, much better than that watery English beer, better than Budweiser. He didn't understand English at all, but the driver knew enough French to order sandwiches. After awhile the sandwiches came, good Belgian bread, meat and cheese, they were excellent. The steins were empty so we had to have another round to go with the sandwiches. We had been provided with French and Belgian money before leaving England but we had no idea how much we should pay for the lunch. We each laid down some money and the owner frowned, we laid down some more until he smiled, then someone noticed there was wine displayed on the shelves, the same someone picked up a bottle, set it on the table and laid money by it until he smiled again. We loaded onto our truck and away we go, enjoying the scenery and passing the bottle around , and life was good. Sometime in mid-afternoon we arrived at the Brussels Airfield just northeast of the city. There we were assigned quarters for the night and after awhile we went the mess hall for supper though no one was very hungry after the good lunch. We learned there were trucks leaving for downtown Brussels at seven o'clock so after a shower and a shave Jack, Brad, and myself got on a truck. The driver parked in the market place near downtown and reminded us, the truck leaves at precisely eleven o'clock, be here. Brussels was blacked-out but not so severely as London so we looked around for awhile then heard music coming from a night club. We went in and it was a large room with a local band playing in the back, tables all around and a dance floor. We sat down at a table and as I look around I see two good looking girls sitting alone having a glass of wine. I went over and said "Hi", they pointed to the empty chair so I sat down. Their glasses were nearly empty and I waved to a waiter who brought another round. One of the girls was from Holland and could speak some English, the other was French and had no English. I learned the Dutch girl's name was Doortie and the French girls name I could neither pronounce properly let alone spell. Even so, we had a good time. Its getting time to go to so I re-join Jack and Brad and we return to the Brussels Airfield. We knew when we left Merville that our destination was Louven, about twenty miles east of Brussels, the B-24 we were to fly back to Merville was located at the airfield there. Its been a long fun day, I was asleep as soon as my head hit the pillow.

After breakfast at the mess hall we loaded onto a truck and went to Louven where we were assigned quarters in a large chateau near the airfield. We were the only ones there at the time, this chateau had been commandeered by the

Army for the use of visitors to the air base. It was an elegant house of three floors with wide lawns and grounds. The furniture had been replaced with standard army bunks so it was rather barren inside. It was manned by two sergeants whose duty it was to prepare meals and keep the place clean, possibly the cushiest job in the entire Army. After a good lunch we learned the B-24 wasn't quite ready so we had the afternoon off to lounge about on the lawn and take it easy. After supper the sergeants asked if we would like to go into Brussels for they had the use of a truck, so away we went. Again, more sight-seeing and we went to the night club of the previous evening for drinks. The place was nearly empty, my girl friends were not there, so after awhile we went back to the truck and waited for the sergeants to show up and drive us back to the chateau. After breakfast we went to the airfield and the B-24 was still not ready, it would be ready in the afternoon. Well, this gave us an opportunity to watch the activities there. This had been a German airfield a few months ago, now it was operated by the Ninth Air Force and the airplanes were all Republic P-47s being used as fighter/bombers. The front was only about 100 miles away, the Germans on the east banks of the Rhine River, the British and American armies on the west banks. We learned that pilots from this base were flying as many as three missions a day to targets across the Rhine. The P-47 was a formidable airplane, eight .50 caliber machines guns in the wings, plus a one thousand pound bomb under each wing, an ideal airplane for strafing and low level bombing. It was fascinating to watch them take-off in a steady stream one after the other all day long, while those returning were landing on another runway. After lunch we went out to the B-24 for it was finally ready to go. We look it over, start the engines and are taxiing out to the runway for take-off. Now, the taxi-ways are narrow for a B-24 and as we turn a corner the right main tire slips off the pavement into the mud, we are stuck. The control tower sends a big tow tug right away for we are messing up their operations. The tug pulled us out right away, we taxi on to the runway and take-off. It is only a thirty minute flight back to Merville so we are there in plenty of time for supper. We learn we will fly a B-24 back to England the next morning, this B-24 belongs to the 491st BG. So it was, the next day we leave Merville Airfield, cross the English channel over the white cliffs of Dover at low altitude and are enjoying this flight very much for we seldom get to fly low and enjoy the scenery. After awhile I notice a British Spitfire fighter plane off our right wing, flying formation with us. It has the markings of the Polish Air Force and the pilot waves and I wave back. I think he was just out having some fun, same as we were. It was about lunch-time when we deliver their B-24 back to the 491st BG, I don't recall if they said "thank you" or not. In due time a truck takes us the six miles or so over to our own 392nd BG at Wendling. It has been a fun trip and we got to see some of France and Belgium from the back of a GI truck, not many 8th Air Force guys got to do that. At our familiar old Nissen hut we find Bob Lowe, he has recovered from the flu and is glad to see us, for he has been lonesome. Another piece of good news, I have been promoted to first lieutenant, a surprise for I wasn't aware that Squadron Commander Major

Player had put my name in for promotion. My job as co-pilot won't change but my pay will increase from $268 per month to $293. That will be nice.

On 27th of February, Clarke and crew flew a combat mission to Halle. The target was the railroad marshalling yards. The weather was overcast, bombing was by H2X, results unobserved. There was a barrage of moderate flak, a B-24 in the bomb group ahead of us received a direct hit and exploded, there were no parachutes. In our 392nd BG two airplanes were hit and slightly damaged, our B-24 came through unscathed. This was our 25th mission, 10 more to go, hope we make it.

1945

MARCH 1945

The English weather improved in March and the Clarke crew would fly eight combat missions. We had flown only two in February plus our "vacation" trip to France and Belgium.

On March 1, our mission was to the railroad yards at Ingolstadt in southern Germany. Over France one of our P-51 fighter escort planes shot down a German fighter plane within sight of the group formation. The target was covered by clouds and bombs released by H2X radar. The snow covered Alps in Switzerland were a pretty sight from our route into the target. No flak, no enemy fighters, all 392nd BG bombers returned to Wendling safely.

The cloud tops in England on March 4th were to high to permit group formations to form so we took off and flew to France to make up the group and wing formations. The weather there was not much better and B-24s from various groups were milling around trying to find their own group in the dense contrails each airplane was leaving behind. Even so, the 392nd managed to form and departed the "buncher" on time in proper place in the wing formation. After crossing the Rhine on the way to the target at Aschaffenburg, near Frankfort, the weather got worse. The cloud tops extended above 25,000 feet, to high for a B-24, so we were in and out of clouds in very poor visibility, the wing formation of three bomb groups broke up with the groups going their separate ways. The weather at the target was impossible, the 392nd bombed Pforzheim as a target of opportunity. All B-24s returned safely, but this was a mixed up, ineffective mission.

We got a four day pass starting March 5th and went to London again to sight-see, bar-hop, etc:,and I went to the London PX and bought new first lieutenant bars for my uniforms. After returning to base, our next mission was March 11 to the shipyards at Kiel in northern Germany. Clouds obscured the target, bombing was by H2X , there was moderate flax but not accurate. Easy mission.

The railroad yards at Munster were the target on March 17. This had been a dreaded target earlier and the 392nd had suffered heavy losses there on previous missions. Today, clouds covered the aiming point, bombs dropped by H2X, very little flax, all B-24s returned safely.

On March 19th, the mission was to the airfield and jet aircraft parts factory at Neuberg in far southern Germany. The weather was good, bombing was visual with the Norden bomb-sight, the target was clobbered and there was no flak nor enemy fighters. A long but very successful mission.

The next mission for the Clarke crew was to the airfield at Essen on March 21st. This would be a relatively short mission and take-off was in the afternoon at 3:40

pm, very unusual. We arrived at the target at 6:00 pm in perfectly clear weather. The flak was less intense than expected, but it was accurate. A flak fragment came through the front of Windy City Belle and hit Bob Lowe squarely in the chest. His flak suit stopped it and he was not injured. He kept the piece of flak for a souvenir, it was about two inches long and one-half inch square. The bombs were dropped visually with the bomb sight and the target was destroyed. Just one squadron of ten B-24s were on this mission, very unusual, and eight of them had some flak damage, but all ten returned safely at 7:40 pm.

The target on March 22 was another airfield, this one in southern Germany near Swabish-Hall being used by the new Messerschmitt 262 jet engine powered fighter planes. The weather was clear, bombs were dropped with the Norden bomb-sight and the airfield was obliterated. There was very little flak and none of the jet-fighters came up to meet us. Captain Grettum was the lead crew and was flying his last mission to finish his tour. Major Barnes, commander of the 576th Squadron was along as Group Command Pilot. As their B-24 approached Wendling from the east they were firing flares as a way to celebrate Grettum's last mission. Somehow a flare was fired inside the airplane igniting other flares inside the cockpit. The airplane caught fire, nosed over and crashed. Four crew members managed to successfully bail out, all others died in the crash including Grettum and Barnes. To explain the presence of flares aboard the airplane, the Group lead plane always made the first take-off and was first to arrive at the "buncher". There flares were fired with a flare gun through a fitted hole in the ceiling just behind the cockpit area to identify the Group lead airplane so following airplanes could easily recognize it. The flares were normally fired by the flight engineer and each bomb group had different colored flares.

March 24, 1945. The British and American Armies had been preparing for some time to cross the Rhine River and proceed across Germany. The B-24s of the Second Air Division, 8th AF had been loaded the previous day with supplies with parachutes attached instead of the usual bombs. Early in the morning of this day, paratroopers and glider troops landed on the east banks of the Rhine to secure positions there. By mid-morning the B-24s were making their take-offs, the Drop Zone for the 392nd BG was a few miles north of Wesel. We would be dropping to British troops. The Group formation consisted of four Squadrons of six airplanes each. The Clarke crew was leading one of these six plane squadrons. We would not need oxygen masks for this mission, cruising altitude was 500 feet above the ground, we were to drop our supplies in the Drop Zone from no higher than 200 feet. This became a sight-seeing trip across a bit of France and across Belgium. Our navigator, Brad Eaton, guided us to the Drop Zone with great accuracy. There in a small clearing on the east bank of the Rhine was quite a sight. Big British Horsha gliders were everywhere, some had made good landings, others had crashed into trees or each other. The colored parachutes for supplies dropped by previous bomb groups were scattered all about, visibility was restricted by smoke screens sent up by the Germans. After supplies were dropped by the squadron we had to pass over the German lines who fired with rifles, machine

guns, small caliber flax guns, and we saw two bursts of flak from our old nemesis, the big 88mm flak gun. As soon as possible we made the turn back to friendly territory and all but one 392nd BG B-24 made it back to Wendling. Lt. Hummell's B-24 had number 2 and 3 engines shot out and was forced to crash land in enemy territory. The landing was successful but the Germans attacked at once killing a waist gunner, the first man out of the airplane. The rest of the crew were captured and were held at a nearby house. After four hours or so, American troops surrounded the house, took the Germans prisoner and rescued the crew who eventually made it back to Wendling. We inspected our airplane carefully after landing and found one small hole in the tail made by a rifle or machine gun bullet.

Kevin Killea, our tail gunner, had missed a mission because of going on sick call and was one mission behind the remainder of the crew. In order to finish his last mission on the same day as the rest of the crew he volunteered to fly with Kaiser's crew on March 25. Also flying on this mission to Hitzocker were our friends the Markuson crew, one of the four crews from Tonopah. Soon after the Group formed-up and were on the way to the "splasher" at Cromer the B-24s of the Kaiser crew and the Markuson crew collided ten miles north of Norwich. My friend, Harold Hutchcroft, co-pilot, and P.L. Cain, engineer, of the Markuson crew managed to bail out and were saved, the rest of the crew perished in the crash. From the Kaiser crew, the two waist gunners bailed out successfully, all others were killed. Kevin Killea's body was found away from the wreckage and his parachute had deployed, no one knows for sure what happened, but it is assumed his parachute mal-functioned and did not open properly if at all, but apparently he had managed to get out of the airplane. It is so sad for he did not have to fly that mission, and he could have come home to the good old U.S.of A. with the rest of the crew. When I heard the bad news, I went to Hutchcroft's nissen hut and he was there telling about the collision. From the cockpit right window he had seen most of the right wing torn away. He immediately bailed out through the bomb bay doors which Cain had already opened. As he parachuted to the ground he could see the airplane spin as it fell, the centrifugal force would have kept anyone else from getting out. He was terribly up-set and crying, he had lost his crew, his friends. A small crowd had gathered and we all tried to console him but mere words are not much help, this had been a most tragic day, the worst of all.

APRIL 1945

The American and British armies are crossing the Rhine River now, the Russians are in Eastern Europe moving west. Through a stroke of good luck the Americans captured a bridge over the Rhine at Remagen before the Germans could blow it up and troops, supplies, and equipment were pouring over it. Also, the Army Corp of Engineers were busy building floating pontoon bridges over the river, perhaps the war will end soon.

On April 4th I flew my 34th mission, it was to the airfield at Kaltenkirchen. The orders were to bring the bombs back if the airfield was covered by clouds. It was and the bombs were not dropped. There was no flak and no enemy fighters planes, perhaps the easiest mission of all.

April 7th was my 35th and last combat mission. The target for the 392nd BG was a munitions plant at Krummel, a small town just south of Hamburg. It was on this day the German Air Force (Luftwaffe) had planned a maximum last ditch effort to shoot down as many 8th Air Force B-24 and B-17s as possible. Unknown to us at the time some of their pilots had volunteered to ram our bombers with their fighter planes as well as shoot down as many as possible. Beginning about an hour before reaching the target area the dog-fights began, our own escort fighters attacked the Germans to keep them away from the bombers, in all directions the fighter planes swirled and turned at each other, the bombers all pulled together in very tight formations to protect each other. Just before arriving at the target I saw a German Messerschmitt 262 (the new German jet engine fighter plane) approaching the bomb group ahead of our Group, I believe it was the 93rd BG. It happened that the only fighter group in the 8th Air Force still equipped with Republic P-47 fighters was flying escort above us at that time, the 56th Fighter Group. I saw a P-47 in a vertical dive at the Messerschmitt, all eight machine guns firing. The Messerschmitt exploded, I doubt if its pilot ever saw the P-47. Also the gunners of the 93rd BG had been firing at the Messerschmitt, perhaps it had been hit and was unable to fly away from the P-47. The target was visible and the bombs from our Group hit with good effect. All 392nd B-24s returned to Wendling. The Luftwaffe did shoot down a few bombers in other bomb groups but their last ditch effort was mostly a pitiful failure. Our P-51s and P-47s had done a masterful job of keeping the Germans away, to them every bomber crew member owes a large debt of gratitude.

Remember that I flew as co-pilot for Cieply and his crew away back on October 3rd. therefore I was always one mission ahead of the other members of my crew. They all flew their 35th and last mission on April 11th to Regensburg. Jack asked me to go with them but I refused. The skies over Germany were fairly safe now but it had been only a few days ago that our tail-gunner, Kevin Killea, had been killed in a mid-air collision over England, as well as our friends on the Markuson crew. Also, one of those German flak gunners might get lucky and put a flak shell right into the bomb bay and cause the airplane to explode, or a lone fighter plane might slip into the formation and shoot us

down. There plenty of co-pilots available, there was no need for me to go. As it turned out the co-pilot that went on the mission was not able to fly the big B-24 in formation and Jack had to fly the entire nine hour mission with no relief. The B-24 is a tough airplane to fly in formation, control movement requires real muscle plus it's not responsive to control movement, a bad combination. Flying a B-24 is hard labor. It is normal for the pilot and co-pilot to switch over flying the airplane every hour or so. Years later when Jack and I had a visit he sometimes would remind me that he had to fly that entire mission with no help from the co-pilot.

The Russians are making good progress from the east, the Brits and Yanks are moving to meet them from the west. The 8th Air Force flew its last mission over Germany on April 25th. Within a week Hitler committed suicide, on May 8th Germany surrendered.

Let's review what happened to the four B-24 crews who arrived from the Tonapah Air Base to the 392nd Bomb Group at Wendling, England. Tennie Peterson and his crew returned to the U.S. with no losses. The Jack Clarke crew lost the tail gunner, Kevin Killea, killed in a mid-air collision while flying with the Kaiser crew. In the Markuson crew all were lost in the same collision over England, except Harold Hutchcroft, co-pilot and J.L. Cain, top turret gunner, both managed to parachute to safety. The Edward J. Cieply crew were shot down on a mission to Bingen on Dec. 2, 1944, all were lost. Of the forty men on those four crews, twenty-three came home, seventeen were killed in action.

So what did it feel like to complete that 35th and last mission? My vocabulary cannot describe the complete sense of relief, the overwhelming relief at not having to make another flight over Germany. Now I can go home to the good, old, U.S. of A. see Papa and Momma, and brothers and sisters, and feel safe again. It was a dirty job that had to be done, now it was over! I will always mourn the loss of my good friends especially Kevin Killea, for he was a good kid and didn't deserve to die.

This a April 12, 1945 photograph of the Clarke Crew the day after they finished their 35th and last combat mission. Also included are Earnest Barber, "Windy City Belle" Crew Chief, the best Crew Chief in the 8th Air Force, and two mechanics who are his helpers. My 35th mission was April 7, 1945 and I had gone on leave to London alone and therefore not in this picture. Kevin Killea not included as he was killed in that tragic mid-air collision on March 25, 1945.

Top: Ernie Barber, unknown, unknown, Jack Heckman, Waist Gunner, Edward "Pappy' Brunett, Engineer & Top Turret Gunner, Bottom; Jay T. Brown, Radio Operator, Jack Clarke, Pilot, Bob Lowe, Bombardier, Clyde Eaton, Navigator, George Peer, Waist Gunner.

GOING HOME

On, or about April 23, 1945 the Clarke crew departed from the 392nd BG at Wendling by train to the Redistribution Center at Stone where we had entered England so long ago, or so it seemed. Actually, it had only been eight months, but flying 35 combat missions made it seem like a long time. We had no duties here, eat, sleep, read, and were free to go into town whenever we wanted. Usually, we took the bus to Stafford, about 20 miles away, for it was a larger city than Stone, and we could take in a movie there, or go to the many pubs. Hutchcroft was with us, and the navigator from the Markuson crew, Warren Gallagher. Warren had been promoted to Squadron Navigator and was not involved in the mid-air collision of March 25th. We all had a good time for the war was over for us and we were going home.

It must have been May 1, 1945 that we loaded on to a train all the way to Portsmouth on the south coast of England. There we boarded the ship that would carry us home. We had gone to England on the Ile De France, a luxury liner converted to a troop transport. This ship in Portsmouth was no luxury liner, it was a typical freighter converted to a troop ship. No state rooms here, the bunks were stacked five high in the cargo holds, the mess hall small, we ate in shifts. Did we complain? Not at all, this ship was headed for New York and home. We would be going in a convoy, the war was not officially over yet and there were still German U-boats out there in the Atlantic. Two U.S. Navy Destroyers would escort the convoy of 12 ships. So it was on May 8, 1945, VE DAY, that the convoy sailed from the Portsmouth harbor and down the English Channel. What a wonderful, wonderful way to celebrate the war's end! Still, not all the U-boats had checked in so we stayed in convoy. When we got into open water the next day we learned this old freighter was not as stable as the Ile De. France. It pitched and rolled in every wave, but the troops aboard this ship were all air crews and were used to rough air, so no one got seasick. Dolphins sometime swam along-side usually in bunches of four or five, they would leap from the water and could keep up with the ship very easily. Actually these ships were slow, 8 to 10 knots, it would take us 14 days before we spotted the Statue of Liberty on May 22, 1945, and another day before we got on the train to Camp Kilmer, New Jersey. There we all sent telegraphs home, said goodbye to each other, and went our individual ways. I took a train to St. Louis, connected to another train to Tulsa where I spent the night at a hotel. At the time, there was no bus service from Tulsa to Okemah, so I took a bus that would pass through the small community of Pharoah six miles east of Okemah. There I stood beside the highway to Okemah and the first car that came by picked me up and took me straight to the taxi stand in town. There I found my friend Hoggie Lucas was driving the only taxi and he drove me the 3 miles out to home. What a wonderful thing to see all the familiar scenery where I had grown up. Momma was standing on the back porch as we drove up, I hopped out, gave her hugs and kisses, Papa came from whatever he was doing and we had handshakes and grins. We went on into the house and sat down at the kitchen table to talk about my voyage home for they had never been aboard a ship. It was mid afternoon and Momma wanted to know if I was hungry which I was for there had been no chance for lunch. As she busied around to fix something Amos and Otto came in from whatever they were doing.

More grins, hand shakes and hugs, it had been just over a year since I was home after finishing aviation cadet flight training. Otto was 17 and had one more year of high school, Amos was 20 and had stayed at home to help Papa on the farm after graduating in 1942. So much had happened in the past year it was hard to know just what to talk about, there had been the B-24 training at Tonopah, transfer to the 392nd Bomb Group in England, flying 35 combat missions, the voyage home on the old converted freighter, the train and bus ride from New Jersey. Overwhelmed, I just sat there and ate my snack while wanting to just cry out for pure joy. The familiar barns, the farm machines, some cows in the pasture, and horses too. A new dog on the back porch, old Pat had died, these are the old scenes that caught my eye out the kitchen window. It was true, I was home. Conversation turned to farming, the cotton was planted and coming up, the German prisoners-of-war who were kept in the National Guard Armory in town had been out to hoe the weeds out of the corn, there were new little pigs, and new calves. Momma no longer milked any cows, she bought milk in town, and had a new refrigerator. Otto ran the John Deere tractor I used to drive, Amos had a brand new Ford tractor. While the others did the evening chores I took my bags upstairs to my old room in the south-west corner and un-packed. It had not changed, the dresser was in the corner, the bed same as always, the old sea chest where Momma kept extra bedding was under the west windows, the closet was empty. As I un-packed my military uniforms seemed very much out of place here, uniforms are for military bases, they didn't belong here. Momma called up the stairway that supper was ready. The five of us were to many for the kitchen table, we had supper in the dining room, then went out onto the back porch where it was cool, just like old times. More talk, about family mostly, Abner, my older brother was a doctor and was in the Army somewhere in Belgium the last anyone had heard. Now that the war in Europe was over he would be coming home soon. Myself, I had a thirty day furlough, then must report to a Army Air Force Re-Distribution Center in Santa Ana, California on July 1, 1945. It had been a long two days traveling by train and bus, I was tired and went to bed early. Up the stairs just like old times, turn the covers back, say a prayer of sincere Thanks, get in and fall asleep right away.

Next morning after breakfast I went into town to look at a 1939 Ford advertised for sale in the Okemah Daily Leader by John Leonard, a fellow I knew from the seismograph crew where I worked just before going into the Army Air Force. Well, the car was like new, not a scratch on it. The tires were re-treads but that was to be expected, civilians could not buy new tires during the war. He wanted $600.00 dollars for it, I wrote him a check right away for it was a real good buy. After registering the car in my name and getting new license plates I drove around to see the old town again. It was mostly empty for no one else was home from the war yet, I had come home because I had finished a tour of 35 missions, it would be another month before others came home.

The next Sunday featured a family reunion, Ruth and Albert and their five kids came from Norman, Alice came from Oklahoma City, Ethel and George and their two kids lived not far away and were there, in all about twenty people. There was home grown fried chicken, mashed potatoes and gravy, new veggies from the garden, and ice cream for dessert. It sure was good to be home. In the days that followed it was fun to help with feeding the animals, to get on the John Deere again and do some field work, Amos

even let me try out his new Ford tractor. With my new car I could range far and wide, check out the night-life in Henryetta, and two trips to Oklahoma City to see the girl who had been my pen pal while I was in the service. On our second date she told me she was engaged to a sailor from the Navy Base at Norman, so that was the end of that.

The days had flown by so fast it seemed like just a week ago that I had arrived home, yet my furlough was coming to an end. June was nearly gone, it was time to hit the road to Santa Ana.

SANTA ANA REDISTRIBUTION CENTER

The purpose of the Redistribution Center was to re-assign anyone returning from overseas. I had not the foggiest idea where my new assignment might be, nor what I might be doing. Perhaps train in the big B-29 and go to the Pacific, become an instructor in the training command, train in fighter airplanes which is what I wanted to do in the first place. Before leaving England there had been the faintest of rumors that some who had completed a tour of missions could actually be discharged from the Army Air Force. I did not believe that rumor at all.

So it was on or about June 27, I loaded by bags into the car, said my Good-byes and headed west. It took just two days and one long night of rest to reach Santa Ana, about 1500 miles, so I arrived a day early. I was assigned a room to myself in the bachelor officer quarters, (BOQ). Next day I learned there was a back log of people to be processed for re-assignment and it might be as long as two weeks before it was my turn. To kill time they suggested I go over to the Long Beach Army Air Force Base and go along as a observer on C-47 training flights. That way, I could earn my flight pay for the month of June with very little effort. Monthly flight pay was about $90.00, so I did take advantage of this opportunity. Also, I ran into an old friend from Tonopah. Douglas Dahm was the pilot of a B-24 crew there, he had gone to England also and had been assigned a different base there. He knew some girls, I had a car, a good combination, and we did have some good times.

Finally, it was my time to go get my new assignment. I went to the proper office and the sergeant in charge there sat me down across from his desk. He had the file of all my Army records, all the way back to Shepard Field in January of 1943. We went through them to check if all were correct, and they were. He leaned back in his chair and said, "Well, Lieutenant Mackey, we can offer you two choices, you can go to an air base in Georgia and fly Lockheed Lodestars while aviation cadet navigation trainees learn to navigate, or you can go to Camp Chaffee near Fort Smith, Arkansas where you will be discharged from the Army." I stared at him for awhile to let this incredible information soak in. After about 30 seconds I said, "Sergeant, I do not want to go to Georgia, I want to go to Camp Chaffee and get my discharge." There was some additional paper work, I was issued orders to report to Camp Chaffee on July 31st.

Right away I sent a telegram home that I would be home in three days and I would be discharged from the army by the end of the month.

CAMP CHAFFEE

So it was that I left Santa Ana and headed east on US 66 to Okemah where I would arrive in time to celebrate my 23rd birthday on July 22nd. After a week or so at home I drove to Camp Chaffee in time for my appointment there on the 31st. The very first event there was another physical exam although I had just had one in Santa Ana. Then there was some paper work which was finished before noon so the sergeant suggested I have lunch at the Officer's Club. The lunch was excellent, served on tables with white table cloths, good china and silverware, a fitting venue for my departure from Uncle Sam's Army Air Force.

I entered the service in January of 1943, today is July 31st, 1945 that totals 30 months, or two and one-half years. In that time I learned to pilot various airplanes including a complicated four engine bomber, the Consolidated B-24. Also I had learned to love aviation and was now determined to secure a pilot's job with an airline if possible. It wasn't easy for there many pilots being discharged now and the airlines didn't need many pilots in 1945. After mailing out applications to all airlines, and a unscheduled visit to United Air Lines headquarters in Chicago, United did hire me in May of 1946. So began an airline flying career that spanned 38 years and 30,000 flying hours, but that is another story.

"MY STORY" about my time in the Army Air Forces ended today July 31, 1945. It was a good time, an adventuresome time, and the place where I received an excellent aviation education for which I am sincerely thankful.