



ENDLESHAM MEMORIES

34TH BOMB GROUP H

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391

Dear Fellow Members of the 34th Bomb Group.

My wife and I want to thank each one of you who sent Christmas Cards to us. We do appreciate it very much. We only wish we could have sent each one of you a personal greeting.

We are again starting another great year for the 34th Bomb Group. We are hoping to make the year 1981 the best one yet, for the 34th Bomb Group, of course we can not do it, without the help of all of you, who have put forth a great effort in behalf of the Bomb Group. There are a lot of you who have put forth extra effort to see that the 34th B.G. become the Great Bomb Group it was during the War.

I think, most of us have recovered from the reunion in Orlando as much as we ever will, from seeing and meeting old friends and companions. I know all of you, who were there, enjoyed the Reunion and are looking forward to the next one in St Paul, Minnesota. I do not think it was such a shock, to all of us, seeing that we had grown older together, after all most of us were just out of the teens, when we were in Service, together.

I have just received a call from Doug Underwood, He says he has been under the weather but is feeling better now. He has gotten behind in his research he has been doing for the 8th Air Force Historical Society and the 34th B.G. but hopes to catch up soon. He would like each of you to be sure and fill out the questionnaire, which was in the last newsletter and return it to him as soon as you can. He has only received 53 filled out questionnaires. He needs them to help complete the History of the 34th Bomb Group, which he is writing. I am a little late also, I failed to put mine in the letter I sent to Doug. Mine has been filled out since I came home. I do hope you have received it by now, Doug. So come on now and fill out the questionnair and send it to Doug. You may think what you have or what you saw, while you were in England, is not important, but let Doug be the judge of that. If you do not have one of the questionnaires, write to me and I will send you one. Doug can not do a good job on the History of the 34th Bomb Group, unless we all cooperate and send the information, he has asked for.

How many of you, who were at Blythe, remember one of the men, who was called "Bill the Mailman"? His name is William Ambler of 505 West Hickory, Arcadia Fla 33821. I have recieved several letters from Bill and he would like to hear from some of you. Bill delivered mail at the Base, at Blythe.

Al DiNenno, has received the specifications for the 34th B.G. flag from Doug Underwood and has taken them to a Flag Manufacturer, who will make a drawing of our 34th B.G. flag and when completed, will send it to Doug for approval and if it is according to specifications, will sent back to the Manufacturer, to be made. We hope to have the Flag and Battle Streamers at the Reunion In St Paul this October. I have been able to find no tract of the original Flags and Streamers, so far. We have not given up yet. Unless they were destroyed or sold by the Government, they may be in some forgotten warehouse, Bob Gay, our Group Executive Officer, said he packed the Flags and Banners, along with the 34th B.G. Records for storage, before he left Sioux Falls after the 34th B.G. was deactivated. just in case the 34th B.G. was activated again. The Records of the 34th B.G. are at the Historical Research Center at Maxwell Field Ala. but the other things which were packed with the Records are missing. Even the 8th A.F. Historical Society is searching for an 8th A.F. Flag as well as most of the other B.G.s and they can not find them

The Flags, which are at the Museum at Wright Patterson, have been donated to the Museum by some of the men, who had them when their Bomb Groups were deactivated.

How many of you men from the 7th Sqd., remember the Supply Sgt Alf T. Connley? Alf has been helping me find some of our men in Tenn. and has sent me a clipping from a Knoxville paper concerning the Memorial which the 8th AF, Historical Society is erecting at the Air Force Museum at Wright Patterson Field, Dayton Ohio. Alf has been writing to me quite often about any news which appears in the newspapers around his home town of Oak Ridge Tenn. Alf would like to hear from any of you 7th Sqd. men, who care to write.

I received a letter from Russell Crouse of 436 W 4th St Waynesboro, Pa. He has sent me a rundown, about the forming of the 34th B.G., at Langley Field Va. and its moves thru the years, to Blythe Ca. It was very interesting. I have sent a copy of the letter to Doug Underwood, to see if he might want to use it in his book. Russ was in the Group, when it was formed and remembers quite a bit about the forming of it. Gen LeMay was one of the Officers who help form the Group. Are there any more of you out there, who were with the group at Langley? Thanks a lot Russ.

There is another person, who knows a lot about the forming of the 34th, he is George Gerlach, of 1140 Cordova Bl N.E. St Petersburg Fla. George has sent me clipping from the St Petersburg paper about the reunion in Orlando Fla. last Oct. The write up was good but it could have been better, if the 34th B.G. had been mentioned. George visited the 34th at Orlando and gave me some pictures of the 34th B.G. after it was formed. I have the pictures here and will keep them until such a time, the 34th B.G. has a display or Museum to place them in.

Bob and Lorraine Hartwick stayed over, after the Reunion and went to Daytona Beach, while there they bought one of the newspapers and it had in it a good story of the Reunion in Orlando. Thanks Bob and Lorraine for sending me the clipping. Sometime when you are near Anderson, drop by and visit. You do not live too far away.

Do you know, when Fred Berglund was waiting to register at the reunion, he was asked by a reporter for an interview and for some pictures? Fred did you ever get those pictures? Maybe some of you men in Minnesota can get the press to take some pictures of the 34th, when we are in St Paul to the reunion. We could use some good publicity.

Oliver Bolduc of Chaplin Con., one of the 391st Crew Chiefs, wrote me that he had retired as of last year and would try to be at the reunion in St Paul in Oct. He also said he had written to quite a few of the men, with whom he has been corresponding all these years, to tell them, he would be at the reunion in St Paul. Oliver and I were on the same ground crew together at Blythe when we first went there. He was from a B17 School and I was from the Willow Run Bomber plant, a B24 School. Jennings Beckham was our Crew Chief and when the 34th B.G. was reformed, Oliver and I went to different Sqds. as Crew Chiefs. He went to the 391st and I went to the 18th. When we were in the 7th Sqd., our plane was known as the "Rupture Duck" and when Oliver received his new plane, he named it the "Ruptured Duck" Oliver was one of the Crew Chiefs who was awarded the Bronze Star for the extraordinary work in keeping his plane flying. Oliver had sent me a list of several men from the 391st, who addresses he had. Thanks Oliver, you have helped the 34th B.G. a lot. We are looking forward to seeing you in St Paul.

I owe Paul Buss and his Crew a lot, for the inspiration they have given me with their phone calls and letters. We have been looking for their Crew and now have found them all. Paul those phone calls and letters have meant a lot to me, thanks to all of you.

Some of you have received letters from Jim Hanson, nephew of Oscar Hanson from the 391st Sqd, who went down on a bombing mission over Mersburg. Jim and I, with the help of Roy Jones and Joe Edwards have found all but one of the surviving members of Oscar's Crew. Jim had been trying to find Oscar's Crew for several years but did not know where to look until he saw the article about the reunion of the 34th B.G., in one of the papers. He called me one night and we have been searching ever since. Jim has located some of

of our 34th men in Minnesota. Thanks Jim, maybe we will be able to meet in St Paul in April.

Bill Hart, of Topeka, Kansas, had asked if there was any thing he could do to help the Group find some of our men. I sent him the list of names, which I had, of the men from Kansas and he has located several. Keep up the good work, Bill. I appreciate all the help I can get.

You all remember the man with the Colonel Sanders" beard, at the reunion in Orlando. He is Gerald Pine from Wisc. On the way home he shaved it off so you may not recognize him in St Paul. Gerald asked, if there was anything he could do to help find our men in Wisc. I sent him the list of men from there and he has written a real nice letter to all the ones he has found. He sent me a copy of the letter and it was real good and we should be hearing from some of the men from Wisc. Thanks a lot Jerry. One thing bothers me tho, how will we know you at the reunion this fall. Better wear a red flower in your lapel, better make sure it is not a lily.

I mailed a list of names to Ed Bouty in Michigan and he in turn called, Gordon Breeding, to locate Raymond Kaiser. Gordon called Ray and Ray has sent me most of his flying Crew's addresses. I am at the present time waiting to hear from them. Thanks a lot Gordon, Ed, and Ray.

I received a package from Dana Schrupp and his wife June, earlier this year. In the package were several slides, taken at the reunion in Orlando. I will bring them to the reunion in St Paul. I only wish I could identify all the people in the pictures. As you know Dana and June had broken down the old 34th Roster by states and now it is a pleasure to look up an address, to try to find one of our men. Thanks a lot Dana and June.

I want to thank Hank Lambert for the letters he has been sending. He seems to know when I get a little low, for here comes a letter from Hank. Hank I think it will be sometime in June, when we come thru there.

My wife wants to thank Henry Jurgens for the Birthday card, she enjoyed it very much. What about the one Ruth would not let you send? Henry and Ruth both are interested in the growth of the 34th and are working very hard to find some of our lost friends from the East. I think his telephone bill must be as great as mine. He does a lot of calling to find our men. The 34th owes a lot to Henry and Ruth for the work they have been doing. Thanks Henry and Ruth. We hope you can make it this way in the spring.

My wife wants to thank all of you wives out there, who have written the checks for their husbands dues and reminding them to send their membership in to us.

We need all the help we can get from you members, who retired from the Air Force, to find some of our men. It will only cost you a few stamps if you have retired. All you have to do is to write a letter to the one who you are trying to find, if you think he has retired, seal the envelope, address the letter to the person you are trying to find, be sure and put a stamp on the envelope, put this in another letter, give as much information about the person as you can, send the letter to Locator Center, AFMPC-DPMDOP2, Randolph Field Tx. 78148. If the person you are searching for has stayed in Service, the letter will be forwarded to him and you will be notified. You will not be given his address, the person whom you are seeking will have to give it to you. Make the letter strong enough so the person, will want to join the 34th B.G. Ass'n. Be sure to include your retirement number in the letter to the Locator Center.

To all of you who wish to join the 8th AF Historical Society, Send \$6.00 to 8th AFHS c/o Aida Kaye, 495 N.E. 157 Terr. Miami Fla 33162. Give B.G. you were in and your address. You do not have to be a member of the 8th AFHS unless you want to attend the reunions of the 8th AF. Do not send the money to me.

I had a letter from Harold Rutka, saying he still had quite a few of the Sqd emblems on hands. They are \$4.00 each, a good price for these are the 5 in. emblems. Send a check to Harold Rutka 11 Artavia St Duluth Mn. 55811. Harold says he will be gone for awhile but will begin sending the emblems out after April 15.

I received a letter from Dave Scales last week. Dave had been to England on business and when he finished his business he took a tour of the Base at Mendlesham and the Cemeteries, where our men are buried. He says there is not much left of our old Base at Mendlesham, just a few building left. He took several pictures of the Base and has sent them to me along with some of the pictures he took at the Cambridge Cemetery. I have seen pictures of the Cemetery but none of the long wall where the names of the ones who died are engraved. He took pictures both inside of the Chapel and outside. The pictures are wonderful and I have gone thru them several times. Thanks a lot Dave I appreciate what you have done.

Dwight Bell and his wife Betty stopped by, one evening, for a visit. Dwight and his wife are from Iowa and were in Anderson, for their son's wedding. We had a delightful evening, reminising about the 34th. The time was too short and Dwight and Betty had to leave. We could have spent all night talking about the 34th B.G. and still had plenty to talk about the next day. Dwight was on Walter Bower's crew in the 391st. Dwight and Betty, we hope you will come back, the next time you are in Anderson, to see your son.

I have a message from Al DiNneno. All of you who were at the reunion, remember Al. he is the one, who brought the 34th B.G. Caps to the reunion. Al says he will order more caps for you, who will attend the reunion in St Paul. He will bring them to St Paul in Oct. The price this year will be \$4.50 and he will take orders up until Sept 1st 1981. Send the \$4.50 for each cap ordered to Al DiNneno 441 Church Rd. King of Prussia Pa. 19406. These are nice looking caps in blue with 34th B.G. written across the front. Do not be disappointed have Al order a cap for you and be delivered to the reunion in St Paul in Oct.

Clem Hammel wrote and asked if he could do anything to help the 34th B.G. find our men who live in Iowa. I have sent him the list of our men who were from Iowa and he has sent me the list of the ones whom he has found. Clem I have written to them and I am waiting for an answer from them. We should hear from them in the near future. Clem was with the 391st Sqd. He has not been feeling too well this last year and would like to hear from some of you men from the 391st Sqd. How about it, you men from the 391st.

Pete Gray, did you receive the picture I sent to you. George Ritchie sent it to me and I had duplicates made to send to you. The picture shows "Pete" just before he went overseas with the crew on his plane. You haven't changed too much "Pete".

I am a little ashamed of the response that was sent to The Battery Press concerning the reprint of the 34th B.G. History book. The Battery Press, President called me and said, he had not received many letters for the reprint. They will reprint the book any way but only a limited number, so if you do not get one it is your own fault. If you are interested, write to The Battery Press P.O. Box 3107, Uptown Station Nashville Tenn. 37219. Tell them you are interested and will purchase one of the books. Due to the lack of interest the Book will not be out until last of June. Several more B.G. have really responded and they will do those first. When this printing is gone there will be no more printed.

I had a phone call from George Crump, one of the Medics, George is writing a book about the 34th. Some of you may have gotten a call and others of you will get one. Lets all help George make the book a success. Remember George at the reunion in Orlando. George told a few tales about the men who were sent to him to have shots.

Someone else, I would like to thank for their help and inspiration, is Malcolm and Tillie Corum. I receive a letter or phone call every week from them. Malcolm, send me interesting facts he has gathered about the 34th B.G. You know Tillie forgot to sign the register at the reunion and I had forgotten to put their name on the list. I, am sorrv, I do make mistakes as you can see when you read this letter. Malcom and Tillie you will have to pay me a visit to help me straighten out my files. Give my best to Red Dog.

To all of you whom we have jsut found, you may not know it but the 34th B.G. is incorporated in the State of Texas and we do have a Board Of Directors, to help run the Ass'n. We are at the present time waiting for the bylaws so we

can go to the IRS to be a non-profit Organization.

The Officers and Board Members are as follows

President

Grady Deatherage, 411 Murphy Rd, Collinsville Va. 24078

Vice President

Malcolm Corum, 5320 Marcillus Ave, El Paso Tx. 79924

Sec.

William Cheek 210 Maxwell St, Lakeland Fla. 33803

Sec Treasurer and Contact Man.

Ray L. Summa 2910 Bittersweet Lane, Anderson Ind 46011

Archivist and Advisor

Doug Underwood, 301 Bowling Green AVE Montgomery, Ala. 36109

Jack Blackham, 8809 McFall Dr., El Paso Tx. 79925

Ken Humphreys, 4016 Sundown Dr. Ft Worth Tx. 76116

Bob Wright, 411 Parkovash Ave, So Bend Ind 46617

Seymour Issacs. 300 Evergreen Dr. Summit Park Utah 84060

Dana Schrupp, 1010 E Olive St, Bozeman. Mt. 59715

These are the Officers of the Ass'n. If you have any suggestions to help the 34th, send it to one of these.

The response to your membership dues have not been too good so far this year. I have only had about 200 members who have sent in their 1981 membership dues. This is not a very good average for the Group. This as well as the cost of printing and postage, means that after the June letter we will have to curtail the mailing of the newsletter to only those who have their dues paid up. I have sent a 1981 membership card to those who have paid their membership fee. If you do not want to miss your newsletter, send in your membership fee as soon as possible. Our fiscal year is from Dec to Dec.

The 8th Air Force Historical Society Board of Directors will meet in St Paul at the Reunion Hotel Raddison St Paul Hotel on Friday and Saturday April 10 and 11 to make final plans for the reunion. My wife and I both plan to be there the same week end. We will be staying at the Midway Twin Motor Inn in St Paul. I will meet Bruce Sothern there and we have a little business with the H. Society on Sat afternoon and we will be free on Sat Evening. so if some of you want to joins us for dinner, it would be nice. If you are going to be there, let Bruce know a couple of weeks ahead so he can make arrangements, for the dinner. Everyone will take care of their own Hotel registration and pay their own way. Bruce will just be the go between for us. Bruce lives at 3354 Ulysses St N.E. Minneapolis Mn. Ph 612-789-2225. We would like to meet some of you men who live around St Paul, while we are there. Please let Bruce know if you are coming, so we can have a place to meet and have dinner. The Hotel would like to have at least a weeks notice, should we decide to have the dinner there at the Hotel.

Do you boys of the Jewish faith remember one of your Rabbi by the name of Rabbi David Lefkowitz, Lonnie Crook sent me his address. David now lives at 4607 Norway Shrevesport La. 71105. Some of you might want to get in touch with him.

Start making your plans now to attend the reunion of the 34th B.G. along with the 8th Air Fore at St Paul Mn. Oct 15-18 1981. Brochures will be out in June. A good program for all has been planned.

The story which is in this letter was written by Stephen Niatas and sent to me. Steve was the Engineer on the plane.

Do any of you men from the 18th remember one of the flight crew who had Steve on one pocket and Barbara on the other pocket of his A2 jacket. We are trying to identify a picture of the crew he was on.

Fly low and slow

your 34th B.G. Contact Man.

Ray L Summa

Topping, Don 391
886 Woodbine Dr
Crestwood Mo. 63126

Hyman, Norman 18th
6040 N. Lake Dr.
Milwaukee, Wi 53217

Rhein, Lyle 7th
967 Sterling Ane N.
St Paul Mn. 55109

Franklin, Weller 4
3401 Alpha Ct N.W.
Albuquerque, N.M. 87120

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Dubarry Fal. 32713

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Coles, Ira S. Jr.
P.O. Box 10720
St Louis Mo. 63124

Camp, John Rogers Jr. 7
9290 N Bayshore Dr
Miami Shores Fla 33138

Schade, Jack B.
3976 Parkview Dr.
Salt Lake City Utah 84117

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College Park Ga. 30349

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24 Linden Ave.
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Crown Pt. Ind 46307

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Hasting Neb. 68901

Young, James C. 391
662 Second St
Williamsport, Pa. 17701

Beaver, Duane
3414 Meinard
Drayton Plains Mi. 48020

Address Changes or Corrections

Change spelling of of Richard Fecko to Fechko

Change address of Jim Harkess to 241 No 6th St. Decatur Ind. 46733

Add Apt 1205 to Bill Strotts address.

Spelling of of Strudivam to Sturdivan.

Spelling of James Shutt. to Schutt and add Apt 4

Spelling of Lou Bolce's street to Gilbert.

Arl Saeger Z.C to 16508

Fred Sampson's State to New Hartford N.Y. Z.C. 13413

Frank Feltovich address to 145 Chestnut

Correct John D Griffith to John G. Griffith

Z.C. of E.G. Goy to 35710 Add N.W to address

Correct spelling of Smethills

Change Malcolm Corums Z.C. to 78824

Robert Priddy's address should be 2900 Hamilton Blvd. 76308

Spelling of Robert Ingerville to Ingrouille

Change spelling of Heatherington to Hetherington Change Seid Valley to Seiad

Change address of Paul Stoutsenbarger to 510 Newcastle St, Renboth Del 19971

Address of Charles Allen to 5284 Carmargo Rd So. Littleton Col. 80123

Correct Spelling of Dirk Gamberette to Gombert.

Change Jack Odom's address. to 2231 Canal Road Lake Park Fla 33410

Sam Turnipseed's Address should be Ralph McGill Instead of Miguel

Williard Soderland

Horace Gifford

Robert Cahill

James Brame

Thurman Cox

Joe Burton

Clinton Baum

Marion. Prised

John Soler

Donald Cumberworth

TAPS

Charles Busacker

Eugene Coombe

Richard "Mac" McLaughlin



391st B. Sqd. 18th B. Sqd.

7th B. Sqd. 4th B. Sqd.

34TH. BOMB GROUP

MENDLESHAM MEMORIES

DINGHY,
DINGHY,
DINGHY

This story was sent to me by a member of the 34th Bomb Group, 18th Sqd. It is a true story telling what actually happened to one of our Bomber Crews, on a mission over enemy territory and on the way home to Mendlesham, England.

INTRODUCTION

I would like to dedicate this story to the bomber crew of a B-17G Boeing Flying Fortress named, "Dinah-Mite". This crew and aircraft were stationed at the village of Mendlesham, Suffolk, England located 14 miles north of Ipswich, 83 miles north of London during World War II. They were part of the 34th Bomb Group, 18th Bomb Squadron, 3rd Air Division of the 8th Air Force of the United States Army Air Forces. I, Stephen Niatas was the flight engineer of this crew with the rank of Staff Sergeant.

We had successfully flown fourteen missions over Nazi Germany. At times the battle damage to our aircraft was severe but never enough to prevent us from returning to our base in England. This story is about our fifteenth mission in which our aircraft became missing in action.

BOMBER BASE

In the evening of April 4, 1945 there were a group of men gathered in front of the 18th Bomb Squadron Orderly Room reading the bulletin board. The names of the crews for tomorrow's mission over Germany were posted. I was among these men as I read the name of my crew scheduled for our fifteenth mission. It was as almost the same thing as reading one's name in the obituary column in a newspaper. The same depressed tenseness seemed to prevail among the group as each crew read its name from the roster.

It was a wet English morning that April 5, 1945 when the Charge of Quarters of the 18th Bomb Squadron made his way among the maze of huts to awake the bomber crews. At approximately 0130 he arrived at Hut 25 where my crew and I slept. He entered the hut to awake me. It was customary to awake the flight engineer, whose responsibility it was as ranking non-commissioned officer to awake the rest of the crew. I never was much of a problem to the charge of quarters to awake, since I have always been a light sleeper. The moment I heard him entering our hut I would rise and sit on the end of my bunk. That much could not be said about Staff Sergeant Jack Share, my radio operator, Sergeant Robert Lampey the ball turret gunner, Sergeant Albert Dinnes and Sergeant Lucius C. Morgan the armorer and tail gunner. As everyone agreed with me my boys were the best qualified sack artists in the whole United States Army Air Force. Getting them from the horizontal to the vertical was a major problem. After a great deal of effort and the exchange of some unorthodox language, this task was accomplished.

We all began our morning chores of washing, shaving and making our beds before leaving for breakfast. Eating before a mission was always an important ritual. One always seemed to eat like a prisoner who was partaking of his last meal before walking out to face the hangman's noose. In fact we all use to gorge ourselves. Then after chow we would all go to the 34th Bomb Group Chapel. The chaplain would conduct a small service to give us the spiritual strength we needed for the day's mission.

Then we went to the most important place a bomber crew attends before leaving for Fortress Germany, the bomb group briefing. One could feel the tension mounting as the crews assembled

in the large briefing room awaiting the 34th Bomb Group Commanding Officer. He was a full colonel and he would be accompanied by his executive staff of subordinate officers. The briefing would be conducted by him. That instant had arrived as a junior officer called attention and the whole assembly rose to acknowledge his presence. The cover of the giant map on the wall was lifted as the colonel announced the target for today was Unterschlvversbach, Nuremburg Germany. The specific strike was the railroad yards. This target was in the South-western corner of Germany near Austria. Take off time was 0500 hours. Our bomb load was six 500 lbs. demolition bombs, a maximum bomb load. The gas load was to be full capacity with not a gallon to spare for such a long trip. The pressure and tension on the bomb crew were enlarged manyfold by the last few statements. Many crews actually groaned out loud at their disapproval of today's effort. Perhaps I best explain why. A B-17G was a very dependable bomber under many conditions of operation. This was a maximum load and the hazards at take-off would be greater. Getting a heavy bomber airborne under normal conditions was a tricky undertaking and under this additional load, there would be a great deal of sweating in the cockpit before the engines, stressed to the breaking point, would get us off the ground. Even at this most men took it as just another job to be done by the famed 8th Air Force.

The group commander told us that the German Air Force fighters were to be light that day according to our air reconnaissance. Our fighter escort was to be the P-51 Mustang fighters of the 8th Air Force. The enemy flak enroute to the target and over the target was to be light to moderate. Let me tell you that was a relief. On many of my earlier missions the flak and fighters were so heavy that it was pure unadulterated hell.

Our weather officer said that the weather was to be as it was earlier this morning; rain and more rain. There were rain clouds all the way up to 20,000 feet and all the way in to the target and back. No relief in sight. That information went over like a lead balloon. It was bad enough fighting the Germans much less the weather elements of mother nature. The point of assembly was to be in France around Paris at 23,000 feet.

After briefing was over we would head for the Personal Equipment Building where each of us had a locker housing our personal flying equipment. We donned our electrically heated flying suits over which went our flight coveralls. Then we put on our heavy orlon pile lined flying suits with heavy flying boots. You would look just like a polar bear in size and you would move as quickly as a turtle. The weight of all this bulk was necessary to keep you warm at high altitudes. Before we leave the building we signed out a chest parachute. An amusing sign hung abruptly over the checkout counter which read, "We guarantee our work. If your parachute is defective do not hesitate to return it for a replacement". Some joke! Immediately outside the building trucks were waiting to transport the crews to the hard standing where our aircraft were deployed. Our B-17G, Dinah-Mite was at hard standing number 17. After a short ride in the truck we arrived. There sat our shining silver lady, a veteran of 14 missions, waiting for us in the wet, dim-lighted English dawn.

The moment we arrived every member of the crew went to the task of putting the final checks and touches to the already preprepared bomber. The bombs, gasoline and all equipment were worked and checked for many hours by the ground crews. Each gunner including myself went to the armament shop and checked out his 50 caliber machine guns. I had two in my Sperry Electro-Hydraulic Top Turret. I loaded my guns into the two machine gun casings and checked out my turret. Then I secured my turret for take off. I would always polish the plexiglass dome of my turret. Spots of dirt would obstruct my vision for sighting enemy fighters.

Then came a very important function of a flight engineer, the pre-flight inspection of the aircraft. When this was finished the Ground Crew Chief of our aircraft "Dinah-Mite" assisted me to warm up engines and test them. He was the top mechanic responsible for all maintenance of the aircraft. He supervised the many specialists who maintained the complex equipment of a bomber. After we ran up all four engines we shut them down. We called for the fuel truck to top off our fuel tanks. The fuel we had burnt up for the pre-flight had to be replaced. This was a maximum gas load mission so we would need every ounce of fuel to get home after we struck our target.

Then the crew and I relaxed to await the pilot, co-pilot, bombardier and navigator to arrive from their final briefing instructions. In a few moments they arrived, but the mission was still set to go off even though the weather was still socked in.

TARGET

At 0445 hours a green flare was shot into the air, the signal to start all aircraft engines. The weather was still foggy with a steady downpour of rain. We again preflighted

our engines and all our equipment to find them all A OK. We were ready for take-off. Then came the white flare and we taxied for our take-off position. At the green light from the tower we gunned the engines and off we were rolling down the runway airborne on our 15th mission over Nazi Germany.

It seems the odds are always against you from the time you leave the ground until you return safely to your home base. Sweating out mechanical failure, fighting off enemy fighter planes, enduring all the flak the enemy can throw you, then have mother nature with all her weather elements against you is a little more than one's nerves can bear. From take-off time until the second hour 0600 we had crossed the English Channel and were still climbing over France, flying blind completely on instruments. You could not see the hand in front of your face.

We finally came to the Rally Point and the visibility was still poor. There was no break in the weather. Instructions came over the radio to climb to 25,000 feet for better weather instead of 18,000 feet as had been prearranged. Finally at 25,000 feet over France the sun shone brightly -- we were above it all. It was cheerful and bright. We began looking for our lead ship to assemble our formation. In a few seconds we spotted the flaming colored red tails and red wing tips the painted identification of our 34th Bomb Group - the red ladies from hell, as the Eighth Air Force nicknamed us. We worked our way into formation. Our position was left wing off the lead aircraft. One turn around the Rally Point and we turned towards Germany and we were on our way.

In about twenty minutes our Navigator Britton informed us we were now over Germany. The weather had closed in again causing vapor trails from the slip stream of the B-17G-s. This made visibility very poor. We were at 28,000 feet now flying near blind; the temperature was at 30° below zero and the humidity caused the moisture to freeze on my top turret plexy glass dome. I saturated a cloth with a special liquid chemical defroster and applied it to the machine gun turret glass, but I could not get it to defrost. The ice was too thick. That of course was a dangerous condition for it rendered my battle station position useless against enemy fighter attack. Then over the aircrafts interphone I heard Sgt. Robert Lampey's voice advising us that his Ball turret was completely frozen. Bob was our crew's youngest member, turning 18 years old only a few days ago. By some miracle he was able to move the turret vertically and return into the aircraft. Otherwise he would have been trapped in the turret below. Believe me at this point this aircraft was no place for an atheist.

Our navigator, Flight Officer Harrison Britton, reported that we were nearing our target. Then in a few minutes we hit the I.P. Up to this point there were not any enemy fighters in sight; the bad weather kept them on the ground. Our fighter escort was doing an effective job flying above and under our formation. The enemy flak was as thick as the clouds over the enemy target. It looked like a Red and Black carpet of death as we approached it. The pilot called for bomb bay doors open; The Bombardier replied "Bomb bay doors open". At this point I eased further into my turret for more protection against the flak. I often would wish my steel flak helmet was large enough to envelope me completely. Of course it was only intended as head gear protection so I was out of luck. Flak was bursting all around us by now. Some of the bursts would come so close that the skin of the fuselage of our plane would flex like an oil can when one would depress it to lubricate a moving part. Another burst beneath us sent a jagged piece of metal through our nose section, knocking out our radio equipment and missing the navigator's head by a fine hair. It continued its flight through our aircraft until it hit a metal box below the pilot's seat, then it dropped to the floor. The weather below us was completely clouded over. Our bombing now had to be done electronically by radar. Our 34th bomb Group had two radar-equipped aircraft this day, which would enable us to toggle our bombs at the same instant the lead ship was dropping theirs. That moment arrived as the bombardier called bombs away. I checked the bomb bay and one of our 500 pound bombs had not been dropped. I notified the bombardier and he tried releasing it again, but without success. We closed our bomb bay doors and the 500 pound bomb was still hung up in our bomb bay. I checked the bomb more closely and found that the release mechanism was jammed and it was hanging nose down leaning on the right side bomb bay door. It was secured to the bomb rack by only one small wire. The formation turned on the D.P. and began its descent. Our only Radio Set in operation was our VHF. I should say it was not in complete operating condition since we could only receive and not send. This was in itself a real problem.

After a few hours of descending on course with the bomber formation we were down to about 1,000 feet above allied territory in France. Over France there was a ruling issued by the 8th Air Force Headquarters pertaining to hung-up bombs in Allied bomber aircraft. All aircraft with such a condition were to avoid the towns and cities in France in order to prevent the

accidental discharging of bombs on our allies. The instructions were to fly around all heavily populated areas. First before leaving the formation we had to secure permission from our bomb group leader. This seemed impossible because our sending set or our radio was damaged and out of order. Our radio operator, Staff Sergeant Jack Share, came to our rescue. He used his high wattage Autosyn Lamp to signal the aircraft next to us, which in turn relayed the message to our formation leader. He in turn gave us permission to leave the formation over our VHF radio. Our orders were to stay in sight of the formation. We were to zigzag around all the French towns. Then we were to drop our bomb in the North Sea and proceed alone to our home base. Shortly after the maneuver was being executed many times over we were informed by the navigator that the french coastline was sighted. All this time the navigator was trying to pin point our position but our zigzag maneuvers prevented him from doing it. He finally did so and instructed the pilot to change course to a new heading. He explained tha we were too close to Dunkerque for comfot. This was a city was was an isolated pocket of resistance held by the Germans. The pilot, Lt. George Mehling corrected his course and of course I felt relieved.

ATTACK

All Hell Broke Loose! The German ground batteries from Dunkerque were firing at us. Our position was not, as we had assumed, to the right of Dunkerque, but smack over it. Twenty Milimeter Cannon coupled with Twelve Milimeter Machine Gun shells peppered our aircraft. The whole aircraft was punctured to assume the appearance of a Swiss Cheese. Our flight controls were knocked out. The wing section aft of the main fuel tanks was on fire. The metal skin of the wings surface was bubbling like a pot of hot water from the intense heat of the gasoline fed fire.

The pilot reported that the only controls he had of the aircraft were the throttle controls of the four engines. They by some miracle were still operating perfectly. Everywhere I turned, light was coming into the aircraft from the severe battle damage.

I released my grip on the armour plating. It was located on the back of the pilot's flight chair. I had grasped for it in the exciting moments of the enemy attack. I grabbed a fire extinguisher and entered the bomb bay area in order to fight the fire. The fire was spreading to the fuselage. I was unable to do an effective job through the small opening afforded me by the construction of the aircraft. I soon gave up because the smoke and heat were too intense. Upon entering the radio room I saw the radio operator slumped over his radio table. Jack Share had the lower portion of his leg shot off and he was in great pain. The bombardier was slumped over on the floor of the radio room. I checked his condition and found that he was dead from a wound in the abdomen. He had caught a bullet that killed him instantly. The bombardier had come to the radio room after he had set up the hung bomb to be dropped in the North Sea. Just then the tail gunner, Sergeant Lou Morgan, and the waist gunner, Sergeant Albert Dinnis, entered the radio room. I quickly handed them the First Aid Kit to give aid to Sergeant Jack Share. I left and returned through the smoke filled bomb bay to the flight deck. The wing was afire and the fire was working towards the main fuel tanks. The pilot asked me what I thought of the battle damage. I said, "We better get out of here quick". He said, "That is my decision too". The pilot, Lt. George Mehling hit the emergency bell in three short rings and calling over the interphone, "Dinghy, Dinghy, Dinghy, prepare to ditch the aircraft".

DITCHING

I prepared my station for ditching and I returned to the radio room. I took my ditchng position. In a B-17G all crew members except the pilot and co-pilot take ditching positions in the radio room. Their emergency exit is through the main escape hatch in the ceiling of the radio room. Before I sat in my position I pulled the release levers to jetison the escape hatch cover. In a few seconds we felt the first impact of the aircraft striking the crest of the waves. Then came the second and hardest impact as Dinah-Mite settled in the North Sea a prelude to her doom of a watery grave. My head struck the bulk head on the last impact and I was stunned. I began to regain my senses when the cold salty water poured over me. I jumped to my feet and lunged for the life raft release to jetison the two life rafts or dinghys as the R. A. F. called them.

With assistance of my ball turret gunner Sergeant Rober Lampey, I made it out of the top escape hatch on to the right wing. When I landed on the wing I noticed that our life raft was

beginning to drift away. Right behind me in a second was Bob Lampey. I ordered him after the life rfe raft or else we would perish with the aircraft. He dove in after it. I called to Sergeant Jack Share to pull himself out, but he said he could not. Just then as the sea swell receded, the large crack in the fuselage opened like the jagged jaws of an alligator. I saw my only opportunity to remove him from the doomed aircraft and with a rapid fire motion I extracted him from its jagged jaws. This was a strike of luck. Lifting the dead weight of a wounded man from the escape hatch was an impossible task. I then looked back at the ball turret gunner as he fought the cold waves trying to return the life raft to the aircraft, only to realize he was not getting closer with the raft to the aircraft so we could board it. He was exhausted. I pushed the wounded man into the sea and followed him into our icy bath. I carried him in a chest carry and I swam about 25 feet to the drifting life raft. When we both arrived at the life raft I noticed the ball turret gunner trying to lift himself aboard without any success. He was exhausted from the struggle to keep the raft from floating away. I told him and the radio man to hold on to the life raft while I climbed aboard. I then pulled both of them aboard. Bob and I broke out the paddles and propelled ourselves towards the rear of the aircraft to rendezvous with the other life raft. Just then I spotted the waist gunner, Albert Dinnis, who was very late in coming top side. He waited on the wing a second and then he jumped into the water. We noticed that he had inflated his Mae West. The waves floated him towards the tail horizontal stabilizer where he took hold. The jagged metal protruding from the torn parts of the aircraft prevented us from coming close enough to be of any assistance to him. We called to him to push himself away in order that we could paddle to him without further endangering our lives. He did not respond. He seemed frozen in a death grip to the tail section of the sinking aircraft. On the aft side of the aircraft we spotted the other raft containing the tail gunner Lou Morgan, the pilot George Mehling and Harrison Brittan the navigator. The plane remained afloat about 30 seconds. Then Dinah-Mite lifted its tail like a whale preparing to dive to the depths as it slipped away carrying with it the waist gunner Albert Dinnis as he clung to the tail section. Within its flight deck were the pinned-in body of the co-pilot and the dead navigator on the radio room floor. Finally there was a loud gasp as the searushed in to fill the remaining air space of the dying aircraft, slipping down to its watery grave in Davy Jones Locker.

We paddled our rafts towards one another as we shook from the cold exposure to our new North Sea environment. We secured our rafts together in order not to be separated in the vast cold barrens of the sea. Our morale was finally boosted as we noticed a B-17 bomber circling over our position. It was probably sending our position to air sea rescue over its radio. At least that is what we prayed for.

In about a half hour after we had ditched we heard a single engine aircraft approaching. It sounded like one of our own and it was. The pilot began shooting flares from our flare pistol. The pistol was part of our emergency kit. The aircraft spotted our red flares and began circling over us. It was a P-47 Republic Fighter from air sea rescue. It dipped its wings to inform us that he had sighted our position. Boy! were we happy. The pilot of the aircraft kept us in sight by dropping smoke and dye bombs. The radio operator was in pain again. We gave him another shot of morphine and he immediately began to relax. In fact we gave him a piece of chewing gum and he chewed it as if nothing was the matter. His wound was not bleeding any longer. The cold salt water of the North Sea had stopped the bleeding. This was amazing but true. This single factor would insure his survival if only we could be rescued from the sea.

About fifteen minutes had passed when overhead there were two P-47's and three R. A. F. Spitfire Fighters. They began to circle our rafts when one of the Spitfire aircraft developed engine trouble. It was only about 100 feet above us as the pilot of the craft tried in vain to regain altitude. The plane rolled over on its back and dove into the sea killing the pilot. This accident added to our depression and growing feat that our destiny was now to be a slow lonely watery death. We rowed our rafts to the spot where the aircraft had entered the water in search of the pilot. There was no sign of life anywhere. He too had joined the fate of our crew members. A berth in the icy tomb of the North Sea.

An hour passed with no incident except the continual use of the rubber buckets for bailing out the sea from within our life rafts. Suddenly we all heard the rear of a twin engine aircraft as it approached our position. As it came in sight we were able to identify it as a P. B. Y. Catalina or the Cat as the men of the air sea rescue squadrons called her. It was an amphibious aircraft capable of making a sea landing. The sea was too rough with its high swells for a safe landing. It flew over us several times, almost close enough to reach out and touch the low flying craft. Finally it dropped a note to us on a small miniature parachute. Unfortunately it sank out of sight before we could reach it and retrieve it.

RESCUE

Five hours had passed. The cold was getting more intense. Our strength was sapped by the exposure. Hope was replaced by despair. With night slowly approaching only death seemed the inevitable. Life sprang into our beaten bodies as with joy we sighted the P. T. Boat of the R. A. F. AIR SEA RESCUE on the bleak horizon. It sped towards our bobbing rafts, guided by a P-47 of Air Sea Rescue flying above it. They pulled along side us and assisted all six of us aboard the P. T. Boat. We were so weak we could not lift our own weight. They immediately sank our life rafts with bullets from their sub-machine guns. We were literally carried below to the crews quarters. We were given hot soup to drink and a large shot of rum to warm our spent bodies. The ship's doctor went to work on our radio operator and he later told us that he was in good condition considering his wound. We had done a good job of first aid. The boat crew gave us dry warm clothing to wear and a comfortable bunk bed to lie down.

The P. T. Boat did not waste much time leaving the rescue area since the crew had been fired upon by the German Shore Batteries several times before. The boat seemed to be flying it traveled at such great speed. The trip took about three hours to reach the port of Ostend, Belgium. The vibration of the boat as it traveled at high speeds was so great that it made the trip seem like an endless journey. Of course we were not exactly relaxing tourists. Our condition was not at best after the narrow escape from the jaws of death earlier that day. When we arrived at Ostend, Belgium A British Army Zone, we were sped by ambulance to a hospital. Our radio man Staff Sergeant Jack Share was taken to the British General Hospital in Ostend. We went to a small Field Hospital. The radio man had his lower part of his leg amputated. All we had done to us was to be treated for shock and exposure.

RETURN TO BASE

After about ten days of treatment we were shipped by U. S. Army truck to Brussels, Belgium to an R. A. F. Air Base. Thereafter spending the night we boarded a C-47 cargo plane for the trip back to England. When we arrived at our base in Ipswich, England we all felt relieved. Our arrival was unexpected. In fact we had been listed as missing in action - presumed dead. The British authorities forgot to advise our London headquarters that six of us were survivors. This oversight was corrected by our Squadron Commander. He phoned base headquarters and had the order changed.

We were ordered to the base hospital for a complete physical. After one look at us the Flight Surgeon decided that we needed more rest. They sent us to the rest home in Bournemouth, England. It was a pleasant two week stay. The food was good. The sea relaxing and the many other pleasures afforded by the seashore exceptional. Time passed quickly.

On the 26th of April we returned to our base for active duty. We found that we were taken off of that duty status and now we were non-combatant. In a way we were glad. We had had enough. After a couple of weeks I was assigned to fly as engineer on an aircraft that was to be tested. It has an engine overhaul and major repairs. I evidently performed well and in a few days we were informed that we had been assigned four new crew members. We were to begin retraining as a combat team. We began flying each day with our new co-pilot, bombardier, radio operator and waist gunner. Finally the war ended and we were assigned to fly food missions to the Dutch populace. Shortly after that we flew French P. W. out of Lenz, Austria to return them to Paris, France.

CLUB MEMBERSHIP

Our Squadron Commander gave us applications to file for an international honor society

composed of crews that ditched and saved their lives by using the emergency life rafts, or Dingy' as the British called them. The club was named the Gold Fish Club. We wore an emblem on our uniforms composed of a black field with a gold fish above two blue ripples. The ripples signified an ocean wave. They also gave us a membership card that was made of plastic in case we ditched again in order not to soil the card.

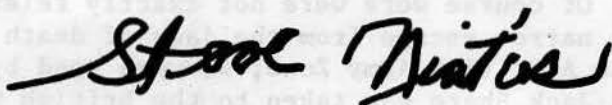
The saving of our lives by getting out of the aircraft in the shortest possible time certainly proved out the air force theory; a well trained crew will be a live crew. Speed and know-how gave us the method to save our lives.

AWARD

One summer day in 1948 my family and I were sitting on the front porch. We were enjoying the comfort of the cool shade afforded by the cover of the porch when a U. S. Army Air Force staff car pulled up in front of the house. A Sergeant came over to me and asked if I was Staff Sergeant Stephen Niatas. I said that civilian Stephen Niatas was the only one that lived here. We both laughed and he then began to explain. The War Department had uncovered the fact that they had not given me an award for the action of April 5, 1945. It should have been given to me prior to my discharge on November 14, 1945, in Roswell, New Mexico at the Roswell Army Air Force Base from which I was separated from the service.

He signaled a Major in the staff car to come over to the porch. The Major repeated the reason for their visit. He read the presidential order signed by President Harry S. Truman. They were awarding me the Soldier's Medal. He asked me if I wanted the presentation at a formal review of the troops at Fort Dix, New Jersey. I did not. I requested that it be presented to me at home with my immediate family to be the only ones present.

About a month later the presentation was made to me for saving the life of my radio operator and other crew members on April 5, 1945. It was certainly a moment I shall always remember.



-STEPHEN NIATAS

From the collection of:

Joseph K Marks

Pilot, 4th Sq., Crew No. 12, April - Aug 1944