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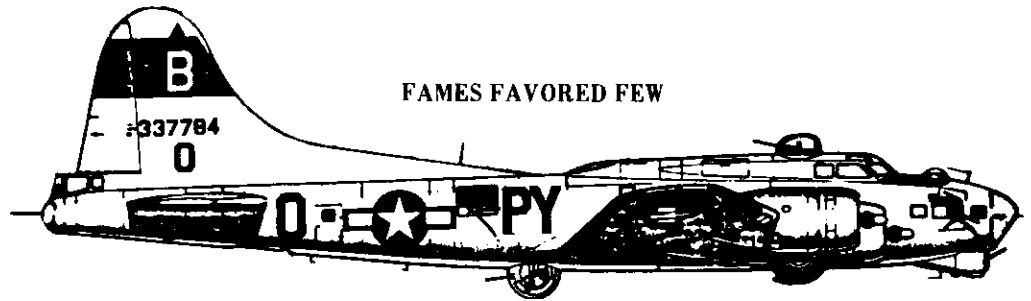
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THE ENEMY UP CLOSE

BY William B. Post

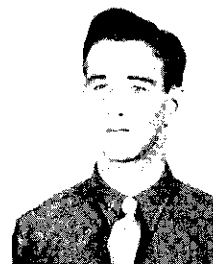
PART II The Phantoms

The brave men flying missions out of England in B-17's well knew and feared the arms of the enemy: the terror of the yellow-nosed 109's and the JU-88's sitting outside our firing range and lobbing 20mm's into us. The high flying FW 190 and the super fast ME 262 jets screamed in at us in an aggressive, disciplined and determined manner.

It never occurred to me to wonder about the enemy as people. What made those faceless, nameless phantoms tick? Were they as scared as I? Had they homes and loved ones they would rather be with? In a word, were they human? I was soon to find out.

The Jackals Howl

On our September 13, 1944 trip to Merseburg, I was blown out of a B-17 and had a nightmarish descent by chute. I found myself all alone and sitting badly wounded in the middle of Germany. I had landed in a strip of trees between large plowed fields. The Germans were searching for me. Their yelling and shouting sounded like a turkey farm. A huge hulk of a man with a crew cut and baggy pants found me. He shouted to the pack and they all came running. All were civilians and carried a pitchforks and clubs. The huge man, who seemed to be the leader, carried a pistol. His hand was shaking. I was amused to notice they were all shaking. He grabbed me by the chute harness and yelled, "Rusky? Rusky?". My head bobbed back and forth as he shook me. I didn't know what he was talking about but he seemed to want an answer. I said yes and he hit me in the jaw. I realized that I had given the wrong answer, so I said "No no Rusky." He then asked "Anglais?". I finally figured out that he wanted to know my nationality. I thought "Anglais" meant American so I tried yes again. He stood up and said something to the pack. They started picking up large stones. They formed a circle and closed in on me. Their intentions were obvious.



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MRS VIVIAN POST JR. ★★
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THE SECRETARY OF WAR DESIRES ME TO EXPRESS HIS DEEP REGRET THAT YOUR HUSBAND TECHNICALSERGEANT WILLIAM H. POST JR. HAS BEEN REPORTED MISSING IN ACTION SINCE THIRTEEN SEPTEMBER OVERGERMANY IF FURTHER DETAILS OR OTHER INFORMATION ARE RECEIVED YOU WILL BE PROMPTLY NOTIFIED.
J. A. HILD, MAJ, ADJUTANT GENERAL.

They were going to finish me off with rocks. (I found out later on that a fighter plane had strafed their town the day before killing thirty school children.) The civilian jackals probably killed more downed airmen than the military. Although, if the shoe had been on the other foot, who knows?

The Green Knight Arrives

A soldier burst through the circle and straddled me. He held a rifle with a bayonet. He swung it around pointing it menacingly at the circle. He started yelling at them in clipped German. The pack seemed reluctant to move. It was a sticky situation and he had a worried look on his face.

The pain from my wounds was fast becoming unbearable. While he was busy with the crowd, I took a morphine syrette from the little pack on my harness and was trying to stick it in my left arm with my left hand. The training films said that you stick it in your arm. I later found I could have stuck it anywhere. It was impossible. The soldier had finally gotten the pack to move back and noticed what I was trying to do. He knocked it from my hand and shook his finger in my face. "Nein, nein," he said. I guess he thought I was trying to kill myself.

More soldiers arrived with a horse and wagon. They heaved me

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in like a sack of flour. They drove me back over the plowed fields. It was the worst ride I ever had!

The Free Freak Show

They took me to a little town outside Leipzig. They carried me down into a cellar of a large house and put me on a table. An elderly doctor and a cute nurse in a white uniform showed up. The only clothes that were left on me were the chute harness, my brown flying pants, and my underdrawers. How all the rest were blown off me from under the chute harness I'll never know. They stripped me naked as a jay bird and started bandaging my wounds. The huge crew cut man showed up again. It seems that he was the mayor and this was his town. The little nurse pointed at my arm and said "Kaputt". "Do you mean amputate?" I said as I made a sawing motion on my arm. She said, "Ja, kaputt." Had she understood my question? She had me worried.

It seemed the mayor was taking credit for my capture. He had the whole town, consisting of mostly women and children, coming in one door and going out the other. It was either natural curiosity or a ploy to put me ill at ease with my nakedness. I learned rule one. You must beat them at their own game. I began to notice that some women had gotten in the line several times. It was time for the "embarasee" to embarrass the "embarassor". I spread my legs and let it all hang out as I smiled and waved to them. I was learning the game fast.

At first, anyone who entered or left snapped to and shouted "Hiel Hitler" with a stiff arm. As time went by it deteriorated to a limp wrist and a mumbled "Hiel Hit..."

Telling The Players Without A Program

A new and dangerous man drifted in. He was short, wore gold rimmed glasses and looked like Peter Lorre's Mister Moto. He placed a revolver an inch from my head. He also spoke English. His voice was low and his words were clipped. "I am from the Gestapo." He warned "Do not try to escape. For you the war is over." It was laughable, I couldn't even stand up! He was a dangerous man for his pistol didn't shake.

One more player entered the scene in a funny looking uniform. He presented himself as the police chief of Leipzig. He also was on the short side but he seemed more friendly. He discovered my escape kit that we carried in our flying suit pants. He also found a cork with a fishhook stuck in it. (I had planned should I be shot down, to live off fish as I made my escape. The best laid plans always go astray.) The Gestapo man grabbed the hook and cork. "What is this?" he shouted. It was obvious he thought it was some kind of secret weapon. "It's a fishhook and cork, and what does kaputt mean?" He smiled a thin smile and said "Broken or finished." I still didn't know what the nurse meant.

The chief spread out the contents of the kit. I was curious because I hadn't seen the insides before. It contained maps, three kinds of money, a compass, benzedrine, chocolate and a pack of gum. The chief offered me a stick of gum. I refused. The Gestapo man held the fishhook and cork in front of my face and screamed "What is this used for?" He was getting excited. "For fishing," I said as calmly as I could. "Go ahead have a slice of gum" said the chief. I realized he was a gum addict but wanted me to chew first in case it was poisoned. I learned rule two. If they give you something, be wary.

The whole room snapped to; their arms shot out and a chorus of "Heil Hitlers" rang out. An officer of importance breezed in. He was a good looking man graying at the temples. His uniform was immaculate and covered with silver braid. The brim of his hat and his boots sparkled. He was followed by an aide carrying a big book. The aide put the book on the table, opened it and stepped back. The officer shoved the women out and turn-

ed to me. The room became quiet as a church. He asked me my name, rank and serial number. I gave it to him and he wrote it in the big book. He asked me a couple more questions about my plane and group. I said, "Sorry sir I'm not allowed to give that information." He said, "Good soldier" and walked out. His aide snapped the book shut and followed. The people in the room breathed a sigh of relief, me included! I thought there would be more. I was soon to discover there would be more! I had learned rule three. It's okay to be afraid as long as the enemy didn't know it. I also learned rule four. Respect for military courtesy would be returned.

After he left, the room started buzzing again. The Gestapo man asked me for the umpteenth time what the cork was for. I asked him if his gun was loaded. He told me to see for myself and he handed me the weapon. Realizing what he had done he immediately grabbed the pistol back. He struck it near my temple. "Do not try to escape," he roared. It seems the enemy had some clunkers in it.

They carried me to what they called an ambulance. Its walls were blood splattered and it looked more like a meat wagon. It was also full of flies. The chief climbed in alongside me still offering me a stick of gum. He finally dropped the pack on the floor. The ambulance had a bell that clanged and we were off to check into the "Rat Motel." But that's another story.

COMMANDER OF 446TH TAKES LAST FLIGHT



Retired Air Force Col. Edward J. O'Donnell, 81, of Arlington, VA, a former staff member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, died 26 November 1985 in Georgetown Hospital, Washington, D.C. He served in the Air Force 28 years and was a veteran of World War II and the Korean War. He commanded the 36 Air Service Squadron which was redesignated the 446th Sub Depot Group. He and his unit joined the 92nd at Alconbury and remained with the Group until the end of hostilities. He received the Bronze Star, Soldier's Medal and Croix de Guerre. He served on the staff of the Joint Chiefs at the time of his retirement. Our sympathies go to this wife, Lillian.