

RECOLLECTIONS

Dear Col. Kirsner:

Just received your March, 1981 "92nd Bombardment Group News" and found it most interesting especially the story of Gene Wiley's crew, their last mission and their capture in Germany. I am looking forward to the continued story in your next issue. I guess I was lucky to be flying with the 407th Bomb Group in 1944 instead of 1943. By that time we had air superiority and seldom saw a German fighter plane, and I never had a direct attack in all my 30 missions with the 2 crews with which I flew.

My wife was rummaging through some old back and white negatives last week, and she discovered the one of the original B-17 Combat Crew that I trained with at McDill Field, Tampa, Florida. We ferried a B-17 overseas from Hunter Field, Savannah, Georgia to Nuts Corners, North Ireland with stops at Mitchell Field, Long Island, New York; Dow Field, Bangor, Maine; Goose Bay, Labrador and Keflavik, Iceland. We were naive greenhorns as believed that we would fly the new aluminium colored B-17-G into combat. Our ball turret gunner Sgt. John Mortimer who was a fairly good amateur artist decorated the new plane with a replica of petty girl model and printed the first names of each of our wives and girl friends at each position on the outside of the aircraft. After we landed at Nuts Corners, North Ireland, we never saw that aircraft again. Like all B-17s that were delivered to the 8th Air Force as replacements, it had to be modified to operate efficiently in the ETO, but we didn't know that at the time. From Ireland we were put on a boat for England and then after attending an indoctrination school at Bovington and a gunnery school at the Wash, we were assigned to the 92nd Bomb Group, 407th Bomb Squadron.

We were outfitted with heated suits which we had never heard of during our brief training as a crew at McDill which consisted of about 100 hours of navigational flights, gunnery flights, and one formation flight. Being the new crew and the low ones on the totem pole, we had to stand by in the supply room while the crews assigned to the mission were briefed just in case anyone became ill or didn't make it back from Rushdon or Wellingboro in time or in shape to fly. I remember that morning very well. It was May 7, 1944. I was dozing on the floor of the supply room where all the heated suits were stored. It was dark outside. The briefing rooms were in the building across the way from the supply building across the way. Finally the door of the briefing room building opened and a couple of worried looking guys came out ahead of the crowd and entered the supply building to check out their heated suits and other gear. One of them said with a worried look on his face "God damn, it's Big-B today". None of us knew what Big-B was so one of us asked where it was, and they looked at us like we were kidding and finally said

Berlin. After a while the briefing building was emptied and the supply building was filled with crew members checking out and donning their flying gear and being checked out on the flight mission roster. Finally after a certain time came and there were some missing positions on some of the crews, the supply Sgt. received a call from operations office to replace those missing with an equivalent replacement from the stand-by crew members. So I was one of the lucky members of the stand-by crew whose name was called.

I checked out my gear and donned it, was given the pilot's name, Lt. Hanson, and the aircraft number and told where to catch a GI truck to the aircraft. When I climbed in the back of the first GI truck I could find after giving the driver my aircraft number, one of the men who was already in the dark rear of the truck asked me what crew I was flying with. I said Hanson's crew. Then one other guy who couldn't see my face in the dark said is that you Joe. I didn't know anyone by that name or anyone for that matter so I said no and he introduced himself (have since forgotten the name) saying that he was one of the waist gunners on Hanson's crew. I was the other that day as Joe didn't get back from town on time or something. Then he asked the \$64 question "how many missions did I have?". When I told him none, he said "no, Joe you can't do this to me". However we did get through that mission although the flak was very heavy over Berlin and the coast of Holland. We flew 28,000 feet over the target and the prime concern of our Bombardier seemed to be that no one passed out due to lack of oxygen, so we had very frequent interphone oxygen checks. We expected enemy fighters around the target, but we never saw any. We had P-47 escort on the way to the target and I didn't expect to see any friendly fighters as far away from England as Berlin so I almost fired at some P-51 Mustangs who were flying around near the target as they looked somewhat like ME-109s. According to the AFN News that night after we returned, the Luftwaffe claimed poor visibility was the reason why they didn't show.

As luck would have it, the next day our whole crew went on our first mission together back to Berlin again. There were many bombers in the air that day, visibility was clear, we were one of the first groups over the target, the flak was very intense, and the aircraft just in front of us (being the newest crew we were flying tail-end Charlie) suffered a direct hit behind the cockpit in the vicinity of the upper turret, it was Lt. Thomas R. Johnson's crew. We discovered when we returned to base that his engineer suffered a direct hit from a piece of shrapnel in the head and was dead on arrival at the base hospital. It was the first of many rough missions that the Johnson crew had early on.

The next day, May 8, 1944, my regular crew that I had flown overseas with, Koehler's crew, went back to Berlin again on our

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Return membership blank to: Sheldon W. Kirsner, 2603 Cathedral Dr., St. Louis, MO 63129
 Make ALL checks payable to: 92nd Bomb Group 1/11 CCRC Corp.

LAST CHANCE '81 DUES

NAME _____	(Nickname) _____	Wife's First Name _____
_____ TRIANGLE B LAPEL PIN-TIE TAC	Address _____	
_____ \$5.00 members	City _____ State _____ Zip _____	
_____ \$6.50 non-members	92nd Unit _____ Squadron _____	Dates Assigned _____
_____ MEMORIAL CONTRIBUTION		
	_____ \$10.00 1981 DUES	POW CAPTURE DATA
	_____ "ROUTE AS BRIEFED"	Date _____
	_____ \$ 5.00 members	Place _____
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PLEASE PRINT INFORMATION

Recollections *continued*

first mission together. It was a perfect day and visibility was very good flak was heavy at the coast and over the target, but we saw nothing but American fighters on the way over, at the target, and on our return. We were among the first groups over the target, and read reports in the Stars & Stripes the next day that other groups over Berlin later were under heavy fighter attack and between 20 and 30 bombers were lost. Those were my only missions to Berlin. About half of my 30 missions were over France and the Low Countries.

Only, the airport at Paris and Calais although it was just across the Channel was perhaps the roughest mission as far as casualties outside of the big German targets like Schweinfurt, Cologne and Mannheim in the Ruhr Valley, the synthetic oil refinery at Merseburg which was the roughest mission that the 407th Bomb Squadron ever flew. I believe 7 out of 9 crews were shot down. (Page 178 of "The Route As Briefed" verifies it). That mission was September 11, 1944. Fortunately, I was at a rest home at Worcester on Severn, the Lord Barclay Estate when that mission was flown. However, the only member of my original crew, Capt. George Koehler's crew, S/Sgt. John J. Mortimer was flying with the lead aircraft crew piloted that day by 1st Lt. Neil S. Holbrook which crash landed in France. Mortimer was killed on that mission. He was the only one on my original crew who was killed, and unfortunately he was an only child. We have kept in contact with his parents all these years. We just saw them last year in Florida. 2nd Lt. Harold Wallace and his crew were also shot down on that day and taken prisoner. I had just been introduced to Lt. Wallace a week before the mission by a Sgt. Smith from the orderly room staff because during a conversation I mentioned that I was from Ithaca, New York, and Sgt. Smith mentioned that the pilot of a new crew in the squadron was also from Ithaca.

However, I never knew Lt. Harold Wallace in civilian life although he knew a cousin of mine. When I completed my missions a month or so later and returned to the states, I looked up his parents, and we talked at length. They were especially worried about him being a prisoner of war as they were Jewish and had heard of the poor treatment of Jews at the hand of the Nazis. I assured that their son was a prisoner of war and not a German Jew and not a political prisoner and probably in the hands of the Wehrmacht not the SS Storm Troopers and the war would be over soon as the allies, at the time I saw them, were at the German border. I don't know how I had the nerve to tell them that, as I was only guessing. I hadn't intended to see them at all. I happened to be visiting my parents in Ithaca, and I went to an ice cream plant where I had worked at one time to see some friends and maybe get a free dish of ice cream, and the boss just casually asked me if I ever met any one from Ithaca

while I was overseas and then I mentioned Harold Wallace and before I could say anything, he was on the phone to his parents and they were down to the ice cream plant to see me before I could finish my dish of freezer, fresh, free, ice cream. It was a meeting that I would rather not have had at the time. However, it turned out real fine and Harold Wallace returned from POW camp in real good shape, and sometime after I was discharged in September 1945 and working in Ithaca, he stopped by my house and personally thanked me for seeing his parents and relieving their anxiety. I have never seen or talked to Harold Wallace since, but I hope to this July when I return to Ithaca for the 45th reunion of my high school graduation class and perhaps I can at the same time add him to the list of 92nd Bomb Group members or at least get him on the roster. I understand from friends and acquaintances that he took over his father's junkyard business after the war and expanded it into a steel company and I understand he may be one of the wealthiest men in Ithaca today.

I am enclosing a check and a picture of the crew I was assigned to in the states and flew about half of my missions with.

Sincerely,
John L. Knight



Rear L to R: 1) Vincent Lorenzi (deceased), Engineer - Sgt., 2) "Swede" Sorenson, Bombadier - 2nd Lt., 3) George Koehler, Pilot - 2nd Lt., 4) Jack Routh, Co-Pilot - 2nd Lt., 5) Edwin Kuebler, Navigator - 2nd Lt.

Front L to R: 1) Arthur Senf, Tail Gunner - Sgt., 2) Brown, Waist Gunner - Sgt. 3) Wm. Parks, Radio Operator - Sgt., 4) John L. Knight, Waist Gunner, Radio Operator - Sgt., 5) John Mortimer, Jr., Ball Turrent Gunner - Sgt., deceased (killed in action), Merseburg, September 11, 1944

March 22, 1944? Taken at McDill Field, Tampa, Florida.

488 BG 3:22 4HR 130:37 Combat Crew 20

407th Bomb Squad, 92nd Bomb Group, Podington, England.

92ND BOMBARDMENT GROUP 1/11 CCRC

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