

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 black 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 aluminum 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

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_____ \$10.00 1981 DUES		POW CAPTURE DATA
_____ "ROUTE AS BRIEFED"		Date _____
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