

Interview with LP Johnson, by phone, 16 July 1978

Snuff Smith was a replacement. James H. Hobbs, his regular ball turret gunner, had completed his tour on the previous mission, the second EM to do so. Eugene Pollock, his navigator, had also completed his tour.

"I could see that Smith was not the average replacement. He was older, and I recommended him for promotion soon after I had had a chance to observe him."

On May 1 he performed magnificently.

It was a nice day, with little opposition, until we hit Brest.

"It seems odd to be going northeast," LP said to Bob McCallum, his copilot.

Everyone had been pretty relaxed, but once in sight of land the tightened up the formation.

The lead fired flares as we came in over Brest, and got the appropriate answer. Gunners later said that the boats they saw in the entrance to the harbor they thought looked like flak boats.

Only when they were well into the harbor, at 500 feet, did the flak guns open up. Then their tight formation became a hazard.

We did a 180 to the right, just trying to keep in the air, staying close to Pappy Check.

"I knew we had been hit and had a serious problem. The plane was on fire and not flying well."

Told Fahrenhold to get a fire extinguisher.

"Lieutenant, I can't go back there," said Fahrenhold.

Both McCallum and I looked back through the bomb bay and could see the flames. Fahrenhold sprayed his extinguisher from the door, but did not go through the bomb bay.

Our plane wanted to climb. Both of us pushed hard on the yoke, and then put our knees against it to hold the plane level. The plane did not start to disintegrate, so I didn't think about bailing out.

It didn't take us more than half an hour to fly to England. As we reduced power, the plane settled down, and we began a normal let down, and then could see a runway straight ahead. We flew right into it. Landing was normal. Autopilot did not work so we flew it all the way. Only after we had stopped did the mid section begin to settle.

Johnson Interview / 2

This was LP's last mission. TWO OF CREW had finished earlier, as at Thanksgiving, 1942, he had been selected to go to London and Buckingham Palace, representing second lieutenants, for a American Thanksgiving dinner, given by the King and Queen. Purportedly the first shipment of Thanksgiving turkeys had been given to the British for use in children's homes and hospitals. He missed a raid, thus Hobbs and Pollock finished it before he did.

BOB MC CALLUM

Had a bad elbow, arm wouldn't straighten out. Unable to pass US flying physical, so enlisted in RCAF and became a pilot officer. Went to England. In early 1943 transferred to USAAC, and then to the 306th.

Later wrote LP about his flying on a mission and shooting down a German fighter plane. Crew had already shot down some planes and was in trouble. German fighter came up and was flying formation with them. McCallum pulled engineer out of top turret, and then shot down German fighter. There was a big flap over it.

At Westover AB, combat conditions were simulated and only one crew per sq uadron got a pass at night. Some p-47 pilot friends from Windsor Locks came down to see LP. He went back to town with them, and while on bus it stopped, and JW Wilson and his wife got on the bus. JW didn't say anything, but at next day's squadron meeting he announced that LP was confined to base for the duration of the war, and issued an order on it.

JW had a habit of frequently reminding miscreants of such acts. And he kept bringing it up to LP. In England one night everyone was on leave except LP. Wilson came in to borrow a pair of pinks, and said something about leaving for town in 10 minutes. When he came back LP was not ready, and told Wilson that he couldn't go because he was confined for the duration of the war.

JW said, "O, Hell, forget it." They went to London together and became close friends. Later, when LP was bak in the states working with a new combat group, Wilson had him transferred to Ardmore, OK, so he wouldn't have to go back to combat.

Dec. 12, 1978

Dear Russell,

I have not been able to get any line on the present location of B.C.(Barney)Bryant.

As far as Pan American is concerned, he was employed from June 1945 untill July 1969. He left the company without any pension benifits and without any forwarding address.

I have asked many people but no one seems to know where he went. Sorry I was not able to help.

Thank you very much for what you are doing for the 306th, I wish you good luck in your efforts.

I extend to you my best wishes for a Very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!

Sincerely,



L.P. Johnson

L. P. Johnson, Jr. Pilot 7 May 1943

Red lights on gas supply went on over Brest.
Fired recognition flares and were answered.
Fired on by two groups of flak barges, did a 180 and got out of there.
Intercom out

Fahrenhold started back, Johnson grabbed him and said "Take a fire extinguisher with you."
Fahrenhold opened bomb bay door, and then said he couldn't go because of flames. Johnson looked back and could only see flames.

Aircraft became very difficult to fly.

McCallum and Johnson had to force wheel forward and hold it with their knees to maintain level attitude. Plane wanted to climb.

Johnson and McCallum were sure the plane was going down.

Johnson didn't fear death.

Flew straight in to land, and couldn't have made a pattern.

Gibson said, on being taken out of the plane, "Get me a Purple Heart."

Snuffy was very conscientious before the flight. That morning Johnson had recommended Smith for another stripe.

1340 over Brest

FW 190s, heavy flak, 500 to 700 feet.

Heading 142°, 1410 288°, out of Brest at 1405

Roller injured. Fire in tail, oxygen line severed, burking. Roller bent wires with hands to stop flow of oxygen and cut off fire.

Landed 1517 at Predenoock (just a runway, no operational field).

Ferried in 040 by Capt. Riordan to Portreath, and back to Thurleigh
2 May in 040

17 November 1975

Mr. Lewis P. Johnson, Jr.
131 Tullamore Road
Garden City, New York

Dear Mr. Johnson:

After some searching I have finally located you, and I hope you will kindly entertain some of my questions.

One of the accompanying sheets outlines my project and just what I am about.

In your case, I am very interested in your story on the May 1, 1943, mission to St. Nazaire.

I have a great deal of information about Snuffy Smith, and at the Eighth Air Force Reunion in Miami Beach I talked extensively with Bill Fahrenhold. Thus, I have two viewpoints that are somewhat opposed on the entire day's events.

What happened as far as you know, or would you rather not talk about it? Is there at least some validity to Fahrenhold's view? He was very willing to tape an interview stating his opinions on all that happened. He was the the reunion, but Snuffy was not in evidence, and a recent letter of mine to his Albany address was returned as undeliverable.

I would also appreciate any comments you may have on the early days of the group, as I note that you were Mack McKay's original co-pilot.

Thank you for the time, and the next time I am in New York perhaps we can get together. The 306th is planning for a reunion two years' hence when the 8th meets again in the States, in the Midwest some place, and very likely in Dayton.

Sincerely yours,

Russell A. Strong

4900 Appleridge Court, Dayton, Ohio 45424
Home: 513-233-8735

L. F. Johnson Jr
131 Tullamore Rd
Garden City - New York

Wright State University



Dayton, Ohio 45431 513 426 6650

News and Information Services

29 October 1975

Postmaster
Crummies, Ky. 40821

Dear Sir:

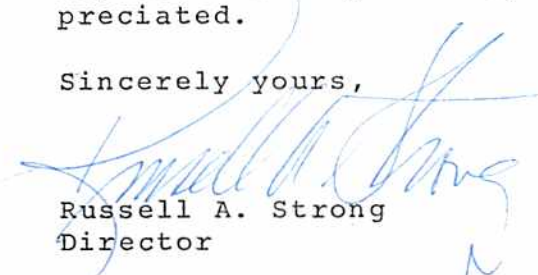
I am presently researching a history of the 306th Bombardment Group, U. S. Eighth Air Force, World War II.

One of those whom I would like to contact is Lewis P. Johnson, Jr., whose Silver Star citation indicates that his hometown was Crummies, Ky.

Can you give me any information about him, or tell me who to contact, or where I might possibly learn more about him?

Any assistance you can give me will be greatly appreciated.

Sincerely yours,


Russell A. Strong
Director

Sorry to be so late. I called L.P. Sister and she had to call her daughter Long distance and in this morning mail I got this address

11 June 1984

Dear Russ,

Thank you very much for your letter with the article on Snuffy Smith and for the opportunity to comment.

I am sure the mission was a very traumatic experience for Maynard and I am sorry that the effect was so profound and long lasting that it confused his memory.

After we were hit and the fires started, there was no contact between the front and the rear of the airplane so we in the front had no knowledge of what was going on in the rear.

After the raid when we could see the condition of the rear of the airplane, I did thank Maynard for staying with the airplane.

Maynard was older than the other members of the crew and it was his first mission so I am sure he deserved recognition for his actions but since I had no way of knowing what he had done, I did not recommend him for a citation.

I thank you very much for the tremendous amount of work you have done on behalf of the 306th and please be assured that we all do really appreciate it even though we do not express ourselves.

I would like to recommend you for a citation for your work because you have given us something that was not obtainable here-to-fore and you will be the standard and the inspiration for all the future military historians.

Best personal regards,


L.P. Johnson

16 May 1984

Mr. L. P. Johnson
131 Tullamore Rd
Garden City, NY 11530

Dear L. P.:

After you have read the accompanying piece on Snuffy Smith, I would appreciate it if you would consider writing something of your recollections of that day.

Needless to say, the June issue of the Echoes will contain a story about Snuffy's demise, but not quite the story that appears in this obituary. As a part of the material on Snuffy, I would very much appreciate it if you would write something.

Snuffy has had his day, and his changing versions of the story. But I am sure from talking with you several years ago that you have some reactions and recollections as well. And I am certain that many would be interested in how you view the events from a distance of 41 years.

If you decide to do something, I would need what ever copy you produce in about a month.

Please give the idea some serious consideration.

Sincerely yours,

Russell A. Strong

7-21-89

Russ,

IT IS GOOD TO HEAR
FROM YOU AGAIN.

I AM SORRY BUT
I CANNOT HELP YOU
WITH INFORMATION
ABOUT BEASLEY.

THANK YOU FOR
KEEPING ME IN MIND
AND YOUR GOOD WORKS
FOR THE 306th

LP Johnson

RUSSELL A. STRONG
2041 Hilldale
Kalamazoo, MI 49007



**306th Bombardment
Group Association**



RUSSELL A. STRONG
5323 CHEVAL PLACE
CHARLOTTE, NC 28205



April 8. 1985

Dear Russ,

I feel that the inclosed letter to me from John Gell would be of interest to you.

I told (wrote) John that you were our official historian and that I was sending the letter to you and gave him your address.

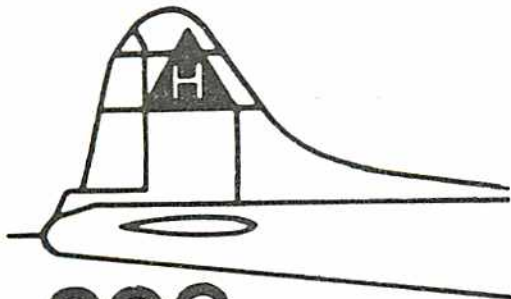
I have a very vague recollection of a board that recorded missions but was not able to give John any specific information.

I hope that all is well with you and yours and do thank you for all you have done for all of us.

Sincerely,



L.P. Johnson



306TH BOMBARDMENT GROUP

Secretary/Historian

Russell A. Strong
5323 Cheval Pl.
Charlotte, NC 28205

28 April 1989

Dear L. P.:

I wonder if you might not fill in some telephone numbers for me, starting with your own, and any others that are within easy reach of you.

It would be most appreciated.

When are you going to attend a reunion? Mac McKay has become a regular attendee, along with some others from the 423rd out of the original group. I'll guarantee a good time for you and your wife at the Little Rock affair in September!

All the best,

PLEASE SEE OTHER SIDE

5-27-89

Hi Ross,

SORRY THIS TOOK SO LONG —
WE JUST CAME UP FROM FLORIDA
YESTERDAY AND WILL BE HERE FOR
ONLY TWO WEEKS.

THE GUYS WHOSE NUMBERS I
DID NOT GET ARE NOT LISTED
OR HAVE MOVED.

THANKS FOR THINKING OF
ME — I HOPE TO MAKE IT
TO A REUNION IN THE FUTURE.

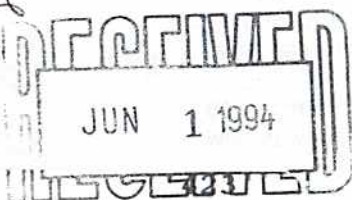
THANKS ALSO FOR ALL YOUR
WORK FOR THE 306th

Sincerely,
L T Johnson

April 1994
Vol. 19, No. 2

Assume

3-18



L P Johnson, Jr
602 Augusta Blvd
Naples, FL 33962-7502

JOHN602 339622037 3194 05/17/94
FORM 3547

JOHNSON
8865 LELY ISLAND CIR
NAPLES FL 33962-2609



to correct or update your

5-19-94

DEAR ROSS,

WILL YOU PLEASE CHANGE
MY ADDRESS IN NAPLES?

CONGRATULATIONS AND
THANKS FOR ALL YOUR GOOD
WORK FOR THE 306TH D.B.

WHEN YOU ARE IN THIS
AREA PLEASE DO CALL AND
STOP BY AND BE OUR GUEST,
WE WILL BE VERY PLEASED
AND HONORED.

ALL THE VERY BEST!

SINCERELY,
L.P.

Sgt William W. Fahrmeier
Silver Star - 20340

HEADQUARTERS EIGHTH AIR FORCE
Office of the Commanding General

20 May 1943.

GENERAL ORDER)
NO.....61)

SECTION

- AWARDS OF SILVER STAR* * * * * I
- AWARD OF SOLDIER'S MEDAL * * * * * II
- AWARDS OF DISTINGUISHED FLYING CROSS * * * * * III
- AWARDS OF DISTINGUISHED FLYING CROSS * * * * * IV
- AWARDS OF OAK LEAF CLUSTER TO AIR MEDAL* * * * * V

I. Under the provisions of Army Regulations 600-45, 8 August 1932, as amended, and pursuant to authority contained in Section I, Circular 36, Hq., ETOUSA, 5 April 1943, the SILVER STAR is awarded to the following named Officer and Enlisted Men.

X

LEWIS P. JOHNSON, JR., O-661846, 1st Lieutenant, 306th Bombardment Group (H), Army Air Forces, United States Army. For gallantry in action against an armed enemy of the United States, while serving as Pilot of a B-17 airplane on a bombing mission over enemy occupied territory, 1 May 1943. After successfully bombing the target, enemy fighter planes attacked in large numbers causing severe damage and starting an intense fire in the mid-section of the airplane. The condition of the airplane was so serious that part of the crew bailed out. Lieutenant Johnson knowing that the airplane might disintegrate at any minute, and with complete disregard for his own safety, skillfully kept his plane in the flight formation enabling two of his crewmen to eventually extinguish the flames. The bravery and skill displayed by Lieutenant Johnson in remaining with and returning his airplane to a friendly base after all chances to save it seemed gone, reflect the highest credit upon this Officer and the Armed Forces of the United States. Home address: Crummies, Kentucky.

MARTIN A. BUCHHOLZ, 16046784, Staff Sergeant, 322nd bombardment Squadron (H), Army Air Forces, United States Army. For gallantry in action against an armed enemy of the United States, while serving as Ball Turret Gunner on a B-17 airplane on a bombing mission over enemy occupied territory, 1 May 1943. On the return journey enemy fighter planes concentrated their attack on this lone airplane, forcing it down so low that Sergeant Buchholz could no longer effectively operate the ball turret guns. At this point, he left his turret and while fighting from the Radio-Gun position was seriously wounded by an exploding 20 mm. cannon shell. Displaying great bravery, skill and devotion to duty, Sergeant Buchholz, with utter disregard for his wounded condition, continued to fight, destroying one enemy fighter plane and warding off many attacks. Only when the attacks had ceased did he report the fact that he was seriously wounded. The bravery, skill and devotion to duty displayed by Sergeant Buchholz on this occasion reflect the highest credit upon himself and the Armed Forces of the United States. Home address: 1000 E. Lyon Street, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

MAIL CALL

Dear Friends:

The following appears in our 452nd history CD and thought it was worthy of printing.

Lt. Lewis P. Johnson lands Flying Fortress after tire blown out on takeoff Sunday, 31 October 1943.

Circling above the long runway of Pendleton Field was a B-17 with a blown-out tire. Down below were crash crews, ambulances, fire trucks, doctors from the Medical Corps and soldier spectators. As the big bomber turned for a landing on its crippled gear the men who are designated to go into action in case of a crash, tense for the moment the ship would settle into its dash along the ground.

But at the controls was 1st Lt. L. P. Johnson of Kentucky, veteran of 25 flights over France and Germany to whom bringing a battered plane had become a common occurrence. As the ship skimmed above the ground and the wheel with good tire touched the runway, Lt. Johnson jammed the brakes on that side, gunned the motors on the other and teetered along until the craft had lost enough speed to settle on the hub of the flattened tire. The bomber ground to a stop and what might have been a tragedy for all the men aboard turned into a feat of piloting that left the ship undamaged and the crew uninjured.

Lt. Johnson back in this country since May after service with the 8th Air Force in England, was giving one of the pilots his final takeoff on instruments when the tire blew out just before the plane left the ground. The control tower was immediately informed of the craft's problem, the men in charge told them to jettison their practice bombs, stay in the air until their gasoline was almost used up and then to attempt an emergency landing.

After four and a quarter hours in the air, Lt. Johnson brought the bomber safely to the ground. Lt. Johnson has had far more trying experiences during his participation in raids against the enemy targets. On his 25th mission, which completed his tour of duty and entitled him to return to this country for training instructor duty, his Fortress literally broke in two after he had brought it back to its home field.

It was on that raid to St. Nazaire submarine base in western France that Sgt. Maynard "Snuffy" Smith, ball turret gunner on Johnson's ship, displayed such

heroism that he was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor, Lt. Johnson was awarded the Silver Star, second only to the MOH. This decoration was added to the D.F.C. and Air Medal with several Oak Leaf Clusters for previous gallantry in action.

Editors Comment: Lt. Johnson was flying with the 306th Bomb Group on May 1, 1943 when this event occurred. The complete story is in Roger A. Freeman's book "The Mighty Eighth", pages 30 and 31. Included is a picture of the fire destroyed radio room. Lt. Johnson was one of 5 Officers brought back to form the 452nd Bomb Group.



*From: Mike Prestia
1323 Chestnut St., Connellsville, PA. 15425*

Dear Hank:

After returning from England in February 1945, I was sent to advance navigation schooling at Wellington Field, Texas. One day the bulletin board asked for volunteers for a secret mission to Karachi, India. I volunteered and after weeks of rumors and great secrecy, we flew to Wales. We arrived May 7, 1945 and the base seemed to be abandoned. No one at operations and the mess hall was closed. So we decided to take a train to London and the city was a mad house. Have no recall on where we ate or slept. We returned 3 days later and no one questioned our absence!

Each navigator was assigned to a C-47 to return to the U.S.A. from Wales to Scotland, Iceland, Greenland, Newfoundland and finally to Hartford, CT. Each C-47 was then loaded onto a flat bed barge, towed to deep water and dumped overboard!!

Question: no one ever explained the secrecy or why we were headed for Karachi. Perhaps a military SNAFU. If any navigators participated in this event, I would like to hear from them.

All the best,
Mike Prestia

From: Chuck Gillette
16924-25th Ave., Bothell, WA. 98012

Grandpa's Hands etc

Editors Comment: Chuck is the son of Charles F. Gillette, co-pilot on the crew of Lawrence Downey, shot down a second time on December 4, 1944. Downey was killed, as were 2 other crew members and Gillette and the others became POW'S. Ray Crewson and Bill Vidulich survive from the crew, are members.

"Grandpa's Hands " was sent to me by Bill Roche and I forwarded it on, the following was a reply.

From: Chuck Gillette

What a great reading. I get so much garbage via the email systems that its really a joy to get to read something that has true meaning in this life... and the next!

I took my Wife and 15 yr old son through the Collings Foundation "9-0-9" this afternoon. They are on their annual tour around the country and today is a nice 75 degrees with bright blue skies, here in Seattle. We paid the few dollars and walked through the area, around the fuselage and up through the hatch directly behind the nose section, through the center of the aircraft and out the back. We stopped at each section and looked over the turrets and waist gunners positions. I pointed out the Co-Pilots sliding side window, the one my father went through to get out of his burning plane... What things he must have seen while flying one of these birds. I want my children to know and understand as much as possible the experiences that their Grampa had...even though they never got to meet him in life.

I've made a conscious decision to never, ever forget my Dad's contribution to the WWII war efforts... or for any of the other veterans of any time of war or peace. I want my 4 children to have the same appreciation for those men and women and to always remain thankful for the sacrifices of their youth in the great and noble cause of Freedom.

Chuck Gillette

Grandpa's Hands

Grandpa, some ninety plus years, sat feebly on the patio bench. He didn't move, just sat with his head down staring at his hands When I sat down beside him he didn't acknowledge my presence and the longer I sat I wondered if he was OK.

Finally, not really wanting to disturb him but wanting to check on him at the same time, I asked him if he was OK.

He raised his head and looked at me and smiled. "Yes, I'm fine, thank you for asking" he said in a clear strong voice.

"I didn't mean to disturb you, grandpa, but you were just sitting here staring at your hands and I wanted to make sure you were OK" I explained to him.

"Have you ever looked at your hands? " he asked. I mean really looked at your hands? I slowly opened my hands and stared down at them. I turned them over, palms up and then palms down

No, I guess I had never really looked at my hands as I tried to figure out the point he was making.

Grandpa smiled and related this story: "Stop and think for a moment about the hands you have, how they have served you well throughout your years. These hands, though wrinkled, shriveled and weak have been the tools I have used all my life to reach out and grab and embrace life. They braced and caught my fall when as a toddler I crashed upon the floor. They put food in my mouth and clothes on my back. As a child my mother taught me to fold them in prayer. They tied my shoes and pulled on my boots. They held my rifle and wiped my tears when I went off to war. They have been dirty, scraped and raw, swollen and bent. They were uneasy and clumsy when I tried to hold my newborn son. Decorated with my wedding band they showed the world that I was married and loved someone special. They wrote the letters home and trembled and shook when I buried my parents and spouse and walked my daughter down the aisle. Yet, they were strong and sure when I dug my buddy out of a foxhole and lifted a plow off of my best friends foot.

They have held children, consoled neighbors, and shook in fists of anger when I didn't understand. They have covered my face, combed my hair, and washed and cleansed the rest of my body. They have been sticky and wet, bent and broken, dried and raw. And to this day when not much of anything else of me works real well these hands hold me up, lay me down, and again continue to fold in prayer. These hands are the mark of where I've been and the ruggedness of my life. But more importantly it will be these hands that God will reach out and take when he leads me home. And with my hands He will lift me to His side and there I will use these hands to touch the face of