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WORLD WAR II

AS LIVED BY JOHN Paul NOACK 369th Sq of 306th BG.

(per info on p. 17, written late Oct 2002 or within the year before 14 Oct 2003)

p. 15 - 2nd Schweinfurt Black Thurs. 14 Oct 1943

November 7, 1941 was quite a day in my life. I drove to Beaumont, Texas to take a physical exam for the Naval Air Corps. At 21 years of age (22 – Dec. 1st), being in pretty good shape, I passed the exam and was informed that I would be required to pass a comprehensive written test since I did not have two years of college credits for entry as a Naval Cadet. I was told that it would be several months (April or May, 1942 as I recall) before this 3-day test would take place. I returned to Port Arthur to my job at Texaco Terminal by early afternoon; however, I was unable to accomplish anything due to my eyes having been dilated during the physical. I was floating on a cloud for days, feeling confident that I would be able to pass the written exam and would be on my way to becoming a naval aviator.

One month after passing the physical, the infamous attack by the Japanese on Pearl Harbor occurred. Thinking this would accelerate the gearing up for war, I contacted the Navy Recruiting Office to ascertain when I should report for the written test. Much to my chagrin, there was no change. A couple months later, my disappointment was diminished by the fact that I learned that the Army Air Corps would conduct both physical and written exams in Houston on March 22nd and 23rd. I reported and was very fortunate to pass both – I was immediately sworn in and became a member of The United States Army, as a buck private, and was placed on furlough for thirty days. Disappointing? Yes, but I could take it – I was going to become an Aviation Cadet, so why despair. Before the 30-day furlough ended, I was notified that it was extended for another 30 days. Oh, well, that just meant another round of farewell parties. Needless to say, that was not the end of the furlough – another 30-day extension. Here is where my luck changed; I received orders to report to the Preflight Center in San Antonio midway of the third 30-day period.

Mar '42

~ early Jun '42

Upon arrival in San Antonio, I became an Aviation Cadet and was assigned to a tent on the edge of Kelly Field. Of course, the first thing that happened was the issuance of uniforms and the traditional "burr" haircut. Some of my fellow cadets almost cried when they lost their curly locks, but I enjoyed being able to comb my hair with a wash cloth. I don't remember how long we remained in the temporary quarters near Kelly's runway (probably two or three weeks) but we finally moved up the hill to Lackland Field, where we began our Ground School courses. We also took a lot of shots – we would go down a line and get a shot in each arm, which caused some to faint, a wash out offense. What a glorious couple of months – classes, rigorous physical training (the cross-country course was a killer) and open post on Saturday afternoons and Sundays. A mad dash into San Antonio to get a room at the Gunter Hotel (Preflight Cadet headquarters) and the rental of a convertible to catch the eyes of the fairer sex. If one was fortunate enough to get a room, he had to get in early if he wanted a spot on the bed. Usually when I got to my room at night, I was lucky to find a spot in a chair – most of the time it was on the floor. None of our rooms were locked on those Saturday nights – after all, we couldn't have inebriated cadets in the corridors. Could life be any better?

After two months of Preflight, orders were received to report for Primary Flight Training at Chickasha, Oklahoma. Finally, we were going to get into the air – "Off We Go Into The Wild Blue Yonder". The main distraction during my flight training was the nagging fear of "washing out" – I guess that was something that we all lived with. I loved

~ early Aug '42

every minute that I was able to spend in the cockpit of the Fairchild PT-19A. For some unknown reason, I loved to spin that plane. My instructor demonstrated the maneuver and then had me perform it a couple times. Having done this without a problem, I was instructed that the maneuver was performed strictly to learn how to recover if one fell into a spin, by accident, and that was to be the end of it. Under no circumstances was I to practice it like other maneuvers such as slow rolls, snap rolls, loops, falling leafs, lazy eights, etc. Naturally, every chance I got while on solo flights, I had to kick the plane into, at least, one spin. Of course, I only did this when well away from the field. Oh, what fools we mortals be (especially this one).

The most interesting experience that I had during Primary was the day I soloed. I had around eight hours dual time with my instructor and he decided it was time to send me up on my own. I made a couple landings and he told me to taxi off to the side of the landing strip. He got out of the plane and told me to take three. I taxied to the takeoff position and waited until it was clear and gave her the gun for a nice smooth takeoff. After circling the field, I made a good approach for what I expected to be a routine landing. It turned out to be anything but routine because the cadet ahead of me (also soloing) came in too fast and hit pretty hard bouncing his plane back into the air. He started a good recovery, throttle and stick forward, but he forgot to cut power or pull the stick back to settle into his landing. It ended up in a power dive into the ground – the wheels of the plane squirted off to each side. God was with me and made me move to the side for my landing and follow-through takeoff. When I shot two more landings (the usual solo requirement) my instructor held up three fingers, a signal for three more landings. He did this thinking that I might need them to help me settle down after the harrowing experience of the first one.

I made it through Primary Training without mishap and was transferred to Majors Field at Greenville, Texas for Basic. This seemed to be quite a jump: a larger plane, more instruments and much more power – oh, how in the world was I going to make the change? Just when I had become comfortable in the PT-19A, I had to start over in a new plane, a BT-13. I had serious doubts that I could make the transition, but after four hours I had soloed and thought I had the world by the tail. I even went on a cross-country flight and managed to find my way back to home base. Then the time for night flying was upon me. The first group of students flew to the satellite field with the instructors, while the rest of us were transported by truck. It was a very cool night and the driver was not familiar with the area, so we were late in arriving at the field. The instructors had to wait for us to get there and they were not happy having to stand around in the cold. Unfortunately, I was the second cadet, that evening, to be introduced to night flying by my instructor and had to bear the brunt of his displeasure for the delay. He told me to be ready to flip on the switch for landing lights when he called for them. Oh, Lord, how could I do this – I had no idea which switch controlled the lights. I had not been in this aircraft at night and had not thought of the possibility of being called upon to perform such a momentous chore.

When the call came, I boldly flipped a switch while praying for help. A miracle happened – the landing lights came on! My instructor taxied into position for takeoff and said "OK, it's yours – let's go". I managed to get the plane into the air and flew what

seemed to me to be a good pattern around the field. I lined up with the runway lights for landing when it suddenly dawned on me that I was preparing to land on Main Street of a small town. Then I saw a tiny postage stamp of lights slightly to the right side of the approach I was making and realized what I was about to do. About this time, I was asked (in a very sarcastic tone) if I intended to go all the way to Dallas before getting us back on the ground. I managed to make an acceptable landing (on the field, not on Main Street) and was told to taxi back to the point where I had boarded the plane. I thought I had pulled the ultimate "screw-up" and was about to be told that my flying days were over. Instead, my instructor got out of the plane and said "Take three – you'll be fine".

"Now what a ness you've gotten yourself into" was the first thought that came to mind. With a great amount of trembling, I managed to taxi to takeoff position and pushed the throttle forward. Soon, I was in the air and flew a much better pattern around the field. Things did not look so strange this time around. After a routine landing and follow-through takeoff, I hit prop wash from another plane and started sinking toward a lake. Thank God, the plane came out of the stall without getting wet and I made the second and third landings without any additional thrills. Wonder of wonders – I had completed the night solo. While waiting for the other cadets to complete their solos and during the ride back to our base by truck, I was still flying – this time on "Cloud Nine".

Our days in Basic Flight Training passed, but not without a lot of griping. I don't know what the Mess Sergeant spent the money on, but I'm sure it was not food. We didn't eat much of what was served, but we did consume a lot of bread, butter, jelly and milk. Another big complaint was that the ground officers tried to run the place like Randolph Field (the showplace of the Training Command). We were the second class to be assigned to this brand new base and it was very difficult to live up to the "spit-and-polish" regime that was expected of future Officers and Gentlemen.

During our stint in Basic, I came very close to "wash-out" which I had been dreading. One of my buddies, Frank Teltschick, who was also from Port Arthur, decided that we needed to go to P.A. for the weekend. When open-post started, we got in my car and drove home. We agreed that I would pick him up at 2:00 PM on Sunday to head back to Greenville, since we had to be back on base by Ten O'clock. Leaving Port Arthur at 70 MPH (35 was the speed limit) we attracted the attention of a couple of constables in an unmarked car. They caught up with us and one of them got into my car and told us they were going to turn us over to the MPs. This, definitely, was the end of our lives as Aviation Cadets. Not only had I broken the speed limit, but we were about 200 miles outside the area covered by open-post rules.

It so happened that Frank had assisted this constable with a flat tire about a year before. Having recognized the guy, Frank asked him if he had any more flats. This jogged the constable's memory and after a short conversation about the incident, he told me to pull alongside the other car and wave him over. The other man came over to my car and our new friend told him that they really didn't want to turn us over to the MPs. After listening to our sob story about having been away from home for a long time and needing to see our girl friends, they agreed that we should resume our trip back to our base, but to watch out for the "Black and Whites" (State Highway Patrol). Who said that

good deeds go unrewarded? God really smiled on us that day – we resumed a 70 MPH speed and made it back to our base about 9:55 which left us with five minutes to spare. How sweet it is to live on the edge.

Eventually, our tour of duty in Basic Training came to an end. A few of the guys were ordered to single-engine advanced training (which I really wanted) but most of us were ordered to report to Blackland Field for advanced training in twin-engine planes. We did quite a bit of cross-country flying, both day and night. One night, during the latter half of our stay at Waco, we returned from a cross-country and were informed that the lower classmen were shooting landings. We were instructed to fly to Austin and the field would be open when we got back. Soon after we got away from the field, we joined the other planes in our group and decided to play "Follow the leader". As fate would have it, my partner and I ended up as tail-end-charley. I had the controls at that time and was having a great time when the leader decided to dive on a small town. Each plane got lower than the one ahead so by the time I got to the low point, I was watching lights pop on in second-floor rooms and they were not much lower than we were. That was a bit hairy, so we got out of there in a hurry. We never did hear anything from this little escapade – I guess those folks had no idea who we were.

16 Feb '43

February 16, 1943, Graduation Day for the class of 43-B, is a day that stands out in my memory. We got dressed in our new Officers Uniforms and proceeded to the Parade Ground for the ceremony. My mother, brother Erich, brother Bill and his wife, Ineta, attended the festivities. As our names were called, we marched across the stage to receive our commissions and a set of Wings. At the conclusion of the ceremony, I joined my family and my mother pinned my wings on my uniform. I had made it. I was a brand-new Second Lieutenant pilot in the United States Army Air Corps. We next proceeded to the Base Chapel where I served as Best Man at the wedding of my best friend, Don Ogden. Don and his new bride left immediately for their home in Michigan since he had a six-day delay before reporting to a B-26 base in Florida. My family and I spent the rest of the day seeing the sights around Waco since I did not have to leave until the next morning.

We received orders to report to Salt Lake City for deployment to our new bases. My memory is not clear on how much time we spent in Utah (I think it was about two days) and then 48 of us were sent to Ephrata, Washington for First Phase B-17 Training. Our group filled a passenger train car and we soon became bored with the ride, so we started a poker game. As each guy lost his money and had to leave the game, someone else would take his place. My luck was phenomenal - when the game broke up, I had all the money. Upon arrival in Spokane the following morning, we saw a train pulling out of the station. We soon learned that our car was to have been attached to that train for the trip to Ephrata and we would have to spend the day and night in Spokane. We went downtown and got several rooms in a hotel and by the time we had meals, etc. all my ill-gotten gains had disappeared. We had a wonderful time in Spokane that day and night and none of the fellows resented the fact that they lost all their money on the way.

The next morning, our car was attached to the train to Ephrata. Upon arrival, we found there was no one at the station to meet us, in fact we were not even expected.

Communications were as usual – SNAFU! We called the base to inform them that they had a bunch of new pilots at the RR Station waiting for a ride. Some time later, several trucks arrived to take us, and our gear, to our new home. What a rude awakening – we were on another new base and another mud-hole, very reminiscent of Greenville. I must admit that the food was much better. For some time (two or three weeks) we were pretty much at loose ends. We had some ground school classes – a repetition of what we had as cadets. I'm sure it was just make-work to keep us occupied while waiting for pilots, navigators, bombardiers and gunners to arrive. We were there to become co-pilots on crews being assembled for a new Bomb Group, the 390th.

At last, the crews were formed and we began first phase training. This consisted of a lot of practice gunnery and bombing missions – all low level stuff. A large amount of time was spent in flying formation, learning how to maintain a tight group for maximum firepower against our future enemies. We flew some night missions, but most of the flights were during the day, since we were training for daylight precision bombing. One dark and stormy night, we flew a cross-country mission to give our Navigator a chance to practice his skills. As we neared our base at the completion of the flight, we saw a bright flash in the distance. Shortly, there was another bright flash – when we landed, we learned that two of our planes exploded while in the air and no one knew what had caused the explosions. They were too far apart to have been a mid-air collision. The suspicion, of course, was sabotage, but that was ruled out after investigation because the next day a B-25, that had landed at our base for fuel, exploded shortly after taking off. It was determined by the investigators that our fuel supply had become contaminated somehow. Tests were made and we were grounded until a new supply of fuel was received. That did not take long – we were back in the air, and none too soon, in our estimation.

First Phase training came to an end and the 390th moved to Spokane, Washington for Second Phase. My recollection of this period is hazy, but I believe we got a day off every eight days. Our crew would go into town, have dinner together, and then go our separate ways for the night and the next day until it was time to gather for the trip back to the base. Supposedly, officers were not to fraternize with enlisted personnel, but we thought it very important to have dinner together when we went to town. I look back to those days and realize that those dinners meant a lot to me – I guess the feeling was growing within me that we were welding a group of men together that would be dependent upon each other when facing the enemy. Little did I know that it would be a different bunch that I would be flying with, and that it would not be the same crew from one mission to the next. At any rate, we were bonding into a crew that understood what part each of us played in this fighting machine. This is the crew that we had during our training:

Pilot	Ralph Peters
Co-pilot	John Noack
Navigator	Dan Peterson
Bombardier	James Vaughter
Top Turret	Raymond Grimm
Radio	M. L. John

Ball Turret	Richard Kern
Waist Gunner	Frank Wesner
Waist Gunner	Dan Piedmont
Tail Gunner	E, J. Mayer

There could have been a change or two among the enlisted personnel during our training period (at least, I recall someone mentioning to me that there was). Enlisted men and officers each had there own clubs on the base, so we had little contact other than when we were flying.

Upon completion of second phase training, we were assigned to bases in Montana for third phase. Headquarters personnel and one of the squadrons were based near Great Falls. My squadron went to Glasgow and the other two squadrons were based at two other fields in the state – I don't remember where, if I ever knew. About ten days after arrival in Glasgow, we were about ready to take off on a mission on which we were to climb to 20,000 feet for our first flight to altitude requiring use of oxygen. This was to be our initiation into use of oxygen masks while flying. Just as we were preparing to taxi out to takeoff position, a Jeep pulled up and the Squadron Operations Officer boarded our plane. He informed us that he would fly with us and occupy the pilot's seat. That meant that our pilot would bump me from the co-pilot's position and I would be a passenger in the nose, along with the navigator and bombardier.

Our B-17 had such a good heater that Ralph and I wore A-2 Jackets rather than the heavy gear worn by the rest of the crew whose positions were much more in drafts. After cruising around at the twenty thousand foot level for a while, I developed a case of the sniffles since I was not dressed for the low temperatures which we had at that altitude. Soon, I had a full-blown cold. About that time our "hot-shot" pilot for the day decided we had enough oxygen training and put the plane into a dive designed to set a new record for descent. This resulted in my ears getting stopped up, causing me five days of misery. The Squadron Physician shoved long cue-tips, soaked with ephedrine, up each nostril to try to open the passages to the inner ears. Getting these treatments, twice a day, was something that I did not want to repeat. I don't know which was the most painful – not getting to fly for a week or the remedy for the ear condition. After the fifth day of ephedrine treatments the passages opened, the bloody mess drained from my ears and I returned to normal.

Third Phase training was about over when we were informed that the Squadron Operations Officer ("hot-shot" referred to above) decided he wanted to be an Airplane Commander instead being in Operations. He liked our plane so much when he flew it on the altitude mission that he chose it as his plane and left us as a crew with clipped wings. The group flew to Bermuda and spent a day or two before returning to Montana. This was the last bit of training before departing for England. The long flight was supposed to be training for the long flights we would be making on bombing raids over Europe. I think the real motive for this was that the Group Commander wanted a nice mini-vacation before going overseas. Since we had no airplane, we did not get to go – instead we were ordered to go to Great Falls while the group enjoyed themselves.

We had gone through training as twelve-crew squadrons; however, when third phase training was completed, squadron strength was decreased to nine to conform to the groups that were already in England. As we were without a plane, our crew was one that was cut from our 568th Squadron. We were given a six-day Leave after which we were ordered to report to Salina, Kansas to get a new B-17. This enabled me to go home for four days so I boarded a train headed for Dallas. I did not have Summer- weight clothing since Winter uniforms were worn year-round where I had been. I started getting very warm (hot) as the train chugged through the Midwest. By the time we rolled through Oklahoma I was so hot that I unbuttoned my Blouse to try to get some relief. About 50 to 75 miles before arriving in Dallas, I was approached by an MP who asked if he might speak to me. I answered affirmatively and he handed me a card and pointed to a line which stated that military personnel must maintain a neat appearance and in proper uniform in public. I was in uniform but certainly did not have a neat appearance, so I had to button up and suffer. There are times when regulations cause extreme discomfort. My brother, Bill, met me at the Dallas station and my first words were "Get me to a store where I can buy a Summer Uniform". I believe I did remember to say "Hello" while on the way to the store. The acquisition of the uniform was accomplished in short order and we started the drive to Port Arthur. What a relief it was to be a bit cooler. I don't think I ever put myself in a position to be reprimanded by the MPs again, so I guess I did learn something from the episode.

4 July '43

After a quickie visit to the old hometown, which included July 4th, I had to leave for Salina. The crew reassembled, as ordered, but we had nothing to do for two or three days because our plane had not arrived. We killed time (we could have had a longer Leave) but that was the story of military life – hurry up and wait. Our beautiful B-17 arrived and we spent about a week checking the instruments while slow-timing the engines (in other words, flying at normal or slightly slower speeds to break them in). Having satisfied ourselves that we had a good, sound airplane, we were ready to take our new plane and ourselves to the war. We received our orders to fly to Bangor, Maine. If we encountered any problems, we could land anywhere for repairs; however, under no circumstances were we to land at Chicago Municipal Airport.

We left Salina with a plane that was operating just as it should and it took a lot of tall talking to convince Ralph, our pilot, that we had radio malfunction and that Chicago Municipal was the only place that we could get it repaired. He must have had a difficult time trying to ignore the pleas of nine of us, because he finally relented. We landed and described our problem to the mechanics. They said that they could have us back in the air within the hour. We suggested to them that surely the repairs could not be completed before morning. They were very understanding fellows and quickly caught on to our real reason for stopping. Ralph had to call back to the base at Salina to report our problem and where we landed for the repairs to be made. He had to listen to a tirade, which came close to melting the telephone wires; however, he recovered and we headed for downtown Chicago.

The only thing that I really remember about our escapade is getting a room in a hotel before going out on the town. I don't know how many bars we visited or how many drinks we consumed, but we did not pay for a single one. Other patrons in the bars

insisted on buying drinks for the would-be heroes who were on their way to bomb Hitler out of existence. I don't know if we ever got to bed that night – I guess it was too drunk out to remember much of anything. What a night! By the time we got back to the airport the next morning, Ralph agreed it was well worth the chewing out that he had suffered. We crawled aboard our plane and immediately donned our oxygen masks to inhale the greatest of remedies for inebriation. With a few deep breaths of oxygen, we were ready to resume our journey. The rest of the flight to Bangor was accomplished with no additional "malfunctions", but we had a lot of chatter about what a great place we found "The Windy City" to be.

We stayed at the field in Bangor for about four days, awaiting favorable weather conditions for the next leg of our trip. To pass the time, we hung out at the PX quite a bit, saw a couple movies that played at the base theater and stayed out of trouble as best we could. We were so anxious to get into the war that delays in getting there were very boring (except for the night in Chicago). On our first visit to the PX, I went to the soda fountain and ordered a root beer float. The clerk looked at me like he thought I had lost my mind, so I said, "frosted root beer" but the comprehension was no better. I tried "black cow", which worked no better. Finally, the guy asked me how to make the drink I requested. I told him to take a mug, put in a couple scoops of vanilla ice cream and fill the mug with root beer. He did so, with misgivings, and when I asked the price he looked at me and said, "Sir, if you can drink it, you can have it". Would you believe that my root beer float was usually ready by the time I got to the soda fountain on subsequent days and I did not pay for any of them. I believe the guy tried one, himself, and found that it was a great drink.

When the weather cleared, we left Bangor for Gander, Newfoundland. The flight was uneventful and we arrived at that isolated field (it looked as though it had been built in the middle of a swamp) and had to hang around there for another four days. We finally were lucky enough to get favorable wind conditions for the longest leg of our flight to the war. We left Gander late in the afternoon for an overnight hop to Prestwick, Scotland. I have no idea how many planes were flying over that night, but we took off at ten-minute intervals and started winging our way to Europe. Every so often, during that night, some comic would radio that they were feathering a prop, meaning that they had lost one of their engines. Shortly, the call would come that another engine was cutting out. Finally, the jokers tired of their little game and we flew for hours in total radio silence.

Dawn broke and we were presented with a beautiful sunrise to welcome us to Europe. Soon we saw land ahead of us and the navigator informed us that we were approaching Ireland. We crossed Northern Ireland and shortly arrived at Prestwick. Dan Peterson, our navigator, did a great job that night – we came in dead on target. Upon landing, we were told that once again we would lose our airplane. It was revealed to us that all planes that came into the theater had to be modified. This consisted of pulling all the insulation (flammable material) out of the plane, which had been put in during the manufacturing process. It seemed so crazy that the planes were built according to certain specifications and then more money had to be spent to get them properly prepared for combat. Many things seemed to be done that didn't make much sense – I guess that is how one of our favorite sayings came to be: there is the right way; there is the wrong way;

and there is the Army way to do things.

It is not in my recollection how long we stayed in Prestwick, but I think we were trucked to the rail station where we boarded a train for a base in England. It could have been Eighth Air Force Headquarters where we awaited assignment to one of the bomb groups as replacements. While there, I met a fellow and we started talking about making a run into London to take in a show. Ascertaining that we would not be going anywhere for two or three days, we secured permission to carry out these plans. We arrived in London, booked a hotel room and, since it was pretty late in the afternoon, we started toward the theater. As we were walking, I saw a cart at the curb that was loaded with different kinds of grapes. I saw some that looked especially good and bought a pound for us to eat during the show. Arriving at the theater, we purchased tickets for the presentation. It was a stage production featuring a popular comedian. We found that our sense of humor was totally different from the English people – we didn't laugh at the right times. The audience would roar at something that we did not think was funny, and when we laughed, no one laughed with us. Oh well, everyone's taste cannot be the same. During the show, we were eating our grapes when, all of a sudden I choked. It suddenly dawned on me that the fourteen shillings that I paid for that pound of grapes was $2.80 U.S. Back home they probably would have cost five or ten cents.

After several days at this station, we received our assignment to the 306th Bomb Group (H) which was based at Thurleigh. We boarded a truck and were transported to our new home. When we arrived at the base, I was told that I would be co-pilot on an experienced crew headed by Lt. Charles Schoolfield. The rest of the crew was placed under the command of one of the veteran pilots in the squadron – Ralph Peters became the co-pilot. This group followed a policy of putting new crews with pilots who had flown a number of combat missions and working all newcomers in with men who had been through several raids.

8 Aug '43
per Card File
(1)
12 Aug 43

It seems that I should remember the date that we arrived at the 306th, but I do not know. There is no problem in recalling the date of August 12th. I was awakened before dawn with the words, "Breakfast at four – Briefing at five" or some such message. Being an eager beaver, I jumped into my clothes and practically ran to the Officers' Mess Hall. Don't even ask what we were served for breakfast – I couldn't tell you in a million years. We learned at the briefing that the target was Gelsenkirchen (some place in the Ruhr Valley). This meant something to the old hands, but nothing to the greenhorn who was about to embark on his first mission. We boarded a truck which took us together with our flight gear out to our plane. After an examination of the outside of the plane, we proceeded to our various positions and the pilot and I started our pre-flight check in the cockpit. Soon, we started engines and began lining up for takeoff. The control tower fired a flare, which was our signal to begin the takeoff procedure. We were in the seventh position in the lead squadron for this raid. This was filling in the diamond in the second element in a maximum effort mission. Everything went according to plan - the Group assembled and proceeded to the designated rendezvous point to join the other two Groups in our Wing. What a feeling of elation – here I was, flying to Germany with a load of bombs to show Hitler that he would not be in a position of power much longer.

Dream on, rookie - fantasize while you can. What an awakening is in store for you. My memory of the early part of the mission is hazy. I do remember immense enjoyment because I was finally doing what I had spent many months training to do. I had no feelings of fright (I had no experience, and very little sense, about the grand adventure on which I was embarking). I really enjoyed the thrill of flying that big bird which was carrying a load of 500# bombs. Charley Schoolfield, our pilot, allowed me to do quite a bit of the flying during our assembly and rendezvous with the other groups in our combat wing. My handling the controls continued, off and on, across the channel and into enemy territory. You cannot imagine the emotions that I felt, seeing all those beautiful Flying Fortresses and our fighter escort above us to ward off enemy fighters. When our escort had to leave us, we still had a long way to travel. Soon tiny specks appeared in the distance – these turned out to be German fighters. I thought these were just like the fighter planes that made passes at us during our training flights back in the States and I was enjoying the show. Unfortunately, these guys were out to knock us out of the sky. Besides the fighters, looking into the distance ahead of us, I saw a huge, black cloud that seemed to stretch across our path. The cloud was created by anti-aircraft shells exploding in this well defended industrial area known as the Ruhr Valley. Suddenly, I realized that we were expected to fly into that mess and that put me in a state of panic. Shortly after coming up with the idea that I would not last long in the war, we were attacked by a group of FW-190s. They came from one o'clock level and poured 20-mm shells into our formation. One of the shells penetrated the fuselage at my right knee and exploded when it hit the plate where I would have plugged in my heated suit if I had been wearing one. Shrapnel hit me and I knew that I had bought it. It felt like someone had taken a 4 x 4 and whacked me as hard as possible. I knew that shell had penetrated my abdomen, exploded and that I had, at best, a few minutes left on this earth. That brought me to prayer, "Dear God, please get me back to England and I promise I will never get in one of these things again". We had taken a number of hits on "SIS" (the plane we were flying) – our #4 engine was out of service, and our left wing had been hit about half way between the #1 engine and the wingtip. Every time I looked at that wing, I was amazed to see that it was still hanging on, since the wing was waving up and down like a leaf floating in the breeze. As a result of this damage, we were knocked out of formation. Since we had already lost altitude, Charley kept the plane in a controlled, steep dive until we reached 8,000 ft. The Germans, apparently, thought we were crashing and didn't bother to follow us down to finish the job. Things were quiet for a time and Charley called the Navigator to come up to take a look at me and apply first aid. I was very reluctant to open my flying gear to assess the damage, thinking I would see a bloody mess. I was persuaded to let them take a look, and much to my relief and amazement, my stomach and abdomen were still intact. We discovered that I had been hit on the back of the right hip - God answered that prayer right away. We encountered further enemy attacks shortly before we got to the channel, but those guys were as green as I was – our gunners shot two of the planes down and the other two turned tail and ran. The rest of the return trip was uneventful – we landed at our base with the left wing still hanging on, but drooping almost to the ground at the tip. I was hauled off to the base hospital for a four day stay. The Squadron Surgeon informed me that the shrapnel had hit behind the hip and exited the back about four inches later. I also had a wound on the right shin, but that piece of shrapnel did not penetrate the bone. I came out of that incident with a new nickname, "Sore Ass", bestowed upon me by the good doctor. I guess I got the last laugh – he told me that all

the shrapnel had cleared the body; however, years later during an MRI, it was discovered that I retained a piece of metal to remember my first combat mission. The ferocious opposition of the Luftwaffe and the Flak batteries took quite a toll. We lost 25 B-17's and suffered major damage to many of the planes that made it back to England. I had my baptism of combat and never again did I take off on another mission without fear of what could happen to me.

After being discharged from the hospital, I was grounded for another ten days, or so, while the entry and exit wounds were healing. During that time, I spent several hours in the Link trainer. Our squadron had a dismal record of using the Link (I'm sure all pilots figured that we did enough of that training during our cadet days) so when the Squadron Operations Officer suggested that I might spend some of my idle time in the Link to improve our image, I willingly complied. I was asked by the Bombardier of the crew I trained with, Jim Vaughter, to perform the pilot's duties while he practiced his skills in the bombing trainer. I also did the same for my former Navigator, Dan Peterson, in the navigation trainer. I was so eager to get back to flying that I did everything I could to stay active in a supporting roll. Having clipped wings was no fun at all.

On the afternoon of my discharge from the hospital, I went to the control tower to watch the planes come in from that day's raid. One of the pilots in our squadron flew his 25th mission that day. After buzzing the tower in celebration of the event, he landed his plane (he led our squadron) and proceeded to debriefing. I tagged along to hear how the raid had gone and that pilot spotted me and suggested that we get cleaned up and go celebrate. That night we had a group party at the Officers Club, so this guy (I wish I could remember his name) arranged for a truck, and driver, to haul us around to the neighboring Pubs. We proceeded to deplete their stock of scotch and other spirits, ending up with dark ale (which I disliked). We had secured help from two or three other fellows to help us on our binge. Our main purpose, in setting forth on this adventure, was to try to round up some females to take to our group party. After visiting a couple pubs and cleaning them out of their wares, we sort of forgot our original intentions and concentrated on the more important business of getting plastered. We had dinner at our mess hall (I think) and proceeded to the Club for the party. There are a couple things I remember about that party –I danced a number of dances with a good-looking nurse and our Squadron Surgeon called to me from across the dance floor, "Hey, Sore Ass". The only other thing that I remember of that night was getting back to my room in the barracks (I don't know how) and watching my bed (cot) circling the room. After contemplating the problem for a time, I figured how much lead I would have to give it and launched myself at my target. Man, was I on the money – I tucked one arm under the mattress on one side and the other arm under the mattress on the other side. That was when my lights went out. Some time the next day, I came to and was in the same position.

Time passed so slowly while I was recuperating. It was tough watching the planes taking off, whether it be for a mission or practice, and not being a part of the operation. I remember that the first Schweinfurt mission was flown on August 17th – this was the raid that the Third Division flew to Africa after bombing Regensburg. That, undoubtedly, was the mission that I referred to above. That had no particular significance to me since my

17 Aug '43

group, the 306th, came through without a loss although losses were very heavy that day – 34 planes from the Schweinfurt raid and 26 from the Regensburg raid. The crew that I trained with in the States was a part of this raid and came through with no damage or injuries. What a difference between this raid and the second mission to this target in October.

Finally, near the end of August, the doctor released me and pronounced me ready to return to flying status. I had to wear a bandage over the entry and exit wounds for quite a while due to wounds reopening when pressure changed as we climbed to altitude for the raids. Eventually this condition corrected itself and I had no more problems with it. I

(3)
31 Aug '43

flew my second mission on August 31st (God had released me from my ridiculous promise to never fly again) on a raid to Amiens, France. This was one of those screw-ups where things were totally snafu. Things were fine until we neared the target. We encountered complete cloud cover over the target which forced our mission commander to look for a target of opportunity. Two of the groups in our Wing bombed an airfield at Glisy, but just as our group was about to drop bombs, some other group swung in underneath our group and prevented us from dropping. We took our bombs back to our base – a wasted trip. Two raids under my belt and still no bombs on an enemy target. Oh well, we can always hope for better luck in the future.

(3)
3 Sep '43

September 3rd was another morning affair – we were bombing our target at Romilly-sur-Seine, France about 9:00 AM. On the previous raid, we didn't take off until 3:05 PM. This time, in spite of intense cloud cover, we were able to see the target through a hole in the clouds long enough to drop on the primary. My luck is changing. We suffered severe damage to four of the planes in our group, but all planes made it back to our base. We were very fortunate since we had no damage to our plane for the second mission in a row – perhaps this was making up for my first mission. This was the third, and last, mission that I flew with Charley Schoolfield. He was a good pilot and became "A" Flight Commander shortly after – there were three flight leaders in the squadron and Charley was the "B" flight commander at this point.

(4)
15 Sep '43

September 15th I flew my fourth mission, a return trip to the airfield at Romilly. This was like a reunion because I was co-pilot with the crew I trained with stateside and flew with to Scotland. Our pilot was Lt. B. C. Bryant (I think he finished his 25 that day) who took over Peter's crew when we arrived at the 306th. Once again there was very little opposition from the enemy, at least against our group. We had good weather and had direct hits on the target. This was another afternoon flight – we dropped bombs at 6:49 PM and landed back at our base after dark.

(5)
16 Sep '43

The next day, Sept. 16th, we were on another mission, this time to Nantes, France to bomb sub pens. I was with my old crew again and Ralph Peters was the pilot. Ralph had flown five missions as a co-pilot and became the pilot of his crew when Bryant finished. This was mission #5 for me and I was with my old gang. This was a very long mission – we took off at 11:15 AM and had very little opposition from the Germans. Unfortunately, when we arrived at Nantes, a very large cloud covered our planned drop area and we had to pick an alternate target again. We bombed an airfield at Chateau Bougon and the bombing results were excellent. The return trip was over the water, which provided us with a good chance of avoiding enemy fighters on the way home. This

plan worked perfectly, except we had to land at a field on Lands End because Ralph didn't think we had sufficient fuel to get back to base. A number of other Forts had the same problem. We landed at Exeter at 6:25 PM and finally got back to the base at 8:42 PM, whereas the rest of the group landed at our field at 6:40 PM.

(6) 23 Sep '43

Another trip to Nantes, September 23rd, was my sixth mission. Once again I flew with most of my old crew, but this time our pilot was Capt. Charles Flanagan, our Squadron Operations Officer. I did not know it at the time, but this was my check ride preparatory to being promoted to Airplane Commander (lofty title meaning first pilot). Our target on this raid was a submarine supply ship. We took off at 2:45 PM and had considerably more opposition on this trip. When we got to Nantes, we were unable to see the target due to a very effective smoke screen; however, we had a good concentration of bombs on the secondary which was along the north bank of the river. Our group suffered slight damage from flak to several of our planes (we had no damage to our plane) and our Squadron Leader crash-landed in England, cause of the damage was unknown. We landed back at our base at 8:40 PM – the flight time was considerably less since we flew a direct route back to England. I guess I performed reasonably well on this check ride because after one more mission in the co-pilot's seat, I got my own crew.

(7) 27 Sep '43

We had a very early wake-up call on September 27th. About 2:30 AM my door opened and I was greeted with the message that breakfast was at 3:00 and briefing at 4:00. They didn't waste words nor time to make sure we were awake. At the briefing, I found that I would be flying with Lt. E. M. Murphy on my 7th mission. We took off at 7:05 AM for Emden, Germany, with 18 planes in our group, to hit port facilities and any ships that happened to be in port at that time. We had no fighter attacks on our group on this mission, although we saw 20 to 30 enemy fighters attacking the wing ahead of us. We observed a group of FW-190's coming up to attack the bombers. They made a bad error by apparently mistaking our P-47 escorts as some of their buddies and flying up to join them. What a gift that was for our fighters – they had a good score of enemy aircraft downed before the Germans realized what hit them. We encountered 10/10ths cloud cover over the target, so we had to bomb through the clouds, utilizing a Pathfinder to let us know where to drop our bombs. All reports agreed that bombs were dropped all the way from the IP to the target and to the coast on the way out. I do not know how many planes we lost that day, we saw three Fortresses go down, but our group escaped with only one plane receiving minor flak damage. We really had "milk-run" on that day.

It was almost two weeks before I flew my next mission. I do not know what date I was told about being promoted to Pilot and who was assigned as members of my crew - but it was a glorious day for me. I was floating on "Cloud 9" yet I did have presence of mind enough to get together with them. I did not know any of these fellows – they had been with a pilot who had finished his tour. The crew was intact, except for the Navigator who was a recent arrival in the group. Our crew was:

Pilot	Lt. J. P. Noack
Co-Pilot	Lt. R. L. Fallow
Navigator	Lt. D. H. Fay
Bombardier	Lt. H. H. Bittman

Radio	S/Sgt. C. J. Hufnagel
Top Turret	T/Sgt. E. K. Fox
Ball Turret	S/Sgt. D. J. Williams
R. Waist	Sgt. A. E. Sewald
L. Waist	Sgt. K. H. Smith
Tail Gunner	S/Sgt. T. H. Smith

We did not stay strangers very long. I soon became very close to them and our second mission together was one that welded us into a lasting, close relationship.

(8) 10 Oct 43

Mission #8 for me was number 1 as First Pilot with my own crew. On October 10th, we were dispatched on a mission to Munster, Germany. We had no difficulty with take-off or assembly in our group but when we were supposed to rendezvous with the other two groups in our wing over Thurleigh, they were nowhere in sight. We proceeded on course and finally caught up with the other two groups – 92nd leading and 305th in the high position. The climb to altitude was too fast for us to get into good wing formation until we were well past the English coast and over the North Sea. The lead group made two "S" turns to allow us to slide into our position of low group in the formation. After joining the other two groups, we had good wing formation and we suffered no attacks by enemy aircraft. This turned out to be another SNAFU. The lead group became confused about the target and made a drop on the town of Coesfeld and our lead bombardier had only ten seconds to release his bombs. As a result of this error, we did not suffer the heavy flak that the other wings had over Munster and we were, once again, without opposition from enemy fighters. Maybe God wanted to spare me on my first mission as a First Pilot – I'll never know. I do know that this mission helped the crew get acquainted with their new pilot and start to let us know that we could rely on each other. That was very important.

BLACK THURSDAY

14 Oct '43
Eighth Air Force Mission 115 - 2nd Schweinfurt
306th Bomb Group (H) – 369th Squadron

THROUGH THE EYES OF JOHN NOACK

(9) 14 Oct. 43

October 14, 1943 was a day that I will never forget – was that yesterday? My memories seem so vivid, it certainly could not have been over 59 years ago as the calendar indicates. Those of us who were scheduled to fly went through the usual routine of breakfast and briefing to prepare for a 10:25 takeoff on my ninth mission. The weather was so bad that we figured there was no way that we would fly that day. At briefing, we learned that the target would be Schweinfurt, the center of the ball-bearing industry in Germany. The 306th had been there on August 17th (the day after I was released from the hospital after my first mission). Our Squadron and Group suffered very little damage to our planes, so we didn't think too much about what the day held in store for us, especially since the weather was so terrible and we wouldn't be flying anyway. We got our gear together and headed out to the plane. I had not been given a plane of my own at this point (this being only my second mission as an airplane commander) so I was scheduled to fly a plane assigned to another pilot in our squadron. Lt. T. C. Olsen, a recent arrival in the squadron, was my Co-Pilot for the mission, which was to be his first. We kept waiting for word that the raid was scrubbed due to the weather. After all it was impossible to take off with clouds on the deck and visibility of 200 feet. A few minutes after we checked the plane, our Squadron CO pulled up in his Jeep (I guess he thought he should offer words of encouragement to his newest first pilot in the squadron). He told us there was no way that we would fly that day due to our home base at Thurleigh being socked in as it was. After chatting with him for a few minutes, it was time to board the plane to go through the pre-flight checklist. The time arrived for us to start engines and then taxi to our take-off position. What is wrong with the Eighth Air Force brass – could they not see that the conditions were impossible?

Trygve Olsen

The signal came for us to begin taking off – I thought we would have a pile of wrecked planes just off the end of our runway. Ralph Peters (Pilot of the crew I trained with in the States and with whom I flew on my 5th mission) was on the left wing of Charley Schoolfield (Group Commander that day) and I flew on Charley's right wing. With misgivings, I moved into position for take-off and shoved the throttles forward to take-off power. We were immediately on instruments as the wheels left the ground. Shortly after we got off the ground our flight indicator showed us to be OK so I looked at this new Co-Pilot to see how he was reacting. Much to my horror, I saw our right wing tip flirting with trees - we were in a right turn. I looked at the artificial horizon instrument and it showed we were straight and level. I quickly used needle & ball, rate-of-climb, and compass to get us straightened out. We climbed through 12,000 feet of clouds and were able to assemble in our group formation at 14,000 – amazingly, all our planes made it with no mishaps. This was the hairiest takeoff that I had ever made and, as my Engineer remarked years later, I was sweating bullets. I have to believe that he was right because he was standing at my right shoulder during our takeoff and had a perfect view of what was going on. I'm sure he and the Co-Pilot were sweating a bit also. After we settled down, I asked Olsen to fly for a while. He took the controls, but after a short time he allowed the plane to get a bit too high and was unable to see the lead ship. He asked me to take control and I flew for 10 or 15 minutes to give him a chance to calm down (I'm sure our brush with the trees after take-off sort of unnerved him). I asked him if he was ready to try it again and he answered affirmatively. He had the same problem again and turned the controls back to me. Ordinarily, the Co-Pilot does a lot of the flying during the assembly with the other groups in the wing, which is over friendly territory, so

the Pilot can reserve his strength for combat. It became apparent, as the mission continued, that I was to get little help from the right seat that trip. As the day unfolded I easily understood his dilemma – I imagine that I would have been a basket case if my first mission had gotten off to such a terrible start.

We were supposed to assemble in wing formation over our field, but arriving there at the appointed time, we were unable to find our lead group, the 92nd. We proceeded on the briefed course and finally made contact with the 92nd at the departure point from England. We moved into our assigned position as high group – nothing had been heard from the 305th which was the low group for that mission. Our Wing Leader proceeded to the enemy coast and then made a 180 degree turn back toward England. We flew this heading for three minutes and made another 180, which brought us to a position just behind the 41st combat wing. We still had no word from the 305th so the Mission Leader asked the 41st Wing Leader to take over the lead and we, as a two-group wing, would follow. Flying a two-group wing into combat was a violation of orders and the mission commander, Col. Peasley, laid himself wide open to a court martial; however, I don't know if he was reprimanded or what, if any, action was taken – he continued in his job. Three planes of our group aborted, none from my squadron, before we reached enemy territory due to mechanical problems. We had good fighter protection until our fighters reached the limit of their range, near Aachen on the German border, and had to turn for home. Almost immediately the Luftwaffe moved in with FW-190's, ME-109's, ME-110's, JU-88's and a few DO-217's. The fighters attacked relentlessly from all directions while the JU-88's attacked from the rear with rockets. We started losing planes all the way to the IP (Initial Point – this is where the bomb run begins) mostly due to the rockets, which were very effective against our tight defensive formation.

At a point along the way I heard a high-pitched voice over the intercom but could not make out what was being said. I suggested that whoever was on the intercom to calm down and tell me what was wrong. It turned out that Big Smitty, our tail gunner, was yelling when he saw the planes firing the rockets toward us. By this time, we had only 7 or 8 planes left in our group, so I told Big Smitty to call out "Bounce it" whenever he saw a plane release it's rockets. Each time he called out, I bounced our plane 50 to 100 feet higher and then let it settle back into position. We had quite a roller coaster ride the rest of the way to the IP. I do not know whether we dodged any rockets with this maneuver but it sure made us feel a lot better.

So much was happening that I do not know just when it occurred, but our Engineer-Top Turret gunner (Ken Fox) was hit just above the ankle by a 20mm shell. That left his foot dangling and yet he had to have both feet in the stirrups to be able to operate the turret, so he supported himself with his elbows while he hooked the good foot under the bad one to put it back in the stirrup. I cannot remember who I called to administer first aid to him, but someone put a tourniquet around his leg and he continued to man the guns. I have never witnessed, or heard of, a greater act of bravery.

I have to get back to my Co-Pilot and his reactions to his first mission. He had a steel helmet on over his headgear and his head did not move during the entire time we were under attack. He would only move his eyes from side to side – I guess he was

seeing all he wanted to see with that maneuver.

Shortly before we got to IP, Ralph Peters pulled his plane off to the side of the formation, opened the bomb bay doors, dropped the bombs and resumed his place in the group. Upon reaching the IP, and having lost 12 aircraft to abortions and enemy action, we joined the 92nd group and flew high squadron with them and bombed on their release. A short time after bombs away, Ralph pulled out of formation and the crew bailed out. I was not able to figure out why they abandoned ship because everything appeared to be normal. Fifty years later when I saw Jim Vaughter, Bombardier on Peter's crew, I was informed that their plane exploded after they had bailed out.

This mission was the only raid that I participated in where the Luftwaffe fighter planes continued their attacks through the flak field above the target. Shortly after we dropped our bombs and left the area the German planes left us to concentrate on the Fortresses that were on their way to the target. We were not totally out of the woods, but our opposition consisted of only a few individual planes that made runs on our formation. We withdrew considerably to the south of the route to the target and the enemy was mainly interested in the stream going to Schweinfurt. They were tenacious in their defense of these ball-bearing factories that were so valuable to their war effort.

Our bombing was excellent – we only delivered 30 bombs (six 1000# bombs per plane) but they were all on the button. I don't think we ever did a better job. Photographs showed our bombs bursting right on our aiming point (one of the bearing factories located in Schweinfurt). By the time we unloaded on the target, we had endured approximately an hour of the most intense firefight ever encountered – this engagement later became known as the greatest air battle of all time. It is hard to know what was flak and what were rockets since they were so mixed up. After the bomb run the remnants of the 40th combat wing joined the 41st wing for withdrawal.

The remainder of the trip was uneventful. The main concern that we had was wondering if the cloud cover had dissipated enough for us to be able to find our field. God smiled on us – as we approached the area we saw a hole in the overcast and there was the welcome sight of our field. All five of our planes suffered major damage and all had wounded personnel aboard. Our Squadron CO came out to our hardstand (I brought back the only plane of our squadron – Schoolfield was flying a plane borrowed from another squadron) and asked what had happened. I tried to give him a rundown of the day's events. He told me that he would take me to interrogation, so on the way he vented his anger at the Germans stating that he would like to load a plane with bombs and personally deliver them to Hitler. I volunteered to fly Co-Pilot with him. I also told him about the heroism displayed by Ken Fox and asked him to recommend that the Medal of Honor be awarded. I learned, years later, that Ken received the Distinguished Service Cross.

When our crew sat down for debriefing the first thing I said to the interrogating officer was "Don't ask me how many enemy planes we saw today because my answer will be a thousand". I think the consensus was that our wing suffered attacks by 300. I prayed that I would never experience such intense action again. Two of my crew did not

fly another mission. Ken was in a hospital for several months and then sent back to the States and Hufnagel, our radio operator, suffered severe frostbite to hands and feet and he also was unable to fly any more.

This raid became known as "BLACK THURSDAY". Our group put up 18 planes, of which three aborted, ten were shot down and five returned to base. Sixty planes were lost by the Eighth Air Force over enemy territory and five more crashed upon returning to England. Of the 17s that made it back to their bases, I believe I read that an additional 17 were so badly damaged they were used for spare parts. A total of 383 ships took off for the raid, of which 60 were B-24s. The 24s had so much trouble trying to assemble in the adverse weather conditions that most returned to their bases, but 24 did manage to form up and fly a diversion to the Frisian Islands off the coast of Holland. After all the abortions and the 60 that were shot down, 197 returned. There was some thought that this may be the end of daylight precision bombing, but our air force was made of sterner stuff. It did prove that we desperately needed long range fighters that could accompany us to any target that we were directed to hit. This came along a bit later when the P-51 made its appearance in December.

If I have ever been more physically exhausted than I was that evening, I cannot remember when it was. I think I slept at least twelve hours that night – I was so tired. We had been awakened around 6:00 AM, took off at 10:25 AM and did not land until 5:50 PM. Other than normal fear of facing enemy action before takeoff, this was a mission that I can truthfully say that I was not scared – I was far too busy to think of what was happening. Everything I did that day was instinctive and a result of the hours of training that I had gone through, at times wondering why we had to repeat things so much. I say that my actions were instinctive, but the fact that God was guiding my every move was what actually got us back.

Olsen and I went out to the plane the next day to see what damages we could spot. After viewing the ship, we wondered how we escaped injury – the skin around the cockpit looked like a sieve. How could we have survived all that metal that was apparently flying around us and both of us coming through without a scratch? We had a large hole in the right wing that covered the whole flap – I believe three men could have crawled through it at the same time. I also complained to the pilot, to whom the plane was assigned, about his not having noted in the ship's log about the artificial horizon instrument being out of commission. He said it had been that way for a long time, so I reminded him that we could have crashed as a result of not knowing about it and that it was sheer luck that we made the flight. He was very apologetic and I'm sure he never failed to write up whatever malfunctions occurred with any plane that he flew thereafter.

Two or three days after Schweinfurt, my crew and I were sent to fly a mission with another group. I do not remember where their field was located nor which group we were to join. We left our base and arrived at the other field in total darkness (the raid was to be flown early in the morning). Even though the Eighth Air Force was a daylight precision bombing force, there were times that we did some night flying, as in this case.

We arrived at the field and came in for a beautiful landing only to have the landing lights pick up a large mound of dirt across the runway. It was too late to put on full power to try to take off again, so the Co-Pilot and I stood on the brakes to try to lighten the damage to our landing gear. We hit the barrier at a pretty good speed expecting to be wiped out, but (miracle of miracles) we rolled right through the barrier and coasted to a normal stop. Our mound of dirt turned out to be a large amount of weeds that had blown across the runway (shades of West Texas tumbleweeds). When we got to the flight line and stopped where we were directed, we told the story of our landing and had a good laugh with the guys of that group. We were briefed for a raid just inside enemy territory, which should have been a "milk run". This had been planned to help us recover from the Schweinfurt mission. The reason our crew was scheduled to fly with another group (the other guys that made it back from the 14th raid went to other fields) was that the 306th did not have enough equipment or personnel to put a group into the air. I am not sure, but I think the mission was scrubbed before the briefing was completed – bad weather over the target area. We visited with the fellows at our host field for a while (no doubt swapping tales about the experiences we had) and later in the morning we returned to our base.

As I recall, we experienced a lot of miserable weather during the last half of October. Our crew did not fly another mission during the month – I do not recall if the group flew or not. It is possible that the 306th was briefed for missions, but they were scrubbed due to weather or our squadron was not scheduled (only three of our four squadrons flew on a raid). New crews were assigned to the 306th to bring us back to strength after the terrible loss at Schweinfurt. Our squadron received four new B-17G's (the latest model) and one of them was assigned to me. We flew a practice mission over England to check out our new planes (only the four new ships participated) and found that everything worked perfectly. I called a crew meeting to decide what we would name that beautiful new Flying Fortress. I suggested "BLESS 'EM ALL" and everyone agreed that was a great name and no further suggestions were offered. I do not know if this was a case of deferring to the Aircraft Commander but everyone seemed pleased with our choice.

(10)
3 Nov '43

With the new planes and replacement crews, the 306th was able to fly 25 planes on a raid to Wilhelmshaven on November 3rd. The weather was good over England, but a total overcast was expected over the target, so two Pathfinder planes took over the lead of our wing at the coast as we left England. We flew over the North Sea and just as we were turning in a southeasterly direction to penetrate the enemy coast, two planes from our group (not our squadron) collided – one plane suddenly gained altitude and smashed into the bottom of another plane of the same squadron. Only two parachutes were observed coming out of the tangled wreckage and it is unknown if anyone survived. As expected, our target had 10/10 cloud cover so we had to rely on the Pathfinders to mark the proper time to drop bombs. The Pathfinder ship performed as briefed – bomb bay doors were opened at the IP, parachute flares released and then the bombs. The only flak that we saw was a concentration of 25 to 30 bursts right after our bombs were away. This tended to indicate that our bombs were dropped near the target area. Our fighter escort was great – a force of about 25 enemy fighters climbed through the overcast to attack us, but our P-47's dove on them and broke up the attack. As the P-47 escort left, the enemy regrouped and tried to mount an attack, but a group of P-38's arrived and disrupted their plans. The

368th Sq. planes piloted by Donald L. Wadley + Geo. E. Goris

enemy aircraft dispersed and were not seen again. My Co-Pilot on this mission was Lt. B. W. Casseday, another new arrival in the squadron who was flying his first raid. The Engineer/top turret gunner was S/Sgt. F. J. Wesner – Frank was on Ralph Peters crew but was released from the hospital the day of the Schweinfurt mission (he had been injured four days earlier while removing the 50 caliber guns after the Munster mission). When Frank learned that Ken Fox had been injured on the Schweinfurt raid, he came to me to ask if he could join my crew. I was delighted to get him because I knew him to be a good man, having flown with him through our B-l7 training and on the three missions that I flew with the old crew prior to my getting my own crew.

Shortly after the Wilhelmshaven raid, my tenth mission, the Schoolfield and Noack crews were sent to rest camps for a week of R&R (rest and relaxation). Our enlisted men went to one camp while we officers were flown to a delightful Country Estate in the southern part of England. What a great week that turned out to be – nothing to do but live in the lap of luxury for seven days. The weather was so good (we did have morning fog) that we wondered if we had suddenly been transplanted to a different country. We did not see, or hear, an aircraft, enemy or friendly, during that whole week. Each morning we were awakened with a cup of hot chocolate and a cheerful "Wakey, wakey, wakey; good morning, gentlemen; it's a beautiful morning". With that greeting, the butler would open the blackout drapes to reveal a thick fog – nothing could be seen beyond the windows. The butler seemed to take a great amount of satisfaction in catering to our every wish or desire. We learned that he had spent years aboard passenger ships as a steward. No wonder he was so good at this job that he performed at that stage of his life. The fog always burned off by the time we finished our breakfast, so we spent a lot of time walking around the area, or riding bicycles if we desired to venture farther. We also played a lot of cards, reading, or playing practical jokes on each other. Unfortunately, that week passed very quickly and we had to return to our base to resume the war.

(11)
16 Nov '43

November l6th was another mission – we had a pre-dawn breakfast, and a briefing which disclosed that we were going to Knaben, Norway that day. My Co-Pilot for this raid was Lt. R. F. Crowley, another of our newly arrived Pilots who was going on his first mission. We arrived at "BLESS 'EM ALL" and discovered that our ground crew had not been alerted to the fact that we were flying that day. They jumped into action preparing the ship and getting bombs and ammunition brought out to be loaded aboard the plane. All of this activity caused us to have a delay in takeoff (about an hour after the rest of the group) and we then had to try to find the 306th. I believe every group was using the same color for identification that day. We saw a flare that was supposed to designate our group, but when we got near them we found that it was not the "H" in a triangle on the vertical stabilizer that identified our group. We saw several more flares of that same color and checked them, only to find they were not the 306th. By this time the bomber stream was well out over the North Sea. I finally decided we could not fly a one-plane mission so we saw a group near us and decided we would fly with them. As we approached this group, they started firing their guns at us apparently thinking we were a B-17 that had been shot down and repaired by the Germans to use to penetrate our formations. We immediately shot flares to identify us as a friend. With that recognition, we were permitted to join the group, which turned out to be the 305th, another of the groups in our 40th Combat Wing (enemy action was expected to be light so we flew

individual group formations rather than the customary wing formations). We joined the high squadron and in a short time were joined by other planes that were not able to find their groups. By the time we reached the Norwegian coast, we had accumulated almost another whole group flying with us. Everyone that joined in wanted to fly with the high squadron, as we did, thinking that was the safest position.

There was a problem in locating our target (some groups never did find it) and we were flying past it to the north. We were looking for a Molybdenum mine located at the south end of a small lake (this mine produced a product which was used in hardening steel and was practically the only source of this material for the Germans). Our crew spotted the target and when it became obvious that our group leader had not seen it, I called the leader and told him to look off his starboard wing. He turned to the right toward the mine and the lead bombardier made a great run on the target. Just as we dropped our bombs, we saw another group making their bomb run from the opposite direction at the same altitude. We made a violent climbing turn and the other group, fortunately, made a diving turn away from us. Once again, the Good Lord was guiding us and we escaped that harrowing experience without any mid-air collisions. Our bombing results were excellent , crews reported that we wiped out that mine. We encountered a few bursts of flak and saw only four enemy fighters, which gave no indication of attacking us – they were apparently looking for stragglers to pick on. This was a difficult raid for most of the guys, very cold except for the cockpit and almost impossible to spot the target on the snow-covered mountains. We were airborne for eight hours in extremely cold temperatures with no activity.

(12) 26 Nov 43

Ten days later, we flew on a raid to Bremen, an important port on the north coast of Germany. The existing groups were being expanded from nine to twelve crews per squadron and we put up 20 planes in our regular group formation plus 9 more in a composite group, which flew the low group position in the wing. Our crew was a part of this composite group – we were joined by six planes of the 92nd which formed the low squadron and three planes from the 305th which made up the second element of our high squadron. My Co-Pilot was Lt. P.E. Crowley again, the only Co-Pilot that flew two missions with me. We had 10/10 cloud cover over the target so we had to have a Pathfinder mark our dropping point. As a result, we had no idea what damage we inflicted on the target. We were attacked sporadically by 20 to 25 enemy aircraft, mostly ME-109's. We also had a few rocket attacks but the Sweinfurt mission taught us to spread our formation when faced with that tactic, so the rockets had little to do with any damages that we suffered. Our group did suffer two losses on this raid, one each from 368th and 423rd squadrons. Four planes from our 369th Squadron suffered slight damage but 23 planes in our group came through the raid with no damage (my plane was one of these). We saw six aircraft in trouble besides the two lost from our group – I have no idea if they were all lost because once they disappeared into the clouds we were unable to determine their fate.

(13) 1 Dec. '43

On December 1, 1943 I celebrated my 24th birthday by flying my 13th mission. We were briefed for a raid on Solingen, Germany and once again due to 10/10 clouds over the target we had a Pathfinder lead us on our bombing run. Somewhere along the way the target was changed to Leverkuson – I don't know if the Pathfinder made a mistake or if it was intentional. My Co-Pilot for the day was Lt. W. R. DeWolf who was flying his first

mission. Of the seven planes in our squadron, only two suffered no damages (I guess I had a wonderful birthday present because my plane was one that was not hit), two had serious damage and the other three had slight damages. We lost one plane from the 423rd squadron that hit a thunderhead and was damaged to the point that the pilot could not maintain control. This happened before we assembled the group over England. The pilot was able to keep his ship level long enough to allow his crew to bail out; however, one man was killed in the process of jumping – the other nine made it. We observed a dozen bombers (one from our 367th Squadron and the remainder from other groups) being shot down during this raid. Two fighters collided – they looked like P-47's but may have been enemy planes because the Germans camouflaged some of their FW-190's to look like our 47's.

Our fighter escort was good as far as the Rhine River where they turned back towards home. From that point until just after we dropped bombs, we had no friendly cover and that is when the Luftwaffe hit us. Shortly after the target another group of P-47's arrived and took care of the enemy fighters. Most of the flak that we encountered came after our bombs were dropped. In the target area it was moderate but accurate, both barrage and tracking.

My regular ball turret gunner did not fly with us that day. A man from the ground personnel wanted to transfer to flying status so he could go home after 25 missions rather than spending the rest of the war overseas. He had been qualified as a gunner and was assigned to my crew for this mission. We reached the altitude to go on oxygen (10,000 ft.) and the crew was advised to don their masks. A short time later one of the waist gunners called me on the intercom to report that the ball turret was moving erratically. I tried to get a response from the turret, but was unable to do so. The waist gunners were advised to try to crank the ball around to the opening into the fuselage and pull the gunner out. Every time they tried to do so, the man would partially revive and start moving the ball. Finally, I had to give the order to leave him and return to their positions since we were over hostile territory and subject to attack. I thought that I would suffer the first death of a crewman on any of my missions, but I had to sacrifice him to allow the rest of the men to perform their jobs of defending our plane. We got through the mission and started descending as we were over water on the way back to our base. After we got our oxygen masks off, the waist reported that the ball turret was moving. I finally established contact with the turret and told him to take his hands off his controls. The waist gunners were then able to crank the turret around to the opening and pulled the man out of the turret. Apparently he had not plugged his oxygen mask into the supply line and as the air got thinner at altitude he started losing consciousness. After we landed the medics checked him over and found him none the worse for wear. This guy flew a mission without being aware of it. I told him that as far as I was concerned his flying days were over. He pleaded for another chance so I finally relented and asked another pilot who was going on a practice mission to take him along and check his performance. The same thing happened on that flight and it was determined that he would be grounded for his own safety.

Having survived the 13th on my birthday, I began to have thoughts that I might make it after all (I had never expected to see the good old USA again). Don't get too

optimistic, old buddy, you just passed the halfway point and you have certainly seen plenty to know you are not invincible.

(14) 5 Dec '43

December 5th arrived - once again we were up early in the morning preparing for another raid. This time our target was an airfield at La Rochelle, France, which was near Nantes the target on two of my previous raids as a Co-Pilot. Our squadron flew in the high position of our group, which led the 40th combat wing on that raid. There were multiple targets that day, other groups going to St. Jesu, Cognac and Bordeaux in our area and six groups bombing a target near Paris. Flak was seen at Nantes and Rennes, but it was moderate and inaccurate and seemed to be of the barrage type. My Co-Pilot on this mission was Lt. W. C. Quaintance, another recent arrival flying his first mission. We had breakfast at 4:00 AM, briefing at 5:00, stations at 7:55, taxi 8:05 and took off at 8:17. We arrived at our target area at 11:20 AM only to receive a recall message – all of France had total cloud cover and even the Pathfinders could not help, because they had nothing to use as reference points. We landed back at our base shortly after 3:00 PM in total frustration - we could not even attempt to bomb any target after such a long flight.

(15) (last mission) 11 Dec '43

We had another early awakening on December 11th – Breakfast at 5, briefing at 6. At the briefing, we were advised that we were going to Emden, Germany and that Col. Robinson, our group Commanding Officer, would be the group and wing leader. Flying Co-Pilot with the Colonel was Major "Rip" Riordan, our 369th Squadron Commander. My Co-Pilot on this mission was Lt. R. A. Schoch (yes, you guessed it, another recent arrival in our squadron flying his first mission). We took off at 8:28 AM, as briefed, with 21 planes in our group. One of the planes in our squadron turned back before we left the English coast due to failure of one of the engines. Our fighter support was very good – we saw no enemy fighters. Flak was extremely accurate during the bomb run – according to Big Smitty, our tail gunner, we had bursts walking toward our formation, getting closer with each salvo. Just before boarding our plane, I had a very strong premonition that I would not be returning from this mission. A few minutes before time to drop bombs, "BLESS 'EM ALL" was rocked by a loud explosion. We received a direct Flak hit on the #2 engine, which knocked it off the wing and us out of the formation. The #1 engine was so badly damaged that I had to feather the propeller. The #3 engine started losing oil in a steady stream. The plane dropped off to the starboard side and we lost about 2,000 feet elevation before I could get it back into fairly level flight. Someone was screaming over the intercom "Bail out, Bail out, Bail out". I ordered everyone to stand by their stations, that we were OK in the cockpit, and asked for reports from the crew about damages in their areas. By this time we were dropping farther behind the group so I told our Bombardier to guess where he should salvo our bombs based on where the group made it's drop. Since we were flying on the left wing of the second element, I was flying in the right seat of the cockpit and Schoch was in the left seat. The Flak burst pulverized the glass on the left side of the pilot's compartment and I thought I had lost my hands because they looked like bloody stumps on the ends of my arms. The Co-Pilot had the worst of it as he was on the side where the Flak hit us. The left side of his face was a bloody mess. After we dropped our bombs, we turned toward the west and I called the Navigator on the intercom asking for a heading to take us home. The Bombardier answered with the message "He's gone, Jack". I pictured Dud as being splattered in the nose of the plane since the Navigator's desk was on the side where we had been hit. I

then asked Bittman to bring the maps up to me so I could try to determine a heading to take us back to base. I pushed the throttle for #4 engine as far forward as it could go. I used #3 engine intermittently because after running a while it would overheat and I had to let it idle to cool down. Bittman came up to the cockpit to inform me that the nose was a mess and that he couldn't find any maps. At that time I learned that Dud Fay had not been killed but had bailed out (I learned later that he heard "bail out" and did not hang around to determine if that order had come from me). I then decided to fly a course of 270 degrees because we would hit England somewhere if we could remain in the air long enough.

During the flight across Holland, I explained to the crew that I did not know if we had power enough to get us back to England on the one engine. I asked each man to tell me if he wanted to bail out and take his chances on making a connection with the underground to evade capture. A second option was to stay and take a chance of getting back, although I considered the possibility of reaching England as very poor. All eight of the men elected to stick with me (I felt a surge of great joy that they wanted to remain together). We continued on our way and crossed the northern end of Holland and passed between two of the islands off the coast. A few minutes later, I tried to get some help from the #3 engine which had cooled down, but as the engine RPMs increased it started to ignite (it had lost too much oil, I guess) so there was only one thing left to do – ditch. We had descended to 1,500' at that point so I ordered the crew to prepare for ditching, having already told them to assemble in the radio room after we reached the North Sea. I quickly descended to a position just above the water.

We had practiced ditching procedure at the base just a couple days before this mission. This called for all, except the two pilots, to take a position on the radio room floor with feet forward. The radio operator kept his radio on intercom so the pilot could warn the crew to brace themselves against the forward bulkhead at impact. We had been trained to remain in this position through the first impact because the plane would skip and there would be a heavier jolt when it came to a sudden stop in the water. The procedure was to land along the swells, not across them, and no flaps were to be used because they could dig into the water and cause the plane to flip. When the plane came to a complete stop the crew had to abandon ship in 30 seconds because it was not expected to float longer than that. The North Sea did not have any swells to land alongside – what we faced was a choppy condition with the waves about four feet high. I decided to call for full flaps to reduce speed as much as possible before impact. I dropped the plane down until I could hear the tops of the waves clicking against the bottom of the flaps. The remaining engine was shut down and we glided to the payoff. There was no second jolt – we just hit water and there it stayed. Once again God was flying the plane and I was along for the ride, there is no other explanation.

The Co-Pilot and I deplaned through the side windows of the cockpit while the rest of the crew went out the top hatch of the radio room. It seems that something funny occurs regardless how serious things may be. Big Smitty was the first man to come out of the radio room, but he had trouble trying to pull himself up. I looked back to see how things were progressing and saw him hanging on the top of the plane by his elbows but unable to get any farther. A look of desperation was on his face, but suddenly he came

flying out of the hatch – the other fellows gave him a boost that propelled him four feet or more above the plane. The rest of the crew got out in rapid order and the ship was abandoned in record time. We got into the two life rafts and started drifting away from the ship. Our emergency radio was brought out so we could signal for help – unfortunately, we were unable to unscrew the ground plug that had to be put into the water to make the radio operable. I took a can of water from our emergency supply and started beating on the plug to loosen it. While I worked trying to free the plug, I experienced a bout of seasickness. I would bang on the plug for a while and then look out at the horizon for a while, gagging the whole time. I was fortunate that my stomach was empty. Finally I was able to unscrew the plug and drop it over the side of the raft. I then inflated the balloon allowing it to raise the antenna. We were now able to transmit the distress signal and we took turns cranking the handle on the set.

Almost immediately after getting into the rafts, we had to start baling because of the rough seas washing into the rafts. We were soaking wet from all the water that was spraying over us – it was probably lucky for us that we had all the activity to help warm us and keep us from freezing. As it turned out, we could have stayed in the plane for about another hour because it stayed afloat at least that long – finally we had to say goodbye to "BLESS 'EM ALL" as we watched our beautiful bird disappear beneath the choppy sea. By that time, we had drifted probably 100 yards from the ship.

We ditched around 2:00 PM, as best I can remember. Around 4:30 we saw something on the horizon which, after a few minutes, we discovered to be two German Naval Vessels. One of the ships came over and started circling us about 100 yards out. The deck of this ship had a number of small cannons with crews standing by and there must have been at least 20 men with automatic weapons standing along the rail of the ship. We were ordered to pull the balloon down and we complied. When the antenna had been retrieved and the balloon was deflated, the ship approached our rafts. It was a creepy feeling facing all those guns pointing at us and the men behind them looking ready to use them. We were pulled aboard the ship and herded into a room where we stood shivering in our wet clothes. We were addressed by an officer who told us that he was the Captain of the vessel. He asked who we were and we replied with name, rank and serial number. He wrote this information down as each of us answered. After a few more questions, which we did not answer, he told us to remove our clothes and he would have them dried for us. That was quite a help – after a while we stopped shivering. When our clothes were dry, they were returned to us and we were able to dress and feel human again. When the ship docked, we were turned over to the Luftwaffe at an airfield in northern Holland. We were taken to a building and given a meal. While we were eating, several Germans came over to us to talk. With their scant knowledge of English, they asked if we had been on the Schweinfurt raid in October. They informed us that their whole group had been sent down there to intercept us. That was the first knowledge that we had of planes being concentrated along the route which we flew to the target. After eating we were shown to a barracks where we spent our first night of captivity, facing an unknown future.

The next morning we had breakfast and were taken to a nearby railroad station. We boarded a train bound for Amsterdam – upon arrival, we were put on a bus along with our

12 Dec. 43

guards and taken to the city jail – my Co-Pilot was taken to the hospital. I learned sometime later that they had saved his eye and that he was eventually repatriated – that was the last time that I saw him. On the ride to the jail, we passed a building that had the name "E. Noack" on the building. I had two brothers whose first names began with "E" and I had to wonder if I could escape, would they give me help. That was so improbable that I gave up that dream in a hurry. Upon arrival at the jail, I was placed in a cell, in solitary, apart from the rest of my crew. I was too far away from them to be able to converse with them – in fact when I tried calling to them, I could not get an answer. Perhaps they were worried that I might lead a grand escape if we were not separated.

14 Dec 43 On the 14th we were taken back to the railroad station. We had four guards to escort us to the interrogation center at Oberursel, Germany. When we arrived at the station we had to wait quite a while for the train. There were no other people on the platform with us, but a train was boarding passengers two or three tracks away. It soon departed with people who were looking over at us – we were easily recognizable in our uniforms. As the train started moving, I flashed the "V for victory" sign and a number of the passengers returned it by placing their fingers in a "V" on their necks or cheeks, trying to return my signal while attempting to stay out of trouble with the Germans. Very soon, two German officers appeared and proceeded to read the riot act to our guards. I was glad that I didn't remember the German language that I spoke as a very young child – I'm sure that I would have felt sympathy for those poor guys. At that point, I didn't know if I was to be shot or what might happen, not that I cared all that much. The harangue finally ended; a train pulled in which we boarded and we were soon on our way to Frankfurt. The trip to Frankfurt took a couple of days, as I recall. Our train stopped several times, but the Germans did not see fit to keep us informed as to what was happening. One thing I do recall was the difference in the food that we were given from that which the guards ate. We had sandwiches while they had what appeared to be a hunk of fat made up into a sausage. If there was any meat, I sure couldn't see it. Maybe they liked it.

~ 15 Dec '43 We arrived in Frankfurt in the early evening hours of the 15th (my guess since I had no diary) and were herded through a mass of humanity in the train station. Our guards did some job getting us through the mob. We heard numerous calls of "Schweinhund" and "Terrorflieger" as we were crossing the station to the place where we were to spend that night. We must have seemed terrorists to the kids – they saw our "Fightin-Bitin" squadron insignia on our uniforms and gave us as wide a berth as the crowds allowed. We eventually arrived at a room, somewhere in the station, where we were given our evening meal, a straw mattress and a blanket. Note, I didn't mention a bed – that was the floor. We were all so tired that I do not think anyone even noticed the accommodations. Thank God, there was no air raid on the Frankfurt rail yards that night – I wasn't in the mood to be rousted out to take cover from British bombs.

~ 16 Dec 43 The following morning we proceeded to Oberursel to the interrogation center. The crew was split up and placed in solitary confinement. My cell, as I recall, was very small – I would guess about six feet wide and perhaps ten feet long. The only piece of furniture was a cot with a straw mattress and a blanket. There may have been a straw pillow, but I don't recall such an item. I was getting a bit tired of the clothes that I was wearing – after the dunking in the North Sea (following the ditching) and the drying process aboard the

naval vessel, they stayed on my body for a lot longer than I desired. The pilot's compartment in our plane was so cozy that I only had a minimum amount of clothing – no winter gear at all. I guess that was a blessing, in a way, since I did not have to contend with lugging a bunch of heavy stuff around. It was pretty easy to pack since I could wear everything I had (underwear, socks, shoes, pants, shirt, lightweight flight coveralls, A-2 leather jacket and my cap). Our helmets, Mae Wests, oxygen masks, etc. were all taken from us when we were picked up.

It is very difficult to describe what it is like being locked away by yourself. My cell had a small window near the ceiling, which was the only contact with the outside world. This window was probably one foot square and about 6-1/2 feet from the floor. I had to stand on my bunk to be able to look out. That did not afford much to see, so I didn't spend any time with that after my first look. After a time (probably a couple of hours) the door opened and a German Officer came in with this greeting, "Ah, Lt. Noack, ve haf been vaiting a long time for you". I was not in the mood for conversation so I said nothing. He tried to get me to talk, but I would not oblige. After several attempts, he must have decided I didn't care to engage in idle repartee, so he asked me to identify myself. That demanded a response, so I gave my name, rank and serial number. At that opening, he apparently thought I would continue a dialogue and he handed me a sheet of paper. He explained it was a form which they would turn over to the Red Cross to use for notification of my family that I was a POW and that I was OK. I examined the form and saw that it asked for a lot of information (name, rank, serial number, names of my crew, group, squadron, next of kin, and much more that I don't remember). I filled in the name, rank and serial number and crossed out the rest. I handed the form back to him. At that point, there was a sound of marching, a door to another cell being opened, more marching and an outside door opening and closing after the squad and prisoner exited the building. After a short time, the sound of rifles being fired outside the building was heard – then dead silence. The interrogator shook his head and made a remark that another of my fellow inmates would not cooperate. That was the end of my first interrogation.

~17 Dec — No one made an appearance at my humble abode the rest of my first day or the following day except the person who brought my meals or who answered when I had to go to the latrine. I heard a number of repetitions of the firing squad episodes and other noises from inside and outside the building. The Germans played the psychological game to the hilt – one never knew for sure if he would see another day. That was another occasion when all you could do was trust in the Lord – I never did try to question the rest of the guys to see if they had the same kind of feelings that I experienced.

~ 18 Dec — Sometime on the third day the interrogator who first questioned me came back for another go at me. He still had no success at engaging me in conversation, so he did not waste much time trying. One thing they did was to change the temperature in the cell. At times I would be freezing and at others I would be burning up. After the interrogator left the second time, the hot and cold treatment occurred much more often.

~ 19 Dec — The next day, I believe it was afternoon, a guard appeared at my door and motioned for me to follow him. I asked if I should take my hat and jacket. He did not understand me either, so I grabbed the jacket and hat – what a brilliant decision that turned out to be

because we exited the building and walked about a hundred yards through the snow to another building. I was taken to an office and greeted by an officer who introduced himself and told me to be seated in an armchair across the desk from him. I could hardly believe the sudden change in attitude (this fellow told me his rank was the equivalent of our Major). He enquired about the treatment I had received since being captured. He asked if I would like to shave, which I declined (that was the longest time that I have ever gone without a razor touching my face). I was asked if I had any injuries, if so, had they been treated. I told him that I had a flak wound on my right shin, but nothing had been done for it, although I had reported the wound and requested first aid for it. The German Officer apologized for the lack of attention and offered to send for a medic to treat it. I had torn a part of my undershirt and used it to cleanse the festered matter out. That seemed to take care of the problem and the only other wounds that I sustained were the numerous perforations to my hands caused by the glass from the cockpit windows which had been washed clean in the ditching. Tiny bits of glass worked to the surface of my skin for several years, but I scratched them off and they caused no problems.

After a bit more chit-chat, he settled down to asking questions about my military experiences. This went on for quite a while until he decided I wasn't going to provide any information (perhaps he decided I was too dumb to know what was going on). He opened a drawer in his desk and pulled out a tech manual on the B-17, which he tossed across the desk to me. His remark was "We did not get this from one of your B-17's which we shot down". This was a book about two inches thick and he was right – we did not carry these on the planes. Obviously, they were able to get all kinds of information through their spy network. This was proven during the remainder of this interrogation. He showed me a copy of a London newspaper published the previous day. Then came the kicker – he withdrew a file from his desk, opened it, and proceeded to read my history to me. The file was complete. It contained the date when I was sworn in, the fact that I was placed on furlough , etc., etc., etc. He told me things about myself that I had forgotten and the information was accurate. Every place that I was stationed, the dates of arrival and departure, who my commanding officers were as well as names of others in my squadrons – all was included. I'm sure my mouth must have dropped open in surprise. I asked him how they had acquired all that information. He replied that we probably had more knowledge about them because with all the forced labor, they figured that at least 3 of each 100 were spies. He also indicated that they would eventually be defeated, although from my perspective, I was unable to ascertain how he reached that conclusion. With that, he told me that I would be sent to a temporary camp on the edge of Frankfurt the next day. This was were they accumulated prisoners until they had a sufficient number to transport to the permanent camps. I thanked the officer and was then taken back to my cell, a much enlightened person.

~20 Dec'43 The following morning, A guard appeared at my door and motioned to me to follow him. He led me to a much larger room in another building. Shortly, thereafter, the other seven members of the crew that arrived at the interrogation center with me were brought in one by one. It was a great feeling to see my guys and one of the fellows told us that he had seen Dud Fay, our Navigator, at a distance during a latrine call. No one else could confirm this, but we were happy that someone had caught a glimpse of a person that he thought was Dud, even though it was from a distance and he could not be

absolutely sure. We kept hoping Dud would join us, but we were then taken back to Frankfurt to the temporary camp where we would await transport to our permanent camps. My best guess is that this occurred on, or about, the 21st of December. I remember a feeling of elation that I would be with others for Christmas and not spending the holiday in solitary. ~ 21 Dec. 43

We had another reason to be happy – either the next day, or the day after, several more POWs were brought to the camp to join us. The one that brought joy to our hearts was Dud. Having been picked up at Emden, he was by himself and had to endure added time while the Germans tried to make him admit that he was on our crew. My experience proved that we were kidding ourselves thinking that Name, Rank and Serial Number answers were hiding anything from our captors. Christmas Eve was about as happy as could be expected given our status as Prisoners. There was quite a gathering in the mess hall – we really had a mixed group of English and American officers and enlisted men. We sang all the songs and before the party ended, we were blasting out all the songs that we would not have sung before the ladies. 24 Dec 43

During our stay at this location, we were treated to three air raids by the British. The sound of the air raid sirens was indescribable. We were rousted out of our barracks and herded to a so-called air raid shelter for the first raid. This shelter consisted of a ditch that was no more than six feet deep and three feet wide that was covered by boards and a few inches of dirt on top. Due to the luck of the draw, I guess, I was the last man into the trench and had no cover. The man next to me claimed to be a Brit who had been shot down just two or three days before (a tale I found hard to believe since I didn't think anyone moved through the system so rapidly). As the raid progressed, a white flare landed about 100 feet off the end of our shelter. At that point this man said loudly that that was the drop signal and that meant the end of the road for us. I saw many flashes and felt the ground shake from flak batteries or bombs exploding (I could not distinguish one from the other) and the beams of searchlights as they played across the sky. I had been scared while on bombing missions but never so badly as I was during the raid on Frankfurt that night. God takes pity on us during our moments of great need as had been proven to me so many times. The raid finally ended, with no injuries to any of us, and when the all-clear signal was heard, we returned to our barracks. The other two raids were not nearly as frightening since we were in much better shelters where very little of the sound effects reached us.

Christmas day, 1943 does not stand out in my memory. I'm sure we spent most of our time speculating on what our families were doing and what they would be having for Christmas dinner. I do recall that I was hoping that my family would not be notified that I was MISSING IN ACTION until after Christmas. This was not to happen though – it was after my return to the States that I learned they were notified on December 23rd. I never have been able to understand why the word had to be sent just before the holiday if they waited that long – after all, I went down on the 11th and it was known by our people immediately. 25 Dec 43

We said "Goodbye" to the enlisted men on the 26th. They were marched off to the rail station to be transported to a camp which I later learned was Stalag 17-B. While bidding them "Adieu", I suggested that we gather for a reunion in ten years to talk about 26 Dec 43

our experiences. That meeting, I am sorry to say, never took place. By the time that proposed meeting date arrived, I did not want to go back to that part of my life - I would not talk about those experiences to anyone. Various members of my family and my friends seemed to be interested in what I had gone through during the war, but I would brush off their questions and comments with the most meager answers that said little. I will have to say that everyone complied with my wishes and did not bug me with things that I didn't care to discuss. I feel sure that I did not satisfy their hunger to know about that part of my life. I am sure that the rest of my crew did not want to relive that part of their lives either – it was quite a number of years before any of them tried to contact me.

~ 28 Dec '43

It is not clear in my memory when we left the temporary camp, but I believe it was the morning of the 28th. We walked to whichever track our train was on and boarded a rail car which was a surprise to us. We expected to be transported in a 40 or 8 boxcar (40 men or 8 head of cattle) but found that we had a regular passenger car. It was not the most modern car, but we had regular seats and not just a boxcar to claim a space for sitting, sleeping, etc. Our car was switched from one train to another during the trip and our progress to the stalag was slow. We had no idea where we were headed but we thought we would end up in the same camp that our buddies that went down on the Schweinfurt raid were housed. One of the stops was Berlin – we never left the car that took us to our destination, but we spent several days on the trip. It seemed, at times, that we would not travel more than 50 miles and we would stop again. We would be delayed for a period of time, sometimes an hour, at other times several hours; sometimes being switched to another train, and other times just holding up because of allied bombers or fighters raiding in our vicinity. We pulled into Berlin in the late afternoon and hoped we would move right out again because we could easily see the devastation caused by the British bombers. They did a lot of their night raids on Germany's capital and from what I saw, they did a good job. There was a lot of collateral damage – I know a lot of bombs were dropped that did nothing to help the war effort for our side. I was able to observe that the Germans were able to get things back in operation very shortly after you would have thought they had been bombed out of existence. We spent the entire night on the track in Berlin and believe me there were a lot of prayers from our car that Berlin would not be a target that night.

We finally arrived at what was to be our home for the next 16-1/2 months - Barth, Germany. We were marched from the rail station through the city and then about two miles out in the country. One thing that made a big impression on me was the cleanliness of the town. I saw several women sweeping to the middle of the street in front of their houses. We were opening a new camp for American Flying Officers (each of the branches of the services kept the prisoners captured by the Germans, thus we were under the control of the Luftwaffe). This camp had been an English enlisted men's camp. When we arrived, there were only two or three barracks, as I recall, occupied by prisoners. Some of the English had been transferred out, I believe, and those that remained were to be orderlies for the American barracks. The English, prior to our arrival, had set up some mash which they proceeded to distill about the time we got there. I believe it was our second morning in the camp, when we fell out for roll call, that our English friends started staggering out of their barracks. Some of them were totally without sight and others could barely see enough to make their way to the parade ground

while trying to lead their buddies. Something in the distillation process did not work quite right and it took a couple days to get everyone back to normal. I was glad that they did not invite us to their party. This camp was located next to a large building which housed a flak school (Anti-aircraft training facility) which was probably three stories, as I recall. We conjectured that this was too close to the POW camp, according to the Geneva Convention, but we really had no one to complain to with any hope for relief.

With the transfer of the new contingent of Americans, the camp became a matter of curiosity for the people of Barth and the surrounding area. On weekends, people from the town would stroll outside the barbed-wire fence to look at us. We couldn't figure out what the attraction was – we had a head, two arms and two legs just like them, perhaps it was to see what the terror-fliegers looked like. It must have been a period of many captures of American Fliers because a complete new compound was under construction to the North of the original camp and was being put up in a hurry. My Navigator, Dud Fay, had been in training while in England in intelligence work. His father was a Lt. Colonel in intelligence in 8th Air Force Headquarters. Unknown to me, Dud and a number of other officers from the various groups were trained to perform intelligence duties in the event that they were shot down and captured by the Germans. Very soon after arrival at the camp, Dud asked me to work with him on this important duty. I agreed and we went through the process of getting me processed through the system in Headquarters (I never did know where our contacts were located, but we had to report to Washington when we were repatriated at the end of the war in Europe). Two other guys, who had been through the training as had Dud, were on our committee of four people who made up the intelligence service of the North Compound of Stalag Luft I. We were among the very first to move into the new compound shortly after our arrival at the camp.

Stalag Luft I
Barth

The barracks, that became our home for the following months, was a building that I would guess was about 30-ft wide and probably 100-ft long. Our committee had a room on one end that contained two double-decked bunks, a table, four chairs and a stove. There was another 4-bunk room on the other end of the building, which housed our four English orderlies. There was a space about midway of the building for latrines and showers (cold water only) and the rest of the space was devoted to larger rooms. Each of the larger rooms accommodated 12 prisoners at the beginning, which were quite spacious but became cramped later in the war as more prisoners were added. For a number of months, our camp grew, rapidly, as more and more men were captured. Our compound finally grew to thirteen barracks and then North Compound II was constructed. North Compound III was eventually built and that was the end of the construction at our camp. At that point, mid to late 1944, the Germans started crowding more men into the larger rooms. We were very lucky that we did not have to accept more men into our room. Our senior officer was able to prevail on the German Commandant to let us remain as we were – I don't know what kind of story he came up with to sell that, but the nature of our work demanded privacy.

Our job, as intelligence types, covered a pretty broad area. As each new man came into our camp, we had to interview him to determine if he was really an American Officer. It was very easy to identify most of the new arrivals because people from their Groups who had been captured previously knew them and told us they were legitimate.

In some cases, we had a lengthy process of questioning due to no one knowing who they were – these would be put on a suspect list and other POW's were warned not to talk to them. Eventually the "would be" plants would disappear from our midst. In some cases, we were able to gain further information from new arrivals that allowed us to accept them as our fellow Americans. The Germans were always trying to infiltrate our ranks with moles to find out what we knew and what we might be planning in the way of escapes, etc. They also hoped to find out where we hid our supplies of maps and other escape materials to aid those who were given the OK to attempt to get out. This identification process was the part of our job that was known to everyone, and we hoped the only part that was known. I am not sure that we got every plant that the Germans tried to foist off on us, but we never discovered a leak and I feel that we were able to do a thorough job of screening.

The Germans, over the loudspeakers around the camp, kept us informed of the latest propaganda from their side. We had a news network (another committee) that kept us aware of what the BBC was reporting about the war. Our committee had nothing to do with publishing our news, but we did work with them by acquiring parts for radios to pick up the BBC broadcasts. This was a part of our job that was known only to a Lt. Col. who was our boss and the SAO (Senior American Officer) of our camp. Some radio parts were acquired from German guards who loved our American cigarettes, but most were sent to us in shipments of athletic equipment (softball, football, boxing gloves, etc.) which were received quite frequently. These supplies were shipped under the label of the YMCA but were actually handled by our government. One of our committee would receive a letter from someone purporting to be an old friend which would give us information (in code) as to a certain box of equipment containing parts secreted in baseball or boxing gloves, or other articles. We destroyed numerous items which contained parts secreted in the equipment. Fortunately so much of this was sent to us that we had plenty softballs, footballs, gloves, and other sports paraphernalia to have a well rounded sports program for the guys. It did seem a shame to tear so much stuff up, but we really appreciated the information we were able to have as a result.

Each POW was allowed to write a limited number of letters and postcards each month. It was very difficult, for the four of us, to say what we wanted to tell our folks and still be able to convey messages to Headquarters. We would work for hours to be able to send a message and still have the letter sound like something that we wanted our families to know about what was going on in our confined lives. The coded messages, which we sent, consisted of information which we gleaned from new arrivals reporting what they observed on the way to the camp, or things which our SAO wanted to transmit to Headquarters. Most of our personal news to our folks was contained in the postcards – I think we were allowed four of these each month. The letters were limited to two per month, so we could not waste these on trivial stuff like all the other guys. I am not trying to imply that we were unable to say things – we became quite adept at writing letters to our families and managing to get the messages to Headquarters. It just took much more effort than one would devote to ordinary letter writing.

Our committee also acted as a part of the Escape Committee. We were joined by the SAO and two or three other senior officers to sit in judgment of the feasibility of plans

for escape attempts. If anyone devised a plan to escape, he was required to brief this committee and secure approval before making the attempt. This was not adhered to always, since there were always mavericks who would go their own way. There were always tunnels being dug – the Germans were good at finding them, so we engaged in that activity mainly for the nuisance value. One plan called for the dirt from the tunnel to be placed in the attic of the building from which it was being dug. This went real well and the tunnel was completed to near the outside fence when the ceiling collapsed and all that dirt came tumbling down. We were very fortunate that there were no serious injuries. Of course, we always hoped that we could get some people out that way, so we did not give up. The only escape attempt that I tried involved one of the interpreters that we cultivated over a long period of time. The Escape Committee approved the plan and we proceeded to make the final arrangements. The German was to obtain a boat to take ten of us across the Baltic for $100,000.00 which we would arrange to be paid when we reached Sweden. I don't know what went wrong (loose lips, possibly) but two days before we were to take off, our man disappeared from the camp.

Phil Higdon was one of the four on the Intelligence Committee. He and I would take a daily walk around the compound, which consisted of ten or twelve laps just inside the warning wire inside the main double fence. We loved to walk near the warning wire to taunt the guards in the towers. If there was any reason for a POW to go beyond the warning wire (to retrieve a ball, for instance) he would have to get permission from the guard in the tower or he was subject to being shot. At a point while construction of North II was in the early stages, one of the guard towers was removed. Phil and I noticed that this left a narrow blind spot in the guards' coverage. We immediately reported this to the Escape Committee and plans were made for an immediate attempt to be put into action. That night eight men were moved out of our camp – the Germans claimed that all were recaptured, but they were not brought back to our camp so we could not be sure that we were given straight information. Phil and I felt that we should have been among those to leave as we discovered the gap, but our boss thought we were needed at Stalag I and we did not argue the point.

Red Cross parcels were shipped into our camp (our government supplied them) to give each POW a food parcel per week. These parcels consisted of a tin of powdered milk (Klim), a can of spam, a can of corned beef, a chocolate bar, a box of crackers, several packages of cigarettes and a number of items that have flown from my memory. Together with the rations given to us by the Germans, which consisted of barley, potatoes, brown bread, dehydrated vegetables, and a weekly ration of meat, we fared pretty well. After 3 or 4 of the barracks had been filled with prisoners, a mess hall was built for us. This was accessible to our compound, but it could be locked off since a fence separated it from the barracks area. We were able to move freely into the mess hall area during the day, but during the night, we were not allowed.

With the completion of the mess hall, all of the Red Cross Parcels and the rations from the Germans were delivered to that point. Cigarettes, chocolate bars, Klim, crackers, (items that did not conform to mass feeding) were distributed to the individual prisoners. We had a crew that volunteered to do the cooking and everyone else pulled a tour of KP from time to time. With the number to draw from, we did not get this duty

very often. We were fed two meals per day – mornings was a bowl of barley which was prepared like a hot cereal. It was always nice to eat with new arrivals in the camp. The barley always had weevils and these were cooked along with the barley since it would have been impossible to get them out before cooking. Most of the new guys would turn away at the sight so if someone refused his portion, those around him would divide the spoils. That would only last a few days though because they learned they could eat anything when they got hungry enough. We would have our second meal of the day about 4:30 PM, as I remember, and that was our big meal of the day. This was normally a well-balanced meal. Combining the parcels with the German rations, we were able to have meat at most, if not all, evening mess calls. The dehydrated vegetables were not what one would order when going out to a restaurant, but you can learn to live with anything if you must and we were in a place where it was a necessity.

The mess hall was also our meeting hall. We had a number of our fellows who played musical instruments and along with the athletic equipment we received drums, horns and all the pieces to put together a fine orchestra. One of the fellows, across the hall from our room, was a man named Mike Spodar who could play the sweetest trumpet I think I ever heard. I think he was the one that put together our orchestra and remained a driving force behind it. They would play frequent concerts for all that cared to attend – the hall was always packed. I would guess that they had 25 or 30 guys in that band and they performed a great service with their music. Very often, after lights out at night, Mike would sit on the table in their room and play his trumpet for us. He became more willing to do this as time went by and he discovered that we loved his music as much as he did. Some classes were held in various subjects (yes, we had some professors among us) and these took place in the mess hall if there was a large enough crowd. The building was kept in use a good bit of the time. One sad morning, we waked up to find nothing but a pile of ashes where our mess hall had been. The Germans claimed that it had burned during the night and the fire was out of control before being discovered. My opinion was, and remains to this day, that they burned it themselves because they did not want to build a mess hall for each compound and they were receiving too many complaints from the guys that didn't have a like facility. From this point we had to do our own cooking. To make it fair for all, the Red Cross Parcels were opened at a central point and distributions made to each room. This way, everyone received the same thing since the parcels were not the same (for instance, one parcel might have three packages of cigarettes and the next one seven – one parcel, jam and another peanut butter, etc.). We thought we worked out a pretty good system, our SAO agreed, and we heard no complaints.

The tin cans, as they were emptied, were quickly turned into cooking utensils and we very soon adapted to our new circumstances. In our room, we decided to pool our rations and have a 4-man commune. We started out taking turns with the cooking, but it soon developed that a couple of our quartet were not great chefs, so we decided to limit the food preparation to me and one of the other guys who could at least boil water without burning it. This worked - we managed to do quite well until early 1945 when we suddenly ran out of Red Cross Parcels and the food supplies from the Germans also became scarce. Our Allied Air Forces were pounding all ground transportation facilities to near extinction and no shipments of parcels were received for some time. As a result,

we had no Red Cross Parcels for six weeks and local food was given to us only as available, which was not on a regular basis. One example of our starvation period was my using our meat ration, mostly bones, to prepare a pot of soup with a small amount of dehydrated vegetables. That sumptuous meal was followed the next day by boiling the bones again and adding another small handful of dehydrated vegetables. I'm sure I boiled those bones several times when nothing came from them, but imagination works wonders and the four of us thought we were eating soup. There were several times that I went outside and picked leaves and grass (not much available in the winter) to augment the meager supply of vegetables. The name of the game was "do whatever it takes" to survive. During this six-week period everyone lost weight – we all were prominently displaying our bone structure. My normal weight during my combat days was 163#. Due to all the potatoes and other fattening foods in our diet, I gained and topped out at nearly 200# - everybody became much heavier. During that six weeks, we shed pounds so fast that we dropped almost half our weight – I got down to about 110#. What a great day it was when we received word that a trainload of Red Cross Parcels got through and we shortly were back on a regular distribution basis. We had one of the biggest celebrations ever. It was so wonderful to see the change in attitude around us – we had hope once again.

One of the worst of our experiences during our incarceration was when a contingent of guards and officers descended on our barracks in the early morning hours (2 or 3 AM) with their calls of "Raus mit du". These were surprise searches for escape materials, and other items, which we were hiding from our captors. This activity was mainly practiced during cold weather, so I suspected that it was a way to harass us while hiding behind a legitimate excuse for the behavior. The first time this happened was on a night when the snow was about knee-deep on the ground. Not expecting to be rousted out of the barracks, we were not dressed for spending time outdoors. After a couple hours out in the snow, dressed only in long underwear, we were allowed to return to our bunks to begin the process of thawing out. We grabbed our overcoats and blanket and huddled around our stove as close as we could get. Believe me, we learned a good lesson that night – the next time that occurred, and every time thereafter, when we heard the command, the overcoat, blanket and shoes came off the bed as we left so that we could don them while we were outside.

As mentioned before, we had cold water only in our barracks. We did have showers, so when we felt we wanted a bath, we would take the bucket of hot water, which was always ready on our stove, and head to the shower room. We would get wet under the shower, lather ourselves using the warm water, and get back under the shower to rinse. I can testify to the fact that we did not spend a lot of time taking a shower during the cold months of the year. I think I was able to go from start to finish in three minutes flat. Periodically (I think at two week intervals) we were taken in sizeable groups to the bath-house which was located in a separate section of the camp. We were able to take hot showers and live in the lap of luxury for a few minutes. One day after I had completed my shower (we had to take turns) we were standing around in idle conversation with our guard. He was one of our favorites and could speak fair English. During our repartee, I remarked to him that I had heard they had a new secret weapon. He said "Ja, Ja –what"? I told him that the Germans had invented a rear-view mirror to put on their rifles so they

could shoot while they were running away. A silence fell on the room and the guard turned every color of red known to man. I wasn't sure if he was going to shoot me nor did any of our guys who were there. I think he finally realized that I was joking when I began laughing and things returned to normal – lucky for me, there was no rupture in our relationship, because he could have made life miserable for me.

There were regular games of softball and football during the spring, summer and fall – we did not engage in league play but we would get a couple teams together and play a game. There were always plenty who would join in, so we kept the limited area occupied during the times we were able to indulge ourselves. We did a lot of walking around the perimeter of the camp – some regularly, but some to a lesser extent. We had a sizeable library (another thing we received under the YMCA banner) and that was a popular thing to do. I guess boredom was probably the worst thing that affected us during our captivity. We played a lot of cards; bridge, poker, cribbage, etc. A game would get started in someone's room and others would wander in and replace those who dropped out. One of our favorite activities was to sit around and dream up exotic dishes to prepare when we got back to the land of freedom. Some of the dreams were so fantastic that they were beyond the realm of possibility. The recipe that I determined to prepare when I got home (I even wrote it down and probably still have it among my papers) was one involving ice cream. This was natural since I have loved ice cream more than any other edible in my lifetime – candy comes in a close second. I dreamed of taking a banana and drilling a hole through it from end to end, stuffing it with peanut butter and then building the most fantastic banana split I could put together. I never did do it because I did not have access to an ice cream store – it's probably a good thing because I may have killed myself trying to consume it, since it would have been impossible to walk away before the last bit was in my stomach.

My sense of humor must be very odd because I seem to come up with ideas that could have dire consequences if God were not keeping a close eye on me. One evening after we had been locked into our barracks for the night, one of us when looking through a crack in our shutter (these were also closed at night) saw a couple of Germans crawling under our room. This was something they did to try to hear about escape plans and other deep, dark secrets that we had. I quietly told my roommates that I was going to take our bucket of water from the stove (it was very hot at that juncture) and pour it through a knothole in the floor, hoping I could give them a surprise. I asked them to go to a couple other rooms for additional buckets of hot water. In a very short time, we were set to begin our project with our doorway and the hallway crowded with onlookers. I started pouring the water through the floor and scored a bulls eye – I drew return fire from the Germans in the form of bullets from their side arms. Thank God, they were low caliber pistols and did not have enough power to penetrate the double floor with sufficient force to do a lot of damage. One of the bullets hit the bucket from which I was pouring and that cured me from trying to continue the game. A mad rush ensued to clear the room and we stayed out until the barrage ended. We then crept back to the window and saw our adversaries emerging from under our room. They took their shirts off and proceeded to wring them out. The sub-flooring apparently spread the water well enough to give both of them a good soaking. I fully expected us to receive some time in the cooler for this prank but nothing resulted from it.

There must have been a misunderstanding about mail somewhere in the pipeline. My family believed that they were limited in the number of letters they could write to me – perhaps they were told one thing by the Red Cross in our area which was different from word received by others. Regardless what occurred, when we had mail calls, some of the guys would receive dozens of letters while I would be lucky to hear my name called at all. It was always a great day when mail was distributed. Too often, when I did receive a letter, it would be from someone I did not know since it would be a message in code. Luckily I would receive something from a member of my family, most of the times this occurred, otherwise I would have been feeling mighty low. The family, thinking I could receive limited mail, deferred to my mother and most correspondence I received was from her (I cannot believe they did not want to write me). Over the years, before and after the war, my family showed their love for me in so many ways that it is impossible for me to describe or to be able to acknowledge. I have always felt that I was and am one of the most loved people on this earth.

We were allowed to receive a small number of personal parcels (cigarettes or food and personal items). My mother received tickets which could be used to order cigarettes (6 cartons at a time as I remember) which would be shipped from the manufacturer direct to the POW. The food and personal items were packed by family and shipped using a label supplied by our government (perhaps through Red Cross). These parcels were restricted to a certain size and weight. I was amazed at what my mother was able get into a package. I do not remember what all she sent me in the two parcels which I received, but she did include a small package of coffee, which I used and reused until it barely colored the water. The first personal parcel that I received while in the camp was a cigarette parcel ordered by my brother, Ernest. Most of the parcels received by my fellow inmates were food and personal items. Since I was a non-smoker, you can imagine that I was not overly thrilled at this. It was not for a long time that I was able to tell him that I had some less-than-kind thoughts about him (for a couple days) and then apologize for having had them. It turned out that word spread that I had received cigarettes and the smokers started beating a path to my door. Guys offered all kinds of things for a package of "fresh" cigarettes, but I was mainly interested in the hard chocolate bars that we received in our R.C. parcels. I kept myself in supplies for making hot chocolate by being able to trade for a can of Klim, on rare occasions, to augment the weekly ration from the parcels. Some guys loved cigarettes more than what I considered to be the finer things in life. This taught me that my brother wasn't so dumb after all.

When we heard that the invasion of the Normandy Coast took place, we hit a high around the camp. We had to hold back on celebrations because the Germans did not announce it for two or three days and we could not give away the fact that we had clandestine means of knowing what was happening. When they did announce it, they put a spin on the news that our side was being repulsed at every turn. We had much more factual information from the BBC, although we were sure that reports from our side were more optimistic than the true facts. As our troops pushed inland, our newspaper showed maps that purported to be the lines according to the German reports as well as what the BBC claimed them to be. Never were these lines on the map close together. We chose to believe the actual front was between the two, but much closer to that which the BBC said.

Our elation grew as our forces pushed the German army back to their own land and speculation began to be heard that we would be home for Christmas. Many of us were not that optimistic, but it was difficult to not believe that it would not be much longer.

What a tremendous let-down we suffered when we received word that the Germans mounted the counterattack in what became known as the "Battle of the Bulge". Bastogne became a dirty word to us – how in the world could our magnificent fighting machine allow this to happen. If the Germans were to be believed, the Allied Forces were soon going to be pushed back into the sea. It was a time when we went from an extreme "high" to the level of being able to crawl under a snake without touching it. For a few days we felt like we were on a roller coaster in our feelings – we would hear things that made us feel it was only a minor setback and then something would occur that plunged us into the depths again. As our troops gained the upper hand again, things returned to normal but the home-for-Christmas talk was obliterated from our conversation.

By the time our starvation period had run its course, we were feeling very optimistic about the prospects of our ordeal nearing its end. American and British forces, along with others on our side, were advancing from the West and the Russians were pushing closer from the East. I am not certain of the dates, but I believe the German Commandant ordered our SAO to have us ready to evacuate the camp on April 30, 1945. 30 Apr 45 Col. Zempke, our SAO, refused – he told the Commandant that we would not go. With those strong words, the German made the statement that there had been enough bloodshed and said his forces would leave that night. An officer and five enlisted men were left in charge and the remainder of the Germans marched out of the camp at Midnight. Immediately thereafter, the German Officer and the enlisted personnel remaining at the camp surrendered to us and turned over their weapons. They were allowed to melt into the countryside – the officer ended up sweet-talking himself into favor with the Russians when they arrived about Noon, May 2nd. The Russians appointed him "Mayor of Barth"

Upon the departure of the Germans, Col. Zempke installed some of our liberated Kriegies as guards on the gates and in the guard towers surrounding the camp. He did not want us to scatter because he wanted to get our Air Forces to send planes to the Barth airfield to fly us to France. Some of the fellows left anyway, but they were in a very small minority, only a handful. A number of our guys were dispatched to the airfield on 1 May the morning of May 1st to ascertain the conditions for our airlift. They found that the Germans had placed all the bombs they had on the runway to prevent any aircraft from using the field. Our men began defusing the bombs and preparing the field for our use provided the Colonel could make arrangements for planes to come for us. While being engaged in this work, our people discovered that there was a concentration camp beneath the field. This explained something that we wondered about during our stay at Stalag Luft I. From time to time we would see wagonloads of nude bodies being transported on a road alongside our camp. We thought there must be a concentration camp somewhere in the area but had no idea where it was located. It turned out that it was beneath the airfield and as the inmates died (or were executed, more likely) the bodies were piled on wagons and taken to a place north of our camp where they were burned.

The German townspeople were deathly afraid of the Russians. They had heard of the things that their soldiers had done to the Russians when they invaded and of the reprisals when the tide turned. They pleaded with us to move into their houses with them – they were guessing that they would be safe if an American was living with them. One man brought his family (a wife and three children) out to our camp and proceeded to kill a child about every 100 feet along a pathway across a field between our fence and the water. After the children were dispatched, the wife was shot and the man killed himself near the edge of the Baltic. I had not witnessed anything so horrible.

2 May 45

About Noon on the 2nd, a Russian Colonel and his staff arrived at our gate and asked for our SAO. Col. Zemke went to the gate and invited the Russians, who were on horseback, to enter. The Russian Colonel asked why the barbed wire was still in place since we were free men. Col. Zemke explained that he wanted to keep us all together to be airlifted to France. The Russian ordered that we tear down the fences and when there was not immediate compliance, he pulled his pistol and pointed it at Zempke and once again ordered the fences be taken down. We were immediately told to dismantle them and I think it took us about 30 minutes to complete that job. There was no animosity – the Russian just did not want to see barbed wire around free men and he made no bones about it.

The Russian spearhead seemed to be a rag-tag outfit – the soldiers were on foot, some riding bicycles, equipment loaded on carts which were pulled by hand and almost any other means of conveyance, but no motorized equipment. They clearly had the Germans on the run because we heard no sounds of battle in the area. The Russians paused in their offensive push for 3 or 4 days (I guess they were consolidating their occupation of the surrounding area) and while they were in our area, they put on a couple shows for us. The top officers had their wives traveling close behind them and they performed some of their dances for us. They seemed to take great delight in performing to an audience of 10,000 who were starved for that kind of activity. We were very envious of their agility in leaping into the air and landing in a squatting position and other contortionist maneuvers. I have been amazed every time I have seen their dances and I was certainly overjoyed to see these excellent shows.

One day a couple of us were strolling around Barth and a Russian pedaled up to us on a bicycle. He stopped and tried to engage us in conversation, which was not very successful since we could not speak each other's language, so we did a lot of hand talking and smiling. We happened to be chewing gum, so we offered our new friend a piece, which he chewed about four times and promptly swallowed. We tried to explain that it was not to eat – just to chew. I doubt that he ever caught on and after a few more smiles and some backslapping, he went on his way.

The Russian Colonel noticed that we did not look well fed (we had not come all the way back from our starvation period). He sent some of his men around the countryside to round up about a hundred head of cattle which they drove into a pen at our camp. There were a number of our guys, who had been butchers, who went to work slaughtering and cutting prime steaks for us. We were really living it up during the remainder of our stay in our old prison camp.

mid May 45

The great day of departure from Barth finally arrived about the middle of May, I think. I don't know how many days it took to get everyone out, but it was a welcome experience to board a B-17 to fly to France. I was lucky enough to be among the early groups. I was able to secure a spot behind the pilots where I could see everything and could converse with them. We flew on a route which took us over the Hamburg area and we could see the devastation which our bombers had caused. It seemed like a vast wasteland. We landed at Reims, France and were taken to a camp in the area that had been set up for those of us who came from the various prison camps. We spent several days, perhaps as long as a week, at this camp. We were fed nourishing food three times a day and had access to drums of eggnog (without spirits) at any time we chose to partake. This was a part of the process of rebuilding our bodies after the prison camp ordeal.

Some of the fellows took the opportunity to visit Paris since we were so close, but I refused to join them – I had seen all of Europe that I cared for at that point of my life. After our stay at Reims, the call came for us to board a train which took us to Le Havre. I seem to recall that the camp near the port was called "Lucky Strike", but that could have been the designation for the camp at Reims. Memories grow so dim about some things while other incidents stand out as if they had just occurred. Again some elected to go to Paris but the vast majority were like I – nothing was to be allowed to interfere with our seeing the roster that contained our names and directed us to report to the ship that was to take us home. The four of us from our intelligence committee in the prison camp stayed together for the trip. We were instructed to give Washington, D. C. as our destination in case we were to be debriefed or given special instructions regarding our activities during our incarceration.

Once again time seemed to drag while we awaited the ship, but finally we received orders to proceed to the docks to board a C-4 freighter which had been converted to a troop carrier. We were among the last of the men to arrive for this vessel. Many more people were scheduled for this ship than the bunks that were available so we were advised that we would have to rotate using bunks for 24 hours and then going on the deck for 24 hours. We were preparing to bed down on the deck when a call came for all 1st Lieutenants in the overflow to report to sick bay. Upon arrival at the hospital quarters, we were advised that these were to be our accommodations until the beds were required for sick people. This was definitely a case of "Rank has its privileges" since 1st Lt. was the highest grade among those of us who did not have a bunk. We did not fill the available beds and were soon joined by the 2nd Lieutenants from the overflow group. This still left four or five beds for guys that really required hospitalization. These turned out to be the choicest quarters on the ship and we were able to spend the entire voyage in these accommodations since no one was brought in for hospital care (seasickness did not qualify).

Officers were assigned the duty of patrolling the holds of the enlisted men to assure there was no smoking below decks. The holds had bunks (hammocks) about 15 or 20 high and I have no idea how many rows in the width and length of the hold. I recall there were two officers, per shift of 4 hours, assigned to our hold. We found it an impossible task to police that many men to prevent smoking, so we had to appeal to their

better natures to obey the rules. Some of the men started suffering seasickness almost as soon as we left the dock and the smell became progressively worse as time went by. Our ship crossed to Southampton, England where we joined a convoy, which proceeded to sea after a short time. I think it was about the fourth day out when the ships in the convoy were advised that it was deemed safe to proceed on their own and the destroyers left us. Shortly after that (day 5, I believe) we hit some very foul weather and most of us suffered from seasickness. The ship would climb to the crest of a huge wave where bow and stern both cleared the water. The vessel would shudder as it descended to the trough and then repeat the process on the next wave. The smell in the hold became so rank that I resigned my job of patrolling, as did the others who had been engaged in this chore. The officer in charge of our hold ordered us to resume our patrol duty and we told him to shove it (he was a 1st Lt. in the Infantry) and there was no way he, or anyone else, could tell us we had to spend time in that mess. He threatened us with court martial, but that had no effect either. The seas calmed down after a couple days and we started feeling a lot better. I had definitely decided there was no way I would ever be a sailor. One thing I discovered during this ordeal was that, although I did not want to eat, I could enjoy Hershey bars – they tasted just as good coming up as they did going down.

We arrived in New York harbor during the night of the eighth day of the voyage in a thick fog. The ship dropped its anchors and we spent the night at that spot. The next morning I was on deck watching the fog lift and saw an amazing sight – we were in the midst of dozens of ships spread across the harbor. I could not believe that all those vessels could arrive and anchor without colliding. Radar is something that I don't understand and yet we depend on it for so many things. We proceeded to our appointed berth at the dock and disembarked. I cannot remember what mode of transportation was used, but we were taken to Camp Blanding (I believe that was the name) to begin the process of paper work to get us back to our homes. The army did everything through loads of paper – I guess that was the only way they could attempt to keep things straight. The first thing we did upon arrival was to go to the mess hall. We had to pay for our meal for the first time in years. We were served huge steaks along with all the trimmings and had to pay the cashier the great sum of twenty-five cents. I do not know why that charge was levied on us (perhaps it was to reacquaint us with the way things were done in civilian life) but it is something that became a vivid memory.

We did not stay at this base very long, perhaps a day or so. The only other thing, besides the steak dinner, that I remember was placing a phone call to my mother to let her know that I was back in the U. S. and that I would be home after a few more days. Mom was overjoyed to hear her baby's voice – she cried and laughed and could hardly talk due to the relief she felt from having me back in our country. We could not talk very long because hundreds of guys wanted to make similar calls and they did not have a separate line for each of us to use. Most of the men were sent, by troop trains to various parts of the States (to bases in their home areas) for processing. Our committee of four was sent to Fort Meade, Maryland along with the men who were being processed at that location. We did not have to go to Washington for debriefing since someone in intelligence took care of that at Meade. That proved that at times the army could do something right – we would have been held up from getting home at least a couple more days if we made the detour to D. C. We completed our processing in a couple days and were given tickets on

home ~ June 16, 1945

regular passenger trains to our homes. I think I got to Port Arthur on June 16, 1945 and was greeted by my whole family. I had 60 days R&R (rest and relaxation) leave with orders to report to the Miami Beach Redistribution Station on August 15th. I had purchased a number of cartons of cigarettes for my brother, Ernest, and boxes of candy bars while aboard the ship crossing the Atlantic. When I received my duffel bag, a day or so after my arrival, I found that every candy bar and cigarette had been removed. I guess the baggage handlers thought they needed them more than the soldier boy. I hope whoever consumed them derived great enjoyment from the pilfered goodies.

15 Aug '45

It was so wonderful seeing family and friends during my leave, but I had dreams that I would be going to the Pacific theater to help finish the Japs. August 15th dawned and I boarded a train to take me to Miami. Somewhere along the way, the announcement was made that the Japanese had surrendered. Everybody on the train cheered and we started dancing in the aisle – what a party. Upon arrival in Miami, I was met by an army driver and taken to the hotel where I would spend the next couple of weeks. I had appointments for physical exam and paperwork, but most of my time was free.

The army had taken over a number of the hotels on Miami Beach for use as the Redistribution Station. Only one hotel in the area we were in, at least, had civilian guests. We were provided with transportation, golf clubs and tee times at one of the local golf courses any time we desired to play. Three other fellows and I made up a regular foursome that indulged in a round of golf on most of the days that I was there. I had decided that I would stay in the service and make it my career. When I was told that I was being assigned to B-29 transition training, I quickly changed my mind and decided to separate. I still had a great desire to be a fighter pilot (I thought the P-51 was my plane) but the Army Air Force would not consider it. I was given a 6-day delay-in-route with orders to report to the Fort Sam Houston Separation Center. When I got back to Port Arthur, I learned from my sister, Lydia, that her husband was due at the Separation Center the day after I was due to report. Since I had not acquired a car yet (they were difficult to obtain) she decided to go to San Antonio a day early and we would get me started and then await Roy's arrival. I finished my mustering out process the second day – the day that Roy arrived. During the separation process, I was told that I could receive a second award of the Purple Heart for the wounds that I received when I was shot down. I was advised that would take two or three days, so I told them to forget it since I already had the medal. Roy finished the process the next day and Lydia and two happy soldiers departed Fort Sam. I was not officially out of the service yet since I would be on Terminal Leave until November 25th.

During the last three weeks of September and the month of October I bummed around doing not a lot of anything. Somewhere during that time, I made a trip with my brother, Erich, through West Texas and into New Mexico to look for equipment for drilling a water well on a farm that my brother Bill had purchased at Knippa, Texas. When we got to Fort Stockton, we learned that the army had a bunch of surplus planes for sale at an airfield there. We went out to the field to see what was available and found a number of PT-19A Primary Trainers were available. I think the price was $880.00 and since I was still in the service I would receive a 25% discount, making the price to me $660.00. I picked out the plane that I wanted and we went into town to the bank. They

called my bank in Port Arthur and arranged for me to transfer the $660 to that bank for delivery to me. Back to the airfield where I completed the purchase of a plane like I had learned to fly in Primary Training at Chickasha, Oklahoma some three years earlier. Erich and I resumed our trip – I was not able to take the plane at that time since they had to order a propeller for it. I returned to my job at Texaco Terminal on November 1st and found that I had a week of vacation to be taken in 1945 and would receive two weeks in 1946. A few days after I returned to the job, I received word from Fort Stockton that the propeller had been received and I could get the plane at any time. I made arrangements to take a couple days vacation and went to West Texas for my plane. I arrived at the field the next morning, started it, let it warm up and took off. When I got into the air, I discovered that the tachometer (indicates revolutions per minute of the engine) suddenly went haywire. I returned to the field and found that the instrument in the back seat was OK and I decided I would fly from the rear seat rather than waiting several days to order and install a new instrument. Of course, this meant that I would not have a compass since there wasn't one in the rear cockpit. That did not bother me because I was using a highway map to navigate rather than aerial maps. The flight went well. I landed at the municipal field in Austin for gasoline and then on to a field in Port Arthur where I had made arrangements to keep the plane.

Erich and Bill decided that they wanted to be part owners of the plane and learn to fly it, so I agreed to teach them to fly. Erich did well and I figured after about 10 hours that he was ready to solo. I did not trust my judgment all the way, so I asked an instructor pilot at the field to take a hop with him to see if my judgment was sound. After one landing the instructor got out of the plane and sent Erich up for the usual three solo landings. Bill was another story – when I would take him up for a lesson, he would not take control when I wanted to turn it over to him. I repeatedly asked him what was wrong and he finally confessed to me "John, I am scared to death of flying". What a shock – this came from my brother who had spent most of his life doing steeplejack work on a scaffold that consisted of two 12" boards on brackets hooked on a cable around a smokestack, at times 400 feet off the ground. I asked him if he wanted his $220.00 back, but he refused.

mid-Feb '46 met Harriett

The most important and pleasurable thing that I did in the plane was to take Harriett up for flights on Sunday afternoons, after I met her in mid February, 1946. The Port Arthur Little Theater was resuming activities after being interrupted by the war. A friend who was going to direct a one-act play entitled "Suppressed Desires" asked me to come to her house one Sunday afternoon to meet the two females she was trying to cast in the play, one of whom I hadn't met. When I walked into the living room, I saw a dream (a tall blue-eyed blonde) standing in front of the fireplace and immediately my mind told me "There stands Mrs. Noack". Harriett and I played husband and wife in that play (we made that a reality in August). She decided that she would not be in any more plays but would be my life-long support (at this point, she has fulfilled that role for over 56 beautiful years). What a job she has done, but that is a whole other story.

married in Aug 46

My intention was to end this narrative when I related my homecoming, but I feel that I must tell how I came to the point where I am reliving those war years. As I mentioned, I practically refused to discuss anything in connection with that period. As

time passed, I began to say a few things to Harriett and maybe a few others. My son used to try to get me to tell him things, but I didn't say very much. One day, I received a telephone call from Trygve Olsen, who was my co-pilot on the Schweinfurt mission. He told me that he would like to see me and asked if we could get together. I had received a 306th ECHOES (our Bomb Group newspaper) a short time before and told him that I noticed that the reunion would be held in Little Rock, AR that year. I inquired if he attended the reunions and if he would be in Little Rock. He replied that he would be there if I went. I had never attended any veteran meetings or joined any organizations, but I agreed that I would meet him there.

Little Rock 1989 Reunion

Harriett and I drove down to Little Rock, registered for the reunion, and started looking for Olsen. My luck was holding – we saw a group in the lobby of the hotel and walked over to see if they were the objects of our search. Trygve recognized me and introduced me to his wife and the others that were with him (two other guys from our 306th and their wives). I introduced Harriett to them and we decided, since it was near the lunch hour, that we would check out the restaurant. We spent the rest of the day talking about our previous experiences together and then brought each other up to date with what we had been doing since that time. We spent an enjoyable two days with the Olsen's and the other two couples but I did not care for the reunion. There were 400-500 people in attendance and I knew only a handful of them that I had been with at Thurleigh. Trygve told me that someone had asked him about joining the Second Schweinfurt Memorial Association. He asked if John Noack was a member and the answer was "no". He said that he advised the person that he would join if they got me to join. Sadly, Trygve died in December, 1989 (about three months after we met in LR). His wife called me in January to advise me of his passing. That left me with a deep reluctance to pursue any more reunions or affiliations with any veterans organizations. The meeting with Olsen did bring back a lot of memories and I lost my reluctance to talk about the war.

The bombardier on the crew with whom I went through B-17 training, Jim Vaughter, had been trying for quite some time to contact me. I received a letter from Jim and answered it. This started regular correspondence between us and Jim brought up the subject of Second Schweinfurt Memorial Association and my joining the organization. I did not think much of the idea, after my experience with the 306th Reunion, and told Jim that I did not care to join. He kept pressing me to join and I kept resisting. The 50th Anniversary of the second Schweinfurt raid was coming up on October 14, 1993 and SSMA was planning a big celebration at their reunion in New Orleans. Jim was determined that I was to be a member, so I was notified that this feat had been accomplished with Jim signing me up by paying dues for me for that current 2-year period. With that, I could not refuse to attend the meeting. Harriett and I drove to New Orleans and spent a glorious 3 days in one of our favorite cities. We fell in love with the organization and the camaraderie of a bunch of men with whom I had flown a raid over Germany fifty years before. I was so elated that I paid dues to be a life member at that meeting. The author of the book "OR GO DOWN IN FLAME" was at this meeting. He approached me, with book in hand, and asked if I was John Noack. When I replied that I was, he showed me his book and said "This is your plane on the cover". He said his brother was the navigator on one of the planes in our squadron that was shot down. He lost his life that day, which prompted the writing of the book. He also requested, since I

14 Oct 93

was mentioned in the story, that I autograph his copy. I considered this to be an honor by W. Raymond Wood and happily complied.

We chose San Antonio as the site of the next reunion, which was scheduled for October, 1995 – meetings were held every other year. Time seemed to drag, but finally the date arrived when we started out to San Antonio. We had another great time, topped off by seeing Ken Fox, from my crew, who had been wounded on the Schweinfurt raid. Ken had heard about the organization and investigated until he acquired information that enabled him to join. I cannot describe our meeting except it was joyful and emotional. I was so thrilled at being with Ken and so many others that participated in the Black Thursday raid that I made a motion at this meeting that we have reunions annually. This motion passed without dissent and we now get together each October. Bud Smith, Frank Wesner and Dud Fay came into our group at later meetings – at one of the reunions, Tucson, there were five of my crew in attendance. This has really opened the floodgates – memories and words about my experiences, during those years, now flow freely.

Oct 95

During the past six years, or so, we have been joined by a number of our German adversaries of World War II. These men were 15 – 16 year-old high school students who were pressed into service to man the anti-aircraft guns that defended Schweinfurt – they were called "Flakhelpers" but they did the whole job. It is wonderful that we have become such good friends with these men, once enemies by circumstance – now friends by choice. Our 2001 reunion was held in Schweinfurt and we have voted to return for the 2004 meeting. It has been a great joy to me that my son Dave has been able to attend a couple of our reunions and has become a Life Associate Member of SSMA. Also, I am very happy that a number of our members' sons, daughters, grandchildren and other relatives have attended our reunions and joined our group. This gives me hope that the organization can continue to exist in our memory.

This story was written for my beloved wife and son, Harriett and Dave. Without their urging and support, it might never have been done.