JOHN H. CHEVALIER
344TH TRAPEZE ARTIST

Reprinted from the December 1992 Milk Run

John Chevalier is probably the oldest 344th man as he recently celebrated his 92nd birthday. Without a doubt he most likely can claim to be one of the "luckiest," too. His outstanding feats described in the FLIGHT LOG, June 16, 1945 stated:

"T/Sgt. John Chevalier...had more narrow escapes than the average trapeze artist. One time he parachuted from a diving Marauder at an altitude of 300 feet. Another time he parachuted into the hands of the Germans, "sweated out" a bombing attack by the 344th group when it was after a target located close to his POW camp. John was finally released when the American armies overran his camp, returned to the 344th after an off-the-cuff vacation and announced he was ready for more flying."

Group Headquarters recorded the first close call this way:

"Casualties and battle damage for the month of December 1944 were comparatively slight. Three crewmen wounded due to enemy flak action and 22 aircraft struck by flak. One plane crashed near the base on return from the Ahrweiler mission 27 December. The weather that day closed in so thickly at our station that most of the aircraft after circling were diverted to emergency fields, nine planes only being able to put down at the field. A plane piloted by Lt. L. Fleming, 495th B. S., was rapidly running out of gas and not being able to land due to visibility, proceeded toward an emergency field. Unfortunately and before he could reach a landing point his gasoline was practically exhausted. One motor stopped and the plane began to lose altitude and when the plane was approximately 300 feet above the ground the other stopped. All of the crew bailed out at this low altitude, except Lt. Fleming who remained at the controls hoping to crash land the plane successfully and probably could have had the plane cleared a slight hill in its path. He was killed.

Two crewmen only were successful in the parachute attempt at that extreme low altitude, T/Sgt. J. Chevalier, engineer and S/Sgt. R. E. Farley, gunner, who both stated their chute opened practically as their feet struck the ground."

John Chevalier recalls the mission:

"December 27, a day that has lived with me ever since – the weather was cold and blustery, average for the time of year.

The target, Ahrweiler, was hit with great success, clouds, grey and black were proof enough. We encountered light flak to the target and again