

I trained in the B-26 for about 6 weeks, did little but learn about the bomb system and the mosquitoes of West Florida.

In July I was assigned to Lakeland AFB where I became a member of the 344<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group. I completed the European tour with that group and I still attend their reunions.

Two squadrons, the 494 and 495, trained at Tyler Texas, flying low level missions against the army at Camp Kilgore. That tour was about 6 weeks. By Christmas we were ready to go overseas and moved to Savannah, GA to get new aircraft. Our B-26s were to be unpainted and became the Silver Streaks with a white triangle on the rudder. At Savannah, I contracted hepatitis so I was sent to the hospital. The Group Commander, Col. Vance, made a trade with the local Group so I could later trade back to the 344<sup>th</sup>. I went overseas with the 386<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group. I stayed in the hospital about six weeks, sleeping, reading, and resting. It's an awful long time considering the active life I was used to. About 2 weeks after I entered, I was rested, recovered, and restless. I could eat all sweets, but only boiled chicken for meat. No fried food of any kind. One morning a Red Cross young woman came by and asked "How are you, Lieutenant?" I replied, "I'm fine, but it's terribly boring here, I feel fine, but they won't let me out for any reason – and – and – tomorrow is my birthday". I suspected she would arrange a party for the ward. I could eat all the cake and ice cream I wanted. I was correct, the next day a big cake and a gallon of real ice cream came and we partied. The next week we had a new Red Cross lady, and she was unaware of the party gang in the ward, she fell for the story and we partied. I was dared to do it the third week, but I had to try and it worked. That drew the attention of the nurse and she counseled me about drawing in the kitchen help and the poor Red Cross workers. That's probably the only time I ever got anything from the Red Cross and that time they asked the Army Hospital kitchen to provide the treats.

In March, we moved to New Jersey to catch ocean transport. We got the Saturnia, a commandeered Italian liner. We joined a convoy and zig zagged for nine days to land at Grenock Scotland. A train took us to Bishop Stortford and two days later I was back with the 344<sup>th</sup>. They had flown only a few missions, but had lost two crews from my Squadron in a mid-air collision.

Our airfield was Stansted, about 2 miles from Bishops Stortford, some 40 miles north and east of London. During April we saw searchlights and flak, anti-aircraft fire over London and some enemy aircraft at high altitude, always at night. In May we heard and occasionally saw V1, buzz bombs flying by. None landed

near the field. We always cheered them on to the west where there were more open fields. At the same time we bombed out the V1 launch ramps and support area located in France. I led one of my first missions against a V1 site at or near Notre Dame de Ferme. It was such a success that I always was in the lead aircraft with my navigator, Carl Moore. We were very successful. Somehow German intelligence learned who the lead crews were and their "Lord Haw Haw" announced one evening, probably during August, that there was a ten thousand dollar reward for Carl and me dead or alive. "Lord Haw Haw" used to tell us how many aircraft took off, how many landed and that the clock on the church steeple in Bishop Shortford was 2 minutes slow. The group rated crews on the distance the first bomb in the formation missed the designated aim point. This was my 21<sup>st</sup> mission.

The 344<sup>th</sup> led the "D" day invasion and Jim Perrish of the 495<sup>th</sup> Squadron got the lead. He flew with the Squadron Commander as pilot, while my pilot, Tom Johnson, was only a flight commander at that time. He later became the 494<sup>th</sup> Squadron Commander. We were designated as deputy lead and were about 50 feet behind and below the first bomber to hit the beaches. We took off long before light and hit our target at 0608. Our scheduled time to hit it was 0610. We carried 500 lb bombs and bombed in "boxes" of 18 aircraft. Our altitude was 5320 ft. as I had been watching the altimeter. I had to modify the bomb sighting at the different altitudes because I had to be ready to take over if anything happened to our leader. I could not bomb over or short. Our Group devastated the defenses on the shore. Ground troops had no problem where the Marauders were assigned targets. The heavy bombers would not get lower than the clouds and missed their targets by miles so the German defenses were very strong there, resulting in heavy ground forces loss of Allied personnel. I saw only one German aircraft and it was a red ME 109 and it must have been a trainer as it headed east as fast as possible.

The 344<sup>th</sup> sent 56 aircraft and lost one that day. We had a high view of the invasion forces and were back to Stansted before 8 AM. That afternoon another mission was flown to strike bridges north and east of the invasion beaches. I did not fly that mission. During the summer, we normally flew every other day or two but on one occasion I flew two missions. On trips to London we often met classmates flying heavies (B-17 or B-24 four engine bombers: mediums are B-26 and A-20 twin engine bombers). The conversations would go like this: "How many missions have you flown this month?" The heavy bomber crew member would reply "Two and scheduled one more this month". Well, the B-26 crew member "I flew ten and get about three a week. They average about two and a half hours." The Heavies averaged nine or more hours.

The summer was rather long and tense with quite regular replacement crews arriving. We had a tour limit of 65 missions and a theory that the first five and last five were far the hardest odds to beat.

In September, we moved to France to be closer to the targets. Our airfield was a former German fighter base at Pontoise, near Paris. We lived in tents in a wooded area and rode bikes or walked to the flight line. The Operations office was in a revetment that had been used by the German airfield defenses. They were earthen barricades around wooden buildings that were about three feet below ground level. They were actually rather nice work areas. Carl and I flew as instructors with almost all the crews. We had a practice range farther east in France. The Germans didn't need it any more. We seemed to do more training of new crews than flying against the enemy. Very recently I found a book that included interviews with a number of 9<sup>th</sup> AF Generals who expressed grave concern about bombing accuracy and how combat crews had been directed to divert extensive training to new crew members.

I might comment here that the replacement crews were arriving with less than 300 hours air time. That's the crew commander upon arriving in Europe. Some were as young as 19. To the veteran air crew members they were not well qualified. Fifty years or more later I see 500 hour pilots who are not ready to fly in instrument conditions solo or would be recommended for twin engine upgrading. The Navigator or Bombardier has even a harder time acclimating to working as a technician in a difficult environment under all types of pressure. Some can never become comfortable navigating and working equipment at the same time. During my instructor tour at Kirtland AFB, Albuquerque, New Mexico, I had one student who never identified the target day or night. In daytime the target was 5 concentric circles 100' larger than the next with lighted crosses at night. I had to put the crosshairs on the target, then he could operate the bombsight, but he couldn't hit anything if he were alone.

At Pontoise I always had an additional duty, one I enjoyed most was "base game warden". By French law a warden must accompany every hunting party. We had skeet practice especially for gunners, but those Remington 12 gauge automatics are super for partridge, pheasants and hare. We regularly supplemented our menu with my bounty. "The warden had to go with every party - that's French law".

In early February '45 Tom, Carl, and I were briefed on a special mission; we were removed from combat and ordered to train for a new tactic. We would cross the target at altitude, turn and descend so we crossed the target going the other

direction at ground level. That sounds easy in a single aircraft, but to bring a six or eighteen ship formation down at that rate of descent, speed and bank angle have to be correct or you are too high or exposed too long. We plotted it out first, then tried it a number of times to have it down correctly. On February 22 the mission was ordered and all communication capability of Germany was struck that day. We briefed what speeds and timing worked for us and we led the Group against a large railroad yard in Germany. The idea was to bomb the yards then shoot it up with 50 caliber. We were at 280 mph when we passed over the target at 100 feet or less. I saw a gunners tower collapse and fall to the town building it was mounted on, but I wasn't shooting at it. Our left wing man spread out about 300 feet and he was credited with a tower. The Group lost one crew on that mission.

In January Tom was the Squadron Commander and he asked me to be superintendent on construction of an Officer's Club. I had previously helped recover some German barracks made of pre-fabricated panels. They were 1 meter wide, 3 meters long, some had doors, some windows and all had insulation. They set on a wooden piece about 1-1/2" x 3" and of various lengths. That piece stabilized the panel to the floor and a similar piece kept the panels aligned and firm. The trusses were all the same, about 25 feet long so our room had to fit the material. I sketched what size we could accommodate and Carl recruited the volunteers. We had the posts all installed by 10 a.m. and the floor all finished by evening, thanks to the many, many panels that were complete and fit. It took three days to complete the building. It took only a few days longer to have the bar installed and water for washing glasses. The German pre-fab barracks were great. They even made great firewood when the fiberglass was removed.

In March or April we moved to Florense, Belgium, to follow the front lines. We were with a P-61 Black Widow, night fighter unit until they moved nearer to the front. Many years later I found that Lt. Col. Jim Jernigan had flown P-38s off the same base during the winter when the "Battle of the Bulge" came within 10 miles of the base. He tells that they retracted the gear and armed the guns and bomb rack at the same time.

From Florense, we flew as far into Germany as Magdeburg, almost within sight of Berlin. It was about 400 miles as the crow flies, but we joined up and flew around defenses that were bypassed. The fighter opposition was often suppressed by P-47 fighters that were now plentiful. My last mission was flown in April. By May 8 I was on a trip to London and VE day celebrations had to be taken in. A number of us had caught a ride back to Stansted and we all got lucky. This was the first time street lights had been turned on since 1939 and everyone was in the street with the spirit of the occasion.

I stayed in Belgium until September with the unit preparing to go to the Pacific by way of the Middle East. We had maps, routes, and everything to fly the Douglas A-26 to end the Pacific conflicts. I was Squadron Bombardier and was then proficient in Shoran use and trained other Bombardiers. We were practically ready to leave when the Pacific war was over. One of the copilots by the name of John Bush remarked when the Atomic bomb was dropped and Dr. Vannover Bush was one of the scientists credited for its development. "I knew the old man was up to something when he was gone so much and was so secretive."

In 1945 following VJ day I led a team of 3 to go to Wurzburg, Germany, and get captured German vehicles. I came back with a BMW four-door convertible, an NSU coupe and 3 motorcycles. I got a Mauser rifle and an officer's P-38 Walther's pistol. I rode one motorcycle; a Zundopp for the time I was in Belgium and the cars went to the Red Cross workers.

I returned from Europe by way of Belgium to Stoke on Trent and Liverpool arriving in Boston in mid-September via Army transport. We sailed nine days across the North Atlantic so rough that the entire ship shook every time the prop came out of the water. I toured the ship's engine room and couldn't believe how simple the three stage steam engine was. The engine turned less than 120 rpm and all the drive lines were exposed.

Westinghouse wanted Campini and so did Preston Tucker of the Tucker Automobiles. I had to make sure State Department characters and Organization, Naturalization OK, of the deal. I escorted Campini who spoke excellent English to a conference room where all the luggage and prototype parts were inventoried and catalogued. Somehow, a new Peerson, a newspaper reporter and radio commentator got word of Campini and the Washington Post had headlines "Army Air Force brings Italian engineer and his wife smuggled millions of jewelry into the U.S."

Campini was the past master of Campini / Caproni factory in Milan, Italy that manufactured aircraft. He flew the first prototype jet - powered aircraft in 1933. I remember the article from Popular Science how he used an Alpha Romeo racing engine instead of a jet turbine to turn his engine.