



THE
WIDOWMAKER
FEATURING
THE
TERRE HAUTE
TORNADO ·

BY J.Q. FRIERSON



Chapter 14

Stepped Up Training Schedule

In early September the 344th training schedule took on a new dimension. We were flying more and for longer periods of time. Bomb bay fuel tanks were installed in a number of our planes. These tanks added five hundred gallons of fuel, which enabled our plane to stay aloft up to ten hours or more.

New pilots, navigators, bombardiers, radio operators, and gunners were arriving. They would be trained for crews that were to go overseas with us. Only a few of them were trained as replacement crews for groups already in combat.

Lt. Wilson began selecting his crew, and one of the first he selected was Lt. J.H. "Jack" Havener as his copilot. Jack hailed from Sterling Heights, Illinois. He graduated from high school in the spring of 1938. After graduation he was employed by International Harvester Co. at their Rock Falls, Illinois plant as an office clerk. Jack enlisted in the Army-Air Force aviation cadet program in July 1942. He was drafted into the regular army before the cadet corp called him up and was sent to Camp Berkeley, Texas where he completed his basic infantry training. In December 1942, Jack was transferred to the air cadet corp and he entered pre-flight training in San Antonio, Texas. He later entered primary flight school at Brayton Flying Service in Cue, Texas. Jack completed his basic flight training at Waco Army-Air Force Field in Waco, Texas and graduated from twin engine flight school in Ellington Field, Texas on October 1, 1943. From there he was sent to Drane Field, Florida and assigned to the 497th Bomb Squadron.

On a Saturday afternoon in early October, soon after Jack arrived at Drane. Lt. Wilson was assigned to fly a target-towing mission. Lt. Havener was his copilot; I was the engineer and two Sergeants trained to let out, take in or cut loose the target were also aboard.

We took off from Drane about one-thirty that afternoon flying west. We crossed the coastline and flew out over the Gulf of Mexico in the Clearwater vicinity. We continued west over the Gulf for ten minutes more until we were well off shore. We then turned south and let out the target. When the target was released into the slipstream of the plane the drag on the plane was immediately felt. Lt. Wilson had to increase the engines' R.P.M. in order to maintain our normal cruising speed. When the target had been extended the full length of the tow line, The planes assigned to fire on the target started making their passes. Their gunners manning those powerful fifty caliber guns began shredding the target as we gradually flew large circles over the water. This constant pounding of the target continued for about two hours. By then the target was practically demolished and had to be cut loose. The plane surged forward at a much faster speed, and again the throttles were cut back and the plane once more slowed to our normal cruising speed.

Lt. Wilson set our course for Drane and we crossed the coast between Fort Myers and Brodenton in a northeast direction for our home base. Jack had taken over the flight controls and we were relaxed and enjoying the ride on this beautiful sunny autumn afternoon. I was sitting in the radio and navigator's compartment just rear of the flight deck. The two target-tending sergeants were seated on the right side of the compartment at the navigator's table. From their position they had a clear view of the right engine nacelle. One of the sergeants beckoned to me and pointed toward

the right engine. When I looked out the small window, through which a good view of the nacelle could be observed, I saw that the complete left side of the nacelle was covered with oil. The oil seemed to be coming from beneath the engine cowling. I instantly realized we had problems, probably a broken oil line. I informed Wilson of the leak and told him that most likely we would start losing engine oil pressure very shortly. I had no more than said this when the oil pressure indicator for the right engine started receding toward zero. I grabbed my parachute and strapped it on while the other two sergeants did likewise. Wilson lost no time in trimming the plane for single engine flying by elevating the right wing and adjusting the trim tabs to make it remain so. When the oil pressure indicator hit zero, he cut the ignition switch to the right engine and feathered the prop and simultaneously increased the speed of the left engine to maintain our minimum cruising speed. All these actions had taken less than a minute, and we were now safely flying on one engine, something the early Marauder critics had said was impossible.

Wilson set our course to Drane Field so that we could make the first leg of our approach a couple of miles from the south east end of the Drane northeast runway. It was necessary for him to yaw the plane around in level flight in order to make our final approach to the runway. Making a bank and turn on the approach could have thrown the plane into a spin. When we were in our final approach and had descended to one thousand feet, the roar of our port side engine sounded like a refrain from a beautiful waltz. Landing and taking off are always the most dangerous time of any airplane's flight. A minor loss of power, a malfunction in the propellor or a myriad of other things that can happen that would affect the plane's flight mode can lead to a crash but this Marauder performed perfectly. Jack, on a signal from Wilson lowered the plane's landing flaps slightly and then lowered the landing gear. Under the astute hands of Lt. Wilson, we made our final approach and touched down on the runway with a perfect landing.

The field had been alerted for an emergency landing. The fire trucks and ambulance were lined along the runway and the medical staff was at the ready, but "Thank God they weren't needed. Wilson managed to taxi the plane onto the taxi-strip, where we were met by a tow truck that attached a towing rod to the plane's nose wheel and quickly pulled us to a hard stand. It seemed that everyone in the 497th squadron was there to greet us. Wilson was applauded by everyone. He had come through in an emergency with flying colors. We all became a lot prouder of our Marauder.

At training bases here in the States and in combat zones around the world wherever the Marauders were dispersed, they were no longer considered Widow makers, but were establishing a reputation as one of the most reliable planes in our aerial arsenal. They were already being proclaimed the most dependable medium bomber in the Allies Command. The 344th Bomb Group was destined to greatly enhance the Marauder image in the not-to-distant future.

When our target towing Marauder had been parked on its hard stand, the ground crewman quickly brought the engines work stand along each side of the malfunctioned right engine and removed the cowling from same. I had surmised that the trouble was a busted oil hose where the line from the engine's oil tank passed through the engine firewall, separating the forward section of the

engine from the engine accessory section on the rear part of the engine. A four inch hose absorbed some of the torque on the line caused by the vibrations of the engine when it was started or revved up in flight. On the early models of the Marauder, this hose had been made of rubber and burst quite often, but on our current models the rubber hose had been replaced with a new synthetic one made of neoprene, which was much more durable than rubber, so it had been quite sometime since we'd had trouble with this small hose. The hose was replaced and the engine started up and checked out. Everything worked fine, and the target tower was placed back on flying status.

Lt. Wilson continued to put together his crew. His next selection was a young navigator, Lt. L.H. Jones, but after a couple of weeks he realized that Jones couldn't do the job in a manner that was acceptable to him, so Jones was transferred to another crew. John Preston, a quiet young Lieutenant who was dedicated to his work, came next. He passed Wilson's evaluation test with high marks and remained his navigator throughout the remainder of the war.

Next came Wilson's choice for a bombardier. He selected Lt. Roy Humes, a Texan who never met a stranger. Though he often sounded off rather loudly, he was very sincere about his duties, worked hard, and studied much to become a top notch bombardier, which he succeeded in doing. Roy would come down to the flight line and spend a lot of time asking questions about the plane. He sat in the nose cone and peered through a bombsight and acquainted himself with the fifty caliber nose gun that he would man in the event of an enemy fighter attack or a strafing mission. Roy made friends easily with officers and enlisted men alike. He gave us the impression that he realized that we were all in this war together. Working to bring it to a successful conclusion was more important than protocol.

Wilson's next choice for his crew was Sgt. Raymond Sander, a radio operator and gunner. His choice could not have been better. He was very smart and an exceptionally adept radio operator. Ray also spent a lot of time down on the flight line making himself familiar with the Marauder's radio equipment. He accompanied the radio mechanics when they came to make repairs on any malfunction of the equipment. He was also very dedicated to the cause. He and I became very good friends.

Wilson's next choice were his two gunners, John Skowsky as his aerial engineer and tail gunner and Robert Smith as armorer and turret gunner. John and Smitty were also dedicated to the task at hand. They spent lots of time down on the flight line learning all they could about the Marauder. These men remained together until they had completed their required combat missions and become one of the best combat units in the 497th squadron. The 344th Bomb Group was fast becoming a cohesive fighting unit.

Our rigorous training schedule continued at a fast pace. Our planes were flying day and night, and flights were for longer periods of time. We flew many simulated missions in tight formation to designated points to give our navigators proper training. The gunners shot at simulated targets. The bombardiers dropped make believe bombs. All this precise training was preparing our crews for real combat, which was growing closer with each ticking second.

A young radio operator was assigned to the 497th during the time the pilots were selecting their crews. James E. Meacum from Illinois was a rare commodity and would become one of the best. Everyone admired him. He was a model soldier in every respect. Jim was assigned to Captain Bentley's crew, and they soon became fast friends. Both were men of high principles and dedicated to becoming the best at their Air Force profession. They achieved these goals as later wartime experiences would prove.

The last three months of 1943 were a busy period for the 344th Group. We were given fifteen-day furloughs, so many allocated each week. Many of the personnel who got their furloughs in October and November went home and married their sweethearts. Most of those who were already married brought their wives back with them, so that they could be together a few months before we were shipped out. I'm sure this was true in all the squadrons because many of them had trouble finding apartments to live in near the base.

We were all counting the days we had left stateside. Though we stayed busy, anxieties and restlessness overcame many of us and unfortunately we turned to "Ole Barley Corn for solace. We began to drink far too much. Many of us, like myself, had drunk very little previously, and whiskey didn't mix well with our body chemically. When we partook of the many drinks, we became sick and had monstrous hangovers. Drinking did relieve my restlessness, but I soon realized that booze guzzling was not for me. I sipped a nip occasionally, but my hard drinking interludes had come to an end.

Our barracks life became a bit more keyed up. There were more drinking and many poker games. We played poker and listened to our favorite radio station play the Big Band music we loved. In late November two songs became very popular, Bing Crosby crooning "White Christmas" and "I'll Be Home for Christmas." We could hear the latter being hummed or sung wherever we went. Stan would get out his trumpet and play it and other popular tunes. Our barracks quartet would sing, not beautifully, but we enjoyed their offerings and often joined in, creating a simulated songfest.

Irv Cooperman was still seeing Kathy from Kissimmee, and Glenn Crane was courting several Lakeland belles, but most of us were playing the field. By now so many troops had moved into the central Florida that the pickings were getting slim.

Chapter 19

To the United Kingdom By Air

This chapter is derived from the writings of Lt. Col. Jack Havener, Ret. Air Force Reserve. Jack was a Lieutenant and

copilot on Captain Wilson's Marauder #295906.

The 344th Bomb Group's sixty-four planes departed Hunter Field for Morrison Field, Florida, located near West Palm Beach.

The group was led by Col. Reginald R.F.C.Vance, who had been assigned commander of the group in August 1943. Col. Vance was a career Air Force officer, having served in World War I, and a seasoned pilot and exceptional adept leader. He would remain our C.O. for most of the time that we were on combat duty.

On January 20, 1943, the group departed Morrison Field on the first leg of their journey to England. Their first refueling stop was Borinquen, Puerto Rico, thence to Atkinson Field, British Guiana; Belem, Brazil; and Natal, Brazil. Jack related the following account of their flight from Natal, Brazil, to the Ascension Island.

From the Ascension Island the group flew to Roberts Field, West Africa, Liberia to Dakar, Senegal Providence and from there to Marrakech, Morocco, then to St. Mawgam, Newquay Cornwall, England and thence to Stantead.

At Natal, Captain Wilson's plane was assigned an air transport navigator to fly with the plane and map their course to the Ascension Island. His name was Chaffee Halmark.

Ascension Island was referred by him as the "Rock." The island was a small, hard coral rock jutting up out of the middle of the South Atlantic Ocean, A navigator had to be very correct in charting his course, or the plane could easily miss the island and have to ditch in the vast expanse of the South Atlantic. Jack Havener described Chaffee Halmark as being one of the most Conscientious navigators he had ever known. Quoting Jack's description of him, "Chaffee was a soft spoken southern

gentleman type from the sunshine state of Florida, with big soft brown eyes and hair parted in the middle, just like the old tin type, who had just stepped out of an antebellum sepia-tinted photo.”

When he came aboard Wilson's plane, he carried an extra chart. Wilson and Havener took turns following their progress toward the Rock. Wilson called for a position report every hour and sometimes a little more frequently. Chaffee in his dedicated demeanor was chewing his fingernails and making periodic sextant shots of the sun and checking their wind drift constantly. He was so engrossed in his work that he said nothing to anyone, except to answer Wilson's inquiries. He never took time to get a cup of coffee. Jack felt sorry for him, so he would go back and give him a cup, insisting that he take a few minutes off his charts and drink it.

After seven hours and forty-five minutes of palm sweating anxiety, the Rock loomed out of the Ocean directly ahead of them. Chaffee had hit the Rock dead center, and the plane was lined up with the runway for a direct landing.

Quoting Jack, “I've never seen a more relieved and elated expression on a man's face as when Wilson called him up front, shook his hand and said “Chaffee, you are the best damn navigator in the group.” All the crew members shook his hand and expressed their appreciation of a job well done.”

This was the longest flight that the group had experienced thus far on its overseas journey, and all of the crew was both physically and emotionally exhausted, Chaffee more so than the others. That evening he remained on his bunk while the others went down to the beach to relax and watch the giant sea turtles

dig holes in the sand and lay their eggs. The remainder of their flights to Robinson Field and north to Marrakech, Morocco, was period of time awaiting improved weather conditions for their long and precarious flight to England.

After many days of delay due to bad weather over the Atlantic and at their destination St. Mawgans Airbase near the village of Newquay on Lands End in Cornwall, England, orders came to depart. On February 10th the 497th's planes took off from Marrakech on the last leg of their journey to the United Kingdom. Due to the neutrality of Spain and Portugal and the danger of German fighter plane attack off the coast of France, the group had to fly well out over the Atlantic. Their first compass setting was slightly west of north so as to skirt the Iberian peninsula, Portugal and Spain. Their course was then altered northward until they were off the northwest coast of France, and thence northeastward direct to Lands End.

This last leg of their flight to England was approximately twelve hundred miles in length and seven and one half hours flying time that taxed the plane's fuel supply to the utmost.

After they had gained their twelve thousand feet flying altitude, the engines' carburetors were leaned off to their bare limits to conserve fuel. Jerry Reed, who was flight engineer on Wilson's ship, related to me how low on fuel they were as they approached the St. Mawgans base on their final approach to the runway. The red light on the fuel gauges came on, denoting they had only a few minutes fuel supply left in the tanks and that one of the engines had cutoff as they taxied off the runway. They were grounded at St. Mawgans for several days by inclement weather and did not arrive at Stanstead until February 20th.

Their arrival at Stanstead was welcomed by all the squadron's engineering section and the bombardiers, navigators

and other combat crew members. Lt. Humes in his Texas drawl was the first to hail Lt. Wilson as Captain Wilson. His promotion to captain had just come through. We were all elated because we knew he was deserving of the step up in rank. The promotion never affected Wilson's attitude toward any of us who knew him. I'm sure he realized that we were as happy for him as he was for himself.

By March 4th

Wilson had still not decided on what to call our airplane.

Jack said, "Why not call her the Terre Haute Tornado?"

"Terre Haute, Indiana, was Wilson's hometown.

He liked it, and everyone on the crew bought it, so Wilson said, "OK! Johnny, you named her, so now you can paint the name on each side of her nose."

He was the boss so it was, "Yes Sir, Captain!" He knew that I would consider it an honor rather than a punishment but how in hell did he know I had a bit of artistic lettering talent?

Chapter 20

Introduction to Combat

As soon as the planes landed at Stanstead, we were given a list of modifications that were to be made on each plane before it could fly in combat. Though they were minor, some of them were time consuming, both for us and the radio and armorer mechanics.

Jerry Reed informed me that, due to the fact that the plane had performed flawlessly during the flights from Hunter Field, all he had done to it was refuel and add oil and that the engine cowling had not been taken off and that it was due for a fifty-hour inspection. This inspection took at least a day. The fact

that the plane had performed perfectly on its overseas trek was proof to us that this B-26 Marauder #295906 was indeed a rare bird. The next fourteen months of combat operations would prove us right.

In the latter part of 1943, it had been decided by the Air Force brass that it was no longer necessary to paint Marauders the standard aircraft olive drab color, which served as camouflage while they were on the ground. The new Marauders coming into the E.T.O. were unpainted. Their bright shiny aluminum coat was unmarred except for the Air Force Group and Squadron markings on them.

Col. Vance, our group commander, apparently liked these unpainted models and named them "Vance's Silver Streaks." There was also an order sent down that all the planes painted olive drab in the group would be scraped making them silver streaks also. Removing the olive drab paint from the older planes proved to be much easier said than done. We scraped a couple of days on 295906 and got very little paint off. The order was soon rescinded, and we had sixteen planes in the 497th with only a few square feet of silver showing, mostly on the underside. Even though most of the planes were olive drab, the name "Vance's Silver Streaks" stuck with the group for the duration.

On February 29th the first simulated mission was conducted, led by Colonel Vance. They flew across the English channel to within five miles of the French coast and Hitler's highly fortified west wall. Everything went well on this excursion of the 344th's first feint at Hitler's domain.

On March 6th the 344th flew its first mission, this one for real. The group struck a German Air base near Barney St. Martin, France. The mission was successful and the airbase was badly

damaged. Both heavy flak and German fighter planes were encountered, but only four of the group's planes received minor damage. At long last the 344th Group and the 497th Squadron's race with destiny had begun. This race would prove to be a long, bloody, and destructive one with many pitfalls along the way to accomplishing our goal of helping to rid the world of Nazi tyranny.

On March 8th our third mission was carried out, bombing Soesterberg Airfield, France. The weather over southeast England was cloudy with a low ceiling. Joining up for close formation flying was difficult and two of the 494th squadron's planes collided in attempting to get into formation. The planes plunged to earth killing all fourteen crew members. These men were the 344th's first combat casualties.

From March 8th to the 19th we had ten days of very bad weather, both in England and over the would be targets in France, Belgium and Holland. Every mission scheduled for this period had to be scrubbed. During this ten day period, the squadron began issuing two day passes, so Glenn Crane and I decided we would take our first trip to London. We got an early start and boarded the train in Bishop's Stortford at 8:15 a.m. From Bishop's Stortford to London there were only small villages with quaint names. One was Matching Green another Heath Row. We were amazed at the lush greenery of the pastures in East Anglia Country, and this was still winter time in Merry Ole England.

One of the first signs we noticed after boarding the train was " Is this trip really necessary?" Because of wartime restrictions imposed by the British government, all unnecessary travel was

discouraged. Other advertising signs located near the ceiling of the passenger car were: an English soup ad for "Bovril"; and an English ale called "Stout" was advertised as being "Good for what stales you." We also encountered our first brush with the British class system. The train was divided into 1st and 3rd class cars, as were the pubs' "bar room." The 1st class tickets were only a few cents more than the 3rd class, so Glenn and I purchased 1st class ones. We noticed the ticket agent was a bit concerned when he issued them, but we brushed his impoliteness aside because we didn't condone class distinctions in England or anyplace else. When we boarded the 1st class compartment, there was only one other passenger inside. We recognized him to be a British admiral. As we seated ourselves, Glenn, who was a smoker, lit up a Philip Morris. The admiral was a large man and sat in the corner looking down his nose at us. We could certainly read his thoughts, and they weren't cordial ones. When Glenn lit up, the admiral came to life. First, he flicked his fingers, indicating for Glenn to snuff out his cigarette, and at the same time he pointed to a no-smoking sign, which we hadn't noticed before.

Glenn readily doused his cigarette, and extracted his pack from his pocket and offered the stiff-necked admiral one.

The admiral only gave him a hard look and turned his head. This was unusual. Most Englishmen would have taken the whole pack from Glenn, if he would have parted with it.

Phillip Morris was their favorite smoke, and they weren't sold in the British Isles during the War. The rest of our ride to London with "Old Stone Face" was uneventful, and we landed at Liverpool Street station on schedule.

Glenn was an avid coffee drinker, so we went over to the tea booth in the station and ordered a cup. The operator, a middle

aged man said, "Hi Old Chap! There's no coffee for sale to the public in England. You'll have to make do with hot tea."

Glenn was unhappy, but we ordered us a cup each. We next discovered that there was no sugar available for it.

When Glenn asked for sugar, the server replied, "No sugar or sweeteners available either Yanks. You'll have to drink it as is." So we drank the weak tea unsweetened. We also made a mental note to get us some sugar from our mess hall and bring it

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with us on our future trips to London.

We boarded the "Underground," the British term for the subway, from Liverpool Street to the most frequented section of London by American G.I.'s, Covent Garden and Piccadilly Circus. This was amid the theater and entertainment center of the city. There were also several large hotels in the area. One was the Prince Regent. We soon found out that it was booked up indefinitely. At Covent Gardens there was an enormously large dance hall, and even in the fore noon it was partly filled with dancing G.I.'s and their girls. There were three different sections of the dance floor with a Bohemian band playing in each section. We soon discovered that Bohemian bands were the most popular music groups in the country. They were composed of an accordion, mandolin, banjo, drums and a bass fiddle. They made beautiful music and the British loved it. A short distance from Covent Gardens was Piccadilly Circus where three of the main streets in London intersected forming a large circle around a statue in the center of the circle. On the northeast quadrant of the circle was a large triangular shaped building in which was located the Rainbow Red Cross Club. The entrance to the club was on the pointed corner between the two intersecting streets. Over the double door entrance was inscribed "Through these

portals pass the finest men and women on earth." This sign made us proud to go in and sign the register. On later visits I met two of my friends from the states here.

By the time we had completed our visit to Covent Garden and the Rainbow Club, it was nearly one o'clock and we were hungry. The nearest and most convenient eating place we encountered was a fish & chips booth. We got two pieces of shad and a small bag of fried potatoes for two shillings, about fifty cents, not a bad price although we were short on food. England was during the war.

That afternoon we continued to acquaint ourselves with London. We attempted to get a ticket to one of the stage plays currently running in the better theaters. We found out they were sold out and booked for weeks ahead. *Arsenic and Old Lace* was the primary attraction, but it was booked for the remainder of the season.

We settled for a movie. After the

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movie we attempted to find a room for the night, but none was available, so we settled for a bunk at the Hands Crescent Red Cross Club. It was a large barn-like building and served as a sleep over place for G.I.'s while they were in London. We sarcastically called it the London Waldorf Astoria.

We encountered other oddities brought about by the wartime restrictions. There was very little gasoline available for civilian use, so almost all of the automobiles on the streets were very small and compact vehicles by American standards. Most of them seemed to be Austins. The small cars were powered by seven-and-one-half horse power engines, and we were told they would get forty or fifty miles per gallon on a low octane fuel.

We were amazed at their speed and acceleration. Taxi cabs were an exception. They were regular sized autos, also mostly

Austins. There were few modern cabs in Britain. They were all models of the late teens or early twenties and were well preserved and maintained.

Many of the buses, especially those traveling through the rural and suburban areas where electrical connections were unavailable, were powered by coal gas, methane extracted from coal. Behind these coal gas fueled buses and trucks was a generating unit mounted on a two wheel trailer. This unit burned coal and converted the gasses from it into methane, which was carried by a rubber hose to the engine of the buses. These coal powered buses were slow, but due to frequent stops, speed wasn't of the essence. They apparently used anthracite coal since there was very little smoke emitted from the exhaust pipes.

We also noticed that most of their large trucks and vans were Stanley Steamers, powered by Britain's world famous Stanley steam engines. These trucks emitted large amounts of smoke from their exhaust pipes. They reminded us of miniature trains as they traveled along leaving a long smoke trail. They were very powerful trucks and carried huge loads at a faster rate of speed compared to most vehicles in England.

We learned for the first time how the British gave directions to anyplace we might enquire of them. Their answer with their nasal twang was, "Oh sure Yank, go two squares down" while pointing in a direction, "then one square left, a half square right

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and you'll see it. You can't miss it."

The next morning we were back at Piccadilly circus, where a London cabby was hawking sight seeing tours, so along with two other G.I.'s we were loaded into one of those ancient Austin Healy cabs and were on our way. The cabby was very friendly and certainly knew the most attractive places we were interested

in seeing. He carried us to Downing Street by the British Parliament building and pointed out the location of Churchill's office, to Scotland Yard and down Fleet street, where all the major newspapers were printed. He carried us by the main office of the Bank of England and on through the old city of London, where we observed the devastation done to this section by German bombers during their all out assault on England from 1940 to 42. We also went by the docks on the Thames River that had been completely destroyed and were yet unrepaired.

Traveling on he showed us the Tower of London, Big Ben, and passed Westminster Abby where all the kings and noblemen throughout the years were entombed. We went by Waterloo station, then to Victoria Station, Trafalgar Square and Admiral Nelson's statue. From there he carried us to Buckingham Palace. The cabby had timed his tour so that we arrived there at twelve noon British double daylight savings time. Here we stopped and observed the changing of the guard at the Palace and saw the king and queen emerge from the palace onto a balcony overlooking the parade grounds. They remained there long enough to return the guards' salute, wave at the spectators, and then disappear back into the palace.

That afternoon we continued to acquaint ourselves with London. We discovered several more British customs that greatly differed from ours. One in particular was the fact that London policemen, Bobbies as they are called, never carried sidearms. They only carried a night stick, a wooden club about two feet long. We took notice of the antiquity of most of their buildings, which were shrouded in a grayish eerie countenance that had been brought about by hundreds of years of Britain's dreary weather. Most of the streets were very narrow

We would later discover that narrow streets was a trade mark of

Most European cities and towns. We soon found out that the English
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people adhered strictly to jay walking rules and seemed to enjoy calling American military personnel's attention to this if we ignored them. Their unusual reminders were, "Hey Yank, can't you read the street signs?"

We returned to the Covent Garden dance pavilion, where we enjoyed the music and met several pretty young ladies, whom we could have entertained that evening, but unfortunately we had to return to Stanstead. Our train was scheduled to leave Liverpool Street station at eight-fifteen. We arrived at the station early, and while awaiting our train, we met two very attractive ladies, whom we made dates with for a week later, dates we weren't sure that we would be able to keep.

Chapter 21

Germany's V-1 Missiles

In the latter part of March the weather over the target areas on the continent improved, and the Ninth Air Force Marauders were able to again resume their pounding of assigned targets. The 344th was leading many of these missions and was building a reputation for their ability to hit their target. When it was the 497th's turn to lead the group on these missions, the "Terre Haute Tornado" was either the lead plane or a box leader. The Tornado and three other flight leaders' planes had been equipped with GEE equipment, which greatly aided the lead plane in zeroing in on the target, so as to give the bombardier a much better chance to pinpoint the target. It worked because our bombing accuracy greatly improved.

After every mission when the planes had returned, Eddie Hagman would paint a small yellow-white bomb on the left side of the fuselage. These little bombs were increasing rapidly

because two missions a day were often flown. By now the Tornado had been thoroughly christened by a baptism of fire from the German antiaircraft batteries around the targets they had bombed. On many of these early missions she had encountered severe barrages of flak, but she had returned to Stanstead with very little damage and always stood at the ready for the next mission

To Eddie Hagman and me each time the Tornado returned from a mission unscathed by German flak or fighter attacks, our superstition back at Hunter Field that she would always return became more strongly embedded in our minds. The aura we had sensed about our new plane back there became a bit more vivid. We felt this strange aura was a blessing of God and would protect this Marauder through all its battles that lay ahead in our mounting conflict with Hitler's forces. Captain Wilson and his crew had flown most of the missions the Tornado had made so far and we felt that they too shared our thoughts about the plane.

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Coy Humes was the most vocal in his accolades about the Tornado and after every mission he would pat her plexiglass nose and say, "Thank you baby. You'll always return."

The research and development of pulse jet engines had been conducted in Germany as early as 1913, but it wasn't until 1939 that the aero-engine firm of Argus Motorenwerke came up with the first successful working model under the technical direction of Dr. Fritz Gossiau. Just prior to the outbreak of hostilities that marked the beginning of World War II, the German Air Ministry invited Argus to submit proposals for a pilotless missile with a range of three hundred fifty miles. To conceal the true offensive nature of the proposed weapon. It was designated as the FZG-76 which was an abbreviation for Flazielgerat, an aircraft target

apparatus. Due to the fact that accuracy of such a vehicle on purely military targets could not be assured because of their inability to produce radio devices necessary to aim these missiles properly and because of the early and spectacular success of the German armies across the low countries and France that ended in the Dunkirk riot of British Forces and the ensuing successes of their all out air attack on England from late 1940 and on through 1942 their pilotless missile program was shelved.

On March 28, 1942, the 234th R.A.F Lancaster and Stirling bombers destroyed Labect. Hitler was so enraged that he demanded revenge and ordered Terroran Griffe,terror attacks, on the British cities. Argus was directed to proceed on the development of the FZG-76, his weapon of choice for the attacks.The Nazi occupation of France had reduced the range of a pilotless missile to one hundred fifty miles, so sophisticated radio guidance equipment was no longer essential and accuracy became secondary. Hitler's burning desire for revenge was to get the missiles over London and create as much havoc and destruction as possible, with no regard for women, children and other civilians. It was to be a terror weapon the likes of which he world had never experienced. In June of 1942 Field Marshal Milch agreed, on behalf of Hitler's Air Ministry, that the development and production of these missies should be give First priority, Amazingly the initial ground-launched model took Off from a launching ramp on December 24, 1942. This first test 164

was highly satisfactory. It flew three thousand yards. Most of the developmental work had been carried out at Peenemunde on Germany's Baltic Coast.This would later become the breeding ground for Hitler's next infamous V-2 rocket. As successful as the first test of the V-1 missile was it took eighteen months to get

a properly functioning model in production. In the summer of 1943 a British intelligence agent on the continent had informed London that an “air mine with wings” was soon to be launched against England from catapult ramps. On August 30th another source informed the British that a German regiment would be deployed along the French channel coast, by November, to man one hundred eight catapults that would launch these “air mine missiles” against Britain. This information shook the British intelligence people up, and they initiated a counteroffensive action to find out about this missile.

British intelligence agents in France were directed to investigate construction sites that might be connected with the secret missiles. This beefed-up vigilance by British agents in France paid off. In late October they reported that a launch site had been constructed at Bois Carne, ten miles northeast of Abbeville. The British dispatched aerial reconnaissance planes to fly over the area and make photos. These photos revealed a concrete platform thirty feet long and twelve feet wide with its inclined axis aligned with London. Numerous buildings were clustered around the ramp, some of which were shaped like skis lying on their edge. So from then on the sites were referred to as ski sites by the British intelligence people. Further aerial reconnaissance revealed twenty-nine more sites with the ski-shaped buildings around them. In-all British agents located seventy to eighty more sites. The conclusion was firmly drawn that flying bombs were indeed going to be launched against England. In reality eighty-eight of the sites were to be completed by December 1943.

Realizing it was time to take action against these ski sites, on December 14, 1943, the British and Americans mounted a ferocious bombing raid against them. The U.S. 8th

Air Force

sent six hundred seventy-two B-17 "Flying Fortresses" that were assigned twenty-four sites to attack. The U.S. 9th Air Force
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dispatched a contingent of B-26 Marauders, "The Widow Makers." I'm sure they made a few Frauen widows on this raid. The Marauders were also assigned twenty-four sites to bomb. The R.A.F. were assigned twenty-three sites to attack with a large number of their best bombers. When the British appraised the results of this massive raid, they estimated that twenty-one sites were actually destroyed, fifteen severely damaged, and six left intact. No conclusion as to the extent of damage on the remaining ten could be assessed. A total of one thousand two hundred sixteen tons of bombs had been dropped in this raid. As a result of the bomb damage inflicted on the launching sites by the December 24th raid, the German General Commander of the German Wehrmacht Armed Korps in northern France reported to his superiors that the launching of their terror weapon against Britain would have to be delayed until May or June of 1944. Hitler went into a rage upon hearing this news. He threatened to send the generals in charge of the project to the Russian front, and even threatened to have some of them executed, but he calmed down when he realized the folly of his threats. If they had been carried out the whole program would be wrecked, so he reluctantly agreed to the delay.

General Heinemann devised a completely different plan for the future launching sites. Early in January 1944 work on the ski sites near the French coast was continued as a blind for the actual launching sites. He devised a completely new plan of relocating the sites further back from the coast. He instigated a revised security plan that resulted in the building of these new sites in

complete secrecy. They were also camouflaged so completely that they couldn't be detected from the air. Storage supply facilities were built in caves and underground tunnels. In all seventy-five of these new sites were constructed.

Between January 1st and June 1944, the U.S. 9th Air Force dropped twenty thousand tons of bombs on these sites, mostly on the original ones near the coast. The new ones inland from the French coast went unscathed.

In February of 1944, the British first got wind of the new sites, but it wasn't until April before their actual existence was confirmed. The new sites were circled with numerous batteries

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of German antiaircraft guns, consisting of the highly accurate eighty-eights better known as "the screaming meemies."

Chapter 22

The Noball Raids

No knowledge of the German pilotless missiles was ever disclosed to anyone by the British Intelligence Service, except to the Allied High Command, Prime Minister Churchill and his staff. Their existence was labeled "Top Secret." This was necessary to prevent chaos among the British subjects, which probably would have happened. Axis Sally came on the German Propaganda Network several times during the early months of 1944. She ranted and raved about how the Wehrmacht would release a rain of terror from the skies over London in a very short time. She would also state that there would be no defense against the terror weapons, but few of her threats had ever materialized in the past, so the British people paid no attention to her.

The bombing raids against the ski sites were given the code name "Noball Raids" and were described as highly fortified tactical targets that must be destroyed. Not even the group commander or briefing officers were given any hint as to the nature of these noball targets. The 9th Air Force Marauders were assigned the task of destroying the targets along with the 9th fighters and attack bombers, who would go in at low level and attack their anti-aircraft guns and ground installations.

During the latter part of April and the first week of May, the Marauders hit these launching sites around the Pas-de-Calais area hard, flying two missions a day whenever the weather permitted. The aircrews referred to this relentless assault as "Two a day for the Pas-de-Calais." At this time no one realized that, due to the backup sites the Germans had built further inland from the French coast, very few missiles would ever be launched from these coast sites and that all of this relentless bombing served little good. The Germans had outsmarted the British on this one rare occasion.

On April 23rd the Terre Haute Tornado was the lead ship for
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the 497th Bomb Group Squadron's contingent of Marauders on one of the Noball missions. Lt. J.H. Havener was Capt. Wilson's copilot on this raid, Lt. Roy Humes was bombardier, Lt. John Preston was navigator, T/Sgt. Ray Sanders the radio gunner, S/Sgt. Robert Smith "Smitty" was turret gunner, and S/Sgt. John Skowski was the tail gunner. Lt. Havener describes this mission that would be long embedded in his mind for two reasons. His closest friends were shot down when their wing plane was hit hard by an exploding ack-ack shell over the target and a strange coincidence that happened on the Terre Haute Tornado. When the bombs were released over the target, two of the five-hundred

pounders jammed in the bomb bay causing great anxiety among the crew members.

The following is his description of these two mishaps:

“As we leveled our plane for our twenty-to-thirty second bomb run on the target that day, in spite of the evasive action we had taken up to the I.P., (the initial point from which every bomb run is started), the radar-controlled aiming device of the Wehrmacht antiaircraft batteries had ample time to zero in on the proper altitude of our flight. As a result the aiming devices were able to lock in on our speed and altitude and time their shells to explode at the right second amid our tight formation. Our number two wingman, off our right wing, took a direct hit seconds after we had dropped our bombs and had begun a diving turn to the left of the target. He then peeled off to the right and lost altitude for about one thousand feet. We had been flying at twelve thousand feet on the bomb run. The plane then zoomed up into the most beautiful perfect inside loop I've ever seen. The plane was obviously out of control, and the pilot had dropped his landing gear in a desperate attempt to stabilize the ship.”

Jack continued, “We were leading the high flight of the first box of three flights in a two-box group mission, and I kept my eyes glued to Lt. Ralph Leone's craft as it looped. At the top of the loop a parachute popped open out of the inverted ship's nose-wheel doors, and I exclaimed into the Tornado's intercom

That's got to be Flynn.” Flynn was actually Lt. John J Bausano of Wilsonville, Illinois, the bombardier on Lt. Leone's ship. According to Jack he had gotten the name Flynn for his

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often use of the expression “in like Flynn.” This was an abbreviated description of the swashbuckling, womanizing movie star of the World War II era, Errol Flynn.

Jack's friend Flynn had given 2nd Lt. Harvey D. Scott of Jacksonville, Illinois, and copilot on Leone's plane fair warning that if they were ever in any trouble serious enough to necessitate abandoning their aircraft, that he, Scotty had better get his copilot's seat slid back fast or he would leave his footprints all over his body as he came out of the bombardier's compartment in the nose of the plane. In order for the bombardier in a Marauder to escape his compartment, the copilot had to slide his seat backward to make room for him to get out. This was what Flynn was referring to when he warned Scott that he'd better move fast in the event of an emergency. As Jack related, that was why I yelled into my intercom microphone, "That's Flynn." Lt. Scott was six feet two inches tall and a former Illinois State University halfback. He had listened well and had let Flynn exit from his nose compartment.

Jack continued his story. "As the stricken ship came down the backside of the loop, it went into a flat spin, and more parachutes began popping open as the remainder of the crew bailed out. We counted six chutes floating earthward as the stricken ship spun out of sight among the clouds below. We learned later that all six of the crew members were captured soon after they hit the earth, and spent the remainder of the war in a prisoner of war camp. After confirming the six chutes from Leone's plane had emerged and opened safely, Captain Wilson was concentrating on staying in formation with our box leader. Our radio operator, Ray Sanders, came on the intercom informing us that two of our bombs had jammed against each other in the bomb bay and had not dropped. Roy Humes, our bombardier, came out of his compartment in the nose of the plane and proceeded into the bomb bay section of the plane to investigate this problem. Before leaving his compartment he had

checked his bomb panel lights and found no indication that the bombs were still attached to the racks. He opened the bomb bay doors again and hit the salvo switch. This had no result on the bombs, so he surmised that the bombs had already left their

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shackles on the racks and were jammed against each other between the bomb bay racks. When he entered the bomb bay, he found this to be true. He kicked the bombs in an effort to dislodge them, but they wouldn't budge. This was an unsavory situation at best. These bombs were of the latest high tech, high explosive composition B Type and so sensitive that it was said they would explode if dropped from only twelve feet, even without a fuse. Roy took no chances on trying to kick them out again. To complicate the situation, the arming wires had worked as designed too, and they had jerked the safety pins from the nose and tail fuses of the bombs. The bombs' tiny propellers were windmilling from the air current created by the plane's slipstream entering the bomb bay. These fuses had to be removed from the bombs or we had the potential of an explosion at any second.

There was little room on the bomb bay catwalk to work with a parachute on and it was also impractical. S/Sgt. Skowski and Sanders and Lieutenants Humes and Preston removed their chutes and went to work. Sgt. Smith, the turret gunman, remained in the top gun turret as our sole defense against the Luftwaffe fighter planes. We were fortunate that none attacked us. Sanders and Preston held Humes by the legs as he hung upside down to unscrew the nose fuses from the bombs. He dropped them out of the open bomb bay hoping they would bounce off a "Kraut's" head before hitting the terra firma below. The bombs had jammed in between the racks, nose downward, and Skowski was

able to remove the rear fuses from his standing position on the narrow ten-inch-wide catwalk that ran through the center of the bomb bay. After the fuses were removed, they tried to dislodge the bombs again, but to no avail. Luckily they found some webbed belting in the rear compartment of the plane. No one knew why it was in the plane, but they were thankful for it. They went into their acrobatic act again, and using the webbed belt, they secured the bomb to the racks and closed the bomb bay doors.”

The men had performed some aerial acrobats, comparable to circus high wire performers, but they never had the benefit of a net beneath them, only ten thousand feet of ozone over a hostile

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country. The irony of this incident was that these men never received a written citation, let alone a medal, for their bravery, not withstanding the fact that they had saved a quarter million dollar aircraft and the lives of seven of the finest crewmen who ever flew and manned Marauders. Their flight back to Stanstead was uneventful, and Captain Wilson set the Tornado down like it was a feather pillow with wings, being careful not to land too hard and dislodge the bombs. After he landed and was rolling down the runway, he applied the brakes, and to his chagrin nothing happened. The brake lines had been severed by flak. He was confronted with another mishap to sweat out. He knew he couldn't let the plane continue off the end of the runway to crash into a grove of trees because surely this would cause the delicate bombs to explode. Wilson was a quick thinker and a master at improvising in an emergency, so before the runaway ship reached the end of the runway he cut the left engine, revved up the right one and held hard left rudder. The plane did a ninety degree turn, ran off the side of the runway and onto the grassy

area, where he quickly cut the right engine and the plane came to a gentle stop. When the crew emerged from the plane, there was some ground kissing going on in a big way. Fate had abetted our ship and with ingenuity and bravery, we were safely home again. While the armament crew was removing the lodged bombs from the plane and checking as to why the bombs lodged, the flight and ground crew members were assessing the flak damage done to the plane. We found the main hydraulic line that supplied the brakes had been severed. There was also a gaping hole that narrowly missed vital parts of the ship. One piece of flak had entered the top of the nose just in front of the copilot's seat and lodged in the instrument panel, knocking out several of the flight instruments.

Eddie Hagman stood by and observed the Tornado. The aura emitting from her seemed a little brighter, for again she had delivered her crew home safe, as she would continue to do through many more trying times throughout the duration of the war. I said a silent prayer of thanks and Eddie crossed himself.

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Chapter 24

D-Day

On the fourth of June in the afternoon we were notified that all personnel were confined to the base until further notice. That evening we were directed to paint broad white stripes around each wing of our plane and around the fuselage rear of the wings. These stripes would be on all Allied planes to enable them to be easily identified from enemy craft from the ground as well as in the air by our invasion forces.

The D-day invasion was originally scheduled to be on June

5th. We were down on the line at three o'clock pre-fighting and readying our planes. The D-day morning mission was scheduled to take off at 4:30 a.m., but the time came and passed and our flight crews never appeared. Very soon we were notified that the mission had been scrubbed.

The D-day invasion had been delayed twenty-four hours because of severe weather over the target areas and rough waves in the English Channel. We were told later in the day that we had to wash the broad white stripe from our planes and repaint three alternating white and black ones eighteen inches wide. This took a couple of hours. We were then told to stand by for further instructions.

This delay only seemed to increase our anxieties. In fact, they were fast turning to tension. Our nerves were getting edgy. Those who could find alcoholic drinks indulged freely. Almost everyone would have savored a good snort, if you could find one. Poker games or music could not calm the turmoil in our Souls. That night sleep was nearly impossible. Most of us never shed our fatigues, "work clothes." At one o'clock we lay down on our bunks with our shoes on and dozed fitfully for an hour. Then we were roused up and told to go eat and then report to the line and pre-flight our planes. Take off time would be 4:30.

When we stepped outside to proceed to the mess hall, we were greeted by a roaring crescendo the likes of which we had

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never before experienced. We readily realized that we were hearing the first wave of aircraft that was carrying the paratroopers and towing the gliders filled with troops and armament. This was the vanguard of our invasion fleet. This crescendo continually increased as more planes rose into the sky. By the sound of the engines, we knew that the fighters had taken

off and joined the troop carriers, to form an umbrella above them as protection against German fighter craft.

This continuous droning sound was the result of thousands of engine exhausts pounding the air and by an equal number of propellers, like thousands of thunder bolts splitting the heavens.

This crescendo of sound continued for hours until all of the Allied nations' planes had risen skyward on their assigned mission in this historic event. This was the greatest aerial armada ever to ply the heavens. Down on the English Channel the largest invasion fleet ever to be amassed in the annals of history was surging through the turbulent channel waters toward the beaches of northern France to mount an assault on Hitler's fortress of Europe. In addition to the hundreds of troop-carrying vessels, there was an equal number of naval craft protecting the invasion fleet. They were later to lay offshore and pound the German defense installations with their huge naval guns.

This den of noise pulsating from the sky was sending a message to the world that on this day, June 6, 1944, that the nations of the free world, led by the United States and Great Britain, had launched an assault on Germany's Third Reich, and this was the beginning of the end of their attempt to destroy the freedom loving nations of the earth. This assault would continue until all semblance of Nazism had been erased from the face of the earth. Few of us realized that this historic event would determine the course of freedom for centuries to come. We were amazed and awed when we thought of the intricate planning and liaison work that was necessary to make the coordinated invasion effort possible.

Every aircraft unit in this massive assault was assigned a definite hour and minute for its planes to take off. They were then assigned a rendezvous point and altitude at which they were

to assume their flight formation and set a prescribed compass

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heading for their assigned target. They were given an exact time down to the minute that they were to start their bomb run, and the direction they were to approach the target from, and a precise time to drop their bombs. All this information was passed on to the aircrews of each plane, and each crew member was assigned his part in making this plan work. The pilots, copilots, navigators, and bombardiers were directly responsible for the success of the mission. These crews had been well trained for their role in this epic undertaking and it was carried out with near perfect results, even though they were hampered by low hanging clouds and a misty atmosphere. The assault on the beaches by the ground forces had likewise been planned with precision in order to coincide with the air strikes. All these intricate plans had been perfected without the aid of modern computers, like our Armed Services rely on today.

When the 497th squadron's aircrews arrived at their assigned planes at 3:30, the planes were ready for this epic mission. Like the rest of us they were a bit subdued and more precise in carrying out their pre-flight duties. Even voiceful Roy Humes was quieter than usual. Captain Wilson went about his duties with a quiet but authoritative manner as he always did, but we could detect that he was a bit anxious. But who wasn't? This was a day we had been preparing for, for what seemed like forever since we had landed at Stanstead. The 344th Bomb Group would lead the entire 9th Air Force's Bomber contingent over the invasion beaches. The Terre Haute Tornado would be one of the lead planes in this initial attack.

The following is the story of Captain Wilson's crew and the Tornado's role in this gigantic undertaking, as related by Jack

Havener, copilot:

“With bomb bays loaded with twenty two-hundred-fifty pound general purpose bombs and with the weather worsening we taxied to the runway for takeoff. We had been told at an early morning briefing that our targets were German gun emplacements on the cliffs above the beachhead on the eastern side of Cherbourg peninsula near the village of Barfleur at St. Martin de Varreville. Our mission was not to knockout the gun positions but to stun the German gunners and infantrymen, to
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keep them holed up while our troops took the beach, and to create a network of ready made foxholes which our troops could utilize once they had gained a foothold on the beach below the cliffs given the code name Utah Beach. We were to approach the targets and drop our bombs from twelve thousand feet. We were told that we could expect very minor flak, if we stuck to our course, bomb run, and drop time as briefed. The high command was betting all their chips on achieving complete surprise in this operation. Colonel R.F.C. Vance, our group commander, had conducted the briefing by dropping a bomb on us. If the weather worsened, we were to drop down below the cloud cover until we could see the target, even if it was at treetop level. This directive sent chills up and down the spines of everyone present. We remembered the second mission Marauders had made in the E.T.O. a year ago when twelve planes were dispatched to carry out a tree top level raid on German subpens at Ijmuiden, Holland. Eleven planes had been lost. The one that returned to the U.K. had developed engine trouble and had to abort. We surmised that our chances of avoiding heavy losses were nil if we went in at low level. Just before we hit the runway for takeoff, it began to rain.

This further damped our spirits. Our assigned takeoff time of 4:30 was mandatory, and we were not to deviate from the timetable laid out for this mission under any circumstances.

Split second timing was the key to its success. After takeoff and joining up with the other planes in our squadron, we climbed to eight-thousand five-hundred feet above the cloud cover where the sky was clear. We headed south toward our target and the beaches of France, where the action was. Everything was going fine. The Tornado was purring along smoothly, and we were above the turbulence of the lower atmosphere and close formation flying was much easier.

As we crossed the English coastline and went out over the Channel, the clouds began to thicken and we had to go down beneath them. As we neared the French coast, I went through more mental anguish than I had on any of my twenty-four previous missions. I couldn't get the thought of those eleven planes that went down at Ijmuiden out of my mind because here

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we were about to carry on a possible suicidal raid. There were fifty-four planes in our flight and over five hundred more Marauders and British Havoc bombers following us spaced at regular intervals of two minutes apart. It helped my feelings somewhat when I first observed the hundreds of landing boats loaded with troops, tanks, and equipment plowing through rough waters toward the French beaches in a steady flow, knowing that, if we failed to complete our mission, they would fail also. I knew now that we were at the point of no return. We were now flying at an altitude of three-thousand five-hundred feet. I knew we were sitting ducks for those Krauts with their light flak guns

below.

By now landfall was at hand and as we turned west to the I.P. Off to our right in the haze, we saw flashes from what we first thought was heavy enemy flak guns firing at us. But then we realized what we were seeing was flashes from our Navy battle wagons and heavy cruisers firing their twelve and sixteen inch, two-ton shells at the German gun emplacements along the shoreline. We had only a few seconds to marvel at the action below because all of a sudden the Krauts cut loose at us with their light flak guns. The airspace around us blossomed with light flak tracer shells, incendiary and explosive shells. If it had not been so terrifying it would have reminded us of a July 4th fireworks display on Coney Island.

A ship in our first box ahead of us took a flak hit, did a complete snap roll, regained its correct flight mode and continued in formation. This was a miracle and unbelievable. We were now on our bomb run when another one of our planes took a direct hit, blew up and went down.

After what seemed an eternity, we dropped our bombs at 06:09 a.m. and began to concentrate on getting the hell out of this inferno. We flew westward across the Cherbourg Peninsula and then northward across the Channel on an assigned return route well west of the incoming flights, mostly the heavy bombers carrying their lethal cargo to unleash against Hitler's Fortress Europe. We concluded that we must have caught the Krauts off guard or our losses would have been much greater. We had not seen a Luftwaffe plane. The Allies had complete

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control of the air over the invasion beaches. When we turned on our assigned heading for Stanstead, we could again see our Naval craft lobbing their heavy shells at the Kraut positions and

the first wave of landing craft hitting the beaches. We also observed hundreds of P47 Thunderbolt fighters dive bombing and strafing every German that moved along and behind the beaches. We were back at Stanstead at 08:00.

We learned at the debriefing that the flak burst we had encountered as we approached the French coast had come from the battleship Nevada. It was too dark for them to identify us by our invasion stripes on our planes and we were mistaken for enemy craft. Because of radio silence we had been directed to maintain on the mission, we couldn't contact them. Our group leader realized this and ordered identification flares to be shot off. The battleships recognized the flare signals and ceased firing at us. The shortest night of the longest day had ended early for us.”

When the Tornado landed and was back at its hard stand, a smiling and elated flight crew descended onto the tarmac. They were all talking at once, telling us what an epic panorama they had witnessed.

John Skowski, who had an unobstructed view from his tail gun turret exclaimed, “I never knew there were so many boats afloat as we saw on the Channel today. There were sea craft of every description, all churning toward the French beaches. I couldn't believe my eyes.”

Smitty the turret gunner related, “As I scanned the sky for Kraut fighters, I could see nothing but Air Force planes with their invasion stripes. The sky was teeming with our fighters as high and as far as my eyes could conceive. Many of them were diving on targets down on the deck. I don't see how those Krauts could have survived this onslaught.”

The ground crewmen were all anxious to know where the invasion was taking place. Where on the French coast were we

landing? When we were told the Cherbourg peninsula, we must have had a blank look on our faces. Captain Wilson, seeing that we were unaware of its location, took out his map and pointed it out to us. This was our first time to ever hear of the place. After
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the aircrew departed to be debriefed, Joe, Eddie and I went over the Tornado searching for battle damage. There wasn't any. She had escaped this epic ordeal unscathed. As Eddie patted her nose, Joe and I stood back and admired her. She had run the gauntlet of fire again and returned her crew home safely. To us her aura of distinction glowed a bit brighter.

The Tornado was again the lead plane in an afternoon mission. The weather had cleared a bit and visibility became much greater. When the planes took off, conditions were much better than it had been for the morning outing, but soon after all the planes were in the air, the weather closed again and it soon began raining. This soupy weather continued, and when the planes returned, it was raining steadily, not a hard rain, but a steady pelting one. Ironically, about 3:30 when our planes returned from the mission, the clouds lifted slightly and visibility improved greatly. All of the 344th Group's aircraft were able to land with little difficulty. We saw a red flare shot from the first plane as it came in for a landing. As it passed our squadron dispersal area, we recognized the plane to be the Terre Haute Tornado. We also saw that the plastic nose cone was badly broken with a large hole in the front part of it. We readily surmised that this accounted for the red flare. A hole like this in the nose of a Marauder could cause a disruption of the smooth air flow over the fuselage and could very well cause problems landing in this turbulent weather. Fortunately, the pilot was able

to set the plane down perfectly. The door into the nose compartment of the plane had been closed and the fifty caliber gun in the very tip of the nose had been removed. The closed door to the bombardier's compartment prevented a blast of air from coming right through the plane, which would have made it very difficult to fly and hold a steady course.

When the Tornado reached its hard stand, we immediately went over her checking for further damage, but we found none. A piece of flak had apparently struck the right front part of the nose and knocked a gaping hole in the right front side of the cone. After observing the damage, Gene Cardon went to order a replacement cone and Eddie, Joe and I started the long slow job of removing the damaged nose cone. We had to remove over

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two hundred one-quarter-inch by two-inch screws to get the old one off and replace all of them before the exchange was completed. There was only room for one of us to work at a time inside the cramped nose compartment, so we knew we were in for a long eight to ten hours of work. Fortunately, once we got the broken one off and the new one attached with several bolts at the top and bottom, we were no longer exposed to the intermittent rain and wind gusts that continued with no evidence that it would soon abate. We took turns going to the mess hall for our evening meal and a supply of hot coffee. The work progressed quicker than we had first anticipated and by one a.m. on June 7th the job was finished and the Tornado was ready for the morning mission.

Life soon returned to routine after D-day. Our planes continued to fly two missions a day whenever the weather would permit. Most of our missions were in direct support of our advancing troops after they had gained a foothold on the French

coast. Our efforts were directed at German supply and support personnel. Our planes were kept busy bombing enemy troop movements and any other target that was connected to their defensive effort. We also resumed bombing on the secret no-ball targets.

The Stars and Stripes and the Armed Services radio station kept us abreast of the war front activities, especially in Normandy where our troops were moving forward toward St. Lo and the Brest peninsula while the British and Canadians were moving eastward toward Calais and Antwerp, Belgium. In Italy we had broken out of the Anzio stalemate and were pushing toward Rome. We received the score on the 344th Bomb Group's D-day missions. Our planes had clobbered their targets beyond all expectations, and we had lost only two planes. The "Widow Makers" had once again proved their true worth and shown their critics' skepticism to be pure folly.

Chapter 25

The Buzz Bombs Fly

In the late night hours of June 15th the Germans unleashed hoards of robot bombs directed across the English Channel at southeast England and London. They came like droning swarms of enraged hornets, with their pulse jet engines emitting a noise akin to a revved up motorcycle engine. They came in at an altitude of five hundred to two thousand feet. Apparently their flight control mechanism had been set to approach the United

Kingdom at an altitude low enough to fly beneath British radar surveillance. As a result of their low altitude approach, they were not detected until the coastal antiaircraft guns picked them up as they neared the coast and opened fire on them. The coastal batteries' fire alerted the inland ack-ack batteries which were heavily deployed over southern England. The British had been preparing their defenses for the V-1 weapon attacks. The Germans had designated their robot planes "V-1" meaning V for vengeance. To put it mildly, these droning flying machines of death and destruction were soon flying through a deadly hail of flak that the Krauts had never expected them to encounter on their initial assault. The British intelligence agents in France had kept them abreast of the German's progress in readying these weapons and their launch sites. Adhering to these reports the British had greatly enhanced their defenses against an impending attack, so they weren't taken by complete surprise by this initial attack. As a result of the accurate antiaircraft batteries' fire, many of the robots were shot down on this first fateful night attack. Many more of them ran out of fuel before they reached the London area and dropped and exploded on the British countryside, doing little if any damage.

The V-1 flying bomb was a very ingenious frightening weapon, especially to the English civilian population. Once one was heard there was no way of knowing when or where it might hit. The robot was a huge flying bomb, carrying about sixteen

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hundred pounds of high explosives. It had stubby wings and was propelled by a pulse jet engine, set aft and atop the explosive filled fuselage, resembling a stovepipe. A small tail assembly was affixed to the tail of the fuselage and beneath the stovepipe exhaust of the small jet engine. They were launched while

pointed in the general direction of their target. They were equipped with a gyro, similar to the ones in our automatic pilots. These gyros stabilized the robot's flight but did nothing to control its direction. They carried only enough fuel to propel them to the greater London area and were designed to glide to the Earth at a steep angle when their supply of fuel was exhausted. The bomb was equipped with an impact exploding cap which exploded on contact with the earth or any building it might hit.

Jack Havener was in London on the night of this first buzz bomb attack, and he related the following account of the raid: On the night of June 15", Jack was on a twenty-four hour pass to London. Like everyone else who received a twenty-four hour pass he had gone into the city after duty hours on the night before his day off began. In doing so he had stretched his time off to nearly thirty-six hours. On this night he had acquired a room at the Princess Gardens Red Cross Club. He had fallen asleep only to be awakened a short time later by air raid sirens and bombs bursting. The antiaircraft guns in nearby Hyde Park and the exploding missiles were creating such a din of noise that it was hard to distinguish between the bombs bursting and the ack-ack, but it appeared to him that they were either dive bombing or glide bombing. The latter proved to be more accurate. Almost everyone in the dormitory type rooms in the club had gone down to the air raid shelter, but he was rather tired and decided to sweat this one out and try to visualize what was going on. He was also curious to know why the bomber engines cut out and then went into a steep glide followed a few seconds later by an ear shattering explosion. Jack finally concluded that the Krauts must be mounting suicide attacks because he couldn't hear any engines restarting after they cut out. The attacking

planes came over in waves. Everything would go quiet for a half hour and then startup again. This scenario went on all night and 194

he got very little sleep. Jack had to return to Stanstead the next morning, and on the bus to Liverpool Street station, he realized that the air raid all-clear siren had not sounded, and at intermittent intervals he would hear ack-ack guns, so he knew that the Germans were still sending this strange sounding plane over London, although he never got a glimpse of one of them.

It wasn't until that evening when the news came on BBC that he learned that the Germans had released their robot bombs against the United Kingdom. The next morning he learned at a briefing that the noball sites our planes had been bombing for the last few months were the launching sites and assembly points for these robot planes that had attacked London the night before, and he had been present to witness this historic event.

These state of the art pilotless missiles that the Krauts tabbed their V-1 weapons, would not turn the tide of the war in their favor as the Germans believed. In reality they were a very crude craft when compared to our modern smart bombs and cruise missiles in our defense arsenal today. They were the fore runner of these weapons.

On August 19h, Jack and a fellow copilot, C.D. Shattuck, were on a two-day pass sight seeing in southeast England. On the second morning of their leave they arrived in Dover having spent the night before in Canterbury. They climbed Shakespeare Cliff and were enjoying a view of the Port and Channel beyond. It was one of those rare beautiful sunny days that is seldom seen in England, especially along the Channel coast. Standing there on this beautiful chalk white cliff that they had often observed from the air when returning from missions, they were in awe at

the picturesque view that unfolded before their eyes. Then all of a sudden they were jolted back to reality by British ack-ack fire from behind and from either side of them. Their eyes followed the burst of the ack-ack shells out over the Channel to try to determine what they were shooting at and glimpsed three V-1 robots headed their way.

“What in the hell are they?” Shattuck snapped.

“Well, they aren't blue birds,” Jack retorted.

When they got a clearer view of them, they realized that they were headed directly toward them at about six-to eight-hundred

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feet in altitude. They were so close together that they were sure they were in formation, as if controlled by human hands. The ack-ack shells hit one before it reached the coastline and it fell into the Channel and exploded. There was no place to run and take shelter, so they flattened themselves against the crest of the white cliff. I'm sure they wished they had the burrowing power of a mole about then. The antiaircraft guns got another one of the intruders and it hit the railroad track below the cliff off to their left and exploded. They were immersed in a cloud of dust and rock that engulfed them following the explosion.

Fortunately, they were not injured.

The remaining V-1 continued on its way and disappeared beyond the horizon over the English countryside. The engine noise from the third craft had completely subsided, so Jack and Shattuck arose from the cliff top and dusted themselves off.

They were well shook up. It took a few minutes for them to regain their composure. They then ran down a path on the cliff's edge to the railroad track and shuffled their way to the crater where the downed robot had exploded, in hopes of finding a souvenir as a memento, a keepsake of their near encounter with

destiny. As they stood by the twisted rails peering into the crater left by the explosion, all they could detect was a small bit of twisted metal skin from the robot's wings. The pieces were no larger than a gum wrapper, they retrieved several of these. Jack says he still has his piece, fifty-three years later.

Life at our base at Stanstead was not greatly altered by the advent of the V-1 robot aircraft attacks. For the first few days of their assault they were the focal point of everyone's thoughts and were discussed continuously, but the idea of V-1 attacks created havoc among the Allied military personnel, driving the British populace and their war effort into total disarray, as the German high command had hoped they would, was not to be. The British considered the whole affair as just another German nuisance.

When talking with them about the robots, their pet phrase for the whole matter was "Just another German nuisance, distraction, it'll pass Yank, and they'll gain little from it." We Americans had come to this conclusion already and it proved to be correct.

All through the summer the Krauts kept launching their

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pilotless craft toward the United Kingdom. Sometimes as many as ten or twelve of them would get as far as London. They would come at erratic intervals. Sometimes a week would pass without one appearing, and as summer faded into autumn, they gradually diminished all together.

After our troops in France closed the St. Lo pocket and broke into the their blitz across France, the German launching sites had been over run. The Krauts were forced to attempt to continue their V-1 assaults against the United Kingdom from launching sites in Holland. From this distance only a few of them reached London.

As it became more difficult to launch their robot missiles

directly at London from across the Channel, the Germans came up with another method, to hit London with their terror weapons. They devised a method to attach the V-1's beneath their Junkers bombers, which they flew from Holland out over the North Sea, northeast of London, and released them in the direction of the greater London metro area. Stanstead was situated between the point the German bombers released these missiles and London, so many of these V-1's came over or near our base. One in particular gave us quite a scare. Our planes had flown a late mission, and it was in the late evening twilight before we had refueled them and made any necessary repairs in order to have them ready for an early morning mission. To get from our squadron's aircraft dispersal area to our barracks area, we walked down a path along a fence row about three hundred feet long. On this evening there were maintenance personnel strung out all along this path. We were all rushing to get to the mess hall. We had remained on the flight line later than usual and were all very hungry.

As we hurried along, out of the northeast came that now familiar sound of a buzz bomb. We looked and saw it was coming directly toward us at a very low altitude and descending earthward in a gradual glide. We also noted that its engine was pulsating erratically. Without hesitating, everyone of us hit the ground. We would like to have buried ourselves beneath the fence. The missile came on fast. It was a bit to our left, but as it passed close to us, I imagined I could feel the heat emanating

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from its engine, as it passed us and barely skimmed over the top of several large elm trees just east of our barracks area. It continued aloft propelled by its malfunctioning engine for about a mile beyond our base, where it hit a hillside and exploded.

After this experience I could relate to how Jack and Shattuck felt during their close encounter on the cliffs of Dover.

During late July and August, when the Germans were sending their V-1's over London at sporadic intervals, big Red McCormack and I were in London on a weekend pass. Mack as usual was inquiring of every pub owner we encountered of the possibility of obtaining a fifth of Scotch. We were in a pub in the vicinity of Piccadilly Circus where he flashed a five pound note and inquired of the bartender, "Say Pal, do you have a fifth you could sell me?"

"I'm afraid not Yank," the bartender replied in his high nasal twang. Then I noticed his eyes light up, "But I can tell you where you can find one."

"Where?" Mack asked.

The bartender got out a sheet of paper and drew a sketch indicating the directions to the pub in question. "Board the underground here, Yank," indicating a near by station. "It'll take you out northwest of the city into a suburb. " He wrote the name of the place down and continued , "Its about an hours ride to the end of the underground . It'll emerge onto the surface there and you'll be at the end of the line. There's a small town square there and you'll see the pub on the square. Joe's the bartender's name. Tell him Ron sent you. He'll fix you up, Yank."

Mack thanked him very much and headed for the door.

When we were out on the street,I said,"Mack that S.B. was pulling your leg. He had a smirk all over his face as we walked out."

Mack had been downing every drop he could get at the pubs we had already visited and by now was getting rather high.

"No!", he replied. "He wasn't lying.

Besides we got nothing else to do. It'll give us a chance to see some of the city. Let's go," he continued.

I reluctantly agreed, and we boarded the underground and settled down for a long tiresome ride. We arrived at the end of 198

the line and landed at a station on a small square just as the bartender had described it. We went straightway to the pub in question. Mack went to the bar and inquired if Joe was in.

“Who Yank?” came the bartender's retort.

Mack then told him how he had been referred to his pub and that he was seeking a fifth of Scotch.

“So am I, Yank,” the barman chirped, “I haven't seen a fifth of Scotch in a fortnight. Don't even have a drop I can sell you. This is war, you know, and spirits are hard to come by.”

Mack stood there staring at him in a half daze. I thought he was going to explode like a block buster, so I grabbed him by the arm and pulled him out onto the street.

We had moved only a short distance down the street when we heard that unmistakable sound of a V-1 buzz bomb approaching from the southeast. It sounded as if it were coming right over the square. All of a sudden, as if out of nowhere, three women and five small children came running toward us. I'll never forget the frightened panic stricken look that radiated from their faces, especially the children. Both Mack and I realized that they were approaching us as if we could protect them from the impending danger that we all were facing. We immediately started telling them to stand against the wall of a building fronting on the square and as calmly as we could we were saying, “If the engine cuts off hit the deck and let your children get beneath you. Just be calm and everything will be alright.” I wish we could have assured them of that. Our words did seem to calm them. By now the roar of the robot was almost upon us and all of a sudden it shot from behind the cover of some tall trees on

the southeast side of the square. It was only about two hundred feet high and we got a plain view of it as it zoomed over the square and continued on its way. We heard the engine continue to run for about one minute. Then it cut off and only a few seconds later the explosion echoed about us. By now the women had regained their composure and were embracing their children. One of them came over and embraced both Mack and me thanking us passionately. We didn't know what they were thanking us for, but we sure enjoyed their overtures. Several Englishmen came along and we all engaged in a discussion of 199

the "Doodle Bug Menace". This was the name tag by which the British identified the V-1s. Our discussion ended up with all of us giving Hitler and his cohorts a thorough cursing. Mack who was a great communicator took charge of the conversation and in his eloquent Tennessee drawl assured them that this robot bomb hazzard would soon pass, Hitler was going to get his just dues, and the world would soon be at peace again. They must have liked what he said because they shook our hands and kept thanking us. We lingered a while longer, then took our leave to the underground station, where we boarded a car that was headed back to central London.

As we walked toward the station I looked at Mack and said, "You were spreading it rather thick weren't you bub? What were you doing practicing on us your oratory skills to run for Congress or the Senate?"

"Hell no", he retorted, "For President!" There was never a dull moment when Big Red was around.

After our long ride back into central London we exited from the underground station near Covent Garden. We spent the evening at the huge dance hall there and by curfew time we were

well jaded and ready for a night's rest. We found a hotel room on Liverpool street and welcomed a chance to relax in a normal sized bed for a change. Mack fell into a deep restful sleep, but mine was just the opposite. I slept fitfully and seemed to awake every few minutes. About one a.m.the air raid sirens cut loose emitting their mournful wooing sound over the city, like a thousand cooing doves. I got up and dressed. I wasn't going to get caught short if one of Hitler's terror weapons clobbered the hotel. I tried to wake Red, but his alcohol clogged system had taken control of his senses making him immune to reality, so I let him sleep. I knew that the chances of us being hit were remote anyway. Then above the wailing sound of the air raid sirens I heard the distant sound of a buzz bomb. The sound was getting louder and seemed to be coming right in our direction. Then all of a sudden the ack-ack guns began blasting away. They were very near by because the lights flashing from the guns lit up the blackout window drapes. Then both the buzz bomb engine and the ack-ack guns went silent. I hit the floor and

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attempted to get beneath the bed. The exploding bomb lit up the sky. The windows shook, and light fixtures rattled. The bomb had hit nearby, but not close enough to do us or the hotel any harm. I paused a moment and thanked God. Through all of this Mack slept peacefully, so I let him be. Knowing I wouldn't be able to sleep for quite a while, I went down to the hotel lobby to inquire about how close it had come to us. The clerk knew no more than I did, so I went out the front door to see if anyone was on the street. A bobby came along spinning his nightstick calm and cool as if nothing had happened.

I hailed him saying, "Chief how close did it hit?"

"About two squares over." pointing southward, "No harm

done, Yank. Go back to bed and sleep. Chances are there won't be another doodle bug to come this way tonight.”

By this time I had begun to feel really tired, so I took the bobby's advice and returned to our room. I fell into bed with my clothes on and never woke until nine o'clock the next morning.

By ten a.m. we were on our way down a side street, off Liverpool, to see the crater where the buzzer had hit eight hours earlier. As we came within three hundred feet of the impact point, we began to observe broken windows and debris scattered over the streets. The V-1 had impacted the earth in a tier of previously bombed out gutted buildings, and had done very little damage. It had hit near the sidewalk, and when we reached the scene no one else was there. I spied a piece of metal protruding from the dirt along the rim of the cavity and walked over to extract it from the soft earth. To my surprise it was a wing strut from the V-1's wing. It was about two feet long with the top side arched into the contour shape of the wing.

I kept the strut, along with many other wartime mementos, for many years. When my youngest son was a toddler, he adopted it as a toy and played with it often, but at some time during those years it became misplaced and I have never been able to recover it.

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Chapter 26

The Tornado Survives Again

The following is an account of a mission as related by Jack Havener.

On the afternoon of June 20th the Terre Haute Tornado, with Captain Wilson and his crew had been designated to lead the 497th contingent of thirty-six planes on a no-ball target raid.

Everyone knew now what noball targets were and why they were so heavily fortified against our Marauder raids. The target for this raid was protected by sixty or more German eighty-eight aircraft guns and manned by the best of their ack-ack crews. Our planes would change course every twenty seconds after we hit the French coast, in order to evade the Kraut ack-ack fire. But when we made our final approach to the bombs away point it meant thirty seconds of straight and level flight. This was a crucial time for us and when most of the hits would be scored by the Krauts on our planes. Two methods were used to distract the antiaircraft gun's accuracy, one questionable the other definite and never failed to be effective.

The first of these was a scheme cooked up by the British who cut tons of thin stripes of paper backed with a thin strip of tin foil into shreds. These stripes of tin foil paper were put into boxes and loaded in the rear compartment of three of our Marauders. These three ships flew ahead of our bomb carrying planes with two men sitting near the rear side hatches of the Marauders. These men would take handfuls of the tin foil strips from the boxes and throw it out the side hatches. The British surmised that these tin foil strips would scatter and float over the target and gun emplacement areas when they hit the airplane's slipstream and that these tinfoil strips would cause clouds of blips on the German radar screens that transmitted the altitude and speed data of our bombers to the aiming devices of their ack-ack guns, thus confusing the guns delicate aiming mechanisms and disrupting their accuracy. It was questionable whether this scheme ever had the desired effects they had hoped for. It sure

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didn't help defray the accuracy of the German guns zeroed in on our first flight of bombers led by Captain Wilson and the

Tornado on this afternoon mission of June 20,1944.

The second and always dependable method of disrupting the enemy ack-ack fire was the 9th Air Force P-47 fighter planes that accompanied the Marauders on their missions against Hitler's European Fortress. The P-47s flew above and below and on each side of the Marauder formations, protecting them from German fighters. The ones below the bomber formations went in ahead of the bombers, dive bombing and strafing the target area and gun emplacements. The German anti-aircraft gunners never fired at the vanguard fighter plane so the fighters had trouble locating the gun emplacements and by the time they started firing on the Marauders above the fighters, the P-47s had to clear out of the target area to prevent themselves from being struck by the Marauder released bombs. The P-47s would ascend to several thousand feet and when the ack-ack guns cut loose on the first wave of bombers over the target, they would get a fix on them. Before the next wave of Marauders came over the target area, they would clobber the gun emplacements with accurate fire and anti-personnel bombs.

This was the scenario that the Tornado was flying into as they proceeded across the English Channel toward their assigned target. As they approached the French coast little did Captain Wilson suspect that he was destined to perform a feat of miraculous flying ability that had never been or would ever again be equaled by a "Widow Maker pilot." On this mission each of the planes in Wilson's formation carried eight five-hundred pound composition B bombs. These bombs were relatively new and were known to contain much more raw T.N.T. than most bombs making them powerful and exceedingly sensitive. Due to the sensitivity of these bombs it was necessary to exercise extreme caution. When taking off carrying this type of missile,

even more caution had to be observed if it was necessary for a plane to have to abort the mission and land with this sensitive cargo. With this knowledge in mind every pilot in the formation was anxious to get over the target and dump their bombs.

Wilson managed to lead his flight of Marauders past the first
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coast gun emplacements without drawing their fire. Now their only concern was the guns around the target area. As they approached the target, Lt. Humes came on the interphone and announced, "I see gun flashes down there. Those guns are eager today."

They were now on their bomb run and evasive action was no longer possible. In order to keep the plane in straight and level flight, Wilson's eyes were glued to the pilot's directional flight indicator on the instrument panel directly in front of him. Lt. Humes opened the bomb bay doors and they locked open. There were four flak bursts to their left and close enough that they could see the red and yellow flashes in the center of their black puff as the shells exploded. This indicated that the flak was close enough to them to cause extensive damage. The next bursts were right under the Tornado and close enough that they could feel the heat emanating from the exploding shells. Jack felt a sting in his lower right leg and heard the flak shrapnel as it hit the plane. The ship bounced upward. Roy realized that they had been hit, so he salvoed the bombs, dropping them all at once, in lieu of their normal procedure of letting the bomb release mechanism release them at short intervals apart creating the so called bomb train effect. As the bombs cleared the bomb bay doors, they snapped shut automatically. This was one of the many features Marauders had, that most bombers didn't possess. The Tornado began to swerve to the left and Jack jammed

the left rudder pedal in order to help Wilson keep control of the plane. But when he pushed the pedal the rudder did not respond and the plane continued in a diving turn to the left. Jack asked Wilson if he could hold the plane while he moved his seat back and let Humes out of the nose compartment. Wilson only nodded. Roy crawled by Jack and spoke to the crew on the intercom saying, "Hold tight men we're going to be okay." As Roy crawled by Jack he yelled in his ear, "You're hit in the leg and blood is running onto the deck."

Jack replied, "I suppose that is why I couldn't push the right rudder."

Jack pulled his seat forward and Roy asked, "You want a shot of Morphine?"

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Jack declined.

He didn't want his senses dulled in a situation like they were in. Roy then reached from behind Jack's seat and helped him put a bandage around his ankle. They glanced over at Wilson and saw that he was so preoccupied with trying to control the plane, that he had not noticed them. Wilson then came on the intercom and said, "Johnny", speaking to Jack, "The right rudder wont respond." At the same time he reached over his head to the rudder trim tab control nob to adjust the trim tab to compensate for the loss of rudder control. Jack realized now that it wasn't his inability to control the rudder, but that they had no right rudder period.

Wilson who was ordinarily calm and cool in situations like this. This time he momentarily lost it. He slid his fist along the side window, while looking down to the left, yelling, "You Kraut bastards!" He then calmly adjusted the rudder trim tab and lit a cigarette.

Things went fine for a few minutes, then the left engine began spewing oil along the engine cowling and momentarily the left engine oil pressure gauge began to flutter. The gauge pressure then began to gradually drift downward. Wilson had directional control of the plane, but continued to dive in order to attain as much airspeed as possible. The left engine prop was trying to runaway and Jack was manipulating the prop toggle switch control in order to prevent it from completely running out of control. They knew that it would be only a few minutes before the engine would quit and the prop would have to be feathered. Jack called the crew and asked if everyone was okay. All of them reported that they were fine. Sgt. Skowski came out of his tail turret and checked the rudder cable. He reported that it had been severed in an inaccessible spot under the flight deck. This meant that he couldn't temporarily splice it. The plane was now down to three thousand feet and the entire crew realized that a landing with the left engine out and a right rudder cable severed would be an extremely risky undertaking. The damaged engine went out, the prop was feathered, and they leveled off at two thousand feet. Wilson advanced the throttle of the right engine in order to maintain flying speed and altitude. The crew donned their parachutes. When Lt. Preston picked up his chute

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he discovered that a piece of flak had passed through it, rendering it useless. Humes informed Wilson of Preston's dilemma. Wilson immediately notified the other crew members of the situation then sat down and said, "This is it. We'll stick with the plane." He asked Preston for a compass heading to the nearest English Air Base, which was Manston, located on the extreme southeast end of England, which jutted into the North Sea.

As the crippled Tornado struggled to stay aloft on its homeward journey across the Channel, Captain Wilson's request that Sgt. Ray Sanders contact the Manson tower, give them a fix on their position, inform them of the crippled condition of their plane, and request permission for an emergency landing. The tower gave him a quick okay. Captain Wilson then took over and requested a straight in approach. This too was quickly acknowledged by the tower. When Captain Wilson sighted the Manston runways he began to maneuver the plane into an approach mode of flight. This required him to yaw the plane first to the right and then to the left in order to align the plane with the runway and gradually descending the plane toward a landing point. The plane's nose had to be kept slightly elevated and the airspeed gradually reduced to permit it to drop onto the runway. With the left engine out and the right rudder cable severed, keeping the plane in a proper approach mode required pilot skills that very few men possessed. Wilson clutched the control column with his left hand, while his right darted from the rudder trim tab control over his head to the elevator trim tab control on the left side of the console to the throttle control atop the console, with his eyes fixed on the airspeed and flight mode indicators. This unrehearsed routine of his right hand could only have been accomplished by a seasoned pilot with hundreds of hours of flying time. Each adjustment to these flight control mechanisms had to be precise or the ship could have been caused to stall or be thrown off course or dropped to the Earth prematurely causing an inevitable crash.

The Manston tower had informed Wilson that there was a twenty-six mile per hour crosswind blowing across the runway and signed off by saying, "Good luck Ole Chap."

Wilson gave Jack a thumbs down signal, indicating to him to lower the landing gear. As the wheels came down, they all breathed a sigh of relief. They knew that the hydraulic system was not damaged. When the wheels locked in place, Preston looked out the side window along beside the navigators table and his eyes were greeted by a bursted tire on the left landing wheel. When he informed Wilson of this his only comment was "Jesus, What Next?" Humes then opened the nose wheel hatch and ascertained that the nose wheel wasn't damaged and informed Wilson that it was okay.

With all these problems Wilson managed to set the Tornado down in a nearly perfect landing, bringing it to a halt without making a ground loop, which was a minor miracle, considering the condition of the plane. The crew exited from the Tornado and kissed that Royal English soil. Having first assisted Jack into an ambulance, he was rushed to Manson Base infirmary where he was attended by an English doctor. As the Doc was probing and reaming out his wound, Jack remarked, "My God doc, You're doing a lot of snipping down there."

The Doctor looked his way and quipped, "It's okay, Yank.

The small piece of shrapnel had passed between his Achilles tendon and the bone, low down near his heel. Later the other crew members came to the hospital to check on his condition and Roy presented him with the small piece of shrapnel. After piercing his leg it had hit the console floor. Jack was happy. He had a memento of this ordeal.

Back at Stanstead the following day, Wilson asked me to fly down to Manson with him to check out the damaged Tornado. When we arrived we found our plane sitting in a secluded corner of the field with one wing sagging from the flat tire. As we approached her, Eddies and my imaginary aura that

encompassed the Tornado was more illustrious than ever and seemed to portray a message to us "Well I did it again." Meaning she had again weathered the gauntlet of hellfire itself and brought her crew back home safely. I went over and patted her nose and once again reaffirmed my belief that she would always return.

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We attempted to push the left prop around, but found the engine was indeed frozen up. This made it mandatory. A new engine would have to be installed. I also checked the severed cable and found that Sgt. Skowski was right, a new cable would have to be installed. This would take a major operation to tear out the floor in the navigator's compartment in order to find where it was severed and string a new one. We returned to Stanstead and reported our findings to Gene Cordon and Captain Fitzgerald, who arranged for a mobile unit to go to Manston to install the engine and make the other necessary repairs to the Tornado. It was a week before our plane was back on its hard stand at Stanstead.

One morning in mid July the Tornado was scheduled for a ten o'clock mission. At 9:15 two jeeps pulled up to our hard stand with a Captain in one and two sergeants in the other. One was carrying a camera and the other a clipboard. The cameraman got Captain Wilson and the flight crew lined up and made numerous pictures, while the other Sergeant proceeded to interview me. After a lot of questions he related to me what this to do was all about. The Tornado had completed fifty consecutive missions without a mechanical abort and that I was going to be awarded the Bronze Star. The cameraman posed me beneath one of the engine's propellers and made several pictures

from different angles. I was told that one of the snapshots would be sent to my hometown newspaper with an accompanying news release. Then the Captain whose name I don't remember presented me with the award.

After the brief ceremony was over and the Group people cleared out, I told Eddy and Joe that I was happy to have been awarded the Bronze Star, but I thought they should get one also. Because without their able help this feat would not have been possible.

For his miraculous feat of flying the Tornado back to Manston Captain Wilson was awarded the Silver Star and all his crew members the Distinguished Flying Cross. Those of us who knew the true story of Wilson's miraculous feat thought he should have been awarded the big one, the Congressional Medal of Honor because he had saved seven lives and a quarter million dollar aircraft. I'm sure others have been awarded the honor for lesser feats.

As the sun receded southward, the days grew shorter and we noted by the changing color of the leaves that autumn was fast approaching. Our planes continued to rain their cargo of explosives on targets pertinent to the German's attempt to halt our on-rushing legions as they rushed across Northern France and into Belgium. The Germans had to abandon their V-1 launch sites in France. They pulled them back into Holland where the V-1s were out of range of London. The presence of Kraut bombers over the United Kingdom was the fewest there had been since the start of the all out Blitz in 1940. The British people were enjoying a repast from German bombing raids that they had not experienced in over four years.

Then out of the stratosphere came the first of Germany's ultimate V-2 terror weapons. These rocket propelled bombs

could neither be seen or heard until they hit the Earth, penetrating deep into the soil, blowing out a tremendous crater. Like the V-1s they had no accurate guidance system, and many of them landed over the English countryside, doing little damage. But enough of them hit the greater London area to cause havoc among the people. The V-2 rockets were truly the terror weapon the Krauts had proclaimed they would be. The British had to evacuate their women and children from London to rural areas throughout England. The V-2s served their purpose as a terror weapon, but not to the extent to dampen the British determination to rid the World of Hitler. Like the buzz bombs, these rockets came too late and too few. The Allied armies soon overran Holland, pushing the Krauts back out of launching range of England. The Germans did use their V-2 weapons fairly effectively against the port of Antwerp, in an effort to prevent our use of the port, the largest and closest maritime facility to our troops fighting their way toward the Rhine River.

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Chapter 27

France

In mid-September the 344th was put on notice that we would be moving to a former Luftwaffe base in France by October 1st. Packing and getting ready for this move and keeping our planes flying their assigned missions kept us on the move, we worked long hours, but truly enjoyed our routine. We knew that we were getting closer to our goal of destroying the Third Reich. On September 20th an advance echelon of Group personnel departed for our new base in France to prepare it for the remainder of the

Group's people who would arrive there by September 30^h. This former German fighter base was designated by the 9th Air Force as station A-59 and was near Cormeilles-en-Vexin about thirty miles northwest of Paris and was bounded by three other French villages. Our planes had raided this base several times prior to the time the Germans had been forced to flee in wake of advancing tank columns. The condition of the base when we arrived was fairly good considering that the Krauts had tried to destroy it before they made their hasty departure. The runways were quickly repaired and ready for our planes to land there September 30^h, and to takeoff on our first mission two days later, although they required quite a bit of work to put them in top condition.

The nearest city to our french base was Pontoise, on the Oise River, with a population of about thirty-thousand. There was a large white chateau on the northwest side of the Base near the village of Cormeilles-en-Vexin, which became our Group Headquarters. One of the other small villages was just beyond the south perimeter of the base and a short distance to the southeast was the Oise River which flowed northwest to join the Rhine near Rouen and on into the English Channel at Le Harve. On a ridge beyond this small village ran the Red Ball highway from Le Harve to Paris and on East. This highway was maintained by the U.S. Corp of Engineers and was the main

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artery over which supplies were transported to our Front Line troops. Twenty-four hours a day there was a continuous line of transport trucks traveling bumper to bumper loaded with troops and supplies going East.

Before the main contingent of our personnel arrived at A-59, tents had been erected to house personnel and other necessary operational facets of our squadron. There was a large tent erected for cooking, but no Mess hall, we ate from our mess kits, standing or sitting wherever we could. Later we got a tent with tables and chairs which sufficed as a Mess hall.

Latrines were make shift toilets built over slit trenches. We had no bathing facilities. We simply bathed from water in our helmet. We weren't very clean troops.

On the North side of our compound, the Germans had excavated large rectangular pits into the Earth and built wooden barracks in them. They were camouflaged over the tops and could barely be detected when looking across the field in which they were built. From the air, I'm sure that they were invisible. The Krauts housed their antiaircraft batteries personnel in these underground huts. When the 497th took over this section of the base, these barracks were made into our officer's quarters.

Each of the personnel tents housed five people. The tent was erected over a wooden floor with a five foot high frame around the perimeter of the floor. The tent covering was all we would have to protect us from the frigid winter that lay ahead.

Construction on a Mess hall was started soon after we got settled in and was completed within six weeks. The first few weeks after we arrived our meals consisted of K rations and canned C rations along with powdered eggs and potatoes. Very soon we began receiving very good white bread baked in Paris, in a bakery taken over by our Quartermaster Corp. A couple of weeks later we were served our first American beef since leaving the States. In England we were never served white bread or beef. By mid-December a large central bathhouse had been constructed. With hot water, this was the most welcomed luxury

we had received since our arrival in France.

Our planes continued to bomb targets ahead of our advancing troops, inflicting much damage on Kraut supply lines

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and impeding their withdrawal effort greatly.

During late November and December our efforts were greatly hampered by bad weather. The targets our planes were attempting to hit were in the Ardennes mountains and forest areas. The winter snows had hit this area early causing heavy ground fog and most of our designated targets were usually shrouded in a heavy overcast that made visual bombing impossible. Many of our bomb runs had to be guided by our G-equipment and resulted in few hits on the targets.

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The Battle of the Bulge

Taking advantage of this adverse weather in the Ardennes, Field Marshall Gerd Von Rundstedt launched his counter attack. This last ditch desperate offense by the Germans came to be known as the "Battle of the Bulge". It culminated with his siege of Bastogne. This ill-fated effort by the Krauts cost the Allies thousands of casualties and much anxiety before it was blunted in late December and they were forced to retreat back toward the Rhine. Our planes continued pounding bridges, communication centers, and supply depots that were essential to the German success of their fruitless effort to march to the English Channel and drive a wedge into the Allied Forces.

On December 24th the snow storms over Northern Europe abated and the sun rose over a bright clear cloudless horizon.

All the Marauder Groups in France dispatched their bombers eastward and pounded Kraut targets. Only a few of the 344th's planes ran into heavy flak that inflicted only minor damage to several of them. A number of other Groups of the 9th Air Force Marauder Brigade ran into heavy flak and German fighter planes, suffering severe damage. While the Marauders were * inflicting great damage to the German counter attack behind their lines, the 9th Air Force P-47s were dive bombing and strafing the German Front Line positions, especially around Bastogne. The P-47s went down on the deck and attacked with reckless abandon. They suffered tremendous losses, but they kept up their attacks. The pilots knew that their chances of surviving were small indeed. This was also true of the 8th Air Force and British fighters and attack bombers.

The clearing weather enabled our efforts to continue our bombing for the remainder of December and into early January 1945. Our planes flew two missions a day and the fighters kept up their relentless attack. The fair weather enabled our ground forces to move armored divisions, mobile infantry, and Ranger 215

groups into attack position on both the North and South quadrant of the Bulge into our lines the Germans had made. By January 1st Rundstedt saw the futility of his efforts and ordered his troops into a hasty retreat back to the East, with our armored division in hot pursuit, led by the 9th Air Force bombers and Fighters.

When the snows came in the middle of December, the heavens seemed to burst dumping a white blanket of fluffy crystals onto the landscape. The storm continued unabated for days, blanketing the Earth with three and one half feet or more of snow with drifts up to six feet. It took us a while to get accustomed to this unwelcome intruder. We donned our leather

fleece-lined suits, boots, caps, and thick woolen gloves. Fortunately our planes couldn't fly everyday, so very little maintenance work was required. When work on our planes became necessary, it was pure drudgery. You couldn't work with tools very well with thick gloved hands and when we removed the gloves we soon discovered that the wrenches would freeze to our hands. When we attempted to remove them often our skin would stick to the tools and peel off our hands. It was COLD. The thermometer seldom rose above zero degrees Fahrenheit during the day. We soon learned to heat our tools at an improvised oil burning heater, in a shack that we had built by our hard stand. After heating them, we wrapped them in rags to keep them warm. This enabled us to work fifteen minutes, then we would have to repeat the warming procedure.

During these cold snowy days we were subjected to several, hurry up and wait, squadron meetings. Most of them were regarding the cold weather and relating to us how best to cope with the frigid conditions that many of us had never been exposed to. The other meetings concerned security and the impending treat of Rundstedt's counterattack, if it was not halted, we might have to destroy the base.

Through the month of January cold winds and snow continued to plague us. Many of our missions had to be scrubbed. On January 1st, forty-five of our Group planes were assigned a mission to bomb a railroad bridge at Kons-Karthus in Germany, west of the Rhine River. The third plane of the 497th squadron, raced down the runway and ascended into the

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sky. When it had reached an altitude of twenty-five feet, the plane's engines apparently stalled causing it to crash. When it

hit the Earth it burst into flame.

Fire fighters from an Aviation Engineering group, that were standing by in the event of a crash, arrived at the crash scene in minutes. They approached the burning plane and attempted to extinguish the flames and help any of the crew that might have managed to survive the crash and needed assistance in escaping the inferno. No one had survived. Fifteen minutes after the firefighters arrived the bombs the plane was carrying exploded, scattering fragments of the plane and the bombs over a wide area. Four of the firemen were killed by the explosion and five others were seriously burned. Eleven good men had perished and bits and pieces of the seven crewmen were scattered over a large area. When the bombs in the crashed plane exploded, a boiling mushroom cloud ascended into the air. You could feel the effect of the vacuum the explosion had created from several hundred yards away. This vacuum was evidenced by the air rushing in to fill the void the explosion had created.

By early February the snows had ceased but the Earth was still covered with a white icy mat. On a cold fog shrouded morning with very high humidity we went out on the flight line to pre-flight our planes for an early mission. After the routine check of the plane, we proceeded to start the engines for our usual pre-flight procedures. I climbed into the cockpit. After checking all the controls and instruments, I signaled Eddie and engaged the starter on the left engine. When the starter reached the height of its crescendoing whine, I hit the engaging switch and the prop started turning, slowly at first and then faster, but not once did the engine start firing. I continued to manipulate the choke and throttle, but nothing happened. We then attempted to start the right engine, but like the left it also refused to start. We tried the left once more but with no satisfactory results.

I descended from the plane and we pulled an engine stand along beside the left engine nacelle and removed the cowling from the engine. First we checked the carburetor and found that it was working properly. We then checked the electrical harness and distributors and found nothing amiss. As we stood there

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thinking what to do next, it suddenly dawned on us that there wasn't an engine in our squadron running. Ordinarily by this time the flight line would be a roaring crescendo of engines being pre-flighted. Eddie said, "Man this is strange. There's not a sound from any of the planes."

I replied, "Surely they're not all on the blink."

Joe came up, having been at the engineering tent, and said, "Not an engine in the whole damn squadron will start and everybody's in a turmoil. We stood and discussed the matter a few minutes. We were dumbfounded.

Then Eddie said, "Let's check the plugs."

I thought a minute then said, "We may as well." We proceeded to remove both plugs from one of the cylinders.

When we removed the plugs so that we could see them, we saw the firing points and the end of the plugs were caked with hard ice. How did this much water get into the cylinder heads? We removed some more plugs at random around the engines and the same was true with them all. Joe took two of the plugs and went to the engineering tent and tech supply for two sets of plugs.

When he arrived there a couple of other crews had also discovered the problem and everyone was as dumbfounded as we were.

Eddie and I concluded that it was caused by condensation, but others said "No!", it was impossible for that

much humid air to have gotten into the cylinders. Sabotage was the question on everyone's mind, but how? Someone said water in the fuel, but when the fuel tanks were checked, none appeared. I don't think the true reason was ever derived at and to many of us it is still a mystery. When the new plugs were installed in the engines, they started and performed perfectly. A repeat of this fiasco never occurred again. As it turned out the inclement weather never abated that day and no missions were flown. The frigid winter cold took its toll on all our Armed Forces in Northern Europe. Our Front Line troops suffered most. For many of them a hastily dug foxhole, a blanket wrapped around them, and a tarpaulin stretched over their lair was their only protection from the cold. Frost bite became a common malady. The icy cold and packed snow caused our trucks and armored vehicle much difficulty.

These Front Line soldiers were

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receiving a triple "Whammy." German counterattacks, artillery barrages, and the arctic weather.

While we had it rough at A-59, we were in paradise compared to those poor souls up on the Front Lines. We often thought of them and said a prayer for their well being. In late December the Tornado flew and completed her eighty-fifth consecutive mission, without a mechanical abort. On its next mission for reasons I do not recall, our grand old ship had to abort her assigned mission, and return to base. Eddie, Joe and I were greatly disturbed over this incident, but we had the consolation of knowing our plane had already established a record that few Marauders ever equaled or surpassed.

On February 13, 1945, the Tornado was on a low level

strafing mission over the Ruhr Valley and ran into a merciless hailstorm of flak. Thrown up by one hundred twenty-seven ack-ack guns near the target, a railroad bridge near Euskirchen. As a result of this deadly barrage the ship was badly shot up and he had to make a crash landing in Belgium. To our delight the Tornado had not been damaged beyond repair. Again a crew from our base depot squadron was sent to repair her and in a couple of weeks our proud old bird was back at A-59 ready for action again.

By the end of February the weather had greatly improved. Snow storms had ceased and the long awaited spring thaw had begun. Our planes kept pounding Kraut targets and they were gradually being forced back nearer the Rhine. The Russians were pushing them back out of Poland and across the Oder River on their Eastern Front. The Germans were surrendering by the thousands each week. Hitler's proudly proclaimed Third Reich was fast disintegrating. His Air Power was becoming decimated and soon would be grounded forever. His once proud legion was in shambles and on his Western Front they would soon be in a wild disarraying retreat back into Germany, Their cities had been reduced to piles of rubble with block after block of bombed out buildings.

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Chapter 29

Smitty Bails Out

On December 12th Jack Havener was assigned to fly a plane, other than the Tornado, on a mission to pound a fortified town

southeast of Aachen, a small town named Hellenthal. There was a concentration of German troops there, so the thirty-six Marauders were loaded with sixteen two-hundred fifty pound fragmentation bombs, known as antipersonnel bombs. The mission was designed to create as much havoc among the German infantrymen assembled in this area as possible. By the time they reached the target area, the weather had closed in and it was impossible to make a visual bomb run. The P.F.F. blind bombing equipment on the Group's lead ship apparently malfunctioned and the order was given not to drop the bombs. In the confusion of trying to fly in heavy clouds, Jack's plane got separated from the other ship in his flight. They were attempting to climb up through the soupy clouds into fair skies at twelve thousand feet. Ice was forming on the plane's wings, making it hard to control. The right engine was cutting out and the German anti-aircraft guns were zeroing in on them. Jack was desperately maneuvering the controls in order to keep the plane climbing. The ice on the wings formed into larger chunks. As these small masses of ice would become heavy enough to lose their adhesion to the wing surface, they would then roll off the wing, striking the fuselage making a clanging noise, very much like flak hitting the plane. Amidst the clamor, the right engine cut out completely, causing the plane to descend to the right momentarily before Jack could regain control of the plane. When the engine cut out and the plane dipped to the right, Smitty thinking they were going to crash, came out of the top turret, strapped on his chest chute, and dove out of the waist window.

John Skowski, the engineer and tail gunner, yelled over the intercom, "Smitty's bailed out."

Then Ray Sanders the radio operator and gunner yelled, almost knocked me down in his haste to get out.”

Jack got the stalled engine started and the plane continue climb until they rose above the clouds into semi-fair sky. now they were out of range of the antiaircraft guns and t could relax. Jack radioed the tower at A-59 and informed th of Smitty's bail out.

As they flew toward A-59, the clouds cleared and the pl flew perfectly. The right engine gave them no more trouble. the intercom they discussed their near disaster in the cloud They thanked God and congratulated Jack and copilot Sheric for bringing them out alive. They also discussed why Smitty had bailed out and hoped that he had landed safely behind our lines When they arrived safely back at our base, Major Wilson w anxiously awaiting their return and informed them that American infantry company in Belgium had reported that Marauder crashed and a lone airman parachuted into one of the advanced patrols just inside our battle lines. He had identified himself as Smitty. He was okay and had been taken to the 70 Fighter Wing in Liege.

That evening Wilson arranged to fly a plane to Liege th next morning and pick up Smitty. They were to leave daybreak. The next morning before takeoff, they were informed that the 70th Fighter Wing's airstrip could not accommodate a B 26 and even if it could the weather had closed in and Liege was at zero visibility.

Upon receiving this news Wilson exclaimed, “Damn! We can't leave ole Smitty sitting up there. We'll take a jeep and go bring him home.”

The entire crew wanted to accompany Wilson, but there was

only room for four in the jeep. Although the others were disappointed it was decided that Wilson , Jack and one of Smitty's best buddies, Sergeant Durham would make the trip. They hastily loaded a carton of K rations into their jeep along with several thermal canisters of hot coffee and surmising that gasoline might be hard to come by during their trip as good Samaritans into what might be through semi-restricted zones near our Front Lines, so they carried two Jerry cans of extra

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There was no road map available for Northern France and Belgium so they had to plan their route from aerial photographs. The towns and cities they would travel through were indicated on these aerial charts, but they had to determine the intersecting road between the landmarks. Finding the best roads to travel on proved to be no problem. These main arteries, between cities and leading to our Front Lines, were maintained by the Army Engineers. They made good time until they neared the French-Belgium border, where the traffic became congested with vehicles ferrying supplies and replacement troops to our Front Line fighting units.

One of the first cities they journeyed through was Beauvaix. This was one of several areas they would traverse, that once had been one of the many targets they had previously bombed. Their target had been Beauvaix-Tille Airdrome a major German Air Base. They readily recognized the cathedral in the city that was undamaged. They had been briefed to avoid hitting these sacred edifices if possible. Devastation inflicted by our armored vehicles when they had driven the Krauts from the area, was evident on all sides and in every village and byway the Germans

had attempted to defend. There were burned out German tanks, trucks, halftracks, and armored cars, wherever you looked. They traveled on to Mons, France where they crossed into Belgium. The Germans had evidently vacated this sector in such haste that they left behind entire mobile field kitchens and undamaged tanks.

From Mons eastward through Dinant and Charleroi the roads were heavily congested with long British and American convoys of heavy trucks and huge tank retrievers all rumbling northeastward. This was a spectacle they would not soon forget. Jack averted his eyes at the thought of the task of providing fuel for all this mass of machinery. When you multiplied the scene with hundreds of others up and down our combat fronts, it was mind boggling.

When they arrived at Liege they were directed to the 70th Fighter Wing compound, where they were billeted in a large well maintained former Girls School which had been taken over by

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the Air Force for the duration of the War. They arrived there near twenty-one hundred hours or nine p.m. European Time. Smitty was ushered into the orderly room to meet them. He approached them with teary eyes and much amazement. He stood gaping at the three of them speechless. Jack rushed over and embraced him in a bear hug.

Only then Smitty stammered, "My God Lieutenant. I thought all of you were dead! The G.I.s who rescued me, told me that a Marauder had crashed nearby where I had landed. I was sure it was our ship! Where are Skowski, Sanders, Lt. Sheridan and our bombardier? God! It's good to see you! How did you get here?"

After a big bear hug from Wilson and Durham, Smitty beamed “Hey, you guys hungry? They have excellent chow here and there's a section of one mess hall that's open all night.”

This was great news for three hungry airman who had eaten nothing but dry K rations since breakfast.

Over chow Smitty related to them what had happened to cause him to bail out. Saying, “From my view in the top turret I saw how close we were to the number three ship in our formation and concluded that we were going to collide with it, and then more flak hit the ship. So I hit my emergency seat control and dropped out of the turret and reached for my chute. I saw Skowski coming out of the tail turret reaching for his chute. We both slipped our chutes on and I again heard the flak hitting the fuselage. I yelled to Skowski and Sanders to come on and I dove out the waist window.”

Jack then told him by the time he hit the silk that they were out of range of the flak guns and further stated, “What you heard hitting the fuselage was ice breaking off from the leading edge of the planes wings and propeller hubs.” At this Smitty sat staring with a sheepish grin on his face.

Jack then laughingly said, “Come on now Smitty with your intercom on the blink and all the trouble we were having controlling the ship, I would have done the same thing. The most important thing is that you and the rest of the crew is safe.”

A look of relief broke over Smitty's countenance as he said, “Thanks Lieutenant.”

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He grabbed Jack's hand and shook it warmly. They returned to the barracks where they had been assigned bunks and discovered that as guests of the Fighter Wing, they had been given three-quarter size beds with inner spring mattresses and

linen sheets. These beds were welcomed after their long arduous day's ride in freezing weather and a rough riding jeep.

The four of them were up at zero seven hundred hours for a delicious breakfast of hot cakes. When they were ready to depart for A-59, they were informed that there was no Gasoline available, so they filled the jeeps tank and the two Jerry cans with Kerosene. The jeep's engine would only run with the choke half out, and it sputtered and smoked, but they managed to creep along at about thirty-five miles per hour. Just out of Liege they encountered fog so thick that they could see no more than a block away. The fog condensed and froze on the jeep's windshield. They had to stop every few miles and scrape the ice away. This condition persisted until they reentered France.

Then to add woe to their already troubled conveyance, the jeep's engine's water pump started leaking and they had to stop every half hour and add water to the radiator. They sputtered into the 497th

squadron area at eighteen thirty hours, four very hungry exhausted travel weary airmen. To them the hastily erected shanties constructed from material salvaged from demolished former German installations on the base were the most welcoming sight they had encountered all day, especially the rough clad mess hall. When they had appeased their hunger pangs and reported to the squadron orderly room, they proceeded to their Spartan dwellings for a welcomed nights rest. They knew that tomorrow, if weather permitting, they would again hit the "Wild Blue Yonder" pelting Hitler's diminishing thousand year Reich with their deadly and destructive cargo.

Chapter 30

On the Move to Florennes-Juzaine Belgium

By the latter days of March the sun had moved northward and cast more direct rays on the frigid landscape of Northwest France. The snows began to melt, slowly at first, but as the Earth became warmer, the ice crusted surface thawed faster and soon we could tread on solid Earth again. By this time our troops had crossed the Rhine, first at Remagen where the 9th Army Forces had captured a bridge spanning the Rhine and establishing a foot hold on the River's east side. A few days later our 82nd

Air Borne Division had descended into the Ruhr Valley farther north of Remagen and established a second foot hold across the Rhine. Soon our forces had constructed pontoon bridges at numerous points across the river and troops and supplies were pouring across them.

Our ground troops soon secured their initial footholds across the Rhine and began their drive into central Germany. It became necessary for the Marauder Groups in Western France to move eastward in order to be in quick striking distance of the retreating German columns, their supply lines, and communications centers.

In the last week of March the 344th Bomb Group was alerted to begin packing we were moving to another former German Air Base near Florennes-Juzaine, Belgium, a village five miles east of Dinant, a small city on the Muese River. On April 5th, we landed at our new base and the next day resumed flying missions in support of our ground troops. Our six month stay at A-59 had not been a happy experience for the 497th squadron, and everyone was happy to say goodbye to the place.

Weather conditions at the former German airdrome, near

Florrennes were similar to those at A-59. When we arrived the melting winter snows had created a muddy surface, most of the large sprawling base was not as well drained as A-59, and this caused even more problems than we had encountered at our
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French Base.

Fortunately for the 497th squadron area was located on the southeast fringe of the base and was better drained than the North Section. This made our area much less affected by the quagmire. April brought numerous showers, adding to our inconveniences. Our planes continued to fly missions though our operations were greatly hampered by the rainy weather. The Florennes base was in much better condition when we arrived there than had A-59 when we moved there..The Germans had left more buildings intact and before we had arrived there an American Fighter Group had occupied the Base and had made a lot of improvements. There was a Mess hall, latrine and bath facility in the section the 497th was assigned to. Our advance crews had put these facilities in working order by the time the remainder of the squadron personnel arrived on April 5th.

Events on the War Front happened fast in April, our ground forces broke out of the Ruhr Valley and were racing toward central Germany. Montgomery's troops were near Hamburg and Patton's divisions were nearing Madgeberg and the Elbe River.

On April 12th President Roosevelt died. News of this tragic event caused great remorse in the Armed Forces. Most of us had grown up during his tenure in office and he was the only President we had ever known. He had proven himself to be a friend of the Armed Services personnel. In regard to Truman, everyone was asking the question "Harry Who?" The only way Marauder men could relate to Harry was in regard to the

Congressional Committee he'd chaired. The committee had come down to MacDill Field in the summer of 1942 to investigate the fledgling Marauder program regarding the many crashes in Tampa Bay. As a result of what we called his very biased report to Congress, the Marauder program was almost scrapped in favor of the B-25. Later when we became more abreast of his World War I record, and he had assured everyone that Roosevelt's good will toward servicemen would continue, we were greatly relieved of our anxieties concerning him. On April 25th the 344th Bomb Group flew its last mission, It was directed against the Earding Airdrome located well across the Rhine. On this mission our planes encountered Germany's new

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M.E.262 jets. They chose not to attack our formations.

The attack on the Kraut Base was highly successful and no planes were damaged or lost, because of the swift advances of our troops. No further missions were attempted. On April 29th German resistance in Northern Italy collapsed and surrendered.

This left the southwest quadrant of Hitler's defense of his homeland practically nonexistent. Our troops were forging through the Brenner Pass only getting token opposition from German Forces. On May 2nd our old nemesis from A-59 descended upon us once again. At zero five hundred hours it began snowing. It was of the damp fluffy variety that filled the air to the extent visibility was only a few hundred feet. The Earth was warm enough that the snow melted quickly after it descended on the Terra Firma, but it came down so fast and dense that by ten hundred hours there was an inch or more blanketing the Earth and drifts of three or four inches. By noon the sky cleared and the sun was soon spreading its warmth over the landscape and the snow melted. This greatly compounded

our already mud ridden existence. This last week before the total collapse of Germany's resistance and the Armistice, we lived in a state of suspense . We kept our radios tuned to the news stations, hoping and praying that today would be the day that it all ended. There was a lot of betting among us as to the day and hour that the end would come.

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Chapter 31

The Armistice

Late in the evening of May 7th near twilight the news broke. A highly elated Armed Forces Network announcer cut in on a Big Band concert featuring the leading musician of the World War II era. The tune being played at the time was Dinah Shore singing her beautiful rendition of "P'll Be Seeing You." The speaker cut into the middle of her song and literally shouted, "It's over! It's over!" and then proceeded to relate how Germany had capitulated.

This was the story he told. Admiral Donitz, who by a decree from Hitler, one of his last directives issued to an officer of his once mighty military legions, had been appointed Chief of Staff of the pitiable remains of his once mighty Armed Forces, presented himself to General Montgomery at his headquarters in Hamburg. Donitz related to the General that he was ready to surrender Germany's Northeast and Baltic provinces.

Montgomery, knowing he had no authority to accept such a proposal, informed Donitz that as long proclaimed by the Allies, that he could only accept a total surrender of Germany's Armed Forces or no part at all. Donitz hesitated, the General arose and indicated to the Admiral to follow him. The General led the way

into his inner office/war room and picked up a long pointer. He then went over to a large map of Europe covering an entire wall of his inner sanctum. He proceeded to point out to the Admiral the positions of the Allied armies advancing eastward and the Russian Forces advancing westward, showing him that Berlin was surrounded, and that only a narrow silant separating the Allied and Russian Forces from the Baltic to Vienna was still in German control and German troops were surrounded by the thousands each hour.

He then stated,“It is useless for you to continue to resist on any of your fronts.”

It took Donitz only
a moment to realize the reality of

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Germany's position, then after a long sigh, he agreed to an unconditional surrender. The Allied Headquarters upon being informed of the surrender had arranged that at eleven hundred hours of May 8,1945, the official surrender would take place in the same railroad car near Rheims, France, where the World War I armistice had been signed on November 11, 1918 at eleven hundred hours. The announcer then stated that May 8'h had been declared V.E., Victory in Europe, day.

Moments after the report ended, down the line from our tent we heard shots ring out. We realized that a celebration was beginning, so we went outside. We were greeted by airmen boiling out of their canvas adobes like swarming bees. They were loading a clip onto their rifles or forty-five automatic pistols and all were pointing them skyward and firing. This scene continued with much elation until their clips were empty. This was probably one of the happiest moments of our lives. Our emotions were brimming over. Some shed tears of joy. Others

prayed and crossed themselves. Everyone was shaking hands and slapping each other on the back. These emotional outbursts continued for fifteen or twenty minutes, before everyone retired to their tents to write letters home. It seemed as if many thought that the news would not be heard on the Home Front. Others speculated as to how they longed to be in Times Square or on other Main Streets over America when the news broke there. The 344th Bomb Group had been in action for fourteen months, and had flown two hundred sixty-six missions. The Terre Haute Tornado had flown one hundred fourteen missions, eighty-five of these were continuous missions without a mechanical abort. The Tornado was one of only a few of the original complement of planes we had been assigned at Hunter Field, to fly to England for combat duty that remained in the 497th squadron. When all the statistics were in concerning the eight Marauder Groups that comprised the 9th Air Force's 99 Bomb Wing, the 344th's record was number one in all categories by which bombing efficiency was rated number one. Most bombs dropped that came within five hundred to one thousand and two thousand foot of the assigned targets. Both their training and combat activities were rated very high in all its

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various facets of operation.

The elation of V.E. day gradually subsided, and rumor of our assignment to the Pacific War Zone began to circulate. Our flight crews were attending classes appraising them of conditions under which they would be flying under in that distant combat arena on the opposite side of the Earth. Training missions soon began. While flying these training sorties two planes and their crews were lost. Neither of them were from the 497th

squadron.

One was practicing low level flying. When the pilot dropped the plane too close to the Earth and lost control, the plane hit the ground at a high rate of speed. Parts of the plane and its crew were scattered over a large section of pastureland. Another flight was engaged in gunnery practice over the North Sea, when a turret gunner ineptly shot away most of the plane's rudder, elevator, and vertical stabilizer. The pilot was able to control the plane and get it headed back toward land. He had managed to climb to two thousand feet and had just made landfall when the stabilizer and rudder broke away. The plane went into a dive and crashed to earth killing all aboard.

On June 1st an order was passed down for us to commence packing all our equipment, except that which was absolutely essential to continue operations. We were told that by early July we would be moving to a staging area near Marseille, France. From there we would travel by boat to the Far East. We were informed that we would be assigned new planes, the new A-26. This was a light bomber akin to an A-20. It carried only one crewman other than the pilot, who controlled all the planes guns by remote control. Soon after July 1st we received one of these new planes for training purposes. It was powered by two R-1800 Pratt-Whitney engines, with three bladed propellers. It flew much faster than the Marauder, because it was much lighter and carried less of a bomb load. It had both a top and lower turret. With a twenty millimeter cannon in its nose section and several fifty caliber guns mounted in each wing. It was also equipped to launch rockets from beneath its wings. It was a sleek appearing machine, but nothing would ever replace the Marauder with us. Marauders had become so ingrained in our hearts and minds that no airplane would ever replace our love for them.

Early in June the point System, a plan based on age, time in the service, marital and dependent status, military awards, and designated campaigns that your Group or other military unit with which you had served, was announced. Each facet of the designated gender was ascertained a given number of points. A total of the points derived from your status in regard to the context of this list determined your time of release. A minimum of eighty-five points was required for you to be eligible for discharge. Quite a few of our Group's people had accumulated over a hundred points and were at the top of the list to be released. The high point individuals were very upset at the prospect of having to go to the Pacific Theater of Operations and rightfully so.

Wayne Rolands, one of the 497th's Flight Chiefs, was nearly forty years old and he was at the top of the list in our squadron and was on his way home by the middle of July. It was about this time that plans to send us to the Pacific were changed and the wild rumors abated. Passes became easy to come by and shuttle plane service was made available for anyone who wished to take a furlough to go to Switzerland or England. A chateau in nearby Dinant on the Muese River had been taken over as a R&R center for Group personnel, while they were on leave there. Our planes were no longer flying designated training missions. The pilots and crews flew more or less when and where they desired. They were required to fly a designated number of hours per week. Many of these routine training flights were made over western Germany and the Ruhr Valley. I flew as engineer on many of these sorties and one I remember well. We took off from Florennes and flew northeastward, at low altitude. We first flew over and around Aachen and observed the remains of what

had been a city of one hundred, sixty thousand. From the air the center part of the city appeared to be one large pile of brick and rubble with only a few bombed out structures standing around the outskirts. There were few signs of human activities in the scope of our vision. We wondered where had all the people gone? We continued eastward over Cologne, a major industrial city on the Rhine. The devastation we observed was beyond belief, bombed out buildings and piles of rubble as far as our

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eyes could perceive. One noticeable exception was standing in the midst of this devastation. In the center of the city was the Cologne Cathedral. With everything surrounding it leveled, it stood almost intact. It had been damaged but had never collapsed. Its imposing spire was still reaching toward heaven. We continued northward then south over what had been one of the most industrialized areas on Earth.

There was total devastation in every direction. We wondered how any living thing could have survived the onslaught of aerial bombardment, that had reduced this once prosperous country into a pile of brick. We continued to fly south to Koblenz, then returned north following the Rhine River at low altitude. We got a splendid view of the ancient German castles, set in the rocky cliffs along the river.

By late July we were getting acquainted with the Belgian people. Unlike the French who lived near A-59, many of them could speak fluent English. The Belgian people were much friendlier than the French and were definitely more appreciative of our sacrifices in freeing Europe of Hitler's domination. They treated us as their liberators. If the French we came in contact with, while at A-59, felt the least obligated to Americans, they

never gave us any reason to think so. This matter was often discussed when we were at A-59 and most concluded that the French around the Base had no more respect for us than they did the Germans. The French we had known were definitely less educated than our Belgian acquaintances were, and I'm sure their inability to speak English deterred them from being more friendly toward us.

By the early part of June the poppies began to bloom throughout the Belgian countryside and on our Base. They seemed to spring up everywhere around our tents and in every open space in our squadron area, and along the flight lines, the runways and taxi strips. Overnight they had burst into radiant blooms. When we looked across the Base, our eyes were greeted by a floral wave of pastel colored blossoms, gently swaying in the breeze. It was one of the most beautiful sights we had ever gazed upon.

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Holland

When the War ended on May 8th, plans had already been made for American troops to occupy the American section of Berlin, set up and enforce Martial Law. The 2nd Armored Division, one of Patton's elite groups, was assigned to be the first American Divisions to be dispatched there. General Lucius D. Clay III was made Commander of the American Sector of the longtime Capital of Germany.

Soon after the 2nd Armored had taken over their duties in Berlin, the Division was assigned a fifty room hotel in Settard, Holland as a R&R center. I had an older brother, Glenn, who had been with the 2nd Armored from the time it had gone to

North Africa in the autumn of 1942. Glenn was assigned to Settard as a member of the 2nd Armored Security detachment. Late in June, Glenn wrote informing me of his assignment at Settard, and invited me to visit him there. On consulting a map, I discovered that Settard was only seventy-five miles from Dinant in the extreme southern end of Holland, just a few miles north of a larger city, Maastricht.

On the 2nd of July, I applied for and was issued a four-day pass to visit Settard. There wasn't any public transportation available in this section of either Belgium or Holland. Our only way of travel was by bicycle or hitchhiking. I decided it was a bit far to ride a bike. There was lots of military traffic moving in every direction from Dinant, so getting a ride proved no problem. From Dinant I traveled northward along the Muese River to Liege and on into Holland and Settard. I discovered that when I entered Holland the Muese River became the Maas River and Maastrich meant a city on the Maas. I didn't have a problem getting rides and made exceptionally good time. In Liege I had to walk through a large section of the city. My route carried me along a street on which a U.S. Army depot was situated. The depot must have covered a ten block area and was

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stacked with every conceivable type of armament that anyone could imagine. How so much and varied amount of war material could be stacked in such a manner that it could be readily accessible was beyond belief. This section of the street was well patrolled by M.P.s and I was asked for my identification. I assumed that I had mistakenly wandered into a semi-restricted area. After checking my ID the M.P. gave me a ride to the outskirts of the city and onto the road to Holland.

I arrived in Settard well before twilight. It had only taken me seven hours to make the trip. I was given a very cordial welcome by my brother and his friends there. They were a group of seasoned combat troops who had been through the North African campaign and had hit the beaches of Normandy on D-day+4 and had spearheaded everyone of the 3rd Army's assaults across Northern Europe and was one of the first divisions to reach the Elbe River. They were proud of their war record and shared many of their combat encounters with me. They had been near Malmedy and were well aware of how the Germans massacred hundreds of our troops there rather than take them prisoners. They also assured me that the Germans paid dearly for this barbaric act. For weeks afterward the American troops in this area of the Front took no German prisoners.

My brother related to me the story of their first encounter with the Russians near Magdeburg. The 2nd Armored Division had reached the river several days before the advancing Russians. It had been agreed that the Allied Forces would cease their forward thrust at the Elbe River and wait there until the Russians had reached the river. While waiting they were to prepare for what would be a friendly and orderly meeting. They had arranged to have champagne for the officers, of both Russia and America, to drink to their united victory over the Third Reich. Extra kitchens had been set up to serve a hundred of the Russians a noon meal. A contingent of forty Russian tanks and armored vehicles were to advance to a designated sector of the Front, where they would be met by a like number of American tanks and other armored conveyance. The two columns were to

stop at a designated line with their tank guns raised, forming a
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hundred foot corridor between them. The tank crews were supposed to dismount and exchange greetings while the officers drank their toast.

The 2nd

Armored Division's tanks arrived at their line first and sat waiting for the Russians, who were advancing toward them at a distance of several hundred yards. As their tanks rolled toward the 2nd

Armored troops, they lowered their guns into a level position as if they were going to blast the Americans at point blank range. The American officer, not liking what he saw, began to signal the Russians to raise their guns. He contacted the Russian officers, who were riding along the east side of their columns, by radio telling them to adhere to their agreement and order their tank crews to raise their guns. The Russians ignored the request. The American Colonel in charge turned and ordered the American tanks to lower their guns and start their engines. The Russians continued to advance, but much slower. The American Colonel got into his jeep with his translator and ordered his driver to meet the Russian officers in their American jeep head on, forcing them to halt. He then leaped from his jeep with his translator beside him and approached the Russian officer's jeep. He went directly to the Russian, and putting his face very close to the his, told him to halt his column and raise their guns as agreed. The Russian got out of his jeep, but made no effort to halt the tank. The American Colonel, whose face was livid, shouted "You halt those damn tanks or I'll order those fighter planes up there to attack you!"

The Russian looked up and saw at least a dozen P-47s circling above. This got his attention. He ran out in front of his tank column and signaled them to raise their guns. The American Colonel then turned his jeep around and directed the Russians to follow. He had his jeep driver proceed to the designated line where the Russian tanks were to stop. He halted and directed the Russian to stop his tanks there. The Russian complied.

It was not known whether the Russian was confused and didn't understand what he was supposed to do or if he was trying to test our will to resist. Whatever, when his tanks stopped, he

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and his fellow officers accompanied the American Colonel into the tent where they drank the champagne and shook hands in a friendly manner. The Russian tank crews exited their tanks as did the American. The 2nd Armored Division troops were in for another shock.

The Russian soldiers uniforms were worn tattered and filthy beyond belief. The American troops couldn't believe their eyes. The Russians didn't appear to have had a bath in months and the reeking odors that their bodies emitted were proof of this. Many of them had long matted hair, and they were scratching themselves continuously, indicating they were well infected with cooties (body lice) as well as head lice. The Russians acted very indifferent and refused to shake the Americans' hands. Several of them climbed into the American tanks and commenced fidgeting with the tanks controls and attempting to start the engines. One of the Russians managed to get a fifty caliber gun switch turned on. He swung the gun out of the top of hatch and

fired several bursts into the air. The Russian tank officer who was present only laughed and made no effort to stop him. Two
2nd

Armored Division Sergeants climbed onto the tank and indicated to the Russian to get out. He paid them no attention. The American grabbed him by the arms and yanked him upright. Then they pulled him from the tank and pushed him sprawling onto the ground. The Russian officer continued to laugh and made no effort to call his troops to order. The other Russians were removed from our tanks. We then closed and locked the hatches.

The announcement was made that it was chow time. The Russians were led to the section of the Mess tents where they were to be served. They were shown their trays and eating utensils. Some of them never stopped to pick up their knife, fork or spoon, but went straight to the serving line. As the food was put on their trays they started eating with their filthy hands. Others proceeded down the serving line rather orderly and went to a table to eat. Once they were seated, they started eating like hungry wolves. They showed no similarity of table etiquette what so ever. They were like a herd of hungry swine rather than human beings. They acted as if they had not been fed for several
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days. They kept going back and refilling their trays until all the food that had been cooked for them had been eaten. The 2nd Armored troops were happy when the whole charade was over and the Russians had withdrawn back into their sector.

I learned on the third of July that the Settard towns people along with the 2d Armored Special Services personnel were planning a big Fourth of July celebration in a nearby park and picnic area. This reminded me that a year earlier in England,

there had been no mention of a Fourth of July celebration by the British people. We had one at Stanstead but no local dignitaries or towns people had attended. This was the only time I was ever conscious of the fact that the British people remembered the American Revolution.

There was a large area of wooden floor sections laid out for a dance. There were two bands there one an American Group that played very well and a Dutch Bohemian Band with their mandolins, violins, accordions, and bull fiddle, who made very good music. There were lots of pretty young Dutch girls there, dressed in their best, which wasn't very good due to the ravaged conditions the Germans had left the Dutch economy in.

American and Dutch flags were arrayed side by side. These flags created a very striking scene. The bands started the show about six in the evening by playing our national anthem followed by *Yankee Doodle Dandy* and other Patriotic tunes. The Dutch band then countered by playing the Dutch national anthem and then the dance music started and reverie filled the air.

The Army Special Services had taken over an idle Dutch brewery some weeks before, and were brewing a very strong beer. The 2nd Armored men said it was twenty proof. I'm sure it was for two glasses of it would make you tipsy. There was an ample supply of this beer being served at the celebration and the Dutch and Americans alike were soon filled with elation. The celebration went on until midnight and drunken soldiers were sleeping it off wherever they could find a place to lie down.

There were quite a few Dutch revelers, who drank too much and were stretched out along with the G.I.s. I soon discovered that all Dutch people could speak fluent English. Upon inquiring why this was, a very pretty young Dutch lady, who I later

learned to be a school teacher, explained to me why. She related that before World War I the Dutch, who had no native literature, had taught German literature in their schools. After the Germans treated them so badly during the War, they changed to teaching English literature and consequently all the young Dutch people now spoke English and that most of the middle aged and elderly people had learned English. I further learned that along the Dutch and Belgian border, that practically all the Belgian people spoke English, especially those who operated businesses.

Sgt. Herndon of the 2nd Armored Security Detachment told me a story of the economic situations along the Dutch and Belgian border that had turned into a very lucrative enterprise for American service men, who were stationed in this area. To fully explain the matter, he went back to the circumstances that Belgium and Holland were drawn into when Germany invaded their countries in June 1940. Holland had greatly resisted Germany's onslaught and had continued to do so throughout the War. Everyone who has studied the history of the German occupation of Holland is well abreast of their famous underground resistance movement against Hitler's occupation forces.

In retaliation to this continuous resistance, the German's used every conceivable tactic known to punish the indignant Dutch. They looted the country of all its national treasures, took all their farm produce and manufactured output, and all the gold and other valuable metals they could find in the country. To further punish and humiliate them they issued them only enough food to enable them to exist on and allowed them very few items of clothing.

This Spartan existence that the Dutch were subjected to, left them a bankrupt country with nothing to buy or sell. This was

the destitute situation they were in when the Allied Forces liberated their country. The American's and British brought food in to enable them to survive and were helping them rebuild their manufacturing plants. The Dutch Guilder was almost worthless, but on the European money market the Guilder's value in relation to American and British currency was rated the same as it was prior to the War.

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Sgt. Herndon related that in Belgium the economic situation was just the opposite of Holland's. After Holland had been overrun, by the German Blitz of 1940, King Albert of Belgium had concluded that total resistance was useless. After a token stand at their eastern border, he capitulated to the Krauts letting them pass through and take command of his country. For this King Albert had been greatly criticized by France, Britain and their sympathizers in America. For not resisting the German invading troops, Hitler had made a deal with King Albert not to ravage his country. This enabled Belgium to maintain most of their economics pursuits and enjoy the highest standard of living of any German occupied country in Europe and enabled its currency to sustain its pre-War value. When the War ended Belgium's factories were soon turning out consumer goods which created a shopping Mecca in their country, especially for the people in countries along their border. But for the people to shop in Belgium they had to have Belgian Francs.

This situation was what enabled American personnel to get into what became known as the G.I. underground economics system. In conversation with other members of the Settard 2nd Armored Detachment, I learned that there was quite a few of the people there, both enlisted men and officers, who were heavily involved in a money changing scheme, and were reaping huge

profits from their transactions. Several Dutch bankers were also aiding and abetting them.

In order to get Belgian Francs to purchase goods in shops inside Belgium along the Dutch-Belgian border, the Dutch would exchange their inflated Guilders at a rate of fifty to one hundred to one for a like amount of Belgian Francs. The Dutch also had a great taste for American cigarettes and soon discovered that American soldiers were a prolific source for both Belgian currency and cigarettes. The Dutch would gladly pay the equivalent of fifty dollars per carton, in their inflated Guilders, for American cigarettes. The Americans learned that they could take their Dutch Guilders to American Post Offices

(there was one on every Base) and buy money orders at the Standard exchange rate. They would take these money orders to another A.P.O. or to a Bank in Belgium and exchange them for 243

Francs. They would return to Holland and sell the Francs huge profit. Apparently the authorities were aware of this sh business, but nothing was ever done to curtail it.

Chapter 33

The General

On the morning of July 5h I returned to Florennes. We continued to fly training missions. Colonel Lucius D. Clay IV, who was now Commander of the 344th Group, having been recently promoted, flew with the 497h squadron on most of these training flights. He usually flew the Terre Haute Tornado and I became well acquainted with him and flew as his engineer quite often. We soon found him to be very different from any other of the West Pointers in our squadron. While most of them were

courteous, but brash and military like in their relationships with enlisted men, Col. Clay was just the opposite. He gave us the impression that he was one of us, very much like Colonel Bentley and Major Wilson had been.

Soon after V.E. day, General Eisenhower acting in accordance with the Yalta Agreement, sent a large contingent of American troops to the American designated sector of Berlin as part of our Army of Occupation in conquered Germany. General Lucius D. Clay III had been made Commander of the U.S. sector in Berlin. General Clay was our Colonel Clay's father.

One morning a half dozen or more of our engineering personnel were sitting in the engineers tent checking the bulletin board and making our daily entries in our aircrafts' logs.

Someone entered the tent. I glanced in the direction of the door and could not believe my eyes. Standing there, appearing very nonchalant, was a two star General. I snapped to attention and yelled, "A-tt-en-tion", The others turned and looked at me.

Several of them said "What the Hell," then seeing the General they came to the position of attention.

The General was waving his hands downward and very coolly saying "At ease men, at ease." He said, unmilitary like, "I'm General Clay and I'm looking for my son Colonel Clay." Being the closest to him I said, "Sir he's down the line in our Operations tent. I saw him there a short time ago." I walked

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toward the door and said, "Come I'll show you." We stepped outside and I pointed out the operations tent.

The General said, "Thank you Sergeant. Thank you." He then got into his jeep and his driver proceeded to carry him down the line to the Ops tent. I hadn't bothered to salute and he was in no way perturbed by my lack of military protocol toward him.

During my four years of Air Force service, this was my only contact with a General and it was nothing like the encounter that I had assumed it would be.

During the remainder of July we had lots of idle time and engaged in numerous pastime activities. We played Poker, Pinochle and every other card game known to us. We organized baseball and softball teams and played tennis, volleyball, and swam in a large lake north of our squadron area. There was a large recreational hall in Florennes where the local people organized several dances that we were invited to. The pub near the dance hall kept an ample supply of foul tasting cognac, big Red Mack was one of the pubs best customers.

One day Glenn Crane and I were enjoying our noon chow when Irv Copperman came over and joined us. He extracted a letter from his pocket and looking very dejected he said, "I received this letter from Kathy's mother in Kissimmee this morning and I can't believe what she had written."

Glenn and I both said at once, "What has she written. Is something wrong?"

Coop read from the letter. "Dear Irving it is with great sorrow that I'm writing this letter and deeply saddened that I have to tell you that on June 10, 1945, we laid Kathy to rest. She's gone and life will never be the same for us without her." She went on to say how Kathy had adored him and she hoped he would soon forget Kathy and get on with his life.

Glenn and I were stunned and said, "Coop we can't believe it." We continued to console him as best we knew how and assured him that time would heal all of the pain of his aching heart.

When we departed and Glenn and I were walking toward the flight line. Glenn said, "I don't believe that Kathy has died.

I replied, "You must be reading
then said, "It's hard to believe that any mother would write a
letter like Coop received for the sole purpose of breaking up
their affair."

Glen retorted, "I'll bet my last dollar that's what that letter
was meant to do, and it has apparently worked."

We had both gathered from Coop's account of his visit in
Kathy's home, when we were in Lakeland, that he didn't make a
very good impression on her mother. We gathered that she was
concerned about Coop being Jewish, but if she would have only
known, Coop would have denounced any religious belief for the
sake of Kathy. He was truly in love with her.

August dawned upon our Base at Florennes bringing
continued beautiful weather. Potato fields were blooming
wherever we looked. Indicating a well needed bountiful harvest,
that was sorely needed in Europe, where food was in short
supply.

By August 1st it had been confirmed that the 344th
Bomb Group would be made a part of our Army of Occupation and
would be moving to another former Luftwaffe Air Base near
Schlesischeim, Germany.

It was one of Germany's oldest
Airdromes, dating back to World War I and located about seven
miles north of Munich. Early in the month a large contingent of
men was sent from the 497th
Squadron to Schleissheim to
prepare the Base for our occupancy. We were tentatively
scheduled to move there by or soon after September 1st. On
August 8th we heard the news that an Air Force B-29 had
dropped an atomic bomb on Hiroshima, Japan, obliterating the
city of over three hundred thousand people. With this news we

realized that the end of the Pacific War was near. Most of our people were completely in the dark as to what an atomic bomb was. I had studied chemistry in high school and one year in college. I remembered a bit about the possibility of splitting atoms and the many ways this could alter chemical composition of minerals such as lead and gold, but I did not remember ever reading anything about the possibility of an atomic bomb being constructed by splitting atoms. I sought out Sgt. Tom Alford, a former Mathematical Science teacher. He was much more knowledgeable on the subject than I and was able to enlighten

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me quite a bit on the matter. On August 9th a second atom bomb was dropped on Nagasaki doing even more damage than the first one. Euphoria was running high among us. Everyone was singing "I'll Be Home for Christmas" and this time we really believed it.

On August 14th we got the news that Japan had unconditionally surrendered and that the War was over. There was another big celebration. That night we stayed awake into the late hours of early morning listening to radio reports of the wild celebrations taking place all over America. We were truly homesick. Things happened fast after V.J. day. A bulletin was posted stating that all 344th personnel had been awarded six battle stars, one for each campaign our planes had participated in over Europe. This added up to thirty more points toward our eligibility for release from the Air Force. This gave almost everyone of the original members of the group eighty-five or more points. This was enough to qualify us for quick departure. The additional thirty points gave me ninety-eight and Gene Cordon ninety-seven. We were now near the top of the list of those eligible for separation. This bulletin had come out on the

22nd of August and a rumor was floating around that the names of the next ones to leave would be posted by August 29th, which was the Friday before September 1\$.

◦ The notice of the additional thirty points caused havoc in our engineering section. Almost everyone was eligible and would probably be leaving before the move to Germany. Captain Buojac, our engineering section head in charge of maintenance, was frantic. He had already agreed to stay with the outfit and move to Germany. It appeared that he would have only a few experienced people to accompany him. He contacted each flight chief, crew chief and assistant personally in an attempt to persuade as many as possible to remain with the outfit, at least for a few months until he could get some people trained for line maintenance. Captain Buojac was a good man. He had made an excellent line officer for us and everyone admired and respected him. He persuaded two flight chiefs, Master Sergeants Lawson Williamson and Jerry Reed to remain with the outfit, but few others. When he talked to me, I felt obligated to him but with 248

much remorse I said no. The thought of home, loved ones and my desire to get on with my life was too overwhelming. I wished him well and said, "I believe things will soon work out." He wasn't very encouraged. None of the other crew chiefs remained, so I never felt bad about my decision.

A few days later we began getting replacement personnel to fill the void created by our impending departure.

These

replacements were sent from the 9th Air Force's first echelon repair depot in England. They had been overseas twice as long as the 344th personnel, but they had not received all the defense campaign and other awards and citations that we had, as a

combat unit. They had not accumulated enough points to make them eligible to be released. They were a very unhappy group and we could well understand their frustration, but it was one of those incidences in which some lost and others gained. We were fortunate to be the one on the gaining side in this event.

Although these men were not trained for line maintenance, they were experienced mechanics and I'm sure that they soon adapted to line maintenance.

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Munich

On the 24th of August Lieutenant Hall was directed to fly to Munich to transact some Group business. He chose to fly the "Tornado" and asked me to fly with him, as engineer. I readily agreed because I was anxious to make a trip into Germany. We took off at zero eight hundred. It was a beautiful sunny day with unlimited visibility. We ascended to eight thousand feet and flew southeast on a direct course to Munich. We passed over Ulm, Augsburg, and several other smaller cities and landed at an Air Base very close to Munich. The Base had a P.X. and a very good Mess hall. I chose to remain at the Air Base rather than go into the city with the others. They were going directly to the 9th Air Force Office and return as soon as their business was completed, so I would not have had time to see much of the city. At the P.X. I talked with a couple of M.P.s and they told me that I made a wise decision because the city was under strict martial law, "Patton Style," and required everyone to wear a sidearm and be properly dressed with polished boots, buttons, and belt buckles. I was neither properly dressed or carried a sidearm so I probably would not have been able to go with the others into the

city.

I had seen a long line of single engine German jet fighter planes lined up along the tarmac as we had taxied off the runway after landing, so I headed back that way. I wanted to give them a good looking over. They were the first jets I had ever seen.

There was a guard posted near them and he permitted me to inspect these sleek, menacing aircraft with a twenty millimeter cannon mounted in each nose. The guard was an Air Force man, Sgt. Hal Lee, and he was familiar with the story of the jets, and related the following story to me:

Two months or more before V.E. day fifty to a hundred of the single engine jets and been flown from the factory to this
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Munich Base and readied for combat, but only part of them had been put into action for numerous reasons. The first of these the fact that they were fuel guzzlers and could remain aloft only twenty to twenty-five minutes on the small amount of fuel that they were able to carry. There was a drastic shortage of fuel in Germany and the German's capacity to transport fuel to their bases near the Western Front had been greatly curtailed. A further reason was the lack of trained pilots to fly them. They lacked the training facilities as well as the qualified recruits for pilot training. As a result of these and many other reasons over thirty of these new jets remained here unused.

Late in the War the German's did get a larger twin engine jet fighter into combat.

The ME262 and they used them successfully against a large B-17 & 24 attack on Berlin in late March.

The ME262 shot down over twenty American bombers and a number of their fighter escorts. These twin engine jets

could fly over five hundred fifty miles per hour and carried two forty millimeter cannons. No Allied fighter could match this speed or fire power. The Germans had built a large number of these fast jets, but for the same reasons as their smaller counterparts, that were left in Munich, they were never able to use them effectively.

Like the V-1 and V-2 pilotless missiles their jet aircraft program came too late and they were not able to utilize them properly to change the course of the War. Many of these German jets were dismantled and flown in C-46s to the States. Others were transported to America by Sea, intact, and they were used as prototypes for our early jets that were put into service in 1949 and 1950.

We departed from Munich on our return flight to Florennes at fourteen hundred hours, two pm. When we had been airborne about thirty minutes, a huge thunder cloud appeared directly in our path. We referred to these summertime atmospheric disturbances as thunder storms, as they were tabbed in America, but in Northern Europe they were seldom accompanied by either thunder or lightning. Lt. Hall put the "Tornado" into a gradual climb, thinking he could fly above the gathering clouds and continue on our course. As we came closer, the cloud became

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much darker and seemed to rise like the mushroom cloud of an atomic bomb, so Lt. Hall increased his rate of climb, thinking he could still pass over the storm. When we reached seventeen thousand feet we came face to face with a churning mass of black clouds that reached probably forty or fifty thousand feet into the blue sky above. By this time the radio operator and I were beginning to pant for air. We had no oxygen in the Marauder, the plane's engines were also showing signs that they

too were running lean. B-26s were not equipped with a supercharger that would enable their engines to run properly above twenty thousand feet. Lt. Hall quickly realized that it was useless to attempt to fly over the storm, so he turned left in a slow descent. He was able to skirt the fury of the disturbance. After flying southwest for thirty minutes, we were out of danger of the storm, which was moving in the opposite direction. He turned the plane and resumed his planned course to Florennes where we landed at 4:15 p.m.

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Chapter 35

Margarten Cemetery

That evening soon after I arrived back at Florennes my friend, John Shaver, approached me with a letter in his hands.

"Frierson as I told you a while back, one of my close friends, from back home, was killed in the Battle of the Bulge" he sends I replied, "Oh, sure I remember."

"Well", John continued, "I have a letter here from his wife asking if I can go to an American cemetery near Margarten Holland and get some pictures of his grave for her. I know you have been going into Holland to visit your brother. Do you by chance know where Margarten is?"

"Sure!", I replied, "The cemetery is between Leage and Maastricht. I can carry you right to it."

John replied, "When can we go?"

"It'll have to be tomorrow", I replied, "because I want to be here Saturday. As you know the new list of those that will be going home on September 1st is supposed to be posted by then."

He returned, "That 's fine with me."

So we went to the orderly room and arranged for a three day pass, which we would pick up the next morning.

By eight the next morning we were well on our way from Dinant. We traveled a road that ran up the Muese valley to Liege. Two sergeants in a four by four gave us a ride from Dinant to Liege, a distance of nearly fifty miles. We were sitting in the rear of the four by four, which had a canvas top over the passenger section. As we rode along over a rather rough road at forty miles per hour, I related a story to John in regard to my Second trip from Florennes to Sittard Holland. On a Sunday, I had left Florennes at Dinant, so in lieu of traveling the Muese River road to Liege, I opted to cross the Muese and travel up a steep road out of the valley onto a high plain, north of the Ardennes mountains. It was beautiful country and the road ran through what seemed endless miles of wheat fields with

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maturing stems waving in the gentle summer breeze. The road I had planned to travel meandered eastward over this rolling landscape. Fifteen miles east of Dinant it intersected with a north-south thoroughfare that went into Liege. A few miles out of Dinant, I saw three six by six government trucks headed my way and gave the foremost one the thumb. He pulled alongside me and stopped, motioning me to come aboard. The other two trucks halted and waited until I boarded, then followed us as we proceeded.

I got into the cab compartment with two young black soldiers. The driver was a corporal who was in charge of the three truck convoy. They were very friendly and talkative. I soon discovered that the corporal was from the Mississippi Delta

country. When I told him I hailed from south Mississippi he became elated and asked me where I was going. He then told me that they were carrying supplies to St. Vith. to Liege”.

I said, “Well, I'll get off at the next intersection and go north Sittard.”

The corporal replied, “Oh no you won't. We'll carry you to “Oh no you won't man. You can't do that. I'll have no trouble getting a ride”, I replied.

He shook his head and said, “I'll carry you all the way.”

I never said any more and when he reached the intersection he turned left toward Liege, which was about twenty miles away.

Near the outskirts of Liege, we came to an intersection. On the northeast corner, there was a pub and a road sign pointing east, indicating that the road went to St. Vith. I said to the driver, “Stop here and I'll buy you fellows a drink.”

He readily agreed to this and parked the truck. The other two did likewise. We entered the pub and I ordered drinks for them all. They drank and thanked me. I ordered them another drink and paid the bartender. I then quickly thanked them for the ride and went out the door and headed down the street toward Liege. Before they came out of the pub, I had already gotten a ride. The corporal didn't seem concerned that he could have gotten into trouble for making a long detour to carry me to Sittard, but I sure didn't want to cause him to lay himself liable

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for misconduct. I think he would have carried me to Berlin if I had asked him to.

When John and I reached Liege, one of the sergeants in the four by four directed us to a transit G.I.mess hall. We

proceeded there and ate lunch. From the mess hall, we got a ride to the north outskirts of Liege and were well on our way to the Margarten cemetery. We soon caught a ride with a soldier in a jeep who put us off at the entrance to the cemetery. We alighted from the jeep and proceeded up a long street, running through the center of the expanse of white crosses that extended for at least a half mile on either side of the streets, which led to several tents along the back perimeter of the crosses. As we walked along, we noted a group of Prisoners of War digging trenches and putting mattress covered corpses into the narrow graves, with only a six inch ledge between each excavation. When the six inch layer of topsoil was removed from the grave sites, the Earth beneath looked to be pure white chalk or lime. After the P.O.W.s had closed the graves, they placed a white cross at the head and drove it into the Earth. The Sergeant in charge of the work detail had tacked a dog tag on the cross before he had given it to the P.O.W.

As we neared the tents, the sight that greeted our eyes and the heavy sickening odor we encountered almost overcame us. There was a large number of mattress covered bodies stacked in lines to the left of the tents where P.O.W.s with face masks and protective clothing were moving the mattress remains out into an open space, opening them and checking each corpse for dog tags. When they found one the name and serial number was duly recorded by the sergeant in charge. The dog tag and bag were each numbered with a like number. The bag was closed and put on a truck to be carried to the grave site. The dog tag was retained to be placed on the cross. If there was no dog tag in the mattress cover, that corpse was placed in another stack to be further searched for a dog tag.

Further behind these bags, there was a large stack of

decaying human remains with flies swarming over the pile. This was where the sickening odor was emitting from. Around this pile there were more P.O.W.s with long poles that had a hitch on 257

the end and a rope running up the pole. The P.O.W.s would poke in the fly covered pile and extract skeletal parts, rib cages, spines, skulls, arm and leg bones, and place them on a wide canvas sheet on the ground. When they had assembled these parts into skeletal remains, the tarp was rolled up, wrapped with twine and placed in a mattress cover. These remains would be buried as unknown soldiers.

As we came closer to this scene, the stench almost overwhelmed us. We took out our handkerchiefs and placed them over our noses, this helped some. A Staff Sergeant came out of one of the tents and approached us. He was one of the roughest looking people I had ever met, five foot ten inches tall and very muscular, with all the marking of a washed up prize fighter. His nose had been broken, and he had scars over his eyes and a cauliflower ear. He met us and extended his hand very cordial like. Then he told us that we were in a restricted area and were not supposed to be there. John then proceeded to tell him why we were there.

The Sergeant who had introduced himself as Sgt. Frank Fields said, "You were supposed to have gone to an office in Margarten and they would have had someone bring you out here to show you the grave."

I said, "Well if we had known that, we would have certainly done so, and we're very sorry to have broken any regulations."

Sgt. Fields replied, "Oh well, since you're here I'll call the Margarten office and get the row and grave number and you can easily find the grave. Come on in the tent."

We followed him in and sat down across his desk from him. He proceeded to make the call and give us the information. He had a fifth of good bourbon sitting on his desk and he offered us a shot. We gladly accepted. He drank with us then poured us another round. We thanked him and proceeded out of the tent and back down the street.. As we left the area, I looked back at those eerily dressed P.O.W.s, probing around in that fly covered, reeking, decaying pile of human flesh and bones, and thought with a bit of imagination one could perceive those P.O.W.s as demons from Hades probing with their tridents into that repulsive mass, in search of any wayward souls that might be

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hiding there in an attempt to evade eternal torment in Satan's domain of eternity.

We proceeded down the street, halfway to the cemetery entrance, where we found the row numbers where John's friend's remains lay beneath one of the crosses. The grave was one hundred fifty yards down the designated tier. When we had located the grave we took several pictures. I noticed on a grave nearby a wreath made of artificial poppies that had been placed on the grave against the cross. I went over and got the wreath and put it on John's friend's grave. He took several more pictures, then I returned the wreath to its proper grave.

As we walked between the crosses, back to the street we saw scattered among the white crosses quite a few Stars of David. We didn't know why they were different, so we asked a sergeant who supervised the P.O.W.s working in the cemetery.

He replied, "They are graves of Jewish soldiers." There were few Jewish people in the rural south, where John and I were reared, and we had never seen a Jewish grave before. The

War had claimed the lives of those from all races and creeds that made up the American population. Out on the road we soon hailed a ride to Maastricht. As we rode along, John and I both were in deep thought. I'm sure we were both thinking of the bizarre scene we had witnessed at the cemetery and it was bearing on our minds. Like all military personnel who had served in a Combat Group and gone through a long arduous training period in the States, we had seen the horrors of war. We had stood by and watched our friends burned alive in plane crashes, and heard their frantic screams for help, that no one could render, and smelled the awful odor of burning flesh. We were young men hardened beyond our years, by the horrors and atrocities of war, but the cemetery scene was beyond anything our war-hardened minds could have ever conceived. We were shook up and our minds were searching for a way of forgetting the scene. So in search of answers, our thoughts turned to alcoholic drinks as a means of at least finding temporary relief from the memories of that haunting scene. In Maastricht, we found a pub and had several drinks, then proceeded on to Sittard, a short distance away.

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We arrived at the 2nd Armored Division's chalet at five, in time for the evening meal. We went into Sgt. Herndon's office, who gave us a hearty welcome.

I asked him, "You got room for two vagabonds for the night?"

He replied, "Why certainly. You can stay a week if you like."

We talked for quite a while. He told me my brother had been posted back in Berlin, and would probably not be back at Sittard.

I said, "If you see him again or can get word to him. Tell him that I feel certain that I'll be leaving for the States by September 1st."

He assured me he would relay the message. He further stated that there would be a dance at the pavilion that evening and that we were invited.

"I'll assure you we'll be there," John said as we departed.

After being shown our bunks, for the night in the Non-Coms quarters we went straight to the Rec. room and ordered mugs of their strong beer. After three rounds, we were feeling high and the cemetery experience was forgotten for the evening.

At the dance, we had an enjoyable evening, dancing, sitting and listening to the 2nd Armored troops tell of their battle experiences. Many of the stories were greatly exaggerated, I'm sure, but they enjoyed telling them and we were good listeners. We also continued to drink their strong beer. By midnight we were well inebriated along with many of the others there. John and I staggered from the pavilion and in reeling, wobbly steps made our way to our sleeping quarters. We had never been so drunk in our lives, but we somehow managed to remove our clothes and get into our bunks.

When I lay down and attempted to sleep, the thoughts of our cemetery experience enveloped my mind again, that awful stench seemed to stick in my nose as I lay there in a drunken stupor. The bed seemed to float from the floor up toward the ceiling. It then would turn over and I felt like I was falling to the floor, but I always landed back on the bunk. The bunk would then seem to rise above the floor and start spinning around and

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turning topsy turvy, but always landed back on its legs at the proper moment. Between short fitful naps this went on until two

ò'clock, when I became very sick. I was sure I was dying. I managed to sit up on the bunk and in the semi-darkness I saw John doing likewise.

I managed to get to my feet and said to him, "I gotta get rid of it. What about you?"

"YEEAAH", he painfully replied.

We staggered to the bathroom and each got our head over a commode. I burped and the beer came streaming out of my mouth and nose, like an erupting oil well, gushing forth. I kept vomiting until I threw up everything that I had eaten and drank that day. At the adjoining commode, John was likewise relieving himself. When we could vomit no more, we sat down on a bench in the shower room with our head in our hands, and in a few minutes we were feeling much better. When we arose, we could walk again in a normal manner. We made our way to the kitchen. There was a night shift who served coffee, cookies and toast all night long. We greedily partook of the coffee and buttered toast and were soon feeling much better, so we returned to our bunks.

I lay down and was soon relaxing and drifting off to sleep.

Just before I fell into a deep sleep, that awful odor, from the cemetery again, stuck in my nose and that age old cliché came crashing through my mind "But for the Grace of God," my remains could have been in that pile of reeking flesh and bones.

At eight fifteen the next morning Sgt. Herndon woke us up and said, "If you want breakfast, you'd better get dressed and into the mess hall shortly, because they don't serve after nine O'clock."

We thanked him and departed for the bathroom for a quick shower and on to the mess hall. Soon after nine we bid Sgt. Herndon and a few of my other friends there goodbye and

departed for Florennes. We made excellent time and by three we were home again. It was Saturday and sure enough the list had been posted for those who were to leave for home on Monday, September 1st. Gene Cordon and I were at the top of the list. My elation skyrocketed. The day I had so long yearned for was at 261

hand and I couldn't believe it was happening. In approximately thirty days I would be home to stay.

On that last Sunday morning at Florennes, though I was officially on leave, I went down to the flight line where Eddie and Joe were pre-fighting the "Tornado". I knew this would probably be my last opportunity to bid her adieu. I stood by and watched as Eddie put her through pre-flight tests. To me the engines never sounded better. When the pre-flight test was completed I ascended into the cabin and onto the flight deck. I gazed several minutes at the interior, the instrument panel and its myriad of meters and gauges, in the navigators compartment. I observed for the last time the "G" equipment, radios, generator switches and the various other instruments. I then walked down the narrow walkway through the bomb bays and into the rear compartment. After looking over every piece of equipment in the stern of the plane, I exited through the waist door. I joined Eddie and Joe on the tarmac. Eddie and I walked twenty or thirty steps to the front of the Tornado and stood there gazing at that scarred ole' Warrior. I'm sure Eddie's thoughts were the same as mine. Our mystic aura that emitted from her was more evident than ever. In the early morning sun, she stood there proud indeed, just one small symbol of the greatest Air Armada ever assembled on Earth, and we were rightfully proud of her. I turned and walked to the engineer's tent, then back to the squadron area, and I never once looked back

Chapter 37

The Terra Haute Tornado's Demise

Back in Florennes the 344th

had completed its evacuation of the Base by September 15, and had moved to their new Base of Schleisshiem, Germany.

The “Terre Haute Tornado” was one of the Marauders that was retained in the 497th Squadron, and flown

to their new base. There were only a few of the original squadron personnel, that were listed on the squadron roster,

when they reached Schleisshiem. Captain Buojac, Master Sergeant Lawson Williams, and Master Sergeant Jerry Reed

were among them. At their new Base, a contingent of young pilots and aerial crews were assigned to the Group. The 344

again became a training echelon. The young pilots were taught

to fly both the Marauders and the new A-26s. Life at the new

Base soon became routine again. The personnel had lots of spare time on their hands, and the military regulation prohibiting them

to fraternize with the German people soon became obsolete. The

G.I.s and Frauleins socialized as if there had never been a war

and soon the Base personnel were making friends with the

German people.

The 344th remained at Schleisshiem until February 1945,

when it was reassigned to the States at Bolling Air Force Base.

The Marauders that remained in the Group, including the

“Tornado” were flown to a large reclamation depot at Landsberg,

Germany. Here along with the other B-26s, this “Grand Old

Plane" was stripped of the serviceable radio and navigation

equipment and demolished. The wings were blown away from

the fuselage, then she was systematically cut into pieces and

bulldozed into a huge scrape pile.

In sure that if Eddie and I would have been present, that aurora around the “Tornado” would have shone brighter than and that tears of sorrow would have filled our eyes. This Old warrior had been part of us, through the most trying days of Our lives.

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In March 1946, Jack Havener and his wife were watching a movie. When the news reel came on it was showing aircraft being demolished in Landsberg, Germany. The camera was stopped on a Marauder and there on its nose section was emblazoned the name, “Terre Haute Tornado”. Jack rose in his seat and exclaimed, “That's my aircraft!” “Oh no, Oh no”, he moaned. I'm sure that if either Eddie Hagman or I had been there, that we would have run down the aisle and tried to touch the Old Bird one last time.

During the years since World War II, Jack has written and published many articles about the “Tornado.” Through his efforts a fifty-two inch scale model of the “Tornado” has been built and reproduced, and now resides in the New American Air Museum of Duxford, England. B-26 models are enshrined in each of the following museums: “The Vigo County Historical Museum” at Terre Haute, Indiana; “The Glenn L.Martin Aircraft Museum” near Baltimore, Maryland; “The Ninth Air Force Museum” at Stanstead, England; and “The International Archive of the B-26 Marauder Historical Society” at the Pima Air & Space Museum in Tucson, Arizona.

Through Jack's efforts the "Terre Haute Tornado” has become one of the most renowned Marauders ever to roll off the Glenn L. Martin Aircraft assembly line.

A 52 inch scale model of Terre Haute.

This model is on display in several museums in the U.S.A. and England.

Afterthought

I am grateful for the privilege of having served in the U.S. Army Air Force in World War II with a vibrant group of well schooled men, well trained to perform the duties they were assigned, and to work in harmony with the many other facets of our armed services. We were consumed and dedicated to but one common goal, to turn Germany and Hitler's Third Reich into a pile of rubble, and to reduce the Empire of the Rising Sun and its war lords into a speck of dust in the cosmos of eternity. The combined effort of the U.S. Armed Forces achieved this goal, but unfortunately our politicians let us down or there would never have been a divided Germany, and the ungodly Russian communist regime would not have been handed the East European Block countries on a silver platter, and Japan would have been made to pay a much greater price for its pursuit of World domination.

J. Q. Frierson

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HISTORIC "FIRSTS" AND SIGNIFICANT ACCOMPLISHMENTS
OF THE MARTIN B-26 MARAUDER THAT PLACED IT WELL
AHEAD OF ITS TIME AND PROVED IT TO BE THE PREMIER
USAAF BOMBER OF WWII. A RECOGNITION IT NEVER
RECEIVED DURING THE WAR NOR SINCE. THE B-26

MHS HOPES TO SET THE RECORD STRAIGHT AND
ACCORD IT RECOGNITION IT NEVER RECEIVED!

1. It was the first combat aircraft to use butted seam skin covering instead of overlapping. Reduced drag.
2. It had the first aerodynamically perfect fuselage. An early nickname was "Flying Torpedo."
3. It was the first combat aircraft to use plastics as metal substitutes on a grand scale. Over 400 parts.
4. It was the first WWII vintage bomber to use a four-bladed propeller. Curtiss-Electric.
5. It had the first horizontal tailplane with a marked dihedral. 8 degrees.
6. The first model off the production line was the prototype. The Army Air Corps was so anxious to get the revolutionary high speed bomber that it didn't allow for the usual prototype models for testing.
7. It was the first twin engined bomber to carry more payload of bombs than the B-17 of the time. 4000 pounds.
8. It was the first American WWII bomber to carry a power-operated gun turret. Built by Martin and used on many other U.S. bombers and also the British Lancaster.
9. It was the first U.S. combat aircraft with self-sealing fuel tanks as regular equipment. Developed by Martin in 1036, manufactured by U.S. Rubber Co., and called Mareng cells.
10. It had the first all plexiglass bombardier's nose.
11. It was the first to use flexible tracks for transferring ammunition for storage boxes in the waist section to the tail guns. These were made by Lionel trains.
12. It was the first medium bomber in which the tail gunner could sit upright.

