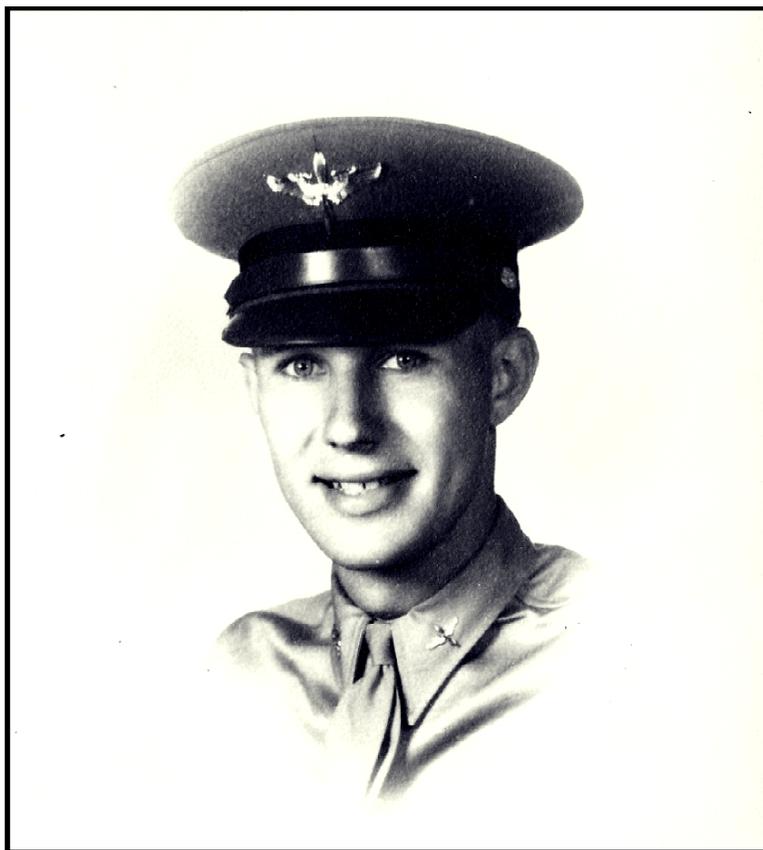




**The Evolution of a WWII
Army Air Corps Bomber Pilot:
The Memoirs of
1st Lieutenant Harry O. Rohde
1942-1945**



726th Bombardment Squadron



451st Bombardment Group



15th Air Force



The Red Tail of the 451st

The Memoirs of Harry O. Rohde

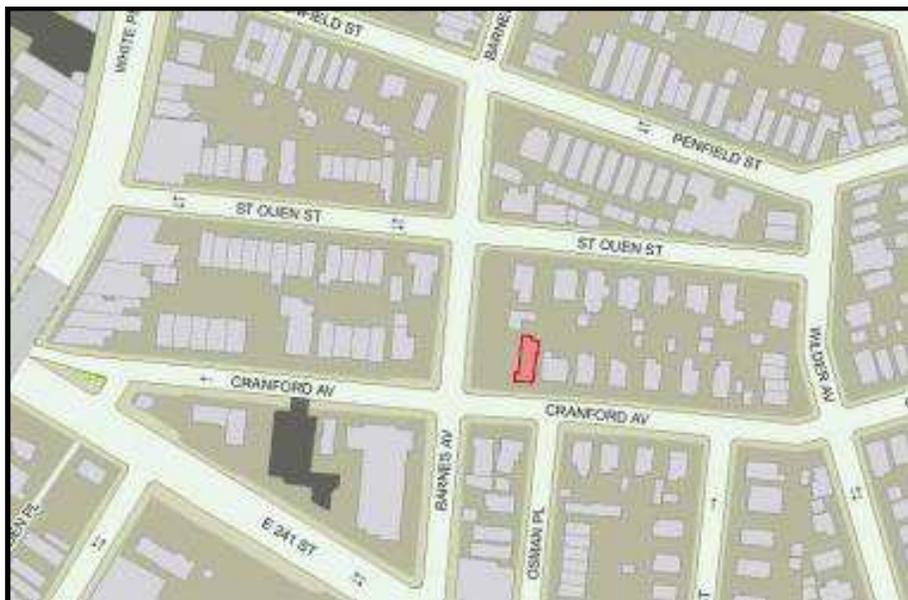
INTRODUCTION

I was born on August 12th 1922 in the Bronx, NY to Catherine and Harry Rohde.

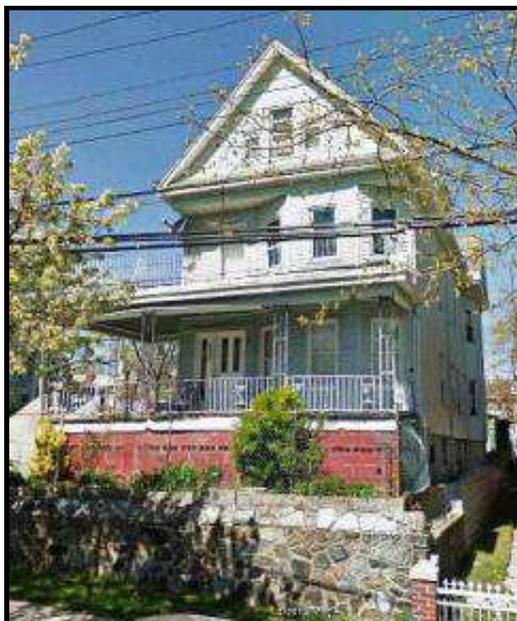
The 1930 US Census shows my family living at 773 Cranford Avenue in a house owned by my mother's parents, Charles and Catherine Hecker. We paid \$50 a month in rent, as did two other families who also lived at this address - the McKennas and the Burtons.

My dad, Harry, was a salesman for a milk company and Catherine stayed at home.

At the time of the 1940 US Census, we were living at the same address and I was attending college in Indiana.



Map of Cranford Ave. Source: NYC Tax Department



773 Cranford Ave, Bronx, NY. Source: Google Earth

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I wanted to be a Pilot from the time I was a little kid. I can recall seeing a movie in the 1930s called "Hell's Angels", all about the bi-planes flown in WWI. I also saw a movie about Cadets being trained at Randolph Field and I made wooden model airplanes. Then of course two of my big heroes from WWI were the Red Baron and Eddie Rickenbacker. On Sunday afternoons we would take a car ride up to the Armonk airport where barnstorming Pilots from WWI would come in and fly people in their bi-planes for \$5. I never had the \$5, but I really enjoyed watching them fly. All I could think was, "Man, I sure would like to fly an airplane." That's one of the many reasons I wanted to become a Pilot, it didn't just happen by accident.



Source: IMDb.com



Manfred von Richthofen - The Red Baron
Source: Wikipedia
80 confirmed kills



Eddie Rickenbacker - Source: Wikipedia
Medal of Honor winner
7 Distinguished Flying Crosses
26 confirmed kills

CHAPTER 1 ENLISTMENT, BASIC TRAINING, CTD, MAXWELL FIELD AND PRIMARY FLIGHT TRAINING

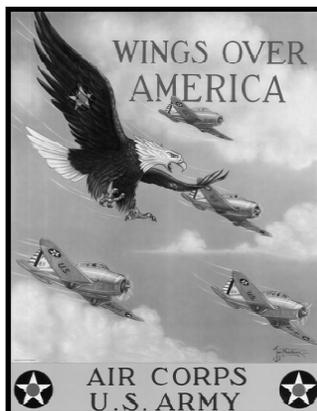
The following pages tell of my experiences in World War II from the fall of 1942 when I enlisted, to June 1945 when I was discharged from the Army Air Corps as a B-24 Pilot.

My enlistment process was interesting and worth describing in some detail. I was attending Purdue University as a Mechanical Engineering student in the fall of 1942, and decided to enlist. I thought that Chicago would be a great place to enlist, figuring that might result in my assignment to Randolph Field in Texas. So, I hopped on a bus and took a ride to Chicago.



Harry Rohde college photo – 1942. Source: Ancestry.com from Valparaiso Yearbook

The enlistment office was housed in the Chicago Post Office. When I arrived, I noticed that there were two lines. One line led to the Navy Air Corps and the other to the Army Air Corps. I thought, “Well, I really prefer the Army Air Corps because if I became a Navy Pilot, I might someday find myself out over the Pacific on a mission, and by the time I came back I could find that my aircraft carrier had been sunk by a Japanese submarine and I wouldn’t have anywhere to land. I certainly couldn’t swim 1,000 miles!” So I decided that I would go into the Army Air Corps, flying mostly over land, and that is the enlistment line I got into. After I passed the physical and mental tests, they asked us if we would like to be sworn in at halftime at Soldier Field. It was a Saturday, and a National High School Championship Game was going to be played. It featured Paul Brown’s team from Massillon, Ohio.



Source: Vanderbilt University collection

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There were about thirty of us, and we were all taken up to Soldier Field. There was a capacity crowd in the stadium, and at halftime, among all the fanfare with flags waving and the band playing, we were sworn in. I thought the whole experience to be quite interesting.

I returned to college for a couple of months, and then was called into the Army Air Corps on February 27th 1942. I left school and headed to Keesler Field in Biloxi, Mississippi for indoctrination and basic training.



Keesler Field – from the collection of Harry O. Rohde

There were about 20 of us that lived in a hut during basic training. We had plenty of physical training and plenty of marching. I especially liked it when we became good enough to march in groups to a playing band. We had much heavy work to do – practicing with bayonets, learning how to throw a grenade, and crawling under barbed wire. Basic training in the Army Air Corps was the same as basic training for the regular Army, since at that time we were part of the Army and not a separate branch called the Air Force. We underwent gas mask and tear gas drills, and discovered to our relief that the gas masks we wore really did work!



Gas mask practice – Keesler Field – from the collection of Harry O. Rohde

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Obviously, we wouldn't need all this training if we became Pilots, but basic training really got us into great shape. We were at Keesler a little over a month, after which we were shipped off to a College Training Detachment (CTD) in Maryville, TN. We thought we were headed to Maxwell Field in Montgomery, Alabama, but Maxwell could not accommodate us at the time. Maxwell Field was the place where we would undergo the Cadet training that would lead to our assignment in the role of a Pilot/Co-Pilot, Bombardier or Navigator. Maryville was the backup plan.

Maryville College was a nice little college with all its brick buildings, and we received more heavy physical training, marching, six mile runs through the Tennessee hills, and a load of class work. At one point towards the end of our stay (we were there for about two months), we got to fly in a Piper Cub. That was the first flying experience for most of us. I had never been up in an airplane before then, and I wasn't disappointed!



The Piper Cub. Source: Wikipedia

POINTS OF FLIGHT					AIRCRAFT CLASSIFICATION	SOLO			DUAL			REMARKS	INSTRUCTOR ENTER	
DATE	FROM	TO	AIRCRAFT MAKE & MODEL	AIRCRAFT REGISTRY		HR.	MIN.	HR.	MIN.	HR.	MIN.		SIGNATURE	CERT. NUMBER
3			PIPER CUB (CRUISER)						7:30			75 H.P. CONTINENTAL		
4		7 1/2 hrs.										FIRST FLYING TIME -		
2												ENJOYED VERY MUCH -		
					TOTAL				TOTAL			TOTAL		
											DATE _____ I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT ALL ENTRIES ARE TRUE & CORRECT			
											_____ PILOT			

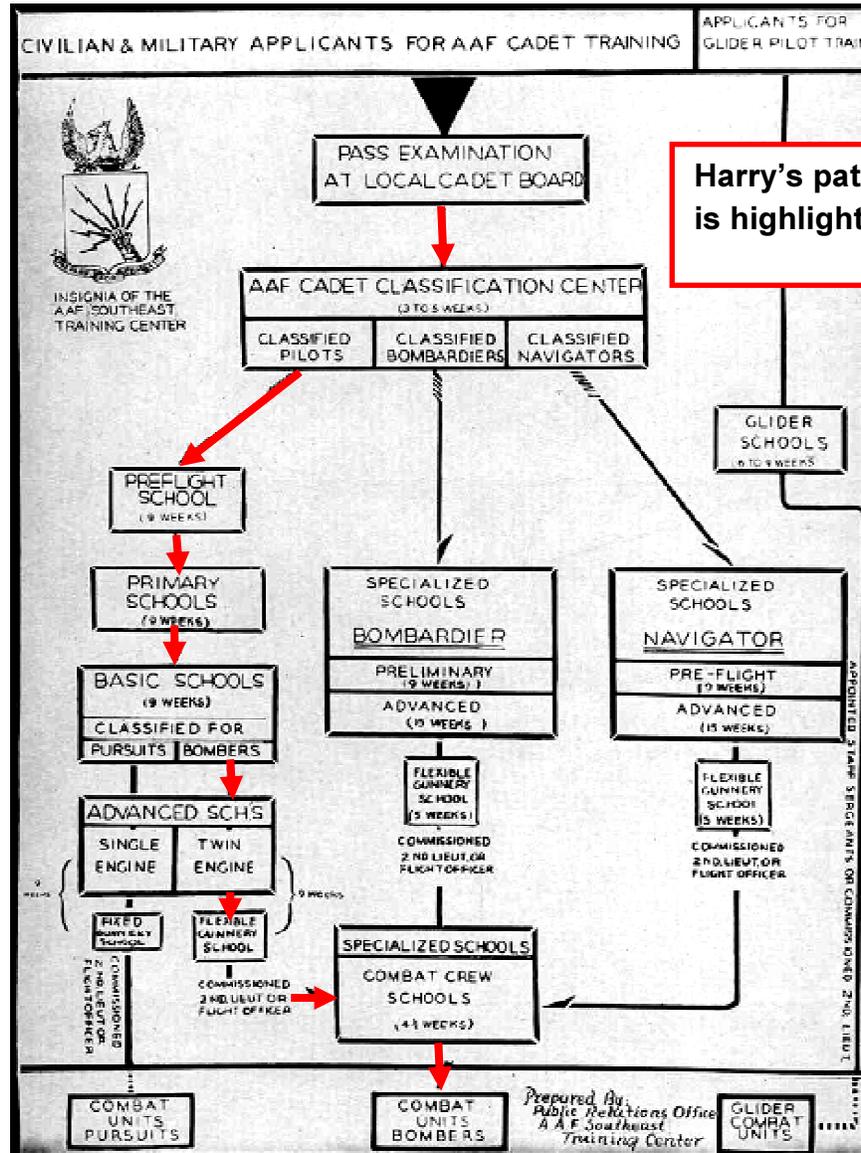
Documenting the event...Harry's first flight. From the collection of Harry O. Rohde

After two months at the College Training Detachment, we were ready to go to Maxwell Field in Montgomery, Alabama for testing and Cadet training. The instructors at Maxwell would teach us how to be real Army Air Corps Cadets. We were looking forward to all the physical and psychological testing they would perform, since from all those tests we would learn our final assignments as Pilot/Co-Pilot, Bombardier or Navigator.

Meanwhile, as the tests were going on, we were subjected to being underclassmen. There was an underclass and an upperclass of Cadets, so during the testing phase, we were subjected to being underclassmen. We learned how to be real Cadets because the upperclassmen really gave us "the

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works”, which was OK. It was good training for us since in a month we would become upperclassmen, and would have to handle the underclassmen.



Harry's path to the B-24 is highlighted in red

The progressive stages of Cadet training. Source: Maxwell AFB

The testing turned out the way I had hoped and I became a potential Pilot. During that time we continued the physical training and marching. As before, we continued to take ground school classes, such as meteorology, engine maintenance, engine operation, and classes that pertained to situations that might occur with the airplane while we were flying. We were intensely trained for two months and when we finished, we would learn our final fate - whether we would be Pilot/Co-Pilot, Bombardier or Navigator. Then, we would be sent onto the more specialized schools for additional training. After two months, the fun, training and education ended. It was a great introduction into what the Army Air Corps offered. We felt we were very well prepared.

One of the real highlights of my stay occurred about halfway through my stay in Alabama when my Mother and Ruth rode down on the train to see me. They had a good time on the train, riding down with some troops who were also traveling. They stayed for a few days just to see what was going on

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and to visit with me. I was able to get a day off and we went into Montgomery, looked around, did some sightseeing, and things of that nature. My Mother and Ruth were also there to see us march on the parade field. Since all the guys knew that my Mother and girlfriend were in the crowd watching, they sang songs like:

***"I want a girl, just like the girl that married dear old Dad.
She was a pearl and the only girl Daddy ever had".***



Ruth and Harry in Montgomery, AL. From the collection of Harry O. Rohde

They would move our band towards Mom as we marched, so it was fun. I learned many, many useful things, and was well prepared to go from Maxwell Field to Primary Flight Training school.

One event that occurred during Cadet training was both stunning and thought-provoking. One of our Cadets was caught stealing. They decided to make an example out of him. They used to say people were going to get "drummed out" and he was literally drummed out of the Cadets. They lined up all the Cadets in two lines about 50 feet apart and faced us outward from the line. That poor cadet had to walk about 200 yards through those two lines with the muffled drums beating while we all had our backs turned to him. It was both impressive and very sad but it let us know what we definitely shouldn't do.

After leaving Maxwell Field my next stop was Primary Flight Training and I was fortunate enough to be assigned to the flight school in Lafayette, Louisiana where they had the PT-23 (*PT=Primary Trainer*), which was the airplane we first learned to fly. Lafayette was a great little place. We had civilian instructors during my primary training. My civilian instructor's name was Clyde Erwin who was just a great Pilot and teacher. I learned well with him and enjoyed every minute of flying with him.

Note: Years later I ran across Clyde in West Virginia; he was working for the same company I was working for, American Cyanamid. He was the technical director for the plant in Willow Island, West Virginia. We were taking a process from Willow Island, and upgrading it to build a plant in Wallingford,

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Connecticut. I was down there checking it out to see what we needed to do when we built the plant in Connecticut.

At any rate, primary flight training was absolutely great – first, I learned to fly, and second, we had open cockpit airplanes! These airplanes were low wing, radial engine PT-23's. They were just great to fly; you could do acrobatics in them, fly formation, and do a lot of rat racing.

During the two months we were at Lafayette, we learned how to take off, run patterns and then land. After about ten hours of instruction, my instructor told me to take the airplane down to the practice field. So, with me sitting in the front seat and him in the back, I landed the airplane. He told me to taxi over to the fence, where he jumped out and said, "I'm going to have a smoke - why don't you take her up and fly her around? Come and pick me up after I finish my cigarette".

This was really a big thrill because he was really telling me I was ready to go out on my own - fly solo. So that was my introduction to flying solo and becoming an airplane Pilot.



First solo flight in a PT-23. From the collection of Harry O. Rohde

I don't remember a lot about the accommodations at Lafayette Field except we had barracks and they were all very nice.

While I was at Lafayette, a hurricane came through and some of the instructors moved a few of the airplanes to a safer place. Since some airplanes still remained, they made us, the Cadets, dig holes in the ground for the tires. This brought the airplanes so low that the wings practically touched the ground. We performed all this work in the rain storms that preceded the actual hurricane. We tied the airplanes down so they faced the direction the hurricane was coming from. The whole procedure worked quite well since we didn't lose a single airplane.

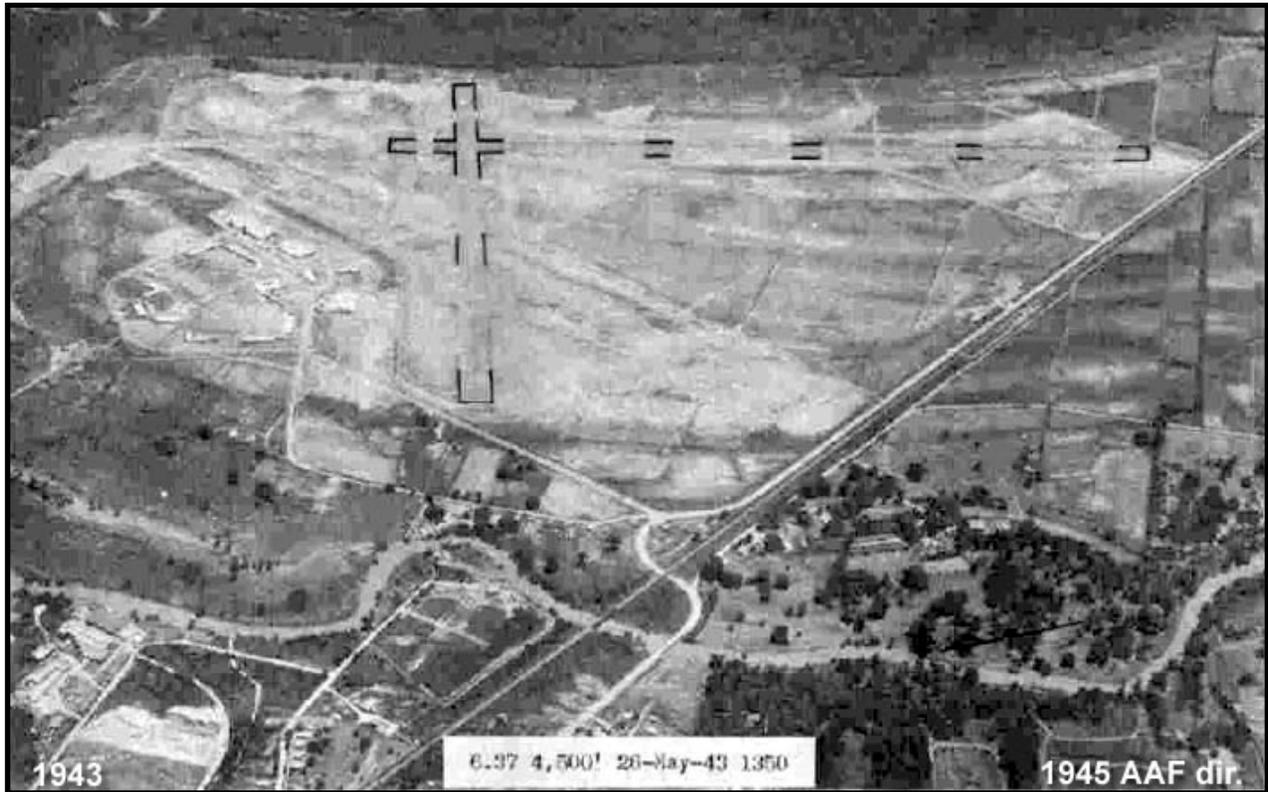
Lafayette, Louisiana turned out to be one of the nicest places I ever came across in the Army Air Corps.

After we had all flown solo, we thought we were pretty hot Pilots flying in these open cockpits with leather helmets and goggles. Ruthie had sent me a six foot long white silk scarf that I tied around my neck when I flew, resulting in three feet of the scarf streaming outside the airplane behind me. Oh boy,

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I felt like a reincarnation of the Red Baron from WWI who was one of my heroes. Flying the open cockpit airplanes, in my opinion, still to this day, is the only real way to fly. Oh yea, after flying plenty of airplanes for plenty of years, even with the hot jets they have now, there is nothing like flying in an open cockpit airplane and enjoying the sky, the freedom and the thrill of flying.

That was real flying!



Lafayette Air Field. Source: Airfieldsdatabase.com



Location of Lafayette, LA

CHAPTER 2 BASIC FLIGHT TRAINING

We were sent to Walnut Ridge, Arkansas for Basic Flight Training. Now, we would use a larger airplane - still a low wing airplane with a single engine, still two seats - instructor behind, student upfront. However, it had a sliding cockpit canopy so that you weren't out in the open all the time as you were in the PT-23. The new airplane, a BT-13, was affectionately known as a "Vultee Vibrator" because when you put it in a spin it sure did vibrate and make a lot of noise.



BT-13 "Vultee Valiant (Vibrator)" - Wikipedia

Walnut Ridge was a true military base and instead of civilian instructors as we had in primary flight training, we now had military instructors. These instructors were mostly Lieutenants, who I am quite sure were annoyed at being instructors since they would have preferred to go to war to fly fighter airplanes and been on their own as Pilots instead of just instructors. However, their jobs were very important - they were training men who would go overseas to fly combat later on.

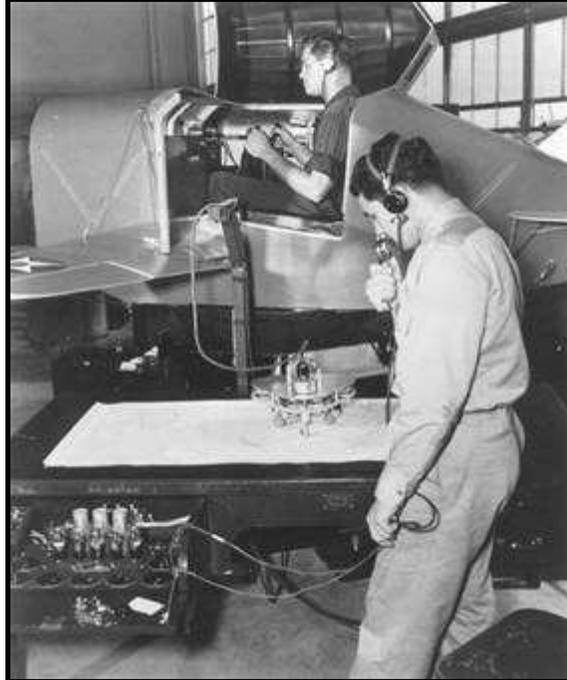
Walnut Ridge was out in the boonies somewhere in northeast Arkansas among the rice fields. It wasn't much of a town; it was just a place where we learned to fly larger airplanes. We did cross country flying, night flying, acrobatic flying, formation flying, and so on.

Basic flight training was definitely a step up from primary training. I had a very good instructor here, a real military man. He was mighty tough on us students, which was how they were supposed to be in the military. We were "racked back against the wall" at different times for alleged, or supposed, infractions on the routines that they wanted us to do. Consequently we were becoming more and more trained and disciplined Pilots. In basic flight training, decisions had to be made by the Army Air Corps as to whether you would go on to advanced flight training to become a fighter Pilot (single engine airplane) or a bomber Pilot (multi-engine airplane). Most of us wanted to be fighter Pilots, but we knew that we couldn't all be fighter Pilots. The instructors had to make the choice, and after basic flight training, I went on to advanced flight training (multi-engine) to become a bomber Pilot.

At each of these flight schools (primary, basic, and advanced), we were constantly marching and taking physical training while mixing in some meteorology classes and even Morse code training. We learned many things other than flying; but for most of us, we were truly and honestly interested in the flying part. At basic flight school there were a couple of things we learned that we hadn't learned before. One was

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instrument flying where we learned how to fly only by instruments while up in the air, useful when visibility was poor. We were also trained in the "link trainer" which was on the ground but simulated instrument flying. The link trainer was a lot of fun. For instance, if you "ran into a mountain" by mistake, you weren't killed, they just turned off the juice, opened the cockpit in the flight trainer, told you that you were dead and started you out again.



Typical Link Trainer. Air Force Historical Research Association

At any rate, this was great training for us. Of course, the only training that came in real handy was the actual instrument training in an airplane, for if you found yourself in instrument conditions and tried to fly by the seat of your pants the chances are you might really end up dead. We had to rely on the gauges and displays on the instrument panel and use them to fly whenever we found ourselves in instrument conditions. We also learned about cross country flying, navigating from the airplane, flying from one spot to another and finally coming back to the field.

All this was very interesting, but there wasn't much to see in Arkansas except rice paddies. Walnut Ridge certainly was not a picturesque place, in my estimation. On one of my cross country flights, I had the instructor sitting behind me, and I was following a course that he had laid out for me. We had completed the first and second legs of the course, but on the last leg coming back to the field, we flew into a fog bank, and I couldn't quite see the regular landmarks that I should have been able to see on a cross country flight. However, I spotted a railroad track that ran right next to our air field. I knew that if I followed that railroad track, I would make it back to the field and safely land. So, that is what I did. The instructor turned out not to be very happy about my choice, and asked me to report to the office. I did and as he racked me against the wall, he said:

"Do you know what the 'Iron Compass' is, Mister?"

"No Sir" I said.

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"Well, I want you to write a 5,000 word essay on what the Iron Compass is and have it on my desk by morning."

Needless to say, I knew I had a lot of work ahead of me. I went over to the base library, researched "Iron Compass" and wrote the 5,000 words (which I dutifully counted to make sure I had enough) and reported to him the next morning.

He said, "Have you got the report?"

"Yes Sir", I replied.

I handed it to him and he said, "5,000 words?"

I said, "Yes Sir", and he dropped it in the "round file".

Then he said, "Now that you know what the Iron Compass is, do you understand my point about the Iron Compass?"

I said, "No Sir"

"Well, I'm just trying to keep you alive, Mister," the instructor said, "Don't you ever fly the Iron Compass because in all probability you will meet a Navy Pilot going the other way. You could crash into him and you both would die. We don't want to lose Air Corps Pilots just because the Navy Pilots don't know how to navigate over dry land. All they do is fly the railway tracks, the Iron Compass . . . and now you know - get to your duties!"



Walnut Ridge Army Air Field. Source: Airfieldsdatabase.com



The "Iron Compass" through Walnut Ridge. Source: Amtrak

CHAPTER 3 ADVANCED FLIGHT TRAINING

With basic flight training finished the next stop was advanced flight training in Stuttgart, Arkansas, another picturesque spot. Stuttgart was where those of us who went to twin engine advanced flight school learned to fly the twin engine AT-10.

The boys who didn't go with us to Stuttgart went to Single Engine Advanced School somewhere, and flew an AT-6 single engine airplane that was an excellent airplane for learning to be a fighter Pilot.

We flew the AT-10 which was what we certainly needed to learn to fly to prepare for the larger multi-engine bombers. We stuck it out in Arkansas and went through the regular ground school training. Physical training continued, along with some marching, but we basically concentrated on learning to fly the AT-10. We practiced flying in instrument conditions, and practiced our cross country flying. The AT-10 was a very good airplane. One difference from our prior trainer airplanes was that the instructor sat next to you in this airplane in the Co-Pilot seat. We flew the AT-10 quite a bit. One immediate discovery was that it didn't vibrate like the BT-13, the "Vultee Vibrator". Our training continued on until we had finished Advanced Flight Training in a multi-engine school and we received our wings. We graduated, and we finally became Pilots in the Army Air Corps as 2nd Lieutenants. This was fantastic for all of us. We thought this was our ultimate goal and now we would get down to the serious business of how to fly military combat airplanes.



Beechcraft AT-10 Wichita at Stuttgart AAF. Note fuselage code "ST". Source: Wikipedia.

One thing that I haven't dwelt upon was my feelings about the fellows that I trained with. Back in primary training I had a very good friend named G JT Runkle - he was a card, he was funny, and he and I were inseparable. We even went hitchhiking together when we got a day off, which was a rarity. He was an excellent guy and there were other fellows, of course, that I was friendly with but I was closest to him. When we got to Walnut Ridge for basic training, our hut mates became very close. The Army Air Corps always lined us up by the alphabet, so the names always followed one right after the other like: Robinson, Rogers, Rohde, Rossen, Rubadue, and so on down the line. We were assigned by alphabetical order into a single barracks. We got to know one another, got along great, enjoyed our training and each other very much.

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Walnut-Ridge - R. J. Ramer, A. E. Robinson, E. A. Rubadue, W. V. Richards, J. E. Rogers, Rohde, C. P. Greason, H. R. Rossen – from the collection of Harry O. Rohde

However, when we went to advanced training many of our friends went off to single engine training, and I never saw them again. I hardly ever saw the ones from advanced training because somehow we all got split up for further training as Army Air Corps Pilots. I did want to mention that these guys that I trained with were as good a bunch of men as you will ever find anywhere. Obviously they were all volunteers and most of them were totally involved, but A. E. Robinson, my buddy in basic training, and I were called the “Eager Beavers”. He and I did everything “spit and polish” and we always did our physical training to the utmost.

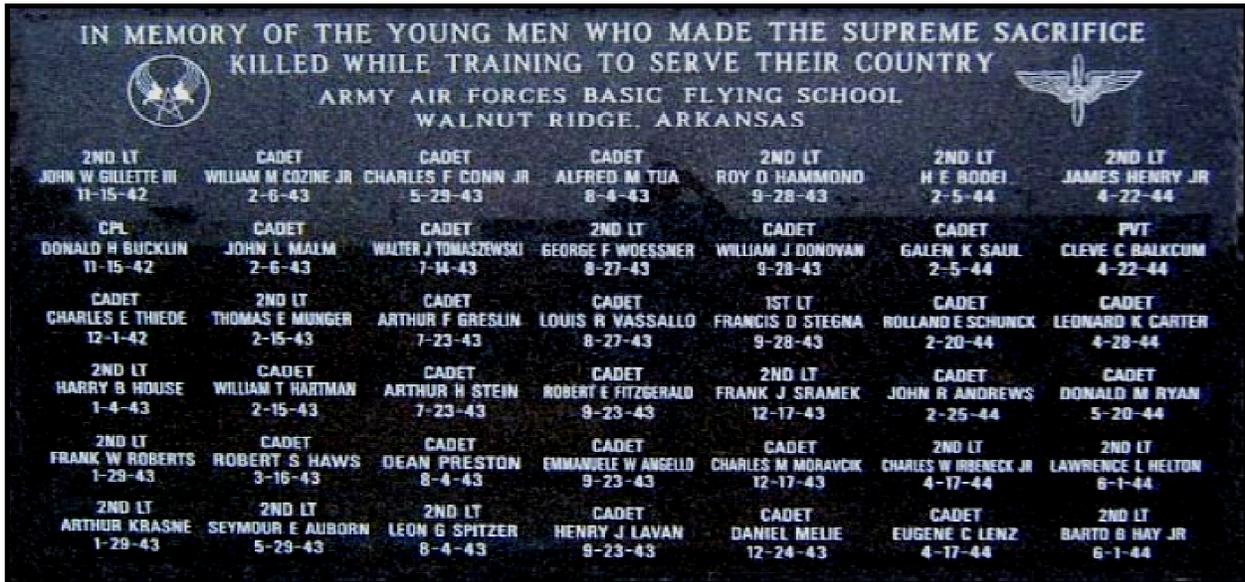


Walnut-Ridge - Harry Rohde and A. E. Robinson – from the collection of Harry O. Rohde

These were all great guys, I have to say again, and I hope that they all got through the war, which is doubtful, but I lost track of almost all of them. The only one that remained a good friend for many, many

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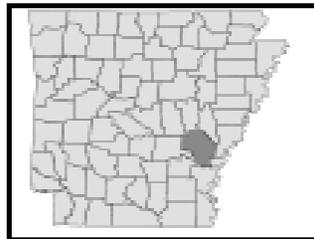
years was Henry Rossen because he and I went to Purdue together when we got discharged. We were together again, and we totally enjoyed that too.



The dangers of Basic Flying School



Stuttgart Army Air Field. Source: Airfieldsdatabase.com



Location of Stuttgart, Arkansas. Source: Wikipedia

CHAPTER 4 CHARLESTON, SOUTH CAROLINA

The end of our time at Stuttgart in March 1944 marked the end of our time as Cadets, and we were now known as the Class of 44-C, meaning that we were the third class to graduate from Stuttgart in 1944. After graduation we were given a week off to go home, visit the family, girlfriends, and so on...then get ready to go back for reassignment to pick up a crew. I went to Westover Field in Massachusetts and was there about ten days. At that time other fellows arrived who would form the flight crews – more Pilots, the Co-Pilots, the Bombardiers, the Navigators, and the Gunners. My crew didn't do anything together while we were at Westover because our real crew training in an airplane was going to be in Charleston, SC. That was the next stop for us once we got our crew together. Prior to leaving for Charleston, we were given a few days of leave. I can recall catching the evening train a few times and heading to New York City.

I would arrive in the early evening, and Ruth and I would spend time together, not break off too soon, usually ending up in a German bakery right in the neighborhood. It seems to me that we would be there until two in the morning having coffee and *kuchan* (cake). I would then hop on the train back to Westover Field, get about two hours of sleep, get up and do the things I was supposed to do that day. I was young, so this schedule was OK with me, because it was a short period and I got to see Ruth.

We were all eager to start training as a crew, so we gathered together at the Charleston Army Air Field in South Carolina. We reported to our assigned huts, and got ready to learn how to fly as a crew on a B-24 bomber. We were there about two months during which time we got acquainted with the B-24, and learned how to operate as a crew. Each of us learned our positions and how it would be as we flew on a mission together. We had many practice missions flying formation with other crews in their B-24s. On our practice missions we would bomb big target circles on the ground. They even shot flak off to the sides of the airplanes so we would get used to being under fire from the enemy once we arrived in Europe. Consequently, we spent a lot of time learning to fly at Charleston Army Air Field and became a capable crew. At the end of this training, we were designated as crew #183.



Crew #183 – Charleston Army Air Field. June 1 1944. From the collection of Harry O. Rohde.

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On our practice bombing missions we went up to Myrtle Beach, SC where thousand foot circles were drawn on the ground as our practice targets. Today, Myrtle Beach, SC is a fantastic golf area, with over 100 golf courses, but back in 1944 there wasn't a single golf course to be seen. The entire landscape consisted of sand and scrub pines. We dropped numerous blue practice bombs, which they were still finding years later when they developed the area for vacations and golf courses. I couldn't believe it, until I went there on vacation a few years ago to play some golf. What a change! Thinking back, seeing it from twenty thousand feet as waste land where we would drop practice bombs, was quite a visual comparison.

When we had finished our crew training in Charleston we were given a few days off and told to report to Mitchell Field, Long Island to pick up a brand new B-24. This would be the airplane which we would then fly overseas to our assigned area of combat. We were given a few days of leave, so I went home. I was able to see the family and Ruth one more time before I left to an uncertain future.



Blue practice bomb. Source: Liveauctioneers.com



Charleston Army Air Field. Source: Airfieldsdatabase.com

CHAPTER 5 OFF TO WAR

We went over to the Officers' Club at Mitchell Field one night, and we had a pleasant couple of days. We had to report back to Mitchell Field to get a look at the airplane that we were assigned to fly overseas as a crew. Everyone from our crew arrived - we had our orders and we were ready to go. At this point, we didn't know our final destination, but once we got airborne, we opened our orders, and discovered that we were going to wend our way to Italy along the "northern route". That meant we would fly from Mitchell Field to Bangor, Maine, and then to Gander Bay, Newfoundland. That gave me an opportunity to fly right over my house in the Bronx, which I did. Enroute to Bangor, we developed a little trouble with our gas tank, so we stayed an extra day before taking off for Gander Bay. Once we had landed the weather closed in and it got very bad for flying so we ended up staying at Gander Bay for 10 days to two weeks. We lost a lot of time there because we could not take off in the bad weather and make our way over the Atlantic to the Azores, which was the next step in our odyssey.

Newfoundland at this time of the year was really a dreary place. There wasn't much to do, so we played an awful lot of cards. When we got tired of playing cards, we went kayaking a few times. While kayaking, we discovered we could have a little fun by loading 45's with shotgun shells and shooting at the local birds, mostly seagulls, flying over our heads. That was about all the fun we had at Gander Bay.

Finally the weather broke and we were able to take off on the next leg of our journey to the Azores. This was a long haul over the ocean flying mostly at night. We landed at the Azores in the early morning hours, and we stopped there just to refuel. The thing I recall most vividly about the Azores was looking at a stone wall that was at the edge of the air field and seeing big signs that said, "Don't sit on the stone wall" and "Beware of the Bubonic Plague" and I thought, "What a hell of a place". We slept in our airplane that night. There wasn't really any place to go and after our airplane was refueled, we left the Azores without ever seeing anything but the sign saying "Beware of the Bubonic Plague".

We then headed over to Africa toward Marrakesh, Morocco. We arrived without incident, landed, and since we had some time, we went into downtown Marrakesh. Marrakesh was a big town, with an estimated population in 1944 of almost 250,000 people. We bartered with the natives, and bought some trinkets. Since we had come from Gander Bay, where it was mighty cold, we were still dressed in our winter uniforms. Marrakesh has a mean temperature during August of 94°F, and as we walked around in that hot sun, I took off my hat. To make a long story short, I got sunstroke and had to stay over an extra day to recover. That was a little annoying but that's what happens when you stay out in the sun too long.

The next leg of our trip was our last flight in this nice brand new B-24 airplane. We flew from Marrakesh up to the Replacement Depot in Italy, landed, and turned the airplane over to the folks there. We then received a ride from the Replacement Depot up to the 451st Bomb Group field and the 726th Squadron area, where we were assigned. We reported there in early August 1944, and were assigned to stay in different tent areas. We made ourselves at home, getting ready to take on the life as a member of a combat crew in a Squadron in Italy in the 451st Bomb Group of the 49th Bomb Wing of the 15th Air Force. We had finally arrived at our final destination with all the training we needed for us to fly combat missions. We were near the town of Castelluccio which is west of Foggia. It was the biggest city around, if you want to call it a city. It is located in central Italy toward the Adriatic Sea.

This location was going to be our home for the next nine months or so. I will start telling you about how we prepared for combat because we still had many practice missions to fly to learn how they fly in combat, which was somewhat different than what we had learned in the States. Combat flying was

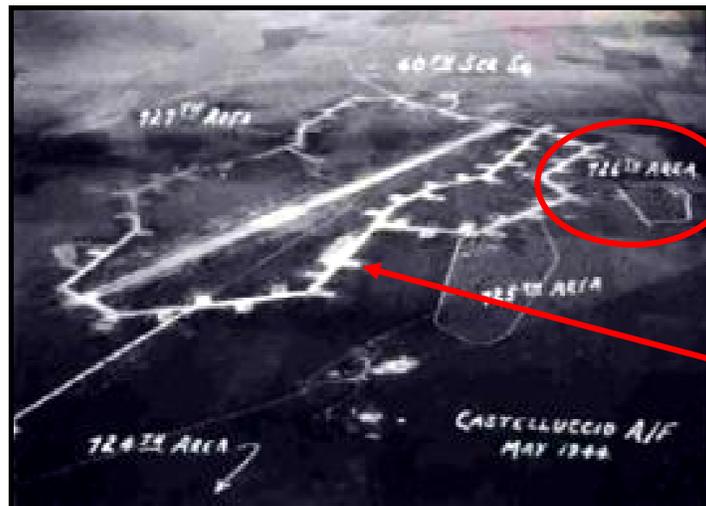
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more precise, shall we say. Consequently we had more training to go through which we did and then we were ready.



Mitchell Field, NY (near LaGuardia) to Castelluccio, IT (near Foggia). Source: Great Circle Mapper.

<u>From</u>	<u>To</u>	<u>Initial Heading</u>		<u>Distance</u>
Mitchell Field – LGA	Bangor, ME BGR	41.0°	NE	378 mi
Bangor, ME BGR	Gander Field, NF	62.0°	NE	732 mi
Gander Field, NF	Azores – TER	107.0°	E	1,530 mi
Azores – TER	Marrakesh - RAK	108.8°	E	1,183 mi
Marrakesh – RAK	Foggia – FOG	55.9°	NE	1,470 mi
Total:				5,293 mi



726th Squadron area

Revetment (parking) areas

Squadron assignments at Castelluccio Air Field

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I'm sorry to say that the stay of crew #183 (that was our training crew number assigned to us in Charleston), in Italy was rather star-crossed. Number one, when we got over there, they gave us pills to ward off malaria. The pill was called Atabrine. It didn't agree with me at all for I got deathly sick, so sick I couldn't even stand up. They had to bring an ambulance from Foggia to ship me off to the hospital there. I was in Foggia for about four days. It turned out I was allergic to Atabrine. The medical staff reverted to one of the older types of medicine (quinine) that could also ward off malaria. There is only one thing that I can say that was interesting while I was recovering in the hospital for four days...the actress Madeline Carol from England came by and said hello. She leaned over my bed, and she was beautiful. She was there cheering up all the boys in the hospital.



Madeline Carol - Wikipedia

After her only sister Marguerite was killed in World War II's London Blitz, Carroll made a radical shift from acting to working in field hospitals as a Red Cross nurse. Having become a naturalized U.S. citizen in 1943, she served at the American Army Air Corps' 61st Station Hospital in Foggia, Italy in 1944, where wounded airmen flying out of area air bases were hospitalized. (Source – Wikipedia)

When I finally got out of bed and was heading back to the air field, and was leaving the hospital through the doorway exit, this great big figure came up on the other side of the door. I mean, he just filled the doorway and as he came through I recognized who he was - Joe Louis. He was there also to cheer up the boys that were in the hospital. I had a few words with him, shook his hand, and then headed on my way back to the field. Joe just continued through the door into the hospital to visit with the sick and wounded boys.

Upon returning, I received some really bad news. My original crew, the Pilot, who had another Co-Pilot with him, crashed on takeoff on their first mission. They were going to fly as a crew. Four of them were killed. My good buddy the Bombardier was killed as was the Flight Engineer who was just a great guy. Two gunners were also killed. As it turned out, the only member of that crew who flew again was the Navigator, Alphonse Witwicki, just a nice kid from the Midwest. I guess he was star-crossed also because he went off on a mission with a different crew, and as they came back from that mission, they had been shot up a good bit, tried to make it back to Italy and didn't make it across the Adriatic Sea. They had to bail out. Nine of them perished in the Adriatic Sea and one survived. So that was another member of the crew that never got to fly in combat other than that one mission. This was not an auspicious start for crew #183. That left me hanging without a crew to fly with, except another crew where the Pilot had become the Operations Officer, which meant he wouldn't fly every day. The Co-Pilot moved up to Pilot and now they needed a Co-Pilot, so I joined that crew. We flew together for about 15 missions. That's the way things started in Italy, not really the way I expected. It was pretty sad for five of them. The others never flew again. I don't know what happened to them but I became a member of this other crew, Mel Carter's crew. The original Pilot was Henry Ford who was the new

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Operations Officer. These were excellent Pilots and I'll probably have lots to say here as we go down the line but that was the start of our stay in Italy. It sure wasn't what we expected.



Harry and Henry B. Ford. From the collection of Harry O. Rohde

The names of the fellows that I referred to from our original crew, that unfortunately were killed on takeoff: the Bombardier who was my best buddy in Charleston, South Carolina and remained that way until his untimely death was Sid Levenson. The Flight Engineer, another great guy was married and was the oldest of all of us. He was probably 28 or 29 and came from the Boston area. He was a real terrific guy, Frank Fagan, an Irishman, who sure looked like one. Frank was really a fine fellow. The two Gunners killed were Oscar Cwienkala and Felix House. All five of these guys from crew #183 were all really nice guys. I know that had they been able to continue on with us and fly the rest of their combat missions, they would have certainly done a fine job.



Harry and Sid Levenson.
From the collection of Harry O. Rohde



Grave site of Levenson, Cwienkala and House. Danville National Cemetery. Source: Findagrave.com



Holy Cross Cemetery and Mausoleum, Malden MA. Source: Findagrave.com

IMO / NAME / STATE / 2DLT 15 AIR FORCE / WWII PH - ORIGINAL

NONRECOVERABLE

1. NAME OF DECEASED—LAST—FIRST—MIDDLE (Print or type) WITWICKI, ALPHONSE E.			APPLICATION FOR HEADSTONE OR MARKER (See attached instructions. Complete and submit original and duplicate)		
2. ENLISTMENT DATE (Month, Day, Year) Sept. 10, 1942	3. DISCHARGE DATE (Month, Day, Year) Killed in action AUGUST 17, 1944	4. SERVICE NO. 0-716565			
6. STATE PENNSYLVANIA	7. GRADE 1st Lt LIEUTENANT	8. MEDALS PURPLE HEART	12. EMBLEM (Check one) <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> CHRISTIAN (Latin Cross) <input type="checkbox"/> HEBREW (Star of David) <input type="checkbox"/> NONE	13. CHECK TYPE REQUIRED <input type="checkbox"/> UPRIGHT MARBLE HEADSTONE <input type="checkbox"/> FLAT MARBLE MARKER <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> FLAT GRANITE MARKER <input type="checkbox"/> FLAT BRONZE MARKER	
9. BRANCH OF SERVICE, COMPANY, REGIMENT, AND DIVISION OR SHIP ARMY AIR CORPS. 451st Bomber Group 726th Bomber Sqdn 15th AIR FORCE			14. SHIP TO (Name and address of person who will transport stone or marker to cemetery) THE GAYDOS MONUMENT CO. OAK SPRING ROAD CANONSBURG, PA.		
10. DATE OF BIRTH (Month, Day, Year) APRIL 24, 1923	11. DATE OF DEATH (Month, Day, Year) AUGUST 17, 1944	15. FREIGHT STATION CANONSBURG, PENNA.			
16. NAME AND LOCATION OF CEMETERY (City and State) ST. MARY'S, CARNEGIE, PA.			17. I CERTIFY THE APPLICANT FOR THIS STONE OR MARKER HAS MADE ARRANGEMENTS WITH ME TO TRANSPORT SAME TO THE CEMETERY. SIGNATURE John Gaydos Jr. DATE 8-8-62		
DO NOT WRITE IN THESE SPACES RECEIVED VERIFIED B/L ORDERED			18. NAME AND ADDRESS OF APPLICANT (Print or type) Joseph Witwicki 521 HULTON ST. CARNEGIE PA.		
DA FORM 1815 1 AUG 56			19. I certify this application is submitted for a stone or marker for the unmarked grave of a deceased member or former member of the Armed Forces of the United States, soldiers of Union and Confederate Armies of the Civil War. I hereby agree to accept responsibility for properly placing the stone or marker at the grave at no expense to the Government. SIGNATURE OF APPLICANT Joseph Witwicki DATE 8-18-62		

REPLACES OQMG FORM 546, 13 OCT 52 WHICH IS OBSOLETE IMPORTANT—Reverse Side Must Be Completed 16-11453-10 GPO

US Headstone Application for Military Veterans. Source: Ancestry.com

CHAPTER 6 INTRODUCTION TO WAR

On August 25 1944, I flew my first mission. I joined Mel Carter's crew and the airplane they flew became very well known. It was called "Patches, the Tin Tappers Delight". It was a very good airplane to fly, excellent for flying formation. Both Carter and I really liked that airplane. The best thing about the airplane is that it always brought us back. When I first met the crew they welcomed me. I wasn't sure how they would receive me, but as it happened, we became very close and are still to this day, all these years later. There are five of us still alive (as of 2008) and we get together every two years at our reunions. We are still very close, making phone calls and so on. I could not have joined a better crew, they were excellent up in the air and as I say not only good guys but five of us are still around and we are still friends.



Harry with Mel Carter's crew – from the collection of Harry O. Rohde

For our introduction to combat, the 451st Bomb Group was sent up to Budapest, Hungary to bomb the Szolnok/Szajol Railroad Bridge. Fortunately the bomb strike was very good and that bridge wouldn't be used for a long time to come. Another good point about that mission was that all of our airplanes got back. For the next few missions, Carter and I in "Patches" normally flew in the #4 position which was right under the lead airplane in our Squadron. Whether the Squadron was in the lead, in the top flight or in the lower flight, we usually flew the #4 position. I liked that spot, it wasn't bad at all, and we certainly learned how to fly formation, or I should say that I learned. Carter already knew.

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Budapest – August 28th 1944. Source: Fold3.com

The next two bombing missions, one on September 1st to Ferrara, Italy and the second on September 5th to Belgrade, Yugoslavia had mixed results. We failed to seriously damage or destroy the railroad bridge North of Ferrara, Italy, and cloud cover at the target in Belgrade kept us from achieving our objective.



Ferrera mission. Source – 461st Bomb Group website

After those two missions, our lives changed drastically. We became supply airplanes, flying in ammunition, gas and anything else that was needed, from Italy up to Lyon, France, on the Rhone River. An invasion had started at the French Riviera and went on up the Rhone River. Patton's Seventh Army was involved, and they outran their supplies. The German's, of course, were blowing up all the bridges as they were retreating. This had never happened before to our Group or to any of us that were involved. They stripped our airplanes of their guns to make them as light as possible. Then they loaded the airplanes up to their maximum weight limit (71,200 pounds maximum overload), and we flew the supplies to France. Only four of us would go along; Pilot, Co-Pilot, Navigator, and Flight Engineer. We would fly up to Lyon, France with the supplies and land at the Lyon airport to be unloaded. We didn't fly in normal formation. We didn't have any fighter protection or machine guns, and we were a little jumpy because we were asked to fly very low down near the river, obviously to stay out of sight of any German fighter airplanes. If a German fighter did spot us, since we didn't have any guns to protect ourselves, we would be sitting ducks. Fortunately no German fighter airplanes saw us until we landed

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at Lyon. I'll tell you what happened there, very interesting and upsetting, but I flew a number of other missions there as well and I will get into that.



Probably seeing a four motored bomber on the ground for the first time, these natives of a French town near an Allied air base in Southern France stand around in admiration and awe after the Consolidated B-24 Liberator of the 15th Air Force landed in France with its load of supplies for fighters and fighter-bombers of the tactical Air Force. Source: National Archives via Fold3.com

At first, the missions up to Lyon were not going to count toward our total flight time and missions in order to finish our tour of duty. However, after a couple flights the 15th Air Force decided that they would count because they were very long missions (602 miles, one way), and as I said, we were a little jittery flying these missions. It wasn't just that we were flying so low, but the four of us were always looking around to see if any German ME-109s or D-10s were coming along to blow us out of the sky. You never knew if that was going to happen, it certainly could.



Messerschmitt – ME-109

At any rate what I really want to tell you about is something kind of bad. When we first got there, on our first supply mission, we got out of the airplane so the ground crews could unload the gas, ammunition and so on that we had carried up to the Lyon Airport. When I got out of the airplane, I smelled a horrible smell. I mean it was really a terrible smell, and I wondered what it was. I looked around and saw a number of people standing at the edge of a bomb crater. The Lyon air field had been bombed by the Allies, probably by our medium bombers as our troops were advancing. So I walked over there to see what was going on and discovered the source of the smell. When the Germans were in control of France, they had taken people out to these bomb craters, stood them at the edge of the craters, and machine-gunned them into the craters. The people standing around this particular crater were all French people hoping to find their relatives. I don't know how long the bodies had been in the crater, but they created an awful smell and a rather bad sight. The bodies were pressed flat because the

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Germans had bulldozed dirt on top of them to fill in the crater. It was a sad sight to see. I don't know why the Germans had executed these people, but it was certainly the kind of thing that got everyone upset and rightfully so. To this day I can almost recall the odor and I don't want to smell that ever again.

I was tapped to fly as Co-Pilot for Henry Ford, the Operations Officer. He wanted to go on one of these supply missions so I flew with him and two others, naturally, the Navigator and Flight Engineer. I was later tapped again to fly as Co-Pilot with the Squadron Commander, Major Walkey. The mission was the same as before. We flew up to Lyon and unloaded a bunch of supplies. I later flew again with Henry Ford. On one of those flights, we developed some engine trouble and had to stay overnight at Lyon. By then the Germans had been pushed through the town of Lyon to the north and the Military Police were in charge of the city of Lyon. So when my crew and I went into town, we had an interesting overnight. The Germans had been pushed out to the limits of the city on the northern side and all the inhabitants of Lyon were celebrating, and I mean they were celebrating like mad! They were dancing on the tables in the bars, and naturally, there was lots of drinking. Everyone was ecstatic that the Germans had been chased out of town, so we had quite a night of celebration with the French people. We were housed in a hotel that had been taken over by the MPs and had pretty good quarters to stay in which was pretty nice. The next morning I got up and had some rolls. The night before I had met some FFI (French Forces of the Interior), known as the Free French, the men and women who were the underground fighters against the Germans when they were in Lyon.

We got friendly with the FFI while we were drinking so they asked us to come with them the next morning to get a couple of collaborators, and I said sure. The next morning they picked me up at the hotel in a car. There were five of them in the car already, and they jammed me in the back seat. French cars weren't too big and were somewhat uncomfortable. We went barreling out into the outskirts of Lyon, along one of those very narrow roads with trees on both sides. I thought this was a big mistake figuring that whoever was driving the car was going to plow into one of those trees. Fortunately we made it without hitting any trees. We arrived at a farm house on the outskirts of Lyon and they told me to stay in the car. They ran into the farm house, dragged out the farmer and shot him on the front lawn. They came back to the car and said they had one more in town. The man they shot had been a German collaborator. So again we barreled back down that road lined with trees and made it back to Lyon, the city itself. They drove up to some apartment house, about ten stories tall and again they told me to stay down, so I did. They went up into the apartment house and the next thing I know I'm looking up and they have some guy on the roof of the apartment house, standing on the ledge. As I found out later they gave him a choice, jump or we'll shoot you, so he jumped. He landed on the sidewalk not too far from where I was standing, and, of course, he died right away. They came back down and they were as happy as could be, they had just killed two Nazi collaborators. That is what they had been after - getting a line on anyone who was friendly to the Nazis when the Nazis occupied Lyon. The FFI were a brave bunch and fought the Germans as underground fighters for the whole war.

I flew four supply missions, before they suddenly ended. I will pick up on the missions that I went on with Carter and the whole crew all over Europe.

We were stationed at an air field in Castelluccio Italy and from that base flew missions to nine countries in Europe. Europe is not a large continent geographically speaking, particularly when compared to the United States, so it was easy to become acquainted with all the different areas in Europe. I flew missions to: Hungary, Italy, Yugoslavia, France, Greece, Germany, Austria, Poland, and Czechoslovakia. The targets in these countries were diverse and most interesting, and the missions were of varying lengths. For example, a mission to the far reaches of upper Poland or Czechoslovakia covered close to 600 miles. These targets were the furthest from our Italian base. Others targets in Austria or Germany covered 350-400 miles. Some of the others were less, perhaps 300 miles. The closest ones were Castelfranco and Verona, both in Italy. We bombed all across Europe, except for those targets taken by the 8th Air Force, who were stationed in England. The 8th Air Force primarily

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covered the western and very northern ends of Europe, while we handled much of the central, southern and eastern parts.

The distance of the mission directly affected our mission counts. Any mission that took more than 7 hours to complete gave us a double mission count. The 15th Air Force had determined that the longer we flew over Europe to get to and from the target increased the danger quite a bit.

A typical mission began when the orderly would show up at our quarters, usually 6 hours prior to the actual mission. So, for an 8:00 am mission, he would wake us at 2:00 am. This early start would allow us plenty of time to prepare for the mission. We would groggily get out of bed, get dressed and head to the mess hall for some breakfast. At some point, we would hop into our 6X6 trucks and be taken down to HQ where the mission briefing would occur. At the front of the briefing room would be a large board, which at this point was covered with a large paper sheet. We would sit down, and the Colonel would arrive in the briefing room to fill us in on the details of that day's mission. His first action was to roll up the sheet to expose to us the actual target. We would see a red line from our air field at Castelluccio up to the target area. Of course, we had targets that we really did not want to be assigned to, so the reaction to the actual target information was always different. Yet, we knew that we would fly to whatever target he exposed to us. The Colonel would cover the specifics of the target - where we were going, the specific target objectives, how we would accomplish the bombing, how we would approach the target, the type of opposition that we might encounter, and what fighter cover we might have, if any. He would also brief us on the bombing altitude, usually 23,000-26,000 feet.



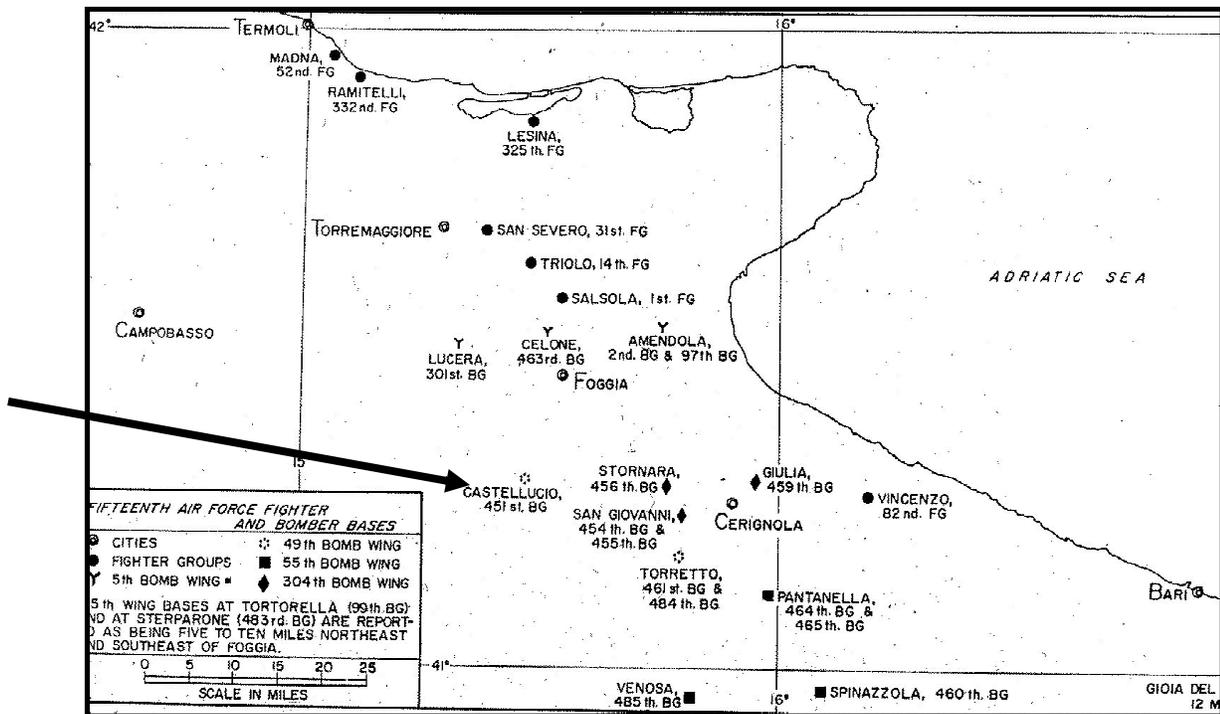
Typical mission briefing. Source: Liberatorcrew.com

Our first step after the briefing was to do a walk-around of our airplane. A team of the Pilot, Co-Pilot, the ground service people, the Sergeant in charge and our Flight Sergeant would check out the airplane to make sure that nothing was wrong. If nothing was wrong, we were ready to go. Some time before the assigned takeoff time, usually 30 minutes prior, the crew would board the airplane. We would get into our positions, make any necessary adjustments and wait for a green ball (flare) to be shot into the air. That was the signal to start the takeoffs. Occasionally, a red ball would be shot into the air, which indicated that the mission was cancelled.

For each mission, a specific Squadron would be selected to lead the mission. So, at this point, the lead airplane of the lead Squadron would start to taxi out to the takeoff spot at the end of the runway. The other Squadrons would then follow according to the overall mission plan. This was always very interesting...you would hear the coughing of the engines as we were taxiing toward the takeoff area. It was always an impressive sight. We would wait for the green ball that told us it was time to go. The

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lead airplane would then takeoff...they would be followed in 30 second intervals by all the other airplanes in the first Squadron. Then, the other Squadrons would follow this same process until all the airplanes were off the ground. Usually, the size of the mission consisted of 25-26 airplanes. The number of airplanes from each Squadron varied based upon the availability of airplanes in each Squadron. Sometimes, a given Squadron would have too many airplanes shot up, or under repair, so the other Squadrons would assign additional aircraft to round out the required numbers.



15th Air Force bases in Italy. Source: Wikipedia

There was no sound in the world like the sound of dozens of B-24s taking off. To this day I can hear it in my ears. No one will ever hear this sound again. As the airplanes took off, the lead airplane would take off and start circling overhead until the other airplanes in his Squadron were in the air. They would then form up into a specific formation. Each Squadron followed this procedure with the idea of gaining altitude and moving away from the air field. We weren't the only Group doing this. In our area of Italy, there were other Groups taking off also, all part of a much larger coordinated effort. There were perhaps as many as 15 Bomb Groups, and 6 Fighter Groups executing this procedure. The roar of the four engines from each B-24 in the air would echo down to the ground. It was just a fantastic sound. The men on the ground were in a unique position to hear this sound, and none of us ever forgot it.

If you were flying, you could only hear your own airplane. The noise was quite deafening, even with headphones on. We would eventually circle up and head in formation toward our target area. Our target could be up toward northern Italy, or across the Adriatic. Each Group was assigned its specific target, which was usually different for each Group. It was a rare case when all Groups were assigned the same target. On some missions, the Groups might head off in different directions. All the while we would be gaining altitude. As we climbed up, and as we got to 10,000 feet, we would put on our oxygen masks. We needed oxygen above 10,000 feet, since we did not fly in pressurized cabins, and without oxygen above this altitude, you would soon get headaches or even worse, pass out.

As we went further along on the mission, we had the discretion to put on our flak suits, flak vests, helmets and otherwise prepare ourselves for anything that might be coming our way. We would then continue on toward the target area.

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A standard bomb run would take from 2 to 8 minutes. During this time, any number of German guns would try to make a bead on your airplane to shoot you down. The Nazi gunners used 88mm anti-aircraft guns and were extremely good. The 88s were the best guns in the war, and were also used by the Germans on their Panzer tanks. Each mission had an assigned Initial Point (IP), where we would then turn toward the target and started receiving flak fire from the 88s, which would continue throughout the bomb run.



German 88mm guns. Source: Wikipedia

Once we started our bomb run, we had to fly straight and level. While over the target area, the Bombardier actually flew the airplane, using the Norden bombsight, and would take us to the Release Point (RP). At the RP, the lead airplane would drop first, and all the other airplanes would follow suit. Sometimes we would smother the target really well, while at other times most of the bombs would miss the target. There were many variables involved in bombing...from the accuracy of the lead airplane to the targeting efforts of the Bombardier. The Germans would also use smoke pots to obscure the target, or we might encounter varying degrees of cloud cover that would hinder our visibility at the target area.

We were not always perfect in our execution of each mission, but we would eventually get the target one way or the other. Once we dropped our bombs, we would rally away, dive to the left or right to get away from the target area where the 88s were positioned. We would gradually lose altitude and head back to our respective air fields. At this point, we may or may not still be flying in formation. Some airplanes might have been shot down. Others may have been shot up to the extent where the airplane had to leave formation. Still others may have bailed out somewhere along the way. We might also encounter German fighters on the way back as soon as we were free from the flak area. A lot of this depended on the extent of fighter cover that we had - sometimes we flew with their protection, but other times we would not.

We were usually quite spread out by the time we spotted the landing strip at Castelluccio. If we were still in formation, the lead airplane would zero in on the landing strip first. The #3 airplane would be adjacent to the lead airplane on the left, the #2 airplane adjacent to him on the right, and #4 up on the right of #2. We would thus have 6-7 airplanes lined up to land, assuming we were fortunate enough to have that many airplanes left. We would hit the start of the runway at about 1,000 feet. The #3 man would make a mighty tight turn, and would aim for the end of the runway. Then each airplane thereafter would take a tight turn and land behind the first airplane. Our goal was to have 5 airplanes

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on the runway at the same time. One ready to turn off the runway at the far end, and the last ready to hit the runway at the landing point.



Typical B-24 flying formation. Source: B24.net

Although this sounds difficult, we had good Pilots and we usually were able to accomplish this landing pattern. Sometimes, airplanes were low on fuel or shot up so badly that they would crash land, clog up the runway and require everyone to adjust.

Once we had landed safely, we would taxi back to our revetments, total up any damage and be mighty happy that we had racked up another mission.

We continued to fly missions through September 1944 based upon the weather, and the availability of airplanes. The weather was a big variable, since it could create problems at our base, en route to a target or at the target itself. Word of a new mission would come down from our HQ and we would go through the same pre-flight routines again. We flew to such places as Munich, Germany, Komarno, Hungary, Castelfranco, Bologna, Vienna and many others. (*See Appendix for a complete mission list.*)

As the missions continued, we would lose crews and airplanes, and as this occurred, we would receive replacement crews, who in turn required training before they could fly with us. We would also get replacement airplanes. The turnover was high during this time when the weather was reasonably good and we were flying fairly often.

CHAPTER 7 THE WAR CONTINUES

On October 13th 1944 (Friday the 13th), we had a mission planned to go to Vienna, Austria. The entire 15th Air Force would be involved in this mission. I recall that about 600 airplanes went to Vienna that day. I will never forget that day because the Germans were on target with their flak. We had a very long bomb run, with a large number of targets to hit around Vienna, with each Bomb Group focusing on different targets. We all went on the long bombing run and we got shot to hell. The target was mostly obscured by an almost solid undercast. The formation straggled back to base through adverse weather conditions where it was learned that sixteen of them had been hit by flak. A few enemy airplanes were seen in the target area but none were encountered. This was one of the toughest days we had seen thus far. We lost 60 airplanes that day out of the 15th Air Force. That was not a great result. I saw airplanes going down in flames, men jumping out with their parachutes, and all the bad things that happen when you are going through a long bomb run with a heavy flak attack.



Flak over Vienna. Source: John C. Schumacher's POW history
<http://www.rb-29.net/HTML/79SchumacherSty/05.00schum.html>

Fortunately, after that mission, things lightened up a little bit. Through the rest of September, and all through October, missions were less frequent because the weather was starting to deteriorate. We would go three, four or five days in a row where there were no missions. Finally, as we flew mission after mission, Carter's crew, which was well ahead of me in mission count, was getting near the magic number of 50 missions. I flew my last mission with them to Linz, Austria, on December 15th 1944. After that mission, I became a First Pilot with another crew, because their Pilot had moved up to a position at HQ.

An interesting event occurred on one absolutely clear and sunny day - a perfect day to fly. Our Squadron took off first as the lead Squadron and Mel Carter and I were flying in the #3 spot. We tried to join the first two airplanes near the field, but no sooner had we reached a couple thousand feet in the air we could hardly control the airplane. It would rise a thousand feet, so we were both pushing on the stick trying to get the nose down, and the next moment we would drop like a rock a thousand feet, so we would be putting our feet on the instrument panel and pulling back on the controls as hard as we

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could. We were going up and down, up and down. We had to call off the mission because there was no way we could fly in that weather. I had never experienced anything like that on such a clear day. Later on we talked to a meteorologist who explained to us that sometimes the thermal currents just did that and since you can't see the thermals, they were extremely dangerous. It was a good thing we got out of the sky that day.

On our next flight, when our Squadron was leading the Group, a General from the 15th Air Force HQ picked our Squadron to fly with. He flew lead and I was deputy lead that day. We flew our missions for the day, dropped our bombs, and returned safely. I was collecting my things out of the airplane after we landed when an orderly drove up in a Jeep. The Squadron Commander wanted me in the Operations office immediately! When they dropped me off at HQ with the General and the Squadron Commander, I was told that the General would like a few words with me. I thought, "Oh no what did I do?" I stood there at attention and he said, "I would just like to commend you on your formation flying today. You flew the best formation that I've seen in the 15th Air Force!" Well I was honestly flabbergasted. I said, "Thank you Sir!", saluted and left. That was one of the highlights of my career in the Air Force as far as I'm concerned.

In the days when Mel Carter and I were flying together we absolutely concentrated on flying formation as tight as we could, as steady as we could, and as smooth as we could. This was the way to fly in combat because the closer you flew together, the better chance your gunners had of shooting down any fighters that were coming up to challenge you. The fact was that fighters would pick on looser elements rather than the tighter ones so it just made sense to fly a good, tight formation. Well, this day I was flying and the General could see me quite easily as he flew in the #1 position and I was off his wing on the right. To this day I value his comments the same as any of the medals I received. That was a highlight, no question in my mind. Things like that just stick with you because you try so hard to do what's right and when someone like a General notices, it's like frosting on the cake.

CHAPTER 8 BAIL OUT!

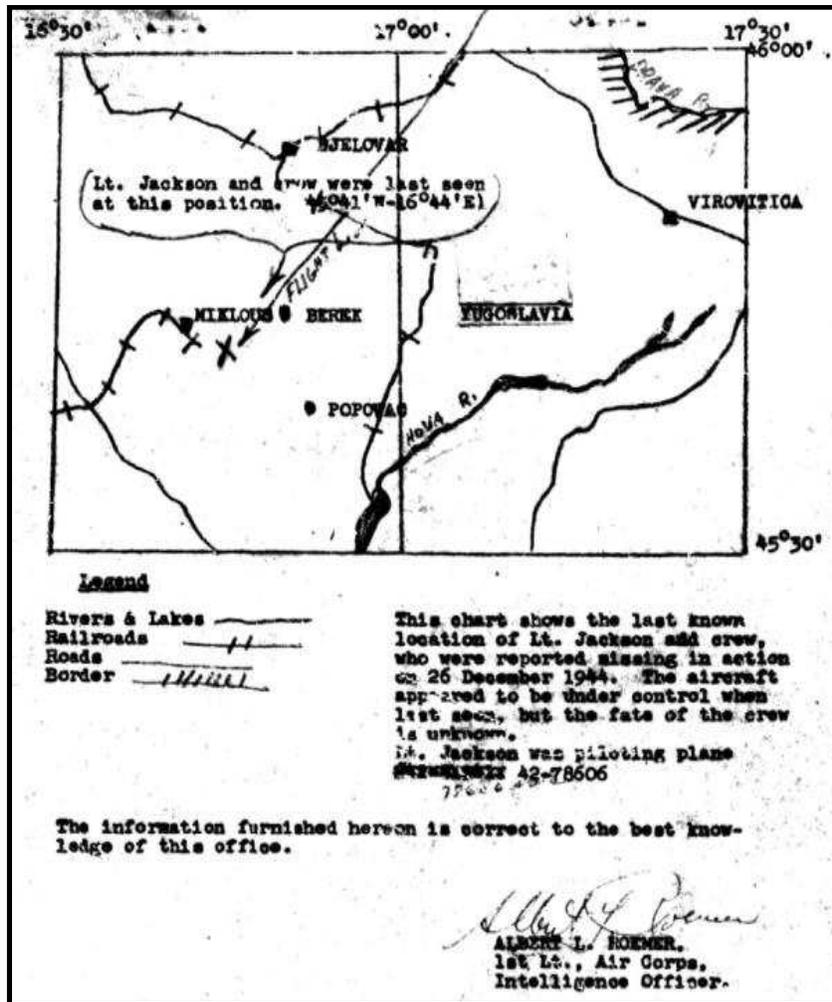
We continued to train new crews on how to fly in formation. All of a sudden, Christmas was upon us. We tried to celebrate as much as possible since we were not flying that day. The Operations Officer, Henry Ford, came to me and asked me to check out a crew who had been shot down in November and were ready to resume flying missions. The November mission had been their fourth mission. In our Squadron it was customary that any time a crew was shot down and got back to the field, they would be checked out by an experienced Pilot. Ford asked me to fly the checkout mission with this crew on December 26th. Of course, I agreed.

At this time, Carter's crew had one more mission to fly to hit the magic number of 50, and when they had completed their last mission, Carter and I planned to take a little R+R time. I don't recall where we intended to go, although we had discussed the possibility of hitching a ride to Paris. I never got there. The crew I was checking out on December 26th was William Jackson's crew in the B-24 with a serial number of 42-78606.

We followed the normal pre-flight routines - getting up early, having breakfast, heading down to the briefing room, etc. We were told that we were going to a target way up in Poland, to Oswiecim, site of an oil refinery. What we didn't know at the time was that Oswiecim was another name for Auschwitz, a notorious concentration camp where the Nazis killed at least one million people, about 90% of them Jews. We had no idea that this place even existed, much less realizing that it could be subjected to our bombings.

After the mission briefing, we boarded our airplane and taxied down the runway. It was another absolutely crystal clear day...blue sky and mighty cold. We took off in flight with our Squadron, and met with the other Squadrons. We climbed to our assigned altitude, put on our oxygen masks and headed to our target. I don't remember seeing any German fighters that day. When we arrived at the target, the skies were still crystal clear, which gave the German gunners a clean shot at us. We lost four airplanes that day out of our Group. Our airplane was hit, and although we left the target with the Group, we were having trouble controlling the airplane since the control cables had been damaged. We drifted out of the formation on purpose, being careful not to drift too far away and invite a fighter attack. We dragged along near the formation, but as we got further down into Europe, we were hit again by flak. This time they hit our fuel tanks and we were leaking fuel. Our Flight Engineer kept a close eye on our fuel supply, and we constantly checked with him on our status. It got to be a little bit iffy as to whether or not we could make it back to Italy. We knew from the Navigator that there was a valley in Yugoslavia which was probably under control of Marshal Tito's partisans. They were fighting the Germans as an underground unit, using weapons and supplies provided by the United States. The Chetniks were another underground group fighting the Germans, but were also fighting Tito's partisans.

We picked this valley and made our decision. I was not keen on trying to cross the Adriatic on the day after Christmas in very, very cold weather, and having to bail out into the Adriatic in case we ran out of fuel. Jackson and I discussed our alternatives and we agreed that we should bail out over Yugoslavia. We put the airplane on auto-pilot and bailed out at 12,000 feet over this valley. We were trained to wait a few seconds after we bailed out to pull the ripcord to slow our air speed down. I figured that initially we were falling about 120 mph...we pulled our ripcords at about 10,000 feet.



Missing Air Crew Report (MACR) 10875 – page 2. Source: National Archives via Fold3.com
(See Appendix for the full MACR)

While using a parachute, you descend about 1,000 feet a minute. It was still a very bright and clear day and that gave us about 10 minutes of parachute time. We could see what was going on down below. I didn't know much about parachuting, but we had been taught how to pull the shroud lines in order to direct ourselves, without pulling too hard and losing control.

I was going down and looking below I could see a bombed out rail train with sharp steel girders sticking out from the box cars. A few hundred feet away I could also see a bombed out tree. I was heading down toward both of them. I worked the shroud lines a bit and landed in between the two, although my parachute did get snagged a bit by the tree. I hit the ground pretty hard because as you pull the shroud lines to steer yourself, your descent accelerates. I banged up my leg a little.

All ten of us got out of the airplane with no problems. I assume the airplane crashed into the Adriatic.

After hitting the ground, a guy approached me, and held a bayonet to my chest. I figure that he was a partisan...or at least I hoped he was a partisan! I pointed to the American flag on my sleeve and said in what I hoped was good French, "*Oui nous sommes des Américains*" (Yes, we are Americans"). He understood since, as is the case with most Europeans, he could speak about 5 languages. He pulled the bayonet away and we started chatting, him very fast in French. I asked him to slow down (in French), but I still couldn't understand very much even though I had studied French in high school. So I

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said "Sprechen Sie Deutsch?" because I grew up in a German household and we spoke a lot of German at home. Fortunately, he did. So, he and I spoke in German from then on.

There was a little town in the mountains, so we headed toward it. The town was beat up and bombed out. At the same time, the rest of our crew was being rounded up. All of us ended up in the basement of a bombed-out house. The partisans were holding us there waiting for their head man to come by and look us over. We sat for a while, probably a couple of hours. Finally, in walks this little guy, he might have been 5'6", and he surely was the boss - he acted like the boss, and everyone treated him like the boss. It turned out he was the partisan leader in the whole area. He looked around the room and he said "Who's in charge here?" in perfect "Brooklynese". I did a double take and answered him. He looked at me and I said, "You're from Brooklyn?" and he looked at me and said. "And you're from the Bronx?". We got along great.

He had a wife and eight kids back in Brooklyn and was a shoemaker. However, he had been born in Yugoslavia and he wanted to get back there and work with the partisans to get control of Yugoslavia again, so that is what he was up to.

<p>Partisans Helped 'Missing' Flyer Return To Base</p> <p>NORTH BRONX—First Lieutenant Harry Rohde, of 773 Cranford Avenue, pilot of a B-24, Liberator, bomber with the 15th Air Force in Italy, now home on leave, has revealed that Partisans aided him in getting back to his own base when his crew was forced to bail out over Yugoslavia. Rohde had been reported missing in action on Dec. 26, but was returned safely ten days later.</p> <p>Son of Mrs. Katherine Rohde, the young officer has completed 35 missions and is the recipient of the Purple Heart, the Air Medal with three Oak Leaf Clusters and wears two battle stars.</p> <p>He now is honeymooning at Ponte Verde, Fla., with his bride, the former Miss Ruth Miller, of 4322 Matilda Avenue, after which he will report to Atlantic City for reassignment. The couple was married Sunday.</p> <p>Lieutenant Rohde entered the service in February, 1943, while attending Purdue University. Before that, he was a student at Valparaiso, Ind., and was graduated from Evander Childs High School, and Concordia Collegiate Institute in Bronxville.</p>	 <p>LIEUT. HARRY ROHDE</p>
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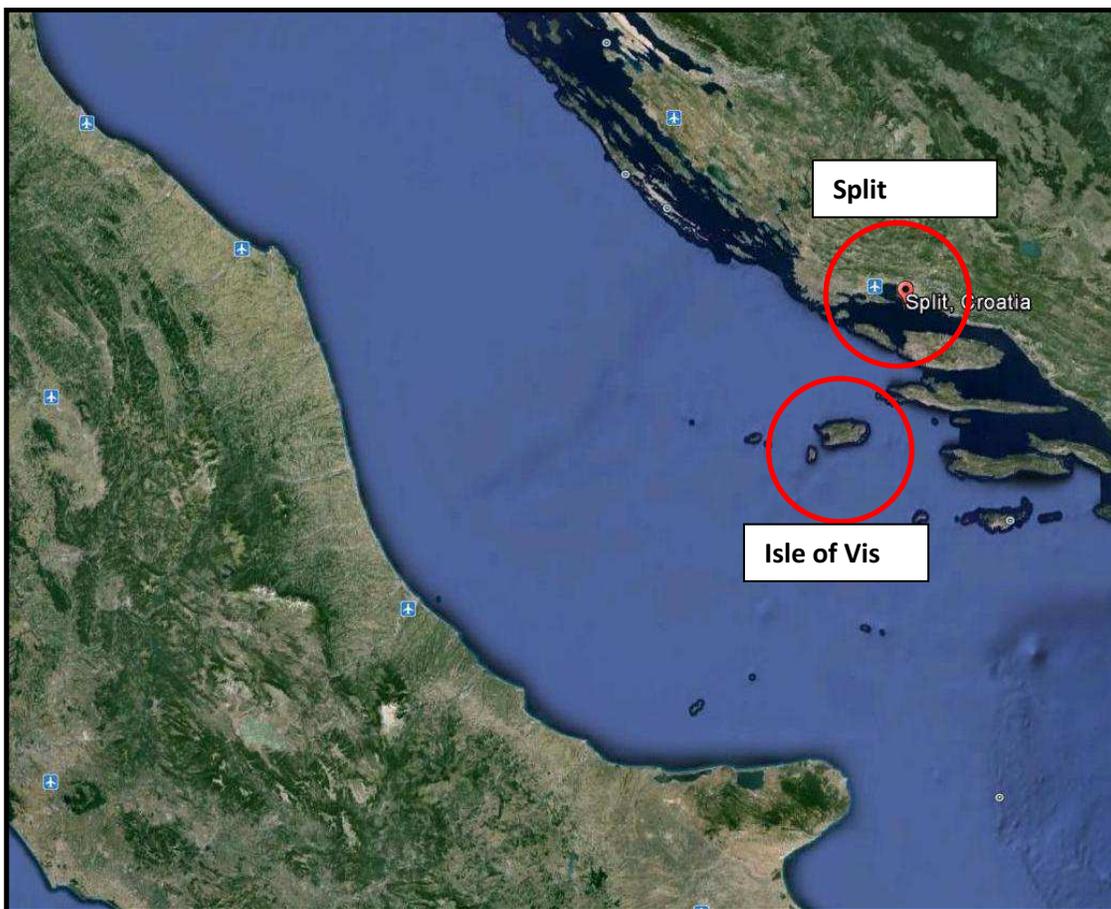
Daily Argus Newspaper - from the collection of Harry O. Rohde

The partisans would be taking care of us for some time. No one knew for how long, but the leader said he would have to work out a plan to get us to the Adriatic Coast of Yugoslavia without getting intercepted by the German patrols. They fed us and otherwise looked after us during this time. About the second day or so he came to me and said, "I have some prisoners. Come on down with me - we're going to give them a trial". We were still talking in "Brooklynese" and "Bronxese". I walked down to a bombed-out house and saw six guys with their hands tied behind their backs. They were guerrilla fighters. He had three or four of his people there. Upon arriving, he nodded and indicated that they were going to be given a trial. I didn't know why they would get a trial when they were prisoners but here was the trial. When he nodded at his henchman the henchman pointed at the first fellow with his hands behind his back and he said, "You're a Chetnik." They walked him out the door about 15-20 feet

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away, made him kneel down and shot him in the back of the head. He did this to all six of them. The Chetniks were enemies of the Tito partisans even though the two of them were fighting the Germans. We walked out of the bombed-out house into the street and I said, "What did you do that for? They're fighting the Germans", and he said, "Chetniks no good." As I found out later, what did I know - I was 22 years old, the Chetniks and Tito partisans had been fighting each other for over 600 years. They weren't about to stop fighting each other just because the Germans were around. They were willing to fight against the Germans, but they still fought against each other. They just hated each other. That's the way things were in Europe back then. If you go back in history, you can find many situations similar to this one. This was the way these people were, the way they grew up, and the way they lived.

We were just sitting around and getting along the best we could. The leader came to me and said "OK, it's clear now. I'm ready to get you to the coast". So he took 2 or 3 or us in one truck and put the rest in another truck. Our truck got through, and we arrived in the town of Split, right on the coast of the Adriatic where he dropped us off. He talked to a homeowner who agreed to hide two of us, me and a fighter Pilot who had also been picked up after he was shot down. We got paired up for some reason and went to this house. The residents greeted us with open arms. It was great because they had feather beds and we slept in feather beds that night.



Split, Yugoslavia and the Isle of Vis. Source: MapQuest

The next evening somebody came to us and told us they were ready to take us across the Adriatic. We were taken to a boat, along with a few others, and got in. The Adriatic was very rough that day. We started our crossing on New Year's Eve. As we got closer, we saw the Isle of Vis. The Isle of Vis had a short landing field that could accommodate a B-24 if you couldn't make it back to Italy. The short landing field would allow you to land your B-24 there, but you couldn't take off again. So, there were quite a few B-24s on the island.

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As we headed across the Adriatic the seas got just too rough. The captain of this small boat said that we were going to stop at the Isle of Vis. There we would wait for the seas to calm down and then we would try again. So land we did. It was New Year's Eve and as it turned out the Scottish troops were in charge of the Isle of Vis. We learned that it was a Scottish tradition that on New Year's Eve they drank up every bit of Scotch whiskey (and probably any other whiskey they had). They drank the place dry. So we joined them and had a good evening, drinking their good old Scotch Whiskey. About 3:00 am we were all a little loaded and the Captain of that little boat said, "Ok we're ready to go, get on"! So here we were, a bit loaded and having to get back on this little boat. The seas were still plenty rough, but I guess they were starting to calm down and the captain thought it was safe enough to go to Italy. I never had such a bad time in my life! Talk about hanging over the rail! That was the only place I think I was on that boat. I couldn't wait to hit dry land in Italy. Fortunately we did reach Italy sometime early the next morning and it was just so nice to put our feet on solid ground again.

Back at the base, the military folks took us over to a nearby delousing spot, and we were, of course, deloused. After the delousing, they took our old clothes (to burn) and issued us new uniforms. At that point, we felt nice and clean. I started to hitchhike back to our air field at Castelluccio. I made it back and walked into the mess hall. It was around eating time, and everyone was pretty happy and surprised to see me back. I sat down and had something to eat with the boys. I then went back to my tent.

One of the things that went on while I was overseas was that Ruth kept sending me shoeboxes of candy bars and other treats since we couldn't get such things overseas and I happened to be a candy hound. I would take the candy bars on our flights and missions to help perk me up while I was flying, particularly on the 7 or 8 hour long missions. When I got back to my bunk area and looked for my shoeboxes I found only one left with candy in it. The boys had naturally decided that I wasn't coming back so they decided to eat all my candy! I was OK with this, it was a normal reaction. I got back with my tent mates and we went on from there.

At this point I would like to say something about the fellows. That was my one and only flight with Bill Jackson's crew. As noted earlier, I was sent out as a check Pilot to see how he would make out and how his crew would react after being shot down on their fourth mission. He had one fine crew after only four missions. The December 26th mission was their fifth. Even though they were shot down on their fourth **and** fifth missions, they got back safely both times. After our return from Yugoslavia, I just assumed they were going to start flying missions again. I intended to give the crew a good report covering their fifth mission and how well they acted on that mission. They were totally capable of continuing on their tour but for some reason (I still don't know why), after getting shot down twice the whole crew was sent home. I never saw any of them again until we started having our reunions where I saw Bill Jackson, his Navigator (Ted Wengart) and his Bombardier (Wally Glass). We would see one another every two years at our Group reunions and we stayed in touch.

CHAPTER 9 MEL CARTER'S CREW

Since we are talking about crews, I surely want to talk about Mel Carter's crew. That was the crew that I flew most of my early missions with. Before Carter had been a Pilot, he was Co-Pilot for Henry Ford, who went on to be Operations Officer of our Squadron. In retrospect, looking at all the crews I flew with, and seeing other crews in action, Carter's crew was really a fine crew.

Let me name them and tell what happened to them.

Our Navigator was Roman Whiting. He not only stayed in the service after the war, but while he was a Navigator for us he went on to become the Group Navigator. He was a mighty good Navigator.

Tyrol Coley was our Bombardier. He went on up to fly leads in our Squadron whenever necessary. He had a true love for flying and later obtained his private pilot license. After the war, he was a member of the Civil Air Patrol, the Experimental Aircraft Association and the Commemorative Air Force.

Then we have Billy Seale, who was a fine Flight Engineer.

The Gunners besides Billy Seale, who flew the top turret guns, were Tom Plude, Tony Markowitz, John Gonnering, Walter Poholski and a fellow with the last name of Guthrie.

This was one heck of a good crew. Everyone was very good at their position, and they did a great job on every mission. They were totally capable under any circumstance, and coped with whatever happened. So all I can say is: "Hey, you trained me well because I certainly learned a lot being a Co-Pilot on your crew."

I mention the Carter crew now because when I did get back to Italy, Carter's crew had just finished their 50 missions and they were ready to go home. They hung around the base for a bit before they left for home. Carter didn't go home right away though. Along with another one of our good Pilots, a fellow named Rousey, Carter joined MAC (Mediterranean Air Command) and they continued to fly overseas as transport Pilots, flying different airplanes from one field to another. They really enjoyed that stint since they got to add to their flying time. Eventually that stint ended and they did get home.

I went on to fly with a third crew that we will talk about later.

CHAPTER 10 PURPLE HEART

When I came back from Yugoslavia I was inflicted with a heavy cold and had to sit out a few days to wait for the cold to clear up so I could fly again. For my next mission we flew to Brod, Yugoslavia. I looked down over Yugoslavia as I was flying over and wondered how close we were to wherever it was when I was on the ground. The Brod mission went OK and I came back and got ready for another upcoming mission

The next mission was to Moosbierbaum, Austria and I was flying the number three spot which is off the left wing of the lead airplane in our Squadron. My Co-Pilot that day was my good buddy Nick Battistella. We were flying up to the target when all of a sudden we came under a slight barrage of flak which unfortunately was rather accurate.



Nick Battistella and Harry. From the collection of Harry O. Rohde.

I had been flying formation as the Pilot and I had just finished my stint. (We flew in fifteen minute stints Pilot and Co-Pilot.) I nodded to Nick and I kicked myself back and Nick came forward to take the controls. Just at that instant a piece of flak came right through the Plexiglass and went right next to my leg. The shrapnel actually hit the alpaca-like flight clothes we had on and the stuff just went all over the airplane.

The next thing I knew, I had my hand on my lap and the shrapnel went straight through the fleshy part of my hand by the base of my thumb. From that point it went right behind Nick's head in the seat where he had been. We had been lucky that I had moved back and he had moved forward. Otherwise we knew what could have been the result of that flak coming through the Plexiglass. My hand was pretty bloody and the Flight Engineer took action right away to see if he could stop the bleeding by cauterizing the wound. It was pretty obvious that I couldn't fly anymore. Since we were still heading to the target and still had a long way to go, we pulled out of formation and went back to the field.

We landed with the red ball going up to indicate that someone was injured on the flight. They took me into the Flight Surgeon who cleaned up the wound, sewed it up, bandaged it and said, "You can't fly until that heals somewhat and take care of it blah blah blah." I thought, "Oh this is going to take so

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long." Well it didn't take all that long but it did take just long enough that Henry Ford and I had our chance. I had never had a break from flying ever since I got to Italy and started flying. I had never gotten to Capri or anything like that. As I had said earlier, Carter and I were going to take time off to go to Capri after his crew finished their missions but we never did.

So I took a few days off and went up to Rome. I got to see quite a bit of Rome and I picked up some interesting jewelry pins for all the girls in the family. I got them dirt cheap compared to what they would have cost back in the States. We still have all those pins in our possession.



Harry in Rome- 1945. Note how he is hiding his wounded hand in his right pocket. From the collection of Harry O. Rohde.

The Flight Surgeon cleared me to fly again and so I started flying with a new crew, the third crew I had, and finished out all my missions with that crew. I had about 12 missions left after being hit in the hand. I was starting to wonder after being forced to bail out on one mission, and then getting hit in the hand two missions later, if I was snake-bit after I left Carter's crew. As it turned out, I wasn't since I finished the rest of my missions quite well. In fact I started to really get involved in things as a Pilot. I started to fly deputy leads for Squadron, Squadron lead, and two or three times flew a Group lead so it was very interesting to me and satisfying that I was able to get to do that.

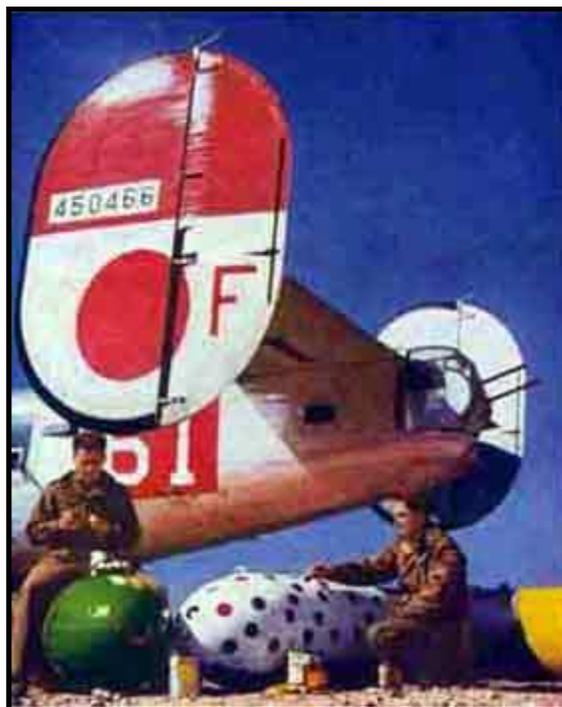
CHAPTER 11 MISSIONS 50 AND 51

I finally came down to my last mission. But first I will tell you a little about the period between when I started flying again and my last mission.

I loved flying so I haunted the Operations Office on days I wasn't flying missions to find out if they had something for me to do. This might involve training new crews to fly formation properly, or taking crews that were going on leave over to Naples so they could get to Capri. I had to fly one guy to Rome on a Section 8. We had a couple of MPs guarding him. I was a little jumpy because I couldn't tell what he was doing behind me but I figured the MPs could handle him. I kept flying pretty much all during that whole period, flying any day that was flyable. Basically, if I wasn't on a mission I was flying one of those B-24's.

I love the B-24 and I loved that whole time period. Fortunately nothing bad happened between then and when I finished.

On April 1st 1945, which also happened to be Easter, the ground crews had the beautiful thought to paint our bombs to look like Easter eggs so we could drop some eggs on Hitler. It was a good mission except that clouds interfered with the ability to know how much damage we did to the target. We just couldn't get over the line of clouds from a storm front in the target area. I was flying Group lead that day and just couldn't get the airplanes up over 28,000 ft. They were kind of shaky above that altitude.



Happy Easter. Adolf! Source: National Geographic

Sgt. Leebert C. Wise of Bedford, KY, left, and M/Sgt Tully D. Carr of Paul, Idaho ordnance men of a MAAF B-24 Group, set to work with paint and brush to design "Easter Specials" out of blockbusters

Due to the clouds, we had to bomb at a lower level at a secondary target. I don't remember the specific target that we hit but we did deliver the Easter eggs to Hitler that day...the day of my last mission.

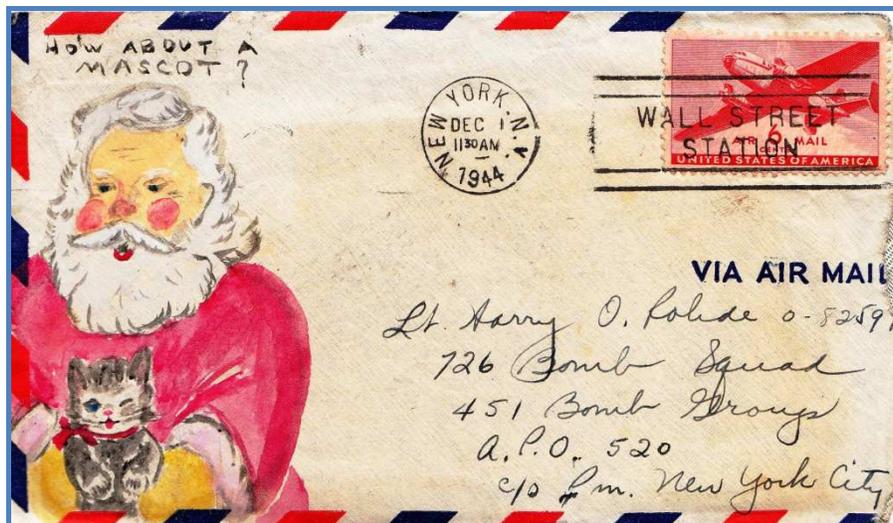
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We came back, landed and I jumped out of the airplane, kissed the ground, grabbed the Red Cross girl, Inez, kissed her, got a couple shots of booze and said. "Thank You Lord! I am most fortunate and every day is a plus day from now on!"



Inez – the Red Cross lady. From the collection of Harry O. Rohde

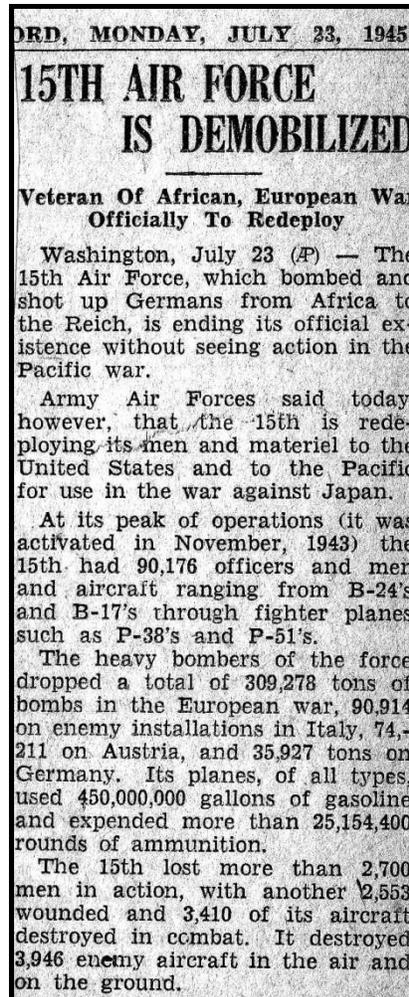
I went to the Operations Office just to make sure that I really had 50 missions. We had a board which listed all the Pilots' names vertically down the left side and next to each name there were fifty boxes. After each mission an "X" was put in the box. You could tell at a glance how far along each Pilot was getting towards the end of his tour. I looked at my line and YES! I had fifty boxes with fifty "X's" in them. But, there was also a 51st box. On top of that 51st box someone had printed "Ruth". All the boys knew about Ruth because she sent me lots of letters (and those boxes of candy). She was an excellent artist and would draw something on the left hand side of each envelope. As a result, it always took a while for me to get my mail from her because at mail call they would pass her letters around. Everyone wanted to see what Ruth's artistic work was for that day. In any event, they all knew about Ruth and also knew that as soon as I finished my missions and got home we were going to get married. So, Ruth was my 51st mission. It has been my 51st mission and it has been a rather long one. In fact it is 68 years (and counting) right now, a mighty good mission, a mighty long mission, and a very good mission all the way through.



Ruth Miller's art work. From the collection of Harry O. Rohde

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One thing I didn't dwell on was that our loss ratios were very high. The skies in Europe were definitely not the "friendly" skies of America. 70% of our airplanes, over 3,000, were shot down by the Germans while we were there. That's a very high loss ratio, but fortunately many of the Pilots, including me, made it back to the bases and survived. We were flying these missions in all sorts of weather, at very high altitudes against an enemy who was very good at what they did.



The cost of war. From the collection of Harry O. Rohde

My third crew was also a very good crew. This crew came from a Pilot named Pascoe who just by tying things together moved up to be Operations Officer for the Squadron to replace Henry Ford. At that time, the crew became available for me, and I took over as Pilot and finished most of my last missions with them. The Co-Pilot was Bud Landis, a really good guy and when I finished my missions, Bud Landis took over as Pilot. On his first mission as Pilot, I ran out to the end of the runway, got a picture of him taking off and thought, "Well I've wrapped up the whole thing - the Pilot of that crew had been my Co-Pilot and all down the line."

So that's how I ended my tour in Europe and now I'll tell about getting home.

CHAPTER 12 GOING HOME!

For about a week, I was waiting for my orders to be cut to find out how I would be getting home to the States where I would report for reassignment. The days went by and finally about a week after I finished my missions I knew what to do. I got an airplane and I asked one of the Pilots and his Co-Pilot to fly along with me on my last flight on a B-24. I flew it right over to Naples and landed at the Naples Airport. I reported to a disembarkation point on the waterfront with the Navy, because they were going to be sure that I made it to the United States. So that was my final farewell to flying B-24's, which I thought was great as long as I didn't get killed. Unfortunately so many of my buddies. . .well you know what happened there. But basically I was ready to get home.

The meals with the Navy in Naples were great because we all know how well they ate compared to the stuff we ate back at Castelluccio Air Field. We got ushered over to the shipyard to board a ship which would take us back home and lo and behold it was the *SS America*. I grabbed my barracks bag and my flight bag and got on this monstrous liner. It was a cruise ship, one of the biggest at the time, which had been converted over to a transport. I ended up in a state room with five other fellows. We had three double bunk beds and we were going to room together for the trip home. It was great. They were also Air Force fellows so we had a lot in common.



SS America. Source: Wikipedia

One of the fellows on the cruise had a small barrel of rum. I don't know where he got it, but he had figured out that if it took 8-10 days to reach the States, the six of us could gather at 5 o'clock each evening in the stateroom, each have a two ounce shot of rum, and the barrel would last us through the trip home. It was a nice idea, and we did that each day we were at sea. We left Naples probably around the middle of April 1945 and started out across the Atlantic. The trip took the typical zigzag course to avoid any German submarine attacks, which we always wondered about, but obviously we made it home, and didn't get hit by any torpedoes. One of the greatest things was that our entertainment on the ship was none other than Red Skelton. He was absolutely a naturally funny guy. He would put on a show or two a day and we would all sit around and listen. He would walk around the ship and talk to us on the deck. He was as natural and funny on a man-to-man basis as he was on the stage, and boy was he funny. I had so much respect for him, not only then but even today. Even when he got into movies and on television he was so clean and I never heard him say a dirty word. He was just fabulous for us. As we went home, the weather was great. We sunned out on the decks when we felt like it and every so often we'd run into good old Red Skelton and just laugh ourselves sick.



Red Skelton - Wikipedia

During our trip home, in the middle of April, we got the very disturbing news over the loudspeaker that President Roosevelt had died. The war was still winding down in Europe and still going strong in the Pacific. We were very upset because we didn't know how this would affect our re-enlistment or anything else for that matter. We all assumed that we would get reassigned to go over to the Pacific Theatre. But then the news came that Harry Truman, the Vice-President, would succeed him. No one really knew much about Truman, but once he took over we were all pretty happy with the way old Harry took over.



Source: Ancestry.com

We finally arrived home at Norfolk, VA. It was good weather that day. I knew we had to be processed as we got off the ship, and some good people came along while we were standing in line and asked us what we wanted. I think I wanted pretty much what most of us wanted - a quart of milk. Of course throughout our stay in Italy, and even on the ship, all we had was powdered milk, which didn't really taste much like milk. So they brought us our milk and we drained it and finished processing. Afterwards, we got to use the phones. I called Mom and said, "Hey Mom I'm back home. What's new?" She said, "Well you better get back up here because you're going to get married shortly." So I said, "Oh boy, OK." It just so happened we got processed through quickly and I got back home to good old New York City and Cranford Avenue and was welcomed home by the family.

The next thing I had to do was get down to Ruth's house, which was eight blocks from where I lived. Once I got there, I discovered she wasn't home from work yet. Gene Autry had this song:

*I've got spurs that jingle, jangle, jingle
As I go riding merrily along
And they sing, oh, ain't you glad you're single?
And that song ain't so very far from wrong.*

I decided that I would put this record on and play it when she walked in. When she walked in we had a good laugh about it, went into a tight hug, and then a kissing contest. And that's how I was welcomed home.

The Memoirs of Harry O. Rohde

We got on the subway, went downtown, and got our marriage license. That just so happened to be on May 8th, the end of the war in Europe. They were going to have a big parade on 6th Avenue and we got to watch Ike go by in the parade. I thought that was a very fitting way to end my tour in Europe. Our wedding was planned for the following Sunday May the 13th. The wedding went off very well in our small Lutheran Church up on 237th St in the Bronx. My best-man was Walter Hecker whom I grew up with in our house on Cranford Avenue, and the matron-of-honor was Ruth's sister-in-law Betty Miller. As we were getting in the car to go the reception a thunderstorm started. I couldn't help but wonder if this was an omen for our marriage.

<h3>Ruth Muriel Miller Becomes Bride Of Lieut. Harry Rohde, B-24 Pilot</h3>  <p>MRS. HARRY ROHDE</p> <p>At an Eucharistic ceremony Sunday, Miss Ruth Muriel Miller, granddaughter of Mrs. Pauline Miller of 4322 Matilda Avenue, Bronx, was married to First Lieutenant Harry O. Rohde, U.S.A.A.F. son of Mrs. Katherine Rohde of 773 Cranford Avenue, Bronx.</p> <p>The double ring ceremony took place at 5 P. M. at Redeemer Lutheran Church in the Bronx, with the Rev. Robert C. Haupt officiating. A reception followed at Turn Hall.</p> <p>Given in marriage by her brother, John George Miller of New York City, the bride wore a white satin gown, made with a fitted bodice, a full skirt and long train. Her long veil of net was draped from a coronet of orange blossoms, and she carried gardenias and lillies-of-the-valley.</p> <p>Mrs. Miller, the bride's sister-in-law, was matron of honor, in an aquamarine chiffon gown and a matching Juliet cap trimmed with veiling. Other bridal attendants all of the Bronx, in pastel chiffon gowns with matching flowered coronets and veiling were: Mrs. Maxine Priebe, in blue; the Misses Martha Hecker, cousin of the bridegroom, in pink; Beverly Dexter, in orchid, and Gwendolyn Naumann, in yellow. All attendants carried bouquets of variegated flowers.</p>	<p>Walter Hecker of the Bronx was best man for his cousin. Ushers included Stephen Doorley of Dunellen, N. J., cousin of the bride; Walter Hecker of the Bronx, uncle of the bridegroom; Charles Hecker of New York City, the bridegroom's cousin, and Robert Borchardt of Yonkers.</p> <p>After a wedding trip to Ponte Verde, Fla., the couple will reside in Atlantic City, N. J., while Lieutenant Rohde is stationed at the Redistribution Center there.</p> <p>The bride was graduated from Theodore Roosevelt High School in the Bronx, and from the Concordia Collegiate Institute, Bronxville. She formerly was associated with Duncan and Mount, attorneys in New York.</p> <p>A graduate of Evander Childs High School, Bronx, and also of Concordia, Lieutenant Rohde attended Valparaiso University in Indiana and Purdue University, before entering the service in February, 1943.</p> <p>He recently returned from Italy after completing 35 missions as a pilot of a B-24 Liberator, with the 15th Air Force. Recipient of the Order of the Purple Heart Medal, the Air Medal with three Oak Leaf Clusters and two battle stars, Lieutenant Rohde was reported missing in action Dec. 26 over Yugoslavia, and ten days later was found and returned to his base with the aid of Partisans.</p>
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Daily Argus Newspaper – May 15th 1945. From the collection of Harry O. Rohde

The reception was great, but after it was over we had the wildest taxi ride ever while heading down to the Hotel Commodore. We were wondering for a while if we were going to get there.



Hotel Commodore. Source: New York Architecture

The Commodore was opposite Grand Central Station, where we were to board a train to Ponte Vedre, Florida for a week-long honeymoon. I had gotten a great military discount and we had a wonderful time. I even got to play some golf while I was there! When I got home, I went down to the Boardwalk in Atlantic City to see what was going to happen with my re-enlistment. I sat down across from one of the officers who briefly reviewed my record. We then began talking about my future. I told him I wanted to fly a P-51 but I was told they didn't need any P-51 Pilots. I was crushed. I had wanted to fly a P-51 for a long time. I then offered to fly a P-38, P-47, A-20, B-25, and so on. He told me they didn't really need any more Pilots, that I had served my time, and that I had a lot of "points". I wasn't sure what he meant by "points", but he explained to me that over my tour I had received points for my duties, and had accumulated over 100 points, which was enough to be discharged. But, I didn't want to be discharged; there was nothing wrong with me. He told me that they did not have any plans for me to fly, and to think it over.



North American Aviation P-51 aircraft- Source: Smithsonian

Combat Probably Gets Most

WD to Announce Points On Discharge Priority

WASHINGTON—The War Department is to announce shortly the relative weight which will be attached to the four factors determining the priority of discharges, for soldiers whose service is no longer necessary.

The Department outlined its discharge plan Sept. 6, listing the four factors to be taken into consideration but giving no indication as to which of them would be the governing one. It announced then that the point value of the four credits would be made public after the cessation of hostilities in Europe.

The four factors which will determine priority of discharges are:

- "1—Service credit—based upon the total number of months of Army service since Sept. 16, 1940 (when the draft law was passed).
- "2—Overseas credit—based upon the number of months served overseas.
- "3—Combat credit—based upon first and each additional award to the individual of the Medal of Honor, Distinguished Service Cross, Legion of Merit, Silver Star, Distinguished Flying Cross, Soldier's Medal, Bronze Star Medal, Air Medal, Purple Heart and bronze service stars or battle participation stars.
- "4—Parenthood credit—which gives credit for each dependent child under 18 years up to a limit of three children."

In advance of the official announcement as to which of these factors would weigh the most, it was generally assumed that the combat and parenthood credits would be assigned more points than the overseas and total service credits.

Officials emphasized that the manpower demands of the Pacific Theater would be the paramount consideration after the defeat of Germany and it was believed that the number of men who could be released from the Army would be relatively small. It also was pointed out that prosecution of the war against Japan would make great demands upon the available shipping and that it might take some months to return to the U.S. those men slated for discharge.

The four-point discharge plan was promulgated to apply specifically to discharges given before the conclusion of the war with Japan. The same priority may not necessarily apply to the discharges to be given when the entire war is finally won.

Star and Stripes. Source: Ancestry.com

This was in May 1945, and my discharge was one of the first discharges they had done, since the war had just ended. None of us even knew what discharges were. So, all of us Pilots met on the Boardwalk and discussed the situation. We all ended up deciding to be discharged since we really didn't see that we had many other options. I went back in to talk to the same officer who interviewed me and suddenly I had a bright idea. I said, "Listen, I just got married last week and I really don't want to leave the service. What if I volunteered to be an instructor?" He sat there and looked at me and said, "We don't need you experienced, capable Pilots to carry on, so why would we need instructors? I'm sorry there is nothing we can offer you at this time."

So I was told to report to Ft. Dix to receive my final discharge from the Army Air Corps. When I got to Ft. Dix, NJ, I reported, got my discharge papers, received a "thank you for serving our country", and was wished well. That was the end of my service in the Army Air Corps, covering a period from the spring of 1942 through June of 1945.

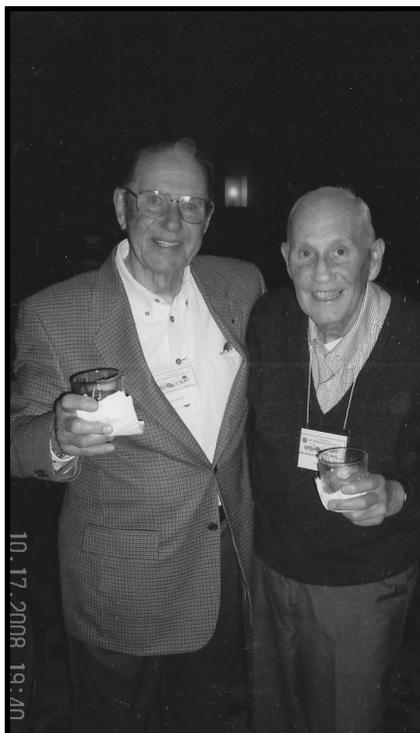
As a B-24 Pilot, I had a great run. Lots of ups and downs, but I got to meet and fly with a lot of great men. It was an experience, obviously, that can never be forgotten and all I've got to say is, "Thank you Lord for getting me through and getting me back home to start my life as a civilian."

CHAPTER 13 POST-WAR LIVING

In June of 1945, Ruth and I had just been married and I needed one more year at Purdue University to get my mechanical engineering degree. I went right back to school that summer, and stayed there for a year. I finished the school work and graduated. Then we went back to New York City to spend some time with the family. We lived with Ruth's Aunts and Grandmother in their spare bedroom. I got a job with North American Phillips, a good company, as a production engineer with some duties in mechanical design. I decided while I was there to join the reserves at Mitchell Field in Long Island. I had hoped to have a B-25 to fly on weekends but we never got an airplane so I just went to meetings once a month to learn this and that and the other thing. After a year we moved to Rochester, NY and I got a job with Taylor Instrument Companies. Fortunately, there was a reserve unit there, so I joined that unit and stayed in Rochester over four years. Again, we never got a B-25 to fly there either. We just had more meetings and talked about the Air Force. After that I was asked to go back to Purdue to do graduate teaching and work on my graduate degree.

There was no reserve unit in Lafayette, Indiana, so I gave up the reserves and that ended up being my last stint in what was then the Air Force. I was very sorry not to be able to stay in the reserves.

Fortunately two of our fellows from the 451st Bomb Group who lived in Minnesota decided that the 451st needed a reunion and set about making contact with a lot of the members. They arranged for a reunion in Chicago and we had almost 600 people attend. It started out as a roaring success which was followed up every two years by our 451st Bomb Group. Well this year, 2008, we are going to try to have another one in October, but we don't know how successful it will be; the ranks have thinned. Many have died, or are incapable of traveling. We usually change cities every two years, and we have never met in the same city twice. This time will probably be our last reunion so we will meet in Chicago where it all started. Consequently this may be the last gathering of our beloved 451st Bomb Group which we truly thought was the best Bomb Group in the whole Air Force. Who knows we may have been right – at least most of us thought so.



Harry (left) and a buddy at the 2008 Reunion in Chicago. From the collection of Harry O. Rohde

The Memoirs of Harry O. Rohde

I'm not sure what else to say other than I was extremely fortunate to get into the Army Air Corps, to have made it through the war, and back to civilian life. The United States definitely the best country in the world and well worth fighting for.

Editor's note:

The Reunions have continued but with a much larger pool of possible attendees:

**2014 WW II Joint Bomb Group Reunion
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma on September 18-21, 2014**

**451st Bombardment Group (H) - 49th Bomb Wing - Fifteenth Air Force
455th Bombardment Group (H) - 304th Bomb Wing - Fifteenth Air Force
461st & 484th Bombardment Group (H) - 49th Bomb Wing - Fifteenth Air Force**

APPENDICES AND EXHIBITS

US Army Enlistment information about Harry Rohde
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Name:	Harry Rohde
Birth Year:	1922
State of Residence:	New York
Enlistment Date:	27 Feb 1943
Enlistment State:	Mississippi
Enlistment City:	Keesler Field Biloxi
Branch:	Air Corps
Grade Code:	Private
Term of Enlistment:	Enlistment for the duration of the War or other emergency, plus six months, subject to the discretion of the President or otherwise according to law
Component:	Reserves - exclusive of Regular Army Reserve and Officers of the Officers Reserve Corps on active duty under the Thomason Act (Officers and Enlisted Men -- O.R.C. and E.R.C., and Nurses-Reserve Status)
Source:	Enlisted Reserve or Medical Administrative Corps (MAC) Officer
Education:	4 years of college
Marital Status:	Single, without dependents



Harry Rohde in "Patches, the Tin Tappers Delight" flying over the Alps. From the collection of Harry O. Rohde

 MITCHEL FIELD, LONG ISLAND		
1. - BUDAPEST - [HUNGARY]	7 1/2	Aug 25 1944
2. - NORTHERN ITALY [FERRARA]	6 1/2	Sep 1 1944
3. - BELGRADE - [YUGOSLAVIA]	6	Sep 5 1944
4. - LYONS - [FRANCE]	9	
5. - LYONS - [FRANCE]	9 1/4	
6. - LYONS - [FRANCE]	9	
7. - LYONS - [FRANCE]	9 1/2	
8. - ATHENS - [GREECE]	6 1/2	Sep 24 1944
9-10. - MUNICH [AUSTRIA] [GERMANY]	7	
11. - KAMAROM [HUNGARY]	- 7	Oct 7 1944
12. - CASTELFRANCO [ITALY] 1944	- 5	Oct 10 1944
13. - BOLOGNA [ITALY]	- 6	Oct 12 1944
14-15. - VIENNA [AUSTRIA]	- 7 1/4	Oct 13 1944
16-17. - LINZ [AUSTRIA]	- 7	Oct 16 1944
18. - MILAN [NORTHERN ITALY]	- 7 1/2	Oct 20 1944
19-20. - VIENNA [AUSTRIA]	- 7 1/4	
21-22. - VIENNA [AUSTRIA]	- 7	
23. - VERONA [NORTHERN ITALY]	- 5	
24-25. - BLECHSEIMER [CZECH] GERMANY	- 8 1/2	Dec 18 1944
*26-27. - LINZ [AUSTRIA]	- 7 1/2	Dec 20 1944
*28-29. - OSWECIM [GERMANY] POLAND	- ?	Dec 26 1944
*30. - BRUD [YUGOSLAVIA]	- 5 1/4	Jan 19 1945
*31-32. - MOOSBIERBAUM [AUSTRIA]	- 8	Jan 31 1945
*33-34. - WELS [AUSTRIA]	- 7	Feb 17 1945
*35-36. - KNITTELFELD [AUSTRIA]	- 7 1/2	Feb 23 1945
	<u>179</u>	
**37. - KLAGENFURT [AUSTRIA]	- 7	Feb 25 1945
*38-39. - MOOSBIERBAUM [AUSTRIA]	- 7 1/2	Mar 1 1945
*40. - GRAZ [AUSTRIA]	- 7	Mar 4 1945
*41-42. - REGENSBERG [GERMANY]	- 7 1/2	Mar 13 1945
*43. - KLAGENFURT [AUSTRIA]	- 7	Mar 15 1945
*44-45. - WELLS [AUSTRIA]	- 7 1/2	Mar 20 1945
**46. - BRUCK [AUSTRIA]	- 7	Mar 21 1945
*47-48. - BUDWEIS [CZECH]	- 7 1/2	Mar 24 1945
*49-50. - STRASZHOFF [AUSTRIA]	- 8 1/2	Mar 26 1945
**51. - BRUCK [AUSTRIA]	- 7	Apr 1 1945
	<u>252</u>	
		

Harry's missions list - from the collection of Harry O. Rohde

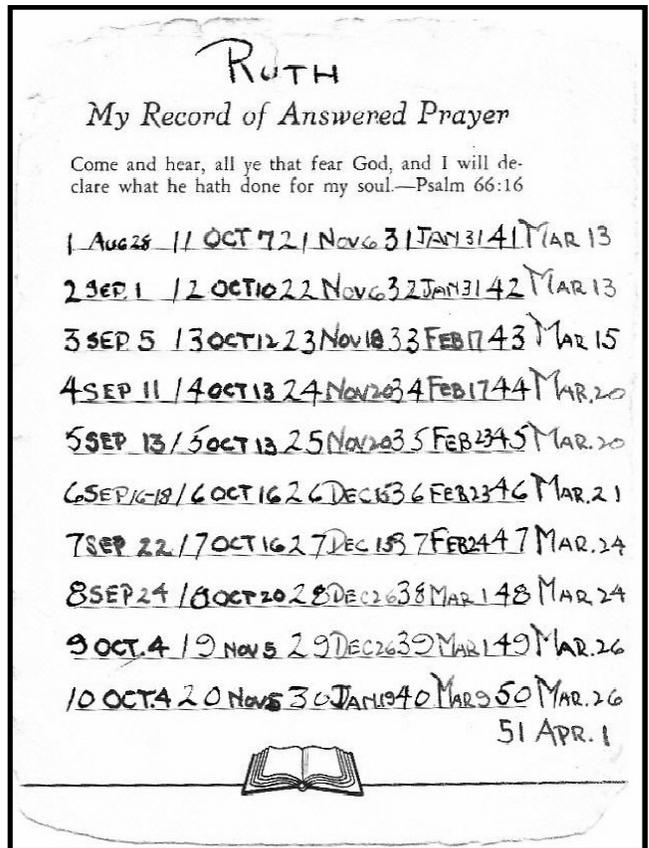
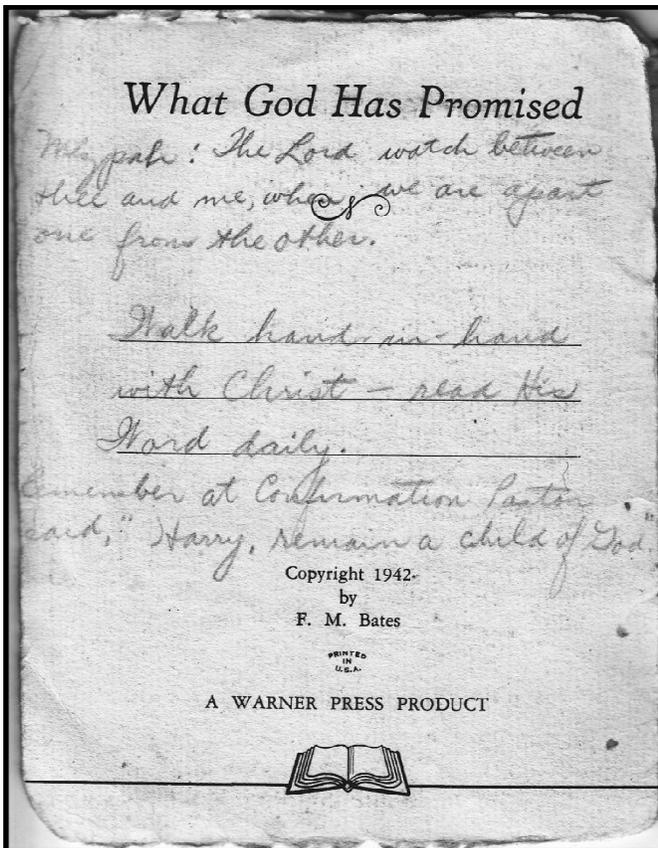
By direction of the President, you have been awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross by the Commanding General, 15th Air Force. The citation is as follows:

DISTINGUISHED FLYING CROSS

"For extraordinary achievement while participating in aerial flight in the Mediterranean Theater of Operations. Showing a high order of courage, leadership and professional skill, this gallant air crew member has distinguished himself throughout many long and hazardous combat missions against the enemy despite severe and adverse weather conditions and enemy opposition by large numbers of fighter aircraft and intense, accurate and heavy anti-aircraft fire. Displaying great combat spirit and aggressiveness, this man has met, engaged and defeated the enemy regardless of the odds and in spite of the fact that at times his plane was so severely damaged that only by extraordinary skill and fortitude was he able to fight his way through to the objective and aid in the grave damage inflicted upon the enemy. By his heroism, skill and airmanship, as shown throughout his combat career, together with his intense devotion to duty during this period of intense combat operations against the enemy, this man has upheld the highest traditions of the Military Service, thereby reflecting great credit upon himself and the Armed Forces of the United States of America."

Citation to 1st Lt. Harry O. Rohde – Distinguished Flying Cross





Pages from a prayer book given to Harry by Ruth. Per Ruth's request on the cover, Harry read this book every night before he went to sleep. From the collection of Harry O. Rohde

Classification changed to **RESTRICTED** by **L. A. BRADUNAS, Lt. Col., AC** on **12/15/97**
 by **F. M. MULLENH, Capt., AC** on **12/15/97**
CONFIDENTIAL 10785

MISSING AIR CREW REPORT

1. ORGANIZATION: Location Castelluccio, Italy Command or Air Force 15th Air Force
 Group 451st Bomb Gp (B) Squadron 726th Bomb Sq (B)
 Base 433LN 1639E-4619N 1649E

2. SPECIFY: Place of departure Castelluccio, Italy Course 4757N 1729E-4954N 1756E-IP-
 Target Oswiecim, Poland Type of mission Bombing Target Target

3. WEATHER CONDITIONS AND VISIBILITY AT TIME OF CRASH OR WHEN LAST REPORTED:
Weather clear, Visibility good

4. GIVE: (a) Date 26 Dec 44 Time 1445 Last known position 45° 34' N. 16° 44' E.
 (b) Specify whether: Last sighted, Forced down, Seen to crash,
 Last contacted by radio, No information.

5. AIRCRAFT [LOST] [BELIEVED LOST] AS A RESULT OF: [Check one only]
 Enemy aircraft, Enemy anti-aircraft, Other

6. AIRCRAFT: Type, model & series B-24 J AAF Serial Number 42-78606

7. NICKNAME OF AIRCRAFT --

8. ENGINES: Type, model & series P-1830-65 A AAF Serial Number (a) 446075
 (b) 446080 (c) 446076 (d) 41-44090

9. INSTALLED WEAPONS: [Make, type and serial number]
 (a) Browning MG, M-2, 1281282 (c) Browning MG, M-2 1259198 (i) Browning MG, M-2 1259180
 (b) Browning MG, M-2, 1281169 (j) Browning MG, M-2 1259079 (j) Browning MG, M-2 1259285
 (d) Browning MG, M-2, 1287130 (g) Browning MG, M-2 1281104 (k)
 (e) Browning MG, M-2, 1281131 (h) Browning MG, M-2 1281179 (l)

10. PERSONNEL LISTED BELOW REPORTED AS: Battle Casualty, Non Battle Casualty.

11. NUMBER OF PERSONS ABOARD AIRCRAFT: Crew 10; Passengers ; Total 10
 [If more than 12 persons aboard aircraft, use separate sheet]

CREW POSITION	FULL NAME [Last, first, initial]	RANK, SERIAL NUMBER	CURRENT NEXT OF KIN, RELATIONSHIP STATUS AND ADDRESS
1 Pilot	Jackson, William F.	2nd Lt. O-705024	MIA Mr. Frank E. Jackson (Father) RTD 425 N. 22nd St, Quincy, Ill.
2 Co-pilot	Rohde, Harry O.	1st Lt. C-825992	MIA Mrs Katherine Rohde (Mother) RTD 773 Cranford Ave, NYC, NY.
3 Navigator	Wengert, Theodore W.	2nd Lt. O-2056506	MIA Mr. Theodore Wengert (Father) RTD 430 E. 155 Street, NYC, NY.
4 Bomberdier	Glass, Wallace H.	2nd Lt. O-1540467	MIA Mrs. Nelda M. Glass (Wife) RTD 20059 Lake Chabot Rd, Hayward, Calif.
5 Top Turret	Lucas, Elwood	Cpl 35665854	MIA Mrs Lena Lucas (Wife) RTD Wisemantown, Ky.
6 Lower Turret	Prochnow, Lawrence W.	S/Sgt 16009295	MIA Mr. Frank W. Prochnow (Father) RTD 8922 W. Adler St., Milwaukee, Wis.
7 Waist	Malkin, Morton W.	S/Sgt 33786408	MIA Mrs Sarah Malkin (Mother) RTD 2419 S. 9th St, Phila., Penna.
8 Waist	Fuqua, Clyde M. Jr.	S/Sgt 16105519	MIA Mrs Clara J. Fuqua (Wife) RTD 1202 Western Ave., Amarilla, Texas
9 Tail	Treese, Doyle E.	Sgt 36670019	MIA Mrs Sula Treese (Mother) RTD Anna, Ill.
10 Nose	Phifer, Clyde W.	Cpl 38579811	MIA Mrs Bobbie Irene Phifer (Wife) RTD 701 S. E. Colorado, Portales, N. M.
(11)			
(12)			

12. IDENTIFY BELOW THOSE PERSONS WHO ARE BELIEVED TO HAVE LAST KNOWLEDGE OF AIRCRAFT AND CHECK APPROPRIATE [one only] COLUMN TO INDICATE BASIS FOR SAME:

NAME IN FULL	RANK	SERIAL No.	BY RADIO	CONTACTED LAST	SAW SIGHTED	SAW FORCED CRASH LANDING
11 Hamilton, William C.	2nd Lt	O-829473			X	
(12)						
(13)						

13. IF PERSONNEL ARE BELIEVED TO HAVE SURVIVED, CHECK ONE OF THE FOLLOWING:
 Parachutes were used. Persons were seen walking away from the scene of the crash.
 Other reasons [specify] Plane was under control when last sighted.

Missing Air Crew Report (MACR) from December 26th 1944 mission. Source: Fold3.com

726th BOMBARDMENT SQUADRON (H)
451st BOMBARDMENT GROUP (H)
APO # 520 U. S. ARMY

27 December 1944.

STATEMENT OF CIRCUMSTANCES

On the 26th of December 1944 I was flying in the same formation with Lieutenant William F. Jackson on a mission to the oil refinery located at Oswiecim, Poland. On the return journey Lieutenant Jackson began to straggle behind the formation. At about 1445 hours Jackson called one of the flight leaders but couldn't get him. He asked anybody to answer. I answered by radio and he stated his rudder controls were damaged and his oxygen was low; that he was going to leave the formation, lose altitude and try to make Vis. I repeated his message back and he confirmed it. Prior to the second flak area where he was hit he was in the number four position and I was in the number six position.

William C. Harrison
WILLIAM C. HARRISON,
2nd Lt., Air Corps.

726TH BOMBARDMENT SQUADRON (H)
451ST BOMBARDMENT GROUP (H)
APO 520 U.S. ARMY

27 December 1944

S T A T E M E N T

On 26 December 1944, Second Lieutenant William F. Jackson, O-705024, was pilot of a B-24 type aircraft, AAF Serial Number 42-78606, no nick-name, on a bombing mission over a synthetic oil refinery located at Oswiecim, Poland. On the return journey at approximately 18,000 feet, between Nitra, Czechoslovakia and Gyor, Hungary, the formation in which Lieutenant Jackson was flying encountered intense, accurate and heavy anti-aircraft fire which severely damaged Lieutenant Jackson's aircraft. He withdrew from the formation and began to straggle behind. He stated over the radio that his rudder controls were damaged and that his oxygen was low, and that he was going to lose altitude and try to make Vis. He followed the formation into Yugoslavia and was last seen at approximately 1445 hours at 45°41'N-16°44'E. He appeared to have control of his aircraft and all engines appeared operative. No parachutes were seen to leave the airplane. The weather was clear at the time.

Nothing further has been heard from Lieutenant Jackson or his crew and the undersigned has no opinion as to their fate.

Albert L. Roemer
ALBERT L. ROEMER,
1st Lt., Air Corps,
Intelligence Officer.

Missing Air Crew Report (MACR) from December 26th 1944 mission. Source: Fold3.com



B-24s heading to the target area. From the collection of Harry O. Rohde



A famous 451st Bomb Group photo...this plane blew up minutes after the photo was taken.
Source: National Archives via Fold3.com



Leaving the target behind. Source: National Archives via Fold3.com



Sunbathing at Keesler Field. From the collection of Harry O. Rohde



The boys of hut 66...Keesler Field, LA. From the collection of Harry O. Rohde
Harry is third from left, back row



Harry at Maryville, TN. From the collection of Harry O. Rohde

The Memoirs of Harry O. Rohde

451st Bombardment Group (Heavy)

Constituted as the 451st Bombardment Group (Heavy) on 6 Apr 1943.

Activated on 1 May 1943. Prepared for combat with B-24's.

Moved to the Mediterranean theater, Nov 1943-Jan 1944, with the air echelon training in Algeria for several weeks before joining the remainder of the Group in Italy.

Operated with 15th Air Force, Jan 1944-May 1945, functioning primarily as a strategic bombardment organization.

Attacked such targets as oil refineries, marshalling yards, aircraft factories, bridges, and airfields in Italy, France, German and Czechoslovakia, Austria, Hungary, Rumania, Bulgaria, Albania, and Greece.

Received the Distinguished Unit Citation for each of three missions: to an aircraft factory at Regensburg on 25 Feb 1944, to oil refineries and marshalling yards at Ploesti on 5 Apr 1944, and to an airdrome at Vienna on 23 Aug 1944; although encountering large numbers of enemy fighters and sever anti-aircraft fire during each of these missions, the Group fought its way through the opposition, destroyed many interceptors, and inflicted serious damage on the assigned targets.

At times the Group also flew support and interdictory missions.

Helped to prepare the way for and participated on the invasion of Southern France in Aug 1944.

Transported supplies to troops in Italy during Sep 1944.

Supported the final advances of Allied armies in northern Italy in Apr 1945.

Returned to the US in Jun 1945. Inactivated on 26 Sep 1945

Squadrons:

- 724th 1943-1945
- 725th 1943-1945
- 726th 1943-1945
- 727th 1943-1945

Stations:

- Davis-Monthan Field, AR: 1 May 1943
- Dyersburg AAFld, TN: 3 Jun 1943
- Wendover Field, UT: 18 Jul 1943
- Fairmont AAFld, NE: 9 Sep
- Gioia del Colle, Italy: 20 Jan 1944
- San Pancrazio, Italy: 5 Mar 1944
- Castelluccio Airfield, Italy: 6 Apr 1944
- Dow Field, ME: 19 Jun 1945

Commanders:

- Col Robert E. L. Eaton: 1 May 1943
- Col James B. Knapp: 19 Sep 1944
- Col Leroy L. Stefonowicz: Dec 1944
- Maj William H. McGuire: unkn-16 Sep 1945

Campaigns:

The Memoirs of Harry O. Rohde

- Air Combat, European-African-Middle Eastern Theater
- Air Offensive, Europe; Rome-Arno; Normandy; Northern France; Southern France; North Apennines; Rhineland; Central Europe; Po Valley

Decorations:

- Distinguished Unit Citations:
 - Regensburg, Germany, 25 Feb 1944
 - Ploesti, Romania, 5 Apr 1944
 - Austria, 23 Aug 1944

Miscellaneous:

The 451st Bombardment Group was the only 15th Army Air Force Group to earn 3 Distinguished Unit Citations while assigned to the 15th.

The total tonnage dropped by the 451st was not the highest in the 15th AAF; however the 451st Bomb Group achieved the highest overall bombing score in the 15th AAF.

The 451st Bomb Group was the only Group in the entire European Theater to achieve a non-disrupted perfect mission.

Personal decorations are listed as:

- 1 Distinguished Service Cross
- 9 Legions of Merits
- 25 Silver Stars
- 320 Distinguished Flying Crosses
- 1 British Flying Medal
- 280 Purple Hearts
- over 6,300 Air Medals
- 52 Soldier Medals
- Over 100 Bronze stars

The 451st Bomb Group was one of the most highly decorated Groups in the 15th Army Air Force.

The 451st Bomb Group was also one of the most battered. In 216 missions 135 B-24s were lost.

The Memoirs of Harry O. Rohde

Editor's note: These are the men from the 451st who remained interred in Europe, and as such is only a partial list of the 451st men who gave their lives during the war. May they all rest in peace.

Name	Squadron	Rank	Ser No	State	Date of Death	Cemetery
AHEARN GEORGE L	726th	TSGT	31169141	CT	22-Jul-44	Sicily-Rome
ALAIMO SALVATORE D	724th	SSGT	32421216	NY	11-Mar-44	Rhone, France
ANDERSON FRANK	726th	TSGT	19101445	CA	17-Dec-44	Henri-Chapelle, Belgium
ANDERSON ROBERT J	726th	SSGT	33596658	PA	10-Jun-44	Sicily-Rome
ANTONIK EDWARD J	724th	2LT	O-749953	PA	11-Mar-44	Rhone, France
ARBOGAST LINN S	726th	SGT	37537640	KS	17-Dec-44	Henri-Chapelle, Belgium
ASPINWALL PETER G	726th	2LT	O-706775	NY	26-Jul-44	Sicily-Rome
BAKER RAY E	724th	SSGT	35545004	OH	14-Oct-44	Florence, Italy
BALFANZ HUGH E	725th	SSGT	38513080	TX	4-Oct-44	Epinal, France
BANIS PAUL P C	726th	TSGT	11057199	MA	17-Dec-44	Henri-Chapelle, Belgium
BARTON EDWARD L	727th	SGT	12095337	NJ	21-Jul-44	Sicily-Rome
BAXTER JOHN R	725th	2LT	O-2065128	IL	7-Feb-45	Lorraine, France
BEATTY JACK L	724th	SSGT	13059235	PA	11-Mar-44	Rhone, France
BELINKIE ISADORE G	725th	FLT O	T-133050	CT	7-Feb-45	Lorraine, France
BERNABIC JOHN F	724th	CPL	36581953	MI	22-Aug-44	Ardennes, Belgium
BOOKER JOSEPH H JR	726th	SGT	31310236	MA	16-Jul-44	Ardennes, Belgium
BOUSQUET GERALD J	727th	SGT	11096538	RI	4-Nov-44	Florence, Italy
BOYHAN ALBERT F	725th	1LT	O-819424	NY	7-Feb-45	Ardennes, Belgium
BOYLE FRANCIS M	727th	1LT	O-747197	MI	5-May-44	Lorraine, France
BRADY JACK I	724th	FLT O	T-124916	PA	22-Aug-44	Lorraine, France
BROSTER KENNETH J	726th	SSGT	36077836	IL	16-Jul-44	Lorraine, France
BROWNELL CLAREMONT D	727th	1LT	O-523467	MT	5-Apr-44	Ardennes, Belgium
BRUCE GEORGE	726th	CPL	33286121	PA	17-Aug-44	Florence, Italy
BRUN THOMAS W	724th	SSGT	32612283	NY	23-Mar-44	Sicily-Rome
BUCHANAN WILLIAM C	724th	2LT	O-750178	NC	23-Mar-44	Sicily-Rome
BUCKLEY RICHARD M	726th	2LT	O1998985	PA	15-Jan-45	Sicily-Rome
BURLEY ROBERT G	725th	TSGT	35222306	OH	24-Apr-45	Sicily-Rome
BUTLER AARON E	726th	SSGT	12141175	NY	16-Jul-44	Lorraine, France
CAMPBELL CHARLES R	725th	1LT	O-710442	ID	11-Dec-44	Lorraine, France
CAMPBELL JOHN E	724th	SGT	12201314	PA	1-Nov-44	Sicily-Rome
CAMPBELL LEE D	726th	PFC	33534896	VA	17-Apr-44	Sicily-Rome
CARR ANDREW B	724th	SSGT	32605049	NJ	23-Mar-44	Sicily-Rome
CARTER GEORGE P	724th	TSGT	18217625	TX	11-Jun-44	Sicily-Rome
CHANGELO ROCCO L	724th	2LT	O-684108	NY	23-Mar-44	Sicily-Rome
CHYLEK JOHN P	725th	SSGT	36740310	IL	3-Jun-45	North Africa
CLARK EARL B JR	726th	SGT	35601873	OH	22-Aug-44	Ardennes, Belgium
CLAUSEN GORDON G	725th	SSGT	36232625	WI	11-Dec-44	Lorraine, France
COMPTON DAVID N	727th	2LT	O-720186	TX	25-Feb-45	Ardennes, Belgium
CORBIN KENNETH C	726th	CPL	33765365	PA	22-Aug-44	Lorraine, France
CORN JAMES J	724th	SGT	34888828	TN	1-Nov-44	Sicily-Rome

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CROW JAMES V	725th	SGT	18151400	LA	7-Feb-45	Lorraine, France
DANDREW WINSTON F	727th	SGT	32853196	NY	2-Aug-44	Rhone, France
DAPPALONE NICHOLAS J	724th	SGT	33785683	PA	14-Oct-44	Sicily-Rome
DAVIS WILLIAM H	725th	SGT	31341167	CT	14-Nov-44	Sicily-Rome
DENNEHY ROBERT W	725th	SGT	31379131	CT	14-Nov-44	Sicily-Rome
DEVLIN JAMES J	725th	SGT	33173634	PA	13-Oct-44	Ardennes, Belgium
DOBRY DONALD S	726th	SGT	37471164	NE	8-Feb-44	Sicily-Rome
DONELSON ALFRED M	724th	2LT	O-819394	PA	22-Aug-44	Ardennes, Belgium
DORING LEO F	726th	SGT	15072138	OH	8-Feb-44	Sicily-Rome
DRUEDING NELSON K	724th	TSGT	13046344	PA	29-Dec-44	Florence, Italy
DUBUISSON THOMAS E.	727th	SGT	34794238	FL	4-Nov-44	Florence, Italy
DURAN ALFONSO O	724th	SGT	18121469	NM	25-Feb-44	Florence, Italy
EAKINS ARCHIE	725th	SSGT	32010147	NY	6-May-44	Ardennes, Belgium
EGNATENKO HARRY	725th	SSGT	33591276	PA	13-Oct-44	Ardennes, Belgium
ELDRIDGE GRIFFITH M	725th	SGT	34686266	GA	25-Feb-44	Lorraine, France
ESKEW MURRAY F JR	726th	1LT	O-723873	CA	7-Feb-45	Lorraine, France
FELDMAN NORMAN E	726th	SGT	32729916	NY	16-Jul-44	Lorraine, France
FISH KENDALL K	725th	CAPT	O-822126	FL	24-Apr-45	Sicily-Rome
FITZPATRICK CHARLES	724th	CPL	32542135	NY	22-Aug-44	Sicily-Rome
FLINT GARDNER W	726th	SSGT	11016265	VT	10-Jun-44	Sicily-Rome
FORRISTALL FRED B JR	724th	SGT	31310587	MA	1-Nov-44	Florence, Italy
FRY WILLIAM D	726th	CPL	33916793	PA	17-Dec-44	Henri-Chapelle, Belgium
FULLER CLARENCE R	726th	2LT	O-684648	NY	17-Aug-44	Sicily-Rome
GATES RICHARD O	725th	1LT	O-698835	VT	31-Jul-44	Sicily-Rome
GEISEL EARL L	724th	2LT	O-684516	PA	23-Mar-44	Sicily-Rome
GOLD THOMAS A	725th	2LT	O-833435	FL	24-Apr-45	Sicily-Rome
GOODNER EUGENE G	725th	PVT	38334018	AR	17-Mar-44	Florence, Italy
GRANDY LEONARD N M	727th	SSGT	6826565	WI	10-May-44	Ardennes, Belgium
GRAPEY SIDNEY S	726th	1LT	O-719850	IL	17-Dec-44	Henri-Chapelle, Belgium
GULBISH ERNEST M	727th	TSGT	13100658	PA	7-Oct-44	Ardennes, Belgium
GURUNIAN GEORGE A	727th	SSGT	16108423	MI	4-Nov-44	Florence, Italy
HALL DEVON R	727th	1LT	O-825846	IN	13-Oct-44	Lorraine, France
HANNA THOMAS L	725th	CPL	18163736	OK	7-Feb-45	Ardennes, Belgium
HARRINGTON LEONARD A	725th	SSGT	32610499	NY	20-Jan-45	Sicily-Rome
HAYNES ALFRED A	725th	2LT	O-777667	CA	14-Nov-44	Sicily-Rome
HEATHERLY RALPH E SR	725th	SGT	34896117	SC	7-Feb-45	Lorraine, France
HENDRIX PAUL	727th	SSGT	35707654	KY	25-Apr-45	Ardennes, Belgium
HOBBS WILLIE N	724th	CPL	34851121	NC	22-Aug-44	Lorraine, France
HOLQUIN SAM A	725th	SGT	39573285	CA	13-Oct-44	Lorraine, France
HORAN JAMES J	724th	2LT	O-688671	NY	28-Apr-44	Florence, Italy
HUHNKE RICHARD W	725th	SGT	36746635	IL	16-Oct-44	Sicily-Rome
HUNT JAMES N	726th	2LT	O-742163	AR	8-Feb-44	Sicily-Rome
JACOBSEN RALPH G	725th	2LT	O2056322	WA	22-Nov-44	Sicily-Rome

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JENSEN LYLE L	725th	2LT	O-705962	WI	11-Dec-44	Lorraine, France
JOHNSON FRANK A	726th	TSGT	37666953	IA	22-Aug-44	Ardennes, Belgium
KAUDELKY RAYMOND A	724th	SSGT	32390848	NJ	11-Mar-44	Rhone, France
KELLY MAURICE R	725th	SSGT	37651421	IA	5-May-44	Lorraine, France
KIMMEL RICHARD F	725th	1LT	O-732017	TX	25-Feb-44	Florence, Italy
KING THEODORE C	726th	1LT	O-820033	NY	17-Dec-44	Henri-Chapelle, Belgium
KLEIN VALERIAN E	726th	1LT	O-819407	IL	22-Aug-44	Ardennes, Belgium
KLUEBERT FRANCIS J	724th	SSGT	33327965	PA	23-Jun-44	Florence, Italy
KOOLISH RICHARD A	724th	2LT	O-717450	IL	22-Aug-44	Ardennes, Belgium
KUPKO MICHAEL P	724th	TSGT	33255640	PA	23-Mar-44	Sicily-Rome
LAMON GAVIN G	725th	2LT	O-681126	MS	25-Feb-44	Florence, Italy
LAWLESS VALENTINE B	725th	TSGT	13036557	VA	16-Oct-44	Lorraine, France
LOENSHAL JAMES M	725th	2LT	O2061734	PA	7-Feb-45	Lorraine, France
LUBINSKI RICHARD S	727th	SGT	13137757	MD	25-Feb-45	Ardennes, Belgium
LUPTON GEORGE T	726th	1LT	O-1636244	DE	11-Dec-44	Ardennes, Belgium
MACSUGA JOSEPH J	724th	SSGT	31007495	MA	11-Mar-44	Rhone, France
MARK JAMES F	727th	2LT	O2057352	KY	4-Nov-44	Florence, Italy
MASLANEK MICHAEL	725th	SSGT	6709561	NJ	7-Feb-45	Lorraine, France
MCCORD JOSEPH J	725th	SGT	15382924	IN	25-Feb-44	Florence, Italy
MCENTEE GENE F	724th	2LT	O-808871	NY	25-Feb-44	Sicily-Rome
MCKEEMAN KENNETH J	724th	TSGT	32424781	NY	11-Mar-44	Rhone, France
MCNEESE ERNEST L	726th	SSGT	36700948	IL	25-Feb-44	Florence, Italy
MERRITT EDWARD L	724th	2LT	O-807490	MO	1-Nov-44	Sicily-Rome
MEYRAN GEORGE D JR	727th	SGT	32997244	NY	25-Apr-45	Ardennes, Belgium
MILLER HOWARD G	726th	SSGT	37539423	MO	17-Dec-44	Henri-Chapelle, Belgium
MILLER ROBERT L	726 th	SGT	391426727		7-Nov-44	Honolulu
MISKEND ARTHUR L	727th	1LT	O-826258	NY	25-Apr-45	Ardennes, Belgium
MORRIS J W	727th	FLT O	T-126809	IL	4-Nov-44	Florence, Italy
NAVINS WILLIAM G	726th	1LT	O-557995	NY	17-Dec-44	Henri-Chapelle, Belgium
NELSON JAMES W	724th	SGT	18076752	TX	22-Aug-44	Ardennes, Belgium
NOLL HENRY W JR	727th	TSGT	12186264	NY	5-Apr-44	Ardennes, Belgium
O'HARA JOSEPH V	724th	1LT	O-716755	PA	29-Dec-44	Florence, Italy
O'HEARN JOSEPH K	725th	PFC	12170953	NY	17-Mar-44	Florence, Italy
OTSTOT PAUL T	724th	TSGT	33237953	PA	11-Mar-44	Rhone, France
PAGAC DANIEL M	724th	SSGT	35026980	OH	22-Aug-44	Lorraine, France
PALMER MARION A	725th	2LT	O-827929	MI	7-Feb-45	Lorraine, France
PAONESSA ANTHONY J	724th	TSGT	32832730	NY	29-Dec-44	Florence, Italy
PEARCE ALBERT L	726th	SSGT	37539417	KS	16-Nov-44	Lorraine, France
PENLAND D L	726th	CPL	6929795	NC	17-Aug-44	Sicily-Rome
PERKINS SIDNEY L	725th	SGT	31340836	VT	7-Feb-45	Lorraine, France
PETERS THOMAS A	725th	FLT O	T-129459	PA	7-Feb-45	Lorraine, France
POPE DONALD I	725th	SGT	39209106	MT	20-Aug-44	Lorraine, France
PRATT PHILIP W JR	724th	2LT	O-714171	ID	23-Aug-44	Lorraine, France

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PUNZAR JOHNATHAN D	725 th	SSGT			10-May-44	Ardennes
PRINDLE EVERETT R	725 th	2LT	O-861023	NY	10-Mar-44	Sicily-Rome
RHODES TROY L	724 th	SGT	38478386	TX	1-Nov-44	Florence, Italy
RHODY THEODORE R	724 th	SSGT	20841346	CO	23-Mar-44	Sicily-Rome
RITTER HARRY W	724 th	1LT	O-718423	CA	29-Dec-44	Florence, Italy
RUDLOWSKI ELMER R	724 th	SGT	13111390	PA	1-Nov-44	Florence, Italy
RUSHING LAWRENCE M	727 th	2LT	O-747324	AR	7-Feb-44	Sicily-Rome
SCAFIDI SALVATORE P	725 th	SGT	11091044	MA	25-Feb-44	Florence, Italy
SCHAEFFER STERLING E	725 th	SSGT	33828267	PA	11-Dec-44	Lorraine, France
SCHAMS BERNARD W	726 th	1LT	O-824910	WI	17-Dec-44	Henri-Chapelle, Belgium
SCHERMERHORN JOE D	727 th	SSGT	12011187	FL	5-Apr-44	Ardennes, Belgium
SCHNECK SEYMOUR B	724 th	1LT	O-798895	NY	11-Mar-44	Rhone, France
SHANER EUGENE C	726 th	2LT	O-818954	CA	17-Aug-44	Sicily-Rome
SHARP JOHN L	726 th	1LT	O-863584	NY	17-Aug-44	Florence, Italy
SHIELDS HENRY E	727 th	SGT	37655434	IA	4-Nov-44	Florence, Italy
SMITH DALE W	727 th	2LT	O-687713	NM	5-Apr-44	Ardennes, Belgium
SMITH EARL G	725 th	SSGT	13133477	PA	31-Jul-44	Sicily-Rome
SOLIS AGUSTIN	726 th	SGT	38555852	TX	17-Aug-44	Florence, Italy
SPIEGEL CHARLES J	724 th	2LT	O-827747	NJ	29-Dec-44	Florence, Italy
STONE RICHARD J	727 th	CPL	31373823	NH	17-Feb-45	Sicily-Rome
SULLIVAN JOHN L JR	726 th	2LT	O1638624	MA	17-Dec-44	Epinal, France
SUNMANN WILBERT G JR	724 th	2LT	O-743129	CA	23-Mar-44	Sicily-Rome
SUTTER JOHN C	725 th	SGT	17115937	KS	17-Aug-44	Sicily-Rome
SZEKELY JOHN	725 th	CPL	15128170	OH	7-Feb-45	Lorraine, France
TISCHLER ALBERT M	725 th	CPL	37487223	SD	7-Feb-45	Lorraine, France
VAIL CLAUDE U	724 th	1LT	O-735125	MI	11-Mar-44	Rhone, France
VALDES DAVID J JR	726 th	SGT	36809704	WI	27-Jul-44	Ardennes, Belgium
VARGA STEVE	725 th	SGT	15333985	MI	25-Feb-44	Florence, Italy
WALLACE IRVING	725 th	2LT	O-753117	NY	17-Mar-44	Sicily-Rome
WALTER RAYMOND S	725 th	2LT	O-827762	NY	22-Nov-44	Sicily-Rome
WARTMAN ARTHUR H JR	727 th	2LT	O-751777	PA	13-Apr-44	Lorraine, France
WEBER WILMER J	725 th	SGT	39916328	IA	11-Dec-44	Lorraine, France
WILLHITE THEODORE E	HQ	MAJ	O-406074	IA	11-Mar-44	Rhone, France
WILLIAMS CLYDE C	726 th	CPL	36684655	IL	17-Aug-44	Florence, Italy
WILSON ROBERT S L	725 th	SGT	35048922	OH	7-Feb-45	Lorraine, France
WIRTZBERGER ANDREW D	726 th	SSGT	39608439	MN	30-Mar-44	Sicily-Rome
WITWICKI ALPHONSE E	726 th	2LT	O-716565	PA	17-Aug-44	Florence, Italy
WOOD JAMES N	726 th	SSGT	35320174	OH	17-Dec-44	Henri-Chapelle, Belgium
WRIGHT JACK B	724 th	2LT	O2060868	OK	1-Nov-44	Florence, Italy
YOUNG HOWARD N	727 th	SGT	33902876	MD	25-Feb-45	Lorraine, France
YOUNG WILLIAM R	727 th	2LT	O-686300	OH	4-Nov-44	Florence, Italy