

Ball Turret Gunner Rescued

The official account of this story is shown below in blue type and was released by the 15th Army Air Force in Italy during World War II. The author of the report is Corporal Richard Kraus of Chicago. The incident reported in the story took place while my father, David Hamilton Eagles, was flying in a B-24 on a bombing mission to Kufstein, Austria on November 4, 1944.

By Corporal Richard Kraus

15th AAF in Italy

There were no fighters or flak, but a faulty oxygen connection and ice box temperatures turned a milk run against the Kufstein Rail Yards into a sour milk run for T/Sgt. Robert L. Grieco, 3048 Cinnamon St., Cincinnati, Ohio; T/Sgt. Edward S. Ches, 53 Lewis St. Buffalo, N.Y. and S/Sgt. David H. Eagles, Newton Rd., Oak Bluffs, Mass.

Ten minutes before reaching the bomb run, Sergeant Grieco, the engineer, called for an oxygen check. When he received no answer from the ball turret gunner, a replacement flying his first combat mission, Sergeant Grieco told Waist Gunner Ches to investigate.

"He's out like a light," reported Sergeant Ches. Sergeant Grieco went back to the ball turret and climbed in head first to see what the trouble was. He saw that the gunner's oxygen connection was SNAFUED. As he began to climb back out of the turret his Mae West became inflated.

"I was stuck in that turret like an ostrich with its head in the sand," recalled Sergeant Grieco, "only my feet were sticking straight up in the air."

Tail gunner Eagles raced up from his gun position and grabbed one of Engineer Grieco's leg as Radioman Ches took hold of the other. Together they jerked him clear.

Sergeant Eagles then reached down into the turret and grabbed the unconscious gunner by the parachute harness and dragged him out.

While Sergeant Grieco and Sergeant Ches returned to their gun positions to watch for enemy fighters at the target, Sergeant Eagles worked on the unconscious gunner, sharing the only available oxygen mask on a 7-30 basis.

"I'd work on him until I started to feel faint, " said Sergeant Eagles, "then I'd grab the mask and catch a couple of quick breaths. When he finally came to his hands were frozen. We piled our combat jackets on his hands, hooked up his heated suit and the trouble was over."

A few hours later, back at the squadron, the Intelligence Officer phoned in his mission report. "A milk run, no flak, no fighters."

"Milk run, baloney," said Sergeant Eagles, as he headed toward the Dispensary for a couple of aspirin.

CPL. RICHARD KRAUS, CHICAGO

CERTIFIED PASSED BY FIELD PRESS OFFICER

On April 13, 1992 my father wrote the following information (shown in blue type) to provide additional details about the mission to Kufstein, Austria. Note that passing from the forward section of the plane to the rear section of the plane requires passing through the bomb bay. In the bomb bay the passageway is barely wide enough for one person to squeeze through.

In December of 1944, Ed Ches, Bob Grieco and I rode in an Army truck to Rome via Naples. We went to Rome to make a radio broadcast about this episode involving the ball gunner. Corporal Kraus wrote the original disposition given for the rescue of the ball gunner on the Kufstein M. Y. raid of November 4, 1944, mission #144. Kraus' disposition is a modification of what really happened, but also much more accurate than the tape that was made in the Rome broadcast of December 1944. Bob Ashiba, our navigator, went through the bomb

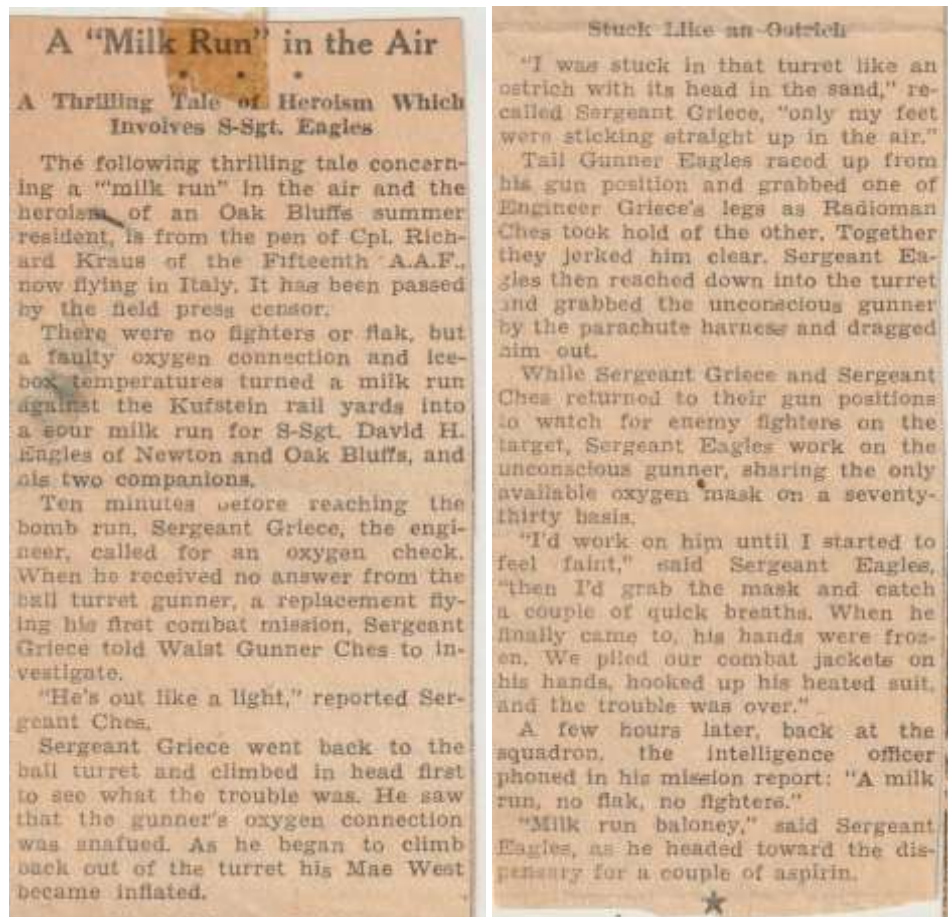
bay, tried to gain entrance to the waist area, but I prevented his entrance by the two of us seated blocking the rear door. I was propped against the door with the ball gunner in my lap. His dead weight prevented me from moving.

The action I took squeezing the gunner to start his breathing was no easy task. My efforts to revive him most likely contributed to the collapsed lung he subsequently sustained. On second thought that may have been part of the initial problem.

Lifting the gunner out of the ball turret was no easy task. He was dead weight. I don't remember his name.

David H. Eagles 4/13/92

My father's parents saved a newspaper clipping of the official account written by Corporal Richard Kraus. The newspaper clipping is shown below. It does not contain any new information, but is shown here to illustrate how Dad's parents cared for him by keeping newspaper clippings about his time in the service.



Shortly after World War II my father handcrafted a detailed model of the B-24 bomber that he flew in. This B-24 model hung from the ceiling of the study in my childhood home in Stoughton, Massachusetts. Growing up with this B-24 model prominently displayed in our home left me with an indelible memory of Dad's B-24. A notable feature of my Dad's plane is the number "47" that appears as very large numerals in four places on the fuselage. The following picture shows my father's B-24 model. Note the number "47" appearing twice on starboard side of the plane. The number "47" also appears twice on the port side of the plane.



My father's handcrafted B-24 model – number "47"

After my parents were in their mid to late 70's, I began to spend a dedicated day with them each winter. The primary purpose of this dedicated day was to prepare for their eventual deaths as I had been appointed as the executor of their estate at that time. While each visit was focused on end of life topics, we also had time to enjoy each other's company and to reminisce. On one particular day I was leafing through one of my father's books regarding the 15th Army Air Force in World War II. As I turned the pages I suddenly stopped when I saw a photograph of a B-24 with the number "47". In this photograph number "47" was headed straight down to the ground without any tail section. I turned to my father and asked him if this was his plane. He said "Yes, that's my plane. That picture was taken on the day that I was in Rome for a radio broadcast about saving the life of a ball gunner. Number "47" went on a mission that day without me and two other crew members. Number "47" was involved in a mid-air collision with another B-24 after dropping their bombs on the target. The tail section of number "47" was clipped off by one of the propellers of another B-24. All crew members were killed as a result." At that moment I was struck once again by how fortunate my father had been to survive World War II.

The photograph on the next page shows my father sitting on top of the tail gun of a B-24 after he completed his 35th combat mission. With completion of this mission he met his quota and would be sent home to the United States.



My father after 35 combat missions

By Dana Burton Eagles, son of David Hamilton Eagles