

THE PIONEERS

This chapter is titled "The Pioneers" to highlight how poorly we were prepared to go into combat. Time and again, during these early months, you will see how we learned to fight and how to modify our equipment so that we improved our chances of survival. The mechanics on the line and other ground personnel also learned new and better ways during this time period.

The *Old Crow* arrived at Shipdham on February 23, 1943. After we had landed and were directed to a hard stand, we were told to load aboard a truck with the things that we would need for the night. The truck took us south through farmland on a blacktopped road. Then the truck turned into an unpaved lane that looked as if it would lead to a farm. Instead it stopped and we were home.

The truck had stopped at a small low squat building that was the Squadron Orderly Room. Scattered helter-skelter beyond were a number of low long stuccoed buildings. Further away were three large metal buildings that looked like huge corrugated sewer tiles that had been laid on their sides and cut off at the bottom. Holes had been cut in the sides and windows inserted. We learned that they were called Nissen huts. Further along the lane that we had just turned off of, there were some old occupied farm buildings.

Running from the concrete apron that started and ended at the Orderly Room were a number of concrete walks that led to the various buildings.

When we entered our new metal home, we found a number of beds and a round stove that was to provide our central heating. It looked somewhat like a cast iron milk can with a chimney running out of the top. Outside the door was a small bushel basket sized pile of coal. Along each inside wall was a small shelf that was about face high over the beds. There were no other furnishings, except for the three biscuit mattresses that we thought we left behind in St. Evals. Each hut would have two or three crews quartered in it. I believe that we started out with the crew from *Mr. Five by Five*.

The scenery outside was not too bad. We were quartered in the middle of a farm. Just to the south of our hut was a fenced field of wheat. On the other side of the field, along the road, was an old stone church. Across from the church

was a small farm house.

This scene was in sharp contrast with what you saw when you turned around. This had to be a new base! Otherwise, there would be some grass here in our living area. Instead, a sea of mud was growing where grass should have been. It was then I remembered the great gobs of mud and clods of earth that I had seen at the Tech. Site. Even Wendover hadn't been like this.

We were told that we would be eating in the enlisted combat mess. Unless we could hitch a ride, we would have to walk. You go back out to the road, turn right and then take the second left. "It really isn't too far." This proved to be not quite a half mile.

Then to our surprise, we were told to get back on the trucks. This was to be our home, however it was not ready yet. We were to temporarily stay on another site.

After the next morning's breakfast, we got a truck to take us to our aircraft to retrieve the remainder of our belongings (including the cases of Old Crow). Then we were given an introductory "cook's tour" of the base.

Ray Marner also described the field in his diary:

We arrived at this field early this morning. It's about 30 miles from the coast. Eighteen miles from Norwich and 100 miles from London. The field is spread out over about 10 miles so bombing won't destroy everything. Everything is camouflaged. The barracks are one story with a stove in the middle. The fuel shortage is terrible and it's pretty cold. The latrines are in separate buildings and there's hardly any hot water. Aside from that, it's nice here. Not much gas so we ride around on bikes. Money is kind of confusing at first.

The chow is really good. We eat horse meat, powdered eggs and milk and it's not bad. All-in-all, I like it here.

The day after the *Old Crow* arrived we started Group conducted training to make certain that we were ready to go forth to meet the enemy.

Training for the radio operators was conducted in one of the buildings on the Tech. Site. The one in charge of the training was a Sgt. known as "Doc." Wright. I believe that

he was assigned to the 68th Squadron.

"Doc." was a good man at sending and receiving Morse Code. He preferred to use a "bug" (a two way spring loaded key that moved on a horizontal plane rather than a vertical plane) and would communicate with other bug users at other bases.

There was also a Sgt. named Lafferty that helped "Doc". I don't remember what squadron he was from. Delores Brumagin, a combat radio man from the 67th, could frequently be found in the radio training class room.

Gunnery training was also conducted in facilities that were located on the Tech. Site. There was a good deal of time spent with cards and slides in the rapid identification of aircraft silhouettes. You had to be able to tell friend from foe. I was later to wonder why? When we were over the continent there were no friends that were not in your formation. When we were over the channel you shoot at anything that pointed its nose at you.

On the morning of March 1st we were to leave to go to Hethel for some additional training. We were told to take only the things that we would need for a one-week stay. We were very concerned about leaving our personal things (including the cases of Old Crow) since our site was so isolated and there would be no one there that we knew to watch them. The response was, "Don't worry! The base M.P.'s will conduct patrols." So off we went.

The thing that impressed me most about the trip to Hethel was the domination of the training by British personnel. I guess the reasoning was that they had been at war much longer than we and therefore had the expertise.

One bit of training that I recall had to do with ditching. In the lectures we were told how susceptible the B-24 was to break in two. The break seemed to always occur in the bomb bay area when the ship hit the water. Also, the armor plating was likely to tear loose. Can you guess where the gunner's ditching positions were? We were seated on the floor, facing the rear of the ship, with our back supported by the bomb bay wall. A few feet away was the armor plating.

After the lectures we were expected to go to our aircraft and perform practice ditching drills. That meant getting fully dressed (including parachute), sitting in our ditching position, waiting for the alarm bell, jumping out of the

aircraft and climbing into a dinghy that was stretched out on the ground beside the aircraft. 1st Lt. Ronald Allen, who was responsible for overseeing the drills, could not understand the laughing attitude of the enlisted men in the back of the ship.

Another bit of training that always intrigued me was the Geneva Conventions and the Rules of War. If you go down at sea, off the shores of a neutral country, and the current is taking you into shore, what should you do? If you allow the current to carry you, you may be held by the neutral country for the duration of the war. On the other hand, if you splash and help the current to take you in toward shore you are coming in under your own power. Therefore, they are supposed to return you to your own country. There were others like the different handling, by a neutral country, of one who evades capture and one who escaped from capture. Also, the instructions on how to contact and conduct yourself when in the presence of the underground forces. And last, but not least, the rules you were to follow when captured.

We returned to Shipdham on March 11th. That was when we found how efficient our M.P. force was. Our living quarters had been looted. The Old Crow whiskey was gone! Frank Juskowski's watches were gone! Very few things of value remained.

Complaints were quickly handled by, "It must have happened after our patrols left." and "It had to have been outsiders because our boys wouldn't do that to other members of the Group.". We gathered up our things and transferred them to our permanent living site.

While we were getting over our losses, we spent a number of days flying around England. These flights were to practice formation flying, flying at high altitude, dropping practice bombs on "The Wash" (a large North Sea bay lying on the eastern English coast) and to generally become acquainted with the English countryside.

Henry Fetherolf had a surprise within a few days after the arrival of the ground personnel at Shipdham:

We were welcomed to the ETO by Lord Haw-Haw on German radio! I thought we were a big secret. However, they knew about us right away.

Ray Marner's diary indicates that the ground echelon arrived

at Shipdham on March 17th. The next day he wrote:

Norwich was bombed last night by enemy bombers. We could hear and see the explosions and fire. Also, the antiaircraft fire.

When the all clear sounded, Henry Fetherolf remembers:

We couldn't find two cooks. We looked everywhere and the Captain said we had to find them or parts of them. One air raid shelter was never used because it had three feet of water in it. That was the last place that we looked. There they were, sitting in the dark, holding hands like two scared kids.

Ray Marner also remembers:

Within the first week of our arrival at Shipdham, I was walking from our barracks to one of the headquarter buildings near the field. A staff car stopped and the driver offered me a ride. Being only 19 years old and not very military, I didn't realize I should have gotten in front with the driver. I piled in the back with the Group Commander, then Col. Johnson. He couldn't have been more friendly or nicer. He wanted a detailed account of our trip over and the submarine attacks, and treated me just super. I will never forget how reassured I felt with this man as our commanding officer.

Our enlisted combat mess was located on the same site as the Group Commander's living quarters. In fact, if there was a line waiting to enter the mess hall, the line formed in front of the C.O.'s quarters.

All available aircraft of the Group, except the 506th, went to Vegesack on March 18, 1943. The raid had been successful in spite of strong enemy opposition. Our gunners had destroyed a number of enemy aircraft. All of our aircraft returned to base even though many were damaged. Getting them all back was a reversal of a trend that had nearly decimated the Group.

A couple of days later I was standing in the chow line when the door of the C.O.'s quarters opened and there stood Col. Johnson. He called the combat men over to him and complimented them on what a good job they had done. He praised the pilots who had flown a tight formation. He then stated that we would continue the newly tried tactic of

ceasing all evasive action in the target area. He said that, "If we are to destroy targets, the bombardiers have to have a flat and steady platform to work from." He said that, "We must destroy targets if we are to justify the losses of men and equipment that we all knew was going to occur." It was his belief that the losses we would incur with this new tactic would not be significantly greater than those incurred with the old. Thus the pioneering had started before the 506th was baptized.

The morning of March 22, 1943, started for me when the Charge Of Quarters shook me and said they were waiting to take me to the briefing room. While I was dressing, he said there was going to be a raid and they wanted me to go. Lt. Michaels was at the Orderly Room with a Jeep and would take me to the Tech. Site.

Lt. Ronald Allen was waiting for me at the Drying Room (a dry heated place where we kept our flying gear in order to minimize freezing problems while flying in the extreme cold of high altitude). He said that Captain Swanson, Squadron Operations Officer, had asked Lt. Anderson, to fly aircraft #068, *Lynn Bari*. He was to lead the 2nd element on a raid to Wilhelmshaven. They still did not have a hatch gunner and thought that I would like to go. I agreed and they took me to the armament shop to pick up my gun.

In explanation of why I was flying with a crew other than my own, none of the 506th crews had hatch gunners when they left the States. If a crew was to fly combat, they had to borrow a gunner from another 506th crew that was not scheduled to go up.

Lt. Virgil Fouts also took off that morning in aircraft #191, *Cactus*. Flying with him as hatch gunner was Morrice Dobbins, a waist gunner from my own crew and Kenneth A. Klose, a gunner from the Bunker crew. The third Squadron aircraft, #295, *The Wicked Witch*, was flown by James C. McAtee.

When we were airborne, we formed up with nine other ships from the 44th. The Group then joined five ships from the 93rd Bomb Group (the only other Liberator Unit in England at the time) and headed for Germany.

Once we were over the English Channel, the order was given to test fire the guns. This test firing was not only to assure that all guns were operating, but also to keep them from freezing as we climbed into the cold air of high altitude.

Coldiron, in the tail turret reported that his guns were inoperative. Lt. Anderson decided that he would not abort even though our only tail protection would be from our wing men. However, to the men in the back of the ship this was not our greatest worry. When we left the States, we had been issued back type parachutes. These chutes would not allow room enough for the two waist gunners to operate their guns without brushing against each other. These slight contacts resulted in the parachutes popping open. While test firing the guns, the first chute opened.

In the *Wicked Witch*, McAtee said:

I was having engine trouble as we approached the coast off Germany. Ahead I could see the fighters approaching. Suddenly, my #2 engine gave out and I could no longer hold my position in formation. Knowing that I soon would be alone, I rapidly descended and when near the water dropped my bombs. I then headed back across the North Sea to England. (He reached an English base and spent a week getting the ship repaired).

The fighters were also getting near to the *Lynn Bari*. Oscar Ferkauff, one of Anderson's waist gunners, had agreed to experiment with a new idea on how to keep personnel in the back of the ship from freezing. An electrical outlet had been installed at his gun position. He had been given what looked like a pair of blue long Johns to wear. A wire with a plug on the end ran from the leg. Oscar plugged it in as we climbed to altitude and seemed quite pleased with the warmth it provided.

My combat record indicates that we encountered 35-to-40 enemy aircraft that day. There were Me-110's and Fw-190's. I will always remember the sight of Oscar Ferkauff firing at one Me-110 while stamping his foot in parachute silk because his new electric flying suit has shorted out. Also, the other waist gunner, George Hartney, was wearing a popped chute.

McAtee recalls being told:

Some of the pilots on the mission saw Lt. Virgil Fouts, in *Cactus*, being pursued by fighters. Others reported seeing the ship fall out of formation. It is likely that the ship was hit in the initial fighter attack and the crew bailed out before the formation crossed the coast.

With Lt. Virgil Fouts (KIA) were Lts. Frank Navas (KIA),

Joseph L. Brenner (KIA), and Robert H. Seaman (KIA). Also with him were Sgts. Eldo A. Russell (KIA), Richard K. Nordquist (KIA), Edward W. Lindau (KIA), Jerry H. Wieser (KIA), Kenneth A. Klose (KIA) and Maurice H. Dobbins (KIA).

Charleston Miller remembers:

There were three planes went out, and only one of you came back to the field.

That night the enlisted crew members of the *Old Crow* and *Earthquake* had their first experience of an empty bed. If I remember correctly, Dobbins had married just before we left for overseas. This was a particularly hard time for Mike Davis since he and Dobbins had formed a close relationship.

One last thing I remember about that day had to do with the supply of ammunition that we had available. When we landed at Shipdham, there were very few shells left for any of the guns. If the fight had lasted much longer, we would not have had a means to fight back.

This resulted in a modification being made to our ships. They built a long narrow box that ran head high from each of the waist windows back to the oxygen bottles that were strapped to the walls over the bomb bay. These boxes were for 50-caliber machine gun shells that were belted together in one continuous string. The leading end could be threaded into a gun feed at each waist window. The intent was to increase the length of time that the guns could be fired.

The *Flint Journal* reported the raid as follows:

WILHELMSHAVEN
HIT THIRD TIME
BY U.S. PLANES

FORTS, LIBS MEET HEAVY
FIGHTER OPPOSITION
3 BOMBERS LOST

American bombers struck their third heavy blow at Wilhelmshaven, Nazi naval base in northwestern Germany, in daylight yesterday.

The formation of Flying Fortresses and Liberators stood off enemy attacks which began as they reached the German

coastline and continued well on the way back home.

Three bombers were lost, Eighth Air Force headquarters announced.

Air gunners reported heavy encounters with Nazi fighters, but there was no official statement of the number shot down, pending checks by intelligence officers.

The bomber force completed its mission without fighter escort.

Previous blows at Wilhelmshaven, where naval shipyards turned out submarines as well as surface vessels, cost seven bombers on Feb. 26 and three bombers on Jan. 27

Attacking yesterday in "excellent weather", the U.S. bombers reported "good results".

There was heavy smoke over the target shortly after the attack began, apparently from fires started by bombs and smoke smudge pots set out by ground defenses. (The newspaper account continued, but mostly was repetitious.)

During the following week a weather front hung over England. One day during that period, we were briefed to go on a raid. Since I was an experienced combat man with one mission behind me I was asked to go with 1st Lt. George Rebich. Once again, it was a last minute rush to get me to the drying room, armament shop, and then to the aircraft, #235, Mr. Five by Five.

As the Jeep pulled into the hard stand I noticed a mechanic standing on a ladder. He was painting the white star, on the side of the ship, a battleship gray. This was to take away from the Germans a highly visible target. Lt. Hobson was standing on the ground near the nose of the ship.

The Jeep pulled around the wing and back toward the tail. I jumped out of the Jeep and had just thrown my A-3 bag and gear into the hatch. Suddenly a runaway 50-caliber machine-gun started to fire above my head. I tried to dig a hole in the concrete hard stand. Then the firing stopped. When I lifted my head, I saw the mechanic, that formerly was on the ladder. He also was on the concrete. He too lifted his head and looked around to see what had happened.

When I looked through the hatch I could see a very shook up Lawrence Kallal. Above his head there was a good sized hole in the top of the aircraft and a large number of electrical wires hanging limply from the ceiling.

About then, people and vehicles from everywhere were converging on the rear compartment of Mr. Five by Five. The mechanic, who was painting, was now headed in the other direction. The gun had fired very close to where he stood on the ladder. I don't think he ever returned to the line.

Kallal kept repeating that all he had done was pull back the charging handle to make certain that the gun was loading properly. It should not have fired.

Personnel from the armament shop were very interested in what had happened. They took the gun for examination. They determined that when Kallal had finished cleaning his gun the day before, he had reassembled it with the Bell Adapter hand grips positioned in such a way that the trigger was locked in the firing position. Thus, when Kallal pulled the charging handle and a round went into the chamber it immediately fired and pulled a new round into the chamber. Kallal had done the only thing that was possible. He swung the gun inward and pushed down on the butt so that it was firing into the air. He then reached over and twisted the ammunition belt so that the gun jammed.

I don't know if the mission was canceled because of the damage to Mr. Five By Five, or whether the weather closed in, but either way it was canceled. The armament shop later reported that this was the first recorded incident of the gun being assembled this way and they started to look for a cure to assure that it did not happen again.

We kidded Kallal quite a bit after that about having to stay in the Air Force a long time in order to pay the Government back for the B-24 that he had shot up.

On March 25th Ray Marner wrote:

The rear echelon of 30 men just came in. We thought we had it bad. They had five nights of submarine attack. About 32 ships were sunk.

The following events occurred on that crossing of the S. S.

Jean as Nick Garza recorded them at the time:

Day 1, March 8, 1943, 6:15 P.M.--Left Port (New York) this A.M. 9:20. Sea is rough and I feel dizzy. Some of us were appointed as Gunner's Aide to assist navy crewmen in case of enemy attack. Ed. Bobrick and I volunteered to man a 20-mm cannon high above the ship's deck. We had a short drill in preparation. This was to be a daily practice for the real thing. Read a chapter from my prayer book and hit the sack.

Day 2, March 9, 6:09 P.M.-- Today was "rougher" than yesterday. Very cold. Had another attack drill. Cleaned "pillbox" and stood watch over 20-mm cannon. Red and Phil (crewmen) and I spotted aircraft. Still feel sick and very dizzy. Have been able to read a little, but this funny feeling won't go away. K. P. tomorrow; read my prayer book!

Day 3, March 10, 6:28 P.M.--Today was a day of real excitement! Our ship had engine trouble and had to leave the convoy. We were all at battle stations and were given explicit orders on what to do. This was the real thing. There was a 42 minute delay for repairs and there we were all alone. Fortunately, repairs were made by the crew and we were on our way once again, after some trying moments. Three hours later we caught up with our convoy and we were all very happy! I continue to be sea sick, but so are most of the fellows aboard. Boy, what an experience!! What a day!! I sure thought about my family today!

Day 4, March 11, 8:30 P.M.--Today was terrible! Ran into stiff winds and rough seas! The waves whipped over the ship's side with ease. I was sick all over again (and it ain't no fun). No change of clothes and a long beard make me feel worse. I stood my regular watch (for subs, aircraft, etc), as does everyone else, for one hour each. I didn't eat (just couldn't). Read a bit and went to bed at 9:30.

Day 5, March 12, 4:52 P.M.--Weather a bit better. Slept pretty good, but haven't eaten much. Had drill and went to pillbox as standby. Manuel Asquith and I were discussing our girl friends. "Quith" is some swell guy, and we get along so well. No mail since we left port, so perhaps we will have some waiting when we reach England. Mail is a morale booster which we love to get!!

Day 6, March 13, 5:35 P.M.--Weather today was pretty good, but as evening approached, it's been kicking up "rough". "Quith" and I went up on deck and talked for a while about home, family and girl friends. I'm always teasing him about his "Yankee" accent. He's a good friend, as is Lou Wademan. All three of us shot the bull and did a lot of remembering of days past. Word is we still have 8-or-9 days before we reach our destination. I stood watch last night from 10 to 11. It was cold!

Day 7, March 14, 9:57 P.M.--Got up at 4:00 A.M. for my daily watch. It was cold!! Had coffee and sandwich with crew. Waves are rough and the Jean has really been rocking. Most of the day was spent below deck since it was too rough topside. The crew is very good at shooting the bull, and our fellows have joined in very well. We seem to get along very well as our trip continues and friendships become more meaningful. I've gotten to know "Quith" and Wademan (Lou) much better. I call Asquith "my Amigo from Massachusetts". He calls me Pancho Villa, the pride of Mexico. Still have a long way to go.

Day 8, March 15, 7:55 P.M.--Didn't feel good today. Dizzy, upset stomach, plain sick! Had 11 to 12 watch. Weather has been really "rough". We are in our bunks and can hear the waves roaring overhead and the water dripping into our quarters through the ventilators. This has been the "roughest" sea since we left New York. I'm plain sick! The waves are huge! Watch was discontinued due to very bad weather. Hold On! Looking forward to reaching good old terra firma!

Day 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15-March 22, 1:07 P.M.--I had not written a single word for exactly seven days, and for good reason. The last seven days have been ones that I will never forget. Starting with March 16 all was well and quiet until about 8:15 P.M. when we got a General Alarm. We all went on deck to battle stations. It was very cold and everyone was tense! About 9:29 they struck their first blow (German subs), sinking a ship on our starboard bow. It was a most terrifying thing to see. Yet it was only the beginning. About 10:29, or one hour later, another ship went down, again on the starboard side. This one was so close to our ship, I actually thought we had been hit. It went up in flames until we lost sight of it. Two escort destroyers (small corvette type) stayed back to try to help, but I had no idea if anyone was picked up. God I hope that some of them had a

chance to be rescued. You can imagine what we were going through at this time. We could only pray and hope for the best. You certainly can't fight something you can't see and it was all happening so very quickly. At 12:00 midnight, another ship went down. This one on our port side. One of the men reported that the torpedo barely missed our stern, probably because we were zigzagging most of the time. We were quiet for a while, then at 3:00 A.M. three more ships were hit. Before my very eyes I saw them and all I could do was pray. The night seemed to drag and dawn would not come fast enough. We all stood cold and shivering. Just waiting and not able to do much. We could not see because of darkness and the rough seas. Besides my constant prayers, I thought very much about Mother, my family and my many friends back home.

We passed the night and finally, a dreary dawn showed us a gloomy morning. We are too tired to sleep. At 11:15 A.M. we got another General Quarters Alarm (this was the 17th). Two more ships were torpedoed off the port side. One went down. After this, we were on constant alert. We were working watch along with the navy gun crews night and day. The navy crew men have done their part in a very big way. I remember Phil Faulkenberry, Shorty Amerillo and "Red" Calos (all Navy crewman). We were all under extreme tension, but I'm glad to say at no time did I see anyone show signs of panic. The Captain was cool and calm at all times. He was always shouting words of encouragement to all on board. Lt. Donald Pratt (in charge of the Air Corps personnel on board) was very encouraging also. He told me that morning, "We'll make it Nick, I know we will. This ship is going through. Even if something should happen, we'll make it because we have confidence and faith." Lt. Pratt is a swell guy, a good friend, and has done much to keep up the morale of the men on the ship.

As I write this, we are near port (Happy Days!!) Everyone is Happy! I pray that those left behind were picked up. Someone is responsible for all this, and they will pay. I only hope to see that day! I saw children (two little girls) on the deck of one of the ships sunk. It made me angry mad! How are they to blame? I only hope that I was wrong about what I saw and that it was an illusion. I pray that it was!

All aboard feel much better. Tension is off and everyone seems happy. Seasick days are over and I am so glad. I will be able to eat normally and not feed the fish at all!

I believe the enemy took its toll, in human lives as well as ships on this trip. We shall pay our dues one day, and you can depend on that! We were the lucky ones who made it and must commit ourselves to fight and to defend what is right and just for those who never got the chance. The *S. S. Jean* came through, thanks to God! God bless this ship and all who sail on her.

March 24, 9:05 P.M.--I write this in my barracks, Shipdham Airdrome, near Norwich. We sighted land on March 22 and came into Liverpool on the 23 March, 1943. Real tough to say good-bye to the crew as we had become real close, like brothers. We met the rest of the Squadron and it was good to see the "Old Gang". They too had a very rough journey! Thank God we are all here. Capt. Benton and Lt. Ned Brisendine said hello and it was good to see them.

And now we are here, by the grace of God! Let us get on with it and do the job we were trained to do. Our best efforts, in unity and harmony, should make for a shorter war and a quicker return home.

On March 26 Ray Marner went to Norwich. He found:

A lot of buildings are even with the ground from bombing. I saw the famous Norwich Cathedral. A beautiful building. It's so black out the last few nights you can hardly see your hand in front of your face. I am getting used to going around in the dark. Almost all English women and men are in uniform. I went to a dance in a nice ballroom.

The entry for March 27 read:

A lot of captured German planes are overhead today, including a Messerschmitt. A P-47 was being tested today on this field. There are a lot of English bombers around too. Lancaster, Halifax, Sterling, etc. We have had a lot of rainy weather lately. It rains for days at a time.

On March 28, the author asked, who said that history does not repeat itself? That morning the Charge Of Quarters was again shaking me. Once again there was to be a raid and once again I was late. This time Lt. Michaels wouldn't take me to the armament shop. He indicated that it was almost taxi time and Captain Anderson was waiting to take off in aircraft #068, *Lynn Bari*. He said that they had already placed a gun on the ship. No, it wasn't my gun, but he was certain that it had been cleaned and was in good shape. We took off and joined

seven other ships from the 44th. We were on our way to the marshalling yards at Rouen, France.

I wasn't to find out how good Lt. Michael's promise was until we were over the Channel and test firing our guns.

The hatch on a B-24 was on the floor between the tail turret and the waist guns. It actually was an aluminum framed door with plexiglass inserts for visibility. The inserts were set into the door frame and into the edges of the X shaped aluminum gun supports that crossed the door. At the center of the X was a ring receiver for the gun barrel. A clamp snapped over the ring and held the gun in place.

When the order was given to test fire the guns, I removed the gun from its storage rack and inserted the barrel into its ring receiver. I then tightened the clamp in place, made certain that there were no friendly aircraft below us, pulled the charging handle and pulled the trigger with the intent of snapping off one round. Imagine my surprise when the gun came back at me. I sheepishly looked around to see if anyone had observed what had happened. No one had, so I repeated the whole process with the thought that I had stupidly not fastened the clamp into place. Well you guessed it! I wasn't stupid! The gun came back at me again! This time it was me that reported a malfunction. The clamp was broken! Coldiron also reported that his tail turret guns were inoperative. Once again Captain Anderson decided to go on.

We proceeded toward the marshalling yards and encountered no opposition. Those Germans were not foolish enough to be out in this kind of weather. The clouds were too thick. The raiding party was ordered home. We turned and headed back with our bomb loads still aboard. Our rules of war would not allow us to dump them on the occupied territory of our allies' homeland. We were gone four hours on Sortie #64.

Needless to say, I was happy to be back without having to fire my gun at an enemy aircraft. Upon landing I made a visit to the armament shop and left behind some unkind words. Also, I told Lt. Michaels that I never again would fly without my own gun. What's more, if I was going to fly, I expected to attend the briefings.

For March 28th Ray Marner wrote:

Some of our planes went out on a mission. When they came back we looked for ours and found that they were there.

The fellows were all out. Looking up and cheering. No one was hurt.

They were testing some German ships again today. The Heinkel and the Junker 88. That Ju-88 is really a good ship.

The Flint Journal reported the raid as follows:

In their daylight blow yesterday the Eighth Air Force heavies ran into strong fighter opposition. The number of enemy planes shot down was not revealed, pending intelligence surveys

SOME SOFT, SOME TOUGH

Rouen, which is some 35 miles due south of the channel port of Dieppe, last was hit by American bombers Mar. 12 when Forts and Libs raided without loss. Four days before that, Rouen and Rennes, also a French railway center, were hit at a cost of four bombers.

Although one bomber group completed its mission yesterday without firing a gun, most of the American planes had to fight their way through intense enemy fighter opposition. One swarm of about 30 Luftwaffe fighters followed a bomber group back from the target to within sight of the English coast. (The newspaper article continued with personal accounts by Fortress crews.)

Lt. Michaels believed me when I said that I wanted to attend the briefings.

On the morning of March 31, 1943, I was called to the briefing for a raid on Rotterdam, Holland. This time I was to fly as the hatch gunner with 1st Lt. Slough on aircraft #201, Baldy and His Brood. Our target was the shipyards. There was cloud cover and we once again brought our bombs back with us.

My combat record indicates that we encountered enemy aircraft. There was no flak mentioned. I wish there was more room on those records. They should have included that I fired my gun for the first time in combat. Nothing spectacular, just one short burst as one Fw-190 drifted a long way below us. It might also have stated that this time it was my chute that was popped before we got to the target.

The *Flint Journal* account was as follows:

Flying Fortresses raided shipbuilding and ship repair yards at Rotterdam, Holland, in daylight yesterday. It was the third raid on the vital target, site of the huge Wilton shipyards, major building and repair facility for enemy surface craft.

Intense and very accurate antiaircraft fire was experienced over the target area, but fighter opposition was light, returning pilots reported. One bomber failed to return Eighth Air Force Headquarters announced

Heavy clouds over the target area prevented detailed observation of results. (The article continued with some background data about Rotterdam.)

Soon after this raid, aircraft #068, Lynn Bari, was flown to the Lockheed Aircraft factory in Belfast, Ireland, for modification in its armament system. Ron Allen believes:

It was flown by a makeshift ferry crew. The ship crashed on takeoff for the return flight to Shipdham. The radio operator was killed when the top turret tore loose. The ship was scrapped.

It was early in the month of April that the 506th began flying diversionary missions.

To understand the importance and meaning of the diversions, it is necessary to understand the weakness of our aerial combat forces and the type of defense that the German Air Force was using.

The most notable weakness of our Air Force was the manpower shortage. You will notice that during these early days the 506th never mounted a raid with more than three aircraft. We took eight ships over and had lost two. We could have mounted more, except for a shortage of hatch gunners.

It was during the month of April, that the Air Force began to work on this problem. An active recruiting campaign was directed toward ground personnel, particularly in the armament sections. Recruited personnel were sent off to "quick" gunnery training centers. This is where we got Sgt. John Edwards, who started flying on the *Old Crow* during the month of May.

Bob Struble remembers:

I failed the physical for aerial gunner while in the States because of sinus problems. However, I passed in late April or early May when they asked who wanted to be an aerial gunner. Bob was awarded his wings on May 10, 1943. He then flew as a spare gunner with eleven different crews.

Oliver Germann recalls:

I had gone to a ground course in aerial gunnery and volunteered to go on a crew. They did not put me on a crew and I went overseas as a mechanic. When we first got to England they went on a very rough mission. Strong's tail gunner (Orville W. Kapp) refused to fly any more. They came out on the line looking for me to take his place. All of my friends, that I worked with as a mechanic advised me to tell them to go to hell. They said, "You have volunteered twice and they never took you. You don't owe them anything." I would have done except that Strong, the copilot, and radio operator all were married and their wives were expecting babies. I had no extra responsibilities so I decided I had to go and help.

I told Strong that I had no flying training as I had only been up in an airplane on one occasion and needed some experience. He said they would train me. In the meantime there was a maximum effort mission scheduled. The Operations Officer was sick. There was a Warrant Officer doing his job for him. He came up to me and said, "If I schedule you for this mission, will you go?". I went, and we encountered no opposition for several missions in a row. I received my training while on bombing missions.

Other ground personnel who transferred to combat status at this time were Foster Blake, Harry Grannon, Maurice Hall and William McFarland.

Another tactic was to divert flying personnel from other units. For example, Sgt. Mark Morris states:

I arrived at Liverpool, England, on March 31 as a member of the 414th Night Fighter Squadron. Soon after I was training with a Beaufighter pilot at Cranfield. By April 11 I had been routed to a Combat Refresher Course at Bovington. At month's end I was a member of the 506th Squadron and about mid-May, was assigned to the *Old Crow*

crew.

Even if we had enough personnel, we still would be relatively weak. Replacement aircraft and crews were slow in arriving. Lt. Angell's ship and crew had never been replaced. We had lost our first aircraft in combat on March 22. It wasn't replaced until late April when Lt. Horace W. Austin Jr. and crew arrived. With Lt. Austin were Lts. Andrew T. Fabiny, Sheldon Finder, and Paul S. Singer. Also with him were Sgts. Joseph W.D. Jett, Edgar Shaw, Dale B. Lee, Thomas Q. Purcell, Glenn G. Hickerson, and Charles J. Warth.

They were given a brand new B-24 that had been shipped to the field. They named it Southern Comfort after a drinking concoction that contained that brand of liquor as its main ingredient.

Joe Warth tells of their arrival in England:

We left the plane that we had flown from the States in Scotland and took the train down to London. We arrived there early in the morning. We were quickly lost in an English railroad station, hungry, without English money and unable to understand the type of English spoken there. We were all armed with Thompson submachine guns and 45-caliber pistols that we had been issued in Bangor, Maine. We found the Bank Of England on Threadneedle Street just outside the railroad station. At least we could get some money.

I have often wondered what the employees and guards thought when promptly at 10 O'clock, when the doors opened, we marched in with our guns. We were able to exchange our money for English money without any trouble. We then found our way to Liverpool Station with its food stalls. We fell in love with English wartime Bangers. This was the first sausage I have ever seen or tasted that was made without a trace of meat. We finally caught our train to Norwich and the war.

Quite a number of years later, James C. McAtee was to reminisce about the day that Lt. Austin joined the Squadron.

It seems that the Group was on stand down and the combat officers decided to hold a "welcome aboard" party for the new incoming officers. They bought some beer and started the party in the officer's quarters.

Lt. Thomas I. Hyde entered the room when the party was well along. He took a seat along one wall and sat staring into space. He said nothing to anyone. Every few minutes his face would twitch. Periodically his whole body would jerk or shake. When someone offered him a beer he slobbered it down. It was obvious that this man had a problem.

Lt. Austin did his best to ignore what he saw, but involuntarily his eyes always returned to look at Hyde. At last he asked McAtee, "What's the matter with him?" McAtee with a solemn attitude replied, "Oh nothing. He's just a little tired of combat. He's still the best navigator we have in the Squadron. He's always all right when he is airborne." Lt. Austin brooded for the rest of the evening. It wasn't until the next day, when he saw a normal Lt. Hyde, that he realized the he had been set up.

In varying degrees, the personnel and equipment problems that were evident in the 506th was typical for the other air units in England.

Maybe the Germans faced the same problems. At least the combat tactics they adopted were those of scarcity, not abundance. The German Air Force assignment at this time was to meet and resist any attacking force that approached the Continent of Europe. To facilitate this assignment with the personnel and equipment available, a grid was laid across the map of Europe. Airfields were constructed within each grid area. Most of these airfields were assigned to an Air Force unit.

It was fully recognized that individual German Air Force units, lying along the route of a given attacking force, could not successfully repel or punish the enemy. Therefore, the tactic was devised to first determine the course of the attacking enemy force and then draw additional defending fighters from adjacent grid fields. These supplementing fighters in turn were replaced at their home grid fields by fighters from further away grids. These fighters then became the reserve force to be drawn from as needed. Thus the German Air Force could maximize their effectiveness on any given raid.

Now our warfare became a game of trying to make the Germans think that we were going one place and have the main force go somewhere else. To the Germans it was a game to see through our feints and concentrate their strength along the route of

the main attack.

At this point in time our fighter aircraft were short-range. They could reach out into the English Channel. In places they could even cross the coast of France and get into some of the lowland countries. They could not go with us to our targets. However, when they went on strafing runs in these coastal areas, they did demand the attention of the German Air Force. Also, many of our attack bombers and even heavies could be used on these coastal diversionary raids that were timed to coincide with or just before the main force crossed into the Continent.

These efforts of our "little brothers" were very helpful to the heavy bombers going into enemy territory. However, the Germans were fully aware of our flying time limitations.

To overcome these limitations, our Air Force was bringing in new equipment. That was the reason for the test flights of the P-47 mentioned in the Ray Marner diary. Also, modifications, such as wing tanks, were being made in our fighter aircraft.

However, for the time being, it was up to us to thwart the German defending force. We either had to flood the sky with heavies or send up a dummy force that was large enough to be a threat.

At that time there were two B-24 groups flying out of England. The 93rd and the 44th Groups were both badly battered. Therefore, it was logical that they should be the diversionary force. We would load up with guns and ammunition and go out into an area that the main force (B-17's) was not going into. Our intent was to draw the German Air Force into our area and away from the B-17 force. When you see an old B-24 with a series of ducks painted on it, you know that you are looking at a ship that went on a diversion for each sitting duck.

It was during this month some political maneuvering made the enlisted men in the rear of the ship feel uneasy.

You will notice in each of the newspaper articles covering our raids, there is a definite lack of information about the number of enemy aircraft shot down. No one believed us! The British people and their military command believed our aircraft losses were too high, our kill reports were exaggerated and we were not hitting our targets. Their

solution was to have us fly night raids with them. They even found sympathetic ears in our own command.

In response to these pressures, we began to fly night practice missions. There were even rumors that dampers were going to be installed on our aircraft so that the German flyers could not see our exhausts.

The enlisted men were concerned. They didn't want to go on raids as a single aircraft flying in a sky that was filled with other single aircraft. The chance of midair collision was high and you could not see to coordinate your firepower against enemy aircraft. They preferred daylight raids in which you could see what was around you and could draw fire support from the other ships in your formation.

It was with these events developing in the background that we took off on the morning of April 4th on a diversion. This time I flew as hatch gunner with 1st Lt. Walter Bunker on aircraft #235, *Earthquake McGoon*. James C. McAtee, flying in aircraft #295, *Wicked Witch* also went. The other 506th ship was Anderson flying in aircraft #172, *Lynn Bari II*. We joined up with other aircraft from the 44th in what Will Lundy called a "very small 44th formation. I am reasonably certain that we joined with ships from the 93rd.

My records show that we went along the French coast. However, Will Lundy's writing and Webb Todd's account in the *History of the 68th* agree that it was the Dutch coast. Regardless, the trip was without event and we returned home after logging five hours on Sortie #66.

Ray Marner's diary did record an event that day.

Pictures of the 44th Bomb Group planes, with the 8-Ball on the nose, were printed in the *Yank* magazine. The Group was not mentioned. A Captain in S-2 wrote a sarcastic letter to the magazine. The 44th is the oldest B-24 group in the world and the most famous.

The next day, April 5th, the Squadron was once again out on a raid. This time the target was Antwerp. Flying that day were Anderson, in aircraft #172, *Lynn Bari II*, Strong, in aircraft #201, *Baldy and His Brood* and Rebich in aircraft #068, *Mr. Five by Five*.

Dave McCash reports:

My first combat mission was with Lt. Strong's crew to Antwerp. I don't recall why it was with this crew. It must have been that Strong's navigator, Fretwell, had been grounded with a cold that so many of us got in those first few months. It was a great mission to break in with because it was pretty much a piece of cake. Of course, I was so excited about the whole thing that I shot at a Spitfire that was escorting us.

The author's notes indicate that I took off that morning. My flight log shows that I put in three hours flying time. Neither the notes nor the combat record show that I was credited with a raid. We must have aborted. I don't remember. Neither do I remember who I flew with.

For that day, Ray Marner's diary states:

Our planes went to Antwerp and bombed a shipyard, etc. Very successful. Ferkauff, Goodson and Germann were credited with knocking down Fw-190's.

The Squadron only put up three ships and it appears that they all got back to base.

The *Flint Journal* reported the raid as follows:

USAAF HITS
AERO WORKS
IN ANTWERP

Four Bombers Shot Down
In Heaviest Fighter
Opposition

Flying Fortresses and Liberators struck at German armament works in Antwerp, Belgium, in daylight yesterday, carrying the newest Allied nonstop air offensive into its 72nd hour.

Four bombers and one of the supporting Allied fighters were lost in what some veteran American airmen said was the most severe opposition yet encountered on U.S. raids from bases in Britain.

It was the second U.S. raid in two days. Sunday, Nazi factories near Paris were hit.

The attack was aimed at the big Erla Aero Engine works

on the edge of Antwerp.

(The article continued with accounts of British raids made on Kiel.)

It was probably around this time that Ollie C. Bowling joined the Squadron.

In the briefing on the morning of April 16th we quickly learned that we were to go into the heavy flak concentrations that surround the German submarine pens at Brest, France. Three 506th ships were to join eight other 44th aircraft on the trip. The author was to fly as hatch gunner for 1st Lt. George Rebich on aircraft #234, *Mr. Five by Five*. James C. McAtee took aircraft #295, *Wicked Witch* and Captain Anderson flew aircraft #172, *Lynn Bari II*.

My combat record shows that we encountered heavy accurate flak and some enemy aircraft. I don't remember the aircraft, but I definitely do remember the black, boiling smoke of bursting anti-aircraft shells off our wing tips. We were fortunate that they weren't any closer and didn't stay with us. This was sortie #69 and it took us six hours to complete it. I don't believe that the 44th lost any ships that day.

The *Flint Journal* account of this raid was as follows:

IMPORTANT BASES

Lorient and Brest serve both the Atlantic and Mediterranean U-boat packs. Friday's raid was the third dual attack delivered in daylight by American heavy bombers on Brest and Lorient. Both submarine nests have been consistent targets for the Americans since early last winter. Brest had been bombed four times previously and Lorient five times by Liberators and Fortresses.

In addition to their normal naval installations, Brest and Lorient have concrete-roofed pens in which submarines are docked for repair and refitting. Lorient has been bombed so desperately that its civilian population has been evacuated. (The article continues with personal accounts of B-17 crews.)

Ray Marner had the following interesting entries during the next few days:

April 16th--"Our planes went out on a mission today and

two came back without dropping bombs. It is a definite case of sabotage. Everyone has to walk guard duty now by the planes. I'll pull it too."

April 17th--"Nick made combat today." (Note: This appears to refer to Nick Popovich. Thomas Hobson remembers that Nick was a ground crewman at Shipdham. He was in ordnance and an armorer. He volunteered to become an aerial gunner.)

April 20th--"The letter written to Yank magazine by Capt. Crucher was published in the April 18th issue of the magazine".

During the remainder of April, the air crews spent a lot of time in training, both in the air and on the ground. Some of those hours in the air were on night flights.

Personally, Norm Kiefer spent some of that time in London. I left as soon as I could after we returned from Brest. On April 22 I wrote to my wife:

I arrived in London around 2:30 in the morning. We then faced the big job of trying to find a hotel room. We got one at the Charring Cross around 5:00 in the morning. The only reason that the old fellow gave us a room (it had been rented once, but the chap didn't turn up) was the wings that we were wearing. The three of us slept in the one room until morning. We then got our own rooms. They were nice big rooms. You would have paid around \$3 or \$4 a night for them in the States. It was a bachelor place.

The food in London isn't very good. Neither is there any to spare. They serve breakfast from 8:00-to-10:00, lunch from 1:00-to-3:00, tea from 4:00-to-5:00 and dinner from 5:00 until the food is gone. During the tea and dinner hour a string group or piano recital is offered.

They have the big two-story buses. Also, funny, slow moving taxicabs. It is just like you see in the movies. Every now and then you see a car with a big bag on the top of it. It is a natural gas driven taxi.

Frank Juskowski and I were a little disappointed at one place. We walked through Piccadilly Park and came upon a building that was surrounded by a high metal fence with huge gates. There were statues all around and guards on patrol. We couldn't figure out what it was. In a joking

way I said that it was a palace. When we asked a Bobby, he said that it was Buckingham Palace where the royal family lived. It sure was a far cry from looking like all of the pictures of palaces that I had seen.

In a "V" letter on April 23 I wrote:

While we were in London, Williams and I saw a very good picture. It had very few obvious errors. The fellow that was the technical advisor knew what flak looks like and had some very good pictures of planes exploding in the air. The name of the picture is "Air Force.

Williams and I were walking along a back street looking for an eating establishment that had been recommended to us. As we rounded a corner we found our way blocked by a fenced in schoolyard. The young children were on break and playing. When they spied us they came charging to the fence with cries of, "YANKEE RAF! YANKEE RAF!". Then they reverted to the typical children we had seen elsewhere. "Chewing gum mate?".

Other excerpts from my letters that month:

"We had rabbit to eat the other night. One of the fellows caught a big Belgian hare sitting up for a perfect shot."... "They have a fairly large library here and I am taking full advantage of it. I have read two books and am almost through another."... "Do you know what I am eating? Salted peanuts! Yes, I got my rations today. Yes, we have ration cards also. Once a week each man can have 1 carton of cigarettes, 1 package of gum, 1 Tootsie Roll, 2 packages of Life Savers, 2 small boxes of cookies, cough drops and each week something special like peanuts."... "Now if I should tell you someday that I have frozen a cheek, don't scold me. If I should, it will happen while flying and can't be helped. It was 46 degrees below the other day."... "I went for a nice walk out in the country this afternoon. Maury and Mike went with me. The flowers are starting to bloom and the fields are beginning to show signs of spring crops."... "The boys just left to go to the N.A.A.F.I. (a British service organization) to get tea and cakes. We have a thermos bottle for the tea and a sandwich box for the cakes."... "I got paid today. I got 59-pounds, five-shillings, and one-pence. That is about \$237 American."... "We had quite a windstorm the other day. It blew the roof off from one of the buildings. The roof had no more than touched the

ground and we were out there gathering the wood. It will help to solve our heating problem for a while."... "A couple of the boys are starting to shave. The only place we have that we might get hot or warm water is about half-a-mile away. We bring the water to the barracks (hut) and heat it on the little stove. Then we use the outside shell of our helmet to wash and shave."... "We saw a very silly movie tonight. The name of it was 'That Uncertain Feeling'. Where do we hold the movies? They are in the left wing of the airmen's mess hall. Just as fast as the men finish eating, they pick up the benches and carry them to the far end of the hall for the show."... "Lt. Graham and Frank (Juskowski) are both out of the hospital. Frank had his ears lanced and Lt. Graham had the flu and then pneumonia."... "We all had bikes issued to us today. I have been riding all day. Boy, am I ever sore."

It was about this time that Lt. Gordon S. Stevens joined the Squadron as a replacement for Lt. Fouts. With him were Lts. Robert Z. Harris, Anthony Rispoli, and John J. Huber Jr. Also, there were Sgts. Clyde C. Fry, August A. Fritz, Marion S. Paciorek, Elmer R. O'Gara, Larry W. Vincent and Frank L. Rodriguez.

John Huber tells of their arrival:

We arrived in England flying in a B-17.

We then spent six weeks at Bovington for theater orientation and tactics before it was discovered that we were indeed a B-24 crew. We were to be the first group of replacements to the 44th Bomb Group and assigned to the 506th.

Our first plane, AC #787, B, Texan, was selected by Stevens because it was parked closer to the briefing area than others. This selection annoyed Lt. Michaels because he said it was jinxed. We took B up and flight tested her. We did everything except an Immelmann turn and she came up A.O.K. Stevens told Michaels to have Texan painted off the nose and said he would take it.

On the morning of May 1st, the Charge of Quarters made his usual wake up of personnel that were to go on a raid. This time Norm Kiefer was thrilled!

Instead of coming to my bed with a flashlight and shaking me,

he just turned the lights on and said, "Everybody out! You are all going out today.". Yes, I was at last to fly with my own crew.

We were briefed to go on a diversion. I was to fly waist gunner with Lt. Graham on aircraft #283, *Old Crow*. Captain Anderson, took aircraft #172, *Lynn Bari II*. Lt. McAtee went out that morning flying A/C #295, *Wicked Witch*. In all, five 506th ships were joined with 13 other ships from the 44th's other squadrons. I don't remember who the other 506th crews were. We were to go to the Coast of France (Lizard Point) while the Fortresses went further to the South. We saw nothing, heard nothing, flew our prescribed route and returned home. It was a nice six-hour and 10-minute ride. It did not count as a raid. Nevertheless, Lt. Graham had gotten in some experience.

This was the first combat mission for Ollie Bowling. He flew with the Anderson crew.

Mark Morris entered in his diary on May 2.

First ride on a B-24. The pilot was practicing night touch and go landings.

The nice part of that entry is he did not record any further night practice missions. Neither did I. The High Command had given up on preparing to fly with the RAF.

On May 4th, Lt. Graham once again took the *Old Crow* on a diversionary mission. Once again the author flew as a waist gunner. His notes just say "coast", but Will Lundy's writings indicate that it was from Orfordness to North Foreland. Once again nothing happened except that we had a five-hour ride. It did not count as a raid. This was the first time out for Lt. Butler. He flew with Lt. Bunker on *Earthquake*.

There were some night happenings at the field during the first week of the month. Mark Morris wrote in his diary:

On May 5 our field was bombed at 0130 hrs. Some butterfly antipersonnel bombs were dropped.

For that same date Ray Marner recorded:

At 3 A.M. this morning we had a big bombing raid. I guess you'd call it a blitz. We had two red an two black

warnings. One was pretty bad. The concussions shook the barracks knocking things from the shelves. Lt. Pratt, who was a little way out of Norwich, was knocked into the ditch with his motorcycle from a bomb nearby. Eddie Copain was just outside of Norwich too. A shot down plane crashed a few hundred yards from him. It was burning. Flak and shrapnel were flying all over. It knocked out all the windows in a pub.

Again on May 11 Mark Morris recorded:

Our field was bombed at 2300 hours.

Robert Struble reported:

We had an air raid at our field one night (I believe it was in May, 1943). I was living in the Nissen Hut and He-111's came over and salvoed a load of bombs about 50-to-75 yards from our hut. It knocked me out of bed. I got up finally. Most of the others were in the air raid bunker. Several of us walked down to see the damage. Along the way, we found one of our ground officers in a hay stack hiding and crying.

Henry Fetherolf recalls:

In the early days we had a few air raids. One of our officers became unstrung because of the raids and was given a section 8. He was later sent home.

One incident that Norm Kiefer remembers happened on the night of May 11:

One of the new arrivals to the Squadron had brought from the States a Big Ben alarm clock. He had placed it over his bed on the shelf. He was very proud of it. During the bombing the clock was jarred from the shelf to the floor. The glass was broken and the clock never did work correctly again. The new arrival had some choice words and thoughts about the German Air Force.

I was one of the fellows that was an early arrival in the air raid shelter. As I entered the shelter, I saw Oscar Ferkauff rush out of his hut and grabbed one of the flexible 50-caliber machine guns that were mounted in our living area. He fired into the air and claimed that he hit one of the enemy aircraft. No one else saw the hit.

I believe that on these two nights there were a few German aircraft that split off from the larger force that was hitting Norwich. We could see the explosions and a few seconds later would feel the blast of the bombs dropped on the city. Also, the search lights and tracers from the anti-aircraft guns were highly visible from the base.

During the month of May efforts were made to make the base a little more presentable. One of the efforts involved the planting of grass seed. Here and there signs sprouted with the words "KEEP OFF THE GRASS". One of these signs provided the author with a look at Colonel Johnson and his relationship with the enlisted combat men:

On mornings that we were to fly, our trucks would make round trips to the living sites to pick up crews. They would stop at the mess halls and then continue to the Technical Site. Rather than driving all the way into the site, the trucks would stop to unload at a large tree just off the main road. Here, there was room to circle the tree and return for another trip. The combat crews had a well-defined path that led from the drop off straight to the briefing room.

One morning, when we emerged from the rear of the truck, we found a "KEEP OFF THE GRASS" sign planted in our path. One of the sergeants started to walk around it. He was immediately accosted by a Lieutenant who had passed all courses in how to chew out an enlisted man. Col. Johnson happened to be passing by. He listened for a moment and walked over to the two men. He said, "Lieutenant, this is one of my combat men. You can't scare him.". With that he left. The sign was removed and the combat men continued to prove that the shortest distance between two points is a straight line.

Another look at Col. Johnson was provided in a combat mission briefing during this month. This time it was an expression of his resolve to pursue the war effort and his frustration with the mud.

The Technical Site during these spring months was a sea of mud. Whenever you stepped off the paved surfaces, you sank into it. You can imagine what happened when a multi-ton B-24 slipped off the surface of a taxi strip or a hard stand. If this happened while the ships were taxiing to take off on a mission, all of the ships in line behind the disabled ship had no place to go. The ships

that were airborne had to be recalled. The Group was removed from the combat ready status. The mission was either scrubbed or the other groups went on without us.

During the briefing it was traditional that the Group Commander would say a few words. This morning his words were brief. He mentioned the rash of these "accidents" that the Group had experienced in recent weeks. He said that they had to stop. He indicated that he was going to design an Iron Cross that he would award to the next pilot that slipped off. That pilot would have the dubious honor of keeping it until the next accident. Then he could pass it on to its new winner.

The subject of decorations was a serious one to Col. Johnson. In these early days, it was not uncommon for an airman not to be around by the time that paper work was completed on these awards. Col. Johnson wanted the men to receive them as soon as possible. More than one man received his decoration during the briefing for a raid. The picture that was sent back to the home town newspapers showed both Colonel Johnson and the recipient in leather flying jackets. Behind them was the briefing map with the raid course plotted on it. The map was blanked out in the newspaper version.

Another thing that I believe that the Colonel changed was the angle at which these ceremonial pictures were taken. At first the emphasis was on the individual making the presentation. Later, it was shifted to the recipient.

The Colonel occasionally used the briefings as a time to announce promotions of officers. I remember he announced the advancement to Captain of, I believe, Kolliner. Kolliner jumped to his feet, threw a salute, and in a loud voice said, "Bucking for Major, Sir!".

During the period May 6th through May 13th I flew five practice missions as radio operator for Lt. Graham. There was a total of eight hours.

On May 10th, Robert Struble moved into combat crew quarters on site 2. He remembers:

I was in a 10-man Nissen hut. As you walked from the Orderly Room we were the furthest to the rear on the right.

The men with me most of the time, since we continued to lose crews, were Mike Davis, Jack Edwards, Harry Grannon, Eugene Clarno, Foster Blake, Willie I. McFarland, Maurice Hall and Eddie Coldiron. Eddie's hair went white after 7 missions. He was sentenced to life in prison for cowardice. Sad story. Eddie could really play the guitar and compose country music.

My room mates were always doing the unexpected. One night I was laying in my sack when Mike Davis started wildly firing his pistol. Close! Another shocker was Jack Edwards. Many the night he would come in half sloshed and throw a handful of 50-caliber shells in the dying fire. No wonder we had no fire tile left in our stove.

Eugene Clarno was regular army. He flew B-18's prior to the war. He was a radio operator. I forget which crew. He could run a "bug" at 45/50 words per minute. Gene got drunk every night at "King Willies" in Shipdham. After going to bed he would wake up to go to the bathroom. When he couldn't find his way out in the dark he would relieve himself wherever he was. We finally started putting a barricade around him so that his night wanderings and other activities would be restricted to his bunk area.

It was about this time that Lt. James A. Bunce arrived as a replacement crew. With him were Lts. Wayne Middleton, James D. Young, and Richard I. Fisher. Among the enlisted men were Sgts. Henry A. Klinge, Steve F. Bugyie, Robert E. Grow, Joseph C. Barnett, Benson G. Daniels, and Thomas E. Davis. They brought aircraft #606, X Timba-a-ah.