



UNDER THE WINGS OF A P-38 IN NORTH AFRICA.



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### Preface

This started out to be an account of my four years in the Army Air Force, three years in the 48<sup>th</sup> Fighter Squadron, and the hard decisions needed to sign up in the armed force for three years back in 1941. My three daughters and one son never heard the full story, only isolated accounts of some of the events that were relevant at times during their lives. They were too busy growing up and establishing their own lives to be very interested. So I thought I'd relate the story as I remember it, before it is too late. Some research was necessary to get dates and spellings of foreign airfields. Also some of my 48th Fighter Sq. buddies were contacted to verify some of the details.

In the process of writing this, I sent a couple pages of a humorous incident to Joe Onesty. (Sec. Treas. of the 48<sup>th</sup> Fighter Sq. Association, which still meets every two years). I had sent him this as an excuse for not attending one of our reunions. After seeing this he asked me to send him a copy of the book when I had it finished. So from then on I wrote from a historical viewpoint of any one in the 48<sup>th</sup> Fighter Squadron ground crew, as accurate as I could recall. The ground crews all went through the same things with the exception of some of the diseases we caught and some of the "detached service" we participated in.

### Acknowledgments

I thank Ole Olsen for permission to include a couple of his letters in this reminiscing. Also Wayne Gerlach, for an eye witness account of a near miss by a German torpedo. Skip Harvey for his poem "Old Number 13" and my wife for her comments on the home front. To my wife and family for encouragement to write this, to daughters Judy and Kris for helping with the composition, to son-in-law James and grandson Brian for keeping my computer running and Granddaughter Desiree for showing me how to adjust and put my old photos etc. into the text.

L. A. G. 2005

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Breathes there a man, with soul so dead,  
 Who never to himself hath said, This  
 is my own, my native land!  
 Whose heart hath ne'er within him burn'd,  
 As home his footsteps he hath turn'd,  
 From wandering on a foreign strand!  
 If such there breathe, go, mark him well;  
 For him no minstrel raptures swell;  
 High though his titles, proud his name,  
 Bountless his wealth as wish can claim:  
 Despite these titles, power, and pelf,  
 The wretch, concentred all in self,  
 Living, shall forfeit fair renown,  
 And, doubly dying, shall go down  
 To the vile dust, from whence he sprung,  
 Unwept, unhonor'd, and unsung.

Sir Walter Scott

#### CHAP. 1.

##### To college or not to college?

The above poem was one we had to memorize in fourth or fifth grade when I went to YELLOW STONE TRAIL grade school in Readfield, Wisconsin. The school was located on Highway 10, called Yellow Stone Trail, the first Trans continental road in U. S. At that time a muddy unpaved road. I think we memorized this as a patriotic poem? In a one-room school, 1<sup>st</sup> through 8<sup>th</sup> grade, we heard these things repeated every year for eight years. So I thought of and remembered this poem at various times while overseas, especially at the time when the war with Germany was nearly over. At that time the Air Force sent the troops home by the point system. The point system gave you one point for each year in service, one for each year overseas, one for each stripe on your sleeve and what else went into this formula, I don't remember. Any way, I was high on the list, and was on the 2<sup>nd</sup> group to go home. You had a choice of whether you wanted another stripe or to go home. The added stripe would have been a good deal for anyone making the Air Force a career. There was never a question in my mind.

WHOSE HEART HATH NE'ER WITHIN HIM BURN'D  
 AS HOME HIS FOOTSTEPS HE HATH TURNED,  
 FROM WANDERING ON A FOREIGN STRAND.

I had a lot of catching up to do, at 25 years old, no marketable skill, no girl friend to return to, no job in sight, where to start, but anxious to get started.

After graduating from New London High School in 1939 my Dad had bought a lumberyard in Horicon, so I left Readfield and went to work with him. I could have gone on to college but at that time it seemed to be a waste of time. Already Hitler was overrunning Europe with only England mounting any kind of resistance. How could you even think about what you'd like to do as a life's work, when you knew the world situation had to change first. Having registered for the draft, it would be just a matter of time before my draft number would be called, as I was 1A. Although you could get many deferments at that time, college would be one. Also I had an offer from Goodman Lumber Co. to run one of their smaller lumberyards. This too would have been a

deferment from the draft, maybe only a temporary one. Goodman Lumber Co. was one of the first companies, with Kindt, to start chain lumberyards in Wisconsin. This eventually sounded the “death knell” to the small city yards like ours.

Bill and Karl, my deer hunting buddies, were deferred because they were farmers. One could avoid the draft by early enlistment. You could then select the branch of service that you thought best suited you. My first choice was Air Force because any one knowing how to fix gas engine had a good future as an auto mechanic, as in those days cars were always breaking down. To enlist you needed three character references. I asked and got them from Uncle Ed Walden, Mr. Crist, my Manual Arts teacher, and my Biology teacher, Mr. Charlesworth. Charlesworth had been a next door neighbor to us, when I was three years old, in New London and this gave me a ‘drag’ with him. All three probably thought, “that’s a good place for him!”

The world situation was getting ever worse as Hitler overran one country after another, with no real opposition to his blitz-krieg. No citizens were allowed to own a gun in those countries. America was turning out arms for England and helping in any way we could. People in the U.S. were asked to turn in any personal rifles, like deer rifles, that we could donate to the people living on the channel in England. Guns would make it possible for those living on the coast to help defend themselves, in case of an invasion across the channel. It seemed inevitable that the Germans would invade England across the Channel, just a matter of time. England’s army was stretched too thin to cover all those fronts. This is the most important reason to uphold the 2<sup>nd</sup> amendment as it reads; or this could happen to us some day!

The way politics are today, I think some people would like to have the government take care of all their responsibilities. Believe me, Winston Churchill was right when he said, “Democracy is the worst form of government—except for all the others”!

The way the war was going it looked like just a matter of time before the invasion of England would happen if the U.S. didn’t get into the war soon. At this time there were even some people that thought U.S. should join with Germany. For one thing, people didn’t like the way France looked down her nose at the USA after WWI, and at this time, nineteen forty one, Hitler wasn’t the scourge of the world yet.

Think a minute, in year 2001, could this happen to us in America, with China wanting her way in everything? This was the cost of gun control in Europe! It scares me! Those overrun countries could have no ‘gorilla’ movement which would require a large occupation force. A situation the U. S. might be in if we keep undermining the 2<sup>nd</sup> Amendment rights. Believe me, this is one of the “rights” we fought for, because it was so obvious to us how easy it was for Hitler to overrun those countries, because the civilians had no means of defending themselves.

Imagine if you will, if Hitler would have waited two years until he had perfected the jet plane and the A bomb, we would all be goose stepping and saying ‘Heil’, speaking German and with no world movement toward democracy. You say the Germans couldn’t have done it, I’m here to tell you that they could have, as they already had the Jet plane. My hunting buddy before the war, Gene Wendt, from Horicon, was trained as a P-38 pilot. He was flying escort for the bombers during the last days of Germany. He shot down one of the only two German jets that were shot down in the war. He showed me the pictures of this event. The pictures were taken with his “Gun Sight Aiming Point Camera”, that was mounted in the nose of every P-38. These jets were manufactured even during the bombing, when most of their factories had been destroyed.

Gene said that they were way too fast for us to over take and shoot down with any of our fighter planes. He said that he had ‘lucked’ into a good burst with his guns as the Jerry (German) was making a run on one of our bombers.

## Chap. 2.

## How to be a soldier?

On September 19, 1941, I enlisted at the age of 21, and was “sworn in” with three other guys in Milwaukee. We were given free transportation to Jefferson Barracks in Missouri, by rail.

Jefferson Barracks was an old field, but they had just finished blocks and blocks of new barracks. Every day brought new recruits, assigned to these new areas. The old sections were reserved for the permanent personal. The new grass seed had not sprouted despite all the fall rains we had. We kept these fields well churned up doing close order drill. Forward—march, halt, %^# you start with your left foot first! Forward—H-a-a-a-ch, hut, two, three, four, hut, two, three, four, to the rear—H-a-a-a-ch, count off, column left—H-a-a-a-ch, halt, one, two- at ease. Needless to say, we never did become a polished marching team in that six inches of mud. A good way to break in a pair of shoes though.

Jefferson Barracks was a boot camp and distribution center. From there, they sent you wherever you were destined to go. I wanted to go to aircraft mechanic school, so I found the list to sign up on, only to find out the next class wouldn’t start for another month. It is surprising how quick you get sick of mud, but unknown to me, good training for North Africa’s rainy season. On checking around I found that an armament class was to start in less than a week. Now this really intrigued me. My love for guns and hunting said, “go for it”. My name appeared on that list in a hurry, and I left the mud behind, for now.

Lowry Field, Denver, Colorado was where we were sent to armament school. This was a few miles out of Denver. It was overcrowded so we got stuck in army pyramidal tents. These tents were set up on wood platforms six inches off the ground. Five beds to a tent. There was a four foot by four foot sand box in the middle, filled with four inches of gravel, on that was a conical sheet metal stove, with no grates. We fired these with coke (distilled coal), which was hard to start but burned very hot and smokeless when you got it hot enough to start burning. If one let it get out of hand, it got so hot that it would start the floor afire, even through the four inches of gravel. The rules were that all fires had to be out by 10 P.M. The guards checked each tent as they made their rounds. This didn’t bother me too much, only on Sunday, as I went to school on the night shift during the week, and in school we had heat. Believe me, many times you’d like to “let her rip” as it got down to zero many times while I was there. Sometimes you had goose pimples on your nose, especially after taking a shower. There was always 6 inches of ice on the ceiling of the shower room, from the steam from the hot water. This ice didn’t melt all the while I was there. Having night classes had its advantages, you were off when the fire could be started in the heater. Also when the sun shone, it warmed up the tent some. Don’t forget Denver is a mile high.

We had some interesting subjects to study. Electrical Controls, Chemical Warfare Materials, Math, Explosives and Ammunition, Metal Work, Bomb Racks, Synchronizing Aircraft Machine Guns and Gun Sights. We had 600 hours of classroom training. In Chemical Warfare we learned the smell of each lethal gas. We had a chance to smell some of them in the gas chamber. We did this by going in to a gas filled room with our gas mask on. You were required to lift the corner of the mask and take a breath to smell the gas, then to let go of the corner of the mask and blow out to clear the mask of gas then to breath normal, with the mask on. Enough of the gas got into the mask that you could identify which one it was. Needless to say, they didn’t check us on the ones that one whiff would be, ‘curtains and slow music’. After awhile, they let you out of the gassed room and if you did it right, you got out on your own power. That also gave you confidence in your mask. One of the gasses smelled just like geraniums.

If you wanted to learn more about the secret ‘Norden Bomb Sight’, you had to go to another school, that depended on whether your grades were good enough. This bombsight was reputed to drop a bomb from 10,000 feet into a ‘pickle barrel’.

'Synchronizing machine guns', was learning how to have the machine guns timed so that it would only fire when the bullet would not hit your own propeller. In those days there were still some fighter planes that had the machine guns mounted on the engine nacelle (engine housing) and had to shoot through the propeller. That would be a hell of a note if you shot yourself down. I never used this technology after I left Denver.

We were taught how to handle bombs and bomb fuses safely. Do you know that you can drop a bomb from 10,000 feet and not have it go off? This was necessary, so if the bomber had to return to the field before it made its bombing run, because of engine trouble, or mission canceled, that they could land safely. They would not land with the bombs in the 'bomb bay' if there was danger that the plane couldn't land safely. Then they would drop the bombs with the "safety wire" attached, in some open field before landing. Both the nose and tail fuses on a bomb had propellers on them. When making a "bomb run" the bombardier flipped the switch to 'arm' the bombs. This would hold the safety wire back, when the bombs were dropped, thus pulling the safety wire out of the nose and tail fuse propellers so they could spin off when dropped. These propellers had to spin about 50 turns before they would spin off completely, thus 'arming' the bomb. This protected the bomber crew in the air, so that they would be quite some distance from the bomb before it could go off. Now if the bombs were dropped with the "safety wire", the props couldn't spin off. Therefore the fuses wouldn't be 'armed' and the bombs could be dropped so they wouldn't detonate.



Jacob, King, Guenther, Mc Caslin and Guerrero in Denver.

It was not all schoolwork, we got passes over the weekend. After learning to know a few guys fairly well, five of us went to Lookout Mt., about two miles from Golden, Colorado. They were Gooder, Kelerstat, Gerrero, Kasbeir and myself. We rode the streetcar to Golden and walked the rest of the way. About four miles of walking, up and back. Buffalo Bill is buried on top of this mountain, and we had a grand view of the Lariat Trail from there.

Gooder, was from Michigan, and drove a 'stud horse' service truck for a 'moonshiner'. He said he wasn't afraid of getting caught by the long arm of the law because the tank with the 'moon' was under the horse's manger. With hay in the manger, you would never guess there was a false bottom in the bin. The horse logged a lot of miles. Prohibition (Federal law prohibiting the sale or manufacturing of liquor) had been over but it was still a profitable business.

When the law was repealed the federal tax put on it was so high that 'Shiners' still sold it

cheaper than stores could sell it, a very lucrative business. This is what might happen if the cigarette tax gets too high.

My personal experience with this illegal business was after the ban was lifted and I worked in my Grandpa's lumberyard during summer break from High School. A fellow by the name of 'Guy' (his last name I won't mention) ordered enough lumber to build a dance hall. We all knew where he got the money from, every one in the area knew who to contact if you wanted booze, all but the "revenuers". I delivered the lumber to a beautiful spot on the Embarrass River. Months later, Guy was shut down by the 'Feds' for Counterfeiting. I checked, the lumberyard was paid in good money, probably profits from his moonshine business that everyone knew he had been in.

Gerrero was the youngest jeweler in U. S. at that time. He owned his own store, and was a nice guy. He made some jewelry for me, soldered wings on a watchband. He had his store in Brownsville, Texas. My wife and I tried to find him the year we had our reunion of the 48<sup>th</sup> at South Padre Island, Texas but we couldn't find him, he might not have made it through the war?

A couple of us guys were on a pass riding a street car, in Denver, down Colfax Ave. on Dec. 7, 1941 when we heard on the radio that the Japs had bombed Pearl Harbor. Shortly after that we heard on the radio that all leaves and passes were canceled. So we headed back to the field wondering what this meant for us. United States then declared war on Germany, Italy, and Japan. The English breathed a sigh of relief, they had a 'much needed' partner.

After finishing school, we were shipped to any fighter or bomber Sq. that needed armorers. The next train west had about 20 armorers on it and about six of us were scheduled to join the 14<sup>th</sup> Fighter Group, 48<sup>th</sup> & 49<sup>th</sup> Fighter Squadrons at Long Beach, Cal.



## Chap.3.

The 48<sup>th</sup> Fighter Squadron.

The 14<sup>th</sup> Fighter Group, 48<sup>th</sup> Fighter Sq. was taken out of mothballs from World War I a couple years earlier and was reorganizing, at Long Beach Cal. Six of us armorers were assigned to this squadron. We traveled Pullman 1<sup>st</sup> class and learned to know the other armorers assigned to the 48<sup>th</sup>. These trips were always interesting with plenty to do and see. Heading west was always interesting as you passed through so many places you had heard of and wondered about.

I had my first exposure to gambling with dice and taking a 'hit' playing 21 and new brands of poker. No, I didn't play, a Private made \$21.00 a month and collected about \$16.00 after Insurance and laundry were taken out.

Learning to know your own squadron, Buddys was important because the cars were full of 'GIs' that were not all going to the same place. Slingshotting the B.S. with the guys you were with was probably the most educational and character forming thing you had done in your young life, and this maturing continued all the while you were in the service. The importance of your "Judeo Christian" upbringing was tested continuously before they were solidified. Your moral ethics base, whether you knew it or not, determined who you were when you reentered civilian life. Like some guys always wanted their way, some always complaining, some never let their religious upbringing show. One of my closest buddies took a quarter mile shot at an Arab scrounging through our squadron garbage pile for food and gleefully claimed that he had hit him. Sure, legally no unauthorized personal could enter our airfield, but the Arabs were neutral, and posed no threat to us. They were always sneaking in, looking for food on the garbage heap. Sure, we all made mistakes but we never bragged about it. I often wonder if I wasn't somewhat guilty too, for not telling him how I felt about that. Hate was not something most of us hung on to. When we got to Italy we felt sorry for Italians rather than treating them like a defeated enemy. We treated them much better than their allies the Germans did.

We were at Long Beach a couple months without planes. Sometime in this period the Japs had shelled the coast at Long Beach, from a submarine. They did little damage, but now we knew that we were in range, and could no longer hold the idea that they couldn't touch us. If the Japs only knew, this act alone got everyone behind the war effort and solidified our resolve.

As soon as we got our planes, we were sent to North Island, near San Diego. We were to train and to fly as coastal patrol. The 1<sup>st</sup> planes we got were P-43s. This was the experimental model for the P-47. North Island was a huge navy base and we were bivouacked (camped out) in an enormous hanger. These hangers were big enough to run a PB-2Y2 Navy plane in. This is the Navy plane my brother Franklin was an aerial gunner on.

It was warm during the day, so the huge doors on both ends were opened. They never closed them until we were freezing to death, in the evening. When that cold damp air blew in from the ocean, the one issued blanket was not enough to keep you warm for sleeping. Brrr, freezing in San Diego! We ate in a navy mess hall, where I learned to like beans for breakfast and to hate S.O.S. (shit on a shingle, or chipped beef on toast).

In Feb. of 1942, a month after we were at North Island we got our first P-38s, some of the 1<sup>st</sup> available. To familiarize the pilots with the cannon and guns the pilot shot at tow-targets. This was a big sleeve about 6ft. in diameter, and 15ft. long. It was pulled by a tow-plane over the ocean. The pilots then made passes at the target that was towed a long way behind the tow plane, on a very long cable. After the exercise the holes could be patched up and counted. In sporting clays, only the target moves but in aerial combat, there are a lot of other movements that need to be factored in. The gun sight worked on what they called the collimator principal. This same principle is used in the Nydar shot gun sight that you can buy today. Both project a red dot out in space, you put the red dot on the object you want to shoot and with the proper lead, 'bingo' a hit. We helped the pilot by loading the articulated ammunition belts with every fifth round being a tracer bullet. The tracer bullet left a trail of fire so you could see where your 'bullet

group' was traveling, or going to hit. Overseas for combat, we received our ammo in belts already assembled. They came 500 rounds to a metal container, sealed air and water tight. This was enclosed in a heavy wooden box. These ammo belts were loaded, two incendiaries, two armor piercing and one tracer, ready to load in the plane. A machine gun would fire about a 1000 rounds per minute, but if the pilot fired that long a burst, he could burn out the gun barrels, and run out of ammunition. The P-38 only held about 300 rounds for each gun. In combat, it was seldom that the pilot needed all the ammo. If he used it up he was defenseless. He had to learn not to freeze on the gun switch, but use short bursts.

A "Gun Sight Aiming Point Camera" was mounted in the nose of each plane. When the pilot pressed the trigger of the guns, the camera started to take pictures. The camera ran a few seconds after the pilot quit shooting. This allowed the enemy target to show a hit, either by going out of control, trailing smoke or exploding. The proof of the pudding was in the camera.

After going through school and working on .50 caliber machine guns, I drew up a model that required one less part. I thought if this would work, it would save about five pounds per gun. I was excited about this and thought that to get this approved by the military, I would first have to get the approval of the Master Sgt. in armament. He would surely see the merit of the idea. So I asked him if I could show it to him and he said sure, bring your idea to my room at five o'clock. In those days Master Sgts. had a private room. So at five I knocked and I was asked to enter. Master Sgt. Bean and Tech. Sgt. Goedach handed me a bottle of Four Roses whiskey and asked me to sit down. I sat and took a drink at the same time and "vershlucked" (choked) because it went down the wrong throat. My eyes watered and I coughed for 15 minutes and could barely talk. All the while the two Sgts. were snickering to themselves. They figured a new recruit and don't know how to drink yet. So, I had such trouble talking that they didn't listen to me and nothing happened to the idea. A year later, in Africa, I went over Beans head and talked to Lt. Hahn, head of the Armament department. He was interested and said he would see that the proper people got a look at it. About three weeks later he got killed in a jeep accident. With out the blue print I didn't pursue it any more. But in later years the Mayville Rifle Club, which I was a member of, shot matches in National Guard armories and I could see that the .50 cal. machine guns were a lot lighter and smaller than they used to be. I wouldn't bring this up because it sounds like bragging, but the fact that I became a tool and die designer in civilian life, gives the machine gun idea some credibility. I wonder myself whether it would have worked? Maybe just a pipe dream at that time.

We had a gunnery range on the beach next to Mexico, on the Pacific Ocean. On this range we had six targets 15ft. by 25ft with a 4-foot diameter Bull's-Eyes, made of heavy cardboard. In the morning six armorers were trucked out to the range. When we had the targets ready, we would take down the red flags, get in the truck and drive a half-mile away. We called the Sqd. by phone and they sent the planes over. Each pilot shot at his own numbered target and made a low-level pass, firing when he felt he could score the most hits. The pilots would then make other passes at his target until his ammo was used up. This practice was to simulate ground strafing.



Scoring and patching each pilots results.

After each exercise we scored the targets, patched the holes and called the squadron to give the pilots their scores. The Range Commander would then give us the time off until the next practice. One of these times we had hours to kill before the next practice, so we went beach combing. After about two hours we spotted a command car tearing over the sand dunes heading our way. Seconds later four GIs jumped out of the car and surrounded us with rifles, ready for action. The leader than started to question us as if we were spies, because we had wandered a half mile across the border into Mexico, according to him. They checked our dog tags and called the 48<sup>th</sup> to verify our story. They read us the 'riot act' and told us to "get the hell back to the United States."

After a gunnery training mission, the armorers had to clean the guns and reload the ammo trays. To get ready to load the guns, you stuck the end of each ammo belt into the feed mechanism of each gun. Then you got up on the left-hand wing and reached into the cockpit to 'charge' (load) each gun by using the gun charging mechanism located in the cockpit by the pilots left knee. The dial on the charger tells you which gun is being charged. Seeing we weren't in a combat zone we didn't fully load the guns. You had to charge each gun three times to fully put a shell in the chamber, ready to fire. We were instructed to only charge each gun two times and the pilot had to charge each gun once, if he was on a combat mission or gunnery mission. This was a safety measure so the pilot couldn't accidentally fire the guns until he was ready. To charge a machine gun on a P-38, the armorer selected the gun to be made ready, then pulled on a handle that pulled out about a foot. This was quite hard to do as you were working against the mainspring of the gun. The charger handle was connected to the gun by a cable that was attached to the loading mechanism, a good grip and power was needed to accomplish this act. By the time you had the guns cleaned, the crew chief had the cockpit dirt free for the next flight. So in order to get along with the crew chief, we stayed out of the cockpit.

One day after a gunnery training mission, I cleaned the guns and charged each gun twice. We were also required to release the pressure on the firing pin spring. We did this by flipping on the gun switch and pressing one of the firing switches on the steering wheel. Imagine my surprise when I got a 'burst' out of one of the guns. Three shots and one landed three miles away in someone's bedroom in Coronado! I though sure I'd catch hell, but good, but it didn't even go on my records. I think it was because of the fevered pitch to get on with this war, knowing we had to learn as we went. I wasn't the only armorer that had this happen to him. It seems what had

happened was that as I was charging one of the guns, I had slipped on the wing as I was reaching in the cockpit charging it and thinking that I hadn't pulled it far enough, giving it another pull, thus making it combat ready. So on releasing the firing pin springs, I got more than an empty click on one gun. On top of that I had to clean that gun again, being very careful when getting it ready to releasing the firing pin spring. Luckily a parked P-38 rests with its nose in the air by about 10 degrees so all the shots went over the Navy's airfield. Soon the newer models of the P-38's didn't have gun chargers in them. We fully loaded the guns ready to shoot by flipping a gun switch on and pressing the trigger switch. The trigger button was handy, it was on the steering wheel, so you could 'mash' it with your thumb. There were two buttons, one for the left thumb and one on the right for the right thumb. No excuses if you couldn't shoot right-handed!

We got into the gun compartment by standing on a four foot high platform, giving four 'DZUS' fastener ( I think that was how it was spelled ) a half turn, with an ordinary screw driver and lifting one side of the nose canopy up and supporting it in the up position with a rod.

The way we got our squadron insignia was through one of our pilots. He was a friend of Walt Disney and he had asked Disney to 'womp up' an insignia for us. The cat looked somewhat like Felix the cat that was popular by that time. The four stars, on one side and eight on the other was our Squadron number, forty eighth. I think he did a good job, a cat jumping on a mosquito. I don't think that was why Disney became famous though. On the cover of this book is the insignia , but instead of the letters F I S, it was "48<sup>th</sup> Fighter Squadron. 14<sup>th</sup> Fighter Group written around the border"

Curtis, at least a 50% Choctaw Indian, and myself hitchhiked to Altadena. Curtis, I can't think of his first name, we never used it, we called him Curt, had some relation living there. The son of these people, Roger, was 16 years old and was the youngest editor of a newspaper at that time, the Altadena Press. He had an interesting fellow working for him by the name of Fred Lane, He had been a spy in WW1, and told us some exciting stories about his exploits in that era. That night Roger took us to the Palladium in Hollywood. That was a bad place to go, as all the people wanted to buy anyone in uniform drinks. Lucky it was eleven o'clock before we got there and by midnight we had had more than we could handle. Don't ask me whether we had met any Movie Stars, as that night it was a bit 'hazy' out. Roger was 'out like a light' and Curt insisted that he was going to drive us home. We got on the freeway and Curtis drove 90 M.P.H. I sobered up in a hurry, and tried to get him to slow down. But Curt could not drink with out getting belligerent. I often thought that was the most dangerous situation I was in while in the service, as I had little training trying to control a drunken Indian. No fox hole to crawl into. Finally I got him to stop by convincing him that we had to sober up Roger before we could take him home. That worked, he stopped and we slept under an overpass until Roger came to. Then Roger drove us to his home, about 3 A.M. That morning we had avocados for breakfast, the first time I'd eaten them and on a weak stomach, not the time to taste test something new. But I kept them down. Roger didn't look too chipper, I bet his mom was glad that we were leaving after breakfast.

We hitchhiked back to North Island, no trouble. You were always picked up by someone who would go out of his way to show you the best way to get where you wanted to go, and take you as far as he could without wasting rationed gas.

We had our pilots trained in P-38s and in June of "42" it was time to get ready for overseas. For this we were shipped to March Field, Ca. While there, we ate with the 4<sup>th</sup> Mapping Sqd. After the boring navy chow, we were in 'hog heaven'. Real eggs for breakfast just the way you liked them. Pork chops, roast beef, roast chicken and always a dessert. The days were filled with packing all our armament tools, spare parts and supplies, in wooden boxes that we had to make from scratch. Every thing that could rust from being in, or near saltwater, was coated with cosmoline. This was heavy, sticky, black grease. It went on a hell-of-a-lot easier than it came off. Overseas we had to soak the parts in 100 octane gas and scrub like the dickens to remove it, because it seemed to air harden and dry into a hard shell.

We lived pretty good here, in barracks, the grounds were beautiful, even a swimming pool. We

were allowed passes, so one week end, Ray Hendershot and myself headed for Lake Arrowhead, to see how the Hollywood crowd lived. After wandering around a while, we struck up a conversation with a guy and gal in their fifties. They invited us to eat dinner with them and stay for the night. They had a pretty nice second home on the lake. He was a movie producer but I can't remember his name, it seems to me that it was Berman. His wife looked like she might have been a beauty in her younger days. At the time of this writing, I'm 83 so I can see how one in later life can lose their vim, vigor and viciousness, as time goes by. People went out of their way to be friendly to men in uniform, a great time to be a soldier with a pass. The next morning after breakfast we hitch hiked back to the base.

Ray Hendershot was an important friend all through my stay in the 48<sup>th</sup>, as was Curtis. I usually tried to go on pass with someone other than Curt though, because if he got a little booze in him, he was always looking for a fight. I asked him why one time, and he said his dad spent time in prison because he killed a Negro and because of that, he hated African Americans. But a hell of a nice guy when sober, then his prejudice didn't show.

One day a Bell Air Cobra fighter plane came in and I got to clean the guns. This was the new fighter with a 37MM cannon where the barrel stuck out the center of the prop hub. They didn't get to be too popular for some reason, I never found out why. They were easier to work on than a P-38 because you didn't need a stepladder to get at the gun compartment.

We always had some pilot that we admired and built a daredevil reputation around. At March Field we had a number of huge hangers and we always claimed that every time Lt. Philpot was up in the air, they always closed the hanger doors so he wouldn't fly through the hanger. I didn't know him, whether he was that 'gutsy' or not, I don't know. We had our Paul Bunyans, to help prove our invincibility.

We had a squadron mascot called Roger. It was a wiener hound, 5 inches high and 12 inches long. Over the year we had him, he logged more flying time than most pilots did. By the time we reached England he was full-grown and had the run of the airfield. One night he was wandering around and he fell into a foxhole that had water in it and he drowned. The whole Sqd. went into mourning. Our first overseas casualty.

One of the things we had to do with each P-38 was bore sight the guns, especially if it was a new plane. To bore sight, the crew chief taxied the plane to the firing range and let the air out of the nose strut until the airplane was level to the line of flight. The armorers would then put a bulls-eye target out about 50yds. The gun-sight was turned on. The sight was mounted at the factory and was coordinated with the line of flight of the plane. The red dot appeared out in space as the pilot sitting on his parachute was looking straight ahead. In combat, the pilot had to fly the plane so the red dot out in space was on the enemy, with the proper lead. Back to bore sighting; the target was moved up or down, left or right, on an adjustable stand until the red dot of the gun sight fell on the bulls-eye. With the plane and target in this position, each gun was adjusted on the adjustable rear mount of each gun, until the barrel was lined up with the bulls-eye. The right spot was found by unloading the gun, by opening the 'cover plate assembly', removing the 'back plate', unhooking the 'drive spring' removing the 'bolt' of the machine gun and putting a 'bore sight' tool in the barrel. By looking in the mirror of the bore sight tool you could see the target and would adjust the gun until it was in the center of the target. You did this for each of the four 50s and once for the 20MM cannon. Once in awhile over seas we would fire the guns to see that they all worked. The recoil when firing the four 50s and the 20MM was so great it lifted the nose of the plane and the whole plane rocked back. The plane shuddered like it was 'fixen' to fall apart. The armorers cleaned the guns and the crew chief blew air into the 'nose strut' and taxied the plane back to the revetment (parking space).

They had all kinds of things for us to do on the base. One night they had a religious speaker, Professor Moon, speaking on the miracles in the Bible. He showed us how it was possible for the flood, 40 days and 40 nights of rain. According to him the earth was shrouded in vapor until the earth cooled enough to cause the vapor to fall as rain. He also showed us possible scenarios for

other miracles. For some reason this was important to me. I could then take all other unexplained things by faith knowing God knew how. Years later I told Pastor Nass about this and wanted to tell some Sunday school class about Prof. Moon's theory, but my pastor didn't want to mix scientific theory with faith.

In early Aug. we got the word we were going overseas, the date I can't tell you, or where, it's top secret! When the time came, we were loaded on a troop train, with all our equipment and headed northwest to Oakland Ca. By this time we were convinced we were to head across to the Philippines and I guess everyone else did too, especially the spies. When we woke up the next morning we were heading Southeast. We were really confused, what we didn't know we couldn't tell to anyone else. We soon learned there were three ways to do everything, the right way, the wrong way, and the Army way.

Sometime that day, (or was it the next), we stopped in Salt Lake City, Utah. We were on a siding waiting for something, so we were allowed to get off the train for three hours. A group of armorers and myself set out to check out the city. We saw the Mormon Tabernacle, and a few other sights when someone said, "let's get some whiskey". We found a liquor store, even in Salt Lake City. We asked an older looking soldier that had a few service stripes on his sleeve if he would get us some booze? He said, "sure". So we gave him some money and waited outside while he bought us a pint of Four Roses, a popular brand of that time. Most of the time they wouldn't sell it to us unless we had an older civilian or an old Army guy to get it for us, as we were all under 21 years old. This pint we got we hid until we got back on the train. It didn't last long once it was opened up, with six guys 'nipping' on it, but we felt 'grown up'. About the time we got to Texas, I got the GIs (the runs) and didn't enjoy the scenery again until we had gone all the way through Florida.

We crossed the Mississippi River on a ferryboat and went up the East Coast until Washington D.C., where we had a 3hr. layover. While there, we got to see the Capitol, House of Rep., Senate rooms, the Oval Office and I can't remember what else. The next morning we left D.C., with train tracks and trains on both sides of us. The trains were all going like the "mill tails of hell". You would think people were in a hurry! The only scenery you saw was between the speeding boxcars.

We finally reached our destination, Bradley Field, just out side of Windsor Locks, Conn. This was a troop train we were on and the 48th & 49th composed only a small part of it. We had all the ground Officers and personnel of the two outfits, about 100 men and 10 Officers, and had traveled through 18 states. The rest of the Sailors and GIs on this troop train had been dropped off or went on to other destinations. The pilots brought the planes in to Bradley Field the next day. This was a nice place, barracks set in an oak woods. We didn't get to see Windsor Locks, as we were restricted to the base. I was assigned to the Company Commanders plane as armorer "Porky" Thompkins was the Crew Chief, and Roy T. Harvey was the Assistant Crew Chief. We crewed the C.O.'s plane from then on. Our first C.O. was Capt. Walles, later Major, after he got his 50 missions in.

We lost our first pilot at Bradley Field in a freak accident that should not have happened. One of our pilots was taking off and a gas truck with a tank trailer tried to go across the runway. It's hard for me to understand why a gas truck would ever be allowed to drive across a take-off runway. Anyway, when the pilot saw the truck he was going too fast to stop, so he tried to takeoff over him. The plane didn't have enough flying speed and hit the gas trailer. The noise of the prop chopping into the trailer and the following explosion attracted the attention of anyone who was near. The gas truck trailer burst into flames and the P-38 bounced back about 15 ft., with one engine stopped from the impact and the other still trying to take off. This racing engine sucked the flame from the burning gas back through the prop and out the back end of the plane, like a huge blowtorch. The pilot was not hurt, so he jumped out the cockpit, slid down the wing, and I held my breath as he ran right through the blowtorch. If he would have run the other way he would not have been hurt. Needless to say he died the next day.

We were not at Bradley Field too long. The only other highlight that I can remember was one day Porky and Skip were required to be somewhere else and I had to preflight the plane for them. This was starting the engines, checking the 'mags', props, etc. to see that it was ready to fly. Having watched Thomkins and Harvey, (Porky and Skip, the crew chief and assistant) do this many times this was no big deal. This was our plane to take care of and we depended on one another.

I'm really in the money now as I had made Corporal before I left March Field. If I remember right that was about \$40.00 a month. This was a far cry from my first take home pay of \$16.00 as a Pvt. The pay then was actually \$21.00 before the laundry and life insurance policy were taken out. After a couple weeks at Bradley Field, we were shipped to Fort Dix, a port of debarkation. We all got our pictures taken for our passports. Looking at the passport, I see that I must have made Sgt. before the picture was taken. This was the time we increased our life insurance and made allotments to send home each month, knowing we wouldn't have much need for money overseas.

A few armorers and crew chiefs followed the P-38s in a C-47 to England, by way of Goose Bay, Labrador and Iceland. Jack Brown was one of the lucky armorers. This route was in the newspaper a few years ago when they dug a P-38 out of 200 feet of ice. This was one of a squadron of P-38s and some B-17s that got caught in a bad storm. They 'ditched' their plane in Iceland, on the ice and snow without a fatality. The pilots and crews lived in one of the B-17s for about a week before they had been rescued.

The rest of us spent a few days at Fort Dix to wait for our equipment to be loaded along with everyone else's on the U.S.S. West Point. The few days that we were there, the only lasting memory was of a guy about 40 years old selling newspapers on base. This guy out sold all the others. He came around in the morning and at the top of his voice hollered, "Yooohh hooohh pappoo". You could hear this even in the barracks. He sold papers! His singsong message rang in your head long after we left Fort Dix, and to this day.

The U.S.S. West Point, troop transport, was next in line for size, to the Queen Mary and Queen Elizabeth. This was U.S.'s largest luxury liner before it was changed over to a troop transport. The swimming pool was now the mess hall, etc. To stand on the dock, at the water line and look up was an impressive sight...it looked higher than some skyscrapers. They loaded the ship from the bottom up as far as the personnel were concerned. If this was done according to importance, we must have ranked pretty low, as all the ship was full except the weather decks, when we arrived. The 48<sup>th</sup> ground crew was assigned their area, on the weather deck. This meant no roof to keep out the rain, wind or sun. It was September, and froze some nights as we headed north. That's the down side, the other side was that we had a ringside seat to see the Statue of Liberty disappear in the distance. We didn't get claustrophobia being jammed in where the beds were three beds high either. There was also less chance of getting seasick in the open air. The best was that we lucked out, it didn't rain hard the week we were at sea. They fed us twice a day; we went through the chow line and stood at tables chest high mounted from the ceiling in the former swimming pool.

Whether the Germans knew that thousands of troops were on their way I don't know, but we stayed near air cover as long as possible and headed north to Halifax, Nova Scotia and Iceland. We stayed at Nova Scotia one night and left the next morning. We didn't have any Navy escort vessels or travel in a convoy, but we were led to believe that the U.S.S. West Point was too fast for a German U-boat to catch us if they tried to follow us. Our ship would 'tack', that is turn left awhile, then tack right awhile, back and forth in such a manner that the Germans couldn't figure out where we would turn next. This was done so they couldn't figure out our path and then lay in wait for us, to get close enough for them to fire a torpedo.

We passed just off the coast of Iceland. In these cool waters there were plankton that were phosphorescent. At night you could see the wake, all lit-up, for a long way behind the ship. It seemed the stirring of the water made these little 'fellers' light up. Much like a moonbeam shining on the water of a placid lake. A beautiful but eerie sight to see. This also looked eerie in

the urinals and flush toilets, as the ship was dark at night. It seems these little 'jiggers' really glowed with that rapid agitation.

It was fun learning the Navy's way of giving orders. There was a P.A. system on the ship that gave the orders loud and clear, such as, "chow down for all troops in C-164", that meant for that section of the ship's personnel to head for the mess hall. "Now hear this, the smoking lamp is lit on all weather decks", meaning no smoking out in the open and all lights out. "Abandon ship", was a scary one, you didn't know if it was practice or not. "Abandon ship" was practiced nearly every day. Each section of men was assigned to a lifeboat. The navy had a couple sailors assigned to each lifeboat, to load us and lower us if it were the real thing. When the P.A. announced, "Abandon Ship" everyone had to move 'double time' to his lifeboat, by a pre-mapped out route that had to be followed to the letter. The reason being that there were 10,000 GIs moving double-time, at the same time. On one of these drills, I saw and recognized Lyle Fredricks, a guy that attended High School with me and as part of a group we had camped at the "Cut-off" on the Wolf River for a week. We passed as I was going up the steps and he was coming down. I didn't find out until after the war, whether or not he had recognized me.



THE WHITE HOUSE  
WASHINGTON

TO MEMBERS OF THE UNITED STATES ARMY EXPEDITIONARY  
FORCES:

You are a soldier of the United States Army.

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You have embarked for distant places where  
the war is being fought.

Upon the outcome depends the freedom of your  
lives: the freedom of the lives of those you love—  
your fellow-citizens—your people.

Never were the enemies of freedom more  
tyrannical, more arrogant, more brutal.

Yours is a God-fearing, proud, courageous  
people, which, throughout its history, has put its  
freedom under God before all other purposes.

We who stay at home have our duties to  
perform—duties owed in many parts to you. You will  
be supported by the whole force and power of this  
Nation. The victory you win will be a victory of all  
the people—common to them all.

You bear with you the hope, the confidence,  
the gratitude and the prayers of your family, your  
fellow-citizens, and your President—



The above was received after we got on the U.S. West Point to go overseas.

When our section was called on the P.A. system to eat for the first time off the coast of Maine somewhere, the line extended up from the mess hall at least eight stories or decks, and about 200 guys ahead of us. All went well for about an hour, until I got outside the mess hall. The steamy

smell of food on an empty stomach and the motion of the ship made me feel seasick. As fast as I could I ran up the stairs to the weather deck to 'shoot my cookies' over the rail, but by that time my stomach had settled down and I didn't get sick. No, I didn't go back and 'sweat' that line again, I went hungry until the next meal. This was the only time that I was close to being seasick on my tour of duty. That included two other weeklong boat trips, the invasion of Africa and the trip home. By this time everyone with a weak stomach had experienced that feeling.

## Chap. 4.

## Shrewsbury, England.

After a week at sea, we landed at Liverpool, England. We were put on lorries and trucked to Atchem Field, near Shrewsbury in the Midlands. This was 60 miles north of London. When we arrived at Atchem Field our planes were parked in revetments on the periphery of the airfield. A revetment was a circular earthen mound heaped higher than a plane. It was open on one side, for the plane to enter. This was to protect the ground crew and planes while on the ground, from a bombing attack. The ground crew really ate dust when the planes returned from a mission. On entering the revetment the pilot taxied to the center, cut one engine, set one brake, and revved up the other engine and around it went in a cloud of dust.

The crew chief always helped the pilot out of the plane to discuss the performance of the plane. The armorer knew if the guns were fired because we put masking tape over the end of each barrel to keep out the rain. If the masking tape was blown off, the armorer knew the guns had been fired and needed cleaning and the ammo trays needed to be refilled. If it was a high altitude mission, like escorting bombers at a height of around 20,000 feet, the temperature was so cold that when the plane landed in the warmer and more humid air, moisture would form beads of water on the guns, similar to taking a frozen package from the freezer in the summer. So the guns had to be dried and oiled to prevent rust. The armorers used sperm oil on the guns. Sperm oil was used because it didn't get thick from the cold above 20,000 feet. A fighter plane would be pretty defenseless and useless escorting high-flying bombers, with frozen guns. This was a problem until we switched to sperm oil and wiping the guns dry after each high altitude mission.

In England we were paid in British pounds. At that time, it was four dollars equaled one pound. Now I'm here to tell you, the service developed your moral attitudes in more ways than one. I learned a real lesson on gambling the first pay day in England. I got into a crap game, which was usually played a buck a throw. Now we were paid in pounds and the pound bill was nearly the same size as the dollar bill, so didn't it make sense to play the pound note like the dollar bill, each throw of the dice? Well after laundry, insurance, and an allotment were taken out of my paycheck, I probably received three or four bills, or pounds. A few bad crap bets and I was broke. I very seldom gambled after that. I didn't like to be broke, and still don't, I'd much rather be a lender.

To make matters worse, a couple days later, Morton Epstein, an armorer and I, and three crew chiefs were given orders to go to Milan, Scotland. Our pilots and planes were being sent there to practice dive bombing on an English practice range up there. Now, to get up there we were assigned a weapons carrier and a driver from the Motor Pool. From the Midlands to Milan, seemed to be all back roads. Many were one lane and most of them were lined with stone fences on each side, very English. If we stopped in a town we drew a crowd, as no one up there had seen a Yank soldier. One woman even gave us her ration of chocolate. Feeling guilty we gave her a couple packs of cigarettes. During the war, wherever we went the civilians coveted American cigarettes, worth more than money. They seemed to be stronger than the Limey weeds. GI's that had smoked English cigarettes didn't like them, they said that they made your throat raw, and no nicotine kick. I smoked a pipe so I didn't know or care.

There wasn't much chance to spend money, but Morton Epstein found I was broke so he loaned me a few pounds until next payday. He loaned some to one of the crew chiefs and the driver too. Eppy knew he would get his money from me, as we were both armorers in the 48<sup>th</sup>. The crew chiefs were from the 48<sup>th</sup> too, but the truck driver, Eppy would probably never see again. With Eppy, money was not important. Being a Wisconsinite of German extraction, I had a hard time understanding a Jew that would do this. The only Jews we had known, were rag peddlers. They bought up old rags, tin cans, and other junk, always trying to gyp you, we thought. Now this Eppy changed my thinking of a Jew completely. He must have had some college education from

the way he talked. When he gambled, he always won. He seemed to know how to play the averages. Other than being a good army buddy, two events made a lasting impression on me and changed my idea of Jews forever.

In the invasion of Africa, we had marched all night with full field packs and were dead tired. We came to a bombed out hanger on the outskirts of Oran where we were to catch up on some sleep. Eppy spotted a church a couple blocks away. He went over to the church and with his gift of gab, talked the Priest out of enough wine to give each of us a half a canteen cup of good wine. On pressing him on how he got it, he said he told the padre that we wanted to hold Communion in the outfit. He could speak four or five languages well and he loved to argue. At this time the French Africans hadn't even decide what side of the war they should be on. Maybe the Allied bombing of the airport convinced the Priest that we were the right side. Anyhow, imagine the boost the wine gave us, on an empty stomach!

Another time in the bombing of the Polaski oil fields, Eppy's brother was shot down and killed. His brother was a gunner in a B-17 outfit. Eppy immediately applied for a transfer to that bomb squadron. These requests were hardly ever granted, but Eppy talked them into it. He could talk the 'nuts off a brass ape'. I often have wondered if he got his fifty missions in safely. This was after the invasion of Africa, he should have had his belly full of war and all its insecurities, and to knowingly put yourself at risk in a bomber with all the flack the Germans were throwing up can only be equated to patriotism. In our reunions after the war, he is the one guy I would liked to have been able to see and talk to. I wonder if he made it?

When we arrived at the airfield in Milan, we found that the British had moored down our planes. They had used three quarter inch rod formed like a corkscrew, screwed into the ground two feet. They had one fastened under each wing. This tickled us immensely as no wind could move or tip a P-38 with it's brakes locked. Their planes were mostly made with fabric, so were much lighter and needed mooring.

We were assigned to the Non-Commissioned Officer's mess. We thought we had it made. The first time we went through the mess line, we were dressed in our old greasy coveralls, from working on the planes and all the British were in their class "A" uniforms, all spit and polish and we looked like a bunch of bums. It didn't take Eppy long to tell them we were "Yionks", on those P-38s. He even convinced them that a P-38 could "take off going straight up". That didn't happen until long after the war, and the British were the ones to accomplish this with their Harrier vertical take off jet. Believe me, watching one of those take off is a thrill. I was fortunate to be at the Experimental Air Association (EAA) in Oshkosh, Wisconsin the year they demonstrated one of those. To see and hear one of those jets take off, straight up, go backwards and forward with ease was astounding to say the least.

Believe it or not, we had to learn how to understand English all over again. The British had their own expressions and until you caught on to these and the speed they talked, it was hard to understand them. Like the southerners talk slow, they did the opposite, they talked fast and clipped a lot of their words. Like the words, half a penny, became "apnay".

Anyhow, one meal a day was fish and chips, which I just couldn't stomach. They had some kind of cream sauce on them and that tasted fishy, yuck! But wait until I get to the English mutton stew, later!

We were there for three or four days flying dive-bombing practice runs, so that each pilot could become proficient at it. The armorer loaded a 50 lb practice bomb under each wing that had a black powder charge that went off on impact. The pilot got passing grades if he hit the target and pulled out of his dive before he hit the ground. Our pilots made good use of this skill on the invasion of Africa.

On returning to our home field, we thought we were ready to take on the Germans, over Germany, but it never happened. Our outfit never flew any combat missions from England.

I did get a pass to go into Shrewsbury one afternoon. The guys I went in with and myself tried to drink the pubs dry, but we didn't accomplish this. It wasn't our style of beer, but rather Guinness or Stout, served warm! When night came you couldn't see a light anywhere, on the outside, made worse by drinking too much. Because of the strict "black out" enforced, when entering a building, you had to pass through a couple of doors before seeing any light. Every tavern had a dartboard, pretty tame sport for GIs. There were very few Limeys in the taverns, their pay was too poor and I don't think they liked the way the GIs threw theirs around. What few girls there were, were English and mostly in uniform. Most were with GIs, because of their loose spending habits, I would suppose? I felt sorry for the Limeys, to be outdone on their own turf. I only had one pass while in England, hardly enough time to draw any accurate conclusions.

On this pass, the only way we could get back to the base was to catch a ride on a milk truck that left town at nine o'clock. We had a hell of a time finding the meeting place of the truck, in the dark. We got there in time, and what a ride!! We were sitting on the floor on the bed of the truck, with nothing to hang on to. The driver drove like crazy, on winding roads without lights! I still don't know how he knew if another vehicle was coming or not?

One of our favorite pastimes was to make a finger ring from an English florin. The florin was about the size of a quarter and made of silver. We would flatten the edge of the coin, with a hammer, holding the coin vertically between our fingers, on an anvil. Hammering would flare it over about a quarter of an inch when the diameter was about right. Then we would drill a big hole in the center. The final fitting was done with a round file until it fit your finger just right. It looks like a silver wedding ring and doesn't turn your finger green. I still wear my florin, I found out later that it was illegal to destroy the Kings money in this way. I'll take mine off if I go back to England.

## CHAP. 5.

## North Africa.

We were really confused, when one day in Oct. of 1942, we were told to pack up all of our gear and get ready to move. We were loaded on trucks and taken to Liverpool. We boarded the USS Uruguay, a converted troop transport, with a bunch of other GIs. We thought maybe we were going to the Pacific Theater. We didn't have a clue.

We were in compartment "C", below the waterline, knowing full well the dangers of this level if hit with a torpedo. The compartments were full of vertical rows of hammocks, two feet between them, three high. When you lay on your back, you had room to fold your hands on your belly and that cleared the guy's butt above you by two inches. Maybe that's why they didn't allow fat guys in the service? You were lucky if you got the top one, so no one was crawling over you. I often thought that this is the way they should house the prisoners in our prisons. We wouldn't have to build so many new prisons then. I bet this would be a good deterrent too. If it was good enough for us, it should be good enough for them. That would give them something to 'bitch' about! There would be a lot less crime, I'll bet. At least they wouldn't be looking forward to the good life in prison. Maybe 'Limey' rations would be a good deterrent also. Fish and chips for one and maybe mutton stew for Sunday.

We didn't know until two days out to sea, where we were going. They gave us all an American flag to sew on our right shoulder and a 'straight dope bare facts' book on North Africa. After a few days on the Atlantic, we went through Gibraltar. We were allowed on deck to see the rock, but were warned under penalty of court-martial, not to take any pictures. I guess they thought the enemy might get them and know where their big guns were.

All the while we were at sea, we didn't have Navy escort, but we had air cover to look out for subs. The 'air cover' was an English Lockheed Load Star, a six or eight passenger "Lend Lease" plane. The British had revamped them and used them with a load of 'ash cans', or depth charges, for submarine patrol, no guns.

About a day out of 'Gib' a German sub fired a torpedo at us which missed us, due to good tacking techniques I guess. The sub did get one of the other ships in the convoy, before our British escort plane sunk it with a couple "ash cans". Being down in the hold, we didn't know we had been attacked until it was over. Saved us a lot of anxious moments.

One day in 2003 I got a call from Wayne Gerlach of Iowa. After discussing the atrocious weather we both had been having, we checked the health of each other and our wives. It wasn't long when we started to reminisce the days gone by and the ever shortening list of our 'African buddies', that had been in the 48<sup>th</sup>. We are all in our 80's, so there were getting to be fewer all the time. It was then that I thought of this 'Kraut' torpedo attack and asked Wayne if he remembered it. He said, "Boy do I, it still scares me and give me the cold shivers when I think of it". He then related the story as it happened to him.

Quoting Wayne:

Being in the Armament department, Beazel (Twenty-one People) and I were to take a shift on a machine gun on the fantail of the boat. At one time in the shift, I had noticed this strange streak of bubbles or different colored water heading straight for our ship. When it got close I recognized it for what it was, a German torpedo! I froze and watched it as it narrowly missed the back of the boat. Sometime later we could hear some explosions and a little later we saw a big black cloud of smoke rise above the water, many miles away. At this time we figured some other ship wasn't so lucky. Unquote.

'Twenty-one People', as Beazel was called, got this nickname after telling us this story. See if you think the moniker we had given him was appropriate? He told us he was a Greyhound driver

in civilian life. One day as he was driving through the mountains, he was driving down a steep grade full of 'switch backs' and his brakes went out! He said that, with squealing tires as he negotiated the switchbacks, he finally brought the bus to a halt. He stood up and looked around to the back of the bus and twenty-one people had fainted!

These crazy things are forever interrupting my thoughts. Now to continue, this was not to be the second front, as we weren't ready for that yet. As near as we could figure, we had to help Malta survive. The British occupied the island and were trying to keep supplies from reaching Rommel in Libya, from Sicily and Italy. Malta is near the southern tip of Sicily and Italy. The Italians were continuously trying to shut down the Malta airfield. But the R.A.F. still held on but needed help. Another reason was to draw Rommel away from the Suez Canal, a British supply line.

On Nov. 8<sup>th</sup> we arrived in Oran, French Morocco. At this time we didn't know if we were in friendly territory or not, as some French were German sympathizers. Most of the regular Army guys got off the ship first. We didn't get off until the city was safe, almost dark. We marched with full field pack, double file all night, through tunnels and Oran's outskirts, until we reached a bombed out hanger about noon.

It might be worth noting at this time, that back in the states, before we were sent overseas we were issued our rifles. First they ask for volunteers to be issued six 'Tompson' machine guns for each Squadron. Hey, big stuff, only a few years after Al Capone used them with much success to keep his gang out of prison. Tony Delano, an armorer was one of the unlucky volunteers. On this all night march, he nearly died with the extra weight. The rest of us were issued .30 Cal. Carbines that weighted about 15 pounds with the ammunition. The Tommy guns weighted, with the ammo, about 40 pounds. Their ammo was a 100 round drum and a couple 20 round clips loaded, that must have tipped the scales to at least 20 or 30 lbs. One learns early in army life, to never, never, never, volunteer, period! You volunteer to drive a truck, which everyone liked to do and you got a wheelbarrow to drive instead. We also had to carry our 'ditty poke' strapped to our backs. This must have weighted 20 pounds, or more. We never had to practice walking or practiced with a full field pack, gas mask, ammo, carbine, steel helmet, the works, before.

In the morning when we reached a bombed out airfield and hangers across town, we were really pooped. As I already told you, Epstein saved the day, with his ability to speak at least four languages fluently. Eppy spotted a church, and he talked the Padre out of enough wine for each of us. This was supposedly for communion, and him a Jew that you could tell from a block away! All of us, about 60 guys, had half a canteen cup of this good wine before eating our "C" rations. That really pepped us up. The best wine I ever tasted. You can't believe how this raised the moral of this beat crew.

So far it looked like it didn't take much fighting to gain a foothold in Oran. We didn't know how strong the 'Vichy France' movement was. This airfield had been destroyed, with a bunch of burned out airplanes in the destroyed hangers. We heard that the enemy had set up a machine gun at one of the tunnels after we had gone through it, but no shots were fired at us.

At this field, Tafaraoui I saw a sight that I still haven't figured out, a pile of .22 caliber BB caps. This pile was three feet high and about ten-foot in diameter. There must have been millions of BB caps there. Why were they dumped on the ground? Or what had they been used for?

A couple of days later we boarded a couple transport planes and went to an airfield at Mason Blanc, a suburb of Algiers, in French Algeria. Our planes came in soon after we arrived. They had been in Gibraltar, with the skeleton crew of armorers and crew chiefs that always followed our planes. The reason that they followed the P-38s was to service them, gas them up, clean and load the guns and preflight them for the next leg of the mission. The ground crew that was on the air echelon had to ditch their C-47, in the Mediterranean Sea as it ran out of gas or some such thing. Had I gotten wet in this exciting event, I'm sure I would have remembered the details much more clearly. I'm sure they weren't shot down with all those P-38's for an escort. My buddy Curt was on that plane and caught up with us later.

At Mason Blanc, our 'Officer of the Day', had us pitch our pup tents in a neat double row along the side of the airfield. This was along a drainage ditch, we used for a latrine. Ray Hendershott and I shared a pup tent.

That first night, a JU-88 came over and dropped a 'parachute flare' that lit up the whole night sky and airfield below, like day. They spotted our two wide, neat rows of pup tents and made a bombing run and dropped four fragmentary-bombs almost on us. We didn't have any anti aircraft batteries to protect the field, or to spoil their bomb run, at this time. But the good Lord was looking out for the 48<sup>th</sup> that night! Better than ten 'ack, ack' batteries. The second time the 48<sup>th</sup> ground crew missed being annihilated by only seconds. I think it looked so easy to the Krauts that they became trigger-happy and dropped the 4 'frag' bombs too soon. The nearest one missed our pup tents by fifty yards, which was close enough to do plenty damage. But it dropped in the drainage ditch on the edge of our area. I said to Ray, "are you hit", he said "no", and seconds later, we jumped in the ditch where the last bomb had landed. Why the Krauts didn't come back for a couple of more bomb runs over our area, we didn't know. They made a couple of passes and dropped more bombs on other targets, as the parachute flare lit up the night sky for quite a while. What else they damaged we were too busy to find out. With the phosphorus flare still lighting up the night sky, like daytime, they could have strafed us all squatting in the ditch. We didn't even have our carbines along to shoot back. That was where one second could have changed the war for us. Now we live with that "second" every day on the highways and think nothing of it. No, we didn't lie down in the ditch, because it had been used for something else! It must have been a funny sight to see us all lined up squatting in that ditch in our olive drab boxer shorts, which we all wore as PJ's. In boot camp we found out that there were such people as homosexuals, we called them 'queers', and were deathly afraid that some one would think we were queer, so we were careful to never expose ourselves unnecessarily or suggestively.

Needless to say the next morning we took down our neat row of pup tents, and scattered them in a grape orchard, per a chastised 'Officer of the Day, the dummy. We were learning.

Our planes flew front line ground support out of here for about a week. It was here that the only member of our ground crew had been hit by enemy fire that I can recall. Crew chief Hayes was on the wing of his P-38 after gassing it, and a sniper shot him in the leg from the grape orchard. Needless to say we increased our guards at night, while we were there, as we had our bivouac in that same vineyard. One night the Jerrys dumped a load of three-cornered tacks on the runway, to flatten our plane tires on takeoff. Another time they dropped some anti personnel 'Booby traps' that looked like fountain pens, they must have been running out of real bombs! On at least one of these raids some of the planes were damaged but I didn't see them so I do not know how much damage was done to them.



## Chap. 6.

## Wrong Airfield.

After a week at Mason Blanc, in late November, the front had moved to the area of the Kasserine Pass. This was most of the way across Algeria, to the border of Tunisia. Half the armors and half the crew chiefs of the 48<sup>th</sup> were sent to this area, on 'Detached Service'. We were loaded on C-47s with our equipment. This ground echelon had to service both the 48<sup>th</sup> and 49<sup>th</sup> Squadrons, which consisted of about forty planes in all. Both squadrons always shared the same airfield while overseas.

Detached service was when a skeleton crew from each department, crew chiefs, armorers, cooks and other necessary personal were sent to a temporary airfield. This was usually a field nearer the front lines so we could respond to air support requests faster. We didn't take all our maintenance equipment with us. Basically we only gassed the planes, cleaned the guns and reloaded ammo or bombs. The idea was to keep the planes ready to fly support missions at all times.

Any major repairs on the planes, like 50 or 100 hr. maintenance checks, had to be sent back to the rest of the outfit at Mason Blanc, our home field at this time. This included the necessary checks on props, engines, radios, and any thing else on the checklist. Our trained experts performed these checks when scheduled.

In this time period the new replacement planes that we were receiving, came through with an explosive charge in the radio. So if a plane was shot down over enemy territory, the radio would explode on impact. We didn't want the Germans to get our radio wave length and get in on our front line target instructions, or any other pertinent info that we put on the air.

To make our move, we had three C-47s for the ground crew, their equipment and supplies. The C-47s flew about 200 feet above the ground, just over the trees, if there would have been any trees. It was easy to see the people on the ground. Going over one area, the Arabs threw stones at us as we passed over. What a temptation to slide open the side door and cut loose with a Tommy gun at them. At this time I don't think they knew whose side they were on yet. We were pretty safe from enemy air attack as our P-38s flew cover for us.

Somewhere in the command, they screwed up! We landed at an airfield about 15 miles ahead of any ground protection. The wrong field was quite evident when one of the P-38s ran off the end of the short runway into an irrigation ditch and collapsed one of the struts (wheel supports). When the C-47s landed one of them couldn't stop in time and hit the ditch too. I'm glad it wasn't the one I was on. No one was hurt, only broke off the landing gears on one side. This was what was known as a SNAFU (situation normal, all f- - - ed up). We unloaded the C-47s and the good planes all took off again, leaving us to fend for ourselves. Hey! What gives! The C-47s went back to their base and the 38s back to the field at Mason Blanc.

At this wrong field, there was a one room stone building near the strip, and there was one English soldier lying on the floor with malaria. He had a high fever and seemed to be delirious. It looked like he was waiting to be rescued by the Medics. Anyhow he couldn't help us or lend us any confidence. The fears and rumors indicted some German paratroopers in the area.

The building was too small to be of any use to us, so we spent a hairy night out in the open, not knowing what to expect. No, we didn't go hungry, on a move like this, we were issued "C" rations. These we heated if we had anything to heat them with, in this case we ate them cold. We were in a deep valley that was below the city of Tebessa. We could see the city way up on the hilltop, so we knew that they saw us. We hoped they were friendly, or at least chose to be on our side. We had guards posted all night. After a more or less sleepless night, morning came without an incident.

The next day a delegation went up on the hill to Tebessa and hired a bus to haul us back to Youks

Les Bains, where we were supposed to land in the first place. This bus was run on the fumes from burning charcoal. The burner looked like a water heater, standing vertical in the rear of the bus. It worked, it got us back to Youks.

For a campsite at the field, we chose a big hole in the ground left by the Paratroopers. They had some kind of gun emplacement there. We used the hole for kitchen supplies and as a foxhole, if it became necessary. The cook tent was near the hole and our pup tents were scattered around it. No neat rows anymore. Hauling stuff into the hole, I found two twenty Franc gold pieces wrapped in a couple 100-Franc notes. This money had been given to the Paratroopers and Rangers in case they were captured and had to buy their way to freedom. Called "invasion money".

Our camp was located half way down the slope of a mountain, over looking a valley that was about ten miles wide. Youks les Bains (city of the bath) was across this valley on the side of a hill. It seemed to be about 10 miles away. Our airfield was below our bivouac area about a 100 yds. in a flat area. This whole area as far as the eye could see was sagebrush, not a tree in sight. This was semi desert, called the Saheel. The dirt between the bushes were covered with snail shells. Most of them were dead, a few dormant, until the next rainy season. Guess when the rainy season started? Two days after we got there! After another two days, the pilots and the ground crew were wading in mud, knee deep in places. One of these places was in front of the mess tent, as we all had to slog past there three times a day.

After a few missions our airfield was mud flats! But, you have to give our pilots credit, they wanted to fly. They suggested that we clean the rocks off the side of the steep hill above camp and use that for a take off and landing strip. After cleaning off the rocks and some of the brush from the hillside, the pilots had to get the planes out of the mud from below. If a plane couldn't taxi to the runway, the ground crew sat on the tail of the plane to lift the nose wheel out of the mud. This way the pilot could rev it up, to taxi to the end of the runway and start to take off and we would slide off the tail before he was going to fast. It worked! I suppose that landing going up a pretty steep hill was kind of 'hairy' the first couple times, but it also made takeoffs easier, going down hill. The best part was no more muddy runways. It was easier for us to work on solid ground, both for engine repair and cleaning guns, because we needed a platform. This skeleton crew had skeleton equipment and we used 5 gal. gas cans or ammo boxes, stacked up to the height that we needed, to reach the area on the plane we had to work on. After we got gas in 55 gallon barrels we used them until our lightweight stands caught up with us, months later.

Before we left England we had to have three pairs of shoes, one on our feet, one in barracks bag "A" and one in barracks bag "B". You had to have something of everything in each bag. When we drew our supplies in England for this, they didn't have any left in my size 10 1/2C. I had two pair that fit, and they made me take a pair of 11Ds for the third pair. I didn't want them but I had to take them. It said here, 'on page six', that you had to have three pairs of shoes, not three pairs of shoes that fit. Was I glad a month later, that they were so insistent. Now as we prepared for the invasion, "A" bag was put on the ship with us and the "B" bags, where I had put my big shoes was to come later on a different boat. Anyhow I never got my "A" bag cause we couldn't take it with us, when we marched off at Oran, it was to be delivered to us by truck as soon as we stopped moving and stayed in one place long enough for them to catch up with us. A month later they delivered all the "A" bags to everyone but me. Mine had gotten lost! Probably it fell into the Mediterranean when they unloaded. Another month later our "B" bags were delivered, just in time, as my shoes were in bad shape from the mud etc, they were falling apart. Now my only pair was a pair of 11 Ds! After a day in them, it felt like I could do an "about face" inside the shoes. So I cut insoles out of waxed cardboard. We had plenty of this eighth inch thick cardboard that was not corrugated. Our 100-octane gas came in 5-gallon cans, two to a case, for fueling the planes. The wax was to keep the cardboard from soaking up water, causing the cartons to fall apart. You couldn't tear it either, tough as bull leather. I put two pieces of this cardboard into each shoe, about one quarter inch thick, to take up the extra space. Never did live them down! The guys always sang 'Clementine' to me, and one part they changed the words to "Ammo boxes

without 'topses' weren't for Clementine". The ammo box where my shoes. We got our .50 cal ammo in wood boxes 12in. wide x 18in. long x 16in. deep and my buddies thought that my shoes looked like they would be a good comparison.

The most important dislike to come out of this campaign was mutton. It earned this with such deep seated feelings that it has lasted for my entire life. I still will not eat mutton. In the invasion of Africa, the Big Wheels decided to have the Limeys supply the food for all the invasion forces. This made good sense, why have duplicate supply lines. Limey rations consisted of oxtail soup, mutton stew, bread pudding, and a kind of hardtack and instant tea, with a dried milk mixture. Now picture this, a cold rainy day, standing in the chow line, knee deep in mud. Your turn in line, the cook dumps a glob of mutton stew in your mess kit, you wade out of the mud and finally find a suitable place to sit. By this time the food is getting cold. As soon as the mutton got cool, the mutton fat congealed, and stuck to your lips and the roof of your mouth. It left a waxy coat in your mouth that wouldn't wash out with the near horrible tea made with heavily chlorinated water. Mutton reminds me of that congealed waxy fat that I can still feel and taste. To me going home was never to have to eat mutton again! Ever!

I mentioned the rainy season had started, and with it was cold weather. You wonder cold in hot Africa on the edge of the Sahara Desert? Hell yes! It even snowed a couple hours one day, about an inch, that melted in a short time. You had to learn to cope with being wet or at least damp most of the time and cold. You couldn't go to bed and dry out your clothes, because you had to put more clothes on, over the ones you wore all day, to try to get warm. That left everything you wore damp in the morning.

Did you ever try to undress in a pup tent? It's an art! In fact, an impossibility if it is raining. Then, you didn't dare touch the side of the tent, or the area touched would leak. If it did leak, your straw mattress got wet, and you couldn't trust the weather to dry it outside. If it leaked very badly you could throw your raincoat over you while you slept. Worse yet was if you didn't ditch the tent right, the water came in under it, and soon you were sleeping in a mud hole. You learn a lot of things not covered in the manuals.

When we were issued our equipment back in England, each guy was issued an English "gas cape". This was like a great big raincoat that would fit over a full field pack and down to your ankles. It had a large hood and the whole thing was made of plastic or maybe oiled silk. You could tell it was English because it had English camouflage, which had more colors than U.S. 'commo' had. More like a desert commo. The idea was to cover you completely in case of a mustard gas attack, or any other gas attack. We thought more junk to carry, "useless as tits on a boar". Now we found out different. This gas cape was easily as big as a shelter half, and more waterproof. So we used one to cover the open end of our pup tent at night or when raining and your partners was used to cover you're two "A" barracks bags when they arrived. The two barracks bags were too big to completely fit in the point of the pup tent, so they had to stand outside. My partner and I were lucky, we only had one bag, as mine had been lost.

We flew a lot of ground support missions in the early part of the invasion. Sometimes three missions in one day. That kept the few of us cleaning guns, loading ammo, and gassing up the planes most of the day. We received our 100 octane gas in a waxed cardboard case, with two 5 gal. tin cans of gas in each. The gas tanks of the planes were filled from on top of the wing. There were four tanks in the wings, two on each side. Each tank held one or two hundred gallons of gas, if I remember right. The wing of the plane was six feet off the ground, so all the gas had to be lifted up on the wing by one guy, while another poured it into the tanks.

The ground support missions from the front lines where sometimes called in, requesting that we knock out a gun battery, enemy supply, convoys etc. They also took off as a search and destroy mission, looking for trouble. The pilots loved to do this. They shot down some tri-motored German transport planes that were without fighter escort on one of these sorties. They said, like shooting sitting ducks on the water. Truck convoys were fun, no ack-ack. One day my pilot came back all smiles, he caught a lone Jerry motor cycle on the road. The Jerry did all kind of

maneuvers on his bike, but my pilot said, "I got him"!

In the early stages of the invasion, we had a P-38 in the air at all times during the day to protect our planes and personnel on the ground. Comforting! In the early days of the invasion, while the Krauts still had a few planes left, the crew chiefs wouldn't preflight their plane until dawn, because when the 38 was started for a preflight check, the superchargers that were on top of the plane, got red hot, a dead giveaway to an enemy upstairs. The hot exhaust gas from the motors spun the superchargers. They got really hot, cherry red. I might add here, that they spun so fast that the little fins on the periphery of the round supercharger wheel could fly off from centrifugal force, or especially if hit by flack etc. This wheel was about 18 inches in diameter with at least a hundred little buckets or fins around it. Since these were located right outside the windows of the cockpit, on both sides, they could kill the pilot, if they flew off. Therefore the plane was designed with thick armor plate between the pilot and the supercharger.

To bailout of a P-38, if your plane was hit by flack or if shot down by an enemy plane, was life threatening. Reason being that the horizontal stabilizer (tail) would cut you in two, if you would slide down the wing. So we were told that the way to abandon ship was to roll it over on its back, upside down, open the canopy and jump as hard as you could. At least we knew that more than one pilot was successful at bailing out, as we later found out that they were prisoners of war.

## Chap. 7.

## The End of a German Ace.

After a couple weeks, the rest of the outfit joined us in Youks. Things got a little better then, but we still had to live in pup tents. The pilots got bigger tents and their own mess tent to eat in, out of the mud.

One day a couple armorers and a few crew chiefs took a truck to that airfield by Tebbesa. This was where the crippled P-38 and C-47 planes were with the broken landing gear. We were there to take the guns off the P-38 with the broken wheel strut. The crew chief had some parts they were salvaging from the engines and I removed the guns. After getting our work done, we went over to the C-47 to get the emergency "D" ration from it. The "D" rations were chocolate. A bar about three-quarters of an inch thick by three inches wide by six inches long. Much better tasting than mutton stew! I must have found six of them and pretty much lived on them for a month, after that. While looking for "D" rations, we were in the cockpit of the C-47 at the time and we heard a JU-88 making a wide swing to make a bomb run. You could always tell a JU-88 or a Hinkle 111 (Hinkle run run run as we called them) by the unsynchronized props. This sound was a hum, a pause, a hum, and a pause, rhythmic. Our planes were quiet, you heard only the even prop and engine noise. On recognizing it as a Kraut, we jumped from the emergency escape door in the cockpit to the ground. Lucky we didn't break a leg as it was about 12ft high. We scrambled for the ditch and away from the C-47, all the time praying that our "cover man" back at the field was alert. He was, and he poured on the coal toward us. The JU-88 saw him coming and broke off the bomb run and also poured on the coal to get the hell out of there. The JU-88 was no match for the 38, and got shot down in a hurry. The German pilot and gunner were not hurt when captured. The pilot was a German ace two times over. They had sent him down here for "R&R" (rest and relaxation) from the German war zone. He was pretty shook up when he found out he was shot down by a rookie pilot, his first victory.

After about a month at Youks, I got the GIs. I wasn't eating that mutton stew or oxtail soup but was living on the "D" rations I had gotten from the C-47. I checked in to the Medics and they gave me a few pills and said I had amebic dysentery from eating dates that we had bought from the 'Jayrabs' (our friendly nickname for the Arabs). You can easily see how this could happen. The peddlers usually appeared at the edge of camp carrying a big glob of sticky dates about the size of a basketball. When he saw the number of Francs you waved at him he would brake off a glob of dates for you. Now you knew when you looked at an Arab that cleanliness wasn't his first priority. We were told in our invasion literature that we shouldn't buy from the natives. *Sez la Guere*. The snails were the carriers of the amebic dysentery bug, and they were everywhere. They kept me in the dispensary because I was feeling so bad, and had green stools.

While I was in the dispensary a JU-88 was making a bomb run over the field. The Medics hollered "air raid", alerting me as they ran for their foxholes. I said, I'm too sick to run. About that time the machine guns started to hammer, I knew then it was no 'dry run', and I was in the ditch before the 'pill rollers' got there! The JU-88 flew so close that I could see the feature on the gunner's face as they went over. The JU-88, was a two-motored dive-bomber, the gunner sat behind the pilot with an 8mm machine gun that he could shoot to either side and behind. I don't know what he was shooting at, I'm glad it wasn't me! After a few days I could eat a little and I wasn't so loose, so the Medics turned me free.

There were always planes in the air, both enemy and ours. We were always watching, and as soon as anyone spotted a plane, he would yell, B-2. We would watch until we identified it, and if it were an enemy, we would run for a foxhole. What! You haven't heard of a B-2? "Be too damn bad if it ain't ours".

When our planes were in the air and we had time off, we would stand around a fire and heat English tea in our canteen cups. Our fires were made in a five gallon gas can cut in two. We

would throw a little gravel in the bottom and dump in a couple cups of 100 octane over the gravel. When lighted, we could warm our hands and heat our tea. Was it smoky, but it just added another layer to our Africa tan.



## Where Old Romans Scrubbed, GI's Now Clean Their Hides

By MILTON LEHMAN

(Stars and Stripes Staff Writer)

**YOUKS-LES-BAINS**—The baths at Youks date back to 2,000 BC, when the Romans bathed here in the natural, hot mineral water, splashing and laughing and singing risque odes in Latin. These old baths are not used now. Grass has grown in them and soldiers toss their Lifebuoy soap cartons into them on their way to the new baths.

The new baths at Youks are only 300 years old and, built Roman style, they're not exactly baths at all—they're more like individual swimming pools. Tajin Elbadi, a silent, conscientious Arab, sweeps them out between customers with a long straw broom that he also uses for policing the grounds outside.

Tajin was hard at work cleaning up after a T-5 when I walked into the chamber where a flight of steps leads down to Bath No. 3. I could see him down there moving back and forth on the red tile floor, sweeping it with his famous broom and his bare feet.

"Good day," I said in French. "I take a bath?"

"Volla," he replied.

### HEALTHY WATERS

He propped his broom against the wall and turned on a tremendous brass tap in the corner of the pool. The waters of Youks, which are reputedly healthy and certainly active, came rushing up out of the ground into Bath No. 3. I thanked Tajin and he went away.

You can't see very much in this bath, because the only light comes from a small slit 12 feet up one of the solid walls, but it's a good bath nevertheless. The room is about 6 feet by 12 and if you allowed the water to rise to the level of the top step, you might very easily practice your back stroke.

I sat down on the stone steps, which are all right to sit on after you become accustomed to them, and put my feet in the water. The

water continued to roar out of the faucet.

After a while I got up from these steps and went into the pool with my soap, which somehow slipped out of my hand and got under my feet. For a while I skated about on the cake of soap and then suddenly sat down. I bathed comfortably for ten minutes until I noticed that the water was now coming up around my ears, so I swam over to the faucet and with considerable effort turned it off.

### GOOD FRENCH TALK

The rest was easy. I came out of the bath, dried, dressed and quickly got into conversation with Yotte Gustave, the 71-year-old caretaker, who appreciates hearing good French. Yotte, who was born in Fernandin d'Yonne in France, has lived in Youks-les-Bains for many years. He explained that his job was to supervise Tajin Elbadi, as well as to take care of the grove of trees adjacent to the baths. "These groves," he said, enumerating on his fingers, "contain trees of all sorts: almond trees, pear trees, cherry trees, olive trees and there is also a beanfield."

According to Yotte Gustave, business at the baths has never been so active. In days before the Yanks arrived, Tajin slept peacefully under one of the olive trees, getting up for the occasional customer only about five times a day. Now, says Yotte Gustave, business sometimes runs up to 500 daily.

On the way out of the baths, which are open from 7 to 4 o'clock every day including Sunday, I saw Cpl. Lloyd Pitchford, of Gerard, Ill. Cpl. Pitchford had just taken a bath himself and was now dicker-ing with a peanut salesman.

"I came many miles to take this bath," said Cpl. Pitchford. "It is the first I have had in a long time. I was sent to investigate. Next time I come back, I'll bring my squad with me."

When we were here there was no caretaker around, the water ran all the time in the tank.

After a month here, we got time off to go to the Roman baths at Youks Les Bains. The water for this bath was quite hot as it was piped from an underground hot springs. It was piped into a big concrete tank that was about three feet deep. The tank was about 20 feet square. With that much surface cooling the water, it was still too hot when you first got in. The tank wasn't too clean, but then neither were we. Our soap scum soon covered every thing, the floor, the walls and the tank. That made everything very slippery. I imagine in peacetime that they had a caretaker to keep it clean and probably charged a fee to use it. We enjoyed the heat though, after being cold and wet so much of the time.

As I mentioned before, we had moved our runways on the steep incline of the mountain, for better drainage to get out of the mud. It so happened that this runway was built on a path the Jarabs used, maybe once a week. You could barely see it in the sagebrush. It was like a deer trail in the woods, up north in Wisconsin. Anyhow one day as a mission was returning to the field to land, an Arab was going up the trail that crossed the landing strip. The Arab had two donkeys loaded with small sticks he had cut out of the sagebrush. In Africa they made charcoal from this. The Arab was going up the hill, so he didn't see the plane coming in behind him. A 38 is pretty quiet when it cuts its engines to land. So at the last second, some GI saw the problem and hollered at the Arab and he just jumped out of the way in time. The donkeys weren't so lucky. The 38 went right between them and caught both of them in the whirling props. The props threw the sticks all over and cut both donkeys pretty badly. The donkeys were hurting with some of their parts hanging out, and braying loudly. Some GI "Xed" them out with his carbine. We buried them next to the runway and some GI stuck a sign on the grave reading,

*Here lie two jackasses,*

*Both early and late,*

*Caught in the props of a P-38.*

I heard later that the US Gov. paid the Arab 18 dollars for chopping up his jackasses. Lucky the cooks weren't around, that sure would have beaten mutton stew. You have to give the cooks credit. They were always looking for something that was eatable to supplement the army fare.

If the cooks ever got anything good to eat, someone would find out about it. As I told you, the cook supplies were kept in that dugout, gun hole, the paratroopers dug before we got to this field. Our nighttime guard on duty had this hole in his route to patrol, and maybe passed it every half-hour. So anyone that felt brave enough to face the Officer of the Day or the Adjutant's wrath, if caught, would time the raid to the mess supplies to correspond to the guard's route. One night Bill Harvey wanted some extra tea for the next day, so he watched the guard and hit the hole at the proper time. He was sneaking around in the dark, and saw another guy in there also looking for something. Pretty soon they started whispering to each other, asking where this or that was. You should have heard Bill tell about it next day. The guy snooping around with him was the Adjutant, Emmet Wilson. I tell you this because where else but the US services would the Officers have to go through the same things the enlisted men did under combat conditions? Wilson was easy going, we called him "Grandma Wilson", but not to his face. We all liked him, as we all had to make the best of the situation. The officers and pilots got special treatment if it was available, and it wasn't always available. We were moving too often for our amenities to catch up with us.

One day, after a couple months at Youks, we had a visit from General Dolittle. The next morning we broke camp in a hurry. The Germans were counter attacking and coming up the Kassarine Pass and our field was on it. We moved lock stock and barrel, by truck, on the double, to some field about 30 miles away. As it turned out, the Germans were stopped just before they got to Tebessa, and our airfield at Youks les Bains. We heard later that a German air raid pretty well



took care of what was left at our field at Youks. This seemed to have been the last big push that Rommel made in North Africa.

We moved a couple times in the next weeks and ended up in Berteaux. Flat country, nothing but sagebrush. It was about 20 miles from Constantine. One of the pleasant memories of the move, was the wonderful tangerines that we could buy from the Jayrabs. They were big and juicy, no dry ones like we sometimes get in the U.S.

The Arabs adapted to us being around pretty well. The Arabs we saw were mostly shepherds or at least rural people of the so-called lower class. Some of them wore baggy pants where the crotch hung down to their knees. I believe this had something to do with their religion, which I don't know anything about. Now as I had explained before, we were issued two barrack bags, they were made of denim material with a heavy wash-line cord in the top hem, so we were able to tie them shut. These bags would hold about a bushel and a half. Before we went 'overseas' we were required to stencil our name and serial number in big bold letters in white, so we could identify our own bag when dumped on a pile, after they unloaded them from the truck they were delivered on. Now it was very comical to see a 'Jayrab', who got one of these bags and had cut two slits in the bottom and stuck his feet through the holes and pulled it up, and tied the drawstring around his waist, with the bag bottom hanging down to his knees. 'Joe Blows' name and serial number in big white letters, was displayed everywhere the Arab went! That's what you call real fame!

It looked like we were going to stay here a while, so four of us armorers decided to live in better conditions than a pup tent. Curtis, Wm. Harvey, Bull Bolton, and myself dug a four-man foxhole. As I mentioned before, we got our 100 octane gas in 5-gallon cans, 2 cans to a heavily waxed thick cardboard carton. We put the dirt that we had dug out in these cartons and wired them shut. We set these cartons around the periphery of our foxhole. With the height of the cartons and the depth that we dug the foxhole, it was three feet deep. That is from the top of the four earthen bunks to the top of the gas cartons. We felt that 10 inches of dirt, the carton width, would stop any bomb fragments and therefore we wouldn't have to dig so deep. If we stayed lying down during an air attack, we would still be below ground level by a little bit.

Then on top of these cartons we stretched our 'shelter-halves' as our pup tents were officially called. This wasn't very rainproof as these shelter-halves were only buttoned together with a 4-inch overlap. This overlap ran down the middle of the roof both ways, which didn't keep out the rain on a flat roof. We should have engineered a peak in it, but we felt the rainy season was pretty well over. We also thought that the way we had been moving around, we would only be here a couple weeks at best.

With the end of the rainy season came dust storms. If you didn't chew your food too fine you didn't notice the grit. I can't recall ever suffering or even washing up because of a dust storm. But the rain and cold I'll never forget. Maybe it was because we were in pup tents during the rainy season.

Between the beds we dug six inches deeper. Then we could sit up on our straw mattress and put on our shoes. We couldn't stand up though. When you got dressed, you did it lying down, you swung your feet to the center aisle to put on your shoes, then crawled over to the door. The door was a tent flap tied shut or open as the time of the day dictated. Once the door was open you could stand up to walk up the three hard earth steps to ground level. The hard soil steps were good until we got the first rain. From then on it was more of a kiddy slide, especially when wet. It was also muddy between our beds for awhile, after each rain. Very convenient though, we didn't have to get up for an air raid anymore. Ours we affectionately called "The Snake Pit".

Wm. Harvey convinced us that a little rain wouldn't hurt us very much, as he told us stories of the floods he had experienced in his home town in West Virginia. The river flowed through the town and flooded every year. He said, they would sit on the roof of the house with their jug of 'corn' until the water receded. He told us the story like it was fun, but I think it was a lesson in learning

to cope with the hand you were dealt.

Our straw filled mattress bags on top of the dirt platform gave us a pretty good place to spend the evening; writing letters or playing Pinochle.

Did we ever get lice? Never. Quartermaster issued us a flea powder to shake on top of our straw mattress to control them. We used it liberally, if you hit your bed too hard with your hand, or got into bed too fast, you stirred up a cloud like a dust storm.

We made lights by punching a hole in the cap of a round pint machine gun oil can. Then we pulled a piece of soft cotton rope through the hole in the cap of the pint can. Step three was filling the can with 100 octane gas and putting the rope in the can and screwing on the cover. When lit, the light was dim and very smoky.

We also purchased a low-pressure gas burner in Constantine, now we could make coffee at any time. Oh! Best of all, we were on GI rations, no more mutton stew or oxtail soup, HOORAY! By this time the effects of dysentery were pretty well gone and my appetite had returned.

We were about 20 miles from Constantine. This very old city was built on a huge gorge. The gorge was about a quarter mile, to two miles wide in places. In the city it was really deep, I never had the guts to creep up to the edge and look down, the rock edge looked too wobbly to suit me. There were bridges over it but I never did cross one so I could see down. Now I wish I would have, to see if there was a river down there.

The first time I got a pass into Constantine with a couple others from the "Snake Pit", we were looking for something to drink. Good wine etc. was hard to find, the Germans had pretty well beat us to it. The streets were narrow with mostly two story stone buildings, one against the other. Every street you went down, you would run into a little kid about 10 years old, that was 'pimping' for his sister. There were no stores just street vendors. You could buy anything they had just about, for a pack of cigarettes. What did they have, not much? The foodstuff they sold, your stomach said "no no"! Like muttonchops or other cuts. If you liked mutton, the flies sitting on it cautioned you to pass it up. They did have an egg white candy, like our sea foam, that was sweet and edible. One time when 'Goon Drawers' Adams was in town, he bought the entire tray from a 'hawker', and went to a park and gave it all away to the kids that were there. He drew a crowd in a hurry. Big hearted Adams!

I must tell you about Alvin Adams, a big 6 foot 2 inch, 225-pound, good-natured, loveable guy from North Dakota. He was always jovial and agreeable. We all wore coveralls 99% of the time. We wore ODs or Suntans only on pass, on guard duty, or in an inspection, which we never had to stand overseas. Anyhow when our coveralls wore out, we would go to Supply and get a new issue. The time Alvey needed a new pair of coveralls, all Supply had were for short guys, so they issued him a pair that was half way up to his knees. So his hairy legs stuck out of his pants legs and we appropriately stuck him with the nickname 'Alice' at first, after 'Alice the Goon' in the Popeye cartoon. The Alice moniker soon changed to 'Goon Drawers', as it was more descriptive. In our outfit it didn't take long to get a nickname. Mine was 'Von' because I knew some German.

The toilets in town, WC's (or water closets) were something else, a four inch diameter hole in the concrete with two footprints on each side by the hole, so positioned, that if you squatted and placed your feet in the footprints, you would hit the hole, bullseye!

It seems that I got off track again, we were looking for something strong to drink. We finally found a shop that sold wine. They had a 4-gallon heavy glass jug of wine that was in a thick wicker basket. He wanted 400 Francs (\$40.00 dollars) for it. We couldn't pass this up, it turned out to be our best buy ever. To convince you I will relate to you the saga of 'Little Puke Face'.



Sitting on the 'snake pit' entrance, Curtis, Wm. Harvey, holding 'Little Puke Face', Bolton and myself, laundry in background. It must be cold, I have on a sheepskin leather jacket.

The night we returned with this 'purple death' we invited a few friends over for a social drink. The stuff was horrid but after a few canteen cups of it, it tasted pretty good. This was the first of many mornings when in front of the 'Snake Pit', there was crusty purple ground from too much merry making with 'Little Puke Face', or was it just, maybe, weak stomachs! The reason I say many mornings is because every time someone had a pass, we sent the 'Little Regurgitator' or 'Little Puke Face' in for a refill. It only cost \$2.00 to get it filled. We had a mail truck that went into Constantine every day. We convinced the truck driver to get it filled now and then, if enough guys didn't take a pass to keep us in "purple death". This became so popular that we had to send it along on "detached service", to Tripoli with some of the guys. After a couple months, somewhere along the line it was broken, maybe saved all of us from becoming addicted to rot-gut vino.

I got a haircut in Constantine by a 12-year-old boy. All he used was a comb and a straight razor. He held the hair up with the comb and with a deft swish of the razor along the comb and the ends were off. You hoped he was not a GI hater with that dangerous weapon in his hand.

We had a gas attack one night after dark. The guard ran through the area hollering "GAS, GAS". You can imagine what a scramble, in the snake pit, trying to find our gas masks in the dark. They are supposed to be handy at all times but after being in one place any length of time they always wound up at the bottom of the pile. Anyhow the gas that the guard had detected was the smell of someone making a bedtime snack. Some guy that was frying onions and whatever, on one of those low-pressure gas stoves that had caused the smell. So the "all clear" was sounded, and we went back to sleep, some before they had found their gas masks, but with a firm resolve to find it for next time.

## Chap. 8.

## Civilian Vs Military Life.

At this point I'm going to include two letters that are somewhat alike in their content, as portrayed by their writers. Excitement! My deer-hunting buddy wrote the first letter, as he described the annual fall hunt in northern Wisconsin and the second written by myself, describing the excitement of the Invasion of North Africa, I was very anxious to brag about the dangers we had to endure. Ginny (G sounded as in "go") was my nickname back home, in pre W.W. II days.

Dear Ginny,

Boy did you miss a deer hunt! At 2:30 A.M. Fritz yelled "daylight in the swamp" and guys lying all over the floor in every room at our home opened one eye. After a cup of coffee the other eye came open and we headed north. Three cars, one trailer, Bill, Harvey, Al, Lawrence, Bud, Bunny, Fritz, Cliff and myself, were off. The taverns weren't open yet so we made the trip up north in record time.

When we arrived at Pfieters, we decided to walk in to check out the "tote road" before trying to pull a trailer through all those low muddy areas. Good thing we did, it wasn't frozen over and very wet.

So we set up two tents, just a little way into the woods. This meant we had to walk a half a mile to reach our old hunting grounds, and two and a half to get to "Cigarette Camp". We got the tents up by 1:30 and had some chili Al's wife made. A whole cream can full. At about 2:30 we had the thing pretty well fixed, so everybody 'sloped' to spy out the land. Bud and Cliff started for the Cigarette Camp, Harvey and Bill, for "The Rock" and I for the ridge between the two swamps south of our old camp. While Peanuts who was also camped there, went up the "Pony Trail" and Fritz hit for the place where Bunny always shot his deer. Al and Lawrence took the car and drove around to Spur 250 to look that over. We all reported back and told about all the deer we had seen and the big tracks, etc, etc. Excitement run high as each of us laid out our strategy for the next morning.

The next day, after all of us hunted our favorite spot, as evening approached we each headed home to see how everyone else had fared out.

When I pulled into camp, there was a six pointer hanging in the tree, and believe it or not, it was Fritz's. He said he had shot it where Bunny always gets his and he'd shot at two more bucks from the same stump.

Well we ate and Cliff and I washed the dishes and everyone told about the bucks they'd heard but hadn't seen. I noticed Bill was sitting there with his crooked thumb wrapped around a whiskey bottle and Fritz took a snort now and then. Well pretty soon somebody got out the cards and stated "nickel limit and dealers choice", and they were off! After much passing the bottle between Bill, Fritz and Harvey, and wild betting, the game broke up about 9:00 P.M. Well I was in bed, about 10:00 o'clock when Bill, Fritz and Harvey busted open the tent door of the sleeping quarters and Fritz hollered, "I'm wild and wooly and full of fleas" and "I'm a sonofabitch on wheels". Well we all woke up to protect our selves. Bill pestered Al for a while, until Al swore a blue streak at him. Then they wanted to go to Argonne, to the "Hunters Ball", Harvey talked them out of that, but the circus lasted until the threats got too heavy, about 11:00 PM.

The next morning after pancakes, we all agreed to make a few "drives". The first couple drives we moved deer but the drives weren't engineered right, so no one got a shot.

Then we drove the drive north of Gerlock's, from the "main gut" to the cranberry marsh. Peanuts, Al, and Bill were along the edge of the cranberry marsh, Bud was on the logging road by the "first cut". The rest of us strung out on the logging road East of Gerlocks and drove north. When the drive started, we went about 50 yards and Bud shot twice, then 10 more yards and he

shot twice more; another 100 yards and Bill shot once, then Pfeifer, who snuk in on the drive shot at least 10 shots. Well when I hit the marsh, I headed for Bill and he had a 5 pointer, one shot; a head shot, standing about 50 yards away. We waited for the rest and pretty soon we heard 2 more shots, over towards Bud. The rest of the guys showed up all but Bud and Bunny. So after a while, we started to drag out Bill's buck and a little while later we ran into Bud and Bunny, dragging a nice 6 pointer. Talking it over, we had seen at least 10 deer, and 4 of them were bucks.

The next day we made four drives in the Cigarette Camp area. We moved one buck on the second drive but no one got a shot due to poor planning.

The next day we packed up and headed home. Bills number one weighed 150-lbs. and number two weighed 156-lbs. This story is complete except for what I forgot.

*So long till Sat*

*P.S. Our venison fry is Sat. night.*

Karl

Now back to the war; we had the first Ace of the African campaign, Lt. Williams. He got orders to fly home for a little public relations and propoganda. It didn't take long we were sending pilots home frequently, as they flew their missions in record time, sometimes two missions a day. We got word that one of these lucky guys would try to get letters into U.S. without being censored. So by the light of our makeshift lights, we wrote home the things we couldn't write about otherwise, about the war. As it turned out, the pilot had to stand a "shake down" inspection and had to turn the letters in to be censored, when he got to the U.S.A. They were held until the end of the war. I wrote mine in Jan. of 1943 and my mother got the letter in 1945. At that time I was anxious to tell my deer hunting buddies that we had more exciting times than their deer hunting. The hurried letter was written as follows, and barely readable as it was written at night by a home made light and a dull stub of a pencil:

Dear Folks,

I am sending this home with a pilot going to the states, so this will not be censored?

The high lights of the N. African Campaign:

On the way over, Curtis's plane (C-47) ran out of gas, and landed in the Mediterranean. He is safe.

We landed at Oran, and expected to be machine gunned at any time, as we marched from 9:00 at night until 2:00 in the morning, and again from 5:00 until the next noon. We got to an airfield that had been destroyed by the army.

We moved, by plane, to Algiers and Jerry dropped bombs within 200 feet, and strafed hell out of us, (piss poor shooting and never hit any of us). They returned 3 or 4 nights in a row, and dropped bombs and 'booby-traps' that if you stepped on them they would badly mane you.

Moved by plane, one week later to Tebessa. That turned out to be the wrong airfield. The guys (30 men in the advanced echelon) no more than landed and it was reported that 60 German paratroopers had landed to take the field. Prepared for battle, but it was a false alarm. The next day we moved back 10 miles, moved to a field where 200 American Paratroopers were holed in. Thirty men took care of 30 planes, work, o' man! We cooked our own grub, never washed mess kit, mud up to our knees, and wet for 2 or 3 days at a time. We were there a week before the rest of the Sqd. caught up with us. All we had to eat for 3 or 4 weeks was mutton (pew) stew and hard crackers. JU-88's bombed the field, R. Hall and I lay in a ditch 3 inches deep, could see the gunner strafe the field but only got one guy.

Christmas, sicker than hell—got the GIs and was in the hospital tent, when 4 M.E.-109's tried to strafe the field. Minutes later our planes got the bas- (censored). Another day, a JU-88 strafed the field but didn't do too much damage before he was shot down.

We built homes out of 5gal. gas can cartons, and dug down 2 feet for protection, very crude, but as comfortable as a hotel, we thought.

Our planes and pilots did very good so far, at least two enemy planes shot down for every one we lost. Best record in Africa. Plus enemy trucks, locomotives, ships and transport planes by the dozens. My guns shot down 3 fighter planes, and many transport planes, trucks, etc, which don't count much.

Flew to an airfield at Telegrama in early Jan. One day a friendly mortar shell accidentally landed near the tent area missed us all! Not much action, Jerry over every other night, but never drops any bombs, thank God. The night after we left Youks les Bains, the Jerrys almost blew it off the map.

It's just about over now. No more Jerrys flying over, good grub, and we get a few passes to go into Constantine.

They took our planes away, now we are resting and reorganizing. For awhile it looked like we might get to come home, but I guess we'll stay here for quite some time. They might split the Sqd. again, I don't know. Anyhow it's all over but the shouting here.

I got your package with the knife and candy. Boy, is the candy good. That cigarette lighter sure is a dilly.

Send this to Karl, I'd like to have him see that I had more action than he had in his deer hunt. I wouldn't go through it again for a million bucks, but I wouldn't sell what I learned for the same.

It's colder than hell where we have been. It has always been in the foothills of the mountains. Frost most nights, snowed once, but it's nice in the daytime.

The day Martha Ray, Mittsy Green, and a couple other movie stars were here, I was in the foothills big game hunting for Jerry paratroopers. No find.

On the way over, a torpedo missed us by a few yards, the same sub hit a different ship and blew it up. A British patrol plane blew the sub out of the water.

If only I had the room, I could have gotten more guns, machine guns, and pistols (German & Italian) than I could carry.

I hope to hell this doesn't worry you because it's all over now. Pardon writing and short cuts, I'm writing this in a hurry by a home made lamp. Don't ask questions about this but tell me you got my letter of the 29<sup>th</sup> of Jan. I wish Karl could have been here with me. Hope you can make sense of this. Love To All                      Lloyd

P.S. I would suggest you or Karl destroy this and tell no one.

Sixty years later, I don't remember it being so bad as I had written. Maybe I was doing a little 'Snow job'? As I write these things now, those events seem to run together and many I can't remember at all.

No story would be complete without telling some of the hardships that the people had to go through back home to keep us in supplies. For this I'm having my wife, Genn, relate how it was, as she can remember things.

"December of 1941 found me a freshman in Mayville High School, "Elmers Tune" was number one on the "Hit Parade" and Bob Hope was a budding radio comedian. Fibber McGee and Molly were a must on Sun. night if you had a radio. We were still digging out of the "Great Depression

of the 1930s. Earlier I had spent two years in a Sanitarium because of the scourge of the era, Tuberculosis. So I could relate to the GIs being cold, as the only cure for TB was fresh air, until Penicillin came along. We had to sleep on an unheated porch, even in below zero weather.

December 7<sup>th</sup>, a snowy Sunday, and after church, we came home and turned on the radio while making Sunday dinner. The Japanese had attacked Pearl Harbor!! It was hard to believe as we listened to the crackly reports. Mom and Dad were very quiet.

Things changed very fast then. Civil Defense was organized, things needed in the war effort were rationed. War Bonds went on sale and 'Victory Gardens' were planted. Immediately young acquaintances left for the armed force. Many High School seniors and even some juniors signed up, but some waited until they were drafted.

Even kids helped finance the war effort by buying Saving Bond Stamps for ten cents apiece, when you had the book of stamps full, you turned it in for a War Bond.

Things on the rationed list were gasoline, oil, tires, meat, sugar, butter, shoes, stockings and many other things. You could get out of school during harvest time to help farmers harvest sugar beets and other crops. You could also work in factories after school for a few hours, like the shoe factory. Everyone was anxious to help in any way they could.

The average person could only get a gas stamp for three gallons a week so you had to save for weeks to go any distance. The speed limit was 35 miles per hour, so it took forever to visit grandma and grandpa in Milwaukee, about 60 miles away. In large cities you went to work via streetcar or bus or walked.

Everyone having someone in service had a big blue one star flag in the front window and as the war went on, more and more of these flags turned gold as their sons were killed.

Every where you went, you would run into a big poster of Uncle Sam, pointing his finger at you with the caption;

I want you

U.S. Army

Enlist Now.

As the war went on we started using V-Mail, both for sending and receiving. In this process, you wrote on a form letter and it was photographed and sent over seas recorded on film. At the proper APO address overseas, the tape was photographed and sent to the proper unit. This way they could send 1,500 letters on one roll of film. Never liked it too well as it lost that personal touch.

Genn

## Chap. 9.

## Psychiatric Ward.

Sometime after this we got a pilot in that had been a Lt. in the Marine Corp. He told us about the fight that he and his men were in to gain a foothold on an island in the Pacific. He said it was really hell to establish a beachhead when you didn't have air superiority. The Japs kept them pinned down by strafing the beaches. He was wounded and went back to the states to recuperate, and he reenlisted as a pilot in the Army Air Force because he could see how effective air power was. He was sent to us after his training was over. He gave us a little talk on his experiences on that beachhead, it was then that we knew that we had gotten the best front to do our fighting on.

One day I reported to the Medics because I had a rock in my gut or that is what it felt like. It didn't go away in a couple days so they sent me to a field hospital. They diagnosed it as Yellow Jaundice. No doubt something to do with the amebic dysentery that I had before, or maybe all the "D" rations, or maybe because I didn't eat my mutton stew. They fed me some pills and after a week I started to feel better.

This field hospital was the first stop for the wounded from the front lines. The tent ward I was in was next to the psychiatric tent. One night in the middle of the night a guy started to scream, "If Gene Autrey and Hopalong Cassity were here, we'd fix those cock suckers". He screamed and hollered this over and over until all went quiet. The nurse must have given him a hypo to quiet him. These screams in the night left you thinking, thank God it's not me, and left you feeling vulnerable and more dependent on your faith in God to help you through these times when things didn't seem to make good sense. It happened mostly to combat infantry guys, but it even happened to one of our guys. This guy of ours, was a Mennonite if I remember right. He seemed to be getting a little 'flaky' and one day was walking straight into the whirling props of a 38 that was taxiing to the revetment. Someone grabbed him just in time to pull him out of the way. The next day he was sent to a hospital, I never did see him again. He was probably sent to this same hospital. At any rate this was one way to get sent home, it was called a "section 8". Guys threatened to do this all the time to get home, but only in jest. The term usually used, after doing something crazy and dangerous was, 'I'm bucking for a section eight'.

It was here that I got the only gold crown the Army gave up? It happened this way. I had a tooth ache while at this field hospital, and a brand new Lt. from the states, was the guy that looked me over. He called in his superior and recommended the tooth be filled or pulled, as it had a lot of fillings. The Major looked at it and said he should put on a gold crown. The Lt. and I both know that the Major was just checking to see how skillful this new Lt. was. He knew his stuff, I still have the tooth with the genuine gold crown, 60 years later. At this time I can assure you he passed the test with flying colors.

The bulletin board advertised a Communion service for one evening. I took it in and soon knew it was different than a Lutheran Communion service. I think it was here that the seeds of ecumenism were sown in my mind. If the main thought and elements were the same, that was what counted. I was later reprimanded by my pastor back home. He indicated I had committed a grave sin, but I never thought so. When I think it over, I can't remember seeing a posting on the bulletin board, overseas, "Lutheran Communion". It always read "Non Denominational Communion".

After a couple weeks here, I was sent back to home base. I didn't look any different than all the rest. Yellow eyeballs, and yellow cast to our skins, jaundice or attabrine did the same thing to us all. We were required to take one attabrine pill a day to prevent you from getting Malaria in areas where the Malaria carrying mosquito was present. This attabrine pill was used instead of Quinine, and was very effective.

We were now getting our 100-octane gasoline in 55-gallon drums. There were probably ten full ones and maybe that many empties by each plane most of the time. All enlisted men below Staff Sgt. were required to pull guard duty. We only had guards at night. If I remember right it was a



2-hour shift and 2 or 4 guards patrolled the entire area around the planes and bivouac area. Imagine the thrill, in the still of the night and you are looking for saboteurs, and slowly walking among the planes, near 55-gal. gasoline drums, when the head pops with a noise that was deafening! Enough to 'spot your drawers'! It seems some drums would build up heat in the day and the air inside would expand then at night when they cooled off, the air and gas inside would shrink enough to make the head of the drum pop in with a loud bang. Even after you know it, you could not hear it without jumping and your heart doing a couple cartwheels and skipping a couple beats. This happened in reverse too, as the sun heated the drums, the air inside would expand and the head would pop up with an equally loud bang, but in the daytime it didn't bother you a bit.

One day, Intelligence was informed that some German paratroopers were dropped in the area, somewhere close by. Having no army personal in the area to call on, our C.O. ordered a driver and one of our 4x4 trucks and 4 of us armorers to check this out. All we could do was drive around on all sides of our airfield to see if we could find anything. The terrain was mostly flat, with two-foot high sagebrush, on all sides, as far as your eye could see, with a few low rolling hills. We were leaning on the roof of the truck cab, with our rifles, ready for action. The driver drove around the area for about four hours, trying to hit all spots within a five mile radius. There is no way we could have spotted them first, if they had been there it would have been "curtains and slow music" for us! The sagebrush was just high enough to hide a man lying down but not a truck. Lucky for us, it turned out to be a false alarm or at least we didn't find anything. When we got back to camp that evening, we found we had just missed the soon to be famous, "Three Jills in a Jeep", Martha Ray, Mitsy Mayfair or was it Mitsy Green? The other gal I don't remember. The reason I remember Mitsy is that one of our radiomen had gone to high school with her, I believe that was in Sparta, Wisconsin. His name was Frey. They told us she even recognized him and 'bussed' him. The most envied guy in the outfit! That had to be some kind of miracle, at least for him.

We were doing some dive bombing now and then. The Italians were running for home. That meant a boat trip across the Mediterranean for them, and we had air superiority! They all didn't make it. We were using 500 pounders, (bombs), one under each wing. My pilot, the C.O. Capt. Ross, was credited with sinking a big Italian ship. With a wide grin, he said, "right down the smokestack".



Florian, Morris- holding tail fuse-myself and Pruden- holding nose fuse.

We made a training film to send back, 'states side', for training in Tech. schools. The stars in this epic film were Lt. Blood, Tech. Sgt. 'Bird' Pruden, Ed Florian, Clarence Morris and myself. The training film showed Ordinance unloading the 500 lb. bombs and a couple of us putting them on

the bomb slings that were used to lift the bomb in place, under the wings of the P-38. It showed the locking of the bomb shackle that held the bomb in place. This shackle was really strong, made from duraluminum and could stand the "Gs" of dive bombing and flying maneuvers with 500 lbs. of weight. Next was putting on the tail fins. These fins were shipped in very strong metal framework. The tail fin was handled carefully in shipping, because if they were bent in anyway the bomb would not fall straight. It would ruin their trajectory when dropped from 20,000 feet from our bombers. This wasn't so important for the 'dive bombing' that we did, but we handled them carefully anyway. These heavy gauge metal shipping crates we used for stools to sit on, rather than junking them. In fact our church pews were these cages. Each cage or stool, had four sixteen inch high legs, with one solid square top, 12 x 12 inches, low but better than sitting on the ground.

Next was screwing in the tail and nose fuses. These fuses had a different setting so they could be dropped with a time delay. This allowed the bomb to be dropped through a couple of floors, like in a ship, before detonating. Also each bomb had an arming wire on it. This wire went through a hole in the nose and tail fuse propeller and on a lever in the bomb shackle. Now in the cockpit were the controls to drop the bombs. If the pilot wanted to drop the bomb 'safe' he could flip a switch and do so. This was necessary in case the pilot had to ditch the plane in friendly territory or landing a shot up plane, you would want to get rid of the bombs, so he would drop them safe, when in friendly territory. When the pilot did this the arming wire was dropped with the bomb and the wire stayed in the holes in the fuse props so they couldn't spin off. You could drop a bomb 10,000 ft and the bomb wouldn't go off. If it did it was called a low order detonation and wasn't very powerful. In a bombing run the pilot flipped the arming switch and the arming wire stayed with the plane, thus pulling the wire out of the fuse propellers allowing the props to spin off, arming the bomb.



Morris and Pruden loading 50 cal. Ammo. Trays.

The rest of the film was showing the reloading of the ammo trays with 50 caliber machine gun belts and the 20mm canon belts, and the loading of the guns to make them combat ready. The belts were articulated metal ammo belts that each time a round was fired, another round was pulled out of the belt, and one link of the belt, with the spent round brass casing dropped out a chute and fell to earth. I never did see the film with this 'motley' crew, so I don't know who was the 'pin up star'.

We had some of our planes go to Alexandria, with a complement of ground crews. I was not on this detached service. They were chasing Rommel at this time. I guess the Germans were trying to cut off the Suez Canal. It seems this was the justification for the North African campaign, to

keep Rommel from closing the Suez Canal. This was the shortest route for English oil, from the Middle East. England had been fighting Rommel in the Libyan Desert for a couple of years to keep him away from that strategic place. Anyhow when the guys returned they brought back tiny bananas. Cute little ‘fellers’, about 3 inches long and as thick as a lead pencil. They tasted just like other bananas.

Time for a little humor. In the early days of the African campaign, Bizerte was in the news a lot because of some hard fought battles there by the ‘foot soldier’. So some GI thought he should pay a tribute to it, and this poem appeared in the ‘Stars and Stripes’, our free newspaper in the North Africa area.

Dirty Gertie from Bizerte,  
Hid a mousetrap ‘neath her skirtie,  
Strapped it to her kneecap purty,  
Baited it with Fleur de Flirte,  
Made her boy friends fingers hurty,  
Made her boy friends most alerty,  
She was voted in Bizerte  
“Miss Latrine” for nineteen-thirty.

Pvt. William L. Russell

A couple guys and myself took a pass to the Bay of Carthage, we heard it was good swimming. As we got near the beach, a road had been bulldozed down a steep bank and when you looked at the bank, it cut right through an old Carthaginian house from its ‘hey days’, back in Hannibal’s time. You could still see the outline of the rooms.

The bay was so salty, one couldn’t sink. This would be the ideal place to learn to swim. The bad part was getting out and no place to wash off the salt water. After you sweat a little it wasn’t too bad, the salt rubbed off on your cloths.

A little history of Hannibal would be in order here. We spent much of our time in N. Africa in areas that were controlled by the Carthaginians before 146 BC. Hannibal, a Carthaginian General, had the same goal in mind that we did. The fall of Roman territory. Hannibal did it the hard way, up through Spain and across the Alps with elephants, into Italy from the north. He met Claudius Nero’s army north of Rome a few miles and annihilated Nero’s army in 210 BC. He could have walked right into Rome at that time, as all of the soldiers in Rome had come out to fight him and he had annihilated them all. Hannibal chose to let his army rest after their long trip across the Alps instead. That gave the Romans the time needed to reorganize. Hannibal spent the next 15 years in southern Italy around Naples but never did succeed in subduing the Romans, or getting into Rome. After his death in 183 BC, the city of Carthage “Mistress of the Seas” was completely destroyed by Scripio (Roman) in 146 BC. All the buildings were knocked down, so it could never become a powerful force or city again.

A couple of us took a pass to an old Roman ruin called ‘Ruines De Djemila’. The roofs were all off and most of the walls were down. The city was about 2000 yrs old, and had about 1500 people living there at that time in history. It had an arena that seated 3000 people and that was in good shape yet. The seats were all of stone and had a fan shaped seating arrangement. From a distance it looked like it was ready for use. In other parts of the ruin you could make out where the markets, prisons, dungeons, water fountain, stables, front gate and the red light districts were. The latter were marked with a ‘cock and balls’ carved in the stone above the door, there was no doubt what this was meant to suggest. The guide took great delight trying to explain to us what this was, in French. There was a statue of some Roman “big wheel”? The statue had lost its head

and feet. Just the torso was standing upright. The chest was 4ft wide, not a chisel mark on it, smooth as glass. The feet were off to the side, they were two feet long.

But here, let me include a much more detailed description of this same place written by George Olson. Here it is as he wrote it shortly after he had visited this relic.

*"A visit to the past"*

Work being rather light one morning I had a few moments to spare and while scanning a map happened to note that the site of an old Roman city was only a few miles from our camp. Commercial photos of the ruins looked very interesting so I had no difficulty in convincing Joe Beierschmitt, Bill Bailey, Walker and Bill Schwartz that it would be worth our while to visit the spot.

A couple days later the opportunity presented itself and we were off in a jiffy in a jeep armed with our cameras, prepared to record for ourselves some of the scenes of ancient history.

We had driven only a short distance when we passed one of the largest camel and burro caravans I have seen in North Africa. A tribe of nomad Arabs was moving herds, families and homes to greener pastures (an annual event) and the procession was strung out for a couple of miles. Pictures were snapping but it would have required colored film to really record the scene in its many hued confusion of camels, burros, men, women and children with the different colored packs, robes and turbans.

For several miles we crossed level plains covered with ripe and ripening grain. A number of fields were being harvested, some with headers, horse or mule drawn, a few tractor drawn binders were also seen. The majority of the fields were being harvested by crews of Arabs wielding sickles such as we use to cut out the odd corners of the lawn that the lawn mower can't reach. These sickle operators also bound the grain as they went along using strands of straw as twine. It is a very slow process, but what they lacked in individual speed they made up in numbers. Crews of from a dozen to forty men working in the field were not unusual sights and they manage to hack down quite a bit of grain in a day. An interesting sidelight is the way they handle grain by a header. No barges are used, instead the cut grain is elevated into a large bag which has a draw string at the bottom to hold it closed, this is operated by an Arab walking alongside holding it closed until a windrow is reached where he dumps the load. This is then loaded on a small hayrack, or on a pack animal, to be hauled to the village, stacked to be threshed later.

Reaching the mountains the road started winding its way up the slopes, higher and higher with hairpin turns galore. We must have climbed several thousand feet. High enough at the top to notice the difference in the air, it was cool and bracing and gave you that top-of-the-world feeling you get when the Boss says, "Joe, you've been doing fine work and to show you I appreciate it I'm giving you a raise of \$25, starting this week".

After covering about a mile of winding road on the opposite side of the ridge, we rounded a sharp turn and a half mile ahead of and slightly below us, on a bench land jutting out into the valley, the ruined city came into view. It covered an area of at least five square acres and the rows of broken columns and uneven crumbled walls gave it the appearance of a city that had been ruthlessly bombed.

The site naturally enough is a national park and there is a small admittance charge. In order to get the most out of our visit we hired a native guide who turned out to be quite a character. A young Arab, he spoke a smattering of English and must have made a study of the place as he was able to give us the function of each building and square.

The start of the tour was a church, the altar and the baptismal font were in good shape and several parts of the mosaic floors were in fair state of presentation. In its original state it must have been a very beautiful building, decorated with ornamental columns, statues and symbolic figures inlaid in the floors. The inlay depicting a couple of fishes was still unblemished in one of the squares of

the floor that was visible. Next was a private home with the bath, toilet and floors in very good shape. The Romans were great engineers and fundamentally their water and drainage systems differ very little from our present set-ups. Adjoining this was a building that had been a store and had various shaped storage urns, a flourmill and various sized bins that most likely had been used for storage purposes.

The theater, seating capacity, approximately 3000 people, was intact, in fact, it could be used today for performances. Built in a natural amphitheater, there was a good view of the surrounding peaks and undoubtedly good crowds attended every show. If the performance wasn't so good they could enjoy the scenery.

Living quarters in the Roman days were one story apartments with dozens of families living under one roof, their quarters opening off the main hallway. The inner rooms must have been very dark and ill ventilated as the alleys separating the houses were very narrow. Here and there in the residential area were small stores so no one had to go far for their groceries in these days either. Some apartments seemed to consist of only one room while other larger ones boasted three or four with an open patio, with a small pool or fountain where the tenant could relax and enjoy the sun and air.

The temple of Jupiter was a massive structure with large pillars and ornate carvings. It was a two story affair with large vaults partially underground. In one of these the statue of Jupiter had been set upright, with the head and legs missing, it was over eight feet tall. There was a head on the Museum grounds that looked as though it might have belonged on this statue and it was truly a work of art.

The prison was well preserved, it was largely underground and had four fairly large cells with a high walled courtyard adjoining it where the prisoners got a little sun and exercise. There were no windows in the cells so they probably needed it.

Centrally located were the remains of the Forum. This structure had no doubt been roofed as there were several rows of columns within the walls. It was the largest structure in the city and must have been an architectural masterpiece in its day. The rostrum had weathered the ages well, covered with carvings and inscriptions, it was a sight to remember and I hope the pictures we took of it turn out well. The walls and pillars were well ornamented with carvings and inscriptions, proof that these ancient peoples believed in lavishing a lot of work on their public buildings.

A paved, fairly wide street ran from the public square through the city passing through several triumphal arches, a fad originated by the Greeks and Romans that still survives. It ended at the market place, which still had its stalls and counters intact. A large fountain graced the center of this square and the walls and counters were covered with inscriptions and bas-reliefs.

In the public square and towering over the city was the Grand Triumphal Arch, this had two stories, the arch flanked by eight large columns, four on each side and on top of this another pair of arches supported by pillars. This monument was ornately decorated with scrolls, statues, fancy bases and caps for the columns, and numerous reliefs. This arch rose to a height of seventy or seventy five feet and looking at it makes one marvel at the ingenuity of these ancients as all this building was done without the benefit of the machines we have at our disposal.

Here and there in the streets and squares were drainage plates carved out of stone that allowed excess water to enter the drainage system and flow away underground. Just off the public square was a large public bath and rest room. The latter establishment was quite large accommodating thirty persons at one time.

On the high side of the city were nine reservoirs, seven in one bank and two in another, which had supplied the people with water for cooking, drinking, bathing and operation of the sewage system. Here and there on the mountainside one could see traces of the aqueduct that brought the water down from the springs high above the town.

There were many other points of interest which space does not permit me to detail. The pictures we shot have all of them on the film, so when telling of it on my return they will spur my memory.

Looking at these ruins with one's imagination filling in the missing details and seeing it as it once appeared, the thought strikes one that here was a mighty civilization that toppled and disappeared. History relates that the causes of their decline were much the same as those that trouble us today. Such as . . . the sight leads one to reflect as to whether or not we have garnered enough knowledge in the passing years to surmount our problems, or will our civilization come to the same as the Romans did centuries ago?

S/Sgt. George Olson

June, 1943

In this story of ours, I will not give you the pilot's side of the 48<sup>th</sup> story, mainly because the ground crews didn't get in on the briefings before or after the missions. So we only knew what our pilot told us as we helped them in and out of the plane. They were the real heroes of the 48<sup>th</sup>. We had many aces, some didn't return from their mission and some became POWs. They led a short but exciting life before their 50 missions were in. This part of the 48<sup>th</sup> history I will have to leave to someone who can find the records to do it justice. My pilot, in the first months of the invasion of North Africa, the CO of the 48<sup>th</sup> Major Walles, had shot down six or seven planes, plus tanks, trucks, etc. Capt. Ross replaced Major Walles as our CO and became an 'Ace' in a short time. He even had a large Italian navy ship to his credit. That day we had loaded two 500-pound bombs, one under each wing. When the mission returned from this dive-bombing mission he said, "Right down the ships smoke stack"! The rest of the exploits and history of the 48<sup>th</sup> and its pilots sure would be exciting and I will have to leave that to someone that got in on the debriefings. The ground personal were there to "keep em flying". By this time we were feeling like the war was pretty well over, as we had 'air superiority' and the Italians were on the run. Like 'Superman' was on our side.

Do you know why Superman didn't join us over there? He read the eye chart in a different room a couple rooms down the hall, so being wrong, he was classified 4F. I don't think he was created or drawn at that time in history. The 4Fer's weren't too highly thought of by the G.I. because too many of them were stealing our girl friends.



Our first C. O. in North Africa, Major Walles, on the right, being decorated with the Distinguished Flying Cross by General Dolittle.

We spent a lot of time under the wings of the P-38s. Early each morning the Crew Chief warmed up the plane and checked all the required daily checks. The Armorers made sure the guns were combat ready and loaded the bombs if it was a dive-bombing mission. If it was a bomber escort mission, we usually had to hang two belly-tanks (drop-tanks) and gas them. By the time we were using belly-tank, we were gassing our plane with a regular gas truck. Then we sat on the ground with our back against the landing wheels, waiting for our pilots. This could be ten minutes or a half a day. At this time the pilots are being briefed as to what, when, and where the mission will be.

When each mission took off, we had free time until their return. It was at this time that the ground crews discussed what we had heard about the previous missions, washed our clothes, or did any other thing that needed doing. We did know of our own pilot's victories, because we painted them on the sides of each pilot's plane, along with the number of combat missions and ships sunk. Then too, the pilots would do a "victory roll" over the airstrip before landing, after a successful mission. This was a pretty sight, but dangerous, when executed a couple hundred feet off the ground. So it became a 'no-no', and they had to celebrate in some other way. As I said before, the real exciting stories of the war would have to be told by them.



While our planes were up, we did various things to amuse ourselves. I got a piece of German Plexiglas and made a cigarette case and carved a small P-38 to wear on a coat lapel. As soon as they landed our job was to get the planes combat ready again as soon as possible. We didn't learn to know most of our replacement pilots too well, because after 50 missions they went back to the States. The pilots we came overseas with, we learned to know very well because they were with the 48<sup>th</sup> from March field or longer, until they got their 50 missions in. In the invasion of

Africa, they sometime flew more than one mission a day. So they got their missions in, in a hurry.

We also practiced our French on one another. The most commonly used French phrase was 'toute de suite' meaning, hurry up. We always said this French phrase followed by the America explanation—'Toute de suite, the touter the sweeter'

Sometime after going into service, I received a letter from a gal I sat near all through High School. We got to know each other pretty well because the seating arrangements in High School were usually alphabetically arranged. It was nice to get news about other kids that we both knew and the home front gossip. After about a year, I got a letter from her sister, wondering how serious I was with her sister Valda? I hated to lose a pen pal, but I wasn't about to get serious. 'Bull' Bolton had just received a "Dear John" letter, and had been stepping on his lower lip for days. So the guys in the 'snake pit' knew first hand how loosing a gal friend under these conditions affected you. He couldn't even get good and drunk to drown his sorrows as the stuff you could get to drink made you sick before you could get drunk. We always thought the worst and blamed it on some 4Fer. I often wondered why Valda's sister pushed the issue? Twenty years later I found out she married a guy that used to live on the other side of my block. I knew his older sister and his brother, Bert. They were top students in New London High. So if the younger brother was that good, Valda did all right.

My Uncle, Elmer Wittlinger, a tinsmith, worked for Valda's dad in his hardware store. Aunt Martha, Elmer's wife, told me years after my uncle had died, that he had made a whiskey still, during prohibition, for Valda's dad. Uncle Elmer had to deliver it and set it up. Aunt Martha said that he was really afraid of the revenue agents, as he had to deliver it by truck to a secret place, in a deep woods, on logging roads, in the Neopit Indian reservation. I don't think it was the Indians with this enterprise but 'shiners' hiding in there. This was a safe place to be because the reservation was off limits to the gendarmes. If I ever see Valda again I'm going to see if she knew that this 'skeleton' was in her closet? I'll bet she didn't. As young kids we all heard our parents whispering about people we knew, that were considered to be of poor moral standards, making 'moon', and here I find out we both had some in our families.



## Chap. 10.

## Roller Coaster Via 40 et 8.

One day in late Jan. we were told to pack up for a train trip. Our planes were all transferred to some other outfit. We hoped we were heading for the good old 'U.S. of A'. At least that was what the rumors were, but it wasn't to be, just wishful thinking! It was important in your training to follow orders without knowing the how, when, where, so you couldn't argue about it. The Army way! Don't forget there are three ways to do every thing, the right way, the wrong way and the Army way.

We were heading back to Casablanca to split and form a new Squadron. We were loaded on those cute little '40 et 8'. One boxcar was to haul 40 men or 8 horses. That's how they got their name. The 40 men that you were supposed to get in a boxcar would only be possible if they all stood. We had all our personal equipment, so we used our A and B bags for a bed and it was really crowded with 20 guys in one car. We were on the train for a week. The trains with GI troops, equipment and supplies that were heading for the 'front' had first priority. So we spent a lot of time on sidings, as we were going the opposite direction. What a wonderful trip! Nothing to do but sleep and watch the scenery go past.

The route took us through the Atlas Mountains. Very scenic in spots. One place, there were big flat rocks sticking up vertically in the air, in a row, as far as one could see. Like the back of a giant dinosaur. These flat rocks were about one quarter mile wide, sticking out of the ground about a half-mile and each one from one to two miles long, a little gap and the next rock would start. These rocks reminded you of how prehistoric monsters were supposed to look.

One time in the middle of the night, our train was traveling through the mountains. As we were going up one of those steep mountain grades our line of rail car came loose from the engine. As per one eyewitness account, we picked up considerable speed going backwards until the bottom of the grade, it slowed to nothing going backwards up the slope we had just came down. The cars went up and down these grades until the train finally came to a stop. Luckily no one saw this and jumped off in panic. After hooking the engine back on we made the grade safely. We traveled across a good part of N. Africa on this trip. One city was Si di bel Abbes, I think that was the headquarters for the French Foreign Legion. In Morocco we went through Fez, and Rabat and south to an airfield, just north of Casablanca, with barracks.

Each rail terminal we waited for trainloads of GIs heading for the front. If they stopped, and we got to talk to them, that was our moment in the sun, answering all their questions about what to expect "at the front". Heck, I don't think Super Bowl winners felt more important. I imagine we laid it on pretty thick. One place that we were waiting on the siding, a GI ration train stopped. It didn't take some guys long to find out there were things on that train we hadn't tasted since we left the States. Like canned turkey and other canned goodies, and real ground coffee. To me that seemed like stealing, but a good amount found its way aboard our train.

I'm including another version of this trip written by S/Sgt. George Olson. Just so you don't think we all turned out to be a bunch of bums, after we got out of service.

George married Selma, who became a Legislator in North Dakota. George was very instrumental in our biannual 48<sup>th</sup> Squadron 'get-together'. Here is his letter that he had sent to me to include in this story.

“Hommes 32-40” “Cheaveaux 8”

The above title may mean nothing to the uninitiated but to veterans of World War I who served in France, it will bring back memories of trips they enjoyed or suffered over French rail lines. Translated it means “32 to 40 men or 8 horses” and is the inscription stenciled on each boxcar on French railroads to give the load capacity. As they are only 1/3 the size of the boxcars on our lines this must be the capacity. During the trip we took, there were about 20 men, with equipment, per car and they had a hard time sleeping as they were packed tighter than sardines in a tin. With forty-man load, every one must standup or probably that pertains to midgets.

The tour that inspired this story lasted several days and covered quite a few hundred miles, so I can count myself an authority on life in a 40 and 8. The car that was to be my home on wheels for the greater part of a week was also the abode of the following genial comrades-in-arms: Captain Wilson, Commanding Officer, Captain Bernstein, Medical Officer, 1<sup>st</sup> Sgt. Walker, S/Sgt. Swanz, T/Sgt. Resweber, S/Sgt. Beierschmitt, S. Sgt. Berquist, S/Sgt. Schwartz, Cpl. Morton, Sgt. Arney, Sgt. Gerlach, Sgt. Florian, Sgt. Calhoun, S/Sgt. Boots and Sgt. Bingham. We had better than half a day to prepare for the ride, the first for many of us; others were old 40 and 8 travelers. J.P. (Arney) swung a bed on the wall with ropes and had an upper berth, Whitey (Berquist) and myself swung hammocks across one end of the car. This sleeping arrangement was the source of much comment and a War Department Photographer took a couple pictures of the set-up, so if you see faces of Beierschmitt (who climbed into Arney's bunk for the picture), Bergquist and Olson beaming out of the pages of some newspaper or magazine, don't be surprised. The arrangement turned out to be comparatively comfortable for us and gave the other occupants much more sleeping room as six men were able to bunk on the floor under our swinging berths.

One out of the ordinary events of the journey was the Arab boot-black at one of the stations at which we stopped who sang “Alexander's Rag Time Band” in French, a jazzed up version of “Shoe-Shine Boy” in English and Arabic and with another Arab youngster using the shine box as a drum put on an Arabic song and dance in the best jitterbug style. He was a great admirer of Tom Mix, Fred Astaire and other American movie stars he had seen at French cinema houses. Needless to say he was a big hit and between numbers he had more shoes to shine than he could do. Years from now he'll be telling his grandchildren of the good old days when American troops visited Africa as he raked in some well earned, but generous, tips.

At another of the stations, a couple of Kabyles, members of the native constabulary, (the Kabyles are the original Arabs as they put it) were present and very interesting conversation was carried on with them, through our “official interpreter”, Resweber, who speaks fluent French, being a product of “Cajun Country” in Louisiana. They were very intelligent and well informed and had a number of exciting experiences to relate. One had been a prisoner of war in Germany for over a year and the other for

more than six months. Their lot in the prison camps had been a tough one and German soldiers who run into them can justly expect very little mercy. Both were looking forward to the day when they could have the pleasure of slitting a few German throats.

Some of the scenery was pretty dull, treeless plains with short sparse grass and a little camel brush. In contrast there were miles and miles of mountain scenery, wooded hillsides and snow-capped peaks, comparable to that seen in the great Southwestern section of the United States. One trait of this country is the rapid change of scenery and terrain, the train would be crossing a seemingly endless plain only to make a sharp turn, climb a long grade, go through a couple tunnels and we would be skirting a fertile valley covered with vineyards, orchards, grain and alfalfa fields that would change to steeper and steeper slopes with erosion carving them into fantastic shapes. Many areas were near-desert but fifty or sixty miles (around 100 kilometers as distance is measured here) further on would be a veritable garden spot resplendent with flowers, fruit trees, vineyards and fine crops dotted with well-built farm homes and villages.

Another peculiarity of this territory is the lack of wild life, a covey of birds resembling quail, a few storks, some crows and what appeared to be an eagle was about all that we saw on the entire trip. There were many herds of domestic animals, sheep, goats and a few cattle, all herded by Arab youngsters. In the semi-desert areas several large herds of camels were sighted, an impressive scene.

Several areas we passed through were infested with millions upon millions of snails clinging to the low brushes. They looked like white blossoms. A few spots where they were especially thick looked as though light hail or snow had fallen there. Even the telegraph poles along the track were clustered with them.

The larger farms were tilled by tractor drawn implements, the medium sized ones used horses or mules for power, but in the outlying districts all sorts of beasts were seen hitched to the crude wooden plows and drags used to till the patches of soil. There were seen teams of oxen and mules or burros, oxen and horses, a cow and a camel, two camels, a camel and a mule, also three women and a few small kids pulling a drag. That completed the sequence, we had seen everything.

All of us were surprised one evening on coming to a halt to hear a voice in English, with a heavy accent to be sure, but English, ask, "Anybody in here from Pittsburgh?" There wasn't, but we entered into conversation with the fellow who turned out to be a Greek citizen who had lived and worked in Mechanicsburg, Pa. for many years and on returning to Greece for a visit had been caught by the war and not being an American citizen had so far been unable to return to the U.S. He was working on the railroad at top wages for this country, but a mere pittance compared with the wages paid a railway worker in the States. He had been in Africa for two years and volunteered a lot of information regarding living standards and conditions that was of great interest to us. He was very sure of one thing, the United States was the best country in the world and he was going back there the first chance he had.

Regarding the railroads, the rails were not as heavy as the steel in the States. The coaches were on the European order, compartments instead of open seats as we have,

with first second and third class rates. First class coaches had seats, second and third class didn't, but third class stunk worse than the second did. The roadbed was smooth and well built, the route well engineered so we rolled along pretty smoothly. Part of the line was electrified and as modern as any of our lines in U.S.

More highlights: A scattering burst of rifle fire, loud shouts, frantic arm waving from the rear section of the train. Reason: A dog-face had fallen out of the open door of one of the cars and his fellow passengers were stopping the train as best they knew how. After backing up about two miles the soldier came loping around the curve, out of breath, humiliated, but unhurt. A mob of natives was at every town scrambling for the sweets (bonbons), biscuits, (bisquites) and cigarettes thrown out to them by the troops. Captain Wilson's lighting of the smudge pot, to drown out unexplainable, vile smelling odors that persistently permeated our car. The unforeseen result was, smoking Arney out of his bed, gasping for air. Swanz and Mason's imitation of planes buzzing the field and dogfights between fighter ships. Beierschmitt's shooting pictures of fellows in unorthodox poses. The disastrous 3400 set at contract bridge. Mort and Swanz imitating a radio station broadcasting, ball games, World Series of course, prizefights, broadcast to the services, commercials, soap drama with trimmings. It was a killer-diller and had the audience literally and figuratively rolling in the aisles. We laughed ourselves sick.

With the changing scenery, the antics of the natives, reminiscing, small talk, cards, cooking and singing the days passed quickly. In some ways we were sorry to arrive at our destination and all agreed that this trip would be one pleasant memory of this unpleasant business known as war.

March 1943

S/Sgt. George Olson

## Chap. 11.

## Casablanca and back to Tunis.

Our airfield was about 15 miles north of Casablanca, at Mediouna. Our main task here was to organize a new P-38 squadron, which was sent to the Pacific, and then to reorganize to get ready to go back to supporting the troops on the front lines near Tunis. At this time the remaining pilots that came overseas with us were sent back to the states to be reassigned to new duties. It was at this time that Maj. Walles, who had so ably led us this far, also left us. It had been an honor to be a part of his crew. In the mean time we were getting pretty used to living in barracks and sleeping on cots again. We did lose some of our buddies to the Pacific Theater but not too many from the Armament Dept.

On our train trip to this 'airfield' we had stopped on many train sidings to wait for other trains to go through. Many were ration trains. When we got to Mediouna, one of the guys showed up with a whole 5 gallon tin of good old U.S. coffee grounds. He became the most popular guy in the barracks. Everyone was staying on the good side of him for a little grounds to brew a cup just the way you liked it. This lasted until the first time he got a pass. No doubt this night he had a 'tad' too much to drink. In the middle of the night he had to go 'wee wee'. Where did he go? You guessed it. With out coming fully awake, he reached under his bed where he had hidden his treasure, he pee'd in it! From the most popular guy to the most ridiculed in the outfit.

Our squadron doctor was Dr. Bernstein. He found this to be an ideal time to have everyone circumcised that hadn't been. We thought maybe because he was Jewish and wanted to convert us? You say how would he know if we had been circumcised? Well in the service you had what was popularly known as "short arm inspection". Anytime we were allowed to get passes into town, the danger of contracting a venereal disease was possible. So to make sure that anyone who caught a disease didn't hide it, they had "short arm inspection", maybe twice a year, or more often if passes were given out freely and results dictated it. This inspection took place with the doctor sitting on a stool, while everyone lined up in a row in front of him. As you approached him you dropped your drawers and 'milked' it down. If he saw any pus or other signs of VD you were sent to the Medics for treatment. So you see you couldn't hide the fact that you weren't circumcised for long. We had a lot of guys walking wide legged for awhile. You should have heard the moaning and groaning.

We were here over Easter and our Chaplain organized a sunrise service. So, early in the morning I headed out to the open-air altar that was set up the day before. It was real foggy that morning and there were camels and donkeys lying in the field as we walked up to the altar. The altar was decorated with palm branches, the sun was just coming up over the foggy altar, that was just barely visible. A very awe inspiring scene for Easter. Many times this scene has come to mind and thrilled me when thinking of that time in my life.

While on the subject of camels, it was an odd sight to see a camel and a donkey working side by side. The donkey was small beside the camel and had to take five or six steps to the camels one. They were quite often teamed together when pumping water. The well was the usual, a stone wall around a hole in the ground. These wells

had a pump down in the well with an arm that stuck out over the stone wall. They attached that to the camel and donkey. The team walked around and around the well in a circle, the donkey always on the inside, and yet the donkey had to run to keep up with a slow walking camel. A very comical sight! When you see a camel you sense that there is something strange and different from other animals. There is they have an extra joint in their rear legs.

A short resume on 'Fearless Fred Greene'. He joined our squadron back at North Island, Cal. By this time in Casablanca, all of us had made Sgt. but Fred was still a Pvt. Numerous times he had been up to the rank of Corporal, but he would always go AWOL (absent without leave) or some such thing and get busted back to Pvt. We all knew him pretty well as he spent a lot of his time on KP. He came by the nickname of "Fearless Freddie Green", followed by, 'He ain't afraid of nuttin'! He earned this name because he went to town just about every night looking for 'poon tang'. He often went where wise men fear to tread, like the 'casaba' in the Arab section. Much like our big city ghettos are today. These were Arab sections that were impossible for MPs to patrol, dark allies, dead ends, and narrow streets. They were declared 'Red Light districts', therefore 'off limits' to any wandering GI. These were the areas Fearless would explore and this was the main reason that he got the name, 'Fearless Freddie, he ain't afraid of nuttin'. The most 'happy go lucky' guy in the airforce.

When we were finished reorganizing in May, we made our move and as we expected, we were sent back closer to the front. They flew us back to Telergrama, an airfield we had been at once before. This was a little south of Constantine. Now at times we flew escort for B 17 and B 24s. They were softening up Sicily for the invasion of it. In late July we made a move by truck. It was a long days drive, and hotter than Hades in this desert heat. By the time we got to where we were going, everyone had drunk up his canteen of water. The water supply for our new field, at El Bathan, was a dug well with a stone wall around it and a hand cranked windless with a bucket. We hurried over and started to draw water to quench our thirst, when our medical officer said "no way" not until it's purified in the 'Lister bag'. The Lister bag was about a 25 gallon bag, made from oiled silk or maybe it was rubberized cloth. This was suspended from a tripod with three little taps that we could press to draw a canteen cup of water from it. The water was chlorinated at least a half an hour, to kill the germs. The M.D. damn near needed to protect the water with an armed guard to, keep us at bay. He may have saved our lives, as the well was being used by a herd of sheep at the time we arrived. The shepherds had been drawing water and pouring it into a trough for the sheep. The well was surrounded by water that missed the trough and was slobbered on the ground by the sheep. A muddy mess, mixed with plenty sheep urine, and manure, that no doubt was seeping back into the mortared stone wall of the well. I think that was the longest half-hour I ever waited!!! The M.D. finally said O.K.; the chlorine has done its job. Ah such nectar.

It looked like we weren't going to be so mobile anymore as we were issued pyramidal tents to sleep in. Africa was pretty well under allied control, so moving in a day's notice was no longer necessary.

We used straw filled mattress covers on army cots now, we were spoiled in Casablanca with barracks to sleep in, it would have been hard to go back to pup tents

after that.

Our steel helmets had a liner inside, which we used in hot weather. These liners were light and cool to wear. The head bands, that were adjustable allowed air to circulate through the shell. Along with the helmet, they issued us a wool knit cap that could be worn under the helmet in cold weather. For temperate weather we had regular green denim caps with a sun visor. When you wore ODs or suntans you wore the cap that went with the uniform. Class 'A' ODs were our wool uniform worn to town if it wasn't too hot. Suntans were the uniform worn if it was hot.

We were also issued 'mosquito bars' as they were called, to keep the mosquitoes at bay. This was a cloth mesh, like screen, that you could see through and air would pass through. These were hung about two feet over your cot with poles stuck in the ground. When you went to bed you lifted one side and crawled in.

The hottest it got that we knew of while we were in Africa, was 120 degrees F in the shade. One humid day we had half the guys sick from the heat. Some from too many salt tablets and others couldn't take the heat. I 'lucked' out and had no ill effects from either.

In this heat and humidity we had trouble with the guns freezing up on high altitude bombing escort missions. As I mentioned before, sometime the planes came home and the guns would be a solid mass of ice and frost from the cold upstairs and the humidity near the ground, condensing on them. We went to a special sperm oil, which kept the guns from freezing, when at high altitude, but they still had to be cleaned, dried off, and oiled again after the mission. Otherwise we cleaned the guns only when they were fired.

The machine guns and 20mm cannon were very reliable. The cannon had very few parts. Designed by 'Hispano - Suiza', I believe a French automobile company as there was a French car by that name. I can't remember a time these guns had a malfunction, except probably from freezing up. These cannons were manufactured by a lot of different companies. The names stamped on the cannon and guns indicting the manufactures were from various US arms manufactures and companies you would never expect like International Harvester and Singer Sewing Machine Company to name a few that I can remember.

We were stationed near a river that was bigger than most we had seen in Africa. We got a chance to swim there, or maybe I should say wash off there. The bridge was gone and the army had dumped a whole truckload of German hand-grenades in the water. They picked the deepest spot, below a falls and the pile still stuck out of the water. Needless to say we didn't move around too much in there, but that was the only area that was deep enough to duck under the water and also cover most of the pile of grenades.

This was the place to try our hand at fishing. A hand grenade thrown in the river, after the pin was pulled, would stun the fish long enough so you could retrieve them. This method scared me enough that I didn't try it, even with all that tempting bait lying around. One day on a pass, we were going to Sfax to check it out. As we were driving through a small village, we saw a group of beggars aside the road. They

had on the usual Arab garb, long robe with a hood. As we drove by you could see inside the hoods. What a scary sight, half of their faces were gone and the holes where the flesh should have been was all black! They had leprosy! That sight bothered me for a long time. You know, one of those scary things you dream about.

The next move was by truck through the bombed out city of Tunis. The sewage system had been hit during the bombing raids on this Italian stronghold. The smell was so bad that it seemed you couldn't breathe. We were glad to get through there, out in open air, so we could breathe again.

Our destination was Ste-Marie-du-Zit, a couple miles from Zaghouan, just south of Tunis, in Tunisia. The place was famous because a German General had been killed there. The Germans had used this airfield, but they must have left in a hurry as they left a lot of 8mm rifles, ammo, and stacks and stacks of empty field artillery shells. These empties were two feet long and about six or seven inches in diameter.

Our bivouac area was in front of a 6-foot high hedge of cactus. These cacti were bearing fruit that was good to eat. To pick it was a problem- - - very prickly. You could get rid of the pickers on the fruit by rolling them back and forth on burlap. The fruit was red and tasted sweet. For the longest time I used one of the fruit in my one pound tobacco can, to keep the tobacco moist. I smoked a pipe most of the time I was in the service. I had trouble getting tobacco, until we began to get good mail service, then I had my Mom send me a pound when I was low. Because I didn't smoke cigarettes, this gave me a powerful trading tool. We were issued free cigarettes, I think it was two packs a week. I had no trouble getting rid of what I didn't use, for dates (the eating kind), tangerines, almonds, or old coins. There was always someone that was dying for a pack, of 'Sir Walter Rottens', our term for Sir Walter Raleighs. It seemed those were the only 'weeds' they sent to us.

Mom sent me some Kool-Aid, which at first looked useless because of no sugar. One of the guys in our tent said "Hold it, I'm on guard tonight", that always included the mess hall, so this solved the sugar problem. We bought a couple of earthen jugs from the Jarabs in Zaghouan. Beautiful earthen jugs, that would hold about three gallons. They were made of clay and stood about two feet high. The fact that they were made of clay was the key. These jugs were porous enough so the water would seep out and evaporate, thus cooling the jug and contents in this hot tent. This cool drink was so popular in our tent, that I immediately wrote Mom to send more Kool-Aid. We had to be careful that too many guys didn't know about our cool drink or the word would get out and they would cut off our sugar supply. This was popularly known as "Dr. Guenther's Piss Producer", because it did just that.

This was the only place that I heard jackals at night. It would have been fun hunting them, but there were too many guards around at night to make it safe. They might mistake us for a 'kraut'.

From our field we could see Zaghouan, which was a couple miles away. It was on a level plateau that was hundreds of feet higher than our airfield. Sort of, "the city in the sky". They made some of the best French bread you ever tasted. They made it in the community oven. The whole city was made of adobe. The City Square had a big oven in it. This oven was dome shaped, and was made of brick and adobe, where



everyone did their baking. Their bread was sure good, nice and crusty and tough. Every time I ate it I got the hiccups but I couldn't stop craving it.

We had been taking Atabrine (a substitute for quinine), for malaria prevention, ever since the invasion, and by this time we all were suntanned from the sun and yellow from the Atabrine. We looked like suntanned Japs.

One day I came down with a fever and reported to sick bay. After a couple days they said I had "sand fly fever". I had a fever, aching bones, and the chills, much like the flu, or malaria. A week later I was in the pink again, or should I say yellow?

One day a few of us got a pass and took a truck to the Bon Peninsula on the Mediterranean for a swim. It was almost impossible to swim there! The breakers were six feet high and the undertow was so strong that it was dangerous to swim, if you were tired. Diving through the breaker and after a few minutes you lost the battle with the next breaker and it threw you up on shore with such force that it knocked the wind out of you, kawomp! Twice like this and I had had it! We even had a time when we had to 'scrub' some flying missions because of the grasshoppers. These were big fellows, about three inches long. They flew not unlike migrating blackbirds, a continuous undulating stream, all the same direction. The reason we had to cancel some missions was that they were so thick that they would plug the radiators of the plane on "take off", before the pilot could fly above them. If this would happen, the motors would get hot, the red indicator light would come on and the pilot would have to return to the field in a hurry. It's a good thing that the Krauts never figured a way to make the grasshoppers just keep circling our airfield, to keep us from flying. Mud couldn't stop us but bugs did. They were really something else, as thick as they were, flying and sitting on every greenish thing; you couldn't catch them without a net. They ate everything they could chew. They didn't do too much damage around our field, as there wasn't much they could eat. The hoards lasted about four days.

Most of us got a 'butch' haircut during the hot weather. They were cheap because there was always someone that wanted to try his hand working someone over. I don't remember who did mine but I think he had fun, plenty bloody before he got my knobby head fairly smooth with the safety razor.

We couldn't drink shaving lotion, but we tried. They had something in it that would make you sick, so someone came up with the idea that we build a 'still' and distill the local purple death, rot gut wine. That sounded like a pregnant idea. Now it was not all that long ago that we had had Prohibition, so we all had a good idea how it went. All that was required was a copper boiler, copper tubing, heat, and whatever else you used instead of mash. I don't know where we got it, but someone found a cream can. That's like a big milk can, only about one quarter that size, or about 10 gallons. We had all kinds of aluminum tubing from the hydraulic systems in the planes. The aluminum tubing was coiled round and round and was immersed in cold water to cool the hot steam, which was really alcohol because it turned to vapor first, from the heat. So we had a galvanized can and aluminum tubing and rot gut 'vino' for the first 'test hop'. We had 4 blowtorches for the heat source. We placed the blowtorches on four sides of the cream can, and presto, steam. The still was a success, we got 200 proof stuff but it tasted so horrible no one wanted to drink it. To get rid of it we threw darts

to see who got a canteen cup of the nectar. The guy with the highest score didn't have to take a cup of it, only the loser. Believe me, it was no fun losing, as the loser was the winner of the 'alkey'. As near as I can remember, no one ever bought a refill of wine or anything else to run through our still.

The Arabs adapted pretty well to having airplanes around. The shepherds pastured their sheep real close to the plane at times. Most of the shepherds were kids about 12 years old. They made sure that the sheep didn't come too close to the planes and they would sit and play three or four notes on their flute all day long. A real exciting life?

After living with scorpions awhile, you found that they were quite aggressive, and could be found under or in most anything. It was a good idea to dump your shoes out before you put them on. They would come at you with that tail waving, ready to fight. One day we found a millipede that was at least 8 inches long. We stuck that in a box with a scorpion to see which would be the winner. Heck, they coexisted. Then someone caught a mouse and we put that in with this giant millipede. Nothing seemed to happen, a couple hours later we looked in and the millipede had strangled the mouse. It had wrapped itself around the mouse like a boa constrictor.

## Chap. 12.

## Mount Aetna, Corsica and Italy.

I told you how we gassed the planes from 5-gallon cans, then later from 55-gallon drums. Now we had a gas truck to gas up our planes. When we escorted bombers we had two belly tanks that we mounted under each wing next to the pilot's compartment. These were hung from the bomb racks and were expendable and dropped when they were empty. These tanks held about 150 gallons each and were necessary to extend the range of the fighter so they could fly along with the bombers to fight off enemy fighters while making their bomb runs. The fighter planes got rid of the belly tanks before a dogfight, to make the plane more maneuverable and safer in case the tanks were hit by incendiary bullets. If hit they might explode. When empty they were light, because they were made from aluminum. I would guess their weight about 70 pounds. I should know exactly, cause I helped hang enough of them, but time blurs one's memory.

Along with all the bombing, the invasion of Sicily was accomplished by amphibious forces. Next to fall was Italy. By this time the Italians had surrendered, so the opposition was only German. I imagine the Germans treated the Italians pretty badly by this time, because they had chickened out, leaving the Germans holding the bag. At least the 'Ities' seemed to welcome us when we took over.

For the Italian campaign, a few armorers and crew chiefs were flown over to Lentini, Sicily from Zaghouan. Our airstrip was next to an olive orchard. This was a nice shady place to pitch our pup tents.

We were flying support for a couple of beachheads, Anzio and Salerno, near Naples Italy, these were the toughest to establish. I'm glad we had that water between us, because they were hard fought beachheads, with many casualties for the GIs.

From our airfield we could see Mount Aetna about ten miles away. One day our planes were on a mission and I was lying in the grass beside our revetment, snoozing, waiting for the planes to come back. I awoke with the strangest feeling; the ground was shaking, as if we were having an earthquake. Mount Aetna started to belch smoke. The ground tremors only lasted a few minutes, and the smoke quit by the next day. Not too unusual for Aetna, I guess.

After the beachheads were established, we weren't needed to keep air-superiority, knock out truck convoys, and dive-bomb gun emplacements, so we were flown back to Zaghouan where the rest of the outfit was. Now we were back to bomber escort.

We flew many missions escorting bombers to soften up the southern part of Italy, like Monte Cassino. This was the town that the Germans had their 'field artillery lookout' located in a historic church, on top of a high hill. The Germans knew we respected it as a church and wouldn't bomb a church, so they had set up their command center there. The GIs couldn't get near it to capture it because of the German artillery. The American Airforce and American field artillery, bombed and blew up every building in the town but the Monastery. A hard fought city only because we wouldn't bomb the Monastery. A couple months later I went through the city and it was quite a sight.

As you approached the city, the only building you could see was the Monastery, high on a hill, still intact. All the other buildings in the city were leveled. Weird, to drive through and see every building reduced to a pile of rubble six feet high, and this tall Monastery, high on a hilltop, overlooking the rubble. The only reason we could get through was because a road had been bulldozed through the mess to open up the supply lines.

It was an eerie sight early in the morning to see hundreds of bombers, high in the sky, all heading north. They would lay a huge sheet of lined paper, high in the sky, with their “con” trails. As you watched in awe, the con trails merged and the sunny sky was soon all cloudy. You thought to yourself, with a mass of bombers like that, the war would be over in a couple weeks. A couple hours later our planes would take off to rendezvous with them over the target. They sometimes had three different squadrons of fighter planes on a single bombing mission. If the bombing mission was real far, like to southern Germany, a fighter squadron would escort as far as half of their gas would take them, then a prearranged squadron would take over, usually near the bombing target. The fighters would drop their tanks on approaching the target to get ready for the inevitable swarm of Jerry fighters that would try to knock out the slower bombers before they could hit their designated targets. After the bombing run was completed, the fighter squadron would have to leave if it didn’t have gas enough for a slow trip home. At this time another prearranged third fighter squadron would again take over while the other ones scurried for home, before they ran out of petrol. These various fighter squadrons could be P-51s, P-49s or P-38s.

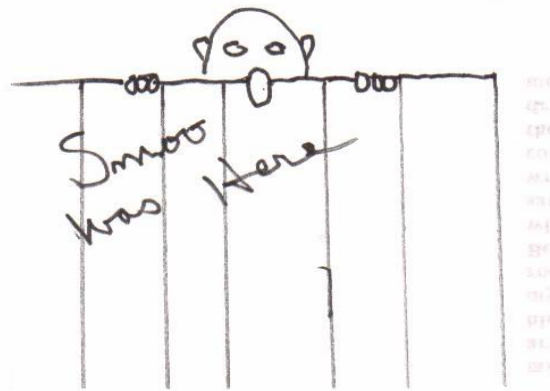
After southern Italy was secured from Naples to the south, we were loaded on planes and the whole squadron was flown to Naples, in early December of 1943. From there we got truck transportation to a new airfield about ten miles from San Severo, called Triolo. This field was near a group of large farm buildings, farm commune or collective farms. The G.I. Engineers had laid down a steel landing mat for us. This steel strip was made of hundreds of pieces of steel. Each piece was made of steel about one eighth inch thick, two feet wide and ten feet long. These were interlocking and were painted green. Each of these sheets was perforated with three inch diameter holes pierced and flanged down so the landing strip would be rough and not too slippery when wet. This eliminated the mud in the rainy season as well as most of the dust in the dry season. It rattled pretty good when the wheels touched down as the 38’s landed.

Squadron Headquarter finally caught up with the 48<sup>th</sup> & 49<sup>th</sup>. They stayed in these farm buildings, along with the officers and pilots of the 48<sup>th</sup> & 49<sup>th</sup>. In these buildings we had 1<sup>st</sup> aid, church and Movie Theater, and Operations. Operations Department was our command center that controlled all our missions and the movements to the best airfield for the missions. Operations did all the planing and briefed the pilots before and after the missions, to analyze the success of their plans. When the films from each pilot’s Gun-Sight Aiming Point Camera was developed it would verify the number of planes or targets that got hit, destroyed, or probably destroyed on these missions. Ira Latour of our Photo Department did the film developing and took care of the cameras that were located in the nose of the plane.

The Germans were making a stand just north of us. We could hear the big guns

booming all day and all night for a couple weeks. After that the 'krauts' began to run again. The Allies were afraid they would hole up in Rome knowing we wouldn't bomb around the Vatican City, but they didn't.

All through Africa and now Italy, the guys up ahead, left their trade mark, 'Smoo was here'. It was everywhere like graffiti on any standing wall or building. The words were under a line drawing, or spray painted of a guy with a big bulbous nose looking over a board fence. The drawing always showed the nose hanging over the fence quite far with his fingers hanging over on each side of his head. I was surprised to hear that in other areas of the war, this GI art had the caption, 'Kilroy was here', but in the fronts we followed, it was always Smoo was here.



We had a bad accident one day. It happened as a mission was taking off. It seems the nose wheel of one of the 38s didn't want to retract, so the pilot was intent on that and flew right up the tail of the man ahead of him. It sounded like machine guns going off, as the props of the plane in back chewed off the tail of the one in front. We all saw it happen, as that machine gun sound usually got your attention in a hurry. They were only up a couple hundred feet in the air. The first plane that got his tail cut off, nosed into the ground, immediately, and exploded. The other plane had his props all bent, and he tried to gain altitude but I think the plane just shook apart because of the bent props, and he bellied in. It was sobering to see how vulnerable we are at times, always pushing the limits.

One day in August, about twenty-five of the ground crew, with equipment, were loaded on C-47 and flown to Aghione, Corsica. I think the idea was to make the Germans think that we were going to open the "second front" in the southern part of France. So it was back to pup tents.

We were near some mountains and there was a nice looking trout stream flowing through the foothills. So after three or four days, I looked around for fishing tackle and found a hook and line. Most survival kits had these bare necessities. No one shared my enthusiasm, so after a mission had taken off, I checked the mission's return time and headed out with the usual fisherman's optimism. Worms were handy, under each rock. As I climbed the low hills, and fought the brush, I found pools to fish. After a couple hours of this I had caught one eel about six inches long. What I needed was some of those hand grenades we saw by the dam back in Africa. Time to get back, the planes will be home soon.

After about a week, the home base in Italy was preparing a load of supplies for us, - mail, groceries, spare parts, ammo, and a couple replacement guys, also, two cans of beer for each of us. This was the first beer that we had seen or were issued since the invasion of Africa. After the C-47 was loaded it was to be flown to us in Corsica by a Lt. Starbach. Starbach had his 50 missions in and was waiting for his orders to return to the States.

It so happened that a couple other guys and I were riding out to the airfield in an army

truck. We were standing up and leaning on the cab as the driver came to a stop before crossing the end of the runway. We could see our C-47 approach the runway to land. We waited, it looked like a good landing as it passed a city block in front of us. It was about ten feet off the runway when Starbach poured the coal to the plane's engines and he peeled to the right. He had seen a P-38 coming directly at him from the other end of the runway. The 38 had priority, so Starbach had to get out of the way. Starbach's plane had lost its flying speed, so the C-47 just "side slipped" into the ground and exploded into a ball of fire. We saw one guy run from the plane, the rest were burned to death, if they weren't killed on impact. Six guys on the plane and one lived. When the plane hit, it broke open and threw this one guy out. We could see him running away from the crash and fire, he wasn't even badly burnt. It was hard to lose a pilot that way, especially after his missions were in and he was just killing time as he waited for his 'orders' to return to the States. C'est la Gere!

After the wreck cooled down, we found the beer cans had not ruptured. The cans were all greasy and smelled like burned flesh and it tasted like it was burned, (kroisened like Heilman Old Style used to advertise). But what the heck, first in a year and a half, tasted good. You're supposed to wipe the can top off any how before you open it.

It wasn't long after this accident that I got sick with a hell of a fever. Medics said malaria, and sent me to a field hospital. With all the atabrine that we took I didn't think we could get malaria. I was too sick to know or care where I was sent or how. It must have been in Corsica because I can't recall a plane or a boat ride going to the hospital. Anyhow, a couple weeks later I had recovered with their treatment and I was shipped back to the 48<sup>th</sup> in Italy, on a B-25 that had been converted into a transport plane. I sat in the bombay with a bunch of packages and equipment just hoping that they wouldn't deliver this cargo by opening the bombay doors, dropping the works and scooting for home like in a bomb run. There were a lot of war planes that were no longer considered good enough for combat, they were retired to the second hand lot and used for all kinds of transport duties, like this B-25, or for spare parts.

We landed in Naples and from there I caught a C-47, that was heading for our airfield with supplies and a few replacement personnel. This cargo plane had no windows but a great big wide door to load big equipment through. So on take-off we sat on our barracks bag and hung on to the parallel mooring bars used to tie down heavy equipment. Being a smooth ride and not too high, we moved our barracks bag seats in front of the open door to watch the scenery go by. When the pilot neared our airfield, he stood the plane on the left wing to circle the air strip as we sat in the open door looking straight down on our field with nothing to hang on to. What a scare! I'll bet the pilot knew that he'd scare hell out of us and got a big charge out of it. He knew the "Gs" from the turn would keep us from falling out of the plane.

From our field in Italy we flew a lot of bomber escort missions. We often accompanied the bomber to the Polaski oil fields. These were hairy missions, as the oil fields were well fortified by Jerry planes and anti aircraft batteries. We also flew one escort mission that I think was in Germany somewhere. Anyhow the distance was so far that our 38s wouldn't have enough gas to get back to our field. So it was

arranged that we land in Russia. I suppose that we had to arrange for 100-octane gas, to gas the planes and I suppose arrange for approval to land at a Russia airfield. No, this time we didn't send any of the ground crew on 'detached service' to do the gassing. After it was over, I didn't think the pilots were too enthusiastic about the mission. It seems the Russians weren't too friendly. They claimed the Allies were dragging their feet by not starting the second front that they had hoped would take some of the pressure off them.

I forgot to mention a while back one of the guys in our tent got syphilis, too much 'poon tang' in the Red Light district. He had to get a "jab in the ass" once a week, for a couple months and did he hate that. At this time they treated it with a shot of Bismuth, in your butt. It burned and made his butt plenty stiff, pretty painful according to him. This was a good deterrent for the rest of us to see him suffer.

We were about 50 miles from Mt. Vesuvius. She made the news when she erupted one time. There was a fighter squadron down wind from it and there was a couple inches of ash on everything. Imagine the mess there would be if it rained before they got it cleaned up. I'm glad it wasn't us. Maybe worse than Africa in the rainy season?

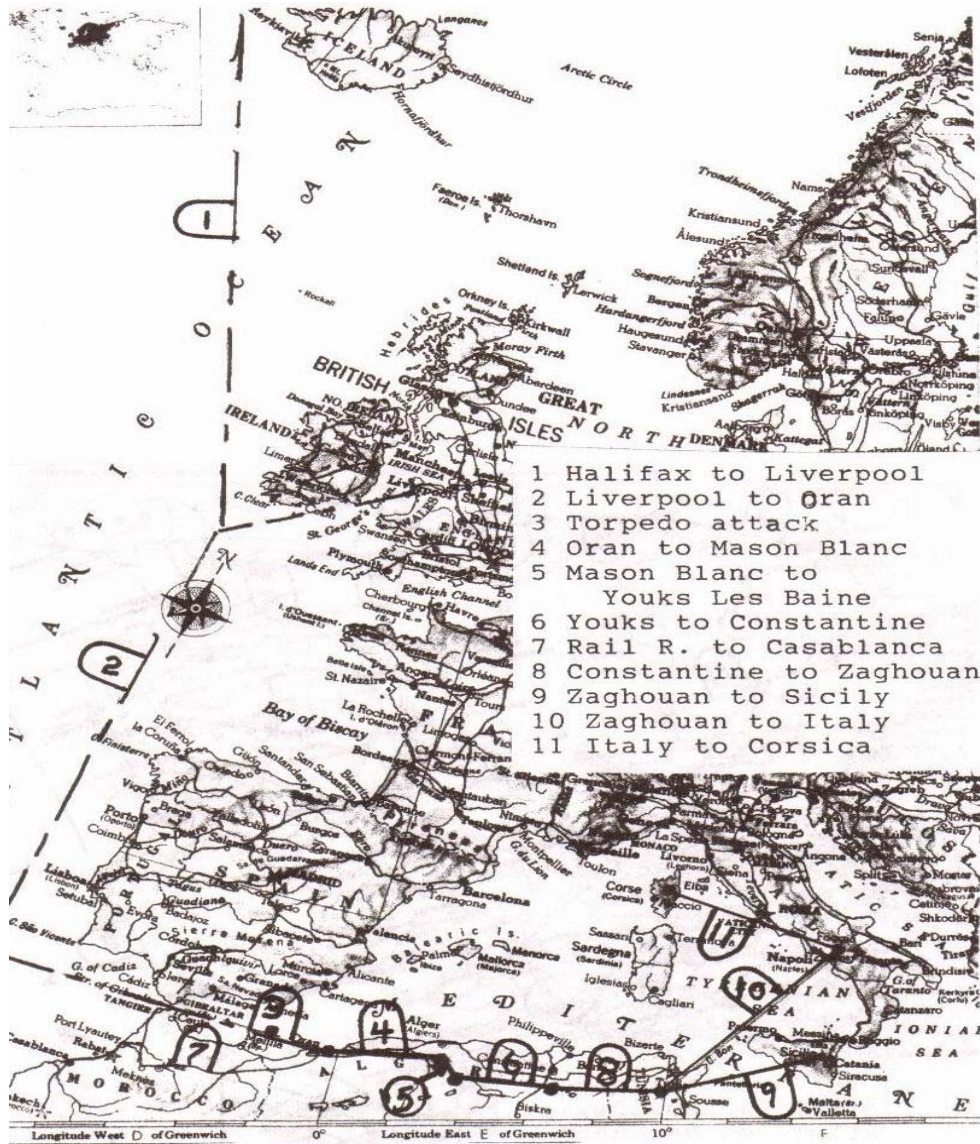
We were usually amused by Axis Sally's radio broadcasts. The stories that she told, that we knew about, were never true. Like the number of fighter planes shot down in any given raid. The Stars and Stripes kept us well informed as to how the war was going. We did like the music she played, all the latest hits from America, although the rest was BS. We wondered how she got the records, because in those days, the phonograph record was the only way to store music. We didn't let that bother us, we got a morale boost from it anyway.

After a couple months here, the "Krauts" were withdrawing to the north, hotly pursued by GI Joe. We flew a lot less ground support missions, and more long range bombing missions. This gave our ground crews a lot more free time as the planes were gone several hours.

We weren't flying as many mission anymore and some of new pilots weren't getting all the flying time they needed, so we had a Piper Cub two-seater that they would use to get in their flying time. So any ground personnel that wanted a ride could get it. The day I took a ride, it was hot and one of the valleys that we crossed, the plane dropped a couple hundred feet as we hit an air pocket. That was enough for me, I didn't ask for a ride again.

We also had a P-38 that wasn't good for combat anymore, so we had converted it into a two-seater. We did this by removing all the radio equipment from in back of the pilot. Then if you wanted a ride you would ask your pilot and when he had the time he would give you a ride.



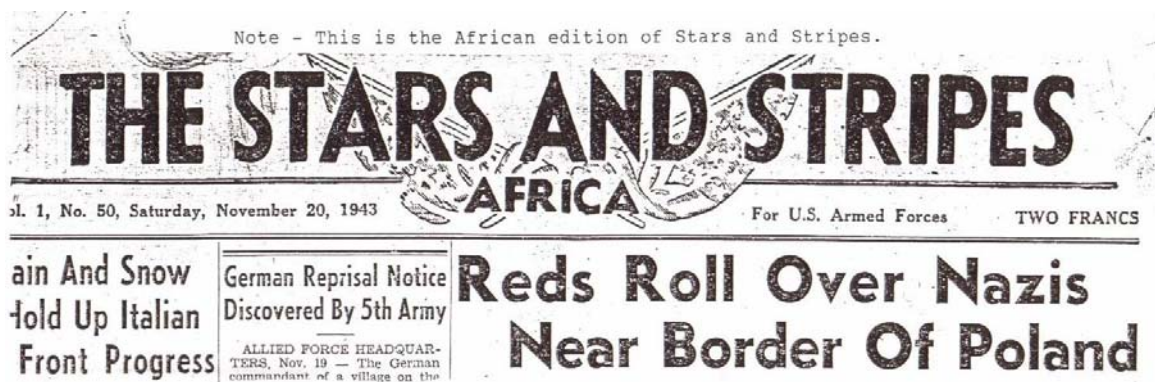


The route the 48<sup>th</sup> took during the North Africa campaign.

Some of these pilots had a good time making the passenger holler 'Uncle'. I wasn't too enthused about testing my tolerance in a P-38 but the excuse I used was that the C.O. didn't have time to entertain me.

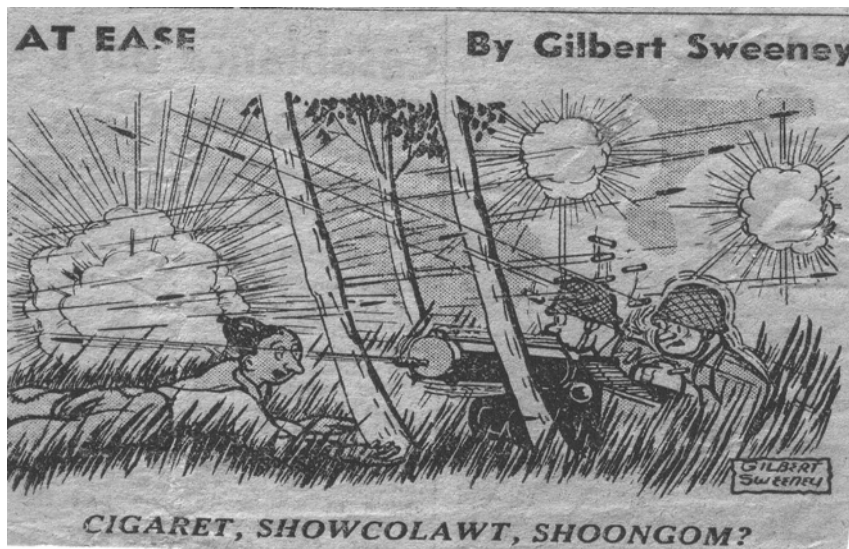
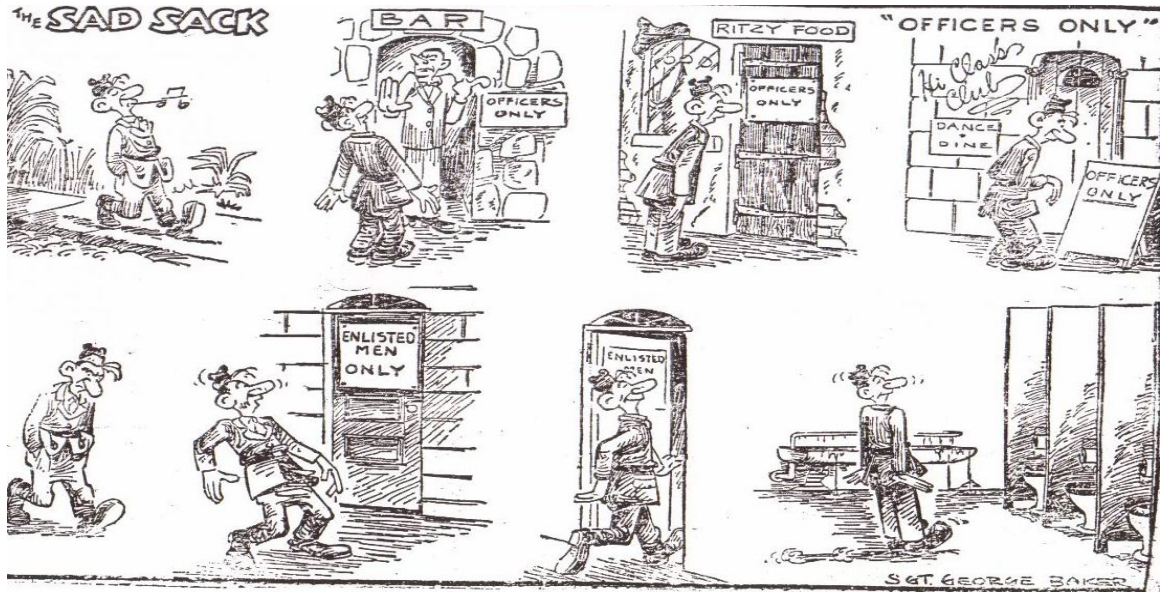
In our tent were A.J. Brown, Billy Brazil, Coleman, Tony Delano, and myself, all Armorers. With all our nervous energy left over because of the cutback in missions, we decided to improve our living conditions. Little things like a wood door to make it easier to enter the tent. We even had our names on the door. a line to our tents. We only had one 60-watt bulb, but what a difference from our home made 100 octane lights. The generator ran practically all the time but you soon tuned it out.

One thing the Germans forgot to take, were all of the almonds. They were good if you found a way to crack them. We bought them by the helmet full, and stored them in the same. We no longer needed to have the steel shell part handy. One time I had bought a helmet full and stored them under my bed. The next day they were gone. At first I didn't want to let on that I knew they were gone, hoping to catch the prankster trying the trick me. We were constantly doing this to each other. I finally found the culprit, a week later, when someone put on his spare pair of shoes, there they were. They had been put there by a pack rat.



Already we had set up tall poles with a P.A. system on them. The loud speakers on them were ample to cover the whole bivouac area. In Foggia we had an army broadcast station that gave us the news. Before this we got all our news from Stars and Stripes, a weekly GI printed newspaper. It had some famous features, such as "The Sad Sack", by Baker, "Male Call", by Milt Caniff, featuring Miss Lace, who was always scantily clad and displaying barely covered 'boobs'. We can't forget, "Up Front", by Bill Mauldin, featuring 'Willie and Joe'. The paper had a lot of pictures and all the news from North Africa, all the other fronts, and home.





**UP FRONT**

**... with Mauldin**



"DAMMIT, YA PROMISED TO BRING RATIONS THIS TRIP!"



**MALE CALL**



**By MILT CANIFF**



**MALE CALL**



**By MILT CANIFF**

In Foggia a GI radio station played requests, and the most popular one, bar none was:

When robin calls, his little mate.  
She answers back, and it's a date.  
They fly through tree tops.  
With two or three stops.  
To make some Whoopee.

The Cuddle fish, are very shy  
When other fish are swimming by.  
Then with great speed.  
They head for sea-weed.  
Too make some Whoopee!

Away up north, where pine trees swish.  
Where it gets too cold, for folks to fish.  
They go a-sprucen, and go producen.  
A lot of Whoopee!

I know two girlfriends, away up north.  
Who once were snowbound, until July the fourth.  
One knit a sweater, but the other did better.  
She made some Whoopee!

We really liked this one. Back in those days suggestive language like this would not have been allowed on the air, in song, words or print, in the States. Even my writing this narrative, using this suggestive language that we used in our daily conversation, would not have been allowed in book form, back then.

Between the Stars and Stripes, Foggia radio station and Axis Sally, our morale couldn't be higher. We were winning the war and anticipating going home. We were tired of living in tents.

## Chap. 13.

## Building our Casa.

We had piles and piles of belly tank crates. Figure it out, one bomber escort mission a day, ten planes average, twenty belly tanks, each belly tank shipping crate had four sides. That made eighty sides. In 30 days you would have about 2400 sides. Now all of us had spent our youth during the great depression and knew what it meant to save. We were brought up with the adage “waste not, want not”. So here we were, with a lot of time and lot of building materials. We first built an armament shack out on ‘the line’, a term used to designate where the planes were parked. There we could wait for a mission to return, out of the sun or maybe rain. So it just made sense for us to build us a Casa (house) too. The first problem was, to build of stone or belly tank crates?

We decided to go permanent and build with stone. About a mile away was an old Roman aqueduct, it stretched from horizon to horizon. It was about 20 feet high where it had not fallen over. As I remember only about one quarter of it was standing. The rest was lying in a heap where it had stood. A lot of the stone had been cleaned up already here and there, to make fields to grow crops. We were a little reluctant to use this old relic but it was obvious that much of it had been carried away already. So we agreed, in our minds at least, that it would be all right to use the stone blocks that were lying on the ground. We weren’t going to destroy them and they could always be recovered. We were just moving them a mile away. These were just the right size for our purpose. About 12” x 12” x 22” and cut out of a stone that was a little softer than

lime stone ledge rock and a little harder than sand stone. We used our armament weapons carrier, which was similar to a pick-up truck, to haul the blocks. So when a bombing escort mission took off, we had time until they returned, to work on our home away from home. As I had mentioned before, our work detail consisted of A.J. Brown, Billy Brazil, Coleman, Tony Delano, and myself. Now looking at a picture of our casa, one of us must have been an architect. The reason I say that is, we even had pilasters for strength on each side of the door and two in back on the long side. Our casa had a window on each end, and three windows in back, and two in front. We were able to buy mortar, sand, and brick, from the ‘Ities’ in a town about 20 miles away. For a floor, we put down sand, and laid the brick on top of it, without mortar, like patio blocks.

We needed 2x4s for our roof rafters. That was a little more of a problem. The nearest place that we had heard that there were some was up in the mountains, and they were a half a days drive away. But we developed a plan. We all worked on getting a day pass on the same day and were able to ‘big deal’ Transportation out of a weapons carrier for the day. Coleman being a Tech. Sgt. helped. He signed out the weapons carrier and did the driving. It was a long trip, our butt was sore from riding in back, on wood benches, over rough roads, for about four hours.

We got up in the mountains where there were a lot of trees. The sawmill was something else! Get this! They sawed all their lumber by hand! Hard to believe. The log was pulled up on a cross arm, held up by two posts sunk in the ground, similar to a wash line posts with cross arms. The cross bar was about 15 feet off the ground, and the log was pulled in place with a block and tackle. One man ran up the log and grabbed the handle of a ten-foot long saw, held up by another guy that was down below. The guy below was standing on a ramp under the log, holding the other end of the saw. As they sawed the board, top ‘Joe’ backed down the log while the ‘under dog’ came down a ramp as the sawing progressed. The saw was no stranger





A view of the old Roman aqueduct.



I'd like to see if they are still being used today?



to us, because that was how we cut down trees in the good old U.S. of A., but never to saw boards or 2x4s. In those days, we didn't have chainsaws, but ripping boards by hand, Jeeeeeeze!

The price of the 2x4s wasn't all that bad either, considering that it was all hand labor. All this material that we had to purchase, we would chip together to pay for. The officers didn't get in our way, or try to stop any of these efforts. Best of all, we were beyond the reach of the politicians. No committees, no environmental studies, perk tests, or building codes to contend with.

After buying our thirty some 2x4s, we headed for home. It wasn't long before we saw an eight-year-old boy walking the same direction we were going. We were way out in the 'boonies' where we were miles from houses or towns or any place the kid could be going. We stopped to give him a ride, but he seemed reluctant and afraid. We tried to talk to him, but he couldn't understand English. With the little Italian we knew and sign language, we convinced him that we wouldn't hurt him. As near as we could figure out, his parents were killed and he was heading south to his Grandma's. We weren't going all the way but we could save him 4 or 5 days of walking. He had no food with him, and he looked starved. We gave him some we had along and he ate it and relaxed a little. But all the way he never lost that scared look, relaxed or smiled. We felt very sorry for him, but helpless to get through to him. After a couple hours we let him off as we turned to go away from his destination. I often wondered if we helped him, and if he found his grandparents, or if they were dead too.

The borrowed antique block wall was mortared up and the 2x4s were put in place for the roof rafters, ceiling joist and ridgepole. We covered the roof rafters with the panels from belly tanks. The panels were long enough to reach from the ridge to the eave, with a 6-inch eave, covered with canvas to keep out the rain. For the windows we had home made window frames but I can't remember what we used for glass, or where we got it?



The back side of our casa, note another casa like ours in back ground.



The inside of our casa, note stove on the right and  
Pres. Roosevelt along with another pin up.

The other day a fellow Legionnaire and I were discussing belly tanks while we were working at our Legion annual Brat and hamburger fry. He had been a gunner on a bomber in the Pacific Arena. He told me the natives there used the aluminum belly tanks for kayaks. They did this by cutting a hole in the aluminum so they could sit in them. They must have worked pretty good as they were streamlined.

Tent mate, Tony Delano had a habit of talking to himself as he worked. Naturally everyone gave him a hard time about that. After taking the jabs for awhile, he'd say, "Gosh fellas, I just have to talk to someone intelligent once in a while".

The size of the Casa inside was about 12x20 feet. The insides were paneled with the belly tank crate panels. These were made of second grade plywood, but we had so many to chose

from that we could select really beautiful panels for the interior walls. With the electric generators running most of the time we had electric light at the flick of a switch.

Our interior stereo system was really the last word. We used a pilot's old radio headset and removed the inside from it. Then we screwed this to the hollow plywood wall panels. This amplified the sound much like a music box, the hollow paneling giving very good sound quality. This system gave us up to the minute news and music all day, with a switch to turn it off if we wanted to sleep. One of the reasons that the song, "When Robin calls his little mate", became so popular was because we could request songs from the GI Foggia station and listen to them until 'lights out'.

Another modern convenience was our heater. The stove was the GI issue model, made of sheet metal. It was about two feet in diameter and two feet high. It had a flat top that worked good to make coffee, etc. We had a stovepipe out the roof to get rid of the smoke. On the outside of the building we had a four-foot high stand, with a 55-gallon drum on it. The four-foot height above the stove was for gravity feed. This we filled with 100-octane gas, and we used aluminum hydraulic tubing to get the gas to the stove. We had a small adjustable valve, on the tubing, to control the flame. We let the petrol drip on a brick inside the stove. As it dripped on the brick it spread out, and once ignited it kept on burning and heating. It was very smoky but did the job nicely. It probably wouldn't have won any awards for efficiency, but it was sure nice to come home to on a cold rainy day. You wonder how safe it was? Well, we would clean guns submerged in a tank of 100 octane, while we smoked. I never did find out why this didn't blowup. I always thought the higher the octane the more explosive it was, but they must have had some anti-knock additive that made it less explosive. This petrol really did a nice job, cleaning up sweat-up and greasy coveralls too. The gas we used probably cost more than the coveralls did when new. I often wondered why they didn't have us throw them away and issue us new coveralls?

One day our planes returned from a bombing mission and one of the planes could barely limp home. He had taken an "ack ack"(anti aircraft explosive shell) shot in the gun compartment. Now the gun compartment opened up like the hood on the old model T Ford or model A's. That was sideways or like a ladybug, when it opens its shell to fly. Anyhow the explosion of the anti aircraft shell blew the gun compartment canopy open. Now the prop spins about a foot from the canopy, and as it popped opened on each side, the prop tried to chew it up. Now the prop is made of aluminum too, and was not made to cut other metal, only air. So the prop on the right side was so badly bent and out of balance, that the pilot had to shut off that engine for fear of it shaking the plane apart. Now a P-38 can fly easily with one engine, but the three left blades were also bent. It just wasn't bent as bad as the right one was. The pilot limped home with the left engine running, the tip of each of the three blades were curled back about a foot and how it could fly was a marvel. The pilot was very lucky and talented. That speaks volumes for the capabilities of the plane as well. The pilot said it shook so bad that he could barely keep it in the air, but he didn't want to 'ditch' it and become a POW (prisoner of war). The gun compartment was all shot up but the pilot wasn't hurt because of the armor plate between the gun compartment and the pilot. The windshield had a 2-inch thick piece of bulletproof glass in front of the pilot to protect his head. This was made of laminated glass, like some bank windows are made today. The old saying goes, "any landing you can walk away from is a good one", sure applied here.

Ray Hendershott and I took a pass to go for a swim in the Adriatic Sea. We hitchhiked about fifty miles to Barletta. Hitchhiking was easy with a steady stream of GI trucks going anywhere you wanted to go, a beehive of activity.

When Christmas came one year, we (the guys in our casa) sent Coleman to town with orders to get us some Xmas cheer, good stuff. We knew this would be a challenge, because the

Krauts didn't leave any good stuff behind. When he came home he had bought a miniature Roulette game and four quarts of peaches brandy. So Christmas Day we played Roulette and drank peaches brandy. It was as good as any thing we had had since England. In the Roulette game, Coleman wanted to be the 'house'. He figured he'd make some money, because the house always wins. Well, I don't know why, but we 'cleaned his clock'. We bet for the ball to stop on red or black, if we lost, we doubled the bet, and bet on the same as before. We kept doubling until we won, you had a fifty-fifty chance to win, and eventually you had to win if you kept that up. So we broke the house, and concluded that Las Vegas wasn't on the level.

By the time we drank those four bottles of Christmas cheer on Christmas Day, we were all feeling happy or sick. Never drink more than a couple good belts of that stuff. The next day, every time you took a drink of water to put out the 'chimney fire', you got sick all over again. Another lesson learned.

## Chap. 14.

## Rome.

The war with Germany was pretty well over in Italy. The Germans were retreating from Southern Italy. We were even given a week off to go to rest camp, when your turn came up. The most popular one was the Isle of Capri. When my turn came up they had just opened a new rest camp in Rome. I couldn't pass that up, as my buddy Hendershott was also on the list. Ole Olson wrote a resume not long after our trip while it was fresh in his mind. This will be a lot more accurate than my 80-year-old memory would be. So the narrative, as he wrote it is as follows:

## Rome – The Eternal City

Rumors are always circulating in any Army unit, for several days around the middle of July the current one in the Squadron had been that several men would very soon be offered the opportunity of visiting Rome. I had heard it often and most likely passed it on a few times but otherwise paid little or no attention to it. One evening Major Wilson, our genial executive officer, met me in the area and inquired in an offhand manner whether I would be interested in a trip to Rome? There could only be one answer to that, "When do we start?"

A couple days later we had an early breakfast and started on what was for all of us, the first visit to the Eternal City. The party consisted of Major Wilson, 1<sup>st</sup> Sgt. Walker, M/Sgt. Morrow, Sgt.



Ferraro, Sgt. Hendershott, Sgt. Guenther, Cpl. Kaczka (the driver and a very good one), Cpl. Crume, Cpl. Noble and myself. In order to see as much of Italy as possible we skirted Naples to take Highway 6 through Monte Cassino so we might view the debris of the battleground. Approaching and leaving Naples we saw ample evidence of the industrial power of the United States, everywhere along the road were vast dumps of war material and practically all of it American made.

Along the road north of Naples there was scattered damage to remind us that war had passed that way, bullet scarred railway cars on sidings, piles of shot-up, burned out vehicles and ruins of factories and other buildings. When we neared the Liri Valley the footprint of Mars were unmistakable. As far as the eye could see there was not a building that had a third of it standing, the majority were completely destroyed. Monte Cassino was a mass of rubble with a couple of roads bulldozed through the fallen bricks and stones. As there is practically no wood in Italian buildings there were no signs of fire. It was a strange and sorrowful sight, this battered, broken city with not a sign of life in view other than a few soldiers passing through in trucks. Somehow it made one think of the polished veneer man has acquired through several centuries of so-called civilization was pretty thin after all. It might be a good idea to leave this pile of wreckage as "exhibit A" for future generations view in case they think of embarking on an adventure in arms.

Several miles north of Monte Cassino, damage lessened somewhat, a bomb crater here and there, a few bashed in houses around the crossroads. Some of the larger towns that commanded road junctions were pretty badly beaten up, Velletri and Frosinone, especially, were hard hit. After winding through the vineyards and olive groves of the rolling Alban Hills for some distance we topped a ridge to see the dome of St. Peter's Cathedral glistening on the horizon. We had been on the road for over twelve hours so it was a welcome sight. We had filled several mattress covers with straw to pad the seats of the GI truck but they were still getting pretty hard after covering such a mileage.

Legend has it that two orphans, baby boys, were found by a she-wolf that suckled them while young and cared for them till they grew to manhood. Whether this is true or not, it gives employment to numberless artists and peddlers who sell us souvenirs of Rome, paintings and statues, large and miniature, of this unusual foster mother and her foundlings, who were named Remus and Romulus.

In 753 B.C. Romulus was feeling overly ambitious on the 21<sup>st</sup> of April, probably a few days of sunshine had dried up most of the mud which Italy has so much of during the winter months. Whatever the reason he yoked a bullock and a heifer to the plow, marked out the proposed boundary of the city that was to be known as Rome, after its founder, and began building the wall that was an integral part of every ancient city.

The project prospered and in 79 A.D. the chamber of Commerce boasted of a population in excess of 2,000,000 people. For a period of four centuries all the wealth of the known world was funneled into Rome by the conquering legions. Around 476 A.D. internal feuds, the conquest by the Barbarians from the north with the resulting sacking and burning, started the Eternal City on the skids downward. By 1300 it had been reduced to a large village inhabited by only 20 or 30 thousand persons. The revival began in 1447 and the period from 1500 to 1800 was the golden age of Rome. During that era some of the greatest architects and artists the world has ever known lavished their talents on the task of making the city the showplace of the world.

There are marks of battle on the outlying manufacturing districts of Rome. What appeared to have been an aircraft factory was leveled, yet the buildings across the street were hardly scarred. The area around the marshalling yards was pretty badly damaged, luckily none of the famous buildings are in this area. Otherwise the city showed no sign of bomb damage, a fortunate state as many of the objects of historical, architectural or artistical fame which adorn Rome are irreplaceable.

Modern Rome is sprawled out over several hills on both sides of the Tiber River which meanders through the city like a tired snake. The present population is approximately 1,350,000 persons and it covers an area of roughly 211 square miles. There are very few buildings more than 10 or 12 stories high so a lot of ground space is required to house the people and their places of business. The business district is well built up, modern show windows, neon signs, wide streets bordered by ample sidewalks, a far cry from the provincial towns. Sidewalk cafes are numerous, each frequented by a scattering of Italian civilians and numerous soldiers, with all the Allied Nations represented. Practically all the GIs are accompanied by good looking, well dressed signorinas who have done so much to add to the already great fame of Rome and increased the urge of every American soldier to visit the city at an early date.

We arrived in late afternoon so our first objective was a place to wash, eat and sleep in just that order. After considerable inquiring as to directions from M.P.'s and Carabinieri (Italian policemen) we found the rest camp headquarters.

Major Wilson, gregarious by nature, was rather irked when assigned a room in the Majestic

Hotel, which was reserved for officers of field grade (Majors and above) as he enjoys company, the more the better, regardless of rank. The old Army game though and there was nothing he or anyone else could do about it. The rest of us were directed to the AAF Rest Camp across the Tiber some distance from the center of town.

A former industrial school, this was quite a spread, however as a vacation spot it left much to be desired. Lots of tile and marble but very few comforts. The showers were outdoors, a sixty-head affair, lots of warm water with good pressure, so a session here left all of us quite refreshed. Sleeping accommodations were a cot and two blankets, enough as the weather was on the warmish side. Somewhat of a disappointment to most of us as we had expected to hit a sack with a soft mattress, box-springs and sheets. As there is about 1,500 men stationed here, their lines for chow, showers and toilets were the usual order of affairs. Where it not for the opportunity of seeing the sights of Rome one would have been much better off at home base.

Early the next morning we started our tour, with Kaczka at the wheel, crossing the Tiber, which incidentally is a very muddy stream, much like the Mississippi, too thin to plow and too thick to swim in. No matter what bridge you cross there are several others in sight both up and down the place you are crossing at the time. Ornate bridges, most of them with large statues and bas-reliefs decorating the approaches and railings. No steel girders in these bridges, all the spans are built of stone blocks in the old Roman style arch. Then through a couple of parks, each with several statues and fountains gracing their slopes. From the appearance of the lawns I would say Rome was suffering from a water shortage as the grass was burned to a crisp and the greater share of the fountains were inactive.

Picking up Major Wilson at his hotel we decided with the Coliseum being the nearest site of interest, should be the first stop on our itinerary. Heading down the street we turned a few corners and dead ahead loomed Victor Emmanuel's Monument. A magnificent pile of white marble, featuring massive columns, ornate facades, bronze statues depicting ancient warriors and the Latin version of freedom and the seas bordering Italy. Long flights of broad steps rising toward the background of majestic columns towered high against the blue Mediterranean skies with large equestrian statue of King Emmanuel dominating the center of the imposing setting. Midway up the gigantic sweep of steps two large Italian flags waved in the breeze on each side of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier of Italy. Two guards in the dress uniform of the Italian Army, with their peculiar hats, wide brimmed with the brim in the front and rear turned up against the crown, stand watch on each side of this shrine. It seems that no matter which street one starts out on in Rome you always end up with Victor Emmanuel's monument staring you in the face. Incidentally, this is the square in which the Italians gathered to hear Mussolini's speeches during the years he was suffering from illusions of grandeur. We passed it dozens of times a day so I am sure none of us will ever forget this particular landmark.

The Coliseum is only a few blocks southward so we continued on our way after snapping a few photos of Victor Emmanuel's monument. A huge circular structure, the Coliseum's form is well known as thousand of photographs of it circulate all over the world. About half of it remains at its original height as for several years during the early days of modern Rome, it was the custom to tear down the walls of this stadium to furnish building material for other buildings being constructed. What remains are in a fair state of preservation, although the marble facing has all been removed, so only the gray inner structure remains. During its heyday 50,000 people could be seated before the S.R.O. sign was hung out. The main act featured skilled gladiators battling each other, or as an added attraction they would pit their skills against wild lions, tigers or elephants. The arena was also the scene of contests between armed gladiators driving chariots. To give you some idea of the size of the place,

the arena was often flooded and naval battles were staged there for the entertainment of the spectators. All the walls are honeycombed with gates for the various levels of seats, cages for wild animals, entrances for the performers and rooms where the bodies of the dead men and animals were disposed of after each engagement.

In the same square as the Coliseum stands the Arch of Constantine, several hundred years old but truly a work of art. It had been sandbagged during the war years and workmen were removing these and going about the job of cleaning it up.

Leaving the Coliseum, passing Victor Emmanuel's again; we headed down the street toward St. Peter's Cathedral. Just after crossing the Tiber we made a turn and at the end of a wide boulevard St. Peter's reared its huge dome skyward. Because of the immense courtyard in front of it the church itself does not seem very large at first sight. This court is walled with massive pillars supporting a roof on which are aligned a row of 162 statues of the various saints, each 11 feet in height but so dwarfed by the impressive background that they appear to be less than life-size. The columns are in sets of four, so arranged that at two places in the courtyard designated by round markers in the pavement something of an optical illusion presents itself and they all blend together and it appears that only a row of single pillars supports the roof.

A lofty obelisk dominates the center of the piazza, flanked by two great fountains spurting streams of water high in the air. Great flights of steps rise majestically towards the entrance which is set off by four great columns on each side of it. On entering one is awestruck by the beauty of the decorations and height and breadth of the nave. The walls and floor are faced with highly polished marble, with all the shades of the rainbow glistening therein. A pleasant surprise was the coolness of the interior; the guide informed us that the temperature never varied more than a few degrees regardless of the season of the year. As the entrance to St. Peter's is one of the ports of entry to the Vatican City, a neutral country, all firearms and cameras are supposed to be checked at the gate. For a pack of cigarettes most of the guards will overlook the rule concerning cameras. Major Wilson lugged a K-20 (aerial mapping camera) inside and up into the dome. From this vantagepoint he got some marvelous shots of the city, also close-ups of the courtyard and the colonnades surrounding it.

The climb to the dome and cupola is a hard task, however the various views of Rome, the Vatican and the details of the church you see, make it a worthwhile effort. The first stop brings you out on top of the church at the base of the dome; here an excellent birds-eye view of the courtyard can be had. One can also stroll along the colonnades and examine the statues that top it. Climbing a flight of stairs one enters the balcony, which runs around the interior of the cathedral where the dome begins. An oddity here is the "telephone wall" at a certain spot when a person talks directly into the wall as into a telephone, the sound travels approximately a quarter of the way around the dome and comes out of the wall just as one's voice comes out of the receiver. A mere whisper carries the entire distance. Here too, you can examine the beautiful mosaic work which decorates the entire interior surface of the dome. From a distance these pictures appear to be oil paintings, closer scrutiny reveals each is made up of thousands of bits of tile in many varied shades of color. The guide said there were 2,800 different tints of color in this mosaic work and that the artist doing the work could only work two hours a day in order that they would not lose their sense of color.

From this balcony it is a stiff climb to the top of the dome where an outer balcony rings the exterior of the cupola. There are numberless steps and the stairway winds around so rapidly that one becomes rather dizzy if he climbs to fast. On reaching the top a lens has been set so you can see the entire interior of the dome by looking into it. Another flight of stairs and you enter the outside walk, the view of the city from this height is a marvelous one indeed. After several turns around the cupola, viewing the city of Rome and the Vatican from all angles we



started down the stairs again. Not so bad going down, passing several GI's who had collapsed on the way up and were being revived by their friends, I couldn't resist thinking that I must be in fair shape yet, even after two years of overseas duty.

The crowds had thinned out now so we took a tour of the church proper. The nave is lined with massive statues of various saints, former Popes, and other personages important in the history of the Catholic Church. Several works of Michaelangelo are among these and their perfection is almost unbelievable. Near the center of the church is the tomb of St. Peter, with an altar in the background featuring 4 columns of solid bronze in a spiral design which are nearly 100 feet in height. Many other altars are housed in the various halls opening off the main body of the cathedral. Also at several places around the church are confessional booths, with signs on each giving the language spoken by the priest occupying it, to hear the transgression of the confessor.

The courtyard is always well filled with sightseers, with dozens of hawkers noisily vending rosaries, medals, crucifixes and other items of religious interest. The shops in the vicinity also have large stocks of this merchandise.

Approximately at noon the Pope holds a public audience in the northerly wing of the Vatican. This, I understand takes place practically every day. Huge crowds attend and it is difficult to see or hear much if you arrive late, even if the public address system is used. This ceremony is a pageant of color and pomp. Guards in medieval costumes are all around, dozens of bishops and numberless priests of lower rank, are present. The Pope is a very distinguished old gentleman and in his white skull cap and flowing white papal robes presents a very striking appearance. He usually delivers a short speech in several languages on the benefits of an early and just peace. Troops of all the allied nations comprise the greater part of the audience and the Pope gives all his blessings, with those in forward positions, the recipients of his personal benedictions. Each person attending is presented with a colored photo of the Pope as a remembrance.

This session of touring had taken up most of the day so it was back to the Rest Camp for the night.

During the course of the second day we visited St. Angelo's Castle, a massive structure of traditional castle design, began in the 13<sup>th</sup> century and added to and improved during the passing centuries. Circular in shape with battlements at various levels, it reminded me of a huge layer cake. A deep moat had surrounded it during the days when it was subject to siege. The old drawbridge still spans it but most of the moat has been leveled to form the park adjoining the castle. The interior has been left much as it was in the early centuries. Emplacements for two canons dominate the entrance to the castle proper, if the outer walls were ever breached. Just before the inner gates is a large trap door that can be sprung to drop the attackers into a tunnel filled with water leading to the Tiber. Several of these old cannons were emplaced with piles of stone cannon balls used in olden days, stacked beside them. To gain the effect of shrapnel, crushed rock encased in cylindrical, wooden, slatted containers were fired. Relics of much earlier times were ballistas, a huge mechanically operated bow that hurled a long, finned spear and catapults, mechanical devices using a bow actuated lever to heave large stones against the enemy.

There were numerous cells, small ones with no furnishings for the common criminals, larger ones with a table and chair for political prisoners. Justice was speedy in some cases in olden days, adjacent to the judge's bench in the old courtroom was a grill covered shaft that dropped three or more stories to the tunnel mentioned above. If the accused was found guilty it was down the shaft and finito.

Work of famous artists adorned the walls and ceilings and at one time the largest library in

Italy was housed in this castle. Most of these treasures have been removed for safekeeping, when they are returned to their original places, this old castle will be even more interesting.

The ancient Forum is not as well preserved as many of the other well known ruins of early Roman cities. It covers several blocks in the heart of the modern city so the contrast between the old and the new stand out in great contrast. Graceful pillars, a few complete, the majority with broken sections, mark the location of the buildings they once supported, but very few walls are intact. It seems that these ruins of the old Rome provided convenient building material for the modern city and the greater part of it was used before its value was recognized.

Varying amounts of time were spent at the Pantheon, Circus Maximus, Pyramid of Caius, Temple of Venus, the new Forum and many other places of interest. Lack of space does not permit going into detail concerning all of these.

The morning of the day we left Rome was spent at the Catacombs of St. Callistus, one of the largest of the many such burying places of the ancient Christians that are in the city or on the outskirts of Rome. Not much to describe here at the Catacombs. They are merely tunnels hewn out of the soft stone with niches carved in the walls to hold the bodies. To provide light for the descent and tour, the guide wound a long, thin, yellowish candle around a stick, then led us down a flight of stairs to a depth of about 20 feet. To have additional light each of us in the party was furnished a small candle similar to those used on birthday cakes. A small fee of one Lire was asked for this gadget. An eerie spot with the candles making very little impression on the darkness. Here and there the guide would stop to show us a place hollowed out to the dimensions of a small room and used by the early Christians as a place of worship. Several of these were decorated with crude paintings of religious subjects on the walls and ceilings. Those of you who have read the popular novel "The Robe" will be interested in the fact that the sign of the fish was carved on many walls. Then too there are many tombs of early day saints, martyrs, and Popes who reigned during the first centuries of the Catholic Church. All of the bodies have been removed to other burial places, with the exception of two bodies displayed in a glass case and supposedly to portray the average state of preservation in which the former inhabitants of the Catacombs were found. Also a replica of St. Cecilia rests in her tomb to show the state in which her body was found. Needless to say, bones and a few rags was all that remained of the ordinary bodies. After about forty-five minutes below ground no one was very disappointed when the guide said, "That's about it", and we started for the surface. As there were several miles of tunnels in this particular catacomb, we didn't see very much of it, personally I have no desire to complete the tour. The blue sky, bright sun, green trees and blooming flowers really looked good after a session in those gloomy underground passages.

Leaving Rome laden with postcards, guidebooks, maps and various items of fine merchandise to remind us of the visit there, we headed out on Route 7, homeward bound. This road skirts the Anzio battleground so we passed through some of the towns that were in the headlines recently, Cisterna is probably the best know of these. It is really a wreck, however some of the buildings are still standing, though badly scarred by bombs and shell fire, so it doesn't compare with Cassino as a picture of complete destruction.

Food wasn't too plentiful in Rome as the transportation system was still out of commission. The first train from Naples had arrived only a few days before we got there, so we hadn't been eating very well. Walker and I tried an Italian restaurant (good bif stik) but the food was terrible so we stuck to the GI places which served the ill famed "C" rations as the main course. After a few hours on the road we began to feel the pangs of hunger, no ration-dumps in sight and no camps. When we reached the point where we thought we couldn't stand it another mile, we spotted an English convoy parked along the road cooking a meal. Relying on

their proverbial hospitality we pulled in and inquired if they could spare a bite of something to eat, to save several men from starvation. They were only too happy to help us out and served us all the bread, corned beef and good New Zealand cheese that we could eat. Washed down with big cups of hot tea, it really hit the spot.

Traveling southward along the winding road, which skirts the Mediterranean, there were many picturesque views where the mountains met the sea. Some of the seacoast towns were badly shot up, others practically untouched, and the degree of damage determined by how fast Jerry was going when he passed through.

Reaching Naples area several hours ahead of schedule, it was decided that we might as well spend the night in the famed resort town of Sorrento. Although it is not far from Naples, the road leading to it is narrow and winding, skirting the Bay of Naples for many miles, toward the westward tip of the southerly arm of land that shields this great anchorage. Pretty well tired out by the long ride, many of the fellows thought we were on the wrong road as the truck could make little time over the curving, hilly road, so it seemed we would never get there. Finally we rounded the last curve and this jewel of a town nestled along the majestic cliffs, reflected in the glistening blue waters of the sea, lay just ahead.

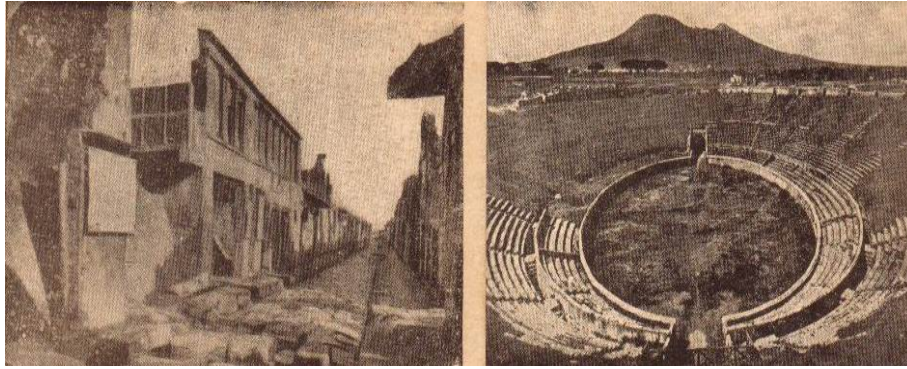
Parking the truck in the town square, we headed for the café that some of us had visited before. By this time the effects of the bully beef and tea had worn off, so everyone was hungrier than a bear after a long winter. Seating ourselves at a table and feasting our eyes on the delectable Maria, an incomparable hostess and as good looking a signorina as I've seen in Italy, we ordered the complete dinner, spaghetti, eggs, French fried potatoes, breadfruit and salad. Wine flowed freely, the conversation was spirited and the food excellent. Helping after helping disappeared and the cook was hard pressed to keep up with the demand. By this time the check resembled an income tax assessment, well over thirty dollars.

While enjoying after dinner smokes and liqueurs a couple of the Australian officers wandered in and joined the party. Shortly after that a South African and later an Englishman dropped in. All were affable and enjoyed good wine and conversation. One of the Australians was an excellent singer, so we joined in a few community sings. A good party with everyone joining in, exchanging notes on their respective countries, swapping yarns, telling jokes, the evening rolled by fast. In fact before anyone realized it the time was well after midnight.

We had rooms at this inn and here we reveled in the soft mattresses, deep springs and clean sheets we had expected to find in Rome. Sorrento leads a leisurely life, so when we tore ourselves from the comfortable pads at eight, there was hardly a soul in sight. Picking up some oranges at a roadside stand for a light breakfast, we headed for home base and the humdrum of routine camp life.

--T/Sgt. George Olson Italy, Sept. 1944.

When 'Thumb on the Scales', John Fliatz, heard I was going to Rome he asked me if I would take his camera and take pictures of the important historical sites and I said, "sure". He said that he would give me a copy as we had our own dark room to develop and print pictures. The hard part was to get the right size film for your camera. He had gotten some from home and it was hard to get it in the states too because of rationing. Anyhow his camera was one of those that you had to give the lens a half turn to pop it out to get the right focus before you took a picture. It seems he had forgotten to tell me about this, or I had forgotten that he had told me. I shot both rolls, all but the last exposure. This one another G.I. ask me if I wanted my picture taken, the only one that turn out, as he must have known about the half turn. Imagine my embarrassment when 'thumb on the Scale' informed me that only one picture turned out, and with film so scarce, and hard to come by. 'Thumb on the scales', in civilian life was a butcher, so it was proper to assume that he weighed his thumb along with the meat once in a while.



Pompei-Street of Abundance,Amphitheatre and House of Caster and Pollux.

Another historical place that most of us got to visit was Pompeii, not far from the Bay of Naples. This ancient city was destroyed by the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 79 A.D.

The city was completely covered with lava and ash and had been dug out. During the war all these archeological diggings had been suspended and it would be interesting to know what other interesting things have been uncovered since. When we were there we had no guide, so we had to use the postcards that we bought at the gate from a street vender, to know what we were seeing. There were some two story stone buildings without roofs, a lot of columns, an amphitheater and streets. The streets were full of deep ruts worn into the cobblestone from the wagons or chariots. It looked like their sewer system was these same ruts. If so, must have been smelly in summer.

Even here the 'red light' district was easy to find as it was carved in the stone above the door, a cock and balls. There was a temple for Jupiter, and an Arch of Nero. The arch you could recognize as it was still intact but the temple was just tall columns. The statues and human imprints were housed in a museum with other artifacts that we did not get to see because it was locked.

Chap. 15.

Old Number "13".

I must include a poem written by our Assistant Crew Chief, Roy T. Harvey. By this time Capt. Ross had been our Company Commander for some time and had racked up quite a few victories.

*"Old number thirteen"*

Thirteen is it's number,  
Baby Karl is it's name,  
Captain Ross is it's pilot,  
An out-law he can tame.  
Well, it is an out-law,  
And it well can be seen,  
Painted on it's Roman nose,  
In big yellow figures –"13".  
Old "13" is in good shape,  
And that Ross always knew,  
It clicks like a sewing machine,  
For Tompkins and Harvey are his crew.  
Guenther is the armorer,  
And does his work well,  
For with those five flashing guns,  
Ross gives those Jerries a ticket to hell.  
He would take it out of its revetment,  
Armed to the gills,  
Down across the runway,  
And up over the hills.  
There is Captain Ross high at the stick,  
All chicked full of joy,  
Flying a streak of lightning,  
Carrying the name of his boy.  
He has seven to his credit,  
A ship and a plane,  
And when he gets around again,  
He'll talk to others the same,  
To all you other flyers,  
No matter how they set,  
It takes a pilot to fly it,

Not a cadet.  
It's branded on all four sides,  
And it well can be seen,  
This high strung out-law,  
Number "13".

"Skipper" 5/29/43.



Myself and Skip Harvey by Capt. Ross's plane, at this time he had 5 victories

The 48<sup>th</sup> & 49<sup>th</sup> were awarded the 'Presidential Unit Citation', and a couple other ribbons, one with six battle stars. The battles stars were for the battles that we had actively participated in. They were; Algerian-French Morocco, Tunisian, Sicilian, Naples-Foggia, Roma-Arno, Air Offensive of Europe, and Southern France. Again I must remind you the pilots did the fighting, we were the support team and got in on the glory. With our 'Hash Marks' on our sleeve, six by now, Distinguished Unit Citation ribbon on the right chest, and on the left chest we had ribbons for; American Defense, American Campaign, World War Two Victory, European-African-with Silver Star and Good conduct ribbon, we felt like a walking Christmas tree. Pretty proud though. We really didn't get all this 'glitz' until we got back to the States.

Foggia was about 30 miles from our field. It was a pretty big city, at least big enough to have a nice theater, which was not damaged by the war. You could not say the same for their rail yards. They were a mass of twisted steel and burned out rail cars.

The Army Air Force presented Irving Berlin and his musical show "This is the Army". This was an all male GI cast, a 'must see' for everyone in the area. All the girls were played by guys instead of Gypsy Rose Lee, and many other stars that I don't remember, too long ago. They even had GIs for Jack Benny and Rochester. Irving Berlin (in person) directed the entire production. The thing I remember most about the musical was the image of Mr. Berlin standing in front of the stage, giving a little talk, looking a little bow legged in his riding pants and high top leather boots

like a motor cyclist would have worn in WW1.

The war with Germany was nearly won and having been gone from home for almost four years, guess what we were all thinking about? We were euphoric at the welcome news when the Air Force announced a method that they would use to send us home. This was a golden opportunity for anyone that intended to make the Air Force his career, because when your name appeared, you could volunteer to stay in the Air Force. If you did, you would get a promotion, one grade higher. If you went home, there was always a chance that you might get a furlough and then get sent to the Pacific, as that fracas wasn't over yet. I was optimistic that hostility would be over soon. I was very anxious to get home and catch up on some lost time. I was 25 years old and didn't have a job lined up. I had told my Dad that I didn't want to come back to the lumberyard, that I had set my sights on becoming a gunsmith. The government realized that many of us would be coming home without a job or skills necessary to earn a living, so they had passed the GI Bill. This gave us dummies a chance to go back to school and get a little 'school housing' and 'book learning', with some added pay. I couldn't wait to get home and start an apprenticeship in gunsmithing.

When the second list came out, my name was on it!! Did I volunteer to stay for another stripe? Hell no, I could still remember the poem I started this story with.

“As home his footsteps he has turn'd,  
From wondering on a foreign strand!”

As our group shipped out of Naples, in early February of 1945, we were put on the U.S.S. Richardson. It was an all welded ship made during the war, a Liberty Ship as they were called. We weren't very crowded this time. The first day out, 50% of the guys were soon traveling on an empty stomach, because they had thrown their last meal overboard. The sea was really rough, but I made it again without getting seasick. Sailors told us that the waves on the Mediterranean were worse than on the ocean. About half way across the Atlantic we ran into a hurricane. I stayed inside but you knew the ship was being stressed to the limit as you could actually feel the front end of the ship twist one way while the back end twisted the opposite way. It only lasted a half a day, but that was long enough with that helpless felling so common in war.

We docked at Newport News in Virginia, to a band that helped us celebrate debarking on good old U.S.A. soil. The feeling was hard to explain and do it justice, a climax to many hours of longing, the start of the rest of your life.

Red Skelton was on K.P. and kept everyone entertained with his usual antics throughout the meal. They rushed us through Newport News in a hurry, they knew that we didn't have the patience to wait much longer. They gave me a two-week pass to Horicon, Wisconsin, with orders to report to Lamoore Field near Santa Anna, Cal. It was great to be home again, but things had changed, I didn't know anyone anymore. The hardest change was to talk civil again, no more foul mouth talk that we were so used to using overseas.

From home I was sent to LaMoore Field in California on the 13<sup>th</sup> of March. There I was to report to the hospital for three weeks to get rid of the Amoebic Dysentery bug, that I had acquired in Africa at Youks Les Baines.

They had a sign-up sheet for a deep-sea fishing trip that turned out to be a super experience. There were about twenty other ambulatory hospital patients that had signed up. We had a beautiful day for boating and fishing on a fairly large boat equipped to fish for mackerel. We no more than got out of the harbor than the Skipper spotted the Coast Guard doing something a little ways out. The Skipper glassed the area and said that there was a dead whale out there that the Coast Guard was tying on to, so they could drag it out to sea, where it wouldn't stink up the harbor. The Skipper asked us if we wanted to go over there and watch? Naturally we wanted to

see the whale up close and the Skipper did just that! He ran our boat right up so it touched this dead whale! We really got a scare, as we were all hanging over the side, four feet over the whale when two big sharks about twelve feet long, streaked in to take a bite of the whale! The show began, the sharks would swim in a wide circle to get up speed and just as they would get to the whale they would turn upside down and take a bite out of the bottom of the whale. This kept up as the Coast Guard dragged the whale out to sea, as we were following behind. It was fun watching the sharks dorsal fin scoot through the water and then disappear near the whale as they took a bite.

After heading out to sea, for about an hour, following the whale, our skipper 'revved' up our yacht to catch up to the Coast Guard tug. He then offered them a case of beer if they would cut the whale loose, which they readily consented to. The skipper told us his plan, that we would go off and fish for mackerel and catch a few. Then if we wanted to, we would try to catch a shark with mackerel for bait. He explained that the sharks were Soup Fin Sharks and their livers were worth forty dollars for the oil that was in them. He also said that we didn't have the equipment to catch that big a fish, but he thought it would be fun to try, and so did we. I think he had a 30-06 rifle in the cabin and he would have shot it if we would have caught one.

It seem that at this period of time the whales were in great danger from aircraft that were patrolling our coast looking for Japanese subs. A whale a little under water was supposed to look like a submarine. The plane would drop a "depth charge" on it, the end of the whale.

We went off a ways and proceeded to fish for mackerel. The first thing the Skipper did was, tell us how to bait up as he prepared to 'chum'. To chum, he uncovered a washtub filled with rotten fish guts and scales. One whiff was all you could stand. With a quart can, he threw the chum overboard all around the boat and told us to drop our lines straight down, baited with a chunk of fish.

After a couple of hours we had about eight mackerel, about three pounds apiece. We readily agree with the Skipper to go shark fishing. So we motored back to the whale and he rigged up two poles with mackerel for bait. The Skipper sliced down the sides of the mackerel to draw blood and let us troll this behind the boat. This turned out to be a fizzle, the sharks were still around but a quarter of a mile away. We could see their dorsal fins now and then, but we could never maneuver so we could get in front of the sharks to present our bait to them. So we headed home, all in all a very exciting day.

From Lamoore, I was sent to Mountain Home Idaho, a big airfield stuck in the sagebrush. Here I got lucky and was sent to school to learn 'Central Fire Control' on B-29s. I loved it! This was where two gunners in the B-29, in two different turrets could see in all directions and pointed their gun-sight at an enemy plane. Then the rest of the remote, unmanned gun turrets, about six, would automatically swing in unison and point the same direction that the gun sight was being pointed. When the gunner 'mashed' the trigger, all guns would fire that could track the enemy plane. If the enemy was over head, the belly guns wouldn't fire, etc. With this set-up the whole plane didn't need to be pressurized for high altitude bombing.

About the time I was half way through the course the Japs surrendered in August of 1945. Now the Air Force didn't need any more Armorers to send over seas, so I was taken out of school and pulled guard duty on graveyard shift, until they cut my orders to go home, a free man after four years.

One day, on a pass to Mountain Home, I ran into a middle-aged guy that invited me to go sturgeon fishing with him on the Snake River. He told me that they grew to 1000 lbs. He had me all steamed up and we agreed to meet in the park in Mt. Home, on his day off. He had to cancel for some reason and he had no way to let me know, so I showed up but he didn't, what a disappointment.



## Chap. 16.

## Back to the Future, Civilian Life.

Since being in the states I had written to the gun editor of Sports Afield magazine for his thoughts on becoming a gunsmith. He gave me the name of Emil Koshollek, a well-known gunsmith in Wisconsin with my second choice being a gunsmithing school in Golden Colorado. The library had many good books on the subject that I had been studying every chance I got. I wrote to Mr. Koshollek to see if he would take me on as an apprentice. He wrote back, saying that he already had an apprentice and that the Wisconsin Industrial Commission only allowed one apprentice to each Journeyman. Golden was out, I was home sick for Wisconsin and deer hunting (both two and four legged kind), and Golden was in Colorado. In all the places, countries and states, which I had been in, none seemed to interest me but good all Wisconsin.

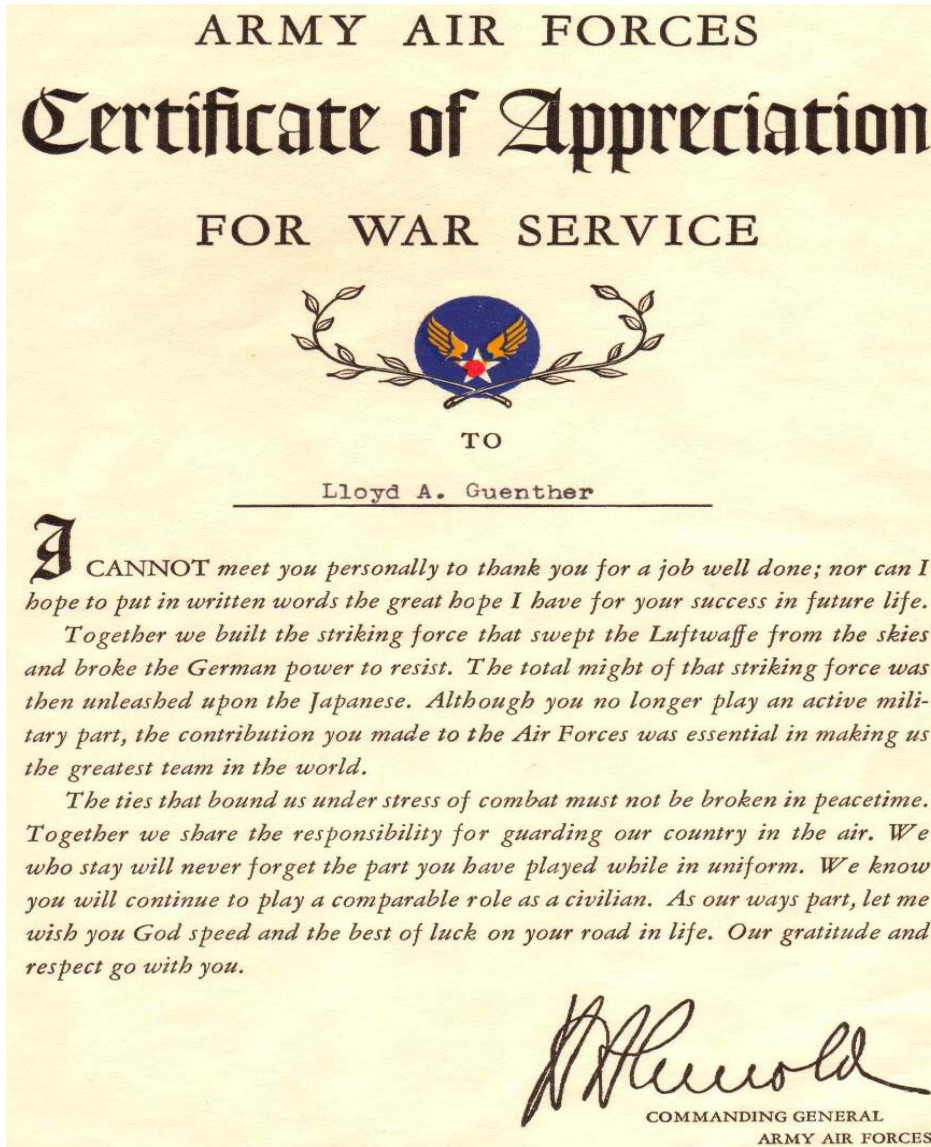
After about a month of guard duty, I was sent to Camp McCoy to be discharged. They paid me and gave me train fare to Horicon, Wisconsin.

Now I had to make up my mind fast as to what I wanted to do to earn a living. We had a John Deer plant in Horicon and I knew some of the Tool and Die makers that worked there and knew that they were the highest paid of any of the workers. The skills and machinery they used were the same I had been studying in gunsmithing. So a search for an opening in this field was found in a new company, Mayville Engineering (MEC), later to become famous for its 'shot shell reloader'. My apprenticeship was a four-year course, were I worked on the job four days a week and went to school for one day. I earned 45 cents an hour, with the GI bill giving me about 10 cents more an hour. Not much to live on but the future looked bright. I soon found a "Sweet Heart" and we got married. We had to start on the bottom, as it was done in those days. We had a second hand 1938 Dodge, that we called 'Lespadeza', or 'Lespy', that had an 'egg shaped' crankshaft. It used a quart of oil per fill of gas and you could only go 50 MPH with it for fear of the motor throwing a connecting rod because of the lop-sided crankshaft.

The hardest thing about reentering civilian life was learning how to talk without using foul language. I think for the first year, I did more listening than talking. Life was a lot easier to adjust to then, than it would be now. All you had to do was fall back on your Judeo Christian upbringing and you wouldn't get into trouble, but now the 'rule of the land' is political correctness, where the government teaches us the morality we have to live by. Most of us have overcome that too.

In ending this I am going to use the ending my deer hunting buddy Karl used to end his letter to me, "This story is complete except for what I forgot".

The 48<sup>th</sup> lives on in the "48th Fighter Squadron Association". We get together every other year. Our officers see to it that we have very interesting and exciting programs with present and past Commanding Officers, astronauts, air shows, air museums, new fighter jets, the list goes on and above all, to renew old acquaintances.



I received this at Fort McCoy when I was discharged.



G. L. (PINKY) SCHULGEN  
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Seal Beach, CA 90740

48th Fighter Squadron Assn.  
14th Fighter Group

HISTORY of the 48th SQUADRON

| FORMER PRESIDENTS   |                      |  |  |
|---|----------------------|--|--|
| CARLTON GARDNER<br>(1975)<br>Bonsall, CA                  | 1917 Aug.            | Organized: 48th Aero Sqdn. Kelly Fld., Tx.<br>WW I, France, 3 Campaigns      |  |
|   | 1920's-1930's        | 48th School Sqdn.  |  |
| G. L. (PINKY) SCHULGEN<br>(1978)<br>Port Isabel, TX       | 1935 Mar.            | Redesignated: 48th Pursuit Sqdn., Chanute<br>Fld., IL.                       |  |
|   | 1936 Sep.            | Inactivated: Chanute Fld., IL.   |  |
| G. Y. (JERRY) CONNORS<br>(1977-1978)<br>St. Louis, MO     | 1941 Jan.            | Activated: 48th Pursuit Sqd., Hamilton Fld.<br>Ca.                           |  |
|   | Jun. 1941/Apr. 1942, | March Fld., Ca., WW II: 15<br>Campaigns                                      |  |
| JOSEPH ONESTY<br>(1979-1980)<br>Seal Beach, CA            | 1942 May             | Redesignated: 48th Fighter Sqdn., March<br>Fld., Ca.,                        |  |
|   | 1942 Aug./Oct.       | Atcham, England.   |  |
| T. G. (TOM) COLLINS<br>(1981-1982)<br>Colorado Spring, CO | 1942 Nov.            | Tafaraoui, Maison Blanche, and Youks-les-<br>Bains in Algeria, North Africa. |  |
|   | 1943 Jan.            | Berteaux, Algeria, North Africa.   |  |
| FRANK RESWEBER<br>(1983-1984)<br>Lafayette, LA            | Feb.                 | Mediouna, French Morocco, North Africa.                                      |  |
|   | May                  | Telergma, Algeria, North Africa.   |  |
|   | Jun.                 | El Bathan, Tunisia, North Africa.  |  |
|   | Jul.                 | Ste-Marie-du-Zit, Tunisia, North Africa.                                     |  |
| GEORGE (OLE) OLSON<br>(1985-1986)<br>Langley AFB, VA      | Dec. 1943/Aug. 1945  | Triolo Air Fld., San Severo,<br>Italy.                                       |  |
|   | 1945 Sep.            | Inactivated: Lesina, Italy.  |  |
|   | 1946 Nov.            | Activated: 48th Ftr. Sqdn., Dow Fld., Ma.                                    |  |
| WAYNE HUBBARD<br>(1987-1988)<br>Sacramento, CA            | 1949 Oct.            | Inactivated: Dow Fld., Ma.   |  |
|   | 1952 Sep.            | Redesignated: 48th Fighter Interceptor<br>Sqdn.                              |  |
| BURT COX<br>(1989-1990)<br>Dayton, OH                     | 1952 Nov.            | Activated: 48th FIS, Grenier AFB, NH.  |  |
|   | 1953 Jan.            | Langley AFB, Va.   |  |
| CARL LINDSTROM<br>(1991-1992)<br>Louisville, KY           | 1991 Dec.            | Inactivated: Langley AFB, Va.  |  |
| DAVID R. MILES<br>(1993-1994)<br>Orlando, FL              |                      |  |  |

"THIS 48th SQUADRON HISTORICAL SUMMARY WAS FLOWN  
ABOARD THE U.S. SPACE SHUTTLE, ATLANTIS STS-74"

Any one wanting to discuss any of these events, please write to me soon, as I am 85 years old in 2005.

Lloyd A. Guenther  
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Mayville, WI. 53050-2809