Chapter 3 – The Marauder War Begins

July – September 1943

July 1943

On July 9th and 10th Allied forces under the command of General George Patton and Field Marshall Montgomery, the Allies invaded Sicily. Of course, Ernie Pyle went with them, this time traveling with an artillery unit.

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Just as the Allies were landing the B-17s of the 390th Bomb Group moved from New Hampshire to Presque Isle, Maine. That would mean that Uncle Joe flew pretty close to right over his hometown of Skowhegan. From there, they would begin to fly the northern route to England, through Greenland, Iceland, Scotland, and then to southern England.

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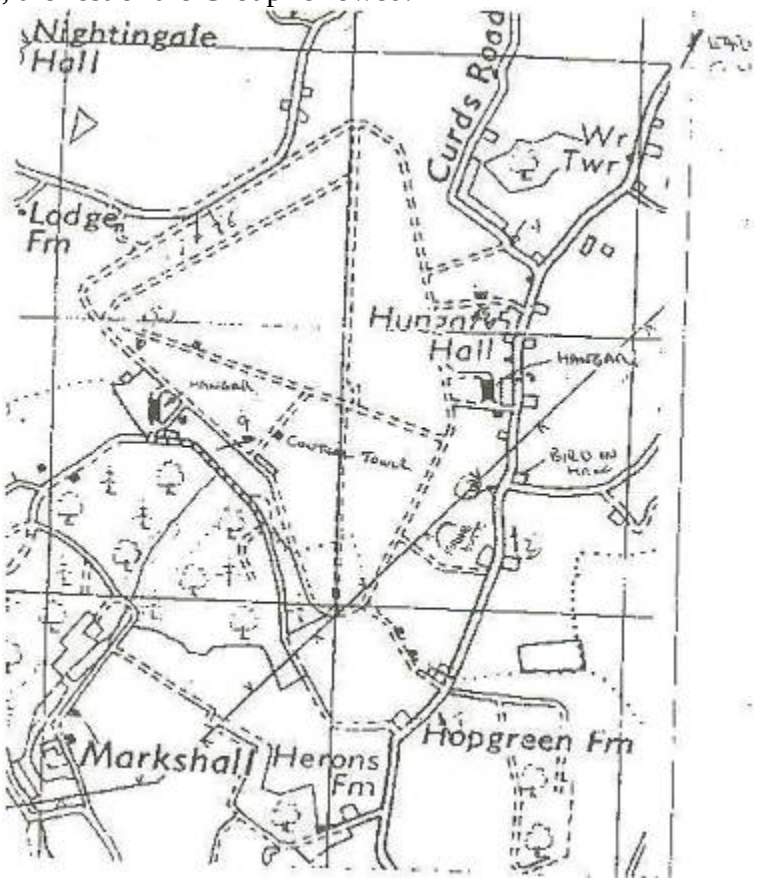
Meanwhile, the 323rd moved to a new air base at Earls Colne. Sochocki was in the first group to arrive.

"Left Horham Field in G.I. and British trucks as our advanced echelon 6/13/43 at 7:50 A.M.," he wrote. "Seen some beautiful country on the way to new field. We arrived at Earls Colne, Station 358 at 10:25 A.M."

The next day, the rest of the Group followed.



Map of Earls Colne Airfield. Tex wrote, "At Earls Colne we moved into steel Nissen Huts which were going to be my home for more than a year. Our station was located in Sussex County of England just a short distance inland from the English Channel. Our Niessen hut was located behind Marks Hall. There was a swan pond (the resting place of many old bicycles) between us and the old mansion that housed Wing headquarters *(Courtesy of Samuel Findley).*

On July 14th, the 323rd Group formally took over AAF Station 358 (Earls Colne, England) from the RAF and, in spite of the sobering news respecting the May 17th losses of the 322nd group, it was eager to get into the war.[1] But even during this transition and retraining period, the Marauders received one more set-back, and although they didn't know about it yet, it would affect them for the duration of the war. Just before their first mission the US Committee under Harry S. Truman that was delegated to study procurement of warplanes issued a report that gave the impression that the B-26 was soon to be written off.[2]

It was unfortunate that when Harry S. Truman and members of the Committee arrived as observers at the Avon Park bombing range in the US, two crashed B-26s were burning, one at each end of the runway. They concluded that the B-26 was a bad idea. But for the men affiliated with the actual operations of the bomber, there was no question about its value. Powerless to do anything else, they attempted to express their faith in the Marauder and their contempt for the Truman committee.[3]

Fred Mingus was there at Avon Park the time of Harry Truman's visit. He said, "We had a big session down there when Vice President Truman came down to find out why we were killing so many pilots in training. Of course, at Avon Park we had them burning at both ends of the runway because of the runaway props."

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Gen. Hap Arnold

Gus said, "General Arnold, he was in charge of the whole Air Force. He was Thatcher's father-in-law – nothing like being married into the family. Thatcher went to talk with him. Well, anyway, when he came back, this was July 14, he picked out the crews he wanted to fly the first mission at 10,000 feet. And he says, 'If we're not successful, the B-26s are going to be out; grounded for good.' They didn't pick the easiest target in the world for the next mission. They picked Abbeville, which doesn't mean a thing to you, but it's a big railroad junction where all the railroads of France come in together, right down in the joint."

This was Gus' and the 323rd's first mission. The plan was for the Group to send a formation of eighteen planes, called a 'Box,' composed of three 'Flights' of six planes each. The Box was arranged so that all the gunners would have the best line of fire at oncoming fighters. The Lead Flight flew in the center and forward. The Right Wing flew a bit higher and to the right of the center while the left wing flew lower and to the left of the center. Each flight would fly in a 'V' formation like a flock of geese, or in two sections of three planes in a 'V'. The position for each plane was numbered. The point of the Flight was flown by the Flight Leader (the #1 spot) and the other planes fanned out to the left and right and slightly lower than the Flight leader. That's why you read about pilots saying something like, "I was flying the number three position…etc." Each Box leader would have a squadron bombardier, and a squadron navigator and sometimes a copilot. One of the other flight leaders would be assigned as deputy leader in case something happened to the Group Leader. Flight leaders also had both, a bombardier and a navigator.

On this mission the 455th Squadron provided the Third Flight (Left Wing/Low), and Colonel Thatcher led the group, flying #1 in the First Flight (Center/Lead) with the 454th Squadron. The 453rd Squadron lead by Captain Lipscomb was slated to provide six planes to form the Second Flight (Right Wing/High). One plane from the 454th and one from the 455th did not take off due to mechanical difficulties, so sixteen planes made the bomb run. Of the men previously mentioned in this story, William "Zip" Zipperling, Howard Odom, William Crowe, and Dell Benson were also

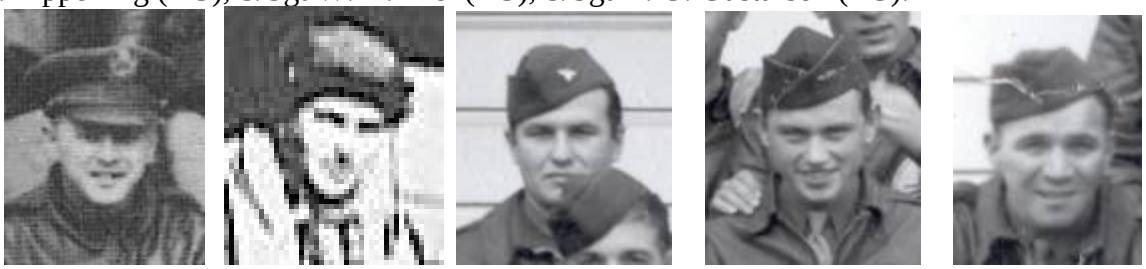
[1] Moench, *Marauder Men,* 45.
[2] Freeman, *B-26 At War,* 61.
[3] Moench, *Marauder Men,* 68.

on this first mission. Willie and Tex were not assigned to this one. The six 453rd crews assigned to fly the first mission were:

1. The Lipscomb Crew: Capt. J. P. Lipscomb (P), (no CP), 1st Lt. G. O. Edwards (NB), 2nd Lt. R Morwood (NB), S/Sgt R. E. Clark (RG), S/Sgt W. P. Crowe (EG) S/Sgt J. P. Berry (TG).

Roger Morwood, Roland Clark, William Crowe, James Berry.

2. The Van Antwerp Crew: 1st Lt. A. G. VanAntwerp (P), (no CP), S/Sgt E. C. Duffy (NB), S/Sgt W. P. Zipperling (RG), S/Sgt W. D. Diel (EG), S/Sgt H. G. Gustafson (TG).



Anthony Van Antwerp, Eugene Duffy, William Zipperling, Willis "Dirty" Diel, Harold Gustafson.

3. The Satterwhite Crew: 1st Lt. A. W. Satterwhite (P), (no CP), 1st Lt. G. J. Friesner (NB), 2nd Lt. R. J. Baker (NB), S/Sgt C. J. Ketchum (RG), S/Sgt V. Rogers (EG), S/Sgt G. G. Poulin (TG).

Albert Satterwhite, George Friesner, Richard Baker, Charles Ketcham, Victor Rogers, Gaston Poulin.

4. The Heather Crew: 1st Lt. W. J. Heather (P), 1st LT. W. E. W. Stevens (CP), 1st Lt. G. P. Burnett (NB), S/Sgt J. E. Bull (RG), S/Sgt H, Odom (EG), Sgt C. Turpin (TG).

William Heather, William Stevens, George Burnett, John Bull, Howard Odom, Cecil Turpin.

5. The Gohdes Crew: 1st Lt. C. D. Gohdes (P), (no CP), S/Sgt Roglien (NB), S/Sgt W. H. Bos (RG), S/Sgt E. C. Bell (EG), S/Sgt J. C. Bailey (TG).

Clifford Gohdes, William Bos, Clifford Bell, James Bailey.

6. The Hartnett Crew: 1st Lt. W. E. Hartnett (P), (No CP), 2nd Lt. L. J. Carboneau (NB), T/Sgt B. Lasky (RG), S/Sgt B. A. Becker (EG), S/Sgt D. S. Benson (TG).

William Hartnett, Leo Carbonneau, Benjamin Lasky, Benno Becker, Dell Benson.

In late afternoon, July 16, 1943 Colonel Thatcher led 16 B-26s from Earls Colne to attack the Abbeville Railroad yards in France. They were given a substantial Spitfire escort to support them.[4]

"One thing our command did, they made sure we had plenty of protection," Gus said. "They got 600 British and American fighters to go in with us [accounts indicate it was 18 full fighter squadrons]. We were only bombers but they came in with us. We went in and we nailed it good, real good [the bombing accuracy was actually poor, but at this point, it didn't matter]. Of course, we got a lot of anti-aircraft, which we expected anyway."

Only one man, a member of the 455th squadron, was wounded. Every man in the 323rd Group waited on the flight line for them to return. With all planes account for everyone felt an immense relief at the success of the mission. It was time to celebrate.[5]

An article released from the Associated Press from an Eighth Air Force Support Command Bomber Base in England, July 16, relayed a description of the event:

> Medium bombers of the Eighth Air Force in a surprise dusk attack on France hit the important freight yards of Abbeville today. It was the third United States medium bomber raid in this theatre and the first under the Eighth Air Force's "tactical" branch.
>
> None of our bombers was lost and only one man was injured in the course of a short flak barrage near the target 15 miles inside the French coast. Today's operation was the first disclosure that medium bombers had been transferred to the Air Support Command.
>
> The 323rd Group got their bombs away, some 15 tons, without losing a single aircraft but the mission was not without cost. Returning with a severe hip wound, Cpl. Ronald G. Creakbaum [455th BS], Tail Gunner on Capt. Brier's [455th] aircrew and the most junior Marauder Man in the entire formation (the only Corporal), became the first 323rd Group's casualty.[6]

[4] Freeman, *B-26 at War*, 61.
[5] Moench, *Marauder Men*, 48.
[6] Moench, *Marauder Men*, 48.

One of the new armor flak suits worn by U.S. bomber crews probably saved the life of Lieutenant Thomas G. Trainor, 13 15th Avenue, Haverhill, Mass., a bombardier-navigator on the bomber "Miss Emily".

"We hit kind of heavy flak over the target," he said. "About the third or fourth burst I saw came past my nose. I saw a piece ricochet right past my eye."

It ricocheted, he found out, off the back of his flak vest, tearing a hole in the canvas covering.

"All we needed was lunch – we had a picnic," said Sergeant Gaston Poulin, Skowhegan, Me., turret gunner of another bomber, "Miss Safartus Rickenschicker."

Brigadier General Robert C. Candee, chief of the Air Support Command, after attending the interrogation of the men involved in this arm's first action in this theatre, said: "It was swell – a good start and we'll keep it up until we smash them for good and all."

One of the flyers was Captain Frank Kappler [454th BS], 2992 Johnson Avenue, Alameda, Calif., a navigator in the Doolittle raid on Tokyo, making his first mission, except for one operation in China, since the attack on Japan. Colonel Thatcher summed up the mission: "The bombing was only fair but the experience gained was incalculable and they're not so tough. We never made a better bombing run. The weather seemed to open up just for us – there was a rift in the clouds right over the target. The boys worked like a bunch of old-timers."[7]

[Later, Gus told the local newspaper…] The most vivid of all is the first [mission], "for that really was the big thrill." It was a case of "where ignorance is bliss" for the local man states that "I didn't think anything about it, because I didn't know what was in store."[8]

That night there was celebration in the 323rd Group. This was no longer a unit in training for combat – this was now a combat unit! The enemy had been engaged and, in spite of one wounded aircrew member, everyone in the Group had returned to the Base! Far into the night, the jubilant aircrews on this first mission related to those who had not yet "been there" the bursts of flak, the smell of the cordite, the look of the French countryside, and the feeling of having finally entered combat. Hidden bottles of booze were broken out as everyone celebrated the day's success.[9]

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On the day after Gus's first mission, on the 17th of July Guy Poulin with the Flying Fortresses of the 570th Bomb Squadron, arrived in England. They settled in at their new base at Framlingham and also began to prepare for their first mission.

In July of 1943 the air echelon of the Group was assigned to the 8th Air Force and dispatched to Station 153 located at Parham in Suffolk, England. The ground echelon with support equipment arrived later in July after an Atlantic crossing by ship.[10]

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On the 24th of the month, the British instituted a new campaign in their night bombing raids – Operation Gomorrah - sending 746 RAF bombers to the German city of Hamburg where they dropped 2,300 tons of high-explosive and incendiary bombs, causing fires that were visible for 200 miles. It was the first use of 'window,' radar-jamming strips of aluminum foil. The German radar was useless. Their ground control could not direct the fighters to the bombers and the searchlights and radar-guided flak guns aimed at empty air. Without window the RAF could have expected to lose about 50 bombers, but instead they only lost twelve, so the effect of the bombing was maximum. People back home did not know what they were saving their scrap tinfoil for.

"Zip's parents lived in Hamburg," Tex related, "After reading in the Stars and Stripes about a raid by the RAF on Hamburg, I informed Zip that the RAF dropped 2,000 tons of bombs on Hamburg and Zip's response was, 'I bet the old man sh_t that night.'"

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[7] Gus Poulin's Scrapbook.
[8] Gus Poulin's Scrapbook.
[9] Moench, *Marauder Men*, 49.
[10] 390th.org.

A 323rd Group Marauder, distinguishable by the horizontal white stripe on its tail, flies through a flak barrage. *(Photo courtesy of W. L. Brainard).*

Throughout the latter half of July, the 323rd flew 10 medium altitude missions, all the while gaining confidence, and yet taking relatively few casualties.

Sam "Tex" Findley

"On July 25th, I flew my first mission," Tex said.

This was Willie's first mission also, flying with 1st Lt. Sprague in a plane designated *Ecstacy* #41-34741 VT-P instead of *Pub 13.* Tex flew with the Haller crew in the *Egg Crate.*

"The target was some coke ovens at Ghent, Belgium," Tex related. "As our flight of 18 planes approached the coast of Belgium I felt a fear and anticipation of what my fate would be. When we crossed the coast black puffs of smoke began to erupt throughout the formation. So this was flak. It didn't seem so harmful. I developed a healthy respect for it later when I saw the holes it made in the planes. I kept my eyes peeled for German FW-190 and ME-109 fighters. The only fighters I saw were the Spitfires of the RAF that were our escorts and were a comforting sight. All of our aircraft returned to our stations. No one was killed or wounded and only three aircraft were damaged. The group had now completed five missions without the loss of an aircraft – how long would our luck hold out?"

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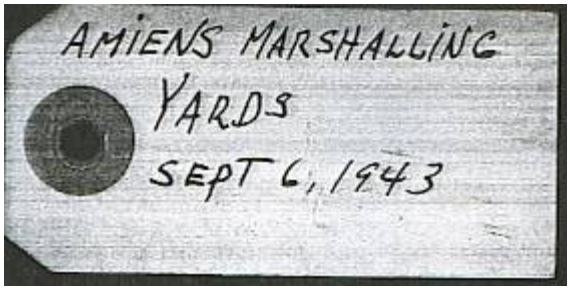
It didn't take long for the regimen to become routine. Tex described the procedure for preparing to go on a mission: "A loading list was posted on the Squadron bulletin board to alert the

crews who were scheduled to participate on each subsequent mission. When the mission was announced these crews went to the Operations briefing room to be briefed on the target, weather, expected enemy opposition, bomb load, fighter escort, rendezvous point, route to and from the target, and take-off time. When the Mission Briefing Officer announced the target he would display a large map with a string marking the route to be flown to and return from the target. Enemy flak batteries along the route would be indicated by circles drawn on the map. Where the string passed through a circle, flak could be expected at that location during the mission. Of course there was always flak at the target. Any target that was worth bombing was one that was also worth defending."

"After the briefing," Tex continued, "we would go to the equipment room. Here our parachutes and escape kits were issued. The parachutes were of British manufacture, and the parachute harness incorporated a quick release feature that enabled the airman to quickly separate from the parachute in case of landing in the water after bailing out of the airplane. A 'one man' rubber boat was available to each crewmember and it remained in the aircraft, as did the flak vests that each crewman wore when flying over enemy controlled territory. The escape kit contained many useful items such as a compass, rubber water bottle, a map and money of the country where the mission target was located, etc. Each combat crew had a jeep available to transport them to the hardstand where their aircraft was parked and ready for the mission."

As the flight engineer, Tex had one more job to do on his way back to his tail guns, and this chore helped him to keep track of how many missions he had flown.



One of Tex's bomb tags *(courtesy of Samuel Findley).*

"I was the one that always pulled the safety pins from the bomb fuses, and plugged in the IFF detonator, on the way from the front of the aircraft to my tail gun position on a mission. IFF stands for 'Identification Friend or Foe'. Each combat aircraft operating out of England had one of these devices. It continually transmitted a signal to the Brits that we were friendly aircraft and not enemy. There was a small explosive charge built into the unit that would destroy the signal frequency if the aircraft were to crash in enemy held territory. I kept one of the tags that was attached to the safety pins and would write the date of the mission, the target, and sometimes a short comment regarding the flack etc. I kept these tags until after the war, but gave them to a young cousin along with some other souvenirs."

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On the 25th, the German radio announced that 100,000 people were now homeless in Hamburg. The USAAF heavies bombed the city again that day. Three days later, on the 28th, the RAF sent 722 more bombers there. This was retaliation for the bombing of London and the "Battle of Britain." It was on this second British raid that the firestorm started. Rainfall in the previous month in the Hamburg area had been minimal. The fire exceeded 1,000 degrees and convection currents caused 150mph winds. Nine square miles of fire destroyed that section of the city. The next day the Germans ordered the mass evacuation of a million citizens from the city.[11]

"We asked Zip if he thought his parents were all right," relates Willie. "We asked him whether he thought they were alive or not. He was very confident. 'Oh ya, they live right across the street from the Catholic Church,' he said. We wondered, though." From things that Zip's wife,

[11] *Warplanes,* 91-92.

Lillian said, it was obvious that he was much more worried than that but preferred not to show it. There was nothing he could do about it anyway.

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The Satterwhite Crew: L-R Gaston Poulin (turret gunner), Charles J. Ketcham (radio-gunner), R. J. Baker (navigator), A. W. "Pappy" Satterwhite (pilot), G. J. Friesner (bombardier), V. Rogers (engineer-gunner and Willie's replacement). Their aircraft is *Miss Safartus Rickenschicker* 41-34708 VT-J. The decals on the plane indicate 15 bombing missions and two decoy missions, notated by the ducks. That would place the timing of the photo in late November or early December 1943 *(Photo courtesy of Alf Johannessen).*

Gus knew from letters sent by the family that his brother Guy was also stationed somewhere in England. But the problem was how to find him. With all the wartime secrecy and precautions, this proved to be very difficult. He tried to do it through letters to home, but the wartime censors kept cutting out the vital information.

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Tex wrote, "Our luck finally ran out when the Group flew its 10th mission on July 31, 1943, while attacking the enemy airfield at Poix, France." This was Tex's second mission. The flight was attacked by six FW-190s. Seven marauders were hit by flak and the plane piloted by Captain John P. Lipscomb [453rd] a direct hit in the bomb bay. The eyewitness reports were not favorable to their survival. It appeared that all crewmen had been lost.[12]

Gus was on that mission also, his fourth, "The fourth one, one of the boys really got nailed," he said. "He was flying the high spot [box leader]. We were leading so we were flying up high. And he got a bomb bay full of anti-aircraft. The cockpit got hit also. Of course, he flipped over. The guys tried to get out. They got out, but had no parachutes. I recall this guy came down

[12] Moench, *Marauder Men,* 52.

right by me... I mean I couldn't help him (pause)… from here to about there (6 feet). I recognized him. I mean I couldn't help it (pause)."

"And the pilot," Gus continued, "I knew him well... He went with the plane. The thing just blew up. So, (sigh), those are some of the things you can't forget. They are just like pictures. How do you forget a picture when it's sitting in front of you?"

Roger Morwood, Roland Clark, William Crowe, Joseph Hager, James Berry.
Men of the Lipscomb crew (MIA).

No one in the squadron knew if anyone had survived. It didn't look good from the air, but one thing they felt sure of was that the pilot did not have time to get out. The loss of the Squadron commander, Captain John P. Lipscomb, affected everyone deeply, and to this day, they still discuss it at gatherings – such as the reunion I attended. William Crowe had been one of the group that Willie and Gus had trained with in gunnery school. It was a grim reminder that the war would not be easy – that it would have a cost.

As a result of the loss of Captain Lipscomb Colonel Thatcher decided that the Group Operations officer and all Squadron commanders would only participate in every fourth mission in order to lessen the losses of experienced leaders.[13] Apparently, this practice was also extended to flight leaders as well - a 'group' was usually 54 planes, a 'box' was 18, and a 'flight' was six. Each of these formations had a leader who was responsible for all under his command. This order to fly every fourth mission meant that the mission tour for the leaders and their crews would be extended to a longer duration than the average aircrews. There were other factors too, that would extend a tour length, such as down time from wounds or injury, sickness, furloughs, or temporary special duty, etc.

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"Did the flak give you much trouble?" I asked Gus.

"Well, you know, flak became almost normal; you knew you could expect it. So we got through that mission good. We only had… oh… 350 to 400 holes in the plane."

"Wow!"

"Oh, that wasn't bad."

"Oh(?)"

Tex said, "Allied combat crewmen in Europe always referred to anti-aircraft fire as "FLAK" (an acronym for the German term Flieger Abwehr Kanone)." Flak was their biggest problem. Everywhere their mission took them there was flak waiting. The Germans began to move in more flak batteries to protect potential targets. Flying at their medium altitude they were better targets than the heavy bombers.

Besides flak the Allied air forces also had Nazi fighters to contend with, and despite the number of sorties flown by the Allies, these enemy fighters were not decreasing in strength at this time, they were increasing. The enemy was moving in fighters and building new bases for them.

[13] Moench, *Marauder Men,* 341.

At this time they had about 800 fighters on or near the coast to oppose the Marauders. They had a network of well-stocked air bases 450 miles deep from the coastline.[14] But despite the increasing effect of enemy anti-aircraft fire and fighters, morale in the 323 was at a new high and people on all levels began to re-evaluate the B-26. General Moench described the mood as "decidedly upbeat." Many of the men felt they were on their way to completing their mission tour of 25 missions.[15] The airmen began to believe that perhaps they did have a chance to finish their tours and go home.

"All that training from Travis really paid off," Willie said. "We knew how to fly a good formation. It was the best exposure for the gunners. Those Germans didn't like to come at us – we would have 25-30 fifty calibers pointed at them. They figured they wouldn't last too long. I wouldn't want to go into it. We were also pretty fast and the fighters had a hard time catching us and the ack ack [anti-aircraft guns] couldn't track us very well. In the early part of the war we could outrun the fighters. That's why our losses were so low."

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August 1943

In August, the 323rd flew eight more missions and the Satterwhite crew flew four of them. Marauder bombing accuracy began to improve and casualties were still relatively light.

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Fred Mingus

Also in August, pilot Fred Mingus arrived in Ireland to continue his training. He said, "In August I was shipped overseas….went to Northern Ireland near Londonderry, to a little town between Belfast and Londonderry. Toome Bridge was the name of the base. I took over a full crew: pilot (myself), copilot, navigator/bombardier, radioman, engineer, and tailgunner. While we were in North Ireland the B-17s were having such heavy combat losses that they came up and asked for any copilots or celestial navigators in B-26s to transfer to the 17s. They offered twenty-five missions and go home. My copilot couldn't fly a kite – he'd come in and land six feet higher or three feet deeper. My celestial navigator was not necessary for this kind of aircraft [the B-26] because for our navigators, D.R. (Directional Radio) was about all they'd use. Laurent, the navigator, wanted to go to the 17s and I told him, 'Well, I'll let you go if you take Fisher with you.' Fisher was the copilot. So he talked Fisher into going in. That left me with a short crew. Fisher was shot down and killed on his first mission. Laurent was shot down on his 4th mission and became a prisoner of war….and he went there because he could get twenty-five missions and go home. I flew sixty-five missions and beat him home."

"I picked up Tom Goddard. That's a story in itself. His personnel file looked like a Sears and Roebuck catalogue….about that thick (a few inches). He was one of the original men to check out on a Norden bombsight. Before the war, all bombardiers were enlisted men. He had made and broke every rule in the army. His father was a cavalry colonel and he was born and raised out West on some post out there. He knew every rule and regulation in the army and how to break 'em and he did it, frequently. He was a maverick. In fact I got him because he came into Tampa from Panama and met a G. I. in an alley….took his gas mask and his M1 [rifle] and went aboard a troopship that was heading for Europe. He got up into Londonderry and he got off that troop ship. And he threw his rifle and his gas mask at the 2nd Lt. that was checking off the troops doming down the ramp. The 2nd Lt. said, 'Hey where are you going?' He said, 'I'm not in the army. I'm Air Force,' and he came down to Toome Bridge. My group commander there was named Comenator…. Comenator said, 'I'll have you court marshaled for desertion.' He said, 'Colonel, you don't desert <u>to</u> the fight. You desert <u>from</u> it.' Comenator called me down and he said, 'Mr.

[14] Perret, *Winged Victory*, 252.
[15] Moench, *Marauder Men*, 53.

Mingus.' I was a flight Officer at the time. 'Check this guy out. He is a maverick. He says he's a bombardier and he has no records….nothing. All he's got is his I.D. Before I try to straighten this thing out, you find out if he is a bombardier.'"

"So I took him up and I flew him up-down-crosswind, low-level, high-level, Norden bombsight, D8 sight….and he had a 50 foot error….within 50' of every target. And he said, "Now you can take these things out of here (the bombsights) and I'll use my thumb and finger and do the same thing. So I told Comenator I wanted him and he finally got straightened out, got his papers all filled back in. He could never be commissioned. The highest rank [he could achieve] was master sergeant, and he had been a master sergeant a half a dozen different times. So we got him straightened out and I got him on my crew."

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The ninth Allied attack on Hamburg occurred on the 2nd of the month. The German civilian losses in Hamburg alone, in the last eight days now almost equaled Britain's civilian losses throughout the entire war (50,000). The Brits had achieved their goal in one week.[16] It is a strange fact of the war that in the beginning, Hitler had a soft spot for the English. To him they were long-lost Germanic cousins and in his grand insane scheme of things they were part of his 'master race.' Americans didn't figure into his picture at all because we were 'mongrels,' too culturally diverse. Early in the Battle of Britain, the Luftwaffe focused on military targets only because Hitler had given express orders that London was not to be bombed. But a lost flight bombed London by accident and Churchill ordered the bombing of Berlin - which Hitler had proclaimed would never be bombed. 'Der Fuhrer' went berserk and pulled out all the stops, targeting only London, especially civilian targets. In another twist of irony, this gave the almost spent RAF time to regroup and build up enough strength to win the 'Battle of Britain' in the air, causing the Germans to call off their pending invasion of England. Now, in 1943, after seeing Hamburg go up in smoke, the overconfident British thought that they could bomb Germany out of the war – exactly what the Germans had tried to do to them three years earlier. But they did not reckon with the incredible resourcefulness and tenacity of the 'Gerries,' which equaled or excelled the Brits. In reality, the war was far from over – and for some it was just beginning.

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On August 12th Guy Poulin flew his first mission, coincidentally, also the 390th Bomb Group's very first mission, to Bonn, Germany. Previous to this, the Flying Fortresses of the Eighth Air Force had just had a maximum effort week and, unfortunately, had taken tremendous losses.

> In a week of sustained combat operations, VIII Bomber Command had lost about 100 aircraft and 90 combat crews [about 900 men]. This reduced its combat strength to under 200 heavies ready for combat. However, the losses in men and machines were soon made good and on August 12 the 390th Bomb Group from Framlingham helped swell the ranks of 330 bombers heading for targets in the Ruhr.[17]
>
> The many months of sweat and toil that went into training a bomb group reached a climax 12 August 1943, when the 390th warmed engines for its first operational mission. The crews were assembled. "Your target is a synthetic oil plant at Wesseling in the Ruhr Valley," they were told. Nineteen planes took off that morning in a force of 243 planes. Clouds covered all the check points that led to the Ruhr, so the group leader singled out the secondary target, an optical instrument factory at Bonn. By later standards, bombing results were poor. A direct hit was scored on a bridge across the Rhine, several bursts were plotted in the rail yard and adjacent warehouses, but most of the bombs carried over into the residential section of town and nearby fields. Several enemy planes were seen but none attacked the Group. Bonn was a lightly defended flak center. It was an insignificant mission in terms of results but it was one of the Group's great ones. Every man on the base was on the field to welcome the returning planes. The ETO ice had been broken.[18]

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[16] *Warplanes*, 92.
[17] Martin W. Bowman, *Castles in the Air*, Patrick Stephens Limited, 1984, 66.
[18] *The Story of the390th Bombardement Group (H)* – privately printed/390th.org)

As for the *Eightball* and crew, Guy later recalled this mission to a local paper while home on leave:

> This little trip is well remembered, not only because it was the first, but also because "everything went wrong." The target was Cologne [but they were apparently diverted to Bonn] and it was the first time that Poulin had seen German airplanes. "We had trouble with the oxygen and with the heating equipment, some of the men freezing up a little."[19]

* * * * * * *

Three days later, the *Eightball* went on its second mission as part of 'Operation Starkey' which was a demonstration intended to reduce some of the German reinforcement of the eastern front in Russia and the southern front in Italy.

> On August 15, VIII Bomber Command participated in the 'Starkey' deception plan which was created to make the enemy believe that an invasion of the French coast was imminent. In theory it would relieve some of the pressure on Russia and halt troop movements to Italy. The Fortress formations roamed across France, Belgium and Holland, dropping their deadly loads of bombs on long-suffering German airfields. Friendly fighter support was generally described as 'excellent' and the Luftwaffe stayed largely on the ground. However, there was always the 'expected unexpected' and two ships in the 390th Bomb Group collided, tearing the tail off one, and both spun in.[20]

* * * * * * *

Since the heavy bombers sustained a high rate of casualties, Guy and the men of the *Eightball* quickly developed a 'culture' of humor to counteract the dreadful reality of their situation. Life expectancy wasn't high in a B-17 and there was nothing they could do about it – but at least they could laugh. Here are some of their daily mission-prep routines as described in the article titled, *Screwballs and the Eightball,* by Lt. H. D. Steinmetz:

> There is no logical explanation for the *Eight Ball* or the guys who fly her. In Army records she's just another flak-battered Flying Fortress, her crew just ten more average Yanks in the big bombing business over Europe.
>
> Which merely goes to show about Army records…
>
> Because actually the *Eight Ball* is the luckiest ship in the Eighth Air Force, her crew the wackiest ten guys who ever bombed and belly-laughed their way across Germany, guffawed at Goering's goblins and in general made merry with murder.
>
> "We're not really nuts," claims 1/Lt. Bill Cabral, pilot, of Santa Monica, California. "We get plenty scared, like anybody else in this business. But we figure if you take it *too* seriously you'll end up tagging telephone poles and walking around on your heels for the rest of your life, if any."
>
> On mission days, the flyers get up at two or three in the morning for breakfast and briefing for a dawn take-off. Poulin or Ferris, one or the other is always the first up – delight in waking the rest of the crew by dragging a stick along the corrugated steel walls of the barracks. The effect is that of a not-so-gentle patter of flak on the hull of a Flying Fortress and the hilarious result is a suddenly very wide-awake crew.
>
> There's usually an hour or so to kill between briefing and take-off, and the crew spends it hanging around their ship. Near the dispersal area where the *Eight Ball* berths is an al fresco two-holer that does an increasing brisk business as take-off time draws near. Here the crew makes essential preparation for battle, a ritual enlivened by a "combat conditioning" routine devised by Messrs. Poulin and Ferris. "Combat conditioning" consists of sitting and taking it, under circumstances offering no other alternative, while being pelted by crew mates with gravel flak and warned of enemy wasps and bees attacking from all around the clock.
>
> A confirmed cut-up on the ground, Ferris often goes quietly studious in the air. To kill time when he isn't killing Germans the bombardier takes a book along on missions. His taste runs to Sherlock Holmes and

[19] Joseph Poulin's Scrapbook.
[20] Bowman, *Castles in the Air,* 67.

other mystery yarns, but he also enjoys good novels and non-fiction. "I read *Oliver Wiswell* on the Bordeaux and Marienburg trips," he says…

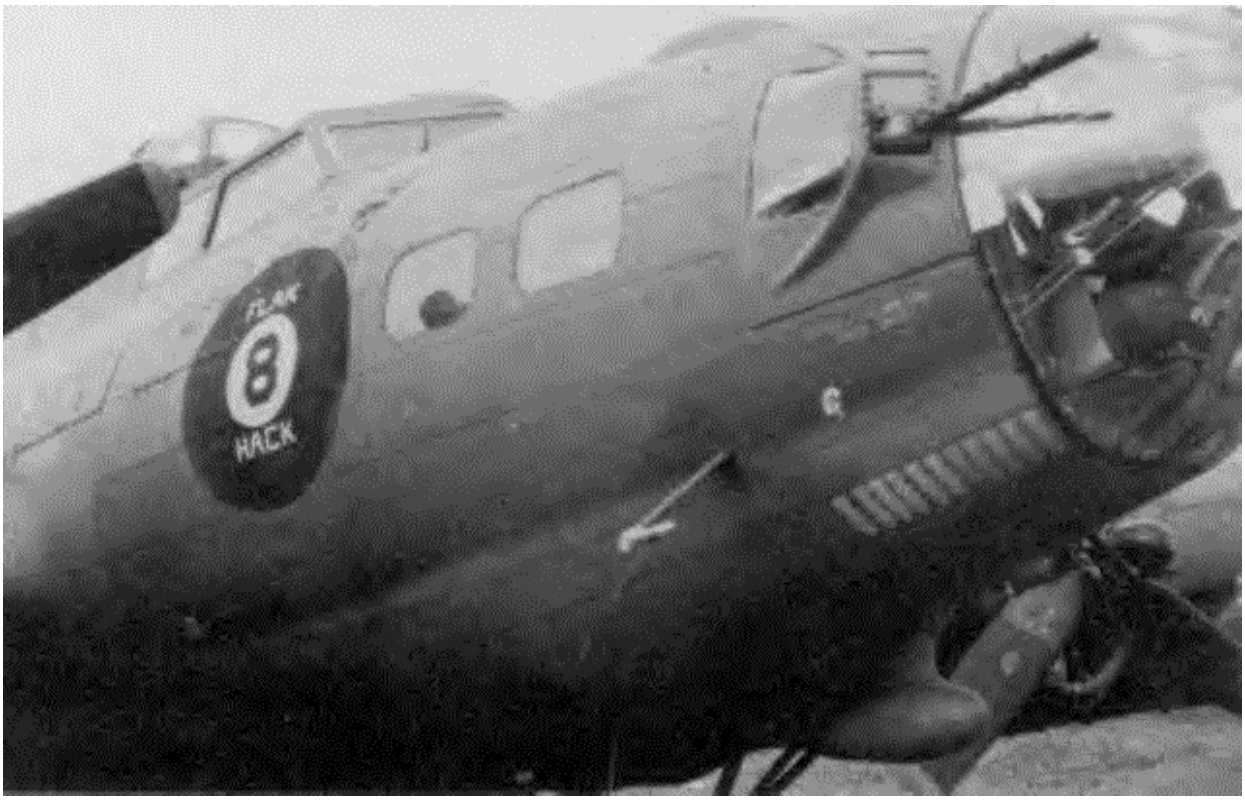
Holman's sense of the humorous side of near-disaster is a little too whimsical to be in the best *Eight ball* tradition. But, like Poulin, he's always ready to play the goat in the sort of knockdown, drag-out gag in which the screwballs specialize. He and Wamble have a routine act that has become as regular a part of every mission as "bombs away." Staged a half hour or so after take-off, while the ship is circling to altitude over England, it goes like this:

"Zounds!" shouts Wamble from his turret. "Fighters, after us already! Get 'em Holman!"

Holman's head pops out of the radio hatch. "Where?" he yells.

"There!" hoots Wamble, sending a thunderous burst of .50-cal. Slugs past Holman's right ear. Tried and true, this bit of gunplay never fails to get the mission under way in the right spirit.

Balance wheels of the high-geared crew are the co-pilot, 2/Lt. John E. Wenzel, of Brooklyn, N.Y., and the left waist gunner, S/Sgt. Reuben Widetsky, of Philadelphia, Pa. "My main job is playing alarm clock for Bill," Wenzel states solemnly. "Early in each mission, just after we go on oxygen, he catches a nap. I wake him up after we've assembled at altitude and are on our way to the target."[21]



The *Eightball/Flak Hack*; the nine bombs painted on the fuselage indicate that this photo was taken after the Marienburg mission on the 9th of October, 1943 *(Photo courtesy of Daniel Poulin).*

* * * * * * *

Aunt Martha told me that despite the censorship program, Guy had devised a system of letting the folks back home know where he had been on his missions. "He would say something like, 'I met a girl from Berlin, New Hampshire,' and we would know he had been to Berlin, Germany."

* * * * * * *

At Earls Colne, the Marauder crews were finally outfitted with the new flak armor, which had already proven itself on many occasions. Up until this time, there had only been a few available and these had been given only to bombardiers in their exposed forward positions. "Earlier in the year special body armor had been developed in the UK for heavy bomber crews, but

[21] *Screwballs and the Eightball* – Newspaper Article by Lt. H. D. Steinmetz.

owing to demand it was not until the end of August that each of the four Marauder groups had sufficient sets to fit out every man on a 36-plane mission."[22]

* * * * * * *

Gus described one mission to Amiens, France. "Amiens had Göering's yellow-nosed boys," he said. "They flew ME 109s and they were good flyers. There was only one fighter that came through the whole formation. But he was dead before he got halfway through. They nailed him right off quick." The attack on the Amiens-Glisy Airdrome in France took place on the 19th. The Group sent 36 aircraft that soon met with heavy flak and FW-190s. One enemy plane was shot down with three additional probables.[23]

Herman Göering was the commander of the entire German Air Force (the Luftwaffe), and his 'yellow-nosed boys,' sometimes referred to as a squadron, was actually an elite German fighter wing that usually maintained about 110-124 operational fighters at several bases near the English Channel. They were affectionately known to the Nazis as 'Göering's Kids,' but their official designation was JG-26, Jagdgeshwader 26 (Wing 26). The wing was divided into three 'Gruppen' (Groups), composed of three squadrons (Staffeln) each, although the organization varied at times. They had taken part in the Battle of Britain in 1940, during which time they claimed a win/loss ratio of five wins to each loss. Group One was sometimes referred to by the Allies as the 'Abbeville Kids' but their operations also included bases at Amiens and other airfields, while Group Two was based further to the north near Calais. Two other Fighter Wings also fought alongside JG-26. In March, 1941, JG-26 began receiving Focke Wulf Fw-190s and Messerschmitt Me-109s, which, when painted with a yellow nose, became their distinctive trademark.

At different points in the war, the Group, or portions of it, were sent to the Russian Front or to Germany for a rest, but by 1943 they were back in Western Europe. In the minds of the Allies, they were unquestionably the best German fighter unit, and, in 1943, their win/loss ratio was still as high as four to one. But, while they were winning individual victories in the air, they were losing the overall war of attrition. The Germans simply could not put as many planes in the air as the Allies, and their replacement pilots did not have the level of training of their predecessors. Yet, even by this time, as the average pilot's level of skill and training was decreasing, the combat ability and spirit of the unit as a whole was still very high. It was important to the Allies that all German fighter bases near the Channel be destroyed and this became one of the primary objectives of the B-26 Marauders. It was bad enough to be attacked by the yellow-nosed fighters on the way to a target, but it was really dangerous to attack their bases; not just because of the fighters, but also because of the abundant flak batteries that protected them.

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On the 24th of August, 1943, the *Eightball* and crew bombed a Noball, Evreaux-Conches, most likely, the secret target which is mentioned here:

> As for actual trouble, excluding the sort the Germans try to make for them, the screwballs haven't had any. The pilot keeps just enough rein on the crew to prevent it's overstepping the line between good morale and poor discipline. During an attack on a secret target at a nameless location in France, it looked from the *Eightball's* position as though the lead ship of the formation had failed to spot the target, which Wharton had positively identified several miles off their line of flight.
>
> "There it is, Bill…over there on the left," the navigator phoned the pilot, "Let's go after it!"
>
> The rest of the crew chimed in, urging Cabral to pull out of formation for an individual sock at the target. Wisely, he refused. Abandoning formation for any reason whatsoever, excepting necessity or on orders

[22] Freeman, *B-26 Marauder at War,* 71.
[23] Moench, *Marauder Men,* 57

of the combat commander, is a grave offense. The entire theory and practice of high-altitude precision bombing and defense against enemy fighters are based on formation flying.[24]

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A 453rd plane - the "VT-M" on the fuselage indicates that this is very likely a photo of Zipperling's *Flying Dutchmen* piloted by Lt. Van Antwerp *(Photo Courtesy of W. L. Brainard).*

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At this time, military priorities in medium bombers received a new focus on 'secret targets,' which were not identified to the aircrews; actually Allied intelligence couldn't tell them, because they did not even know what they were. Described only as "secret targets," the men called them "Noballs."[25]

Tex said, "What was a Noball? When we asked we were only told that it was a secret target. The only thing we could see from our bombing at 8,000-12,000 feet was a small mark in a hedgerow and a small structure of some sort. They were heavily defended with flak. Why did the enemy defend these Noballs so strongly? We combat crewmen disliked these targets. From our point of view we were exposing ourselves to great risks and unlike an airfield or railway marshalling yard we could see no real damage our bombing did. At this time there were at least six other Marauder Groups bombing them also and thirty B-26's were lost during attacks on them."

"We were just picking away." Gus ventured. "We were bombing sites that we didn't even know what they were. We found out later, after the war, that we had been bombing rocket sites. Von Braun was in charge of the rockets. You know where he got his rocket ideas from? It was from an American professor in Massachusetts. He bought every rocket book that was written. I think he put up the first rocket. We didn't even know what it was when it came up through our formation."

Together, on the 30th of the month, the Haller (Tex), Sprague (Willie), and Satterwhite (Gus) crews bombed the first 323rd Noball target. This was Gus's eighth mission, Willie's ninth. Lt. Satterwhite had just been promoted to Captain and the Satterwhite crew was honored with the presence of Col. Thatcher, flying as mission commander and Captain P. J. McGlynn, the mission

[24] Steinmetz, *Screwballs*
[25] Moench, *Marauder Men*, 59.

bombardier.[26] Tex was one of three men wounded and twelve of the aircraft were damaged. Another wounded man was also of the 453rd Bomb Squadron, Sgt. Arthur J Morlock.[27]

Samuel "Tex" Findley (WIA), Arthur J. Morlock (WIA).

In Tex's words, "On the 30th of August 36 aircraft from our group bombed a secret target in the Foret de Eperlesque in France. As the formation crossed the coast between Dunkerque France and Ostend Belgium our Marauder was hit with flak. Shrapnel pierced the side of the aircraft at my crew position and severed the ammunition track to one of the guns knocking it out of commission. Pieces of flak and shreds of metal from the ammunition track pierced my right arm, hands, and neck. I immediately knew I was hit and there was blood on the piece of bulletproof glass through which I sighted my guns. After notifying the pilot that I had been wounded I asked the radio operator at the waist guns to look at my face to see where I had been hit and he told me that he couldn't see any wounds there at all. Upon returning to our airfield from the mission our aircraft landed first (it was normal procedure for aircraft with wounded aboard to be the first to land) and we were met by the ambulance and medics. The wounds to my arm and hand were examined and treated and I advised the flight surgeon that I had also been hit somewhere about my face. After examination he concluded that I had no wounds in that area, but the next day while shaving my razor scraped something and I rode my bicycle to this office where he removed a small piece of metal from my neck. Luckily, I was not seriously wounded and I continued flying missions. For my wounds I was awarded the Purple Heart Medal. I had already received the Air Medal for flying 5 combat missions. I never learned what the secret target was that we bombed that day but considering the amount of flak at the target it must have been important to the enemy."

The next day, on the 31st, the 323rd Group flew to another Noball at the Foret D'Hesdin in France. Upon arrival, the target was shrouded in cloud cover and the group couldn't drop their bombs. Adding to the difficulties of the day, they were fired upon by Allied ships in the Channel on their return trip. Luckily, no casualties were reported. Nevertheless, things were still looking good. There were four Marauder Groups now based in England, the 322nd, 323rd, 386th, and 387th.[28]

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The Marauder crews continued to visit the local pubs during their time off.

"We had this character, Goglin [possibly Coggins, or Coughlin?]," Gus related. "He ran Earls Colne. He was going out with the mayor's daughter and in a way he was running the mayor. For one night, he came down to the George Hotel and says, 'All right, we'll stay open an hour later now.' Then the guy that owns the place says, 'What do you mean?' Goglin answers, 'I told you, we'll stay open one hour later.' Well, the owner answers, 'We can't, it's against the law.' Goglin ups and says, 'I just made a new law and that's it.' Well the poor guy at the hotel didn't know what to do, so he called the mayor. And the mayor says, 'What Goglin says, is what it is.' So they

[26] Trevor Allen, Marauder Researcher.
[27] Moench, *Marauder Men*, 59.
[28] Moench, *Marauder Men*, 60.

stayed open an hour later. See, the mayor was hoping that Goglin would marry his daughter so that she might be able to come to the United States. That was the biggest ambition of everybody in Europe. I know, I met a girl in France. She wanted to come to the United States. She wanted to get married in a hurry. Baloney. There was another girl from London. She wanted to get married also. That was more or less the general pace - get married in a hurry and then get to the States."

* * * * * * *

September 1943

The 323rd flew fifteen missions this month and the Satterwhite crew flew on eight of them; the Haller crew flew seven and the Sprague crew flew eight also. By now, the Marauders were 'on a roll' and it was time the high command let the men know it was recognized by the higher echelons. On the 4th General 'Hap' Arnold spoke to Marauder crews at Marks Hall. He basically told them they had been accepted at high command. But contrary to his remarks Marauder production at Omana was being phased out. Accordingly, two Marauder groups were disbanded and four more were held while deliberations were made.[29] In other words, not only was the production of the Martin Marauder being phased out, so were new groups, and new crews, the intended replacements for the existing Marauder crews.

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The Sprague Crew: L-R Mark A. Sprague (pilot), Donald Nelson (bombardier), Walter L. Woods (turret gunner), Willis L. "Willie" Brainard (engineer-gunner), and a replacement radio-gunner for Larry Nusser (possibly Don Showalter). *(Photo courtesy of Willis L. Brainard – names courtesy of Mrs. Mark Sprague).*

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[29] Freeman, *B-26 Marauder at War*, 73.

More and more, combat fatigue became a recognized concern.

"We used to come back from a mission," Gus related, "and if we had had a real rough mission, the flight surgeon was there with his jugs. He'd give you just so-much and that was it. But he knew you had to get rid of the tension, which you build up. You start at 4:00 a.m. in the morning and finish at 4:00 in the afternoon and you've built up enough tension to explode a whole damn city. Those are things that people don't ever realize. All right. So it's been 25 years, but... you can't forget it. It's impossible."

"We came back from a mission," Willie said. "I turned around, Sprague was sitting there, 'I suppose you want this bottle,' he said. He gave us each a bottle of Old Oak Rye. They [the officers] would get a ration every now and then. We didn't even get a quart of beer! Sprague felt guilty about it. So did the bombardier, Nelson, so we ended up getting their booze. Of course, when I got a bottle of booze like that, I'd share it with Frenchie. He didn't need it. I didn't know that. But I would have it laying there under my bunk. We got completely separated. I wasn't even in the same bunkhouse with Frenchie. I'd give each one of those guys in my hut a snort. That's what they took – a nice decent drink. Then I'd go take and have myself a drink or two. And I'd put it in my musette bag under my bed."

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Early in the month, Larry Nusser on the Sprague crew became ill. Several radio-gunners filled in for him for a while. They were S/Sgt's David Nattis, Bryce Ramey, J. H. Given, Joseph L. Bothwell, Benjamin Lasky, and Robert H. McClintock.[30]

Larry Nusser, Dave Nattis, Bryce Ramey, Benjamin Lasky, Joseph Bothwell

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One more development that was actually due to the success of the medium bombers occurred – their mission tour would be extended. "Reviewing the accumulated statistical data, Col. Anderson recommended that the B-26 combat tour be set at 30 missions."[31]

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In between missions, the crews experienced unscheduled time off. It wasn't really free time because they had to be ready to go on short notice.

"Combat crews stayed pretty close together when on base," Tex explained, "so the pilot could assemble his crew on short notice. Each crew had a lot of time on their hands - we had as many scrubs as missions we went on, really. A lot of time was spent in briefings for missions that had to be canceled at the last minute due to weather. In order to alleviate the boredom, crews would shoot skeet, play volleyball, attend survival training, etc. A lot of time was spent in aircraft identification classes. Silhouettes of all aircraft in the war theater, both enemy and friendly, and taken from various angles of flight would be flashed on a screen and crewmembers would compete in identifying them. There was a nice service club on base, but I rarely went there. I do recall going there once and eating some tomato and onion sandwiches. They tasted pretty good. During

[30] Trevor Allen, Marauder Researcher

[31] Moench, *Marauder Men*, 60.

inclement weather we also spent a lot of time in our barracks playing blackjack or just laying on our sacks (cots)."

"Mail Call was held at the Squadron Office each day," Tex continued, "and it was an event almost every one looked forward to (I say almost everyone because there were some who never received mail at all). All of the letters I wrote had to be mailed at the Squadron Office unsealed so a censor could read them. The censor would cut out or obliterate anything he thought may be of any value to the enemy. The mail I received was of utmost importance to me. It was the thing that kept me connected with my loved ones. I remember some candy that my mother sent me, also some leather fur-lined gloves. I lent the gloves to my radioman and he lost them. My mother also sent a pair of Nylon stocking for my girl friend in London and she tore a runner in them the first time she wore them."

"The only criteria was that you would do the best you could do" Willie said. "Don't piddle around with anything sloppy. Do the best you know how. Frenchie was like that. He was a damn good armorer. I wish I could take a gun apart like that… and he could do it blindfolded. He'd lay out the parts, put a blindfold on and put it together… as long as nobody messed up the parts... like take the blanket and shake it a little. 'Brainard, keep your hands off that blanket!' (laughing) I was always helpful that way. But he practiced that all the time. He'd slip over… put the parts on the floor… have a machine gun sittin' there. Now, why he felt he had to do that, I don't know. I would do it with my eyes open but I couldn't do it blindfolded. I couldn't tell exactly how the… I'd get my finger in the damn hole and try to put a part in on top on my finger. You know, stuff like that. I used to go over to the stands [the hardstands, concrete pads where the planes were parked], just like Frenchie used to go over to the hardware shack to work on guns. I'd go out to the hardstand, hell, if I couldn't do anything but hand them tools. You can learn something every time. Even though you forget to put in a cigarette lead [spark plug] like we did that time (laughing)."

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Maintenance on *Truman's Folly:* Harold Newkirk on left. *(Courtesy of W. L. Brainard)*

"It took a lot of support personnel to sustain combat operations," Tex said.

Indeed, General Eaker, commander of the Eighth Air Force once said that it took 75,000 men to keep 150 heavy bombers in the air. With crews of usually ten men per bomber, this meant that only 1,500 men, only 2% of the heavy bomber personnel, were actually combat men. For the Marauders and other medium bombers (the B-25s and A-20's), the ratio would be similar. On the ground, logistics were the main part of the war also. Only about 20% of the frontline divisions were actually combat men, i.e. only about 2,000 men in a 10,000 man division. And behind the frontline divisions there were support divisions. This meant that only a very small percentage of the soldiers and airmen in the European Theater were actually combat troops.

The typical Marauder Squadron at normal complement would have about 450 men, with 1800+ men in the entire Bomb Group (four squadrons) and they were supposed to keep sixty-four medium bombers in the air. During the war, that was impossible of course; air and ground crews were always short of men and available planes for various reasons. When we read about combat statistics indicating the number of planes lost and the number of those damaged, it is significant that most of the damaged planes could not fly again without some kind of repair beyond their usual maintenance. Ground

crew personnel worked feverishly in all kinds of weather to get their planes back into the air. And bases had to be supplied, so behind the front line Bomb Groups, there were many different supply depots, transportation people, and training facilities constantly working to keep the fighting groups supplied. Thus, the Air Forces in England were a massive logistical organization.

Nelzo Cassano working on the engines of the "Truman's Folly" *(Courtesy of Nels and Ronni Cassano)*

"Without the crew chiefs and airplane mechanics to service and maintain the aircraft there would be no flying," Tex said. He knew this better than most of the men, having been an aircraft mechanic himself before the war. Master Sergeant Lewis Williams, who attended the reunion in Colorado City, had been the Maintenance Chief who coordinated all the different shops involved in aircraft maintenance for the 453rd Squadron. He said he had been responsible for scheduling repairs and upkeep on all the aircraft involving over twenty different trade shops.

What were these skilled craftsmen?

Tex explained, "Specialists for the propellers, electrical systems, radios, hydraulic systems, and instruments were on duty. Sheet metal men were kept busy after each mission patching the holes caused by flak. They kept a supply of various size patches on hand to speed the task. The armorers took care of the guns and loaded the bombs in the planes, however I chose to take care of my two tail guns myself."

453rd prop specialists *(courtesy of Nels and Ronni Cassano)*

One source of spare parts was crashed Marauders. Some crews were formed specifically to retrieve parts from broken airplanes for future use. In fact one of the Group's aircraft was named *Half and Half* because it was constructed from two different planes put together. Later, the better parts of it were joined with a third plane and it continued to fly many missions although no one could tell how many missions to count for it.

Casimier Sochocki described the duties of the ordnance section. "As an Ordnance man our duties were to deliver the specified bombs to the hardstands where the planes were. We also supplied the ammunition for the 50-caliber guns on the aircraft, and flares for use in emergency landings and for identification if need be. We, at times, had to change bomb loads, due to changes in targets and weather played a big part in load changes." The ordnance men in the 453rd also developed bomb handles to help them lift the smaller bombs into place.[32]

"Loading the bombs was a hard job," Tex said. "We usually carried eight 500 pound bombs, but sometimes the target required 1000 or 2000 pounders. Each of the bombs would have to be hoisted up into the bomb bay with a hand-operated winch. Often, after they were loaded, the target would be changed and bombs of a different size needed."

[32] Moench, *Marauder Men*, 149. Postwar comments of David A. Goss.

453rd Ordnance Section, Earls Colne, England, 1943 L-R (front row): Casimier V. Sochocki, Leonard J. Cotter, Frank A. Black, John E. Baird, Back Row: Robert H. Baker, Robert Laidlaw, Henry F. Jensen (behind), Bascom Musick, John B. Tilson (behind Musick), Emmett A. Clark, Jessie C. Avant, Antone S. Medeiros Jr., Charles A. Stagner (behind Madeiros), and Carroll S. Packard. Richard Inman was absent. Sochocki states, "As for Inman not being in that Ordnance Section photo – He married an English girl and I'm sure he was with her at that time."
(Photo and names courtesy of Casimier Sochocki).

Sometimes the damage to the aircraft was puzzling, with the ground crews trying to figure out what had happened. Sochocki recalls one incident that left everyone wondering how it had occurred.

"… a crew chief noticed an exit hole in the top part of the fuselage just above the bomb racks of the bomb bay," he related. "Upon further inspection, he couldn't find the entry point of the projectile. So we came to the conclusion that the only way possible that this could occur was like this: The plane was on the bomb run, the bombardier or togglier had the bomb bay doors open and got his signal for 'bombs away' – the projectile entered the aircraft split seconds after 'bombs away.' The bombardier or togglier closed the bomb bay doors and 'bingo,' a close shave had occurred. Imagine what would have happened if it had hit a bomb in the rack."

There were other specialties too: cooks, commissary and administrative clerks, medical personnel, base security, photo labs, etc. All these people were supervised by an Operations staff.

* * * * * * *

Willie and crew on furlough:

Willy said, "One time, me, Woody, and Larry were on a 72 hour pass to Southampton. It was an R&R place. We got into the station and just missed the train. Well, sittin' there across the tracks, pointing the other way, was the high-speed train to Scotland, the Scottish Flyer. I had read about that. It was the fastest train in the world. I'd never been to Scotland before – so we looked at each other and pretty soon we were on our way to Scotland. We got in there and the conductor came by. We asked him if we could get tickets and we showed him our tickets to Southampton. He said, 'Ya, those tickets will do for Edinborough.' So we gave him our tickets. We went to Edinborough near the university and we got rooms at a boarding house for students run by a little

old lady. No alcohol was allowed in there. That night, me and Woody came in with a case of Scottish beer and knocked on her door to see if she wanted any. She invited us in and we had good time talking and drinking beer. The next day we went to the brewery where they made Scottish whiskey and they gave us free drinks. We were loaded by noon. We also went out to that lake with the sea monster…"

"Loch Ness," I said.


Richard J. Travis
Captain, 453rd

"Ya, that's it. We took a boat across the lake to a Pub on the other side and came back. We got lots of rest on that trip. We got back to the base and we were a little late. We went in to the C&C and the guy there said we were deserters and we had to go in to see Travis. Some guy from the R&R place in Southampton had called and said we didn't show up. We were looking pretty good and we were sober so it wasn't too bad. I was telling Travis about the train to Scotland and how great it was. I was pretty excited about it and I could see the he was really interested. It seemed like he thought it was a pretty good thing too. When I finished he didn't say anything but they put us on KP for four or five days. They had to punish us somehow. It was on a list 'report to the Mess Hall' at such and such a time. Then we were put back on ops. You'd think that being a West Pointer, Travis would have been a lot stricter, but he wasn't. He was a good C.O. I liked him."

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The 453rd photography section. The men kneeling in front are the aerial photographers. Those standing in back are the lab crew. Front row: second from left, J. Fink; center, Julius Perlinski. Andrew Kovatch who loaned Willie a camera now and then is kneeling on the right and to his left is Don Pepmiller. Standing in the back row on the right is Proctor Ransden *(Photo courtesy of W. L. Brainard; names courtesy of C. V. Sochocki).*

Willie eventually developed an interest in photography and befriended the 453rd photo lab crew. "I wanted to know how that worked. They used to loan me a K20 camera and let me shoot some photos."

Many of the photos included here, including the cover photo, are from Willie's collection.

"Once you took a picture, it was automatically 'classified' for security reasons," Willie said, "but occasionally the photo guys would say, 'These are the ones you took,' and they would hand me some. Some of the photos I got were rejects. I'd ask, 'What are you going to do with these?' And they'd say, 'Oh, throw 'em away.' So I said, 'I'll take 'em.' I got them home somehow, in an envelope, I think. Those guys in the photo section were all pretty good," Willie continued. "Other outfits would fly with them onboard. They would request them for photo recon." General Moench singles out Julius A. Perlinski of the 453rd as "one of the best of the best..."[33]

An aerial view of Earls Colne, England. It looks like this is possibly a shot from the aircraft's bomb bay. "I used to hang out of the bomb bay for some of the photos I took," Willie said. "The photographers liked that." *(Photo courtesy of W. L. Brainard)*

[33] Moench, *Marauder Men*, viii.

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ADVERTISEMENT: Found – a five-dollar bill. Owners will please line up at the orderly room after evening mess.[34]

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Tex and crew on special assignment:

"On two occasions our crew was sent to Ayr, Scotland, to ferry some of the B-26s to southern England that were flown there from the U.S. over the northern route by replacement crews. This was necessary because these crews would not be familiar with the radio procedures, etc., in the European theater of Operations (E.T.O.). Once we went up to Scotland on the train and the other time 54 of us crowded into a B-17, which had been converted into a transport."

Sometimes just flying around:

"Sometimes, if we were not scheduled for a mission, we would just fly around the local area just for the fun of it. Once we saw a lone B-17 flying along and decided to have a little fun with it. We could fly faster on one engine than it could cruise on all four of its engines, so our pilot shut down one of our engines and we overtook and passed very close by the B-17. The crew of the B-17 had very surprised looks on their faces as we slowly passed by apparently with no engines running!"

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On the 8th of September, 1943, the government of Italy surrendered, however the Germans still held the northern part of the peninsula, and the next day, on the 9th, Allied forces landed at Salerno and Taranto, above the German lines, to attempt to dislodge them, but it didn't work. They were contained on the beach heads. Ernie Pyle was there at Anzio Beach, sharing their misery. On the eastern front, the Axis troops continued to retreat from the Russians. Meanwhile, in Britain, preparations and training had begun for the impending Operation Overlord (D-Day). On the 8th and 9th of September, the allies in England conducted a practice "dry run" for D-Day. While ships maneuvered off the coast of France, the medium bombers were to test their ground-support capabilities. As part of the maximum effort, the Satterwhite and Sprague crews flew on both days and the Haller crew joined them on the 9th. The bombing results were exceptional, and Colonel Anderson sent out a congratulatory message: "Under extremely adverse conditions, you did successfully complete the missions assigned to you. I have just been informed that the coastal defense guns, which were your targets this morning, did not fire a single round at our ships in the Channel."[35]

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Two days later on the 11th of September, visibility cleared enough to launch the Group's 28th mission to the Beaumont Le Roger Airdrome in France. On this mission, S/Sgt Kenny Class, the drummer, distinguished himself. He was flying as the turret gunner on Lt. Stern's crew on the Groups 11th mission to the Beaumont Le Roger airdrome. Over the target a bomb got hung up in the bomb bay. Class scrambled out into the bay and freed it.[36] But on the return back to the base, the cloud cover was a problem. Willie described what happened.

"They were coming in… we had set a big bonfire on the end of the runway because visibility was so bad. I was down at the end of the runway, helping to keep the fire going. And they came in… one, two, three, four landed and the last one, [the pilot] Stern was his name. He came in and (roar) took off, he ran the throttles… I could tell by the sound… he ran up the throttles too fast… shoved 'em too far forward. Next time around he did the same thing. The third time

[34] Gus Poulin's Scrapbook.
[35] Moench, *Marauder Men*, 74.
[36] Moench, *Marauder Men*, 76.

around, he could have made it… but one engine quit. The wing went down [into the dirt] and he went cartwheeling."

"The kid who came out of it was Kenny Class," Willie said. "That top turret assembly flew off and he landed 30-40 yards away from the airplane… maybe farther… and it crushed the bottom part of his legs… outside of that it didn't hurt him. In the turret, your legs are down against two metal braces that you shove against when you're shootin' the guns. When the medics got there, he gave the name and the serial number of everybody on that crew, before he passed out. We hauled him into the infirmary, and from then on, we were all kind of standing around to see what happened... they came out of the emergency room… he was all wrapped up, and off they went. The next thing we heard, they had taken him over to Braintree. They had a hospital there and they tried to patch him up a little bit, and then over to C4 on the west coast of England, the great big general hospital, and that's where they had to remove his legs – they removed one leg just below the knee and the other leg 2 or 3 inches above the knee."

Arnold Stern (KIA), David Nattis (KIA), William Archer (KIA), Kenneth Class (WIA)

When they got Kenny out of his turret, 200 feet away from the snarled wreckage of the Marauder, they rushed him to the hospital. For a while they didn't operate on him because he was suffering from shock and they were afraid of what the operation might do to him, but they soon realized that infection was setting in, so they gave him plasma and transfusions; and they amputated both legs, one just above the knee, the other just below the knee.

For a couple of days he pretended not to know, and pretending almost made him believe it wasn't true – so finally when Miss Southerland [his nurse] went out of the room he reached down painfully and flipped the blankets aside. He couldn't be quite sure of what he was seeing, because of the bandages, but he could see enough to be certain that both his legs were gone.

Knowing for sure, he fought back the tears, but he was sick and tired and his legs hurt him, and when Miss Southerland came back into the room she could see that he was crying. For a minute he was wrenched with fear that she would start oozing sympathy. He turned his head away from her. She came up beside the bed and stood there a second before she spoke.

"Well," she challenged, "what are you going to do about it?"

Kenny couldn't speak for a minute. The question caught him off balance, and then he turned and grinned at Miss Southerland.

"I'm going to be the best damned drummer in the world," he said, and Miss Sutherland held out her hand and they shook on it.[37]

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Willie felt personally sad because of the accident. Lt. Stern had been the flight trainee whose hand he had slapped back at MacDill Field.

"Oh, we came in in bad weather sometimes," He continued. "You couldn't see your hand in front of your face. After that, they rigged up a great big bar of bright lights at the upper end of the landing strip, and they would shine 'em away from you up in the sky like this [pointing upward], so you were coming in behind them. They lit up the whole end of the runway. They learned their lesson."

[37] YANK the Army Weekly, November 14, 1943 – courtesy of Lee and Lillian Zipperling.

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While flying on a mission in a flight of six planes which Satterwhite was leading, Tex and the Haller crew received some 'friendly fire' from the lead plane due to a problem with the package guns. The package guns were fixed to the side of the aircraft and had been installed for strafing during low-level flying. They were fired by the pilot or copilot. In order to be able to use these guns, they had to be 'charged' first. Tex relates what happened.

"The four guns had been prepared so only one pull of the charging handle was required to put the first live round from the cartridge belt into the gun's firing chamber. The radio operator, Ketcham, who was in the flight lead aircraft, pulled each charging handle twice which resulted in four live cartridges being ejected from his aircraft. We were flying number four position (below and a little behind the lead plane). One of the cartridge rounds struck our plane's top turret and bounced off. Another one came through the turret's plexiglass cover just barely missing our turret gunner's head (James Smith). This angered Smith and he said over the intercom, 'If he throws another round (live cartridge) out I'm going to cut him out of there.' If the live round had hit Smith in the head it would have seriously wounded him or even killed him. Apparently the other two ejected rounds missed our aircraft and hopefully Smitty wouldn't have carried out his threat if they had."

"There were two ways to charge the guns in preparation for firing," Tex explained. "One, the ammo belt could be inserted into the gun just over the holding pawl in which case the gun charger would have to be pulled once to get the cartridge under extractor and then again to pull the cartridge from the ammo belt link and insert it into the firing chamber of the gun barrel. Two, the ammo belt could be further into the gun with the cartridge under the extractor, in which event they would only have to be pulled once to chamber the live cartridge. This (second method) is the way the guns had been prepared for firing. The radio operator (Ketcham) assumed that the charger on each of the four package guns needed to be pulled twice and in doing so, on his second pull the live cartridge that had been chambered on his first pull, was extracted and ejected below the aircraft."


Charles Ketcham and James Smith

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The Quonset huts used as barracks at Earls Colne were overcrowded and Willie wanted to find a way out of his.

He said, "Woody, Larry and I moved from the Quonset hut we were in. It was so damn crowded. It didn't hardly have room for you to sit on the edge of your bunk. So we moved out – that was three of us moved out. On the end of the bathroom there was a drying room where you could dry your clothes. But where would you wash them? There were no tubs or washing machines. That was supposed to be the wash room and nothing was being done with it. All that was in there was some dirt and empty boxes so we cleaned it all up and moved in. We were scrounging around and I got a hold of an old set of bunk beds and a single one – so we set them up. We were gonna draw straws to see who got the single one. I said, 'No, I'll take the top bunk.' Nobody wanted it but I said 'I'll take it.'"

Willis Brainard, Walter Woods, Larry Nusser; enlisted crew of *Pub 13.*

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Crew of the *Toid Boid:* L-R standing: John F. Shilts, Frank E. Larkin Jr (B/N), Alfred C. MacSoud (CP), Selby M. Foster Jr. (P); front row: Louis Rosen, Ferdinand P. Dec (EG). The Foster crew was one of the earliest replacement crews to arrive in the 453rd. *(Courtesy of Frank E. Larkin III)*

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On the 16th of September, Guy and company in their Flying Fortress, *Eightball*, bombed an aircraft plant at Bordeaux-Merignac, France, making the longest flight they performed on a mission. It was eleven hours long and they made the return trip in the dark. Two other formations that had hit other targets made it back relatively easily, but…

> Groups in the force which attacked Bordeaux were not so fortunate. Just off the southwest coast of England the B-17s encountered heavy rain squalls and this and the impending darkness dispersed the formation. The storm front knocked radio altimeters about 1,000 feet out of calibration and many pilots got into difficulties.[38]

Four B-17s crashed, two into the sea and two onto solid ground. The *Eightball* made it back safely. In a bizarre accident, one B-17 bounced off the top of a hill and kept on flying. A crewman was thrown out of the plane and rolled about 200 yards on the ground; a little beat up, but basically he was OK.

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[38] Bowman, *Castles in the Air*,

As the airmen accrued more leave time, they encountered Americans from other branches of service and learned how the rest of the army thought of them. Opinions such as expressed by the famous wartime cartoonist, Bill Mauldin who related that the infantry often complained about the way the airmen could go home after a certain number of missions. They felt that a "few hours of discomfort" followed a return to their base.[39]

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Tex, on leave in London:

"London survived the Blitz of 1940 but there were still lots of evidence of the destruction caused by the massive raids of the bombers of the German Luftwaffe. In 1943/44 they continued to come but they did it at night and with just a few planes. I witnessed several attacks and the British searchlights would converge on the raider and the anti-aircraft guns would open up on the intruder, which was usually a Junkers JU-88. There were servicemen from many different allied nations in London. There was an American enlisted man's service club in an area of London called Piccadilly Circus. It was called the Rainbow Club. A serviceman could go there and get snacks and cigarettes, write letters, etc."

"When I went into London I would call a girl friend that worked for the British mint. We would meet and take in a show or go to a dance at the Hammersmith Palais or at Covent Gardens. The lights of the city were totally blacked out to make it more difficult for the enemy bomber crews to locate specific targets. In fact all cities and military stations were blacked out everywhere in England. We used the underground subway to travel in various parts of London. Most of the service men that I knew drank socially and so did I, but the British liked their beer warm (there was no ice) and I was not too fond of it. Dave, you may recall that another famous Marauder was named "Mild and Bitter." This name referred to two of the types of beer that could be bought in the English pubs. A person could order Mild or he could order Bitter. A lot of the Brits would order half and half meaning to fill their glasses or mugs with half of each type. They would not pronounce the word half as we do, as to them, the "h" was silent. It would come out like this, "Bartender, 'alf and 'alf, please."

"There were many cultural sites to visit in London but I didn't see many of them, however I did visit St. Paul Cathedral once. I also remember going to Madame Tussaud's Wax museum. Most of my time though was spent patronizing the many public houses (pubs), meeting girls, and seeing shows. War is bad anywhere, but it was better to fight it in a place where the natives spoke your language and were civilized. The times that I spent in London were very beneficial in unwinding, to some degree, from the rigors of combat."

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On September 26th, on a mission to Paris/Citroen, France, Guy's 8th mission, the crew of the *Eightball* lost a replacement radio gunner named Noel H. Howard. Vernon Holman must have been sick that day.

Dean Ferris

On one of its early missions, the *Eight Ball* carried a substitute radio operator. It was his first high-altitude combat flight, though the rest of the crew didn't know it until too late. When he failed to answer an interphone check call from the pilot, Ferris [the bombardier] went back to the radio room to investigate. He found the radio operator dead. Apparently the man had gotten airsick, taken off his oxygen mask and lost consciousness before he could get it back on.

The incident bothered Ferris, an apprentice engineer for Westinghouse Electric before joining the AAF, he went to work on the *Eight Ball* with lights and wires. Today, if any member of the crew goes off oxygen, one of a row of small bulbs by the bombardier's position

[39] Bill Maulden, *Up Front,* W.W. Norton & Company, NY-London, 194, 98-99.

flashes. The life-saving invention bids fair to become standard equipment on all Army high-altitude bombers.[40]

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"One time they were looking for volunteers for the French underground service and Frenchie's name came up," Willie said. "They wanted people to parachute into France to blow things up. He didn't have to think about that very long before he said no. He didn't like the parachuting part. He probably wouldn't have minded going by boat or something like that."

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The airmen were well aware of how the other branches of service thought of them and their cushy jobs. A song was developed as a sort of challenge to those who might envy their good fortune.

COME ON AND JOIN THE AIR CORPS

Come on and join the Air Corps,
It's a grand branch, so they say;
You never do any work at all,
Just fly around all day.
While others work and study hard,
And so grow old and blind,
You take the air without a care,
And never, never mind!

Come on and get promoted
As high as you desire,
You're riding on a gravy train
When you're an Army flyer.
But just when you're about to be
A General you will find
Your ship folds up, your wings fall off,
But you will never, never mind!

You're flying o'er the ocean,
You hear your motor spit,
You see your prop come to a stop,
The God-damned motor's quit.
You cannot swim, the ship won't float,
The shore is miles behind!
Oh, what a dish for crabs and fish!
But you will never mind!

You take her up and spin 'er,
And, with an awful tear,
Your ship folds up, your wings fall off,
But you will never care!
For in about two minutes
Another pair you'll find,
And dance with Pete, in angel's suits,
And never, never mind!

Chorus:
You'll never mind! You'll never mind!
Come on and join the Air Corps,
And you will never mind!

(The Blue Book 239)

[40] Steinmetz, *Screwballs.*

First Lieutenant Fredrick J. Mingus
323rd Bomb Group, 453rd Bomb Squadron
USSAF 1941-1945

Technical Sergeant Nelzo F. Cassano
323rd Bomb Group, 453rd Bomb Squadron
USSAF 1941-1945

More photos courtesy of Nels and Ronni Cassano:

Man of many talents. Nels applies his welding skills to a project.

Nels and ground crew mates wait for the return of their planes.

Nels in front of his tent at Lessay, France
It has a working door and front walk.

Laundry day – another job well done.


Postcard to Ronni, 4/7/44.


Ronni DiFiore 1945

Guy in a new flight suit
(Photo courtesy of Bernadette Karter).