

Chapter 4 – The Battle to Rule the Skies

October – December 1943

October 1943

During this month the Ninth Air Force was moved from the Mediterranean to Britain and, as tactical bombers, the Marauders were transferred from the Eighth Air Force to the Ninth under General Brereton. The plan was to relocate the Ninth from the Mediterranean to England in preparation for the planned D-Day Invasion. Their mission was to destroy the Luftwaffe and its bases of operation thus bringing about air superiority. This was also preparation for upcoming role of ground support after the invasion.¹ Along with Operation Point Blank, the Ninth would have different objectives than the heavies of the Eighth which were mostly employed in attacks against German industrial targets.

According to the online History of Ninth Air Force, they had to prepare to move into Europe following the invasion while continuing to give the troops air support. They had to build and maintain their own airfields. The top commanders were Gen. L. H. Brereton, commander, Maj. Gen. Ralph Royce, deputy commander, Brig. Gen. Myron R. Wood, Service Command, Brig. Gen. Samuel E. Anderson, Bomber Command, Brig. Gen. E. R. Quesada, Fighter Command, and Brig. Gen. P. L. Williams, Troop Carrier Command. General Anderson insisted that aircrews stay together, even on furlough. The training program was a prodigious one. Even after a mission crews often were sent on training flights. The standard operating procedures called for two missions a day. This really taxed the maintenance crews, not to mention the flight crews. Men also received days in classes when flights were not scheduled. And, at times, whole weeks were spent in practice.²

The above description, of course, was a schedule that no one could keep, and it was surely written in interview with a staff officer. At any rate, it was the intended goal for the mediums at this time. But despite the big plans and intensive schedule, the weather in October, 1943, was so bad that the 323rd Group only logged seven missions this month, the least in any month throughout the war. To add to it, the media only covered the heavies of the Eighth Air Force. It seemed that the Ninth hardly existed in their eyes. Unfortunately, except for a few notable exceptions, this would continue for the rest of the war. They were lucky to get a sentence, “the Ninth also flew today”.³

The Marauder Men had been accustomed to being the underdog. In fact that idea had helped them to galvanize their resolve to prove themselves. But now that they had been doing it for some time, where was the press? As Ernie Pyle put it, “Lack of recognition definitely affects morale.”⁴

Ironically, and to make matters worse, the bomber high command was getting upset with the Marauders for an entirely different reason than they had in the previous spring – the reason now was that they were performing too well! The brass believed that due to their relatively low losses, and high bombing rate, they were making the heavies look bad. The low losses of the Marauders were overlooked by the press. This should have been news because of the recent view that the Marauders should be phased out of operations. This had to be embarrassing to the review committee that Truman headed.⁵

¹ History of the Ninth Air Force – online.

² *Air Force, July, 1944*, 13-15.

³ Moench, *Marauder Men*, 84.

⁴ Pyle, *Brave Men*, 396.

⁵ Moench, *Marauder Men*, 82.

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In contrast to the Marauder schedule, the first half of October turned out to be very active for the heavy bombers of the 8th Air Force, and the crew of the *Eightball*. Guy Poulin was witnessing first hand the ‘murderous losses’ of the heavies. They flew six missions this month and none of them were ‘milk runs.’ On the first mission, on October 2nd, which was mission ten for Guy, the crew made their second raid to Embden, Germany.

Despite a strong P-47 escort the Luftwaffe was again up in force. The *Eightball*, piloted by Lieutenant Bill Cabral of the 390th Bomb Group, lost its number three engine to flak and began trailing smoke. Cabral lost altitude and made a solo run on the docks at Embden. When he turned for home the bomber was still alone and therefore an easy target for preying Luftwaffe fighters.⁷

[Cabral] called his crew on the interphone: “Don’t look now, kids, but here comes the German Air Force.”⁸

Lieutenant Richard H. Perry, the copilot recalls: “It looked like the whole Luftwaffe was waiting for us at the German coast. I started calling them and our boys went to work at the guns.” Soon the *Eightball* had 20 fighters on its tail and Cabral was forced to dive as fast as he dared into cloud cover 16,000 feet below.⁹

“Surely they mean us no harm,” answered S/Sgt. Jim Dolan, tail gunner, “Maybe they just want to play.”

“Yeh...tag...and we’re it,” put in the right waist gunner, Sgt. Earl Meitlage.

“Fighters at 12 o’clock high...any bets?” drawled T/Sgt. Lloyd J. Wamble, top turret gunner.

“A pound you don’t,” said Cabral, “and I hope I lose.”

The whole ship shuddered as the top turret guns cut loose. “You do, Lieutenant,” said Wamble. His stream of tracers playing over the German plane until they had found the gas tanks and blown it to smoke and splinters.

For the next twenty minutes the *Eight Ball* played queen bee to the Nazi swarm. The Germans came in from high, low, and level from nose, tail and both sides, their wings twinkling like Fourth of July sparklers. The Fortress spat back from every gun as she screamed downwards. Two more fighters went down, falling to the guns of Poulin (ball turret gunner) and Dolan (tailgunner). Then the *Eight Ball* made cloud cover at 3,000 feet.

“Everybody OK?” asked Cabral.

“Sure, but we’re on fire,” said Ferris (bombardier). “Just thought I’d mention it.”

The No. 4 engine, smoking before, was now blazing violently, long orange tongues of flame leaping back half the length of the ship and licking dangerously around the wing tanks the ship was still over Holland and it looked like a bail-out-or-blow-up proposition to the pilot. He put it up to the crew.

“All ashore that’s going ashore,” yelled Cabral.

“What about you, Bill?” asked Wharton (navigator).

“There’s a long chance on getting back and I’m taking it,” said Cabral. “But that doesn’t mean that you guys have to.”

⁶ Moench, *Marauder Men*, 82.

⁷ Bowman, *Castles in the Air*, 77.

⁸ Steinmetz, *Screwballs*.

⁹ Bowman, *Castles in the Air*, 77.

“Hell, I don’t know any Dutch gals,” said Wharton. “Besides, I have a date in London tonight – I’m sticking.”

“Me too,” said Poulin.

“That goes for all of us,” said Ferris. “Carry on, stout fellow.”¹⁰

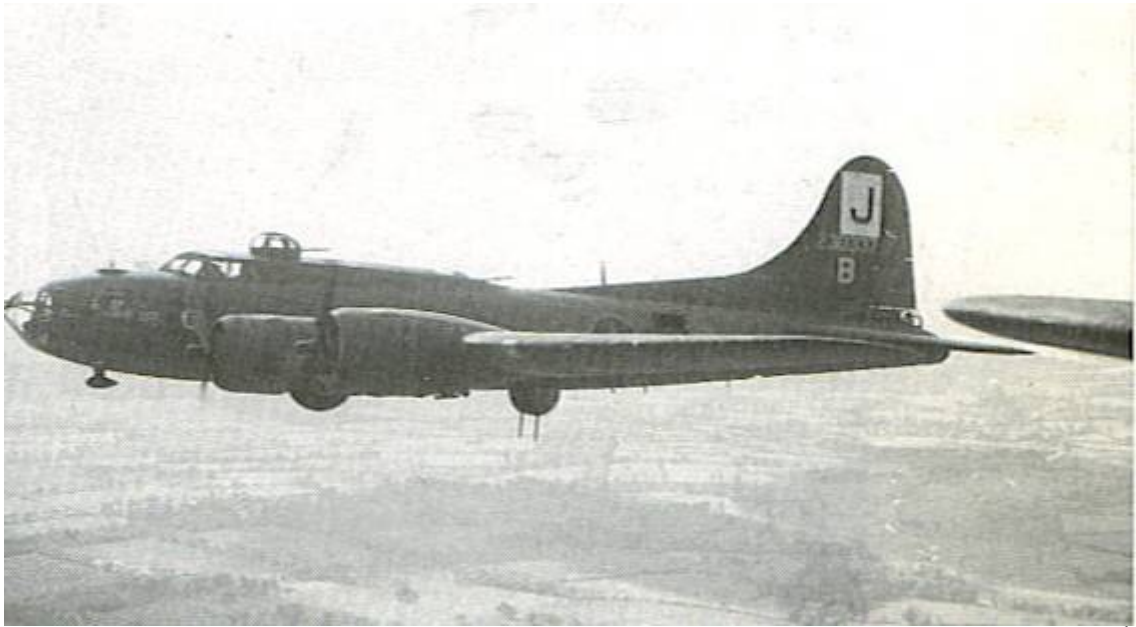
Cabral steered the ailing bomber around the flak at Rotterdam and headed out across the North Sea towards England. The *Eightball* lost altitude rapidly and soon the badly damaged bomber was so low over the sea that salt spray entered the waist windows and splashed the gunners. The engine fire threatened to engulf the number three engine and Cabral ordered the crew to take up ditching positions. He was about to ditch when in the distance he saw a large rolling wave and decided to fly through it. Gambling that it would extinguish the raging fire. He took the B-17 in as low as he dared and the wave washed over the wing. Cabral and Perry threw the throttles forward and lifted the *Eightball* clear of the water. The fire was out!¹¹

“Fire out,” he called to the crew. “Come out, come out wherever you are.”

“But Lieutenant, we’re right in the middle of a hand of bridge,” answered the radio operator, T/Sgt. Vernon R. Holman.¹²

Cabral canceled the SOS to Air Sea Rescue and flew on to the coast of England where he brought the *Eightball* in for a smooth landing at an emergency base. As the aircraft hit the runway, the propeller of number four engine spun off and rolled some distance down the runway.¹³

The three gunners who claimed enemy fighters were T/Sgt. Lloyd J. Wamble, 24, of Birmingham, Ala., top turret gunner; S/Sgt. James E. Dolan, 22, of Gwynedd Pa., tail gunner, and S/Sgt. Joseph G. Poulin, 19, of Skowhegan, Me., ball turret gunner.¹⁴



The *Eightball* #230337 on its way to Schweinfurt on Black Thursday (Bowman – Dick Perry). The 390th Group’s identification was a “J” in a white square on the ship’s vertical stabilizer.

Later, a local Maine newspaper, probably the Independent Reporter, carried this article:

¹⁰ Steinmetz, *Screwballs*.

¹¹ Bowman, *Castles in the Air*, 78.

¹² Steinmetz, *Screwballs*.

¹³ Bowman, *Castles in the Air*, 77-78.

¹⁴ Joseph Poulin’s Scrapbook.

Skowhegan Youth Bags German Plane As Bomber Limp Home – SKOWHEGAN – (Special) – Carried over the Yankee Network News Service yesterday and featured October 5th in an English paper was the thrilling story of the Flying Fortress “Eight Ball” and its ball turret gunner, Staff Sgt. Joseph Guy Poulin of this town.

This son of Mr. and Mrs. Joseph W. Poulin of 153 ½ North Street was credited with the destroying of an enemy fighter from his gunner position, “on the homeward leg of a raid on Embden, with one motor in flames, waves from the North sea literally splashing through the windows and horde of German fighters on its tail.”

“Somewhere in England” yesterday Staff Sgt. Joseph Guy was undoubtedly celebrating – not only his safe return but his birthday too, for he was 20 years of age.¹⁵

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Meanwhile back in the Marauders, due to the miserable weather, the Satterwhite, Haller, and Sprague crews each flew only 2 missions this month. Gus’s first one was to the Amsterdam-Schipol Airdrome on October 3rd. Willie and Tex were on this one, too. Major Wood led the Squadron. Over the target they met very heavy flak, both approaching and leaving, which was noted in the post-war comments of James F. Hunt and 1st Lt. Jesse R. Swan’s Mission log. Wounded were Haglund and T/Sgt Charles I. Vacanti.¹⁶



Wilson Wood, James Hunt, Jesse Swan, Phillip Haglund (WIA), Charles Vacanti (WIA)

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On the 4th of the month, on a flight to Hanau, Germany, Guy is listed on his mission log as flying in the position of Radio Operator. According to the log, this was the only mission on which he did so – all the rest were as the ball turret gunner. The following mission, on the 9th, the *Eightball* was sent to Marienburg, Germany. Guy recalled good bombing accuracy that day.

“Our best bombing was at Marienburg where we completely wiped out the target,” he says. “We bombed from a comparatively low altitude, and you could feel the explosions.”¹⁷

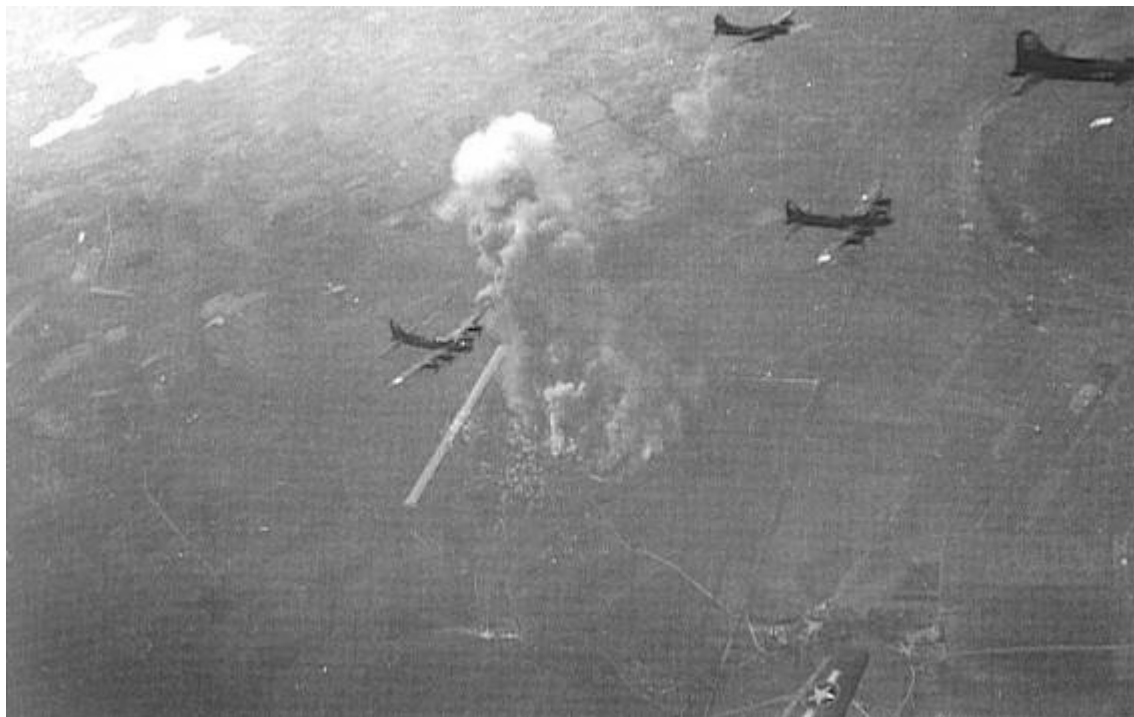
The third force of B-17s, which bombed Marienburg, achieved the greatest success of the day. Anti-aircraft defences, thought unnecessary at a target so far from England, meant that the force could bomb from between 11,000 and 13,000 feet. At such heights accuracy was almost guaranteed and 60 percent of the bombs dropped by the 96 Fortresses exploded within 1,000 feet of the MPI, while 83 percent fell within 2,000 feet. Before the raid the Marienburg plant had been turning out almost 50 percent of the Luftwaffe’s FW190 production. Results were devastating and General Eaker called it ‘A classic example of precision bombing.’¹⁸

¹⁵ Joseph Poulin’s Scrapbook.

¹⁶ Moench, *Marauder Men*, 82.

¹⁷ Joseph Poulin’s Scrapbook.

¹⁸ Bowman, *Castles in the Air*, 82.



The 390th Bomb Group over Marienburg (*Freeman, USAF via Dick Perry*).

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Meanwhile, that same day at Earls Colne:

The next day at Earls Colne bad weather covered the area. During the day a B-17 crash landed and started burning. S/Sgt David Goss was the first to see the pilot trying to get the unconscious co-pilot away from the plane. Still near the plane he fell to the ground. Goss arrived about that time and picked up the co-pilot thus allowing the pilot to get away too. The plane exploded a few seconds later.¹⁹

David Goss hailed from Gardenville, Maryland, just outside Baltimore. He was fourth in a family of five – three brothers and four sisters. David's father, Andrew Goss, was originally from Tennessee and he worked as a salesman. His mother, Regina, was from a German immigrant family. David liked to wander in the woods alone and read books. He was not gregarious and pretty much kept to himself. His grades were good enough in school to win a scholarship to college. He had studied engineering for two years when the United States joined the war. He tried out for pilot but was rejected when it was discovered he was color-blind, a fact he had not known before. The Air Corps trained him in the maintenance and use of the Norden bombsight.

However, since the Squadron had only been given a few of them he found himself without anything to do. He started working with the armorers, discovered he liked it, and had become a member of the armament section by the time they reached England.²⁰ After being stationed in England for a while David liked to paint and started painting nose art and flight jackets. His artwork was very good but he was admittedly colorblind, and he would sometimes ask others for advice on color selections. The first nose art he painted was on the *Red Dog*. The airship's crew chief liked to play a card game called Red Dog, hence the name of the plane. David painted a smiling dog holding four aces.²¹

¹⁹ Moench, *Marauder Men*, 82.

²⁰ (David A. Goss, *Was This Meant to Be?* Privately Published, Arlington Texas, 1994, 7, 12-13, 21, & 25. Copy furnished courtesy of Ronni and Nels Cassano.

²¹ Goss, *Meant to Be?* 28.



David Goss, servicing one of the waist guns of *Red Dog* 41-31818 VT-C, piloted by Jerome F. St. Peter.

I called David on the phone and explained who I was. He said, “Yes, I remember Frenchie. I knew him well.” I told him about the story I was putting together and he said, “I will do whatever I can to help. Send me some information on what you need and I will do it.”

David died before receiving the package I sent, but through a relative I was informed that after the war David wrote a book titled *Was This Meant to Be?* It was out of print and I couldn’t find it until Ronni Cassano sent me a copy. It was written in the third person about his experiences during the war, and it was from this book that most of the information about him was found. The following is an excerpt from his book, in which he related saving the B-17 crewmen. David, goaded on by his friend John, most likely fellow armament man John W. Foutch, is describing the event to his wife Joan, a woman he met and eventually married in England.

“I won’t say it was nothing, but lots of men have done more without recognition. It was in the middle of October, when a B17 was in trouble with two engines out trying to land at our strip. We knew he wasn’t going to make it and a bunch of us ran to where it looked as if he was going to try to set it down. We got to the edge of the pasture he was aiming for just as he piled in. He tried to avoid the farm house by banking the plane over on its wing and slammed in hard. Must have been a real jolt to the pilot and his co-pilot. Now *that* was something worth talking about. When both of them dropped out, I went to help them get away because the plane had caught fire. That’s all!”

John cut in, “Now wait a minute Joan. That’s not all. The plane was in flames, and we all knew it was loaded with fuel and a full bomb load. We all stood there, but he ran to the plane to give them a hand. Now go on and tell her, Dave. It’s about time you talk about it. You knew as well as we did that the thing could blow at any moment.”

“All right, John. Yes I knew, but don’t ask me why I went. All I knew was they needed help and I had to go. The co-pilot was out cold, and the pilot was dazed, but he helped me get the co-pilot on my back, and we got the hell out of there. Excuse me Joan! We got far enough that when it did blow, we didn’t get hurt. Then some other fellows came to help us get away.”

“Joan you should have seen the blast. There wasn’t much left of the plane.”²²

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On October 10th the 390th Bomb Group’s Mission target was Munster, Germany; 264 B-17s in all – a maximum effort by the Eighth Air Force.

On the Morning of 10 October 1943, the briefed target was the built-up section of Munster, a rail center north of the Ruhr Valley. There was nothing unusual in the importance of the target. The Royal Air Force had been unable to eliminate this populated area as they had other parts of the Ruhr. The idea of the operation was to wipe out the built-up area and disrupt the people as much as possible. Within a radius of a hundred and thirty miles, the logical striking distance of German fighter planes in preventing a bomb run, the crews were told that a maximum of 245 single engine and 290 twin engine aircraft could oppose the operation. As they approached Munster, the three Groups that composed the 13th Combat Wing were hit in the most violent and concentrated attack yet made on an Eighth Air Force formation.

Nearly 250 planes engaged the Wing and fought viciously until the Fortresses had bombed. The attacks, which lasted for forty minutes, appeared to have a definite method. The enemy approached in groups, attacked on their own in formations of from 3 to 6 planes, and flew level and straight at their targets. The attacks were pressed up to fifty or seventy-five yards, then enemy aircraft turned, took violent evasive action, and kept coming back in for the attack. They showed definite tendencies of concentrating attacks on one Group at a time, even to the point of flying through the lead Group to attack the low one (the 100th Group). After disposing of the 100th Group [they lost 12 out of 14 Fortresses], the attack switched to the 390th.²³

Next to feel the full impact of the Luftwaffe attacks were the 18 B-17s in the 390th Bomb Group formation. As the group neared the target a large formation of aircraft was spotted off to the right. At first it was thought they were B-17s but the stepped-up specs materialized into single engine Luftwaffe fighters. While Bf 109s and Fw 190s ripped through the depleted Fortress formations, the twin-engined fighters stayed out of range and fired explosive canon shells from 1,200 to 1,500 yards. Ju88s attacked with rockets from 800 to 1,000 yards and for the first time Dornier bombers flew parallel to the Fortresses and fired rockets from about 1,500 yards. In about 25 minutes the 390th lost eight of its bombers as the rockets exploded among them.²⁴

The Germans roared in from every direction, but mostly from head on, dozens abreast. Ferris and the navigator 2/Lt. Gordon H. Wharton, Texas, were firing their nose guns constantly; and at the height of the battle a hot shell casing from one of the guns set fire to a fleece-lined jacket lying on the floor behind the sweating flyers. Ferris reached the blaze in a step, beat it out with his open palms and returned to his guns with painfully blistered hands to send a Nazi fighter down in flames.²⁵

After the target *Tech Supply*, flown by Lieutenant John G. Winant Jr, son of the US Ambassador to Great Britain, was hit by a rocket and exploded. It was Winant’s 13th mission. The crew of the *Eightball* saw several parachutes leave the bomber. (Winant was among those who was made a PoW.) Shortly after *Tech Supply* went down, *The Eightball* was hit in the right wing by a rocket. Richard H. Perry, the co-pilot, says that, ‘The rocket sheared a path through the top half of the right wing (about 15 feet from the end). The wing tip flapped up and down in the windstream and caused us to lose the lift that we should have gotten from the wing.’²⁶

...when his bomber was forced out of formation, he [Guy Poulin] remained behind empty guns, his ammunition gone, spinning his ball in a silent threat to attacking fighters to keep them

²² Goss, *Meant to Be?* 43-44.

²³ 390th.org.

²⁴ Bowman, *Castles in the Air*, 85.

²⁵ Joseph Poulin’s Scrapbook.

²⁶ Bowman, *Castles in the Air*, 85-86.

from realizing the ship's vulnerability. He had a brush with death then, too, when a 30-caliber German machine gun slug entered the turret and smacked into the gunsight just before his eyes.²⁷

When the combined efforts of the pilot and co-pilot couldn't control the ship, Ferris, a six-foot-two former Golden Glover, was called to the controls. Standing between the pilot and co-pilot, a raw ham on each wheel, he man-handled the shattered Fortress back to England, then landed her through fog to his own rollicking rendition of *A Wing and a Prayer*. To all the boys on board including Ferris, the entire affair was nothing more than highly comical.²⁸



Close call – S/Sgt. Joey Poulin, 20, of Skowhegan, Me., ball turret gunner on the Eighth Air Force Flying Fortress “Eightball” pointing to a hole in his turret where a Nazi bullet entered and was stopped by a sighting mechanism just in front of his eyes. Danny Poulin tells that his Dad would later joke that the two natural bald spots on his sideburns were the places where the bullet went through his head! (Photo courtesy of Daniel Poulin)

Bill Cabral and Richard Perry arrived over Framlingham and decided to climb to 2,000 feet to give the crew of the *Eightball* a chance to bail out if the rapidly diminishing fuel supply cut out altogether. Framlingham was completely fogged in so Cabral headed for Thorpe Abbots where the weather was better. He and Perry brought the *Eightball* in for a crash-landing without injury to the crew.²⁹

It was the blackest day in the [390th] Group's history. And to make it worse, on the return to the field heavy haze covered Framlingham. B-17s that were full of holes made as many as three approaches to land. Some landed cross-runway style. One, with seven hundred holes in it, limped into another base with half a crew. Another pilot of one of the Forts, with a leg shattered by cannon shell, stayed in a propped up position directing his co-pilot to the field.

²⁷ Joseph Poulin's Scrapbook.

²⁸ Steinmetz, *Screwballs*.

²⁹ Bowman, *Castles in the Air*, 87.

In destroying 62 enemy planes the Group established a record for heavy bombardment groups that was never equaled. But in losing eight of their number, the Group lost much faith in the credo of the B-17 firepower. They knew formation flying was good but they did not see how it could stand up when out-numbered twelve to one.

In later days, the group spoke of the men of Munster as the British spoke of the men of Arnheim.³⁰

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Meanwhile the Poulin family back home could only pray and wait – wait for the next letter to prove the boys were still alive, at least on the date they had written last. “It was scary,” Uncle Vic said, “We’d look for letters and wait for telegrams.” He said the family went to church every day and prayed together each night at home. “That’s probably what helped them through the war – the fact that we prayed for them.”

Four days later, the *Eightball* participated in one of the most dangerous missions of the war. Two hundred fifty-one Flying Fortresses were slated to hit the ball-bearing factories in Schweinfurt, Germany. Many men who had just had a rough mission four days before, hoped they could get some leave, but that wasn’t about to happen.

The 8th Air Force attack of October 14, 1943, against the ball bearing factories at Schweinfurt, Germany, resulted in the greatest air battle in history. Through the years since that date, it has become known as “Black Thursday” in Air Force history because of the heavy losses of men and planes.³¹

It was a maximum effort and everyone was needed. At Framlingham, home of the 390th Bomb Group, Lieutenant Richard H. Perry had hoped to receive a short period of leave in London after his crash four days before. “The squadron CO, Joe Gremmill, felt differently. His view was that the best way to get the ‘butterflies out of our stomachs’ was to participate in another mission immediately. We did fly the Schweinfurt mission, which was no milk-run, and I think in our case his approach worked fine.”³²

For hundreds of miles inbound to the target area, the B-17 bomber formations were attacked again and again by untold numbers of enemy fighters of the German Luftwaffe. Despite the horrible spectacle of B-17 after B-17 falling earthward to destruction, those bombers still able to fly never wavered from their course.³³

The going was tough for the *Eight Ball* and S/Sgt. Joey Poulin, 19, French-Canadian by birth, Down Easter by immigration, and a black-thatched, male edition of Betty Hutton by temperament, was curled up in his steel nest under the big ship’s belly, whirling his guns at the enemy fighters and spitting hot lead and hotter French at all Nazi comers.³⁴

“*Maudit fou!*” [Cursed fools!], he’d yell at the unhearing Germans. “*Sucez un oeuf, cochons au nez jaune!*” [Suck an egg, you yellow-nosed pigs!] “*Avancez, je vais vous aveugler!*” [Come on in... I’ll blind ya!].³⁵

At that point a chunk of flak ripped off the door to Joey’s turret and he found himself out in a very cold world 30 degrees below zero, in fact. A ball turret is not particularly spacious and the man inside has no room for a parachute. He has to coil up like a spring to get in at all. Remove the turret door and the human spring pops out. That’s what happened to Poulin, who was saved only by his slender life belt from what is known in the trade as a nasty fall.³⁶

³⁰ Bluebook, *The Story of the 390th Bombardment Group (H)*, 37, – privately printed.

³¹ Online USAF Museum.

³² Bowman, *Castles in the Air*, 90,

³³ Online USAF Museum

³⁴ Steinmetz, *Screwballs*.

³⁵ Montreal newspaper article – Joseph Poulin’s Scrapbook/Steinmetz, *Screwballs*.

³⁶ Steinmetz, *Screwballs*.

Only the steel flak suit he was wearing prevented the shrapnel from taking his life. With only his safety belt suspending him in the turret, Poulin remained at his important guns. The flak hit left the gunner exposed to the cold blast of wind rushing into the open turret. Temperature at over four miles up, altitude at which the *Eightball* was flying, was close to 30 below zero.³⁷

In Joey's spot the safe and sane procedure would have been to abandon the turret for the comparative safety of the ship's fuselage. Nine out of ten men would have done so. Not Joey. Nazi fighters, he knew, have a way of picking on a ship with a dead turret. Besides, the humorous possibilities of his situation, by *Eight Ball* standards of humor, were too tempting to pass up. So Joey stuck to his turret, praying for that strap to hold, shooting it out with the Luftwaffe and hooting it out with his crew. Joey's pals nearly died laughing while Joey nearly died, period, paragraph.³⁸

In these circumstances, for more than two hours the 'down easter' continued to keep his guns on the fighters, leaving his precarious position only after his formation had been picked up by friendly fighter escort.³⁹

Reuben Widetsky, left waist gunner, at 32, is by several years margin the oldest of the crew. Inevitably, they have dubbed him "Pappy," and that is the role he fills. Sage advisor in all matters to the crew at large. He is self-appointed watchdog over 19-year old Joey Poulin in particular. It was he who watched over Poulin, checking his safety belt and heated suit, his ammunition and oxygen, during the latter's trapeze act at Schweinfurt.⁴⁰

After "Bombs Away," the AAF planes turned off the target and headed westward for England and their bases. Almost immediately the German fighters, having landed and refueled, struck again, forcing the American planes once more to fight for their survival as they had done inbound to the target area. Finally, the B-17s reached the coastline of Europe and relative safety, although many of them were so heavily damaged that they would never fly again.⁴¹

The city of Schweinfurt had soaked up over 483 short tons of high explosives and incendiaries. The Third Division had dropped the most bombs on target and the 390th was the most successful. Despite the lead ship experiencing difficulty, all 15 aircraft placed 50 percent of their bombs within 1,000 feet of the MPI.

Sixty Fortresses and 600 men were missing. Five B-17s had crashed in England as a result of their battle damaged condition and twelve more were destroyed in crashlandings or were so badly damaged that they had to be written off. Of the returning bombers, 121 required repairs and another five fatal casualties and 43 wounded crewmen were removed from the aircraft.⁴²

³⁷ Joseph Poulin's Scrapbook.

³⁸ Steinmetz, *Screwballs*.

³⁹ Joseph Poulin's Scrapbook.

⁴⁰ Steinmetz, *Screwballs*.

⁴¹ Online USAF Museum.

⁴² Bowman, *Castles in the Air*, 98.



The Cabral Crew: L-R rear row: Gordon H. Wharton (navigator), Earl Meitlage (right waist gunner), William Cabral (pilot), Dean C. Ferris (bombardier), Lloyd J. Wamble (top turret gunner), Richard H. Perry (co-pilot, replacing John E. Wenzel). Front row: William G. Kublitsky (radioman, replacing Vernon R. Holman), Reuben Widetsky (left waist gunner), Joseph G. Poulin (ball turret gunner), and James P. Dolan (tail gunner). (*Bowman – Dick Perry, names furnished from ‘Screwballs and the Eightball.’*)

Despite the losses, Eighth Air Force command was ecstatic over the bombing results. The factory was believed to have been reduced to only 25 percent of operation. However, the heavies had to go back to Schweinfurt several more times, and the facilities there were not completely put ‘out of business’ until they were overrun on the ground by the Rainbow Division. The boast that air command had made early in the war – that they would win the war without the ground troops did not turn out to be true. The Rainbow Division presented the German flag that flew over the factory to the 105th Bomb Group, which had lost the most casualties on that Black Thursday – 16 out of 18 planes. Miraculously, the 390th had lost only one.

Hitler was concerned about the damage received at the factories of Schweinfurt, but the German war machine bolstered by stockpiled parts, continued to roll on. “Not a tank, plane, or other piece of weaponry failed to be produced because of a lack of ball bearings,” said Speer (their leading war material industrialist). And in spite of the Allied attacks production continued to increase during the following year.⁴³ But at least the attack had slowed things down for the moment. The thing that everyone was sure of now was that air superiority had to be won and long range escort would be the key. General Arnold ordered that all the new P-38 and P-51 groups be sent to England.⁴⁴

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⁴³ Perret, *Winged Victory*, 279.

⁴⁴ Perret, *Winged Victory*, 281.

Although the Air Command was elated at the heavy bombing results, and concentrating on the next targets, the men of the heavy bombers had to live with the high rate of casualties they were receiving. Combat fatigue was even more of a problem for them than for the aircrews of the medium bombers. On the one hand, they had their '25-mission tour' but on the other, they had their high rate of losses. With a loss rate of 3.8 per mission they weren't doing so well – out of 100 aircrewmen in July, sixty-four would be dead, wounded, or POWs by December.⁴⁵ At higher command there was no doubt that performance was directly linked to morale, and that included the ground crews as well. Ground crews might perform poor maintenance while flight crews poor bombing results. General Moench noted that the fact that the United States was rich and powerful and would eventually win the war didn't help the fighting individuals much. It was up to them to find the strength to go on.⁴⁶

The heavy bomber missions often lasted 8-10 hours at a time, while medium bomber missions were usually 3-4 hours at the most. Of course, that meant that mediums often flew two missions per day (not always combat, but still two assignments per day), so it's very difficult to say who had it worse. Charles B. Sadler, one of the flight surgeons for the 323rd Bomb Group noticed the mood of one 'heavy' aircrew when he flew with them. They were very depressed and spoke of the heavy losses their unit had received.⁴⁷ After a particularly difficult mission, one B-17 crewman summed up his feelings as he reviewed the empty bunks in his barracks. He decided not be friendly with the replacements as they might also be lost soon.⁴⁸

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The crewmen in the heavies also had another problem to watch out for besides combat casualties and battle fatigue, and it was just as dangerous as enemy attacks – the cold. The Air Force had not expected the aircrews to fly at thirty thousand feet and did not prepare proper clothing for the intense cold. Seventy percent of our casualties came from frostbite. The Germans had electrically heated underwear. The US began to produce their own heated clothing but the wires usually broke so it was replaced by a two-layered suit. But even the new clothing was not adequate for the altitude, especially in winter. It was the fingers that suffered the most.⁴⁹ The officers and some of the gunners in the forward compartments had heat, but the gunners that were aft of the bomb bays did not. Author Joffrey Perret relates that the airmen of the Eighth Air Force did not receive adequate heated suits until 1944, and even then, fifteen percent of the casualties were still due to the cold.

* * * * *

At last, Gus' and Guy's search for each other paid off. Through letters back and forth, they set a tentative meeting place and time in London. Neither knew when the other would actually have leave, but if they both had leave in London on the same day, they would meet there with their respective girlfriends.

Gus explained, "The thing was, that when you wrote a letter it had to be censored, see? So they gave the pilots the right to censor. Well, this one particular letter didn't get censored. I had an idea where Guy was because I had been stationed there before. But I wasn't sure he was there, it was merely a deduction. Finally, I got an answer from Guy and I went up to see him. Then we made a date to meet in London."

Apparently, both boys each had a regular girl in London who they would meet at a certain time and place if they had the time off.

⁴⁵ Perret, *Winged Victory*, 281.

⁴⁶ Perret, *Winged Victory*, 408.

⁴⁷ Moench, *Marauder Men*, 334. Postwar comments of Charles B. Sadler, M. D.

⁴⁸ Bowman, *Castles in the Air*, 67.

⁴⁹ Perret, *Winged Victory*, 365.

“Well, it was more or less an understood date,” Gus continued. “It wasn’t made in advance because we couldn’t make dates in advance. The understanding was that whenever I came into town, she was my date.”

Guy said, “I was standing there on the street with my date that had brought another girl for Gus when he walked up. Her mouth dropped open and she looked from Gus to me and from me to Gus. Then she said, ‘There’s two of you?’ (belly laugh).”

“We had met the same girl,” Gus said. “She didn’t know what to do. Well, we got rid of her anyway... there was no sense arguing over her, I’ll tell you that. The girl friend she had with her... (sour face).”

She had met them separately and gotten the two Poulins mixed up! The brothers were both so disgusted they left the girls there and went off to talk and drink. This meeting occurred on Guy’s 20th birthday, on October 15, the day after Black Thursday.

* * * * *

After that, when Guy was visiting Gus’s Marauder base, the two brothers concocted a plan to fly a mission together. They really wanted to fly together and Gus wanted to show Guy what a great plane the Marauder was, despite all the rumors.

“We all liked Guy when he came to visit our base,” Willie said. “We wanted to help him fly a mission. He switched places with the tail gunner.”

Gus said, “Guy and I were to fly out together but the plane wouldn’t fly [it returned to base] because of mechanical failure.”



Gus Poulin



Guy Poulin

(Photo courtesy of Bernadette Carter) (Photo courtesy of Solange Turcotte)

Ever since the five Sullivan brothers went down with a ship (remember the movie “Saving Private Ryan?”), the US armed forces decided that brothers must be separated, so a family would not lose more than one son at once. However, disregarding Army regulations, and their Mom’s trauma if they both were shot down, they hatched out a plan on how to fly together anyway, substituting Guy for the usual tail gunner, Rogers. Luckily for Mémère (grandma), the plane had mechanical problems and had to return to base without completing the mission.

However, everything was OK until Guy forgot to answer with the tail gunner’s name and used his own on the intercom. Guy explained, “The pilot said, ‘Two Poulins on the same ship?’ ...and the jig was up!”

“We got discovered, and got hell for it.” Gus said flatly.

I could just imagine Dad telling Uncle Joe what a ‘bonehead’ he was – and Uncle Joe just chuckling it off. No doubt, with Satterwhite escorting them to the CO’s office, they sniped at each other in French undertones; Satterwhite probably just shook his head or maybe rolled his eyes every now and then. If the army didn’t need aircrews so bad they would have been court-martialed, but luckily, the Colonel had bigger fish to fry, so all they got was yelled at. Guy’s pilot, Bill Cabral, stated that this was the only black mark on his crew’s record.

“The boys are pretty good about these London missions and about conducting themselves in the expected manner,” says Cabral. “In fact, the only flagrant violation we’ve had was when Poulin sneaked off on one of his passes to visit his brother Gaston at a Marauder station, and flew a mission with him over France.”⁵⁰

I never heard what Satterwhite said. For a very short time, Uncle Joe had been a Marauder man, too. Later, one of the local hometown papers, probably the Waterville Sentinel, published a small blurb:

SOLDIER BROTHERS FIND EACH OTHER ON BRITISH SOIL

In a recent letter received by Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Poulin of 153 ½ North Avenue, from their son, Sgt. Gaston Poulin mention is made of his first meeting with his brother, Sgt. Guy Poulin in England. Both men are gunners, but this was the first occasion of their meeting on foreign soil. Sgt. Gaston mentioned the fact that Sgt. Guy took a ride with him but didn’t like the plane as well as his own, “but I wouldn’t change with him either,” the sergeant added. The two Skowhegan lads expect to see each other quite often now.⁵¹

A MONTREAL NEWSPAPER PUBLISHED THIS ACCOUNT (paraphrased in English):

Received from England, two Franco-American brothers, members of the United States Air Force met for the first time after they arrived overseas. Their meeting coincided with the birthday of Staff Sergeant Joseph Guy Poulin, who celebrates his exploits in a Flying Fortress *Eightball*. Joseph Guy is a turret gunner, the same as his brother Staff Sergeant Gaston Poulin, 22 years, who serves on board another type of bomber. They are the sons of Mr. And Mrs. Joseph W. Poulin of Skowhegan Maine, who emigrated from St. Joseph de Beauce to the United States just before the birth of Joseph Guy. Their only relative in Montreal is Miss Marie-Ange Lessard [Memere’s sister]. They are the sons of a veteran of the last war.⁵²

* * * * *

In the 323rd, missions continued to be briefed and scrubbed because the targets were covered by clouds and rain. Willie and others used the time to go see Kenny Class at the hospital.

“When we went over to visit him,” he said, “we all went over, giving him a bad time... and they had a nurse there named Bean, he called her ‘String.’ He was having a pretty good spin there that little turd was... he was the smallest gunner (laughing). ‘String, I’ll need another rub as soon as we get rid of these jokers,’ he says, laughing. ‘All right Ken,’ she says. ‘Don’t worry about rubbing my long leg, you can rub the short one this time,’ he says. And we knew what he was talking about. She took it in stride. ‘OK Ken.’ She was a good nurse. She would put up with him. She had to be a good nurse.”

But things had not been so easy for Kenny.



Kenny Class

After the operation, infection did set in. A colonel who knows a lot about the use of the newest miracle drug, penicillin, climbed into a plane and

⁵⁰ S
⁵¹ G
⁵² G

flew half-way across England to take care of Kenny. And the colonel did a good job, Kenny is getting along fine.

“The boys in the squadron gave me something like six quarts of blood,” he says. “I’ve got so many people’s blood in me I hardly know who I am.” The way he says it, you know he’s proud of the new blood.

As soon as the hospital would let them come, Kenny began to get visitors. They came in twos and threes, and their rank ran from private to colonel. They came in and talked with him, but they didn’t say much. And Kenny didn’t say much. They were mostly fliers, and fliers don’t need many words to show their feelings for a friend who’s lost his wings.

Then Colonel Thatcher came, and he brought with him a Purple Heart ribbon.

Colonel Thatcher is tall. His face is gray. Take off his uniform and he looks like a school teacher; but he’s a group commander, and his group flies Marauders. That means the fliers he leads into combat are the best pilots in the world, and his men say he’s the best of the lot. It’s a big job for a man in his thirties, and Colonel Thatcher’s face shows it. Officers don’t have any trouble remembering to say “Sir” when they’re talking to Colonel Thatcher, because they know he’s got the biggest job there is in war. He leads men into combat.



Colonel Thatcher receives a commendation. The man to his left is Lester Maitland, commander of the 386th Bomb Group – the oldest man flying bombers out of England
(Photo courtesy of W. L. Brainard).

Colonel Thatcher walked into Kenny’s room and shook Kenny’s hand.

“How are you, Kenny?” he said, “Glad to see you.”

“Glad to see you, sir.”

“I brought something for you, Kenny, something that stands for a hell of a lot more than the simple fact that you got hurt.”

“Thank you, sir.”

The colonel pinned the ribbon on the front of Kenny’s pajamas and shook his hand and walked out of the room. Kenny saluted the colonel’s back as he was going out the door, and Miss Southerland who had been standing behind the colonel, looked at Kenny and looked at the empty door and she half-ran out of the room and caught up with Colonel Thatcher in the hall and grabbed him by the elbow and turned him around. Colonel Thatcher stopped and turned and Miss Southerland reached up and took him by the lapels of his blouse.

“You can’t do it that way!” she said tensely. “You can’t just walk in there and pin a little ribbon on his chest and walk out. That boy’s all the heroes of this war wrapped up into one. That boy deserves all the medals in the world. That boy is wonderful. You can’t just pat him on the back and then walk away and forget it.”

Colonel Thatcher let her finish, and then looked at her for a minute.

“I know,” he said at last. “I know all about Kenny. And Kenny knows that I know. There’s no need for talk between Kenny and me. We understand each other. I’d be making things difficult for him if I stayed to talk with him, because he’d be working hard to keep me from feeling sorry for him.”

Miss Southerland turned away uncertainly and went back into Kenny’s room. She still wasn’t sure. She didn’t look at Kenny when she went into the room. Kenny spoke first.

“He’s certainly a wonderful guy,” Kenny said, and Miss Southerland looked at him, hoping Colonel Thatcher had been right in what he said.

“He’s the finest man I’ll ever know,” Kenny continued. “He always reminds me of something I read somewhere.”

“What is it?” Miss Southerland asked.

Kenny quoted: “They shook from their wings the dust of their bodies.”

As he finished speaking, Miss Southerland heard an airplane in the far distance. Kenny was listening, too.

“That’s a B-26,” he said. And his eyes were shining.⁵³

* * * * *

“There was another guy over there in the hospital,” Willie said. “His eyes were really big, his eyelashes were gone. He had been burned. His hair was gone. So when he looked at you he looked like an owl. He still was stiff over his burns – but he was making it. He’d been in a B-17 or a B-24, one of those. We used to have wheelchair races. I’d get behind Kenny and two or three other guys would get a guy in a wheel chair and we’d head down the hall. ‘Go!’ We’d run down the hall full blast; never giving any thought to dumping somebody. Kenny didn’t either – he was leaning forward and wanted me to go faster. But that sort of thing helps those guys to get better faster. You can’t hold a bunch of young people down.”

It’s funny to hear how the boys really acted, when the brass and the press weren’t around. Willy was impressed by another nurse there at the hospital. “This wasn’t ‘String,’ this was another one I met there, a British nurse. Her husband had been out at war for three years, and she hadn’t heard from him, she didn’t know if he was coming back. I felt sorry for her. She was quite a lady. She didn’t have any serious thoughts about any man, because she was waiting for her husband. He was a medical man too. I often wondered what happened to her.”

* * * * *

On the 24th of October 1943 the Marauders were finally back in action, but some of the 453rd planes experienced an unusual difficulty on this one. Two hundred B-26s attacked the Airdromes at Mondidier and St. Andre-de-L’Eure. Flak was heavy and some of the planes had trouble with propwash, which is caused by flying too close behind another plane’s air stream – the usual result is that the plane loses its lift and begins to fall.⁵⁴

Tex describes what happened because of the prop wash, which is caused by flying too close behind another plane’s air stream – the usual result is that the plane loses its lift and begins to fall.

“We hit some prop wash and dropped,” he said. “I hit the ceiling. There was everything up there, parachutes, and what-not. Our plane had gone into a dive and Roscoe [Haller, the pilot,] recovered from it. Woomp! I hit the floor and I looked back, and I saw two of the bombs break their shackles. [When a tailgunner looks back, he’s actually looking forward.] We were carrying

⁵³ YANK the Army Weekly, November 14, 1943. Courtesy of Lee and Lillian Zipperling.

⁵⁴ Moench, *Marauder Men*, 83.

four 1000 pounders that day. One of the bombs, after breaking its shackle, wedged the door open just enough where the door joins the catwalk in the bomb bay, to continue on and fall out of the aircraft over England. The other bomb was lying on the bomb bay door.”

“So we settled-down and started to climb,” Tex went on, “I sat down by the radio operator [Ramey]... I thought we had crash-landed. And that 5-man life raft laid horizontally in there... it came loose somehow. Ramey was trying to put on the dad-gummed life raft to jump instead of a parachute!. He had been thrown around very violently after we hit the prop wash and he was probably a bit addled from the jolt of hitting the floor when Haller pulled the plane out of the dive. When [James] Smith got down out of his turret he noticed that Ramey was trying to attach the life raft pack to attachment points on his parachute harness, where his parachute pack was supposed to be, and prevented him from doing so. Haller flew our aircraft on out to the English Channel and the bombardier opened the bomb bay doors. Instead of the bomb falling out, it just remained on the door. As Haller rocked the plane back and forth, Smith caught hold of the bomb’s tail fin and succeeded in making the bomb fall free from the plane. The bomb fell in the Channel.”



Bryce Ramey, James Smith, Sam “Tex” Findley; enlisted crew of the “Egg Crate”

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After the Satterwhite crew’s last mission of the month (15 missions total), their plane, the *Miss Safartus Rickenschicker*, was officially retired on October 24th as ‘war weary’ and sent to a training unit.⁵⁵

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By October 31st the US Air Force had fielded 2,385,000 men all over the world. They had flown over 250,000 sorties and had destroyed over 8,000 enemy planes with many more probably destroyed.⁵⁶ America could do a lot once it decided to.

* * * * *

November 1943

This month, the 323rd Group performed twelve more missions with the Satterwhite crew flying three of them. Bad weather continued to be a serious deterrent. Willie’s plane, *Pub 13* must have also been retired as war weary, because on November 2nd, Willie and crew were given a new plane #41-31983 VT-D.

“They put it in a hangar,” he said about *Pub 13*. “And the last I saw of it, it was back in a corner, locked up. There was a couple of stands around it. They were going to use it for parts.”

Willie’s pilot, Lt. Mark Sprague, wondered what to name the new plane. His ground crew chief, Nelzo F. ‘Nels’ Cassano had an idea. Desiring to showcase the aircraft’s record in spite of its reputation he asked Sprague to let him name the plane. Sprague hesitated due to the controversial nature of the name and the cartoon figure that would accompany it, but he finally gave in. The new name was “Truman’s Folly,” a barb aimed t the Vice President of the United States.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Trevor Allen, B26 Marauder researcher.

⁵⁶ Online USAF Museum.

⁵⁷ Moench, *Marauder Men*, 68. Postwar comments of Mark A. Sprague.



Nelzo Cassano

Mr. Cassano, who also had attended the reunion in Colorado City said, “I gave the airplane the name, *Truman’s Folly*, because at one time, the Truman Committee condemned the B-26 and suggested the Army Air Corps to stop ordering the plane.”

Willie liked the name, and the cartoon... because he sure didn’t like Truman... “He was a stupid ass,” he said. Most of the Marauder men agreed. I asked Nels about his background.

“I was born in Italy on February 7, 1920,” he wrote. “Came to the United States with my parents, two sisters and one brother and went through Ellis Island in 1924. We landed in Chicago and there is where I grew up. I graduated from Hirsch High School in 1938 and worked as a chief usher for Warner Brothers. I then went to work as a brakeman on the Pennsylvania Railroad. I joined the Air Force on October 4th, 1941, went to Sheridan, Illinois, then to Jefferson barracks, and from there to Kessler Field, Mississippi, to train as an airplane mechanic. I was then sent to the Martin Factory in Baltimore and then to Ohio, on to Tampa Bay, Myrtle Beach, and then to England...”

* * * * *



David Goss

At this time, David Goss received a commendation for saving the lives of the B-17 pilot and co-pilot. He wrote in his book: “On the 2nd of November the Squadron Adjutant notified David to report to Operations in dress uniform where, to his great surprise, he was awarded the Soldier’s Medal. The Group Executive Officer, in conferring the decoration, informed the assembly, “This is the highest decoration permitted for non-combat action.” After recounting the event he turned and said, ‘Sergeant Goss, you are a true credit to your squadron.’”⁵⁸ David was surprised at the award but he appreciated the recognition. Sometime during November he started

painting his second nose art of a redhead called *Reddy Betty*.⁵⁹ Later, he would also begin painting airship art on the flight jackets of the aircrew members.

* * * * *

On November 3rd 1943 the 453rd flew a mission to the Amsterdam-Schipol Airdrome, the same airbase they had attacked a month before on October 3rd. This airdrome was a main hub of German air activity on the west coast. These were the fighters that were attacking the heavy bombers as they flew out and back from their long-range missions. It was an important target. Major Travis led the Group. German fighters came in just as the flight nosed down to begin their attack run. The gunners fought back ferociously. The Spitfire escort also joined in. One FW-190 was damaged as it dove through the formation. Another was downed by S/Sgt Eulon C. Bell (tail gunner) and T/Sgt James C. Bailey (top turret gunner). Another was shot down by Sgt Ferdinand C. Dec (tail gunner) and Sgt John H. Niven (waist gunner). Several other enemy aircraft were downed by the Group.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Goss, *Meant to Be?* 12.

⁵⁹ Goss, *Meant to Be?* 19.

⁶⁰ Moench, *Marauder Men*, 86.



Richard Travis (P), Eulon C. Bell Jr. (EG), James C. Bailey (TG), Ferdinand P. Dec (EG).

The 453rd gunners were hot on that day! The airdrome was damaged but continued to be used by the enemy. Turret gunner, James Curlee Bailey, was born in Clarksville, Texas, on April 30th, 1924, to parents Marie and Jim Bailey. Due to a shortage of officers and Norton bomb sights, many enlisted men served as toggliers, men who dropped their bombs when the lead bombardier dropped his. Bailey volunteered to become a togglier. He was wounded twice but survived the war to return home, only to be senselessly murdered while attending college in 1947.

* * * * *

The next day, an accident occurred on the hardstand of *Truman's Folly*. Ground crew chief Nelso Cassano describes what happened.

“On the morning of November 4, 1943, we were preparing the plane for a mission. It had been fueled, the bombs had been loaded by the ground crew, and the plane was ready for a pre-flight check by the flight crew. I saw Brainard [Willie] under the plane checking up inside the bomb bay. He had turned to start out when some malfunction caused a 2000lb bomb to release striking him across the shoulders and knocking him forcibly onto the concrete.”



The *Truman's Folly* before the nose art was painted on. Pilot Mark Sprague in center.
(Photo courtesy of W. L. Brainard)

In Willie's words, "I was in a semi-stooped position, checking the plane's hydraulics and accumulator pressure. I was stepping out from under the bomb bay, when a bomb fell off the rack and hit me square on the upper back. It knocked me forward on my knees and sprawled face-down on the asphalt surface. The bomb landed on the ground between my legs. I was lucky it didn't land on top of me. Ketcham was over on the next hardstand [the *Rickenschicker* was berthed next door], and he was yelling at everybody because he thought the bomb was laying on my legs. He came running over and he was yelling, 'Get that bomb off his legs!' Then he saw that the bomb was between my legs not on them. He was telling me about it, later. I was out cold. I kind of remember they put me on a board, put me in the ambulance, and then I was gone [passed out]. I was taken to the Earls Colne field hospital unconscious. We had been warned to carefully check the adaptors being used to hang this size bomb."

Casimir Sochocki said: "I remember when Brainard had a bomb dropped on him. I was not present when this occurred but later learned that an armament man was checking out the controls in the nose of the aircraft and mistakenly pulled the salvo lever on the intervelometer."

The Sprague crew stood down. Soon the mission was scrubbed due to bad weather anyway.

Willie explained, "When I came-to I could not move my body from just above the waist down. The hospital was three Quonset huts... kind of set out like a "T". One side was the emergency room and the other was a pharmacy and they called that the 'sick call' – that's where you reported for sick call. And the other had six or eight beds in it... might have been more. It was a regular Quonset hut like we slept in."

"It was bad," Willie continued. "I was kind of bummed up a little bit. A little bloody here, a little blood there. You know, when you hit your head on a hardstand it kind of scratches it up some... nothing that lasted very long. I sure as hell didn't learn anything. I was just as stupid afterwards as I was then (laughing). Most of the problems I have now, come from that accident. During the next few days feeling returned but I was unable to straighten my knees or move the lower part of my body. It was several days before I could move my legs or body and I can remember being in a great deal of pain. I didn't get a Purple Heart for that... didn't need one (laughing). After a few days, I felt better and I could move around a little. I was in the hospital for eleven days."

Nels Cassano wrote, "It could have been very serious. Lucky guy!"

"Somebody was watching over you!" Tex told Willie at the reunion.

Everyone agreed.

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On the 5th of November, 1943, Gus and crew received a new plane, #41-31959 VT-S which was subsequently named *Miss Safartus Rickenschicker 2nd*, the crew being the same.⁶¹

* * * * *

While on leave, Tex saw Bill Crowe, one of the 453rd airmen who had been shot down in July! He could hardly believe his eyes.

"I was in London one day," he said, "and I saw one of his [Lipscomb's] crewmen – it was Bill Crowe. I talked to him for just a minute. He said, 'I can't talk now. I gotta go, but I'm coming back out to the base.' I went back to the base and told Col. Travis and he thought I was crazy. I told him, 'I did!' He was having trouble believing me."

Bill Crowe was a member of the Lipscomb crew that had been shot down on July 31st. It turned out that three men had parachuted safely after all.⁶²

"The underground had picked up Crowe and Hager," Willie related. "Crowe told us after he got back to the outfit. They walked out of France to Spain. The underground smuggled them to

⁶¹ Trevor Allen.

⁶² Moench, *Marauder Men*, 52.

the Ambassador's house in Madrid. Then from there, they came back up to England. They gave us a little talk about their escape to England. They saw Berry. The last time they saw Berry, everybody was looking at the car. They were standing there on the street, whistling. Of course, by this time they had on farmer's clothes. Their uniforms were on under their clothes. Their flight clothes were gone but they had their jumpsuits with their insignia and rank – that's what they said you gotta keep. And you gave your escape kit to the underground. They had francs in it, and they needed that money. So you gave that to them. That was several thousand francs and they would take care of you... and that's what they did."

The Germans employed forced labor on their captured nations and thousands of young people took to hiding, eventually forming the Maquis (their name for the Underground). Regardless of what they may have thought about the French government there was no question that citizens and especially the Underground would help the Allies as much as they could.⁶³



Roger Morwood (KIA), Roland Clark (KIA), William Crowe (escaped), Joseph Hager (WIA/escaped), James Berry (MIA); men of the Lipscomb crew.

It's not likely that Crowe and Hager returned to combat duty because the Allied air forces had a policy of not allowing escaped flyers to return to their former posts. The reason for this was that if they were shot down again and captured, they could not be tortured into revealing who had helped them to escape the first time.

"Crowe and Hager said they didn't see Berry come down," Willie explained. "They only saw him in that car. I imagine Berry went off down the highway... lit up a cigarette... puffing that thing and going down the road, and they picked him up. Knowing Berry, he'd probably do that. Never give a thought that he might be picked up by the wrong people, or if he did he didn't give a damn." As General Moench confirms, Berry commonly lacked respect for pretty much everybody. His attitude in the car was reported by Crowe and Hager to have been "like a conquering hero."⁶⁴

Willie continued, "He was riding in this open convertible sedan in the back seat between two SS officers – they looked like SS officers. And that's the last time anyone knew anything about Berry. The Red Cross tried to track him down. Nobody could find him – never did find any trace of Berry. We don't know what the hell happened to him. He probably got beaten to death by the SS officers. He probably told them to go to hell. He was that kind of guy. He wasn't afraid of a damn thing. I might've been tempted to do something stupid like that. I often thought so."

Each man must have run through his own escape scenario in his mind - how to best exit the plane and what to do once on the ground.

"I know what I would do," Willie said. "I would do my damndest. You hit the ground, roll over, roll up your chute and hide it under a bush or anything. You can get under a bush and stay there. Don't move. Let the underground find you - not try to find them. That's what Crowe and Hager did. I always felt that if I was with Frenchie, we'd get out. I'd just stick with him. Stick

⁶³ Moench, *Marauder Men*, 365.

⁶⁴ Moench, *Marauder Men*, 52.

with Frenchie – he was my escape. That’s what I figured too. I’d tell him, ‘Don’t you screw up, ‘cause you’ve got to get me out of France.’ I’m glad it never came to that, ‘cause they separated me and Frenchie anyway.”

But the thoughts that ran through an airman’s mind on a mission were not just simply of escaping from the enemy once on the ground. There were many things to think about: being killed outright, or mortally wounded were the most obvious. But in addition, an airman also worried about things like losing oxygen at high altitude, frostbite in the cold sub-stratosphere, crash landing in a ball of fire on return to base, a parachute not opening, or, worst of all, being plastered against the ceiling of a falling aircraft, completely unable to escape, with nothing to do but wait for death.

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Willie’s plane, *Truman’s Folly* #41-31983 VT-D in flight (Photo courtesy of W. L. Brainard).

Back in the Flying Fortresses, the crew of the *Eightball* only participated on three missions in November. On the 13th, they raided Bremen, Germany, which was Guy’s 17th mission. It was apparent that the crew had been lucky so far, but how did the other crews feel about a ship named *Eightball*? Upon seeing them in formation, one of their fellow flyers made the following comment to a reporter.

Squadron consensus is summed up by 2nd Lt. James P. Fitzsimmons, of Youngstown, Ohio, bombardier of the Fortress *Phyllis Marie*. “It was the 13th of November and I was flying my 13th mission.” He says. “Imagine how I felt when we began assembling in formation at 13,000 feet and I found myself riding behind the *Eight Ball!*”⁶⁵

In those days “behind the eight ball” was an expression of bad luck.

* * * * *

On the 15th of November, eleven days after his accident, Willie was released from the Earls Colne field hospital.

⁶⁵ Steinmetz, *Screwballs*.

“I began getting around on a walker and crutches,” he said, “and a short time later was allowed to go back to my unit on 2 canes. I remember having a hell of a time trying to get to the mess hall and back.”

Gus wrote, “As a result of his accident it was impossible for him to run, walk, or ride a bicycle any distance without having his legs lock on him. When this happened it was necessary for him to massage his legs for several minutes.”

* * * * *

The third *Eightball* mission of the month occurred on the 16th (Guy’s 18th mission). They were sent to Rjukan, Norway, to bomb a generating plant, while another Eighth Air Force Division bombed the molybdenum mines at Knaben. These were very important targets.

Intelligence sources indicated that both targets were connected with the German heavy water experiments which would help give the Nazis the atomic bomb, although crews were not told at this time.⁶⁶

On this trip, enroute to the target, one of the 390th planes mysteriously slid into the sea.

Reuben Fier, the bombardier in Edward J. Sullivan’s Fortress in the 94th formation, recalls, “While doing our 360 degree turns off the coast a B-17 from the 390th began doing slow gyrations in the sky without the benefit of anyone shooting at us. It felt like we were sitting in the balcony of a theatre watching an actor perform before us. The B-17 finally sliced into the water in an inverted position. We did not see any parachutes nor could we understand what caused the unfortunate incident.”⁶⁷



The Cabral Crew, looking exhausted. Joseph Guy is in the front row on the left (*Blue Book*).

⁶⁶ Bowman, *Castles in the Air*, 102.

⁶⁷ Bowman, *Castles in the Air*, 102.

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After this mission, it was relatively quiet for Guy and company for the rest of the month. This is when they would get passes to go to London – for a much needed and well-deserved time off in town.

But Wenzel’s and Widetsky’s sobering influence, such as it is, vanishes entirely when the boys hit London on pass. Typically, the crew descends on the town in close formation, peels off by twos and threes to Picadilly and the Strand, and assembles 48 hours later at the railway station to return to base. Details of the mission as hazardous as any over Europe, are discussed in moot court-martial during the trip home, and each man is cross-examined by Cabral for possible conduct unbecoming an *Eight Ball* screwball. Standards of judgment are a refreshing inversion of those laid down in military law.⁶⁸

Playing Olsen to Poulin’s Johnson in the *Eight Ball*’s high altitude hellzapoppin troupe is the bombardier, 1st. Lt. Dean C. Ferris of Wilksburg, Pa. To Poulin and Ferris the war is not a simple matter of the Allies versus the Axis. It is Poulin and Ferris versus the world at large, each other and their buddies in particular.⁶⁹

This is true, because on one trip to London, a Colonel decided to take his frustrations out on Guy who had probably said something silly in the first place, when Ferris (the Golden Glover) stepped in and ended it with a roundhouse to the Colonel’s jaw. Rank be damned, he and the *Eightballers* could pick on Guy – no one else. Dean Ferris wrote an email to Joe’s son Danny, “I do remember your Dad. We went through some really tough times. Your father was a gutsy ball turret gunner and I can still hear him yelling, ‘Sacré Bleu!’ over the intercom.”



Dean Ferris and Guy Poulin

* * * * *

During this month, as the Ninth Air Force was reorganizing to accommodate new groups coming in, experienced personnel were needed to fill the gaps in command. Colonel Thatcher was transferred to become the commander of the 99th Wing and Major Travis went with him. And if all the personnel transfers weren’t enough, the thirty mission tour was extended in duration to fifty and combat fatigue became an increased concern. The airmen must have wondered how much more they could take.

...one special problem that did worry both the Commanding and Medical Officers was that of “fatigue” – a vague term that covered many of the symptoms of stress of combat, stress of separation from home, stress of the job, and more. The reactions to such stress took on many forms – sometimes the symptoms or presence of a minor illness, sometimes a resort to alcohol, sometimes an actual “breakdown” as that term was popularly used. The Commanding and Medical Officers were especially alert to the problem of fatigue for its emergence could have impacted significantly

⁶⁸ Steinmetz, *Screwballs*.

⁶⁹ Steinmetz, *Screwballs*.

on the maintenance of good health, on the inherent psychological drive of the men, and on the performance of the mission.⁷⁰

Most aircrewmembers initially approached combat with a sense of personal invulnerability in which anticipated casualties were always “the other man.” Typically, the first subtle symptoms of combat fatigue might begin to show up in medium bombardment aircrew personnel with 30-40 missions – something considered normal by the medical staffs.⁷¹

Because of the RAF’s longer combat experience and the special relationships between the USAAF and the RAF, the USAAF was significantly influenced by RAF thinking. In the case of combat fatigue, that influence created a stigma regarding those affected in that, although once lenient on the matter, by the early 1940s the RAF no longer tolerated non-performance keyed to this condition, e.g. if a Non-Commissioned Officer refused to fly he was classed as “LMF” – lack of moral fiber. Such classification normally resulted in immediate loss of all rank. Reflecting or stimulated by this RAF attitude toward combat fatigue, there developed a general view among Marauder Men that anyone who succumbed to this condition was a sissy, was inherently a coward, or worse. Yet, combat fatigue was as likely to strike the daring, driving, hard-hitting combat person as any other individual.⁷²

* * * * *

On the town in London, the adventures of Gus and Guy continue:

“One night,” Gus related, “on a 72 hour pass, half of my crew and half of Guy’s crew was there also. We were sitting at the bar with ‘Whitey’ [Widetsky?] who had false teeth. He had to go to the bathroom. Know what happened to his teeth?”

“What?”

“Down the toilet. When he returned to the bar, everybody asked him what had happened to his teeth. He says he lost them. We asked ‘Where?’ ‘Down the toilet,’ he replied.”

“He flushed ‘em down?”

“Ya, he had gotten sick and puked. We were all sitting around the table. ‘Course the bottles are underneath the table. Whitey says, ‘I need a drink.’ So he reaches under the table to grab a bottle and he drops it.”

“Did he break it?”

“Yup, broke it all to hell.”

“Everybody mad at him?”

“Nope. It was too funny. I told him he had better quit. He was only 20 years old, but you’d swear up and down he was about fifty. Baldheaded. This was a meeting we had in London.”

* * * * *

On the 22nd of November, 1943, my uncle, Neil Turcotte, shipped out to the Pacific Theater. He had trained as a Marauder mechanic crew chief, but since the emphasis on the Martin Marauder was in decline, he was sent to the Pacific where he would not be working with Marauders at all – and it was a very different war for him.

Aunt Solange writes, “He left the USA by troopship and debarked at Brisbane, Australia. He did a lot of ‘hurry up and wait.’ The crossing took about three weeks and in all that time they never had a shower – only a helmet-full of water per day for their ablutions. His duties on board were mostly latrine duty. The sailors got much better accommodations and food aboard ship. He was in Brisbane only a few days before he was shipped to Port Moresby, New Guinea, where he joined the 432nd Fighter Squadron of the 475th Fighter Group.”

“The Squadron started flying out of Port Moresby then they gradually moved up the coast of New Guinea as the Front was pushed northward. They saw action over Weewauk, and Tsili-

⁷⁰ Moench, *Marauder Men*, 334.

⁷¹ Moench, *Marauder Men*, 339.

⁷² Moench, *Marauder Men*, 334.

Tsili, New Guinea. Their Group was named ‘Satan’s Angel’s’ but the Tokyo radio called them the ‘Butchers of Rabaul’ because of all the Jap planes they shot down over Rabaul. They moved to Dobodura, to Nadzak, Hollandia, and Biak Island. As the Japs retreated they continued to advance.”⁷³



The maintenance section of the 432nd Fighter Squadron, posing in front of one of their P-38 Lightnings named *Putt Putt Maru*. Uncle Neil is in the front row, second from right – just as I always remember him, smiling, and with a cigar in his mouth. He was one of the most congenial men I have ever met. Note the steel plank runway (*Courtesy of Solange Turcotte*).

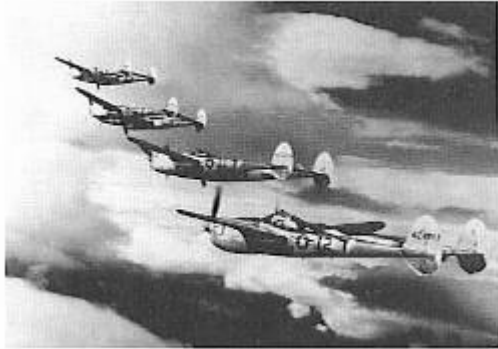
Satan’s Angels had been activated at Amberley Field near Brisbane, Australia, as a P-38 Lightning fighter group, Fifth Air Force, on May 14th, 1943, when they began three months of training for combat. The Group was composed of three fighter squadrons, the 431st, 432nd, and 433rd. Uncle Neil was assigned to the 342nd. In August they moved to Port Moresby where they began active operations. The P-38s were long range fighters which made them ideal for bomber escort, and they were also very good in dogfights with enemy fighters as well. At first they flew bomber escort missions against the Japanese at Tsili Tsili, Wewak, Hansa Bay, and Saidro, New Guinea, as well as Cape Gloucester, New Britain. Over Rabaul, they flew 20 missions while shooting down 62 enemy planes thus earning their honorific title. Uncle Neil and other replacements probably arrived just in time to participate in the Allied invasion of Arawe on December 15th, 1943. The Angels flew cover for the landing troops and bombers there.⁷⁴

The famous aviator Charles Lindbergh flew many missions as a civilian with the 475th Group. He even helped them ‘tune up’ their engines and fuel mixture in order to greatly increase

⁷³ Biography by Solange Turcotte, 3.

⁷⁴ 475thfghf.org.

their flying range. He said of them, “They were salty shock troops who gave enemy aircrews little quarter and no comfort at all. Their gaudy and lustily painted P-38s were the scourge of the Japanese from Dobodura to the Asian mainland. The Japanese called them the ‘Bloody Butchers of Rabaul,’ and the Satan’s Angels relished the title.”⁷⁵



P-38 Lightnings in flight (Perret).

Aunt Solange continued, “Every time the squadron moved up, they had to set up their tents and dig their trenches (foxholes). Frequently the sites chosen were nothing but mudflats. Their tents didn’t have sides so when they had an air raid, which was most nights, they could roll off their cots into their trench. Some guys didn’t keep their hole very clean – they threw garbage into it and used it to relieve themselves instead of going to the latrine. Neil said he kept his very clean because they never knew how long they would have to lie in it, sometimes half the night. He said his prayers every night but the only time some of them prayed was when the bombs were

dropping over their air field. One night they were awakened by a gun shot – someone had washed and hung their fatigues next to the tent and when the moon came out, it looked like what the shooter thought was a Jap creeping up on their tent.”

“They all slept with their carbines beside them ready for use. They received cigarette rations every month (when it caught up with them) but Neil smoked cigars so he didn’t get to smoke very often. He always gave his rations away. They didn’t get beer or alcohol rations at all but the officers did. Some of the men made bootleg liquor in a still they had jury-rigged. He said it tasted terrible.”⁷⁶

I remember that Uncle Neil used to tell us stories about all the different kinds of mud he had slept in during the war. He had several different categories and complete descriptions of each one. I wish I could remember just one of them. He would keep us in stitches for a long time during these monologues. Despite the Jap bombs, discomfort, lousy food, lack of leave, and grueling schedules, I think the thing he remembered the most was the mud.

* * * * *

On November 28th, Roosevelt, Churchill, and Stalin met at Teheran in North Africa, to discuss the ongoing strategies of the war.

* * * * *

December 1943

Although severely hampered by bad weather in December, the 323rd stepped up the bombing of NoBall targets – missile launching sites.⁷⁷ The Satterwhite crew flew two more missions together, then, sometime after the 5th, Captain Satterwhite was promoted to Major and became commander of the 455th squadron. The crew broke up but Gus and Ketcham stayed together and were assigned to fly with another crew. The Pilot was 1st Lt. Selby M. Foster Jr. This plane had a copilot, Flight Officer Alfred C. Macksoud, and the Bombardier was 1st Lt. Frank E. Larkin Jr.⁷⁸ The engineer-tailgunner was Ferdinand P. Dec (mentioned earlier as having downed an enemy fighter). A new crew under the command of Lt. Leo Myron Denny took over the *Miss Safartus Rickenschicker 2nd*.

⁷⁵ 475thfghf.org.

⁷⁶ Biography by Solange Turcotte, 3.

⁷⁷ Moench, *Marauder Men*, 119.

⁷⁸ Trevor Allen, B26 arauder researcher..

Approximately the 18th sortie the crew of the *Rickenschicker* broke up as its pilot [Captain Satterwhite] was promoted to major and made commanding officer of another outfit. From here on, T-Sgt. Poulin did his flying in the “Toid Boid”. Here again was a strange name, this time dreamed up by the pilot. “What it referred to, no one will ever know,” Poulin says.⁷⁹

* * * * *



The Van Antwerp Crew L-R: Harold Gustafson (TG), Eugene Duffy (NB), Willis Diel (EG), Anthony Van Antwerp (P), William Zipperling (RG) (*A. Van Antwerp/Freeman 176*).

* * * * *

Lt. George Friesner was transferred from Gus’s to Tex’s crew.

Tex says, “It was about this time that we lost our bombardier. Every time he was briefed for a mission he would plead illness to our pilot claiming that he was unable to fly due to some health problem such as tooth ache, belly ache, etc. that made him unable to fly that day. He would usually make these complaints to our pilot after the mission briefing causing us to have to get another bombardier on short notice for the mission. He just lacked the intestinal fortitude that it took to be a combat crewman. He was sent back to the U.S. and was replaced by Lieutenant George Friesner. All of us had a fear of the hazardous undertaking in which we were engaged. We were well aware of our mortality and the risks we were taking of being killed, wounded, or becoming prisoners of war. The hazards we shared forged a close bond between the members of each crew. It was a bond, which in some ways was closer than that which exists between blood brothers.”

* * * * *

On December 9th, Willie celebrated his birthday and the adventures of Gus and Willie continue:

“It was my 21st birthday,” Willie said, “and for my birthday present, Frenchie and some of the guys bought me 21 shots of whiskey at a bar. I went in the bar and they set these shot glasses

⁷⁹ Gus Poulin’s Scrapbook.

up on the counter and they said there was twenty-one of them and I was supposed to drink them all. I drank some of them and for the life of me I couldn't finish them. The other guys must have finished them. Then we went out and got on those damn bicycles. I had a hell of a time trying to get started. Finally, we got going."

Gus added, "After that, you know, we're pedaling along on the bicycles and I told Willie, 'Now, you follow me this time. Don't try to pass me.' So zooooom (a sweep of the arm), there he goes. And over in England they have briar patches, just like sandpaper. I was just strolling along when I heard Willie yell, 'Halp! I'm stuck.' I went back and sure enough he was stuck - stuck in a briar patch. I had the flashlight. He was supposed to follow me. Right into the puckerbrush he went. He couldn't get out, but I finally got him out, bicycle and all. I said, 'Willie, you've got to follow me. I've got the flashlight.'"

Willie continued, "I was watching the little tail-light on Frenchie's bicycle but every time he went around a turn I didn't. That tail light would disappear and into the ditch I went - I must have crashed about five or six times that night."

I could just visualize Gus and Willie traveling an English country road on a dark night. Just shapes zipping along on bikes and suddenly, you can't see it happening, but you can hear Willie going into the bushes (again). But the difficulties of the night were far from over.

"We weren't supposed to be out that late, 'cause we were on alert," Willie explained. "About the time we finally got back to the base, we heard the engines revving out on the field and we knew we'd better get to the briefing room right away. After spending so much time in the bushes I didn't look too good, so I came into the briefing room... I was pretty sober by then... I had scratches, dirt, and leaves; covered with all that crap, and I was still in my Class A's (dress uniform), we were late... had missed roll call. I was a mess. My hat was off to one side. Somehow Frenchie had changed into his flight clothes, but I just went straight into the briefing... Travis was standing there looking at me coming in. I sat down in the nearest chair, and stared straight ahead, at attention - not daring to move a muscle. Travis was just starting the briefing and he looked at me and then he turned his back to the group. He was staring at the map. He stayed that way for quite a while. Someone told me later that he was laughing. He was good like that (laughing). After the briefing I saw the yellow flare and I knew I had time to get cleaned up, so I did, but then the red flare meant that the mission had been scrubbed. Boy, was I glad!"



Richard J. Travis
Captain, 453rd

* * * * *



John Bull

As far as bombs are concerned, the Marauder men at Earls Colne were not used to receiving, just delivering, but now the base was bombed by the Germans, possibly in retaliation for the increased attacks on the Noball targets.

"Well, we pulled our regular missions," Gus said, "our regular turns, we got bombed a few times, but not real bad. One night, one of our buddies who didn't care for anything... he didn't care if the bomb landed right in the middle of him. We were getting blasted. He's laying on the top bunk in the Quonset hut. His name was John Bull. 'John, you coming into the bomb shelter?' someone asked. 'Well,' he says, 'I only cover about six feet of this ground here. They're bound to miss me.' Well, they missed him, but they caved in the whole side of the Quonset hut! That's how close they came!"

No one was hurt but the raid reminded everyone that they were not invulnerable even at their base and the air raid shelters got more use than they previously had.⁸⁰

“They bombed us one night,” Willie added, “and that was the worst place to be in that thing [the wash-drying shack]. When that first bomb hit, we got two or three splinters of shrapnel into the side of that shed. We were into that bunker real fast. But the shrapnel didn’t go through the wall. It buried into the stucco. We never heard an airplane – couldn’t figure out what they were aiming at.”

* * * * *

Gus and Ketcham’s first mission with their new pilot, Lt. Selby Foster, was to the infamous Amsterdam-Schipol Airfield on the 13th of December, 1943. This was Gus’s 24th mission and Tex’s 18th. Willie was still recuperating from his accident. On the approach to the target, the flak was thicker than anyone had ever seen before. It was described by some as a “large black cloud,” and by others as “the 4th of July.”



Marauders pound the Amsterdam-Schipol Airdrome on December 13th, 1943 (Moench 126).

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Another raid occurred on the 13th of December with four Marauder Groups, 216 planes in all, the largest number to date.⁸¹ Three Marauders were shot down, and 147 were damaged. The

⁸⁰ Moench, *Marauder Men*, 120.

⁸¹ b-26marauderarchives.org.

Foster crew's hydraulics were shot out and they crash-landed upon return.⁸² As Moench wrote, "Once more, the Amsterdam-Schipol Airdrome earned a name not repeatable in print."⁸³

"We crash-landed six times," Gus stated. "This time, we had been hit in the hydraulic system again. We got the main landing gear down, of course, you don't know what flaps are..."

"Yes, I do. (I'd built those plastic models)."

"Those are more or less air brakes. We couldn't drop any flaps... we had no hydraulic braking fluid. We hit the ground with two wheels. Naturally, at 200 miles an hour, you don't stop without brakes... and we ended up in the ditch again."

Sometime in December, 1943, about the 24th mission, the "Toid Boid" [actually another loaner plane] went on a flight that brought the worst flak that T-Sgt. Poulin has experienced. "The plane was pretty well shot up and we were forced to make a crash landing." All the crew escaped without a scratch. The Skowhegan airman reports that none of his crew in either Marauder ever received serious injuries on any of their expeditions. "I guess we were the luckiest crew in the ETO."⁸⁴



Zip's aircraft #41-34712 VT-M the *Flying Dutchman* (Photos courtesy of Lee and Lillian Zipperling)

Gen. Moench didn't describe Gus's crash landing, but he did write about Zip's, whose plane also crashed upon returning that day. Every aircraft in the 453rd Squadron incurred damage. The "Flying Dutchman piloted by 1st Lt. Anthony Van Antwerp crashlanded at the Halesworth Airdrome. They overshot the end of the runway and ended up out in the field with pieces falling

⁸² Trevor Allen, B26 Marauder reasearcher.

⁸³ Moench, *Marauder Men*, 120.

⁸⁴ Gus Poulin's Scrapbook.

off the plane all the way. Three men were injured during the landing, T/Sgt Eugene C. Duffy (NB); T/Sgt Willis D. Diel (EG); and S/Sgt William P. Zipperling, (RG).⁸⁵



Anthony Van Antwerp, Eugene Duffy (WIA), William Zipperling (WIA), Willis Diel (WIA)

Tex wrote, “When Zip’s plane crashed, a machine gun came forward and hit Zip between the eyes, so he sported some black eyes for a while after that.”



Tex’s bomb tag.

Zip told his family that when he got out of the aircraft, he was shaking like a leaf. He wasn’t much of a drinker back then, but when someone asked him if he wanted a drink, he said, “Yes!” And he downed a whole glass of liquor just like it was water. This was his 25th mission. Van Antwerp’s crew received a new plane which they named *The Flying Dutchmen II*, #41-31826 VT-M.⁸⁶

I asked Tex if he had been on that mission.

“Yes,” he wrote, “I was on the Schipol

mission, 13 December, 1943. It was one of the roughest that I flew on. Schipol received severe damage from this attack. The below sea-level airdrome was put under 10 feet of water and it was June of 1944 before the Krauts got it pumped out.”

Tex wrote on the bomb tag he saved from that mission, “The hottest flak yet, wow!”

The Amsterdam-Schipol raid ended the Nazi ability to cover the European west coast with any significant amount of air power. Because of the damage to their airfields and facilities, they had to pull back to airdromes closer to Germany. The air battle for the western coastline of Europe had been won. The Germans weren’t defeated yet, but they were pushed back and it was the beginning of the end for the Luftwaffe. In December the American fighters known as P-51B Mustangs entered the ETO, and they could fly all the way to Berlin and back. For the first time in the war, the heavy bombers would now have a full escort. And in the next five months, 2,262 Nazi fighter pilots would die. In May alone, the month before D-day, the Germans would lose fully 25% of their pilots.⁸⁷ The relentless Allied Air Forces kept flying.

Foster crew’s plane on the Schipol mission, #41-34897 VT-W, must have been a loaner, the next time out, the Foster crew flew in their regular plane #41-34853 VT-R *Toid Boid*. The nose art on the plane was a drawing of Jimmy Carioca, one of Walt Disney’s Three Caballeros, except that he was leaning on a bomb instead of a cane.

⁸⁵ Moench, *Marauder Men*, 121-122.

⁸⁶ Alf Johanneson, aircraft researcher.

⁸⁷ ehistory.com.



Gus in flight jacket with the *Toid Boid's* Jimmy Carioca logo.

* * * * *

This month, Guy flew seven missions, starting on the 5th. The mission on the 11th was the Eighth Air Force's 7th trip to Embden (Guy's 20th mission), where they lost seventeen B-17s to rocket-firing German aircraft. On December 27th, Guy was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross.



JOSEPH G. Poulin, 11068302, Staff Sergeant, 570th Bombardment Squadron, (H), Army Air forces, United States Army. For extraordinary achievement, while serving as radio operator and gunner on twenty bombardment missions over enemy occupied Continental Europe. Displaying great courage and skill, Sergeant Poulin, fighting from his gun position has destroyed one enemy airplane, warded off many enemy attacks and has materially aided in the success of each of the twenty missions. The courage, coolness and skill displayed by Sergeant Poulin on all these occasions reflect the highest credit upon himself and the Armed Forces of the United States.⁸⁸

Guy's last and final mission (his 25th) was on December 30th to bomb oil installations at Ludwigshafen, Germany, near the Swiss border.

Cliff Hatcher who flew with the 94th Bomb Group recalls, 'We were attacked by Me110s, Me210s and Fw190s, which caused a lot of damage. The German fighters lined up wingtip to wingtip off to our right, out of range of our .50 calibres. About 18 of them were lined up like a row of battleships and when they fired simultaneously, it was like a naval broadside. They fired air-to-air rockets, one of which went right over our right wing by about five feet. I was sure it would hit the top turret but it missed us.

Altogether 22 bombers and 12 American fighters were lost on the raid and 23 German fighters were claimed destroyed. The figures themselves bear scant detail to the casualties on board the surviving fortresses which made it back to England.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ Joseph Poulin's Scrapbook.

⁸⁹ Bowman, *Castles in the Air*, 106-107.



Uncle Joe's 1943 Christmas card (*Scrapbook*).

The mood in the *Eightball* on the long trip back to England must have been one of great relief and joy. They had completed their mission tour and would now be reassigned to other duties. Upon returning to base and landing safely, the pilot, Bill Cabral, pulled one final prank on the ground crew.

Circumstances permitting, however, Bill is the friskiest prankster of the lot, as his ground crew can testify from numbing experience. The *Eight Ball*, her engines still growling, had just pulled onto the dispersal apron after her 25th mission, and the ground crew was on hand to congratulate the air crew. They danced around behind the ship, shouting and waving at the men inside. The flyers waved back, then gaily thumbed their noses. The ground crew returned the greeting, with emphasis. Then, with a sudden full-throttle blast of his engines, Cabral caught the ground crew flat-footed and flat-pratted. To a man they sat down hard on the concrete apron, their hats sailing away in the prop tornado. Bill switched off the engines, leaned out his window and grinned.

“Why fellows,” he chortled, “fancy seating you here!”⁹⁰

There is nothing on the *Eightball* in the scrapbook on these December missions, though it is doubtful that they were uneventful. It was amazing that they were still in one piece, even with a ship named the *Eightball* (which no one wanted to be behind).

But if there's any bad luck in the *Eight Ball's* wake, it hasn't caught up with the boys inside. Apart from the fatal anoxia of the substitute radio operator, not a man in the ship has been so much as scratched. “We're glad enough to do without Purple Hearts, thank you,” says Cabral.

And when it comes to decorations, Bill and his boys have no need of Purple Hearts. Among them they hold ten Air Medals, 27 Clusters to the Air Medal, eight Distinguished Flying Crosses, and the equivalent of three DFC Clusters.

Which isn't so bad – for a bunch of screwballs.⁹¹

* * * * *

Ernie Pyle noticed an interesting thing about the airmen who were close to finishing their mission tour.

There is an odd psychological factor in the system of being sent home after a certain number of missions. When pilots got to within three or four missions of the finish, they became so nervous they almost jumped out of their skins. A good many were killed on their last allotted mission. The squadron leaders wished there were some way they could surprise a man and send him home with six or eight missions still to go, thus sparing him the agony of those last few trips.⁹²

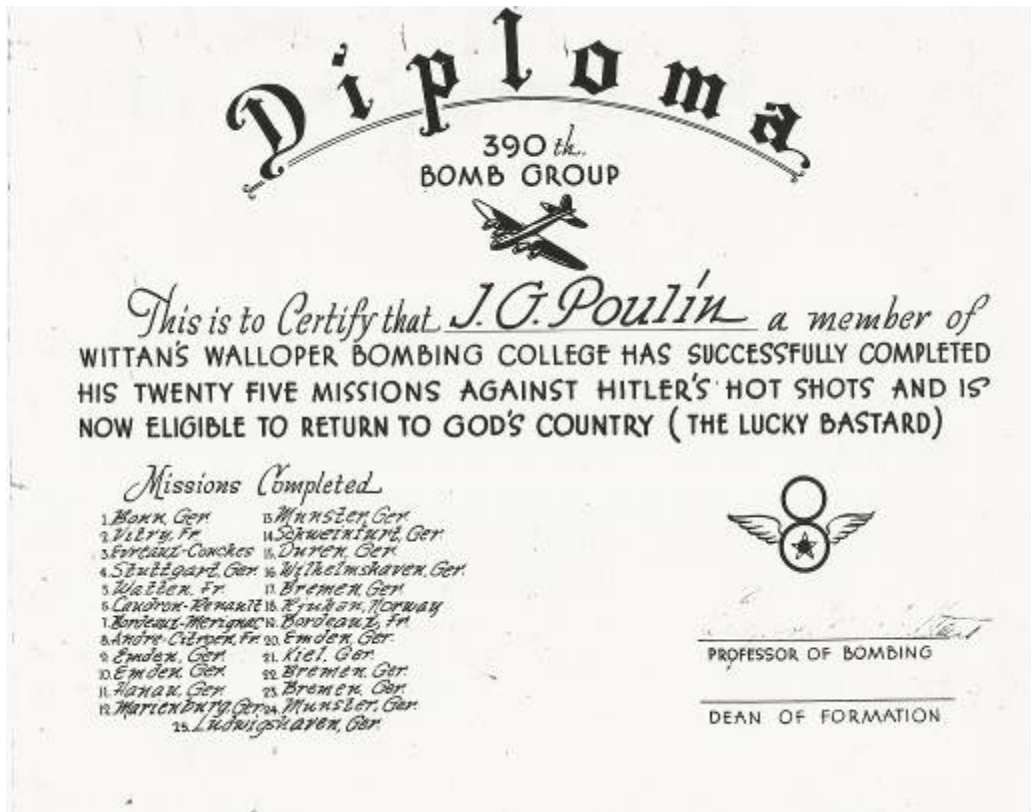
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Gus and Guy didn't see each other again until they were both out of the service. Gus logged nine more missions in December, completing his 30th mission to the Lostbarne Noball on New Year's Eve. He only had 20 more missions to go.

⁹⁰ Steinmetz, *Screwballs*.

⁹¹ Steinmetz, *Screwballs*.

⁹² Pyle, *Brave Men*, 161-162.



Joseph Poulin's 'diploma' for completing his 25th mission. The unit was nicknamed Wittan's Wallopers. Col. Wittan was the commanding officer at the time (Courtesy of Daniel Poulin).

* * * * *

During the last year, the US citizens at home had not been idle. General Moench sums up the amazing material accomplishments of the United States during 1943.

In the United States, the "Arsenal of Democracy" was turning out materials for itself and all the Allies in increasingly enormous quantities. Beginning in 1943, the United States had produced 132,000 aircraft, 148,000 tanks, 1,200,000 trucks, 42,000 guns, 27 million tons of merchant shipping and warships. In this period, the United States had given in assistance \$3.5 billion to the USSR, \$6.0 billion to Great Britain, \$1.5 Billion to China, India, Australia and New Zealand, and \$2.0 billion to African, Middle East and Mediterranean countries.⁹³

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⁹³ Moench, *Marauder Men*, 125.

This is the song that bombardier Dean Ferris sang to the crew while, with both hands blistered by fire, he assisted the pilot and co-pilot in bringing the *Eightball* in to a crash landing in England on October 10, 1943.

A Wing and a Prayer

One of our planes was missing, two hours overdue.
One of our planes was missing, with all her gallant crew.
The radio sets were humming and waiting for a word,
When a voice broke through that humming and this is what they heard:

Coming in on a wing and a prayer,
Coming in on a wing and a prayer,
Though we've one motor gone, we can still carry on,
Coming in on a wing and a prayer.

What a show -
What a fight -
Yes we really hit our target for tonight,
How we sing as we limp through the air,
Look below there's a field over there,
With a full crew on board and our trust in the Lord,
We're coming in on a wing and a prayer.

What a show -
What a fight -
Yes we really hit our target for tonight,
How we sing as we limp through the air,
Look below there's a field over there,
With a full crew on board and our trust in the Lord,
We're coming in on a wing and a prayer.

The Four Vagabonds (McHugh/Adamson) 1943



Technical Sergeant Walter L. Woods
323rd Bomb Group, 453rd Bomb Squadron
USSAF 1942-1945



Staff Sergeant Lawrence C. Nusser
323rd Bomb Group, 453rd Bomb Squadron
USSAF 1941-1945

More photos courtesy of Willis Lee Brainard:



A P-51 Mustang with invasion stripes.



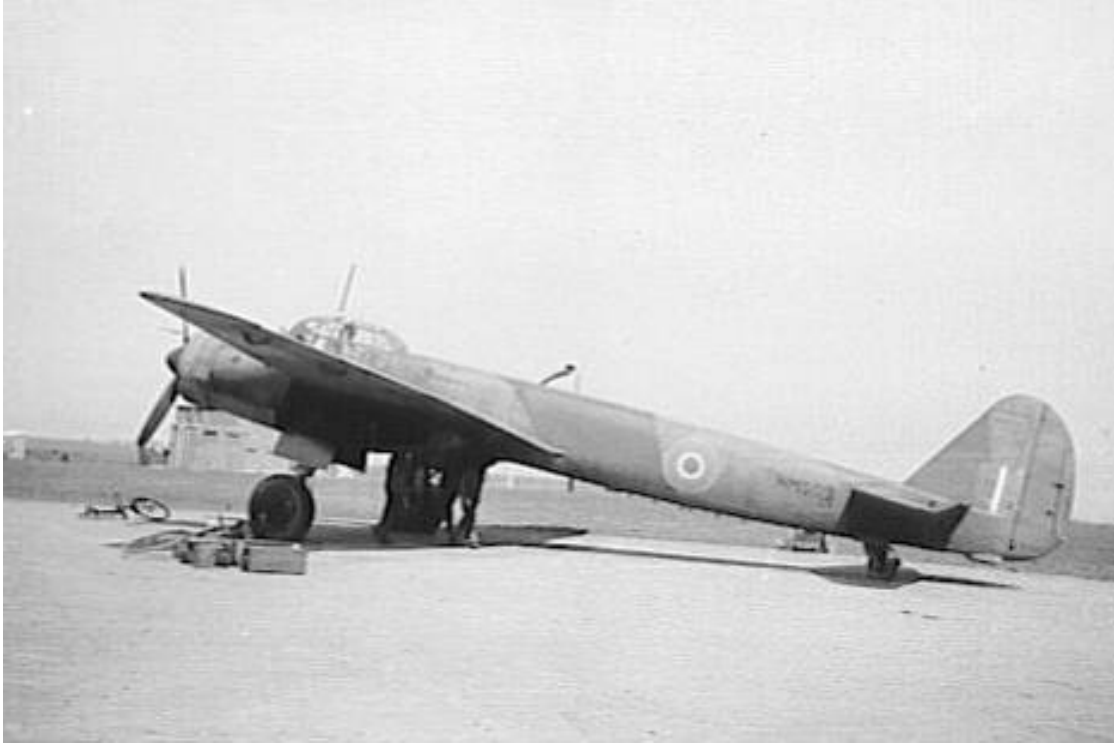
A B-24 Liberator – the other heavy bomber (besides the B-17 Flying Fortress).



Thunderbolt



A captured Focke Wulf with British markings.



A captured Junkers-88 with British markings.



A front view of the same JU-88.



A P-38 Lightning



P-38 Lightning after take-off.



Maintenance on Truman's Folly.