

Chapter 9 – Victory Europe, Victory Japan May – December 1945

May-July 1945

On the 5th of May the 323rd group moved again, this time to Maastricht, Holland. A few days later, May 8th, VE (Victory in Europe) Day was proclaimed.

“Our beloved President Franklin Roosevelt died,” Tex said, “Adolf Hitler had committed suicide, Italian partisans had disposed of Mussolini and Germany had surrendered unconditionally to the allies. Also in the second week of May, I was advised that I was eligible for discharge from the Army if I so wished. With Germany’s surrender the United States would not require the numbers of men that were now in uniform so a point system was implemented to demobilize some of the armed forces. The point system favored those servicemen who had been overseas the longest and had been directly engaged in combat with the enemy. Points were given for the total time in service, time overseas, battles fought, missions flown, wounds received, and etc. My 78 missions made me eligible for discharge in the first group discharged under the point system. I was issued orders to proceed to the Fort Sam Houston Separation Center in San Antonio, Texas by private conveyance to be mustered out of the Army Air Force. So my bride of less than a month, and I loaded our meager belongings in our 1940 Ford and went to San Antonio. This trip was for us the honeymoon that we didn’t have. We went to Boling, Texas, on the way and visited with my Uncle Beryl and Aunt Imogene Jones and my dear cousins Patsy, Martha, and Jeanie. While visiting with them we acquired our first household appliance. It was a small radio that would not play and needed repair. We were happy to get it because new radios were not available, as was the case with many consumer goods during the war years. We had it repaired when we got to San Antonio and enjoyed listening to it for several years. I received my honorable discharge from the Army at Fort Sam Houston on 20 May, 1945, after being a serviceman for three years, one month, and three days. I was now a civilian again.”

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David Goss

On the 21st of May the 323rd moved once again from Maastricht to Rosieres. From this point on, they would be involved in the dismantling of the remnants of the gigantic German war machine. It was discovered that David Goss was the only man in the squadron who could speak German so he was assigned to accompany the officers on their rounds. Their task was to visit selected sites and order the destruction of war material. German citizens and prisoners of war would carry out most of the demolition. Moench notes that the airmen were not entirely suited for this work, but went at it with their usual vigor. David was enthusiastic also; however, he soon found that the destruction went far beyond war material. The Allied armies were determined to take Germany apart one piece at a time. They would finish on the ground what the bombers hadn’t done from the air. Eventually, David did not find his post war assignments to be very invigorating at all. In fact, he became sick of the senseless destruction of even non-war materials that was occurring everywhere. He wrote in a letter to Joan:

“...I’ll probably get chewed out if the wrong person reads this letter, if they’re still doing it. I am getting so disgusted I don’t care. The place manufactured barrage balloons, that’s all. They told me to inform the boss German to destroy everything. When the officers went outside to wait for me, I told the man not to look pleased. ‘I mean it! Look sad.’ Then I told him to break up the broken sewing machines and hide the rest, and chop up some of the material and cut the rest into strips usable for making raincoats, so that when the inspectors return they’ll see that the destruction orders were complied with. Good Lord, do we have to destroy everything?”

Besides being the interpreter for the initial inspections, he was directly involved in the follow up inspections to ensure that the directed disarmament was properly carried out. For some of these efforts, they had a truckload of the men accompany them to carry out the directed work. German prisoners of war carried out most of the physical work under supervision of the Squadron's men. It was his task to speak to the Germans and explain the orders.

His last assignment was at the NAZI archives in Munich. Positively against his will, he had to participate in the burning of books and documents that historians would have given anything to have. He considered that the mania for destruction was an illness that time alone might cure, but he really could not believe that even time would correct such a basic flaw in human nature. He picked up a few small documents like 'slave labor' rosters and maps in German. One book of maps was Baedeker's "Gross Britania." He packaged them and sent them home for safekeeping.¹

In August, David finally finished his duties as an interpreter. By that time he had covered all the autobahns and most of the towns in Bavaria and had become quite proficient in 'Bayerne Deutche.' He was very exhausted emotionally. The war and its aftermath had gone on much too long.

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On the same day that the 323rd moved to Rosieres, and one day after Tex was released (on the 21st of May) Willie mustered out at Fort Douglas, Utah.

"Why I didn't stay in the service I'll never know," Willie told me. "Probably your dad asked himself the same question. We could have stayed in the service with a permanent rank of buck sergeant, three stripes. I had a choice of taking a discharge or going to the Pacific. That wasn't a hard decision – it took me about two and a half minutes. The clerk said, 'why don't you go over and check at the hospital, they'll check you out' and he filled out a card for me. I asked, 'Well, how long will that take?' He said, 'Oh, about two to three weeks.' So I asked, 'How long will it take to get my discharge if I don't?' 'Oh, two to three hours.' You know what ole' Brainard did, probably the same thing your dad did. I decided to take the discharge. At that point that's what I wanted to do."

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Gus in 50-mission hat and Toid Boid flight jacket. (Photo courtesy of Diane Poulin).

Willie was correct. By this time Gus had also lost his enthusiasm for Army life.

"From Plattsburg I was sent to a beautiful place called Courtland, Alabama," he related, "which is like Norridgewock, Maine (real small). There I was still grounded so I got a big job driving a truck. The nearest town was 32 miles away. I mean the nearest decent town. I stayed there about four months doing nothing. They gave me a truck but said, 'Don't go anywhere.' I was a Tech. Sgt. and so I sat in the NCOs center, big deal, eh?"

"I lost my flying pin" [the right to wear it?]

"Why?"

"Because I couldn't fly."

"From Courtland, Alabama, I was sent to Fort Sam Houston, Texas. Texas is a great land. That's all I can say about it [sorry Tex]. I'll tell you why. For one thing, I didn't care for it. Try taking a cold shower out there. Turn the cold-water tap and out comes very hot

water because the pipes are only 3 or 4 inches in the ground. The sun hits it and that's how they get hot water. It was hotter than the hot water. One night I came into barracks when the lights were out. I didn't want to turn them on so I grabbed a coke from the cooler - the cooler, which I didn't

¹ Goss, *Meant to Be?* 148-149.

know, had been shut off. Boy, I opened up that bottle of coke and thought I was going to get something cold. It was very warm soda, real hot. I almost gagged on it.”

“I was disgusted because I wasn’t allowed to fly. I went to see my C.O. He asked, ‘What’s the matter? You tired?’ I said I wasn’t going to drive any more trucks. Finally, he had to give me my discharge because I had more points than anybody else on the base. General Moench noted that many of the veterans had similar problems with their new assignments.²

“How’d they decide on the points?” I asked.

“Oh, medals and all that crap.”

“The young lieutenant asked me, ‘Sgt. Poulin, don’t you ever take orders?’ I answered, ‘No more than these guys do.’ There were only about 150 men out there. ‘Well,’ he says. ‘Somebody has to.’ I says, ‘You take ‘em.’”

“What did he do?”

“What could he do? He couldn’t do a darn thing. He just said, ‘Forget it.’ I said, ‘All right. Get off my back, and I’ll get off yours. Otherwise, we’ll go see the Colonel.’ Well, he knew better, but he thought he might be able to pull something.”

“At that time the boys were being discharged by points, and the majority of them had probably 100 to 115 points. I had 152 so I says, ‘Let me out. That’s it.’ They answered, ‘Oh, you don’t want to get out now; we’ll give you another grade.’ I said, ‘I don’t want to be a master sergeant.’ Do you know where they were going to send me? Up to Washington State, fighting forest fires... from the Japanese fire-balloons they had.”

“What were those?”

“Well they had these balloons that would come over and they’d drop down and bingo! You had a fire in the forest. I wasn’t about to do that. Well, for one thing, the men they were giving me were all returnees, you know - all waiting for their chance to get out. So you can imagine those guys didn’t care about anything.”

The Japanese balloon assault was called Operation Fugu. They sent about 3,000 ballons toward the United States using the prevailing winds to carry them. Only a few actually made it to the US and some exploded in the American Northwest, in Washington State I believe. A few people were injured and some were killed – ironically a couple of them were of Japanese descent.

Dad’s enlisted record shows that on the day the first atomic bomb was tested at the Trinity site in New Mexico, July 16, 1945, he mustered out after three years and nine months of service, one year and eight months of which were spent overseas. The rejected man who flew in a rejected airplane finally went home.



Fred Mingus

“I never knew he felt like that,” Willie said.

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By this time, Lt. Fred Mingus had been transferred to Del Rio, Texas. He had received a French Croix de Guerre and a Silver Star earlier in the year. On the 14th of July, 1945, he mustered out of Service.

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August 1945

The war in Europe was over, but the war in Asia and the Pacific was still raging. US commanders were making plans for an invasion of the Japanese main islands.

Tex wrote, “It was clear that the Japanese were heading for defeat but Americans were anticipating the necessity of invading the mainland of Japan and suffering heavy casualties while

² Moench, *Marauder Men*, 348.

fighting a fanatical enemy. Then in the first week of August 1945 it was announced that atomic bombs were dropped on two Japanese cities causing extensive destruction.”

On August 6th ‘Little Boy’ was dropped on Hiroshima, matching or exceeding the combined destruction of the 1200 heavy bombers at Dresden, with only one plane carrying one bomb. A few days later, on the 9th, ‘Fat Man’ was dropped on Nagasaki with similar results, precipitating the Japanese surrender on the 14th of August.

The many Americans who today believe that we committed an immoral act by dropping the atomic bombs on Japan need to consider the fact that many of us would not have been born, if the United States had had to take those main islands by storm. Some estimates of expected losses were up to one million men. Another chilling thought is that Hitler was also well on the way towards developing a German atomic bomb, but the research was interrupted by the severe bombing by the Allied Air Forces as well as sabotage by Scandinavian underground forces.

Tex said, “Shortly thereafter the Japs surrendered and everyone was celebrating the end of the war. My family didn’t celebrate. We, like thousands of other families who had lost loved ones, had paid too high a price for victory to be in a mood to celebrate, but we were happy for the victory and for the millions of families who had loved ones that would be coming home soon.”

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Gus arrived home and began to think about the future.

“When I finally got my discharge, I went home,” he said. “I went into the shoe shop [factory] to see the boys there, and I heard the noise in there. They offered me a good job but I couldn’t see it. Clankety clank, clank! ‘Let me out!’ I thought, and so I went out. Then that was it... a lot of running around, didn’t do anything real wrong as far as that goes. I had a good time. I went to on-the-job training through the V.A. (Veteran’s Administration). They did leave me my pension when I got through, and then they took it away.”

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September 1945

VJ Day (Victory Japan), September 2nd, 1945, was when they finally signed the surrender agreement. It took some time to demobilize an armed forces of 16 million men. Casimier Sochocki, still with the 453rd, writes that demobilization for him began in early September when high-point ground and flight personnel left for the States.

“Left Rosieres [airfield] B-87 8:20 A.M. September 5th, 1945, arrived outside of Paris at Boulogne 11:10 A.M. [that day],” he wrote.

Men of the Group that had 85 points or more were transported, as General Moench reports, they, “left in one of the most disgraceful (but unpublicized) machinations of the war.” They were transported in the same “cattle cars” that were used by the Germans not only to move cattle but also to transport Jews to the concentration camps.³ Moench notes that some of the men were very offended while others, just glad to be headed for home, shrugged it off and tried to make the best of it. He states that some of the men who had considered a career in the military now gave up the idea. David Goss, George Fewell, John A. Foutcyh, Robert M. Chestnut, and Lucien W. Kidd were traveling in a car that had a gaping hole in the middle of the floor. But they had smuggled two small kegs of beer from a brewery at Augsburg, a wheel of cheese and some bread, as well as K rations.⁴ It took them two days to reach the Staging Area at Le Havre.⁵

Sochocki, with the other group, continued his trip home shortly after that. They left Boulogne on the 13th and arrived in Paris station twenty minutes later, and left there about one o’clock P.M., arriving near Camp Lucky Strike the next day at two o’clock in the morning.

³ Moench, *Marauder Men*, 416.

⁴ Moench, *Marauder Men*, 416; Postwar comments of David A. Goss.

⁵ Goss, *Meant to Be?* 151.

“Walked in from the station about 5 miles and hit the sack at 5 A.M. Left Camp Lucky Strike [in France] in big semi trucks at 3:05 P.M. September 28th, 1945, and arrived at [the port of] Leharne 5:30 P.M. [that day]. Boarded the S. S. Mariposa 6:50 P.M. and left Leharne 12:15 P.M. 9/29/45. Pulled K.P. all the way back to the States.”



David Goss

Meanwhile the second contingent was following the previous one. David Goss describes the miserable conditions he found at Camp Lucky Strike:

It was at Camp Lucky Strike that the situation turned sour. That camp was a miserable mud hole that equaled Laon – if not worse. Further, food was both in short supply and of poor quality. To supplement their diet, some 323BG men, after finding the onion storage point at the camp mess hall, appropriated onions and mixed them with powdered eggs. The result was more than bad breath – the onion-eaters did not get the head colds that roared through the camp.⁶

[David] had to describe the place to Joan, “...Camp Lucky Strike, the staging area, is a mud hole tent city, with plank walkways to the mess hall and latrine facilities. There are no showers. The mess is a cook house with plank tables to stand up to out in the rain, and it just keeps raining. Rations are very short. The only response we get is, ‘Quit your bitching! You’re getting fed, ain’t you?’ Almost directly after being assigned to our tents we received a delegation from the people who run this place demanding our beer and cheese be surrendered for common use. Naturally, we refused in a way they understood. They knew better and backed off. For all we can tell, the people who run this place couldn’t care less about the men they’re detailed to ship home. Their attitude indicates we’re just another type of material to be salvaged and shipped out.”⁷

They were sent by LCI troop carriers to Tidworth staging compound in England. The men were not allowed to visit their wives in England but were allowed one phone call. David called Joan but she didn’t catch up with him until they had been sent to Liverpool. Then she could only talk to him through a fence. She was treated badly by the Americans, as if she were a camp follower. Joan would have to find her own way over which was probably for the best since the troop ships were so crowded. Then David was shipped to the States.⁸

October-December 1945

Nels Cassano had also arrived home but he doesn’t remember how. He wrote, “In 1945, I had 120 points but had to wait five months in France for a ride home. It was on the *Sea Porpoise* to New York. I was discharged at Camp McCoy, Wisconsin. I met my wife, Ronni DiFiore, in Chicago where she was in nurses training.”

Ronni wrote, “We met while I was in nurses training and he was stationed in Tampa, Florida.”

Nels continued, “She graduated in October, 1944, and joined the Army Nurse Corp in February, 1945 and was shipped to the Philippine Islands. She came home on Emergency Leave in October of that year and a judge in the Court House at Akron, Ohio, married us on October 19th, 1945. On December 2nd we were married in a church in Chicago, Illinois. Imagine, sixty years ago! Seems like only yesterday.”

Sochocki continued his travelogue:

“Arrived at Boston Port of Entry 4:10 P.M. October 4th, 1945. Left station at 6:10 P.M. and arrived at Camp Miles Standish at 7:10 P.M. [that day]. Left Camp Miles Standish [Massachusetts] October 6th, in seat cars [cars that had seats – they could finally sit in a seat instead of on the floor]

⁶ Moench, *Marauder Men*, 416).

⁷ Goss, *Meant to Be?* 150-151.

⁸ Goss, *Meant to Be?* 152.

and arrived at Camp Atterbury 5:30 P.M. on the 7th and was processed on the morning of the ninth and was discharged at 2:30 P.M. October 9th, 1945. Left Camp Atterbury at 3:45 P.M. 10/9/45, arrived at Indianapolis at 5:30. Left Indianapolis at 6:10, arrived at South Bend at 10:35, home at last at 10:55 P.M. 10/9/45.”

David Goss described his arrival in New York.

From Liverpool, he crossed the Atlantic in the Queen Mary, crowded as the Queen Elizabeth was when he first crossed the ocean going East. At New York, he shouldered his duffle bag and took his place in the line with the others leaving the great ship. The weather was pleasant when he set foot again in his own country after two and a half years on the other side of the Atlantic. There was no hooting of whistles, no crowds waving flags to welcome them home. Complacency in New York had already set in, but that didn't matter. He had a train ticket to Baltimore where an Army truck picked him up with other men returning to their mustering station at Fort Meade. Since the Air Force had been recognized as separate from the Army, his mustering out at least was not handled by the Army. He was tired of being treated like excess baggage and pleased to receive his severance pay and Honorable Discharge certificate.⁹

The 323rd Group, reduced to a skeleton command structure, was officially deactivated in December of that year.

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Looking back, Gus remembered the men he had served with.

“Thinking of all the guys,” he said (laughing). “Captain Travis couldn't have picked a worse group than the bunch he got (laughing)... but no dubs; we came out with a pretty good record... a pretty good squadron. We flew our missions like we were told, and that was it.”

Miraculously, both brothers, Gus and Guy, had come home. Both had been in primary combat occupations and had survived without any serious wounds. Of the 295,000 Americans who died in WWII, 65,000 were airmen; 50,000 of which died in combat; 36,000 were killed in the European/Mediterranean Theater and the other 14,000 died in the Pacific Theater. Fully 15,000 men died in training or in stateside aircraft accidents. Almost one in five of the American deaths in WWII were Air Force personnel. These figures do not include the wounded. In all, 65,200 aircraft were lost, one third of which crashed in the United States.¹⁰ In the European Theater the Germans had shot down 9,700 planes – 4,300 by fighters and 5,400 by flak.

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Finally, after talking almost all night, Dad said nothing for a moment, and then changed the subject.

“Let's hit the racks,” he said. “Oh, you'd better shut that doggone thing off (the tape recorder). What are you laughing at?”

It was four o'clock in the morning!

The last thing he said that night was, “I hope you hang on to your picture of one of my airplanes.”

Je me souviens. (I remember). Here it is Dad.

⁹ Goss, *Meant to Be?* 153.

¹⁰ various online websites.



The *Toid Boid* in flight, shortly before it was shot down over IJmuiden, Holland. Gus's head can be seen in the turret (*Scrapbook*).

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On the way home from the reunion, Willie asked me, "I wonder what happened to those airplanes we flew in."

I was surprised that he didn't know. "They blew 'em up," I replied.

"What!?" Willie had no idea.

Towards the latter part of 1945, except a few B-26s that were given to the French, the planes were flown to the Landsberg Storage Depot. Moench wrote, "It was as if someone had wanted to obliterate all the evidence of one of the greatest combat aircraft successes of the time."¹¹

"Ya, I replied, "They lined 'em up in neat rows in a big field in Germany and blew them up," I said. "Then German work crews took them apart for scrap metal. It's in Moench's book. That's how much the government hated your plane. Actually it was probably Truman. He was president by then..."

Then I had a suspicion. "Willie, Truman must have seen the nose art on your plane, *Truman's Folly* – so it was all your fault."

Willie laughed, "Ya, we made him look pretty clownish, with that dunce cap on his head. Actually, come to think of it, a picture of the plane with the nose art did show up in news reels at the movie houses in the States."

Then he paused.

"I never liked that guy," he said, expressing the sentiment of thousands of Marauder men. The Glenn L. Martin Company managed to arrange for one B-26 to return to the U.S. It was "Flak

¹¹ Moench, *Marauder Men*, 419.

Bait” of the 322nd Bomb Group. It was given to the Smithsonian Museum in Washington D.C. “Undeclared in war, the B-26 Marauder went to its death at the hands of policy-makers,” Moench declared.¹²



Nelso F. Cassano presenting his proud work and truly amazing accomplishment, the *Truman's Folly* with 177 bombs painted on the side – from Nov. '43 to April '45, 177 missions had been flown without a single mechanical abort! Eighteen months of very hard work! (Photo Courtesy of Mr. & Mrs. Cassano)

Tex wrote, “Nels [Nelso Cassano, the crew chief who had named the plane] told me that the rumor about the scramble to get the name and nose art removed when Truman became president was not true. He said that he knew for a fact that the plane was sent, after wars end, to the base where the Marauders were destroyed and the name and nose art were still on it.”

Nels wrote: “After it [the *Truman's Folly*] went into service for 2 ½ years in the European Theatre during the War, it ended up with the best record of any other bomber in Europe. During this period, they were taking movies of combat crews, including me, and we were scheduled to go to the States on a Bond Drive. In the meantime, President Roosevelt died and Truman became president. The Bond Drive was cancelled and I was asked to remove the name, but I refused. It was very gratifying to see *Truman's Folly* go on 177 missions and come back every time. I was awarded a Bronze Star for maintenance on *Truman's Folly* for going on 50 missions in a row without any mechanical problems... no ‘clusters’ even though it went out 177 times without a problem.”

¹² Moench, *Marauder Men*, 419-420.

This plane and others should have been sent to a museum for posterity, but instead it was destroyed – as equally unwanted as a German fighter. Perhaps there are more surviving German fighters than B-26s. As a result, people like me have never seen a complete B-26. I went to the Smithsonian in Washington DC and saw *Flak Bait*, but it was only the nose section which is better than nothing. But I wanted to see Dad’s turret, Willie and Tex’s tail section, the bomb bay, and Zip and Ketcham’s radio compartment too. Gen. Moench points out that, later, as if to erase even the memory of the B-26 entirely, another aircraft [the A-20 Havoc] was designated a B-26 bomber. But no matter what they do, they can’t erase the legacy of thousands of Marauder men.

Bombing from medium altitudes of 10,000 to 15,000 feet, the Marauder had the lowest loss rate of any allied bomber – less than one-half of one percent. By the end of WWII, it had flown more than 110,000 sorties and had dropped 150,000 tons of bombs, and had been used in combat by British, Free French, Australian, South African, and Canadian forces in addition to U.S. units. In 1945 when B-26 production was halted, 5,266 had been built.¹³

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At the reunion in Colorado Springs, the men talked about Zip, William Zipperling, saying that he went back to Germany to check on his parents. Lillian Zipperling told me that Zip was very apprehensive about going back to his home country. He didn’t know what he would find; whether his parents and sister were alive or not. His mother and sister were still there. His father had died, but after the war, so they all had escaped the fire-bombing of Hamburg. No doubt they had suffered a lot. Zip asked his family not to tell his mother and sister that he had fought in the war.

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Willie was ready to move on, “I had read about the G.I. bill. So I went to school for one year. Then I decided that school wasn’t working for me. I wasn’t getting good grades. Then I went to work for a rancher there [in Montana]. Ranching wasn’t too bad. Two-fifty a month. I ran all the equipment; of course I had to do chores and whatnot. And I went to town on Saturday nights like all the rest of the guys. Did a little drinking and dancing in the bar, you know. But it didn’t quite satisfy me. I tried out for this and that. I was working for the railroad. I stepped off a train to throw a switch. I stepped in a hole and this left leg of mine really gave me a bad time. I’d been in the hospital at Madigan General on the base at Fort Lewis for a short while. They wanted to operate. You know what they had to do to that knee? It would’ve put me in traction for six weeks with another walking cast for six weeks – twelve weeks! You know what that would do to a good healthy knee? Stiffen it up! I said, ‘No, you’re not doing that, I don’t want a damn stiff leg.’ ‘Well, that’s what we do – that’s regulations,’ they said. But that’s what got me started on my pension. The VA started to check into my background and they found the records up at Fort Lewis – all the x-rays. That Colonel determined that this was an injury that was sustained in service. I gave them my health record. Do you know they didn’t want to accept it?”

“Why not?” I asked.

“Damned if I know. The clerks and doctors and lawyers did their thing and stamped it, ‘Denied.’ They’d only do one thing. Pick up that old stamp and mark it, ‘Denied.’”

“You’d think they couldn’t have done that,” I said.

“Ya, they like to have that power. But that went on for while. It took my wife years of telephone calls and letters. We finally found out that my records were at Fort Dix. They weren’t in St. Louis where they had that fire. That was a standard excuse of the V.A. that the records had been destroyed by fire.”

I found a place online where I could request my dad’s records. I didn’t really believe that I would actually get an answer, but I did. Willie was right. They said the records had been

¹³ USAF online museum.

destroyed in a fire. Funny thing was, they wrote to me that records H-Z (first letter of last names) had been destroyed. Brainard starts with a "B." Apparently, fighting for your country was one thing – trying to get something from your country was another – even if it was just information. I just wanted to know what had happened to my Dad.

"Keep trying," Willie said.

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In February of the following year, Willie wrote to Frenchie trying to get information on his accident. His wounds were beginning to catch up with him. This is Gaston's reply:

Feb. 16, 1948

Hello Willie,

You could have knocked me over with a feather when I received your letter yesterday. I thought of writing to you often but I didn't know if you were home or still in the army. I was certainly glad to hear from you. So you went to college, good deal. How come only one year?

I took G. I. Training on the job and learned Upholstering. When we were together I never had any idea I would end up in this business. Although it is a pretty good racket. I opened up my own shop about a year ago, and haven't been doing too bad at all. I am my own boss and the work is the easiest thing in the world.

Sorry to hear about your operation, I guess nobody thought anything like that would happen, at the time of the accident. Look Willie, I remember the accident alright but I can't remember what year or month it happened. So if you will drop me a line and give me the approximate date, I'll write up a verification letter and have it notarized and send it to you.

There was a guy here yesterday and he told me I would have to remember the date as near as possible. Sorry Willie, but I can't remember Ketcham's address. I got an X-mass card from him. I wrote to him but he never answered me. He is married and going to some college in Maryland. I think it is a little place outside of Baltimore. I think the name of the place that Ketcham lives in is Bell Arms, Maryland. I am not certain.

Well, Willie as soon as I get your answer, I will take care of that letter for you. Hope to hear from you soon,
Frenchie

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Willie was a school teacher for 23 years. "Can you imagine that?" he asked Tex at the reunion. "How in hell did I become a school teacher (laughing)?"

Tex laughed. "Jim Siegenthaler was a school principal," he said. Speaking about Satterwhite and Haller, he wrote, "Our paths crossed several years after the war was over. I managed jet engines for the Air Force and Satterwhite became a Colonel and Director of Material for the 5th Air Force in Japan at one time. I visited with him there at Fuchu Air Base in Japan and he came by to see me at Kelly AFB, in San Antonio just before he retired from the Air Force and I retired from Civil Service. My pilot, Haller, took part in the Nuremberg trials, served in Korea, and later became Director of Material at Andrews AFB. He led the Air Force section in the parade for President Kennedy's inauguration."

Colonel Thatcher became a General of the Air Force in charge of NORAD for many years.

Fred Mingus wrote, "I was a boomer and went where the work was in construction for about five years. Then I went into the automotive business as a service manager for Dodge and Plymouth, and a Lincoln-Mercury dealership. I went to work for AC Nelson marketing research and retired from there after thirty years as a director of Engineer Purchase."

Nels Cassano said, "I spent my working life with two partners in Chicago in our heating and air-conditioning company. I was also involved in thirteen Hardee restaurants with my brother in Wisconsin for seventeen years. I retired in 1982 and moved to Southern California. Love living here. Our daughter, Cheryl lives near us, but our son, Frank, is still in Illinois. We have four grandchildren and are expecting our first great grand daughter the end of June [2005]."

Willie remembered Kenny Class. “Kenny had gotten married just before he left for the service. His wife was a nurse. He had his disability – a full pension. With her in company he took up piano playing. He was a musician. He played kettle drums for a philharmonic in Iowa.”

Sochocki went to work for a trucking company in Indiana, but soon realized his true passion. He wanted to keep the spirit of the 453rd alive and well – and he did.

“In 1949,” he wrote, “I had an idea for getting the 453rd members together for a reunion. I had a list of a few 453rd men. I wrote to all of them and asked them to send me all the names and addresses of any and all of the 453rd men that they had. I got a good response to this. In addition I wrote to all of these new addresses and came up with quite a roster. After consulting with Nelso Cassano and Howard Odom we decided to hold our first reunion in Chicago in 1950. Here is a list of our reunions:”

- | | | |
|---------------------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------------------------|
| 1. Chicago, IL 1950 | 15. Madison, WI 1974 | 29. Norfolk VA 1988 |
| 2. Cleveland, OH 1952 | 16. Myrtle Beach 1975 | 30. Colorado Springs, CO 1989 |
| 3. Pittsburgh, PA 1954 | 17. Dayton, OH 1976 | 31. Myrtle Beach SC 1990 |
| 4. Columbus, OH 1956 | 18. Nashville, TN 1977 | 32. New Orleans, LA 1991 |
| 5. Ft. Wayne, IN 1958 | 19. Moline, IL 1978 | 33. Tampa, FL 1992 |
| 6. Detroit, MI 1960 | 20. Clearwater, FL 1979 | 34. San Antonio, TX 1993 |
| 7. Memphis, TN 1962 | 21. St. Louis, MO 1980 | 35. Las Vegas, NV 1994 |
| 8. St. Louis, MO 1964 | 22. Latham, NY 1981 | 36. Cincinnati, OH/Covington,
KY 1995 |
| 9. Moline, IL 1966 | 23. Scottsdale, AZ 1982 | 37. Albuquerque, NM 1996 |
| 10. Atlanta, GA 1968* | 24. Baltimore, MD 1983 | 38. Kansas City, KS 1997 |
| 11. Houston TX 1970 | 25. Rancho Cordova, CA 1984 | 39. Moline, IL 1998 |
| 12. Windsor, CT 1971 | 26. Harlingen, TX 1985 | 40. Flint, MI 1999 |
| 13. England/Holland/France 1972 | 27. Pittsburgh, PA 1986 | 41. Irvine, CA 2000 |
| 14. Madison, WI 1974 | 28. Seattle, WA 1987 | 42. Colorado Springs, CO 2003 |
- *and Chicago, IL an ‘in between’ reunion 1969



Casimier Sochocki at one of the reunions (*Photo courtesy of Casimier Sochocki*).

With the help of Richard Inman, Sochocki published a newsletter to keep the members informed of news and events. Sochocki was also instrumental in organizing “The Return of the Marauder Men” to Europe in May, 1992. The reception they received in each country was outstanding and the only complaint was that they had so little time to spend in each place. The first place they went to was Earls Colne (of course), then to Lessay, France, and on to Paris. Among the 200 people who attended, people mentioned in this story were Lewis Williams, Ronni and Nelzo Cassano, Fred Mingus, John Bragg, John O. Moench, Roger Freeman, and Trevor Allen.



General Moench and Casimier Sochocki prepare to raise the American flag once again at Lessay, France on May 4, 1992.

* * * * *

Twenty-five years later, Dad was still upholstering by day and re-living the war by night. While my sister and I were growing up, we would sometimes be awakened by a crashing sound in the middle of the night. The next day, one of us would jokingly say, “Dad bailed out of bed again last night.” We thought it was normal – to us, it was the price of victory. General Moench confirmed that even 40 years after the war, some men still had “disturbing dreams.”¹⁴

“Why do I still dream of missions?” Dad said. “How do you erase it? How do you forget something that’s sitting in front of you like a picture? You don’t forget that kind of stuff, Dave. Gee whiz, it’s impossible. I don’t give a damn who it is.”

His postwar fatigue was just as involuntary now as it was during the war itself. I asked Willie how he coped with it all.

“I have this mechanism in my head,” he said, “anything bad that happened gets shut out. I’m lucky that way.”

Tex tried to work with the V.A. to get some compensation. He wrote in an email:

“Dave, I think all of us who were combat crew members suffered from combat fatigue. I’m sure it was recognized by our flight surgeons and others but in many cases undocumented when we were overseas. You know, prior to the invasion and after old Brereton cancelled our 50 mission tour he had promised us, they tried to give some rest to high mission crews but before that program was completed it was cancelled because of mission requirements in preparation for the invasion. I don’t remember it being referred to as combat fatigue. In my case, after returning stateside, the VA called it ‘anxiety, moderate severe.’ I got VA compensation in the amount of 10% disability for a few years and they cut me off completely. I tried to fight it but was unsuccessful so I just said to hell with it. As far as I was concerned, I felt that the VA did not give any great concern that combat fatigue was of any major concern to veterans. I think they rated flat feet, or something of that nature, as being more debilitating than combat fatigue. Maybe they have given it more consideration in later years, but I don’t know. The one that championed our cause for a tour was General Sam Anderson. I personally overheard him tell General Hap Arnold, after we came out of

¹⁴ Moench, *Marauder Men*, 348.

the meeting (on June 13th 1944), that unless we had a tour, many of the crews would not be able to rehabilitate themselves after the war; and that he had sent many memos to Brereton to establish a tour for us, all to no avail. BRERETON ----- I hate that S.O.B. until this day.”



Reunion at Moline, IL in 1966. Front row L-R: Mrs. Casimier Sochocki, Theresa Poulin; standing: Casimier Sochocki, Gaston Poulin, Gen. Thatcher and Guest.

By saying Dad had combat fatigue I don’t mean to say that he was just a shell of a man because of his wartime experience. He raised a family, ran a business, and even served a couple of terms in the Maine State House of Representatives. But rather, I mean that his quality of life had been diminished by it – as in the words of Private John W. Haley of the 17th Maine regiment after the Civil War:

“Here we are, some with whole skins, and some not so whole. Others have been left behind. For myself, I can only wonder that there is a bone left in my carcass when I think of the wholesale carnage through which I have passed. My bruises are inward.”¹⁵

Even at my age, I often reflect that Dad is still one of the toughest men I have ever met. I don’t mean that he would clear-out bars and take-on all comers in a brawl. I’m talking about the way he went to work every day when he should have gone to a hospital. He continued to fulfill a man’s responsibilities, no matter how difficult it was. He really was ‘one of the hardest ones.’ He, along with Tex, Willie, Sochocki, Inman, Zip, Cassano and the many, many others, was, as General Moench would say, “A Marauder Man!”

Tex wrote, “You know Dave, your Dad was a highly respected person and combat crewman. Every one I knew, including myself, had the highest regard for “Frenchie.”

Thanks, Tex. Sochocki expanded on that.

“I really am honored to be included in the story, it was a pleasure serving our country with men like your Dad, Willie, Tex, Pechon, Inman, Zipperling, Boling, Odom, Roy, Benson, Crowe, Ramey, Smith, Ketcham, Cassano, and Siegenthaler, just to name a few.”

* * * * *

Just before he died in May 1988, William Zipperling told his wife Lillian about a poem he had kept close to his heart all those years since he started flying.

She wrote in his eulogy, “Bill Zipperling was a stubborn German but he had a soft heart that could transform trash into treasure [he was a collector] and make a maddening man more precious than gold. When he decided that the kind of life he was living was no life at all, he gave it up. Bang. Cold turkey. Just like he gave up smoking and beer. But he did not leave without giving Lil the prayer that he had kept in his heart ever since before the war, for just this occasion. All those years he never told anyone this prayer that he learned as a flyer, perhaps because having been close to death before, he knew better than the rest of us the awe of God on the day of reckoning. This is the prayer:

¹⁵ Ruth Siliker, *The Rebel Yell and the Yankee Hurrah*.

*When the last flight is over
And happy landings past,
I'll swing her nose to the ceiling;
And the great God of all flying men
Will smile on me
Kind of slow
As I stall my crate on the field
Where all flyers go*

(William 'Zip' Zipperling)

* * * * *

The Reunion

Well, Willie and I - oops, I mean Lee and I - got up enough gumption and drove to the last reunion of the 453rd Bomb Squadron, October 5, 1993.



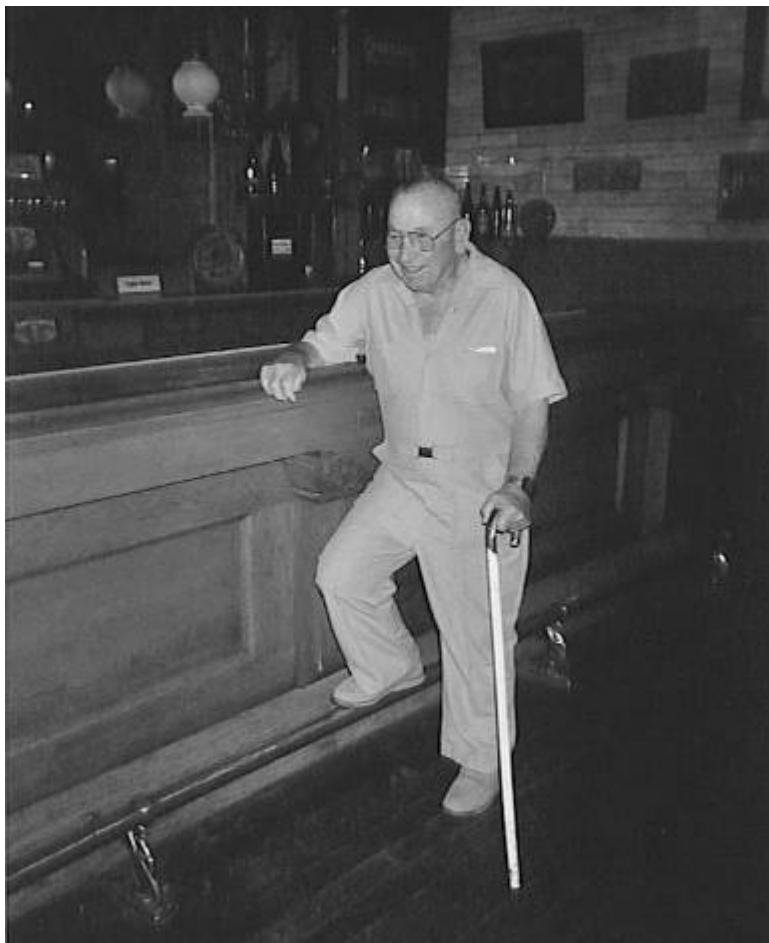
Lee and Dave, intrepid travelers.



In Colorado City, October 5th, 2003: On this day, it was the stories that were flying. L-R: Lewis Williams (maintenance chief), (unknown), Casimier Sochocki (ordnance/togglier), Samuel "Tex" Findley (engineer-gunner).



L-R: Tex Findley, Horace Chriesman (pilot), Oran Begay (pilot), Lee “Willie” Brainard (engineer-gunner).



Like a duck to water, Willie sidles up to a bar at an oldtime museum in Colorado City. “I think I still remember how to do this,” he says with a chuckle.



L-R: Calvin Coates, Robert Gregor, Nels Cassano, Richard Inman, Lewis Williams, Oran Begwin, Cas Sochocki, Horace Chriesman, Henry Dunston, and Sam Findley. Missing from Photo is Willis Brainard and James Hargrove. The men are standing at a wall of commemorative plaques at the Air Force Academy at Colorado Springs, Colorado.
(Photo courtesy of Ronni Cassano)



The plaque installed by the 323rd Group at the Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs in 1989.

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- Production Flight Test Procedure for the Martin B-26*, O. E. Tibbs, Chief Production Test Pilot. This booklet was also found by Micheal E. Smith and presented to the Cassanos.

Research

- Trevor Allen – mission lists and research in the 323rd Bomb Group records.
- Alf Johanneson - aircraft lists of the 453rd Bomb Squadron and photos.
- William Gr. – photos of wreckage at the probable crashsite of the *Toid Boid* and photos of the grave sites of several of the Reese Crewmen.

Websites

- b26.com* – Trevor J. Allen and Michael E. Smith – pictures and stories – check out Dad, Willie, Sochocki, Cassano, and Tex on that site
- b26tailgunner.com* – pictures and anecdotes on the B-26 Martin Marauder. Lots of good pictures.
- b26marauderarchive.org* - a wealth of b26 information
- worldwar-2.net* – an exhaustive timeline of the entire war
- 390th.org* – a web site dedicated the 390th Bomb Group and their museum at Tucson, AZ.
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Oral and Written Histories

These were taken from post-war interviews, telephone calls, letters, and emails. Gus's testimony had been taped and transcribed 40 years earlier. Willie Brainard provided voluminous verbal recollections and fond memories of 'Gus and Willie' in personal interviews at his home in Rio Rancho, NM. Much of Tex's testimony came from his post-war memoir, reproduced here with his permission; the rest came from his emails. Throughout much of the course of writing this book Tex was an avid advisor to me. He died during the writing, so he never saw the finished version. Casimier Sochocki offered use of his travelogue style service period diary, sent pictures, letters of recollections. He also helped identify many of the men in photos. Nels and Ronni Casano volunteered pictures, text, and identification of many men in the photos. Ronni asked surviving Squadron members and families if they would like to contribute. Fred Mingus gave oral testimony on the phone, letters, pictures, and newspaper articles. Manny and his wife gave cheerful support with photos and letters of recollections. I can still hear them yelling over the phone as they looked for their memorabilia. David Goss died a few days after agreeing to contribute to this book so his testimony, necessarily, came from his own book, *Was This Meant to Be?*

Gaston G. "Frenchie" Poulin
Samuel F. "Tex" Findley
Nelzo F. "Nels" Cassano
Manfred "Manny" Blumenthal

Willis Lee "Willie" Brainard
Casimier V. Sochocki
Fredrick "Fred" J. Mingus
David Goss

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Samuel Findley
Willis Lee Brainard
Lillian and Lee Zipperling
Casimier V. Sochocki
Ronni and Nels Cassano
Manfred Blumenthal
Frederick J. Mingus
Mrs. Mark Sprague
Frank E. Larkin III
David Goss (from his book, courtesy of Ronni Cassano)

Barbara Denny – the information in the section on Leo Myron Denny was sent to me by his niece Barbara. She hoped I could find a veteran who remembered him, but I couldn't.

(Sorry if I didn't remember everybody. After working on this for four years in my 'spare' time, it's all a blur!)