

Anecdotes from Glatton

This page is a collection of short anecdotes sent to me by various former members of the 457th Bomb Group. Each story will be identified with the person who sent it.

Stopover at a Royal Air Force Base

"British courtesy a la hospitality"

Returning from a mission in the Fall of 1944 in early evening on a fog bound night, we were short of gas and not certain of our position; searched for any likely landing spot. At a very low altitude we passed a strip of concrete that appeared to be an acceptable solution to our problem. Following a sharp 360 degree turn we made an unapproved landing which ended with the plane coming to a halt abruptly at the end of a runway. An unfamiliar "jeep" escorted us to a parking space where we were greeted by several British combat bomber crew members.

We were taken to the clubhouse where "HIGH SPIRITS" were in hot demand. It appeared that every person in the bar demanded that he buy each of us a drink.....glass after glass became a milk shake glass filled with booze.....milkshake glass after milkshake glass continued.....to the dismal distress of a potted plant in the bar which was the recipient of the contents of the milkshake glasses.

Then came dinner. We were served a hearty meal which include REAL EGGS. Apparently eggs were a real shortage in England and were served only to combat crews returning from a mission. (The American version of WWII eggs was a powdered version of a substance mentally described as an egg).....catsup usage received a huge boost during this period.

Later we were deposited at a billet for the night. All was well as the billet was a very comfortable place with good furnishings. The next morning we were a bit surprised to be watching a female service gal (Wren) ironing our uniforms & polishing our shoes.

Our many attempts to convince our American superiors to adopt the "in bed service" was never successful.

Frank Foster

Two Momentous Days

Two of the most momentous days of my entire life were Aug 6, 1944 and Mar 24, 1945. August 6, 1944 was my first mission, and Mar 24, 1945, was my 35th and last.

The story I'm about to relate happened on my last mission to a town called Hopsten in Germany. My job was to toggle the bombs, which I did successfully.

The flak was quite heavy over the target and after bombing we headed toward our base. The navigator had to relieve himself and he did so in his flak helmet. A short time later we ran into flak which was close.....so close we could see the orange centers when the flak burst. The Navigator grabbed his helmet and put it on, and even the seriousness of the moment, was

allayed by the look of this poor guy's appearance with urine running over his flak vest and flight suit. This, by the way, was his first mission and my last. I couldn't contain my laughter at his bedraggled appearance.

He took it well, as he even gave me his whiskey ration when we got back to the base.

John Kearney

Dive Bombing in a B-17

There were times during our tour of duty when we managed to have some fun, even though it was not always approved by the field commander. I don't remember what date or time of year this was but it was a time of very bad weather in England in 1944.

We had prepared for a mission and had taken off with a full load of 500 pound bombs. After only a few of the Group's planes were airborne there was a mission recall. This meant that the mission was scrubbed, probably because of very bad weather over Germany. We were told via radio that we were to dispose of our bombs and return to our field.

Our Group's procedure for disposing of our bombs was to arm them and drop them in an area of the North Sea that cuts into the side of England known as "The Wash". The Wash was perhaps a hundred miles Northwest of Glatton airfield. The other primary rule for bomb disposal was to be sure that the visibility was good. We must also be out of site of land, and we were to drop our bombs only when we were sure no English fishing vessels or military boats were anywhere near the area.

We proceeded to the Wash only to find that there was a low thin cover of clouds whose top was perhaps 400 feet above the water and extending as far as we could see. There was never any thought of returning to the field with the bombs. Landing with a load of bombs and full gas tanks was too risky.

What to do?

We decided to go down to determine how low the cloud layer actually was. We made a slow instrument descent through the clouds. When we broke through at about 200 feet we found the visibility to be clear and we could readily see for a considerable distance over the water . A suggestion from our bombardier (Joel Lester) and with gleeful agreement from the rest of the crew, we decided that we would rise above the cloud layer, which was only a few hundred feet thick, arm a bomb, then dive down through the cloud layer, level off, observe that no ships were in the area, quickly release one bomb, pull up as quickly as possible and get as much distance between us and the bomb before it exploded.

We did not know how close we could be to an exploding 500 pound bomb without sustaining damage.

We first made a dry run or two before Joel finally armed one of the bombs. Then, down we went. We started at about 1000 ft altitude and dove down with engines at full throttle, broke through the clouds, "bombs away" came over the intercom from Joel, and up we went as fast as a B-17 could climb at full throttle. Just before we broke out of the cloud layer we heard the bomb explode with a loud 'WOOMMP'. Hearing the bomb explode surprised me since I had never experienced that before.

A check of the crew and the plane determined that there was no sign of damage and no one in the crew observed the bomb exploding through the clouds. We continued this bombing, one at a time, until we had exhausted our supply of bombs. Everyone seemed to enjoy this adventure and I kinda wished that we could do this with some of the Group's targets in Germany. Bad, bad, bad idea. This may be the only B-17 in the 8th Air Force to practice dive bombing.

As we returned to our home field there was much chatter on the intercom about the incident and the fun we had had dive bombing in a B-17G.

Willard (Hap) Reese

Isolation

A description by Richard Gibbs of the isolation that most of us experienced during our stay at Glatton.

After flying overseas from Kearney, Nebraska to England, we were assigned to a temporary facility near the "Wash" for about a week or more of training, mostly in aircraft identification. Then on to "Stone" to be assigned to a bomb group. We took a train to Peterborough and the standard GI truck from Peterborough to the 457th Bomb Group at Glatton.

Upon arrival at the 749th Squadron in May 1944, we immediately noticed something different from anything we had experienced before.....the men wore all types of outfits. Most wore A2 jackets as the outer cover. These A2 jackets were painted with all kinds of things.....bombs on the front of jacket, and pictures of an airplanes or perhaps a girl on the back. We immediately felt a little out of place with our shiny new A2 jackets that had just been issued in Kearney Nebraska a couple weeks before.

As we got out of the truck we immediately noticed something even more unusual.....these veteran crews ignored us completely and went on about their business. There were no welcome shouts of "You won't like it here" or "You'll be sorry", that we experienced in the past at training fields when we first arrived. No one came over to see if they happened to know any of this new crew just arriving. Just nothing..... We were ignored. It was just as if we were invisible.

It did not take long for us to adjust and become just like the men that we had seen upon our arrival.

I was to spend 8 months in this squadron without knowing anyone who did not live in our quonset hut. The crew was everything, in our life. We worked with our crew and we played with our crew. No exceptions. Several other crews came to live in our hut along with us, but we stayed aloof from them. One crew came to our hut and was missing two days later. It simply did not pay to enlarge the friendship scene.

I flew 10 missions as a spare gunner with a different crew each mission. I did not learn a single name of any of them. I was told to report to a certain aircraft number and was given the pilots name after the briefing was over. Upon arrival at the aircraft and introducing myself, the pilot assigned me my gun position for the day. Never saw the crew before or after that mission.

I left the 457th on January 3, 1945 after having lived there for almost 8 months. When I left, there were three of my crew members still waiting to finish their missions. They were the only

ones to wish me luck upon my departure. It was almost as a dream, I came in with a replacement crew and left alone. It was almost as if I had never been there.

Richard Gibbs, 749th squadron

Here's a different type of war story that I often tell but never bothered to write about

We got a week's R&R and went up to Edinburgh, Scotland where we were able to stay with a delightful Scottish family whose name, I am ashamed to say escapes me. (At my age many names escape me!) We were treated royally and each night after we returned from "doing the pubs and the town" our host's two bonny daughters would bring us a platter of sandwiches for our midnight snack. With food so scarce, it was quite a sacrifice for them.

One highlight of our leave was a visit to a pub called The Green Parrot, where we had the best Scotch Whisky we ever had poured from an unlabeled bottle! While there a Mrs. Duncan dragged us into a small mini-bar and as a former American married to the Duncans of chocolate fame insisted, were given some very interesting alcoholic concoctions.

Perhaps one of the warmest of memorable events of the entire war took place during our visit in Edinburgh. When on leave away from our base in Glatton we were generally hungry as you were only allowed to get a meal costing no more than one pound and generally we would hunt up a Chinese restaurant as you got more food there. While on leave in Edinburgh one day we took a taxi and asked the cabbie where we might be able to get a good meal. He drove us to a small fish and chips place called the Atlantic Cafeteria and ran in to speak to the manager. We hesitated to go in as we had hoped for a better choice of food. But he came out and told us to come with him, assuring us that we would be pleased with our meal.

We entered and were led by the proprietor back through the shop and down a flight of stairs to a lovely dining room where we were seated. No one came to bring any menu or take an order but after a bit a waiter came bearing plates of steak, potatoes and salad of highest quality and most generous portions. With no comment the waiter left. When we had finished this fine meal he came back with a great layer cake and coffee for dessert, again without us asking for it. We decided then that we were hooked into some black market operation and were waiting for the bill to come for this Lucullan feast. Finally the proprietor arrived and when we asked for the damages we paid just the one-pound as required. Unbelievable! We asked him how and why this was done and his answer was to the effect that you chaps came here and are fighting for us. We appreciate it more than you can imagine and it is our pleasure and honor to do this. He did add though, that we should come again but next time we'd have to settle for a chicken dinner!

Lovely folks, the Scotch!

Murray (Morris) Swerdlove - Bombardier

748th Squadron - Dave Summerville's Crew