



GARTH KANEN

**RECALLS HIS
EXPERIENCES IN
WWII**

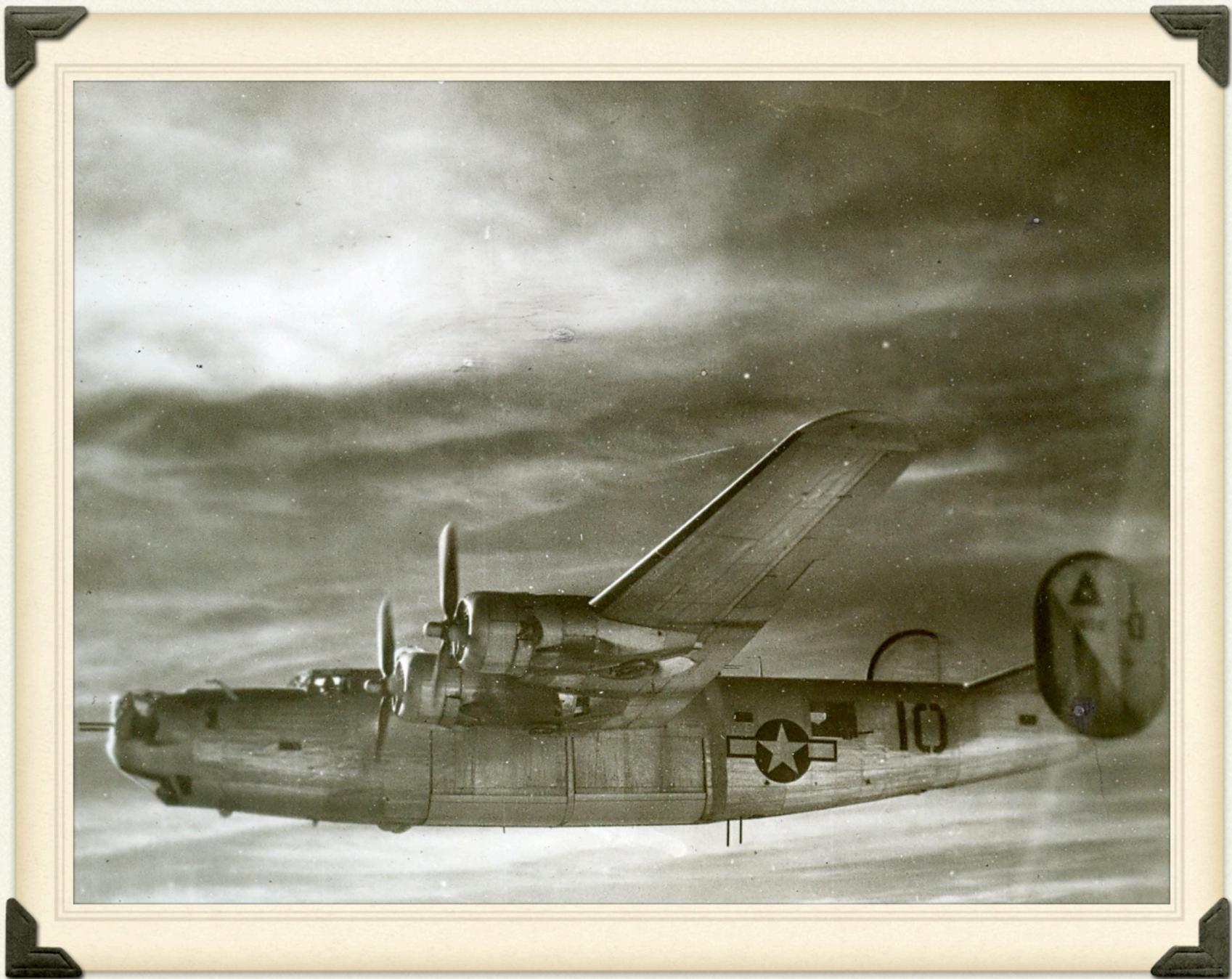


ABOUT THIS BOOK

In the summer of 2000, B-2 and B-17 flew into Sitka, Alaska. As Excited spectators flocked to see the vintage war machines, Garth recounted his experiences during his tour of duty in World War II.

Garth served as a radio operator, radar jammer, and waist gunner in the 720th Bomb Squadron, 450th Bomb Group, 47th Wing, 15th Air Force at Manduria, Italy base (down in the "boot") about 130 miles southeast of Foggia (99th BG with B-17's). He is remembered as a faithful husband, loving father, and caring grandfather... a true man of God.
(March 8, 1925 - Aug. 29, 2000)







UNITED KINGDOM

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SLOVENIA

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GREECE

PORTUGAL

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MALTA

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SYRIA

CYPRUS

LEBANON

TUNISIA

MOROCCO

ISRAEL

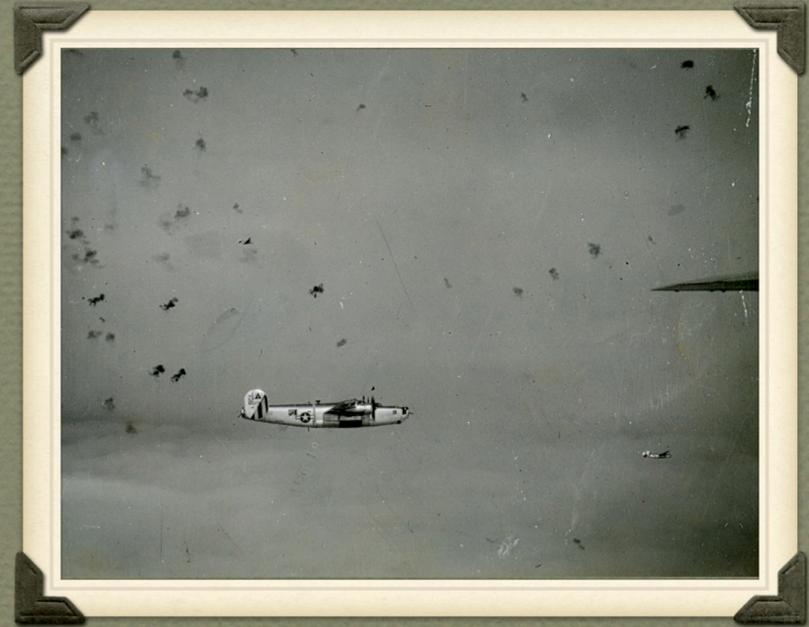


Our visiting World War II bomber in Sitka brought back many memories. I trained on B-17s, but flew 50 plus missions on B-24s which carried more bombs, flew faster, at lower altitudes (25,000–28,000 feet) over the target than B-17s flying a mile or so higher. We flew with our crew split up for experience with other crews on the first mission.



I was flying waist gun and saw the plane out the right window take a direct hit... our ball gunner, Jim Schmeltz, bailed out... he would spend the rest of the war in a German prison camp.





On our 3rd mission when we returned I walked around our B-24 and counted 89 holes- without looking on top of the wing... I never bothered to do that again.



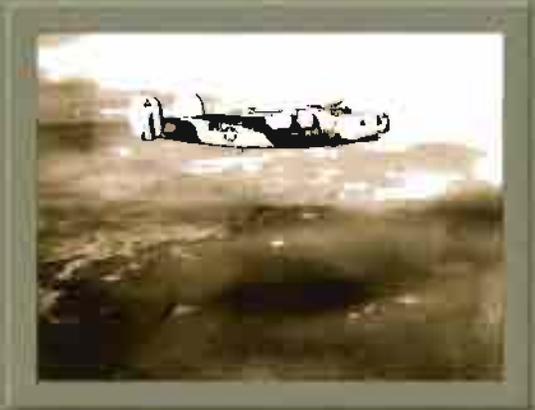
On our 9th mission (3rd trip to Vienna) Sept 10th, 1944 we got hit over Vienna by an 88 mm flak shell that didn't explode... which clipped two fuel lines at the forward end of the bomb bay shutting down No. 1 & 2 engines on the left wing. We immediately shut off all electrical systems including electrical generator on No. 3 engine which powered the superchargers... so as not to ignite the 100 octane gas. The engineer, Gilbert Howe, grabbed a seven minute oxygen bottle and clipped it on, but couldn't clip on his chest pack parachute as he straddled over open space with one foot on the bomb bay cat-walk and the other over open space to the side of the fuselage. He crimped off the open fuel lines so the 100 octane fuel stopped coming out... there was fuel running in the floor grooves in the aft floor behind the bomb bay... Since no guns could be fired without blowing the ship up we were told to throw out guns and ammunition belts weighing hundreds of pounds. Our bombardier, Dante Kingley, sat at the head of the bomb bay pulling fuses and light lamp bulbs out of a little cabinet of spare parts. After getting our attention he would drop them one at a time as his contribution to lightening the ship... it was so ridiculous that it broke the tension as we threw out ammunition, etc. As the pilot, Joe Hirsch, and copilot, Hart IV|ark, pitched the plane forward with bad engines (left wing) high and right wing engines (3 & 4) almost under the plane losing altitude rapidly. Without the superchargers, at that altitude both engines only produced the power of one engine. Our navigator, Gene Wilkinson, headed us for Croatia on the coastal mountains of Yugoslavia along the Adriatic Sea.



We picked up a little power at the lower altitudes without the supercharger, but when we dropped to about 4,000 feet altitude, the pilot asked us if we would rather ditch in the Adriatic. A B-17 can get away with this, but B-24's commonly break in half over the ball turret location so we chose to bail out. Since this was enemy territory, I made a delayed fall until the earth beneath appeared to be rapidly expanding (representing 1000-2000 feet over the surface) then I pulled the rip cord. I looked up as the chute popped open in a split second. I flashed the message "Oh Lord, I have always treated my mother and my sister and father like I should... I want to be yours"...and then I slammed into a pile of rocks on top of the mountain putting about a three inch crack in the top of my skull. (I was pretty smart before that.)

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As I regained consciousness, I saw a man come up over the hill and I fumbled to pull my 45 pistol out of my shoulder holster and he disappeared. A bit later an elderly lady (about 45 years old? - from the point of view of a dazed 19 year old) appeared and approached... guess they figured I wouldn't shoot her and they were right... I opened my escape kit and got out my sulfa powder... that day's antibiotic before penicillin arrived... I pointed at my skull and tried to get her to apply it to the crack... she hesitated, but finally did it... and led me down the hill to a cave and onto a bed. A bit later a man came in with a bottle and washed the sulfa off. Later our bombardier came in with a badly swollen ankle... and this man took the same bottle and applied it to the ankle...later I saw him drinking from the same bottle... must have been a miracle liquid?!





As our crew was brought into this cave location, I was given a red tin star to wear on my hat so they wouldn't accidentally shoot me. We started traveling at night with these. Marshall Tito's partisans, communists, getting their arms from the British and fighting President Michaelovic's men, the Chetniks...



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and both groups were shooting at the Ustaches... we were briefed that they were being paid by the Germans for American dog-tags... so save your last round for yourself (our 45 automatics each had two seven round clips). This ethic problem we were told is centuries old... You may wonder if a peace-keeping force can solve this?



In late afternoon, before our last night of travel...a partisan saw a goat down the mountain and shot it and brought it for our group to eat. We were hungry. But I wondered, was this the last goat that the farmer below had to feed his family? After dark we traveled down the cliffs over the beach and watched a German patrol boat make a circuit in 45 minutes



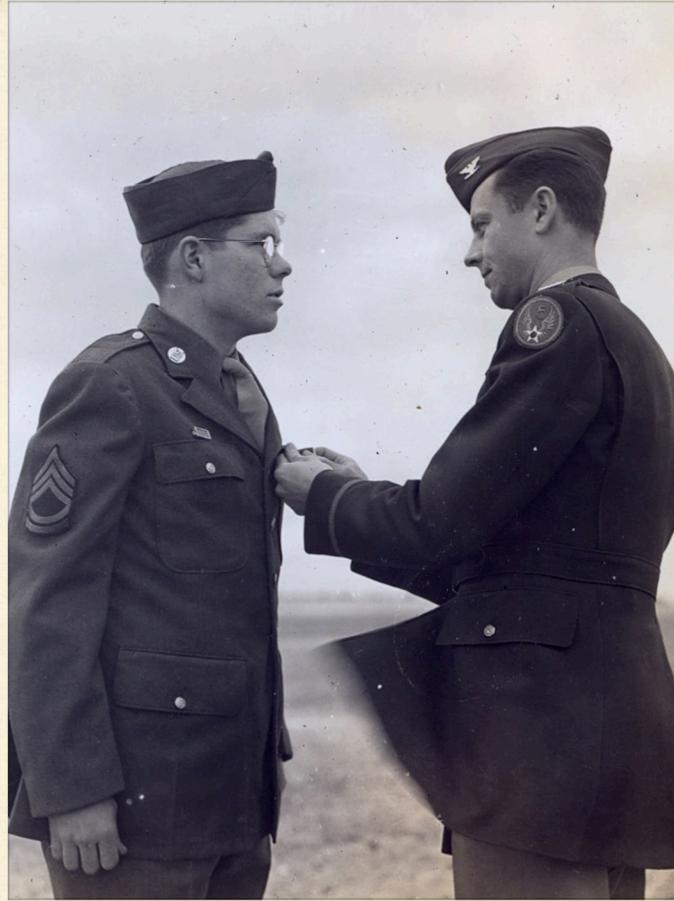
in the bay. Then we hurried down to the beach and lay down under the gunwales of a 22 foot fishing boat. The group now also included a Romanian school teacher and her nine year old son escaping too. Two oarsman stood up using their legs to row forward and another man rowed on the left side. This was all the patrol boat would see with a searchlight swing.

We rowed out to a small island... and hiked to the other side in the dark and waited. After about an hour a heavily muffled motor was heard and we loaded on board. They took us to the island of Vis where we unloaded. Most of the crew went up to make arrangements for passage to Bari Harbor, Italy... but a couple of us went about 30 feet up the path and lay down about ten feet off the trail. Out came a majorette in a white short skirt high stepping around the six by eight foot open space behind the cabin. Out came a man... Marshall Tito, not in the usual combat fatigues like shown in Life Magazine... But wearing a pinkish grey suit with red lapels and gold embroidery around the edges... and walked up the path with machine gunners forward and aft. I didn't jump and greet him, because the slightest move might draw gun-fire. It's surprising what some people will go through to meet Marshall Tito!





We made it into Bari Harbor, Italy, on the next boat ride. The medics checked the cracked skull out and said if they had had access initially they could have done something, but now it was better to let it be... guess that liquid in the bottle was somewhat miraculous!



Col. E Jacoby awarding Garth with the Purple Heart for his head injury received after bailing out of his B-24.



When we arrived at the 450th B.G.... I stopped in to see Captain Vettters, the radar officer. He asked me if I planned to continue flying and I said yes. He said they had received a special auto-sweep receiver with three tunable anti-aircraft radar jammers and only one plane in the 450th was equipped.



He said the man he had trained had been hit in the knee with flak the day before he was to operate the setup the first time... and wondered if I would like to take his place. I said yes and he took me out to the equipped aircraft and checked me out on the operation.

The auto sweep receiver would sweep rapidly through the long range 400 pulses per second and the shorter non-accurate 1700 pps radar and then the 3000 pps accurate flak directing radars. You stop and tune in the first 3000 pps signal you hear and tune the first jammer to it (this covers the radar screen with noise so they can't see you)... then on auto-sweep you pick up the second radar... tune the second jammer to it... auto-sweep again... and tune the third jammer to it and when you hear the fourth radar you tune the jammer to it... etc. (you are now beyond the range of the first signal).

Since this plane flew every time the group flew... I didn't get a day of rest in between as was common practice when possible. So, I ended up flying 24 missions with my original crew and 26 plus with 7 other crews and finished my final mission three days after my 20th birthday. I ended up with nine Vienna missions. The fact that if I did a good job with the jammer, not so many planes would go down took some of the tension off just sitting in the gun turret watching the show. We had a camera count of 375 flak guns (88 mm to 155 mm). We wondered how many more there were in the Weiner Neustadt/Vienna loop that we had not spotted. (See some of the flak and bombing photos to sense the situation.)



On one of my earlier missions before the bailout/escape mission...

I was flying top turret looking aft through the tail area

...when the plane above our left wing got a direct hit and people started bailing out.

...and instead of dropping bombs simultaneously, they triggered them to fire sequentially.

...I watched in horror as one fell just behind the wing root.

...I was looking directly above into its bomb bay.

...in a split second I thought: " God... Whatever happens I want to be with you!"

...in a moment the next bomb dropped directly behind the wing root on my left.

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I had not called the pilot because a slight turn could have put the next bomb in the fuselage.

The last man to bailout hadn't clipped at least one side of his chest pack (if in a hurry you can hook the other side before you pull the rip-cord) but when he hit that 190 mile an hour airstream it flipped him half over and sent the chute flying into space.

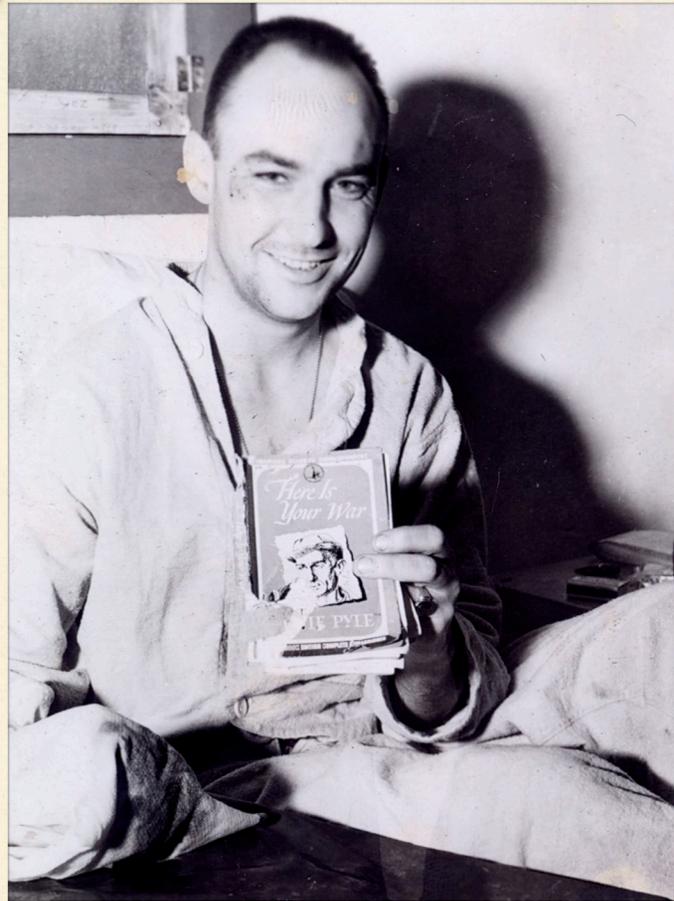
...I said: "Oh Lord, let him hit in a deep snow drift." (we were over the Austrian Alps)

...and I hoped he could dig himself out of that... what else?



I was on board when our jammer plane landed on a fighter strip (too short for a bomber) where the nose wheel became stuck and went up through the fuselage... don't know if that one ever got repaired. I went up the next day and pulled our auto-sweep jammer rig out of it so we could install it in another aircraft.

Our nose gunner, Jim Dolan, had three purple hearts. On some missions 8.5 hours or so he would read a book when we thought we were out of the danger area. On this mission he was reading Ernie Pyle's book, "Here is your war" when a piece of flak tore through the bottom of his nose turret, hitting him in the knee, blowing a hole in the middle of the book... clipping a couple of fingers... and hitting him lightly on the right cheek and out through the top of the turret. (See photo with center torn out of lower middle of the book!)



Jim Dolan after being injured by flak in the nose turret.



Top L-R: Jim Dolan (Nose Gunner), Dante Kingsley (Bombardier), Gil Howe (Aeronautical Engineer), Jamil Kowski (Tail Gunner), and Sol Sacks (Waist Gunner).

Lower: Gene Wilkinson (Navigator), Garth Kanen (Radio Operator/Radar Jammer), Ralph Syverson (Waist Gunner), Joe Hirsch (Pilot), Harth Mark (Co-pilot).

This is the crew following 10 Sept. 1944 bailout and escape from Yugoslavia with partisan help. Walt Lorchak is the ball gunner (not in crew photo). Jim Schmeltz (original ball gunner) bailed out on 23 Aug. 1944 on another crew. Ralph Syverson and Sol Sacks came from the 8th AFA'S replacements. We became a 11 member crew when Kanen was assigned RCM (Radar Jam) duties.



Garth with his mother, Esther Kanen in California.



Garth's Parents, Charles Harvard and Esther Milligan Kanen



Garth's sister, Delsie
Louise Kanen Julien



Garth in Marrekesh (French) Morocco.



Garth's Wings, Dog Tags, and Russian Star which was given to him by Tito's Partisans while they helped him escape from Yugoslavia.

U.S. ARMY AIR FORCE

IDENTIFICATION CARD



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DOWOD OSOBISTY
LEGITIMACE
LEGITIMACIJA
SZEMELYAZONOSSAGI IGAZOLVANY
LEGITIMATION

Garth M. Kanen
SIGNATURE

I AM AN AMERICAN AIRMAN.
PLEASE TAKE ME TO YOUR COMMANDING OFFICER AND NOTIFY NEAREST
AMERICAN OR BRITISH MILITARY MISSION IN BELGRADE, BUCHAREST,
POLTAVA OR OTHER NEARBY PLACE. ALSO, PLEASE ARRANGE FOR TRANS-
PORTATION.

THANK YOU

SHOW THIS TO RUSSIANS:

**Я АМЕРИКАНСКИЙ ЛЕТЧИК
ПОЖАЛУЙСТА ПРЕДСТАВТЕ МЕНЯ ВАШЕМУ КОМАНДИРУ
И УВЕДОМИТЕ БЛИЖАЙШУЮ АМЕРИКАНСКУЮ ИЛИ
БРИТАНСКУЮ ВОЕННУЮ МИССИЮ В БЕЛГРАДЕ,
БУХАРЕСТЕ, ПОЛТАВЕ ИЛИ В ДРУГОМ БЛИЖАЙШЕ
МЕСТЕ. ТАКЖЕ РАСПОРЯДИТЕСЬ О ПЕРЕДВИЖЕНИИ.
БОЛЬШОЕ СПАСИБО !**



The Caterpillar Club

GARTH M. KANEN, T/SGT., AC

qualified as a member of The Caterpillar
Club on **SEPTEMBER 10, 1944**
his life having been saved in an emergency
jump by use of parachute equipment.
IRVING AIR CHUTE CO., INC.

Signed *George W. ...*
President



Garth's Military Issued Identification Card and Caterpillar Club Membership Card



Garth's Metals: Notably his Purple heart and (to be added)





GARTH MILLIGAN KANEN

This book was made for the Kanen family and all those they wish to share it with. The contents of this book were taken from Garth's personal collection of images and writings.