

I had sold Jack Cook a new set of tires. He was foreman in the bottle shop at Cooks brewery. He came in to make a payment and I told him why I would be looking for a job, and that I had met a lot of people that I would be going to see about a job and that he was on my list. He said I have to hire five men Monday afternoon. It will be from 3 to 11 P. M., five days a week. Be there at 2:00. I had another job without even looking for it and it just seemed to happen that way. I was never really out of a job from the age of 18 years til I was 73½. When the V. A. Doctor told me "I think you can make 80 but not if you stay on your feet eight hours a night". I still have from today, four weeks and two days to make 80. When people asked Margie if I had finally retired she said he retired at 65 but this time he just quit work.

Charles was in the first group to be drafted from Evansville. There were a few more than 20 men who met on the corner of 3rd street and Vine. There were a few Dignataries who talked to them. I was there with Charles. A small Brass Band came and led them to the L & N Railroad Station where they boarded a train to Ft. Benjamin Harrison. He was sent to Anti-aircraft Artillery at Elpaso, Texas., where he stayed til the Japs attacked Pearl Harbot, December 7th 1942. His unit went that day to Seattle, Washington. They were protection for the Boing Aircraft factory. He spent the war there. He met Jennie and married her and still lives near Tacoma.

Soon after Charles left, I felt I had no more in common with this boarding house and found myself a nice room at 211 S. E. Second Street. I stayed there til I want to the Army Air Corps.

By now the Ford Roadster was well worn. It would cost more than I had paid for it to fix it right. Not realizing I had a classic, I sold it and bought a real good Chevrolet. After Pearl Harbor, I went to the draft board. They told me that my number would not be up for more than a year. If I wanted to go the Air Corps I should go the the Recruiting Station and talk to them. The recruiting office was in the downtown Post Office. There was a big sign that said "Get your Japanese Hunting License Here". I asked about getting into the Air Corps and he said you are in luck. Sometime in April the draft board will be calling for men for the Air Corps, and we do work together. I will call to tell them you are qualified and to move your name and number to that list. You will have to go back and tell them you wanted this and I did.

In early April I got a notice to report to the Armory in Evansville on April 22, 1942. I was to bring toilet articles, a change of clothes for two days. Uncle Ray read that and said "They are counting on getting you shot quick if you need no more clothes than that." They gave me a little party the last night I worked, paid me up to date and said your job is here when you get back. Mom and Dad came and got my Chevrolet to take back to Kentucky to keep for me and my clothes. Joyce wanted a radio and I gave her mine.

I went to Uncle Ray and Aunt Lillies to stay all night. I would be in walking distance to the Armory. Aunt Lillie said we have eaten out so I will fix you a sandwich. Sue Gaslin was there. She lived across the street and she said "I joined the W. A. C. C.'s today and my nerves are a wreck. I'll borrow Mom and Dad's car so lets go eat and see a show. Maybe it will help both our nerves." I said O K I am ready for it myself

There were about fifty men at the Armory when I got there. The crowd grew to about 500. Ashworth, I was of the first five on the roster. We undressed, put our names on a tag on my clothes and set my shoes on them. I wrote my name on a tag on a string and hung it around my neck. The examinations were on. It was 8 A. M. and at 10:15 A. M. I got dressed again. We went out and played ball til the examinations were done. At 12 noon they called out who passed and who didn't. I passed. We ate lunch then I walked to Aunt Lillie's to tell her I had passed then walked back to the Armory. We got on busses at 3:00 P M and the train would leave at 5:00 P M for Fort Ben.

We got up next day and had a full day of orentation. The next day we drew our clothes. They gave us a box to send our civilian clothes home. That night I drew guard duty from 2 til 3 in the morning in the warehouse area. For a weapon they gave me a club about the size of the one I had cut when I was 8 years old to defend myself at Lyons School. This made me laugh.

Back at the barracks at 3:15 A. M they were getting ready to eat at 4 and start K P duty at 5 A. M. to 5 P M. They said "you too."

All went well until about three in the afternoon. I had been washing dishes in a big metal sink. At orientation they had told us no one would scream at us, no one would curse us or strike us. I was in the best physical condition I was ever in and felt if someone broke that rule I could take care of myself.

The dishes were done; then came the first of the ten or twenty gallon pots from the kitchen. I changed the water. There was a chart on the wall for how much soap to use. I knew cook pots had to be washed and rinsed with no soap or grease of any kind left on. I washed and rinsed and knew it was clean, hung it on the rack and reached for another pot. Before I got it in the water there was a loud noise. One pot was bouncing off another, and knocked the pot from my hands. Soapy water was in my face, eyes and nose. I found a towel and dried my face. My eyes burned from the soap. I looked around and said "what happened". A guy standing there with Corporal stripes on said "I did it". You get those clean. If you hang another one up with grease on it, it will come back the same way." I said "I was not born the day I came in the Army. I know how to clean pots and that one was clean. If you do me that way again I will put you in that sink, maybe head first." He said "you get smart with me, you will, after five o'clock, be in here by yourself scrubbing the cracks under the woodwork with a tooth brush. The guard will unlock the door to let you out at midnight". I said "they told us at orientation, if anyone kept us for extra duty, he was to stay right with us, so nothing would please me more than you and I to be in here with the doors locked. I did not see him again.

The next day we got inoculations and more orientation. We were also told we were in the Army Air Corps and would go to Bloxi, Miss. for five weeks of boot camp training and job classification. We were at Fort Ben for 13 days.

We got to Kessler Field at Bloxi about the middle of the afternoon and got settled in a barrack in time for supper. I still had not learned to call it chow.

Next morning we started close order drill. Many could not even stand the gaft of close order drill. The sun was hot and their legs, stomachs, backs and heads hurt. They were sent to sick bay. A few came back but some I never saw again.

I was 28 years old, but I could take what came my way. We drilled every day. I did three days of K P while there, but never ran into anyone who thought he was Little Hitler like the Corporal at Fort Ben.

We took time out to take tests for job rating. I wanted to train to be a gunner on a Bomber. The eye test showed a slight double vision and they said instead of one plane you would see a plane and its ghost. You maybe shooting at the ghost while the real plane shoots you down. What is your next preference and I said mechanic, I understand there is a school I can attend. They gave me the test and said I already knew more about it than they teach in this three month school. They have given you a Corporal rating but you won't get your stripes here, you will get them at next station. The pay starts today.

The last day of boot drill we took full field packs, arifle, ammunition belt and crawled across one-half mile of sand. Then we picked the man on our left up and carried him him across our shoulder, climbing a sand hill then stood him on his feet.

The next day was graduation. We marched to the concrete in front of the hanger, took our place and stood at attention and parade rest for an hour and one-half. We then marched back to the barracks. There was a man named Scott, who had previous service, who thought if he volunteered for Overseas duty he would get out of boot camp. They assigned him to a unit that was going overseas. He went out to celebrate the night of graduation and the M. B. found him in a wet ditch with pneumonia.

My classification was just below his. They woke me at three A M and said you and ten other guys have to catch a train in Bloxi at six A M. They gave me travel orders and a ticket to Alexandria, La. From Kessler Field the eleven of us were taken to the station in a truck. The train seemed to operate for troop travel and started in Boston down to Miami, across to Los Angles, up to Seattle and re-return. It had more than 30 cars. We were to get on a bus at New Orleans that would take us to the Burlington Station for a train to Alexandria, La. The first time the train stopped in New Orleans, our car was still out between two corn fields. Eleven men got off at the first stop in the station. They should have gotten off at Mobile, Alabama for pilot training. The bus driver saw eleven men, put them on his bus and took them to the Burlington Station. The Conductor knew he was to take eleven men to Alexandria. He asked no questions, he just put them on the train. The train made five more stops before we got into the Station. The station master looked at our orders and told us of the error. He called the bus back and the driver said he could get us there before the train left. He could not. He did take us for one wild ride across New Orleans trying. The next train was at eight that night. We got lunch and went sight seeing. We walked four miles to the docks to see ocean going ships. Little did we know that in three weeks we would spend 24 hours in the harbor at Freetown, Africa, and watch 120 ships come down the river and leave the harbor.

We got off the train at Alexandria at eleven P M and called the 331st Service Squadron. The Charge of Quarters said we picked up our 11 men at noon. He hung up the phone. We called him back and told him we were the guys he should have picked up. He said to call the First Sargent after six in the morning. We got to the 331st in time for lunch. We started helping them pack to go overseas.

In less than two weeks we loaded the train and the next morning twenty men got on that train. They would travel on the ships that took our equipment. About four hours latter a troop train stopped at the base. The rest of our 214 men loaded on with our personal equipment. We went to Fort Dix, N. J. to wait for a ship.

At Fort Dix I got my Corporal stripes. I met Frank (Jerry) berg, a piano player. We, after Margie and I married) on our first television watched him playing the organ for the Lawrence Welk Show.

We also were issued our M I rifles. In boot camp I had taken and old bolt action rifle apart and reassembled it. Most of the men had no more training than that.

We were told to clean and oil them then fall in at three for rifle inspection. After roll call Captain Cunyus ordered the Squadron to attention. You could hear rifles falling apart all over the Squadron. Captain Cunyus turned around, took off his cap, wiped his face and head with a handkerchief, put his cap back on, turned back around and said "I don't know if I have the guts to go overseas with you people or not. If I don't answer roll call in the morning, you will know I have gone over the hill".

The next day we lined up. My name started with "A" so I was point M an. We were told to put our shirts under the straps of our packs. We had field packs, ammunition belt, rifle and a barricks bag. We were two abreast and went to the medics, ~~whohad~~ a crew waiting for us. They gave us three shots in one arm and two in the other. We put on our shirts and in five minutes we were walking two miles to the train.

We were soon opposite the Dock Area on the Hudson River. We got on a ferry boat that took us to an enclosed Dock. On one side was the French liner Louis Pasteur and on the other side of Pier number six was the Normandy. It was being converted to an Air Craft Carrier. Two years and ten months later, when I disembarked from the U. S. Brown, it was a burned hulk, lying on its side.

We boarded the Pasteur. There were 3721 Americans, a British crew of 759. On July 16th 1942 we left just after daylight. There were boards in the outer windows. We could not let them down til we were out to sea, but we could see where we were as we went out thru the harbor, and past the Statue of Liberty. We thought we would be joining a convoy but we soon were told that this ship would be safer by itself, and that it would cruise at 35 miles an hour and could cut in a third engine in an emergency.

The ship's captain told us if he could see a sub's location before it fired a torpedo, it would never hit this ship. He said there was not a surface raider in the world it could not outrun. What he did not tell us was that for evasion purposes it would zig-zag on a different angle every eight minutes and make us so sea sick we would wish the thing would just sink. On the second day, about one o'clock, I was on the bow lying flat on the deck, watching a B-17 that had been circling us for a few hours. We were just south of Bermuda and had just turned east. The B-17 had started a wide decending circle. I looked at the man in the crow's nest. He had just picked up the phone. I looked at the bridge. Someone was on the phone there. By that time the B-17 was twenty feet of the water, just about one and one-quarter mile in front of the ship. I was on my feet. You could see the periscope just above the water. The B-17 began dropping depth charges. As the third one went down, metal, fire and oil came up. It happened so fast, anyone who was not on deck would not have known it.

We could not use radios, electric rasors or anykind of musical instruments. The barber could not use electric clippers. The ship's captain said we are running Radio Silent. Any of that kind of noise could be homed in on to pick up our location.

The next week would have been uneventful except that there was a lot of gambling going on. I took no part in it. One afternoon a man was caught with loaded dice. It was said that he had won \$3000.00 from a large group of men. Next morning he did not answer roll call. Everyone was herded to aft on the ship, came thru forward. Each man's dogtags were checked. We are a man short, the ship's captain said. We thought we sailed with 3,721 men but we were wrong. We had 3,720 men and one dammed fool. That ended it, the man never showed up.

Two weeks out of New York we were told we would go into the Harbor at Freetown, Africa to refuel and would be there 24 hours. About noon we saw men on life rafts, probably 18 or 20. The captain said, "we can't stop, that would be like asking to get our own ship sank." We have broken radio silence and called the Navy at Freetown. They will pick them up. If you are just carrying your life belt, put it on now. They know our location now and we will be vulnerable until we get to Freetown. About three that afternoon we met two destroyers going out to get the men on the rafts. About 4:00 P M two sub chasers met us and escorted us to Freetown.

We were just south of the equator and it was almost nine o'clock before it got dark. The water was so clear you could see a coin in twenty feet down. People came out on small craft, some did not look to be much more than a board. the men dropped coins and candy bars and the people dived for them. I never saw a coin that was lost.

Next afternoon at five, we left the Harbor with all three engines running. The ship set low in the water, the bow was high and I agreed with the captain. I did not believe there was a fight ship afloat that could catch it. It went so fast no porpoise played around the prow all the way to the Antarctic Ocean. We had seen rolls of water so high that the ship looked dwarfed and one moment the ship would be on top of those swells, the next it would be between. We would be looking up to the top of the water. One thing, it was not monotonous.

Richards, our mail orderly, was a barber. He kept hand clippers and sissors. When we got on the boat they told us we would be on it a month. Richards hung up a clipboard and said if you want a haircut, you pick the date. I will cut hair every day if necessary. My turn came at night. We were south of Capetown, Africa, far enough into the Antarctic that subs could not operate there. I went down into E-3 Port where we were assigned. He had a blanket on top of a twenty gallon can, a rope hung from a beam above. He said, grab the rope, you will need it. While I was getting my hair cut, Tom Bretherick came down and said A - Deck just dipped water. They are ordering everyone off the open decks.

Next morning we were headed north out of the Antarctic Ocean. A week later we were tied to a dock at Durban, South Africa on the Indian Ocean. They had pumped salt water into the empty fuel tanks while in the Antarctic for balast to keep the ship top side up. We were there thirty-six hours. We were given leave for the day. Tom Bretherick and I went into Durban together. It was a clean city. We started up the street when a black man stopped us. He was pulling a cart with a double seat. He said "I will take you where you want to go". The soles of his bare feet looked like the soles of gum boots. The temperature was 90 degrees and this was their winter. I said you don't have to haul us around. I think I'm more capable of walking than you are of pulling me on that thing. He stood up straight and said "you will not be using me you will be helping me". I still in school studying law." He used perfect English. He said on the way to town I'll tell you the places to go and the places to avoid. We got in and it cost us 25 cents each.

The first place we went was to get a good breakfast. Then we just looked around. It looked a lot like an American city except there Black people, Red, Yellow and White. We did not see most of those at home. The stores looked well stocked. We stopped in a Pub. They were ready to fight because we wanted cold beer. We left altho some G. I.s were there drinking it hot.

The Rickshaw man was outside and said "I will take you where the beers cold." He took us to a hotel. It was mid-afternoon so we ate lunch there and got a cold beer. It had couches with coffee tables to use. We bought newspapers and started reading. At five o'clock I realized my glass of cold beer was still setting on the coffee table, now hot, so I started reading again.

Two young women came in and sat down on a couch opposite us and said they were on vacation from Johannesburg with their parents who owned a sugar mill. They were coming down to eat dinner and asked if we were from the ship in the Harbor. and if we knew where we were going. We told them no. They said their brother was in the Desert and he was a pilot in the South African Air Force. He had told them three months ago that we were coming. There had been Americans in Eritrea for a long time assembling B-25's and P-40's, fighters for you to use. You are going to the Egyptian Desert. (So much for all the secrets - we were the only ones who did not know.)

Their Mother and Dad came. He asked us to let him buy our dinner. For a couple of country boys the five course meal was quiet unusal. It started with fish, then chicken, beef, dessert, then coffee, each served separately. When they brought the beef Tom asked how many meals did you people eat at one time anyway.

When I got back home my Mom showed me a letter they wrote to tell them where they had dinner with us, and where we were going. Mom and Dad still thought I was in the South Pacific.

Next morning we left Durban and went straight east til noon. The next day we were going northwest. Three days later the Captain said we are just entering the Gulf of Eden and the next will be the Red Sea and Port Touphi at the east end of the Suez Canal. You will disembark there. Tomorrow afternoon you will get your gear ready to go ashore. That night I was sleeping on the forward deck. We had had a strict black out. No outside lights for any reason, not even running lights. I woke up sliding forward. All the lights were on and there was a British Destroyer at one side, its lights on. The ships engines were in hard reverse. There seemed to be no more room between the banks than the two ships needed to pass. A voice on the speaker said "This is where they tell us the Children of Israel crossed the Red Sea." We were enjoying that thought when we almost knocked that Destroyer back to the Suez Canel.

Mid morning August 18, 1942 we were in the harbor east end of the Suez Canal. Disembarkation started almost immediately and was 4:30 P M when the 331st was situated into four tents with large openings and no bunks. We ate supper with a British unit, breakfast and lunch then were loaded on a train.

We were told that we were going to Rayak, Syria and that our equipment and the other men were in a Convoy traveling ten miles an hour. It would be maybe two months to get there.

That morning though was not uneventful. First the Captain said we needed to learn to walk again. The whole unit went on a two hour hike. The night before we had rolled up in one blanket to sleep. We were told to sleep with one arm through the rifle sling and the other through the ropes on our barracks bag. I did but everyone did not do that. There were a few bags stolen and two rifles. When we got back from the hike someone said there is an Englishman starting to peel two bushel of potatoes, lets go help him. Fifteen of us went and in fifteen minutes we were done and started back.

We heard a child screaming and went toward the noise. There was an Arab boy wearing G. I. shorts and undershirt. An English Sargent was whipping him with a whip made of bailing wire. We stopped him, took his whip and told him if we saw him doing that again we would use his whip on him. They were as glad to see us leave as they were when we came.

The train went west on the south side of the Canal to Ismailia, Egypt, crossed the Canal and north through the Sinai Desert. Our kitchen equipment was on one car, bags on another. I was assigned to guard the bags and told not to leave it. My meals were brought to me. The bathroom was anywhere in the Desert the train stopped. The other men were in cars with wooden benches.

We traveled in the Sinai all night. I probably was the most comfortable. Toward noon we passed Jerusalem. From the railway could be seen the walls of the Old City and the Dome of the Temple which seemed to be on the highest spot with white stones. I did not think there were so many in the whole world.

At noon we stopped at Ramidaly Air Field. I was brought my first meal on the trip. The mail orderly brought me three letters, one from Mom, one from Aunt Lillie and one from Walter Ashworth. I thought that is odd, he never wrote me in all the years I had been away. I opened it. It was addressed to Virgil L. Ashworth and the return address was Walter Ashworth. I started reading and thought this is not for me. I looked back at the return address and it said New Hampshire.

This man was in the South Pacific in Java when the Japs invaded. The 376 Bomb group had come to Oran in Africa, they were then at this airfield in Israel. I asked someone to give it back to the mail orderly. Often I got letters he had opened and sent back. Also I recognized his from then on. Later I read in the "Stars and Stripes" that he was killed in an airplane crash in early 1944.

We went on outside Jaffa about ten miles farther. We stopped at a small siding. There was a narrow gauge passenger train waiting and they transferred everything and everyone to it. The bags were put in a baggage car at the end and I was told that they would wake me for supper before we left. Other men ambled around but I climbed in on the bags and went to sleep. My supper was brought at 4:00 c'clock. I was told this train normally ran this road regularly. This trip it was all ours. We went over Mt. Hermon to the Jordan river, to Damascus, Syria, Rayak, Syria and to Beyrouth, Lebanon. We were going to Rayak, Syria, and would get there probably late next day. They brought another guard who sat in one door while I sat in the left.

We left about 5 P M. There was on my side an orchard of those big Jaffa oranges. An Arab was working there. I did not know that oranges were picked green. He was telling me to take an arm full and I was telling him they were still green. He finally realized what I was saying and cut one open to show me that it was ripe. We both piled oranges in to the car til the whistle blew. I, barely got on. The other guard grabbed my hand and helped me. We did not get hungry the rest of the trip.

At one A. M. we stopped on top of Mt. Hermon. The Captain said you walk toward the engine. Sgt. Henderson will be in front of the engine and he will watch as you pass around the engine and circle the train. Your buddy will go the opposite way and pass at the back of the train. The Superintendent said men in uniform will check the complete brake system. After they pass don't be easy on anyone who gets close to this train. We will be decending til 8 in the morning.

I was on my fourth trip around and started toward the engine again when I saw a large man walking slowly toward the center of the train. I stopped in a shadow and watched him. He went straight to the brake lines connecting the cars with a knife in one hand. He put the other on a brake hose. I set a G. I. shoe under his butt as hard as I could. His head went into the car coupling and from there to the ground and rolled over with the knife pointed up. My rifle was under his nose with the safety off. I called the captain. He said thats the man who told us to let no one near the train. They put two guards on him til the train left.

Going down that mountain sure kept me awake. It stopped at every little station to make sure, by phone, that the track was clear to the next. I was in the last car and many times I would still be on the upper side of a gorge going one direction and see the lights of the engine 100 feet below me going the other way, On the far side of the gorge. Daylight came and we were still doing this. About 9 o'clock we leveled out on the west side of the Jordan River. It looked like some of the Western rivers in the U. S., almost dry with what seemed much more than its share of cliffs and rocks of all sizes.

At the next station we were brought a chocolate bar and fresh water. We stopped in Damascus, Syria long enough for the engine to be serviced and arrived at Rayak, Syria at 5:30 P. M. The men had disappeared while the bags were being put on an open platform. We were told to come on the last truckload of bags. I had been on guard without relief for 2½ days and 2 nights.

We were stationed next to a French airfield in what had been a French University. We rolled up in one blanket each with no pillow on a marble floor. We were awakened at five in the morning for a breakfast. We could not eat. It seemed the British had our supplies and gave us the worst in the warehouse. The bread was so full of weavels that you could not pick them out, nor the bread out of the weavels. After you got hungry enough, the weavels had to look out for themselves. The bacon was canned and spoiled. We ate some orange marmalade and left.

That night we had beans with bugs and a can of hash. The group commander had a letter of credit but found Syria did not have enough for itself, so they sent trucks to Palestine and bought all kinds of fruit. I went from 170 to 137 pounds. We were told supplies and equipment to Russia came through Beirut, Lebanon, Rayak, Bagdad to Stalingrad. We would guard trains and trucks from Beirut to Rayak, 30 miles of mountains. I was on that detail for about a month.

The engines had air brakes and a big gear to put into a chain on the ties to help it up the mountains, and brakes for the cars, An Arab in a cubby hole on top of every 4th car with a brake stick to twist or release the brake wheel according to whistle signals from the engine.

About the first of October 1942, I was in Charge of Quarters one night, that was from 6 to 6 in the orderly room with a list of phone numbers in case of emergency. One was for the Doctor on call that night. A man came in about nine P. M. and said Zenzel is sick. He was one of the few men who ate supper and he is miserable. I phoned the Doctor on call and he said send him on sick call in the morning. I told them what he said. They brought him on his blanket to the orderly room. I called the Doctor again and held the phone where he could hear Zenzel carrying on. The Doctor said "I don't believe it" and hung up the phone. I called Major Cunyus who had been

Promoted. He said Col. Gross and I are playing cards. He said you call him back and tell him if he is not there in ten minutes you are going to wake up Col Gross. He will come. I did and the Doctor cursed me and hung up. In a few moments a Jeep bounced off the curb and the Doctor came in with his arm pointing straight at me. He said take care of you later. I said for now you take care of Zenzel. He looked at him and called the French Hospital. It was just across the park.

Next morning fifteen of us were called out for D. P. at Deversor, Egypt to help get planes ready to go to the front at El-Alemein 25 miles west of Alexandria, Egypt. We left the Doctor's jeep still at the curb. Deversor was on the Great Bitter Lake six miles east of Ismiala where the Canal runs from the west to Port Said and to the east to the Red Sea. We were there three weeks. One morning Lt. Sanders sent Frank (Jerry) Berg, Robert Cross and I to 12th Airforce Headquarters in the Sheperes Hotel in Cairo to get travel orders to a front line air field 25 miles west of Alexandria.

Major Cunyus was at 9th Airforce Headquarters getting travel orders for the 331st. The main unit, he said, would be in Cairo. They would leave early next morning for Landing Ground 174 and that we should not be on the road back to Devesor tonight. Sgt. Pleva had a place for us to stay. He said to see Cairo today and meet me in the hotel dining room in the morning for breakfast. I will give you the travel orders then. One of our trucks is at Deversor to bring you to 174.

We went out in Cairo and also the Pyramids. Berg wanted to buy a piece of jade to send to his mother. All the better stores had Allied flags hanging out front. One looked promising so we went in. Berg picked out the piece of jade he wanted. The store owner said that is quite expensive, I can sell that to anyone. Berg asked "Why not Me". He told Berg that someone is going to break the El Allemein line soon. If it is the Germans they will take you prisoner and they will take the Americans money from me. If you break the line, you come back. I will keep the jade in the safe with your name on the tag. Jerry went back three months later and bought the piece of jade. The owner said "come in the back room, I have something to show you, "we have to survive.". There were German and Italian flags there. He said if they break the line, I have to put these up before they get into town.

The next night on October 23rd at eight P. M. in 1942, three months and one day, we had left New York Harbor.

We were back at the Pyramids at the edge of Cairo. We ate supper and watched the first flashes on the sky. The push to break the El Alemien line had started. We knew it was more than 185 miles away and we were going to Landing Ground 174, eighteen miles of El-Alemien.

The flashes looked five miles away. We went into the Western Sahara Desert and at three A M we were at the Air-field.

Major Cunyus said "dig you a trench to sleep in. They tell us one of the four units that operate here gets hit almost every morning." William Julius, who had been my working buddy at Deversor, said lets dig one together. I slept in one and he in the other. We had studied the sound of different planes. At five A M, first the ground shook, then the explosion. I heard the rise and fall of a German Heinkle engine, then nothing. The all-clear sounded. I looked up out of the trench and saw that a bomb had fallen just to the west of us. I looked around and never had I seen so many ditch diggers. Everyone who had not already dug a trench, was digging one now, and most who had dug one was digging it deeper.

We had breakfast and were told to go to engineering to draw a tool box and make a list of what we put in it. We were assigned to crews. We wound up with seven five-man crews. Most of us worked together long afterwards. We were to do second and third escholin repair work. The P-40s had crews for their daily maintenance. They had started early A. M. runs over the front. It seemed they were making hourly trips and planes were already being brought to our area for repair. Our crew changed engines for the first American Ace there. He went through three engines in not many more days and shot down five German planes.

A few days after the line broke, Etc. Sanders told us the Ace we had changed the three engines for had landed in a hard cross wind looped and cut his arm. They took him to 37th Field Hospital at Cairo, stitched it up and gave him a shot of pennicillin to keep out infection. He had a reaction to it and died. We knew then that this was not going to be without cost to us.

With air support, the British 8th Army moved through the Desert with unheard of speed and chased the German-Africa Corps 1,191 miles to Cap bon on the Tunisian Coast in 193 days, where they met General Patton's and Mark Clark's Armies, who had come to Northeast Africa during the winter.

Herbert Erickson, who Goldia married after the war, was in that Army. He was also at the Anzio Beachhead in Italy. The B-24's I helped keep in repair made missions in their support at Anzio every morning.

Lt. Sanders was one of the first friendships I made overseas. He was our test pilot and assistant engineering officer. While in Syria we were free all day Sunday.

There were mountains all around and a large white place we could see. Lt. Sanders had flown over it and said it was a bank of snow at the 8,000 foot level, and it had a "needles eye". The Bible says "it is as hard for a Rich Man to get to Heaven as it is for a camel to get through the eye of a needle". It just means it is not easy, and does not mean it can't be done. The needles eye was a place with an overhang where the camel had to be unloaded so he could get on his knees and crawl through to get on the other side of the mountain and that is not easy for the poor beast. Lt. Sanders said there were switchback trails to 100 feet of the top. After that you have to crawl. One Sunday at five A. M., twelve of us started toward the mountains.

We were still in the Valley when we passed a small stone house. I saw an old man (he was not as old as I am now) come out. He wore a blue serge suit that had not been pressed for a long, long time, a felt hat in the same condition and said "I dress up every Sunday morning and sit on the porch". He asked "do you know where you are?" I said "about five miles from Rayak near the Syria - Lebanon border". He said "you don't know where you are. I will walk you a way." We came to a junction of the creek, which they call them all rivers. He said "this is where Jacob wrestled all night with the Lord", and he went back home. We went on up the mountain. Two men went back about mid morning. Three stopped when we had to start crawling up the slippery loose shale. Seven of us went up to the Needles Eye, went through. The far side and slopes leading away from it looked like they probably did two thousand years ago. We saw three large camel caravans going different directions.

We sat on the snow and ate the chocolate bars the mess sgt. had given us for lunch. We then filled our canteens with snow water. It was 1:30 P. M. when we started down. We slid the first 100 feet and were surprised that we kept our balance. Just after dark we were passing a vineyard. We were challenged.

A young man with what looked like a Pennsylvania long rifle said "I watch you all day on the mountain. I have picked you some of the best grapes I have". He gave us large bunches of long white grapes. We talked with him a while, thanked him and went on to Rayak.

Now back at the Airfield in Egypt we had a chance to pitch a tent. O'bradovich, Sam Larosa, Milchaski, William Julius and I dug a hole and set the tent over it. O'Bradovich and I have a picture after we took it down to move to Bengazi in Libia.

While still in Egypt, Lt. Sanders was given an assistant, Lt. Smith. I don't know who repaired the planes they were testing but they came over where our crew was working, at about 100 feet. A moment later someone said "look at the smoke". A truck came by and we got on. One plane had nosed over and went straight into the ground. The other was landing. The pilot was beyond recognition, ammunition was exploding. The fire truck put it out. Most were saying, hope it is not "Sandy". I did not say it but I was guilty of thinking it. Lt. Smith walked up and heard. I never felt more sorry for any man. He heard it and he left alone. Lt. Smith said he had noticed that Lt. Sander's cockpit cover was back about two inches then looked at something else. When he looked back he was not there.

I was one of the Honor Guards. It is locked in my mind forever.

In early March the two fighter groups had moved on east to the British 8th Army. In early March we went up the Coast to Bengazi, Libia. We began repairing four engine aircraft, the B-24. I was told to ride with Billy Martin and be his relief driver. Billy was a bit of a cowboy. He had been pulling our water trailer. Major Cunyus had been transferred and Col. Snyder was 331st Commander. He said "we have a seasoned mountain driver. We have some rock mountains to go over so Eugene Beckhausen will pull the water trailer".

Billy was driving a 2½ ton truck loaded with at least six tons of food and pulling an old four wheel Italian trailer loaded with four tons of food. I was relief driver. It took seven days to get to Bengazi. On the first mountain Beckhusen rolled the water trailer over the mountain. That left us with one 150 gallon tank mounted on an old truck axle to supply 214 men and a kitchen. While they were pulling the hulk back to the road, I heard someone ask Eugene why he was driving it and he said that Col. Snyder wanted to know that it was going to get there.

The British liked to stop wherever they were and brew up a spot of tea at two and four. A mountain or two farther along, steep with no guard rails, we had just passed a break in the wall for more than 150 feet on the left side. It was at least 300 feet straight down. I was driving and there was a sharp curve. A Company of the British were all over the road, brewing up a spot of tea. Col. Snyder, in front, stopped the kitchen truck. We stopped, not quite passed the open space. The old Italian trailer had no brakes. The truck's brakes had no chance to hold all of that weight. We began moving backward. The trailer was turning toward the abyss below us. Men came from behind piling rocks under the wheels.

It just rolled over them. Billy had pulled the hand brake so hard that it curved backwards. A wheel on the trailer was hanging three feet out over space. Billy and I still had land under us. Col. Snyder was telling us to jump. Billy said "we can't loose our food - Eugene has already lost our water." The truck stopped still. They had piled enough rocks behind it. We sat there til they got two gasoline tank trucks tied to us and pulled to leveler ground.

The Col. was gone. Billy and I walked around to get our nerves settled. We walked around the curve where Col. Snyder was talking to the British. The air was blue. We were at an airfield called Benni Main, eighteen miles south of Bengazi. It was just like the day the Germans had to leave it. Junk and bombs scattered everywhere. One crashed plane had burned, bones were still in it. The Medics came and got them. Before they got there some men took some bones for souviners. Clarence Hunt looked at me and said "When Gabriel blows his horn that guy will have a hard time getting together".

We spent several days just cleaning the field. There was a 3,000 pound bomb between the old hanger and the road with no detonator in it. It was thought safe and they had left it alone.

There was a British Air Unit there and the 98th Bomb Group whose planes we would repair. A few were already waiting for us. There was a rock mountain three miles to the east. The planes landing at night would sometimes scrape on it. That kept the sheet metal men busy.

At engineering we worked almost every daylight hour that we had, and did four hours guard duty almost every other night on four hour shifts.

Col Snyder said "we are quite vulnerable here for sea or air attacks. We need pa plan of defense so he made one and made sure everyone knew their own part in it. He found a copy of it in his garage two years ago and went to his computer, made copies and sent them to some of us.

On this last move we all did some sight seeing. I remembered some ancient history. Egypt and Libia had a border dispute. Instead of fighting about about it they each started the best runners they had at the two Capital cities. Where they met would be the border. When they met they both were so exhausted they died. They built a marble arch with two giant sized black marble men lying on a deck twenty feet above the road.

Where Tobruck had stood there was no city, just piles of rocks. Land mines were in piles and as I remember them, they resembled the salt domes the highway department uses today.

At the old city of Tarshish, where Jonah was swallowed by the whale and spit back out after three days, I have a picture of Woodrow Nelson behind a headless statute, with his head stuck up. Today Nelson is in a V. A. Nursing home just west of San Antonio, Texas. I sent his wife a copy of this picture. This was the old city, on the adjoining mountain was the new one, on a beautiful green mountain-side with roads to every house, a high rock wall circling it with broken glass lining the top. The glass glittered in the sunlight.

At Bengazi my watch stopped running. One morning near Easter I got a ride to town on the supply truck. The driver told me where he would pick me up in two hours. In ten minutes I had bought a watch. You know in the Middle East at that time, when you saw the Swiss guards, there was something worth seeing. They were guarding a large church. I went in. There had been a bomb raid on the harbor a few nights before and there was a big hole in the roof near the front. They had tarps up and men were repairing it. The church was still open to visitors. For a countryboy used to seeing plain country churches, my eyes really opened up. There were gems embedded in the arms of the pews, on the altar and all over the pulpit and this in a country that I thought was Moslem. There were Christian paintings all over the walls. I was looking at one picture and thought, if I move back the light will be better on it. I did. I stumbled on something, turned around and froze. There was a sculpture beneath the Cross where three people were. Christ had just been taken from the Cross. Simon and Mary were cleaning Him up. This scene was in motion. When I realized what I was looking at, it became still.

I went back to camp and to work. I layed down to sleep that night and I could not sleep. I could not get the thought from my mind that this was placed in motion for me. This, I still believe. I went out on the sand alone, knelt and asked God to forgive me in the name of Christ our Lord. Later in 1945 and back home I joined the Baptist Church.

When we reached Bengazi we built a firing range to practice on. There had been land mines when we got here. A British Sargeant brought a crew and cleaned them out. O'Bradovich and I were going to the firing range one morning, taking a short cut. There was about an acre of short brown grass.

We were about forty feet into it when Rudy stopped short and with one hand in front of me. I said "whats wrong?". He said "I think we are in a mine field". I asked if he saw one and he pointed thirty feet ahead. I saw two of those Bouncing Bettys five feet apart with a trip wire from one to the other. I said "don't move til we look around. There may be more." We saw several. The last place we looked was at our own feet. There was a mine between us. The trip wire went across Rudy's instep to another mine. I asked "can you move your foot back? Don't raise it". Rudy said "if I move it, I may set off the mine. My feet were free so I got down slowly and slid Rudy's foot from beneath the wire. By now we were trembling like leaves in the wind. We decided to only move one foot at a time and very slowly, and only after we both agreed it was clear. It seemed to take a long time to get out of there. We reported it to the British Sargeant and his crew came and cleared out the mines.

Someone asked "are you going on to the range?" I said "Now I couldn't hit a bear in the butt with a base fiddle".

At Bengazi there was enough soil to get muddy. We were about $\frac{1}{4}$ mile from our work area. One morning they found 21 Italian parachutes, after which there was a search made but found no one. We put on extra guards. I don't know what other units did but it was dark of the moon and you could hold your hand before your face and not see it. We had five B-24 s parked in a line behind the hanger, the British Unit was East of us, the 98th on the North side of the field. I don't know why no guards caught this but at 4:00 A M we were awakened by the 3000 pound bomb exploding. I rolled out of my bunk, put on my helmet and hunkered down, trying to make myself small as I could. Two men ran over me getting to the trench outside. I looked up and saw the most blue and red sky. Rudy said "I've been hit". Sam Larosa and I went to him. He had been sleeping with his knees up. There was a hole in the tent and if he had been sleeping with his knees down the shrapnal would have hit him in the face. He went to the Medic. We dressed and went to engineering. There were two British planes burning and one B-24. Tom Brethrick said to me it has to be fire bombs. We searched the other planes. The one burning was on the East end, the guard had been sitting under the next. It was clean. We found three fire bombs on the other three - 9 in all. Tom took them off and I carried them 50 feet from the planes and laid them in a row. Tom got a Soldier's medal for taking them off. I was not mentioned. We heard some of the 98th guards were knifed. No paratroopers were found.

That morning I and a man, I will not name him, were told to check anyone and everyone who used the North - South road. They picked a place where both road banks were high. No one could see us til they were right on us. We knew what kind of bomb we were looking for and were told to check their clothing for them. We were just under the bank from the Orderly room. The Officer of the Day was there. We found no fire bombs. The train that ran between Bengazi and Berne had wrecked so traffic was more than usual.

About 2:00 P M two Arabs wearing white pants and shirts with flowing white robes and leading white horses with large bags hanging from their shoulders said in English that they thought we would be checking the road so they dismounted before getting to the base. They did not mind their clothing being checked but refused to open their bags. I said I will have to call the O. D. He said that was ok. The other guard stuck his rifle under one's face and said open them. They opened them and I never saw so much money in one place before or since. I said all I want to do is make sure no fire bombs are mixed with it. When he said "you can't touch it" I fired my rifle into the air. The O. D. was soon there. We took them to the orderly room, checked the money and found no fire bombs. The O D sent them on their way. They were Bank Messingers traveling between Bengazi and Berne. Our relief came and I don't know how long they checked the road.

Next day, back at Engineering things went well. Still no one was found. That night I drew guard duty 10 until 2. The guard tent was just across the road from the old hanger. A 12 foot fence, between the hanger and the road. The guards got on the truck, the Sargent of the Guards drove us to our post. The O D was Captain Percy. At my post the other guard had been under the middle plane. There were three. I had been working on the one on the south end. My tool box was setting against the outside wheel. I laid my jacket on the tool box and sat down to listen for unusual noises. I could hear the half track patrolling the runway. It did not disturb the sounds around me except a moment or two when it was at the nearest point. Outside the thump, thump of a desert rat and crickets and that was it.

Shortly after eleven I heard something scrape metal ever so lightly then nothing. Later I heard a weed break. The wind always blew sand and grit on the concrete apron between me and the bombed out hanger. You would hear it grit when you stepped on it, only this man was not walking. He was crawling flat on his belly. He could not help the sound, but what he did not know was that the sound spread through the concrete apron and I could discern a sure direction but could not tell his distance from me. He would move once and wait. I remembered I was wearing an illuminous watch. I put it in my shirt pocket and heard him grunt his disapproval. It took him over an hour to cross the apron. When he reached the far ground I could tell the direction. Seemed he crawled to a point about 50 feet due east of me. He started a 'straight line toward me. Another half hour had passed. I knew if I fired and missed he would have my sure location. I had a clip in the rifle, a shell in the chamber and a clip in my right hand so when the first clip ejected, I could place another in my left a clip I could grab and do the same. I wanted to excite him from the first shot. He was getting too close. I held my breath trying to pin point him. He could hold his breath longer than I. He was too close now. I pulled the trigger, kept pulling it, heard the clip come out and injected the second one. He was running back the way he had come. I heard noises and cursing as he ran over things and heard my clip come out. I injected the third. I heard two shots from in front of the hanger and heard the wire fence fuss as he climbed it. I got to the edge of the hanger as the lights from the guard truck came on. He was standing in the lights with his hands up. They took him to the stockade. The O D said that is the first time I ever heard an eight shot rifle fire 16 times without reloading.

Until we went to Italy we had a man, I don't remember his name who was multi-lingual. Next morning he took two breakfasts and he went to eat with the new prisoner. The guard let him in. He wore prison denim and told him he was a trusty. He said we are breaking out of this place and if I know how to reach your friends, I can alert them. We will have a better chance together. The prisoner told of a room cut into the quarry on the mountain. The "Trusty" got up, walked to the door, took a key from his pocket, unlocked the door and left. The prisoner knew he had been had.

About nine in the morning about 20 British M. P.s came by on their way to get the paratroopers hid in the mountain. I quit work, climbed up on the plane to watch the paratroopers run them off the mountain. They stopped at a safe distance and watched. I went back to work. Three hours later there came about 40 soldiers, Indian Sikhs and Sudinese led by a South African Captain. They had guns of all kinds, bands of ammunition - more on each man than I could carry. The Italians came out without a fight.

Now and then there would be a raid on the Harbor. From our location, eighteen miles south, we watched. The anti-aircraft fire would go up to a point in the center of a giant circle. It just seemed to float up. Lights searched the night sky for planes. When one was found most of the lights concentrated on it and soon it would start falling.

In July there was a chance to get on a C-47 and go to Egypt for a week. It seemed every Thursday it would take a load to Heileopolis Airport at Cairo and bring back a load who had spent the week there. The first thing we did was to go to a Turkish bath where you got into the steam and pulled out what seemed to be rocks embedded in my skin. We then got a real hair cut, shampoo, shave and felt like a new person. William Julius and I decided to see Alexandria again and went to the railway station.

The board read luxury fare \$7.50 each way, first class \$4.50 and on down with sub fares 85 cents. It was 185 miles. Julius said "let's buy an 85 cent ticket and save our money to spend in Alexandria". The ticket agent said "I won't sell you less than a first class ticket. walk to the end of the train. You will learn why." I said "we will take two luxury tickets." We walked past the outside of the train. The first class cars had wooden slat seats and down to what seemed to be cattle cars with holes but no windows. They were full of people even on top. I asked "don't people ever fall off of there?" He said "when they fall, they just fall". We rode on air cushions that reclined. Seemed the week was over before it got started.

On the morning of August 1st, when I got to work at six in the morning B-24s were lined up from the head of the runway back through the taxi strips. Gasoline trucks were topping off the fuel tanks. Mid afternoon we were told that they had made a low level raid over the Polesti oil refineries in Romania. They said when we got supper to come back. All crews be alert to help planes that may need help when they landed. When they started landing everyone was busy. Our crew, #7, moved three planes with major damage and towed others. We left the field about 11:00 P. M. The B-24, Mountain Mist, had come from England with a flight of planes to make this raid. It had damage. Our crew, #7, put in a new fuel cell and a new engine. It went back to England.

About ten years ago, Margie, our son Donald and I were at Wright Patterson Field Museum. We came to a hanger with only one plane. It was Mountain Mist. The board told about it's part in the raid and the repair it needed to go back to England.

I watched a program on Public Broadcasting last night entitled "On A Wing and A Prayer" narrated by the Pilot of the B-24, Utah Man. It was in one of the squadrons that came from England to join the attack on the refineries at Ploesti. Also, before I forget to note, most of those refineries were built or owned by Major American Oil Companies and were being used to supply the German war effort to defeat and control all of Europe.

We were told a plane in the first flight struck a barrage balloon cable and went straight up the cable. The pilot that narrated this program said that he was leading the flight. He said the plane was so overloaded that when they were gaining altitude to get above the buildings, it just went straight up and over backward. There is no wonder we saw men kissing the ground when they got back on it.

I got a little ahead of the time with my writing. I missed something I think I should note. Before the Germans surrendered on Cap Bon, Tunisia, they sent in more than one hundred Transport Planes, which would carry about thirty men, to try to get key personnel. We had not serviced planes any more for the 57th and 79th Fighter Groups. I read in Newspapers that came from Egypt. It seemed the two Fighter Groups were alerted, one group would stay in the air an hour, then go in for gas, the other in the air. Later on Psalm Sunday, the Germans began taking off. Both groups hit them. According to the newspapers, more than 35 planes were shot down. Historians called it the Psalm Sunday Massacre.

I think it was about early October. We went to Enfideville, Tunisia. As far as I knew the move was uneventful. We camped on a hillside in sight of Cap Bon. There was a flowing Artisian water well with plenty of good cold water. I think we were there for five or six weeks. There we saw the first Roving Tribes on the Desert. The Orderly Room and Supply Tents were on the hill top. Our tents were scattered on a hillside. The Germans were out of Africa now and apathy had set in. There was only one guard at a time and he walked around the supply tents. He could see all over the tent area. He saw a young Arab walking around in the tent area and went down to run him out. The Arab took the longest way out. The guard walked back to his post but he did not have one any more. The Roving Tribe had carried off the food and clothing. We got breakfast after a truck went to Tunisia for supplies. Breakfast was at 3:00 P. M.

We were told that we were now in the 15th Airforce and would be going to Italy to an Airfield close to Manduria and would repair B-24s for the 450 Bomb Group.

About the same time it seemed they wanted more gunnery. Somehow my original application showed up and I was sent to a Flight Surgeon who said he could make me a pair of glasses that would overcome my double vision. All he did was make me a pair of glasses so strong that they felt like they were pulling my eyes out. I said to forget it and went back to camp, laid them on a rock and hit them with a hammer. I sent my mother \$25.00 and asked her to have a pair of glasses sent to me from my last prescription while in Evansville. I got them in six weeks and my eyes soon stopped hurting.

Thanksgiving 1943 we were on a hillside above Berzete Harbor in Algiers. We were waiting for a boat to Toronto, Italy.

I was prancing up and down trying to keep my boot tops above the mud. I was basting two turkeys on a gasoline stove dipping the grease as it cooked out and pouring back over them. I did it for four hours. Five other men were doing the same thing. After dinner Lt. Porterfield said that he saw one man go through that line five times. Two days later we were on an L. S. T. going to Italy.

Two days before we left Enfidiville, #7 Crew was alert crew. A plane had trouble landed where it should not. We went to get it back in the air. When we got there the Crew Chief had fixed it and they had gone. We were gone about six hours.

Fifteen of us had been assigned to be advance detail to Italy; that is, to get there first. Our equipment was on the truck we would use, waiting orders to go to the boat. When we got back the truck was gone. I asked "what happened?" I was told that we had to send some one in your place. I asked "where are my bags and toolbox?" They said on the truck, you will get them in Italy. If you need clothes see the supply Sgt.

At Berzete Harbor we had left the dock. It looked about like going down the Ohio River on a real windy day on a Cork.

I had been on K. P. the past week in the mud. The C. O. said you have taken a cold this week. On this trip don't you do anything but rest. There were Englishmen on board and I was talking with one when the boat began to rock more and the trucks on deck began to break loose. We both started tying them down. With my head down I got sick. I kept working but it got worse. I got up and ran for the rail. The Englishman had hold of my coat tail saying "it's not that bad, Ole Chappie, don't go over the side, You'll get over it".

We unloaded at Toronto and went to the airfield. There was no Advance Detail. We pitched our tents in the shade of the olive grove. Next morning we were told that on the second of December 1943 the ship ~~cut~~ fifteen men were on was sunk in Bari Harbor. They would be a few days yet in getting here. When they did come they had a lot of burns. Most of them got medals as they carried other men out of the ship all night and ~~part~~ of the next day.

What we had not learned yet, was that it ~~was~~ anticipated that we would have more work to do. Something like thirty men were waiting in Barri to join the 331st. They were on a dock when the ship was sunk. Just last year it was admitted that the ship had mustard gas on it. One of our men died, probably from the gas. We were told then that he died from pneumonia. It was kept under wraps for years. The 331st Reunion Committee voted to list him as killed in action.

The B-24' of the 450th Bomb Group had not yet arrived. We had some time to make ourselves more comfortable. The Carpenter shop found lumber and floors were built for the tents. Sgt. Harzinski disigned and built stoves from six inch water pipe, assorted pipe for a vent out the top of the tents. Our crew went to the junk yard of wrecked Axies planes and salvaged oxygen lines and valves. They were used to carry the gasoline from a five gallon can outside the tent where the valves let it, a drop at a time, into the front lip of the stove. When lighted, it would blow torch through the stove.

A few days later the Bomb Group arrived. Still no planes that needed heavy repair. It was raining most of the time. Men from the 450th came and the Carpenter shop and the Welding shop helped them make their tent comfortable. The rest of us knew that if we sat around in the open, there would be some close order drill, so we stayed out of sight.

Three of us went into Manduria. In a small shop we found a Turkish Coffee set. We bought one set each. Back at the base I made a box and stuffed sawdust into mine. I laid them in the sawdust, fastened the top with screws and sent it home. Nelson laughed at me for being so particular. He stuffed his with newspaper. The cream pitcher was broken. He went to the little shop and told the owner what happened. That was a mistake. We had bought them for \$20.00 a set and he wanted \$15.00 for the pitcher. Nelson cursed him out and left. Two months later he went to the shop in his coveralls thinking the owner would not know him. He picked up a cream pitcher and took it to the counter. When he asked how much, the owner said "to you, \$25.00." Nelson threw it at him. He ducked and the pitcher smashed on the wall. The owner started out yelling M. P. Nelson ran, hid in a woods til dark, then came back to base.

The Commanding Officer had changed. When we went to Italy, Col. Snyder was transferred. Major Van Buskirk from the Headquarters Squadron was our Commanding Officer. Our men, who had been waiting in Bari, came. A young man named Quigley, from Tampa, Florida joined our crew and we were back to five men again.

The 450th started going to Pollesti one day and somewhere in Italy or Austria the next. One day our crew was assigned a plane that had been to Austria. All four engines, both alerions, the entire tail assembly and cable controls were gone. The pilot and co-piolet brought it across the Alps and all the way to Southern Italy with only the two outboard engines operating, controlling it with the trim tabs. We spent three weeks on it and it still had to go to the sheet metal shop.

North of the runway was a road. Farther north was an Olive Grove with much larger trees than where we pitched our tents, were at least 1500 feet past the road. The planes would not use more than half or two-thirds of the runway to take off. But one had not. On the grass it could not stop before hitting the trees. It was a salvage job.

We finished the plane we were working on but needed to replace the glass in the rear gun turret. Nelson and I went to get it from the salvage plane. Nelson got in the gun turret to hold the bolts and I was on a crew stand ten feet high with rail around, two feet higher. The planes were taking off but were high in the air when they passed over us. I had taken out a few bolts when Nelson was pointing his screwdriver over my shoulder. I looked behind me as a plane crossed the road, and was coming across the grass at what looked like take off speed. All I could see was four big spinning props. I went over that rail, hit the ground running. The plane was going over us but he was cutting olive limbs. I saw a man on the ground and I hit the ground beside him. When the limbs and leaves stopped falling I got up. The man beside me was Nelson. He had gotten out of the turret and waist window and got here before I did.

In March 1944 we saw the first snow fall - five inches fell just before daylight and it was gone by ten A. M.

At Casino the armies were stalled in a Mountain Valley, a Monestery at the head of the valley. Germans had made it into a formidable fort, nothing had penetrated it. Finally the Ordnance men brought a gigantic bomb. I have no idea what it weighed. It had a heavy arrow point on it. To load one, the center support from the cat walk had to be removed. One morning a flight dropped them on the new German fort. Two days later the Armies went over the mountain.

Newsriters, yet today, complain about blowing up that Church, as they call it. It was War time. It had been built into a Fort. I can't help wondering if they care about the lives that would have been lost; had it not been removed.

One day at noon I was in the chow line when Tom Bretherick the Line Chief came and told me someone was waiting for me under the plane we had been working on. He said he knew me in Kentucky. It was Herman Morris, the fiddler's son I had played music with. I took him to lunch with me then introduced him in the Engineering Office. They told me to take off work while he was here. We talked til the guys in the tent were ready to throw shoes at me. A truck from his unit stopped at ten the next morning to pick him up. I wrote to tell his parents.

That summer, Clarence Hunt, our crew chief had been in and out of the hospital so much they sent him home. Jack (Pappy) Bailey was our crew chief. He got my S. Sgt Stripes for me. Bailey died four years ago.

One morning before Clarence Hunt went home we were making our own inspection of a plane just assigned to us that morning. Hunt was inside and I was outside. He was checking the nose wheel mechanism from inside and I was looking at it outside. He said don't touch anything, don't even breath. Get from under the ~~plane~~ and get a jack under the nose. I had to go get the jack. Then we looked close at the lock. It had been run back to where the latch was only one-sixteenth inch contact. It was sabotoge. We reported it. More planes on the field had been tampered with. They were adjusted. Who ever did this was persistent. A week later a main landing gear collapsed on landing. All main landing gears were checked. I never knew of the landing gears being tampered with anymore.

The week before Easter, Chaplin Best, of the Bomb Group, was looking for a place in the open for Sunday morning Church. He said he had permission to use the theatre area, just a wooden screen painted white, where we sat on the ground. He asked if we would help him get a speaker stand made. We took him to the Carpenter shop. The Sargeant in charge said he would make it and have it in place for Easter. Easter morning it looked like 2,000 men there. Two large Palms, one on each side of the Pulpit were there. The Bomb Group had gotten their first unpainted B-24s. One of those aluminum planes stood just behind Reverend Best. It was beautiful. He held services there til the cold of winter moved it inside. After the war, Reverend Best was Pastor of a First Baptist Church. He died four years ago. The First Baptist Church in Louisville, Kentucky

We had a chance to go to Rome for four days. The American Army had reserved a hotel on the Tiber River. The Vatican City was in sight, the most prominent building was St. Peters Church. The day we toured the Vatican, they said you men are in luck. The Pope is holding Audience today. We were taken to the Auditorum part, way into the Dome, the same room where you see the Pope speaking to people in St. Peters Square. On the way to the Vatican the bus stopped for the men to buy Rosaries to have Blessed by the Pope. When I did not get up, I was asked why. I said "I'm not Catholic.". He said the best thing you can give a Catholic who may not get here is a Rosary Blessed by the Pope. I bought three strands, and gave them to men at the base.

When they carried the Pope past, we were lined on both sides. He touched each strand as they carried him by. After that, two hours allotted time of our four and one-half hours was gone. Our guide took us through halls of paintings where we could have spent a week. We also saw the Sistene Chapel that Michel Angelo painted. A student was copying his painting of the Last Judgment. We saw where the Pope is elected and saw the little pot-bellied cast iron stove where a kind of paper is burned that makes a white smoke to tell the people that a new Pope has been elected. Our time was up.

On our way home we stopped at the old city of Pompei, much of which was still burried under volcanic ash. I read last year that has been uncovered and still digging. I saw and took pictures of Mount Vicuvis. It smoked the whole time we were in Italy.

We were in Naples at sunup. We blew the myth that the Navy has beans every Sunday morning for breakfast. We spent more than an hour finding the Navy kitchen to get a meal of beans. It was just like back at our base, smelly canned bacon and dehydrated eggs.

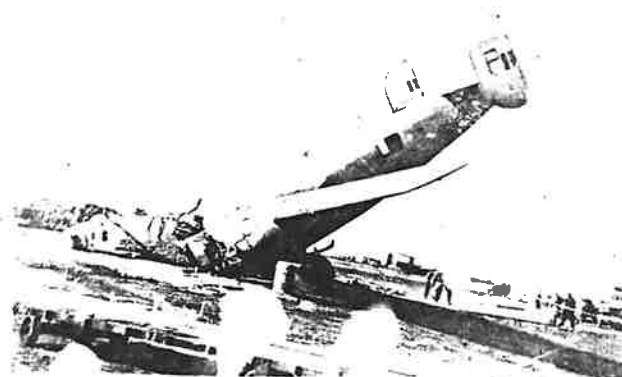
Back at the base, we learned the 15th Air Force had made a very successful raid on a tubing and ball bearing factory in Wenner Newstat in Austria. Now with the oil refineries in ruins with no tubing to repair it and no bearings to keep wheels turning, the Germans were real mad at the 15th Air Force, the 450th Bomb Group in particular. A few nights later we were awakened by Anti air craft fire. Soon the All Clear sounded and we went back to sleep.

Next morning Edward Kolman said he was on guard duty. The first planes had dropped gas west of the Field. Thinking it would cross our area. The West to East winds were quite high, dispersing the gas, without harm. He said Paratroopers dropped just northwest of the Field. The British had expected them and were lying in wait. They picked them up as they touched the ground. For the next five days we worked with a gas mask hanging on one shoulder and a loaded rifle on the other. This happened earlier while Hunt was there. There was a B-24 making a routine flight - some men just getting in some flying time. Officers had to have a few hours flying time each month. We were Alert Crew that day. The planes had gone to Palesti and would be landing by 12:30 noon.

The runway had to be clear. This B-24 was not getting in the air. The pilot bounced it instead of grabbing the air, the nose wheel gave away. The plane slid to a stop on the runway, the props bent under the engines that were rubbing on the ground, the cockpit gone. Only the bottom of the nose metal with the two seats on it. The controls were gone. No pilot or Co-pilot. They just were not there. The top gun turret was lying on three men on the flight deck. It was eleven A. M.

The batteries had to come out before they could lift the turret off these men. They were in a two feet high and wide tunnel under the flight deck. I went in to get them, crawling through leaking gas and fire prevention foam the firemen had spread. The terminals screwed on and off like an outdoor water valve with two terminal points on each side. I could not let touch metal. An arch would set the whole thing on fire. I got one out, passed it to Hunt and went back for the other. When I pushed it up so he could reach it, he fell down on top of me and got up mumbling. I could tell he was mad. When we got out he told me there was a pack of cigarettes laying on the console between the seats. As he reached to get the battery, a man pushed him off balance, picked up the cigarettes and walked away.

John Atchley used the large C-2 wrecker like a pair of tweezers in picking that turret off the men. The tail was 45 degrees in the air. Woodrow Nelson had climbed up and put a line on to pull it down with. With the men out, we tied any kind of line we had, fastened to any kind of vehicle we could get, some men pulled with their hands, and dragged it sideways off the runway. I heard engines overhead. The planes were circling, waiting to land.



In October the Major told me I could go home on rotation - thirty days to get to the States, thirty days at home, come back to New York and thirty days Back to base. . He said I would be Tec Sgt. next day. I told him I intended to get seasick only one more time. I would wait for a one way trip. He made the offer to St/Sgt. Lash. In December he was back and was Tec. Sgt. next day. The Major said does that change your mind. I told him I would still wait for a one-way ticket.

We heard that some of the men going home would be short of money when they got to the States. I sent \$300.00 home and asked them to put it in the Hawesville bank and send me a check to buy a ticket with if it happened to me. The checks never came. When I got home I found they had bought an old car with it. It was not worth \$50.00.

On the morning I was told that four other men and I, who had waited for a one-way trip, were going home. We would leave that night. We spent the night in Barri, waiting for a train. It was February 15th 1945. Many others were there for the same reason.

Now when we went to Rome in a G I. Truck, it took 4 $\frac{1}{2}$ hours to go from Bari to Naples. We were going to the world renowned race track near Seven Hills, just south of Naples. We thought on a train this will be a short trip. Wrong. When the train came at five P. M. next evening, it was ten box cars, held together by chain links and shock absorbers. It traveled slow. I was on the third car from the end. We sat on the floor. A man sitting over the Axle said "I can tell which way it's going without looking out, going forward there is one small flat place on the wheel and two big ones going backward. It's two big ones and a little one.

About eleven o'clock we stopped. We looked to see where we were. The last four cars had come loose and rolled to a stop. We got off for fear another train might hit the cars just sitting there. About one o'clock they missed us and came back down the track to get us. We got to the race track at one P. M.. Twenty hours to cross Italy! The race track was a marsheling point for men returning to the States.

Once you signed in we were told the list of men going to ships will be posted every two hours, between eight A. M. and six P. M. It is your own responsibility to find your name, time and where you meet the truck to take you there. I was there four days.

I boarded the U. S. S. Brown, a Liberty ship converted to carry 4,000 troops. When the last man came up the gang plank, one man was quarreling over the rail with an Officer holding a little dog. Seemed he wanted to take the dog and the Officer said "no".

The man whistled real sharp. The dog broke lose and came up the gang plank. The gang plank was raised. I saw the man and dog at camp Kilmer, N. J.

The next evening we went through the Straits of Gibraultor. Just as dark came, Next morning, we were in an Atlantic storm that lasted until we got to New York. We were in a ten ship convoy. A sub-chaser made the trip alongside the Brown. The seas were so rough at times you could only see the Bridge of the sub-chaser. I thought those guys are better sailors than me. I was seasick for eight days. I could not get in the dining area as I would get sick as soon as I could smell it. I knew if I could get some soda crackers, I would get over it but I did not know how to get them. The eighth day I was assigned to guard the galley supply room. They gave me a loaded rifle and helmet. I found the crackers, hid the gun and helmet and put a carton of crackers on my shoulder just as if I were delivering it. I went down to our compartment and gave thirty men, most of them seasick, a package of crackers, then took one for myself. I told them to get some of these then make small pieces of the carton and boxes, keep them out of sight and get them over the side. The next morning no one from our compartment was sea sick. I was on duty all night and felt like I could eat. The smell of the Dining area did not bother me. We each had a meal ticket. When I gave mine to the Lieutenant to be punched, he said "now give me the card you have been using". I told him that is all I have, and he said this one has not been punched for eight days. I told him I had been too sick to eat. This morning I feel good, I want my breakfast so punch the card. He said "you don't eat on this card - give me the one you have been using or you don't get in". I said "I have been sick. I have not eaten for eight days. I'm going in for breakfast. If I have to take you with me, that's okay too. He said "I'm convinced", & punched my meal ticket". I was not sea sick the rest of the trip.

The night before we arrived in New York Harbor, no one was allowed on an open deck. I lay in my bunk with the ship rocking end for end and rolling side to side, creaking and groaning with every move, listening to a near constant explosion of depth chares. Some were so close they shook the ship. The water never smothed til we were inside the Harbor.

About eight in the morning, we were all on deck. As we passed the Statue of Liberty so many men were on the starboard that the ship was leaning. A loud voice said "look, come and look over here". Men went to the other side. The ship leaned to Port. Some said "What are we looking for?" The first voice said "there is a tree growing in Brooklyn". We docked at pier #6, the same one we had left from 2½ years ago.

The best selling book at the time was "There is a Tree Growing in Brooklyn".

We unloaded on the same inside dock. The loud speaker said "you will be here from thirty monutes to four hours as the trains are ready to take you to Camp Kilmer. The ferry boats will come for you". I was there about an hour and one-half.

During that time more Civic and Church groups than I had ever heard of, gave us soft drinks, sandwiches of all kinds, cake, ice cream - all the stuff we had not had for so long. If you had both hands full, they would set something in front of you on the floor. The ferry came and it was my turn to go to the train. With my bag in one hand and a sandwich in the other, someone stuck a box of ice cream and a wooden spoon in my pocket.

We got to our barracks at Camp Kilmer, picked out a bunk and set our bags on it. A whistle blew at the door, chow is ready - don't miss this one. We went to the mess hall where the band was playing. There was all the steak and trimmings you could think of. We all ate so much that we did not even go to supper.

I was tired and went to sleep at seven P. M on the top of a double bunk. When I woke up at two A. M. the barracks was doing everything the ship had done for the last thirteen days but creak and groan. It also seemed to be swirling in circles. I thought I have to stand on something solid to get my land legs back so I started to the latrine, surprised I could walk a straight line. The latrine was jammed and men were going outside. A man coming in said "I thought all the sand out there was just to make us Desert Rats feel at home but now I know what it is really for." The next morning there were prisisioners out there cleaning it up and putting down new sand.

At breakfast the loud speaker kept saying "this is your last chance to shower and shave for two days. You will be traveling". At mid afternoon we boarded a train headed for Camp Attebury, Indiana.

At Camp Attebury the speaker said "we don't want you to go home broke so you sign this paper and draw \$200.00. You may have that much coming or you may not . It will be balanced up at your next station." We bought a ticket to Indianapolis. They gave us a 21 day Delay in Route to spend at home and travel orders to Santa Anna Air Base, thirty miles south of Los Angeles. At Indianapolis the ticket agent told me the water was up - no way to get to Hawesville, Ky. I bought a ticket on the bus to Evansville. I got off the bus in Evansville at seven A. M. March 15th 1945, one month ago I had left the 331st Sqdn in Italy.

At breakfast at the bus station, I called Aunt Lillie and told her I would visit the men in the bottle shop where I had worked. I walked into the bottle shop. At the line near me, Lile Metcalf was running the filler and three men I had worked with were off-bearing, putting the bottles in the pasturizer. I walked toward them. Lile just stared at me while the other three men's fingers turned to thumbs. The bottles piled up and broke. I knew they were too busy to talk to me now. I turned around and Jack Cook, the foreman, was standing looking at me just like Lile. I walked toward Jack as he had said nothing yet.

I said "a man could easily get the idea that he is not welcome here". Jack said "they are in shock as I was, too. One day last spring the waitress at the Chili King brought a newspaper in, which said you were killed in an airplane crash in Africa." I told him I knew of the man it was. We had the same name, even our father's names were the same. He was either from Vermont or New Hampshire. I said "spread the word that I'm still alive and I will stop on my way to California."

I went uptown and bought a new suit, shoes, shirt and tie then I went to Aunt Lillies. Ray Jr. was in Japan. His car was in the garage with a new top on it and his clothes were cleaned and pressed, hanging in the closet.

The radio said the water was receding and the first train would leave at 7:30 next morning. I called home. Dad met me in the old Ford they had bought. I asked why he did not drive the Chevrolet but he did not answer me.

On the way home we had a flat tire on the Ford. While we were changing it, he told me that a year ago and they had no notice of it, there was a write up in the Evansville newspaper that I had died in a plane crash in Africa. They had sold the Chevrolet. He said the last payment was made last month.

I found that I could get ration stamps for tires so, to have a way to go, while I was there, I put new tires on the Ford. That night Gilbert Morris, his wife and family came. I told them where Herman was stationed and that I had visited him once. They were glad to know where he was. We played music for a while and they went home happy.

It seemed I had just gotten home and it was time to catch the train for California. I stopped at the bottle shop. The visit was much better this time.

I arrived at Santa Anna Air Base in early May and was told on signing in that I was on a shipping list, whenever the ship came in, in early June.

I was sent to see a doctor. There was a convalescence area. The Doctor told me I should spend my time there. I did not agree. He asked "how are your nerves?" I answered "like iron". I noticed him look up at the girl at a desk behind me and I did not see this until after. She had a piece of strap iron fastened with an innertube rubber to a tin pan. When the Doctor looked at her, she pulled the iron back, turned it loose and I almost climbed over the Doctor. I said "so this is how you do it. The damned place must be running over." He said "son, you will enjoy our center. It is the best life you will have in the Army."

In the Convalescent Center every three barracks was a unit. The upstairs of the middle barracks was a doctor's office. You reported there right after breakfast every morning, then you went to the gym for one-half hour, longer if you wanted. After that, the day was your own. In the day room was a wall of books and a room where the Teletypes were. You could read the news as it came over the wire. I had a Class A pass and could take the bus to downtown Los Angeles. I saw most of the radio shows put on.

Back to the center: My first morning to report to the doctor, my name was called. I went to his desk and gave him my papers. He seemed to be looking at them a long time. He laid them down, looked at me and said "Virgil L. Ashworth". He reached for his billfold and looked at the paper he took from it. It looked worn. Then he said "you were a Corporal in the 331st Squadron in Rayak, Syria. I told him I was. 'I still did not remember him. He said "you were Charge of Quarters one night. I was Doctor on Call. You asked me to come see a sick man and I refused. The third time you called you cussed me out. We need to talk". I said "do you have a mind like an elephant? don't you ever forget anything?" Men were looking at us now. He said "take a seat, when I finish here we will talk". I sat down, getting madder by the minute. When he motioned me to come back to his desk he was leaning back and grinning and said "I have to get to the point quick for I know you are ready to hit me in the nose. I owe you an apology. I spent the night and til three o'clock next day with that man. Without a doctor, he would have died. What can I do for you while you are here? I have your name, rank and serial number. When I came by to apologize, you had gone to the Desert. Since then I have looked for you everywhere I have been. Is there somewhere you would like to go when you leave here?" I said "There are three fields that have B-24s two hundred miles from home. I would like one of those but they told me I was on a List to go to the South Pacific." He said "Keep your bags ready to travel. You have been overseas 2½ years. You deserve better than that."

Two weeks later I was reading in the Day room. I was given an envelop which read on the outside "Ashworth, go to the Dentist office now. See the first sargent after." At the Dentist's office they fixed thirteen teeth and took the nerves out of five. The First Sargent gave me travel orders and a ticket to Symrna, Tennessee, 21 miles south of Nashville and said you are on your own. The 4:30 A. M. electric train from here will get you to the station at six, the train leaves at 6:30 A. M.

At Engineering I reported to the Colonel in Charge. He told me "we train pilots to fly the B-24s. They do transition flying around the clock. We need you for the preflite crew to do inspections and write repair sheets. The planes go through the hanger like a production line. You inspect them going in and you inspect them when they come out. Anything wrong, make a new sheet and they come out and fix it. If anyone questions your sheet, bring it to me. There is one thing I need to know. You are a Staff Sargent. Ordinarily you would be a Crew Chief but you are within one point of qualifying for your Discharge. When they count points again you are out of here. We don't have much rank here. The Crew Chief is a P. F. C.. He is a good mechanic. There is one more P. F. C. and a Corporal. Can you work with them and leave rank out of it. They have told me they could". I told him there was no problem. They were good men and we worked together well. My work orders were never questioned.

On October 9th 1945 I got my Discharge at Scot Field. "Ashworth" the man said "was first again." Colonel Christian handed me my Discharge. I gave him a salute for the rest to shoot for, done an about face and walked out the front door. I had gone in a side door. I never looked back. I don't know what the front door looked like. I got on a bus to St. Louis, then to Evansville and back to work. Three years, six months and twenty-seven days of my life had passed.

I have been asked, how can you remember things so long past? I think it is as simple as this; Treat your fellow man the way you would like to be treated, read your Bible with a view toward remembering what you read, letting it and the Christian people guide you. Live so you will be glad to remember what you said or did. Of course, the study I did on how to remember music you have heard" I believe has helped bring many memories to mind.

by Virgil Lee Ashworth
1-4-1994