

"ROUND TRIP ROSIE"--A SHORT HISTORY



By: Bob Breneman, 1st Flight Engineer and Top Turret Gunner.

When I began to contemplate what I would include in this history the question became, not what I would include but what I could? Far better if this were 1945 after my return from Europe when remembrances and recall were at their peak instead of 58 years after our war experience when much that occurred in those years has faded from memory. It follows that place and time in this account may not be in accord with the actual events. For example, I'm not sure when and where we 10 Army Air Force personnel were selected to become a B-24 crew. It was either at the end of our training in Tucson, Arizona at Davis Montham Air Base or at the base in Alamogordo, New Mexico, then the home of the 450th Bomb Group.

I lean towards Tucson for it was there that I and perhaps all others first crawled inside a B-24. We came from various parts of the country, pilots from flight schools, navigators from navigator schools, bombardiers from wherever they learned the intricacies of the secret Norden Bomb Sight, radio operator, airplane mechanics and gunnery schools like the one I attended in Fort Myers, Florida. It was the summer of 1943 and Tucson was Tucson, hot and dry! You could then, and still can, hang the wash out and retrieve it dry in 20 minutes.

What else can I say about Tucson? Not much! I don't recall going into the city and I doubt that many did. I know that, when not flying, I spent the remainder of my waking hours in a hanger pouring over B-24 technical manuals to learn all that I could about the machine that was to eventually bear us to Italy and beyond. Others were doing the same and it was towards the end of summer and the end of our training that I believe orders were posted establishing the members of our crew. They were:

Lieutenants:

Lou Samsa, Pilot
James Green, Co-Pilot
Leonard Getuan, Navigator
Frank Bublitz, Bombardier

Sergeants:

Robert Breneman, 1st Flight Engineer and Top Turret Gunner
Edward Papierniak, 2nd Flight Engineer and Nose Turret Gunner
Ralph Vorhees, 1st Radio Operator and Waist Gunner
Fred Uphoff, 2nd Radio Operator and Waist Gunner
Thomas Newman, Tail Gunner
Lyle Hansen, Ball Turret Gunner

If Tucson was not the place of our birth, Alamogordo was certainly where we came together to become a single unit focused upon honing our skills. There were four squadrons in the 450th bomb group comprised of about 15 planes each and their crews. The 720th, 721st, 722nd and our squadron, the 723rd. This is where we flew as a crew practicing bombing runs, flying formation, firing our 50 caliber machine guns and exercising all of the systems that a B-24 had.

We had specific duties when flying. My duties as 1st Flight Engineer placed me on the flight deck with Lou Samsa and Jim Green and included operating the landing gear and flap controls during take off. I did the same on landing in addition to calling out air speed so that Lou and Jim could concentrate on getting the beast safely onto the ground. Not that a B-24 was really a "beast"---or was it?

Much has been written and shown about the B-17. The press glamorized it because of its sleek looks and the fact that most of them were based in England, the focus of a lot of attention in those days. Of course, it was a great bomber and contributed immensely to the war effort. By contrast, the B-24 was not all that pretty and the general public was not aware that there were more B-24's produced than B-17's, flew more missions, carried a heavier bomb load, dropped more of them on targets and flew faster than B-17's.

The ability to fly faster had a drawback! The fuselage of the B-17 was constructed atop a rather large wing which gave it the ability to "float" with a long glide ratio if it lost some of its power. This also limited its speed. The B-24 was designed with what is called a "Davis" wing through the center of the fuselage and was shaped to minimize drag and thus increase speed. This feature was not so forgiving when not under full power. One had to "fly it" with a great deal of expertise. There were none better at it than Lou and Jim!

Several weeks into our training at Alamogordo, we were notified that a new B-24 was on its way from the River Rouge Ford plant in Detroit and that it would be our aircraft. One that we would fly to a base overseas and into combat. By then we were a confident bunch of warriors, proud of our manhood and mastery over that complicated machine and eager to get on with winning the war. We gathered on the tarmak to watch our new B-24 land. It taxied to our location and the pilot dropped from the bomb bay, walked to us, removed the flight helmet and said "There's your B-24". SHE was a short good looking red head. I sensed that all of our egos had been diminished to a level approaching normal.

Now came the fun of giving our new craft a name. I can't recall how the conversations went but Lou Samsa had a girl friend back in Chisholm, Minnesota by the name of Rosie and recognizing that aircraft and ships at sea were always referred to as "she" it seemed fitting to use her name. I don't remember who may have suggested that we add the words "Round Trip" but with the name decided the resident artist painted it and an image of a curvaceous gal beneath it, on the left side of our B-24. We were now ready to go to war. Well, almost!

A large bomber needed more than just a flight crew so we were assigned 3 ground personnel who were trained mechanics. They were; John Hohman, Emerson Lee and Henry Greenough. Henry was the chief of that crew and reported to me. Their duties began before we took off and again when we landed. They fueled the plane, made repairs, helped load bombs, etc. So, when orders arrived to proceed on the long journey overseas, there were 13 of us who boarded Rosie in late November and flew the first leg to Herrington, Kansas.

The air base near Herrington had all of the facilities to make major or minor repairs and we were there to receive further orders and tend to the needs of our aircraft before we left the country. We had some things that needed to be done so we were there for several days. On one of those days, Jim Green, with a rather devilish grin on his face, gathered us around and said that he had been appointed treasurer of our crew and had been given a large amount of cash (I believe it was \$1,000) to be used in whatever way necessary to get us from here to there. Getting us from here to there probably didn't include renting a bus and driver to get to and from the town of Herrington but it saved a lot of walking or hitch hiking. Thus, Jim was not only our treasurer but our banker and we managed to spend down a portion of the funds on the way to Italy. I have no idea how he settled the account after we arrived at our base in Manduria.

The next leg of our journey took us to West Palm Beach near Miami, the last stop in this country. I knew that I was responsible for the maintenance of Rosie but I wasn't aware of the degree until I was called into the office and required to sign a piece of paper saying that, indeed, I was the responsible person. But, also that Rosie must be in good working condition when returned to U.S. soil. Well, as you will learn later, some of it was returned to U.S. soil but it wasn't working very well. We were there for a day or two during which ground crew members Lee and Hohman left us. Their orders called for them to accompany our supplies by sea to the port of Bari, Italy. Our orders took the remaining 11 crew members south to Trinidad on the first leg of the Flight to Manduria.

The flight overseas was largely uneventful. My memory of Trinidad is singular: RAIN and sleeping in a bunk surrounded with mosquito netting. The next legs were to Belem and then Natal, Brazil of which I remember nothing other than Natal was to be our launch pad for the long flight over the Atlantic ocean to Dakar, Africa. It was the shortest distance between two points and within the range of our fuel load but was still a long flight lasting about 11 hours. With the plane on autopilot we took turns at the controls, relieving the pilots so they could stretch their legs, played cards (black jack) and sang songs over the intercom. I distinctly remember singing the popular tune "Paper Doll" in harmony with Fred Uphoff and Ed Papierniak as we droned on above the Atlantic. My primary task was to watch the gages and transfer fuel from the spare tanks to the main tanks. With that done----back to blackjack and singing. We didn't see much of navigator Leonard Getuan because he was up front in the nose of the ship with his maps, shooting the sun and using the radio direction finder to plot our way. We would not have much leeway for error and had to hit Dakar pretty much on the nose. And we did!

What a strange land, Africa, with different looking people of whom I had only seen pictures in National Geographic. I have no idea what tribe they belonged to but they were tall. Perhaps Zulu. They were not allowed on the base but some would gather near the fences and watch our activities and occasionally try to mimic our western ways. I observed a group of 4 sitting on the ground with a deck of playing cards. They just sat there, patting the deck but nothing more. The surrounding landscape had many gnarled trees where large lizards clung to the bark sunning themselves. We found it convenient to do a little target practicing on them with our 45 caliber automatic pistols.

The next leg took us North to Marrakech in French Morocco for a day or so of rest and more fuel. I remember going into town for an afternoon and seeing some of the more modern parts but the old walled city which would have been interesting had locked or guarded gates that we mere Americans were not allowed to enter. So much for the welcoming by Arabs! They were unfriendly then and much worse today.

Then it was East to Tunis followed by the shortest leg of our journey to the heel of Italy and our base at Manduria. The 450th did not fly over as a Group. Each plane was on its own and I think we were one of the first to arrive in December of 1943. The base had one dirt runway running East and West that the Army Corps of Engineers had graded and laid down steel mats. The barracks contained, among other things, a few Italian stragglers who promptly left. There were some downed wires towards Manduria that left us without electricity so we had to track that down and get back on line. Even so, the barracks had never been wired. So, with no appropriate tools at hand, but with customary Yankee ingenuity, we lay on our backs and drilled holes in the ridge board with our 45's, installed insulators, wired sockets and added light bulbs.

We were short of supplies when we learned that the ship with our other two ground crew members and the things needed to keep Rosie in the air had experienced engine problems at sea and was limping across the Atlantic at about 3 knots. Just what we didn't need! So, we climbed into trucks and visited other groups in Southern Italy begging this and that which we usually got. We even made a midnight raid on a British supply depot in Toranto at the toe of Italy. The guards were very nice about it and we filled the trucks with lumber and all of the things needed to construct floors for tents etc.

Manduria is somewhat of a blur to me. I can only remember being there once. It was a typical small Italian village with a square and fountain and the usual shops, a restaurant or two and, of course, a bar where you could get wine. My afternoon there with some of the 450th gang was memorable only because of the black horse drawn carriage that continuously circled the square. Every so often a curtain would be drawn aside and a lady of the evening would beckon to one of us to come aboard. The carriage looked more like a hearse and the woman inside was far from inviting. There were many of us in town that day and I never saw anyone accept her offer. The wine? Ugh!

As in the States, the officers were quartered separately from the non commissioned personnel and we seldom got together when off duty. When we met at Rosie for a mission it was all business and no chitchat. So I have no knowledge whether or not they got to Manduria nor of their impressions if they did.

Christmas and New Years came and went without much celebration. We didn't have the trees, lights, gifts or other trappings of the holiday season. Besides, we were busy getting ready for our first mission which occurred on Jan. 8th 1944. According to the records, the target was an airdrome in Mostar Yugoslavia and only the 721st and 723rd squadrons participated. Most of the later missions were comprised of all four squadrons but none of us flew every mission. We were usually given a day or so in-between to rest and repair our aircraft if needed.

At that time, the rule stated that we could go home after completing 50 missions. I learned after returning to the States that the number had been reduced to 25, possibly because there would have been few, if any, who would have survived 50 missions. Also, we were beginning to see replacement aircraft and crews arrive in January so there may have been enough backup that could take over well before a given crew completed 50.

Unfortunately, I didn't keep a log of my missions but several of the early ones were to Yugoslavia and at least one to Bulgaria. On the way to the target of one of these, either Lou or Jim told me that we were losing oil pressure in the left inboard engine. I climbed into the top turret and saw oil from that engine being blown back along the wing so I told them to shut it down and feather the prop. Feathering of the propellers amounted to turning them edgewise into the wind so they would not "windmill" and cause drag. This was done by hydraulics using the engine oil. The 3 blades of the propeller only turned part way and were still windmilling. I then suggested that they bring the nose up and come close to a stall. This would do two things. Reduce the air pressure on the blades and move any remaining oil in the sump to the rear where the outlet to the hydraulic pump was located. Well, putting a B-24 loaded with 500 pound bombs near stall speed with only 3 engines working is a tricky business but Lou and Jim did it and it worked.

Of course we had dropped out of formation and had to head back to the base. No airplane was supposed to return to the base with a load of armed bombs if it could be avoided because one crash landing could wipe out the operation. So, they had to be jettisoned somewhere. In this instance, the Adriatic sea. Some of the later missions included targets in Northern Italy and flights to the Anzio Beach head. Anzio was not far away so we made two runs that day. However, it only counted as one mission towards the 50.

One of the longest missions was to Toulon, France where the Nazi submarine pens were located. Whoever calculated that a B-24 with a full load of bombs could get there and back before running out of gas didn't leave much of a margin for error. After hitting the target and on our way back, I transferred fuel from the spare tanks to the mains as I always did on long flights. Darkness came and Lou and Jim began to ask me if we would make it. I would check with Getuan to get his estimate of the distance to the base, look at the gas gauges and respond. The gas gauges were not what we're accustomed to in our automobiles but were "sight tube" gauges. That is, they were glass tubes mounted on the back wall of the flight deck that were filled with gasoline fed from the bottom of the main tanks. If the tanks were full, the glass tubes were full and vice versa. Of course, as Rosie rolled back and forth in any turbulence the gas in the tanks sloshed around and the fuel in the sight gauges went up and down.

Sloshing or no, the gas level was getting quite low and Lou or Jim would periodically ask, "Can we make it"? I don't know where we would have landed in the dark anyway and if Getuan's figures were accurate it looked to me that we would. They were accurate--and we did make it. After I flopped on my bunk and was nearly asleep, Henry Greenough, our ground crew chief, came in the barracks and informed me that he had taken the wood pole with markings indicating gallons of fuel, lowered it into one of the tanks, heard a "squish" and found only dampness on the end of the pole.

We experienced anti aircraft fire (flak) over most of the targets but managed to escape without any holes or other damage to Rosie or her crew. We had seen but few enemy fighters until that fateful day of February 23rd 1944. It was to be Rosie's and her crew's last mission.

Fred Uphoff was not with us that day because he had suffered frostbite to his hands during a mission a few days before and the doctors grounded him. His replacement was a fellow named Marinangeli. The target was a ball bearing plant at the Aero Engine works in Styre, Austria. It would be a long flight during which our P-38 fighter cover, limited on range, would have to leave us somewhere over the Adriatic. As we crossed over land and after arming the bombs, I crawled into the top turret and readied for combat. All others had done the same. Ed Papierniak in the nose turret, Ralph Vorhees and Marinangelli at the waist guns, Tom Newman in the tail turret, Lyle Hansen in the ball turret, Frank Bublitz setting up the Norden bomb sight, Leonard Getuan keeping track of where we were and Lou and Jim holding tight formation on the left wing of our group commander, Colonel Mills. We were the lead squadron.

Rosie's last few minutes:

We proceeded over Austria towards our target and a few minutes past 12 o'clock noon I saw what appeared to be a swarm of bees far ahead. Those bees were FW-190 Luftwaffe fighters forming up to attack us. They had the advantage of deciding when to engage. They came at us at 12 o'clock level with their machine guns and cannon firing before they came within range. With our speed of about 225 miles per hour and theirs at probably around 375 the enclosure rate was 600 miles per hour equivalent to 880 feet per second. That gave us only 2 or 3 seconds to be effective in firing our 50 caliber machine guns. Engaging head-on meant that they could hardly miss us nor we them. After the third wave of attackers passed overhead I saw that both wings of Rosie were afire. Their cannon had punctured our fuel tanks and it was an inferno out there. Aluminum heated by fire fueled by gasoline rammed with oxygen melts away much like paper burns in a fireplace. There wasn't much time. I triggered the intercom and said that we were on fire with no chance of extinguishing it so "Bail out". Then dropped to the flight deck, snapped on my chest parachute (no room for it in the turret) dropped below, pushed the red handle opening the bomb bay doors and proceeded out the cat walk. Co-Pilot Jim Green was right behind me. In fact, his right and my left foot touched each other.

At this point in the story it's important to know that what followed occurred within a period of 2 or 3 seconds. I believe that Jim turned and called to Lou to "Come on" as I pushed my way out and free of the plane. I say "pushed" because Rosie had rolled over on her left wing perhaps by 45 degrees or more and was not far from spiraling straight down to the earth with centrifugal forces that would prevent anyone from leaving her. Jim didn't make it!

There was a war going on up there and I had no intention of hanging in a parachute to be riddled by FW-190 machine guns so I fell free spreading my arms and legs to slow the descent like you see sky divers do today. The only thing we were taught about parachuting was where the rip cord was located. It would be my first and last jump. As I fell I saw Rosie a short distance North, ablaze and heading straight down and then it fell apart or blew up not far above the mountains with the wings coming off. It appeared to me that the wings were floating upwards, but I was hurtling towards the earth while they were wafting down. I then pulled the rip cord and within a minute or two brushed the side of a tall pine tree and came to rest within inches of its trunk with my parachute draped perfectly over the top. I had not received so much as a scratch and was but 7 or 8 feet off the surface of a snow covered mountain. It was my 13th mission and my luckiest day.

It didn't require much effort to free myself from the chute harness, hug the tree trunk and descend to the 2 feet of snow that covered the ground. But, where was I? After covering the bright orange "Mae West" with snow and finding it impossible to dislodge the very visible white parachute from its tree, I proceeded through the trees to get a better look at the small village that lay below and removed the escape kit from my flight suit. Among the various items were rubberized maps of the areas traversed by our flight path, a compass, some high density chocolate and a few other goodies.

After studying the maps I could only come up with a general idea of where I was. The village looked peculiar because there was no smoke rising from chimneys and no visible tracks in the snow. I began to think it was uninhabited. There was, however, a small stream and a single railroad track running north and south through the village which might offer an avenue of escape for me and any others of the crew who may have survived. I knew that Rosie had crashed north of me on the other side of the mountain so I set out climbing in that direction but I was only wearing a thin flight suit and the deep snow made it a difficult slow climb. I would stop and rest from time to time and looked back once to see if I could spot that tell-tail white parachute but then realized that it really didn't matter for I was leaving tracks in the snow that could be easily seen and followed.

It was about 3:00 PM and I had just entered a large bald spot on the mountain with no trees or other cover and was about to proceed when I heard a voice from behind call out "What are you doing climbing around in the mountains?" I turned hoping to see one of the crew. Unfortunately it was a man and young lad dressed in their native *liederhosen* and a soldier carrying a rifle. They escorted me down to the village. Indeed, people did live there and the man who spoke those words in almost perfect English was the *Burgemeister* (Mayor) and the lad was his son. (It was years later when I learned that the soldier was a villager on leave. He was killed during the war.) I was offered coffee as we passed the Mayor's home in the village which I declined.

It was nearly dark when we reached a school house. Upon entering, I saw Lou Samsa lying on his back on one of the benches. He was wounded with bits of aluminum in his legs and it was obvious that he had been in Rosie when it broke or blew up shoving him against or through the skin. He had managed to retain consciousness and pull the rip cord. We had but a short conversation before I was taken to the basement of an adjacent building and placed in a jail cell with a pot bellied stove.

There were two cells, but the other one was vacant, perhaps reserved for the village drunk, if there was one. They had prepared a fire in the stove which I found very comforting for I was wet and cold. I began to dry some of my clothing near its opening when I saw people descend the wooden stairs and peer at me through the bars. They came from the village to see what this American airman looked like. They were not hostile, just curious, and one of them even offered to buy my watch, but I declined.

When I added more fuel to the stove it was of a compressed form that gave off little or no smoke which explained why I saw none when viewing the village from the mountain. Also, I learned that there had been a fresh snow fall that morning before we arrived and it had covered all previous tracks. So much for "unoccupied villages."

If someone told me the name of the village I didn't retain it and around 9 PM the Gestapo arrived. They took me out to a waiting car where they had my parachute and "Mae West" and placed me in the back seat with one of them. It doesn't add much to this story, but that vehicle was Hitler's "Peoples" car. Yes, a Volkswagen Bug later imported to the U.S. in large numbers.

As we drove off my thoughts were of the fate of our other crew members. It would be one year and 4 months later after my return to the U.S. and to the home of my loving parents that I learned that none of the others had survived. I would see Lou once more in France before boarding a "Liberty Ship" to sail across the Atlantic to our wonderful shores. Lou and I were to spend the time in-between as "guests" of the Germans. Those are stories not meant for these pages.

IT WOULD BE CONVENIENT TO END THIS NARRATIVE HERE BUT SOMEHOW ROSIE AND HER CREW HAVE ALWAYS LIVED ON.

In 1975 my wife, Norine, and I traveled for a month in Europe starting in London then flying to Paris where we rented a car. We toured France, Germany and Austria, ending in Zurich Switzerland. In addition to seeing the sights, I wanted to find the village where Rosie went down but not knowing its name would be a problem. Using a detailed map of Austria, I drew a circle of about 50 miles diameter with its center located where I estimated Rosie would have been in place and time. There were about five villages within the circle that seemed to match the features that I recalled. As might be expected, all of them were located near a mountain stream but not all had a railroad track running through it. So I narrowed the choice to 3 and made Grunau my first choice. I had prepared a narrative of the events of that day in 1944, had it translated to German and carried copies with me.

We entered the village from the north and I sensed that this might be the one. Having reached the other end I stopped beside an elderly couple who were walking in our direction and handed them the narrative. They read it but shook their heads indicating they had no recollection of Rosie's demise and then pointed back towards town and said "Gendarmarie" suggesting that we try the police station.

When we turned around what we saw in the distance convinced me that we had found the right place for on the mountain to the north was a large bald area near its top.

Grunau is a small but charming place and we found the police headquarters on the second floor of a building located in the center of town. Police headquarters turned out to be two small rooms the door to which opened in response to our knock. It reminded us of a "B" movie for there stood a fellow in his uniform identical to what we had seen in the theaters back home. His name was Karl Helmrich and after reading my narrative invited us in and to the adjacent room where he opened a thin book containing the documented history of Grunau's crime and much to my delight, the story of Rosie and her crew. It occupied the majority of the book's pages and I was able to communicate by sign language my desire to photograph those pages. He, in turn, indicated his need to call his superior to get permission. He then looked out a window, opened it and called to a woman walking across the road who immediately turned around and ascended the stairs. We passed one another as I was going down to get my camera from the car. When I returned I found that she spoke perfect English and she was to be our interpreter. Her name was Maria Drack and had spent several years in Hollywood as a servant to actor John Forsythe before returning to Grunau to marry a man who owned a saw mill and small electrical generating turbine located nearby on the stream.

It wasn't long before Karl's superior, Josef Bieregger, the equivalent of "your local sheriff" arrived. He was a most friendly fellow and I proceeded to photograph the pages during which time Maria called the only hotel in town and made arrangements for an overnight stay. Josef then led us down to the street and began to tell everyone who we were and why we were there. Among those that we met were the local "green grocer" and a fellow by the name of Gotfried Stadler who had helped carry Lou Samsa from the mountain on a ladder. At first he thought I was Lou but it didn't lessen his enthusiasm when he learned otherwise. Several of the fellows drove us out to where Rosie went down and asked if I wanted to climb up to the site. I wasn't dressed for that nor did I have the proper shoes to make such a climb so I declined their offer. Upon returning to town we were left on our own to check into the hotel and browse the shops having agreed to meet at Maria's home in the afternoon. We were learning that most everyone had memories of that fateful day, including the fellow who owned the gasthaus. He told us that, as a child, he watched the bombers and fighters battle in the skies and Rosie's fiery descent to the mountain.

There was quite a gathering at Maria's and we talked and talked while drinking some wine that I had purchased in Germany. Later in the afternoon Maria went to a window facing east and called "Boob" (though good, her English was not entirely perfect) come look at this rainbow". It was a brilliant rainbow arching from where I was captured back to the mountain where Rosie and her crew perished. I stared in awe for it seemed that I and those that were left behind were suddenly reunited. I am unable to describe it any other way.

We invited everyone to be our guests for dinner at the hotel and had a delightful evening, retired rather late and said our good-bys the following morning. It seems that our appearance in Grunau had refreshed their memories of what was probably the area's most dramatic event of World War II. Our visit was headlined in a newspaper published in a larger nearby town: "EX-AMERICAN BOMBER-FLYER VISITS CRASH SITE IN GRUNAU / INVITES FRIENDS TO U.S." and generously stating within the text that my wife and I were "unusually friendly".

We came away with the same thought of the gracious citizens of Grunau. After returning home, I had the abstract from the chronicle of Grunau translated into English and have appended it to this narrative.

I have exchanged letters with Josef and Maria over the years and they are great people. But so is the daughter of the "green grocer". Her story follows.

A year or so after our return home, Norine received a phone call from this daughter. I was at the office and Norine called me to say that the daughter, now married to a doctor and living in Connecticut, had been back to Grunau to attend the funeral of her brother who had become hang gliding champion of Austria but had been killed during one of his jumps. She had learned from her father of our visit and wanted us to know that, when youngsters, she and her brother climbed to Rosie and removed one of her radios. They took it to their tree house, attached a battery and it still worked. She wanted to know if I would like to have it and though I certainly would have, I told Norine to call her back and tell her that, especially with the death of her brother, the radio would have a very special meaning in her life, so keep it. It was nice to learn that at least a small part of Rosie was alive and well. We could not know that a few years later other pieces of Rosie would arrive at our door.

Our youngest son, Scott, having earned a degree at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, set out to roam around Europe by bicycle. He eventually arrived in Yugoslavia but said the treatment there made him uncomfortable. Recalling our experience in Grunau he headed in that direction and wrote that the welcome received was not just friendly but "overwhelming". With several men from Grunau as guides he climbed the mountain where Rosie came to rest and was reported to be singing loudly as he searched the site. It was August 8th, my birthday. The package that I opened a week later contained some rather misshapen parts of Rosie including a trim tab from one of the ailerons and the lower portion of one of her rudders. They came complete with Austrian ants which I'm sure are still around the yard somewhere. I was surprised that he could find anything of Rosie since it had long before been hauled away for scrap.

A reader of this account may be wondering what happened with waist gunner, Fred Uphoff, the one left behind with frost bitten hands. I had remained in touch with Lou Samsa from time to time over the years but neither of us had any information regarding Fred. I had tried through the VA and other avenues to determine his fate but always came against a blank wall and eventually concluded that with more missions to fly he just hadn't made it back alive.

About 12 years ago I received a call from Don Papierniak, younger brother of Edward the nose turret gunner. He had been looking over Ed's memorabilia and found a letter that I had written to Ed's parents in 1945 after my return from Europe. Thinking I might be alive somewhere he managed to track me down here in Wisconsin which also is where the homestead of the Papierniak family was located, in Thorpe. It was a long conversation during which he made it a goal to find Fred Uphoff. He had a computer at the office with access to the white pages of every community in the country. So we terminated the call but thirty minutes later the phone rang and I heard Don say "Bob, here's Fred" and "Fred, here's Bob" then heard Fred speak an expression that I had heard so often, "Holy cheese and crackers" -----"I thought you were dead".

Fred and I were reunited the following year at a 450th Bomb Group Reunion held in Cincinnati. Our wives were with us to share in our joy of being together for the first time in over 45 years. We were joined by Lou Samsa and his wife at a later reunion held in Rockford Illinois and also attended by Don Papierniak and his wife who's initiatives had finally brought together the remaining members of Rosie's crew. We have since been in regular contact with one another, sometimes at our homes, other times at Group Reunions and more frequently by telephone and e-mail.

On one occasion I gave Don a few pieces of Rosie which he promptly cut up to share with others. He and his wife also traveled to Grunau in 1991 and received a warm welcome. They too saw a rainbow and left Maria and Josef a laminated copy of a wonderful dedication to the crew of Rosie which he hopes has been placed in their visitors center. I want to thank him for all of the things that he has done, and continues to do, in behalf of Rosie's crew and their families. He has become our historian and most valued friend. I consider Don to be a member of Rosie's crew, just as if his brother Edward were still with us.

Much has been written about World War II, the veterans who fought and those on the home front. We grew up during the "great depression" when most of us were poor as judged by any standard but as one writer put it "It was a class room that taught us to be independent and innovative". Others would add that truth, loyalty and dedication were part of the bedrock that allowed America to quickly build an enormous industrial and military complex dedicated to winning the war. Books such as Tom Browkaw's "The Greatest Generation" chronicle the lives of some who fell. Others would aptly describe our fighting men as courageous, fearless, valiant and heroic. The men of Rosie who were left behind on the mountain near Grunau, Austria were all of those things, and more. They were my friends-----and I miss them!

November, 2001

GRUNAU
CHRONICLE

ABSTRACT FROM THE CHRONICLE OF GRUNAU IN THE DISTRICT OF
ALMTAL, AUSTRIA

Feb. 24, 1944:

An America plane has crashed and some crew members were taken prisoner: On Feb 23 at about 12:05 past noon, our fighters which were part of a strong unit, shot down an enemy plane. Two American crew members parachuted and were captured. Two parachutes and their belongings were taken. The outcome of the plane is known.

April 22, 1944:

On April 21 a dead crew member was found from a crashed bomber by patrol leader, head policeman of the Gendarme Felix Kruber and local outlying policeman Michael Kaltenbrunner. According to the identification this body is James R. Green identification number 0-804650 T 42-43 AP, of the USA.

April 25, 1944

Today in the presence of our local policeman Franz Hiebl and outlying policeman Kaltenbrunner, the body of the airman (Green) was buried near the crash site in the mountains of Grunau by some French prisoner of war. The identification which was a silver charm on a chain was delivered to the Wels Air Base Command.

May 8, 1944

On May 6, in the mountains near Grunau 6 enemy bombs were found. The 500 pound bombs were detonated by a demolition disposal unit from Lambach, Austria. In addition, 7 enemy crewmens bodies were also found.

May 16, 1944:

On May 16, 1944 the bodies of the 7 enemy crew members which were found were buried in the Grunau mountains. According to the identification the U.S.A. airmen are:

Leonard Getuan, Enr. 0-803387 T 42-43 O P
Ed. L. Papierniak, Enr. 16156843 T 43-43 A B C
Franklin J. Bubnitz, Enr. 0688305 T 42-3-O P
Lyle L. Hansen, Nr. 17165525, T 42-43 O P
Ralph E. Vorhees, Nr. 35343644 T 43-43 O P
John J. Mariangeli Nr. 36071849 T 42-3-A
Thomas K. Newman Nr. 33175835 T 42-43 A C

They being of the same crew with James R. Green, were all buried together. The grave site is located in the forested hills or more precisely on the south slope of the Grunau mountain side at 1200 meters above sea level, 150 meters north easterly of the so called Traxenbuhler wood cutters hut. The grave site is marked with a wooden cross marked with the names.

The identification and personal effects were sent to the Wels Air Base Command. The burial was performed by four English prisoners of war. Head policeman Kruber and local policeman Kalterbrunner had also assisted in the burial.

June 8, 1946:

All of the American flyers whose bodies were buried on the Grunau mountain were dug up and transported out of the area. Consequently, there are no more graves of Allied soldiers in Grunau.

THE INFORMATION IN THIS CHRONICLE WARRANTS A FEW COMMENTS

It's interesting to note that it would be almost 2 months to the day before anyone reached the crash site. They undoubtedly had to wait for the snow to melt before beginning the search. They found Jim Green on April 21st and buried him on April 25th. They found the other 7 crew members 17 days after finding Green which would indicate that the search party had to wait for snow to melt at a higher altitude. I assume that rather than exhume Greens body and carry it up hill, they would have brought the other 7 down to his grave site where they were buried together on May 16th at an altitude of 1200 meters (about 4000 feet).

Thus, from this account, it appears that Green was not in the ship when it crashed. I can only speculate as to what may have occurred. I see two scenarios: 1. Jim was able to jump free of Rosie at some point and either his parachute failed to open or he was too close to the ground to allow it to open. 2. When Rosie broke up or blew up he was thrown out of the plane much like Lou Samsa and fell further down the slope away from the others.

For those who may not know, the identifications given in the account would have been taken from the "dog tags" that all of us wore on a chain around our necks. If memory serves me correctly, and it may not, the letters and numbers following the serial numbers had to do with immunization shots. I don't know about the officers but the serial numbers of non commissioned personnel, if they had enlisted, began with the number 1. I think that any other number indicated that they were drafted by the so-called "Selective Service" of that day which meant that you received a letter stating that "You have been selected to serve in the armed forces-----". Mine arrived a month after I enlisted.

Bob Breneman, November 2001



STANDING

LOU
SAMSA

PILOT

LEONARD
GETUAN

NAVIGATOR

FRANK
BUBLITZ

BOMBARDIER

JAMES
GREEN

CO-PILOT

BOB
BRENNEMAN

FIRST FLIGHT
ENGINEER—TOP
TURRET GUNNER

JOHN
HOHMAN

GROUND
CREW

EMERSON
LEE

GROUND
CREW

SITTING

RALPH
VORHEES

RADIO
OPERATOR
WAIST GUNNER

THOMAS
NEWMAN

TAIL GUNNER

FRED
UPHOFF

RADIO
OPERATOR
WAIST GUNNER

EDWARD
PAPIERNIAK

SECOND FLIGHT
ENGINEER
NOSE TURRET
GUNNER

LYLE
HANSEN

BALL TURRET
GUNNER

HENRY
GREENOUGH

GROUND
CREW CHIEF