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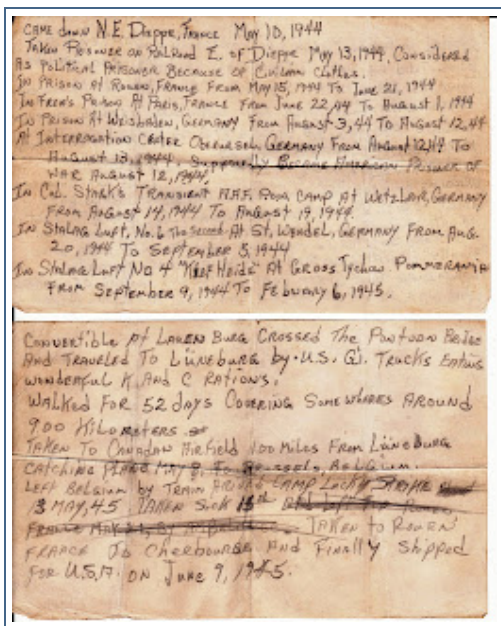
# TAILSPIN'S TALES

FIRST-PERSON ACCOUNTS OF ADVENTURE AND HISTORY IN THE SKY

## • Pride of the Yanks

From a friend:

*My dad, Vernon 'Bish' Bishop, was a B-17 Engineer and top turret Gunner in the 94th Bomb Group. This is part of his story and the stories of three of his crew members after they bailed out of their airplane when shot down over the coast of France.*



(Click to enlarge)

*All crew members are gone now so, even at the off chance that one of their family members might read this, it's all in there. Personally, I think the intimate parts are what make the stories, even with the hard times they had fun, they were funny and human.*

Max Bishop  
Mesa AZ

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## One 94ther's Story

*(this part is from 94th Bomb Group Newsletter)*

by **Vernon Bishop**, Engineer and Top Turret Gunner

*Thanks much for finding this Lost Soul and sorry you couldn't have found me sooner! Would have very much liked to have been a member sooner and gotten in touch with the old crew members sooner. If you talk to Charlie Slater, give him my heartfelt thanks for all the info he has sent me until I get a letter off to him. I'm not much of a letter writer, so will probably take a while after I get word off to Tom Bond, Art Stecher and Bill Belluomini.*



*My wife and I visited Al Spindler and his family when they lived in Springfield MA back in August of 1951. Kept in touch every Xmas until Dec. 1956 when we received a shocking letter*

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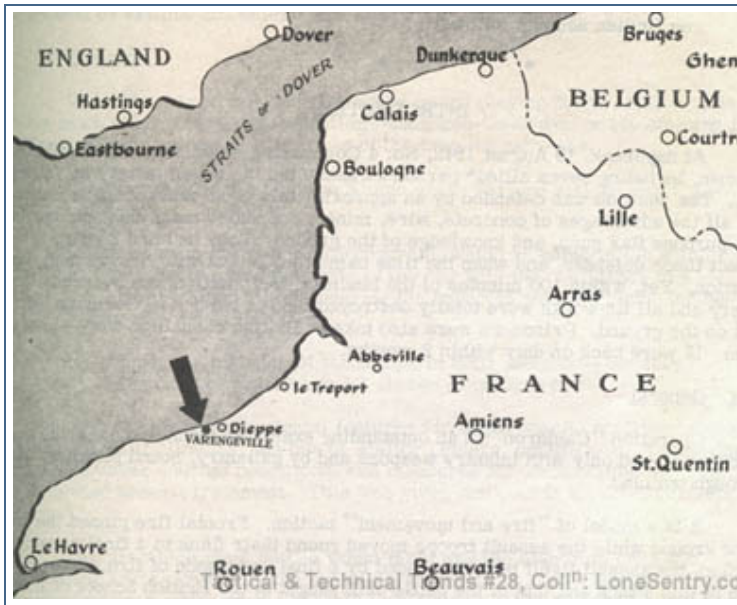
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### "OL TAILSPIN HISSELF

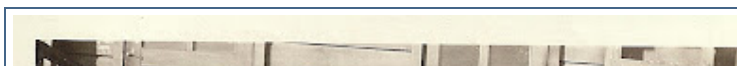
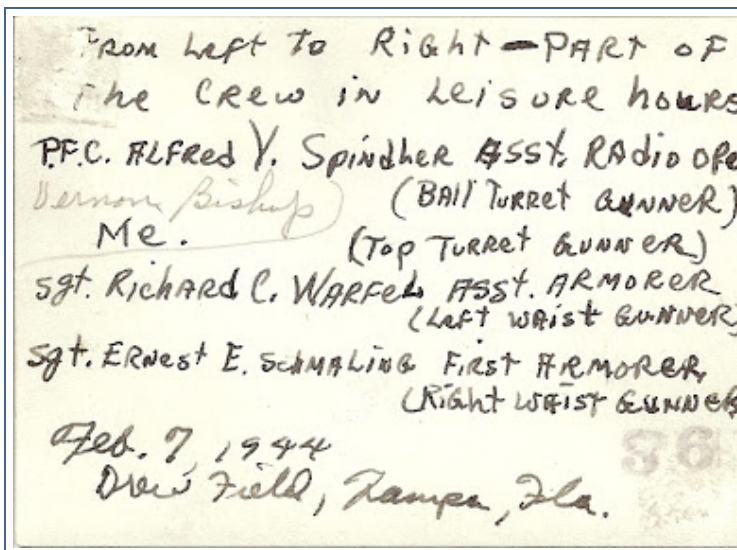
Tom Harnish

telling us that Al had died of a massive coronary. We can't remember the date.

Al's story -- after bailing out, he was immediately taken in and hidden by the French and stayed there until liberated when the Allied troops got there. He fought with the French underground, blowing up bridges, vehicles, etc. Al could speak French quite well so he got along with the French very well. Hope this little info helps.



I wasn't with the 94th very long. Went down on my 6th mission, and of all things, by friendly fire NE of Dieppe, France. We did have a short leave to London once with the crew, and always had a rip roaring time together.



Tom

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*We had a new "first" pilot from another crew by the name of Melton, his radio operator, Claude Brown, and Melton's bombardier with us. I don't remember the bombardier's name. Their first mission was sad for them.*

*The aircraft we were flying had already flown more than 50 missions, "The Pride of the Yanks." It must have blown up after I bailed out because a farmer that helped me took me out in a field and showed me parts of the plane in a thousand pieces.*



*(early picture with another crew)*

**B-17G-15-DL Fortress 42-37804 c/n 8590**

**8th AF, 94th BG, 333rd BS**

**Lost May 9, 1944**

*I arrived at Bury St. Edmunds on the 9th or 10th of April, 1944. They kept us real busy flying practice missions all over*

*England the rest of the month.*

*We bailed out on 9 May 44 and that's when we all lost contact, except Warfel and Schmaling who were together, and Belluomini, Melton and Brown were together. Since I was the last one out of the plane, we figured it was about 20 miles from the time the first person hit the ground and I landed, so I didn't see any other chutes in the air after I went out. I guess I was too busy trying to put the fire out, and my intercom went out when the fire started -- just like a blow torch blowing across my feet right on to the hydraulic pump. I didn't see a soul when I finally turned around, so decided I may as well leave too.*



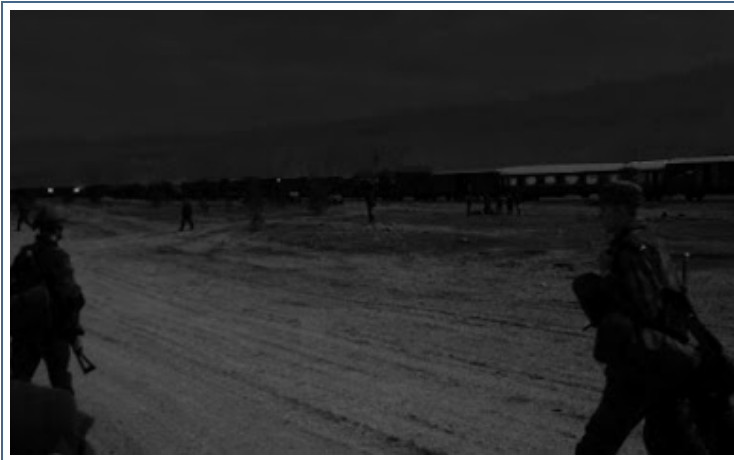
*I had no contact with people until the afternoon of 10 May because I was only moving after dark. Went to a farmhouse and the lady fixed me a couple of sandwiches and a bottle of wine. Then I moved on along hedges that evening to a farmer's barn. Then I got thirsty for some milk, so the farmer came with about six glasses of milk. Sure was better than the wine.*

*Slept in a haystack on 11 May. Finally a pretty young French girl found me and told me to stay there and she would be back later. Early evening she came back with a well dressed gentleman with a complete change of clothing and shoes. I asked them what I should do, so they showed me about where I was on the escape map I had, and told me to head toward Paris. At least get out of the Coastal Defense Area, and told me what direction and rail line to follow.*

*They gave me food and more wine so I was off on my own again, in a strange country with Germans all over the place. Early evening I found the railroad and headed toward Paris.*

*Went by two villages and Station Masters always spoke something, and I would say "Hi."*

*I thought I was doing fine until that evening about 10 PM I ran into two soldiers who asked for identity cards. They took me to their commanding officer. This was a trainload of Panzers parked for the night. The captain asked me for identity card, name, etc. Finally had to tell him I was an American flyer. He said, "For you the war is over." They set me in a corner of the office with about six or seven German officers and they all proceeded to get drunk. They asked me no questions and I sat there all night.*



*Next morning a Gestapo officer came and took me in a car to Rouen which took about an hour. At Gestapo HQ many questions were asked. I wouldn't have believed it if I hadn't seen it, but they had a large book listing every air crew with all the groups, squadrons, where each man came from, mother's, father's, sister's, brother's names, etc. All they needed was confirmation on what crew it was.*



*I stayed there in Rouen Prison for about five weeks in solitary confinement. Lost about 70 pounds, but knew on the fifth of June that the invasion was going to start on the sixth from the other French prisoners. Sure glad to hear the big guns and see all the planes in the air after the invasion.*

*But lo and behold, the same Gestapo officer that had brought me there came and drove me to Paris to Fresnes prison where I was in a cell with a "Scotty Sisson," a Mosquito pilot, and two other officers for about six weeks. The Allies were advancing too fast, so the Germans thought we ought to be taken to Germany. There were about 10,000 there in Paris -- English, Canadian, Polish, American, etc.*



*They took us Americans to Oberursel where we all officially became POWs. Sure great to get good food and lots of it again, compliments of the American Red Cross. Forgot to mention we were in Frankfort on Main a couple of days for interrogation prior to POW camp.*

*After a couple of weeks in Oberousel we were to start a new camp at St. Wendel, but guess the Allies were getting too close again after about three weeks, so they loaded us on a train again, about 40 or more to a car, and headed north to Poland. I'm not sure, but think it was near Czluchow, but thought everyone pronounced it Grostischow; Stalag Luft 3.*





*We stayed there until February '45, then we started a forced march across northern Germany, ending up on the Elbe River where we were finally liberated. I think that was at Lauenburg, and marched down to Luneburg to be flown to Brussels, Belgium, arriving there the day the war in Germany was officially over.*

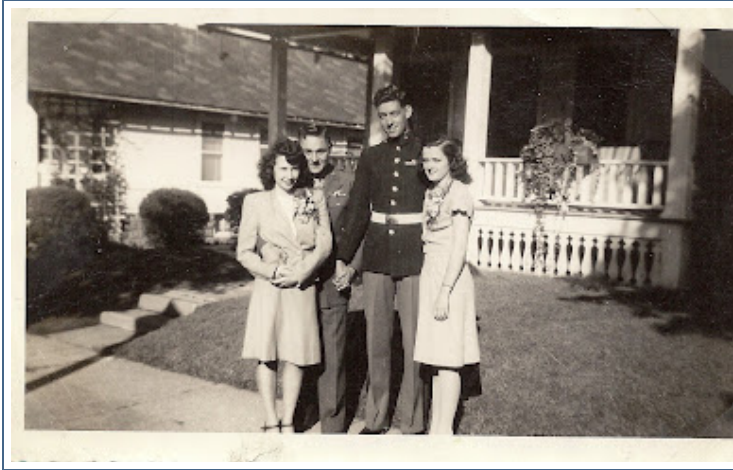


*We sure had a hell of a celebration, which put me on the sick list for many months. From there to Namur then to the field hospital at Camp Lucky Strike near Omaha Beach.*



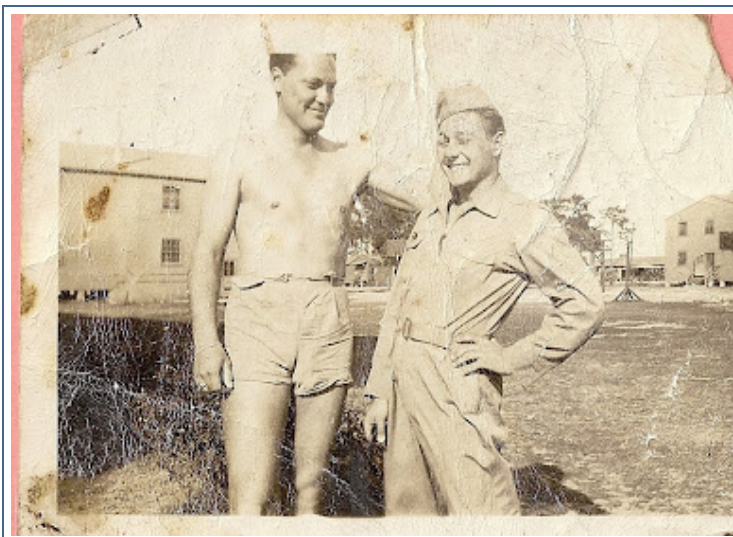


*Lost many weeks there not caring whether I lived or died, then off to the good old U.S.A. on shipboard to Boston for a couple of weeks, then by train to Battle Creek MI, Fort Custer, where I entered the service. Didn't get well enough to go home on leave until another month passed. Mustered out from there on 18 Nov. 45. Married on Sep. 29, 1945.*



*That was quite an experience and I sure couldn't make it again. Being stationed at Fort Custer Army Hospital opened my eyes to my good fortune because that was an amputee hospital, and so many more of the guys had it much worse than I had to endure.*

*I've tried to give you the experience as best remembered from so many years back. The story was never told to anyone except close family, Al Spindler and Richard Warfel. Even my seven children have never heard it because I have never wanted to tell anyone.*





*There were three members of our crew who were not with us on 9 May 44: Lewis E. Reeder, co-pilot; Arthur Stecher, bombardier; Morris Mitchell, radio.*

*We understand that Richard C. Warfel might have moved from Cleveland OH to Florida. We heard Ernest Schmaling might have died, but this could have been his wife. He was 35 years old before going overseas. We never have heard anything from Bruce Waddell.*

*Max explains:*


*As for Dad being sick, he was on a forced march from France to Poland much of his time as a POW and went from 160 lbs to 90lbs over the year of his capture. After they got to Poland, the German guards turned everybody around so, if necessary, they could surrender to the Americans and Brits and avoid capture by the Russians.*

*One morning on their way back through Germany, they got up and most of the German soldiers were gone. They were told to cross a bridge where they find a British unit waiting to repatriate them. Unfortunately, being so emaciated, Dad's body was probably not yet ready for all the good food and drink that they got as soon as they were rescued and he got very sick. He said he was very jaundiced (yellow) so it could have been a severe case of hepatitis, but he wasn't sure.*

*He always said though, that he was glad to have been stationed his last several months at Ft. Custer. It was an*

*amputee hospital and he was grateful that he suffered so very little compared to the many others who returned with missing limbs, eyes, parts of faces or with brain damage.*

*What isn't in any of his story is what happened to him and those around him while he was a prisoner. We never heard any of it while were growing up or until many years later when he wrote that letter. My brother was the same way with his Vietnam experience, and I didn't hear any of that until a few years ago. I could tell you more of what happened to Dad but some of the rest isn't very pleasant...*

3rd Bomb Division Markings		
	<b>94th BG</b>	<b>Squadron Codes</b>
	4 CBW	331 BS - QE
	Bury St. Edmunds, UK	332 BS - XM
	13 May 1943	333 BS - TS
	B-17	410 BS - GL

## ***Al Spindler's story***

*Westover Field Massachusetts*

*2nd July 1945*

*Dear Bish,*

*Words just can't say how happy I am to get your letter and to know that at last you're almost home. Damn but it was a long time! Before I start with my end of the tale, I'll get some of these other details taken care or, for instance the addresses. Of the ten of us, 7 were saved by the Underground, making you, Tom, and the radio operator, Brown, PW's. The rest of us were liberated in France on September 2nd, 1944.*

*S/Sgt Bruce A Waddell: Brookline (Upper Darby) Pa.*

*(That's his address. He's in B-29 training somewhere in the South. He volunteered for it!)  
Last military address (May 3rd) Sqdn 'S',  
3704th AAF BU, Keesler Field, Miss.*

*T/Sgt Morris Mitchell: Sqdn 'P' Bks 1625, Truax Field, Madison, Wis.*

*Home Address: Brooklyn, N.Y.*

*Lt. Wm E. Belluomini: Bakersfield, Cal.*

*Last Military Address: Branch 4, Box 4301 Ellington Field, Texas.*

*S/Sgt Earnest E. Schmaling: Santa Rosa, Calif.*

*S/Sgt Richard C. Warfel: Cleveland, Ohio.*

*June 1st: AAFCH Don Ce Sar, St. Petersburg, Fla,*

*Lt, Thomas L. Bond: c/o Mrs, Ray P. Collins, Jackson, Miss.*

*(That's his married sister with whom I've corresponded ever since I got back. I don't know his folks' address) in Weir, Miss.*

*I've lost all track of Reeder, and Stecher is home in California. I don't have Stecher's address but either, Ernie or Bill could give it to you.*

*And then here's the last addresses: S/Sgt Vernon M. Bishop, USPOW 4187, Stalag Luft 4. Tom was in Stalag Luft III, Germany.*

*Belluomini is, or was an unoccupied officer waiting for a job. I think he was to be put to work as a navigation instructor last I heard. Stecher goofed off as much as he could. After we went down he went to the hospital for almost six months, Then they finally were more stubborn than he was and he had to fly some more missions around Christmas time. Then we heard in February that he was on his way home.*

*That dopey bombardier, Walters, applied for another tour with the 94th as soon as he got back to England. Reeder had finished and left the group, when we got back to it, Mitchell was there, though, and we got plastered for two weeks without drawing a sober breath. Mitch finally made it home right around Christmas*

time. He's now finishing up the last part of a special instructor radio operator course.

Warfel met this French girl that he had intended to marry. She taught English in a French high-school., and remained a virgin all or her thirty years (until she met Warfel), Then the latest is that Warfel goes home on a furlough and meets some babe for the first time, and marries her, after he had made elaborate plans to bring Eliane all the way from France, What a dope! Dick got as far as that rest home in St, Pete and played a damned good game of politics and managed to get himself a job as permanent party there. He plays with the dance band several nights a week and picks up about an extra \$60 a month. During the day he's a life-guard. What a racket.

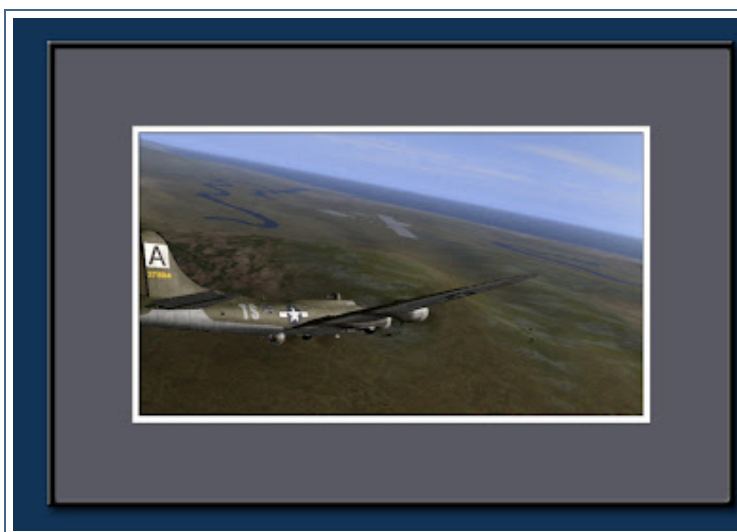
Ernie, is of course damned near home. He finally is happy now that he has Hazel with him. He lives at home and commutes to work in his newly bought '39 Plymouth,

Waddell almost got married to his girl while he was home but he was damned if she could see being denounced by her church for marrying a "non-Catholic." So he applied for another tour of combat via B-29's,

As for myself, I have the racket or all rackets. I work about half a day every day pounding a typewriter, and fly once a month to collect flying pay. I get every sixth day off, or five days off a month and manage to get home for three days about once a month, I'm married now, and living here in Northampton. I've got the nicest wife and the best damned place you've ever seen. A '37 Pontiac sedan helps me to get places in a hurry, If you want a good deal and a pretty soft racket if you must remain in the Army, just ask to be transferred to Westover, near Springfield, Mass, It's slightly CS, but less so than almost any other post. PW's get an extra food ration, I

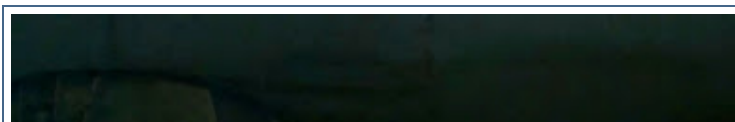
*understand, and also their choice of any AAF field in the country to be permanently stationed on, Shortly we hope to be training men on A-26's here, or we'll still be training' B-24 crews at a new address. I hope ours is the first bargain. In the meantime I'm blissfully happy.*

*Bill writes me quite often , and so does Earnie, Mitch is fairly good about writing and I hear about once a month from Warfel. Waddell crashes through twice a year.*



*I guess that this is all I can say about current events, and now back to May 9th, 1944, 0845. I've given your mother quite a complete account of my version, but in case she hasn't the letter, here it is again, Incidentally I wish you would apologize to her for me. She wrote me of your liberation, and I don't think I ever answered her letter, I hardly write at all these days,*

*We had just crossed the Channel and were over France, I was in the ball turret looking things over, I'd never felt more confident of any mission than I did of that one,*





*There were just a few light scattered clouds, and a slight haze but otherwise perfect visibility. Altitude was believed to have been 19,000 to 22,000. Belluomini claims 22, and Warfel and the rest claim 19, will you straighten us out on that, Bish?*



*Without, any warning at all, came the "bail out" order, given slowly and carefully three times, but sounding as though Tom was crying or had smoke in his eyes. I couldn't believe the first one and quickly whirled around looking at all four engines. The plane was straight & level and four engines were just purring. At the second call, I decided to poke my head into the waist and see what was going on.*

*I was hastily summoned up by Warfel, (who felt*

*it his duty to see that I jumped safely), At the third call I was on my way out, I had one foot out and the other in the turret when Tom dove it straight down for 500 feet or so to get it out of formation, thereby making it safe for us to bail out.*



*At the bail out order, Dick turned to inform Ernie and found both Ernie and waist door already missing, Poor Brown was struggling with his flak suit and when I saw him no one was giving him too much attention. He was scared to death! Warfel got his chute, and I got mine, and at that time it seemed that either Bishop (yea you) or , Warfel were helping him. I looked out the waist door and my mind said "Hell, no.!"*

*Then you came crashing through the bombay, and quickly shut the bombay door, because as you opened it a flash of red flame about ten feet long just lashed out!*





*There was a little scramble in the waist, and someone was either looking for an extra chute for you, Bish, or they were looking for a fire extinguisher. I'm still trying to remember whether I saw you in the waist or not. Please let me know if your reserve chute burned or not. Did you have to use that extra seat pack? I neglected to mention that the waist was a bit hazy with smoke.*

*I jumped out and all went well for a split second, and then slip stream hit me and boy did it hit me! I turned ass over teakettle until I assumed the position of rigid attention, I twanged! I counted to 25 twice and still decided I was too high to pull the rip cord. Something had impressed me not to pull that thing until the very last minute. So about 500 feet off ground I pulled and thought I had hit a brick wall, My feet swung out to the right and as they passed dead center I was on the ground. My knees gave in on hitting and I fell on my belly, not even bruising me, I hit the only square patch of -green grass for miles around. I then looked at the sky, lit a cigarette, and urinated.*





*About that time I was debating whether to join the others as they landed or whether to remain alone. I finally decided on the latter figuring that we had a better chance being alone. I immediately began to burn identification papers in my wallet. (I still had my wallet & all my possessions I had just burned my driver's license and social security card when I looked around and was being regarded by 20 year old farmers. They stood their distance, about 50 feet and looked me over, I don't know who was more scared, the French or myself. I didn't know if I was in Holland, Belgium, France or Spain. I remembered some of the three years of French I took in school, and mumbled in miserable French, "I'm an American, will you help me?" They repeated the phrase a couple of times and then light dawned. They lept at me and kissed me firmly time and time again, screaming at the top of their lungs that I was an American who spoke French. They asked about my chute, and I promptly produced it. I had hidden it in the meantime and they were a little dubious as to how I had arrived. I was led to a farmhouse amidst 20 to 30 Frenchmen from 2 to 90 years old. They tried to make me relieve myself in the barn, but I was too modest with such a big audience. I finally reclined on the hay and they brought me some cookies & some cognac. An hour later I was led to the next farmhouse & met Doug Melton, co-pilot. They had taken him for a German, and I*

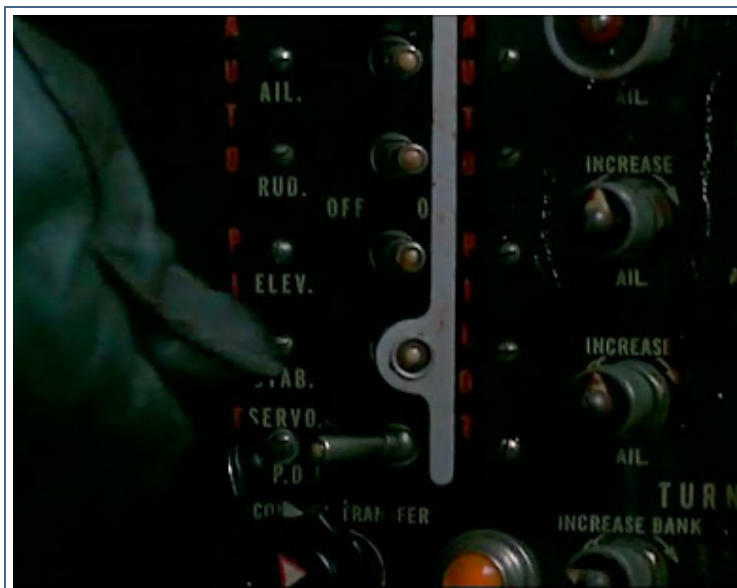
*don't think I ever saw anyone so scared in all my life. They were discussing what to do with him and brought me to identify him. Of course I had never seen him before in my life. He finally convinced me, and I kidded them all a while and later told them that he was all right*



*He acquainted me with the fire in the cockpit. The accepted version is that something set off a flare right next to your turret, we personally think that it was another B-17 test firing into us. The flare ruptured the hydraulic line which burst and the accumulator came on just pushing it out to add to the flame, Then the oxygen went to add to it, and the turret stand became red hot, and later white hot. Doug went to the nose for an extinguisher but when he got there the nose was empty and the hatch gone. He went back to get his chute and saw Tom coming out with his. Tom insisted that he go first, because the pilot of the ship should be the last to go. Doug finally pushed him out. Neither Pinky nor Bill knows who pushed out the nose hatch. Pinky went to bail out and it was gone. We still think that you pushed it out, Someone stuck their head into the nose & said "Bail out!" was that you, Bish? Because it wasn't Doug or Tom.*

*Waddell's tale is a little funny. He had been having trouble with interphone and didn't hear*

the order. All of a sudden he saw a waist door go winging past, And then he saw Ernie going past horizontally with that typical grin on his face. About that time he started to get alarmed. Next I came by, and when as he looked at the waist he saw Warfel leave, About that time he said, "Waddell, just what the Hell are you doing here?" and he left pronto, via the tail hatch. When Pinky bailed out he had forgotten to fasten his chest clip on his harness. The back of his harness consequently got stuck on the door, and he was just hanging there in mid air suspended unable to help himself hoping that the explosion would blow him free. Then Bill came along and said "why you dirty so & so," And gave him a boot in the fanny and out he went. Tom's procedure was to dive the plane, flick on Auto-pilot which was already set, head the plane for Berlin and bail.



I guess Brown was the last one to leave, because no one saw him go, or did you see him? We later heard that he had been picked up by the underground not far from us, but when we arrived at the group we were informed that he was a PW. That's the last I've heard of him.

When we got back to England, we got a detailed map, plotted our landing points. They were in a

straight line, just as straight as they could be, running from about 340 to 160 degrees, 20 miles long.

To make a long story short; we were housed in about seven or eight different homes in three or four different towns. Doug & I started together, moved to Waddell's town, a few doors from him (but never saw him till after Liberation), and three weeks later Bill joined us, The underground was very good about insuring communication between us by carrying our notes back and forth.

Quite a bit later, about a month, we learned that Ernie & Dick were together about 20 miles away. We met them the night of Sept 6th. Sometime in July we teamed up with George, a B-26 radio operator who had been hiding with Pinky, our bombardier. The rest of the time we sweat it out together, cursing each other and for the most part terribly morose and tired of looking at each others' faces. I did manage to gain 20 pounds in the process, though, on French wines, meats, & dairy products,

We were liberated September 2nd, drunk as Hell until the 6th when we started back for England, We hit London the 7th, got drunk all over again and stayed that way until we hit the group on the 19th. There we met Mitchell and some of the old gang and proceeded to get lit until we left near the end of the month. After waiting three weeks in a replacement pool, (three dry weeks) we were flown to LaGuardia on a C-54 where we landed 0500 on the 17th of October. We weren't there long when we had a buzz-on before noon, I was on my way home at six that night, but stopped in at my Aunt's in New York City to hang one on with her. I arrived home around 11 PM slightly lit and started drinking-with the family. I was married eight days later and have been forced to take it easy ever since, except for weekly brawls.

*This is getting too long, Bish so I'd better cut it. I absolutely demand that you come and stay with us sometime during your furlough. Stay as long as you wish, and come when you want to. Any time except the period between July 20th & July 22nd. One of my Navy buddies is arriving then, and we can only sleep three, comfortably. I've got to see you Bish and get this thing ironed out. You can take a train to Springfield, Mass, and I'll pick you up there, I guess you'd go through Albany. Just send me a wire about 24 hours ahead of time and let me know approximately when you'd arrive. If I'm not at the station to meet you, call Westover Fiels for me at extension 606,.Please do this for me at Bish, you have no idea what it will mean to me.*

*Above all, remember that crew 6-N-11 plus its wives sc mistresses have a reunion in Omaha, May 8th, 1950. Did you ever get the letter I wrote you, Bish? I told you of our wedding, of Waddell as best man and Dick & Erie as ushers, trying to inform you that they were home. But the weddin actually happened that way*

*Drop me a note or something soon. I'll inform the others or your arrival,*

*Always your pal,*

*[Al Spindler]*

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## ***Ernie Schmaling's story (waist gunner)***

*Monday, July 9, 1945*

*Hi Bish,*

*It was quite a pleasant surprise the other day to receive a letter from Spindler - and to find out that he had enclosed a copy of a letter that he had received from you. It was saddening to receive the news that you and Tom and Brown had been taken, but then good news to also know that you were still OK. I would like to know more in detail - first what the hell happened that day - Everything seemed rather peaceful and quiet back in the waist - Until Tom gave with the bail out command. When I heard it, I also heard a commotion behind me and it was Brown coming out of the radio room - He didn't know how to get out of his flak suit so I gave the thing a yank and it fell away. Then I looked towards the front of the plane and I could see great bellows of smoke rolling out of the radio room into the waist of the ship.*

*At the time it was hard to believe that Tom told us to bail out - however seeing that smoke was quite convincing but then I never doubted Tom's words - it was rather hard to realize that this was it. When I saw the smoke and after helping Brown out of his flak suit - Well that was when 'Pop' got busy - it didn't take me long to get ready - so when I was all set to go I took a few drags on the tube and after one last look around I saw Spindler was coming out of the turret OK and Dick had kicked out the door and was busy with his chute - I could see no reason for sticking around and I knew I had no business staying - So when I went to the*

*door I don't mind saying I was scared as hell - but as I say I know I couldn't stay there so I dove out.*



*After I was clear of the ship and started to fall I was surprised that I had no sensation of falling - it was more like floating through the air. When I opened my chute I seemed to be about 2000 ft up - the first thing I did was look for the plane and other chutes - I couldn't see the plane - but had a glimpse of the formation and could see only one chute quite high. - Then I concentrated on the landscape - I had time to look the country over for woods & the road for troop movements - then I hit the ground. I landed in a grain field & hit my head pretty hard - my chute pulled me over backwards - and of course I was sure on the way down I had lost my nuts.*

*When I got up and started to get out of my harness I heard someone yell & looked up and saw eight or ten French people waiving to me to hurry - I grabbed up my chute and ran like hell - they were saying Americk and shaking my hand. I asked them where the Germans were and they pointed in several directions.*





*I finally made out that they wanted me to get out of sight and hide in the barn on this farm. I gave my chute to the peasant women and she hid it for me & I started for the barn - I was only in the barn a short while when I heard someone come in - I could tell by the breathing that it was one of the boys - I was hiding on the top of some hay that was stacked to the ridge at one end of the barn - The rest of the barn had hay about two feet deep. - I looked down from my hay stack and there was Dick - I called to him & he found me - We had only been together about fifteen minutes when I heard some talking outside - I peeked through a crack and saw two Jerries coming through the orchard - with their rifles ready - They knew we were in the vicinity & were looking for us - We heard them come in the barn and start searching - and of course Dick and I started to sweat them out. - Do you remember they always told us if we were shot down to always hide up in a tree or likewise. Well it seemed to work out that way because the Germans tromped all over the hay below - but never thought of looking up on the big stack.*

*Anyway, we were safe up there for the time being - Dick and I were in the barn for 4 days and 3 nights. The farmer wasn't of the underground and was plenty scared having us in his barn - We tried to get him to get us some clothes - but somehow he contacted the right parties & they moved us on the fourth to a*

little woods near a village, telling us they would be back at 10:30 that night to get us. They arrived a little late and it was dark and getting darker. - We left the woods and hiked a few miles into the village - it was quite dark about now & the French man told us there were some Germans in the village - So we started to sweat some more - they had taken everything away from us that had English writing on it - even my dog tags -They were not taking any chances with me and a name like I was packing around. - So Dick and I didn't know what we were walking into. Dick was lagging behind - but I was hungry - not having much for four days and nothing at all that day - So I walk right along with the French man - we weren't caught yet and as I say I was hungry. We finally arrived at the village and entered a court yard. We were to find out later that it was a school yard. We entered a building and it was dark as hell and by the sound of it I knew it was empty. Then a door opened and by the light I could look down a hallway - and what I saw made me stop - (This will kill you) Dick was still lagging behind and I called to him asking what he was so damn slow for - that he should see what I saw - about this time another one appeared - by this time Dick was in the line of sight - and when he saw those two French girls he took off like a B-17 and damn near crushed me when he went by. You know Dick he was making plans from that moment.

When we all got into that room which served as a kitchen I saw six of the biggest pork chops on the stove - that I had ever seen - and they were being fried to a golden brown. We had quite a feed that night & much to our surprise - we found out that we were to stay there with those two girls - They were both school teachers and really very nice girls - That part Dick soon discovered - We were there about 5 days and they brought in another gunner - he was shot down that day - (A-20) - We remained there for about another week & they moved us

about 20 miles to a small farm near a large woods. I'll back track a little here. While we were with the girls they brought us Tom's picture one morning. We told them he was our pilot and asked them if he was here - Much to our sorrow we learn that he met a Belgium officer and they had left for southern France - They also told us it was bad to try and travel the Germans were watching the trains & roads & picking up all the young men and making them work for them.

We stayed at the little farm for about a week and a half and talked them into taking us back to the other village - we liked the girls company - and Dick was going out with one of them already.

We returned to the village and were with our friends for over a month - We woke up one morning to find Germans all over the place - A company of infantry had moved in early that morning. They were there for a months rest. It got pretty hot for us and for the girls safety we decided to move again - So one dark night - well it wasn't so dark -there was a big moon - but in the darkness before the moon came up two Frenchmen & four of us slipped through their nite patrol and traveled all the rest of the nite on bicycle and on foot back to the little farm near the woods. - We were there when we were liberated. - We were about 4 months in hiding. We ran into Bruce, Al, Bill & Milton a few days later at a British Intelligence Station & then started our movement home.

This isn't all in detail - but a pretty fair account of what took place with us - Dick and I were together until we departed in New York for home - We'll have to get together some day & tell of our experiences - Until that time we'll have to keep in touch by writing - My address is Santa Rosa, Calif-

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## **Dick Warfel's story**

*(transcribed from 1945 newspaper article)*

### **Diary Gives Inside Details of Days Spent Hiding from the Germans**

*By Sgt. Richard Warfel*

*“Bail Out! Bail Out!”*

*I stood at the escape hatch of our bomber “The Pride of the Yanks.”*

*Five miles below was the English Channel and the coast of Nazi occupied France.*

*Smoke was pouring out of the radio room. Seconds before we had just had an oxygen test. All 10 members of our crew had been at their posts knowing we were only 10 minutes from our bombing objective – a German airfield in central France.*



*Then the flak found our bomber. The crippled “Pride of the Yanks” was now on automatic pilot. The ball turret was being frenziedly turned to the stowed position so that the gunner could get out. I disconnected my oxygen tube, heater cord and headset wires.*

*Next, I pulled the emergency handle, which released the escape door*

*located in the right rear waist. In those seconds, I could feel the lack of oxygen - breathing became difficult. I knew each second the ship might explode.*

*I put on my chest pack and stood at the escape hatch. Someone was behind me. I had never jumped before. I looked at the earth five miles below, hesitated to check my rip-cord and say a very little prayer, then threw myself head first into space.*

*Barely misses Plane*

*I shot past the nose of a B-17 flying in the formation below us. I missed [unreadable]... by a few yards and I could see the horrified expression on the face of the pilot. I believe I must have fallen about 10,000 feet when I gave the ripcord a terrific yank.*



*The formation was already out of sight. Below me, about 2000 feet was a lone parachute. I wondered which one of the crew it was. My parachute began to oscillate like the pendulum of a clock. For a time I was almost crazed with fear I would swing in a complete arc and land on top of my own chute.*

*I could see the English Channel in the distance and knew that I was landing in the middle of the defense area on the coast of France, where the Germans were thick. The swinging parachute, combined with the pain in my groin from the chute straps made me feel faint and I momentarily lost consciousness.*

*Then I was watching the other chute land. I saw the crew member hit hard and I tried to make a mental note of his location. I wondered whether the Germans would shoot at me before I hit the ground. And I*

*wondered how I would act when captured.*

*I thought of my mother and my father and my twin brother, Bob and brother Jack. I suddenly felt more sorry for them than for myself for I knew that a "missing in action" telegram would reach them soon.*

*I hit hard, facing backwards. I wasted little time in unbuckling the uncomfortable leg straps and climbing out of my chute.*

*A dozen or more French peasants ran toward me, waving sticks in a menacing fashion. Later I learned they suspected me of being a Nazi paratrooper.*

*I had memorized some stock phrases in French and I called to them that I was American. My voice sounded like a stranger's. I produced identification pictures and waved them in the air.*

*"Amereek, Amereek!" they cried suddenly and rushed at me first to hug me, then to rip off my chute. While of the peasants half pushed and dragged me toward a high green hedge, the others ran away with the chute to conceal or destroy it.*

*Hid Inside Barn*

*Almost at once we heard a motorcycle approaching. The French pointed in the direction of the farm house and I ran along the green hedge, my green suit blending well with the leaves. At a signal I made a 100 yard dash to a big barn. Inside I buried myself in the three feet of hay that covered the floor.*

*I must have been 10 minutes getting my wind and swimming in perspiration when I heard "Pssst! Dick!" Fifty feet up in a hay loft was Ernie Schmaling, the left waist gunner of our crew. No face ever looked more wonderful. I climbed the rafters to him in a nest of hay at the top of the barn.*

*I think we slept a long time out of sheer exhaustion. We were awakened by screams. Looking through a slit in the rafters, we saw a sight that made us almost sick with horror. The Nazis, knowing we had landed in the area, had seized six young Frenchmen and three French women.*

*The victims were tied, hand behind their backs, to posts in a square about 30 yards from the barn. SS troops were trying to get the men to talk. Each time the Frenchmen shook their heads, the Nazis would kick them in their stomachs. They wore special heavy hobnail boots.*

*We saw one French boys stomach split wide open. He died that night,*

*still tied to the post. Two of the Frenchmen were shot. There was nothing we could do. Had we revealed our presence the owner of the farm and all his family and his neighbors would have been killed.*

#### *Without Food Four Days*

*For four days the French farmers stayed away from the barn and for four days Ernie and I almost went mad for lack of water and food. We had special pills to eat that were supposed to take the place of water. When we couldn't stand it any longer, we dragged ourselves to the barn door and called weakly for water.*

*That night the farmer brought us a bottle of cider and some black bread and gave us a sign to be very quiet, that "Bosch" (Germans) were nearby. He had no sooner left than we heard footsteps. Through the barn cracks, we saw a German soldier with a rifle coming toward the door.*

*We hurried to our perch in the loft. The Nazi entered, began to systematically plunge his bayonet into the hay on all sides. But he didn't attempt to climb to our secret hiding place.*

*We knew the consequences of being discovered. We would be shot or taken prisoner; the good French people would be killed. Germans were offering French people rich rewards for any information concerning allied airman, or their capture. Knowing these facts, we were prepared to kill the German should we be discovered.*

*The next four nights and days we kept very still in the barn. Each night the farmer brought us cider and hard bread. We would return the bottle with a 100-franc note enclosed.*

#### *Then a Visitor Arrived*

*On the fourth day we heard a motor car pull up to the barn and then people approaching. We hardly breathed. To our complete amazement, we heard a feminine voice say in English, "Hello up there, come down!"*

*We peeked down to see a beautiful woman. She told us she was a member of the French underground and a school teacher. Ernie and I were sad-looking sights with our dirty clothes and week old beards, but she said, "Always have I wanted to kiss an American soldier and now is my chance."*

*We puckered up our lips – a useless gesture, for she kissed us on both cheeks and gave us both a hug. She had brought a burlap bag filled with clothes of French peasant style and she turned her back while*

*Ernie and I changed from American airman to French natives.*

*We gave her all our English possessions and identifications. Her father backed the car up to the barn, piled hay over us on the floor. When we emerged we were at the edge of a great forest. Here we hid in the dark awaiting prearranged plans to meet an underground member at midnight. He led us across fields, pointing to great craters made by bombs.*

*We slipped through barbed wire fences, waded through swamps and finally reached our destination – a small farmhouse. Inside were the Frenchman's wife and two lovely girls Elaine Clement and Madelain Liot, also school teachers and members of the underground. On the stove were pork chops, vegetables and the table was set with wine. There was a little cake for us and a little homemade American flag on its top.*

#### *Forced to Move Again*

*It was all too good to last of course. The next Monday we were told German patrols were again searching for us and we would have to move. The girls packed us a lunch and hid us under hay in a cart. We drove through little French towns filled with Germans. Now if we were captured, we would be shot as spies for we had no identification. I quote a page in a diary I kept:*

*“The three of us Ernie [Vern?] and I have been hiding in this farmhouse attic now for 25 days. Today is June 1, 1944. We are well but getting very restless. The roof will not permit our standing up. The two French girls attend to all our meager comforts and bring us food.”*

*“Fleeing to Switzerland or Spain is out of the question for we know invasion is near. Yesterday we took a snapshot of SS troops marching just outside our house. The girls had given us a small camera stocked with film they had been saving for just such documentary evidence.”*

#### *Week of Comparative Freedom*

*There was a week of comparative freedom when the Nazis left unexpectedly and then what a joy it was for us to go freely into the woods. At night we taught the old Frenchmen how to play childish games like we used to play as kids. We played tag, jump [unreadable]... It was amazing to see how seriously the old men took the sports.*

*One can not appreciate the courage or determination of the French people until he realizes the humiliation and sacrifice they have*

*endured the past five years. They have been beaten, robbed, tortured, slain at the Nazi's whim.*

*One afternoon we were sitting on the kitchen floor playing with some baby chicks when much commotion was heard. We raced toward the third floor but the stairs were so narrow all three of us couldn't escape – I raced into a bedroom and dived under a small studio couch and pressed against the wall.*

*Presently I heard boots mounting the stairs – and saw two pairs of boots enter the room. Two Nazi officers had decided to rest for a time. They had a bottle of cognac – and one sat on the couch under which I was hiding. I almost stopped breathing – and then I started to perspire.*

#### *Miraculously Spared*

*After an hour, a little river of perspiration began running slowly across the floor. I prayed it would not run out from under the couch. Suddenly a hoarse command sounded from below and the boots clicked from the room. Again I had been miraculously spared.*

*After nine days we left the farm. We walked through the forest and met a truck which was to take us to our previous place.*

*It was indeed a pleasure to see the girls again. Knowing our strong appetites, they immediately gave us cider, dark bread, butter and honey. Soon a delicious dinner was prepared.*

*These two girls could not do enough for us. They were excellent cooks and each meal was different and better than the last. We had the run of the house. During the day the girls taught school in the schoolroom below us. At night we played games. The girls talked in French and we in English.*

*From the diary:*

*“We are in complete comfort here and in direct contact with the underground. I several days the English will drop bombs and ammunition for the French. The invasion is only days away. When the American parachutists land in France, Ernie, [Vern?] and myself will be armed to fight along with them and the French. Last night we were almost shaken out of our boots by the heavy guns on the coast. We thought the invasion had begun and were ready to head for the bomb shelters but I guess the guns were only practicing.*

*Big Moment Near*

*“Today, June 4, we helped the girls make arm bands with the French insignia which we will wear when we fight. The big moment is arriving, one which the French have been waiting for since 1939 and one which we have been waiting for since we bailed out in our chutes. The invasion means we can get back to England and thus back to the United States.”*

*“From the window in the attic of the house, we watched the formation of B-17's returning toward England after a raid over Germany. Heavy flak could be seen bursting all around them. We saw three B-17's explode and go down in flames. Out of 20 men, five were able to parachute out safely.”*

*“Last night after we were all in bed, a convoy of German trucks [unreadable]... house. We watched them from the window. Soon they moved on, apparently toward the coast.”*

*“Another gunner joined us today – Ernest Grant from Boston, Mass. His Fortress collided with another Fortress at 21,000 feet. He was a top turret gunner – only a miracle saved his life.”*

#### *Tells of Invasion Start*

*“June 6 – The invasion of Europe started last night while we slept. We listened to French and English broadcasts over the radio. Four thousand large boats, many small ones, thousands of allied planes had crossed the channel. The French are very happy today. The Germans have stopped all traffic in and out of our small town, preventing the French from obtaining American guns which were dropped last night – guns which were to be given to us.”*

*“We are situated in range of coastal guns. Our American bombers are expected to bomb in this vicinity. If such is the case we will be given an hour's warning (dropped by planes) to go to open fields and forest.”*

#### *Again from my diary:*

*“The Polish troops came to liberate us on Sept. 1, 1944. Of the members of our crew, seven of us have been accounted for by the Underground. The other three are prisoners or dead. The Allied planes have been dropping supplies for the skies each hour it seems”*

#### *And the final page from my diary:*

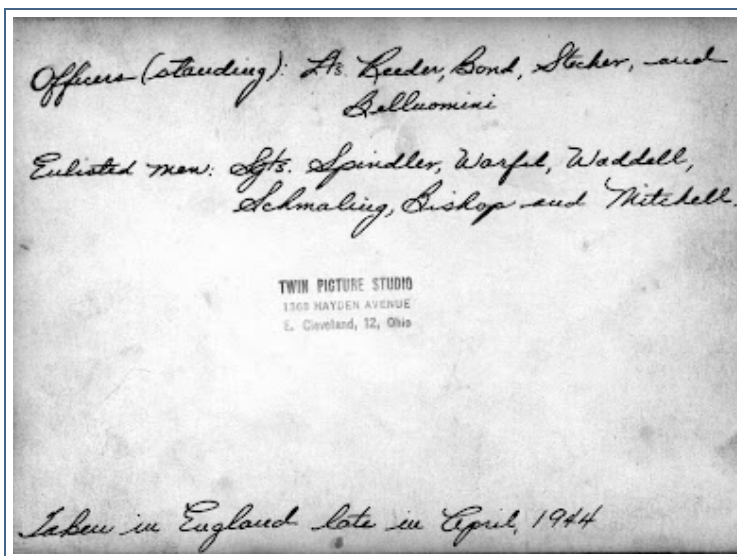
*“Tomorrow I sail for home. What a wonderful word – home! England is wonderful but it seems we will hardly be able to stand the sight of dear old Liberty holding the light for the world. I am scheduled to go*

*to St. Petersburg rehabilitation hospital for an eye operation (flak had injured my left eye slightly) and after that home – to my family.”*

*The author, Sgt. Richard Warfel, served the Air Force as the waist gunner of the ill-fated Liberator bomber, “Pride of the Yanks.” For seven months after receiving the word that their son was “missing in action”, his parents, Mr. and Mrs. Edward Warfel, received no encouragement.*

*After the liberation of France Warfel was returned to England where he cabled his family. He is currently on furlough from Don Cesar Air Force Hospital in St. Petersburg, where he is a convalescent patient. Sgt. Warfel has been awarded the Air Medal, Presidential Citation, Goot and Wing and Caterpillar ribbons.*

*He is the brother of Sgt. Jack Warfel, Press reporter now on leave with the Army Air Forces.*





LABELS: B-17, BOMBER, POW, USAAC, USAF, WW2, WWII

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## 11 COMMENTS:

**Anonymous** January 12, 2008 at 3:37 AM

I'm almost certain that I know the Scotty Sisson mentioned in the first story. He lives at Elm Creek, Manitoba. His number is in the phone listings.

Reply



**Barb Higgins** February 27, 2009 at 9:44 PM

I am the daughter of Lewis E. Reeder, co-pilot. My father was sent to the Don Cesar Hospital in St. Pete in October '44. My mother traveled from Pennsylvania to visit him while he was stationed there. (and that is when I was conceived. After the war, my father returned to his home town of Williamsport, PA. There he lived until his death, in 1982, at the age of 64.

Reply

**Angie** August 6, 2009 at 9:56 PM

Scotty Sisson is my grandfather. Still alive and doing well.

Reply

**Tom** August 7, 2009 at 5:14 AM



If anyone has pictures that they could email, I'd love to add them to this story.

Reply

**Anonymous** October 3, 2010 at 10:13 PM

Tom,  
I found a short diary of Dad's POW time line...  
I can provide the jpg image of it, if you like...

Take care,  
Max Bishop  
mbishop5@cox.net

Reply

**Anonymous** June 19, 2011 at 1:09 PM

Art Stecher is well and living in Lincoln, California; he can be reached at the following email: a-estecher@sbcglobal.net

Reply

**Anonymous** December 17, 2011 at 2:36 PM

Thanks so much for these photos of the pride of the yanks. My Dad was also on this plane during ww11. He was a flight chief or mechanic. His name was George E. Brookes. Has anyone heard of him or have any written proof of him? This is all very interesting to me. Please cotact me if U have any photos of my Father , etc. at j.t.m@frontier.com.

Reply



**Unknown** June 17, 2016 at 11:46 AM

This comment has been removed by a blog administrator.

Reply



**Unknown** June 17, 2016 at 11:50 AM

The "Pride of the Yanks" was water ditched on 23 June 1943 ( B17). Does anyone know if there are multiple plans with the same names? thanks

Reply



**Tom** June 17, 2016 at 12:19 PM

Yes, it was not uncommon for several aircraft to have the same name. I know, for example, that there were at least three B-17s named "Liberty Belle."

Reply



**Unknown** June 17, 2016 at 3:36 PM

Pride O the Yanks sn;42-32004 (not Pride OF the Yanks) with the Joseph Leon Patrick crew was ditched in the English Channel June 20, 1944.

Reply

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