

I went into the Army Air Force in 1943 when I was nineteen. At that time we had only the Army Air Force without it having separate branches of service. My training took me from Biloxi, Mississippi to Syracuse, New York; Nashville, Tennessee to Montgomery, Alabama; Panama City, Florida to St. Marcus, Texas and eventually to Tucson, Arizona where I joined a B24 crew in their final phase of training. The B24 bomber had four engines and as I recall, could carry about ten thousand pounds of bombs. At our last stop in Topeka, Kansas we were given a brand new airplane which needed calibration of the instruments after which we flew off to Italy. It was a long trip in an ice storm which diverted us first to Fort Dix and then to Manchester, New Hampshire. From there we went to Gander, Newfoundland, the Azores, Marrakech in French Morocco, Tunis and on to Italy. We arrived in Italy in the final six months of the war in Europe to what I remember as a cold sea of mud. The brand new airplane was quickly taken away for other use by the 15<sup>th</sup> Air Force. We were assigned an old plane in the 738<sup>th</sup> squadron of the 454<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group. Before leaving the states, our bombardier was reassigned and all crews going to the war in Europe then had nine man crews. This meant that I dropped the bombs in addition to navigating. When the war ended I had seventeen missions, some of them in support of the Russian Western front where we hastened their advance bombing rail junctions and other military targets as their army raced to capture Budapest, Vienna and Berlin. My longest mission was to bomb an oil refinery in a town called Kralupy, perhaps twenty miles from Prague. We knew we hit our target that day as a column of oil smoke came up almost as high as we flew. Some of the planes did not get to the target and others did not get home. In our case we were very fortunate to land at our base, taxi to the end of the runway and turn off when we ran out of gas. We had our share of flak and damage to the airplane in our seventeen missions and were both scared to death and exhilarated at the same time. It is interesting when you are young how you can look at the danger. Every time we flew we said, "This could be the day" and yet when the target appeared, we concentrated on the task at hand and were lucky enough to return to our base in Italy. Not everyone was that fortunate. I still clearly recall the peculiar smell of flak bursting in black balls around us and feeling it hitting the airplane. If you were fortunate, it merely burst in the air or went through the airplane leaving only a hole behind. If you were unfortunate in having an engine hit which resulted in mechanical failure, it was a long way home. I recall one of our early missions to a city called Moosebierbaum in the vicinity of Vienna which had an oil refinery. While over the target our number one engine was shot out and the propeller feathered; then number two and three engines developed supercharger problems which reduced the power we needed to get from them. About this time, the fourth engine shut down and we had trouble trying to get it back in operation. In all probability it was caused by an air lock or flak damage, but we were able to limp off the target and return to Italy. We went limping home on several missions. One was a target in Hungary called Szombathley where we took a lot of flak and should have helped the Russian advance. On another mission north of Budapest to a target with a name I do not recall, we were down to two engines when the pilot called on the intercom to ask if I knew where we were. At twenty-one, you are more sure of yourself than you should be and I told him I knew exactly where I was. Within five minutes I had confirmation from a landmark as we flew alone safely but very slowly home.

It is interesting to reflect back on these experiences with great pride and satisfaction because the WWII efforts created a significant result in history and provided a great victory which was achieved with the help of the Russians for the benefit of the world. Many people, especially among our Russian friends lost family members... Some of my schoolmates lost their lives as well. They made the ultimate sacrifice from which all of us in the years since the war have benefited. While my service was not as spectacular as many, it was significant enough to convince me that peace is a wanted objective for all of the world.



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