



As we approach his 90th birthday I look at my fathers WWII pilot memorabilia. The government almost didn't let him enlist. He was the "Old Man." At 29 years he was the oldest new recruit pilot in the 447th Bomb Group.

He signed up for 31 missions; this meant "over enemy territory." He'd finished his combat flights but could as yet not return to the US so ferried planes to other bases in Scotland, Ireland and England. Upon his release he had flown 130 missions (33 in combat).

My father never talked about the war, at least to me. Now I find myself blessed; in perhaps the last ten years this master storyteller sometimes part the veil and shares tales of that time: a time when a young boy (normally stationed on the ground) begs to go up on an *easy* mission; dad relents and the mission turns into a combative one. The boy, who is riding in the parapet, freezes and doesn't send off one shot. Somehow they return and in my dad's fear/anger he chases the boy around the base only to be held back by other crewmen before dad can catch him. Another time awed by the bravado and courage of Ray Hayes, the man who could find anything, as he crawled out to repair a gun in flight. There are a million things I would like to hear about but I've found it more rewarding when they come out in their own time.

I look through old orders, flight charts, pictures and my hand rests on The Book...it is a mere 5 inches wide and seven inches long. It sports a tan cardboard cover with a brown taped spine. Handwritten on the cover diagonally are the words "**MY G A L**". On the green-lined ledger paper I begin to read:

“My Gal”
 B-17-G, #239882
 Built by Vega and as fine a Fort as ever came off any line.

Finis	“Her Crew”
5/13/44	“Jack” Gruber, Martin J. “Larry” Hatfield, Larry, S. “Gene” D’Albero, Eugene, G. “Gus” Herlth, August, E. “Lou” Jenkins, Louis, L. “Speed” Stoyer, Wm, H. “Ray” Hayes, Raymond, L. “Rock” LoCarro, Rocco, J. “Bailey” Swadley, Gailey, E. “Bill” Lindgren, Wm, M. “Burt” Wilson, B.L.
5/9/44	0-802558 0-681406 0-687816 0-679511 T-SGT T-SGT S/SGT S/SGT S/SGT /SGT S/SGT
5/9	1 st Pilot (Capt 5/2/44) Co-Pilot (1st 5/2/44) Navigator (1 st 5/2) Bombardier (1 st 5/2) Engineer Radio Ball Turret R. Waist L. Waist Tail Gunner R. Waist
5/13	
wounded 4/13/44	

Jan. 12, 1944
Rattlesden, England

“This is not a Diary or a log. It is merely my personal impressions and opinions on our missions and life in general here in England; naturally the main topic will be our ship, “My Gal” and her crew. For my part - no better bunch ever took a B-17 over Germany.”

I will have to “fly the reciprocal” here for awhile in order to get caught up to the present.

Briefly

We left Kearny, Nebraska Nov. 12, 1943. I had left Alice at the hotel at 5:00 o’clock – it’s tough to leave a wife whom one is very much in love with, to take on a deal like this where the odds leave something to be desired. We spent a few days at Presque Isle, Maine then on the 18th took off - refueled in Goose Bay, Labrador and on to Prestwick, Scotland by the next morning - a long and very tiring trip - only saw the ocean a couple of times on the way over - personally I’ll take the ocean liner - it may take longer but it must

be a helluva lot more comfortable. We were weathered in at Prestwick for 4 days - long enough to get up to Glasgow and see a little bit of the surrounding country.

Took off for Rattlesden on the 22nd arriving here in the middle of the afternoon with a low ceiling and visibility measured in yards - gave us a good picture of what the flying weather was to be like over here. We had heard about the comfortable bases the 8th had over here in England, old mansions etc. It didn't take us long to see that this was another of the Army's Snafu jobs - so we bought galoshes and waded in - We have been wading ever since. The barracks are concrete, roof, rafters, walls and floor and damp. *Cere Le Guerre*.

It took quite a while for us to get operational - a lot of grounds school and ferry trips getting ships modified for combat. A term used over here, meaning a place where you leave your airplane for a week while they strip off everything that is loose and steal any thing they might happen to want at the time.

The groups pulled its first raid on Christmas Eve...rather that day. The target was down in France somewhere - We were not invited - they picked up a few flak holes but saw no real trouble and every one came home.

The next raid was a long haul over to Ludwighaven in Germany. Again, we weren't invited - We lost Lt Schero on that one, our first loss. He was a good boy - from Illinois - Also our own SQ 711.

Next was a raid on Cognac in France - not invited again - That was a tough one - We lost Lt Moore - a swell fellow - he had been an officer in the Calvary and was nicknamed "Rough House". He would keep a whole room in hysterics with his conversation while drunk as an owl. Jellison had a rough time that trip but got back. Wes Hudson had a helluva big hole in his right wing right thru the spar - they junked both ships.

I'm not going to catalog all the raids, just those that were of special interest to us.

#1 Jan. 4, 1944

We learned the night before that we were on the list for the next day's raid. I went to bed about 9:30 - I wouldn't say that I slept - guess I just dosed - my mind was full of details, little things, that I wanted to review - When the boy came in to wake us at 3 am it was a relief to get up and get going. My tenseness left me and I was glad to be on my way. We dressed, got down to the mess hall for our fresh eggs and off to briefing - Wow! When we saw what the target was we knew it was no milk run - Kiel, and our first mission, well it was a good life while it lasted. We were on the boards for **#2 position, Low Squadron, Low group - Alt. 24,000'** **Temp. - 60F Ship 882 "My Gal" - Distance 840 miles.** Take off 7:50 am Dark as hell! The boys got out to the ship about an hour

before Gene and I - things were Snafu - The guns had just arrived and the boys were having a helluva time. I taxied out and took off on time but the crew weren't even dressed yet. We nearly cracked up on take off with 38-100lb bombs aboard. - after that one I put the crew in the radio room until we got airborne. Picked up the group and got into position ok. From then on it was all ordinary. We were over water most of the way when we hit the enemy coast I put on my flak suit and my helmet in anticipation - shortly before we reached the IP we started seeing flak in the distance - it looked rough but didn't really think much about it. We turned on the IP for the bomb run and the flare went up indicating that we were bombing on Pathfinder - we could see only patches of ground thru the clouds. Flak really started coming up in earnest now on all sides - it is fascinating stuff to watch but I was much to busy to be interested - its tough to keep in formation and watch out so that some other ship isn't going to unload them on top of us. We made a fast turn out from the target - according to all information we really plastered the hell out of the target. We saw a few enemy fighters but we had excellent protection and no one molested our particular formation. We came on home hell bent and came in on time - "My Gal" did a good job, only a couple of dents from flak and every one happy to have the first one in and only 24 to go.

I had a cold and the Dr grounded me until my ears cleared - Gene, Gus, Jenkins and Swadley all pulled missions with other crews while I sweated them out.

#2 Jan. 11, 1944

Sleep situation about the same as the first raid - I'm going to have to do something about that - This was a Snafu affair from the start - while I'm writing this the radio is telling of the wonderful job that was done and that our loss of 59 Bombers was justified - Hogwash - we got the hell kicked out of us because the whole flight was messed up - half the ships never found the formation and had to abort - We had a turret out and were 1 hr late getting off - Gene did a fine job of finding the formation. We were to have #3 position in the lead SQ but when we arrived it was filled so we took #4 in the high SQ - no one else showed up so there we sat all alone. Ships were all over the sky trying to find their own groups. The weather was foul and I am of the opinion that the mission should have been scrubbed. We were late leaving the coast, went in over Holland where the weather started clearing up. We hit out IP 7 minutes early, so far we haven't seen a friendly fighter but hadn't been attached ourselves although we saw a couple of ships ahead of us go down. We hit heavy flak on the run (damn bomb run was 13 minutes long. I felt like the duck in a shooting gallery - we were loaded with 10 - 500 lb Demo's and put them right on the target. It must be rough down there when those baby's blow. Right after we left the target the fighters started hitting us. Those boys aren't slackers. They come right on in with their wings winking red at you. We saw several ships go down but they didn't get any close to us. We were under constant but not heavy enemy fighter attack for more than an hour after leaving the target. The lead Navigator messed things up and started the let down before we crossed the enemy coast. We were over a 10/10 layer and that meant we're out over the North Sea. I had a bad oxygen leak so when we arrived at 14,000 ft I removed my mask and thinking we were free of the coast I shucked my flak suit and helmet and lit a cigarette - just about that time all hell broke loose - we hit the heaviest flak I have seen yet. Evidently we were over one of the Fresian Isles - we poured on the coal and rode our

tired little asses out of there in a hurry. A few minutes later, we started letting thru the overcast in formation - a tough job at best and on top of that we fogged up so bad we had to fly with both windows open. We were lucky in that we found the SQ we had been flying on although they had lost the rest of the group. We stuck with them and let down thru the last cloud layer almost over Stowmarket. It was sleeting and visibility was practically nil with ships all over the area. We sighted the field and the runway in use. I was tired and pretty well disgusted with the way the mission was run so I let my wheels down and wheeled her in - damn I was tired and glad to be on the ground. Our crew chief Simpkins was waiting for us. I always get a lump in my throat when I see the ground crew standing there waving to us. They work long hours in nasty weather to get the ship in the best possible condition and have almost as much pride in her as we have. God, but it is a wonderful feeling to get down and stretch, smoke a cigarette and look the ship over for holes. We weren't even touched - don't tell me that we aren't lucky - Everyone is talking at once - excited and relieved and covering up their real feelings with jokes. Every man on the crew did his job to perfection - no excitement in their voices while under attack - each man called off the attacks very calmly and efficiently - The big joke of our trip was Gus's calmness when we were attacked by 2 ME 210's from 2 o'clock low. He fired at the first one but his aim was restricted by other ships in the formation. It didn't blow up so he figured to hell with that and when the next one came up spitting 20 mm's he grabbed his camera and started grinding out picture of it—what a guy!

To sum up the raid - here are the vital statistics from Gene's log:

Target: Brunswick about 120 miles SW of Berlin - Alt. 21,000 ft
Distance RT 870 miles
Ship #882 "My Gal"
Temp 42 F
Germany claims 124 H Bombers, 12 fighters and 7 of her own
Bomber Command claims we lost 59 Bombers and 5 fighters - claim over 100 Nagies downed.

Our group lost 3 ships: Lt. Col. Borman leader of Composite Group down over Germany - Lt. Hickey missing - Lt. Fouts of the 711th got hell shot out of his ship and ditches in the N. Sea - was rescued after 3 hours and is back on base. Altogether a Snafu job - Hope someone at Bomber Command get his ass busted and loses a lot of sleep thinking of the men and ships be threw away.

Jan. 13, 1944:

We were weathered in and taking it easy with a class now and then. Next week this time I will be in London where I intend to get myself drunk!

Jan. 14, 1944:

They pulled a fast one on us today - alerted us about 9:am Briefed at 12 noon for a 1:30 take off. Mission was a secret installation in France ETR was 5 o'clock Alt.12,000 ft bombing by SQ. It had the looks of a Milk Run. We were all set but on the run up "My Gal" balked - her left mag on #3 had oil on the points and cut out - by the time we got it fixed, the tower had sent in a spare and wouldn't let us go - we were very disappointed at the time; but more so when the boys got back - They saw no enemy Fighters and not 1 puff of flak. My God, what a mild run - we were robbed. Looks like we'll catch one in the morning - 711 is supposed to have the day off, but since Tuesdays raid that the consequent losses I imagine we will be pulled out and anticipate a tough one.

Jan. 16, 1944:

Fogged in, looks like we may make that London pass yet - hope it holds until Wednesday. Guess "My Gal" had a reason for not letting us go on that Milk run the other day - We found the #3 Super Charger was warped and had to be changed.

Jan. 24, 1944: (This one counted as mission - we were over enemy territory)

Almost chalked up #3 today, was called at 3 am for 5 o'clock briefing. The night was clear and it looked like we might have some good weather. Walked into briefing and should have liked to walk right out again - a deep penetration to Frankfurt—lots of flak and fighters and us sitting up in #9 position high where all I can do is sweat. Think Larry was really afraid of this one. I have never seen him so pessimistic about a mission - guess I'm just stupid - got an idea that they can't hurt us—hope I don't find out different. We took off on time and joined formation without to much trouble. Then began the fun; weather started moving in. We finally reached our altitude out over the Channel after assembling thru several thick cloud layers - damn tricky and dangerous flying with hundreds of loaded ships in the air. The weather ahead looks bad and wasn't to sorry when the Pathfinder ship had to abort causing the whole wing to abort - eventually the whole outfit came home. Guess that Braunschweig mission gave them something to think about. It's a rough deal to get that far on a mission and have it scrubbed - awfully tired so slept all afternoon - hope they leave that target alone for awhile - First time I ever landed with the kind of load I had today; was gentle with her.

"My Gal" is in the shop. Will they never learn to let her alone for her own crew - hope to go over and pick her up tomorrow.

#3 Jan. 30, 1944: Target Brausehweig. Ship "My Gal" Distance 870 miles.

Well we lost 60 the last time in there so we knew it wasn't a Milk Run. Flying #6 in high SQ so I decided to fly it from the right hand seat. I don't mind flying from there but taking off at night with a full load is a little tough to handle. However, everything went ok on the take off. Joined the group at 19,000 ft. We were supposed to bomb at 20,000 ft but oh baby - that was one which should have been scrubbed. We had to keep climbing trying to get over clouds and con trails - I was whipped right thru the other group once on a turn. The rough part came later on the run. We turned on the IP in the soup - Vis is about 500 ft. I was flying on Keller and kept in as close as possible but all at once he blanked out. I went on instruments - found myself in a 45 degree bank climbing at 110 mph - had full power but it was too late. She stalled and would have spun but good old Gus picked that time to let go the bombs and the lift saved us. I climbed on out and found Keller again and on home. That was a tough show for awhile. Flak from below. Another group over us dropping bombs and on instruments - what a helluva way to earn a living.

Jan. 31, 1944:

Had to abort today at 17,000 ft. Oxygen system went out on Pilots side - Frankfurt was the target - turned out to be a fairly easy mission but a long one.

#4: Feb. 3, 1944 - Target Wilhelmshaven, Altitude 27,000 ft, Distance 750 miles

"My Gal" out of commission due to a bad oil leak so we flew Bud Kinsinger's ship 842 in #9 High SQ, flak was heavy and accurate...2 holes in wings; one is nose just missed Gene & Gus. The #5 ship got in trouble; slid over and nearly crashed us. I used everything I had at that time - no future in this business - 5 hours on oxygen, good fighter support. According to reports we hit the target with good results.

#5 Feb. 4, 1944 - Target Frankfurt - Alt. 22,000 ft; 800 miles; Ship 497 Position #2 high SQ

5 hours on oxygen - Gus in hospital and LoCarro on DNIF so we carried a couple of strangers. A long haul, however, they didn't have much trouble last time, we had a good position and a new ship--We were last ship to get off. When I arrived at the ship, the bombs and gas weren't loaded. If Dal weren't a damn good Navigator we never would have found our group. As it was we were able to join and in time to get our briefed position. Not much trouble going in, got a little off course and Amsterdam threw a bit of flak at us. Navigation in lead ship evidently in trouble as we came on the target from the opposite direction. Flak heavy but inaccurate over target. Bombs away about 12:30, had trouble keeping out from under #5 man. Believe me hit target, no reports as yet. Our briefed route took us fairly close to the Ruhr but the lead navigator screwed up and took us right down Happy Valley - that was a hot few

minutes. We took a hit under our right wing, and I figured we had lost an engine but the old baby kept on going altho she looked like a sieve when we landed. The lead ship got hit amidstships and disintegrated. A very nasty situation - lost Major Shepherd - a good guy and the best CO in the group.

#6 Feb. 5, 1944 - Target Scramball - supposed to bomb an airfield down below Paris.

Flying #7 high group (my first shot as an element leader). Capt. Maguire was leading and thru a mistake in Central times we were 15 minutes late taking off. Maguire tried to catch up by climbing to altitude at 500 ft per minute. Ships were aborting one after another. I filled in #2 in the lead finally. Maguire aborted first at the French coast. Keller #4 pulled up to take the lead so I flew on in #2. The High SQ leader a Lt. Logass didn't know what the score was and by the time he had taken over the lead, we had passed directly over Abbeyville and had the hell shot out of us. "My Gal" got her first real test of combat and didn't like it. Had to replace a main tank in the right wing and a lot of other patches. She's a good ship tho and I like to fly her better than any new ship on the field - The leader finally decided we didn't have enough ships to penetrate further so we ran for home-I had enough for that day anyway - This was our 3rd in a row and it was too many - everyone a little tired and off the ball. Gus still in hospital - Joe Hendrix went along as Bombardier - LoCarro back on the job at R. Waist.

Feb. 6, 1944:

Have a lot of catching up to do - The old 8th has been out to break some records. Consequently our little asses have been really overworked. In the last 10 days we have been briefed 9 times.

Feb. 8, 1944:

We've had a 3-day rest and feel like I could pull a mission again - probably will in the AM - hope we get an easy one - we need it for moral. We've had some nasty hits the last 3 times out.

Feb. 10, 1944:

Up this AM and briefed for Brunswieg again. Boy, that's 3 times - had a lot of trouble with the ship and just as I was ready to take off, the whole deal was scrubbed due to weather and everyone came back. I wasn't sorry and neither was the crew. We moved to return by a southerly route at 15,000- boy this business is getting dangerous. Back to operations and got permission to go on our 2-day pass so off to London to unload some of our excess cash.

Feb. 12, 1944:

Back to camp last night. Had a fair time in London but I don't get the kind of rest there that I need. Next time I'm going to some rest resort down South. The boys pulled the Brunswieg deal while we were gone and got their pants shot off - if the facts got out it would be known that we lost 20% of the ships that we sent out. Our SQ lost John Jellason and Lt. Finfinger of the 710th went down. Guess we have lost close to 15 crews already. Finfinger's wife was a friend of Alice's. Ed Kaffun has 10 missions. Bud Esterline got Captain today.

#7 Feb. 20, 1944: Sunday - Target - Tetrow Germany - 1200 miles round trip and assembly time over England

11 hrs and 30 minutes in that old flying seat - damn but that's too much for a man - Larry in the hospital so I flew with a co-pilot from a replacement crew. Went in over North Sea and Denmark then South over Baltic on direct heading for Berlin - weather snafu couldn't find target so dropped on eta - Had a few fighter attacks, no escort as main force was fitting straight into central Germany - got back around 5:30 all very tired.

Feb. 22, 1944:

Up and briefed for Schweinfurt this a.m. after 5 hours of maneuvering around in the soup ops went abandoned and we came home - tough to put in that much work and sweat and get no mission out of it.

Feb. 23, 1944:

Feeling pretty sick with my cold so didn't fly - Gene and Stoyer both went - target Rostok. Boy we are really reaching out these days.

#8 Feb. 25, 1944 - Briefed at 5a.m. for Regensburg. Alt 18,000 ft 5:45 on oxygen - 238 50 ft Freg bombs

No SD Co-pilot Kludt navigator and Goodman Ball turret - rather a mixed crew but all good boys - especially the co-pilot - he held her right in there #6 in lead squadron - Captain Palfrey was leading B Group and got knocked down by flak at Saarbrücken - 10 chutes came out though so I guess old Pauncho is eating sauerkraut and spuds and Stalaglufturt. Was a beautiful day over the continent - first time I have ever really seen the continent - The Bavarian Alps were very close on our right - (wonder how they treat internee's in Switzerland). We hit the target about 2:00. A pretty little town set in an alley - we blew it to hell - don't believe we will ever have to return there. The mission was well planned for a change - groups were up from Italy and others from England were

hitting targets close by. Fighter escort was very good - 31 groups (48 to a ge.) - only one time when Jerry got in close - Bill gave them hell and they changed their minds about picking on "My Gal."

Played a hunch that really paid off - just as we were crossing the French coast on the way out, we ran into flak - Heavy and accurate. We had moved up into the High Squadron flying both 5 & 6 alternately. I had just moved from 5 to 6 and given it to NOYD when we hit the flak - guess the old lucky pieces were really on the ball because I got a feeling, took the controls and skidded over the top to #5 just then all hell broke loose right where we had been sitting. Very little battle damage. She's a damn good ship in spite of what they say about her at Engineering.

#9: Feb. 28, 1944

Am a bit behind with this essay so will reconstruct. Feb 28, 1944 - No ball over French installations - Took off @ 2 p.m. I.P. over Channel 38 mile bomb run, bombing by squadrons @ 12,000 - Don't think we will go in there @ that altitude again. We got into heavy accurate flak over the target where there was supposed to be no flak. I have never heard anything like it. We were flying #3 off Duke who was leading the SQ - Fouts #2 caught fire and about 6-8 chutes came out - we dropped the bombs (didn't hit target) - made turn then Larry who was flying, yelled at me that Duke was bailing his men out. I said, what the hell do you want me to do - he said "take it and get us out of this flak - we got out - Badly shot up but no one hurt.

#10 Feb. 29, 1944. Braunschweig again - P.E.F @ 23,000

Avoided most of the flak going in - 1 hit in left wing. Lost another gas tank - don't know what we did to the target but will be glad to get that place finished up. No one hurt, just tired as all hell -

March 7, 1944

Up and briefed for a target in happy Valley - scrubbed for weather. Yesterday the boys went to Berlin and got the hell shot out of them.

#11

Well this is the one - knew we would get it and will probably see lots of the place. Berlin - East of Town-Ball bearing works. I have never sweated one out like I did this one. Frankly I wasn't too sure we would get back - However, it was a miracle mission - plenty of fighters and flak, but none of it came our way - a well-planned and led mission. It was visual and we had a good look at the

big town (it is big) - We flew #3 off Buck Kelter and Col. Jamper - I did a bit of private praying for My Gal and her crew - I have thanks to give this night. Bombed from 22,000 and hit our target good. Well off to the hay - am on the list for the a.m.

#12 March 9, 1944 - Big Town

Briefed at 4:30 am - tired as all hell, didn't think they would send us back today, to much for men and equipment to stand. Bad overcast, about 800 foot ceiling with icing, thought that they would scrub it but no such luck. Flying #5 high SQ - climbed thru 3000 feet of crude - did a good job (modest). Formed @ 12,000 foot climbed in formation to 24,000 feet. Mj. Elder led. Very poor - too fast on climb - wasted a lot of gas on the forming - Hit some flak on the way in, not bad - strong head wind, seemed like we would never get there. Finally had to decide what I was going to do one of the toughest decisions I have ever had to make. Felt I had a good chance of making Sweden which meant interment or I could dump my bombs and try and make it back to England. Finally decided to stay with our group until I could cut across the target, drop my bombs where they might do some good and try and catch the 1st division leaving the target - figured I would have to ditch in the Channel, but there is always that 100 to one shot. Made the turn dropped our bombs and took off across Berlin all alone - slipped in with the lead SQ of the 1st Division and leaned her out. Threw everything loose overboard - did a lot of transferrng and with a good wind, it began to look like we could make it - to make it short, but a lot of sweating and working, we brought My Gal all the way home to her own hardstand. You couldn't wet a handkerchief in any of the tanks - Col. Harris said it was good headwork - I call it luck and I love my luck. Stand down tomorrow. I couldn't pull one anyway. My fanny is literally bruised -

#13 March 16, 1944. Target Augsburg, Alt 19,000 ft (12B) Supposed to hit an airfield near town but had to bomb center of town on P.F.F. - took off 8:15 - flew My Gal"

Sinaelby and Lindover off - Tail gunner a snake on his second Mission - both his guns went out and he couldn't do anything about it. We were jumped by everything in the Luftwaffe. Locarro got a Ju 88. The boys really burnt up the ammo. Hayes had trouble but being the kind of guy he is he improvised and kept the turret in operation. I was scared and bad - Those bastards came right on in giving us all hell - Hutchins got it, caught fire but believe he got all his men out - Art Durante and Chuelliegh were with him. They kept at us for 2 hours - we were hit twice - once in the wing and once in the horizontal stabilizer, which gave me a bad time on landing - had to change it -

Flak was pretty rough over the target but Switzerland was close so if anything went wrong that was an out. I'm getting an awfully sore fanny from these long trips - time on this one 10.75. I could fly home in that time.

#14 March 18, 1944 Munich.

Briefed Target was Augsburg again - bad fog on the ground so take off was delayed - finally got off around 9:30. 12 noon before we left the British coast - MacRae was leading - he did a pretty great job up to the target, then got balled up - we went on past the target and hit the Beer Hall at Munich - what a deal - plenty of flak and we were plenty low - hit a lot of bad weather up high and had to let down - Saw Switzerland only 8 minutes away—looked mighty good - Flew 124 Lowry's ship - May Gal is being renovated - Lindgren still off but Swadley back on the job - Fighters didn't bother us much. Raised hell with the libs - We didn't land until after 7 pm - They were starting to sweat us out back here. Fanny numb - had #4 tank shot up - everyone okay.

#15 Recall from Frankfurt

Halfway again... boy what a helluva job this flying has become. Briefly saw an airfield near Frankfurt on P.F.F. on the center of town if overcast - Damn near missed the group over England—weather very bad - Finally caught them near coast and joined up. Weather broke over French Coast, hit some flak. We were hit but were lucky. Just at Boueler we came to a front...couldn't get over so mission was recalled - glad the wing leader used his head - 45th C.W. went on in, lost 17 ships. Paper says 6 - we were back by 1:30 - Brought her back with 42 aboard.

March 21, 1944

OPS had the guts to try and get me out for a practice mission this am. Told 'em off - I'll never get anywhere in this army that way - and that's just what I want.

#16 March 26, 1944 Cherbourg, France

We were hauled out of the sack this am at 2:30 - briefed for Leipzig - via every flak area in both France and Germany - none of us liked the looks of it but ours is not to reason why—ours is to do 30 missions - Just as we were starting engines the mission was scrubbed. We went back to the briefing room and were told to report back at 10:30 - It is at times like this morning when one realizes the peculiar sort of life we lead; some of the boys got dressed and went to church, others hit the sack - a bunch of us played ball. Shot my pistol for awhile and just generally had fun out in the sun - it was a very excellent day - to see us one would never know that only a few minutes before we had been all ready to go out and risk our lives dealing death and destruction to those we call the enemy - and that in an hour or so we will go down, be briefed on another target and on our way - never knowing where or what might happen. The saving factor is that very seldom do any of us think of it in this way.

We briefed again at 11 am

#17 Charles, France – March 27, 1944, '43 Dukes ship 719 'My Gal' out for a new #3

Briefed at 5 am for an airfield near the Spanish border – Fog very bad, couldn't see across the perimeter track – started engines 4 times before we got the go-ahead. 3 hour delay – We were flying #2 in comp. group with 385th high squadron – Keller leading. We were second off – visibility no more than half the runway – assembled the SQ at 8000 ft – times were all screwed up, finally tacked on to a 1st division group and bombed an airfield at Charles, Fr. – lots of flak – red flak also? Much shorter mission than we were briefed for.

On returning to field heard that Wes Hudson (my best friend in the SQ) had crashed and blown up shortly after take off. Feel pretty broken up over it...he was a 100% boy from Tacoma. I'm going to miss Wes. Gee, his bombardier and the rest seems to me they are sticking our necks way out, making us take off in that kind of weather.

March 28, 29, 30, 1944

No flying, no ground school. Been to Ipswich a couple times – alerted last night but scrubbed – again. Tonight hope it's a short one. My Gal should be ready to discharge some time tomorrow – be glad when she is back in shape.

#18 April 1st, 1944

April Fools – Target Ludwigshaven. Turned back at French Coast due to weather. Unable to get above 16,000 ft. Meager accurate flak at coast – slight damage ship 188.

Instrument take-off broke out about 50 ft off the ground. Damn I hate those things – so many things can go wrong and taking off #9 high – filled in #2 high at coast out. 00 with a fully loaded ship is not my idea of smart operations – anyway we logged another one...leaves 12 to go – wish I could finish up and be home by end of May.

April 2, 1944 – Sunday – weather rainy.

Briefing 12:45 ground school – went to one class then back to barracks. Think I will go to Ipswich tomorrow if no flying.

#19 April 8th, 1944— Target – Rheine Airfield, 35 miles inside German Border from Holland – Alt. 19,500 ft 6 hr round trip.

Ship 161 Flew #6 low Squadron lead group A Wing. Visual bombing – 13 goddamn minutes on the bomb run with not a degree of evasive action. They held their fire until we were in range, then let go with everything they had; intense. Accurate. We lost #1 by a direct hit and got it feathered. I've seen flak and lots of it, but never had it hit us like today – came home with 3 engines in formation. Blew a tire on landing...don't know why – got her off the runway so the rest of the formation could land. Flying 161 – Bill Johnson's ship. Man it looks like a sieve. Left wing all shot to hell. Big hole in main tank, still leaking when we landed – Radio compass, Inverter, Bomb bay motors; think they were hunting for ours truly today – Well that leaves 11 to go – can't all be as tough as today. "My Gal" will be ready tomorrow...awfully glad to have her back.

#20 April 13, 1944. Augsburg again. Briefed at 7am take off at 10 ETR 6 pm – a long haul

We hit bad flak shortly after crossing the French coast. We were flying #3 in the lead Squadron. They really had us spotted – 21,000 ft but they had us – Bill Johnson lost 2 engines 6 men wounded. He made it back to England and bailed his men out. Bill couldn't get out and was killed – swell fellow, big good-looking Swede from Minneapolis. He was #4 – Lowry in #7 had 3 men wounded at the same time and returned to base. Keller and Maguire in lead ship were hit over target – believe they got to Switzerland okay – we could see the other side of Lake Constance – looked mighty peaceful over there – 2 other ships from our group also headed that way. Flak over the target was intense and accurate. That's where Rock got hit – both legs; the right one looked like it was shattered but found out today that the bone was okay – Swadley was good on the first aid...got a tourniquet on it and gave Rock a shot of morphine – Rock never did pass out – talked and joked all the way back over for 3 hours – going to be tough without him – he was always good for a laugh – We were flying "Journeys End" Keller's old ship. She is now in the shop – if I had known the shape she was in I would have headed for Switzerland myself – The last two have been tough as hell. We ought to get a break soon and get a couple of easy ones – The flak is getting awfully damn rough. Those 10 missions look tough as hell...Hope to get Bret Wilson to take Rock's place.

#21 April 18, 1944 "My Gal" – Berlin

Flying #4 Low Squadron Low Group – took off around 10:30. Took a new route up by N. Sea and in by Hamburg – everything went okay until we turned on I.P. where we hit a front and our group lost the wing. We had no PFF so couldn't find the town – we did a couple of 360s but finally turned back, bombed some innocent little town and headed for home. Burt Wilson is filling in for Rock. Pulled some pretty heavy pressures on the way in – hope we didn't hurt the old gal – don't like that #4 spot at all. I forgot to mention that we didn't get any hits – knock knock.

#22 April 19, 1944 – “My Gal”

Target Werl on the eastern side of Happy Valley – Flying #5 high Squadron. It looked like tough one because although the target, an airfield, was briefed as flak-free, the route was a long one with lots of narrow corridors. We flew in the Low Group 385th leading. Their lead Navigator was right on it all the time – They threw flak at us from both sides but couldn't reach us – Good bomb pattern – altogether a good mission.

#23 April 20, 1944 – “My Gal” – Target – No Ball #40

Thought that we were going to rest today but took off late for a short one into France – No navigators on these trips. Dirty deal for them as it makes all their runs long. Gus did the navigating – did a pretty good job. Bud Gensinger led the SQ. I flew #2 – Don't think we did a very good job on the target – visibility poor. 9:00 pm when we got back.

April 21, 1944

Went out for our 4th in a row. Didn't take off until 1:30 and ETR was 10 pm which is pretty damn dark – Hit soup at 6,000 at 13,000 ft still in it and #2 Engine went out – expected it to go soon as it had been acting up – didn't care as it was a rough target anyway. The whole group returned.

April 22, 1944

Standing by Briefing at 12:30 today – wonder what's “cookin’”. Note Hesse went down on this mission. He was leading wing in the 1st Division...according to reports all men bailed out.

#24 April 22, 1944 – Target Hamm, Germany

“Happy Valley” 179 Northern corner of Rhur Valley. Take off at 3:30 – didn't leave English coast until 6 pm. 7 hour mission – Bomb alt. 23,000 ft – went in over Holland. We slipped thru a flak corridor and did a good job on the Marshalling Yards at 300 mph G. Squad – There was a wall of flak over the target but it seemed to part as we came in and closed up after us – something screwed them up, thank God for that – We got back at 10 pm – dark, tricky landing with all those other ships to contend with. After landing we had intruders and a red alert and we spent 1-1/2 hours waiting for a truck – man was I browned off – told the Colonel what I thought of his system – got to sleep at 2am. We were gotten up for a mission on the 23rd – Thank the weather it was scrubbed.

April 24, 1944

Up for spare. Gus flying with Leach

#25 April 26, 1944 “My Gal” 882

Target Braunsweig again – Supposed to hit a plant outside of town but it was PFF so took the center of town – They threw up an intense barrage but we missed it – We really were sweating it – flying #2 in the lead and we could see it all and couldn't figure how we could possibly miss it – however, we did. I had a bad case of bends on the way over at 21,000 almost aborted but went on and they passed away but left my legs sore as hell. Picked up a little flak on the way out but missed us. That made 24 for me 26 for Gus. Lou and Speed; 25 for Ray & Bailey – 24 for Gene, 22 for Bill – We are all getting up there. The sooner it's over the better.

April 27, 28, 29, 1944

On pass. Went to Ipswich and laid around the R. Cross club. Came back early this afternoon. The boys have been pulling 2 a day until today when they headed for Berlin – 11 didn't show up tonight. The roughest day the Group has had...heard it was a Snafu affair. Red Hughes on his 30th and went down – Fighters got most of them – we have only a few ships operational in the whole group. Only 2 in the AQ. “My Gal” bless her heart, didn't go – she still won't fly for anyone else.

#26 May 1, 1944 – “My Gal”. Recall from a No Ball

Sounds easy but I'm still shaking (a day later). We had a party and although I did not attend I was still awake when the CQ came around a little after 12 midnight. Take off was at 4:10 and coast out time wasn't until 8:48 – We were practicing somebody's screwball idea night assembly with a feint at the So. Coast then back over the field before taking off for our target. I was second ship off, flying #2 on Bud Gensinger – I found him up there. I don't know how and began the hardest 2-1/2 hours of flying I have ever put in – Hundreds of fully loaded (12x50 #) ships flubbing around in the pitch dark. I hung on to Bud the best I could and we came out okay. I'll never do it again – I'll stand court martial first.

We finally headed for our target – just crossed the coast and ran into a front so turned around and headed out. I dropped by bombs in the channel—not about to land with that load.

Four to go – make them short and easy. Look's like I may be a Capt in a week or so.

May 5, 1944

Made Capt. today – what a good deal. very much surprised about the whole thing.

#27 May 7, 1944 “My Gal”

Berlin again. Briefed at 3:30 am for the big town PFF. Getting very tired of that target. I had hoped to get a few easy ones to finish up on. Flying #4 in Lead Sq Low Group but bombed at 23,000 ft – plenty of flak over Berlin as usual but we were lucky and didn't get touched. Got back with just enough gas – really sweated it out but it was easy as far as enemy action goes. Didn't sleep last night so was dead beat when I got home. I get the bends above 20,000 ft. I'm really miserable – hope it's short tomorrow.

#28 May 8, 1944 “My Gal”

Hot Damn – Big “B” again. They are really stretching our luck. We were flying #2 in Low Sq high Group due to bomb at 27,000 ft. The Group took off late and climbed too fast. I had to pull excessive power for a considerable period - #4 engine went out over Colcord, so had to abort. Saw a little flak and just heard that we received credit for the mission – what a good deal – Dick Leigh finished today – Makes the 2ne first Pilot in our SQ to finish. Leaves 3 of us from the original Group. Wish we could get a pass tomorrow – as Gus, Lou and Speed finish on the next one and would like to spend one last pass together.

#29 May 9, 1944, Ship 638

Target an airfield at Laon, France – a short haul with Col. Harris leading and Charles Davis navigating. 26 heavy guns on the target at 23,000 – Flying #4 in High SQ lead Group. Flak over target moderate and to our left. Put Speed up in the nose so he could see the Br. Coast on the way in. A mighty fine feeling to have 3 of the boys finished up Lou, Speed and Gus – am going to miss them on my last one, which I am sweating out as bad as anything I have ever done – “My Gal” getting a new engine – afraid I won't be able to finish in her.

May 10, 1944

Up and briefed for airfield at Brunswick for my 30th – we went out and spent 5 hours trying to get thru a front before it was recalled – no mission. Mad as hell – awful let down – decided to take a pass then come back and hit it fresh. Dad is sick, Larry beat and me nervous.

Went into London – had a hell of a big time with the boys – came back feeling fine and ready to hit that last one – glad we took the pass – we missed another rough one – we are known as a lucky crew all over the base.

END OF TOUR

#30 Operational Missions, May 13, 1944 079 “Toots”

The big one – by the Grace of God – good luck and as fine a crew as ever flew, I am done with combat.

Our target, the marshalling yards at Osnabruck a tough target for flak, but we hit it at 24,000 ft and they were a little slow in figuring our altitude. I flew #7 in low SQ Lead Group. Col. Harris leading again which was a good deal – no trouble going in except weather which made it look like we would have to come back, however, the Col. made it thru. I admit I was nervous as hell, but I would have come home if I'd had to taxi back and row across the Channel in the dingy's – over the target the flak was high and right. I got left in a hurry – in 30 missions a fellow can almost tell where they will throw it next.

Ray Hayes finished with me and Larry's radio operator. Leaves Larry with 3, Gene and Bill with 2 and Bailey who gets out of the hospital tomorrow with 5 – he was even with me when he got the damn mumps. Hope they get them in soon – am going to try and stick around until all are finished up.

I can't explain the way I feel – a tremendous relief; the knowledge that I will see my wife and family again is like having your life handed to you – like a reprieve from a death sentence.

This is a last entry in dad's journal. Although he finished combat duty, he was not able to get back to the United States until August 4, 1944. He flew a total of 33 missions and spent most of his time, while waiting to be discharged flying into Scotland, ferrying planes from one base to another. But that's another story.

As during any wartime where the fighting is abroad there are those who go and those who stay behind. In WWII Women stayed; women who went to work on the lines performing jobs previously held by men, women and children who waited with long periods of non-communication from their loved-ones. Women who followed their loved-ones across the country to that last place where they could go no further. My mother was one of those last women. She stayed as close as she could until dad went overseas; staying wherever she could get a room armed with ration coupons, a hotplate (secret, of course) and a strong will/determination/love that would keep them safe. Their trunks of clothing and household items generally did turn up about 6 months after they had moved on to another base for further training. It was a life on the go; making the most of every moment you had for laughter, and the camaraderie of fast friends & family.

As most of the men were 8 or 9 years younger my mom would often cook for them or provide a place for cards and beer off the base.