

RAID ON BERLIN
Some Rememberances
by L. W. "MAC" McFARLAND
Courtesy of Stephen and Christopher Ames

P R O L O G U E

The following story, "Raid on Berlin," is composed of the best recollections I can make of one day in the lives of ten young men who were a bomber crew on a B-17G in World War II. This crew flew from the 447th Bomb Group in the Eighth Air Force from England. We were second to NONE.

Most of us met each other for the first time in the Classification Center at Salt Lake City, Utah, in the cold winter of December 1943. We became better acquainted on the troop train which took us from SaltLaketo Pyote, Texas, where we trained as a combat crew. Ted Hocking and Malcolm Campman were not on the train. They joined us later in Pyote.

We enjoyed a casual friendliness from our first meeting which helped us function smoothly. On the ground, when we were not in classes, we were a group of young guys enjoying each other in good fellowship. In the air we were, in the speech of the day, sharp in every context of the word. Our crew was serious about our training as we learned to perform our assigned duties to the best of our abilities. There was only one objective in every mind day and nights when we had completed our missions we were all coming home safely. This was never expressed as a hope; we stated it as a fact.

The crew operated as a polished unit, and, if there were any disquieting divisions, they were left behind "for the duration" of the war. We ate together, we traveled together, we sang together, we went on Three-DayPasstogether, and we fought side by side. We accepted each other as brothers, and each tried to contribute to the comfort and confidence in survival of each of the others. In short, we were one hellova crew!!!

On every mission we flew under fire and brought our plane back peppered with holes of assorted sizes. No enemy fighter aircraft ever attacked us, I am happy to report. All of our wounds, personal and to the aircraft, were inflicted by antiaircraft fire from the ground. I strongly believe that the presence of so many trained competent gunners at their places willing and extremely able to use their guns with great effect was the deterrent to attack from fighters.

Each of us was made to feel more secure knowing that every one of us was ready and willing to fight for all of us.

It Worked. We all came home. Thanks be to God!

DEDICATION

This story is gratefully dedicated to the men who flew that mission. They are the inspirations for writing the recollections.
To each of you, for making it possible for me to come home to a good life, thank you!!
Your crewmate,



Pilot Herbert S. "Skipper"
Altman, New York
Co-Pilot L. W. "Mac"
McFarland, Florida
Navigator Frank T. "Ted"
Hocking, Illinois
Bombardier Jay W. Ames,
Pennsylvania
Right Waist Charles H. "Chuck"
Aldridge, Kansas
Left Waist Malcolm C. "Mack"
Campman, New York
Ball Turret John "J-J" Dow, Ohio
Radio William M. "Arkey"
Simington, Arkansas
Top Turret Rex L. Jones,
California
Tail Turret Marvin H. "Marv"
Handley, Tennessee

Additionally, on one mission, we
were joined by:
Bombardier James Walker
Davidson "Jimmy" Ohio
Tail Turret Fritz Jost "Fritz"
South Dakota

At midnight the Charge of Quarters turned on the lights in our hut. Seven pairs of tired eyes looked up at him. He began to read, "Lt. Vorhees' and Lt. Altman's crews - briefing will be in forty-five minutes." We had had but four hours sleep, and we put on our clothes while more asleep than awake.

"How much gas today, C. Q.?"

"Well, sir, the Tokyos are topped off."

A long sigh arose from the whole barracks, then one voice made of seven said, "Big B, sure as hell!!"

On our way to breakfast the half-haze, half-fog morning mist practically concealed the men just ahead of us. The mess hall looked cheerful and warm after the cold of the early English morning. Faces equally as tired as my own looked up from the tables. Only here fresh eggs were served, nowhere else in England could one obtain them. This was a special treat for us before our missions.

We gulped down our breakfast and coffee, and then we rushed to the trucks waiting outside to take us to the briefing room. Little red glowing coals all around told us we were not alone. The cigarettes were the only lights in the trucks. The bumps on the way to the briefing room woke even the sleepest of us.

Benches were lined in two rows on either side of a huge Nissen hut that was the briefing room. There was an aisle between the two rows for the projection machine. A screen was hanging before the map. Concealed behind the screen was our target for the day.

We were all seated when the Group Commanding Officer came in. Someone yelled, "Attention!" and we stood until he reached the front of the room.

"Please be seated. Let's get this target today, and we won't have to go back." He took his chair, and the briefing got under way.

Altogether too slowly the screen was raised, and the map was exposed. Colored pieces of yarn charted our courses in and out of Germany. The red yarn showed our course in; it went up over Holland and then to Berlin--the "Big B". The blue yarn indicated our course out through northern France. There were pieces of transparent plastic outlined in red covering sections of the map. They represented Flak gun positions. The large areas were for many Flak guns, the smaller ones for fewer guns. There was a noticeably large piece over Berlin. It indicated a concentration of anti-aircraft guns in and around that city.

The screen was lowered after the Navigation Officer briefed us on the courses. We were warned not to leave the course being flown except in emergencies.

Next, the Weather Officer took over; his was the most complete data in any theatre of operations. The weather reports were called in by aircraft sent over Germany during the night. "Low clouds at 5000 feet - topped at 7000. Another layer at 10,000 feet - tops unreported. Contrails will form at 15,000, if you're in the clear. The high clouds at 30,000 feet probably won't bother you. Temperature at flight altitude will be 35° below zero."

The navigators were given wind velocities at all altitudes by the Navigation Officer, and then he synchronized our watches. "Coming up on 0147 in 30 seconds - 20 seconds - 10 seconds - 5 - 4 - 3 - 2 - 1, hack!" Now all our watches told the same time.

From here on, Intelligence took over. Detailed maps and charts of the target areas were projected on the screen for us. Photographs, perhaps only twelve hours old, were also shown and discussed. The main point of bomb impact, called the M.P.I., was marked with a big red cross in the center of Berlin. Our courses in and out of the target were also shown in red.

The Intelligence Officer briefed us, "There are at least five hundred heavy guns and a number of mediums in Berlin. We've routed you so you won't be under fire longer than necessary. Mostly, you'll meet barrage Flak. There may be fighters there too. There are three airdromes outside Berlin and a number in nearby towns. Tell your gunners to be alert. The FW-190 and JU-88 are the ones most likely to be encountered. Some of the 88's may be carrying rockets. Four groups of P-47's will pick you up at Enemy Coast-in point. They'll carry you for an hour and three groups of P-38's will take you from there to twenty miles this side of the target. There you will be picked up by three groups of P-51's. Coming out you'll get area support by two more groups of P-51's and three of P-38's."

"You'll be over water for some time. Keep your eyes open for ship movements. If there are convoys on the Autobahns, let us know that too. Keep your eyes open, especially for traffic on the Dutch Canals. See you when you get back - Good Luck!"

Everyone filed out to his locker, and the Bombardiers got their final briefing on the target. The bomb load was discussed and dropping interval selected for maximum effect. Ames joined us at the lockers when his briefing was finished.

The usual horseplay was in progress in the locker room. While someone playfully helped you undress, you tried to dress. First, I donned my Physical Training clothes from cadet days then, my flying suit. Next came my leather jacket and fur lined boots. The Mae West life preserver and the chute harness went on last. We carried out our chute packs, leather helmets, gloves, oxygen masks and Flak helmets.

One of the co-pilot's jobs was to get our rations for the flight. As I walked over to pick up our share of chocolate bars and gum, Ames yelled, "Don't forget the R.A.F. rations, Mac, the boys like them."

"Roger!"

After that, I checked in my wallet and papers with the Intelligence Office. Each man had an individual bag and a receipt. "I'll be back later for that" was the usual comment. And, "we'll be expecting you" was the reply. The smile that followed helped convince even the most doubtful.

For those who desired it, the Chaplains said mass and gave Holy Communion. Many attended a little service before take off time.

The trucks were waiting for us outside, and the drivers were yelling "Low numbers here!" or, "High here". Ours was a high number, so we piled our equipment on the "High here" truck. On the way out to our planes a quiet voice said, "What a hellova way to make a living!" We could feel, rather than see, the smiles all around us.

Briggs, the Co-pilot of the crew in a hut near ours, was being ribbed. His pilot was having a grand time until Briggs said, "Fellows, I wouldn't want it to be generally known, but I have a landing to my credit!" Laughter was quiet now. Pilots let Co-Pilots land only rarely - when they are unable to do so themselves.

"Here is fifty-four" yelled the driver. "Let's go, Mac."

Altman and I jumped off, and the rest of our crew hit the pavement with us. There stood the love of our lives, a B-17G called "The Bouncin' Baby". She was all metal and cold as ice, but we loved her. She has taken us out and has brought us back home before. She had personality. Her name came from the habit of bouncing back home from the continent and because she was a stubborn little gal to land. She was our baby.

Clark, the crew chief and two of his equally tired assistants were giving Baby her final checks.

"How is she today, Clark?"

"She's in fine shape, sir."

Nothing more was asked. That "fine shape" stood for long hours of work by flashlight in the blackout. It assured us we could depend on our plane. Combat crew chiefs loved their planes and sweated out every mission as much as we who flew them.

There was still some time before we started the engines, so we talked over the mission with the gunners. All of their guns had been checked and long belts of ammunition were ready for instant use.

"It's pretty foggy - you'd better flash the lamp for us this morning, Marvin."

With a brief "Okay", Marvin crawled back to his tail gunner position and readied the lamp for use. His job was to flash a red light so that other ships behind us wouldn't taxi into our tail in the fog.

Everyone was now aboard, so Altman and I took our seats in the front office. We went through our check lists, then:

"Start One!"

The centrifugal starter began to whine. When it reached its highest pitch Altman ordered, "Mesh!" It started.

The other three engines were started in order. As they spewed smoke and fire and sputtered to life they shook our plane. We felt we were really on our way to Jerryland. The engines had started easily and checked perfectly, as Clark said they would. Our engines were warmed up, and we were ready to taxi. The squadron leader passed our hardstand, and we fell in line. We went around the perimeter track to the takeoff runway. All along the track other planes were getting ready to taxi out.

Final checks were made just before take-off. Altman and I checked the magnetos, then –

"Co-pilot to right waist - checking flaps."

"Flaps coming down - all the way down - coming up - they're okay", Chuck, the engineer reported.

"Report on the crew, Chuck."

"Everyone in the radio room, sir."

"Roger."

We were now set for take-off, so we taxied out to the run- way. Engines roared as they were run up, and the brakes were held. "Better give me some flaps, Mac. She's loaded today." The flaps went down half-way.

Thirty seconds after the leader was airborne, our brakes were released, and the Baby leaped eagerly for the take-off run. For what seems ages in a bomber pilot's life, the loaded plane rushed down the runway. At last we were airborne too.

"Wheels up!"

The fog was still thick, so the navigator guided us on instruments for the squadron assembly.

"Pilot to Navigator."

"Go ahead, Herb."

"What's the first course, Ted?"

"Fly 230 for two minutes."

"Roger."

First one then another course was flown, and, at last, at 7,000 feet, we broke through the top layer of clouds. The sun was peeping over the horizon; day was beginning. All

over the sky were other bombers getting ready for the same job. Flares were being fired from lead ships of the formations. The radio buzzed with activity.

"Gunblue One, this is Lowland K-king. Will you fire a flare? Over."

"Roger, K-king. Gunblue One circling left, firing flares. Do you see me now?"

"Roger, Gunblue One. K-king joining right away. K-king out."

As we circled for what seemed to be hours, other planes gained altitude and joined their formations. Turn about was taken on the controls while the last cigarette was smoked before the oxygen masks were put on. We continued to climb. Finally, "Co-pilot to crew, we're at 12,000 feet. Put on your masks, acknowledge."

Familiar voices with a different tone due to speaking into the masks checked in:

"Tail, Roger!"

"Waist gunners, Roger!"

"Ball turret, Roger!"

"Radio, Roger!"

"Top turret, Roger!"

"Navigator, Roger!"

"Bombardier, Roger!"

"Co-pilot to tail, are you all set back there, Marvin?"

"Roger.Say, Number Six is trailing."

"Okay. Keep an eye on him in case of trouble. How are you Dow? Is it cool in the ball today, J.J.?"

"It's cool alright. I have my suit turned on already."

"Keep an eye on Arkey in the radio room, Chuck. And you and Campman check each other's masks there in the waist."

"Roger! Will do."

The Co-pilot usually joined the pilot in monitoring radio for most of the mission,

so –

"Co-pilot to Bombardier, they're all yours, Ames. Keep an eye on Ted and don't forget the checks."

"Okay, Mac."

I took over the controls and gave Altman the high sign that everything was set. He had been on radio and missed the intercom chatter.

The altimeter rose steadily as we climbed on course from England. The Navigator informed us, "Coast-out point in ten minutes." The combat wings had been formed during this time, and there were formations on all sides of us. All the planes were now pointed in one direction - The Big B.

"Navigator to crew, we're leaving England. We'll hit the enemy coast in 30 minutes."

"Ted, let us know five minutes before we hit the enemy coast. We've got to put on these Flak Suits."

"Roger, can do, Herb."

The formations droned over the channel. First, we flew north and then, East. We were to enter Germany from Holland. "Light Flak at coast-in point" the Intelligence Officer had told us.

"Five minutes to coast-in, better put on the suits." Turns were taken on the controls as Altman and I put our suits and helmets on. The helmet and masks covered all but our eyes, and we smiled at each other through the masks. Ames reported that the crew was ready, and all had their suits on.

As the coast came into view our P-47 escort joined us. Boy! Did those buzz boys look good to us! Flak was reported low on the right side of the ship. Intelligence wasn't wrong. It was far below us and didn't cause any excitement.

The Dutch border was passed, and Der Vaterland was beneath us now. The first escort left and the P-38's picked us up. Soon, they too were replaced, and the P-51's were taking us in to the target.

Suddenly, the sky over the target now directly ahead of us was pockmarked with polka dots of black smoke. Jerry was awake! Brother, was he awake! This was it!

We were on the bomb run before we knew it. The bomb bay doors opened; the

throttles were advanced. The Bombardier kept up a steady - - "Flak - -9 o'clock low."

"Flak - -10 o'clock high."

"Flak - -3 o'clock level." "Flak - -10 o'clock level."

"Damn! They're throwing it up today!"

The sweetest words in the English language finally came over the interphone, "Bombs Away!" The bomb bay doors were quickly closed, and prayers were quietly said to help us to leave the Flak area safely. Bursts covered the sky in all directions. Our right wing was raised and lowered by a too- near explosion.

"Flak - -11 o'clock low."

"Flak - -9 o'clock level."

"Flak - -12 o'clock low."

"They're tracking us!"

"Flak - -12 o'clock higher!"

"Flak - -12 o'clock higher!"

"Better pull her up, Herb."

"Flak..."

There was a terrible explosion, and the Baby raised her nose above the horizon. I could smell the smoke from the Flak shell, even through my mask. Looking down in the nose I saw Ames in Ted's arms - he wasn't moving! Ted tenderly laid him on the floor and got his oxygen connected again.

First Aid kits were called for and passed forward, then the interphone was silent. Altman and I looked at each other in a strange way. One of us had been hit! There are times when one forgets all about himself - I looked down helplessly while Ted doctored a dirty cut in Ames leg. "Oh God! why doesn't he move?" I felt tears running down my cheeks. I didn't try to hold them back. Ted pressed the morphine tube against Ames leg and injected it, as we had been trained.

All at once he moved! Yes! It was true! He was Alive! "Thanks, God, thanks." Now the tears were for joy, he was still alive! The leg was bandaged, and he asked for his mike to be connected. There was a wonderful voice that said, "Well, I have a medal you guys haven't, I've got the Purple Heart." Good old Ames, he relieved the tension.

All the crew wanted to know how he was. "He's okay" said the Navigator, "Let him rest, I just shot him full of dope. He has a wound in his leg, the Flak was stopped on his

stomach by the Flak suit, and it knocked him out. Let him sleep, the dope is beginning to act."

An uncommonly long time had elapsed in a few minutes. We were out of the Flak area and homeward bound! It was great to be alive! The wind coming in through the hole in the nose plexiglas was not so irritating after all.

Coming home, Flak was reported over many German cities - just to let us know. We didn't care today for we had dropped our bombs on target. Soon the Navigator reported, "We'll leave the coast in twenty minutes."

"Roger. Say, Ted, get me a course home - we're going in early."

"Okay, Herb."

The channel was under us again. Permission was asked to leave the formation, and it was granted. As we left the group, the throttles were pushed forward to get Ames to the Flight Surgeon sooner.

The Navigator's course was true, and soon the field was below us. As we landed, Jones, the top turret gunner, fired red flares to tell the tower we had a wounded man aboard. The ambulance could be seen going to the end of the runway to pick him up.

We cut our engines near the ambulance, and the Flight Surgeon came aboard. He congratulated Ted on his good First Aid work as he examined the wounded leg. As a stretcher was taking him away, Ames asked for his flak. A queer sort of souvenir, but we understood. We promised to bring it to the hospital "unless you get back before tomorrow."

The engines were started again, and we taxied to our hardstand where we were met by the ground crew. The other planes flew over the field before landing. Eyes strained to count them - - "They're all back!"

A truck carried us to the briefing room for interrogation. The Intelligence Officer asked us many questions in order to get a complete report. The number of fighters, methods of attack, amount of flak, accurate or inaccurate, all of these interested him. One crew reported some barges on the Dutch Canals. That "Hot News" was wired to Headquarters for immediate action.

We ate cakes and drank hot coffee served by the Red Cross. On the other side of the room Scotch was available. Our crew didn't drink today - we had our reasons.

The mess hall people were expecting us. It was dark but they had kept our food warm for two extra hours. Their smiles told us they were glad to see us back. The same stew and potatoes were better than ever before.

Going back to the hut, we discussed the day's mission. We were all glad to be back alive, but we were sorry Ameshad been hit. The beds really looked inviting. As fast as we could, we crawled in, and we fell asleep - - that sleep known only to those weary of a trying, dangerous day.

A small prayer of thanksgiving for letting us all return alive was said in a whisper - then everything was quiet.

On 11 July 1944, the Altman crew took off in 42-102651, Piccadilly Ann II for a raid on Munich. Hit by flak, unable to keep up with formation, and unable to return to England, Altman made a forced landing at Dubendorf, Switzerland. The crew and aircraft were interned.

Jay Ames and Marv Handley had been replaced for that particular mission by Lt. James Davidson and Sgt. Clarence Jost.