

I thought you might be interested in this segment of a High School assignment given to my grandson since it included a segment with the 301st bomb group, 32nd Bomb squadron. He was asked to consult with Grandpa on his life as a teenager. So we sat down and tried to establish it from the fragmented memory of his 85-year-old grandpa.

March 1943 Enlisted in U.S. Army Air Force at age 17. At Traux Field Madison Wisconsin.

Nine months later Received pilot wings and Commission as 2nd Lt. from the Air Force South East Training Command.

2 April 1944 294th AAF Base unit Salt Lake, Utah.

Assigned crew number #4409 and the following personnel to my crew. John Anderson Co-Pilot, George Ancil Bombardier, Bruce Howard Navigator, Floyd Smith Top Turret, Earl Kasdorf, Radio Operator, Robert Shaughnessy, Ball Turret, Walter Merkel, Waist gunner, Leonard Schelot, Waist gunner and Joseph Kruczok, Tail gunner.

July 1944 Transferred to Hunter Field, Savannah, Ga.

Final crew checks, physicals, operational equipment and clothing issued. I was assigned 4-engine bomber SN. 44-6342 (B-17-G).

Hunter Field ground crew performed complete pre-flight and maintenance of aircraft and fueled it for flight. I performed ground check and flight check with Hunter Field ground crew chief. We took special care of the assigned aircraft since we were under the opinion that this was our plane and we would fly it in combat. Formal acceptance of Assigned aircraft number 44-6342 (B-17-G) at Hunter Field, GA.

July 1944 Received orders for assignment to join the 301ST Bomb Group 32 Squadron in North Africa. I joined Bruce Howard my navigator and Hunter Field, GA. operations and together we established a flight plan for the transatlantic crossing.

Upon completion of the flight plan we assembled the crew and told them about the flight plan to North Africa. The look on their faces was one of, I hope to hell you guys know what you are doing.

First stop Gander Newfoundland. Then fueled and flight checked the plane before proceeding, after weather delay in Gander, on trans Atlantic crossing. Lots of joking about swim gear etc. during flight delay, but most of crew had serious concerns about the flight. This was a very intimidating undertaking for this nineteen-year-old 2nd Lt. A single plane crossing, lots of ocean, no navigational aids, and a night time takeoff for daylight arrival at the Azores.

Landed in Azores @10:07AM, 3rd August. Approximately 9 hour flight over water to Air base in Azores for a refueling. An in rout sunrise with nothing but water all around was a rather intimidating experience. Upon landing in the Azores, we gave our navigator an "A" for flight

plan, and in-flight course corrections based on star checks and early morning drift readings from ocean waves below.

3rd to 8th Aug 1944. Flew from Azores to Marrakech Fr. Morocco then to Tunis Tunisia and to Lucera just 9 miles north west of Foggia Italy, the operational base for the 32nd Squadron of the 301 Bomb Group.

At 32nd Squadron operations check-in, the operations officer Donald Ewing informed us, that there would be no permanent plane assignments and we were expected to fly any bomber judged to be operationally ready for the assigned mission/ target. Our plane SN #44-6342 was taken over by Major Harding and Amazin Maizie nose art attached.

We were scheduled combat flight assignments regularly from 10 Aug 1944, one day after check in, through 20 January 1945 ending our combat tour with the completion of 50 combat missions in six major European air operations. These air operations were Rome Arno, Rhineland, North Apennines, Southern France, the Balkans, and the air war over Germany. The total combat flight hours logged was 236 hrs 20 min.

Upon combat tour completion our crew was intact except for our navigator Lt. Bruce Howard shot down flying as lead navigator with another crew and Lt. George Ancil relieved from active combat flight duty. Lt. Howard escaped capture and was later returned to the squadron.

As I try to recall individual combat missions flown from notes I found in some old papers, they all seem now at the age of 85, as one big block of memories. The mission dates I was able to establish seem to be awful close together but I do recall flying combat missions almost daily.

The mission dates recorded by Donald Ewing, operations officer in December of 1944 upon combat assignment completion were as follows. Aug. 13, 16, 18, 20, 21, 23, 26, 28. Sept. 1, 5, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 18, 20, 21, Oct.10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 16, 17, 20, 23, 25. Nov. 4, 5, 7, 16, 18, 20, 22. Dec.11, 16. Most of these missions were flown with the originally assigned crew. On some missions members of other crews were used to fill out our crew.

Some mission targets seem to stand out in my memory at this time as difficult missions but I cannot seem to separate their associated actions. Those that stand out in my memory are highlighted below. I can't recall any freebies or milk runs and I will attempt to note the most memorable targets best as I can.

13 Aug 1944. Our 1st combat mission, Target Savona, Italy. Our crew was assigned this mission two days after arrival, no ck-out or pre-combat flight prep. I did not know or speak with any of the flight crews assigned to this mission prior to the preflight briefing. The preflight operational briefing was brief with Target description rout to target IP, bomb run and exit rally point, every thing seemed overwhelming.

This first mission was an eye opener to this young pilot, many aircraft fully bomb loaded, fully fueled, planes flying extremely close together during formation assembly above the air base.

Planes seemed to be going over, under and sliding up to you from all directions before settling into a six-element formation and joining up with two other 6 aircraft elements for the groups en-trail climb to our assigned altitude and flight to the assigned target. To me this first flight assembly routine was a frightening experience.

18 Aug 1944 Target Ploesti Rumania Oil Refinery (Deep penetration rough target) Thoughts about the possibility of not reaching the age of 20 settled in. Next day or remainder of the week thinking replaced long-range planning. This third mission was a real wake up call to air combat and the effect of an unchanging bomb run into a heavily defended target.

20 August 1944 Target Oswiecim Refinery, Poland (Deep penetration double mission). I thought being a fighter pilot might have been a better assignment, as I became aware of our escort flying above the flack and their shorter mission flight times.

The unvarying altitude and airspeed, straight and level flight from the IP to target were a problem and anxiety of mine. Bomber Aircraft during this phase were very easy targets.

10 September 1944 Lobau Refineries Vienna Austria (Deep penetration double mission). Vienna targets were always rough ones, remembered as heavily defended, lots of flack and opposition.

13 Sept 1944 Blechhammer, North Oil Refinery, Germany (Deep penetration double mission).

13 October 1944 Blechhammer, Germany (Deep penetration double mission).

14 Sept 1944 promoted to 1st Lt.

17 October 1944 Blechhammer, Germany (Deep penetration double mission).

Mission duration 9 Hrs. This would be our third trip into this target. This mission was a repeat of the first two. The missions are long and fighter escort short duration. Flack and opposition big problem due to triple visit and the same scripted flight plan to and out of target area as the two previous missions. On one of these missions I recall the fighter escort was forced to drop its external tanks as German fighters in the northern Adriatic region engaged us. This shortened their escort time considerably.

20 October 1944 Brux Oil Refinery, Germany (Deep penetration double mission).

Mission duration 9 Hrs. Back into the long deep penetration flack and opposition in and out of target area. We always seemed to hit target areas around noon and come in from the north and rallying out to the southeast. Target area scripts never seemed to change. Altitudes over target 22,000, or 24 or 26,000 ft. Groups in trail. I always had a problem with this repeated scenario.

22 November Regensburg, Germany. Difficult target. There was one mission I recall where we took a bigger hit than usual but can't remember which one. This may have been it.

18 November 1944 Florisdorf Refinery, Vienna Austria (Deep penetration double mission). The Vienna refineries were always heavily defended. To me Vienna will always be remembered as big trouble not great music.

16 December 1944 Brux, Czechoslovakia (Deep penetration double mission).

Mission duration 9 Hrs. This was our last assigned combat mission. This was a mission filled with high anxiety and nervous apprehension. I recall the opposition flack was moderate to high, aircraft damage slight, trip home uneventful. Shouts of we did it at engines off. Everyone was in high emotional spirit and looking forward to going home, combat tour completed.

January 1945 I was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross, Received the DFC from General Lawrence. Upon presentation he asked, how old are you? I do remember the expression on his face when I told him I was **19**.

21 January 1945 – Crew # 4409 minus our navigator and bombardier received orders transferring us to Naples Italy unassigned, to await transport by troop ship back to USA.

I had completed my combat tour with 50 combat missions and 263hrs, 20min of combat flight hrs. The Distinguished Flying Cross, Three Air Medals and the European theater ribbon with silver star for participating in combat missions of 5 major air campaigns.

I do recognize some of the names on your web sight, Joe Brensinger and colorful crew who occupied the tents next to ours. He shipped out of Hunter Field GA. at the same time as our crew, July of 1944. Ewing the operational officer and Harding the CO. I do remember but many others I do not recall. Since I am now 85 years most of my squadron associates are no longer available and I don't recall any other names listed on your web sight. However, the information on your site was interesting. I wish I could be more definitive for this teenage period in my life with the 301st Bomb Group, 32nd Bomb Squadron. If there is anyone out there that can fill in the blanks I would appreciate their help.

Robert O. Schwantes April 8, 2010

Following is the history of the plane:

Plane No. 44-6342, (Name not known) was assigned to the 32nd Squadron on the 9th of August 1944. It flew its missions with no known major damage. It was then transferred to a Depot in Italy on the 10th of March in 1945. No other info is known other than it was ditched on the 21st of May 1945. Information from Richard E. Drain the Historian of the 5th Bomb wing. "History of Aircraft Assigned"