

12485

MISSING AIR CREW REPORT

Ray's Story

A Lost Air Gunner

of the 454th Bomb Group



Erik Goldstein

1. ORIGINAL LOCATION: San Giovanni Field, Italy
 2. SPECIFY: Place of departure San Giovanni Field, Italy
 3. WEATHER CONDITIONS AND VISIBILITY: Clear
 4. GIVE: (a) Date 28 Feb
 5. AIRCRAFT (LOST)
 6. CREW POSITION
 7. Pilot Schindler
 8. Zisk, Raymond
 9. Moskowitz, M
 10. Goldman, Henry
 11. Ball gunner
 12. IDENTIFY BELOW THOSE WHO ARE BELIEVED TO HAVE LAST KNOWLEDGE OF AIRCRAFT



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*To the memory of Ray, his crew, and
the first American generation of
Zisks and Goldsteins.*



Charlie & Tommy - this is your legacy!

Erik Goldstein
Box 1774
Williamsburg, Virginia 23187
rwfcaptlt@aol.com



Introduction

I consider myself lucky in that I was born into a family that was both large and close, on both of my parents' sides. For as long as I can remember, the way I saw things in my dad's family, if you weren't a Goldstein then you were a Zisk, and Morgan Steel and my grandparent's house in Queens were the dual epicenters of family activity. While I was still in my single digits, there were lots of "uncles" that seemed as ancient as my grandfather Milton. They were a pretty boisterous bunch with strong, distinct personalities and all with their individual senses of humor. I saw them as variations cast, if not from the same mold, at least the same workshop.

The whole phenomenon resulted from a pair of Russian/Polish sisters, Sarah & Esther Krzywonos, born in the late 1880s, but I'm not sure who was older because of conflicting records. Sarah came to America first and married Hyman Goldstein in 1907, while Esther married her husband Isidore Zisk in the "old country." Isidore left his pregnant wife behind and came to New York in 1907, no doubt to



The two sisters, Esther and Sarah, c.1940.

pave the way for a better life for his growing family. A common, but drawn-out way of emigrating, Esther followed four years later with the couple's three year old son Max in tow.

Reunited in the "New World," the sisters settled a few blocks apart in the Williamsburg section of Brooklyn; the Goldsteins on Siegel & later McKibben Streets and the Zisks on Scholes St.

And then came boys. Loads of 'em.



The Zisk family, c.1919. Top row; Esther and Isidore. Front row; Marty, Sam, Ray & Max. Phil isn't in this portrait because he wasn't born yet.

Between Esther and Sarah, they had a total of nine boys and only one girl, poor little Toby Goldstein. As was usual in Jewish families, children were named for deceased family members, and there were apparently two very special ancestors. While there was a Max Zisk and a Max Goldstein, they were followed by a Raymond Zisk and a Raymond Goldstein. The confusion was further compounded by the different Yiddish & English names the pairs of Maxes and Raymonds normally went by. For instance, the eldest Zisk was called Max or Mac by his immediate family, while the Goldsteins called him "Mike." Though it seems

baffling in hindsight, apparently it wasn't too much of a problem when they were all still alive.

I've often wished to be a fly on the wall at one of their regular family get-togethers, or perhaps a Passover seder, at any time during the late 1910s or early 1920s. From the stories that have come down to me, I imagine these frequent Goldstein/Zisk events as deafeningly loud, chaotic and somewhat dangerous. While I can't say what the Zisks found acceptable as far as table manners went, legend says almost anything went with the highly competitive and



*The Goldstein family, c.1924. Top row; Milton, Sarah, Max & Joe.
Front row; Toby, Hyman (seated) and Ray.*

perpetually hungry Goldstein boys. And there wasn't a namby-pamby in the entire lot.

I'd be willing to bet that in the streets and schoolyards of Williamsburg, no one ever picked on a Zisk or a Goldstein. The chance of surviving a swarm of ready-to-rumble brothers and cousins un-bloodied wasn't too good. Joe Goldstein was probably the most soft spoken and gentlemanly of the bunch, and was quite adept at boxing and judo. While Ray Zisk had the reputation of being a lousy fighter, Toby made loads of trouble for the boys. I know for sure that Sammy and my grandfather, thick as thieves until Sammy's death in 1973, saw their

share of mischief. But it was Max Goldstein that reigned as the undisputed brawler & big mouth of the family. Big mouths and brass balls certainly weren't a rarity with this gang, and my father and sister are living testimonials to these distinguished and revered family traits.

So why am I writing this, might you ask? Ray was killed almost 22 years before I was born. Even my father doesn't have any memories of him, being less than three years old at the time. But he does remember the pain and disruption caused by the funeral 4 years later. And now, with all of the Goldsteins and

the Zisk boys gone, Ray's story is something worth recording for future generations before the chance to do so disappears along with all those who were close to the events. I am well aware that that I began this project a decade too late to capture more of the facts and stories.

The answer to my rhetorical question on the surface is simple; I'm the right guy to do it. Having published many works dealing with early American history and old military stuff, the task falls in line with my professional abilities. Slightly below that veneer, it's something that runs deep and is very personal. I don't know when I first heard about Ray, or even from whom (most likely my grandfather Milton), but it really troubled me. Since then I've been haunted and intrigued by this upsetting story of a tail-gunner uncle who was shot down & killed over the Brenner Pass, and whose body came home much later.

Being all too familiar with the death of a sibling in their 20s, I can't help but put myself into the shoes of my ancestors and tap into their prolonged torment over this. Ray was a



Family & friends, early 1940s.



Isidore & Ray, early 1940s.

real hero who sacrificed it all, and in doing so never had the chance to have a family, enjoy life and grow old. Would he have taken a job at Morgan Steel and been around when I came through as a kid, or when I worked there as a college student? Who knows. No doubt, I would have pestered him to pieces to tell me stories of what it was like flying in a B-24 during the war.

Getting to know Ray through the following letters, there is much we can learn about him and what he was really like. A fun-loving charismatic fellow who excelled at being "one of the guys," he earned the nickname *Umbriago*, bestowed upon him by his crew – his "family" away from the family in Brooklyn. These men lived with Ray 24-7 for months, so no one knew him better, and their choice of this particular nickname speaks volumes. *Umbriago*, the imaginary sidekick of Jimmy Durante, was the manifestation of mischievousness, lustiness, and was always the life of the party. Durante penned a popular song about him, the lyrics of which can be taken as a slightly exaggerated reflection of Ray;

Umbriago

*I know a fellow
A fellow can make your life so mellow
There's one like him in every town
He's half a man and half a clown*

*Umbriago
Could be mayor of New York
And of Chicago, hoo-hoo*

*Umbriago
Raises cane from Portland
Maine to Santiago
When you worry
Better send for Umbriago in a hurry*

*He's got lots of time
That's all he spends is time
He never spends a dime*

*So when you feel low
Better send for my friend
Umbriago*

While the evidence shows that Ray wasn't a cheapskate like his nickname-sake, he was beloved amongst his crew, who were all younger than him. As the "old man" of the bunch, Ray was probably looked up to by the others, a few of whom were 7 years his junior. Handsome, he really loved the ladies (another family trait), occasionally drank and was darned good at playing cards. Like most kids raised in 1920s and 30s Brooklyn, he was a rabid sports fan, played ball and kept himself physically fit, although he smoked, as many folks did back then. A look at one of the following pictures of Ray will bear the second to last point out. A sensitive and thoughtful fellow, he had an artistic side and enjoyed photography too.

His wry sense of humor is evident in many of these letters, and you will find yourself laughing at more than a few of Ray's quips and stories. Even though he was a wise guy



Ray wasn't the only one to have the nickname "Umbriago." So did all sorts of military aircraft, like this B-24J.

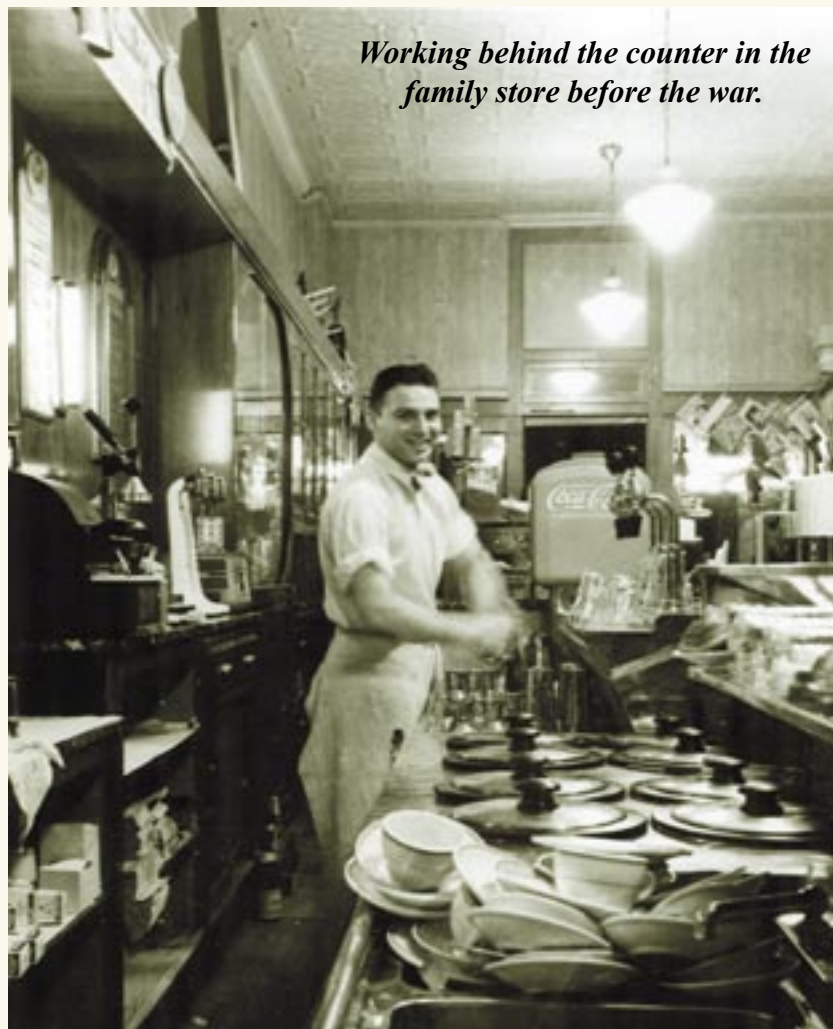
to the core, Ray never comes across as mean-spirited, and he unabashedly lets his decency and empathy for others show through. A big fan of the cartoons printed in *Yank*, the Army's weekly magazine, Ray regularly clipped out some of the funnier ones and sent them home. More than just sharing a laugh, Ray was offering an insight into his life in the Army.

He was a dedicated family man, and obviously loved those back home very much. On most days, he sent home two letters; one to his mother and one to his brother Sam. Usually addressed to "Sam, Jean & Gary," he seldom overlooked his sister-in-law or his very young nephew. Every letter to them was signed "Love, Ray." He was honest, on the level, and spoke his mind when something was bothering him. A read through his communications show a man desperate to maintain his connection to home and dealing with his situation as a true

mensch and patriot, with seldom a complaint. He rarely mentions the nature of his “work,” as he calls it; not just to get his letters past the U.S. Army censors, but because Ray didn’t want those back home to worry unnecessarily about him. Never once does he come across as fatalistic, although it would have been the undeniable prerogative of a crewman flying in an American heavy bomber late in the war.

So I feel very strongly that I owe this tribute to him. Here is Ray’s story in his own words, and those of mine, chosen to the best of my ability. Having stitched together what I hope is an interesting narrative of Ray’s demise from dry Army documents and the experiences of other veterans, I have striven to make the account as truthful as possible. All errors of fact, assumption or perception are mine.

Erik Goldstein
Williamsburg, Virginia
October, 2013





The U.S. Cavalry & Air Force Training

While the Goldstein homestead remained at 24 McKibben Street into the 1940s, the Zisks headed to a more southern part of Brooklyn. After graduating from Lincoln High School in 1934, Ray went to work in one of the family candy stores, including the one at 501 Church Avenue, on the Southeast corner of E. 5th St.

By 1940, Isidore and Esther were living at 9512 Ft. Hamilton Parkway with their four unmarried sons. Sam had married Jean, and was living elsewhere. Phil was still in his early teens and in school, while Ray, approaching his mid-twenties, was working 72 hour weeks at his father's candy store alongside Marty. While he may have felt like he was spinning his wheels and pined for a big change in his life, he wouldn't think of voluntarily leaving the family business.

On the 7th of March, 1941, Ray was drafted into the United States Cavalry. At the time, he was described as 5 foot 6 inches tall and weighing 160 pounds. Other Army paperwork tells us he had brown hair, brown eyes and wore 8½ EE shoes - almost exactly the same size as me.

Late 1942 and early 1943 was a rough time for the family, especially so for Esther. Both

her husband and her sister died, leaving the Zisk boys fatherless and the Goldstein kids motherless. Though my great grandfather remarried, *Tanta* (Yiddish for 'aunt'), as the Goldsteins lovingly called Esther, never did.



***The pre-war Zisk homestead,
9512 Fort Hamilton Pkwy, c.2012***

Unfortunately, detailed records of Ray's time in the US Army have so far proven elusive, so there is little to tell of his career before his letters come into play in late 1944. We do, however, have a list of those specialized bases he was stationed at, so we have some basic idea as to what he was doing at each one of them.

From the below listings, we can tell that he left the cavalry (which was going mechanized)

for the Army Air Force in late 1942, surely in pursuit of pilot's wings. By the time Ray arrived in Europe, the vast majority of the men forming air crews had washed out of the pilot program, and then opted to train for other positions involving flight. For whatever reason, Ray didn't make the cut for pilot and settled on being an Air Gunner in late 1943 or early 1944.

104th U.S. Cavalry, B Troop

| | | |
|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------------------|
| 2-19-41 to 6-18-41 | Ft. Riley, KS | Cavalry School, basic training |
| 6-18-41 to 9-15-42 | Indiantown Gap, PA | Garrison duty, etc. |



On base at Indiantown Gap.

Firing a M-1917 Browning machine gun at basic training, 1941.



*Troop B of the 104th Cavalry at
Indiantown Gap, 23 January 1942.
Ray is in there somewhere!
Courtesy of Barbara Zisk.*



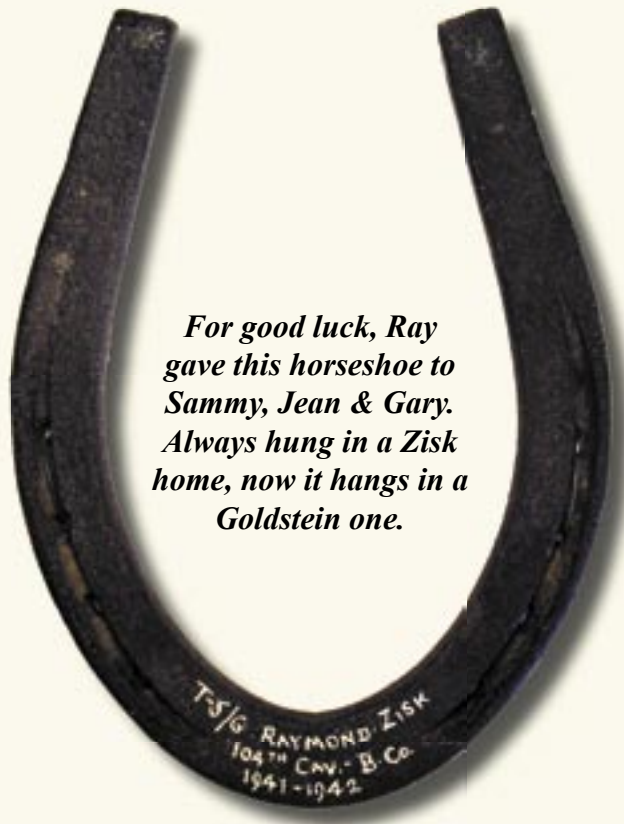
*The badge of the 104th Cavalry,
as worn on Ray's cap, at right.*

*Ray and Gary during the summer
of 1942. Not yet in the Army Air
Force, Ray wears the distinctive
boots & britches of the Cavalry.
His sleeve rank indicates he's a
Technician, 5th Grade.
Courtesy of Dr. Gary Zisk.*





This whimsical shot was intended to show how Army life had thinned Ray down.



For good luck, Ray gave this horseshoe to Sammy, Jean & Gary. Always hung in a Zisk home, now it hangs in a Goldstein one.



Found amongst the effects of Russell Johnson, the Radio Operator on Ray's crew, this tiny contact print was taken either on his induction or transfer to the Army Air Force.

Courtesy of Jason Newgard.



United States Army Air Force



| | | |
|--------------------|--|------------------------------------|
| 9-15-42 to 10-7-42 | Nashville, TN | Aviation Cadet Classification Ctr. |
| 10-8-42 to 1-1-43 | San Antonio, TX | Randolph AFB, flight training |
| 1-16-43 to 3-16-43 | Chickasha, OK | AAF Flying school |
| 3-17-43 to 5-18-43 | Altus, OK | Altus Army Air Field |
| 5-19-43 to 6-15-43 | Atlantic City, NJ | training at “Camp Boardwalk?” |
| 6-16-43 to 8-8-43 | Jefferson Barracks, MO | AAF training |
| 8-9-43 to 8-24-43 | Nashville, TN | Aviation Cadet Classification Ctr. |
| 8-25-43 to 9-28-43 | Jefferson Barracks, MO | AAF training |
| 9-29-43 to 1-17-44 | Lowry Field, CO | AAF Training Command |
| 1-18-44 to 5-15-44 | Harlingen, TX | Gunnery school |
| 5-16-44 to 7-30-44 | Casper, WY | Crew training |
| 7-31-44 to 8/1/44 | Lincoln, NE | final stateside preparation? |
| 8/2/44 to 9/2/44 | Deployment to Italy, via NYC, England and North Africa | |
| 9/7/44 to 2/28/45 | San Giovanni Airfield, Cerignola, Italy | |

The scant records obtained show that Ray spent surprising amount of time in the hospital during the time he was in Air Force training. In fact, he was officially listed as in the sick bay for a total of 63 days between 1 February 1943 and 24 June 1944, a period of 16 months;

| | | |
|----------------------|-----------------|------------------|
| 2-1-43 to 2-5-43 | Chickasha, OK | Register #380 |
| 3-8-43 to 3-12-43 | Camp Upton, NY | Register #1319 |
| 12-27-43 to 12-31-43 | Lowry Field, CO | Register #40 965 |
| 1-22-44 to 2-13-44 | Harlingen, TX | Register #4734 |
| 3-14-44 to 3-28-44 | Harlingen, TX | Register #5373 |
| 6-15-44 to 6-24-44 | Casper, WY | Register #4606 |

While it is true that he was participating in hazardous training exercises, there is a root reason for his medical troubles. During one of the Jewish holidays, a bunch of servicemen were being driven to synagogue in the back of an Army truck. The driver, according to Sammy, was a “*drunken schvartze*,” who wrecked the truck, injuring many of his passengers including Ray. His injury, described as a hole in his buttocks, needed surgery and caused

him pain and trouble for some time. While he could have pushed for a medical discharge, he wouldn’t consider it for even a second, and opted to continue in service.

Furthermore, Ray’s dental records show he was dogged by some trouble with his teeth; his last checkup, on 17 May 1944, shows an unexpected number of missing teeth (mostly molars) and fixed dentures for a 27 year old.

Pilot - Ted Schindler
 Co-pilot - James Graham
 Bomb - Gordon Griffiee
 Radio - Russ Johnson
 Engine - Don Ratchliff
 Top Turret - Martin Moskowitz
 Bell Turret - Ray Sanderlin
 Tail - Raymond Zisk
 Nose - Bill Wiley

Crew number 5591. Before leaving Casper, Dan Ratchliff had been replaced by Arthur Swedberg.

Courtesy of Tim Wherry.



Casper Army Air Base.



The last stage of training before heading off to war was *Crew Training*. Assembling at Casper Army Air Base in the spring of 1944, crews were formed and began the grueling process that would meld them into a team that could do its collective job seamlessly. Here, they would come to know each other's strengths and weaknesses, and learn to blindly rely on one another. Their lives literally depended on each and every man doing his job perfectly and in sync with the others.

While Ray is listed as having been at Casper from mid-May to the end of July 1944, none of his letters from Crew Training have survived. Luckily, those written home by Lt. Charles Wherry, the crew's Navigator, have. Lt. Wherry's words and experiences are a splendid substitute for Ray's.

Clearly unimpressed with both the town of Casper and the base, Wherry rightly described the structures of the later as *strictly tarpaper thru and thru*. He met Lt. Gordon Griffiee, the crew's Bombardier in early June, and they fast became friends. Shortly thereafter, his young wife Verna arrived at Casper, and the Wherrys took an apartment off base.

On 20 June 1945, Wherry sent a crew list to his folks (see above), and describes them as *a darn screwy one*, but clarifies this affectionate remark by stating that *they sure are a swell bunch*. Wherry lists Ray in the *Tail* position, so it is clear he was assigned to said turret from the get-go. The crew flew beat-up B-24s of all models, from the "D" to the "J," in different shifts between 5:00 AM and midnight. In the air, when they weren't perfecting their own tasks, they were learning the others. In case of emergency, any crewman could be called to do another's job.

Brimming with personality, Wherry also had a great sense of humor, and related the following story in his letter of 20 June 1944;

Last night we were on a instrument check flight so Griffiee and I had nothing to do so we got comfortable up in the nose and sang, told dirty jokes, made remarks to the rest of the crew and raised hell in all. We had a lot of fun and killed 4 hours on instruments quite easily.

On the 31st of July, they were off to Lincoln, NE, their last station in the United States.



Annotated Excerpts from Letters Home

On 5 May 2012, Gary gave me a battered manila envelope stuffed with about 50 folded & toned letters collected by Sammy, the original recipient of most of them. Eventually they were passed on to Marty, who in turn passed them on to Phil, and then on to Gary. Along with the letters came a small group of military materials that Phil had framed up to remind him of his lost brother. As far as we knew, these few things constituted all that was left of Ray, save a few photographs.

There are two distinct types of letters sent home by Ray; regular “Air Mail” letters posted in pre-stamped envelopes, and “V-Mail.” The latter was an economy on the part of the Army, looking to cut down on the sheer bulk of mail being sent home. A printed form, including a large space for a message, was filled out by the soldier. The original was photographed on microfilm and then destroyed. Once the film was back in the States, the V-mail messages were printed out on small sheets of paper, placed in window envelopes, and delivered to the addressees.

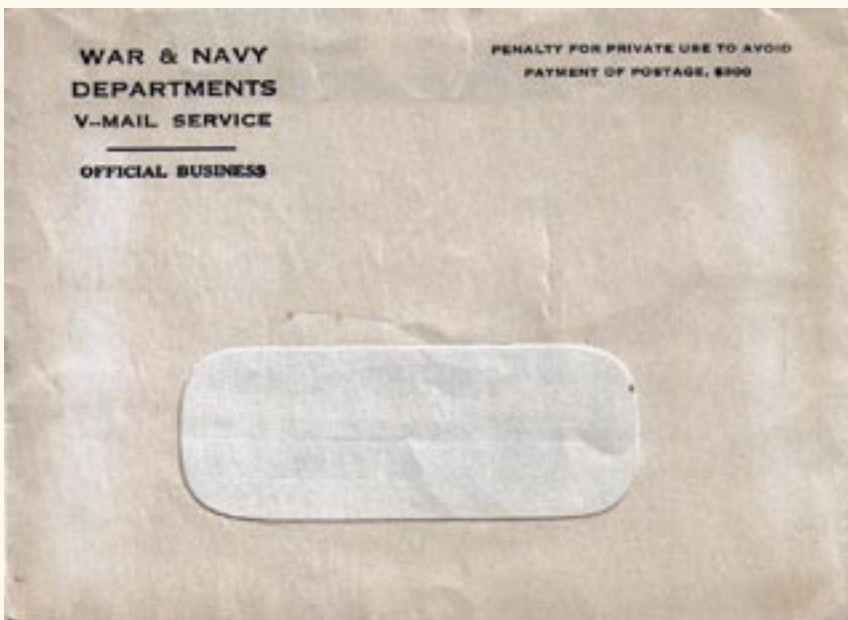
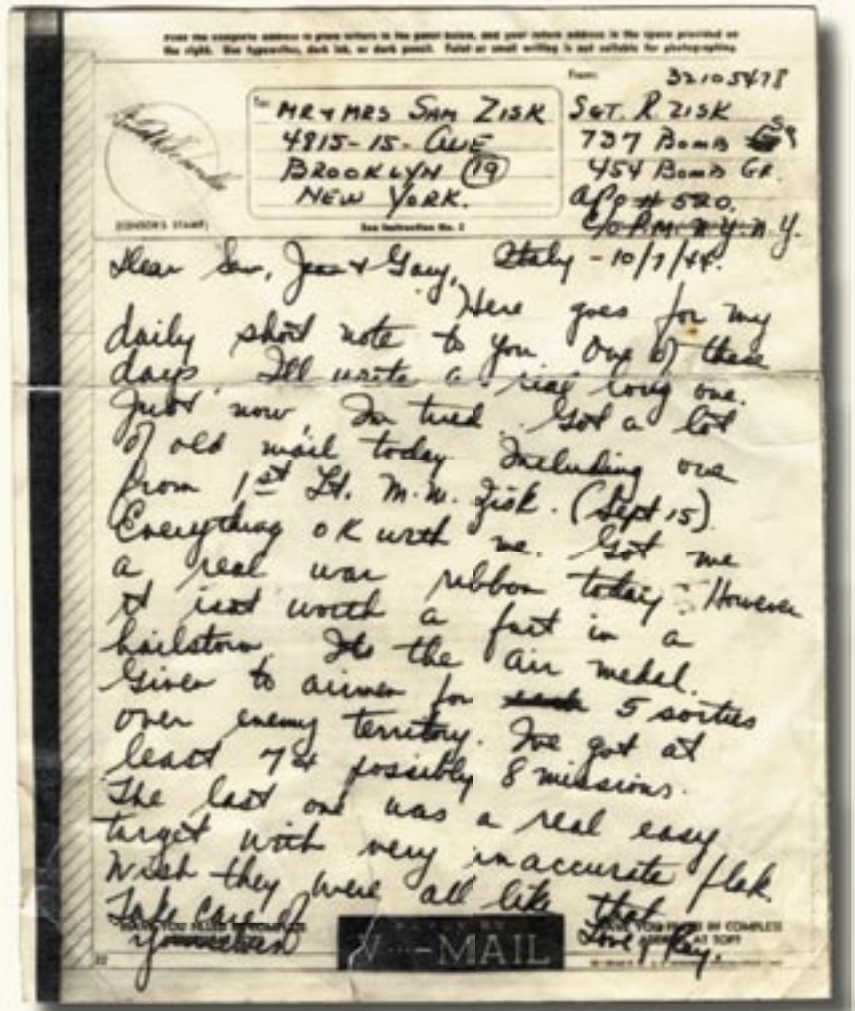
Generally speaking, Ray’s V-Mail notes are short and superficial, while his Air Mail letters are full of all sorts of stories and are more personal. Everyone sending correspondence home was well aware that it was easier for prying eyes to read a V-Mail than see through a sealed envelope cleared by an Army Censor. Consequently, Ray chose V-Mail to let everyone at home know, in an expeditious fashion, that he was OK, and that the weather in Italy was lousy.

There were once many more letters than those excerpted below. Ray was a good correspondent, but few letters which pre-date his time overseas are in the archive. Most unfortunately, those written during the last 4 ½ weeks of his life are missing, so we have none of his words after 24 January 1945.

Ray’s words are in *italic*, with mine below.

Captions are ***bold italic***.

A typical V-Mail home. In the upper left, the printed circle bears the signature of Lt. Ted Schindler, the pilot of Ray's crew, who censored the content.



A standard V-Mail envelope.

Italy 11/6

Dear Sam, Jean & Ray,
 Here goes
 for my daily "communiqué"
 to you. I just hope you are
 getting these letters in the
 correct chronological order,
 because your mail to me
 is quite disorganized. And
 one day I can receive mail
 dated weeks apart. Such
 was the case today, in 2
 v-mails I got from Mac.
 Also received a letter from
 Mildred Wharton today.
 Well, I'm tired again, if
 you know what I mean.
 Had another long jaunt
 today. That makes me
 24 missions in 15 times
 over the target.

Dated 6 November 1944, this letter was penned the evening Ray completed his 15th mission.

Today's "mist" won for me, an oak leaf cluster to the air medal. It don't mean much, but they give the cluster to each additional 10 sorties after the first 5.
 We have a power line to our tent, and we finally got our radio working. The programs coming over it are a mixture of Yank, & British which is almost continually being jammed up. Also get lots of German stations. They are full of shit. Today I even had the satisfaction of jissing on the Reich.
 "Kiss on the bastards"
 That's all. I want to hit the sack. Take care.
 Love, Ray.

When writing home, Ray used his best penmanship - some of the time!



Ray's 3 October 1944 letter was also censored by Schindler, as denoted at the lower left corner of the Air Mail envelope.

6/17/43, Jefferson Barracks, St. Louis, MO (AAF Training)

Got here yesterday. It must be lots different than when Marty was here. Because next to Indiantown, it's the nicest post I've been at yet. However, don't expect to be here long. And it will be off to school for me.

This note was penned on the back of an undated card for Sam, whose birthday was June 18th. Thus, Ray sent the card the day before Sam's 31st birthday, on the day after he arrived at his new station. For whatever reason, Ray found Jefferson Barracks far more comfortable than Marty did when he was there. Perhaps Ray was assigned to a proper barracks while Marty was stuck in a tent?

Marty in the "Tent City" at Jefferson Barracks.



3/11/44, 7:00 AM, Harlingen, TX, Gunnery School, on USAAF stationary (above)

Sam, my leave will probably be about April 1 to the 10th or so. So, if you want to put in for a few days off then, it ought to be pretty nice. That is, I'll be home for at least 10 days. Possibly 11 or 12.

Don't worry about my "gunning." It don't mean a thing. Cause it is such a damn long way off to combat that I sincerely believe the worst will be over by then. Besides, there are at least 150,000 gunners now.

3/29/44, 9:00 PM, Harlingen, TX on Red Cross stationary (see p.20)

Am doing O.K. Out of hospital and leg is OK.

Mailed home today the directions for sending me money to come home on. Getting very feverish with anticipation about the furlough. Never, since my induction have I wanted to come home so badly. Will stop in St. L to see Phil. May cost me a day, but I'm to get at least 15 days at home.

Will leave two weeks from tonite. Takes about 3 days to get home (about 60 hrs if connections are good).

The day before writing this letter, Ray was released from the hospital, the source of the Red Cross stationary. While he doesn't detail the issue with his leg, it was likely part of the chronic problems relating to his injuries from the truck accident. Anxiously anticipating a leave to head home for about 2 weeks, he intended to travel through St. Louis to see Phil then in Army Air Force training at Jefferson Barracks, where Ray had spent a few months the previous year.



Training in a B-24 tail turret at Gunnery School.



Italy



*The “Ted K. Schindler Crew” at Gioia
7 or 8 September 1944.*

Standing, left to right; *Ted Schindler (Pilot), Gordon Griffie (Bombardier), James Graham (Co-Pilot), Arthur Swedberg (Engineer), Raymond Zisk (Gunner) and Martin Moskowitz (Gunner).*

Kneeling; *William Sanderlin (Gunner), Russell Johnson (Radio Operator), Charles Wherry (Navigator), and Clarence Wiley (Gunner).*

Courtesy of Tim Wherry.



***Enlisted men of the “Ted K. Schindler Crew” at Gioia
7 or 8 September 1944.***

Standing, left to right; Arthur Swedberg, Russell Johnson, and Martin Moskowitz.

Kneeling; Clarence Wiley, William Sanderlin, and Raymond Zisk.

Taken at the same time as the full crew shot (previous page) and also in front of tent number “17,” Ray & Wiley are holding bunches of small grapes, alluding to their location.

After leaving the States, the crew headed to England, land of crummy beer. Lt. Wherry told his parents that *a pint glass of warm beer (?) costs a shilling (20¢) and is worth about 2¢*. No doubt all on the crew thought the same, but beer was beer, right?

From there it was to North Africa by boat and then a flight to Italy, where the crew reported to the 15th Air Force at Gioia. Encamped there for a few days between about the 5th and 9th of September 1944, Lt. Wherry described the scene;

RESTRICTED
 ARMY AIR FORCES
 AIR TRANSPORT COMMAND
 A 19585

Channel 16-15 TICKET

Approved in accordance with existing regulations, the following named individual is authorized to travel on aircraft operated for, by or under the control of the Air Transport Command between stations shown hereon, and shall be subject to all established rules and regulations. Deviations from the normal course of travel to accomplish official business will be allowed only when such deviations are noted hereon.

Priority Identification No. 1E127057 AAK

COMMANDING GENERAL
 AIR TRANSPORT COMMAND

R. ZISK
 Passenger Name (Print) 32103478
 Rank or Grade Lt. Col. A.C.

Weight of Passenger 168 No. Pieces of Luggage 3 Baggage Weight Authorized 69 Actual 69

GOOD FOR ONE-WAY PASSAGE

FROM London TO Naples

Via _____ Via _____ Via _____

Via _____ Via _____ Via _____

T. F. Carter (Signed by (Signature)) Major A.C.
 London (Station Issuing) 030-8-44 (Date Issued)

This ticket will be surrendered upon arrival at final A. T. C. destination.
 NOTE: FORM WILL BE PREPARED IN INDELIBLE PENCIL, INK OR TYPEWRITER

RESTRICTED

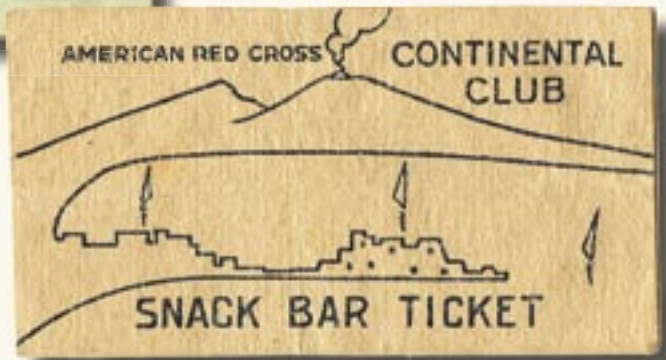
Relics of Ray's trip from London to the war zone; a Red Cross snack bar ticket from Naples and his ATC ticket, dated 4 September 1944 on the back. Traveling with 69 lbs. of luggage (one bag was lost for a while), Ray weighed 168 lbs.

Boy oh boy is it hot. I guess this is just unusual because most (of) the grapes are ripe and everything is drying up. I sure hope the war ends in a hurry so we can get out of this joint.

We sleep in tents with the rest of the crew and are very crowded.

Now an integral part of the "Ted Schindler crew," Ray found himself assigned to the 737th Bomb Squadron, one of the four which made up the 454th Bomb Group. They were part of the 304th Bomb Wing and at large, the 15th Air Force. Stationed at San Giovanni Airfield, the home base of the 454th BG was shared with the 455th BG, and was built in the middle of the Italian countryside some 6 or 7 miles west of Cerignola. Famous for the grains grown in the area since ancient Roman times, the name of the city is thought to be the origin of the modern word "cereal."

The dominant feature of the base was its twin parallel runways, which ran roughly north-south amidst a myriad of taxiways and "hardstand" parking areas for the two bomb groups' 150 or so B-24s. While the 455th had



the western runway, the 454th had the eastern one. Slightly further east was the 454th's support facilities, buildings and hangars; beyond those, strung willy-nilly through an olive grove, was the tent city which became home to the officers and men of the Bomb Group.

Lt. Wherry quite correctly described San Giovanni Airfield as such;

This whole place, except for the planes, is built like a hobo camp down by the river.

Shortly after arriving, the boys inherited a well-worn and patched up B-24J. One of the original planes assigned to the 737th BS, she was an older, olive-drab painted ship named *Dinah Mite*. By Christmas 1944, she would become a celebrity.



Located west of Cerignola, San Giovanni Airfield was part of the 15th Air Force's Foggia complex.

454th Bomb Group Headquarters, San Giovanni Airfield, during the war.



454TH BOMBARDMENT GROUP HEADQUARTERS



*454th Bomb Group Headquarters, San Giovanni Airfield, 1990.
Courtesy of Steve Chalker.*

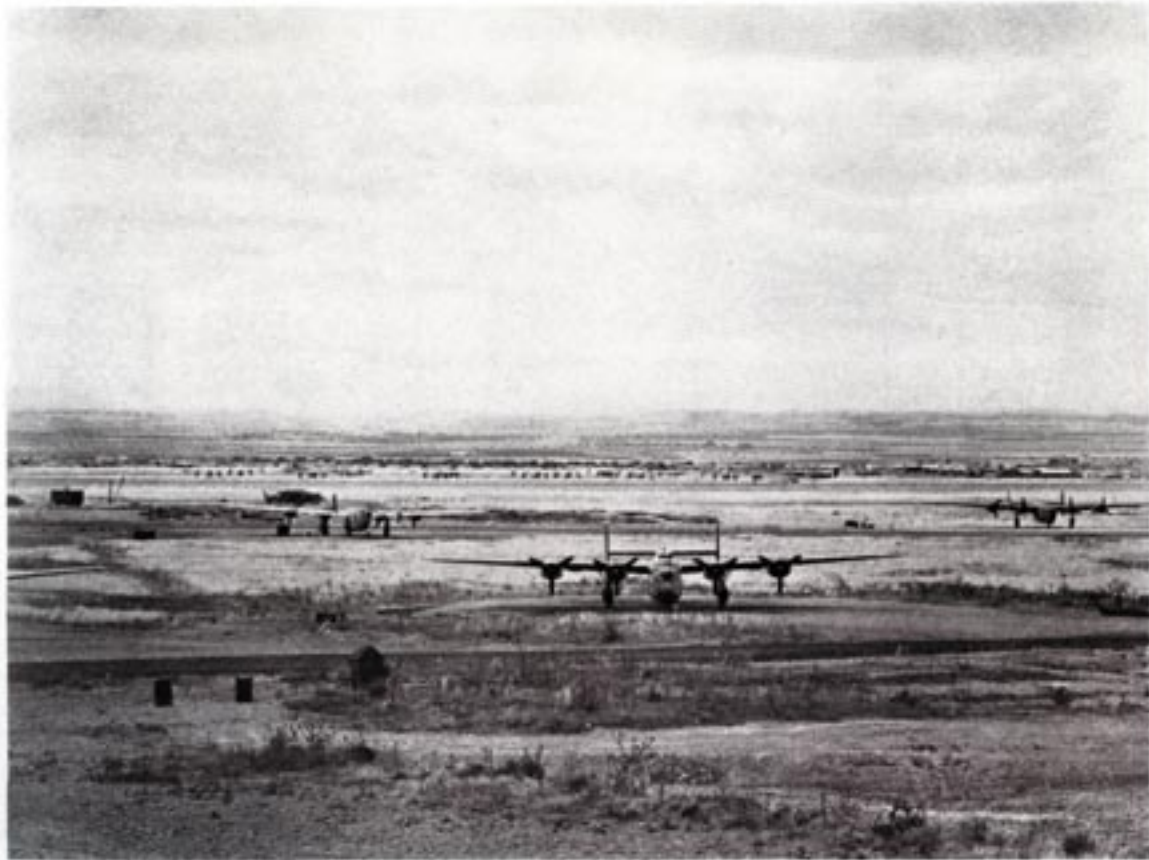


SAN GIOVANNI AIRFIELD, as seen from the 737th Squadron, presents a panoramic picture of activity



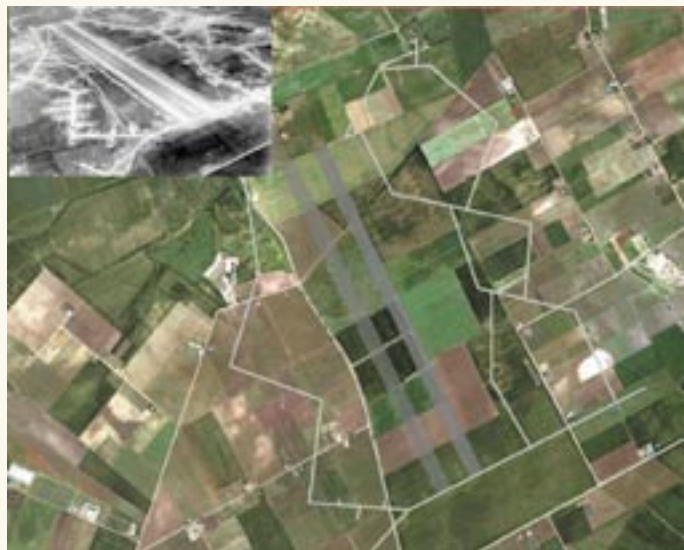
San Giovanni Airfield, as seen from the air during the war. The runway on the left was for the 455th BG and that on the right was for the 454th. The offshoots from the zig-zagging taxiways are the hardstands on which the B-24s were parked.

Courtesy of Paul Johnson.



on a field preparing for battle and a picture of serenity on a field resting after a battle of the skies.

This aerial view shows the extent to which the area was reclaimed for agricultural use. The overlaid lines approximate the airfield's runways and taxiways. To the right side of the photo is the area where the tents of the men were set up.



9/10/44, Italy (Air Mail) on Red Cross stationary

Sure have a bit of a surprise for you, Sam. Goldie, Bob & I went to town for a black market spaghetti dinner. We had previously made arrangements with the "signora." Well, there were several other GI's there when we came in. Bob & I were talking when one of these other soldiers asked if I was from N.Y. I said yes. He said my voice sounded familiar to him. And then he said he was from East Side & that he used to work in navy Yard. I said "My brother works in navy yard. He is a crane operator." He asked what the name was. I said "Zisk." He shouted "Sammy Zisk" And there you have it. This guys name is "Marty Sulla." I suppose you know him. He said he is going to drop you & the shop a card. We drank a bottle of wine together & really shot the old shit.

Hank, Bob, I & one other fellow paid \$10 for a spaghetti dinner with 2 beat up old pigeons thrown in. But it was good anyway. It's all black market & the place is marked "off limits" but the M.P.'s eat there too. What else can a guy do with dough?

It sure was funny meeting this fellow. We really were amazed & the wops thought we were nuts, so enthusiastic were we. I'm doing fine with the "woppo" (?) stuff & they all think I'm a wop. That's OK with me cause it helps out. This AM I got the best haircut & shave you ever saw for 15 lire (15¢). They really go to an extreme to make sure your hair is perfectly trimmed. Some G.I.'s down here haven't shaved themselves in an awful long time. Because it's so cheap getting shaved in a barber shop.

There is also a semi-G.I. cat-house in town (100 liras - \$1) But old beat up bags. Tonight, there is a U.S.O. camp show. Will go to see it.

Sulla says, that when you tell the shop that your brother met him in Italy they'll all say you're full of shit. So he is going to write too.

This is the earliest war zone letter from Ray, and was written right after he arrived at San Giovanni on September 8th or 9th. Ray hadn't flown his first mission into combat yet, and as the weather was nice, his new situation was obviously exciting. Meeting a stranger from home – let alone one who knew Sam – surely made Ray feel more comfortable, and his excitement at relaying the story to his brother is palpable. Sometime afterwards, Sam went to work at Morgan Steel with the Goldstein boys.

Still a "mission virgin," this letter is a window into a man yet unaffected by the hell of aerial combat. Therefore, we get an honest statement of what he's thinking about before life changed; lookin' good, good food, and girls!

When new crews arrived at their permanent bases, their pilots were required to fly 5 missions as co-pilot with a veteran crew to get a taste of the job, and start getting used to it. Meanwhile, the enlisted members of the crew had time to settle in. According to the list provided by Sanderlin the crew's first mission was flown on 20 September, a week and a half after they arrived at San Giovanni. Their induction into combat was over the railroad marshaling yards in Győr, Hungary.

10/2/44, Italy (V-Mail)

Got some comparatively recent mail from Mac & Ray G. dated Sept. 15 & 16. However, it was to my old address.

While it is unclear which “Mac” Ray got a letter from, the other was from Ray Goldstein. More than likely, it was from Max Zisk.



The officers and men of the 454th BG lived in tents scattered willy-nilly throughout an olive grove on the easternmost edge of San Giovanni Airfield. Cleverly built-out with found materials, these tents were made as homey as possible.



Lieutenants Griffie and Wherry outside the tent the officers of the crew shared on the edge of the airstrip.

Courtesy of Tim Wherry.



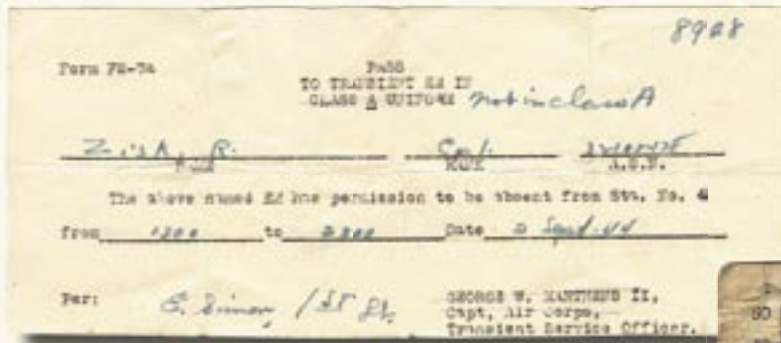


Snapped in front of a brothel named the “Red Hotel” in Cerignola, this is one of the images Ray didn’t have an extra print of to send with the below letter. Ray is seated in front of the open door, and most of the men are holding paper money. With big smiles their intent is clear, or so they would have you believe! Seated left to right are Swedberg, Wiley, a beret-wearing ANZAC, and Ray. “Goldie” and Bob Johnson are amongst the three to the right.

10/3/44, Italy (Air Mail)

Enclosed, find a little item of interest. Use your imagination to get the most significance out of the snapshot. Yes, it (a now-missing photo) was taken in front of a brothel. The bag in the picture insisted on us letting her hold a \$10 bill (1000 liras) Probably so people would think she was \$10 a throw, instead of \$1. Anyway, it’s worth a laugh. The fellow on the right is on my crew. He was half bagged at the time. Of course, Goldie & Bob Johnson are in the picture too.

We have more pictures, one showing us lived up in front of the place together with some Anzac soldiers. However, have no extra print to send. It cost 12¢ for one print. No charge for developing roll.



Newquay is a port town in Cornwall, in the southwest of England.

The significance of Ray's assignment to deck E-5-2, bunk 110 is unknown. The very wrinkled condition of this card attests to its importance as a meal ticket.



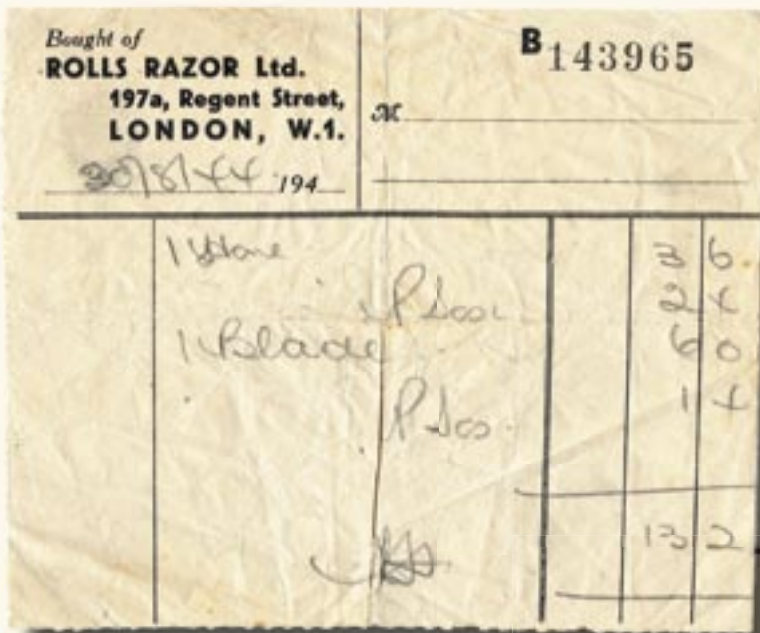
Also, find enclosed, a pass given to me while I was at Newquay, England. And my ship's mess pass. Note the deck I was assigned to. Guess that's all for now. Gotta go & clean guns.



Opposite Marble Arch at the northeast corner of Hyde Park, the Cumberland is still a popular London Hotel.

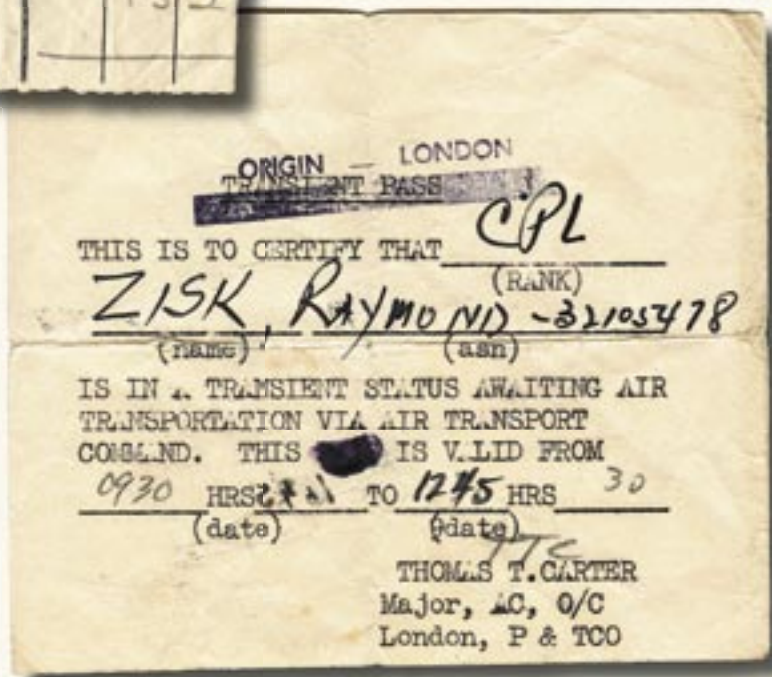


P.S. Also enclosing a hotel folder from London. This card was thrown at us by 3 chambermaids working at that time in room 577, so we just went on up. (No dice, we didn't have time).



Dated 30 August 1944, this invoice for a stone and a blade might refer to a utility knife and a sharpening stone. These were likely amongst the items packed in the lost bag that turned up months later.

One is left to wonder what Ray did with the few hours of freedom this pass granted him in London.....



Another is that 4 hour pass I had in London. The third is a receipt for goods brought from Rolls Razor. The price isn't \$1.32, but 13 shillings & 6 pence (about \$2.70).

Addressed solely to Sam, this letter was not meant to be shared with Jean & Gary. While the enclosures mentioned survive, regrettably, the picture has not. I am sure Sam chuckled when he read Ray's note describing the scene in the picture, as do I every time I read it. Why Ray waited almost a month to send these various papers to Sam, all of which relate to his time in London and the trip to Italy, remains a mystery. Perhaps it had to do with security?

The soldiers Ray and his pals posed with in front of the brothel were of the famed *Australia New Zealand Auxiliary Corps*, who went by their acronym ANZAC.

Even though Ray seems to have avoided the local "working ladies," his regular references to

women suggest he spent much of his free time chasing them, or at least thinking about doing so. The English chambermaids at the Hotel Cumberland were obviously tempting. Since their little folder was worth keeping and passing on to Sam, I think Ray may have been feigning modesty; though he says they “didn’t have time,” he did go to the room after all.....



B-24 Liberators at “work” over Europe.

10/5/44, Italy (V-Mail)

Sure was pooped out last night when I wrote you. Had a tough day, you know what I mean. I'll tell you about it in a couple of days. I haven't heard from Phil in an awful long time. Please tell him to write.

Any letters home describing the day’s bombing mission wouldn’t have made it past the censors, who were officers on Ray’s crew, but allusions to the “work” were deemed OK. No doubt Sammy had read all about it in the papers before the letter made it to Brooklyn, since this was a big one.

The previous day, October 4th, Ray’s crew was part of a huge formation of many hundreds of 15th Air Force heavy bombers to hit the western railroad marshaling yards in Munich, Germany. In addition to being a 7 hour round trip from San Giovanni, the flak was intense, accurate and heavy over the target area, according to the mission report. At least no enemy fighters were encountered by the 454th’s part of the formation, and all planes came back with their crews intact. Other Bomb Groups were heavily chewed up on this largely successful mission.

10/7/44, Italy (V-Mail)

Got me a real war ribbon today. However, it isn't worth a fart in a hailstorm. It is the Air medal. Given to airmen for 5 sorties over enemy territory. I got at least 7 & possibly 8 missions. The last one was a real easy target with very inaccurate flak. Wish they were all like that.

The “easy one” Ray mentions was Group Mission #128, which hit the airdrome installations in Győr, Hungary. Flak was scant, and no enemy fighters were seen.



Ray's OLC-cluttered ribbon bar was a mark of the veteran airman.



Ray's Ribbons

A fart in a hailstorm says it all. While the newspapers back home loved to report on the decorations awarded to their overseas sons, many of the men earning them thought little of the trinkets when compared to the tasks & sacrifices unfolding before them. In the eyes of their families, they take on far greater value, especially those awarded to men who were killed in action. Bearing this out, Phil framed Ray's decorations, including his ribbon bar and *Presidential Citation* along with a 1960s-70s *Purple Heart* and his own named *Air Medal*. Hung on the wall, the group was a constant reminder of his lost brother.

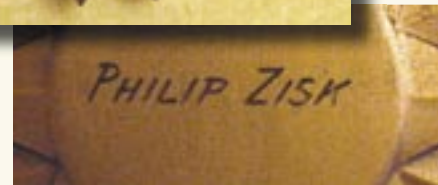
Ray's ribbon bar was made in theatre, and is far cruder than mass-produced versions made back in the States and in England. In fact, it looks as if Ray made it himself! Composed of only two ribbons, it includes the Air Medal with a whopping 5 bronze Oak Leaf Clusters (OLCs) and the European Theater of Operations ribbon. Clearly not on Ray's uniform on his last mission, it isn't mentioned in the official inventory of his effects, so we can assume this highly-important item was amongst the “protected” items Phil acquired from Ray's pals once he arrived at San Giovanni.

If you ever want to make your brain hurt, then try to decipher the every-changing standards the Army Air Force, and its innumerable divisions, used when issuing the Air Medal and Oak Leaf Clusters. The one rule seems to be that the Air Medal was issued to air crewmen after their 5th combat mission. In the 454th Bomb Group, a bronze OLC, to be pinned on the ribbon bar and the ribbon of the medal, was awarded for each 5 missions. As dictated by the Army Air Force, once the 5th OLC was earned, a singular silver OLC was to be substituted for the gaggle of bronze ones previously in place.

It may be that Ray never got the actual Air Medal – he only mentions the ribbon, which eventually got filled-up with bronze OLCs. With 5 of these little pins on the ribbon, we can safely assume two things – Ray had completed at least 25 missions, and was likely above 30 when he was shot down. We can also infer there may have been a shortage of silver OLCs at San Giovanni, which should have taken the place of the 5 bronze ones. As such, Ray’s is a highly unusual and interesting ribbon bar.



*Phil's
Air Medal.*



A rare color shot of a "B-Two Dozen" on a European mission.

10/9/44, Italy (Air Mail)

This P.M. went to town & I got me a good haircut & shave for 16 liras (16¢). Also picked up these films, which I am enclosing. Hope to have more pictures to send to you soon.

Tomorrow, I'm supposed to get paid. This will amount to about \$200. I will collect about \$175 in debts too (I made a few hundred bucks on the boat).

Oh yes, I meant to tell you, that when we first got to Italy, we stayed at a place called Gioia. Look it up on the map. Pretty soon, we'll be getting a scheduled day off, & I expect to visit Bari again. Also Foggia.

These pictures were taken at my present base. The guy in the background is a local "paesano" who does our laundry.

Ray's extra \$175 was won at cards from other fellas aboard the transport taking them into the war zone in early September. "Gioia" is Gioia del Colle, near the top of the heel of the Italian "boot," where new air crews reported to the 15th Air Force (see pp.22-24). From there it was an 85 mile truck ride to San Giovanni Airfield. In order to give some notion of where in Italy he was, Ray resorted to this rather coy tactic to get the letter past the censors.

The pictures Ray sent home with this letter have been lost.



10/19/44, Italy (V-Mail)

Weather hasn't been so good and it is getting a bit colder. However, our tent is in real good shape & we can stand anything short of a hurricane. Got a good gasoline stove. The fire-box is made out of 2 five gallon oil cans. And we have a gravity fed gasoline line running from outside the tent. It throws good heat. And we are warm as toast.

With a seemingly endless supply of 100 octane gasoline around, most, if not all of the men's tents at San Giovanni had similar heaters. To the 21st century reader, the idea sounds amazingly dangerous, and it could be. Tents regularly burned down, taking their contents with them.

According to Lt. Wherry's letter of 18 October, the 454th's formations were getting pretty well chewed up and he was a bit *flak happy* and had *the shakes*. On 16 October they had to return early because three generators went out aboard *Dinah Mite*. This mission isn't on the Sanderlin list, but the crew indeed flew it. Wherry also mentioned that the crew held *the squadron record for the number of hits*. Although we weren't damaged, we were hit plenty. These details went completely unmentioned by Ray, and establish his pattern for keeping worrisome facts from the family.



Likely named for Dinah Shore, Dinah Mite (ASN # 42-64466), was one of the original B-24J Liberators assigned to the 737th BS. By war's end, she completed 124 missions.



Russell and "Dinah-Mite"

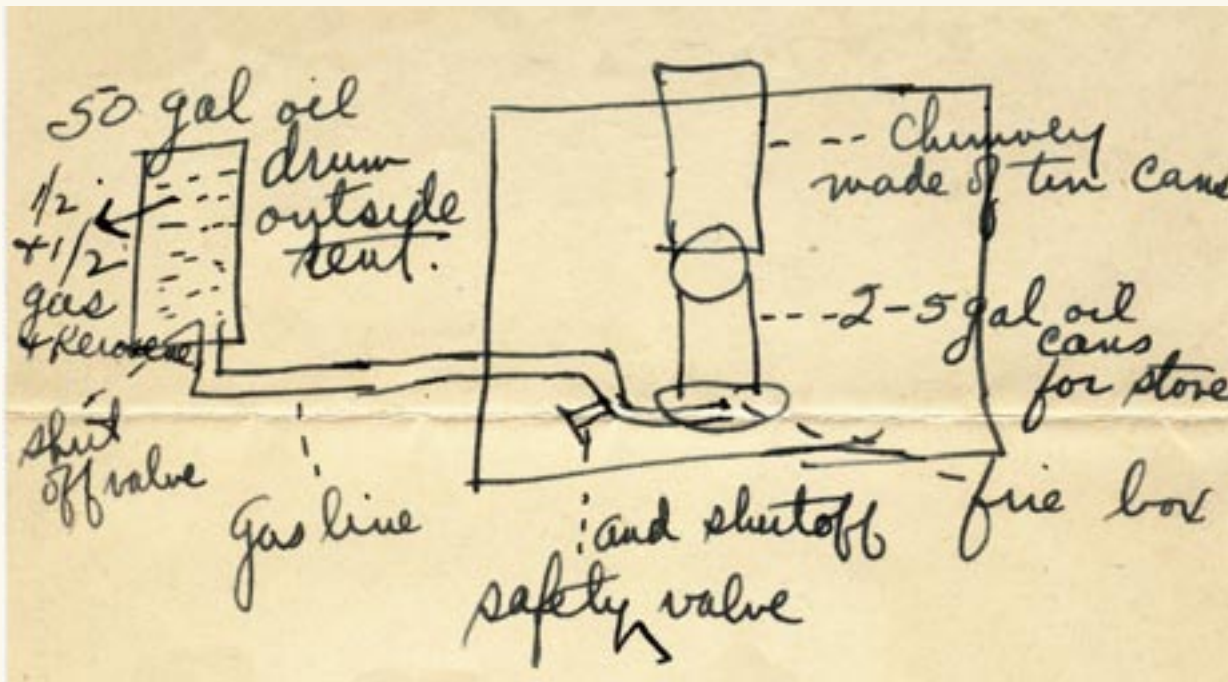
Russ Johnson and Dinah Mite, fall 1944.

Courtesy of Jason Newgard.

10/20/44, Italy (V-Mail)

Chalk up 2 more for me on the scoreboard. That makes 15. I'm sure we'll be sent to the Isle of Capri for a bit of a rest period. Hope I can have at least 25 by that time. Today was pretty easy, altho it was a long & cold ride 35 below zero. I would have had 17 but for an early return we had last week. We developed generator trouble over the Adriatic & had to return to base.

That day, Ray's crew was aboard Dinah Mite and was to bomb the railroad marshaling yards at Innsbruck, Austria. Of the 37 B-24s of 454th participating in the mission, 7 returned early because of similar difficulties.



Ray's diagram of the heating system in his tent.

10/21/44, Italy (Air Mail)

Seated on my sack now. Warm fire in the tent & 2 cold bottles of Trommers beer within easy reach.

Did some work today again. Can't tell where as yet, but its at least 16 & possibly 17 now. Wasn't much to it. Sure am getting to feel like a vet now. We had some "greenies" go along with us today. It was the first for them. For the first time, I've felt really cold. My heated suit electrical unit wasn't working at 24 below 0 it was numbing cold. But all's well that ends well.

I'll draw you a diagram of our heating system in our tent. It really throws lots of heat. And the tent is nice & warm.

Our tent is larger than all the others, for we've built all the sides out. We got our hands on a number of tin cases that fragmentation bombs come packed in. Then we flatten them out & we used them as the sides. We got shelves & boxes nailed up all around the tent to put stuff in etc. Sure is real homey.

I can understand Italian very well now. My laundryman is an old guy & he is quite astonished at the way I've progressed, partly because the other fellows in my crew aren't as nearly good at it as I am.

Also managing to save some of my weekly cigarette rations for that big blowout (one week's rest period). Cigarettes are far more valuable than cash. Really can barter with them. But not in the vicinity of our field, because there isn't anything worthwhile in the towns.



After attacking the railroad marshaling yards in Gyor, Hungary, Ray certainly deserved those two bottles of beer, and I'm sure he heartily enjoyed them. Mission number 138 for the 454th, it was also Ray's second time hitting that target, which he lost his "virginity" bombing a month and a day earlier.

Many souvenirs, likely purchased on Capri with cigarettes, were listed amongst the inventory of Ray's effects taken after he was shot down. These too, are gone.

Some of the items Ray and his crew wore on their combat missions.



Here's Your Complete High-flying Wardrobe

| | | |
|---------------------------|------------------------|--------------------|
| 1. Jacket | 6. Shoes, Felt | 11. Scarf |
| 2. Jacket Insert, Heated | 7. Shoe Insert, Heated | 12. Lead Cord |
| 3. Trouser | 8. Glove, Heated | 13. Woolen Shirt |
| 4. Trouser Insert, Heated | 9. Rayon Glove Inserts | 14. Light Socks |
| 5. Helmet | 10. A-12 Mittens | 15. Long Underwear |



THE electrically heated suit assembly is designed to maintain top body efficiency of the wearer during routine flight, training or combat flying for all temperature conditions to -40 degrees F. below zero regardless of the time duration of flight.

A B-24 waist gunner in full high-altitude combat gear.



Pall Malls frequently made up Ray's cigarette rations.

10/22/44, Italy (V-Mail)

Slept pretty late and went to town this P.M. Drank a couple of “vinos” too. Met a fellow who was at Casper with us who is in a different (Bomb) group. I learned that my crew is far ahead of any of the others from Casper. This fellow had only 6 missions. He was surprised when I told him I had 17. Sure hope the remaining 33 go as well as the first 17.

At this point in the war, Ray needed to fly 50 missions to go home. Since targets more than a certain distance from San Giovanni could count as “doubles” (ie; one mission to the target, one mission returning), the crew could theoretically finish their lot with 25 times over the target. By 22 October 1944, Ray’s crew had flown over the target only 14 times according to the Sanderlin list, so it is clear that some counted as doubles, but it isn’t clear if Ray flew on all of them, or if he ever picked up additional missions with other crews.



Phil Zisk seated on a fountain in front of the Palazzo Cirillio on the Corso Garibaldi in Cerignola. Both landmarks stand today. On the back of the photo he noted that he had gone to town for a shower.

Cerignola from the air, photographed by the USAAF during the war.



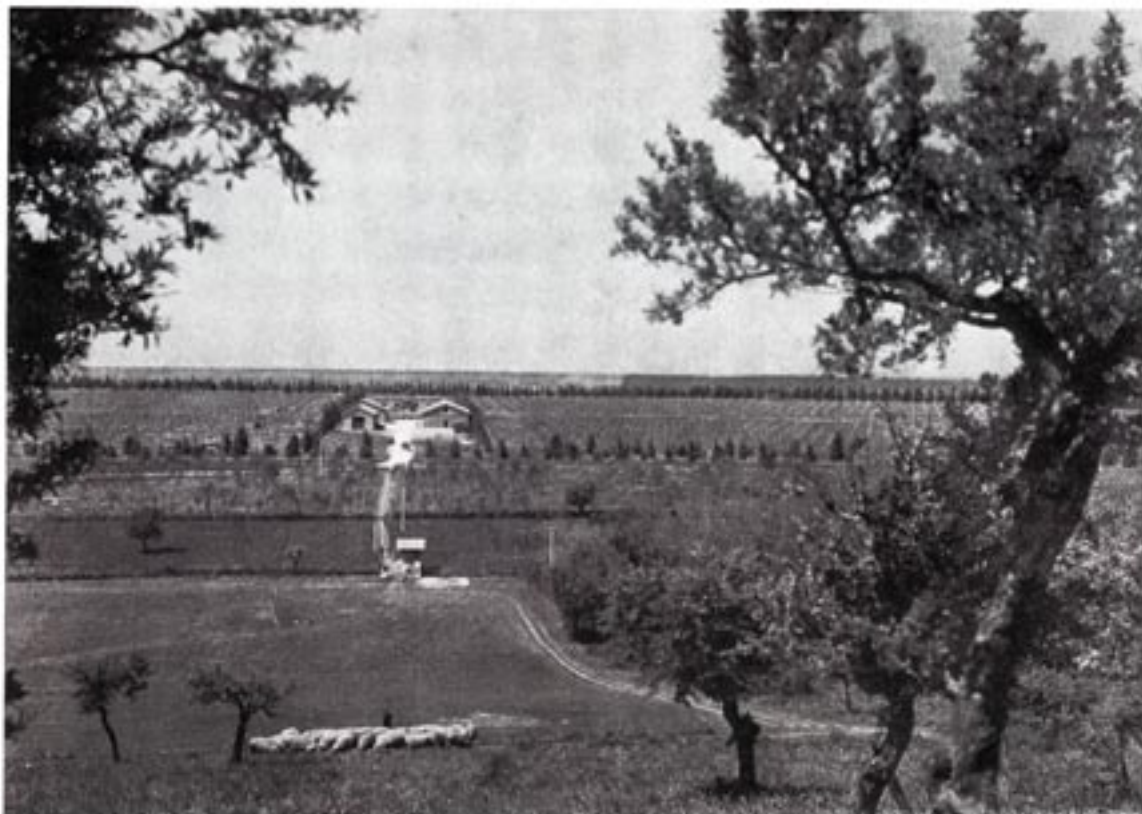
10/31/44, Italy (Air Mail)

I've got over \$300 with me now. Saving it for a spree when we go to a rest camp. Of course, if we get near a big city, I want to buy lots of souvenirs.

Yesterday, I visited some of the surrounding countryside. It's pretty much the same all around. You'd get a big kick out of seeing the natives hauling grapes to markets to be made into wine. The carts on the road are endless. The way it looks to me, the only thing they do is make vino. However, when we consider that wine to them is like water to us, then it isn't too strange.



The countryside surrounding San Giovanni Airfield, then and now.



IN THE VALLEY across the road from Group Headquarters a former rubber plantation was converted to an officers' club, officers' quarters, and a group shower, a contrasting picture to the field of war that neighbored it.



THE PLANS for this ultra-modern latrine will be sent free of charge to any former member of the 454th who now owns a farm. This latrine, M-1, modified, is of simple construction, requiring only the materials from twenty-six frag bomb boxes. Containing seating-space for a bridge foursome and two kibitzers, this modern building is offered to posterity by the 454th Bombardment Group with the simple remark: No post-war home should be without one.

These self-captioned black & white images are from Flight of the Liberators, the 1946 history of the 454th. Much of the writing is refreshingly snarky!

11/2/44, Italy (Air Mail)

Got a nice long letter from you last night, telling me all about the wedding etc. Sure was good to hear all about it. Man, but you really had me drooling when I read of the food. No fair writing like that.

Would have answered your letter last nite, but I wasn't feeling good. Neither did Bob Johnson & several others. Guess it was something we ate. My belly ached so bad, I thought it would bust. Had to get up during the night & run to the outhouse too. Sure was rugged. However, I'm O.K. now.

Hank & Bob flew yesterday, but we didn't. It was the first time for them in several weeks. They have 15 "mish" now. As for us, the last time we made a mission was Oct 23. Sure have been getting piss-poor weather.

If we'd gotten a break in weather, we would have had at least 30 "mish" now. It has happened often that we get up, go to briefing, get out to the ship, & ready to take off, when they shoot red flares off, which is a signal for a stand-down. Other times, when we have been scheduled it's raining so bad at briefing time that they don't bother to wake us up.

Another time, our formations were on the way up to the target and we ran into some solid weather, which forced us to return, and of course no credit for the mission. That's how it goes.

Ray's account of the weather, and its disruptive effects on air operations in Italy, could have been written by anyone serving with the 15th Air Force during late 1944 and early 1945. The same could be said for the effects of Army food on the stomachs of its victims!

11/3/44, Italy (Air Mail)

I wrote Mom last night & told everyone of some creamed chicken we had for mess last nite. Well, about 200 guys & myself wished we hadn't eaten it. Bad cases of G.I.'s all over the place. The latrine was busy practically all nite long, & some fellows (including myself) couldn't make it to the latrine & consequently, had to make some good Yankee fertilizer in the Italian soil. Well, we got some sort of sulfa pills & the medics ate the cooks out & we feel better now, so aside from the wear & tear on the guts, everything is O.K.



Some bigshot Maj-Gen'l presented the 454 B.G. with the presidential citation today after many delays. I didn't attend the ceremonies, but the others did & as usual it was a screwed up affair.

If you remember I told you I was to make s/sgt Nov 1. Well, due to typical Air Force blunders I didn't. Neither did 3 others on my crew. However, Bob & Hank did make it, even tho we have 4 missions more than they do. We all feel lousy about it, but there isn't anything that can be done about it until next promotion list comes out.

We are also supposed to get weekly rations today, but on account of the ceremonies we shall have to wait until tomorrow.

Today is one of the few times I am pissed off at most everything. But, by tomorrow everything will be O.K. Just one of those days.

With an acute case of food poisoning and an assured promotion that didn't come through, it's no wonder Ray was in a foul mood and opted out of attending the ceremony. The official unit history records the event as follows;

On November 2, 1944, in the first double presentation in the history of the Fifteenth Air Force, the 454th and 455th Bombardment Groups were awarded War Department Citations in a ceremony held on San Giovanni Field. The entire personnel of the two Groups was mustered in parade formation between the runways, and saw Major General Nathan F. Twining, Commanding General of the Fifteenth Air Force, pin streamers on the Group banners. Major Joseph Minotty, Adjutant of the 454th Bombardment Group, read the citation for his group.

The 454th Bombardment Group was awarded its citation for a mission to destroy the Hermann Goering Tank Works at Linz, Austria, a mission which was highly successful in spite of determined enemy resistance.

After the presentation ceremony and the reading of the citations, the two Groups passed in review before Major General Twining, Brigadier General Fay Upthegrove, Commanding General of the 304th Bombardment Wing, the Commanding Officers of the Groups, and other members of the reviewing party. A reception was then held for the Generals at the Officer's Club of the 454th Group.

I can easily understand why such martial pomp would earn the disdain of a shrapnel-tempered air gunner like Ray, and I completely sympathize too. The whole thing probably rang hollow for him, since he was not yet in theater when the Group flew the mission that merited the citation. So from his point of view he didn't earn it, but nonetheless received the little gold and blue cloth pin bar to be worn above his right breast pocket.



Major General Twining pinning streamers on the Group banners.
Courtesy of Paul Johnson.

11/6/44, Italy (Air Mail)



Well, I'm tired again if you know what I mean. Had another long jaunt today. That makes me 24 missions in 15 times over the target. Today's "mish" won for me, an oak leaf cluster to the air medal. It don't mean much, but they give the cluster to each additional 10 sorties after the first 5.

We have a power line to our tent, and we finally got our radio working. The programs coming over it are a mixture of Yank & British which is almost continually being jammed up. Also get lots of German stations. They are full of shit. Today I had the satisfaction of pissing on the Reich. "Piss on the bastards."

When Schindler touched down at San Giovanni that day, Ray chalked off his 15th mission, listed as number 18 on Sanderlin's list. Almost seven hours in the air brought them over the Ordnance Depot in the southern part of Vienna, and they dropped their bombs through complete cloud cover, thanks to their "Mickey" equipment. Flak over the target was intense, accurate and heavy, but all made it back safely. Wherry reported only *one small hole in Dinah* for the raids of 5 and 6 November in his letter of the 8th, and also relayed this horrifying story;

I saw the other ship. I couldn't get my eyes off it and I couldn't move. I'll never forget the feeling. When I did act, I hollared for Ted to get the hell away from him before his tanks and bombs explode - we got the hell away - but fast. Meanwhile, the boys in the waist saw the ship explode just a little ways off course. That was a blue day in the squadron that day.

The OLC Ray added to his Air Medal ribbon was the 3rd of the five he earned before his death.



***Ray in front of Dinah Mite in late October or early November 1944.
Note that he is wearing a B-10 cloth jacket, not a leather A-2. He
sent this picture home with his 20 January 1945 letter.***

11/7/44, Italy (Air Mail)

Didn't do anything at all today. Also off tomorrow. Guess we deserve a rest after flying 22 hours combat in 3 consecutive days. Everything here is "Molto buone." Hoping and praying for same with everyone else.

Can't understand why Milt & Belle don't write. I've written to them repeatedly, but nary an answer.

You ought to see my mustachio. It's a killer diller. I'm proud of it but may have to keep it short, because it interferes with the oxygen mask.

We've gotten a bit of a tough break as far as the mission scoring goes. They've stopped counting "doubles." Everything from now on will count as just one mission.

However, where the 15 A.F. formerly required 50 "mish" to complete the tour, it has been changed to 35. In other words, where a fellow used to get 50 missions in the past, it was theoretically possible to get 50 mish, in 25 times over the target (If all his targets took him north of 47°).

As of today, I have 24 missions, but only 15 times over the target. As you can see, I've been on 9 missions which were "doubles."

I find it displeasing that Ray's only mention of my grandparents in any of his letters is to ask Sammy why they won't write to him. Hopefully, they did reestablish their correspondence with Ray, who decided the moustache had to go shortly after writing this letter.

Upbeat, Ray seems to take the mission scoring change in stride, since there was nothing he could do about it. Had that change not occurred, at 11:07 AM Italian time on 28 February 1945, Ray would have been State-side and in bed dreaming of pretty girls, not mortally wounded and free-falling out of a mangled bomber at 20,000 feet.



Take a good look at these two pictures, shot in September and November of 1944. Absent from his letters, the stress of war clearly shows on Ray's face.



11/11/44, Italy (Air Mail)

Well, we were all hoping for a miracle & that the Heinie bastards would quit today like they did in 1918. But no dice. The weather has turned bitterly cold & inasmuch as we have some work cut out for us tomorrow, we sure hope it warms up.

Went to town for a short while today. For \$.40 I got a shave, haircut, facial massage, shampoo and my ear chewed off in Italian. No kidding, these barbers are like artists. They are so careful that it seems they cut each hair individually.

Had a surprise when I started back to camp from town. I usually wait for a ride at a certain intersection. Imagine my surprise when a staff car driven by a Brig –Gen'l pulled up and offered me a ride clear up to my group. I couldn't talk but he asked me if our tent was warm, etc. I answered his questions but naturally, couldn't make conversation of my own. His name is Brig-Gen'l Upthegrove.

Not just any Brigadier General, Ray caught a lift back to San Giovanni from the Commanding General of the entire 304th Bomb Wing! While it was a big enough deal to share with those at home, it seems Ray wasn't at all "star struck" by being in Upthegrove's staff car. Heck, a ride back to base is better than walking in the bitter cold, right?



Brigadier General Upthegrove.

This is one of those specific details that I would have thought the censors would have disallowed, but Lt. Graham, the Co-pilot on his crew, let the letter pass. Regardless, it bears a violet postmark, dated 5 January 1945, from the Blythbourne Post Office in Borough Park, Brooklyn, showing that it caught the attention of a censor somewhere down the line. Eventually cleared, it reached Sam, Jean & Gary almost two months after Ray penned it.

Although this day's mission to bomb the tank factory at Graz, Austria is listed as number 19 on the Sanderlin list, our crew didn't fly it. This fact is backed up by Ray's letter describing the day's events on the ground, and the *Formation Set Up* for the attack doesn't include the Ted Schindler crew.

The cathedral in Cerignola.



11/12/44, Italy (Air Mail)

Gotten into the habit of writing you nitely & so if I were to skip one night, why I'd feel guilty.



The same “small mountains” seen from the site of San Giovanni Airfield.

There are some small mountains near our base & they are pretty well covered with snow. And we had thick frost this AM in our locality. Man, it was rugged. Thank goodness we have a warm, snug tent with plenty of heat & insulation. Some types of bombs come cased in thick cardboard. It's almost like asbestos. Well, when ordnance takes them off prior to loading the bomb, why we grab some. We now have this good insulation all around the inside of the tent.

Really don't have much to write about and I'm trying to think of something to fill the letter out.

Went to town & ran into several good friends of mine whom I knew in Casper. Last time I saw them was July 22. They just got here & really were surprised to learn how many “mish” we had. Really pumped me with questions etc. about missions. Gave them lots of poop about my ideas (and I sure wish someone told me some of these things when I was a mission virgin).

Our radio is working tonight & Frank Munns is on. Nice soft ballad music and it makes a guy feel dreamy as the dickens.

Got some X-mas cards I'll be mailing out soon. We generally get bread out of mess hall for nitely snacks & by putting a mess-kit on stove & bread in the stove, we get good toast in about a minute. Only thing that's missing is coffee. Next time you send a package, send me 1 lb. of good “Yank” coffee. Don't send sugar. We can get that in the mess. We've got plenty of clothes for the cold weather so don't worry about that. Uncle Sam wouldn't let men suffer with cold if he can help it.

Guess that's all. Got a half-ass letter out of a lot of dribble anyway, no?

If you ever get concerned about old "Umbriago," well you're foolish. Please don't. That's all. Take good care of yourselves. Thinking of you.

P.S. – Going out for my beer now. "Multo Buone."

Frank Munn, a New Yorker, was one of the favorite tenors on radio until 1945, when he retired. His specialty was ballads, and Munn, known as "the golden voice of radio," reassured his audience during the war with hits like *I'll be Seeing You, Together, You Belong to My Heart* and *Dream*.



Frank Munn

Sgt. Phil "Alvin" Zisk posing with the right waist gun on a B-24 during training in the US. Behind him is the tail turret, darkened because its protective canvas cover was in place.



11/13/44, Italy (V-Mail)

Weather is "no buone," cold & cloudy. Got a lecture on frostbite today. Last mission our sqdn flew it was colder than 50 below 0 (centigrade). Lot of fellows got frostbite that day. Several in the hospital. Fortunately my crew wasn't scheduled for that mission. Had we flown, we all would have been severely frostbitten as our ship is one of those cold, drafty jobs. No waist windows in it & the wind blast is terrific. The ship is now being modified to put waist windows in it.

While I'm not sure which plane Ray is referring to, about this time the crew began training for various lead positions which necessitated their flying in different ships. Since Ray referred to it as having no waist windows, it was an older B-24, so this may be an indication that they last flew aboard *Dinah Mite* on their 6 November 1944 mission.

11/20/44, 6:30 PM, Italy (Air Mail)

Thanks a million for your gifts. But tell Gary I'm not fighting Japs (not yet anyway). We are still after krauts.

The weather is still good, but we didn't go on a mission. Instead, we flew 2 ½ hours practice in a radar equipped plane. This is the first time we flew in a "Mickey ship" as radar equipped planes are called, here in the 15 A.F. They aren't much different from ordinary B-24's but lots of special equipment is in them that isn't in the other B-24's. They fly with the same characteristics.

Incidentally, we made an "early return" from a mission, one day, about a month ago, due to some mechanical trouble, and we still had our bombs & gas load. The tower told us to fly around for several hours to burn up some gas. Well, we just flew in circles staying within a 50-75 mile radius of our base. I managed to get about 45 minutes stick time that day, & I did pretty good with that old B-24 that day. It handles pretty nice.



Phil posing in the pilot's seat of a B-24, taken during training in the US. Every crewman had some training and experience in the other positions aboard the bomber, and Phil got his "stick time" at some point too.

Talking about your gas difficulties, well it hands me a laugh. You know, we use 100 octane in the ships. Today, I dry cleaned some wool-O.D. clothes in a bucket full of it. Gas is easily available to soldiers for such purposes. We even use 100 octane in cigarette lighters, which we fill from the drain valves of the gasoline supply sight-gauges in the ships.

Want to hear something funny. Here it is. I've noticed some buildings in these Italian towns have stencils on them of "today's" political leaders. I noticed a lot of them had painted on them "W. Roosevelt," or "W. Churchill" or "W. Lenin." That's just the way they appeared. I couldn't figure it out, for you know that Churchill & Roosevelt don't have "W" as an initial. I finally asked my laundryman about it & he told me "W" in Italian is an abbreviation for "Viva." Had a good laugh over that one.

Incidentally, I wrote Phil a real "scare" letter in an attempt to dissuade him from this business. Hope it works, for I told him some bad things (even fabricating some things).

“Mickey ships” got their nickname from the special headgear the radar navigators wore, which made them look like Mickey Mouse.

Writing home the day before Ray penned this letter, Lt. Wherry mentioned that the crew and their pilot, Capt. Ted Schindler, had moved up to one of the squadron leads. Ray’s “scare” letter to Phil made it clear that he though his kid brother had no business following in his footsteps.



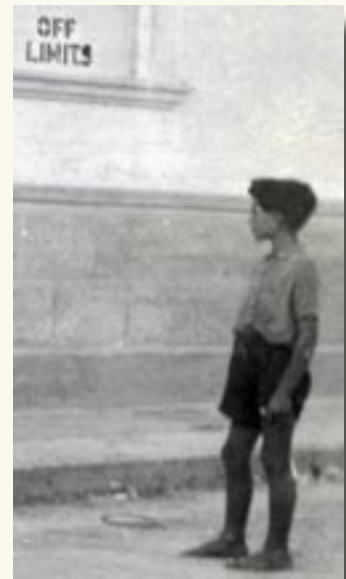
The “Mickey operator’s” station.

11/24/44, 8:30 AM, Italy (Air Mail)

Starting a letter rather early. But the reason is that I didn't write last nite. My belly was too full of turkey to let me do anything other than lie down.

In addition to it being bad weather, we got to take our turn on the missions with the other box leaders.

This candy business is getting pretty rough. Everyone has lots of candy & hardly anyone eats it. If you ever send more packages, don't send candy. Whenever I go to town I always take some hard candies to give to the kids, cause I feel so sorry for em'. They all beg for chewing gum or candy. They know me now & I no sooner start down the main drag, then I am besieged with “Please, one caramelli, Joe” or “one chewing gum, Joe.” These poor kids are undernourished to a bad degree. They don't get what a growing child should get. In addition, they are either barefooted or dam near it most of the time. We all feel bad about it, but “C'est la guerre.”



One of those poor kids.

We got screwed out of our rest camp again, and we are fervently hoping to be able to go next week. The flight surgeon sent a crew who had less missions than we did but due to a little bit of trouble they had on their last mission, he through they needed it more than we did.

11/25/44, 8:00 PM, Italy (Air Mail) – to “Mom, Esther & Mac”

I got a little bit of exercise, in the form of some association football. My body is stiff & aching from it. That’s the first honest exercise I’ve had in many months.

Our radio is blaring with the Ohio-State & Michigan football game now, (as I write) but I don’t get a kick out of it, probably because no names are familiar to me.



Ohio beat Michigan 18 to 14.

If things drag along this winter, due to bad weather, time will hang heavy. Several of the boys have sent away to Armed Forces Institute for correspondence courses. I’m going to do likewise shortly. However, my selection will be along the hobby lines & not purely educational (probably photography).

I wonder, if in any of your packages, you sent me some films? I hope you managed to get some, for I really can get some marvelous photos here.

11/26/44, 6:00 PM, Italy (Air Mail) – to “Mom, Esther & Mac”

Wish you send some sort of new(s) item every time you write. Sam enclosed a lot of sports items from the Sunday news of Nov. 12. This is a good practice and once again let me remind you to do that sort of thing pretty often.

Took it easy again today, but I just saw on the bulletin board that we have a little work cut out for us tomorrow (if the weather holds out).

We expect that our lost bags will arrive pretty shortly. Anyway, that’s what we’ve been told. Hope it’s true for I have lots of valuable & useful equipment in that bag.

The mission for 27 November 1944 was scrapped due to weather. Three months after leaving the States and two months after leaving England, Ray’s duffel bag still hadn’t caught up to him!

11/30/44, 3:00 PM, Italy (Air Mail)

Just got paid (\$117.65). Saving it for our trip to a rest camp (Yes, we got done out of it again this week). Goldie & Bob Johnson & their crew left for the rest camp this A.M. It was impossible for me to go with them as much as we would have liked being together.

Enclosing a couple of items from yesterday's Stars & Stripes. The "Mickey" article should be of interest to you, for I mentioned it once before. The mechanism of course is very secret. I don't know anything about it.

You should see the seas of mud in our camp. Actually, it's at least ankle deep everywhere. And if you haven't sent the knife yet, why forget it, for I now have 3 good ones (we got our lost bags yesterday).



San Giovanni's "tent city" on a snowy day during the winter of 1944.

Courtesy of Paul Johnson.

12/5/44, 7:00 PM, Italy (V-Mail)

Trying to find enough to say to fill up even this meager page. Weather has kept us inactive for a long time even tho we've been briefed & re-briefed, & get to the plane & stand by, only to have a stand-down called. That's the way it is here these days. Just now it's windy as the dickens. We should surely be going to rest camp about the 7 or 8th.

'Mickey' Makes Bad-Weather Raids Cinch For 15th AAF Bombardiers

Sgt. DON WILLIAMS and **Sgt. Steve Starb** (writer) of the 15th AAF and a 54-mission B-24 of which have been in "Mickey" ships.

With Capt. Charles McCrary of Brownstown, Ind., at the controls the plane was flown back and forth below cloud level and the terrain observed through the "Mickey." Then Capt. McCrary lifted the Fort above the cloud level and increased the same course and the observers again peered through the "Mickey." The images projected onto a fluorescent dial resembled a topographic relief map and even to an untrained observer appeared identical with those previously seen.

CAPTAIN EXPLAINS USE

Capt. Beiril explained that the sound waves transmitted by the landing section of "Mickey," unaffected by the clouds, bounced back from the ground and produced a pattern in a graduation of color on the dial. The color intensities indicated to the trained operator whether a particular feature was a hill, valley, river, city or marshalling yard, and allowed the "Mickey" man to know where the plane was at all times.

The Fort then made a simulated bombing run with an oil refinery as the target with Capt. Beiril directing the bombardier, Maj. Everett C. Davis of Bartlett, Texas, by use of the instruments and panel lights as to the operation of the bombight, and automatic bomb release. If bombs actually had been dropped in accordance with this synchronized technique developed by the 15th AAF, the oil refinery would have been a dead duck in the opinion of observers looking through the camera wall.

CORRESPONDENTS ON TRIP

Today, correspondents were permitted to fly aboard the "Mickey" ships in the heavy bomber attacks on Austria and Germany. The weather over the farther reaches of the Alps and beyond was as predicted — thousands of feet of thick snow that precluded any possibility of visual bombing.

Tactical deployment of the "Mickey" ships still is a military secret. But it can be said that Flying Fort 446, piloted by Lt. Donald A. Solomon, Miami, Fla., with Lt. K. D. Stewart, Yakima, Wash., as co-pilot and Lt. Kenneth E. Bender, Coral Gables, Fla., as navigator, was right on the course all the way there and back. Even as the X-ray machine can pierce the fog and take a picture

that will tell the dentist what makes your tooth ache, so can "Mickey" cut through clouds or smokecreens and take a picture of the ground within a certain radius of the plane which can be interpreted by the trained operator.

FIRST USED IN MARCH

"Mickey" was first used for navigation by the 15th AAF in March 20, and for bombing purposes in the April 15 raid on Ploesti. Regular use of the pathfinder technique got underway in June and "Mickey" is given credit by 15th AAF officers for much of the success in the battle of Ploesti. Late in October, the scope of "Mickey" operations was broadened when pathfinder ships participated in a night raid on an American target.

Maj. Gen. Nathan F. Twining, Commanding General of the 15th AAF, announced this week that Germany would be attacked this winter in almost all weather conditions because of the pathfinder technique developed by the 15th AAF.

"Mickey" still is being improved, and new applications of its principles are being studied.



12/7/44, 7:00 PM, Italy (Air Mail)

Guess I spoke too soon of us leaving for rest camp today or tomorrow. It wasn't in the "books," as the saying goes.

You've probably heard about the Russians fighting in the Lake Balaton area in Hungary, haven't you? That area is quite familiar to us. We've been over it a number of times. Hope the Rooshians get to Vienna & Munich soon.

Ever conscious of what information he could get past the censors, the above wording is about the only way he could let those back home that he'd bombed targets in Hungary. Before the date of this letter, Ray's crew had hit Hungarian targets 5 times according to the Sanderlin list. With a casual mention of Vienna & Munich, Ray is alluding to his role in the bombing of targets in those cities too.



12/9/44, 7:30 PM, Italy (Air Mail)

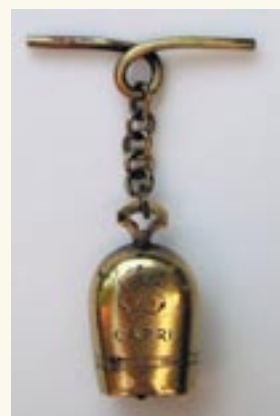
Got a V-Mail from you today dated 11/26. Good to hear from you even tho it was a "grumpy" letter. Didn't write to you yesterday & I'm sorry I missed my daily note. Have been seeing the countryside these last 2 days. Received a 36 hour pass, but I slept in my own tent nevertheless. These "gook" babes want too damn much money to sleep. I'm holding my dough till rest camp, and that will definitely be this coming Thursday.

Hank & Bob came back from the rest camp. They look & feel good & had a wild rip-roaring good time. It's expensive as the dickens. These babes take your underwear, cigarettes, soap, etc, etc. As one of the fellows on Hank's crew said, when I asked him how much it cost "\$40 & all my underwear," was what he told me.

By our info here we understand smokes are impossible to get. Are you getting any? I hope you are, for it really is tough when you can't get smokes. We are still getting 7 packs weekly. Altho rumor has it that we may be cut down to 4 packs. I never have smoked more than a pack a day, so it isn't too bad.

Got 2 packages today from a gal I know in St. Louis. Not bad either (the packages).

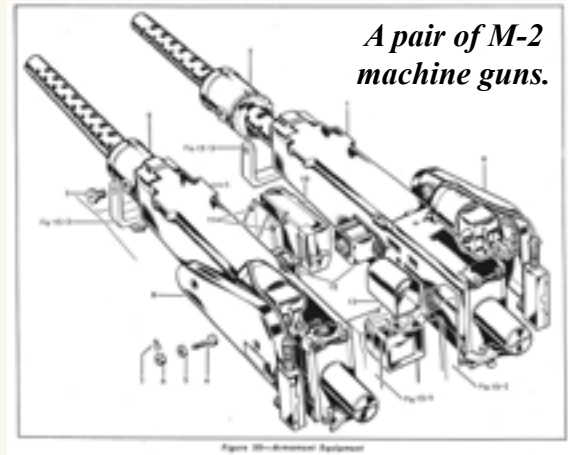
Finally, Ray's crew was given permission to head to the rest camp on the Isle of Capri, where they were from 14 December through 21 December 1944. One has to wonder what was so expensive on Capri; the women or everything else? Clearly, ladies were on paramount in Ray's mind at this time.



A "Capri" bell.

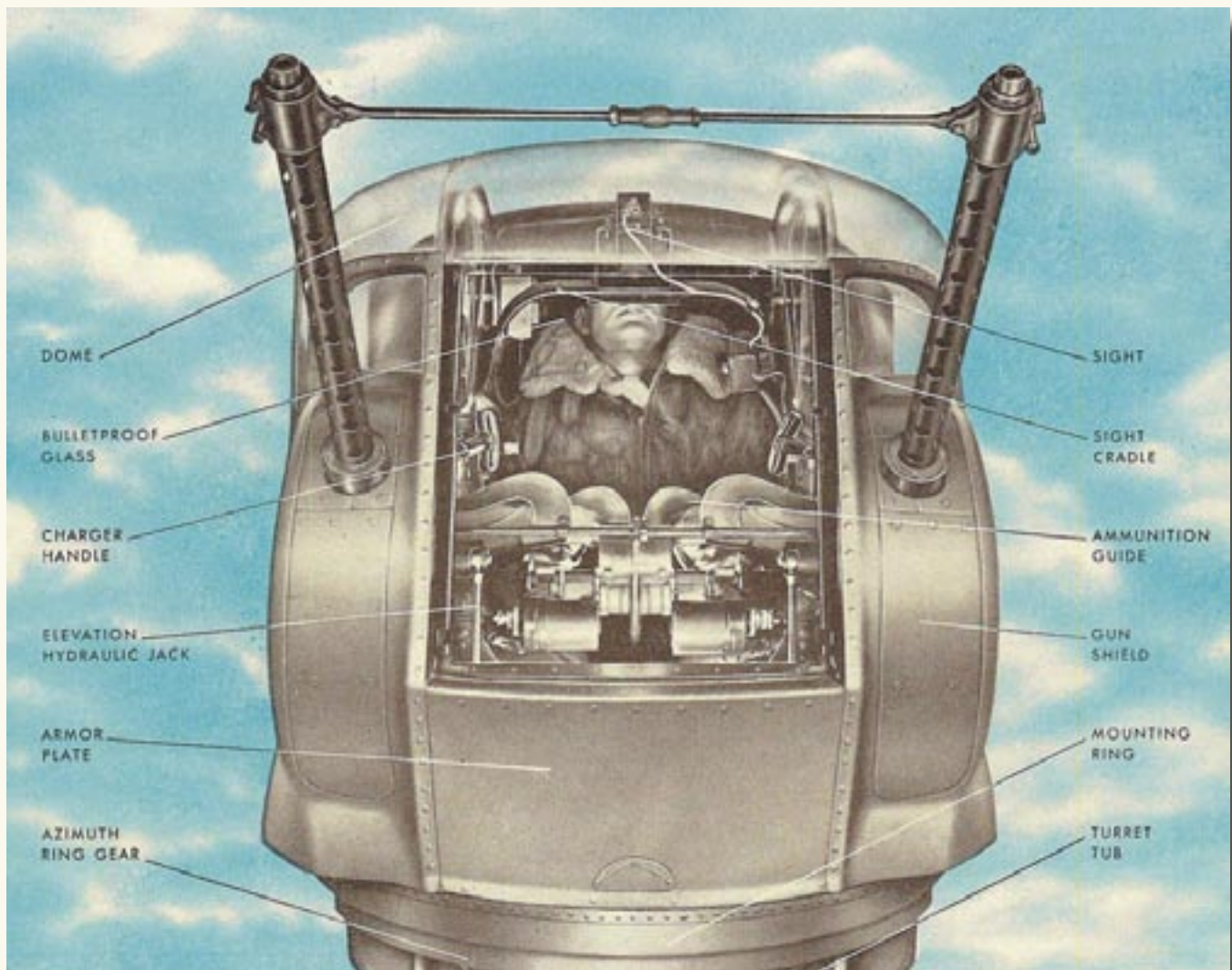
12/10/44, 5:00 PM Italy (V-Mail)

All I did today was clean a couple of guns. I do that every day, incidentally. Henry & Bob came back from rest camp and they had a good time but now they really need a rest. We are all set to leave this coming Thursday. I'm getting enough smokes, etc. If you ever send more packages, don't send candy, gum etc. Send food, like these packages of chicken soup (dehydrated) etc.



While there were many around who could do such menial jobs as cleaning machine guns, Air Gunners were required to do so. In addition to performing an indispensable maintenance task, it gave them the in-depth familiarity needed to keep them firing properly in combat.

The Consolidated tail turret, Ray's usual station in combat.



12/12/44, 8:00 AM, Italy (Air Mail)

Enclosing my weekly cartoon to you. You've fallen down on the clippings yourself. We didn't fly yesterday even tho the others did. Went to town & saw the picture "Dragon Seed."



One of the cartoons from Yank that Ray sent home to Sammy.

We are positively certain of going to rest camp this coming Thursday. As it looks now, we probably won't fly until we get back from rest camp.

You've probably heard about the 15th doing night flying. Well that's true enough. Fortunately, we (my crew) aren't in on it, & we aren't sorry. We've never flown after dark over here. The last nite flying I did was in an A.T.C. plane from Casablanca to Algiers.

Can't think of much more just now. Besides I want to mail this with today's outgoing mail. First I got go & get G.P. Griffiee (my bombardier, and one of the swellest guys I ever met) to censor it.

The "nite flight" Ray is referring to was a leg on his trip into the war zone. Later mailed home to Sammy, his *Air Transport Command* (ATC) ticket from London to Naples was issued on 30 August 1944, and has the date 4 September 1944 written on the back (illustrated on p. 24).

12/14/44, AM Italy (V-Mail)

Haven't any time just now. Transportation awaiting for us to take us to a rest camp for 7 days. Won't do much writing while we're gone, for reasons that are obvious. We'll be running around quite a lot. Incidentally, we are going to the Isle of Capri off the coast of Naples. Take it easy. Don't expect mail.

Ray was good to his word, as this V-Mail was his last communication home until after he returned from rest camp. Although brimming with anticipation, Ray was thoughtful enough to send this note so no one back in Brooklyn would be worried by the absence of correspondence.



The Marine Grotto, Capri, 7th Dec 1952

Capri's Blue Grotto.

A souvenir certificate for American airmen.



The scenic coast of Capri.



12/23/44, 5:30 PM, Italy (Air Mail)

The weather is still very bad for that matter, but during our week in rest camp it did clear up a bit & the 15th AAF was quite busy. That picture you wrote me about that your father-in-law showed you, well, perhaps you shouldn't have seen it. It's not very pleasant. I had hoped you wouldn't see such things, even in the papers.

Today, I flew in an airplane together with Bob & Hank (with their own pilot at the controls). This is the first time we flew together, even if it was only a one hour practice hop. I didn't have to go along, it was merely because I had nothing to do, during the afternoon.

We have a number of fairly new crews in our group. Lots of them are still "virgin." In our sqdn, there are only 2 crews who have more missions than we do. And so, we are looked up to with a good deal of awe by the newcomers.

Especially now, since I've got my jacket all painted up with bombs, etc. When we first got here, our sqdn was full of veteran crews that were lacking just a few missions to complete their tour. I'll never forget the way some of the hotshots scared hell out of us with their talk. I resolved, never to do like they did. I mean to deliberately fill a fellow full of crap. And I've kept my resolution.

I'm awaiting news from Marty. Hope it's soon. I'll now be getting into my normal, daily writing routine, now that the rest period is over.

During the period Ray & his crew were on Capri (12/14 - 12/24), the 454th flew 6 missions, hitting targets in Germany, Austria, Poland and Czechoslovakia. It is curious that Ray made no mention of anything that happened at rest camp, or even if he had a good time. Lt. Wherry complained that they showed the film "Memphis Belle" there, and they *all groaned and sweated that guy out*, and *to show it at rest camp was the worst thing they could have done*. Otherwise, Wherry mentioned that they couldn't do too much sightseeing because of the rain.

Ray's A-2 jacket

If there is one item that could be chosen to represent the American airman of WWII, it would have to be the issue A-2 leather flight jacket. Perhaps these relatively light garments are misunderstood; while they would keep one comfortable on low altitude flights during a warmer season, they were useless on high level bombing missions during the winter. With electrically heated gear worn underneath flying suits, A-2s were a considered unnecessary by most and were primarily worn while on the ground or off duty.

Comfortable and fashionable, the A-2 evolved into a canvas for painted artwork, often boldly displaying an airman's ship, unit affiliation, rank, position or even his hometown. The array of these polychrome pieces is vast and staggering, and each and every embellished A-2 is today recognized as a unique treasure.



I had assumed that Ray had an A-2 when I started this work during the spring of 2012. As a babe-in-the-woods in the realm of WWII stuff, I had imagined that Ray died wearing his, and was sure it was lost. Confirmation that I was right with my first hunch came when I read Ray's letter of 23 December 1944.

Confirmation that I was wrong on my second assumption came on 3 August 2012 in the form of an email from Phil's daughter Barbara, a cousin I hadn't seen since I was a toddler. A few weeks previous, I had called her mother Dottie in Florida, hoping to get a few pictures of Phil for inclusion in this work. I didn't know it, but Barbara was down from New York celebrating her mother's 85th birthday when I phoned. Dottie agreed to dig out as many WWII era pictures of Phil as she could, and send them to me for copying. She also passed my contact information on to Barbara.

Attached to Barbara's introductory email were a number of snapshots of an A-2 which made my jaw drop. While Barbara believed the ragged jacket in her possession was originally her father's, it was clearly Ray's. Phil was 5 inches taller than Ray, and this A-2 is way too small to have been issued to a man of 5'11" and 185 lbs. The artwork applied to the jacket proved the case though;



Painted directly on the back of the jacket is a large cartoon of a B-24 (an earlier model without the nose turret) underneath the name "DINAH MITE."



A painted & incised leather patch of a 48-star American flag on the left shoulder.

*The right shoulder bears a similarly made patch inscribed
BROOKLYN above a shield bearing a large XV over a
ribbon inscribed 454 B.G. – 737 B.S.*



*An incised & painted version of Air Gunners
wings appear on the upper left breast.*



*A large circular
patch is on the lower
left breast and depicts
a bomb falling nose
down and issuing
jagged yellow flames
terminating in four
white stars. Along the
right border is the in-
scription 454 BOMB
GROUP.*

**See both covers for color
images of Ray's patches.**

Phil never flew aboard *Dinah Mite*, the beloved B-24 of Ray and his crew. By the time Phil arrived at San Giovanni in early March, 1945, the war was rapidly drawing to a close in Europe, and he flew just enough missions to earn the Air Medal. No “greenie” would assume to don such a flamboyant marker of the combat-seasoned air veteran.

The jacket itself is a fairly standard goatskin A-2. Although now missing its label, it was made in 1942 by I. Spiewak & Sons of North Bergen, NJ. Thanks to Grant Gill, a friend & co-worker of Barbara’s, who studies A-2 jackets and pointed out the unmistakable Spiewak traits, including the pointed collar ends, the distinctive shape of the pockets and pocket flaps and the Crown (brand) zipper.

Officially out of issue by the time Ray was to receive a flying jacket, the A-2 came to Ray second or third hand while in Italy. Further evidence for this comes from the jacket itself; there are holes in the collar ends from metal insignia, indicating that an earlier wearer of the jacket was an officer. On the left breast, one can see two different circular patterns of mechanical needle holes piercing the goatskin underneath the Gunner’s wings and 454th BG patch, indicating another patch was once in place before Ray had it done up.

The first to occupy the spot may be the detached “Flying Boxcar” patch (a nickname for a B-24) Barbara now has. As second-hand “Government” property, perhaps Ray got it from the supply depot, or acquired it gambling. If a downed airman’s A-2 was found amongst his effects, it was returned to stores on base and issued to another.



Detail of the collar tabs.



Now mostly gone, the representation of *Dinah Mite* on the back was painted by an anonymous Air Force artisan. Since Ray’s crew started flying in other airplanes shortly after their 6 November 1944 mission, this artwork predates that time. Being “used” when it came to Ray, perhaps he got it from a homeward-bound crewman with the *Dinah Mite* painting already on it. I like to think Ray won it in a card game.....

Even Ray’s patches have something to tell of their origin. While those applied to the jackets of men serving in other theaters were machine embroidered, painted or were decals, those easily available to men serving in Italy were unique; they were incised and painted leather. In fact, there’s no doubt that they were made on the Isle

of Capri, where men of the 15th Air Force went to rest camp, and where local artisans produced these distinctive and beautiful patches specifically for sale to American servicemen. The designs often deviate from the official Group crests and patches and can be quite innovative; furthermore,

they could be customized to meet the demands of a serviceman, as illustrated by the addition of “BROOKLYN” and Group & Squadron markings to Ray’s 15th Air Force shoulder patch.

Therefore we can assume at the latest, Ray came back with these patches when he returned from Capri on 21 December 1945. It is equally possible he had a friend bring back these custom-made patches from rest camp at an earlier date.

Predictably, the A-2 isn’t listed on the inventory of Ray’s belongings taken by the Army the day after he was shot down. It likely disappeared immediately after word got out that the plane didn’t make it back, and was turned over to Phil when he arrived in a day or two. Although too small for him, Phil wore the jacket and quietly kept it till the day he died, since neither Gary nor Barbara knew of its existence. When Dottie sold their house to move into a condo in the early 2000s, this was one of the items discovered amongst Phil’s effects. Barbara, ever sharp-eyed, saved it from being discarded and kept it safe with her in New York until she decided that it should be with me.

Gary, Marty & Phil examine something interesting outside of a Brooklyn park in February, 1946.



Phil is wearing Ray’s “toned-down” A-2, even though it is too small. Note how short the sleeves are on him!

But the story of the jacket with gets more complicated. Phil is clearly wearing it in a snapshot with Gary and Marty taken three months after Ray was declared “dead,” in February 1946. In this image, the jacket looks different; the left breast is bare, and the 15th Air Force patch is on the opposite shoulder. A close examination revealed that at some point, Phil had cut the stitches and removed all of the patches, only to glue them back in place later. While he switched the locations of the two shoulder patches, stitch holes in the left breast of the jacket show the current locations of the 454th BG patch and the Gunner’s Wings are in the correct vicinity.



The blue line on the left shoulder follows the stitch holes from the XV Air Force patch.



The original location of the Air Gunner's wings is traced in red (1), while that for the 454 Bomb Group patch is traced in blue (3). The yellow line (2) follows the stitch holes from the first patch to occupy the spot, possibly the Flying Boxcar.



Traces of the two locations that the flag patch once occupied on the right shoulder.

One can only assume Phil removed some of the patches in order to “tone-down” the jacket while still serving in Italy. As a “greenie,” walking around San Giovanni in a fully done-up A-2 could have gotten you in trouble; you had to earn the right to wear one.

Now one of my prized possessions, it is in too poor condition to ever be put on again. As a tribute to Ray, I copied all of the artwork and patches as accurately as possible and applied them to a new A-2 jacket, which I wear with great pride (see p.133).

12/29/44, Italy (Air Mail)

Just got official word from the “keed” himself (dated 12/14) that he (Marty) finished his missions. I’m so happy, I don’t know whether to shit or go blind. I’ve been sweating out something definite, because in your letters, you just kept saying that you think Marty is finished. Well, he wrote & said that he may even be home for New Years. That means even as I write this he may be on his way home already.

Now listen, boys & girls, show him a rousing welcome & a real good time, eh? Don’t let anything happen that will put a crimp into a glorious occasion and don’t bemoan the fact that a couple of other Zisks aren’t home yet.

I’m over the halfway mark on missions. I need 16 more times over the target to finish up. If we don’t have more trouble than we ever have had before, why everything will be hotsytotsy.

Buy the camera & to hell with worrying about post-war bargains. But don’t delay.

The first and only of the three Zisk boys in the Army Air Force to do so, Marty’s completion of his “35” was a big deal. Not too far behind, Ray had completed 19 missions, and Phil was still stateside in training.



The “Zisk Crew” in front of their B-17 Sack Rabbit. Marty is standing in the middle.

Image courtesy of the Bodio family.



While training in Nebraska during early 1944, Marty dressed Sam, a civilian, in an officer’s uniform and took him for a flight with his crew aboard a B-17. Sam brought both a movie and a still camera. This snapshot of the two Zisk boys at a waist gun, and the footage taken during the jaunt, would have been strong evidence against them had they been caught. The footage is now available on DVD.

1/3/45, 6:00 PM, Italy (V-Mail)

Weather is still “no buone” and we are sitting around on our asses. Flew a practice mission this afternoon for a few hours. I meant to tell you about our old airplane “Dinah-Mite,” but I forgot. Last week it completed its 100th mission and when it landed they painted a big 100 on the fuselage & took lots of pictures, which may appear in some N.Y. Papers. My crew flew 15 sorties on “Dinah-Mite,” but when we started flying box lead, we had to start flying in other airplanes.



One of the shots taken of Dinah Mite, and the crew that flew her for her 100th mission, during Christmas week, 1944.

Courtesy of Steve Chalker.

1/4/45, 7:00 PM, Italy (Air Mail)

Just a short note at this time before I go to the “club” for a little vino. Guess I deserve to have a little today, because we did a little “work” today for a change. Weather cleared up enough to let us go out on a mission. It wasn’t particularly bad, and is obvious by this letter, everything is “molto buone.”

Well, only 15 more times to go. Got my 20th sortie today. Just hoping that things continue to go well for us. I’m one ahead of Bob & Hank again.

I've got 2 rolls of film & will be taking pictures if the weather stays good. Enclosing some cartoons from Yank. If you'd take some advice from me, you'd try to get a marine or sailor from the yard to buy you one each week. It is by far the finest publication yet to come out as a result of the war.

Ray's 20th mission was the attack on the railroad marshaling yards in Verona, in Northern Italy. The weather was clear, and the bombing was accomplished visually. The crews reported a good concentration of hits, especially on the eastern portion of the yard, and flak was reported as moderate, accurate and heavy at Verona and Venice. At this point in the war, the Germans were being rapidly beaten up the "boot" of Italy towards the Alps, and the famed Brenner Pass leading into their homeland. Rail lines and yards were their main mode of supply, and were relentlessly targeted by the Allies.

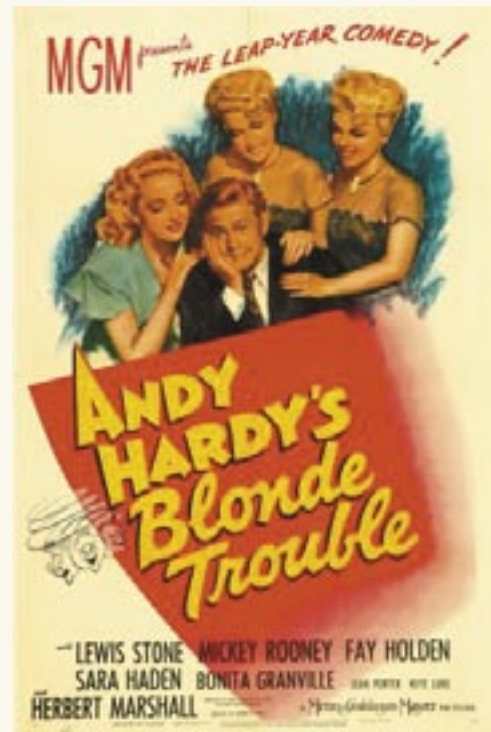


***The Enlisted Club of the 737th BS
where Ray had his "vinos."***

1/5/45, 6:00 PM, Italy (Air Mail)

Had nothing to do and so, I went into town for some Red Cross ice cream & a show. Saw Mickey Rooney in "Andy Hardy's Blonde Troubles." We had lots of laughs, for it was a pretty good picture. The trip into town was very disagreeable because of the mud. And transportation is difficult. When a soldier wants to go to town, he has to sweat out a ride & strange as it may seem to you, traffic is pretty scarce. Sometimes it is an awful long wait.

Received 2 V-Mails from Mac dated 12/24 & 12/26. In them he says that he is very busy, etc. etc. Also that he is worried that Germany's counter-offensive may hold up Marty's leave. I hope & pray to God that this isn't true. But please give me full details if anything new pops up.



Sometimes I get pretty peeved at you & Max. Tonight for one of the few times that I can remember, I'm genuinely angry at both of you. Is it asking too much for you to write a daily note to me? Hell, it couldn't possibly take more than 2 or 3 minutes. Admittedly, my mail to you is on the ball. Perhaps I have more time to write at least 2 letters daily, (one to Mom & one to you). I sort of expect a little reciprocation, even V-mail, if you had nothing else to write about.

Now known as the *Battle of the Bulge*, Ray and Mac were right to worry about events holding up Marty's leave, but if it did, the delay wasn't long. This letter is remarkable in that Ray is giving Sammy hell for not writing enough. Men serving overseas during WWII were desperate to keep their ties with home, and regular notes were extremely important in helping them feel like they were still a part of normal life. The post-mortem inventory of Ray's effects lists 106 letters, showing how important they were to him.

1/8/45, 8:30 PM, Italy (V-Mail)

Had a nice sunny, moderately warm day today. Felt good getting out in the sunlight & getting exposed to it, altho, we were in mud up to our knees.

Tonight, we finally rigged up some power, & we have electric lights & music too. It sure makes a guy feel good too. Just heard a solid 1 hour of recorded jive from A.E.F. station in Foggia. Still got a few more days of leisure till our next working day.



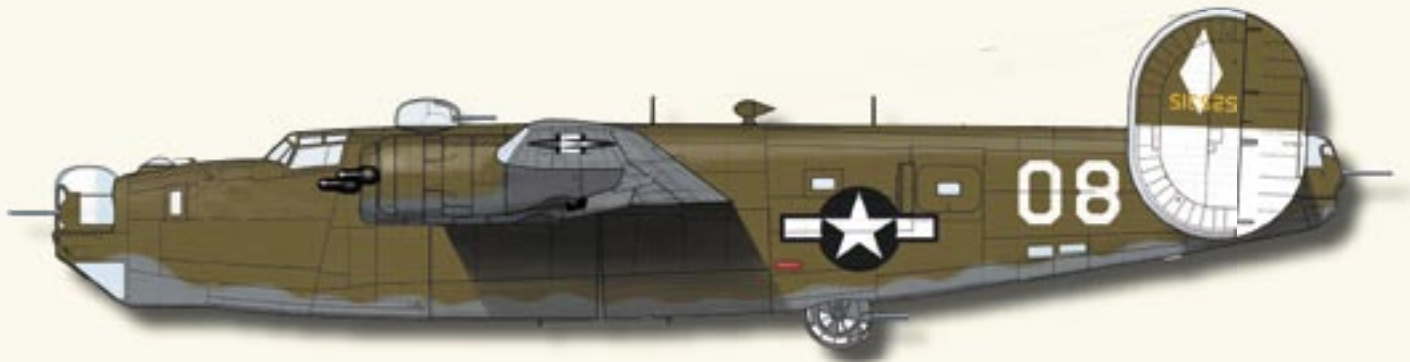
1/9/45, 7:30 PM, Italy (V-Mail)

The gas I used today to dry clean some clothes probably would drive your jalopy for 100 miles (However, it was 100 octane). If you poured 100 octane into the car it probably would react like a hophead with a great big shot of coke in his arm.

The term "hophead" is the WWII period equivalent of "junkie," and refers to one addicted to the use of opiates.



This building housed both the Orderly Room and the Enlisted Club of the 73rd BS.



The first B-24s of the 454th BG were painted olive-drab.

Earlier in the war, 454th BG tails were half white with white diamonds.

1/11/45, Italy (Air Mail) to “Dear Folks”

Probably you are surprised to hear directly from me. Admittedly, you probably get just as much information about me (from Sam, Carrie, Mom, etc.) as if I were to write directly to you. No doubt you get your ears chewed off by the various Zisks, even if you give them the slightest chance to start talking.

Well, whatever you heard about me, don't believe it. It ain't true. Seriously, I'm glad to say that everything is OK with me, in spite of the krauts, and the weather in Italy. As you may already know, Carrie & I are in pretty constant touch with one another, and so current news about everyone isn't lacking.



Various types of rations.

I've been to Germany quite a few times. Also been to other countries like Hungary, Greece, Austria, N. Italy, Silesia, etc. Of course, we don't make any prolonged visits. The quicker we come back, after leaving some presents for Adolph, the better we like it.

Well, that's enough dribble about me.

I received 2 packages from you today, and they were very, very welcome, and sincerely appreciated. We've already made some soup with the “Noodleman” & it's really tasty. Inasmuch as we frequently get the wholesome C-ration & Vienna sausages which we don't bother to eat, the soup will really come in handy. We all save up our canned foods & when we have quite a lot, we throw a little party right here in the tent (with some “vino” to drink it down with).

Since coming back from rest camp (Dec 21) I've only been to town twice, despite the fact that passes can be gotten very easily. Just isn't anything to do but go to the Red Cross & drink coffee.

This letter, sent to a non-Zisk family member, shows that Sammy gathered Ray's correspondence for saving. While the recipients aren't named, they are members of his two sisters-in-law's family, the Cohens. Sammy and Marty married sisters, Jean & Carrie, who were the daughters of the proprietor of the *Goodman Noodle Company*, a beloved New York Jewish institution. The foodstuffs they sent were gladly shared with Ray's crew-mates, as noted by Lt. Wherry, who told his mother "without Zisk's family and friends we would starve to death."

1/13/45, Italy (Air Mail)

We had some pretty miserable stuff for supper tonight and so my stock of food from the U.S. Was quite the thing to eat. Opened up a can of tomato soup & a can of sardines and washed it down with a couple cans of Pabst Blue Ribbon Beer.

P.S. One of the boys wants a page from any N.Y. Paper with the used car sales on it. Please send one.



Snowbirds of the 454th at San Giovanni, late 1944 or early 1945. Courtesy of Paul Johnson.

1/14/45, 3:30 PM, Italy (Air Mail)

Ho hum. Another day with ceiling & visibility 0-0. Already have exhausted my available reading supply, and I'll probably be getting bed-sores if I stay in the sack much longer.

Finally got an air-mail from you dated 12/29. Some of the other boys got some too. Yours was written 3 years to the hour after Gary was born & you were reminiscing.

These days of idleness begin to get a guy after a while. It could help out a lot if plenty of magazines were available. At noon chow, we had Vienna sausage, (which nobody eats) so, I saved my bread, and opened a can of tomato herring. Boy, that sure was good. Still got one can of it left plus other edibles.

Sam, you know I never used to bitch about chow, eh? Well, let me tell you that the general run of the mill food here is really horrible. Never have I seen or tasted food this bad. It is really miserable. Occasionally, we get a good feed, but on those meals, its impossible to get seconds & so practically everyone leaves the mess hall feeling hungry.

Talk of sausage & kraut etc. here is a story I related to Wacs while we were at the rest camp. They asked about some experiences on missions. Well, I told a couple of them that we once missed our target & hit a sauer-kraut factory (on a low-level attack) and we got back to the base with sauer-kraut all over the plane. They actually believed it, until one of the boys put them wise. At that, it might be good for a laugh in days & years to come.*

*That was quite a surprise to learn that Howie Schultz was eligible to play basket-ball in the Garden.** Sure wish I was back to take in the track-meets & b.b. games in the Garden during the winter. Maybe you'd go too – eh?*

**Women's Army Corps*

*** Madison Square Garden*



Ray was right - I had a good laugh when I first read his sauerkraut story, 67 years later.

Howard “Howie” Schultz (1922–2009), was a professional baseball and basketball player. Nick-named “Stretch” and “Steeple,” at 6-foot-6-inches, Schultz was not allowed to serve in the armed forces during the war. From 1943 to 1948 he played first base for the Brooklyn Dodgers, and was traded to make room for Jackie Robinson. Schultz turned to basketball in 1949, and was one of the few players who qualified for pensions from both MLB and the NBA.

1/17/45, 4:30 PM, Italy (V-Mail)

Sure am getting sack weary. What with the continuous rain & the difficulty of going anywheres, most of the time is spent in the sack. Last night, I got 14 hours without interruption (we didn't have to get up for briefing this AM). However we are still scheduled for the next mission the sqdn makes. The rain has poured down for 24 solid hours & only about 1 hour ago did it let up some. Our tent has no leaks, but we shall put another coat of waterproofing on it again, as soon as it dries out a bit.

Packages tonight. Hope I get some.

1/18/45, 7:00 PM, Italy (V-Mail)

Received another package from Mom, containing more canned goods, which is just what we need, (seeing as how Uncle Sam is still feeding us crap). It's good to have an extra little can of food so that when the mess is lousy, we don't have to go hungry & besides we can tell the cooks & mess sgt to blow it out of their “arses.”

We'll go tomorrow if the weather is good. Sure wish I had mail from you with definite word as to activities of Marty & Phil.

19 January 45, 7:00 PM, Italy (V-Mail)

Can't write much tonight. Too tired. Everything is OK with me & my gang. Hope & pray you are all well. Weather has cleared up some, but it's windy and cold. And we've got to sweat out our sturdy (?) tent tonight, for the wind velocity is getting stronger. Did a little "work" today and it wasn't out of the ordinary. Easy, if anything. But it was pretty cold. And now I'm going to eat a couple of tuna sandwiches, hit the sack, read until I fall asleep, (and that brings me to goodnite).

Got 22 now.

The day started out like any "working" day for Ray and his crew. After the usual pre-dawn wake-up, get dressed and eat breakfast routine, all headed to their respective briefings. The boys found out that the target for the mission – number 179 for the 454th BG - was to be a highway bridge near Brod, in Yugoslavia. They would be carrying ten 500-pound high explosive bombs as their cargo, and they would be flying "lead" in Box #4, the rearmost grouping of seven B-24s.

As was often the case during the air war, cloud cover over the primary and secondary targets prevented the formation from completing its task, and they headed back to Italy fully loaded. Bombs were expensive, and if they could be brought back to base in a reasonably safe manner, the Army Air Force ordered returning planes to do so. Otherwise, they jettisoned their explosive payloads over unpopulated areas or open water.

Nearing the airfield at around 3:00 in the afternoon with two and a half tons of explosives aboard, Lt. Schindler peeled off in preparation to land from the north on the easternmost of San Giovanni's two runways. The control tower sternly warned the pilot that he could expect a heavy crosswind from the west. As Schindler maneuvered the B-24 into its final approach, he slowed from 135 mph and assumed a skewed "crab" position in attempt to counter the crosswind, which was then gusting up to 35 mph. They touched down at 98 mph, an appropriate landing speed for a large, heavy bomber.

The crew made it back to their tents a-o-k, but all were exhausted after many hours in the air. At 7:00, Ray decided it was time to pen his daily letter, addressing the above V-Mail to "Everybody" and posted to Sam. While the family was well aware of what sort of work he was doing as an aerial gunner, Ray went through pains to come across as the same warm, happy fellow they all knew. Clearly, he didn't want to burden anyone back home with upsetting war stories and heartache. With selfless wisdom, he shouldered the weight of his experiences silently and kept them as far away from Brooklyn as he could.

Others on his crew needed to vent, and from their words we know that the aborted mission of January 19th was anything but "ordinary." The plane crashed on landing. In fact, it was the closest to an instantaneous death that any of them had come since joining the Army. Lt. Wherry, the crew's Navigator wrote about the crash to his parents in California;

We skidded around so easily. It wasn't until I was out that I remembered the pay load we were carrying. Then I really scooted. That's what did the damage to me. Here I was all dressed up, heated suit etc, large flying boots, and parachute, and I was attempting to run through ankle deep mud. What a sight that must have been. I was so pooped I couldn't get on the truck when it came to get us. Yes it was pure and simply luck, only by the Grace of God did all of us get out uninjured. The plane was completely wrecked.

These two photographs were included with the Report of Aircraft Incident and graphically illustrate both the damage to the B-24 and how lucky the crew was to get out alive. Courtesy of Tim Wherry.



Flight engineer S/Sgt. Arthur Swedberg was so shaken up by the crash that he wrote to one of his parish priests back in Rhode Island. His unwitting mother Jenny told the story to Sam in a letter penned about a month after the crew was shot down, but before anyone knew that all had been killed. Mrs. Swedberg wrote;

Did Ray tell you how close he came to death in the latter part of January? We didn't know this until we received the telegram. Arthur wrote to one of the priests in our parish and told him that when they went to take off to go on a mission one day, they couldn't get up enough speed as it was so muddy. They were a few feet in the air, and suddenly crashed into some brushland loaded with bombs (the facts got twisted around here, as in the game 'telephone'). I guess the plane was quite a wreck, but not one fellow received a scratch. How they ever got out of that is a miracle.

With a destroyed bomber beside the runway, Army protocol required a *Report of Aircraft Incident* to be typed out, complete with photographs of the wrecked plane and the accounts of witnesses and key crew members. All agreed that the plane had just touched down, and while still light, was blown hard to the left by the crosswind. Once the left main gear hit the mud, it sunk in deeply, collapsing both it and the front landing gear, while violently spinning the plane 90 degrees left. Because all hell was about to let loose, Ray and the other rear gunners exited the B-24 through the waist windows while those stationed towards the front of the plane exited through the top hatch. Awkwardly sprinting across the mire, the crew put as much distance between them and the wreck as possible before stopping to catch their breath.

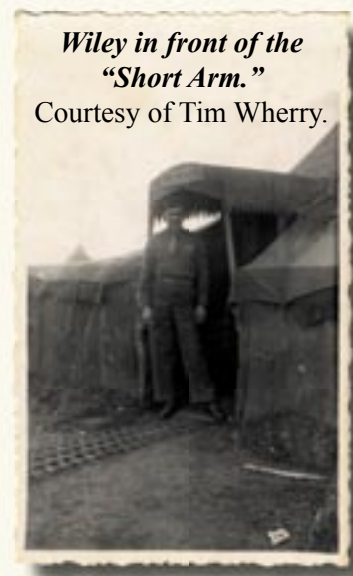
If not a complete loss, the plane needed extensive repair to the fuselage, left side engines, propellers and the tip of the wing. Regardless, blame had to be assigned. The Army Air Force, in its renowned wisdom, split the responsibility between the wind and what they termed “faulty technique.” Instead, I choose to believe that Schindler and Graham’s skill saved the crew’s lives.

1/20/45, 7:00 PM, Italy (Air Mail)

Was going to take a day off writing today. But on second thought, I'd better not. Everything continues well.

The only thing out of the ordinary today is that we took a “short arm” inspection. Lot of V.D. here in Italy & they try to keep close tabs on the boys. Weather was good today & some of the mud dried up, but we'll need at least 10 sunny days straight to turn the mud to dust.

Enclosing a snap taken some time ago. It was taken after a “mishon” when I still had a mustache (on Dinah-Mite). I left my “Mae West” on & my chute. But the heated suit & other flying gear had already been taken off.



The canvas covers over the cockpit had already been replaced.

I've been taking more pictures lately & I'll be sending em home when they're ready. Hope you've gotten definite news concerning Marty by now. According to Mac (as of 1/8) he thinks Marty was homeward bound at that time.

Yesterday's work was all "milk & honey" if you know what I mean. Didn't see any of that black stuff at all. Wish they were all like that.

About the only other unusual thing today is that we got pretty good P.X. rations. For a change, we got Camels & Old Gold rather than the Raleighs, Pall Mall, etc. Also got 1 qt. Can of tomato juice & 5 bars candy, & 3 bottles of Trommer's Beer. Going to town tomorrow to see picture (for a change). "Hollywood Canteen" is playing.



The "snap."

His near-death experience the previous day is why Ray re-thought his decision to take the day off writing letters home. It took weeks for Lt. Wherry to "get it out of his system," and Ray was likely no different. In any event, his description of the event as "milk & honey" is nothing short of remarkable. Thankfully, the picture of Ray donning his "killer diller" mustachio in front of *Dinah Mite* survived.

25 January 1945 to 27 February 1945

With none of Ray's letters dating from the last few weeks of his life, there is little to fill in the blanks. From the Sanderlin list, we know the crew flew 5 missions during this time, but there's no way to tell if Ray was on all of them, or if he flew any with other crews.

On 27 February 1945, Lt. Wherry wrote home in anticipation of his 35th and final mission;

Had a picture taken today of us all. Told them to send it to you guys. I can't believe tomorrow's mission is my last. Home, good food, sleep, so many things are going through my mind. I should see you in about 21 days.



Sanderlin's list of missions flown by the Ted K. Schindler crew. It is largely accurate.

| FLIGHT RECORD | | | | |
|---------------|-------------|----------------------|-------------|----------------|
| <u>No.</u> | <u>City</u> | <u>Objective</u> | <u>Date</u> | <u>Country</u> |
| 1 | Gyor | Marshalling Yards | 9-20-44 | Hungary |
| 2 | Kiskore | R. R. Bridge | 9-21-44 | Hungary |
| 3 | Munich | Airdrome | 9-22-44 | Germany |
| 4 | Venezia | R. R. Bridge | 9-23-44 | N. Italy |
| 5 | Athens | Airdrome | 9-24-44 | Greece |
| 6 | Munich | Marshalling Yards | 10-4-44 | Germany |
| 7 | Gyor | No. 109 Factory | 10-7-44 | Hungary |
| 8 | Casarea | R. R. Bridge | 10-10-44 | N. Italy |
| 9 | Casarea | R. R. Bridge | 10-11-44 | N. Italy |
| 10 | Bologna | Storage Depot | 10-12-44 | N. Italy |
| 11 | Mor | Marshalling Yard | 10-13-44 | Hungary |
| 12 | Oderal | Oil Field | 10-14-44 | Poland |
| 13 | Innsbruck | Marshalling Yard | 10-20-44 | Austria |
| 14 | Gyor | Marshalling Yard | 10-21-44 | Hungary |
| 15 | Geoppe | Troop Concentration | 10-23-44 | N. Italy |
| 16 | Lins | Marshalling Yard | 11-4-44 | Austria |
| 17 | Vienna | Oil Refinery | 11-5-44 | Austria |
| 18 | Vienna | Ordnance Depot | 11-6-44 | Austria |
| 19 | Gras | Tank Factory | 11-11-44 | Austria |
| 20 | Verona | R. R. Repair | 11-19-44 | N. Italy |
| 21 | Mariboc | Marshalling Yard | 12-7-44 | Yugoslavia |
| 22 | Klagenfurt | Marshalling Yard | 12-27-44 | Austria |
| 23 | Verona | Marshalling Yard | 1-4-45 | N. Italy |
| 24 | Vienna | S. Marshalling Yard | 1-16-45 | Austria |
| 25 | Brod | Highway Bridge | 1-19-45 | Yugoslavia |
| 26 | Regensburg | Oil Storage | 2-5-45 | Germany |
| 27 | Mariboc | Marshalling Yard | 2-13-45 | Yugoslavia |
| 28 | Trieste | Harbor Installations | 2-20-45 | N. Italy |
| 29 | Udine | Marshalling Yard | 2-23-45 | N. Italy |
| 30 | Lins | Marshalling Yard | 2-24-45 | Austria |
| 31 | Bolzano | R. R. Bridge | 2-26-45 | N. Ital |



Mission 203 – 28 February 1945

By comparison to previous weeks, the European weather in February of 1945 was glorious, and allowed the 15th Air Force to continue the war from their fields in southern Italy. While Ray and his crew flew only three missions in January – one of which was aborted and nearly got them killed – they had twice as much “work” assigned to them in the last three and a half weeks of the succeeding month.

After chow on Tuesday, 27 February our boys headed up to Operations where they saw their names on the bulletin board, informing them that they were flying the next morning. As a well-seasoned aircrew edging ever so close to the coveted 35th completed mission that would send them home, they started mentally preparing for the following day. That night drinking, if there was to be any, would be kept to a minimum and all would head to bed at a reasonable hour to get a good night’s rest.

Ray’s pack of friends, surely including Henry “Goldie” Goldman and Bob Johnson, decided to play a few hands before turning in. Always a good card player, Ray won pretty big that night. Furthermore, he knew the next day he’d be flying with Goldie, who was taking the place of Sanderlin in the nose turret. Although he was part of a different crew in the 454th, Goldie was trying to fly as many missions as quickly as possible to get to his 35th. An only son, he was anxious to get home to his ailing father, so he volunteered to fly missions that his regular crew wasn’t assigned to. When members of other crews couldn’t fly a particular mission for one reason or another, their positions were opened up to volunteers seeking to complete their “35” at a sped-up pace. Ray was always happy to fly with his Brooklyn pal – not just because of their friendship, but because Goldie was as an experienced air gunner as he was. So it is safe to say that Ray hit the sack on the evening of 27 February feeling swell.

Also feeling pretty good that night was Phil Zisk, then just days away from launching his big surprise. Out of nowhere, he was going to knock on the door of Ray's tent. Regardless of how hard Ray tried to dissuade his kid brother from becoming an air gunner, Phil insisted on following suit. After going through the same rigorous training, Phil found himself assigned to Ray's very Bomb Group and Bomb Squadron. But the anticipation of seeing his big brother was tempered by the worry of what could follow. After the excitement of the reunion evaporated, Ray was sure to let Phil know, in a colorful fashion, just how much he disapproved of the 19 year old's decision to climb into the tail turret of a B-24 – and then show up at San Giovanni to boot.



Phil (center) and friends at San Giovanni, spring 1945.



The interior and exterior of the 737th's dining hall, site of Ray's last meal.

Awoken long before sunrise the next morning, our crew climbed out of their warm cots and began their usual flying-day routines. A quick wash up, shave and then warm underwear, the first of many layers of kit to be applied on “work” days. Before darting out the tent door, Ray put on his flight jacket and carefully placed his wallet on his cot, a pre-mission ritual he always performed – for good luck, of course. But then he remembered the huge wad of cash he'd won at the previous night's card game, and thought better. So off the wallet went into one of his many pockets.

With mess kit in hand, it was a short walk through the darkness to breakfast in the 737th's mess hall, a non-descript long, low building. Hungry or not, Ray knew he had to have something in his stomach since he wouldn't be back for Red Cross doughnuts and coffee until midafternoon. Featuring a tiny selection of Army delicacies like rubbery oatmeal, Vienna sausages, powdered eggs and powdered-egg pancakes topped off with “tropical butter,” Ray was used to such miserable fare by this point. As always, the conversation at the table was about the upcoming mission; who was in what ship, the mechanical problems each B-24 was known to have, and where the target might be.

Slightly before 5:00 AM and still dark, Ray and Goldie headed off to the 454th's Group Headquarters at the northeastern corner of the airfield's twin runways. Around the back of the building, they headed down the ramp to the Briefing Room in the cavernous base-

ment, which been a wine cellar a year and a half earlier. The space was always crowded and noisy, and as usual there throngs of airmen and Group staff there to learn what the day's work was to be.



The passageway to the 454th's briefing room below Group HQ, then & 1990. Below image courtesy of Steve Chalker.



Three 454th Vets check the board on the door in 1990, still showing the briefing time for the last mission! Courtesy of Steve Chalker.



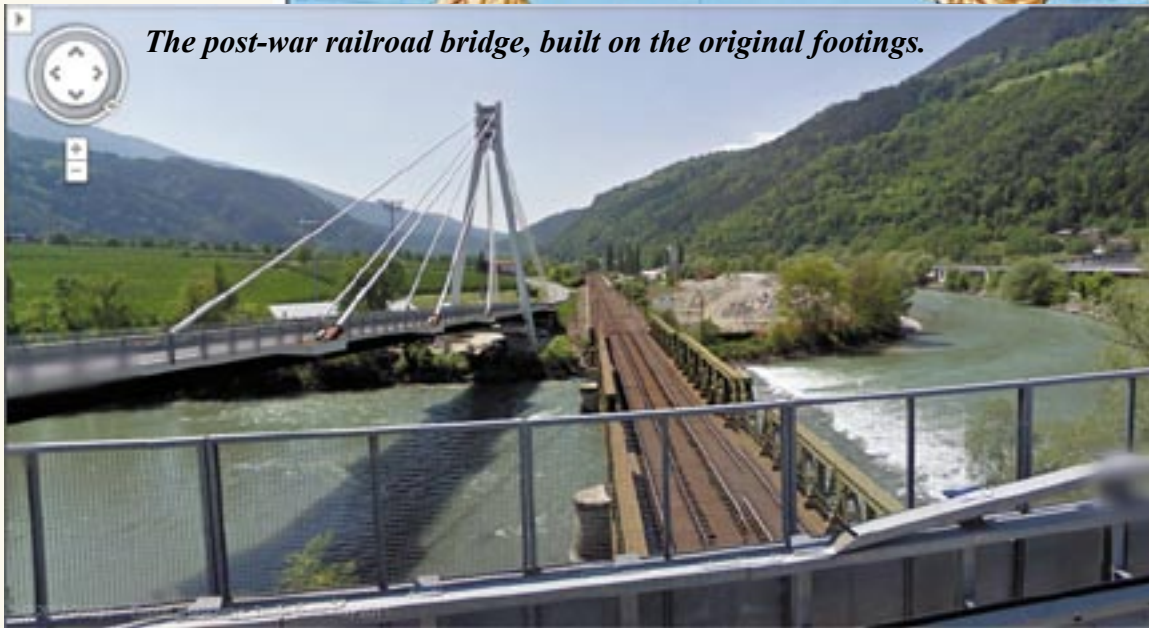
The Briefing Room.

At the head of the room a Briefing Officer positioned himself in front of a covered wall map, the Group Commander arrived, and all stood at attention in silence. On the order *SEATS*, the crewmen planted their bottoms on the upended bomb-fin crates that served as stools. Revealing the map, the crews of 33 B-24s simultaneously learned that the target was to be a railroad bridge that crossed the Isarco River at Albes, just below the Brenner

Pass in the Italian Alps. This was a strategically vital target for the Allies; if the bridge was destroyed, then one of the main umbilical cords connecting the German forces fighting in Italy and the “Fatherland” would be cut off. Now was the time to do the job, and the 15th Air Force had planned to hit it repeatedly, with numerous Bomb Groups and hundreds of tons of bombs, over the course of the day.



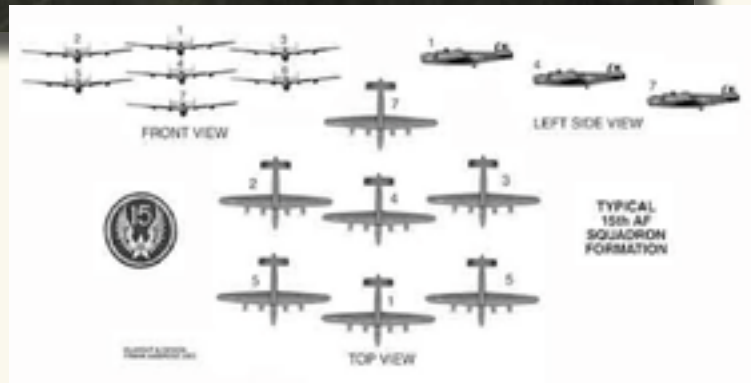
*As the crow flies,
it is almost 600
miles from San
Giovanni to the
target.*





*Bombers of the 454th form up over Cerignola,
with their airfield visible at the top right
Courtesy of Paul Johnson.*

Although diagrams show that “textbook” Air Force formations were flown with the planes extremely close together, period photos and accounts suggest otherwise. Good order was imperative, but the actual “boxes” tended to be more open in flight than what the regulations called for.



For their crack at the target, the Liberators of the 454th were divided into two forces, “Red,” followed by “Blue,” timed to be 23,000 feet over the bridge about a half hour apart. Each ship would be bringing half a dozen 1000 lb. “RDX” high-explosive bombs to the party. Total flying time was estimated by Command to be about 7 ½ hours, and take-off would begin at 7:30 AM. Once in range of German fighters, they would be met by an escort of P-38 “Lightnings” and P-51 “Mustangs.”

two “boxes” as they were called. The lead or “Alpha” box was composed of two staggered “V” shaped formations of three planes each. A lone plane flew midway between the two “Vs” in the number 4 position. Assignment to the Red Force /Alpha Box number 2 spot meant that if the Lead Ship went down or had to abort, as Deputy Lead, Ray’s crew would take charge and guide the rest of the formation to the target, on bombs-away, and the return flight home.

With seniority and experience, Ray’s crew was chosen to fly the number 2 position of the leading 16 plane “Red Force,” composed of

Having been trained to fly lead in a Mickey ship, Ray’s crew would be in one for this mission, with an augmented crew of twelve.

The radar dome took the place of the ball turret on a B-24 Mickey ship.



Liberators of the 454th over Italy, early 1944.



A typical 15th AF briefing.

Ray and Goldie headed off to the gunner's briefing along with Wiley and Moskowitz, the crew's two waist gunners. While they knew there would be little chance of encountering substantial numbers of enemy fighter planes, the target was in the mountains, and the Germans had placed large numbers of anti-aircraft guns throughout the peaks and valleys surrounding the target. The crew knew they could expect lots of flak, and as it was to be fired from a higher altitude, it was sure to be more accurate than usual. They also knew that the German anti-aircraft gunners excelled at their duty, so it could get rough.



Sprung from the various meetings with a clear sense of their duty, the crew reunited and piled into a six-by-six truck for the ride to the Squadron Supply hut. That's where the heavy flying gear was kept and where the crew could leave items not going with them, like shoes and flight jackets. On top of their uniforms came the green satin heated suits with corresponding wool footgear and flying boots, followed by the coverall-type flying suit that had recently replaced the heavy fleece-lined leather ones. Then came the parachute harness and "Mae West," the inflatable life vest used in case of a water landing. Steel-plate filled flak jackets, gauntlets, radio headsets, oxygen masks and flying helmets also had to be toted along. If a fellow looked scrawny in his uniform, he sure didn't once kitted up for a high-altitude bombing mission in the winter! At least the heavier protective gear didn't have to be put on until well into the mission.



Phil and a pal in their leather flight suits and chute harnesses during training, 1944



Later in the war, 454th tails were half white with black diamonds.

With everything they needed for the flight, it was off to the hard stand, where their ready-to-go plane awaited, fully loaded with bombs and 100 octane fuel. Arriving at their fairly new ship, Ray hopped out and made for the tail, as each man took a look around to see that his particular station looked to be in order from the outside.

This plane was nothing special to Ray. Just another shiny aluminum B-24J. True, it was

a Mickey ship, but it didn't have the charm of his first plane, the celebrated *Dinah Mite*, on which he flew 15 missions. She was one of the "Grand Dames" of the 454th, and Ray was proud to have her painted on the back of his leather jacket. But the one that was to take them to the Isarco-Albes railroad bridge didn't even have a name. She was simply known by her serial number;

42-52075

If there was enough time, some of the guys lit up for a quick smoke to get them through the intense hours ahead. As 7:00 neared, the crew piled into the plane with their anti-flak gear, parachutes and A-3 bags, stuffed with extra clothes, escape gear, and perhaps a K-ration or two. As he had always done, Ray hopped up into the bomber through the open bomb bays and headed down the narrow walkway towards his position in the tail turret.

After checking everything out, he stowed his parachute, flak jacket and steel helmet nearby in the fuselage. While other crewmembers brought an extra flak jacket to sit on, there was no need for Ray to do so since his turret

was armored. Before getting into the turret, he made sure the hydraulic shut off valve was indeed “off.” If it wasn’t, and he hit the control handle as he climbed in, the turret would rotate and pin him between the doors and the fuselage. Once seated, Ray turned the valve on and swung his turret side to side, and his guns up and down. Then he checked and adjusted the settings on his computing gun sight, inserting air speed, ground speed, altitude, and one for the 33’ wingspan of a German ME-109, the type of enemy fighter he was most likely to encounter. All was in order, so he headed to his assigned take-off position alongside Wiley and Moskowitz in the plane’s waist, for what he’d hoped would be an uneventful mission.



A gleaming aluminum tail turret on a restored B-24J. The gap between the turret and the fuselage let in both light and the frigid wind.

15th Air Force B-24s taxiing for takeoff somewhere in Italy.



The cockpit of a B-24.

Once through their checklists up in the cockpit, Capt. Schindler, the pilot and Lt. Graham, the co-pilot, expertly coaxed the four 1200 horsepower engines to life, and all aboard the bomber were immersed in a world of noise and vibration. After a short ride from the 737th Bomb Squadron's parking area to the southern end of the San Giovanni's eastern airstrip, they took their place in line on the taxi strip and awaited clearance to take off.

Less than a minute after the lead ship began down the runway at 7:30, Schindler released the brakes, turned onto the runway and did the same. Allowing a similar time interval between each of the planes, it would have taken

less than a quarter of an hour for the sixteen B-24s of Red Force to get airborne and head for the skies above Cerignola, their usual rendezvous point (see p.81, top). Circling ominously and spiraling upward while they waited for the rest to get off the ground and join the formation, radio broadcasts played throughout the waiting planes, helping to ease the minds of the men. A traditional favorite broadcast to 454th crews above Cerignola was Roy Acuff's *The Great Specked Bird*. Once formed into their respective boxes, Captain Meyers in the Lead plane ordered a green flare to be fired, and Red Force broke out of its holding pattern and headed northward towards the target.

45-54-59-54
FOOTNOTED

HEADQUARTERS 454TH BOMBARDMENT GROUP (M), AAF

Ops Order #10 K VIGATORS FLIMSY PLAN ABLE 28 February 1945

Stations: RED-0700; BLUE-0726 Take-off: RED-0730, BLUE-0745

Rendezvous: CERIGNOLA: RED-0824, BLUE-0852; 1000 ft. POINT OF BALANCE; CERIGNOLA

| ROUTE | TC | D:CE | AS | ALT | TIME | RE |
|---|-----|------|-----|---------|-------|------|
| CERIGNOLA to TP (41 50N, 18 20E) | 030 | 58 | 160 | 0115 | 58:00 | 1822 |
| TP to TP (44 50N, 15 00E) | 321 | 282 | 150 | 0115 | 10:15 | 1822 |
| TP to TP (45 38N, 13 08E) | 004 | 48 | 150 | 0115 | 10:45 | 1822 |
| TP to IF S. MARTINO (46 16N, 11 49E) | 305 | 65 | 150 | 23,000 | 10:55 | 1822 |
| IP to Tar ISARCO/ALBES RR Bridge R A L L Y R I G H T | 845 | 26 | 150 | 23,000 | 11:01 | 1822 |
| Target to TP ZOLLA (45 53N, 14 00E) | 116 | 108 | 170 | Descent | 11:32 | 1822 |
| TP to SANSEGO (44 51N, 14 19E) | 170 | 83 | 170 | Descent | 11:54 | 1822 |
| TP to Base | 182 | 206 | 170 | Descent | 12:09 | 1822 |

Emergency Landing Fields:

Loreto (43 27N, 12 37E)

Faldanafa (43 37N, 13 22E)

Pano (43 00N, 13 02E)

Castiglione (43 08N, 12 01E)

Fermo (43 09N, 13 49E)

Pescara (42 26N, 19 11E)

Via (43 02N, 13 12E)

Viterbo (42 34N, 11 00E)

Adria (45 00N, 12 03E)

Rovigo (45 53N, 11 32E)

Verona (45 42N, 10 52E)

Castellazzo (45 57N, 12 51E)

Guado (45 40N, 10 28E)

Castellazzo (45 57N, 13 47E)

Moson (45 50N, 12 13E)

Rovigo (45 53N, 11 32E)

Brescia (45 50N, 11 32E)

Peschiera (45 30N, 11 50E)

Castiglione (45 08N, 11 01E)

Padua (45 50N, 11 50E)

Verona (45 42N, 10 52E)

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Check Points:

Ancona (43 38N, 13 31E) - HAM

Pola (44 53N, 13 50E) - BACON

Udine (46 08N, 13 13E) - STRIK

Bolzano (46 30N, 11 20E) - CHERRY

Maps: Napoli, Chieti, Fiume, Venezia, Bologna

Firenze.

Winds: 5000 010/10

10000 350/20-10

15000 350/20-10

20000 350/20-10

25000 350/20-10

30000 350/20-10

35000 350/20-10

40000 350/20-10

45000 350/20-10

50000 350/20-10

55000 350/20-10

60000 350/20-10

65000 350/20-10

70000 350/20-10

75000 350/20-10

80000 350/20-10

85000 350/20-10

90000 350/20-10

95000 350/20-10

100000 350/20-10

105000 350/20-10

110000 350/20-10

115000 350/20-10

120000 350/20-10

125000 350/20-10

130000 350/20-10

135000 350/20-10

140000 350/20-10

145000 350/20-10

150000 350/20-10

155000 350/20-10

160000 350/20-10

165000 350/20-10

170000 350/20-10

175000 350/20-10

180000 350/20-10

185000 350/20-10

190000 350/20-10

195000 350/20-10

200000 350/20-10

205000 350/20-10

210000 350/20-10

215000 350/20-10

220000 350/20-10

225000 350/20-10

230000 350/20-10

235000 350/20-10

240000 350/20-10

245000 350/20-10

250000 350/20-10

255000 350/20-10

260000 350/20-10

265000 350/20-10

270000 350/20-10

275000 350/20-10

BOMBARDIERS INFORMATION

Primary Target: ISARCO/ALBES RR Bridge, Elev 1822 ft.

a. IP: S. MARTINO (46 16N, 11 49E) o. Axis of Atk: 849 degrees Mag.

b. Formation: Column of boxes d. Base Alt: 23,000 ft.

c. Bombing Altitude: A-23800, B-23500, C-23200 ft.

f. Intervalometer Setting: 20 ft. g. Rally: Right

Alt Tgt #18; VICENZA M/Y; Elev - 118 ft.

a. IP: ASIAGO (45 52 N, 11 51E) h. Axis of Atk: 180 deg Mag.

b. Formation & Alt's: Same as Primary e. Rally: Slight right

d. Intervalometer Setting: 50

Alt Tgt #16; PA DUA M/Y; Elev - 86 ft.

a. a. IP: BREGANZE (45 42 N, 11 34E) b. Axis of Atk: 187deg Mag.

c. Formation, Alt's and Intervalometer Setting: Same as Alt Tgt #16

d. Rally: Right

Alt Tgt No 11; NESTRE Dock Sidings; Elev - Sea level

b. Intervalometer Setting: 50

c. Formation, Alt's and Intervalometer Setting: Same as Alt Tgt #16

d. Rally: Right

Alt Tgt No 10; MESTRE Dock Sidings; Elev - Sea level

b. Intervalometer Setting: 50

c. Formation, Alt's and Intervalometer Setting: Same as Alt Tgt #16

d. Rally: Right

Alt Tgt No 9; MESTRE Dock Sidings; Elev - Sea level

b. Intervalometer Setting: 50

c. Formation, Alt's and Intervalometer Setting: Same as Alt Tgt #16

d. Rally: Right

Alt Tgt No 8; MESTRE Dock Sidings; Elev - Sea level

b. Intervalometer Setting: 50

c. Formation, Alt's and Intervalometer Setting: Same as Alt Tgt #16

d. Rally: Right

Lt. Paul Plesko's "flimsy" for the bombing of the Isarco-Albes railroad bridge. Plesko was the the Lead Radar Navigator for the mission.

Courtesy of Paul Plesko.

Ray's turret was an extremely tight space. While the vacant compartments to the sides in this modern shot are for A-2 machine guns, the gun sight is still in place on the bar above the control handles. It is easy to see why tail gunners couldn't be in position with their parachutes clipped to their harnesses.



Instead of simply making a beeline for Albes, the formation's navigators were given typed directions to the target on a mimeographed sheet called a "flimsy." In addition to the coordinates of the route, the sheet included information vital to the mission, such as alternate targets, the location of emergency landing fields, radio check points and the many areas where the Germans were known to have anti-aircraft guns. The day's route was to take the boys from Cerignola, over the sea, through a couple of turns and towards San Martino (di Castrozza).

Well under way to the target, it was time for Ray to climb into the tail turret, which wasn't the most comfortable position, but it was way better than a ball turret. Sort of like a Plexi-

glas fronted metal can with two guns sticking out of it, some acrobatics were required to pull oneself up and into the seat. While Ray wasn't a large man by any means at 5'6" and 160 pounds, it was still cramped, especially with a flak jacket on. It was too tight for any tail gunner - of any size - to be in the turret with his parachute on, but that was a problem the Army was willing to live with.

Once seated and adjusted, a tail gunner had the option to close the turret doors at his back, cutting him off from the rest of the crew. Well aware that he might need to high-tail it out of there in case of emergency, Ray kept the doors open as all experienced tail gunners did. What little protection the doors might afford from cold, wind and projectiles paled in compari-

son to the lifesaving seconds one would gain when climbing out of the turret, locating & clipping on a parachute and then bailing out of a doomed Liberator. Then he made sure his guns were loaded & ready, and checked that his intercom was set to hear orders from the cockpit along with the conversation throughout the rest of the plane.

Climbing northward over the shimmering blue Adriatic, the gunners test-fired their machine guns. Ray's twin .50 caliber M-2s could fire 800 rounds per minute, and they worked flawlessly that morning. Every few days Ray disassembled, cleaned and reassembled his machine guns, a task he could do with his eyes closed - literally. A perfectly functioning set of these sixty-four pound monsters was not unexpected, but the conditions at altitude could do funny things to these firearms. While it was cold on the ground, it was real goddam cold

in the air. The temperatures that winter morning could be 50 degrees below zero, so they plugged their electrical suits in and donned oxygen masks at 10,000 feet, where the air started to thin.

When Red Force was met by their fighter escort, the distinctive twin fuselages of the P-38s reminded Ray of his cousin. Lt. Morris Leve, a P-38 pilot with the 55th Fighter Group, was shot down and killed over Holland on the last day of January, 1944. Remembering loved ones and buddies lost in combat always served as an impetus for airmen, a somber thought for this last day of February, a year later. But there was work to do that day, so Ray went back to his job of keeping an eye out for Gerry fighters.



P-38 Lightnings.

Lt. Morris Leve, P-38 pilot with the 55th Fighter Group, killed in action over Holland, 31 January 1944.

Courtesy of Barbara Zisk.





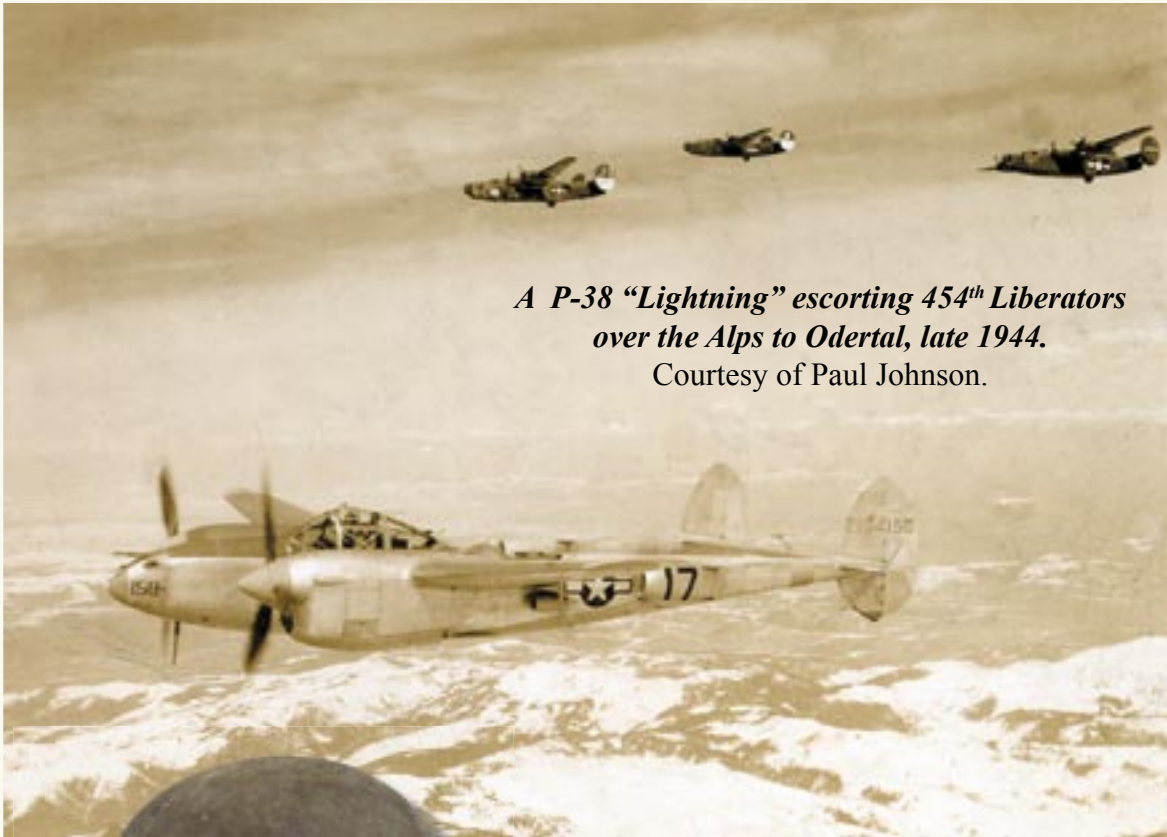
The Italian Alps in the winter, on a day like 28 February 1945.

By the time the formation crossed the Italian coast, they were at their cruising altitude for the mission; 23,000 feet. Capt. Schindler regularly checked on his men via the intercom. Should any man not respond, it could mean that he passed out from a lack of oxygen or he froze. A disconnected air hose or an unplugged heated suit was a common, unnoticed phenomenon, especially in combat situations. So radio checks became a matter of routine.

Heading roughly northwest over Italy, Ray had nothing above him except a few cirrus clouds and the spectacular snow and tree covered Alps below him. With the full brilliance of the sun in his face, he needed his dark tinted goggles as he scanned the skies and looked out on the bombers of Red Force following closely behind, staggered at slightly lower altitudes. Ray noticed one of the ships below having mechanical trouble with their #2 engine, and called it in to Schindler. Also a common occurrence, this ship had to drop out of the formation and head for home.



The flight helmet, goggles and oxygen mask worn by American airmen on high-altitude missions. On top of all of this went the flak helmet (next page).



A P-38 "Lightning" escorting 454th Liberators over the Alps to Odertal, late 1944.

Courtesy of Paul Johnson.



In the confines of the turret over hostile territory, Ray wore a steel flak helmet and a specially designed flak vest for those crewmen who had seated jobs.



Russ Johnson with his head gear on.

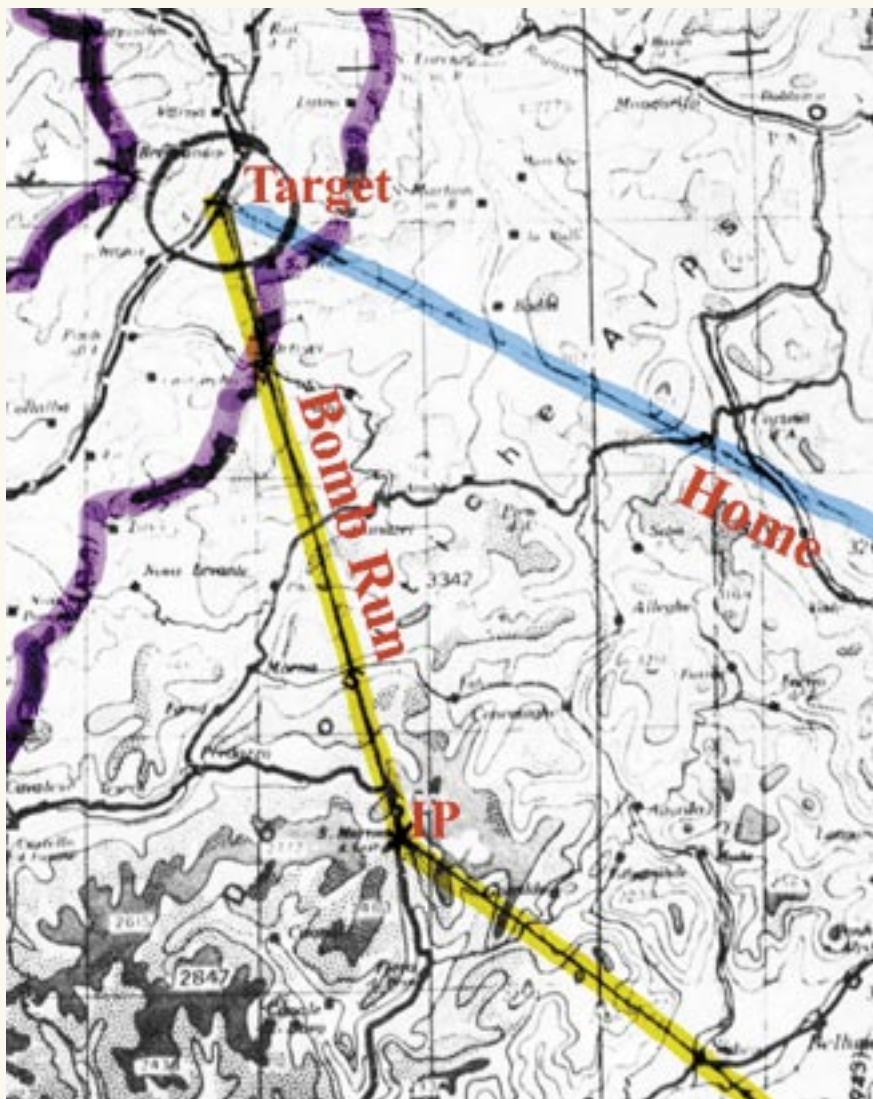
Courtesy of Jason Newgard.



According to the “flimsy” for the mission, (see p.86) Red Force was to be over the IP (Initial Point), San Martino at about 10:53 AM. The IP marks the spot where the “bomb run” begins, being the straight flight path directly to the target. No deviation from the route or evasive action could be taken after the last turn at the IP, or else the target could be lost and the mission royally botched. Here, the formation would make a slight right turn to the north, and assume a heading of 339 degrees. The turn at the IP also marked the entry point into the real danger zone, and the entire crew put on their flak jackets and steel helmets if they hadn’t yet done so. Everyone switched

their intercom to hear instructions from the Lead Ship, and strict radio silence went into effect. From there it would be less than ten, very long minutes to the railroad bridge.

After passing over innumerable peaks and valleys in a sparsely populated, remote section of the Alps, the formation approached the valley that the Isarco River ran through. Once on the bomb run, Lt. Frank Gucciardo, the “Lead Dropper” had effective control of his plane as he scanned the earth below through his bomb sight. To his immediate right and slightly behind, Lt. Leonard Clyde, the Bombardier flying in Griffie’s usual place, did the same.



This map show the route the 454th's formation took to the IP (initial point), and then on the bomb run to the target. The line leading down and to the right of the target shows the vector the formation was to take home after dropping their bombs. The curving lines at left represent the intersecting fields of identified flak batteries, known as flak alleys.

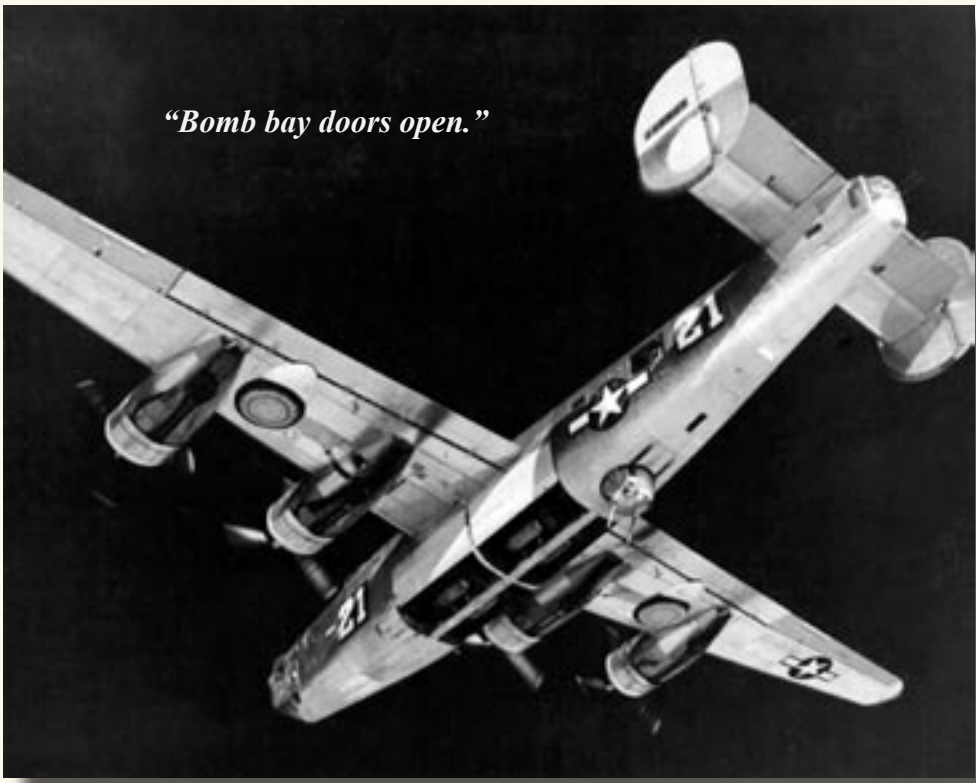


Exploding flak dogs a Liberator. “88” flak guns were monstrous affairs that threw a projectile 88 millimeters in diameter (the part above the soldier’s left hand) and weighing some 20 pounds.

Four corrugated bomb bay doors on the belly of each plane retracted. The remaining 15 Liberators in Red Force kept their eye on the Lead Ship; once she let her payload go, they were to follow. The Germans, as expected, were ready for the attack, and the formation began to see, hear and feel those hated bursts of flak. Masters of gunnery, their 88 mm anti-aircraft batteries threw up a “box” type defense, where all of the guns on the peaks and in the valleys surrounding the target fired into the same area, sometimes a half a mile wide, at about the formation’s altitude. Within seconds of completing their task, Red Force found themselves heading into a gauntlet of little back and grey clouds peppered with fleeting orange blooms. The boys began to hear the sound of gravel being thrown at a trash can, which they knew to be spent shrapnel hitting the aluminum skin of the plane.



While the little puffs may appear quaint in pictures or even harmless, they sure as hell weren’t. Each represented the explosion of a shell which would send countless jagged, super-heated chunks of metal in all directions, any one of which had the ability to shred steel, aluminum and flesh alike. This day, the flak was heavy and extremely accurate, no doubt due to the placement of the guns at an altitude that had brought them thousands of feet closer to the planes.



"Bomb bay doors open."



"BOMBS AWAY!"

When the railroad bridge met the crosshairs of Gucciardo's sight at 11:05 AM, he flipped the toggle switch and excitedly proclaimed "BOMBS AWAY." Within a split second, the other 14 B-24s followed suit, and 72 bombs - 36 tons of high explosive - hurtled down towards the target. Instantly, each Liberator lurched upwards, having just lost 6000 pounds. Meanwhile, the Germans were sighting their guns in on the lead elements of Red Force.

Having just done what they had come to do, it was time to get the heck out of there and head for home. Immediately after dropping

their bombs, the formation was instructed to "rally right." In doing so, Red Force banked sharply to starboard and entered a dive hoped sufficient to get them out of the German gunner's range, after which they would level out and then head home via Zolla (Trieste). Doing his job as the Deputy Lead's tail gunner, Ray was leaning forward in his turret trying to see where the bombs were landing so he could report his observations of accuracy and damage at the debriefing session once back at base.

This high definition photo was taken during the actual raid.

Courtesy of Tim Wherry.





MIA?

Those who witnessed the plane going down knew that there was little chance anyone survived, and once these crewmen were debriefed, the U.S. Army knew it too.

Whenever a plane went down, a *Missing Air Crew Report* (MACR) was filled out, not only as an official account for the Army, but to initiate the process of notifying the lost airmen's next of kin. Witness "statements" were included with the MACRs, but the reports were classified and never transmitted home. In his official statement signed and dated the next day, Lt. Lynn Mullins, a pilot flying one of the other planes in Alpha Box, gave an unvarnished account of what happened as they turned just south of Brixen/Bressanone;

We had just rallied off of the target and leveled out. After an estimated fifteen (15) seconds flak began to hit the lead element. Captain Schindler's aircraft was hit in or just in back of his tail turret. It would be difficult to say just where the shell actually did explode. The back of the tail turret came off immediately and after a few seconds the horizontal stabilizer came off and the tail gunner fell out. I had to dodge the gunner to keep from

hitting him. Captain Schindler's ship started to nose down immediately after the loss of his tail surfaces. The plane went into a slow roll to the left and I lost sight of it. I believe that he never could have gained control of his aircraft.

A second eyewitness account came from Staff Sargent Elven Duvall, a radio operator on one of the other bombers, and was also included in the MACR of 1 March 1945.

While we were rallying off the target, my pilot called out that the number two ship in our box was hit and instructed the gunners to watch it. Looking out the right waist window I saw the entire tail assembly float by turning end over end and before it left my range of vision it straightened out as in level flight. Then I looked down and the aircraft with the tail section gone was going down in a flat spin. It was approximately fifteen hundred (1500) feet below us at the time. I watched the airplane spin slowly down until it hit the side of a mountain and blow up. The way the airplane was spinning I think it would be very hard to leave it.

Of course, neither of these men knew the identity of the tail gunner, or if they did, it had no place in this strictly objective document. Furthermore, the MACR has the gunner's positions down wrong; it lists Ray as the ball turret gunner, but Mickey ships didn't have ball turrets. Post war developments would also show that Moskowitz wasn't the tail gunner either. Ray was.

It was pretty clear to all Red Force crewmen that everyone aboard 42-52075 was more than likely dead. Ray fell thousands of feet without a parachute after the flak shell exploded right at his back, and the rest, trapped in the fuselage of the crippled bomber by centrifical force, were smashed when the plane hit the side of a mountain, exploded, and broke apart.

The MACR.

CONFIDENTIAL
MISSING AIR CREW REPORT 12485 207

1 ORGANIZATION: Location San Giovanni Field, Italy Command by Air Force 15th
Group 454th Squadron 727th

2 SPECIFY: Place of departure San Giovanni Field, Italy Course/Venture
Target IASPO/Alone K.V. Bridge, Italy Type of mission Combat

3 WEATHER CONDITIONS AND VISIBILITY AT TIME OF CRASH OR WHEN LAST REPORTED: Clear

4 GWO: (a) Date 28 Feb 45 Time 1107 (b) Last known position in target area
(c) Specify weather: (1) Last reported, (2) From above, (3) Both to crash,
(4) Last reported by radio, (5) No information

5 AIRCRAFT (a) TYPE B-24D-10 (b) A/R SERIAL NO. 42-52075 (c) Model and year

6 AIRCRAFT: Type, model & serial 42-52075 AAF Serial Number 42-52075

7 NICKNAME OF AIRCRAFT

8 PASSENGER: Type, model & serial 42-52075 AAF Serial Number 42-52075

9 INSTALLATIONS: (a) Type, model & serial (b) A/R SERIAL NO. (c) Model and year

10 WEAPONS: (a) Type, model & serial (b) A/R SERIAL NO. (c) Model and year

11 PERSONNEL LISTED BELOW REPORTED AS: (a) Status (b) Name (c) Grade (d) Branch (e) Duty Station

12 NUMBER OF PERSONS ABOARD AIRCRAFT: Case 12, Passengers 0, Total 12

13 NAME, GRADE, BRANCH, AND RELATIONSHIP TO AIRCRAFT CREW

| NAME | GRADE | BRANCH | RELATIONSHIP | STATUS |
|-------------------------|--------|----------|---|--------|
| Schindler, Ted E. | Capt | O-712090 | Wife: John H. Schindler (Father) 260 Bryan St., Terre, Indiana | |
| Graham, James E. Jr. | 1st Lt | O-712066 | Wife: Shirley K. Graham (Wife) 322 28th Ave., Altoona, Pa. | |
| Sherry, Charles W. | 1st Lt | O-722905 | Wife: Charles W. Sherry (Father) 2629 Elmwood Court, Modesto, California | |
| Clyde, Leonard | 1st Lt | O-722910 | Wife: Martin Clyde (Father) 2434 East Ave., Chicago 26, Ill. | |
| Stricker, Harold L. Jr. | 1st Lt | O-306010 | Wife: Amelia M. Stricker (Mother) 254 Mountview Road, Millburn, N.J. | |
| Wise, Wallace J. | 1st Lt | O-770250 | Wife: Mr. Wallie S. Wise (Father) Route #1, Fort Dodge, Iowa | |
| Swenberg, Arthur F. | T/Sgt | 3428907 | Wife: Jessie L. Swenberg (Mother) Island 13 Maywood Drive, West Haven, Conn. | |
| Johnson, Russell B. | T/Sgt | 3711372 | Wife: Jessie C. Johnson (Mother) Route #2, Rolfe, Iowa | |
| Wiley, Clarence L. | S/Sgt | 2045004 | Wife: Pearl S. Wiley (Mother) 408 Freston St., Jackson, Tenn. | |
| Ray, Raymond | S/Sgt | 3420478 | Wife: Mr. Sam S. Ray (Brother) 4515 15th Ave., Brooklyn, N.Y. | |
| Moskowitz, Martin L. | S/Sgt | 12170590 | Wife: Sarah Moskowitz (Wife) 2010 Grand Ave., Bronx, N.Y. | |
| Goldman, Henry | S/Sgt | 3739985 | Wife: Mrs. Rose Goldman (Mother) 9502 Kings Highway, Brooklyn, N.Y. | |

14 IDENTIFY BELOW THOSE PERSONS WHO ARE BELIEVED TO HAVE LAST KNOWLEDGE OF AIRCRAFT AND CHECK APPROPRIATE (see page 2) TO INDICATE WHEN LAST CONTACTED

| NAME IN FULL | BRANCH | SERIAL NO. | CONTACTED LAST | SAW FORKED |
|-----------------|--------|------------|----------------|------------|
| Lynn D. Mullins | 2d Lt | O-721232 | x | |
| Elmer E. Duvall | S/Sgt | 12113242 | x | |

15 IF PER OF-ENCL ARE BELIEVED TO HAVE BEEN CONTACTED, CHECK ONE OF THE FOLLOWING:
(1) Positive saw and/or (2) Positive saw and walking away from the site of the crash.
(3) Other (specify)

16 ATTACH PHOTOGRAPHS, MAP OR SKETCH SHOWING LAST KNOWN LOCATION OF AIRCRAFT

17 ATTACH EXTENSIVE DESCRIPTIONS OF CRASH, FORCED LANDING, OR OTHER CIRCUMSTANCES

18 ATTACH A DESCRIPTION OF EXTENT OF SEARCH, IF ANY, AND GIVE NAME, BRANCH AND SERIAL NUMBER OF OFFICER IN CHARGE OF SEARCH HERE: No search was made.

19 INCLUSIONS:
Incl 1-Statement of 2nd Lt Lynn D. Mullins (Det)
Incl 2-Statement of S/Sgt Elmer E. Duvall (Det)
Incl 3-Map of Area (Det)

CONFIDENTIAL
RICHARD S. THOMAS
2nd Lt., Air Corps,
Asst. Adl. 454th Bomb Gp (H)

CONFIDENTIAL

1 March 1945

CONFIDENTIAL

the target and leveled out. seconds flak began to hit the aircraft was hit in or just would be difficult to say just explode. The back of the tail after a few seconds the and the tail gunner fell out. from hitting him. Captain down immediately after the loss then went into a slow roll to I believe that he never could aircraft.

Lynn D. Mullins
2nd Lt., Air Corps,
Pilot.

-1-



Back at San Giovanni

For the remaining fourteen ships of Red Force, it was an extremely somber but uneventful flight home. All were stunned by what they had witnessed and palpably dispirited. No one saw any chutes, and the plane spun down in a really violent way. These crews knew that their chums aboard the downed ship weren't coming home - ever.

By 1:30 in the afternoon, the men were on the ground back at base, each telegraphing that something went wrong by the expressions on their faces. 42-52075's maintenance crew and friends of those aboard waited nervously for the ship to return to her hardstand, and it didn't take long before the word got out that she'd gone down. Bad news always travels fast, and the word spread like wildfire as the other crews headed to Group HQ for debriefing. On the way, "Hally" Schindler, Ted's older brother and also a pilot in the 737th, was spotted. Obviously the news had reached him; he was lumbering along with slumped shoulders and dragging his feet in a way that Lt. Paul Plesko, the lead "Mickey operator" for the mission, never forgot.

None of the airmen were deluded into thinking that this scenario couldn't happen to them.

They had seen it repeated over and over and over again, and they knew what would happen when a plane went down, so they prepared to look out for their pals. While it might seem like they were behaving selfishly, Ray's friends immediately set upon his personal possessions; important things like A-2 jackets, mementos and coveted pieces of equipment were promised out in advance. Should the missing airman reappear, his stuff would be immediately returned without question. This was the unwritten code, practiced in full defiance of Army regulations and for good reason; it was better for one's friends to have his stuff than for it to be pilfered by some "rat" down the line, or returned to stores for issue to a stranger.

By the time those officially charged with the duty of collecting Ray's possessions arrived the next day, March 1st, the important goodies had disappeared. Issue items, technically government property, went back to the Army, and personal possessions and cash were tallied up and put into storage for eventual shipment back to the missing crewman's family. Along the way, things had a way of disappearing from Army custody.

March 2nd or 3rd, an excited S/Sgt. Phil Zisk, newly minted 737th BS Air Gunner, hopped off a transport truck at San Giovanni and headed for the squadron's tent area. After making a few inquiries, he finally found the right door to knock on. Upon walking in, Phil boldly asked;

Where's Ray Zisk?

And he was met with a response along the lines of;

What are you, a friggen' clown?

You're his replacement.



Just like that; a profane kick in the stones – is how Phil learned of it. The first in the family to find out Ray was missing, and now he was assigned to step into his lost brother's shoes. It wouldn't be until 13 March that Sammy, as the designated next-of-kin, received the "We regret to inform you" telegram bearing the news that Ray's plane had been shot down two weeks previous. It would seem possible that the word got home before the telegram arrived.

One can't fathom how Phil felt. Expecting to be serving alongside his now-MIA big brother, he suddenly found himself alone, thousands of miles from home and having to face the same deadly task that may have just gotten Ray killed, as far as he knew.

In writing to Marty, now back in the states after completing his missions, Phil gives us some idea of what he was going through;



Phil and Gary, c.1944.
Courtesy of Dr. Gary Zisk.

7 April 1945

Dear Marty,

Italy

Sorry I haven't written sooner, been really feeling low, you know how it is away from home, and what with the news about Ray.

Yes, there were some 'chutes seen they tell me. I am feeling swell Marty, not flying much I might get grounded. Was pretty busy yesterday, and so tired, I couldn't even write home.

I flew my first one over North Italy, wasn't much to it. We were pretty busy I guess you might say, and I didn't even see a puff of flak.

I have to see flight surgeon tomorrow and that is why I said I might get grounded, I will try to, at least for a while.

It's only been 38 days since the damned thing about Ray. I mean that's not long at all is it?

Brother # 4

Clearly, no one had the heart to tell Phil that the brother he replaced as a B-24 tail gunner was in all likelihood, dead. There were those at San Giovanni who knew it. Others sought to give him some hope by saying some parachutes were seen. If Phil ever suspected the worst or knew the truth, he kept it to himself.

By this date, the war was rapidly winding down in Europe. Phil flew into combat enough times to earn the Air Medal, awarded after the 5th mission, before Germany surrendered on 8 May 1945. By Christmas 1945, Phil was a civilian on U.S. soil again.

Phil arrived at San Giovanni in time to see action during the last 10 weeks of the war. He took a number of shots of himself and a friend in front of Lotta Laffs (42-51664), which was apparently the Liberator Phil and his crew flew on.



Phil's crew at Crew Training, stateside. He is kneeling, second from the right.
Courtesy of Barbara Zisk.





Eyewitness Accounts

A number of accounts of the event were taken in recent years. With well over a half century between the mission and the dates they were recorded, some distortions or confusion of the facts are to be expected. One thing is for sure though; no one who witnessed it forgot it. Lt. Joseph Chalker, a Bombardier flying in Baker Box and later Historian of the 454th Bomb Group, never did. “Chalky” wrote in 2004;

I had raised up from my sight just in time to see the ship get hit and to see the tail turret twisting down. I'll never forget it!

Twenty one year old Capt. Conrad Leslie, flying his 29th mission, was piloting #4 in Alpha Box that day. On 15 August 1998, in front of Tim Wherry's camera, Leslie recounted what he saw on 28 February 1945 in the skies above the Isarco-Albes railroad bridge. In the #4 slot, he was underneath and slightly behind the Lead. Ray's plane, as Deputy Lead, was to the right and slightly behind the Lead plane.

Thus, Ray's plane was above and to the right front of Leslie's, or “2:00 High.”

Leslie's usual Navigator, Lt. Hal Stricker, was flying the mission with Ray's crew as part of his training for “Lead.” Filmed when he was 75 years old, Capt. Leslie recalled;

The plane which contained my navigator had its tail blown off. And so, as we turned, this plane was mortally injured, and the turret...the ball turret gunner...his turret looped and barely avoided our plane, and we tried to swing up the wing so it wouldn't hit the motors but we saw his expression as he passed me there, of course he was going right down and had no ability to leave because there wasn't room in a tail turret to contain a parachute, so his parachute was always out in back of him and he had to open his doors to get that. Their tail hit our tail.



This Sargent is examining the damage done to the left rear stabilizer of Capt. Leslie's ship by the free-falling tail section of Ray's plane.

Leslie's next account of the event seems to be a combination of his flight log or diary and his memory, penned when he was about 80 years old. It appeared in the 2003 edition of *454th Bomb Group (H) Bombing Missions and Related Stories*;

On the bomb run, felt our ship receive hits a number of times and heard the shell bursts.

After "bombs away," on the breakaway turn from the target saw Schindler's plane, which contained my Navigator, Hal Stricker, flying his first mission as Squad-

ron Navigator Leader, get its tail blown off just ahead and above us. Its tail turret with the Tail Gunner in it was blown loose and came tumbling directly at us, but I was able to raise the left wing high enough, without disrupting the formation, to avoid an impact. The tail section of the plane came at us. I was able to avoid its smash into our props or wing, but it collided with our vertical tail rudder. Meanwhile Co-Pilot Wayne Wells was frantically calling via the radio to Stricker and any others who were busy on Schindler's plane to put on their chutes and bail out because their plane was mortally damaged.

We are conscious of the (so far) empty cot in our tent tonight. Really a tough break for our much liked and talented Navigator Stricker. Hope to hell he got out okay, but it would seem to be doubtful because of his location in the plane. He might have been here tonight if I'd gone to headquarters and complained about the breaking up of our crew team.



Another view of the damage 42-52075's tail caused to Leslie's ship.

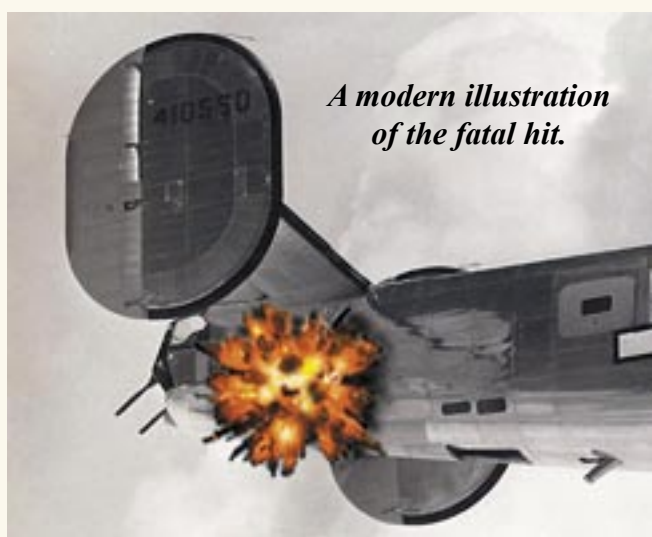
Clearly, Leslie's 2003 written account is incongruous with both his 1998 account and the 1945 Mullins account on a number of details, especially concerning Ray; was he in the turret or not as he fell to earth?

Assuming the cynical position of a historian, I have to view the Mullins account, dated the day after the plane was shot down, as the most accurate. He had no reason to embellish the events – nor would he – in this impartial, classified document. What he saw unfold in front of him 20,000 feet above Brixen haunted him vividly as he dictated his statement to the clerk typing it out. Leslie's accounts still add other, significant detail to what we know of Ray's last moments, regardless of any errors of memory or slight exaggeration.

While not a photograph of Ray's plane, this shot is of a strikingly similar and equally horrifying scene of the demise of a B-24 and her crew.



Keeping wishful thinking and speculation to a minimum, here's what I think happened. All agree that the plane took a burst of flak directly to Ray's position. Mullins' statement that "***the back of the tail turret came off immediately***" is very significant. It tells us that the explosion instantly disintegrated the part of the fuselage behind the turret which supports the horizontal stabilizer. Since the shell burst at Ray's back, I'm sure within a millisecond he was killed by the ensuing concussion and hailstorm of shrapnel. Ditto for Wiley and Moskowitz in the waist.



A complete structural breakdown occurred after a few seconds of subjection to the high winds and the entire tail structure twisted free, spilling Ray out before detaching. The fate of those crewmen still alive was then sealed.

Without question, Capt. Leslie got a good look at Ray as he plummeted by his cockpit window. At the time the plane was hit, Ray would have had his steel helmet, oxygen mask and sun goggles on, but the blast may have blown his headgear free along with the "back of the turret." In any case, I have a hard time believing Lt. Leslie, weaving a B-24 flying in formation through flak and hurtling wreckage, could discern Ray's facial expression in the split second it took for him to whiz by.

For further edification of my analysis, I contacted Mr. Dale VanBlair, who served as a B-24 tail gunner with the 448th, 466th, and 482nd Bomb Groups (8th Air Force – flying out of England) from December 1943 through April 1944. VanBlair, author of *Looking Back, A Tail Gunner's View of WWII*, flew 18 missions and ditched in the North Sea on his final one. As such, he is extremely familiar with the job Ray was doing, the tail turret, and B-24s in general. Thus, he is perfectly qualified to comment on Lt. Mullins' account of 1 March 1945. After reading the MACR and without knowing my thoughts, VanBlair stated the following in an email dated 15 January 2013;

Based on the statement by the pilot of a nearby plane regarding the explosion, I'm almost positive that your uncle was killed instantaneously, probably by flak fragments or, if not, by concussion. It's unlikely that neither he nor the two waist gunners knew what happened to them. The anti-aircraft shell must have exploded either inside the plane or immediately after exiting. The shells were set to explode at a given altitude, and if this one was set to explode at a higher altitude, it would have passed through the plane and left a hole but would not have caused the tail section to break free. I'm basing that on what happened to our plane on my last mission. A shell hit an engine but went on through without exploding. I used to think that it was a defective shell but later realized that was wrong when I thought about all the anti-aircraft shells that I saw explode without hitting anything. They were simply set to explode at that altitude, as a little research quickly verified. As for the crew members in the front end, even though they may have survived the explosion, centrifugal force resulting from the plane's spinning would have made it impossible for them to move to an exit and use their parachutes.



The Crash and Aftermath

28 February 1945 wasn't a good day for the residents of the Isarco Valley either. The 15th Air Force's attempt on the railroad bridge began at around 8:00 that morning with bombs pounding the countryside surrounding the target. German anti-aircraft guns, placed throughout the area, thundered through the valleys for much of the morning and afternoon, firing thousands of rounds into the sky. After detonating, tons of spent shrapnel then fell back to earth from 3 miles up, wreaking further havoc on life and property.

On this cold, clear day there were many who saw Ray's crippled B-24 spiraling down to the east of Brixen/Bressanone. Then a schoolboy, Adolph Argreiter had to leave class and head for shelter at home, but he heard the impact. A day or so later, he found out that the plane had come down in a small valley to the east of the Ackerboden (weather cross) on the Penideralm on Mt. Plose. At the time, there were many feet of snow on the ground so no one could get to the area to look for any signs of life even if they wanted to. A few days later,



Bombs exploding in the Isarco Valley surrounding the bridge. This image was taken during one of the other raids the 15th Air Force launched during late 1944 and early 1945

the German military arrived at the site to hunt for any survivors. Once they saw the situation was unsurvivable, they left immediately. Locals then moved in and took what provisions they could salvage, along with most, if not all of the men's cloathing and other effects like wristwatches.

42-52075 came down less violently than she could have. Since she crashed into many feet of snow, sections of her remained somewhat intact after impact. Those who saw it agreed that the fuselage and engines remained together, and were facing down the little valley. The nose too was intact, albeit some distance from the fuselage. One of the crewmen was found partially hanging out of a window, suggesting death didn't come instantly to all aboard. Two of the men were partially burnt.

Five weeks after the crash, the bodies were badly decomposed, so the remains were taken by sled to a temporary grave behind the



An 88mm Flak-36 gun at work in the Isarco Valley.

Bomb craters surrounding the Isarco-Albes railroad bridge, seen from the southwest, in early 1945.



Ackerboden (weather cross) on 3 April 1945. Names, as discovered, were recorded in the ledger of deaths & burials kept at the local parish church at St. Leonhard, but only 8 crewmen were listed. Considering what these bodies went through, it is not surprising that two names weren't discovered. Predictably, Ray's name doesn't appear in the ledger at St. Leonhard.

That summer, young Adolph Argreiter was tending livestock in the area and found Leonard Clyde, and his dogtag. Although no one in Red Force spotted a parachute leaving the crashing bomber, Lt. Clyde, the Bombardier,

did manage to get out somehow. But he was doomed, injured or not, having come down in an area too remote for rescue or capture. He was alive for at least sometime after landing a third of a mile up the mountain near a muddy creek. Clyde had tried to light some plant material, known locally as "old man's beard," on fire in order to attract attention, which never came. Clyde's body remained outside until early September, even though it was recorded at St. Leonhard as having been buried with the rest.

Piece by piece, the wreckage of 42-52075 was then sold for scrap.

201 5

| 1945-46 | | St. Leonhard | | Totenbuch | |
|----------------------------------|---|---|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Stamm, Taufort, Wohnort, im Tode | Stamm, Taufort, Wohnort, im Tode | Nachname, Vorname, Geburtsort, Geburtsdatum, im Tode | Stamm, Taufort, Wohnort, im Tode | Stamm, Taufort, Wohnort, im Tode | Stamm, Taufort, Wohnort, im Tode |
| 26.5.45 | John Bridges John Parks H. Fisher | Martin L. Los Rios 12178530 L. Los Rios 2202 L. Los Rios 2202 L. Los Rios 2202 | | | |
| - - - | | James R. Graham 7.8.8 0-741066 T 23-44 | | | |
| - - - | | Arthur F. Goodberg 36239097 T 23-44 0 e Tambor und umh. Letzter Ruheort | | | |
| - - - | | Ted K. Schindler 0-741030 T 23-44 0 | | | |
| - - - | | Wallace J. Vae 0-777050 T 22-44 A | | | |
| - - - | | Russell P. Johnson 37413976 T 22-43 A P | | | |
| - - - | | H. L. Wheeler J.R. 0-2060410 T 43-44 A | | | |
| - - - | | Leonhard Clyde | | | |

| Stamm, Taufort, Wohnort, im Tode | Stamm, Taufort, Wohnort, im Tode | Stamm, Taufort, Wohnort, im Tode | Stamm, Taufort, Wohnort, im Tode |
|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| | Letzter Ruheort | Stamm, Taufort, Wohnort, im Tode | Stamm, Taufort, Wohnort, im Tode |
| | Letzter Ruheort | Stamm, Taufort, Wohnort, im Tode | Stamm, Taufort, Wohnort, im Tode |

The entry in St. Leonhard's burial register (totenbuch) listing those crewmen they could identify.

The Ackerboden, behind which the crewmen were originally buried.

Regardless of what the locals knew, it would be many months before those at home learned the fate of their husbands, sons and brothers. Naturally, the families of the crewmen sought solace in the others and wrote to letters hoping to glean any and all bits of news from Italy. With another brother at San Giovanni, Sammy received a number of letters seeking any scrap of information on the boys that may have been conveyed home by Phil (while a few of these letters have been lost, their envelopes are still in the collection). With the knowledge that Phil may have learned the true nature of the event and kept silent, these letters are simply heartbreaking. Here they are, excerpted in chronological order;



A recent view showing the bridge at the bottom and the mountain on which the plane crashed above.

3/30/45, from Mrs. Jennie Swedberg, mother of the crew's engineer

We're hoping that they got out of this crash the same way (in reference to the crash of 19 January 1945).

It must have been a terrible feeling for Philip when he found out that Ray was missing. If he should give you any further information, we would certainly appreciate hearing it.

In the meantime, we'll keep up our courage and pray for the boys' safe return.

5/7/45, from Mrs. Verna Wherry, wife of the crew's navigator

I was fortunate enough to have been in Casper, Wyoming, with Chuck and met all of the members of the crew. It has helped a lot feeling that I know the fellows. Yes, I know your brother. The fellows all had a standing joke and called him, "Umbriago"! They always had such fun together.

I can't help but feel that they are safe somewhere.

7/30/45, from Mrs. Wallace Wise, mother of the crew's radar navigator

I received a letter from Mrs. Goldman, saying your brother (Phil) I suppose it is, is back from overseas.

Would you please write me soon & tell me what he thinks of this crew?

I'm here on a big farm & no boys around here have been fliers & as your brother has been there he would know the possibilities.

Please write soon, as we love our Sonny so much. All the boys are wonderful & we hope they are all safe.

8/1/45, from Mrs. C. W. Wherry, mother of the crew's navigator

I understand Raymond's brother just got home. Has he any news of the boys?

Chuck always thought a lot of Raymond, had nicknamed him "Umbriago" and he wrote home that he must have had a lot of pull with the Postal authorities because he got a package nearly every day. He said "without Zisk's family and friends we would starve to death."

We went to Los Angeles and had a long visit with Sgt. Sanderlin and he doesn't hold out much hope for our boys but of course says, "don't give up hope until you hear definitely." We knew Sanderlin because Chuck brought him home with him from Casper, Wyo.

I am enclosing a list of missions our boys went on. I got these from Sanderlin but one of them Chuck flew with another crew. I don't know which one but he refused after that to fly without his own crew.

Post-war Europe was an absolute mess, and there was much to do before a sense of normalcy could be restored. One of the most gruesome tasks the Army faced was the documentation and/or recovery of the bodies of U.S. servicemen strewn about the Continent. To do so, parties were sent throughout the countryside to check church ledgers and talk to locals to learn the whereabouts of bodies and gravesites. When possible or necessary, these fallen heroes were exhumed, documented, and reburied in temporary cemeteries set up by the military. In many cases the process provided the final word for the families, and the process of bringing them home could begin.

When the Army reached the parish of St. Leonhard in the late summer of 1945, they were quickly directed to the weather-cross at the Ackerboden. While they were exhuming the remains of the 10 crewmen from the grave behind the cross, young Adolph Argreiter directed them up the mountain and into the woods towards the stripped and partially buried body of Leonard Clyde, the crew's Bombardier. Thus, the bodies of 11 of the crew were transported back to Mirandola, and were interred in the military cemetery there. The Army declared the crew "Killed in Action" on November 12, 1945, and notified the families of the change in status.

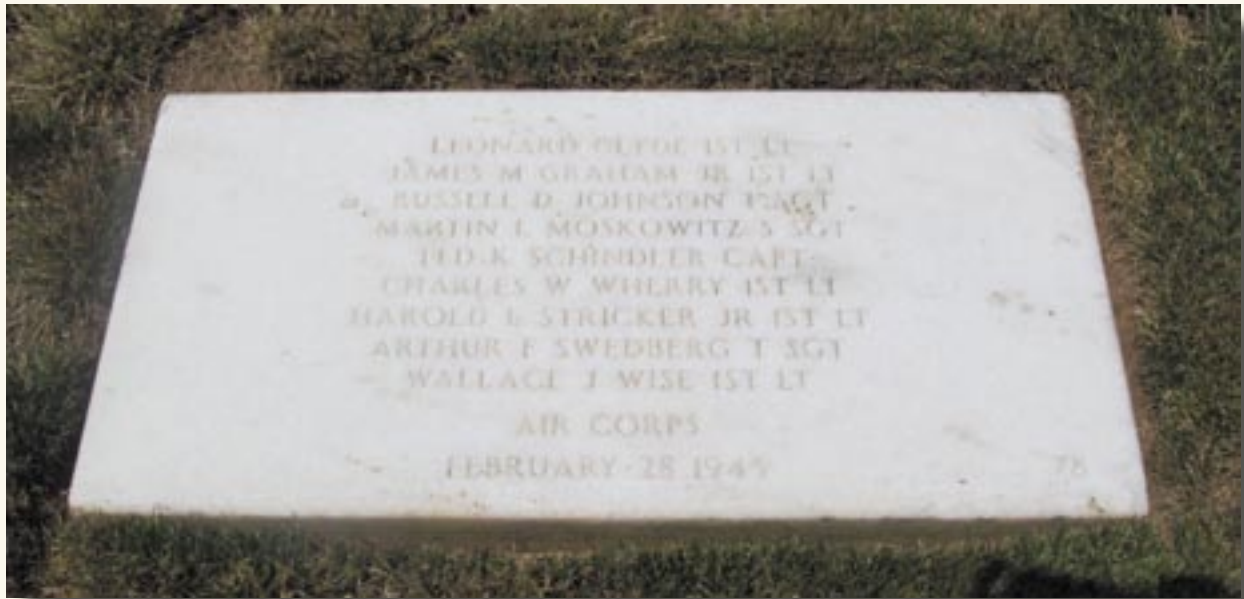
Of these eleven bodies, only Goldie's and Wiley's were eventually identified, allowing their families a greater degree of closure and the option to bury their boys as they wished. Wiley was interred back home in Jackson, TN on March 4, 1949, and Goldie made it home later that spring. It is extremely curious that Clyde's body, which wasn't buried with the burned and decomposed remains of the crew at the Akerboden, and whose identification was clearly established at the time of recovery, became one of the "unidentified" once at Mirandola. The Army royally bungled this one, mixing up the remains in their custody and thereby depriving the Clyde family of the comfort of burying Leonard where they wanted and as they saw fit.

Eventually, the Army abandoned efforts to identify the other nine bodies, and ordered that they be exhumed and prepared for group burial back in the States. On July 29, 1949, nine caskets were buried together at Jefferson Barracks National Cemetery outside of St. Louis, MO. On a scenic, serene hillside on the banks of the Mississippi, they share a gleaming white tombstone inscribed with all of their names.



The funeral of the nine crewmen, 29 July 1949.
Courtesy of Tim Wherry.





The grave at Jefferson Barracks National Cemetery (Section 82, Site 77-79).



Tommy Goldstein visiting the crew, July 2013.



Ray Comes Home

Subjected to a violent explosion mere inches or feet away and dumped out of the ill-fated bomber at 20,000 feet, Ray's body came down in the Kaser Valley, about 1¼ miles northeast of the main crash site at an elevation some 2500 feet lower. Landing less than a mile from the town of Lüssen, Ray was buried by local folk near where he was found.

On September 11, 1945, Sgt. Tony Auditore of the 1st Platoon, 602 Quartermaster General Reconnaissance Company came for Ray with shovel in hand, and disinterred him "from an

isolated grave at B-286962 sheet 4AII map of Italy 1/50,000." How the Army knew exactly where to look for Ray remains a mystery, as no record of his burial has been found in nearby church archives. Clearly, someone told them where they could find the body of a downed American airman.

From the QMC Form I *Report of Burial in Ray's Individual Deceased Personnel File (IDPF)* we see that Ray was positively identified by his two dogtags and "ZISK 5478," being the last 4 digits of his serial number, "on

| SKETCH AND MAP REFERENCE: N | | TOOTH-CHART | |
|--|-----------|-------------|--|
| <p>Deceased disinterred from an isolated grave at B-286962 sheet 4AII map of Italy 1/50,000 by Sgt Tony Auditore 1st Plat 602 QM GR Co, on 11 Sept 45. Plane crashed at A289948 sheet 4AII map of Italy 1/50,000 on Oct 28 45. Deceased bailed out. Body was buried by Civilians. Physical characteristics impossible due to decomposition</p> | <p>16</p> | | |
| | <p>15</p> | | |
| <p>14</p> | | | |
| <p>13</p> | | | |
| <p>12</p> | | | |
| <p>11</p> | | | |
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| <p>7</p> | | | |
| <p>6</p> | | | |
| <p>5</p> | | | |
| <p>4</p> | | | |
| <p>3</p> | | | |
| <p>2</p> | | | |
| <p>1</p> | | | |
| <p>0</p> | | | |

HEAD MISSING

Legend:
 X: crowns
 O: linkings anchor teeth
 (Horizontal lines: Horizontal lines)

Chart markings:
 16: X
 15: X
 14: X
 13: X
 12: X
 11: X
 10: X
 9: X
 8: X
 7: X
 6: X
 5: X
 4: X
 3: X
 2: X
 1: X
 0: X

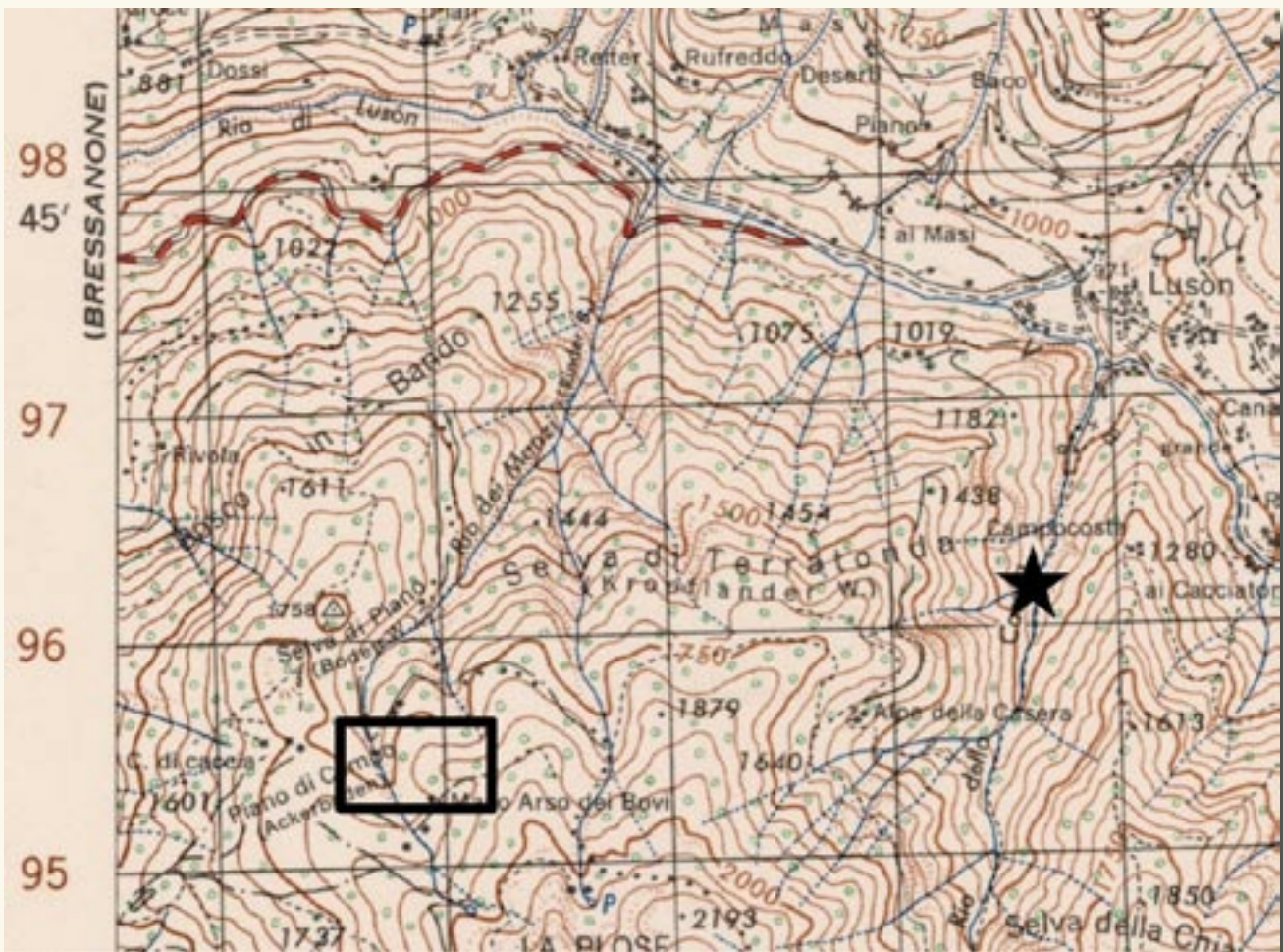
Other text on form:
 Impossible due to decomposition
 If this not possible in sketch

wool trousers.” No other personal belongings or clothing was found with him at all, removed by those who initially discovered and buried him.

Ray wasn't in good shape. The form states “body too decomposed to determine cause of death,” which was also given as the reason no fingerprints could be taken, or any physical characteristics determined. Most upsettingly, the section recording dental information is blank, with “HEAD MISSING” typed across it.



This map is the same one used by the US Army to plot detailed locations in Italy. The site of Ray's landing and temporary resting place is marked with a star, and the crash site and temporary grave of the rest of the crew is falls within the rectangle at lower left.





This Google Earth view shows the same locations on the preceding map and the surrounding area, including Brixen/Bressanone and Lüssen/Luson. Towns and geographic features in this area have two names; one German, the other Italian.



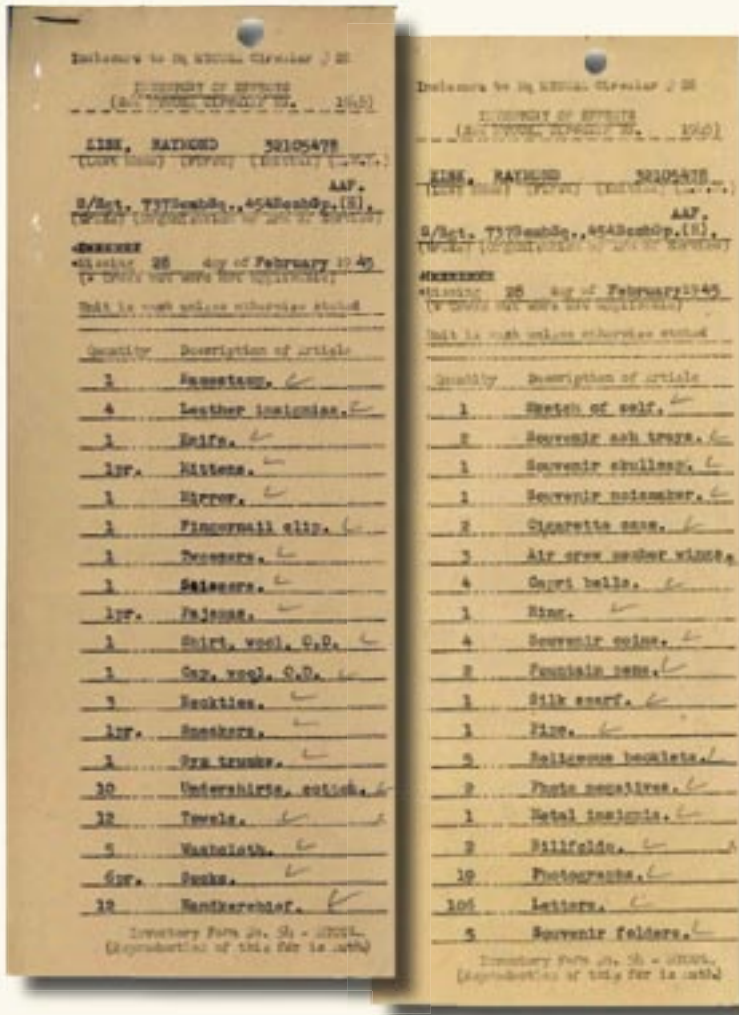
Looking southward from above Lüssen, we see into the Kaser Valley, at right, where Ray's body came down (the 'X'), and where he remained until September 1945.



Now an extremely popular with hikers and skiers, this panorama of the Lüsen area allows a southerly view of the topography all the way past the Isarco Albes railroad bridge at the upper right.



The entrance to the Kaser Valley just south of Lüsen. It is an extremely rugged and beautiful place.



The New York Times announcement of the deaths of Ray, Moskowitz, Goldie and Stricker (marked with an "X").

The more detailed of the two inventories taken by the Army of Ray's effects. While everything on the list is now gone, the 4 Leather insignias are likely the "4 wings" listed on the other inventory, suggesting they may have been additional Air Gunner's wings picked up on Capri.

This report begs the unpleasant question; if Ray appeared intact when he passed Capt. Leslie's cockpit window on the way down, what happened to his head between then and September 1945?

Regardless of what the Army report says, it may well be that Ray was never buried. Remember, the documents show Lt. Clyde was buried with the rest of the crew near the crash site, but it is clear he remained on the mountainside where he died until the Army got him late that summer. One could speculate that the flak blast, followed by a long fall and a high velocity impact with the ground may have

been the cause of Ray's subsequent decapitation. If we assume he remained exposed until September, then it's possible some sort of animal could be responsible for this loss too.

At 2:30 in the afternoon of September 21, 1945, what was left of Ray was buried, wrapped only in a shroud, in grave 1078, Row 18, plot H at the U.S. Military Cemetery at Mirandola. One of his dogtags was secured to the temporary wooden marker and the other was left with him. Next to Ray was his crewmate, fellow gunner and friend Clarence Wiley.

Of the twelve men aboard 42-52075, only

Ray was listed as "identified" in a typed statement dated October 31, 1945. Goldie was listed as "tentatively identified," with the rest of the crew listed as "believed to be one of the following."

With so many casualties to be accounted for, it wasn't until November 9, 1945 that Ray's official status was updated. Confirming everyone's worst fears, the Army notified Sammy four days later, and an official announcement

appeared in the New York Times on p.8 of the December 7, 1945 issue. Also from the New York City area, Goldie, Moskowitz and Stricker were listed as "dead" by the Times too.

Two years would elapse before the Army contacted the family about the disposition of Ray's remains. A photo of his grave at Mirandola was sent to Esther along with its coordinates and an assurance that Ray's identification and burial was executed with an

Sgt. Brenner's report of the funeral. Notable is item 12, where the Army wanted to know if anyone in the family questioned the identity of the remains.

BLANKET
FOR THE PORT OF NEW YORK
American Graves Registration Division
1st Avenue & 30th Street
Brooklyn, N. Y.

THIS FIELD REPORT WILL BE COMPLETED BY ALL PERSONS WHO ACCURATELY BELIEVE
OF THE DEATH OF THE PERSON WHOSE NAME IS ON THIS LIST.

NAME REPORTED TO THE AMERICAN GRAVES REGISTRATION DIVISION, WITH REPORT
DATE OF REPORT AND BY WHOM REPORT TO THE AMERICAN GRAVES REGISTRATION DIVISION.

1. Sgt. Maxwell S. Brenner AF 3142222 accompanying the
(Name, rank, serial number of escort)
remains of 1st Lt. Raymond E. Ray AF 3140072
(Name, rank, serial number)

2. Departed LDL, NYN, on 13 June 49 at 0800
(Station) (Date) (Time)
for B'klyn NYC by Govt Vehicle
(Destination - city and state) (Type of vehicle or train)
If train, give hour of departure from New York City and station
Arrived at
B'klyn NYC on 13 Jun 49 at 0800
(Destination) (Date) (Time)

3. First contact was made with undertaker on 13 Jun 49 at 0900
(Date) (Time)

4. First contact was made with next of kin ESTHER RAY
(Name)
135 W. 44th St B'klyn on 13 Jun 49 at 0900
(Address) (Date) (Time)

5. I did/ did not attend the funeral services.

6. The funeral was held at 1400 hours, on 19 Jun 49

7. Escort's presence to/ was not desired at funeral services.

M. J. Jial

FORM (GRC) 17
Rev. 30 Dec. 48

8. Funeral honors were/ were not provided at the funeral.

9. Funeral honors were not provided because _____

10. Funeral honors were provided by Mitchell Field Army Squad

11. Flag was presented to next of kin

12. The next of kin did not bring up the subject of identity of the remains.

13. 16 81-55 St B'klyn NYC
(Name, address or other full length of stay where notified)

14. Departed B'klyn NY on 19 Jun 49
(Date, vehicle or train) (Date)
at 1100 hours arrived at LDL, NYN on 19 Jun 49
(Date) (Date)
at 2000 hours.

15. REMARKS (Personal comments): Returned from trip on 20 June 49. Was not paid and returned home on 21 June 49. In my own time.

16. IDENTITY OF PERSON OR (ALL) NAMES OF THIS PERSON IS ACCURATE
(IF SO STATE THE SOURCE OF THIS INFO)

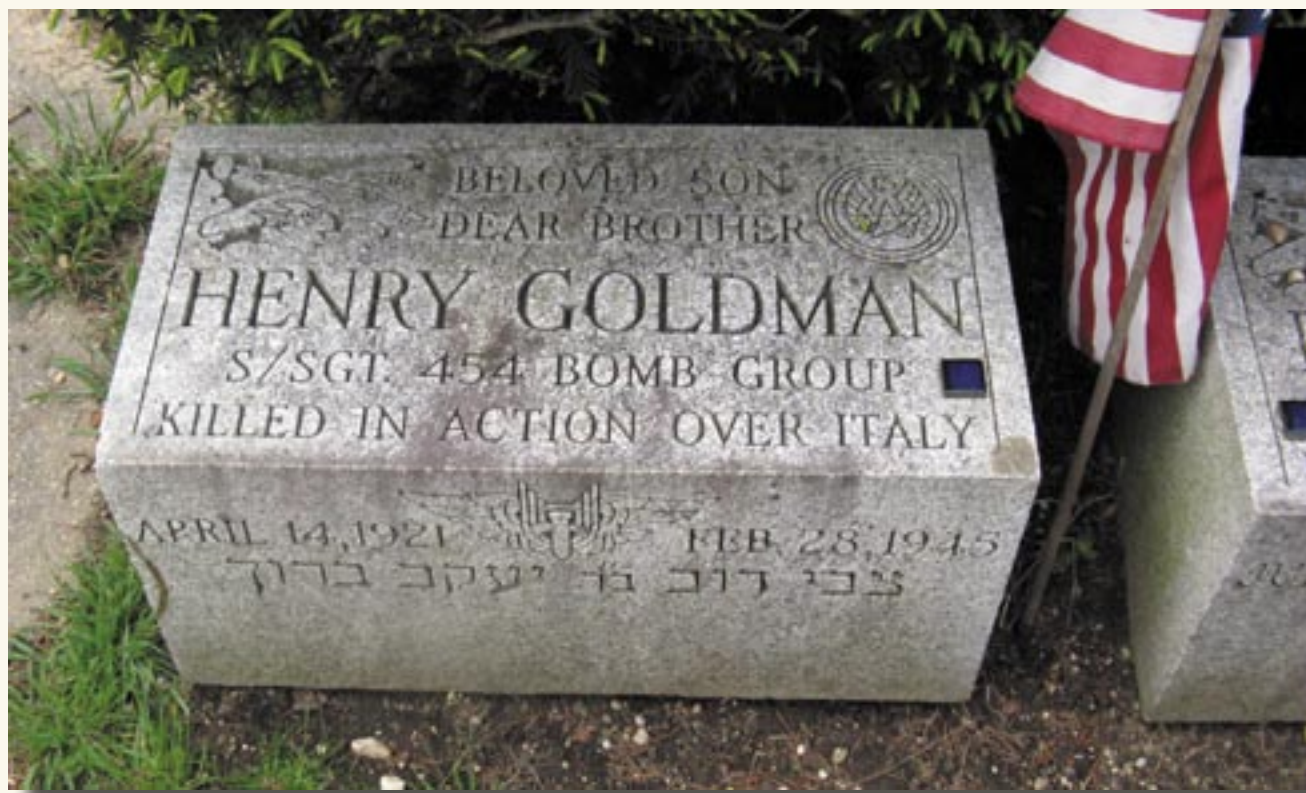
Name of member Sgt. Maxwell S. Brenner
(Name, rank, serial number if "Secret")
AF 3142222
(Organization) 1st AF 5 132d AVN
Date Received 20 Jun 49

appropriate level of dignity and solemnity. A few days later, on November 7, 1947, the Army once again contacted Esther, this time enclosing explanatory material and a *Request For Disposition of Remains*, which began the process of bringing her middle son home. On December 4, 1947, she signed the document in the presence of a Notary Public and sent it in to the Office of the Quartermaster General in Washington, D.C.

Three and a half years after his death, on 3 August 1948, Ray was again exhumed from a temporary grave. His *Disinterment Operations Record* shows that he was once again positively identified by his dogtag, and that his remains were now reduced to a "skeleton." A week later, the embalmer placed Ray's bones in sealed casket, which was then crated and marked. From there, the casket went to the Port of Leghorn morgue, where it waited until May 4, 1949 for shipment back to New York.

In mid-May, the Army notified the family that Ray's casket would be arriving, along with that containing Goldie's remains, within a few weeks. The two pals finally made it back to Brooklyn on June 13, 1949 and were delivered to Midwood Memorial Chapel on Coney Island Ave., in preparation for their shared funeral. Gary, Ray's seven and a half year old nephew, was intrigued by the American flag-draped casket and wanted to look inside. Sammy feigned an attempt to open the lid to show his young son that the casket was indeed sealed shut.

At 2:00 on the afternoon of Sunday, the 19th of June, the respective families gathered in West Babylon, NY at the Zisk-Leve family plot in New Montefiore Cemetery to lay Ray & Goldie to rest, side by side. S/Sgt. Maxwell Brenner, the official Army escort, attended on his own time. Full military honors were provided, and a 21-gun salute was fired over the



twin flag-draped coffins by the Mitchell Field Firing Squad. Just before lowering the boys in to their double-wide grave, the guardsmen neatly folded the two flags into starry blue triangles and presented them to the mothers of the fallen airmen. Today, the flag from Ray's coffin is a cherished possession of Jenna Kahn, Phil's granddaughter.



The flag.

Courtesy of Jenna Kahn.



Charlie Goldstein visiting Goldie & Ray, May 2012.



S/Sgt. Brenner was clearly touched by the story of Ray & Goldie, and went above and beyond his duty. Equally moved, the family sent this typed letter to his Commanding Officer the following week,

On behalf of the Goldman family and ours, we wish to thank you for the type of soldiers you sent as military escorts.

We had previously been torn by doubt as to whether we should bring the remains home or to have any military services whatsoever. We now have the little comfort of knowing we did the right thing.

Sgt. Bishop performed his duty in a soldierly and credible fashion.

Sgt. Brenner did the same and far more. He was extremely tactful in this difficult task and we obtained more solace from him than from our own clergyman and friends.

Both Sgt. Bishop and Sgt. Brenner are a credit to your branch of the service

*Yours truly,
Esther Zisk*

On June 30, 1949, Colonel G.H. Bare of the Quartermaster Corps wrote a Letter of Commendation to S/Sgt. Brenner for the outstanding manner in which he did his duty. In notifying the family of this, Col. Bare also wrote;

The Government of the United States is most grateful to the next of kin for the supreme sacrifice made by their loved ones. The officers and enlisted men consider it an honor and privilege to escort the remains of their fallen comrades to their final resting place.



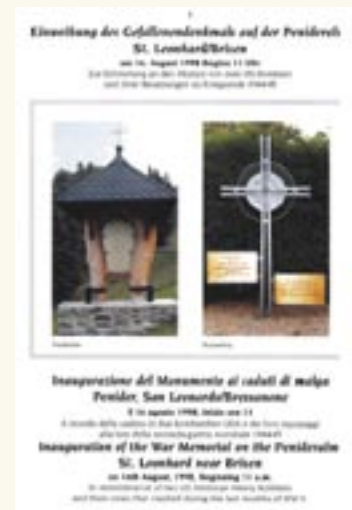
Tanta & Ray, early 1940s.



The Monument on the Penideralm



- A - Where the plane came down.**
- B - Site of the monument**
- C - The Ackerboden, site of the crew's temporary grave.**



The program from the 1998 dedication.

Emil Prader, the owner of the Penideralm, had long been aware that a B-24 had crashed on his property on February 28, 1945. At his own expense, he sought to memorialize the men who died in his mountain pasture with the help of researcher Keith Bullock, who served with the Royal Air Force during the war. In addition to doing the background research, Bullock contacted family members of the crew along with 737th Bomb Squadron veterans who flew that mission and witnessed the downing of 42-52075.

Once the names of the crewmen of the B-24 were identified, they were inscribed on the monument, and a large dedication took place on 16 August 1998. Speeches were given and an invocation was read by the Mayor of Brixen/Bressanone in front of a large crowd which included a number of crew member's relatives and veterans. Representing the crew and the 737th Bomb Squadron were Timothy Wherry (the nephew of Lt. Charles Wherry), Paul Plesko, the Lead Radar Navigator for the mission, and Leslie Conrad, the pilot of the #4

ship who vividly recalled Ray's body flying by his cockpit window on its way down.

Thankfully, Tim Wherry had the foresight to videotape as much of the event as he could, including interviews with Leslie, Plesko and those locals who visited the crash site and were familiar with the wreckage of the bomber and the location of Leonard Clyde's body.

The footage has been transferred to DVD and is available from Erik Goldstein, courtesy of Tim Wherry.



The monument.





*The valley the plane came down in, with its nose facing downhill. Numerous small bits of the plane were found with the metal detector being used in this shot.
Courtesy of John Andrews.*

The monument is on the other side of the structures at the bottom of the valley.



*A view of the valley looking uphill. The plane came in from the right, and crashed facing downhill. In February 1945, this was an open meadow, and there were many feet of snow on the ground.
Courtesy of Peter Petschauer.*

*Emil Prader pointing out the divits in the ground caused by the impact of the engines and fuselage, May 2013.
Courtesy of Peter Petschauer.*



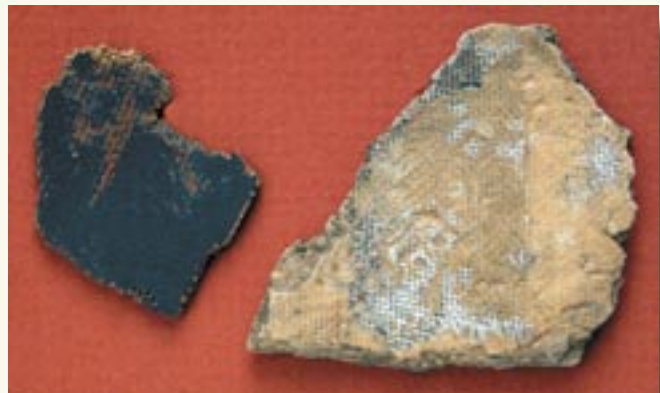
Parts of the plane, found at the crash site, including bits of aluminum and Plexiglas, one piece of which is melted and burnt.



Five linked .50 caliber machine gun shells recovered from the crash site. The ensuing fire "cooked off" all of them, as evidenced by the missing and blown-out primers. 1400 of these rounds were allocated for the tail guns, in two belts of 700 each.



A steel plate from one of the crewmen's flak jackets.



Bits of fibrous material from electronic equipment carried aboard.



The Crew



Capt. Ted K. Schindler, Pilot; single, from Berne, IN. Born on New Year's Day, 1922, Ted's older brother Hallman (1920-1984) was also a pilot with the 737th Bomb Squadron, and they shared a tent at San Giovanni for a while. Both were promoted to Captain on 26 February 1945, two days before Ted was killed. Lt. Wherry described the 6'4" Ted as *the soberest of us all, but that's more or less his nature anyway. He takes his job quite serious and does one swell job of it.*



1st. Lt. James M. Graham, Co-Pilot; married, from Altoona, PA. One of the few married crewmen, Graham was 25 when shot down, and had been in the Army since early 1942. He received his wings in December 1943, was commissioned in February 1944, and made 1st. Lt. in December of that year. His last letter home, to his wife Shirley, was dated 27 February 1945. On 19 November 1945 the local Altoona, PA newspaper printed his obituary which details the downing of the plane.



1st. Lt. Charles W. Wherry, Navigator; married, from Modesto, CA. Still 20 when the plane went down, Wherry was the baby of the crew. Known as "Chug" by his family, Charles had two great loves in his life; his wife Verna, and his car, a '32 Chevy nicknamed "Fallen Arches." In his last letter home dated February 27, 1945, Charles wrote that "I should see you in 21 days," because the next mission was his 35th, and he was headed home. When Charles was reported MIA after the plane went down, his kid brother Jack, also in the service and headed to Manila, was assigned to less hazardous service under the "O'Sullivan Rule." Made famous by the film *Saving Private Ryan*, this statute spared a last surviving son further combat duty, and Jack always credited his brother's death with saving his life.

1st. Lt. Leonard Clyde, Bombardier; single, from Chicago, IL.



1st. Lt. Gordon D. Griffie, Bombardier; An original member of the crew, Griffie flew with them for most of their missions, including the aborted one which resulted in the crash of 19 January 1945. For some reason he wasn't with them on the last one, and thus Griffie survived.

1st. Lt. Harold L. Stricker, Jr. Navigator; single, from Millburn, NJ. Born about 1924. Stricker was likely on this mission as part of his training as a Lead Navigator.

1st. Lt. Wallace J. Wise, Radar Navigator; single, from Fort Dodge, IA. Wallace, only 22 when shot down & killed, entered the Army on November 1, 1943 and earned his wings at Victorville, CA in May of '44.



T/Sgt. Arthur F. Swedberg, Engineer; single, from West Warwick, RI. Born about 1924. Swedberg replaced a Dan (or Don) Ratcliff at Casper, during Crew Training in the summer of 1944.



T/Sgt. Russell D. Johnson, Radio Operator; single, from Rolfe, IA. Born on June 30, 1917, he was the fourth son of Lewis Johnson and Jennie Christiansen, hardworking farmers of Norwegian and Danish decent. When Russell's father past away in 1920, his mother continued to raise her sons on the farm. Graduating from the Des Moines Township School in 1934, Russell then attended a diesel/mechanical school with his brother Manley in 1937. He joined the United States Army Signal Corps on February 19, 1942 and went through basic training in April of 1942 at Camp Crowder, MO, followed by further training at Washington D.C. (5-11-42), Camp Murphy, FL (8-1-42) and Nashville, TN (12-7-42).

After transferring to the Air Force, Russell began Cadet Training at Maxwell Field, Alabama (31 Jan 1943). He continued onto Lodwick School of Aeronautics at Lakeland Florida (Apr 1943), Greensboro, NC (7 May 1943) then to Radio School at Sioux Falls, SD (29 May 1943), where he would spend eight months both as student and instructor. In late January 1944, Russell began training as a Radio Operator onboard a B-24 bomber. From there, he traveled to Yuma Arizona for Gunnery School, followed by a stint in Lincoln, NE (15 Apr 1944). Reaching Casper, WY in May of 1944 for Crew Training, he was assigned to the Ted Schindler crew. Deployment began with a trip to Lincoln, NE (2 Aug 1944), New York City (7 Aug 1944) and then to London, England (2 Sept 1944). Traveling via North Africa, Russell arrived in Italy with the rest of the crew on 7 September 1944.

Russell's nephew Phillip remembers him playing the guitar and being the sort of fellow who was a good man and a real "doer." Phillip also remembers visiting Russell at Camp Crowder and the long trip to Saint Louis for his funeral in 1949. Phillip always through imagined life on the farm would have been very different had Russell made it home.



S/Sgt. Clarence A. Wiley, Waist Gunner (Left?); single, from Jackson, TN. Only 22 when he was killed, Clarence, first served in the 30th Division at Fort Jackson, SC, before transferring to the Air Force. One of the three crew members positively identified, he was buried at Hollywood Cemetery in Jackson on Friday, March 4, 1949. A firing squad from the U.S. Naval Reserves performed the military rites at his graveside.



S/Sgt. Martin L. Moskowitz, Waist Gunner (Right?); married, from the Bronx, NY. Born in 1922, he was survived by his young wife Sarah. According to Lt. Wherry, Moskowitz washed out of the Bombardier program and was still a little bitter about it in June of 1944.

S/Sgt. Henry Goldman, Nose Gunner; single, from Brooklyn, NY. Ray met Goldie, 5 years his junior, in the service, and they quickly became good friends. From his letters home we know that Ray chose to spend much of his leisure time with Goldie. Although on Hally Schindler's crew in the 737th Bomb Squadron, Goldie was only flying with Ray's crew to pick up extra missions, in effort to get home to his ailing father. So it seems uncomfortably appropriate that two close friends, who shared a common background and wartime task, should die in the same incident and rest side by side in perpetuity.



Goldie is one of these three men (see p. 30).



S/Sgt. William M. Sanderlin, Gunner; single, from Texas. Born in 1921, Sanderlin, a friend of Lt. Wherry's, was a regular member of the Schindler crew and was aboard for the crash of 19 January 1945. Not with them on their last mission, he survived the war. Sanderlin was in touch with the Wherry family and provided the list of the crew's missions, along with a realistic assessment of their chances of survival. Married in 1946, he died in Utah in 2004.





*The crew in front of Dinah Mite, October - November 1944.
Standing, left to right; Wherry, Schindler, Griffee, Graham and Zisk.
Kneeling; Sanderlin, Johnson, Swedberg, Wiley and an unidentified crewman.*

Moskowitz, replaced in this shot by an unknown crewman, may have been the unnamed waist gunner Lt. Wherry mentioned as being in the hospital with a "busted ankle" in his letter home of 28 September 1944. In another letter dated 23 October 1944, Wherry wrote;

Ted's the best damn pilot I know, and I've flown with quite a few. We've really got a hot crew. The boys really work like a team. All good boys.

Courtesy of Tim Wherry.





Postscript by Dr. Peter Petschauer

This story began when I was not even five years old and in its core has to do with my first memories of the Egarter mountain farm in Afers/Eores of Italy's South Tyrol/Alto Adige. The positive memories are of my father and the owner of the farm, the Egarterin, one of my favorite women/mother figures. But these memories are mixed with those of war, the drone of bombers, German soldiers manning the FLAK (anti-aircraft) station at the entrance to the village, an Allied fighter strafing our farm hand and our horse, and planes literally falling from the sky.

One of the planes, an American bomber, for some reason took on particular importance in my memories, and when my wife Joni and I visited the Plose Mountain for the first time in late spring of 1983, I pointed out to her that a plane had crashed somewhere below the backside of it. I even pointed to the ravine where I thought it had come to rest. I say backside because the Plose faces south and Afers is at about 1500 meters on that side of the mountain; the backside of it runs the Lügen/Luson valley.

The story of the plane remained dormant once more until last year when Erik Goldstein reached out to members of the city of Brixen/Bressanone, the largest community in the immediate area, for help with finding details about the death on the last day of February, 1945, of his uncle, S/Sgt. Raymond Zisk. Philip Frener from the major's office emailed me with the hope that we might work together to overcome linguistic, spatial, and time barriers to assist Erik. Several individuals almost immediately became involved, and we began to piece together what Erik already had discovered and what we were able to retrieve in the area. Among these individuals is Hartmuth Staffler, the head of the history club, Andreas Piok, a born Aferer who is intensively interested in the story, and Robert Recla, a historian and the organizer of the talk in Brixen.

Today we know that the bomber described by Erik in detail and its 12-man crew were hit directly by FLAK as it lumbered upward out of its drop zone above the Albes/Albeins railroad bridge; it was headed toward the foothills of the Plose, trying to reach the Lügen valley

away from the FLAK. Upon detonation, the plane immediately broke apart and the rear gunner Zisk was thrown out of his rear cubicle and drifted downward toward the Kaser River, above Lügen. During the explosion or ejection, he most likely lost his head. One man, Lt. Leonard Clyde, parachuted out. “Everyone” in the area knows about Clyde, his demise and rediscovery, naked, but up to now no one seems to know about Zisk, who found and buried him.

For me the most interesting part of the story, if one can call this sort of horrific event interesting, revolves around my visit to the site of the plane’s final resting place in May, 2013, Emil Prader’s many details about the plane and its crew, and my presentation of Erik’s and my findings to the Geschichtsverein (history club) of Brixen.

Prader, a former Aferer as well, took me to the spot on this Alm (mountain meadow) where the plane crashed and assured me that ten men were still in the plane and intact, with only two of them suffering minor burns, one on his face. Obviously the plane had come down on a different place than I had told my wife decades earlier and the point of impact, including the propellers and the body of the plane, are still discernable today. He also mentioned several times that the plane did not explode upon impact because most of the provisions and equipment were still in it and “liberated” by some of the villagers soon after its crash. The reason it most likely did not explode, although one witness speaks of a fireball in the air, is that the ground was covered with 2-3 meters of snow and it extinguished any fire as it melted. Interestingly enough, the soldiers from the FLAK came upon the locals loaded down with provisions and promptly took these from them. But local women were able to keep the silk of the parachutes and to make blouses, and some wore watches that they had taken from the crew for some time to come.

In early April, 1945, several men, including a Anton Profanter, then a hand in St. Leonhard and now living in Lügen, buried the Americans in a temporary grave not too far from the plane. The spot is behind a massive alpine cross and still clearly visible today. Either at about the same time, or before, the Patres of one of the monasteries in Brixen carted off parts of the plane by horse and sold them as scrap metal. Prader buried lots of the smaller pieces at or near the spot.

In 1955, Prader built an Almhütte (a mountain retreat) about 300 meters from the crash site and still spends his summers there. It is one of the finest such places I have visited, unless they are one of the rare Hütten (huts) that has been turned into a Refugio.

In 1998, at Prader’s initiative and with the help of the Brixner Geschichtsverein, a monument honoring the American fliers was placed in front of Prader’s retreat. I doubt that it occurred to Prader, nor anyone else who participated in the placing of this structure, that listing their names below a cross may not have been quite appropriate for the four or five Jewish crew members. All the same, the truly meaningful monument overlooks the Eisack/Isarco valley where the missile hit the plane and it disintegrated. Intentionally to be sure, from this spot one sees the crash site also no more than 300 meters distant.

For me, one of the most fascinating parts of this story and its exploration is that Erik Goldstein and I are descendants of Austro-Hungarian families. His family is from Lemberg/Lviv/Lvov in Poland and mine from Gottschee/Kochevje in Slovenia. Two and three generations ago their men served in the same Imperial army. One generation ago, one served the U.S., another Germany. Now we serve each other once more; with the ethnic background mattering no more than an aside.

Equally fascinating was meeting Josef Hermann Pitscheider just before the presentation in Brixen; he had worked as a runner in my father's relocation office in Brixen from 1939-41 or 42. Today at 90+, he is a well-known painter and an avid skier. Through him I also discovered the name of Ida, our first maid there; she is his sister and alive as well.

Raymond is symbolic for so many aspects of WWII. Most importantly, he is the tip of an almost unimaginable iceberg: 50-70 million people lost their lives for the idiocy of a few. He died a bit more than two months before the end of the war. Sadly for us older members of

my South Tyrolean family, Albert Clara, the Egarterin's very gifted son, died in Yugoslavia a month after this war had ended. Both remind us that we must prevent the sort of dictatorial viciousness that Europe experienced in the 1930's and 40s. Nie wieder (never again) remains the artist Käthe Kollwitz' plea from the first of the European bloodbaths. Newer scholarship also addresses transgenerational transmission (of trauma); the sort of cooperation Erik and I are engaged in allows for the healing from the sorrow over loss and unfairness that we carry almost unknowingly from one generation to the next.

Peter Petschauer, Ph.D.
Emeritus Professor of History
Appalachian State University, NC



Dr. Petschauer at Emil Prader's Almhütte on the Penideralm, May 2013.



Acknowledgements

I was having a great time at a WWII air show in Virginia Beach in May of 2010 when an older gentleman wearing a 454th BG baseball cap came through the camp of 601/Sqn. RAF, my re-enactment group. I immediately struck up a conversation with him and told him about Ray & Phil, and he came back the next day to show me their names on a computer print-out he kept. Unbeknownst to both of us at the time, this gentleman - Joseph "Chalky" Chalker, historian of the 454th - was one of the witnesses to Ray's death.

Thinking of Chalky one evening at the office in April 2012, I plugged "454th" and "Zisk" into *Google's* query box, and found the *Fold 3* online memorial to T/Sgt. Russell D. Johnson, the Radio Operator on Ray's crew. This account of the crew's last mission was the first narrative of Ray's shocking death I had ever come across. Instantly, I had to know more; and the more I learned, the more questions presented themselves. This book is the result.

Without Jason Newgard's electronic memorial to his uncle, I may never have embarked on this venture, so I owe him a large debt of gratitude for his help and the inspiration to follow suit.

My cousin Dr. Gary Zisk, the closest my father ever had to a brother, greatly honored me by giving me all he had relating to Ray. Without these materials, this work would be missing its greatest asset; Ray's own words.

Everyone gripes that that as the world shrinks, families are nowhere as close-knit and local as they used to be. One of the great benefits of

this project had been to introduce me to family members I may have never met, or haven't seen since I was a toddler. I am especially pleased to have added a few more Zisks to those family members I now revere, including Dottie, Barbara, Steve and Jenna; their support for this project has been fantastic!

Even though WWII has interested me since childhood, I make my living in the history of colonial America. While the mechanics of doing the necessary research presented no problem, I knew little about the air war of the 1940s. Thankfully, I had the assistance of many generous folks and new friends. This work wouldn't be possible without the help of John Andrew, Steve Chalker, Roland Domanig, Grant Gill, Beatrix & John Houlding, Paul Johnson, Jason Newgard, Paul Plesko, Scott Rall, Astrid Smith, Dale VanBlair and Johnny Wheeler.

A special thanks to Tim Wherry, nephew of the crew's Navigator, for generously sharing his uncle's letters & photos and for attending the 1998 monument dedication on the Penideralm with the foresight to videotape not only the event, but his interviews with those who witnessed the plane going down.

My new friend Dr. Peter Petschauer, a young boy under the 454th's bombs on 28 February 1945, and who has tirelessly pursued facts in the land of his childhood, I couldn't possibly thank enough.

Lastly, I must thank my father Kivey, my wife Chelsea and my sons Charlie & Tommy. I love you all very much!

For Further Reading

454th Bomb Group (H) Bombing Missions and Related Stories, compiled by the Editorial Committee of the 454th Bomb Group Association, 2003.

454th Memories, compiled by the 454th Bomb Group Association, 1991.

Bomben Auf Brixen, by Hartmuth Staffler, 2012

The Final Mission of Bottoms Up, A WWII Pilot's Story, by Dennis Okerstrom, 2011.

Flight of the Liberators, The Story of the Four Hundred and Fifty-Fourth Bombardment Group, by John Barker, 1946 (also reprinted in 1987).

Looking Back: A Tail Gunner's View of WWII, by Dale VanBlair, 2003.

The Wild Blue: The Men and Boys Who Flew the B-24s over Germany 1944-45, by Stephen Ambrose, 2002.



Me, wearing my copy of Ray's A-2 jacket, 2012.



