

454th True Stories

# Flak Happy



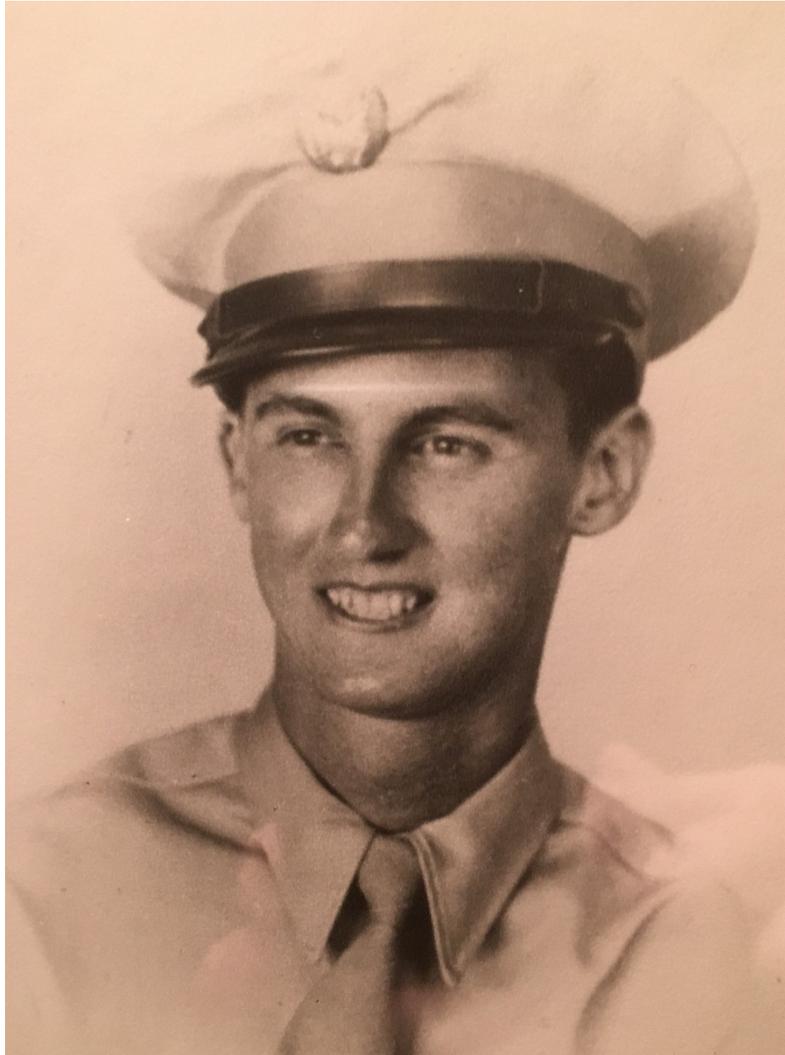
**An airman's time**

**Sgt Vincent J. Murdoch**

**B-24 sn 42-50910 739th sqd 454th BG**

**454<sup>th</sup>**

[www.454thbombgroup.it](http://www.454thbombgroup.it)



Sgt Vincent J. Murdoch  
454th Bomb Group  
739th Squadron

Cerignola, Italy April 1943- October 1945

Air Combat- Germany, Austria, The Balkans

Prisoner of War - Germany, Poland

### Pre-Introduction Background

January 1940- Graduated High School  
Draft classification 1A. Military service deferred for care giving and financial support of aged Grandmother who raised me and my brothers.

Local Selective Service Board could no longer extend deferments under mounting pressure to meet quotas for April 1943. Entered active military service April 26, 1943.

### Induction and Training

Concluded Basic Training at Army Air Corp 1010<sup>th</sup> Station, Atlantic City, New Jersey. Appointed to the Army Specialist Training Unit, a program designed by the Federal Government to train personnel for post-war duty with the Armies of Occupation. The program abruptly terminated with the escalation of German success in Aerial Warfare. Funding for the ASTU was diverted to the priorities for training replacements for combat crews lost to Luftwaffe aggression, as well as for critical manufacture of new Bombers. Returned to Army Air Corp for combat service with the 454<sup>th</sup> Heavy Bombardment Group, Cerignola, Italy.

### Fall of 1944

Cerignola, Italy is located near the seaport town of Bari in Southern Italy. From there the 15<sup>th</sup> Air Force Groups flew aerial missions to Germany, Austria, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and Romania where oil refineries, seaports, munitions works, ball bearing factories, communication centers and marshalling sites were situated.

There were no "milk runs" involved. Every target was heavily fortified from the ground by the most sophisticated batteries. Veteran Luftwaffe fighter units lent further protection against our B24's. Our Strategic Command, energized a daylight bombing campaign designed to destroy enemy industrial capabilities and was making tremendous and rapid advances by the middle of October through early November 1944.

## Aerial Missions

Air Combat is terrifying from take-off to returning to Base, if you were so blessed. Among the 10 sorties I flew, 2 stand out as the most fearful.

My first was to the oil refineries at Odertal, northeast Germany about a 2000 mile round trip from Cerignola. We lost our #4 engine off the bomb run exposing us to intense fighter attack which we fought through safely; however the aircraft took heavy damage from ground installations through loss of altitude by the impairment of #4 engine.

Skillful piloting and our engineers adroit fuel transfers eventually brought us to friendly skies so we jettisoned everything possible to implement a landing at Foggia. Then engine #3 that controls the planes hydraulic system failed us. That meant we were coming down with no brakes or landing gear.

We belly-landed on the Foggia air-strip to the shrieking accompaniment of metal and steel crunch. And then nosed over with a thunderous crash. Ten of us scrambled from the plane as ground crews sped with fire fighting equipment to where we were. No one wanted to look at that shattered wreckage. We all thanked God and embraced each other.

## Last Mission

November 11, 1944, Linz, Austria- petroleum storage sites. Within one half hour of the Initial Point, we were forced to drop out of formation and release our bomb-load as a result of heavy damage inflicted on the aircraft by deadly anti-aircraft fire and aerial attack.

While preparing to abandon the aircraft, I was pelted by a flak burst and lacerated above the right eye, right hand, neck, and left leg. Suddenly, the number 3 engine windmilled and before control was restored, we had lost too much altitude to bail out. At that point, and, as all flight-deck personnel were engaged in keeping the plane aloft and on course for return to base, I was instructed to check the after-section of the aircraft. No response could be obtained from there on the intercom and it was vital to survival of crew members to know that we were crash landing the aircraft as soon as we cleared the Adriatic Sea. Hampered by the bleeding from my brow and other wounds, I picked my way through the tangled wreckage of the catwalk. Only two of the rest of our crew was mobile. Others were either wounded or seriously injured when they were hurled violently around the aircraft as it plummeted from altitude.

Limited by own injuries, I concentrated on lightening the plane by jettisoning whatever I could: guns, ammunition, flak jackets and helmets, parachutes, etc., then helped the disabled into their ditching positions. I barely had enough time to return to my own forced landing position on the flight deck as the plane neared ground level.

Running on just two out of four engines, the pilots make a skillful landing in a rough area of farmland near Trieste, Italy. The impact miraculously threw the pilot, copilot, navigator, and bombardier clear. The flight deck and tail section were split away from the main fuselage. Most other crew members and I were trapped in the wreckage. I managed to get myself out of the aircraft and then helped to extricate the others. I had a chance to escape into the woods and make it back to safety but instead I stayed with the injured, tending to them as well as I could. The pilot of the aircraft was seriously wounded and I did everything that I possibly could to help him. Unfortunately, he died shortly after the crash.

### Captivity

The Germans were on the scene within a half hour. They had seen the plane going down. The badly wounded, dead, and dying were taken away. I received first aid and was taken to a German post about thirty miles from the crash site. The next day, I was driven to a rail station in the Udine Valley and shackled to a train seat under armed guard until we reached Frankfort. Since Frankfort was an interrogation center and prison, only token food was provided and even water was tightly rationed. I was closely interrogated and kept in solitary confinement for about eight to ten days. At the end of the stay, I was transported to a prison camp a little northeast of Stettin (Cazezecin-Polish). I was in that camp for about five weeks. Marshal Zuhkov's Armies were in a sweeping offensive from the East.

When word came that Russian forces were getting very close, the Germans abandoned the camp, took us under close guard and force-marched us in many different directions so as to make our destination unknown and unpredictable. We barely had any food and had to sleep outdoors on the ground most of the time. There was no means of sanitation, no change of clothing. Illness and death were steady companions.

## Liberation

When I was liberated by United States and British forces on May 3, 1945 outside of Lubeck, Germany, I had marched anywhere from one thousand to one thousand two hundred miles during the worst European Winter in twenty years.

We received medical care enroute between Luneberg, Germany and our embarkation point, Le Havre, France. A Liberty Ship took us across the Atlantic to Boston. Then we went home.

## Epilogue

There cannot be an evil greater than War. Inhumanity at its worst! The just War is that forced upon us by men of implacable evil. The appendix reproduces an article from a High School publication of the late 1900's that sought to revive a consciousness of all American's sacrifice in a war period and the tragic necessity of a just war. Hopefully some editing mishaps can be pardoned by the zeal that produced them in meeting the intentions of the project:

Bari, Italy - Linz, Austria  
Trieste, Italy and Yugoslavia  
Stettin, Polish Corridor - Prisoners Camp

VINCENT J. MURDOCH

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RESTRICTED  
by E  
by F  
Date MAR 1 5 1946

MISSING AIR CREW REPORT

- ORGANIZATION: Location San Giovanni Field, Italy Command or Air Force 15th  
Group 454th Squadron 739th
- SPECIFY: Place of departure San Giovanni Field, Italy Course NW  
Target M/Y Lienz, Austria Type of mission Combat
- WEATHER CONDITIONS AND VISIBILITY AT TIME OF CRASH OR WHEN LAST REPORTED:  
10/10 strata cumulus at 4000 ft. Visibility Zero
- GIVE: (a) Date 11 Nov 44 Time 0922 Last known position 46° 15' N 13° 10' E  
(b) Specify whether: (x) Last sighted, ( ) Forced down, ( ) Seen to crash,  
( ) Last contacted by radio, ( ) No information.
- AIRCRAFT (LOST) (BELIEVED LOST) AS A RESULT OF: (Check one only)  
( ) Enemy aircraft, ( ) Enemy anti-aircraft, (x) Other Unknown
- AIRCRAFT: Type, model & series B-24 J AAF Serial Number 42-50910
- NICKNAME OF AIRCRAFT Flak Happy
- ENGINES: Type, mode. & series R-1830-43A AAF Serial Number (a) CP-312028  
(b) CP 315210 (c) 42-37222 (d) CP 312491
- INSTALLED WEAPONS: (Make, type and serial number.)  
(a) R-1534664 (e) R-1527482 (i) R-1534469  
(b) L-1527975 (f) L-1527364 (j) L-1534547  
(c) R-1528024 (g) R-1527740 (k) \_\_\_\_\_  
(d) L-1527557 (h) L-1534512 (l) \_\_\_\_\_
- PERSONNEL LISTED BELOW REPORTED AS: (x) Battle Casualty, ( ) Non-Battle Casualty.
- NUMBER OF PERSONS ABOARD AIRCRAFT: Crew 11; Passengers 0; Total 11  
(If more than 12 persons aboard aircraft, use separate sheet.)

CREW POSITION	FULL NAME (Last, first, initial) RANK, SERIAL NUMBER	CURRENT NEXT OF KIN, RELATIONSHIP STATUS AND ADDRESS
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- |         |   |   |
|---------|---|---|
| KIA(1)  | Pilot <u>Chamness, Hubert 2d Lt. O-674466</u>         | MIA Mrs Nel I Chamness (Wife)<br>2370 San Francisco Ave, Long Beach Cal.      |
| EUS(2)  | Co-Pilot <u>Schrader, Everett E. 2d Lt. O-826013</u>  | MIA Mrs Regina Schrader (Wife) RTD<br>23 Holmes St. Sayville, N. Y.           |
| EUS(3)  | Bombardier <u>Stillings, Glen J. 2d Lt. O-722763</u>  | MIA Mr Glen Stillings (Father) RTD<br>RFD 1, Milford Center, Ohio.            |
| EUS(4)  | Navigator <u>Gallow, Wallace G. Jr. F/O E-127568</u>  | MIA Violet (Anderson) Gallow (Mother) RTD<br>Silverdale, Washington.          |
| EUS(5)  | Engineer <u>Allen, Warren Cpl 39208079</u>            | MIA Mianie Allen (Mother) RTD<br>Star Rt. Bx 173, Shelton, Wash.              |
| RM(6)   | Radio Operator <u>Dow, Ralph R. Cpl 11081507</u>      | MIA Mr Cyrus Dow (Father) RTD<br>574 Lexington St. Waltham, Mass              |
| EUS(7)  | Turret Gunner <u>Hull, Harry C. Cpl 12203938</u>      | MIA Mr Kennon G. Hull (Father) RTD<br>18 Bellaire Drive, Montclair, N. J.     |
| RTD(8)  | Nose Gunner <u>Murdoch, Vincent J. Cpl 32896894</u>   | MIA Mrs F. C. Murdoch (Grandmother) RTD<br>214 MacDonough St. Brooklyn, N. Y. |
| EUS(9)  | Turret Gunner <u>Warren, Kenneth L. Sgt 35811694</u>  | MIA Mrs Betty M. Warren (Mother) RTD<br>101/5 Euclid Ave, Louisville, Ky.     |
| EUS(10) | Turret Gunner <u>Marks, Robert E. Cpl 13084934</u>    | MIA Mrs Rebecca Marks (Mother) RTD<br>2021 Harlem Ave, Baltimore Md.          |
| RM(11)  | Photographer <u>Vergnetti, Victor J. Sgt 13100395</u> | MIA Mrs Phyllis Vergnetti (Mother) RTD<br>116 North 9th Street, Scranton, Pa. |

(12)

12. IDENTIFY BELOW THOSE PERSONS WHO ARE BELIEVED TO HAVE LAST KNOWLEDGE OF AIRCRAFT AND CHECK APPROPRIATE (one only) COLUMN TO INDICATE BASIS FOR SAME:

NAME IN FULL	RANK	SERIAL No.	BY RADIO	CONTACTED LAST	SAW	FORCED	CRASH LANDING
(1) <u>PATRICK J. WALSH</u>	<u>2d Lt.</u>	<u>O-706019</u>					<u>X</u>
(2)							
(3)							

13. IF PERSONNEL ARE BELIEVED TO HAVE SURVIVED, CHECK ONE OF THE FOLLOWING:

- ( ) Parachutes were used. ( ) Persons were seen walking away from the scene of the crash.  
(x) Other reasons (specify) unknown

14. ATTACH PHOTOGRAPH, MAP OR SKETCH SHOWING LAST KNOWN LOCATION OF AIRCRAFT.

15. ATTACH EYEWITNESS DESCRIPTIONS OF CRASH, FORCED LANDING, OR OTHER CIRCUMSTANCES.

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

2 Enclosures.

Incl-1 Statement of Lt Walsh (Sept) Date 14 November 1944.  
Incl-2 Map of Area (Sept)

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Donald G. Martinson  
Signature of preparing officer  
DONALD G. MARTINSON,  
Captain, Air Corps,  
Adjutant.

# VINCENT J. MURDOCH

## World War II

Vincent J. Murdoch went into military service when he was just over 21. Family dependency had delayed his induction to that point. He answered the eventual draft. "It was a call to serve. Our nation was at war and most of us had the sense that not only was the country threatened, but so also was life in this world as we knew it."

Mr. Murdoch said it was not easy becoming a soldier. "Regimentation takes getting used to; but as with all things in life you must look beyond self. Sure I preferred civilian living; I soon learned that I was not unique. What I was doing along with millions of others in the Armed Forces was for a noble purpose. I suppose our enemies likewise felt their cause was admirable. As history demonstrates, though, they were the driven products of evil totalitarian leaders bent on inhuman conquest of the world."

Mr. Murdoch was trained for combat duty in the Army Air Corp and flew as a nose-gunner in the 454th Heavy Bombardment Group, a B24 liberator unit of the 15th Air Force stationed near Bra, Italy. Targets of the 15th were: oil refineries, seaports, munitions and ball bearing factories, communication centers, and railway marshaling yards in Germany, Austria, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and Romania. On his last aerial mission to Liz, Austria, his bomber was severely damaged by ground fire and fighter attack forcing a crash-landing near Truest, a city bordering Italy and Yugoslavia. He and other surviving crew members were taken prisoner and were held briefly in Staling Lust 4, located near Setting in the Polish Corridor. When the Russians began their winter offensive from the East, all prison camps were abandoned as German forces fled their bitter enemy.

For nearly six months, Mr. Murdoch along with other captured personnel were on close guard and forced to march through the harsh winter months of 1944-1945 without the barest necessities for survival - food, clothing, shelter. The march through parts of Poland and Germany covered over 1000 miles. Finally in May of 1945 combined British and American Armored Divisions reached them. They were liberated and returned to Allied Military control in early June 1945.

When asked if it had all been worth it, Mr. Murdoch said that being part of the final Victory was enough satisfaction for any man; however he would always be immensely gratified. In addition, knowing that the first-aid he provided for some of his wounded or injured crew members, when their plane crashed, was probably instrumental in saving their lives. Mr. Murdoch's service awards include the Purple Heart, Air Medal, and WW2 Victory decorations. He left service as a sergeant in October 1945.

Questioned about the Atomic attack on Japan, Mr. Murdoch maintained that it was a militarily strategic measure to curtail further incalculable casualties and bring the war to a swift conclusion. "Our victory crushed a totalitarian threat to the world and preserved our way of life in the United States. We shared the conviction that while our democratic government system has its imperfections, it is second to none."



Mr. Murdoch has been through many parts of the world. He says there is no match for our nation for living conditions and our Long Island is a beautiful, terrific place to call home.

*Interviewed by: Bart Allen*

*"Our victory crushed a totalitarian threat to the world and preserved our way of life in the United States. We shared the conviction that while our democratic government system has its imperfections, it is second to none."*

Kriegsgefangenenpost

Postkarte

GEPOSTET Avion

47 Taxe pe. cue

Gebührenfrei RM 0.20

Absender:

Vor- und Zuname:

Col. Vincent M. ...

Gefangenenummer: 4857

Lager-Bezeichnung:  
Kriegsgefangenen-Lager N. 3 der Luftwaffe

M

Deutschland (Aßemagne)

Empfangsort: ...  
Straße: ...  
Land: ...  
Landsteil (Provinz usw.): ...

Kriegsgefangenenlager (POW camp)

Dec. 8, 1944

Dear Frank, This is my permanent station and I'm settled here in good health, thankful for God's many blessings. Correspondence is limited so I'm restricting my twice monthly letter to Gram. Please send Bud my best as I can't write him. Sorry this message has to be so brief. Merry Christmas. Frank, lots of success in the new year. Let's pray for each other. So long now. Yours, Vin



VICTORY



AIR CORP



N.Y. CONSPICUOUS  
SERVICE CROSS



PRISONER OF WAR



PURPLE HEART



SGT. VINCENT J. MURDOCH  
WWII ARMY AIR CORP  
-1945-



GOOD CONDUCT



AMERICAN CAMPAIGN