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## **ORGANIZATION AND TRAINING**

**T**he 2nd Bombardment Group (H) was stationed at Langley Field, Virginia when war was declared. The Squadrons were the 20th, 49th, 96th and 429th. The 20th Squadron was assigned to Mitchell Field, New York on 8 December 1941, flying anti-submarine patrol until 24 January 1942. It returned to Langley Field, flew anti-submarine patrol on the East Coast until 28 October 1942.

The 49th Squadron was transferred to Newfoundland Air Base on 13 December 1941 but the air echelon, en route to Newfoundland, arrived at Mitchell Field 1 December 1941, then diverted to the West Coast on 8 December 1941. It operated from Geiger Field, Spokane, Washington with the 12th Reconnaissance Squadron until the echelon was dissolved in late 1941. It was then stationed at Agentia, Newfoundland from 16 January to June 1942, returning to Langley Field 24 June 1942 until 28 October 1942.

The 96th Squadron remained at Langley Field, Virginia flying anti-submarine patrols from 8 December 1941 until 28 October 1942.

The 429th Squadron was attached to the 2nd Bombardment Group (H) in December 1940 and assigned 25 February 1942 and attached to Newfoundland Base Command 3 September 1941 until 29 October 1942 flying anti-submarine patrols.

Effective 29 October, the 2nd Bombardment Group (H) was transferred, without personnel and equipment, to Ephrata, Washington. The 304th Bombardment Group (H), now stationed at Ephrata, Washington, was transferred to Langley Field, Virginia without personnel and equipment. In this exchange, each unit inherited the personnel of the other.

It was constituted as the 304th Bombardment Group (Heavy) on 28 January 1942 and activated 15 July 1942 at Salt Lake City AAB, Utah, and assigned to the 2nd Air Force. The Group was stationed at Geiger Field, Washington on 15 September 1942. Here it received a cadre of personnel from the 34th Bombardment Group (H), stationed at Geiger Field. The cadre then moved to a small Air Base at Ephrata, Washington. Squadrons of the 304th Bombardment Group (H) were the 361st, 362nd, 363rd, and 421st. Headquarters and the four Squadrons began receiving personnel. Each Squadron, initially, received two B-17s for training of the air crews.

My term of service in the military began early in the morning on February 14, 1942 when a group of young men from Jefferson County gathered at the Induction Headquarters in Steubenville, Ohio, a small town of about 32,000 located on the Ohio River in the southeastern part of the state. We were taken by Greyhound bus to Fort Hayes in Columbus, Ohio. There we were sworn to uphold the Constitution of the United States, poked, prodded, injected with who knows what serums and received our blue barracks bag and G.I. clothes. I now belonged to Uncle Sam.

Within three days, I was on a train with a multitude of other bewildered G.I.s headed for Sheppard Field, near Wichita Falls, Texas. I had never been further from home than Washington, D.C. I received my basic training there and then entered the Air Corps Technical School for Airplane Mechanics. I graduated from school on the 16th of July 1942.

Three days later, I was in San Diego, California. The train ride was something not to write home about. The cars were coaches and we got the shock of our lives when we entered the "dining car." It was a box car lined with garbage cans filled with hot water and "C" ration cans. As you passed through the line, you received one hot can and one cold can. I don't remember what all the contents of the hot cans were, but the cold cans held a biscuit, had candy, cheese, and a powdered drink. It runs in my mind we had two meals a day.

We arrived in San Diego and were taken to the Consolidated Aircraft Co., builder of the B-24. Here we were given a familiarization course on maintenance of the B-24. The food here, prepared by civilian cooks, was excellent. I graduated from that school on August 21, 1942. I had aspirations of becoming a flight engineer but failed the eye examination. I had been wearing glasses for three years but thought my sight was good enough to fly. In retrospect, having seen all the trauma of flight crews, I suppose I should consider myself fortunate.

I then boarded a train for the Replacement Depot at Salt Lake City AAB. We slept in a large hangar, on cots, and the only thing I remember of that town was the hangar and the Mormon Temple.

In a few days I was off again by train for Geiger Field, in Spokane, Washington, and assigned to the 18th Bombardment Squadron, 34th Bombardment Group (H), a B-24 Group. The Group at this time was temporarily in Arizona or New Mexico so I was in limbo for a few days until it returned. When it did, the Group had been assigned B-17s.

My Army status made an about face at this time. No sooner had the Squadron returned when I was called into Squadron S-1 and confronted by a crusty old Army Sgt., named Timko. I wondered what had prompted this confrontation with some misgivings. He had my service record in front of him. He said, "I see that you have had typing before. How many words a minute?" My reply was, "75." His next question was, "We are in need of typists because we have a cadre going out in a few weeks. Would you like to work in Squadron Headquarters or on the line as a mechanic?" Naturally I jumped at the chance. In a few weeks I was in the cadre of the 363rd Squadron, 304th Bombardment Group (H) and on the way to Ephrata, Washington. It was the luckiest switch that a person could have had.

Living conditions at Ephrata were primitive. There were a few wooden huts, which the cadre members grabbed immediately. Headquarters and the mess hall were in a combined frame building and the tent area was more than a mile from the flight line. The weather was foggy, cold and rainy most of the time. Ephrata was a town of less than 100 people and the nearest sizable town, Wenatchee, was 50 miles away.

When the transition occurred, the 361st became the 20th, the 362nd became the 49th, the 363rd became the 96th and the 421st became the 429th. This period in Ephrata was spent acquiring the full complement of ground and flying personnel. Each Squadron's ground echelon was learning to work together and the flight crews were getting additional flying hours. Having a limited number of planes also presented the problem of the crews getting enough flying time.

The next move for the 2nd Bomb Group began on the 27th and 28th of November 1942. Due to the fact that the four Squadrons were to be stationed at separate bases, movements of personnel were on different dates. Headquarters and the 20th Squadron moved by train to Great Falls, Montana AAB on 27 November, arriving on the 28th. The 49th Squadron moved by train to Lewiston, Montana on 27 November, arriving on the 28th. The 96th Squadron moved by train to Glasgow, Montana on the 28th of November, arriving the 29th. The 429th Squadron moved by train to Cut Bank, Montana on the 28th of November, arriving on the 29th.

The Satellite airfields at Cut Bank, Lewiston and Glasgow were new and the facilities were a world of difference over those at Ephrata. Large comfortable barracks, mess hall, offices, recreation and rest room facilities were a morale booster for the men.

The 96th Squadron *Red Devil News* editor wrote of Christmas Day, 1942: Dear Mom and Pop: If you have a son serving in the Air Force at Glasgow airfield, maybe you would like to know how he spent Christmas.

Day didn't exactly dawn over the barracks, because it was a bit foggy, but warm; fog is unusual here. It was more like Michigan weather, one private from there said.

But long before dawn, the Mess Hall at the field was lit and bustling with activity. In case you don't know, Lt. Alexander J. Tyborski, Mess Officer, and Staff Sergeant Howard T. Fox, Mess Sergeant, run things here.

Back in the kitchen, Mom, is a battery of stoves and probably you would have trouble getting any of them in any room in the house. There are scores of other ovens and gadgets that you can see in any first class restaurant. But don't let anyone tell you that they don't have K.P. anymore. We saw this bunch peeling spuds.

Along about 1:00 in the afternoon things reached a fever pitch. Huge trays came out to the steam tables, folks lined up, and serving started. Probably you have an idea it was like the last war-everything ladled out in a couple of tin dishes. Tain't so because every soldier had plenty of crockery plus a coffee mug that would dwarf Dad's old fashioned shaving mug. You move along the line and you see a tile front for the steam table just like a big cafeteria.

And the food? Well we printed the menu last week in the *News*. There was literally everything from soup to nuts and everything in between. Some of the soldiers had guests for the meal and I can tell you they got a big kick out of it, especially the women.

The long mess tables with their planks scoured white, were all covered. Overhead, red Christmas streamers and bells waved. At one side was a Montana pine Christmas tree decorated, and a fireplace made from decorative paper. From the fireplace hung a red stocking, with the letters, U.S. Army.

"Poncho," the Mess Hall mascot, who'd never seen anything the like, had made a few tentative scratches at the fireplace. This "Poncho," by the way, is quite a character. He came from south of the border and Sgt. Fox, with some stops in between, brought him to the frozen north. "Poncho" is all Army: all the way across the kitchen he can spot a civilian and he challenges him with sharp barks as quickly as an M.P. would an interloper on the field. But he soon becomes friends. He isn't the only mascot on the field.

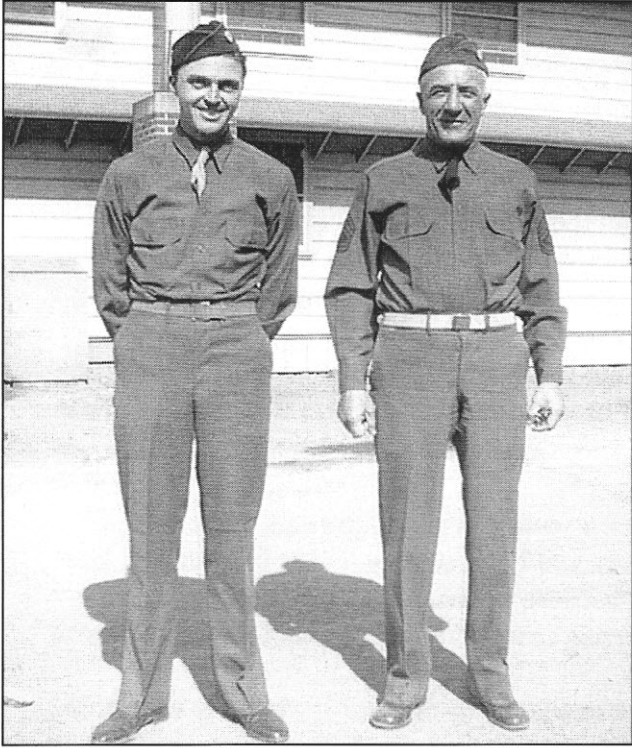
Speaking of the guard squadron, those men who were at their posts and couldn't have dinner in the Hall, had it taken to them.

"I've seen a lot of Army feeds but never one like this," Sgt. Fox commented.

Before the meal began, Chaplain Ira B. Allen, said grace and I think everybody there had many things to be thankful for.

"And those cooks, what a job," said the Sergeant. "Give them a big hand." Every soldier we talked to echoed the sentiment. We saw why in the golden-brown pies and soft rolls, in parsley potatoes and candied yams, in piles of white and dark meat. This gang is proud of their cooks and, in the Army, a good cook is treasured even above your pay.

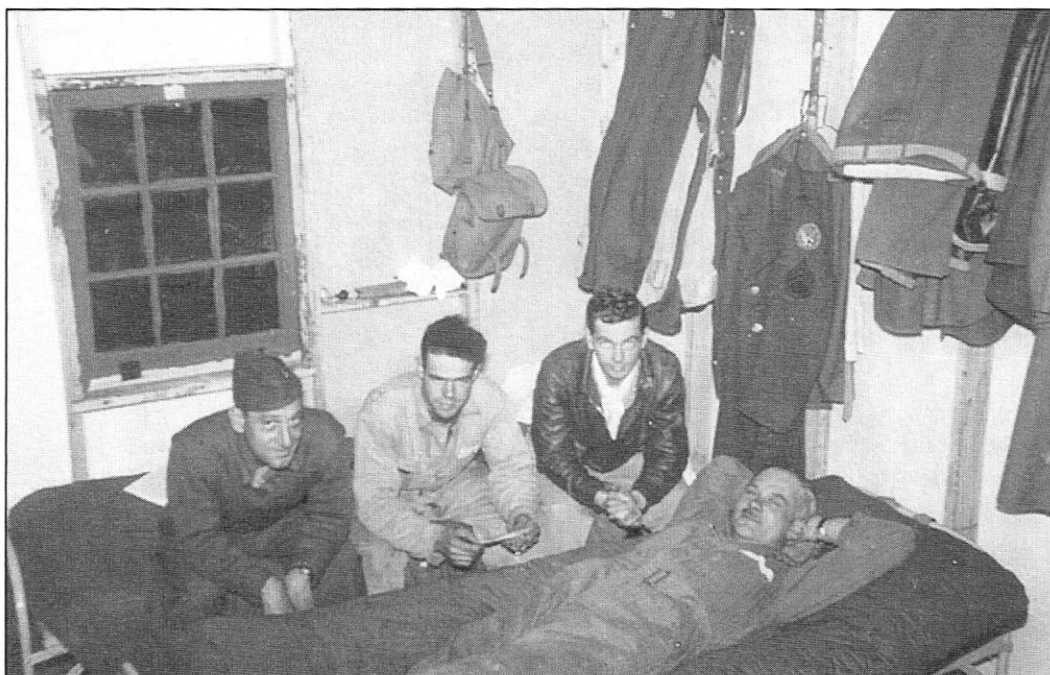
"Well, that's the way Christmas was out here. We know your boy would have liked to be home, but as one told us, "this was the best thing to it."



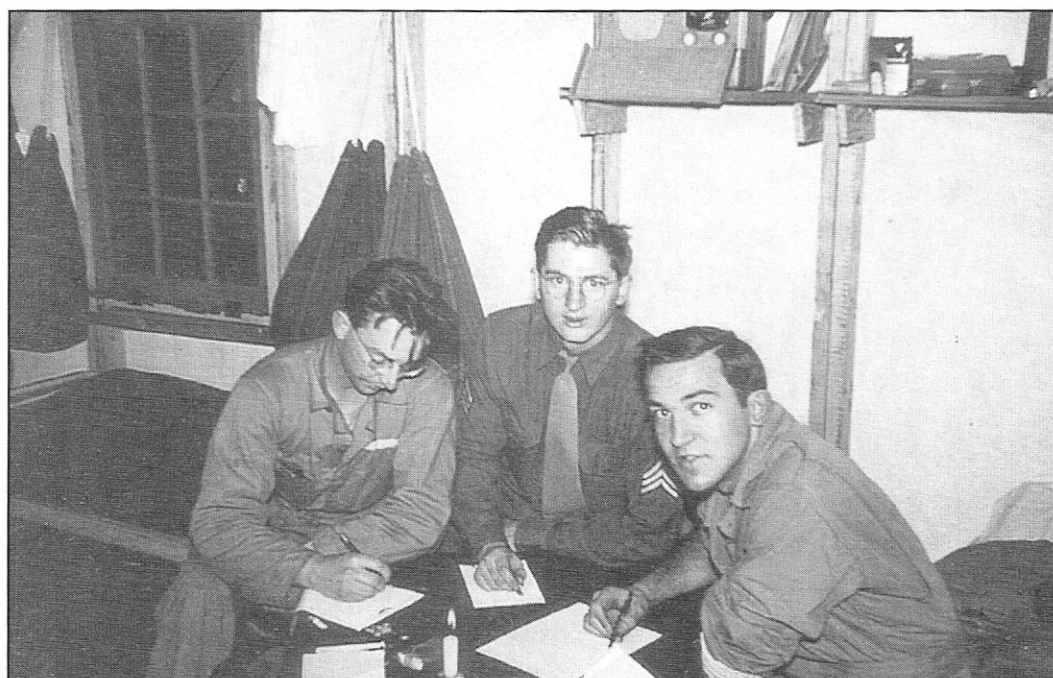
1st Sgts Reidy and Timko  
Geiger Field, Spokane, WA  
(Courtesy - C. Richards)



Major Charles Clapp, 2nd BG Executive Officer  
Major Marion Caruthers  
96th Squadron CO  
(Courtesy - M. Caruthers)



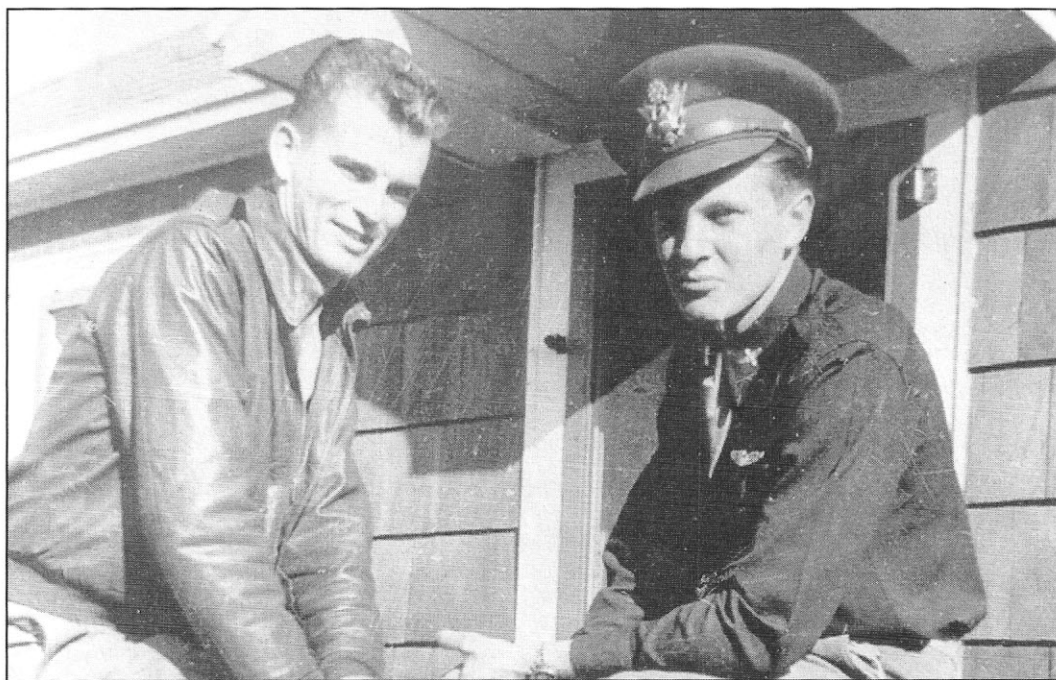
L/R - Sgts Bennett, Saulnier, Casey, McFaull - Ephrata, WA (Courtesy - C. Richards)



L/R - Sgts Jillson, Podany, Richards - Ephrata, WA (Courtesy - C. Richards)



T/R - L/R Dennis, Willock, Rix, Gathercole  
B/R- L/R Ferree, Dumas, White, Long - Glasgow, MT  
(Courtesy - C. Gathercole)



Lts Gathercole and Train - Spokane, WA 1942  
(Courtesy - C. Gathercole)

The Squadron then went into its next phase of training. Each Squadron received five B-17 aircraft for training the crews in formation flying, gunnery, and bombing practice. Three plane formations were used mainly for this phase. Flying conditions were extremely difficult due to the weather which sometimes reached 35 degrees below zero. Glasgow reported one instance of 48 below zero. Ground crews and ordnance personnel experienced great difficulty keeping the aircraft, guns, bomb racks and all other equipment prepared for flying. The transportation section experienced the same difficulty keeping its vehicles in operation.

The Group suffered its first loss of a crew on December 30, 1942. A B-17 from the 20th Squadron crashed and burned in the Bull Mountains south of Musselshell, Montana. The aircraft was on a training flight from the Great Falls Air Base. There were no witnesses to the crash but some people from the town of Melstone had seen the aircraft low and south of Melstone and later, while flying over Melstone, seemed to be in trouble. They later saw smoke to the southeast and immediately started to search for the wreckage.

First arrivals on the scene found the bomber in flames, which started a brush fire, and rescuers could only put out the brush fire. All members of the crew were killed: 1st Lt. Edward T. Layfield, Pilot; 2nd Lt. Gerald K. Beem, Co-pilot; Major Orville A. Ralston, Group Intelligence Officer; 2nd Lt. Lewis J. Newland; 2nd Lt. Chester A. Knight; S/Sgt. Frederick T. Brown; S/Sgt. Hulon B. Dutton; S/Sgt. Charles T. Valys; T/Sgt. Wallace H. Hanson; Cpl. Fred E. Murray; Cpl. Hobart L. Hall; and Pvt. Jacob V. Reiss.

Major Ralston was a veteran of World War I, having served in the Army Air Corps. He was officially credited with six German planes on one flight for which he was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross. He had unofficial credit for six others.

Very high winds, causing much snow to blow along the fields, were present in the middle of January 1943, and practice flying, especially long cross-country flights, had to be curtailed considerably. This condition was the direct cause of another accident on January 15, 1943, in which 2nd Lt. Richard F. Eggers, pilot of aircraft #42-5410, 429th Squadron, was involved. Lt. Eggers tried to land at Cut Bank but couldn't see to land. He then flew to Great Falls and tried to land at the Army Air Base. The visibility was poor and in an attempt to land, his plane hit a high tension wire, which cut off approximately five feet from the vertical stabilizer. Number one engine was damaged by the wire tangling with the propeller and heat loosened many rivets in the wing section. Lt. Eggers regained control of the aircraft and resumed flight. He then flew to Gore Field, Montana, south of Great Falls and landed safely there.

An amusing incident is related by Lt. Gathercole of the 96th Squadron. On his crew were 2nd Lt. Patrick Train, Co-pilot; 2nd Lt. Paul Rix, Navigator; 2nd Lt. Lester Long, Bombardier; T/Sgt. James Willock, Engineer; T/Sgt. Joseph Potvin, Radio Operator; S/Sgt. Howard Woods, Assistant Engineer; S/Sgt. Mike Zahn, Assistant Radio Operator; and Aerial Gunners, S/Sgt. Norman Ferree and S/Sgt. Eugene Lehman.

January 31, 1991: "The B-17F which eventually, through a weird and comical set of circumstances, evolved into the infamous "Gatherburd," began its star crossed existence as a training aircraft adorned with nothing more than the Air Corps Identification Number. A number that I have long since forgotten. It was merely one of perhaps a half dozen assigned to the 96th Squadron when we moved to Glasgow, Montana for concentrated pre-combat training with emphasis on three ship formation flying, high altitude flying, and air to ground gunnery practice.

"It's a given fact that each and every aircraft, beginning with the Wright Flyer, has its own personality. Sometimes the pairing of the plane and pilot results in a torrid love affair, another pilot might rate the plane a real dog - most often, until you draw your very own combat ship from the supply

depot. Training aircraft were the street walkers of Army Aviation, to be used, occasionally abused, and discarded when they served their purpose.

"Somewhere in the early days of their short relationship, Captain H. P. Hall and "Gatherburd" to-be developed a major personality conflict. Nothing of a fatal nature, just a series of minor things, mostly in the area of maintenance or performance. I cannot testify whether Captain Hall gave a direct order to the maintenance crew, or whether they took seriously a remark or name thrown in jest. What is known, that after many unscheduled repair sessions, the ship returned to the flight line emblazoned with, by the standards of those most gentle times, the marginally vulgar name of "TURD BURD."

"Some time later, ol' "TURD BURD," whether flown by Captain Hall and his crew, I don't recall, was part of a flight of 96th Squadron's B-17s, along with similar units from Cut Bank and Lewiston, ordered to assemble at Great Falls for some joint operation with the 20th (HdQRS.) Squadron. One of the featured attractions of the day was an open house and review of the Group's aircraft, which stretched for an impressive length along the flight line, by high ranking East Based and 2nd Bomb Group Officers and Great Falls community leaders headed by the Mayor, his wife and 18 year old daughter.

"Fate's fickle finger ordained that the exploits of the 8th Air Force and its planes, "CHATTANOOGA CHOO CHOO," "MEMPHIS BELLE," etc. were much in the news at that time and much on the public's mind. Since few, if any of the training aircraft could boast a name, the Mayors daughter was particularly thrilled when she, and the review, came upon the 96th's "TURD BURD." "How cute," she exclaimed, spelling it out, "TURD BIRD!" Embarrassed, she broke off the vocalizing of what she had just spelled and joined the inspection party as they hurriedly sped down the runway to where less adorned B-17s awaited them.

"It can be assumed that orders were soon cut and on their way through channels to get that "expletives deleted" name off that "expletives deleted" aircraft. But "through channels" takes time, like maybe a week, since the infringement on good taste and manners wasn't exactly a war time top priority message.

"The next day, with our aircraft back at Glasgow, we fell back into our regular training routine. Shortly thereafter I found myself in command of "TURD BURD" flying the left wing of Captain Doug Metcalf, with Lt. Long and his crew holding down the right wing slot on three ship "V" formation, en route to a high altitude practice bombing mission somewhere in the Dakotas. My crew consisted of those mentioned earlier.

"There are, or at least then, few flying activities duller than high altitude practice bombing. To combat the boredom of these obviously necessary missions, our flight had long since adopted the practice of buzzing the countryside in a 3-ship "V" formation en route to and from whatever bombing range we were scheduled to hit. This game of "Aerial Chicken" had few rules and what rules we had sure as hell weren't committed to any book of Hoyle and were in direct violation of Air Corps regulations too numerous to mention. Basically, the routine consisted of Metcalf trying to shake, or drive, Lt. Long and I off his wing and out of formation, while Long and I concentrated our efforts to hang close on Doug's wings until he gave a "Wave Off" in order for him to escape some obstruction looming close ahead. In these rare cases, Metcalf lost. More often, it was me or Dick who would be forced out of our tight wing slot and thus declared "loser." Looking back from nearly half a century, having not killed ourselves, and crews, with those crazy stunts, made us all winners.

"When we got into combat, it became evident that the other flights in the 96th Squadron must have sharpened their skills with similar games for our formations were almost always tight and sharp. It is more than good luck and coincidence that the 96th never lost an aircraft to enemy fighters during the time we original pilots were with the outfit. The enemy chose to hit some of the other Squadrons whose loose formations invited attack. I like to think of this record as an award, or reward, for our eager participation in this rule-breaking game.



"On this particular day our three ship "V" was cavorting over the Dakota landscape, whether going or coming from the bomb range, I no longer recall. The terrain was relatively smooth and rolling, the air smooth. No gullies wide enough for Metcalf to duck down into, a favorite trick of his, and brush off the wingmen, or conversely, for the two of us to hold Doug in long enough to get a "wave off" from him. Just cruising along, nice and tight, props clearing the sagebrush by maybe ten feet. A great day to be alive, to be a part of a smart flying flight and the pilot of a wonderful crew. Life was Greeeat!

"Reveling at the long chain of events which found me in this happy situation and concentrating on hanging close on Doug's left wing, we were all taken by surprise when Metcalf flushed a large covey of quail out of the sagebrush and the covey broke to the left into our path. Taken by surprise and with no room to attempt an avoidance maneuver that close to the ground, I had no choice but to plow straight ahead into a frantic cloud of quail. "TURD BURD" was taking strikes in every area. The waist gunners were even reporting that several quail had flown in the gun ports, fluttering around in the fuselage before flying out again. To that point no damage had been done to the aircraft that a wash down to remove a collection of blood and feathers wouldn't have corrected. But I was not to be so lucky. One little feathered rascal got caught in the prop wash of No. 2, left inboard, engine. The added thrust and velocity of the air stream turned the quail into a missile which entered the air scoop and severely damaged the air cooler for the engine. This damage immediately manifested itself on the appropriate cockpit instruments and we shut down and feathered the propeller of that engine.

"This incident dampened our enthusiasm for our "game" and the spirits of the entire flight of three were not raised by the thought that only ten days earlier, Doug Metcalf, in an earlier game, had hit a pheasant which had required some minor metal repair work done to the leading edge of the wing of his aircraft. The incident had more or less been "laughed off" by those in command, but I think the whole flight knew the second incident would not be handled so leniently.

"After returning to Glasgow, walking into operations, Metcalf, as Flight Commander, felt he was the responsible officer and offered to stand with me in discussing this latest incident with Buck Caruthers, the 96th Squadron Commander. Due to Doug's recent encounter with the pheasant, I suggested that the flight, as a whole, disclaim any responsibility for this episode and leave it to me to face Buck with some cockamania explanation which might appeal to his sense of humor.

"The next day I failed on both accounts with an explanation, which memory tells me, went something like this: "Sir, early on in the mission I became separated from the rest of the flight and went on to the target area by myself, at an altitude of 25,000 feet. Suddenly, close at hand and dead ahead, I saw a gaggle of eagles -- must have been a dozen of them. Anyway, Sir, I'd never seen more than a pair of eagles together ever before and never at an altitude even approaching 25,000 feet! I know this is hard to believe Sir!" I was throwing out a lot of "Sirs" about this time, "but I became so engrossed at the sight of all those eagles at such an unheard of height that before I knew it I had flown right in among them. Sir, there were eagles hitting the ship everywhere and one of them hit the air cooler and knocked it out, Sir."

"Buck allowed as how it was an imaginative story but unfortunately for me, there was enough of a bird left to identify it as a Hungarian partridge and as an old Nebraska farm boy he knew for damned sure that no such bird was seen over 50 feet above the ground! He then meted out my sentence: I was personally "GROUNDED" for 30 days and my crew would be taken from me for that period as there appeared to be a suspicion that, under me, they hadn't, until then, been properly trained. I could live with the grounding but losing my crew really hurt and was unjustified, as Caruthers later admitted and made up to me the best he could.

"Upon hearing of his harsh penalty handed me, Doug Metcalf again offered to accept the blame as flight leader and to go through a formal hearing in hopes of getting my crew back and grounding lifted, as the air unit was about to start moving overseas with the soon-to-be combat aircraft, which the

ground crews would be traveling by train and boat to join the air group overseas later. My view was that there had been a determination "higher up" that an example would be made and I was "IT" and that anything Doug would do would only hurt him and probably not help me. I did ask that he try and get me one of the spare aircraft to fly and catch up with the Group when my grounding was over so that I wouldn't have to travel by boat with the ground unit.

"Whoever and however it was accomplished, I was given #42-5778 with which to join the air group, a minor adventure in its own right.

"But I digress. The military wheels had been grinding, not too slowly, for once the embarrassment of the Great Falls episode had brought forth an edict from on high to change the name of the damned plane, forthwith. This happened to coincide with the ship being in the hangar for oil cooler repairs needed because of the bird strike. It thus came to pass that one B-17 went into the Glasgow hangar as "TURD BURD" and came out as "GATHERBURD." And as the town drunk was reported to have said as he was being ridden out of town on a rail, "if it were not for the honor of the occasion, I would just as soon walk!" Me too.

"I was given an aircraft to fly to North Africa, a B-17 #42-5778. I turned the ship over to the Reserve Aircraft Depot at Marrakech, Morocco. On the flight with me were 2nd Lt. Roy S. Kline, Co-pilot; 2nd Lt. Kemp Martin, Navigator; M/Sgt. Bernard Cohen and S/Sgt. Robert Fillingame, crew chiefs from the 20th Squadron; 2nd Lt. Robert H. Oliver; 1st Lt. Hubert C. Robbins; M/Sgt. George F. Seimor; and Sgt. Albert J. Aboud. I do not recall what their status was in the Group.

"Although my grounding was long past due, my crew had not been returned to me and I flew my first dozen missions as a fill-in pilot with whatever crew was shorthanded, but mostly with Lt. Delbert Resta in his #42-5261, named if my memory serves me, "INVITCUS," or maybe it was "EXCELSIOR," something noble and uplifting. When I asked Major Caruthers for a plane of my own and the return of my crew, he gave me the former but chose to keep my first crew as the lead (his) crew. However he gave me permission, and strong support, in recruiting a combat crew of a multitude of ground crewmen who were volunteering for combat crew status. From that pool of talent I was able to develop a truly great enlisted crew, with almost every specialty covered by two men: Flight Engineer/Aircraft Maintenance; Radio Man/ex B-25 Flight Engineer; Waist Gunner/ex B-25 Radio Man; Ball Turret/Armaments. A great bunch of guys and probably more in tune with my personality -- but my heart always rode with my first crew.

"The officers came from replacement crews in keeping with a Squadron policy of spreading those newcomers with experienced crews for a few missions before starting them on their own. A wise policy that kept our losses low. Two outstanding officers I recall were Lt. Fred Licence who flew Co-pilot for me for quite a few missions. After completion of my tour, Fred went on to become a Flight Commander and was shot down after the Group moved to Foggia. The best of my navigators was Captain Harold Annex who transferred to the 96th from an ATC Squadron. I only had him for perhaps 15 missions and he was uncanny. I nicknamed him "Oujaboard."

"Pat Train, once broken loose from co-pilot status, not only shared command of the "EAGER BEAVER," with Major Caruthers, but he also became the Squadron's Flight Operations Officer, where he served with ability and distinction. If Pat owed me anything, which is debatable, he amply repaid me by "walking" my promotion to Captain through Wing Headquarters, while acting as Commanding Officer during Caruthers' absence.

"To this day, Doug Metcalf, has the respect and friendly regards of 'GATHURBURD/GATHERCOLE.'"

The flight crews of the three Satellite Squadrons left their stations, February 1, 1943, and proceeded to the Great Falls Air Base. The air echelon then departed for Kearney AAB, Nebraska, February 2, 1943.

The air echelon received new B-17s at Kearney and went through the fourth phase of training prior to going overseas. This phase of training lasted about six weeks. Several days were spent in processing of the crews regarding wills, allotments, equipment, physical condition, etc. The planes were "test hopped," compasses "swung," drift meters aligned and air speed indicators were calibrated. Pilots were required to take rigorous instrument checks both in Link Trainers and in the air.

The first Gulf trip for the Group came on February 13th. The destination was Mobile, Alabama. One Squadron, the 429th, flew to Salina, Kansas and was briefed on the Gulf mission. The night was bitterly cold, and by morning at taxi-time, only two pilots were able to start their engines. Take-off was delayed until eleven o'clock and all plans were able to take off. By the time the Squadron reached Laurel, Mississippi, Major Neal, who was leading had feathered one engine and was having trouble with another. He was forced to land at Laurel Army Air Base. The rest of the Squadron also landed.

When the planes had been parked, it was discovered that about three feet of Captain Mitrovi's vertical stabilizer was missing. He had been flying along side the formation and had dived underneath, coming up close, too close, to Lt. Olsen's props and barely averted a serious collision.

Those ships that were able to proceed left two days later for Mobile. They landed, refueled, took off again with instructions to fly south, climb to 20,000 feet, test bomb racks and guns. They were instructed to fly due east to Fort Myers, Florida and then land at Orlando, Florida to join the rest of the 2nd Bomb Group.

The night of February 18, 1943 will long be remembered by members of the Group. Twenty-eight ships of the group took off from Orlando, late at night, and by next morning it was discovered that the planes had landed in 18 different states. Lt. Olsen and one other ship had been the only two to return to Kearney. Thunder storms in the southern States and fog over Kansas and Nebraska were the direct causes of many being unable to find Kearney. The 429th lost two aircraft and one complete crew.

Lt. Ned D. Knapus, in B-17 #42-29585, crashed while attempting to land in foggy weather. Lt. Knapus, thinking he was landing at Salina, Kansas was actually over the airport at Hutchensen, Kansas, which had an elevation of 300 feet higher than that at Salina. He crashed in the landing pattern, killing the entire crew. The crew of nine were:

- 1st Lt. Ned D. Knapus, 0-727225, P.
- 2nd Lt. Bruce S. Upson, 0-729930, CP.
- 2nd Lt. Raymond L. Zeiter, Jr., 0-730319, N.
- 2nd Lt. Carl T. Miller, 0-731087, B.
- T/Sgt. Bernard (NMI) Budimirovich, 32200170, R/O.
- T/Sgt. Earl C. Wollenwebber, 15075882, F/E.
- S/Sgt. Walter E. Bybee, 6792661, T/G.
- S/Sgt. Max W. McArthur, 19100466, W/G.
- Pvt. James A. Farrell, 36303696, W/G.

That same morning, aircraft #42-29582, piloted by Lt. Kenneth Spinning, in flying about trying to locate Kearney, exhausted his gas supply and was forced to make an emergency landing in a muddy cornfield three miles south of Braymer, Missouri at 7:30 a.m.

Lt. Spinning, flying low, circled Braymer four or five times and then headed south, following a graveled road. The B-17 barely missed a farmhouse sitting close to the road on top of a hill. Just past the house, Lt. Spinning attempted to land the plane on the road. One wing tip caught on a fence post along a cornfield and pulled the plane to the left, into the cornfield where it skidded about 200 yards on

its belly before coming to a stop. About 100 yards of heavy woven wire and barbed wire were torn down and fence posts snapped off.

The plane was heavily damaged but wholly intact. "Skippy," the crew's mascot, was standing near where one of the fence posts went through the cabin, but was not injured. Some of the men said there wasn't even a bump when the plane landed.

In addition to Lt. Spinning, the rest of the crew were: 2nd Lt. Douglas L. McCarter, Co-pilot; 2nd Lt. Raymond T. Bernier, Navigator; 2nd Lt. Raymond C. L'Amoreaux, Bombardier; T/Sgt. Robert L. Picking, Engineer; T/Sgt. Sidney A. Cohan, Radio Operator; S/Sgt. Clarence P. Morrison, Assistant Engineer; S/Sgt. Wilbur F. Peterson, Assistant Radio Operator; S/Sgt. Hinton M. Waters; and S/Sgt. Everett E. Eye, Gunners.

S/Sgt. Ray Keller, Communications Section, 20th Squadron, April 10, 1993: "I completed my radio course at Scott Field and was shipped to Ephrata where I was assigned to the 361st Squadron. Being a radio operator, I flew a lot of hours as a fill-in radio operator, so I was on flight pay for a while at Great Falls, Montana. When the position of Group Communication Chief became available, our Group Commanding Officer, Colonel Ford Lauer, said I'm it. I did fly with him some, but that is a long story in itself, so from then on, until October 1945, I was in Group Headquarters.

"I am sure that everyone in the military had a favorite air base while in the service. Mine was Great Falls, Montana, especially after leaving Ephrata where we lived in tents. Great Falls was like going to Heaven! Great Falls was a city of intrigue. In addition to our Base, 'Up on the Hill,' at the other end of town was Gore Field, home of the 7th Ferrying Command. All planes from the Bell plant in Buffalo, that were destined for the Russians, came to Gore Field for pick-up, mostly P-39s and P-63s.

"Both the Germans and Russians must have had their spies in town. If you got a pass for town, the Orderly Room told you to be careful of what you said to strangers. If Gore would be closed in due to fog, they would land at our Base. Our love for the Russians was not so great, so one time a P-39, with Red Star markings, landed at our Base and someone stripped many things from the plane. This got us a trip to Base Security and a good chewing out.

"Christmas Day, 1942, really stands out in my mind. While delivering a B-17 from the Seattle plant to the 2nd Bomb Group, Boeing pilots by error, landed at Gore. The people at Gore burned up the telephone lines all day trying to get someone from the 2nd to come get their plane as they were expecting the arrival of planes from Bell and had no room for a B-17. Tony Fuscaldo was the OD for the day and tried all day to get someone capable of flying it out. He finally contacted Colonel Lauer but could not find anyone else but a radio operator, namely me. Tony called me and told me to check out a parachute and that a Jeep would pick me up to go with Colonel Lauer and fly the plane back. I remember starting the two right engines and working the flaps on take-off and landing, otherwise he flew the plane single handed. We circled Great Falls and I can still picture what a beautiful sight it was. Our trip back was normal and landed without a problem. If I recall correctly, the Colonel restricted everyone to Base over the incident. I remember writing to my folks back home in Fort Recovery, Ohio how I spent Christmas Day. Being an old farm boy I wrote, 'Nine month's ago behind a plow and now in the seat of a B-17. How are we going to win this war?'

"I can say this, many of the ground personnel would have loved to have been a part of the aerial action, and some were. Shortly after our arrival in Italy, from North Africa, someone saw a memo come out of the 5th Wing stating that they wanted volunteer gunners. Five other men and myself went to Foggia and took the 6-4 examination. I believe we all passed, at least I know I did. Well, our head honcho got wind of this 'unauthorized trip' so we all got called up to the 2nd power of command and threatened with AWOL and reduction in rank. I acted as a sort of spokesman for the group and said that

we would then go to Wing and be re-assigned and go to flying. He said to forget about what had happened and go back to work; that we were people too valuable to replace.

“Being in Group, I often heard the remark from combat crews, ‘the ground crews seem so aloof to us.’ Agreed. With percentage of KIA and POW losses there was no way we wanted to become attached to them. Early on, we learned this loss was hard to endure. I myself was indoctrinated to this early in North Africa. Our first KIA was a close friend from Scott Field, Theodore Ramsey, radio operator in the 20th Squadron. He got a 30 cal. through his leg on a mission over Tunisia in early May. He was sent to a British hospital where gangrene set in and he died of his wounds; I hope this incident is recorded somewhere in our 2nd Bomb Group history as I have heard he was not listed as our first casualty, and I say he was. Theodore was the first to congratulate me when I went to Group and how lucky I was. He remarked to me that he probably would be the first one killed, and he was.”

The air echelon left Kearney, Nebraska in early March, 1943 and proceeded to Morrison Field, West Palm Beach, Florida where it received its orders, information and equipment for over water flight. Meanwhile the ground echelons remained at their respective stations.

Headquarters, the 20th and 49th Squadrons, departed by rail, March 13, 1943, for Camp Kilmer, New Jersey, arriving March 17th. The 96th and 429th Squadrons departed their stations by rail, March 14, 1943. Cars of the 429th Squadron were joined with those of the 96th at Chicago, Illinois and arrived at Camp Kilmer, New Jersey, March 18th.

All personnel were immediately restricted to the camp until overseas equipment had been issued, including gas resistant clothing, gas masks, small arms, rifles, mosquito nets and shelter halves (half a pup tent). Twelve hour passes were then issued and many of the personnel, living in the area, had the opportunity to visit their homes. Personnel living west of the Mississippi River had been issued six-day furloughs prior to leaving Montana. Those living east of the Mississippi had been promised a six-day furlough upon movement to the east coast. Upon the restriction to only a 12-hour pass, those that had been promised a six-day furlough were denied that privilege and were unable to get home before shipping out. There were many unhappy men in the Group over this restriction.

The shipment of the various Squadrons, and individual personnel, came at mixed intervals, different times, different convoys and different ports. It would be many weeks before the Group was together as a unit.