A TIME TO REMEMBER
April 1944

The day started at 5:00 A.M. when the duty clerks made the rounds and woke up the crews scheduled for a mission that day. I was the co-pilot of a B-17 in the 339th Bomb Squadron, 96th Bomb Group, Third Air Division, 8th Air Force, based at one of the multitude of Air Bases which dotted the English countryside. Our base was located at Snetterton Heath which was a rail stop in the countryside of Suffolk County. We were about thirty (30) miles from Bury Saint Edmunds and approximately 100 miles N.N.E. of London.

Breakfast was great. As on all mission days, you could have as many "fresh" eggs as you wanted, plus bacon, ham or sausage (or all of these), and even steak and potatoes if you so desired. Days when you weren't scheduled for a Mission it was dried eggs, et cetera.

Breakfast over, we went to the Briefing Room, a fairly large room with the whole of one end taken up with a huge map of Europe, including England. This map was covered with a curtain and it was a very dramatic moment when the Briefing Officer drew back the curtain

and revealed what was to be the "Target for Today". "Today's" target was Poznan, Poland, about one hundred and sixty (160) miles due east of Big "B" - Berlin. The lines drawn in grease pencil on the Plexiglas cover of the map elicited a lot of "Oh my God, how damn far is that?", and "Hell, we'll never make it back" comments from the crews. After a few "at ease" calls from the C.O., we were given the gist of what the long lines meant. Instead of flying over the North Sea (Denmark and the Baltic Sea), and being subjected to very little anti-craft fire and fighter attacks, we were routed over land, across the northern most tip of Franca, Belgium and the long haul across Germany, past Berlin and on to Poznan. This was an attempt at diversion; to make them think we were going to some other target. Weather was to be our ally, with a lot of cloud under us most of the way and clearing up slightly when we reached Poznan. If it were undercast at Poznan and our Pathfinder (Radar) Aircraft couldn't make out the primary target, we were to fly to our secondary target, Stettin, Poland, on the Oder River about forty (40) miles inland from the Baltic Sea. I'm not sure how many groups were in the force assigned to bomb Poznan, but our plan was to be part of a composite group, made up of planes from several different Squadron and Groups within the Third Air Division. (A note of explanation: a Squadron consisted of four flights of three planes each, with spare crews and planes; a Group was made up of three Squadrons and so on up the chain of command thru Wing, Division and numbered Air Force). The route we were to fly and the other factors controlling the mission, assembly, climb to altitude, rendezvous with other groups, air speed, et cetera, gave us an estimated time in flight, from take-off to landing at home base, of just under twelve (12) hours. This was

stretching it just a bit, and asking allowance for a very small fuel reserve. We (the whole Poznan bomber force) were forced to maintain a slower than normal air speed to conserve fuel. This meant that any time we were over anti-aircraft batteries they would have a longer period of time to zero in on us, and it also meant that many of the fighter planes which came up and attacked us on our way to Poznan had ample time to return to their bases, refuel, rearm and then come back up and press their sustained attacks again on our way home from the target.

We only knew one other crew in the Composite Group, Lt. Joe Ziegler and his co-pilot Joe Gold and the rest of their crew.

On the first leg of the flight we ran into a few scattered areas where there was concentrated flak, but our main concern was the incessant fighter attacks which dove right thru the B-17 formation and it appeared that some of them were committed to crashing a B-17 to take it down. This caused several of the pilots to take drastic evasive action. Three of our 178s were shot down, and the one flying my left wing got a direct hit in the Bomb Bay and just disintegrated. We didn't have time to worry about it or anything, but that was the slot Joe Ziegler had been flying.

Over Poznan the Pathfinders could not pick up the targets so we were routed to Stettin. On the way to our secondary target we had more vicious fighter attacks, and the closer we got to Stettin, the heavier the flak. We lost one engine (No. 3) over the target, and shortly after "Bombs Away" and before we had the Bomb Bay doors all the way closed, we got a near miss just below the plane, which sprung the doors and did

some minor structural damage so the doors wouldn't close completely. The extra drag, and only three engines, made it impossible for us to keep up with the formation and we started falling behind.

By the time we were flying over Northern Germany, headed for home VIA Denmark and the North Sea, Bethe, the pilot, and I decided we would be better off at a lower altitude as we would be able to maneuver better in the denser air (we were at about 28,000 ft. then), and if we went down to tree top level there would be less chance of ground observers or fighters spotting us. We started to let down as fast as we could, given the condition of the aircraft, when we spotted more fighters coming at us. They made several passes at us and it was on one of those passes that I got hit. They also knocked out our No. 2 engine and hit an oil line on our No. 4 engine. That left us with one good engine (No. 1) and No. 4, which was not much good, as it started to overheat almost immediately due to loss of oil. We had managed to partially feather the No. 2 engine when it went out, but No. 3 could not be feathered, so it just kept on wind milling, causing even more drag. We knew we would never make it to England and decided to head for Sweden, which was neutral.

About that time I was beginning to feel kind of weak and the pain was really getting to me. Apparently the fighters had either run out of armament or were too low on fuel to press in for the kill, as they just peeled off and left. Maybe they saw the smoke from the oil leak on #4 and figured we were done for.

Our crew, on this one flight, had five Nazi fighters shot down and confirmed. Bethe decided I was in no condition to keep flying co-pilot, so he ordered me

back to the radio room to have Johnny put some proper bandages and some sulfa powder on my wounds and possibly give me a shot of morphine for the pain. (Up until this point I had just had a pressure bandage over my eye, which I was holding in place with my hand).

The plane was extremely hard to hold on course, which we had calculated to be toward Sweden. (I say calculated because the 20 MM shell which exploded on entry over my head and wounded me had also wiped out the only compass we had left, the magnetic compass). We were flying on only the No. 1 engine now, the No. 4 engine having gotten so hot from lack of oil that it froze. We were steadily losing altitude, having come down from 28,000 ft. to just a few hundred. The crew had jettisoned everything possible, all 50 caliber machine guns, all remaining ammo, all ten parachutes, as several of them had been rendered useless by enemy fire, and every crew member elected to "ride it down all the way", though the risk of a crash landing was very great, shot up as the plane was. Anything that wasn't fastened down got thrown out, and I can still see our Bombardier, Smitty, scrambling around on his hands and knees in the nose picking up waxed paper discs about 3 inches in diameter (used in the sextant) and throwing them out. We didn't know until after we had landed that he had left the ammo belts for his nose turret in and had 800 rounds (400 each) left when we crashed. Could have killed him at the time, but it hadn't made much difference. When I went back to the radio room I had to go thru the Bomb Bay on the catwalk and I could see what the near miss had done to the Bomb Bay doors. They were very nearly closed except in the front, which were sprung open about three or four inches. I lay down on the floor in the radio room and Johnny (an ex-medic who had volunteered for gunnery

school) took charge. His main duty was waist gunner, but we had not been bothered by any fighters for some time and the guns had been jettisoned, so he could tend to me. He cleaned out the wound as best he could with cold water from a canteen and poured sulfa powder in and all around the wound. Then he bandaged it and tried to give me a shot of morphine for the pain. There were at least six first-aid kits per plane and each had a small tube (with needle attached) of morphine. Johnny tried the first two kits and had no luck; one tube had leaked and had no morphine, while the other one wouldn't work when the needle broke off at the tube as he cried to open it. He quickly gathered all the other first-aid kits and tried again. One more had a broken needle and another had leaked dry. Two kits had no tubes of morphine in them (probably stolen), so I didn't get a shot. I'm glad that they weren't all that reliable, because had he been able to give me the shot. I would have been out cold when we crash landed, and being unable to run with the rest of the crew, would probably have spent the rest of the war in a POW camp.

Tony Segalla, our Engineer and top turret gunner got into the co-pilot's seat as soon as I went back to the radio room. He had to help Bethe hold the plane on course by pushing on the left rudder pedal as hard as he could with both feet as the No. 1 engine was the only one still going and both No. 3 and No. 4 engines were creating so much drag by wind milling. The pressure to try and turn to the right was very difficult to overcome. From where I was sitting on the floor of the radio room I could look out of the waist windows and by rising up a little I could see that we were very, very low. About that time Bethe called over the intercom to brace ourselves, we were going to touch down.

Ten, maybe only five seconds before we touched down I felt a shudder go thru the plane and thought for sure it was going to break up. We all must have been doing something right though, as the shudder was the result of striking a telephone pole about six or eight feet in from the wing tip, which slewed the plane around enough to prevent it from crashing through a farm house which had been directly in our path. At that low an altitude and that slow a speed there was no way Bethe and Tony together could have turned the aircraft without dropping a wing and cart wheeling, instead of landing level, straight ahead.

Bethe did a superb job of landing that plane - a lesser pilot could have killed us all. When we touched down the weakened plane opened up just ahead of the radio room and acted like a plow. Dirt was forced up into the radio room so much that it lifted us, Johnny, Al Esler and me, about three feet. All we had to do to get out was take one step up through the open hatch and jump onto the wing and down to the ground. I will never know where they all came from, but within minutes after the plane came to rest there must have been at least six or eight people there, all trying to talk at once, and all trying to tell us what to do. We couldn't understand the language and as more people showed up, a man who identified himself as a Canadian, who was working with the underground, came and told us what we should do.

We were to cross a ditch between the field we had landed in and the one next to it, which bad been plowed. Then we were to run about 300 yards to a small stand of trees, which were back across the ditch. We ran, I mean RAN as we were told, and as we went down the plowed field. Johann Nessin came behind us with a harrow and wiped out our tracks. The trees were very

dense and with so much undergrowth that we had Co crawl in on our hands and knees. When we got to the center of the woods, at least as close to the center as we could judge, we just lay down and stayed quiet. This little stand of trees and underbrush could not have been more than a couple of hundred feet in diameter.

There were a few spots in the middle where some of the crew could sit up, but most had to lie down. Mr. Nessin came past with his harrow and told us to stay quiet as they could hear the Nazis coming. He gave us a password, which I wish I could remember but can't, and said he would be back after dark when the Germans were gone and tell us what their (the underground) plans were for us. Very shortly we heard the Nazis over by the plane questioning the Danes. We couldn't understand them but were sure they were trying to find out what happened to us. We found out later that the Danes told them we were gone when they got there. They even told them they had heard another plane and maybe it had picked us up.

It wasn't very long before the Nazis, who were all older non-combat types of the occupation army, were at the edges of the woods, looking for some clue as to whether or not we were in there. About this time, Smitty, the Bombardier got out his pocket knife and started to cut a small branch off the tree he was lying under, as it was brushing his face. The whole damn tree was shaking, no noise, just movement, but if all the Nazis hadn't been probing around the edges they would surely have seen it waving. Tony reached over and grabbed Smitty's wrist to make him stop. He really got the point across, because Smitty complained of a sore wrist for days. Looking back on it, none of us were surprised that Smitty would do such a stupid

thing; after all, hadn't he been throwing out paper discs to lighten the aircraft and then left 400 rounds in each of his nose guns?

The Nazis finally tired of poking around the edges and left. I don't blame them for not entering the woods - I don't think I would have if there was a possibility of there being ten armed men in there. We stayed as still and quiet as possible until dark when it was safe to move around a little. It was getting colder with darkness, and lying on the ground wasn't helping any. I thought I would freeze. I started shivering and Stan Mrozak and Hy Juskowitz crawled over and lay as close to me as they could to warm me up. They thought I was going into shock, but I wasn't. I was just cold (I think). We took off all of our insignia and all identification except our dog tags and buried it. (It may still be there).

It seemed like an eternity and we were beginning to speculate as to what could have happened that would stop the Danes from coming back. Nessin and two other men came to us about midnight and led us to his farm, where we went up into a hayloft. It was a welcome change - hay to lie on and a lot warmer than the cold ground. Soon we were brought something to eat and drink, and though I can't remember what it was, I do remember thinking it was the best food I had ever eaten. It had only been about 24 hours since breakfast the day before, but what a long 24 hours.

They told us they were sure the Nazis would be conducting a building by building search of the area in the morning, so we would have to be moved before daylight. Plans had been made to move us in a truck, piled with straw, but as yet they didn't know where. They told us to try and rest for a few hours and they

would be back for us before dawn. We were all far too nervous and scared to sleep, especially our navigator, Hy. His full name was Hyaan J. Juskowitz and the fact that he was Jewish caused him great concern, as it was well known how the Nazis treated the Jews. We still had our side arms and Hy vowed they would not capture him alive.

In a short while that seemed endless to us we heard a truck stop in front of the barn and Mr. Nessin called for us to come down, and hurry. We all went out by the truck and were told then that we would be taken to Copenhagen. We were to be staying in an apartment on the top floor of the apartment building which, I think, was ten or twelve stories high. We climbed into the back of the truck and were covered with straw. I don't know how far we were from Copenhagen, but it couldn't have been far as it seemed to be a short trip under the straw. The truck stopped several times and each time I thought it was Nazi patrols wanting to search, but it must have been only stop signs as we immediately started again each time. Finally the truck stopped and we heard the door open and the driver (I never did know his name), told us to get down from the truck, one at a time.

The truck was parked on the side of the street next to an alley and they guided us, one by one, into an elevator which was being held on the basement level. When we were all in the elevator they took us to the top floor and went into the apartment of one Tom Robert Jensen and his wife. He was very active in the underground and was later caught by the Gestapo and killed. I don't remember for sure whether we stayed in the apartment for two, three or four days, but I do remember we were treated like royalty. We had to be

very quiet, walk around in our stocking feet, talk in whispers and only go to the toilet before they left in the morning or after they came home in the evening.

Neighbors might wonder who was in the apartment and call the police. Food for a mob like that was sure to be a problem, or so we thought. They brought hot meals for us in the evening and we had ample supplies of sandwiches and drinks during the day. I don't know where they found it, but they even brought us a small American flag on a stand and American cigarettes. We all crowded around the radio in the evening and listened to the BBC (British Broadcasting Corp.) news of the war. We also listened to the English broadcast of "Lord Haw Haw" from Berlin Radio. Lord Haw Haw, as he was called, was British and had gone over to the Nazi cause. He broadcast propaganda beamed at Allied troops and obviously had quite a few spies in England.

To digress a bit, I recall one night several weeks before being shot down when the crowd at the Officer's Club was larger than usual, as the next day was a "stand down" and no mission was scheduled. It was time for the Berlin Radio and Lord Haw Haw, so nearly everybody got quiet so we could hear. Well, he gave his usual spiel about how well the Axis powers were doing and how badly the Allies were doing and what terrible losses the Air Force was sustaining. We didn't believe it all but it did have a sobering effect. Then something that left most of those present in total disbelief. He said "A bit of advice for you chaps of the 96th Bomb group. I know you don't have anything on for tomorrow, but if you want to be on tine for your next mission, the clock over the bar should be reset. It is now five minutes slow". All eyes went to the clock, then wrist watches and back to the clock.

Sure as hell, it was five minutes slow. How much else did they know? Scary.

As I have said, I am not sure how long we stayed in the apartment in Copenhagen. You could figure it out from the date on the Visa from Sweden which is in my scrap book, as that date was the day after we left Copenhagen. On the evening we were to leave Copenhagen, they told us we should be ready on a moment’s notice, as they were not positive about exactly what time the truck would be there to pick us up. Nazi patrols had a habit of arbitrarily stopping any truck to inspect the cargo and it's driver's papers, so we had to expect that this might happen. It didn't, and when the truck arrived sometime after dark we all went down in the elevator to the same building entrance we had used before. We were sent out to the truck one at a time and each of us was put in what must have been tanks for carrying fish. They were about 2 1/2 feet wide, 3 1/2 feet deep and 3 1/2 feet long. They were made of fairly heavy gage steel and each one had a cover. There was no fish odor but I couldn't think of anything else they could have been used for and when we arrived at our next stop on "The Underground Railroad", it more or less confirmed our suspicions; it was a small fishing village on the coast of Denmark, across from Sweden. We were taken to an Inn of some sort where they once more fed us. They also had a Doctor there who checked my wound, cleaned it up again and put on new bandages. The Doctor had the highest praise for the job Johnny had done cleaning, treating and bandaging me up. He (the Doctor) did not speak English, and I had the devil of a time convincing him that I had had a tetanus shot not more than six weeks ago and didn't need one now.

We sat around waiting for the rest of the night until just before dawn. We were to be put on board a fishing boat which was to rendezvous with another fishing boat from Sweden. Finally it was time to leave and we were all taken outside, down a short street and told to crouch down behind a kind of sea wall about three feet high. “Don't make a sound.” We heard footsteps and peering over the wall could see, a few feet away, a Nazi soldier walking on patrol. He went a short way past our position did an about face and marched back the way he had cone. When he was out of sight two of us at a time went over the wall and ran to the boat, where we were put into the small cabin. Each time the patrol marched to the other end of his beat two more of our crew made it to the boat. Five times, and each time the tension was so high as to be almost unbearable. It must have been far worse for those poor Danes than it was for us, for if they had been caught they would have been shot, whereas we would only have been taken prisoner.

Almost immediately, the "crew" of the boat came down the street, talking and laughing as if this was just another fishing day. They walked over to the boat, and even stopped on the way to give the patrol a light. It seems he had run out of matches very soon after going on duty. The boat crew came aboard and without any fanfare set out for the rendezvous. This was a very ticklish operation as Denmark was an occupied country and Sweden was neutral, and the territorial waters of each country met in a well defined line between the two. German patrol boats were operating in the area and would fire on any Danish boat going into Swedish waters or stop and search any Swedish boat in Danish waters, but the rigid discipline of the Nazi armed forces

worked in our favor. Their patrols were »o regular you could set your watch by them, and the Danes and Swedes had the rendezvous timed to coincide with a period of time when there would be no patrols in the area. They shoved off the dock and we were on our way to Sweden and safety. It seemed an eternity before they cut the engine back to idle, and we thought we must be close to the Swedish boat but it was a patrol boat checking out our boat. They just wanted to know what boat it was and make sure it was authorized to be out. The skipper of our boat knew and was known by all the patrol boat crews so they didn't bother to come aboard, or even get very close. We were all glad they didn't or we were all set to go over the side and hold onto a handrail that had been added to the side of the boat just below the water line. It was not yet quite full daylight, and the skipper told us later that had it been light the patrol probably would not have questioned them at all. We started moving again and before long we were out of sight of the patrol boat. We changed course and before very long we spotted the Swedish boat, apparently just sitting waiting for us. The skipper pulled alongside and we were told to GO. As fast as we could we jumped into the Swedish boat and hid below the rail. In a matter of seconds the two boats separated and we were in Swedish territorial waters and safe.

I don't remember how long it took us to get to Malmo, but that made no difference, we were safe. As soon as we landed we were met by the American Consulate, who arranged for the Swedish Visas for each of us. Almost immediately they took me to the hospital to check out how serious my eye wound was. Bathe and the rest of the crew were taken to temporary quarters, as they were to go to Stockholm the next day. When I got to the hospital they cleaned me up and I was admitted. The

Chief of Surgery told me (thru an interpreter) that they would have to operate on my eye to remove shell fragments in the eyeball and to repair the damage done to my eyelids. Also, some stitches had to be taken in a small laceration in my right cheek just below the eye. (This was where a shell fragment had entered and gone down thru the roof of my mouth and broke my upper plate, which they also fixed).

Bethe and the rest of the crew came by to tell me they were leaving for Stockholm around noon and told me where they would be staying. They didn't know and, because of security, couldn't find out when there would be a flight to England, so they didn't know whether or not I would get out of the hospital in time to catch up with them.

They operated on my eye the next day and that was a weird experience. The doctor used a local anesthetic and I could see everything he did. It was kind of scary lying there and watching the instruments get closer and closer, but there was no pain at all and all I could feel was a slight pressure as he took the pieces of 20 MM out of my eyeball and sewed up my eyelid and cheek. It didn’t take very long and I was pleasantly surprised that there was relatively little pain as the anesthetic wore off, just a slight discomfort. The doctor that did the surgery told me there was very little damage to the eyeball and if there was any change in my vision it would be almost unnoticeable. He also told me that the first-aid (Johnny's cleaning, sulfa powder and bandaging) had in all probability saved the eye from infection and possible loss of the eye. Thanks again, Johnny. The doctor told me he didn't think there would be any complications but was going to keep me for a couple of days to make sure. He was great. He came to

visit me several times a day and we had some interesting talks. He told me there were only a few of the staff at the hospital who spoke English and he enjoyed talking to an American. I told him it was a mutual feeling, as it was difficult to communicate with the nurses in sign language. He also told me a bit about Sweden and the socialized society. For instance, the Chief Surgeon at the hospital was not earning as much as I was as a 2nd Lieutenant. Taxes were very high also, but their standard of living was also very high. He seemed to have few complaints about the system.

I don’t remember how many days I was in the hospital at Malmo. On the day I was released Lt. King from the Air Attaché’s office picked me up and took me to the train for my trip to Stockholm. Some train. I went first-class coach and it was really first-class; huge windows and a swivel recliner at each window. There was a diner car on the train, and the waiters all spoke English, as well a« French and German and, of course, Swedish. One of them told me, when I asked, that most people in any way employed in the tourist endeavors; transportation, lodging, restaurants, etc. spoke several languages. It was about 300 to 350 miles from Malmo to Stockholm and we made very good time. It seemed to me that the train was going very fast, though 1t was one of the smoothest train rides I had ever had.

Bethe and the rest of the crew met me at the station and took me back to the hotel where they were staying; the Continental. It was a very nice hotel and I really enjoyed the three or four days I spent there. Only one mishap, which I probably shouldn't mention. The first time I went into the bathroom I made the mistake of using the bidet instead of the commode and got the surprise of my life when I "flushed" it.

They took me shopping for clothes the next day, which the Air Force paid for, and I got everything from skin out; underwear, socks, two shirts, shoes, necktie, suit and a topcoat. I also got shaving gear, including a mug and brush. The clothes I turned over to the Air Force when I got back to our base but I still have the shaving brush, which is pure badger bristle and cost $9.00 even then. I don't know why it was so expensive. It was just luck, fate or something that the rest of the crew was still in Stockholm. They had left on a flight for Scotland the day before I got there, but foul weather and unexpected head winds over the North Sea forced the plane to turn back. The flight was re-scheduled and we were taken out to the airport late in the afternoon. The plane we were to be going in was a B-24 Bomber, which had been modified to carry people instead of bombs. A platform had been built in the Bomb Bay with four benches the length of the bay; one on each side and two back to back in the middle. The Bomb Bay doors on the B-24 opened by rolling up along the inside of the fuselage (like a roll top desk), and we got in thru a trap door in the platform. Our crew was not the only passengers, as there were a lot of Jewish refugees who had made their way thru Denmark to Sweden, and also quite a few Norwegians. Norway was occupied by the Nazis and for some reason they were far more lenient with the Danes than the Norwegians. We took off just before dark, and there were so many passengers in the plane that a few of them had to move to the nose of the plane so it could keep the nose wheel on the ground to taxi to take-off position. By holding the brakes on and using about half throttle the pilot could hold the nose down while the passengers could make their way back to the rear of the plane.

When we were airborne we immediately started climbing, as we had to get high enough to clear the mountains in Norway. We also had to take a longer than "as the crow flies" rout to avoid anti-aircraft guns and the fighters based in Norway. It was cold - there was no heat in the Bomb Bay and a frail old man from Norway (he told us he was 78) was in a very bad way. Several of us gave him some of our

extra clothes but he couldn't seem to get warm at all. His fingernails started to turn blue and we were afraid he was going to die. Again Bethe proved his worth - he figured that the plane crew would have hot coffee so he crawled up to the pilot's compartment, told them of the old man's predicament, and came back with a thermos full of hot coffee. We gave some to the poor fellow and in a matter of minutes he was O.K. He stopped shaking and the color in his hands came back. The rest of the coffee was given to several other people who seemed to be in the greatest need for it. After we landed, the pilot told us that he would personally see to it that any future flights would have the hot coffee available. He couldn't promise cream and sugar, as they were rationed, but the important thing was the hot drink. I think it saved the old man's life.

We landed at a field in Scotland and our crew were the first ones out of the plane. I stood beside the plane and counted them as they came out, and there were 78 passengers and a crew of four, including our crew of ten. That made 82 people on that B-24. I still find it hard to believe. We were taken in hand by boys of G-2 (Intelligence - it was still the Army Air Corps then) and delivered to 63 Brook Street. London for "de-briefing". We figured it wouldn't take long and were anxious to get out and explore London. What a surprise

we were in for. We were restricted to the premises "until further notice" and informed chat the de-briefing would start in the morning. It lasted for several days; they interrogated us individually, in two's and three's and then as a complete crew. We were rather unique, being one of the very few crews who escaped from enemy territory as a complete crew during the war. They wanted to know about everything, and I mean everything we saw or heard while in Denmark. One thing that made us feel that we had a pretty good intelligence force was this; when we told them about the crash landing, and the Canadian who was there with the Danes, they said "oh yes, that would be "so and »o" naming him. I can't remember his name now, but we knew it then. After the first few days our restriction was lifted and we were given passes to go out on the town - London. The whole crew went together and were seeing the sights when one of the crew (I don't remember which one) let out a yell. "It can't be". Almost simultaneously we heard a yell from up the street. We all turned to look and all hell broke loose. It was Joe Ziegler's crew - every last one of them, safe and sound. We were so sure that theirs had been the plane on my left wing which got the direct hit and exploded. What happened was that in some of the violent maneuvering to avoid the German fighters, several planes in the group had rejoined formation in different positions. Joe's crew saw us drop behind, and when we didn't make it home, they were sure we were either dead or captured. Needless to say, we were twenty happy guys and had quite a celebration that night.

After a few sightseeing tours we were sent back to our base to get our personal belongings before being returned to the States. As escapees or evaidees we were placed in what was called category "R", which meant we

were restricted from any more combat flying. Having been in enemy territory, if we were shot down and captured we could have been shot as spies. Good news - we all wanted to go home. Lady luck had sailed on us so many times in the past little while and nobody can have good luck forever.

We chose to fly a war-weary B-17 back to the States for modification and our first stop was Prestwick, Scotland, where we were to pick up the B-17, and took off for Reykjavik, Iceland, which was the only stop we would make before landing at La Guardia in New York. The ground crew asked us if we had any scotch (I guess every war-weary crew that came through had the same idea) and told us we would have all our baggage checked by customs when we landed and would have to pay duty on each bottle. They also told us that the plane would be parked in a special area reserved for the Air Corps.

Well, before we took off from Reykjavik, we hid bottles of scotch all over that plane. The majority of it was wrapped in our wool socks and placed in between the braces of the partially lowered flaps. Then the flaps were raised completely and we were ready to go. Not being able to lower the flaps 30 degrees (which was standard take-off procedure) we held the brakes until we had almost full power on and the plane just kind of leaped down the runway. No problem. We were airborne with a third of the runway left.

We had an uneventful flight to La Guardia, all be it peppered with smart remarks about being sure to make a "no-flap" landing or that would be the first time in history it had ever rained scotch on New York. All went well on the "no flap" landing, and after checking in thru customs, we went back down the field to the Air Corps area and retrieved our scotch. We were all sent

to a processing center (to be given new assignments stateside, said lengthy and emotional good-byes to each other, and were truly on our way home.

Raoul A. de Mars, Lieutenant Colonel

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