

NAME: James Burgess

Pilot class: 44C

Graduation site: TURNER AFB, GA.
(B-17 TRANSITION - SEBRING, FLA.)

combat missions flown: 26

Other 306th pilots who were in my class:

NONE

Leave card w/hotel desk, 306th registration desk,
or hand it to Russ Strong.

Russell A. Strong, Secretary
306th Bomb Group Association
5323 Cheval Place
Charlotte, NC 28205

James Burgess
Swift Address

PHILLIP L. SWIFT (THE GUNNER)
525 TIMOTHY DR.
FRANKFORT, KY. 40601

OTHER CREW MEMBERS OF #8212, NOV-DEC 1944 ~~MAY~~ MAY 1945

w/c JOSEPH DEMBOWSKI - NAVIGATOR, LOCATION UNK
S/SGT JOSEPH PINELLA - TUGGLE " "
SGT LOREN F. HARTER - BALL TURRET " "
SGT JOSEPH O'BRIEN - WAIST GUNNER " "
1/LT. ^{ROBERT} BODENHAKER - CO-PILOT (DECEASED)



MR. JAMES A. BURGESS
3116 W. EMERSON ST.
SEATTLE, WA. 98199



ANNIVERSARY
MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Russell A. Strong, Secretary
306th Bomb Group Association
5323 Cheval Place
Charlotte, NC 28205



Date: Fri, Feb 17, 2012 at 8:45 PM

Subj: TGGF Travel for WW II Vets

From: langburg@comcast.net <langburg@comcast.net>

To: Barbara Neal, 306th BHGA Secretary

Dear Barbara,

Thank you so much for the alert for a possible trip to bases in England and France Normandy Coast. I am getting the material together to forward to TGGF and will forward the portion you requested for your records.

I am most grateful that you and your compatriots have continued to keep records and memories alive of our wartime activities.

Sincerely yours,

James A. Burgess

368th Sq. 306th B GP

2/20/12

Barbara Neal,

Dear Barbara,

Enclosed is most of the material sent to the
Greatest Generation Foundation

I hope you find it useful for your 306th
records.

Many thanks again for the information
regarding the Foundation!

Cheers,

James C. Burgess.
LT. COL. USAF (RET)
306th Bomb GP.

his middle initial
is "A"

Burgess James A
369th pilot

THE GREATEST GENERATIONS FOUNDATION VETERAN BIOGRAPHY FORM

PLEASE CHECK THE FOLLOWING TOURS YOU WISH TO APPLY FOR

- WORLD WAR II BATTLEFIELDS TOUR
- KOREAN WAR BATTLEFIELDS TOUR
- VIETNAM WAR BATTLEFIELDS TOUR
- VISIT THE WAR MEMORIALS IN WASHINGTON DC

PLEASE TELL US ABOUT YOUR SERVICE

VETERANS LAST NAME: BURGESS

VETERANS FIRST NAME: JAMES A.

TELEPHONE: (206) 284-0678 E-MAIL: langburg@comcast.net

BRANCH OF MILITARY SERVICE: (please check below)

- US MARINE CORPS
- US ARMY
- US NAVY
- US ARMY AIR COPRS
- US COAST GUARD

YEARS OF MILITARY SERVICE: 22.5 RANK UPON DISCHARGE: LT. COL.

DIVISION, REGIMENT, COMPANY, PLATOON, SQUADRON:
WWII 368TH Sq. 306TH BOMB GP THURLEIGH, ENGLAND

FOREIGN COUNTRIES WHERE YOU WERE STATIONED:
ENGLAND, FRANCE

HIGHLIGHTS OF MILITARY SERVICE:
26 COMBAT MISSIONS AS CAPTAIN OF B-17
PILOT - METEOROLOGIST ON TWO NUCLEAR BOMB TESTS
ON ENIEWETOK ATOLL (1954 & 1956) WEATHER
BRIEFINGS AND FALLOUT FORECASTS FOR AIR CREW
AND SCIENTIST SCIBINTISTS
1 YEAR TOUR IN GREENLAND

MEDALS/HONORS RECEIVED:
AIR MEDAL WITH 4 OAK LEAF CLUSTERS.

PLEASE PROVIDE BRIEF STORY OF INVOLVEMENT AND THE DETAILS SIGNIFICANT TO YOUR EXPERIENCE WHILE SERVING IN WORLD WAR II.

MY CREW AND I SURVIVED THE CRASH OF OUR B-17 ON TAKEOFF FROM ICELAND ENROUTE TO ENGLAND. AN ABORTED TAKEOFF ON AN ICY RUNWAY.

MANY CLOSE CALLS AND TOUGH SITUATIONS IN COMBAT FEB 3rd 1945 BERLIN RAID: AFTER BOMB RUN, DEPARTED BERLIN WITH TWO ENGINES INOP ON RIGHT SIDE (#3 & #4) RETURNED ALONE ACROSS GERMANY TO BASE. P-51s SAVED US FROM GERMAN FIGHTERS THAT DAY

PLEASE TELL US ABOUT YOURSELF

PLACE OF BIRTH: SELMA, CA. DATE OF BIRTH: 7/17/23

PASSPORT NUMBER: 211919519 EXP DATE: 4/10/2014

CURRENT ADDRESS:

3116 W. EMERSON ST

CITY: SEATTLE STATE: WA. ZIP CODE: 98199-1718

TELEPHONE NUMBER: (206) 284-0678 MOBILE NUMBER: -

OCCUPATION(S) AFTER SERVICE:

1965-1967: FLT OPS INSTRUCTOR - UNITED AIRLINES, DENVER, COLORADO.

1967-1983: INSTRUCTOR PILOT BOEING FLT CREW TRAINING ON B-727, B-737, B-757 & B-767. SEATTLE, WA.

FAMILY INFORMATION (SPOUSE, CHILDREN, GRANDCHILDREN):

WIFE: EVA B. BURGESS / 3 CHILDREN / 3 GRANDCHILDREN

HOBBIES/INTERESTS:

PHOTOGRAPHY - ~~MUSIC~~ MUSIC (CLASSICAL & 1940s

BIG BANDS)

TRAVEL

READING HISTORY

SAIL PLANING & FLYING ANYTHING!

ADDITIONAL QUESTION:

Are you enrolled/registered with the veterans administration hospital "VA"?

Yes or No

THE GREATEST GENERATIONS FOUNDATION

100 FILMORE PLACE, SUITE 500 DENVER, COLORADO USA 80206

WWW.TGGF.US 303.331.1944

PLEASE THE FOLLOWING WHEN SUBMITTING YOUR BIOGRAPHY

VETERANS BIOGRAPHY FORM (COMPLETE)
PHOTOCOPY OF BOTH-SIDE OF YOU MILITARY DISCHARGED
MEDICAL RELEASE (WRITTEN PERMISSION FROM YOUR DOCTOR TO TRAVEL)
PHOTOCOPY OF YOUR PASSPORT AND DRIVER LICENSE
MILITARY PHOTO, PLUS A CURRENT PHOTO

PLEASE NOTE: IN ORDER TO INCORPORATE PHOTOGRAPHS INTO OUR BIOGRAPHY BOOKLET FOR EACH RETURN TRIP, WE ASK THAT YOU PLEASE PROVIDE US WITH AN ORIGINAL OR COPY OF YOUR FAVORITE PICTURE DURING THE SERVICE, AS WELL AS A CURRENT PHOTO. WE PROMISE TO RETURN THEM IN THE STATE IN WHICH THEY WERE RECEIVED.

IN CASE OF AN EMERGENCY, PLEASE PROVIDE A CONTACT PERSON

FULL NAME: MRS. EVA B. BURGESS

TELEPHONE: (206) 284-0678 MOBILE NUMBER: -

CONTACT ADDRESS: 3116 W. EMERSON ST.

CITY: SEATTLE STATE: WA. ZIPCODE: 98199-1718

ADDITIONAL NOTES:

If this application is accepted, I would like to travel in the July to September period. I would certainly enjoy seeing the old haunts in Europe possibly for the last time!

SORTIE RECORD

BURGESS, JAMES 1st Lt ,O-831110, Pilot,
368th Bomb Sq (H), 306th Bomb Gp (H), has
completed the following sorties over enemy
or enemy occupied countries:

1. 1 Feb 45 Mannheim, Germany
2. 3 Feb 45 Berlin, Germany
3. 6 Feb 45 Fulda, Germany
4. 9 Feb 45 Menteroda, Germany
5. 10 Feb 45 Dulmen, Germany
6. 7 Mar 45 Giessen, Germany
7. 10 Mar 45 Dortmund, Germany
8. 11 Mar 45 Bremen, Germany
9. 14 Mar 45 Hildesheim, Germany
10. 15 Mar 45 Zossen, Germany
11. 18 Mar 45 Berlin, Germany
12. 19 Mar 45 Plauen, Germany
13. 23 Mar 45 Coesfeld, Germany
14. 24 Mar 45 Hesepe, Germany
15. 30 Mar 45 Bremen, Germany
16. 31 Mar 45 Halle, Germany
17. 3 Apr 45 Keil, Germany
18. 4 Apr 45 Fassberg, Germany
19. 5 Apr 45 Weiden, Germany
20. 7 Apr 45 Wesendorf, Germany
21. 8 Apr 45 Halberstadt, Germany
22. 11 Apr 45 Kraiburg, Germany
23. 13 Apr 45 Neuminster, Germany
24. 17 Apr 45 Dresden, Germany
25. 18 Apr 45 Rosenheim, Germany
26. 19 Apr 45 Falkenburg, Germany

VERIFIED:

Harold G. Taylor
HAROLD G. TAYLOR, 1st Lt., AC.,
Asst. Personnel Officer.

HEADQUARTERS
4603D AIR BASE GROUP (ADC)
United States Air Force
Stewart Air Force Base, New York 12544

18 December 1964

SPECIAL ORDER
M-255

ANNOUNCEMENT OF RETIREMENT--1. Announcement is made of the retirement of LIEUTENANT COLONEL JAMES ABNER BURGESS, A0831110, Weather Officer, 12th Weather Squadron, MATS, Stewart Air Force Base, New York, effective 31 December 1964, after 21 years Active Federal Military Service.

2. Lieutenant Colonel Burgess was born 17 July 1923 at Selma, California. He first entered active military service on 18 February 1943 and received his commission after completion of Aviation Cadet training on 23 May 1944. During World War II, he served in the European Theater of Operations as a B-17 Pilot. He completed 26 combat missions with 220 combat hours from 15 December 1944 to 10 June 1945. He was released from active duty and transferred to the Army-Air Force Reserve on 19 October 1945 and remained until 14 May 1946 at which time he returned to active duty and has served continuously since that date. He also has served overseas in France from 20 October 1947 to 27 August 1949, Germany from 28 August 1949 to 10 December 1950, Hawaii from 17 November 1953 to 9 September 1956 and Greenland from 2 June 1961 to 14 May 1962.

3. During his military service, Lieutenant Colonel Burgess has received the following Decoration and Awards:

Air Medal with 3 Bronze Oak Leaf Clusters

Army Commendation Ribbon

Air Force Outstanding Unit Award with 1 Bronze Oak Leaf Cluster

Good Conduct Medal

European-African-Middle Eastern Campaign Medal with 4 Bronze Service Stars

World War II Victory Medal

Army of Occupation Medal (Germany) with Berlin Airlift Device

National Defense Service Medal

Air Force Longevity Service Award with 4 Bronze Oak Leaf Clusters

Armed Force Reserve Medal with Hour Glass Device

Small Arms Expert Marksmanship Ribbon

4. Throughout his military service, Lieutenant Colonel Burgess has given faithful and conscientious service to his country. His standard of conduct and leadership has provided an excellent example for those who have been associated with him during his military career.

FOR THE COMMANDER



JOHN S. WILLOUGHBY

Captain, USAF

Chief of Administrative Services

M-255

DISTRIBUTION:

"E"



Pilot
James A.
Burgess' crew
168 Sq.

Back row L-R: Dembowski, Bodenhamer, Burgess } see more re names on back
Front Sullivan, Harter, Miller

368 Sq.

STANDING LEFT TO RIGHT: NAVIGATOR, FLT OFFICER JOE DEMBOWSKI
CO-PILOT, 2nd LT. ROBERT BODENHAMER
PILOT, 2nd LT. JAMES A. BURGESS

LOWER LEFT TO RIGHT: RADIOMAN-GUNNER, SSGT DEAN SULLIVAN
BALL TURRET GUNNER, SGT LOREN HARTER
FLT ENGINEER GUNNER, SSGT RAYMOND MILLER

NOTE: TAILGUNNER SSGT PHILLIP SWIFT &
WAIST GUNNER, SGT JOE O'BRIEN WERE NOT IN PICTURE AS BOTH
WERE IN HOSPITAL (NON-COMBAT INJURIES).

Date: Wed, Feb 29, 2012 at 3:44 PM

Subj: 306th thanks for a new crew photo & additional info for 306th records

From: Barbara Neal, 306th BHGA Secretary

To: James A Burgess <langburg@comcast.net>

Cc: Vernon Williams vwilliams@acu.edu

James,

Thank you so much for your package of material that arrived today. I especially appreciate -- since your James A Burgess crew was not included in Russell Strong's book of photos of Combat Crews -- this fine quality photo of the 368th Sq crew you piloted, taken at Thurleigh. Thank you for noting the names and positions of the crew members on the back, including the 2 fellows names & positions, who were in hospital the day the photo was made. The list of your combat missions while at Thurleigh; the official announcement of your retirement from 22.5 years of active USAF duty as a Lt Col; the highlights of the service you saw in the Air Force in the years after WWII; and seeing your later interesting career with United and especially with Boeing, are all great additions.

I've enjoyed poring over the material and making notes for my 306th records, and I will be sending things on to Dr Vernon Williams for our 306th archives, along with other items that have been shared with me by others in recent months. I'm glad the info about The Greatest Generation Foundation was timely for you, and I really hope you get to visit England and Normandy accompanied by one of the AF Academy Cadets on one of the Foundation's trips this year. I'll look forward to hearing all about it.

Best regards & with thanks for your service to our country!

Barbara

3/5/12

Dear Barbara,

Digging through old photos recently, I came upon this crew picture. It was taken by T/SGT Raymond K. Miller (FLT ENGINEER, GUNNER) the only member carrying a camera. I enlarged it to this 8" x 10" from a small print.

We departed Lincoln, Nebraska in early December 1944 in our brand new B-17 at about 9PM and arrived at Kenner Field, New Hampshire early the next morning. Overnight rest and departed next morning for Goose Bay, Labrador. My first landing on snow at Goose Bay and temperature about -20° to -30° . Delayed at Goose for about 10 days as unable to start engines in the cold - a common problem as there were not enough heaters for engines available. Finally got away one night for Iceland. Bad weather enroute and atrocious weather for landing at Iceland. Made two instrument approaches and lucky to get down safely. Low on fuel!

Big adventures for a very young man!

Cheers,

Jim Burgess

P.S. I would appreciate any information on LT. LESTER EVANS, 36874 Sq. PILOT. He flew with me as Check Pilot on my first two missions.



B-17 CREW #8212
GOOSE BAY, LABRADOR
DECEMBER 1944

Dec-44 Original snapshot taken by T/Sgt Raymond K Miller - Flt engineer, nose gunner, who had only camera.

STANDING LEFT TO RIGHT:

SGT LOREN HARTER - BALL TURRET GUNNER
S/SGT PHILLIP SWIFT - TAIL GUNNER
S/SGT JOE PINELA - TOWELER, NOSE GUNNER
2/LT ROBERT BODENHAMMER - CO-PILOT
FLT OFFICER JOE DEMBOWSKI - NAVIGATOR

SITTING - LEFT TO RIGHT:

S/SGT DEAN SULLIVAN - RADIO MAN, GUNNER
SGT JOE O'BRIEN - WAIST GUNNER
2/LT JAMES BURGESS - PILOT

postmarked 3-7-12
March 7, 2012

Mr. James A. Burgess
3116 W Emerson St.
Seattle, WA 98199-1718

A Special Note...

Barbara,

Here are the dates of death of
members of my crew:

T/SGT	RAYMOND K. MILLER	3/1/07
FLT OFFICER	JOE DEMBOWSKI	8/20/92
S/SGT	JOE PINELA	1/25/07

I did his
obit in #1 iss
of 2012

Others above
had already
been done

3/7/12

Dear Barbara,

Attached is the article written by Phil Swift (my WWII tail gunner) about our adventures in our early months in the B-17. I treasure it as a very well done and accurate memoir!

As I told you, postwar he became a journalist and editor of the Frankfort, KY newspaper. He became the Chief of Staff for a Senator from Kentucky and spent 12 years in Washington in that position.

He now lives in Frankfort and I visit him there once or twice each year. Sitting at his bar, we share many hours recalling events in our young years in combat.

I will add some comments about the crash in Iceland. The accident investigation determined that the main control cables were sabotaged while on the ground in Iceland. Very likely by an Icelandic employed by the U.S. who was sympathetic to the Nazi regime!

Cheers,

Jim Burgess LT-COL. USAF (RET)

An Atlantic Odyssey

By Philip L. Swift

I keep hearing the statement that "getting there is half the fun." I don't know where it came from, or when it was first said, but whoever said it was not talking about a time in the winter of 1944 when I and eight others tried to fly across the North Atlantic in a bright new B17-G. The place we were trying to reach was Prestwick, Scotland, the destination of new aircrews and their planes, replacements for the U.S. Eighth Air Force, busy making daylight raids on Hitler's Germany. The Eighth, which lost more young airmen during those days than all the rest of the U. S. air forces combined, played the strategic role in the onslaught against the Reich, daily bombing rail centers, factories, bridges, oil refineries, anything that would cut into the war-making ability of the Germans. The Eighth Air Force paid a terrible price for less than three years of action—about 26,000 killed.

Much has been written about the mighty Eighth, its exploits still are seen on the television screen, Hollywood has made many movies about that fierce combat over Europe. In those movies, few of which are accurate, the aircrews are of sturdy stuff—handsome mature men, square-jawed and eager for action. There is John Wayne or Gregory Peck at the controls, fighting to keep aloft while engines smoke and splutter. In the back there is gallant Van Johnson dying at his guns as he shoots another Focke Wulfe out of the sky.

But in reality this air war was being carried out by a bunch of green kids, not far out of high school. Twenty-five was considered pretty long in the tooth. And so our little band of youngsters, ill-trained and inexperienced, but willing, set off in that bitter winter over the dark Atlantic in our new B-17.

We had trained as a crew for three months at El Paso, Texas. There were 10 of us at first. I was the tail gunner, turned 19 the month we went out there. Jim Burgess, the pilot, was 21 and Bob Bodenhamer, the copilot, was 19. There was Dean Sullivan, radio operator, 19; Joe O'Brien, waist gunner, 18; Loren Harter, ball turret gunner, 19, and three old guys—Keith Miller, engineer and top turret gunner, 23; Joe Dembow-ski, navigator, 24, and Joe Pinela, toggelier, 25. These were the ones who were aboard on the Atlantic crossing.

During the El Paso training we had with us a bombardier but he was dropped from the crew before going overseas. The Eighth Air Force used very few bombardiers. Joe Pinela dropped the bombs but never looked through a Norden bombsight and wouldn't have known how the thing worked if he had tried to use it. He sat in the nose, watched the lead aircraft in the squadron, which did have a bombardier, and when bombs came out of it he toggled a switch. Hence the sobriquet, "toggelier".

Over the New Mexico desert we practiced bombing, flew gunnery missions at 50 feet above the cactus, did some cross country work and at the end of three months had a big graduation party with Stan Kenton's band furnishing the music. Then, by train, on to Lincoln, Nebraska, where we hung around for a few days getting new equipment, new flying suits to use at the 65 below temperatures over Europe, and a new airplane.

Now at this time we had no idea where we would be going. There was fighting going on all over the world and we knew we could be sent to any theater of combat. So there was considerable speculation over one item in the equipment we were issued.

Each one of us was given a new parachute harness with a *jungle pack* attached. Mosquito netting, quinine,

machete, the works. Someone in the Pentagon must have thought this would throw the Germans and Japanese into a terrible quandry—where are these guys going—Borneo, Guatemala, Congo? We were a bit puzzled, but I don't recall that we worried much about where we were going. With this jungle pack we didn't get summer uniforms.

The harness itself was the item we were more concerned with. No one had ever seen one like it. It was said to be British. It was so large that no one could adjust it down to his frame. And don't ever jump with a loose parachute harness. Instead of snapping a strap around each leg and one across the chest this harness had a large buckle on the chest and all straps went into it. Hit the buckle while hanging from the chute and you would be instantly free of all hindrances. I never saw one before and after turning it in a month later I never saw one again.

When it became apparent that we were flying to Europe the harness was not a factor. We didn't need a parachute over the Atlantic anyway. Bail out there and you were dead in a few minutes. We all agreed that we would not jump in any case.

They had to tell us soon that where we were going there would be no need for mosquito netting and machetes and after putting a few hours flying around Lincoln on the airplane we were briefed and sent on our way. The route was to take us about 1,450 miles from Lincoln to Bangor, Maine on the first leg. From there it was on to Goose Bay, Labrador, where we would refuel for the long 1,500-mile trip over the North Atlantic to Keflavik, Iceland. From Keflavik there would be a shorter hop of 800 miles to Prestwick, Scotland.

These distances seem like a piece of cake for the jet travelers of today, but they were not that easy for a B17. A jet-powered descendant of the Boeing bomber would make either of the longer

legs of that trip in under three hours cruising comfortably at 550 miles an hour. The jet, with its passengers sipping cocktails in a warm cabin would fly high over the weather at altitudes well above 30,000 feet. It would have an intensively trained pilot with thousands of hours of flying experience operating equipment so sophisticated that he could, on the ground before takeoff, program some flight course numbers, flip a switch and sit back and watch.

The B17, sleek as it may seem in photographs and on the television screen, was slow and had no cocktail bar. And the temperature inside was the same as the temperature outside. Cruising airspeed was about 150 and the average altitude flown on that trip was probably 8,000 feet, down there where all the clouds were. It took us probably eight and a half hours to fly from Lincoln to Bangor. Today a twin-engine Boeing 737 would fly that in two and a half hours, getting a nice high altitude tailwind boost.

It was a night in mid-December when we left Lincoln Army Air Force Base and aimed northeast passing a little south of Chicago, close to Toledo and on to Maine. Daylight had arrived when we got to Bangor. We serviced the plane, stayed there overnight and left the next morning for Goose Bay, about 700 miles away.

It was cold in Bangor, very cold. But it was colder in Goose Bay—a bitter penetrating cold. There was snow and cold like none of us had ever experienced before. Maybe Dembowski had. He was from Wisconsin. New York City has some pretty good snow storms from time to time so perhaps Joe Pinela had gotten a brief glimpse of what we found in Goose Bay, and so, perhaps, O'Brien had seen hard winters in his town of Washington, Pennsylvania. But I was from Kentucky, Miller from Seattle, Sullivan from Arlington, Va., and the other

three, Burgess, Bodenhamer and Harter, were from southern California.

We were high altitude fliers who operated in unheated planes at temperatures down to 65 below and we, of course, had warm clothing. It was state of the art stuff with fur collar and insulated lining. I was still cold. The barracks were cold, the mess hall was cold. What is my memory of Goose Bay? Cold. In the time we were there I found one place which was warm enough to be comfortable. The base had a small library and it was heated. I spent a lot of time during the day reading.

Why did we stay at Goose Bay so long? Why didn't we just gas up and leave? The cold wouldn't let us go. Weather, of course, was a factor in determining when the planes would take off, but it wasn't too bad at that time and we had a clearance to leave—an order to leave for Iceland.

The crew met at the airplane at about eight o'clock the night after our arrival, ready to start engines and depart. That's what we always did. Just get into the airplane, start the engines and go. But this airplane was tethered to the coldest ramp in the world. Someone said it was 40 below and I believed it.

The wind was blowing and we were climbing around on the wings tying heaters to the engines and it didn't do much good. There were devices at the base called pre-heaters. They used kerosene and had a powerful blower. This pre-heater was placed on the ramp in front of the airplane and a long canvas sleeve was attached, one end at the engine, the other at the heater. This delivered hot air directly to the surface of the cylinders.

It seemed to me that our problem was in the number of heaters we could use. We had four engines and one heater. We would turn the heat into an engine and warm it, take off the canvas sleeve and put it on another engine, not

an instant process, and heat that one. By the time we got to the fourth engine the first one or two were as cold as ever. It was a losing proposition.

After going through this heating procedure Jim Burgess and Bob Bodenhamer climbed into the cockpit and tried to start the engines. They would hardly turn over. The oil in them was as thick as grease. They just wouldn't fire and following several more attempts and warming them we gave up for the night after facing that painful wind for three hours.

The next night we were back. Same story except for a small success. We did get one started. You cannot fly to Iceland on one engine, though, so we went back to our frigid barracks.

I'm not sure why the third night was different. It certainly didn't seem any warmer. Maybe we had learned something. Maybe we kept the heaters on longer. Maybe Burgess and Bodenhamer had learned to prime a little more fuel into the cylinders. Whatever it was allowed the engines to start. They groaned and complained, they started without enthusiasm but they were running. A victory and our hearts were warmed. We sat there on the ramp with all four turning over, making some heat, the pilots waiting for instruments to indicate that all was well inside the churning crankcases, that cylinder head temperatures were coming up to green.

But the cold would not be denied. After taxiing out we taxied back in and took our old familiar place on the ramp. The oil was so cold and congealed the pressure would not go down to an acceptable level. We could not, with the oil pressure the gauges were showing, run the engines to full throttle for take-off. It was back to the barracks after a night of near success, but ultimate failure.

On the fourth night we had to go through it all again. This night we won, if winning is achieving the ability to fly

out into the black night over the stormy North Atlantic feeling our way down a faint signal from a radio beacon toward the tip of Greenland and on to Iceland 1,500 miles away.

This night was Christmas Eve, 1944. I and the others had little time to think about Christmas while we crawled over that frigid airplane in the cutting wind. We went through the same motions we had been through the previous night and this time it started. Perhaps Burgess took a little longer this time, giving the heat a chance to build. But the oil pressure went down and we were able to lift the big bird into the night and turn east.

It was at about midnight, the time we took off. Nothing much for me to do for the next 10 hours. Dembowski had wanted me to help him navigate but we were following a radio beacon and Joe didn't really have much to do, either. We climbed to 10,000 feet and set our course on the low frequency beacon.

I thought about what I was doing just the year before and the year before that. The previous Christmas Eve I had walked guard duty in a gentle snow at Montana State University where I was an aviation cadet. The Air Force had sent me there to learn some meteorology and physics and navigation and taught me to fly an airplane. I was to be a pilot but someone suddenly realized there were far too many pilots being trained and they washed out ten thousand. So I became a tail gunner. The year before that I was a senior in high school in Lawrenceburg, Kentucky. Here, I was a long way from Lawrenceburg. Whatever the measure, it was a long way from Lawrenceburg.

We wore on through the night. The cold turbulent Atlantic below, where death would come in 10 minutes should one be so unfortunate as to drop into it, really held no terror for me. I was young and, like most of the young, thought I would never die. Probably the

others felt the same. Maybe not Burgess. He was flying the plane and was uncertain of his skills. Burgess, weighed with responsibility, had had little training for this sort of thing. To say that his instrument training was marginal is an overstatement. He told me 55 years later that when we crossed the Atlantic he could barely fly by instruments. When we gathered in El Paso Burgess was just out of flight school and B17 transition, had probably only 200 hours of flying time. That was not unusual. Most of the pilots were marginally prepared. Burgess loved flying, though. He never gave it up and after the war pursued his craft, eventually becoming an airline captain. But today an airline looking at a pilot with the experience and training which Burgess had in 1944 would hardly let him peer into a cockpit, much less send him off across the ocean in charge of a new airplane.

Bob Bodenhamer, sitting at the controls next to Burgess, was even greener. He hadn't been sent through B17 transition. He had just gotten out of flight school.

Not all the planes which left Goose Bay that night made it to Iceland. Some went down in the icy ocean, their crews never to be heard from again. But we made it to the island although it was touch and go when we got there, fuel tanks nearly empty. We were at about 10,000 feet when land was seen below through a hole in the overcast. It was Iceland, of course. There isn't any other land around there.

When we made contact with Keflavik approach control we were advised that conditions at the field precluded landing, this after we had let down from 10,000 feet to about 2,000. The erratic weather was bringing periodic gales through every 15 minutes and to get on the ground one had to time the landing between those blasts. Keith Miller thinks that we then entered a pe-

riod where we faced the most dangerous condition we encountered during our flying experiences. We were forced to begin a climb through the clouds to 14,000 feet, with heavy ice forming on the wings and engines. The airplane became almost uncontrollable as the ice changed the shape of the wings and it reached a point where pilot, co-pilot and engineer all thought we were going into a long spin into the ocean. At 14,000 feet we broke out above the clouds and the ice finally fell away. Nervous, with near empty tanks we tried again and made it into the airfield at Keflavik.

It was Christmas Day, we hadn't arrived in time for dinner but the left-over turkey and potatoes and gravy seemed as tasty as my mother had ever made. The best thing about Iceland, we thought, was the temperature. It was warm, relatively so. The Arctic Circle passes through the northern tip of the island and we hadn't thought of getting a respite from the bitter temperatures we had endured in Labrador. But when we stepped out of the plane we felt as if we were in tropical heat. The temperature was above freezing.

Housing at the base for us transients consisted of a quonset hut with an oil stove and cots. We humble enlisted men were assigned one and the nobility of the crew, Burgess, Bodenhamer and Dembowski, all officers, were given another. They probably had sheets on their beds. No egalitarianism in the armed forces, although of the three branches the air force is the most democratic.

Plans were to be on our way as soon as possible but weather delayed departure for a day or so. There was little to do there, brief daylight at that time of the year (Keflavik is about 175 miles south of the Arctic Circle), and we were ready to get away when we fueled the airplane and started engines. This was to be a shorter leg—maybe four and a half hours, depending on the winds

aloft. It is about 800 miles from Keflavik to Prestwick.

It turned out to be a very short run, for we were not to get off the ground that day. I settled down on the radio room floor, back to the bomb bay as we taxied out to the runway, pilot and copilot went through the usual engine checks and we were off at full throttle. The B17 accelerated and began to get light, starting to bounce a little as a plane does when it nears flying speed and reaches for the air. The four 1,200 horsepower Wright engines were at full volume when suddenly they were silent. Burgess had abruptly pulled back the throttles and tramped on the brakes. Something was wrong and he was trying to get this big heavy airplane stopped before we reached the end of the runway. He was successful. We stopped and taxied back to the ramp.

A B17 can be pulled off the ground at about 90 miles an hour, depending on the load, but most pilots will prudently let it run to about 120 before lifting off the runway. In the case of this takeoff Burgess had reached a speed of about 100 and eased the controls back a little when he realized that something was wrong with the ailerons. The plane was wanting to roll severely to the right and would not respond to correction. If he had continued the takeoff roll at full throttle and pulled the plane off the ground we would have gone into a slow roll to the right and crashed.

Better a few more days in Iceland.

But what had happened to the controls? The ailerons, the hinged control surfaces at the end of the wings, are moved by cables. The pilot turns the wheel to the left and the left aileron goes up, the right goes down. That turns the airplane to the left. So something was apparently wrong with the cables and that had to be repaired before another takeoff could be attempted.

The base at Keflavik was not well equipped for repairs and there were no

real experts in adjusting B17 control cables. A man was found, though, who could work on our plane and with his instruments did whatever one does to make the proper tension adjustments to the cables.

There has always been a mystery surrounding this mechanical difficulty and the final judgement was that there was sabotage involved. The mechanic who worked on the cables apparently did not correct the problem and we were to suffer from that.

In the several days it took for the work on the cables a new Icelandic phenomenon came on the scene. As we learned in our approach to Iceland, severe gales blow across the Atlantic during the winter of the year. There would be "wind warnings" posted. Such as "Notice—Wind Warning—70 miles an hour beginning at 1400". When we landed we tied our plane to the concrete with strong ropes and had piled sandbags on the wings and around the wheels. This was the only place I had ever seen that done.

But that wasn't enough. When the wind warning sign went up someone was supposed to go out and sit in the airplane. So two of us drew that duty. We went to our B17—two times, I think—and while the 70 mile-an-hour gale whistled we sat there in the cold aluminum cylinder wondering what we might do if the plane escaped its tethers and blew away. As I recall, we were supposed to radio someone if this happened. But it didn't happen and we escaped the ignominy of crawling out of our wrecked aircraft. I am still wondering about what value we would have offered, caroming about inside a four-engine bomber cartwheeling across an airfield in the grasp of a 70 mile-an-hour gale.

After several days of work by the technician, the authorities said our airplane was ready to go, cables taut, controls precise. After 56 years dates are a

little foggy but this must have been just at the end of December. The war news was good and bad. The Allies had the German army on the run but the Wehrmacht and the Waffen SS suddenly launched a fierce attack in the Ardennes and the Battle of the Bulge was underway. Another piece of news on the radio was that Glenn Miller, on a flight across the channel from England to France, was missing and presumed lost.

It was early in the morning when we went to our airplane and prepared for takeoff. Engines started we taxied to the runway ran the roaring Wright radials through their tests and were cleared for takeoff to Prestwick, Scotland. Again, I was sitting on the floor of the radio room as we started the roll down the runway. Dean Sullivan was sitting in his chair to my right. I looked up at him and he crossed his fingers. He seemed to have some doubts about it all.

We were at full throttle, turbosuperchargers pumping 49 inches of manifold pressure for the cylinders to inhale. The plane moved toward takeoff speed—70, 80, 90—it began to bounce a little seeking to free itself from the ground. Then suddenly, as before, the engines stopped. Power was abruptly pulled off and brakes applied. But this time the brakes didn't work and we were near the end of the runway.

From my position on the floor I couldn't see out. I knew what was happening through other senses but not from sight. So when the engines stopped I thought the braking would not be a problem and we would stop before reaching the end of the runway. I sat there waiting, my back to the door into the bomb bay. I first knew we had a problem, a big one, when we ran off the pavement and into the rocks at the end. I couldn't see this, of course, but when the plane began rocking violently and the noise of strained and tortured aluminum became deafening it was apparent that we were totally out of control

and crashing across the rock-strewn ground.

Then after four or five seconds of this violent and wild careening about it was all over. All was smooth and serene. I thought: "Well, that wasn't so bad." I didn't know that we were at that time airborne. We were flying through the air. It was a very, very short flight.

The scene was this: As are nearly all runways, this one was built on what engineers call a fill. Dirt and rocks are pushed into an area to create a level plane on which to place the pavement. This usually means, and particularly on rough and hilly ground, that there is a substantial dropoff at the end of the runway. Iceland has a rough, lava-strewn landscape, a mass of volcanic rock. At the end of this runway there was an abrupt drop of thirty to forty feet to the rocks below and it was through this airspace we were traveling when I, for two or three seconds, thought everything was okay.

It was a wild ride, albeit a short one, as we skidded across those rocks. The plane didn't go far but when it stopped it was a total wreck. Why it didn't disintegrate into a huge fireball I don't know. The landing gear was torn away and pushed into the fuel tanks. One hundred octane gasoline was all over the ground. The plane's spine was broken at the waist, the hot engines, broken from their mounts, drooped to the ground.

From the position where I sat I looked toward the rear into the waist. The ball turret, which protruded underneath the fuselage, was about eight feet in front of me. It hung from the top of the fuselage. The turret was electrically controlled and had a main power cable going down the column from which it was suspended. When we hit the ground the landing gear collapsed allowing the belly to crash against the rocks erasing the ball turret, pushing its supporting column through the top of the fuselage.

When that happened everything shorted out and the scene in front of me was like a huge fireworks display.

There were five of us in that part of the airplane and four up front. Between us was the bomb bay, which had a narrow catwalk, and might slow one down a little. But the group in front lost little time in traversing the bomb bay. They thought they would have to scramble over us folks in the back on their way out. They said later that, as they charged through the door out of the bomb bay, expecting some hindrance from the crew in the back, there was no one in sight. We had left in record speed.

There are three hatches in a B17, one near the nose just behind and below the flight deck, a small one under the stabilizer a little forward of the tail gunner's position and a large one in the waist. After skidding across the rocks two of those were wiped out, so the waist hatch was our only exit.

Emerging through that hatch we saw that there was a peripheral figure involved in our dramatic arrival. About 30 yards away, just to the side of the path we had traveled, was a small building like a house trailer. It held radio navigation equipment and contained a gentleman who had the whitest face with the widest eyes I had or have ever seen. Not used to having a B17 careening across his rocky patch he was virtually speechless when we raced over there.

The plane must have made a deafeningly fearsome noise as it went by his front door and when he got his wits back he said it did. I told him, "You should have been inside." The noise, however, would have been much louder had spark touched gasoline.

The four from up forward arrived on our heels at the radio shack and we stood for a moment looking at each other and back at the airplane. The interior of the shack was brightly lighted

but it was pitch dark outside. It took only seconds for it to strike me, and I think maybe Burgess, Bodenhamer and Miller all saw it at that same time. There was our crumpled bomber lying dead on the rocks in the Icelandic blackness. And the lights were on! Those little blue lights on the tail and the top of the fuselage gleamed as if nothing had happened for they were getting their full power. The main switch had not been thrown.

It is a basic doctrine in flying that in case of any accident the main switch is to be turned off. This shuts down all power and prevents fire from electrical sparks. If the main had been off when we hit the ground all the fireworks in the waist wouldn't have occurred. But there had been no chance to throw the switch before the ball turret struck.

We knew a crowd from flight operations would be on the way in a hurry. Fire trucks, ambulances, operations officers were sure to arrive soon. Burgess, against my judgment although I remember saying nothing one way or another, determined to go back into the plane and turn off the switch. Miller volunteered to go with him and the two entered the waist hatch, climbed through the length of the plane to the flight deck and shut off the power. In my view at the time it was a risky move and I still believe it was. A thrown switch makes a spark.

And so we finished three-quarters of our journey, with a few cuts and bruises but alive. We had lost our airplane and were forced to turn to the Air Transport Command for a ride on to Prestwick. That wasn't to come for another two weeks so we settled in, the entire crew, in a quonset hut. We had started our trip in 1944, it was now 1945. The day came when we boarded a freight-loaded C54, took off and landed in Scotland, our fun journey over.

The crew was assigned to the 306th Bombardment Group near Bedford,

England and many more perilous times were ahead. But that is another story.

Date: Thu, Mar 8, 2012

Subj: Thanks & info re Lester Evans & your crew member Loren Harter

From: Barbara Neal, 306th BHGA Secretary

To: James A Burgess <langburg@comcast.net>

Hi Jim,

Thank you so much for this great photo taken at Goose Bay, Labrador in Dec-44. Wow, it enlarged great from just a snapshot. Nice that this photo also includes Joe Pinela, toggler, nose-gunner. After you and I talked on Tuesday, I realized I should have asked you if Pinela (who you mentioned on the phone) was indeed a member of your crew. I wasn't sure since you had not put his name on the back of the other crew photo, where you had indicated that Phil Swift and Joe O'Brien were missing from that one.

In your letter with the Goosebay photo, you asked about Lt Lester A Evans, 368th pilot who flew with you as your check pilot on your first two missions. I will be including him in the next issue of Echoes, in the "Not Recent Deaths" column, since I see no record of him previously having had an Echoes obit. Here is what I've found on him:

- Lester A Evans, Serial # O-663140 reported to Thurleigh 27 Dec 44. He received the Air Medal on 2 Feb 45, and 5 oak leaf clusters on 14 Feb; 7 Mar; 18 Mar; 5 Apr; and 14 Apr. He completed his tour in April 45. First Over Germany, p.301 has a sentence about him making it back from the 10 Jan-45 mission to Gymnich at a lower altitude when his navigator and bombardier, Cyrus Rubenstein and James Shook, were suffering from anoxia. If you have the bound copy of Echoes 1975-2000, you'll see a photo of his crew on p.6 of the July-97 issue. He is listed at the WWII Memorial Registry, as being from hometown of Cherry Hill, NJ - honored by his son Barry Evans, daughter-in-law Jeanne, and granddaughter Natalie Unsworth. The USVA Grave Locator website has a photo you can see, of his marker, at Ft Gibson National Cemetery, in Fort Gibson, Muscogee County, OK. It shows Lester A Evans, Oklahoma, 1st Lieutenant, indicating that after having served in WWII, he served later with the 60th Troop Carrier Wing of the USAF; and it shows he lived from 25 Dec 1915 to 27 Feb 1971. To see the marker, go to <http://gravelocator.cem.va.gov/> and there enter his last name & first name. From the resulting list, click on his name with the "A" middle initial.

Now, a 2nd subject:

I think that I may have located your ball turret gunner Loren F Harter, still living. From his WWII Enlistment info which is indexed at a National Archives website, I know his middle initial was "F" and that he was born in 1924, so he would now be 87. I have not found any record of him being deceased, so I searched for a listing of his name at Whitepages on the internet. Its listings are not always completely current, but they are usually pretty good help in locating people.

I hope you'll please be willing to try giving a call to this, below, household, to find out if he is indeed your crew member. If you do reach him, I would appreciate finding out

- if he's the right man who was your ball turret gunner
- what he did after Thurleigh;
- if he wants to be added to the Echoes mailing list; and
- if he has access to email, if he wants to share his email address with me for occasional 306th updates.

Loren F Harter.... Roseburg, OR 97471. That's roughly 175 miles south of Portland. Two phones are shown for the household, which includes several other people (maybe relatives?) (541) 637-0826 Shirley Chappell....

I hope he is doing well, and I look forward to learning what you find out. If you reach him, please tell him I said "Thank you for your service to our country!"

3rd matter: Do you have anything with Joseph E O'Brien's Serial # on it? And/or do you know where he was from, and/or when he was born?

Thanks again so much, James, for the photos, as well as for any help in figuring out if this Loren F Harter is your crew member, and which of the numerous Joseph E O'Brien fellows was your waist gunner.

Cheers,
Barbara

Date: Fri, Mar 9, 2012 at 9:43 PM

Subj: Good News

From: langburg@comcast.net <langburg@comcast.net>

To: Barbara Neal, 306th BHGA Secretary

Hi Barbara,

First let me thank you for locating Loren F. Harter. He indeed was my ball turret gunner. I called him this morning at the number you gave me. He lives with his sister at the address you provided. He is in good shape for 87 and we had a very pleasant conversation. He evidently left the service after returning home but re-enlisted. He flew 12 missions in B-29s out of Japan in 1951 during the Korean War! His position was Fire Control Gunner on the crew. He left the service in 1954. He then had a civil service job with the Navy working on Sonar and Electronics. During the B-29 period, he survived a crash on takeoff of a B-29 fully loaded with bombs. He and the other crewmembers got out with minor injuries as the plane caught fire and bombs exploded. The crew took shelter in a ditch. This happened at Yakota AB, Japan.

The address you gave me is correct. He would like to be added to 306th mailing list. His E-mail address is "harterkin17@aol.com. I intend to visit him later this summer!

I do not have any more info on Joe O'brien. I do know that he flew every mission that he could get on and completed his 35 missions early -probably in April 45.

Loren Harters' last rank was S/Sgt.

Many, many thanks for your help in establishing contact with him!

Cheers,

Jim Burgess

Date: Sun, Mar 11, 2012 at 9:44 PM

Subj: Phil Swift and Atlantic Oydessy

From: langburg@comcast.net <langburg@comcast.net>

To: Barbara Neal, 306th BHGA Secretary

Hi Barbara,

I contacted Phil this morning (3/11/12) and gave him your E-mail address- he also has your postal address. There is no difficulty with copyrights to his article and he told me it is ok to use it in the 306th Echoes at your discretion. I encouraged him to contact you and I hope he does. He is a very private person and I believe he only speaks of 306th combat missions when we get together. I sure do treasure his friendship as he is one exceptional man.

Cheers!

Jim Burgess