

Army of the United States



SEPARATION QUALIFICATION RECORD

SAVE THIS FORM. IT WILL NOT BE REPLACED IF LOST

This record of job assignments and special training received in the Army is furnished to the soldier when he leaves the service. In its preparation, information is taken from available Army records and supplemented by personal interview. The information about civilian education and work experience is based on the individual's own statements. The veteran may present this document to former employers, prospective employers, representatives of schools or colleges, or use it in any other way that may prove beneficial to him.

1. LAST NAME—FIRST NAME—MIDDLE INITIAL			MILITARY OCCUPATIONAL ASSIGNMENTS		
CROUCH, JAMES W. JR.			10. MONTHS	11. GRADE	12. MILITARY OCCUPATIONAL SPECIALTY
2. ARMY SERIAL NO.	3. GRADE	4. SOCIAL SECURITY NO.	39½	Capt	B-17 Pilot (1091)
0 726 196	Capt	Unknown			
5. PERMANENT MAILING ADDRESS (Street, City, County, State)					
848 Beaumont Avenue, Jefferson County, Port Arthur, Texas					
6. DATE OF ENTRY INTO ACTIVE SERVICE	7. DATE OF SEPARATION	8. DATE OF BIRTH			
13 Dec 41	8 Jan 46	6 Feb 18			
9. PLACE OF SEPARATION					
Ashburn General Hospital McKinney, Texas					

SUMMARY OF MILITARY OCCUPATIONS

13. TITLE—DESCRIPTION—RELATED CIVILIAN OCCUPATION

B-17 PILOT: In European Theater of Operations, in England, served as pilot of B-17. Piloted B-17 aircraft and commanded crew in the accomplishment of offensive missions against the enemy. Ascertained, prior to mission, that aircraft had been properly inspected by crew members; operated airplane under varying flying conditions and such hazards as adverse weather, enemy attack, and low-altitude and night flying; maintained flight records and reported observations made during mission.

Had thorough knowledge of general and local flying regulations and meteorology. Knew tactics used against various types of objectives and against hostile fighter attacks.

Was shot down over enemy territory 5 Apr 43 and was Prisoner of War in Germany until 29 Apr 45.

Enlisted service as Aviation Cadet from 13 Dec 41 until 22 Jun 42.

The officers of our crew - April 5, 1943 - we hastily assembled for their raid, I didn't get a chance to talk to Joe Consolmagno until we were at Stalag Luft III Prison Camp.



367th, 368th, 369th, 423rd Squadrons, and service organizations
Thurleigh, Bedfordshire, England - September 1942-April 1945

306TH BOMBARDMENT GROUP ASSOCIATION

Historian
Russell A. Strong
2041 Hillside
Kalamazoo, MI 49007

16 March 1980

Mr. James W. Crouch
2829 Las Palmas
Port Arthur, TX 77640

Dear Jim:

I recently spent a night with Joe Consolmagno, who has recently moved to Englewood, FL. He retired several years ago as a speech writer for Chrysler Corp.

During the evening I asked him to reconstruct the crew on your last mission, but he was unable to do much:

- Pilot - Clarence Fischer
- Co-Pilot - James Crouch
- Navigator - Joe Consolmagno
- Bombardier - William A. Moses



Can you come up with any more names out of your memory? This is one of about eight crews that were shot down for which there is no Missing Air Crew Report in National Archives. As I am now writing about 5 Apr 43, I would like to be able to include all the crew names.

Also, I am not sure whether I ever sent you the enclosed form or not. At least I cannot now find it in my file, and I would appreciate your completing it.

I'll appreciate any details you can give me. I have talked with members of most of the other crews, as well, and would like all the detail I can come up with.

Sincerely yours,

[Signature]
Russell A. Strong

ALWAYS FIRST FIRST OVER GERMANY

SEE BACK OF THIS PAGE.

A HISTORY OF THE 306th BOMBARDMENT GROUP - EIGHTH AIR FORCE

Russell A. Strong

Name James W. Crouch, Jr
 Address 2829 Las Palmas Drive
Port Arthur, Texas 77640
 Home Phone 713-982-0536 Date _____
 Occupation Independent Insurance Agent Employer CROUCH INSURANCE
AGENCY, INC.
 Address 5240 GULFWAY DRIVE Bus. Phone 713-983-3213
77640
 Serial No(s) 0 726196

Service Record:

Before joining the 306th:
 Cadet Training Dec 13, 1941 / JUNE 23, 1942
 B-17 Training -
 Nov 22, 1942 OVERSEAS PRESQUE MAIN to GANDER NEWFOUNDLAND
 DEC 12, 1942 GANDER TO PRESTWICK SCOTLAND
 JAN, 1943 FIRST FLIGHT AT 306th 367 Squadron
 After leaving the 306th:
 Shot down April 5 - 1943 - Antwerp
 P.O.W April 6 - 1943

306th Record

Arrival date at Thurleigh December 1942 (FIRST RECORD OF FLYING)
Jan 2, 1943
 Squadron or other unit(s) 367th Squadron
 MOS # _____ Specialty PILOT
 Missions Completed (and date of last) FOUR - LAST ANTWERP April 5, 1943
2nd to 1st March 28, 1943, 1st to Capt SEPT 29, 1945
 Promotions _____
 Decorations AM olcs DFC olcs SS DSM DSC MH SM PH Battle Stars

(On unusual DFCs, and Silver Stars and above would like to see a copy of the citation)

Name James W. Crouch, Jr.

Address 2829 Las Palmas
Port Arthur, Texas 77640

Telephone 713-982-0536 Home
713-983-3213 Office

MISSING AIRCRAFT REPORT

1st Lt C.E. Fischer

Pilot 1st Lt James W. Crouch, Jr.

Plane # and Name Little Abner

Mission Date April 5, 1943

Target General Motors Plant (Before War)
Antwerp Belgium - aircraft plant

Cause of loss: AA fire Fighter attacks Other, explain _____

Describe conditions in the plane as completely as you can:

#2 Engine Burning Out of Control, Left wheel hanging,
~~from~~ #4 Engine burning, Top of Aircraft over Bomb bay
torn away, large dorsal vertical section of tail had a
4' hole.

20mm Shell came directly through nose Plexiglass and
exploded behind instrument panel destroying all instruments
and I was hit above and behind left knee in 6 places.

WE HAD A DIRECT HIT IN OUR #2 ENGINE THAT SET
ENGINE ON FIRE AND LEFT OUR LEFT WHEEL HANGING DOWN
OUT OF STORAGE AREA. I BELIEVE THE GUNS WERE AT GHENT BELGIUM.
How and where did you leave plane? Top turret gunner had been blown
out of turret by enemy aircraft. I went down to nose section
and strapped parachute pack on him and he went out nose hatch
I bailed out nose hatch

What happened when you got on the ground?

see back of page

Did you meet any of your crew mates?

No

How were you treated, if captured?

Any additional details, reminiscences, letters, or documents of these events would be appreciated. If you do send such materials, I will copy them and put them back in the mail to you within 24 hours.

B

JAMES W. CROUCH, JR.
1st. LT. U.S. ARMY AIR FORCE
2829 LAS PALMAS
PORT ARTHUR, TEXAS 77642
U.S.A.

306th BOMB GROUP
367th BOMB SQUADRON
THURLEIGH AIR BASE
BEDFORD, ENGLAND

TARGET: ERLA AIRCRAFT PLANT, MORTSEL
ANTWERP, BELGIUM
APRIL 5, 1943

A

James W. Crouch, Jr.
2829 Las Palmas
Port Arthur, Texas 77642
U.S.A.

Here is the story of the crew of "Lil Abner" B-17 April 5, 1943 Erla Works Raid at Antwerp, Belgium - 306th Bomb Group, 367th Squadron.

Pilot : 1st Lt. Clarence E. Fischer
Co-Pilot : 1st Lt. James W. Crouch, Jr.
Navigator : Lt. Joseph Consolmagno
Bombardier: Lt. William A. Moses
Sgt. : Francis L. Eastham
Sgt. : Henry B. Compton
Sgt. : Walter R. Kuczynski - Top Turret Gunner
Sgt. : Norris R. Phifer
Sgt. : Lee Sanders - Ball Turret Gunner
Sgt. : William C. Rhodes

America was attacked by Japanese Forces December 7, 1941. I was a civilian at that time. The Erla Works Raid was April 5, 1943, sixteen months from the day war was declared. I had finished two years of college and passed the Air Force physical examination in August, 1941. I entered the Service December 13, 1941, finished Flying School in June, 1942, trained to fly a Flying Fortress, flew the Atlantic Ocean in November, 1942, and was a replacement in a Combat Group in January, 1943.

We were young men who had to learn how to fight an air war by trial and error. By comparison, one of the German Fighter Pilots killed on the April 5th Erla raid, Hauptman Fritz Geishardt, had 102 victories. We had very little fighter protection from the British and had to fight our way in to a target, make a bomb run and then fight our way out. The German Fighter Command was probably at its peak. Pilots with 102 victories indicate years of experience with excellent aircraft. It was late in 1943 when the American P-51 Mustangs long range fighters gave the bombers help in destroying the German Fighter Force. The Germans were never successful in turning American air raids from their targets. There were several instances when all American aircraft were destroyed. The only survivors were prisoners of war and I know and respect them.

I was assigned to the 306th Bomb Group, 367th Squadron in January 1943. We arrived as a replacement crew, and all the officers and enlisted men were separated and assigned to various combat crews. I was checked out as a First Pilot and knew who my Co-Pilot was and waited for a replacement crew and B-17.

While waiting for replacements, I flew as Co-Pilot with Lt. Fischer on raids to Vegesack, Rouen, Paris and Antwerp, April 5, 1943. Prior to the Vegesack Raid of March 18, 1943, we were practicing night landings to prepare for B-17 night bombing over Europe. Our losses were excessive, due to German Fighter attacks, bombing had not been accurate, and morale had reached a low point. There were no fighter attacks during Vegesack bomb run and one group placed 76 percent of its bombs within 1000 feet of the center of the target. From the evidence of reconnaissance photographs, seven submarines were assessed as severely damaged and two thirds of the shipyard buildings and much of the plant appeared to have been demolished.

The French at St. Nazaire repaired submarines that were removed from the water and protected by concrete walls 20 feet thick and ceiling 16 feet thick. During the winter of 1942-1943, German submarines were sinking more than 50 per cent of all shipping to England. The primary targets of the Air Force were submarines. There were six raids on St. Nazaire prior to April 5, 1943 raid on Antwerp. The concrete walls protected the submarines from bombs; but, all of the surrounding equipment and buildings were destroyed. St. Nazaire was one of the most heavily defended targets in Europe. There were many anti aircraft guns and they were accurate. One of my business acquaintances was a Chief Engineer on a ship that went to St. Nazaire after the war. He said the French people would "spit on you" if they knew you were an American.

I was held in the hospital ward for about two weeks. Two German Sergeants arrived to take me and Sgt. Bowles to Germany. I had addresses in Brussels and Amsterdam, Holland of underground contacts and had seen enough to convince me that escape was necessary. For obvious reasons, I did not give the addresses to Sgt. Bowles. He was a boy caught in a mans' war. We were in a large railroad station in Belgium, crowded with people in a hurry. I let the Germans get ahead of me and then tried to run into the crowd and escape. I did not realize how weak I was and could not run. It may have been quite humorous to a casual observer to see a weak, wounded man try to run. I ran about 30 yards when I heard the Germans call to me.

I turned around to face them, and to my surprise, they had not drawn their pistols. They knew when to transfer prisoners, when they were not physically able to escape.

I can understand why no one would look at me or try to help. Fort Breendonk Concentration Camp was full of patriotic good people. I know Belgium was divided during and after the war. Who could be trusted was a very real peril. Apparently some people were content with the German war economy of money to spend on food, clothing and little else.

To complete my wartime experience, I might add as follows.

After solitary confinement and interrogation at Frankfort, Germany, I arrived at the main prison camp, Stalag Luft 3, Sagan Germany, on May 5, 1943. One June 5, 1943, I was taken to the prison hospital and treated for blood poisoning in the wound. Due to a high fever and medication, I was unconscious for two days. The wound healed a month later.

Three days after we were liberated, April 29, 1945, I had pneumonia and was taken to a front line hospital, treated for pneumonia, evacuated by air to England, and then to the U.S.A. in June 1945.

I voluntarily entered the U.S. Air Force December 13, 1941. Until I was granted a sick leave from a hospital in Texas, June 25, 1945, I had not received a single days' leave nor had I seen any of my family. (Three years and six months).

The war in Europe ended May 7, 1945. Our war with Japan looked like a long hard struggle. It has been estimated we would lose over 500,000 men when we invaded the island of Japan.

Every man in the armed services was glad that President Truman made the decision to drop the two atom bombs on Japan ending the war.

I did not see the B-17 hit the ground. Three Belgians at Aartselaar told me the B-17 finally tumbled over four times before it hit the ground. There were two explosions, first the fuel tanks, and then the bombs.

I landed in a plowed field and did further damage to my wounded leg when I tried to hold it up when I hit the ground. I ran into a barn and saw a young boy and a older woman. I asked them to help me find a doctor and the boy tried to stick me with a hay fork. I left the barn and ran towards a group of houses. Suddenly a very short man appeared running along beside me. He spoke in English and said "you may as well give up, you can't get away, too many people have seen you". I asked him if he would help me and he refused. I told him to get away from me and he dropped back about 15 feet. I turned, as if to chase him, then turned and ran behind some houses that were facing the road. The people at Aartselaar told me his name was "Charlie".

I saw several nursery glass greenhouses for growing vegetables, and a house where there were two women, one inside a half door, and one outside the door. I asked them where I could find a doctor, and turned to see if anyone was following me. When I turned back to the two women, they had disappeared into the house and the door was closed. I visited these people the summer of 1984. From here I went to the home of the friendly Belgians who hid me until dark.

I was captured the next afternoon and surgery was performed by the Germans. I was held in the same hospital ward as the prisoners from Fort Breendonk Concentration Camp. With me was Sgt. Magee from Lt. Seelos' crew who was hit in the eye by shrapnel. The eye was removed. Sgt. Douglas Bowles from Lt. Kelly Ross' crew had a piece of shrapnel in the base of his spine. It was not removed and he appeared to be in no pain. Sgt. Walter R. Kuczynski, our top turret gunner, had a severely sprained back from the chest type parachute when it opened.

Our ball turret gunner, Sgt. Lee Sanders evaded capture for two months before he and a group of airmen were caught in Paris, France. I evaded capture one day.

I am glad to report that all officers and enlisted men on my crew survived the war in Europe and returned to their homes.

A word about head on attacks. The nose of the B-17 was vulnerable to head on attacks when in a formation of bombers. It was unable to take evasive action, especially during the bombing run to obtain maximum accuracy.

Our B-17 F Fortress was equipped with .50 caliber machine guns except for the nose, where a .30 caliber was provided that could be moved from one side of the nose to another. The .30 caliber side guns in the nose could not be fired straight ahead. This meager firepower did little to deter enemy frontal attacks. While head on attacks resulted in some success for the Luftwaffe and predominated, considerable skill was required. This maneuver started from high above the front of a bomber formation to attain maximum speed. Some German pilots did a half roll to use their aircraft engine and armored belly for protection.

A study of the 306th original crews showed that 30 per cent of the pilots were killed in action and that 23 per cent of the crews killed in action were pilots. Later models of the B-17's had a chin turret which provided twin .50 caliber guns to fire forward.



This picture was taken at the nursery glass greenhouses where I saw two women, one inside a half door, and one outside the door. I asked them where I could find a doctor, and turned to see if anyone was following me. When I turned back to the two women they had disappeared into the house and the door was closed, both top and bottom parts. The lady in the picture is not one of the two women mentioned above.

The man on the left, the lady and the man on the far right all saw me descending in my parachute. The man on the left told me our B-17 finally tumbled over four times before it hit the ground with a loud explosion followed by a second explosion. The first explosion was probably the gasoline tanks and the second was the six one thousand pound bombs.

The man on the left told me I was about six inches shorter than the description from the two women. He also said I had a large gold ring which was my Air Force graduation ring. They were very friendly and glad to see me.

The man second from the right is Charles Thys.



TOP LEFT: Mrs. DeRoeck was 13 years old and saw me descending in my parachute April 5, 1941.
TOP AND BOTTOM RIGHT: Mrs. DeRoeck and entrance into place where I hid.
BOTTOM LEFT: Outside cellar window.

The DeRoeck Family lives next door to this dwelling that is now owned by a man who collaborated with the Germans. He is ostracized by the good Belgians.

(This letter has been re-typed from the original - JWC 2-2-88)

J. L. Verhagen
L. P. Verhagen-de Geus
Ph. Willemstraat 13
4671 EX Dinteloord/Netherlands
Tel. 01672-3347

Dinteloord, 24.2.1985

Dear Mr. Crouch,

Thank you very much for your pleasant and interesting letter of January 29 last. It is always nice to hear something back from a person who flew for us so many years ago and who is still alive and well. Time did in many cases its work and many veterans passed away in the course of the years.

I think that Mr. Seelos told you already with what kind of person you have to do. So you know that I am not interested in writing books, articles in papers and so on. My only intention is to find out what happened so many years ago, give the information to the former airmen, their helpers in Europe and so on. In the course of the years I learned that they all want this and in most cases want to come back and meet people who were involved in the happenings during those dark years 1940-1945. They can stay free here and we do everything to give them some good days. We want nothing back, it is only our family's way to so something back.

I told you the above once more not because we want to show you how "good" we are, but just to let you know why we are doing this as at this moment a lot of people try to get information etc. to write books and articles in papers and magazines. And not always with positive intentions.

In Belgium I am working with a Mr. J. Dillen and he is a good man as he thinks and works in the same way as I do, specially on the 5th of April 1943. We never give away addresses or names without consent of the persons involved.

From your letter to Mr. Rely I learned that you do not intend to get involved in matters which can work negatively to your country and/or your Air Force. You are right, especially in this time that a lot of people try to earn their daily bread or attract attention by hitting people, countries and so on where they can with negatives things and without any knowledge of how things can go wrong during a war and in this case on the 5th of April 1943.

I have also some information about the raid on Mortsel, the official report, some photographs and I have contacts with Belgian people who helped surviving members of the 306th bomber that came down that day. So if you have any questions or wishes please let me know them and I shall try to help you. I did not write or phone to Mr. Thijs and shall not do so before you give me your consent, they are your friends and I have no objections to show them my files, here or in Belgium.

One of the B 17's came down here near Dinteloord. It came, burning, from the south (Belgium) and was attacked by a German fighter. The airgunners of the B 17 were at that moment still firing back but it was already clear at that moment that the B 17 would not make it back to England.

We find that there was still some hope to fly back to England, as some crew-members intended to do, but I think they would never have reached it for they had to cross the Dutch coast with a burning bomber at low altitude. The Germans had a strong zone with Flak and more fighters could have reached the bomber in a short time. For this B 17 there has never been a chance to escape it's fate. It flew in

February 1, 1988

J. L. (John) Verhagen
Your letter of 24.2.1985
Capt. Parker's Aircraft April 5, 1943

This past April, 1987 the Stalag Luft III Former Prisoners of War held a Reunion at Seattle, Washington, USA.

I talked to two men you will want to contact:

- (1) Charles J. Thelen
P. O. Box 5394
Tahoe City, California 95730
Charles (Chuck) Thelen was Capt. Parker's Co-Pilot.
- (2) George L. Lewis
3756 Princeton Way
Medford, Oregon 97501
George Lewis was the Bombardier on Lt. Ross Aircraft shot down same day April 5, 1943.

From these two men I obtained the following information as to what happened on the B 17 piloted by Capt. Parker during the Air Battle of April 5, 1943.

- (1) Engine #3 was burning, Radio contact to members of crew was destroyed. Controls were almost gone and difficult to fly aircraft, aircraft too low to ground, still under attack from German fighters. THEY FOUGHT TOO LONG FOR THEIR OWN SAFETY.
- (2) Capt. Parker told Engineer, Sgt. Creatore, to go back into rear of aircraft and tell crewmen to leave aircraft. Radio contact with crew was not working.
- (3) Controls were set on "Automatic Pilot" to maintain level flight when Pilots stopped controlling manually.
- (4) Lt. Milburn, Bombardier, was in escape hatch in front of aircraft and was pushed out by Lt. Thelen, Co-Pilot. Lt. Thelen then bailed out.
- (5) Capt. Parker bailed out after Lt. Thelen
- (6) Apparently Lt. Spaduzzi, Navigator, was hesitant to bail out. It was reported his parachute was faulty. It was reported he had trouble snapping the parachute pack to his parachute harness which he wore at all times. The Parachute Pack was separate from the harness.
- (7) It is possible that Lt. Spaduzzi's parachute was opened in the aircraft.
- (8) Apparently Lt. Spaduzzi asked Sgt. Creatore to help him fly the aircraft.
- (9) The aircraft was set on "Automatic Pilot". If Spaduzzi and Creatore tried to fly the aircraft manually and turned off the Automatic Pilot to change compass headings, the aircraft would roll due to the #3 engine burning.

I tried to talk to Leonard H. O'Brien by telephone in February 1987. I talked to his wife and she said he would not talk about the April 5, 1943 episode.

P

IT'S A SMALL WORLD

With the thought in mind my home town, Port Arthur, Texas, is a seaport town located on the Gulf of Mexico. Antwerp, Belgium is a port located on the European Continent. Gulf Oil Corporation, now Chevron, has oil refineries in Port Arthur, Texas and also Antwerp, Belgium.

I was shot down about 3:40 P.M. April 5, 1943. My parachute landing was somewhere near 4:00 P.M. I managed to evade capture until approximately 12:00 Noon April 6th when a Belgian collaborator pointed me out to a German sentry guarding a bridge I had already crossed.

Later that day, surgery was performed by a German doctor and one Belgian nurse. My recovery room was a jail cell in part of the hospital where the Germans confined the prisoners from Fort Breendonk Concentration Camp at Antwerp, Belgium, and recently captured and wounded underground and resistance people.

When I regained consciousness, I was attended by a man who could speak English. His name was DePowell (?). He was forced labor who overstayed his leave and had been shot in the back in his home when the Germans came to return him to his job as a truck driver on the Russian front.

The next morning, April 7th, this man came to my bedside and asked me where was my home? I replied, United States. He said he had been to the States and asked me, what State? I said Texas, and he appeared excited and asked me, what town? I said Port Arthur, and he then asked, "do you know where Grace Woodyard's place is in Port Arthur"?

I could not believe what I had heard him say. Grace Woodyard's place was a very well known "house of prostitution" catering primarily to seamen in Port Arthur.

The explanation was relatively simple. DePowell was a crewman on the Gulf Oil Corporation's ship "Belgian Gulf". This ship operated between Port Arthur, Texas and Antwerp, Belgium. I had seen the ship at the Gulf Oil docks many times.

Within forty (40) hours after being shot down in combat, captured, operated on and hospitalized, a stranger is asking me if I knew where a whorehouse is in my home town!

I, PROBABLY, AM THE ONLY MAN WHO !!

England, in latter part of 1942 and the early part of 1943, was still being attack by German Bombers. German Fighter sweeps were a real danger to B-17's parked on Air Fields.

Later in 1942, while on leave in London, I was caught in the wave of humanity headed for the underground subway bomb shelters when German Bombers attack. While in our barracks one night at our Air Base, the lights were turned out and a few minutes later, we heard aircraft fly directly overhead. Later we flew a crew to pick up a replacement B-17 at another Base in England and could not get clearance to take off and return. We noticed four aircraft flying very low and we could not identify them. A few minutes later we were cleared for take off and were told, "Incidentally, the four aircraft you saw were German aircraft".

The English had many low powered radio control stations located throughout England to direct friendly aircraft to the nearest airfield or to their home Base. Aircraft, that were in trouble, could always find a friend by calling "Hello darkie".

There were Red Cross facilities at some of the American Air Bases in England. There was one at our Base where one could buy a hamburger, etc. Yes, I said "buy". American girls usually were in charge and they also had trucks equipped to provide doughnuts and coffee to military personnel.

Now we are ready for my claim to fame.

My good friend, Lt. Clarence Fisher, one enlisted man as top turrent gunner, and I were to fly a crew to another Base in England where they would receive a replacement B-17 and return to our Base. We waited until we were sure the Pilots had located the B-17. I taxied out to the take-off area and was ready to check our four engines for full power when Lt. Fisher told me to wait. He had seen a Red Cross Truck park near our B-17 and two Red Cross girls were holding some doughnuts in their hands. I told Lt. Fisher to go get some doughnuts and I would finish checking our engines and would be ready for take-off when he returned. Lt. Fisher was very successful, he not only returned with doughnuts, he also had two cute Red Cross American girls who were directed into the nose section of our B-17 by means of a passageway from the pilot's compartment.

When Lt. Fisher went to get the doughnuts, he was asked where his home Base was located. When he told them, they knew the Red Cross girl at our Base. Lt. Fisher asked them if they wanted to go for a ride and visit their friend. They promptly accepted and immediately abandoned the Red Cross truck.

When Lt. Fisher returned to the co-pilots position, I asked him what were his plans. He informed me, we promptly took off, he pushed the switch to retract our landing gear and immediately disappeared into the nose section. Shortly after a Red Cross girl appeared. I asked her to be my co-pilot. I briefly explained the controls of a B-17, let her make several turns, climb and descend and suddenly had an idea that would set me apart from all combat pilots. I asked her to set on my lap. She promptly complied with my request.

Yes, probably, I am the only man who flew a combat aircraft, in a combat zone, with a girl sitting on his lap.

The rest of my "claim to fame" story almost got out of hand. Needless to say, when some degree of sanity returned, I realized we were "lost somewhere

The Warrior's Promise

Brookings, Ore. (pop. 5,000), was the only community on the U.S. mainland to be bombed during World War II. The town is celebrating the 40th anniversary of the war's end in equally unique fashion: this week three Brookings high school students will tour Japan as guests of the pilot who flew the missions.

For former Imperial Japanese Navy Pilot Nobuo Fujita, 73, the youngsters' visit fulfills a long-standing promise. In September 1942, Fujita flew two raids over Brookings in a tiny seaplane, dropping incendiary bombs in an unsuccessful effort to ignite the surrounding thick forests. Twenty years later, the Brookings Junior Chamber of Commerce invited Fujita, by then a prospering businessman, to serve as honorary grand marshal of the town's azalea festival. Fujita was so moved by the gesture that he vowed to reciprocate by having local youngsters visit Japan, but his business subsequently failed, leaving him penniless. The industrious Fujita spent more than two decades saving the roughly \$10,000 that will pay the students' travel costs. "After they have toured Japan," he says, "the war will finally be over for me."



Nobuo Fujita

TIME MAGAZINE July 15, 1985

4:

A WORD ABOUT JAPAN

When Japan attacked Pearl Harbor December 7, 1941, they did not realize how successful they were in destroying our Pacific Fleet. Their Army and Navy had occupied the Aleutian Islands near Alaska.

We were trying to reinforce and supply our bases in Alaska by aircraft from bases in the States of Washington and Oregon. Our aircraft were being attacked by enemy aircraft. We knew the enemy had aircraft carriers in the Aleutian-Alaska area.

Our combat crew was in training at Topeka, Kansas in September 1942. We were on a training flight when contacted by radio to return to our base immediately. We were one of six crews ordered to be ready to leave our base in thirty (30) minutes from the time we landed. We were rushed to the State of Washington by commercial airlines and trains. At Tacoma, Washington we received our new B-17s rushed to us from the Boeing Aircraft Factory.

I flew as Co-Pilot in the lead aircraft flown by a Colonel who told us we were the only combat force capable of attacking an enemy aircraft carrier. Contact had been made with an unknown enemy vessel. We tried to penetrate a cold front moving toward the West Coast of the U.S. from the Aleutian Island area. We started at 15000' dropping altitude gradually to 6000'. After a four (4) hour flight, we were forced to return due to bad weather.

Here is what actually happened.

The gentleman in the magazine article above, flew a seaplane carried near the U.S. mainland by a submarine. After the two (2) flights, the seaplane was loaded on to the submarine and returned to Japan.

DROPPING THE ATOMIC BOMB

The American people, and the world, do not realize we had an Invasion Fleet on the way to attack the Japanese Mainland.

Please remember their Emperor was their God and their Island was our equivalent of Christian Heaven. The battle tested Japanese Army was ready to defend their homeland.

I have talked to men, in our city, who were part of this Invasion Fleet. They knew where they were to land and personally visited their assigned landing sites. They all believe to survive would have been a miracle. Japan was well prepared for an invasion.

It is estimated that between 500,000 and 1,000,000 casualties would occur before Japan was defeated.

President Truman was an Artillery Officer in WWI. His decision to drop the bomb was never criticized by any member of the Armed Forces to my knowledge.

Winchell and his gunner, ARM 3/c Douglas M. Cossett, flew out of the conflict into a private war of their own—one with the sea. They had scarcely cleared the battle zone when fuel pouring out of the tanks and steady engine failure necessitated an emergency landing. Winchell made a beautiful job of it, and his men were able to salvage their life raft, emergency rations, first aid kits, and parachutes. Both were painfully but not seriously wounded, and they settled down to await rescue, using their parachutes as awnings, sails, or sea anchors, depending on the wind and weather. For days they floated on, dipping in the cooling sea when the presence of small fish told them no sharks were around. The latter closed in repeatedly, Winchell and Cossett beating them off with the aluminum oars and a Bowie knife.

Occasionally a plane droned by in the distance, but none close enough to see the raft. Winchell shook his fist at each receding dot and shouted, "All right, you bastards, see if I ever buy you a drink at the O Club!" When emergency rations were gone, the men plotted an assault on an albatross which followed them inquisitively. Braving ominous memories of "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," Winchell pounced on the bird and slit its throat. But raw albatross was not exactly gourmet fare. Despite its huge wing spread, the body was no larger than a chicken, reeked of fish, and was too tough to chew.

About their twelfth day of drifting, they saw and signaled a submarine. To their despair, it proved to be Japanese. The sub circled them while a number of crewmen and an officer emerged on deck to look them over. But evidently the Japanese decided the refugees were too weak to question and not worth shooting, for the craft turned away and sped off. Not until June 21 did a PBY find the two fliers and whisk them off to the hospital at Midway. They had drifted for seventeen days, had lost about sixty pounds each, and were the last survivors to be rescued.¹⁹

The story of another plane's crew had no such happy ending. At about 1630 on June 4, *Nagara* spotted a life raft and ordered *Makigumo* to investigate. If the survivors were Americans, the rescuers were to "interrogate the prisoners to ascertain the enemy's situation and then dispose of them suitably."²⁰

The men proved to be an ensign and an aviation machinist mate second class of VS-6 from *Enterprise*. At first the Japanese did not abuse them; the surgeon treated their wounds and the crew shared cigarettes with them.²¹ Still, their interrogator, Lieutenant Ryuhichi Katsumata, threatened them with a dagger when they refused to answer questions.²² Whatever the reason, the prisoners gave their captors some surprisingly accurate information about Midway's defenses, although, apparently, little or nothing about the task forces.

A few days later, with *Makigumo* headed toward the Aleutians, Commander Isamu Fujita decided the prisoners had outlived their usefulness. Even the promise of the Americans' personal effects—including the ensign's lighter inscribed with the affectionate little pun, "To my Matchless Husband"—elicited no volunteer executioners.²³ But late that night, the unfortunate men were taken on deck, blindfolded, weighed down with five-gallon kerosene cans filled with water, and thrown overboard.²⁴ According to Captain Shigeo Hirayama, then *Makigumo's* navigation officer, the two Americans accepted their fate quietly with no sign of fear.²⁵

While we were at this bridge, an International Red Cross man and his alleged wife tried to get over with the troops — also a group of drunken Englishmen. Neither party succeeded.

We then drove to the Allied Prisoner of War Camp at Moosberg, where some thirty thousand Allied prisoners of war, mostly officers, had been confined and were still awaiting repatriation by air. The camp was commanded by an RAF Group Captain with whom I had dined in London in 1942. The executive officer was Colonel P. R. Goode, U.S.A., whose illness during the march from Poland to southern Germany was the reason that Colonel Waters did not try to escape. Waters felt that, if he abandoned Goode, the latter would probably die. No one knew I was coming, so the considerable ovation which greeted me was spontaneous. The prisoners were well disciplined and quite clean.

I went through several of the living quarters, and also the cooking shacks, in which latter were some most ingenious cooking devices, mostly invented and constructed by members of the United States Army Air Force. They were based on the principle of a blacksmith's forge and burned practically anything, during the course of which incendiary operation they produced the densest and most evil-smelling smoke I have ever encountered. With the aid of these cookers, the ample and well-selected supplies furnished by the American Red Cross¹ were heated and made more palatable. During the last month the prisoners at Moosberg were wholly supported by American Red Cross packages, as the Germans made practically no attempt to supply food which they themselves did not possess. To their credit be it stated that they did not tamper with the packages.

From here we drove to Landshut, where the 99th Division was crossing the Isar River. It was at Landshut in the

¹ These supplies were bought by the Army, packed by volunteer Red Cross workers, shipped by the American Red Cross vessels, and distributed by the International Red Cross.

WAR
AS I
KNEW
IT

Patton

HOUGHTON
MIFFLIN
COMPANY

GENERAL
George S.
Patton
JR.

A human and eloquent story told by a great military

WAR AS I
KNEW IT

U.S. flag fills special place in former POW's memories

DEAR ANN:

Thank you for printing that essay about the American flag. It was a beautiful tribute to the symbol of everything we stand for.

My most memorable moment related to our flag occurred on a Sunday morning, April 29, 1945, at Stalag VII-A, Moosburg, Germany, a POW camp where I was imprisoned along with 30,000 other Allies. (The camp was built to hold 3,000.)

We heard the deep rumble of diesel tanks approaching, but they were in the valley and we couldn't see them. When the first tank poked its nose over the hill and the column of General Patton's Third Army tanks made its way to the main gate of our prison camp, a huge roar went up that drowned out the sound of all those beautiful tanks. This was FREEDOM coming up the road!

Shortly after our liberators arrived, a grimy, skinny but smiling GI shinned up the flagpole by the main gate. He tore down the ugly swastika of Nazi Germany and replaced it with the glorious Stars and Stripes. It was a moment none of us will ever forget.

There were many hardened veterans in that camp. Some of them had been POWs for more than three years, but the tears rolled down their cheeks and they were not ashamed to be seen crying. Being set free can do that to people when they have been behind barbed wire and don't know if they will ever see their families again.

Although all this took place more than 43 years ago, Ann, the memory of that morning is as clear as if it happened yesterday.

— B. McD. Jr., Lt. Col.
USAF (Ret.) Irving, Tex.
DEAR COLONEL:

Thank you for jogging loose some thrilling memories for millions of readers. Those old war stories, even after 40 years, can still get the blood coursing through the old veins.

Ann Landers



DEAR ANN:

I was thrilled to see the letter in your column by Retired Lt. Col. B. McD. Jr. He recounted the events that took place Sunday morning, April 29, 1945, at Stalag VII-A in Moosburg, Germany, where he was a prisoner of war, along with 30,000 others.

The writer described his feelings when the first tank poked its nose over the hill and Gen. Patton's Third Army tanks made their way to the main gate of that prison camp. A huge roar went up from all of us who knew we were free at last!

I was the American security officer at the front gate when that skinny GI shinned up the flagpole, tore down the ugly German swastika and replaced it with the beautiful Stars and Stripes.

Capt. Dynamite Dunn commanded the tank company that took the camp. He was a fraternity brother (Kappa Alpha) from the University of Maryland, as were two other fellow officers, Lt. William A. MacGregor and Lt. Page B. Pratt. We were taken to headquarters and given royal treatment. What a day!

An interesting aside: Gen. Patton's son-in-law, Col. Waters, U.S. Infantry, also was interned in Moosburg and later in the day he was reunited with the general, who made a rousing speech to the newly freed prisoner of war.

Thanks, Ann, for bringing back some memories of that fateful day 43 years ago.

— Robert L. Hartman,
Charleston, W. Va.
DEAR ROBERT HARTMAN:

One of the most rewarding aspects of writing this column is providing the thread of humanity that binds us one to the other. I never know, when I print a letter, how many lives I will touch. When I receive feedback

such as the letter you wrote, it gives me a feeling of enormous satisfaction.

Space does not permit the printing of all the letters from "Moosburgers" who were on hand when Gen. Patton's Third Army came in and liberated the POWs, but here are two more.

DEAR ANN:

When that great letter appeared from the lieutenant colonel from Irving, Texas, a whole host of memories flooded my mind.

I was 19 years old, a ball gunner on a B-17. We had been shot down just two months before, over Berlin, and considered ourselves darned lucky to be alive.

I was at Moosburg, Germany, on April 29, 1945, when Gen. Patton and his men came rolling down the road. I will never forget the smiles on the faces of his courageous men as they rode into our camp. What a fabulous-looking guy Patton was with his ivory-handled pistols gleaming in the sun!

Thank you, Ann, for the best column ever.

— Robert L. Copelin
(Lubbock, Tex.)

DEAR ANN:

My husband was a POW at Stalag VII in Moosburg, Germany. Unfortunately, he didn't live to see Gen. Patton's Third Army come thundering down the road. My beloved husband died of tuberculosis just three months before. He wrote some wonderful letters that were sent to me, along with his medals and personal belongings, after he died.

In one of his letters he said, "I hope to God this is the last war we will ever fight. It is such a cruel and senseless way to settle differences. I will never forget the face of a German lad I killed last week. He was handsome and young, somebody's son and maybe a husband and father — like me. War is hell."

— Nameless Please
in Northern California.

W J

I SAW TEN THOUSAND MEN CRY.

By Vernon L. Burda

It was about January 16, 1945, when the Russians started their long-awaited winter offensive, as the temperature hit a new low for the winter. The Kriegies watched breathlessly as the Russians broke the back of German resistance and took Warsaw and Kracow and advanced on Posen and Breslau. Speculation was rife on whether we would be moving or not and betting odds were slightly in favor of not moving. I had a hunch we would be forced to walk, so I made overshoes out of a pair of wool socks with Klim tin soles, which I could tie over my shoes. I made heavy mittens by stuffing German toilet paper between layers of cloth and insulating my blankets with layers of toilet paper. A backpack was made by sewing one stocking on the top of a bag and one on the bottom and putting a belt as a strap between them.

On Saturday, January 27, 1945, the Russians were knocking at the door of Breslau and Steinau. Then, like a bolt of lightning, at about nine P.M., the order came: "FALL OUT FOR A FORCED MARCH AT 11:00 o'clock"--in two hours. And the big flap started. Men rushed about making packs, bashing food, throwing away useless articles and preparing to move. Joe Doherty ran to the kitchen and started making a huge batch of fudge--it really seemed funny at the time. Everyone's bowels moved about three or four times in the first hour. Boy, what excitement!! At the last moment, I decided to make a sled and Schauer and I took four bedboards--used two as runners and two for the platform and put tin on the runners.

On January 28, about 3:00 A.M. we fell out. It was about 20 below zero out and dark. We lined up, drew a Red Cross parcel per man and left Stalag Luft III. The column of men was terrifically long and we moved very slowly. Along the highway (Highway 99), we met the once mighty WERMACHT SKI TROOPERS, all in white--and these "Supermen" were begging cigarettes from us as we passed. They were either about 40 or 50 years old or young kids--headed for the front.

At 2:00 in the afternoon, we reached Halbau, which we found containing mostly French forced-laborers. The weather was freezing

4 - I SAW TEN THOUSAND MEN CRY.

Telephone--503-682-2326
 WILSONVILLE OR 97070
 P O BOX 504
 9180 SW WILSONVILLE RD
 WILSONVILLE TRAVEL LTD

MEMORY LANE AND GRAND EUROPEAN TOUR

