

The following document was received, December 11, 1999, as computer text on a “floppy” disk

# **In the Wild Blue Yonder**

**US Army Air Force**

**Richard C. Naugle**

1

## **Foreword**

I don't read Celestine Sibley's daily column in the Atlanta Journal-Constitution very often, but her headline on a recent article caught my eye. It said, “A great gift veterans can give their families.” A marine had written to her with a suggestion urging veterans to write about their experiences in World War II. This was to be left with their families, not for publishing, but as a legacy for future generations of the family. He went on to say that they may not be interested now, but maybe they will be later. On this note, I proceed to chronicle those days when I wanted to learn to fly more than anything I had ever wanted before.

## **Before Pearl Harbor.**

I began my college education at the University of Minnesota in the fall of 1941, being enrolled in a pre-business curriculum. During that first year, I played freshman football and pledged Delta Kappa Epsilon fraternity. The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor was December 7, 1941 and I finished my freshman year in June of 1942 without becoming an active in the DKE fraternity.

During the summer, I began working for Minneapolis-Honeywell, a defense plant. I decided to continue working until joining the service and enlisted in the Army Air Corps in September of that year. That job lasted until I was called to active duty on January 30, 1943.

## **Jefferson Barracks, Missouri ( January 31, 1943 - March 15, 1943)**

On January 30, 1943, hundreds, like me, reported to the Minneapolis Armory for our first day in the Service. This was our first roll call, and they lined us up alphabetically, a process which would follow us all through our time in the Army. Before boarding the train for Jefferson Barracks near St.

Louis, Missouri, they marched us alphabetically to cafes and restaurants all over the area. There were 8 of us in our little group seated in a booth in a drug store, and one of the men was LeRoy B. "Porky" Nelson, up from Albert Lea, Minnesota. Our paths would cross several times later in our service careers. Most of the guys there were from North and South Dakota and Minnesota. The train was made up of out-of-service rail cars, reactivated for wartime use, with only coach seats. We had to sleep any way we could in those coach seats, and we stopped once that I can remember to stretch our legs with calisthenics. I don't remember how they fed us on that trip, and maybe they didn't. I know for sure there was no dining car available for serving we privates in the United States Army Air Corps..

Jefferson Barracks was cold and damp all the time. My enlisted serial number was 17115252. We lived in wooden shacks with no insulation, four double bunks and a pot belly stove in the center of the cabin. We would stoke up the stove with big chunks of coal before going to bed, and it would be red hot when we piled into the sack.. The fire would go out during the night, and the place would be deathly cold.. None of us thought about taking turns keeping the stove going, so we would work up a sweat in the heat and then shiver later in the damp cold of our perspiration..

Our first military training included marching and drilling in our civilian clothes for at least the first two weeks, and it may have been longer before we climbed into the olive drab, scratchy wool Army uniforms. Many of the men contracted pneumonia and spent time in the hospital. As we marched along, we saw blood in the phlegm the men had spit up on the pavement. There were rumors of deaths also.

## **Columbia, Missouri (March 16, 1943 - June 29, 1943)**

The University of Missouri was the next station for five squadrons of 200 men each. We arrived in the middle of March, 1943, and our barracks were borrowed fraternity houses. We were now classified as Aviation Students (A/S) with pay at \$50 per month. Our training included the usual military drill, physical exercise, including sports, and classrooms of history, geography, weather and physics. There were three colleges in Columbia with girls. Besides the University, there was Christian College and Stephens College.

We were treated very well by the University and the local citizens, and the move into the fraternity houses was a far cry from the miserable shacks at Jefferson Barracks. The food was prepared by the University and was very good. There was a golf course around the corner from our quarters, and I played it once. We had our first flight training at the local airport. They used Piper Cubs to give us a small taste of what flight was all about, but we didn't learn too much at this stage.

Our barracks was Squadron B, and Porky Nelson was in Squadron C. His squadron would be the next squadron to be sent to San Antonio after ours.

## **Army Air Force Classification Center (June 30, 1943 - July 31, 1943)**

All kinds of rumors about how tough the 64 was going to be. The Six-four was the very complete physical examination including a close check on the eyes that must be passed to get into Cadet Training. I was worried about the eye tests because I had “floaters,” and I felt they might find them and not pass me. I passed and apparently the floaters were not noticed or not a deterrent.

I memorized an eye-chart while I was in line waiting to be checked, and was pleased to find that same chart used on several eye checks I was given later in my training.

While at AAFCC, we drilled a lot and played sports a lot, and it was very hot. We had bunks in the barracks, but the sheets stuck to me from the perspiration while I was in bed at night. A group of us were on a grass planting detail that gave us a little bit of freedom and excused us from standing retreat before the evening meal. We found the warehouse where mattresses were stored, and we would sometimes sneak away from planting grass to have a short snooze. I saw my first black widow spider with its red hour glass on its underside in its web in the latrine.

We eventually learned if we had been classified to be trained either as a pilot, bombardier or navigator. Most wanted to be pilots, and some who wanted to be pilots weren't accepted and therefore had to take training as a bombardier or navigator. I was assigned to Aviation Cadet Class 44-D to begin Pre Flight Training as a pilot August 1, 1943 at the San Antonio Aviation Cadet Center (SAAC), pronounced sack..

## **Preflight at SAAC (August 1, 1943 September 30, 1943)**

As Aviation Cadets (A/C), our pay went up to \$75 per month and the increase was most welcome. Seldom does one receive an increase in pay of a whopping 50% Aviation Cadets had four phases of training before being awarded wings and a commission as an officer. The first phase was Pre Flight, then Primary flight training followed by Basic flight training and finally Advanced flight training. Each phase was nine weeks in duration, and I do not recall if anyone failed to get through Pre Flight. The Pre flight classes I can remember included geography, physics, weather, aircraft engines, Morse code, theory of flight and physical exercise.

There was also military training here as well as in all phases of training that followed until we were awarded our wings and commission. The sounds of for'd harch, rear harch, left flank harch, left turn, harch, column right, harch, etc., etc., etc. continued throughout our training. Harch was easier for drill sergeants to yell out than march. Anyone who failed to pass any phase of flight training was “washed out” and then had the opportunity of going into Bombardier or Navigator training.

Whenever we were outside and a plane flew overhead, we would all look up and dream of being able to do that. The AT-6 Texan was the single-engine Advance Trainer that we often saw, and we all

very much wanted to fly that plane. I never did because I went on to twin-engined Advance which was training for multi-engine aircraft.

Porky Nelson caught up with me in Pre-Flight and after completing that nine weeks together, we went on to Primary Flight training at the same time and same place..

## **Primary Flight Training at Vernon, Texas (October 1, 1943 - December 4, 1943)**

Primary flight training would last nine weeks and would include at least 65 hours of flight training. We would have classroom instruction for half-days and flight training the other half days. Some days the flight training was in the morning, and other days in the afternoon. Obviously, classroom instruction would be during the opposite half of the day..

Primary flight training was given by civilian pilots who worked for the contractor, Hunter Air Service.. There were a few military pilots stationed there, but their job was to perform the flight checks when they became due. The daily flying schedule would begin with an instructor and a student taking off from the base field and going through a training session, lasting about an hour. They would then land at an auxiliary field and the instructor would take up another student. The students who were waiting at the auxiliary field got there by truck and waited until it was their turn to fly. There were a number of planes doing this at several auxiliary fields. Student solo flights were made from the main field as well as the auxiliary fields.

Porky Nelson and I had the same flight instructor, and Porky became engaged to marry a girl whose home was in Vernon. I do not know if he ever married her. I could have asked him after the war was over when we were waiting to be shipped home, but I never thought about it.. He was a lover and probably did not marry her.

We learned stalls, spins, snap rolls, slow rolls and shot a lot of landings in the open cockpit Fairchild PT-19. I believe the cruising speed of this craft was about 65 miles per hour air speed.. We also had one cross-country flight which was really a lot of fun.

One day while I was flying solo, one of the Advanced Trainers with two cadets from Frederick Air Field in Frederick, Oklahoma came up from behind so close to me I could see the pilot grinning at me. This seemed dangerous to me, and I didn't know what they were up to so I peeled off and never saw them again.

The food and lodging was quite good at this contract flight school, and after 9 weeks at Hunter Air Service, it was on to Basic Flight Training in Greenville, Texas on December 20, 1943.

## **Majors Field in Greenville, Texas (December 5, 1943 - February 8, 1944)**

It was winter in Texas now, no snow, but it could get cold, especially in the air. We wore heavy flight gear, and I don't remember if we had cabin heat, but I doubt it. The cockpit was enclosed in the Vultee BT-13, and that helped some. The BT-13 was a big change from the PT-19 Primary Trainer. The huge cowling over the engine blocked out the line of sight in front of the plane until the tail was off the ground and a big adjustment for us. The plane had a 450 horsepower engine and cruised around 90 miles per hour. Not enough power for such a heavy aircraft..

Our flight training included the same maneuvers covered in Primary, but in addition, included the first of our instrument flight training, night flying and formation flying. We had the same routine of flying half-days out of auxiliary fields and half days in the classroom.

We also received our first taste of Link instrument training. A Link Trainer is a flight simulator with only the instruments inside the cockpit visible to the trainee. It was very difficult to master, and if you had a mean operator, he could turn on the rough air and it was virtually impossible to stay the course under those conditions. I had a mean operator one later time at Barksdale, and he said I did a terrible job, and he was right. I wished I could have done the same to him.

Our squadron commander at Majors Field told had us we could buzz the water tower of a small town if we were ever lost. The name of the town was usually painted on the water tower, and after stirring up the citizens by coming in low, we had to find the town on the map and fly on. He also said that if we did buzz a town, we must report it to him. If someone buzzed a town, and wasn't on a cross-country flight, and most importantly, didn't report this to the commander, he would be washed out of flight training. I did this one time and dutifully reported it to Grumpy. He was a good officer and insisted on us following the rules for our own safety.

We were in Greenville during Christmas 1943 and our commanding officer hosted a party in a hotel in town. This was my first exposure to Tequila, and my first sip was all I could handle. I can remember one cadet who became quickly acclimated to the taste and almost passed out.

There was a sorority house next door to our quarters when we were in Columbia, Missouri and some of our guys dated some of the girls living there.. I had a date with one of them three or four times and she lived in Dallas. One of my buddies dated a friend of hers and he suggested we get a Christmas pass and invite ourselves to spend Christmas with them since Dallas was not too far from Greenville.

It worked out, and we had Christmas dinner with my date's parents and the two girls. They put my friend and me in a bedroom together for the one night. Don't remember the girl's name, but we shipped out before anything could develop. It sure was a welcome departure from military life.

I logged in another 70 hours flying time in Basic. Ran into Dave Thomas from Minneapolis West High School whom I knew at the University of Minnesota during my freshman year. He was in the flight training class ahead of mine, I think. This recollection makes me think there were two classes at each phase because Dave Thomas was not in our class. That would mean a new class would

come into each phase every four and half weeks. I believe there was an “upper class” and a “lower class,” but the hazing mentality was not present.

I had, what I would call, a close call while at Majors Field. Part of our training included learning to fly in bad weather on instruments. To practice without an instructor, one cadet would sit in the front cockpit to take off, watch for other aircraft while the other cadet in the back seat practiced maneuvers under a hood and then land the plane when the session was over. A hood would be pulled up in the rear cockpit to block out visual contact of the outside of the plane, requiring the cadet to fly the plane using only the instruments in the rear cockpit.

Following this practice, we were coming in for a landing with me in the front cockpit at the controls. The tower operator radioed for the second plane on the final approach to pull up and go around. There was one plane in front of me about to cross the front end of the runway so I thought the message was for me. I didn't see any danger, and I was about to pull up when I happened to look up and there was another plane right above me. It was probably 20 to 30 feet above us, and seemed perilously close. I never saw a bigger airplane in my life. That was the plane that the tower identified as the second plane on final, not mine.

As I eased over to the left, the pilot above me saw me and pulled out of the pattern. I continued on the final approach, lined up again with the runway and came on in for a safe landing.. It was too close for comfort, but I dismissed the incident feeling that I was lucky and went on without pursuing the matter further. There was no investigation, and I didn't even think about trying to find out who the cadet was flying that other plane. In writing this, I wondered how that cadet got there without seeing my plane, and how long had he been flying right above me so close. Where had he entered the pattern without seeing us? Basic Flight Training was completed successfully and now on to Advanced Training.

## **Frederick Army Air Field, Frederick, Oklahoma. (February 9, 1944 - April 14, 1944)**

From Greenville, Texas, we were sent to Frederick, Oklahoma for Advanced Flight Training. Frederick, is only 30 miles from Vernon, Texas where we had Primary, and is across the Red River, the border there between Texas and Oklahoma. It was now February 10, 1944 with just nine more weeks until wings on our chest and gold bars on our shoulders. We looked forward to this event with great anticipation. Porky Nelson and I had the same instructor at Frederick.

Here in Advanced we moved into airplanes with two engines or twin engines as the planes were called, The planes in Primary and Basic were single engine. The schedule and curriculum was pretty much as it was in Primary and Basic. The big difference was now we had to learn how to fly a multi-engine craft. The aircraft we used was designated as an AT-17 or UC-78 with the AT standing for Advanced Trainer. I believe UC was for Utility Craft. This included single-engine procedures for flying on one engine should one engine fail.

We always practiced stalls, and there was more flying on instruments, formation practice, more night flying and more cross-country. There was even cross-country at night and the flying time here of 77 hours brought my total flying time to about 214 hours for the three phases..

When we graduated, we would be given a one time uniform allowance of \$150 to buy officer's uniforms. To get ready for the day when we could get into this uniform on graduation day, we met with tailors who measured us for our dark green blouses, matching trousers and pink trousers, bill caps and overseas caps. Some cadets ordered overcoats, and others ordered trench coats which is what I did. Part of the excitement of graduation was looking forward to the more handsome officer uniforms. Olive drab would be a minor factor after that.

Before being commissioned, we had to be honorably discharged from the Army of The United States, and that discharge document is an appendix to this report. It covers the period I was an enlisted man from January 30, 1943 to April 14, 1944. The Honorable Discharge covering the period from April 15, 1944 to January 23, 1946 is also appended to this report as is the Separation Qualification Record.

## **Graduation Day for Class 44-D was April 15, 1944**

We lined up on the runway for the ceremonies which included a flyover of training planes in formation. We pinned the wings on each other if a wife or girl friend was not there to do the honors. The wife of one of my friends pinned on mine. The careers of Second Lieutenant Richard C. Naugle, Army Serial Number 0-720331 and Second Lieutenant LeRoy B. Nelson, ASN 0-720332 continued onward.

Our pay as Second Lieutenants would now be \$150 per month plus flight pay of 50% more and a subsistence allowance of \$21 per month. We never saw the subsistence allowance because we always signed it over to the base where we were stationed. We had to fly a minimum of four hours per month to earn the 50% flight pay.

Before graduation, we were given four choices for our Transition training, and the choices were B-17, B-24, C-47 and B-26.. There were many rumors floating around about how dangerous the B-26 was, but I did not want the four-engine B-17, B-24 or the twin-engine C-47. That left me with the B-26, and my orders were to report to B-26 Transition on April 26 with 11 days enroute authorized. This let me go home until I was to report to Del Rio, Texas.

Nick Mannick lived across the street from me in Minneapolis and had just graduated from single-engine school in Class 44-D, and he was home at the same time. Bob Perry had graduated from twin engine school in class 44-D somewhere in Texas and he was also home then. Bob Perry and I worked at Minneapolis-Honeywell at the same time and we enlisted together on the same day. We three brand new officers spent a few nights at The Dome which was a downtown watering hole on Hennepin Avenue in Minneapolis.

One day while home, I ran into Harry Porter in downtown Minneapolis who was a year behind me at Washburn High School. He was in the same high school class with Nick Mannick and Bob Perry. Harry Porter had orders to report to Del Rio, Texas for B-26 transition at the same time I would be going. We would go through B-26 training together including being on the same orders sending us overseas by way of ferrying B-26s to England, flying along the southern route. More on this later.

## **Laughlin Field - Del Rio, Texas (April 27, 1944 - August 15, 1944)**

Harry and I flew to Del Rio for Transition Training and reported in together. After getting into our BOQ (Bachelor Officer Quarters) we headed down to the flight line to look over a B-26. It was night time by then, and that plane looked huge. By today's standards, it is rather small. It holds a crew of six normally so it is considerably larger than anything we had flown up to then.

Each phase of the flight training moved up in size and complexity of the aircraft. The B-26 would cruise at 200 mph compared to the 90 mph of the AT-17. Training included stalls, single-engine procedures, formation, night, cross-country, landings and takeoffs, and of course, ground school and PT (Physical Training). We had flights with instructors sitting in the copilot seat, and our first pilot time was with another student in the right seat. I added 120 hours flying time to my total.

We were allowed one overnight cross-country flight, and of course, the destination would be at the discretion of our instructor pilot. He had a brother who was a B-26 pilot at McDill Field in Tampa Florida, and we flew over there to meet him. There were two of us on the trip besides the instructor pilot.. I don't remember the name of the instructor, but the other student was Ted Martin who was a close friend. Ted Martin was lost on the February 10, 1945 mission covered later in this report. I often wished I could have flown up to Minneapolis for showing my Dad what a B-26 was and maybe even doing a little buzz job over my parent's lake home. It was only a dream that would have been fun to do.

Ciudad Acuna was just across the border in Mexico from Del Rio and we went there a few times while off duty. We were paid in two-dollar bills so that the effect of our presence on the Mexican and Del Rio economies could be felt and possibly measured.. This was my first exposure to Mexican food, but I usually ordered American cuisine. I learned to like Mexican-American food later in life after I and my family moved to Dallas in 1963. After learning how to fly the B-26, our next step was to pick up a crew and train together in the Replacement Training Unit.

## **Barksdale Field - Shreveport, LA. (August 16, 1944 - November 10, 1944)**

The RTU, or Replacement Training Unit, was at Barksdale Field in Shreveport, Louisiana where our crew was assembled. Ralph Turner was assigned as Copilot, George Sutcliffe as Bombardier-Navigator, Joe Werra as Flight Engineer and Gene Morris as Armorer. There was a Radio Operator with us for awhile, but a troublemaker and we got rid of him. His replacement was Johnny Amber who had already flown a tour of 65 combat missions in Europe as a Radio Operator. This made up our six-man crew.

This phase included a lot of formation flying, night flying, even night formation flying which was quite difficult. We had practice bomb runs for the bombardier and the gunners fired their machine guns a few times. The Bombardier-navigator manned the gun in the nose where he was positioned

during flights, the Engineer was the tail gunner, the Radio man had the guns in the waist windows and the Armorer was in the turret on top. We flew down to the gulf one day to let the gunners shoot at the white caps on the water. As it turned out, there would be only one future combat mission when these guns would be fired at enemy fighter planes. We logged 131 hours in the air at Barksdale.

## **Ferry B-26 to ETO (November 14, 1944 - November 24, 1944))**

Upon completion of RTU, we were ready to be shipped overseas. There were 36 crews on the orders and the rumors floated about that there were no more flights ferrying new B-26s over the southern route to the European Theater of Operations (ETO).. Then the rumors started that there would be some more planes to be ferried over, and this rumor became true. They selected the 18 crews in the last half of the alphabet on the orders to go to Savannah, Georgia and pick up a plane for ferrying to England. My name was in the last half of the alphabet and that is how we were selected.

In Savannah, we were assigned ship number 44-67924 and had one flight there to calibrate the air speed indicator and something else that I can't remember. We then flew to West Palm Beach to pick up our Secret Orders and to get our briefing for the trip.

The route was from West Palm Beach, Florida to Borinquen Field in Puerto Rico to British Guiana, then to Belem Brazil, and Natal Brazil in South America, then across the Atlantic to the Ascension Island in the south Atlantic, Accra in Africa, Dakar in Africa, Marakech in French Morocco and then up to England.

We left West Palm Beach on November 10, 1944 with our orders marked "Secret" and not to be opened until we were one hour out to sea, so to speak. We landed in England November 25, 1944. The route took us across the equator twice, over the mouth of the Amazon River which is 100 miles wide at the mouth, the Atlantic Ocean, the Sahara Desert and the English Channel. Pretty exciting stuff for a 22 year old.

When we arrived at Belem, Brazil, we saw a sign that said, "World Premiere of Rhapsody in Blue." and it was a great movie. I was a little naive in believing it was the World Premiere and that the Army was really going all out for us by having this special entertainment event so far away from home. The leading character was played by Robert Alda, father of Alan Alda, lead actor in the TV show, MASH.

There were other types of aircraft flying the same route. Each day, the C-47s would take off first because they were the slowest. The C-46s would take off next because they were a little bit faster. We were third in line followed by the A-26s. Of course, the A-26s would arrive at the next base first, then us, then the C-46s and finally the C-47s.

The air strip at Belem was carved out of the jungle. In the morning, after we had boarded the plane and checked out the engines, we taxied toward the runway and asked the tower for permission to take off even though all the C-47s and C-46s hadn't left yet. We were granted clearance and started

down the runway. Normal operating procedures call for the fuel mixture to be in auto-rich for takeoff. We had decided to have the full rich setting because we thought the air would be thinner this close to the equator and that the richer mixture would give us more power for takeoff.

As we rolled down the runway, the air speed was not picking up as quickly as required and the forest at the end of the runway was fast looming ahead. I eased back on the yoke, and I swear we missed the top of those trees by inches or a few feet. The tower was yelling at us to fly back over the field because of the black smoke that was trailing us. It was exhaust from our engines, caused by the full rich mixture. The mixture was set back to auto-rich after we had gained enough flying speed and the black smoke had abated when we passed over the field.

From the radio traffic, we thought we heard something about a plane crash, and this was confirmed by other pilots when we arrived at Natal, Brazil. That plane had taken off down wind before us and that is what we had done. Taking off down wind accounts for the close call we had with those trees near the far end of the runway. The other pilots we had talked with after landing in Natal told us the tower instructed the rest of the planes to start their take-off from the other end of the runway so they could take off into the wind.

From Natal, we flew to the Ascension Island in the south Atlantic Ocean. This would be about eight hours flying over the open waters of the south Atlantic Ocean. We were equipped with two 250 gallon fuel tanks mounted in the bomb bay which gave us the necessary range to make this extended flight. A celestial navigator was assigned to us as a backup in case our radio equipment wouldn't get us there. We were tuned to the radio compass station on the island, but needed the celestial navigator to get us there in case a German submarine sent out radio signals leading us away from our destination and into the drink.

Harry Porter's plane was lined up in front of us ready for takeoff. After we were flying over the water, I radioed to him that I was behind him and could see his plane and the plane to his right.

I had passed him and actually was the plane to his right, but I wanted him to think I was still behind him.

I set the throttles for a little more speed and asked Harry if he could still see the plane to his right. He said it was farther ahead, but he could still see him. I told him I could still see both planes, but one was almost out of sight (mine). After I had flown out of his sight, I asked him if he could still see the other plane (mine) and he said no. He was surprised to find me in the Officers Club, having a 10 cent daiquiri in my hand when he came in but he only smiled a knowing smile at me. We never discussed this deception.

After we landed in Accra in Africa on our leg from the Ascension Island, we had parked the plane and were surprised when little black kids climbed up on the plane and looked down at us from the open hatch at the top of the radio compartment. They wanted us to give them some K-rations and got our immediate attention with their English accents. We thought they must have gone to school with teachers from England. It was most amusing to hear black children speak with English accents. From Accra we flew a comparatively short hop to Dakar and then to Marakech, French Morocco, flying over the Sahara Desert to get there.

We had Thanksgiving dinner in Marakech, served by Italian POWs. Our flight from there to England carried us around Portugal and Spain since these countries were neutrals, and we were forbidden to fly the more direct over these two countries. Weather in England had been bad for several weeks and there were many more crews who were held up in Marakech at this time. We were all supposed to fly together in loose formation, but it soon became very loose and we flew the rest of the way to England on our own.

As we flew over the English countryside, we could see the open fields and the myriad of hedgerows. It was a beautiful sight and beckoned me to return to England after the war.

When we arrived at the destination air field in England, the low cloud cover prevented a normal landing pattern, and there were a lot of planes flying about in these clouds trying to land.

There were flares being shot up to show us where the field was located, but at the time we didn't know the reason for the flares. Nobody told us about flares. I spotted an opening in the clouds, dived down through it and hit the runway much faster than normal. I had to almost stand up on the brakes to slow us down enough for the turn off the end of the runway and we were going faster in that turn than we should have.. We made the turn all right, but the brakes were smoking hot when we pulled up to the parking spot.

I wished afterwards that I had taken some of the emergency K-Rations that were on board the plane during our entire trip. There was a large supply left over, and they would have been good snacks to have around later.

## **Replacement Depot - Stone, England (November 25, 1944 - January 25, 1945)**

After landing in England, we were herded into Army trucks for our journey to a facility at Stone, England which was a replacement depot. There were hundreds of men there awaiting assignment to a combat unit. I ran into Bud Hurd who was behind me in high school and later was a fraternity brother at the University of Minnesota after the war. His buddy, Thelbert H. Ramsey, was a buddy of mine at the college training detachment in Columbia, MO. They were both C-47 pilots, awaiting assignment like the rest of us.

Our crew was at Stone through Christmas 1944 and up to near the end of January, 1945. There were pot-limit poker games, black jack and other card games such as Hearts to pass the time during this waiting period. . One time I shot the moon successfully when we used two decks of cards because we had so many players in the game. News of the Battle of The Bulge was constantly being reported, and we all listened with great interest and concern.

It was in the last week in January 1945 when we were taken in a truck to a field near Plymouth, England in preparation for going to our combat unit. . While waiting for our transport, we went rabbit hunting with our 45 automatic pistols . The only thing we could hit was the ground and we were no threat to the prey.. A C-47 picked us up at the airstrip and dropped us off at a B-26 base somewhere in France where we spent the night. We were then picked up by a 6x6 Army truck and hauled to our base at Roye-Amy, France, the home of the 391st Bomb Group in the Ninth Air Force.

We were assigned to the 575th Bomb Squadron. I learned later that Porky Nelson went to the 322nd Bomb Group.

# **Ninth Air Force - 391st Bomb Group - 575th Bomb Squadron**

**(January 26, 1945 - April 15, 1945)**

The code name for this base was Cupfinal and was designated A-73. There were several new crews assigned to this Group that had gone through training with me, but they were assigned to different squadrons. Our crew was assigned to the 575th Bomb Squadron and in a few days we flew a practice mission to learn the procedures of a combat mission.

During this practice mission, I was assigned as a copilot with the pilot being a regular copilot who was being given the opportunity of flying as a first pilot. We ran into some weather and were diverted to another B-26 base where we landed and spent the night on Army blankets on the floor in a gymnasium. While in the landing pattern, we ran into some clouds, and the pilot let the nose go up approaching a stall when I had to slam the wheel forward to maintain flying speed. We were too low to the ground to be able to recover from a stall. I did not report this incident nor did I pursue the matter with this guy, but I probably should have reported it.

The next morning, the decision was made for us to fly a combat mission from this base, and this would be our first mission as a crew. Ralph Turner was on our plane during the practice mission as an observer making it possible for our regular crew to fly the planned mission.. After the usual mission briefing, we went out and started the engines. The right engine caught on fire, Ralph grabbed a fire extinguisher, climbed out of the plane and started shooting the stuff into the flames coming out of the engine. I shut down the other engine and got out to help. Some flaming fuel dropped to the ground and kept burning, and I pushed snow over on it to try and put it out. Someone from another plane came over with another fire extinguisher and we finally got the fire stopped.

We didn't go on the mission that day. We were assigned to position 5 in the 6 ship formation so I assumed that the pilot assigned to position 6 flew in position 5 where it is much easier to fly on the number 4 plane. That plane did not return from the mission. Perhaps we were spared the same fate, but who knows if my position would have been exactly where his plane was when they took the hit.

Our first combat mission was scheduled for January 31, 1945 but delayed a day because of bad weather. The delay was announced over a loud speaker system and the message was "Sack time, all day." "Sack time 30 minutes" meant the mission is being delayed 30 minutes, and all times announced at the mission briefing were put back 30 minutes. On this first mission, I flew as copilot and Ralph Turner, our copilot, flew as an observer on the same plane. This was our maiden flight into the unknown.

## Mission Detail with the 391st Bomb Group

| Sortie # | Date    | Duty | Combat Time | Place          | Targets in Germany             |
|----------|---------|------|-------------|----------------|--------------------------------|
| 1        | 2/1/45  | CP   | 3:30        | Nassau         | Rail Bridge                    |
| 2        | 2/8/45  | P    | 3:00        | Nutterden      | Defended Area                  |
| 3        | 2/10/45 | P    | 4:15        | Berg Gladbach  | Vehicle Repair and Supply Base |
| 4        | 2/18/45 | P    | :45         | Sortie Aborted | Generator Failure              |
| 5        | 2/19/45 | P    | 3:25        | Pracht         | Rail Bridge                    |
| 6        | 2/21/45 | P    | 4:00        | Bad Oyenhausen | Rail Bridge                    |
| 7        | 2/23/45 | P    | 3:15        | Erkelenz       | Communications Center.         |
| 8        | 3/9/45  | P    | 4:20        | Wiesbaden      | Marshaling Yard                |
| 9        | 3/12/45 | P    | 3:50        | Fronenburg     | Marshaling Yard                |
| 10       | 3/14/45 | P    | 3:40        | Nuenkirchen    | Communication Center.          |
| 11       | 3/17/45 | P    | 3:25        | Altenkirchen   | Marshaling Yard                |
| 12       | 3/22/45 | P    | 3:50        | Coesfeld       | Communication Center.          |
| 13       | 3/23/45 | P    | 3:10        | Dinslaken      | Communications Point.          |
| 14       | 3/25/45 | P    | 3:30        | Dierdorf       | Communication Center.          |
| 15       | 3/30/45 | P    | 4:40        | Bad Oyenhausen | Tank Assembly Plant            |
| 16       | 3/31/45 | P    | 4:00        | Marienburg     | Storage Area                   |
| 17       | 4/7/45  | P    | 4:35        | Cottigen       | Marshaling Yard                |
| 18       | 4/9/45  | P    | 5:00        | Bad Berka      | Storage Area                   |

Those above are the missions with the 391st Bomb Group with the first one being the only mission where I was not the first pilot. We had to abort the fourth mission because the generator failed. A ground crew supervisor told me later that some "window" aluminum strips had found their way into the generator to cause its malfunction. I felt guilty about aborting the mission and this report made the aborting decision legitimate. We were given credit for this mission, but I don't count it because it was only 45 minutes and not over enemy territory. I flew four more missions with the 320th Bomb Group which came later giving me 21 altogether.

Our third mission with the 391st Bomb Group was February 10, 1945 and that date is significant to me for several reasons. First, it was my parents wedding anniversary and one year later, my brother was born on the exact same date. Further, the mission that day was a rough one. We were up near Cologne, Germany which was heavily fortified with anti-aircraft batteries. In addition, we had to battle cumulus clouds which made the air very turbulent. We made several passes at the target as a full group of 36 ships, but the clouds caused the formation to break up and orders were to bomb the target as individual 6-ship flights.

After dropping our bombs through the turbulent clouds, the planes in the flight scattered and the order was given for every ship to be on its own. We headed for the lines and I asked the bombardier-navigator where we were and to set us a course for our home base. We carried about 250 gallons of fuel in each set of wing tanks when we took off, and our gauges showed about 25 gallons left in each one.

Fortunately, we saw a number of B-26s a couple of miles off to our left going in for landings, so we headed over there. It was near Metz, Belgium. We were given permission to land, flew onto the final approach, the wheels were lowered and locked, but the flaps did not come down when the lever was lowered.. With flaps, the tail is up and the nose is down so the pilot can see the runway ahead. With no flaps, the view of the runway was way out in front of the plane.

I didn't want to go around again because we were low on fuel, and since I was this close to the ground, I wanted to get down as soon as possible. I was over the runway now and just pushed the nose down and we hit the ground going over 100 miles an hour. I applied the brakes and there were no brakes.. The end of the runway was fast approaching, and luckily, I remembered the emergency brake system. I reached up and pushed the "T" handle which slammed air into the brakes and locked them. We skidded to a halt just short of the end of the runway and far enough to the right, allowing other B-26s that followed to get onto the taxi strip.

We climbed out and found fuel and hydraulic fluid streaming down the fuselage from holes just behind the pilot's seat. This explained the low fuel reading and why we had no hydraulic pressure for the flaps and the brakes. The rubber was worn down to the fabric on the tires from skidding to the stop on the metal fighter plane landing strip.

We were very lucky that the wheels came down and locked as we approached the runway.. We were also lucky this field was so nearby when we needed it.. If we had been forced to continue on toward our home base with the low amount of fuel left, there is no telling what would have happened. Would we have had to bail out and parachute down or would we have had to look for a farmer's field in which to crash land?. We were spared those anxious decisions. Another reason this date is so

significant is the loss of a good buddy, Ted E. Martin who was also on the mission that day. We went through a lot of training together and had a lot of fun when off duty. He will always be remembered.

We were on only one mission when we were attacked by German fighters. It was such a rare occasion that many of the base personnel were out watching as we came in for landing after the mission. I saw one jet and another I thought was a P-47 with a German cross painted on the side.

He flew along side us quite close before he started his turn into us, but he didn't hit us. Probably a young kid with very little training. By this time, the Allies had complete dominance of the air and a fighter threat was rare. This was probably early March of 1945, not long before the war ended.

Our crew was assigned a night training flight, and we decided to fly down to Paris which was only about 50 miles south of our base. It is truly the city of lights and the sight was magnificent. An infinite number of bright lights is difficult to describe. It was a brilliant jewel below us, and we flew as low as we dared. The Sacre Coure was off to our right, maybe a little below us and we circled around and above the Eiffel Tower. I learned later that Charles Lindbergh circled the Eiffel Tower at night just before landing at Le Bourget Field at the end of his epic flight across the Atlantic in 1927.

While in France, we picked up some French words and phrases that we interspersed with our own language on occasion. One word was beaucoup (pronounced bo coo) meaning much. If we wanted our parents to send candy or cigarettes or most anything that was rationed back home, the letter making the request could be shown to the retailer in lieu of ration stamps. I asked my Mom to send me beaucoup popcorn, meaning I wanted her to send me a lot of popcorn.. My letter sent her all over town trying to find this special popcorn called beaucoup. I forgot that my Mom did not know French as well as I did, and neither did any of the sales clerks she saw. However, she did send me some regular popcorn as a substitute.

The 391st BG was scheduled to convert from the B-26 to the A-26 type aircraft and included a move to Asche, Belgium. I had one chance to fly the A-26, but was not one of the pilots selected to be with the group after it was converted to the new aircraft.

I flew my last mission with the 391st on April 9, 1945. Some of the other crews that were also not selected to go to Asche, and including us, were transferred to the 320th Bomb Group in the First Tactical Air Force in Dole, France.

## **First Tactical Air Force - 320th Bomb Group - 442nd Bomb Squadron (April 16, 1945 - June 1, 1945)**

Our officers' quarters were in a former insane asylum, and the setup was very comfortable. Meals in the mess hall were served by local young women which was a big departure from eating meals out of a mess kit.

## Mission Detail with the 320th Bomb Group

| Sortie # | Date    | Duty | Combat Time | Place                | Target        |
|----------|---------|------|-------------|----------------------|---------------|
| 19       | 4/20/45 | CP   | 5:00        | Ingolstadt Kosching  | Ammo Dump     |
| 20       | 4/24/45 | P    | 4:10        | Schwabmunchen        | Ammo Dump     |
| 21       | 4/30/44 | CP   | 5:00        | Ile d'Oleron, France | German Troops |
| 22       | 4/30/44 | P    | 4:05        | Ile d'Oleron, France | German Troops |

I was on two missions on April 30th which was over nine hours of flying time, an unusual length for one day. The second mission did not drop bombs because there was a 5:00 PM deadline for bombing. I never knew why there was a deadline, but it probably had something to do with the impending end of the war.

My last mission was eight days before the war ended. On May 7, 1945, my promotion to 1st Lt came through one day before VE Day. The war in Europe ended May 8th, 1945, and there was not any real celebrating of VE Day because we knew for days the war was about to end. The real celebrating occurred on VJ Day August 14, which meant the war was over for all of us.

## 397th Bomb Group (June 1, 1945 - November, 1945)

On June 1, 1945, we flew a B-26 to the 397th BG in Perrone, France designated A-72, where we were to await shipment back to the states for further training for the war in the Pacific. There were over 30 planes making this trip to the 397th BG where we lived in tents. VJ Day changed our future and, from then on, we did not have to look forward to going to the Pacific War. We continued to stay at Perrone until the process of going home to civilian life got under way.

To celebrate the Fourth of July, I went down to the flight line and asked the mechanics working on the planes at night if I could have a can of fuel, and they obliged. I went back to the tent area where we lived and poured a stream of fuel along the ground and then lit one end. We all watched our July 4th fireworks display as the flame traveled along the path laid out by the fuel.

We continued to get in our hours so we could get our flight pay. I had one assignment to fly several enlisted men to London. I flew with just the bombardier-navigator and an engineer as the total crew. It was my first flight without a copilot in a B-26 and I enjoyed it. I ran into Captain Jim Brennan, a P-47 pilot, at a long bar, filled with many servicemen, in the Grosvenor House. . Jim is an older brother of Frank Brennan, a golf buddy of mine after the war. The Brennans lived about two blocks from our house in Minneapolis.

With the war being over, things became more relaxed, and we had little to do. A friend was on temporary duty in the headquarters office and managed to get us mimeographed copies for three day passes. There were about four of us who decided to forge an officer's signature on the pass for a three day trip to Brussels, Belgium. A pass is needed to check into a hotel and also to be able to convert French francs to Belgian francs.

The maximum conversion allowed was 10,000 French francs, the equivalent to \$200 in US currency. We were given about 8500 Belgian francs for the 10,000 FF at the finance office in Brussels.. We learned that we could sell the Belgian francs on the black market for French francs. We sold 5,000 of our BF for 10,000 FF which left us with 3,500 BF to cover our hotel room for three nights and our meals. So, we had the 10,000 FF we started with and about \$80 equivalent in US currency for our Brussels expenses.

One evening meal was memorable. Steak, fresh lettuce salad and vin rouge. That lettuce was the first I had eaten in ages and tasted so good it made me love salads ever since. Several of us went to Brussels another time without any pass authorizing the visit. We had learned that there were some pilots who would be flying some B-26s for storing at a base near Brussels, and we asked if we could go along for the ride. The pilot who took us couldn't have cared less that we were stowaways. We went into Brussels after landing, but had no place to stay that night, and we didn't have a pass that would allow us to convert French francs to Belgian francs.

There were two of us sitting on some steps at the Grand Place that night when two military policemen on a motorcycle stopped by to ask why we were out so late. We explained that we ferried a B-26 to a base near here and just decided to come to town to see Brussels. They were loose about the situation and we escaped arrest and detention. Fran and I have visited the Grand Place as tourists.

The next day we went to try and get some money exchanged at the finance office, but it was not easy without a pass. After pleading with them, they finally gave us a small amount of Belgian francs for our French francs so that we could buy something to eat.. We then hitchhiked back to our base. Our first ride was with a major, riding in the back of a weapons carrier, huddled in his overcoat in the back seat.. He had asked the driver to stop and pick us up, and we climbed aboard. . He didn't say much and never questioned us about why we had to hitchhike. I don't remember where he left us off or how we got to the base from where he dropped us. We probably had to walk the rest of the way.

I went to Brussels twice, being AWOL both times, and no one in authority was ever the wiser. The war was over and I did not have a work assignment so I wasn't a deserter. Otherwise, we just spent our time playing cards or sports or sack time on cots in our tents.. My only guilt feeling was dealing with the black market foreign exchange the first time in Brussels. Both trips were wonderful and memorable.

Flying the B-26 came to the end in October 1945, but we needed to get in four hours flight time. to get our flight pay which would authorize flight pay for the next three months. One day, four of us hitchhiked to Rheims where we flew small observation planes to get in our hours. They were somewhat like Cub planes and flew much slower than the B-26, but we were all able to land them as we shot a lot of landings. We tried some formation flying, but it was like flying a kite and too different than the heavier B-26 to monkey around with. We did have fun flying low and herding some cows we saw on a farm..

## **Time to Go Home**

By October 1945, I had accumulated enough points to go home. I had 76 points and 75 were needed at that time, and in November we were trucked to Le Havre for travel to the ZI or Zone of Interior, a.k.a. the USA. Who should be on board the Vassar Victory ship but my old buddy, the one and only LeRoy B. Nelson. We departed Le Havre on December 4, 1945 and had stormy weather all the way. I had a bad cold, the voyage home was miserable, and the tossing ship made me feel worse. The only thing I could eat was cheese and soda crackers, and there was plenty of both available.

We docked in Boston December 13, 1945 and went to nearby Camp Myles Standish for processing where we turned in our government issue (GI) stuff. Porky and I were then put on a train to Camp McCoy in Wisconsin for our final separation from the armed services. The soldier processing was curious about our consecutive serial numbers, and we explained that we were together on the day we first reported and went through much of our time in the service together. It was the last I had seen of my very good friend, LeRoy B. (Porky) Nelson.

I think he may have been in the Korean War. By an almost unbelievable coincidence, I happened to be in his home town of Albert Lea, Minnesota while working for Coca-Cola after the war. I thought I saw him with two other A-26 pilots, which he likely would have been, in a newsreel in a movie theater. If it was him, I hope he made it through that conflict safely.

Home at last in time for Christmas, 1945 and on with the rest of my life. My terminal leave ended on January 23, 1946 when I was officially separated from the Service. Since then, the rest of my life has been great, with a super wife, Fran, and three fantastic sons, Todd, Mark and Blake. It would be a great world if everyone in it was as lucky as I have been and had a life as good as I have had.

-1st Lt. Richard C. Naugle

ASN 0-720331

**Submitted by:**

**Richard C. Naugle**