

Dear Bud

MAIL CALL:

Luverne, Alabama

This story concerns my first mission which was on August 23, 1944. On this particular day Joe Lewis, the Brown Bomber, was to visit our base at about 3:00PM. I was terribly disappointed because the mission and debriefing would take us way past that time.

Our mission was to Moosbierbaum, near Vienna. Just before the IP fighter attacked the groups behind us. I sat spellbound in my tail turret as about 20 P-51's P-38's, ME109's, and FW190's wove in and out of the bomber stream chasing nose to tail. In a few short minutes, the sky was dotted with burning B-24's and fighters. Here and there white parachutes blossomed bobbing slowly while burning aircraft pieces streaked the sky in oily smoke.

Our first pilot Kenneth Rounds was flying co-pilot with Capt. Stebbins, a more experienced combat pilot flying the left seat. With exception of the displaced co-pilot this was our very first combat mission. On the return leg the engineer reported the fuel transfer system was inoperative. The decision was made to try and make it back to Torretta. Lt. Mercer, our navigator plotted a straight in course.

As we entered the landing pattern the fuel supply was almost exhausted. Capt Stebbins fired a RED-RED flare, and the tower replied quickly with the same to give us a straight in approach down wind. The landing gear was dropped and it was my job to see that the yellow pin dropped into place to signify that the gear was down and locked. I called in that the right gear was down and locked, but as I watched the left one the ground appeared to be coming up fast. At the last moment I hit the floor and braced my feet against the bulkhead. Capt. Stebbins made a perfect landing, and we rolled for some distance. As I raised up to look out of the waist window the left gear folded up causing us to swerve to the left into an embankment. I was the first from the plane leaving by the hatch underneath the waist. It was sometime before the nose gunner Ken Crockett came out of the plane. We all came out without a scratch, with the exception of myself, who was conked on the head with a bail out bottle, but my injury was not severe. To my surprise and pleasure Joe Lewis was brought out to the site of the crash landing and I got a chance to meet him. Good things come to those who wait.

Sincerely,

Jim Ellis 827 Squadron



Ridgway, PA

Dear Bud & Bea,

I had shown an acquaintance of mine right here in Ridgway, who was in the 49th Wing HQ in Bari, the Torretta Flyer with the picture of Col. Lee decorating McQuillan and he said, "That was my old Boss ". He had given me some bomb strike photos and an original photograph of the one that was on the cover of the last Torretta Flyer.

From my diary the date of the mission is May 31, 1944 Concordia Vega Oil Refinery at Ploesti. Hit Target with 500 lb demolition bombs. Many enemy fighters. Much Accurate flak. Three planes from the 461st BG badly damaged, went down in the mountains on the way home. More cripples fell behind. One crew bailed out over the base. Only one hole in our plane. Flying time 9 hours. 27th mission.

I have some comments on the article "How I got to Torretta" by Bill Kinyoun. We left the states at the same time for Naples on the SS John Day on January 13th for a total of 31 days at sea. Toward the end of the journey food became a little scarce, and our squadron commander (767) gave us a little morale talk one evening. When he finished he asked for questions or comments. A voice from the back of the crowd spoke out, " Captain, we've been eating so many of those sea biscuits ,I'm wiping my rear end with a whisk broom". That brought down the house. It did more for the morale of the troops than the Captain's talk. I wonder how many remember that.

When we got to Torretta there wasn't much except mud, and we didn't fly for two months. On our first mission April 2, 1944, was a milk run.

Two planes were lost in a collision after bombs away when one plane peeled off too quickly slamming into another. We flew right through the debris. I don't know why we didn't hit anything.

Wally Robinson 767Sq.

Dear Bud;

Sorry that I took so long to answer your letter but I have had some trouble with my breathing.

I was initiated into the Regular Air Force in 1946(Thanks to Bill Keese CO of the 484th BG). That same year my wife had twins, a boy and a girl. Another girl was born in 1948. Served one year in Korea prior to my wife's death of a brain tumor in 1952 With the help of my mother and mother in-law I raised and educated my three children. I retired from the Air Force in 1961 with 20 years of service. After graduating from college in 1963 I went to work for the State of Alabama retiring in 1980. Right now I'm trying to get over the effects of a stroke doing many types of exercises

Give my regards to all of the gang of the 461st and 484th Bomb Groups.

Sincerely,

Claude A (Gus) Trotter Jr 484th BG



**TROTTER
CLAUDE A JR**

Dear Bud,

Torretta Flyer No #10 brought back a lot of memories. I was shot down December 17th, 1944 on the Oderstal Mission and I've been a paraplegic ever since. One is not supposed to live another 40 years, but on the whole life has been pretty good to me. The crew I was with were on their first mission and I did not get a chance to know them well.

Very truly Yours,

Chester Rudel, 764 Sq.
Bakersfield, CA