

Book Review
By Stanley A. Hutchins 824 Sq.

Ad Lib: Flying the B-24 Liberator in World War II
by William Carrigan.

As a former B-24 pilot, I couldn't put Bill Carrigan's book down. It has the detail of a lecture relieved by the ironic asides of a true raconteur. I felt very much like the wedding guest under the powerful spell of the ancient mariner. I also didn't get a lot of sleep after reading (too many names and faces came back)...a tribute to Carrigan's unadorned prose.

There are many who are grateful to specific B-24s for getting them home, or at least to friendly territory, but few confused this devotion with love of the way she handled or looked. Bill Carrigan calls her a "man's airplane;" he goes on to explain the need for four feet on the rudder (after maximum trim!) when an outboard engine is lost. His examination of the many ways of offsetting unequal thrust during the three hour drag home is first rate and worth at least two rounds of drinks in any reasonably quiet saloon.

Carrigan's bomb group (454th) and mine (484th) were a few miles west of Cerignola, Italy, but our groups belonged to different bomb wings. He never does say quite that he enjoyed his hours at the yoke of a B-24, but one gets the feeling of immense pride and thoroughness. I desperately tried to transfer into P-38s and did everything that a 19 year old can think of to shake B-24s dust off my feet. Tolerantly the 15th Air Force said fine, just finish your bomber tour first. The B-24, and my escapist attitude toward it, ruined my "feel" so that it took 10 hours of dual to check me out in an AT-6 in July 1945. I am grudgingly grateful to the B-24 for bringing me home over those 11 months in combat, still I never got to live my dream of rat racing an ME 109 into the ground.

Anyone who was there or who wished he were will enjoy this step-by-step description of every aspect of the B-24, interspersed with chilling, hopelessly-funny combat anecdotes as acrid as cordite. At the end, I found myself humming our squadron drinking song (tune of "Strawberry Roan")...

*Oh, that B dash two four; Oh, that four-engine whore,
 The boys who fly in them are sure bound to loose.
 At 55 inches she won't even cruise,
 Oh, that B dash two four....*

A POW'S MEMORY OF SURVIVAL

Herman J White was 18 years old when he enlisted in the United States Army Air Corps in July of 1944. He was a tail gunner assigned to the 484th Bomb Group. He participated in bombing missions over southern Germany, Austria, Rumania, and Yugoslavia.

As a Tech/Sgt White had flown nearly 25 missions before he and his crew lifted off the airfield in southern Italy on November 16, 1944, to bomb Munich, Germany. Ground anti-aircraft fire disabled number two engine and torched a fire in number three. With two engines feathered, the ship began to drop over 300 feet per minute as the cylinder head temperatures on the two remaining engines began to climb. One engine was restarted in an effort to fly over the Swiss Alps, but the ship continued to drop, and the effort to climb was abandoned.

The crew began throwing everything out that could be pulled loose to lighten the ship when the order to bail out came.

"When I opened the hatch to make my escape the other crew members just stared ahead. They weren't sure what to do, so I said 'follow me' and out I went", White declared.

As he came down, the plane appeared over his left shoulder to disappear into a mountain. "I thought we were over the Adriatic at 8000 ft, but we were at 3000 ft, 500 miles behind enemy lines. Each of us was scared and bewildered. There were 30 Germans with dogs waiting for us as we hit the ground," White said.

"The Germans began to fire at us but we were not armed. There was little to do but surrender." White said. "I was scared not knowing what would happen next. I knew the Germans were mad about the saturation bombing the Allies were doing."

The Germans took them into northern Italy through the Brenner Pass to Munich and placed White in solitary confinement. "I was in a narrow cell for four days and nights," White said. "It was dark, had a narrow window and I slept on the floor."

"They tried many forms of intimidation but I gave just my name, rank, and serial number"

When he was taken to a train station to be moved, a German woman noticed his unit patch on his jacket. "She was outraged," White continued. "Many of the civilians hated the heavy bombing we were doing. Before I knew it, nearly 30 to 40 civilians were gathered to hang me. The German soldiers prevented this and I boarded the train."

White spent the next seven days on that train, just he and the German guards. They moved him first to the Wetzlar transient camp in Germany, and then to Grostychow, Poland, where 10,000 enlisted prisoners were. Most of them were Americans; only 500 were Canadian or English.

"At this time the Russians were getting close," White said. "The Germans decided to move us to Barth, Germany, a POW camp for officers near the Baltic Sea."

"Before long we were liberated by the Russians. I thought my troubles were over, but what I saw between that time and when the RAF B-17s arrived May 15, 1945 to transport us back, I will never forget. The Russians treated their people badly. Many were displaced and starving. The Russians were only concerned with reorienting them," White continued.

Liberated, White was on his own, he had spent seven months in prison camp and had lost 25 pounds. "Hunger is a horrible thing. You wake up in the morning and it's right there gnawing at you. It's there all day until you go to sleep at night from exhaustion. That's the only time you can get rid of hunger, when you're asleep." White emphasized.

It was then that he was sent to Camp Lucky Strike. Prisoners of war from all over were sent there. "They fed us food without salt or pepper. Everything was boiled. We were given a little egg nog at night and no candy. It takes your stomach a long time to recover." White concluded.

The End