

HOW I GOT TO TENT 39 AND BACK

By Arthur C Barkley 827 Sq



Replacing a fuel cell in Broad Abroad. From left: Cpl Art Barkley, S/Sgt Jessie Hogan, and Cpl Edgar M Livingston.

I took my basic training at Keesler Field, Biloxi, Mississippi, then on to the Army Air Force Base, Salt Lake City, Utah. They told me they were assigning me to the Signal Corp. I informed them I had been deferred to attend Elmira Aviation Ground School where I earned my A&E license. So I took a test and was classified Engine Mechanic 747.

The Army Air Force sent me direct to Harvard, Nebraska, to join the 484th Bomb Group for combat training and overseas service.

Prior to service, I attended Elmira Aviation Ground School and worked for the Elmira Area Soaring Corporation, Army Air Corps Detachment, Elmira, New York. The corporation had contracted to train glider pilots. The planes we used for towing were Stinson L-1s and BT-13s.

We used Schweizer gliders, German sail planes, Aeronca gliders. In the fall of 1942 the operation was moved south to Bates Field, Mobile, Alabama, so flying could continue in winter. When the soaring contract ended I went to work for Waterman Airlines on detached duty at the Brookly Field Army Air Field, Mobile, Alabama. We prepared B-24s and B-17s for service in the

Pacific Theater.

Winter in Harvard, Nebraska was no picnic. We had to work in sub-zero weather to keep the planes flying, but we did survive, and all the shots in the arm too. The ground echelon left Harvard about March 7, 1944, for Camp Patrick Henry, Norfolk, Virginia, for embarkment on the SS Gideon Wells a Liberty ship converted to carry troops.

The Gideon Wells weighed anchor on March 24, and it was goodbye to the good old USA. We joined a convoy where our

speed was reduced to the slowest ship, about 7 knots. After crossing the Atlantic and entering the Mediterranean off the coast of Algiers, one moonlit night the German Air Force gave us a welcoming visit. The ship's gun crews were accurate and shot down a couple of planes, before the attackers left. It took 28 days to reach the Adriatic Coast of Italy. Because of suspected air activity by the Germans instead of docking at Bari, we had to sneak into Brindisi, Italy.

We were shipped to Bari via Italian rail that was something out of a silent movie. The cars were hooked together like log chains and had square wheels. It was a long bumpy



Broad Abroad undergoing pre-flight engine run up. Note the nose turret cover is still in place.