

other automatically to the amusement of the other men living in our barracks. The capers included welding knife, fork and spoon together, drilling holes under the handle of a mess cup so that it leaked as soon as it was filled, sewing up pockets and sleeves, and so on. Two other guys did the same sort of thing, but one trick boomeranged on the perpetrator. Gene nailed Gabby's shoes to the wood floor and when Gabby discovered this Gene expected retaliation. When Gabby wasn't around Gene put his own shoes under Gabby's bed and Gabby's under his. Sure enough when Gene wasn't around Gabby nailed down the shoes under Gene's bed. There was a lot of laughter from the other guys when he learned what he had done.'

Retaliation frequently featured in barrack pranks, the usual objective being to cause a high degree of discomfort or inconvenience to the victims. Royal Frey of the 20th Fighter Group:

'One time Altman and Lundin, who shared the first room inside the main entrance of our barracks, came back happy from an evening at the mess bar. The rest of us were already asleep but these two went from room to room waking people, joking, jostling and singing on the bed; good-natured kind of stuff and we all took it with a smile. Next day we got together to think up a trick to pay them back and somebody came up with a good idea. That evening when Altman and Lundin were kept entertained at the bar, the rest of us went back to the barracks and wheeled in the 35 bicycles which were parked outside. We piled these one on the other in Altman and Lundin's room. By the time we finished, the bikes were stacked to the ceiling and when the guy who had been holding the door open let go to close it, the bikes settled down behind. Altman and Lundin came back around 11pm and there was a lot of noise as they tried to get in their door. Eventually they succeeded and for the next three hours we could hear them giggling as they struggled to untangle and remove each bike. Their state of inebriation undoubtedly added to their difficulties.'

Youthful fooling in this man's world was not easily accepted by the more senior and serious. George Meshko encountered this disdain:

'Coming back from the "Fox and Hounds" one evening, we were fooling around playing airplanes on our bicycles, just kids' stuff I guess. I was an Me 109 and collided with a guy who was a P-47. Ended up on the road about a half block from the

base hospital. I got tangled up pretty badly and couldn't walk. Had to crawl to the hospital where they found I'd made a mess of my ligaments in one leg. They put me in bed, my leg in a cast, and elevated it. There I am for about a week with a dozen guys, most of whom have been shot up in combat. Towards the end of my stay a bunch of dignitaries arrive in the sick bay talking to patients. The guy in the next bed, who has his eyes all bandaged, gets a Purple Heart pinned on him. Then one of the officers turns to me and says: "What happened to you sergeant?"

' "I fell off a bike, sir."

'Boy, they didn't think that funny. Did I get the cold shoulder! Guess my feelings were kinda hurt. After all I'd flown 25 combat missions, which was more than any of the others had.'

Newcomers were inviting targets, as Bob Strobell found when he joined the 353rd Fighter Group at Metfield, England:

'In one Nissen hut, when a replacement pilot arrived he would find he had been assigned the bunk just inside the door. He was told by the other pilots in the hut that if he heard the air raid warning go off he was to scamper out that door as fast as he could and dive for cover into the ditch just outside. It was emphasized that if he didn't do this, he was likely to be trampled by a pack of pilots right on his heels, intent on getting out the same door. Air raid warnings were common, but rarely did any enemy activity develop around our base. The newcomer was not to know this and probably expected bombs to fall as soon as the siren went. Sure enough, it wasn't long before the air raid warning sounded one night and out the new replacement rushes, dives into the ditch and comes up covered in mud. And there, standing at the top of the ditch, was a group of pilots with silly grins advising him to get out of there because that was where they went at night when they didn't want to walk over to the latrines. The replacement pilot learned fast. Next night he moved down a couple of beds and waited for a new replacement.'

The newcomer was most susceptible to being duped when it came to the local scene away from the base. Here the 'old hands' could have great fun in bringing recent arrivals discomfort; and in the anecdote related by Whitmal Hill the discomfort probably included punishment for a late return to camp: "We were coming back to our base at Bassingbourn from a pass to London. At King's Cross station we encountered sev-

eral men from the B-17 group recently arrived at Nuthampstead, a new airfield a few miles away from Royston town on the opposite side to our base. These guys had obviously been on their first pass to London, for they were not sure which train they should catch. Anyway, they eventually got aboard and away we went. This was late at night and probably the last train. It stopped at several stations and when it pulled into one called Ashwell and Morden, villages a few miles south of Royston, the guy I was with Thornton, winks at me and says he's going to have some fun. As soon as the train stopped he stepped out on the platform and yells in a fake English accent: "All change for Royston." We guys from Bassingbourn knew that you didn't change. We could hear the doors slamming as all the Nuthampstead guys jumped off. The guard blew his whistle and the train moved off up the line to Royston. I expect the Nuthampstead guys are still looking for the jokers who gave them a mighty long walk.'

Practical joking among members of the crew was particularly marked, a relief from the rigors of combat flying, but also an unconscious bonding activity, much in the way a litter of cubs play. John Wilson, the navigator of a 96th Bomb Group B-17 crew, relates many amusing escapades such as the following:

'Our co-pilot, Charlie, came back from a bike ride in the country with six beautiful fresh eggs which he'd persuaded some farmer to sell him. Charlie was really excited about these eggs - they were the first we had seen in five months and kept talking about how he was going to have them cooked; no mention of sharing with the other guys in our hut. A little later Charlie had to go with our pilot out to the field to check the plane. Before he went he thought he had hidden his precious eggs where we wouldn't find them, but he was wrong. Next morning Charlie took the eggs to the mess sergeant and told him just how he wanted them cooked. So the mess sergeant gets a greased pan and carefully taps one of the eggs on the edge to break it. No luck. He taps again and still no yolk appears. He carefully looks at all the eggs and says: "Is this some kind of a joke Lieutenant? These eggs have been hard boiled." Charlie was more than a little mad at us; but, of course, we pleaded innocence.'

The End