
An Air Medal For The Flight Surgeon

By

Blair P Browne, 826 Squadron

Our crew arrived at the 826th Squadron in the very early morning of a rainy day in August, 1944. As co-pilot, I was grounded for five missions while the rest of the crew were certified to fly combat. Literally having nothing to do in the two weeks or so involved, I wandered the area and discovered the Link Trainer building where I met Sgt. Ted Mahan who was in charge of the trainers. It was something to do and something which I enjoyed doing, so I spent as many hours as Sgt. Ted would give me in the trainer.

But I digress.

In time, we built a hospital, which was part Tufa Block and part Quonset Hut, and where I met Capt. Jack M. Sheppard, M.D., of Little Rock, Arkansas, Flight Surgeon to the 484th Bomb Group. The Doctor and I spent much time together in general discussions of the war, the time before and what to expect after. These discussions were often lubricated by the ingestion of good old 180 proof grain alcohol. In time, Doc Sheppard allowed as how he would like to get some kind of medal out of this war. I suggested it would be easy to get the Air Medal and that I would advise him as to which missions to fly. Accordingly, he would stand outside the Briefing Room each morning and we would give him the thumbs up sign if the mission was perceived as a "Milk Run"; whereupon he would collect his gear and meet us at the aeroplane. I recall he flew all but one or two of the five missions required for the Air Medal with us; I do not recall which crew he flew the odd mission with. It would be interesting if anyone remembers.

I must apologize for his fifth mission but I was young and others in the squadron share in my blame. At a bull session one evening, it was decided by those present, that the good doctor should go to a tough target on his final mission. Sooooo, having been briefed on the mission for the day (Linz, Austria, I believe), we exited the

Briefing Room with broad smiles and thumbs up to the Doc and he hurried off to get his gear and met us in our revetment.

All was sweet innocence through engine start, warm up, taxi, take-off, assembly etc. until we crossed the Alps. Now Doc was no great navigator, but it was becoming obvious to him that we were far afield from our usual routes on his previous missions. He questioned us as to our destination, and



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I presume the Bombardier and/or Navigator gave him an answer. It was the Doc's usual practice to ride in the nose and as we were the alternate lead (we flew in the slot - #4), the Bombardier (Charles Lindsey) rigged an extension trigger so that Doc Sheppard could stand on an ammo can, look out the astrodome and drop our bombs when he observed the bombs exiting the lead ship.

When we turned at the I.P., the sky ahead was literally black with Flak and we were all a little nervous. At any rate, "Bombs Away", Doc pressed the trigger with verve, toppled off the ammo can, landed on his back on the nose wheel door (which sprang part way open), pulled his parachute and was recovered by the Bombardier.

Now our nose gunner (A. F. Segarra, deceased) always opened the turret doors over the target, so we had a good blast of air through the nose, which resulted in the parachute canopy coming up through the rudder pedals, which was our first clue that some-

thing was amiss up forward.

The Navigator (William T. Schwartz) always observed the bomb bay to assure all bombs were gone before the bomb bay doors were closed; so he was crawling back through the tunnel to the nose when he encountered great clouds of canopy. Eventually the parachute was recovered and Doc was sitting in the nose with a lap full of silk, questioning everyone as to what he should do if we had

to abandon the aircraft. Everyone suggested he be very careful not to tangle his chute and to not let go of it until after a slow count to ten. It became obvious to all aboard that Doctor Sheppard was NOT AMUSED!

Return to base was uneventful, except for the constant abuse of yours truly by the good Doctor, who would occasionally include the crew, the squadron, the group and the U. S. A. C. in his invective. Needless to say, I no longer enjoyed his company nor his alcohol for some time.

In due course, Major-General Twining arrived at the 484th and presented medals to all those qualified, including Flight Surgeon Captain Jack M. Sheppard. Later that afternoon, I went to the hospital and congratulated him on the receipt of his Air Medal. He castigated me once more, stating that he was married, had or hoped to have children and he saw no humor in our actions - "I could have been killed!"; whereupon I reminded him that he had a good story for his grandchildren and that no matter how much he embellished it, or how much he left out, he could depend on me to corroborate whatever he said. He finally smiled and we celebrated with a few glasses of his 180 proof; cut with water, naturally.

I have not heard of or from Doctor Sheppard since the end of WWII and since 49 years have passed, I am assuming he is no longer with us, otherwise I would not have written this story.