

5 April 1944

Headquarters Station Caribbean Wing,
ATC Morrison Field, FL
OPERATIONS ORDER
NUMBER 1141

West Palm Beach, FL 15 April 1944

[We were called into Operations one evening and this order was handed to our Navigator, Alexander Sobolewski, in a sealed envelope. On the outside of the envelope were instructions to take off and fly a heading of 180° for one hour and then open the envelope. I believe that Al had it open before the wheels were up. We were to travel "from Morrison Field, via the South Atlantic Route to El Aoina, Tunisia, reporting upon arrival there to the Responsible Representative, Fifteenth Air Force". It was a fairly routine crossing except that the tower operator at Borenquin Field in Puerto Rico refused to believe that we had engine trouble - so we didn't make the traditional liquor stop there. When we called into Belem for instructions we were advised that they were out of parking space and we were to land at Fortaleza, north of Belem. It was the rainy season and that little field at Fortaleza was a quagmire. I did manage to get out of the gate and down to a local bar to buy two small mahogany casks of "Cacheca" (?), a local potion made from fermented sugar cane and reputed to be 120 proof

We were refueled by a bucket-brigade supervised by a honcho who stood on the wing waving his lighted cigar and uttering imprecations at his crew. We took off in a light rain which was forecast to be our best chance in the next several days. Made it ok except that the pilot heads filled up with water and all the rate instruments went out. We turned back to Fortelaza and circled while trying to get rid of some of the fuel load. Couldn't do much about the plywood bomb bay liners stuffed full of blankets, C-rations and mail. The tower told us we had better come on in; there was a squall sweeping in from off the ocean. The pilot, Lloyd Breisch, had the nickname "Jinks". I don't know why. He did a great job. I congratulated him on the landings, particularly the third one. We stayed on the ground with that one. Tried it again the next day and did just fine. We departed at night so that we would make landfall off Dakar in daylight. When the co-pilot, H.O. McAllister said he would turn on the radio compass about 150 miles out and home in on Dakar, the Navigator came unglued. He said that he wasn't going to sweat all night long with celestial navigation and then have them take him in on the beam. Mac did turn it on but stayed on Al's headings and we came in 4 miles north of Dakar. Al said that he did that on purpose because Dakar is on a point extending southwest and he didn't want to miss it.]

On the way from Dakar to Casablanca, Al distinguished himself once again by taking us through a pass in the Atlas Mountains in practically zero visibility. Later, someone told him that the maps he had been issued were notoriously inaccurate in that area.

Arriving in Tunisia, our luck held true to form, there was no representative of the 15th AF there and no 15th AF. After a brief stay in an infantry camp we learned that the 15th AF had moved their headquarters to Foggia, Italy two weeks earlier. When we found Foggia and someone who seemed to be fairly "representative" of the 15th AF he made a snap decision and gave us instructions on how to find Torretta. We arrived there on 4 May 1944. Since we were raring' to go we asked how long it would be before we had the privilege of flying our first combat mission. The head of our wel-

coming committee looked at his watch and said, "Well, it's too late to get you on tomorrow's mission. " We had to wait until 6 May 1944 and were baptized by flying on the fifth mission flown by the Group: Pitesti, Rumania.

I have related in previous correspondence that the plane we flew into Torretta, Serial Number 44-40269, had a Norden bombsight and, since the 484th BG used Sperry bombsights and didn't have maintenance facilities for Norden, our plane, which we had flown from San Francisco, CA was assigned to another Group and we drew a plane which had been ferried in earlier and parked at 827th Squadron. Anyway, that evened up the number of planes and the number of crews in the 827th Squadron. I believe that the plane we were assigned, which carried the ship number 74, was Serial Number 42-78283. There is a picture on the back cover of Torretta Flyer #23 which shows a plane with these numbers. The picture is credited to Jim Pool, 825th Squadron. If he can verify that the picture was taken between 6 May 1944 and 18 August 1944 (my last mission) that should establish that was our plane. The list of planes in Torretta Flyer #24 indicates that #42-78283 crashed on 1/31/45; that's all. If anyone has more information, please let me know.

It has been a real kick digging through long-forgotten files. It is surprising how these yellowed pages have survived all those moves between wars. (Civilian engineers move more often than military people.) Several of the orders give "home of record" addresses. It may be possible, using the CD-ROM phone books, to find a few of the people who shared what must have been the greatest and most significant moments of our lives (up to now).

Sincerely yours,
Lesley L. Seyler

The crew is as follows:

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|------|----------------------|----------|-------------|
| 2/Lt | Lloyd Breisch | 0693840 | Mos 1024 P |
| 2/Lt | Harold o McCallister | 0761148 | Mos 1022 CP |
| 2/Lt | Alexander Sobolewski | 0700672 | Mos 1034 N |
| 2/Lt | Lesley L Seyler | 0701654 | Mos 1035 B |
| S/SG | Leroy H Smith | 39121296 | Mos 0748 E |
| Sgt | Edward F Fahey | 12177418 | Mos0757 R |
| Sgt | John R Brennan | 37350451 | Mos0748 E |
| Sgt | Elbert J Wallace | 17099250 | Mos 0612 G |
| Sgt | Lorin K Heimbruch | 36811573 | Mos 0748 E |
| Cpl | Richard K Rutledge | 20622561 | Mos0611 G |

College Station, TX
Dear Bud:

Receipt of your fall winter Issue of the Torretta Flyer reminds me to follow up with you. It is a good issue, you are doing a good job.

I have been in contact with Alfred Wittman in Ingolstadt for over a year now, and we have carried on a fine correspondence, thanks to your efforts to get us together. Also have been corresponding with Robert Willen the pilot who lives in Cincinnati; We couldn't make the POW in 1995, but did in St. Louis in 1992. Also I have been writing Bill Capece, our Bombardier fairly often.

I am enclosing a write up about my POW experiences in the Bryan-College Station Eagle. There are a few errors regarding my