

## **Easter Egg Surprise Left GIs Shell Shocked by William Allan 37th SQ.**

**From Sortie, 17th Bomb Group Newsletter**

Easter always triggers memories of a Sunday morning in France years ago. Our bomb group was flying daily cover for Gen. George Patton's Third Army, which was racing across Germany.

Crews lived in tents on the lawn of a chateau and had fallen into a monotonous routine: Up at 0400, breakfast at 0430, briefing at 0500, and takeoff at dawn.

Sometimes we were back by noon and were met on the airfield by Jeeps dispensing a choice of the world's worst bologna or peanut-butter and jelly sandwiches. That usually meant another mission was to be flown that afternoon. Once back for the day, there would be debriefing, dinner and bed.

It's still difficult to understand maybe it was a throwback to those gallant World War 1 days, but each member of a combat crew was issued a candy bar and pack of cigarettes for each mission. At debriefing, there was a shot of whiskey, always very good American stuff.

But the food, mission or no, was terrible. For breakfast: powdered eggs which tasted like Fels Naphtha soap, or pancakes so heavy they lay undigested until you got back on the ground and attacked them with the government's booze. The meat was always canned spiced ham at dinner with dehydrated potatoes which never fully regained their moisture and remained hard. Never was there a fresh vegetable, a salad, or anything that didn't come out of a can, box or sack. Food was consumed without comment. There was nothing else in the land of haute cuisine at the time.

Except once in a great while, farmers' wives came through the tents selling eggs. Not powdered eggs but genuine "in the shell fresh eggs." The women came around only during the day, and only those not flying could take advantage of their bounty. Cigarettes were the currency then. Great stories have been told about what a cigarette would buy in France during World War 11, but do not let anyone fool you. By far the most rewarding thing a cigarette could bring was a fresh egg.

Always there was bartering. The farmer's wife argued, "Un cigarette, un oeuf " And we argued back, "Un cigarette, deuz oeufs." Cigarettes issued for missions usually were of lesser known brands, and under no circumstances would the ladies accept them. Nor would they accept money, French or invasion currency, or

even Hershey bars.

So we smoked the lesser brands and bartered with the popular cigarettes, and the farmers' wives always won. We usually coughed up one good cigarette for one egg. Even so, fresh eggs were available only when the hens were laying and we were not flying, and the combination was rare.

This particular day began like the rest: Up at 0400 in that awful mental fog, with half the guys figuring to skip breakfast, when a magical four words swept through tent city: "Fresh eggs for breakfast."

V-E Day did not get more attention. No one really believed it, but no one wanted to chance losing out either. We all lined up, mess kits in hand, visions of two over-easy.

And there in one of those big GI aluminum pots was the soriest looking mess of hard-boiled eggs ever to greet man. Some were an ugly brown, some an awful purple, and some various shades between. Grousing was instantaneous and punctuated by the worst of profanities. Once everyone was convinced they really were eggs, the conversation centered on what

some bleeping so-and-so had done with the bleeping eggs.

As it raged, from the rear of the serving line came a giant of a man, in olive drab and in tears. It was the mess sergeant, and through his rage and tears he too was spouting profanity.

Slowly, the truth emerged: He had spent several previous days bartering with the farmers' wives. And most of the night trying to color the eggs for the occasion. It was Easter Sunday.

He had used coffee and onion skins, among other things. And in his opinion, the least we bleeps could do was show a little bleeping appreciation.

We, of course, hadn't realized it was Sunday, let alone Easter Sunday, and his speech (and our profanity on Easter Sunday) all but put us on our knees. We feasted on hard-boiled eggs, flew the mission, and thanked the Good Lord we got back to an Easter dinner of spiced ham, dipped in some sort of batter (meant to be pancakes), fried, and served with dehydrated potatoes palatable only with gobs of ketchup. I do not recall the mess sergeant's name, but I'd still like to wish him a very happy Easter, complete with fresh eggs, real ham and the rest of what today we take so much for granted.

The End

