

got to the girls' apartment mid afternoon. There were two GIs there, recently returned from the South Pacific. They had nearly finished a bottle of Peach brandy. The six of us sat around the remainder of the day and finally it was bedtime. The girls went upstairs to stay with a friend. One of the GIs was passed out in the bathtub. The other GI and I shared the bed. When I was almost asleep there was a big commotion. The GI jumped up and started yelling at Trechok. He accused him of sitting on his uniform. The GI then went into the kitchen and came back with a large butcher knife. He proceeded to chase Trechok around the chair about three times before I could get him to calm down. There was a knock on the door. The girls had come back to see what all the fuss was about. Since Trechok was no longer interested in staying there we walked around in the snow with the girls the rest of the night.

On New Years Eve we left Peterson Field for Harvard, Nebraska. That had to be the coldest place I had ever seen. Our wooden barracks had poorly sealed ice covered windows down both sides. The only heat was a coal-burning stove in the center. Showers were hot but otherwise you kept most of your clothes on. At night we walked to the Non-commissioned Officers Club. Fortunately the flight crews had sheepskin jackets, pants and boots. These could withstand the north wind and freezing temperatures.

There were a number of training flights. The only two I remember were a night flight to St. Louis which was a beautiful sight from the air and one where we tried to land at the wrong field. Another field was about twenty miles away from Harvard. We made our final approach and almost touched down before the mistake was recognized. The Harvard tower controller immediately knew what we had done so when we landed he said "Hi Ho Silver" and shone a spotlight to light our way as we walked from the plane to the operations building.

The group's first loss occurred at Harvard. Someone had left a live round in a ball turret gun. While the plane was being serviced inside a hangar the gun discharged. A bullet penetrated an office wall and struck a man in the stomach causing a fatal injury.

An attempt was made to break up the crew because Schiappacasse was not qualified for B-24's. There may have been other issues but I was not aware of them. In any case the six enlisted men made an appointment to see Captain Gorton, the Commanding Officer of the 825th Squadron. We pleaded passionately to keep our crew intact. We were already deeply attached to the real pilot, Schiappacasse. It worked and the crew stayed together although it was somewhat later, after Schiappacasse moved to the left seat, that the threat of dissolution finally ended.

In February we began our journey overseas. To provide space on the planes for some Headquarters people, eighteen aerial gunners, including Trechok, Bolduc and me, went by ship with the ground echelon. We first stopped in Topeka, Kansas where I celebrated my 19th birthday. My parents and sister drove up from Oklahoma City. The next stop was Camp Patrick Henry in Virginia on March 4th. On March 13th we took a train to Newport News where we embarked on the Liberty ship, William D. Mosely.

The trip across the Atlantic and into the Mediterranean was crowded but pleasant. That is except for those who were seasick. They spent their time in the toilets, called heads, or

leaning over the rail. We were quartered in the forward hold with bunks tightly spaced five high. Much of my time was spent watching the ocean and the porpoises playing in the bow wave.

Because of our aircraft recognition ability the 18 aerial gunners were assigned to the Navy gun crew. There were 3 anti-aircraft guns, a number of 20mms and a 5-inch gun on the stern with a maximum elevation of 18 degrees. My job was to pass the powder bags between the storage locker and the stern gun.

At the end of March we were in the Mediterranean. Early in the evening on March 3 we were under a submarine attack. There were no losses but the sound of depth charges was a reminder that we were in the war zone.

At 4:00 AM on the morning of April 1 General Quarters sounded. Since I was still awake I immediately sprinted from the forward hold, across wooden catwalks built over the deck cargo amidships, to my post in the stern. Even though the Navy gun crew had their quarters in the aft structure I was the first to arrive. Our ship was out of position about a mile or so from the convoy. Another 3 or 4 miles out was a cruiser, which was part of the escort. The cruiser was lighting up the sky with anti-aircraft fire. I could hear a plane in the distance. It was very dark and as I stood alone I tried to see the approaching plane but could not. All of a sudden a JU-88, which was below deck level, appeared. He had to raise his left wing as he skimmed across our fantail to avoid crashing into us. I had a clear view of the distinctive greenhouse nose and cockpit. Evidently he was a torpedo bomber and did not see us until the last minute because we were away from the convoy. Only recently did it occur to me that I was the first person in the 484th to see an enemy plane. If the JU-88 pilot had seen us in time to drop a torpedo this might have been the end of my story. There were many times when I saw enemy planes but not within 50 feet again. There were rumors that our ship got credit for one plane. The history of the 484th reports that 17 JU-88s attacked.

After an overnight stay in the harbor of Augusta, Sicily we landed at Brindisi, Italy on April 8, 1944, 28 days after departing the U.S. We were loaded on railcars for an overnight trip to Cerignola and the airfield at Torretta. The boxcars were small and the train traveled so slowly that when we tired of riding we could trot alongside. We arrived in late afternoon. Trucks brought our six man pyramidal tents. Telling my two crewmates and three others who would stay with us awhile to pick up a tent I ran to find a good location. I staked our tent site on a small knoll -next to an olive tree. That night it rained very hard. Because of the good natural drainage we were the only tent that did not have water on the floor. Early April was cold. Our bedding was a cotton mattress sack filled with straw and two blankets. Later, we received cots. Needless to say the flying suits made good pajamas for a week or two.

Meantime the planes were flying across. They first flew via Lincoln, Nebraska and Morrison Field, Palm Beach, Florida to Brazil before crossing the Atlantic to Dakar. After stops in Marrakech and Djedeida in Africa they arrived at Torretta on April 14th. Once again we were a full crew. Ralph Crafton had joined the crew in Harvard as Navigator. Carl Naimon had replaced Pacheco just before we left the States.

There were several training flights. The most important though were the check rides that qualified Schiappacasse to be our Pilot. Green transferred to the 461st and James I Adams was assigned as our co-pilot. The crew, which was named Archangel by Shippy's father, was finally complete. Incidentally, we flew several different planes including Numbers 33, 37, and 41 so there was never any plane with a name or nose art on it.