

This might be a good place to introduce the cast. Paul J Schiappacasse (deceased) was from Flint, Michigan and had graduated from Notre Dame. His service began in the infantry, which no doubt contributed to his down to earth manner. He was very much our leader because of our total respect for him. He may not have been the world's best pilot but he was as decent as any man can be. He was the only officer to be called by a nickname, "Shippy". James I Adams (deceased) was from Massachusetts. He later lived in Seekonk but I do not know if that was his original hometown. Like most officers he maintained a certain distance from the enlisted crew. He was a good co-pilot. Ralph Crafton was the Navigator. His hometown was originally Kansas City but after the war he has lived in Memphis then small towns in Arkansas and Mississippi. I heard that on the overseas flight from Brazil to Africa he made landfall within two miles of his target. Later he was offered the position of Group Navigator if he would stay for another tour, The Bombardier was Carl Naimon (deceased) from New York City. Since all bombs were toggled when the lead bombardier dropped, I can not evaluate his skill. He also was aloof from the enlisted men. In fact, he seemed to live on his own planet. Shippy said that was a characteristic of Bombardiers. Since they were the ones who actually dropped the bombs and thus pulled the trigger on targets and people below, it probably took a special attitude.

The Engineer, Walter "Dutch" Scheurs, was from Cedar Rapids, Iowa now living in Riverside, California. He had a Teutonic sense of precision. His knowledge of the plane and everything in it was phenomenal and was tested on several missions. He manned the Top Turret. The Radio Operator was Marion G. "Red" Young from Bonham, Texas, now living in Peralta, New Mexico. Red was a big, raw-boned Texan. He walked tall. His battle station was Waist Gun. Leo Raymond Bolduc (deceased) was the Nose Gunner and came from Worcester, Massachusetts. He was a milkman before entering service.

James E. "Rookie" Rook came from Hermine, Pennsylvania near Pittsburgh. He now lives in Stuart, Florida. Rookie was the Ball Gunner. He had the tough personality of one born in the steel and coal mine country. He laughed at the worst dangers and always met life head-on. Our Armorer and Waist Gunner was Walter T. "Dusty" Trechok. He came from Boston and now lives in Melbourne, Florida. Trechok was Lithuanian and not allowed to speak English at home when a child. He was a big strong guy who was always a little belligerent. Probably he had to fight ethnic battles while growing up. My nickname was "Junior" since I was the youngest by a few months. My position was Tail Gunner. Besides the Ball it was the most isolated part of the plane.

A day or two after arriving in Italy, three of us, probably Bolduc and J.C.. Morgan, who was in our tent temporarily, and I went exploring. We strapped on our 45's in their shoulder holsters and walked to a cluster of houses about three miles away. It turned out the natives were friendly. Since we were at war with Italy it was a nice surprise. Boldy spoke French so he was able to communicate reasonably well. Of course talking included a lot of hands and gestures.

Our living conditions were somewhat primitive. We bathed outside using our helmets for sponge baths. When it warmed up a little we suspended a water-filled oxygen bottle from the olive tree and had shower baths. Before too long the Group built a bathhouse with hot water showers. Like existing buildings on the field the bathhouse was constructed of tufa a type of limestone that looked like concrete blocks.

We then began training flights. All of our flying was in formation and that took a lot of practice to get right. Our formation for the 484h Group was usually in flights of six or seven planes with six flights total. These were identified by the phonetic alphabet as Able, Baker, Charlie, Dog, Easy and Fox. The individual plane positions were in two vees. Dog 11 was the lead plane in Dog flight with Dog 12 on his right wing and Dog 13 on the left. The second Vee would be Dog 2 1, etc. Sometimes a seventh plane flew in the diamond position as Dog 3 1. Flights were arranged left and right and stair stepped upward to permit the optimum bombing pattern when all bombs were dropped at the same time. The arrangement also provided the least danger from falling bombs and ejected shell casings to the planes behind. It also provided the best overlapping field of fire for the gunners with the least obstruction due to other planes. The Group leader flew in the Able 11 spot and the Squadron leaders flew in the 11 spot of their respective flights. Since there were four Squadrons and six flights two of the flights were composed of three planes from one Squadron and three from another. Formation flying was as tight as possible over the target and when under fighter attack. That meant that wings overlapped and sometimes a wing tip was almost in your waist window. Such flying required a lot of coordination and practice. It also took a lot of trust so the same pilots liked to fly together.

Our enlisted crew got acquainted with a farm family about a half-mile away. The wife did our laundry. The house was a typical long two-story building. The grandparents lived upstairs. They had lived in the U.S. for a while. The husband, Ralph, and his family lived in two rooms downstairs. The remainder of the ground floor was a barn with animal stalls. We visited about one night a week. Ralph would get his five-gallon bottle of vino and fill a smaller bottle. Between Ralph's English and Boldy's French we could converse pretty well. The countryside was rolling hills. During the summer the fields were covered with red poppies.

My first combat mission was April 30th to bomb railway marshaling yards at Allesandra, Italy. It was a tune up mission with light anti-aircraft defense. The next mission was again a milk run. On May 10th we flew where the big boys flew. The target was Wiener Neustadt an aircraft factory and field near Vienna, Austria. As we approached the target heavy flak began bursting all around.

Looking down I saw a line of 80 white mushrooms receding into the distance. It then struck me that these were the parachutes from at least 8 planes. These were from other Groups in front of us. The 484th had 2 wounded and 20 missing. My first 4 missions were with either Greene or Captain Gorton, Squadron Commander, as pilot. Finally on May 22nd Shippy was checked out on B-24's and flew in the left seat as pilot with Jim Adams as the new co-pilot.

Missions were flown almost daily with Wiener Neustadt and Wels also near Vienna being the toughest. On May 31, 1944 we made our first trip to Ploesti. This was a very important target. Five oil refineries were in the complex. Heavy flak and fighters were a given. The raid went smoothly. Dropping down to 15,000 feet from the normal bombing altitude of 20 to 22,000 feet we were coasting home. For some reason the lead navigator took us over a copper mine at 8,000 feet near Bor, Yugoslavia. We received a direct hit on the right side of the tail by a small anti-aircraft gun like a 37mm. The concussion stunned me for a brief time. When I regained my senses I heard Rookie saying the tail was gone. From his position in the waist he could not see the tail turret