

My last mission was on August 22nd. Our Pilot was Eppings. Adams and Scheurs were also on board. The mission was to Lobau near Vienna. The 484th received its second Presidential Unit Citation. Thirty-nine bombers took off; six returned due to mechanical problems. Three planes failed to return and two made forced landings on Vis an island off Yugoslavia. Twenty-five planes received severe damage from flak or fighters. We were one of the planes landing at Vis. One engine was out and another leaking oil due to flak. Vis was crowded with crippled planes. We had to clear one on the near end of the runway and then miss an overturned B-24 at the far end. We spent the night there. A Captain from the 82nd Fighter Group, one of the Tuskegee pilots flying P-51s, was also there. He said that he had immunization shots the day before. When his flight spotted bogies while flying at 20,000 they peeled off to investigate. The next he knew he was in a vertical dive at 5,000 feet. When he pulled out no one else was in sight. English anti-aircraft provided protection and Tito's Partisans used it as a staging area. We gave the Partisans our 45 automatics. Because Vis was considered occupied territory we flew from there to Bari for an overnight stay in the hospital. After delousing and a nice shower we relaxed in pajamas and robes before returning to base.

Within a few days I was headed home after completing 35 combat flights. Because long dangerous missions were given double credit I had completed 50 missions. First we went by truck to the 7th Replacement Depot or Repple Depple north of Naples which was across Italy from Cerignola. Here we were prepared for the trip home. Periodically we gathered in a field where we were asked to turn in any contraband such as guns because if found later we would not be allowed to sail. The local cadre must have made a killing from the piles of stuff that were turned in. One day we were asked if we would donate blood. They paid \$10 for type "O". Since my paydays were erratic I was broke. A truck took us to the blood center. After a sample was drawn we stood in line waiting to give a pint. Soon a technician called me out of line. It seems that I was not type "O" even though that was on my dog tags. No blood, no money. Later in the States I was typed as "A neg".

From the Repple Depple we transferred into a former Police barracks in Naples. It was a large stone building surrounded by a high stone wall topped with broken glass. I wrote to my grandfather that we were staying in a real building and sleeping on soft bunk beds - soft pine that is. For almost two weeks there was nothing to do except sightsee in Naples. Since I did not have the money to visit nearby Pompeii and Vesuvius, which was erupting, I simply wandered around. One day I stopped in a real barbershop for a haircut and shave. The barber sang a little opera music and shaved me with a straight razor. He began each stroke with the razor held at arms length and then swooped in one continuous motion to shave me. I hoped his hand eye coordination was good.

On October 8th we embarked on a newly built liner, one of the USS President ships. Traveling unescorted we reached the US on October 22nd landing again at Newport News. The accommodations and food were great compared to the Liberty ship.

I was shipped to Camp Chaffee at Ft. Smith, Arkansas where my papers and pay were updated. My next station was Santa Ana, California with a 10-day delay enroute to go home. I was welcomed home like a prodigal son. The folks had freshly painted the inside and everything was spick and span. Several relatives came over. One of my first actions was to call the young lady who had

written so faithfully. We had a party line and it was 20 minutes before a man on the line would get off. Finally I called her. She was busy that night. Whatever romantic illusions I had were dashed in a bucket of cold water.

One of my closest buddies was Red Broderick from Little Rock. We discussed going to California together. I tried to buy a Nash 400 so we could drive but could not close the deal. We agreed to meet in Kansas City and catch the Santa Fe Chief to California.

Arriving in Santa Ana we were treated royally. They operated on double rations so there was an abundance of food, especially milk and ice cream. I was in Santa Ana about six weeks. It was a reassignment center so there was no duty. Every two or three days I came back to camp to see if my name was posted. Otherwise my time was spent in Los Angeles. Hitchhiking was easy. My aunt and her family lived in Hawthorne so I spent quite a bit of time with them. My social life had been nonexistent since going into service. In fact I did not leave the base at Sheppard Field, Tyndall Field or Salt Lake City. In the other locations we were treated like second class citizens. It was nice to smile at a girl and get a smile in return.

Some time was spent at the USO in Hollywood. For Thanksgiving a half dozen girls invited six of us for a nice dinner. One of my cousins was 17 and working at Paramount as a graphic artist. He gave me a private tour of the studio and sound stages one Sunday. Another cousin was in the service. One evening we helped two young ladies with a car problem. Their tail pipe was dragging the ground. A short piece of bailing wire led to several enjoyable evenings. I met two other young ladies who invited me for dinner. That caused one of those embarrassing moments we like to forget. Their father told a story at the dinner table about his experience in World War I. His outfit uncoupled a tank car from a French train that was filled with wine. Two nights later I forgot where I heard the story so I repeated it at their supper table.

On Christmas day Red Broderick and I were hitchhiking back to camp. A man picked us up and invited us to his house for dinner. He lived in an orange grove and his chickens ran free. Picking up his 22 rifle he walked outside and shot two chickens for our dinner.

California was a nice change of pace. At the end of December, I was assigned to an Aerial Gunnery Central Instructors school at Laredo, Texas. Again there was very little to do off the base.

After completing the Instructors course where the top 10 percent would be given their choice of new stations I discovered that my choice of Will Rogers Field meant that I was best qualified to remain at Laredo and teach.

At least I got to be a flying instructor instead of in a classroom. We flew B-17s and B-24s. Sometimes the students were training to be instructors and sometimes they were armorer officers. It was an easy schedule with one or two flights a day several times a week. There was an Air to Ground range where we flew at 100 feet and shot at canvas planes on the ground. Texas thermals were terrible and we bounced all over the sky. Preparation for a flight was to spot empty ammunition boxes at strategic locations throughout the waist area because most everyone got airsick.

The most interesting training involved frangible bullets. Bullets were made of powdered lead and clay and were designed to be fired from 30-caliber guns but have a 50 caliber trajectory. We fired at specially designed P-39s that had armor on the leading edges of their wings and counters that recorded hits. The frangible bullets pulverized on impact. It was very realistic. Because