Wayne Sayles retired from the US Air Force in 1982, having served 10 years in the enlisted ranks and 10 years as a Communications Officer. After retiring, he earned a Master's Degree in Art History from the University of Wisconsin and founded *The Celator,* a monthly journal for collectors of ancient coins and artifacts. Over the past two decades, he has written 14 books about objects from the past. The story of William Edward Cramsie came to Wayne unexpectedly and pursued him relentlessly. That experience is partly what this book is about. The spirit of Bill Cramsie, never laid to rest, has seemingly orchestrated the telling of his story. It is a story of triumph and tragedy and an affirmation of the still mysterious power of what is sometimes called the collective unconscious. It is a tribute to many through the recognition of one.

Comments from 416th Bomb Group Veterans:

Bob Basnett: "Just finished reading your book, it seems to be very accurate and brought back many forgotten memories."

Ralph Conte: "The depth and effective accountability of events show up marvelously. It is, indeed, engaging reading."

Wayne Downing: "...an excellent story. Plus the coverage of the A-20 Havoc operation and West Point is extremely accurate and educational. (Are you sure that you have never piloted an A-20?)"

Bob Kehres: "It is so beautiful and so easy to read...I can't begin to convey the emotions it brought out in me."

Dick Wheeler: "...a marvelous account of a great guy and a true hero."

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SAYLES • FIRST TO FALL

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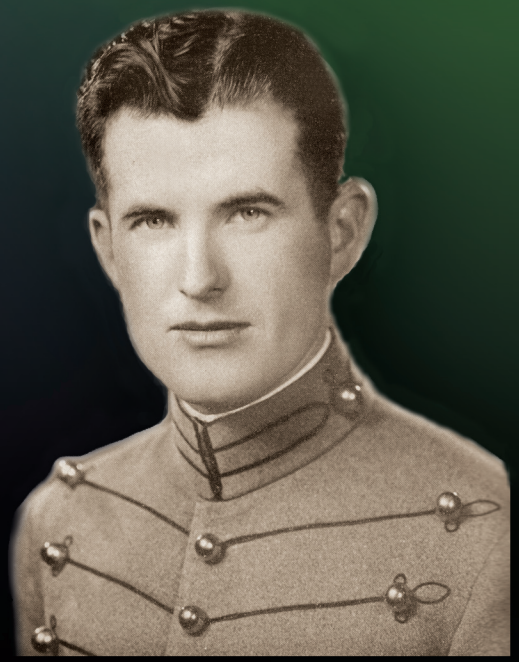
THE WILLIAM EDWARD CRAMSIE STORY



C/C

WAYNE G. SAYLES

FIRST TO FALL

The William E. Cramsie Story

by Wayne G. Sayles

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Lodi, Wisconsin
Clio's Cabinet
2008

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This book is dedicated to
the thousands of unheralded heroes
who have served our nation
when duty called

William Edward Cramsie
1919-1944

Ireland, Ireland

Down thy valleys, Ireland, Ireland,
Down thy valleys green and sad,
Still thy spirit wanders wailing,
Wanders wailing, wanders mad.

Long ago that anguish took thee,
Ireland, Ireland, green and fair,
Spoilers strong in darkness took thee,
Broke thy heart and left thee there.

Down thy valleys, Ireland, Ireland,
Still thy spirit wanders mad;
All too late they love that wronged thee,
Ireland, Ireland, green and sad.

-- Sir Henry Newbolt (1862-1938)

PROLOGUE

First to Fall is the story of one spirit lost during what, to this day, was the deadliest conflict in recorded history. In human terms, the devastation of World War II is nearly impossible to comprehend. The death toll worldwide was staggering and few nations or cultures were spared. Between December 1941 and August 1945, some 16 million American men and women left their families and put their hopes and dreams on hold to defend the cause of liberty. More than 273,000 of them paid the ultimate price for their patriotism and beliefs.

In every war there are heroes, living and dead, who by fate, fortune or circumstance come to be recognized in some special way. Every nation has its heroes (and, indeed, needs them) yet they inevitably represent a microcosm of the broader picture. A conflict of the scope seen during World War II generates heroes daily, with most never being recognized beyond a very small circle of family and fellow combatants. Traveling across the United States, one will see literally thousands of American Legion, VFW or AMVET posts named after local heroes. Members of the modern military frequently serve on posts or bases named after great leaders and fallen heroes. Memorial highways and bridges honor them. Countless libraries, schools, parks and public centers are named in their honor—yet few who consequently know their names will ever know what those being honored actually did. We tend to lose sight of the fact that every one of these names represents a real person who came, typically, from an ordinary path of life. They were thrust into an extraordinary circumstance and met the challenge—sometimes their final challenge.

Every thoughtful person ought to visit one of America's many national cemeteries at least once. Row upon row of neatly spaced and uniform white markers, stretching as far as the eye can see, attest to the true number of America's heroes. It's enough to shake the most cynical mind and to melt the coldest heart. This story is not about a brave young man whose hopes and dreams were replaced by one of those reverently-laid

markers (we might wish that it had been). Bill Cramsie does not lie at rest in the Sierra foothills where he grew up. Instead, this is the story of a fallen warrior whose spirit has wandered for more than 60 years seeking a place to rest. It is a story of unheralded heroism that finally can, indeed *must*, be told.

The class of June 1943 is famous in the annals of West Point for earning more combat awards than any other class before or since. Over the course of their careers, the 514 graduates earned five Distinguished Service Crosses, 52 Silver Stars, 148 Distinguished Flying Crosses, 187 Purple Hearts, 272 Bronze Star Medals (32 of these for Valor) along with an incredible 1197 Air Medals. Graduating right in the middle of WWII, a year ahead of schedule, these young cadets were immediately thrust into roles of critical responsibility and imminent danger. It's not surprising that so many of them failed to return. In fact, their class also holds the unenviable record for most graduates killed during time of war.

1st Lt. William E. Cramsie was the first member of the Class of June 1943 to be killed in action—the first to fall. His story would be one worth telling in any case, but even more so because of the way it came to light. His remains were never found and his spirit has wandered these many decades in search of closure. Remarkably, the most striking symbol of Bill Cramsie's dedication to Duty, Honor, Country—his West Point class ring—has survived. Through it, his spirit rises like a phoenix from the ashes. It has become the catalyst for a journey that has rekindled fond memories among those who knew Cramsie and respected him. The story of this ring's journey, which became my journey as well, has inspired and enraptured many who had never before heard of Cramsie—including some born long after his departure. It is because of this ring, and the seemingly metaphysical nature of events orchestrated by it, that the story of Bill Cramsie is being told. Through this telling, I hope and trust that his restless spirit will finally find peace.

While this story has a decidedly spiritual aspect to it, this is not an advocacy of any particular belief. It is enough to say here that the potential of the human spirit far exceeds our abil-

ity to comprehend. A study of quantum physics may take us to the brink of understanding these phenomena and what seems mysterious to us now may, one day, make perfect sense. The belief that an inanimate object can serve as a conduit for the human spirit is a widely accepted, if unexplainable, tenet of modern philosophy—an extension of what Carl Jung called the "collective unconscious". According to Jung, The collective unconscious contains the whole spiritual heritage of mankind's evolution, born anew in the brain structure of every individual. More recent studies in Quantum Physics have extended Jung's basic theory to an even broader world, opening a mind-boggling array of possibilities.

Bill Cramsie's West Point class ring is a stellar example of an inanimate conduit. Another illustration is the U.S. Navy's newest Amphibious Transport Dock Ship, the USS New York, that is scheduled to be christened in mid 2009. This ship, designed to carry combat assault teams to the far ends of the earth in America's war on terrorism, has a very strong spiritual component. The massive bow section was cast at a shipyard in Louisiana from molten scrap steel recovered from the World Trade Center in New York City after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. Navy Capt. Kevin Wensing, on the scene for this symbolic event, observed that "those big rough steelworkers treated it with total reverence... it was a spiritual moment for everybody there." The foundry operations manager, Junior Chavers, was on hand when the steel arrived from New York. He told a reporter that when he touched it the hair on the back of his neck stood up. Captain Bill Galinis, the Navy's program manager for this project, said "It's a tie that will forever bind the Sailors and Marines who sail this ship with the citizens of New York."

In both cases, Bill Cramsie's ring and the USS New York, it could be argued that some pre-established affinity is responsible for the magnetic, if not spiritual, energy that flows—that it is not the object that causes the sensation, but rather some individual propensity or sensitivity within the receiver. I might well have argued that point myself—before it happened to me.

First to Fall is a truthful story in most every sense—it is based on facts, often obscure, that we have been able to wrench loose from the jaws of history. The names mentioned here are those of real people—some of them still living. The Cramsie "diary" entries, though a literary convention, are based entirely on recorded events and likely scenarios. A few events have been fictionalized to allow for the presentation of strong circumstantial evidence, but these liberties have been taken as infrequently as possible and with, I trust, due sensitivity to the cause of truth.

Through the memories of people who served with Cramsie during WWII, fellow West Point classmates, and surviving relatives, we can relive an experience that many living in America today only vaguely understand. Nearly everyone who knew Bill personally is now 80 or more years old. Although time dims all memories, not one of those people that I could contact has forgotten the dual impact of his charismatic personality and his absolute dedication to the things he believed in. Reliving those memories with a generation on the precipice of extinction has been an unparalleled experience for me personally—not unlike watching the pages of history turn before my eyes. In 2008, World War II veterans are dying at the alarming rate of 1,200 per day. That number sadly includes several 416th Bomb Group members that I have met and talked with during the preparation of this biography. Within another five or six years the William E. Cramsie story may have remained untold. Was it merely chance that opened the window of opportunity here and now?

This story is, in part, really my story too. Interlaced with details about the life of Bill Cramsie are segments that recount my own experiences, some of them unusual and some very gratifying, in the search for this uncelebrated person. The reader will immediately distinguish our two "voices" by the diary-like appearance and cursive font of the Cramsie sections. In many cases, events described from the personal viewpoint of Bill Cramsie are followed up with a more formal and detailed narration of facts in my own voice. Transcripts from

actual Army Air Corps records are presented in yet another, more machine-like font. Unlike many biographies, the text throughout is accompanied by images relevant to the adjoining content. This convention, perhaps more journalistic than literary, will hopefully enrich the reader's appreciation of the setting and events.

The search has not only revealed historical facts and details, it also opened a virtual door into the past. In the process of writing this biography, I feel that a bonding took place between two spirits—one from the past and the other from the present—that in reality share a common spot in the eternity of the universe. It is therefore partly a compilation of data and partly an affirmation of the human spirit. If there is a cosmic force, or field, that binds together all of humanity and all human experience, it must ultimately find harmony in the balance of all things—a theme that man has consistently expressed in religious contexts for thousands of years. Good must balance evil; joy must balance sorrow and beginnings must be balanced by endings.

The story of Bill Cramsie has needed an ending since April 10th, 1944. His spirit has made a passionate appeal for closure through the ring that he earned, proudly wore and purposely left as a testament to his own sense of duty, honor and country. It has served as a conduit for the flow of information and inspiration, often leading me to places that I would not have gone and to people I would never have known. For me to serve as the interlocutor of Bill Cramsie's story is an unsought and humbling honor.

Wayne G. Sayles
Gainesville, Missouri 2008

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

It would not surprise anyone who knows Frank Kovacs to learn that he is responsible for rescuing the class ring of Bill Cramsie from eternal obscurity and finding the right home for it—even though its new steward was blissfully ignorant of what lie ahead.

The search for William Edward Cramsie began (as one might guess) on the internet where he was cited briefly on a genealogy web page created by Mary Ellen Gilbert, the wife of a distant cousin. It was through her gracious assistance that I was first introduced to JoAnn Hughes (a second cousin to Cramsie). Mary Ellen and JoAnn shared with me family information and photos that helped in reconstructing the early years of Bill Cramsie's life. Similarly, local historian Bob Burge gathered information about Bill Cramsie's activities at Placer Union High School in Auburn, California, while Kim Burton shared her bountiful knowledge about Smartsville and the early settlement there of the Cramsie family. Dr. Judy Antonello, a Minnesota based psychologist, introduced me to the subject of "Thin Places", which I had previously experienced without knowing why.

The friendly assistance of Marilee Meyer at the United States Military Academy (West Point) is gratefully acknowledged, as is that of West Point graduates of the class of June 1943, including John Brier, Ned Burr, Bob DeCamp, Wally Magathan, Dick Orphan, Sandy Sembach, Scotty Street, Joe Weyrick and Dick Wheeler. Alicia Mauldin-Ware and Debbie McKeon-Pogue at the USMA Library, Archives and Special Collections Department, were especially helpful and cordial in making available for research the voluminous records of that facility—and at very short notice, I might add. Meredith Neus, Ashley Jefferson and Rita Arno at Marymount College of Fordham University assisted with details of various social contacts between that college and West Point during the war years, and with the search for Dee. Chris and Sheran Daniele were also most cordial, helping research the Marymount/USMA connec-

tion and sharing remembrances and photos of Sheran's mother, Clementine Smith. Chris also offered many useful suggestions as a reader of manuscript drafts. John Robert ("Jack") Cleary, Jr. made it possible, under difficult circumstances, for us to finally contact his mother, Dee Rogers Cleary.

It was through Ralph Conte's book *Attack Bombers We Need You* that Lt. Cramsie's association with the 416th Bomb Group became clear. Ralph's book, written from the perspective of one who lived through it, provides a wealth of information about the group, its history and its role in WWII. It was also through Ralph that Bob Cramsie was located. Bob and his older brother Bill are sons of William Cramsie's only brother, Robert. Both have shared anecdotes and valuable information—including crucial documents relating to their uncle's service. I also was contacted, virtually as this book went to press, by Don and Tom Rickels, sons of Bill's sister, Ruth Cramsie Rickels. Their remembrances and shared photos are very much appreciated.

Many members of the 416th Bomb Group have been extremely supportive of this work, and have shared their friendship along with their memories. Special thanks are in order to Dave Andrews, Bob Bower, Bill Brewer, Al Damico, Wayne Downing, Ray Jones, Bob Kehres, Jim Kerns, Eldon Kreh and his son Charles, Willard Land and his son Miles, Robert E. Lee, Peter Royalty, Jack Sittarich, Don Sorrels, Carl Weinert and all the family members of survivors and those lost in action who participate in the reunions that inevitably diminish in size each year. I will always be particularly grateful to Bob Basnett for sharing his personal memories of Bill Cramsie which helped me, in a very real sense, to connect with the spirit that increasingly seemed to beckon me.

Of this extended family, including interested parties who have been "adopted" along the way, Doug and Jane Enman have contributed richly to the cohesiveness of the group and to the author's 416th database (which is now online at http://416th.com). Rick Prucha, Bart Singletary and Phil Stanley also contributed many photos and anecdotes to the site, thereby en-

riching our knowledge of the 416th during WWII. Dr. Larry Smith, writing his own history of the 416th, *Darwin's War,* is another dedicated and remarkable source, as is Carl Sgamboti, who leads the New England Air Museum project to restore an A-26 Invader once flown by the group.

Until recently, the Lone Star Flight Museum at Galveston, Texas was home to the only airworthy A-20 Havoc in the United States—perhaps in the world. Our welcome there and the opportunity to see this rare airplane "up close" was much appreciated. At the Air Heritage Museum in Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania a second A-20 is being restored to airworthy status. The enthusiastic assistance of the staff and restoration crew at that facility—and especially of Ed Klacik, who patiently explained to me the Havoc's construction and layout—was extraordinarily valuable. A third A-20 in the U.S. is preserved by the U.S. Air Force Museum in Dayton, Ohio. That beautifully restored aircraft is part of an exceptional display and also affords a very rare opportunity to see the Havoc up close. Though surprisingly rare in finite numbers, it seems that almost every year another A-20 is located in some remote corner of the world. The count is now at something above twenty specimens in varying stages of preservation.

The staff of the photo section at the National Archives in College Park, Maryland has consistently provided useful, courteous and professional assistance in searching for pertinent materials. Photos of aircraft and personnel provided by the U.S. Air Force Museum and the U.S. Air Force Historical Research Agency (AFHRA) are very much appreciated, while the staff and volunteers of the AFHRA section at Bolling Air Force Base in Washington, DC were also most helpful in obtaining access to those thousands of 416th Bomb Group records preserved on microfilm.

The internet's many historical resources have been of great benefit. There are far too many to mention—the amount of data retrievable from these websites staggers the mind. Yet, I'm particularly indebted to Tristan Cools for the site photos of Bois des Huit Rues that are used within and to Peter Apple-

ton for his excellent web pages about this historic site. Many official photos, taken by Air Corps photographers flying with the 416th, were made available to the public by Andy Fluxe through the New England Air Museum website. For details of academy life in 1940-1943, the books by Tom Carhart (*Still Loyal Be*) and Bill Yenne (*Black '41*) provide excellent background. Joseph W. Rutter's *Wreaking Havoc* and Jim Mesko's *A-20 Havoc in action* were helpful in understanding the capabilities of the Havoc.

Kenn Rust put the operational history of the 416th into perspective in his book *The 9th Air Force in World War II*. A real treasure trove of information about the V-1 "Buzz Bomb" and its impact on the Allied war effort is unveiled in *Impact: The History of Germany's V-Weapons in World War II* by Benjamin King and Timothy Kutta. Members of the 416th Bomb Group, who knew the V-1 launch sites only by their code name "NOBALL", would be the first to confirm that the effort to neutralize this weapon was costly.

As every writer knows, time is a precious commodity. The time required to effectively research a topic can lead to many long periods of immersion during which other important facets of life must yield some of their prior claims. The unwavering patience and constant support of my wife Doris was essential to the process of bringing this story to light. She traveled with me to gather facts in Washington and Beaver Falls; Galveston and Dayton; Tulsa and Columbia; Louisville and Oshkosh; St. Louis and Topsail Island—validating, through her own experiences, some of my observations.

It almost goes without saying that any useful book demands much more than mere words and pages. Presenting information, especially history, in a compelling and engaging way is much easier said than done. It was my good fortune to have the assistance of author Alice McVeigh in facing this challenge. Alice is the elder granddaughter of General Maxwell D. Taylor, who led the 101st Airborne Division at Normandy.

Several of those mentioned above made very welcome and useful suggestions as readers of manuscripts at various stages

of evolution. In addition, my daughter Stephanie Bloedorn and my granddaughter Sabrina Schultz (a very promising writer at the age of 12, I might add) helped in that respect. John Hooker, of Calgary, read a draft and offered welcome and needed encouragement. Dr. Lew Neblett, a friend with failing eyesight, read the entire manuscript word by word with a magnifying glass. No words can adequately express my appreciation for his unique perspective and determination.

Yet most of all, Bill Cramsie himself should be thanked for what follows. In assuring the preservation of his West Point class ring, an object of personal value beyond measure, he created a poignant time-capsule and a powerful catalyst. It is through this ring that his spirit radiates—compelling in equal measure our attention, our respect and our admiration.

Chapter One

The Message in a Bottle

"Make yourself familiar with the angels,
and behold them frequently in spirit;
for without being seen,
they are present with you."

-St. Francis de Sales, 1567-1622

The ring had come to me like a message in a bottle—floating aimlessly, without direction or meaning—out of nowhere. The minute it touched my hand, I knew that something in my life had changed. A feeling of excitement and mystery pulsed through my veins as I felt drawn to the ring like a moth to a flame. Though I didn't have a name for it at the time, I instinctively knew that I was at a "thin place"—one of those places where our consciousness comes unglued as our world collides with a world that we can not know. Some have described it as the door to Heaven, others see it as touching a Life Force or as hearing a resonant chord in the music of the universe. Whatever it is, I was there—one foot in the sacred and the other in the profane. I've often asked myself, what could have caused this extraordinary reaction?

I've spent my entire life viewing the world through the eyes of a pragmatist and here I found myself in uncharted waters. I knew nothing at all about William Edward Cramsie, yet I strongly felt his presence. It was as if the three weird sisters—Eldritch, Uncanny and Unearthly—were casting knuckle-bones to determine my fate. My mind raced in a search for logical explanations. There were none. Instead, I found myself pondering questions that are more familiar to philosophers than to a conservative believer in hard reality. Can there be a metaphysical bond between those who once were and those who are—or who will be? Surprisingly, I was to discover that some in the field of quantum physics would answer yes and offer a host of scientific studies to validate that belief. As we enter the 21st century, few would argue that the barriers between man and spirit are becoming increasingly thin and thin places are ever more common. In effect, science and religion are finding common ground in fields that once were untrodden. Was Francis de Sales right? Can we believe in angels? And are they present with us?

I've been skeptical of the paranormal and mysticism for as long as I can remember. Though raised in the Roman Catholic faith, and educated in Catholic elementary schools, I've always had difficulty assimilating the concept of mysteries—even as religious doctrine. I was equally skeptical of things like telekinesis, clairvoyance, levitation and other psychic phenomena. Over the past three decades, a number of personal experiences, that can only be described as paranormal, have gradually forced me to become less cynical about things I do not understand. But, that is all part of a different story. It will suffice here to say that my growing awareness of related scientific studies, coupled with remarkable events in my own life, has made me much less a skeptic these days about the power of the human spirit.

Frank Kovacs, in his younger days, harbored ambitions of attending West Point. He knew exactly what this ring represented when he bought it in September of 1994 from Numis International, a jeweler and pawnbroker in Millbrae, California.

The ring joined other objects of varied interest and researching it became one of those things that Frank fully intended to do "someday." It came to light during a casual conversation in the summer of 2005 as I enjoyed the hospitality of Frank and his wife Renee for a few days at their Mediterranean-style villa in Marin County. Now, Frank and Renee are not your typical nine-to-five suburbanites: Frank, for example, has a fascination with obscure places like Commagene and Cilicia. When together, we often find ourselves speculating about the fate of the Tarkondimotid Dynasty and such. Renee is a specialist in cuneiform text, whose translation of the Epic of Gilgamesh was published by Stanford University. For his entire adult life, Frank has been a noted antiquarian and expert numismatist.

As we cruised down U.S. 101 on the way to San Francisco International for my flight back home, Frank asked if I had any interest in aviation history. He knew, of course, that I had retired some twenty-plus years earlier from the U.S. Air Force. In fact, we had first met while I was stationed in California back in the late sixties—yes, *those* sixties. Although I did earn a bachelor's degree in history some eons ago, I had to admit to Frank that my attraction to modern history was minimal. But, being curious, I had to know—didn't I? "OK, Frank—Why do you ask?" So, Frank proceeded to tell me the story of how he found this Army Air Corps pilot's West Point class ring. I always enjoy hearing about Frank's unusual "finds", but I honestly don't recall expressing any particular interest in the ring at that time. This conversation took place just south of the Golden Gate Bridge as we passed by the exit for the old Fort Winfield Scott facility. In fact, I distinctly recall seeing a road sign and wondering about this place that I had never heard of—an irony that would only become apparent much later. The conversation quickly faded from memory as I returned home and tried to recover some sense of order in my office after a week's absence.

Before I realized what had happened, though in reality it was probably a week later, the ring was sitting on my desk here in the Ozarks (along with an invoice) screaming at me, like

the Sirens beckoning Ulysses. I couldn't resist the temptation to hold it in my hand and, when I did, it was electrifying! In spite of my strong existential leanings, I have to admit that it was incredibly magnetic. I tried several times to package up the ring and send it back to Frank, but I simply could not do it. I mean, there was a physical reaction that literally made it impossible. Finally, I accepted the inevitable: I had to learn more about its owner, and I had to discover the story of the ring's own travels.

Had Bill Cramsie's ring come to me ten years earlier, I wouldn't have had the slightest idea how to track down its original owner or find out anything about him. The internet revolution has changed so many things in our daily lives that it's hard to remember how we functioned before the advent of the browser. Thanks to modern technology, the beginning was relatively easy. Inscribed within the ring's band was "William Edward Cramsie, United States Army, June 1943." I did a quick Google search for the name and came up with zero hits. Now this in itself is rather remarkable, since virtually everybody is mentioned at least once somewhere on the internet. I then went to a prominent genealogy website and did a search for the name. I found a singular, but encouraging, entry in a family genealogy created by Mary Ellen Gilbert. William E. Cramsie was listed as a distant cousin of Mary Ellen's husband. Following an exchange of e-mails, Mary Ellen further piqued my interest by sending me a great photo of Frank and Idella Cramsie with their son Robert, then a toddler. It was my first connection with the Cramsie family and I felt instinctively that I must follow this yellow brick road.

Mary Ellen introduced me by e-mail to JoAnn Hughes, the daughter of Marnelle Hollingshead. Marnelle, a first cousin of Bill's was the niece of Bill's mother Idella ("Dell") Cramsie. Marnelle grew up in the Cramsie household and remained close to her aunt throughout her life. Marnelle's mother had died while she was quite young and Marnelle became much like a daughter to Dell.

JoAnn was the first person that I was able to contact who had actually met Bill Cramsie, although she had been only seven at the time. She sent me a high school or junior college photo of Bill and explained that she was at the Cramsie home in Auburn, on Easter vacation, the day that news tragically came that Bill was Missing In Action. That tragedy strangely became very personal to me with a face to connect to the ring.

The effect is difficult to describe. For days afterward, I would catch myself staring at the photo as if in some sort of trance. The eyes of that young man seemed to bore a hole right through me. It really was a little disconcerting and yet I kept returning. Why couldn't I just let it go? It was a ring; it had belonged to a war hero—and, of course, it was heavy, significant, beautiful. But something about it kept pulling at me. Something about Bill Cramsie refused to let me move on to all those projects I was already (over) committed to. Something in the ring pulled me irresistibly. (For some time I wondered whether I might be related to Cramsie, but have never turned up anything in confirmation of this. It was as if Bill Cramsie chose me to tell his story—an offer I had no capacity to refuse.)

JoAnn also mentioned that Bill served in the 416th Bomb Group. This gave me a new avenue to pursue and it was not long before I discovered the wonderful chronologue *Attack Bombers We Need You* written by Ralph Conte. Ralph was one of the original cadre of officers assigned to the 416th as a Bombardier/Navigator. He flew 65 missions in the European Theater of Operations, earning the Distinguished Flying Cross, a Purple Heart, 13 Air Medals and other commendations and medals from the French government. In addition to historical and organizational information, Ralph's book lists each of the group's 285 combat missions with summaries of the results and personnel highlights. The mission of April 10, 1944 is described on pages 47 and 48. I read with fascination this brief entry: "The second plane hit was piloted by Lt. William Cramsie from the 671st with gunners S/Sgts Charles Henshaw and Jack Steward. They were headed down toward the Channel, asking for a bearing to base; they were all listed as MIA."

And then? — What happened? I was becoming impatient with tidbits of information and found myself compelled to unveil the whole story. Little did I know what I was in for!

Inside the cover of Ralph's amazing book was a stick-on label with the address and telephone number of the author. (Consider that for a moment... How many books have you ever seen with the author's telephone number inside?) With great anticipation, I called Ralph Conte and explained about the ring that had crossed my path. Ralph very cordially told me all that he knew about the incident—basically the information presented in his book. He had met Bill Cramsie, and remembered him, but knew little about him because they served in different squadrons and were quartered separately. The squadrons shared a combined officer's club and Ralph had seen Bill there on occasion. He described Bill as "a handsome and intelligent young man with a pleasant disposition." Because of his book, Ralph had been contacted by a member of the Cramsie family, and had an address for a person he thought to be Bill's son.

Bob Cramsie

Bob Cramsie was living in Tampa at the time and it was a simple matter to find an e-mail address for Bob on the internet. On September 2nd, 2005, I sent a brief e-mail to make sure that this was indeed the right Bob Cramsie:

"Hi, Just checking to see if you are the son of William Edward Cramsie of Yuba county, California? If so, please reply as I am seeking information and have some interesting information to share."

The response was electrically swift. "Wayne, I am the nephew of William Edward Cramsie. I am one of the sons of his brother Robert Joseph Cramsie. Uncle Bill was KIA during WW II and I never knew him. What information might you have of my uncle?"

This was the closest blood relative of Bill Cramsie that I was going to find. When I explained that I had come into the possession of Bill's West Point class ring, Bob was shocked. He had no inkling that the ring had survived—assuming that it still lay on the sea-bed with his uncle's as-yet-unrecovered body. In one early correspondence, Bob wrote:

"Information concerning my uncle is rather scarce. I have the MACR [Missing Air Crew Report] from the military concerning the events of my uncle becoming missing in action. My father had a letter that was written to my grandmother, Idella Cramsie, telling just what happened by another squadron member. I have the Purple Heart of his that was awarded posthumously and some other documentation. I also have a very interesting newspaper article from California about my uncle. It seems that there was an effort to have the name of Beale AFB near Sacramento renamed in honor of my uncle. The base was located on a large piece of the family property and the war record of my uncle spurred a local newspaper to send out feelers. As you know, it never came to be but it sure would have been interesting to say the least."

Just three days after our first exchange, I received an e-mail from Bob that filled in a major void:

"I talked to my mother this morning and she enlightened me on a few things. The ring was left with my father while he was stationed in England. I do not recall if it was sent to him or if he requested his effects and retrieved them in person but the ring was part of his belongings and he had them from the time of Bill's death up till it was brought to the pawn shop. I do know that he did indeed pawn the ring shortly before his death in 1996. At that time, he had suffered a stroke and his mental capacities were affected but my mother told me that he would never wear the ring out of respect for his brother and would not alter it in any way to fit his finger. The decision was his and my mother did not interfere. My father was 79 when he died."

One has to wonder what possible feeling could have driven Bill's brother to such a step. It couldn't have been the money. Perhaps he felt the accumulated grief of simply having this remembrance of his brother in his home. Perhaps it was part of his illness—an impulse to dispose of everything he could legitimately dispose of, while he still retained all his faculties. Or perhaps it was something unconscious—one of those gestures even he couldn't have exactly been able to explain, as if by releasing the ring into the world he was setting it on its way to someone else, someone who (for whatever reason) needed to know about it.

Bob and I exchanged many e-mails over time and shared information in a mutual search for facts. He had done some research on his own and shared with me several crucial documents including the Missing Air Crew Report detailing the incident in which his uncle was lost. He also sent me a scan of the page featuring Bill from the West Point yearbook, *The Howitzer,* for the class of June 1943. I learned more about the Cramsie family and began to assemble bits and pieces about the life of Bill Cramsie. I could sense a growing and inexplicable compulsion to know more.

Robert and Marjorie Cramsie had five children, three of them sons. The elder son was named Bill, after his uncle, the next was named Bob, after his father and the youngest (now deceased) was named Timothy. Bill is a Lt. Colonel, retired from the U.S. Air Force, and Bob is retired from Pacific Southwest Airways. In spite of the fact that both made careers in aviation, neither realized that while they were growing up their father was in possession of his brother's class ring. Their sister Mary does remember, as a child, seeing the ring and trying it on. Apparently, it rarely saw the light of day during those 50+ years. The youngest daughter of this family, Idella Jean, was named after her grandmother.

Speaking about his father, Bob wrote:

"He was the eldest of the three children. He served in WWII with the USAAF as part of the medical corps, reaching

the rank of Staff Sergeant. This is where he met my mother who is still alive and well in California. As far as I know, my Dad and Bill never hooked up in England, although plans were made to get together, but they were cut short by Bill's death."

Over the course of these exchanges, I learned more about the Cramsie family and began to assemble bits and pieces about the life of Bill Cramsie. It was like a mystery, a puzzle to which I held only a few of the pieces. Despite many other tasks and projects that came and went from day to day, something kept pulling me back to the ring and its story.

As I honed my internet search skills and broadened the window, I discovered a website dedicated to the Army Air Corps during WWII. The site had a discussion group providing a venue for the exchange of information among people with an interest in the period. It was in the archives of this group where I found a posting by Ray Jones about a recent 416th Bomb Group reunion. Ray was listed in Ralph Conte's book as a gunner/engineer in the 671st Bomb Squadron. His e-mail address was included in the discussion group posting, so I fired

Ray, Shurlee, Doris and Wayne at the 2006 Reunion of the 416th

off a brief exploratory e-mail. Almost immediately, I received a warm reply, which led to many more exchanges.

Ray and his wife Shurlee lived in Tulsa, about four-and-a-half hours from our home in Missouri. Excited by the prospect of actually meeting someone who served with the 416th, Doris and I arranged to have lunch with them at a Kentucky Fried Chicken restaurant near Interstate 44—on neutral ground, so to speak. I drove and Doris made notes along the way as we thought about all the questions I would want to ask. Spotting Ray was easy. He wore a bright blue visor cap with a 9th Air Force patch and a group of miniature medals from the WWII era. He was a tall, trim octogenarian with a pleasant disposition and a disarming smile. Ray brought several photo albums and scrapbooks of clippings and memorabilia from the war years. It was a slow day at the KFC, so we were able to spread this fascinating array of historical treasures along two adjoining tables without any hint of concern from the restaurant employees. We spent more than two hours looking through Ray's memory books and listening intently to his "war stories". I was pleased to see that Doris was as captivated as I was.

I learned that Ray had joined the 416th late in April 1944, just after Bill Cramsie had been lost, so he had no personal recollections to offer—though he had heard others in the squadron mention Bill. Before leaving, we drove to a nearby convenience store and I photocopied something like 100 pages of squadron histories and post war accounts of 416th Bomb Group activities that Ray had saved. When he mentioned that there was to be a reunion of the Group in Louisville, Kentucky that summer, it sounded inviting.

Realizing that I lacked a photo of Bill's plane, I started searching for every photo then available of an A-20G bomber. After many days and nights of fairly fruitless internet searching it became obvious that, even though the plane was produced in huge numbers, few A-20s have survived. The much heralded "Havoc" was surplus to Army Air Corps needs in 1945 and most were scrapped. A few were sold after the war to private parties for $3,000 each. The eccentric billionaire

Howard Hughes bought one for his personal use and had it painted with the colors and markings of Trans World Airlines (which he owned at that time). There are less than 20 of these aircraft known to exist worldwide. Many of those are in fragments, and only one is presently airworthy. In the winter of 2006, Doris and I made a trip to Galveston Island, Texas to see that A-20. It turned out to be a modified A-20J, not the A-20G advertised, but it was still a thrill to see it nonetheless.

Whenever I found time, I continued to gather historical information about the 416th and started to inquire about the Class of June 1943 at West Point. By this time, I was sure in my own mind that I would write at least an article about Bill and his ring. A telephone call to the office of the Archivist for Cullum Records at the Association of Graduates proved very productive. This association, with its office at West Point, is an umbrella group for alumni of each of the classes and provides a variety of services to all West Point graduates. The archivist, Ms. Marilee Meyer, was pleased to hear about my interest in writing about Bill Cramsie and pulled together all of the information in the association files about him. The records included a questionnaire, completed by Bill's mother shortly after the war, which revealed many new and important details about Bill's childhood and pre-academy days. Marilee then sent me a copy of the Register of Cadets, a magnificent book listing a brief biographical entry for every single West Point graduate since the academy was founded. Cadets are listed within their year group by Cullum number, which is in turn determined by the cadet's class rank. From this, I learned that Bill Cramsie graduated number 41 in a class of 514, putting him in the top ten percent of a very select group.

Ray Jones also suggested that I call Bob Basnett, who flew as a bombardier/navigator in the 671st. Bob lives in Fulton, Missouri, about four hours north of us. This was in the Spring of 2006 and I still felt slightly apprehensive about calling people that I didn't know. Calling an office or a government agency was one thing, but intruding in peoples' lives was something that I felt uneasy about. At any rate, after a lot of procrastinat-

ing, I finally dialed the number. Bob's wife Puz (a nickname, I later learned, from Barney Google's baby "Puzzems" in the iconic comic strip) answered the phone. She listened politely and assured me that Bob would love to talk with me once he returned from visiting St. Andrews in Scotland, where their grandson was studying. I remember wondering why it had been so difficult for me to make that call. I'm not by nature a bashful person, yet I felt somehow as if I was treading on hallowed ground when I asked people to talk about their past. It was a feeling that I would come to know well during the search.

A couple of weeks later I summoned up enough courage to try again and this time was amply rewarded for conquering my timidity. Not only did Bob know Bill Cramsie, but he explained that they had been good friends. He shared his sadness about having lost Bill, whom he thought very highly of. Then, he told me about double dating with him in New York City, and about Clementine Smith. For some reason, this obscure detail struck me as being very important. I began to realize that the story of Bill Cramsie is not just about historical facts and details—it's about a human spirit and the triumphs and tragedies of a young man with a promising life. That phone call, reluctantly made in the first place, provided the glue that made all of the subsequent pieces stick together.

Chapter Two

The Sierra Foothills

The Cramsies had been pioneering settlers in Yuba County and by the end of World War I the family had already earned a place in California history through their many contributions to the development of that county. His older brother, Robert, had just turned two when William Edward Cramsie was born at Marysville on May 31st, 1919. Frank and Idella Cramsie named Bill after his grandfather, William Cramsie, who had been born in Ballymoney, County Antrim, Ireland in 1837.

Frank and Idella Cramsie with son Robert, 1918

The elder William Cramsie had been relatively tall for his day at 5 feet 10 ½ inches, with a fair complexion and gray eyes. His decision to leave his homeland for the uncertainty of a distant land was doubtless driven partly by the widespread famine and economic devastation in Ireland during the late 1840s. Another Cramsie who left County Antrim in the 1850s was John, who struck out for Australia and became the progenitor of a prosperous and influential line in that country. It seems likely that John and William Cramsie were somehow related, though the records from that time and place are sporadic and confusing.

At any rate, in 1852, while still a teenager, this adventurous Irish lad set out in the company of his friend Daniel McGanney to prospect for gold in California. After crossing the Atlan-

tic, they faced another 6,000-mile journey from New York to Panama by ship, across the Isthmus by the newly constructed Panama Railroad and then a final leg (again by ship) to San Francisco. Their destination was the Yuba River, where they had heard—along with so many others—of plentiful gold.

The two young men ended up at Rose Bar, situated on the south bank of the Yuba River, just east of a place called "Timbuctoo Bend." Rose Bar had been named for John Rose of Scotland, who had settled there in the 1840s, though it was Jonas Spect who discovered gold in the area on June 2nd, 1848. In fact, two prospectors from San Francisco, Jacob Leese and Jasper O'Farrell were said to have taken out $75,000 in three months—a princely sum at that time—and by 1850, there were reportedly 2,000 people at Rose Bar, either mining or providing services to miners.

Both Cramsie and McGanney tried their hand at prospecting but soon became disillusioned and turned to more reliable vocations. William worked for the Excelsior Water and Mining Company as an agent, becoming a naturalized U.S. citizen in 1861 at Amador County, California. By 1867, Rose Bar was mostly under gravel and the gold rush boom was over. Most independent prospectors were moving on, but the two young Irishmen settled at nearby Smartsville, just south of the river, where their families took root and rose to prominence as ranchers and county public administrators.

In 1870 William Cramsie married an Irish lass, Elizabeth Havey, who had originally come to Yuba County with her parents in 1853 at the age of seven. Both her parents had lived in County Roscommon, Ireland, before emigrating to Newark, New Jersey in 1840—where Elizabeth was born. They headed west to Yuba County in the same year that the Catholic Church at Smartsville burned to the ground. In the new church, constructed on the same site, a memorial pew (pew #5) in the names of William Cramsie and John Havey (Elizabeth's father) can still be seen.

In 1880, a long-running feud between farmers and miners over mining debris threatened to change the local landscape.

The farmers advocated damming the Yuba river below Smartsville and flooding the mines. After the exodus of gold-panning prospectors, the commercial extraction of gold became a major industry. According to a report in *The Plumas National* of November 23, 1867, one mine on a 100 acre site near Smartsville extracted nearly $1,000,000 in gold over a three-year period. The report describes four miles of sluices, throughout which three tons of quicksilver were distributed to capture the gold. The operation required 125,000 pounds of blasting powder per year. Another report in that newspaper, from 1876, mentions the accidental explosion of seventeen hundred kegs of powder in a mine near Smartsville. Ultimately, even these intensive efforts became unprofitable and faded. A dam was eventually built, though farther upstream than Smartsville and not until after the Great Depression of the 1930s.

William was popular and well-respected in the area, serving as Justice of the Peace at Rose Bar Township for 20 years until his death in 1912. He was succeeded in that position by his eldest son—John Edward Cramsie. The Cramsie and McGanney families were formally united in 1906 when John married Anna McGanney, the daughter of Daniel. Most of these early progenitors of the Cramsie and McGanney lines lie at rest in either the Catholic cemetery or the McGanney cemetery near Smartsville. The Cramsie homestead land itself eventually became the eastern part of Camp Beale, which opened in October 1942 as a training site for the 13th Armored Division, the 81st Infantry Division and the 96th Infantry Division. The 86,000-acre installation housed more than 60,000 soldiers, including a prisoner-of-war encampment and a 1,000-bed hospital.

William and Elizabeth's youngest son, Frank, was a slender man—not tall—with blue eyes and ruggedly handsome features. He grew up in Smartsville and rural Rose Bar Township, where he later farmed for a living. He also worked for many years at J.R. Garrett Company in Marysville, making the trip daily in the family's Model-T Ford. Frank was 34 when he married Idella Marie LeBourveau in 1915. The wedding was held at St. Thomas Catholic church in nearby Oroville on

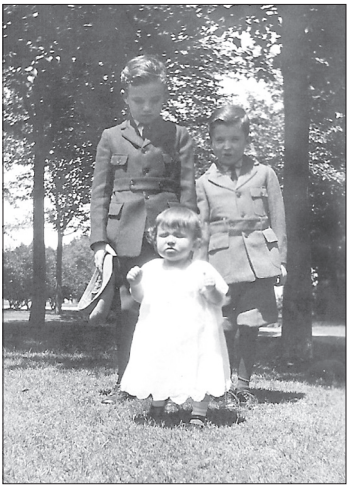
Tuesday, April 27, with Father J.J. Hynes officiating. Frank and Dell honeymooned in San Francisco and took up residence in Marysville.

At the time, "Dell" was 27—a feminine brunette with fair skin and natural charm. Genealogy has always been a personal fascination of mine and the search for Bill Cramsie's roots was inevitable, I suppose. With the help of internet sites like Ancestry.com, it was relatively easy to trace at least some of Dell's lineage. Although the LeBourveau side of her family had come originally from Quebec, Dell was also a direct descendant of New England's Rebecca Towne Nurse. (Rebecca, along with 18 others, was accused of practicing witchcraft, tried by an illegal court and executed by hanging in Salem, Massachusetts in 1692. After the fact, the famous trials were very heavily criticized and the government eventually compensated the Nurse family and others in 1711 for the wrongful deaths.) Dell's father was French-Canadian and worked as a carpenter. Her mother had been born in Arkansas during the Reconstruction era. They had divorced by the time of Dell's marriage to Frank.

The Cramsie family was devoutly Roman Catholic. JoAnn Hughes recalls that her great-uncle Frank, in particular, was a stickler for everyone getting to church on Sunday mornings. These were prideful, God-fearing people who weathered the Great Depression by living frugally off the land. Dell was strong-willed and resourceful; while her husband was working she often added meat to the dinner table by shooting wild game. Using a wood stove, she canned homegrown fruits and vegetables and made memorable jams that her grandchildren still talk about. Cradled in this strong Irish Catholic cultural enclave, a sense of family and honor was deeply imbued in young Bill Cramsie. Even though he never knew his pioneering grandfather, the apple didn't fall very far from the tree. Bill grew into a quiet leader with strong egalitarian principles and boundless determination.

Robert Joseph Cramsie, the first child of Frank and Dell, was born in 1917 at Marysville. The family moved from Yuba

County to a rural setting in neighboring Placer County—just across the county line—about two years later, shortly after Bill had been born. Ruth, was born in 1925. Also living with Frank and Dell during the early years of Bill's childhood were Dell's father, Charles Lebourveau, and Marnelle Hollingshead, the daughter of Dell's sister Ethel. Marnelle was four years older than Bill and was often tasked with supervising the Cramsie children; some years later, Bill became the Godfather to Marnelle's daughter Judy.



Robert, Bill and Ruth Cramsie —1926

In 1930, while working as a nurse, Dell contracted tuberculosis. While she recovered through treatment at a Sanitorium, Marnelle (then a teenager) essentially mothered Robert, Bill and Ruth. Both Robert and Ruth were to follow in their mother's footsteps in the medical field. Robert served as a medical corpsman with the Army Air Corps in southern England while Ruth graduated from the Samuel Merritt School of Nursing in Oakland, CA and worked for many years as a registered nurse.

Bill attended the first three years of elementary school at Notre Dame in Marysville, as did Marnelle and Robert, apparently riding with Frank—who still worked in the city.
The private Catholic school was operated by the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur. After the family moved to Applegate, north of Auburn, the Cramsie children attended elementary school there for four years. They moved to Auburn in 1931 and Bill completed eighth grade at the Alta Vista Elementary School where his father was then employed as a janitor. (The school still exists, at the corner of Oak Street and Huntley Avenue.) The Cramsie family lived at 333 Huntley Avenue, ad-

jacent to the school. Later, Bill was enrolled at Placer Union High School in Auburn where he took college prep courses. In addition to course-work in algebra, geometry, trigonometry, analytical geometry and calculus, Bill excelled in mechanical drawing and ancient history. Add to this his two years of Spanish and one can readily see that he enjoyed a well-rounded education, and one that came to him with relative ease. His nephew, Bob Cramsie, in an e-mail correspondence wrote: "I do recall my father telling me that Bill seemed to have a photographic memory."

Aside from bouts of measles and whooping cough, Bill was a healthy and energetic youth; and from a very early age, he was enamored with aviation. Bob Cramsie recalls: "Bill did love airplanes, my dad would relate stories about Bill building model airplanes and the like while growing up." His greatest ambition as a boy was to go to West Point, where he knew that he could train as a pilot in the Army Air Corps.

In terms of deportment, Bill was active and inquisitive but unobtrusive. On the high school track team, he competed in the

Notre Dame de Namur, Marysville

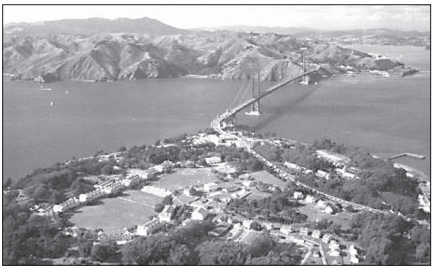
660-yard and 1320-yard runs. He also managed the school basketball team and competed on the swimming and tennis teams. Although never passionate about sports, Bill came by his athletic skills naturally. His uncle DeWitt "Bevo" LeBourveau (Idella Cramsie's brother) played for five years in the major baseball leagues, working as an outfielder with the Philadelphia Phillies from 1919 to 1922 (where he was a teammate of Casey Stengel) and with the Philadelphia Athletics in 1929, where he earned a World Series ring. He also played for 14 years in the minor leagues, winning the American Association batting championship in both 1926 and 1930 as a left-hander.

American Legion Medal
Auburn, CA 1936

Bill was Senior Class President, on his high school's Honor Roll and widely considered the most gifted musician in the school orchestra—playing clarinet, saxophone and violin. Bob Cramsie still recalls, as a child, seeing his uncle's violin hanging in the closet at his grandmother Dell's home in San Francisco. Bob's sister Mary also remembers the violin and her grandmother's watchful guard over it. Bill's Saxophone was passed on to Ruth's son Don and subsequently to Don's son, who learned to play on it as well.

Bill won the American Legion Medal in his senior year, when the Placer Union faculty selected him as the most outstanding student of his graduating class. The award, still presented by some posts, is judged on courage, honor, scholarship, leadership, service and patriotism. As recipient of this award, he gave an address at the graduation ceremony about the nature of freedom. Bill was rather dashing, and always very particular about his appearance, wearing well-cut expensive clothes—perhaps a natural outcome of his youth and popularity.

After high school, he continued his education at Placer Junior College while still pursuing his ultimate dream of an appointment to West Point. In September 1936 he scored in the 98th percentile on the Thurstone Psychological Examination (explaining perhaps his future confidence at West Point and in combat). To help with college expenses, Bill worked in the local fruit exchange, and also as an usher at the State Theater. Although the student body at Placer College was small, the school had an active music program. Bill played clarinet in the college orchestra and also sang in the Glee Club. He received an Associate of Arts degree in 1939.



Fort Winfield Scott, San Francisco

With war on the horizon, Bill stepped up his efforts to obtain an appointment to West Point. The family lived in California's 2nd Congressional District, then represented by House Minority Whip Harry Lane Englebright. The prominence of the Cramsie family as community leaders in Eng-

West Point Prep School classroom - Fort Winfield Scott

lebright's district must have carried some weight as Bill received a primary congressional appointment without having to take the competitive exam—at least, not for the appointment. However, a high percentage of such appointments had been failing the academy at that time and Englebright's appointment carried with it the stipulation that Bill first complete the academy prep school program at Fort Winfield Scott in San Francisco. The prep school required a competitive exam as well as actual enlistment in the Army as a private. In the U.S. military, those who have served in the enlisted ranks prior to attaining an officer's commission are called "Mustangs"—an accolade that Bill Cramsie and I happened to share—and proudly so, I'm sure.

This unique facility was a part of what today is known as the Presidio of San Francisco. Since 1910, the post had consisted of a geographically and architecturally distinct set of buildings based around a separate parade ground. Technically it was an artillery shore defense installation, but in practice it was used for a variety of special purposes, including that of the USMA Prep School. (The modern West Point Prep, established in 1946, is a successor to the program at Fort Winfield Scott.)

On March 5th, Bill Cramsie passed the West Point entrance physical at Letterman General Hospital in San Francisco. Although still in full-time school, Bill was "in the Army now"—and assigned to the 6th Coast Artillery. Bill received his prep school diploma on May 31, 1940 and was able to enjoy a month at home in Auburn before reporting to the U.S. Military Academy.

"Plebe" year for the Class of 1944—destined in fact to become the class of June 1943—started on July 1st 1940.

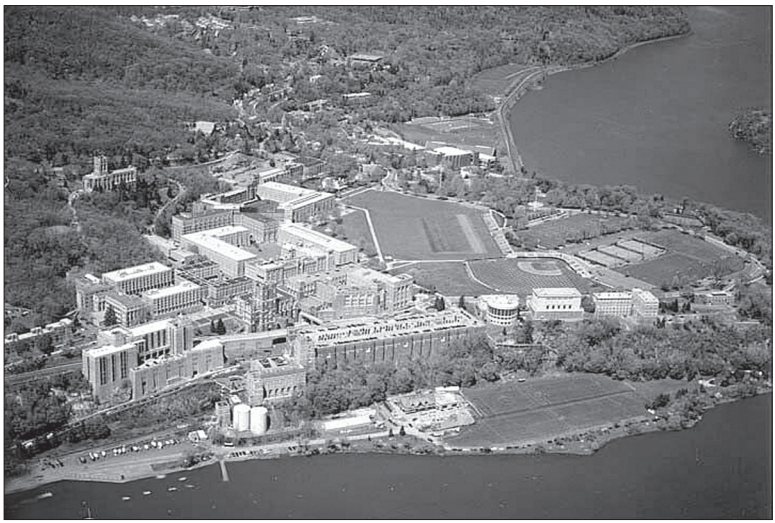
Chapter Three

"West Point"

Monday: July 1, 1940

We started off today as the class of 1944, with 568 cadets. I have to say that it was a pretty motley looking bunch that assembled at the Old West academic building this morning. A few of us wore army private uniforms (I even saw one army sergeant) but most blended into a rainbow of street attire. Some looked arrogant, some nervous, some mature, some boyish, most of us frankly a little scared.

It felt, and was, chaotic—with officers barking orders all over the place and upper



US Military Academy, West Point

classmen more than willing to extend a long standing—if supposedly forbidden—tradition of hazing (probably one that they themselves remember all too well!). The heat and humidity were no help either, it seemed like Mother Nature was also having a little fun at our expense. All of us in our first year are called "Plebes," a term that we're often reminded was the Latin word for the lowest class in ancient Roman society. Though I'd read about the unusual names for the different classes of cadets, I understand now why they chose that name for those just entering the program here. As we straggled through the arch they call the Sallyport, we crossed a boundary that is unlike all others in life. It seems intimidating and bewildering at this moment, but I feel sure that we will never again be quite the same as we were yesterday. What we become will depend on us—individually and as a group—but the change is irreversible.

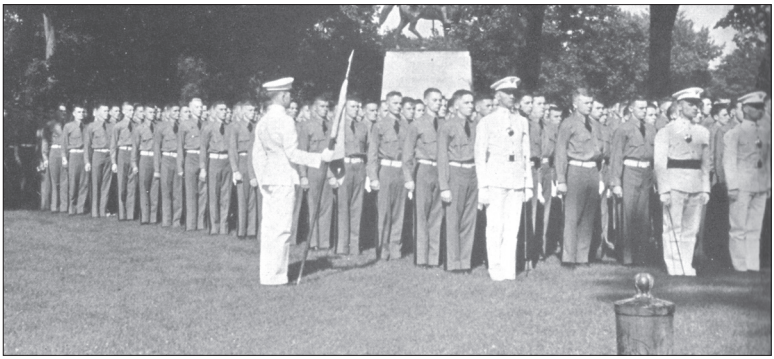
We were basically herded to the Cadet Store (amid muffled "moos" from some irrepressible cadets!) where we picked up uniforms and bedding (including our mattresses). We carted this ungainly load, like porters in a jungle expedition, up to North Barracks—better known as the infamous "Beast Barracks", which is ingeniously designed to be a touch of hell on earth! This will be our home for the first six-and-a-half weeks of intense training and indoctrination that we'll receive. It would have been comical had we not been so intimidated, because some of it was pretty silly.

After room assignment, we all got our hair cut VERY short. Believe me, it didn't exactly

improve my appearance!—and then the constant barrage of hazing by upper classmen really started. I'd been warned about this when I signed up, though, so I know two things: one, it won't last long and two, it's meant to quickly sort out from the rest of us those without the spirit or will to endure. (Needless to say, I'm absolutely determined that won't be me...)

Looking a little more military-like in our new attire, we marched (sort of!) to Trophy Point where the first order of business was for us, as a group, to take a verbal Oath of Allegiance (administered by Lt. Col. Danielson) and then to individually sign the oath and our Engagement for Service. Even those of us (in my case only just!) over 21 were required to show the consent of a parent for the eight-year contract we signed with the Army.

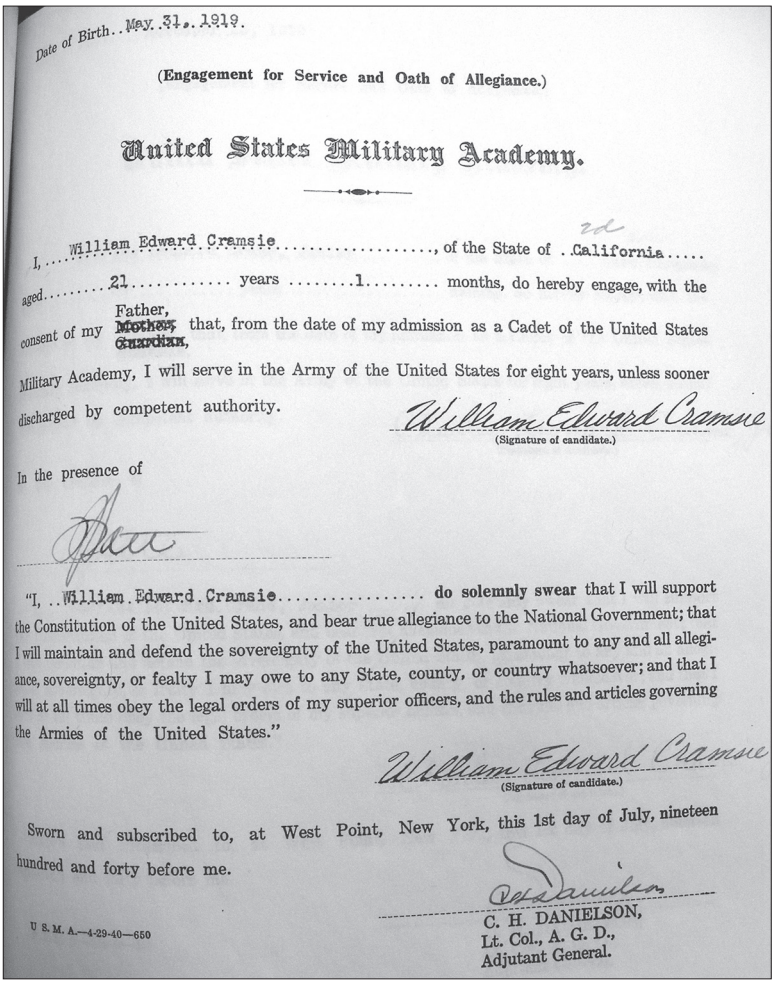
We're all pretty exhausted at the end of a very long day, but there's a hilarious story circulating around that has lightened everyone's spirits. One of the plebes from another company was being dressed down (scolded) by an upper classman



Administering the oath at Trophy Point to the class of June 1943

who was shouting right into his face while the poor plebe stood motionless at a brace. When it seemed over, the plebe asked and received permission to address the Firstie—"Sir, would you like a mint, Sir?"

I'm going to try to record some of my thoughts and experiences from time to time like this as a sort of diary, but I already know that I won't be able to do it regularly. Years from



Date of Birth..May 31, 1919.

(Engagement for Service and Oath of Allegiance.)

United States Military Academy.

I, ...William Edward Cramsie....., of the State of ..California.....

aged.....21..... years .....1..... months, do hereby engage, with the consent of my Father, ~~Mother, Guardian,~~ that, from the date of my admission as a Cadet of the United States Military Academy, I will serve in the Army of the United States for eight years, unless sooner discharged by competent authority.

William Edward Cramsie
(Signature of candidate.)

In the presence of

"I, ..William.Edward.Cramsie..... **do solemnly swear** that I will support the Constitution of the United States, and bear true allegiance to the National Government; that I will maintain and defend the sovereignty of the United States, paramount to any and all allegiance, sovereignty, or fealty I may owe to any State, county, or country whatsoever; and that I will at all times obey the legal orders of my superior officers, and the rules and articles governing the Armies of the United States."

William Edward Cramsie
(Signature of candidate.)

Sworn and subscribed to, at West Point, New York, this 1st day of July, nineteen hundred and forty before me.

C. H. DANIELSON,
Lt. Col., A. G. D.,
Adjutant General.

U. S. M. A.—4-29-40—650

now, when I'm back home in California, I'll be able to reminisce with Mom and Dad about what it was like.

Saturday: August 17, 1940

I still can't believe I'm here!—It's hard not to let the excitement show on my face. What shocked me the most, when I arrived in July, was how beautiful the place is. It's so green and perfectly manicured—and, wherever you look, you feel as if history is coming alive in front of you. Aside from the natural beauty of West Point's 16,000 rugged acres and its impressive architecture, the place enjoys a special aura in history. It was a pivotal point in the Revolutionary War—though plenty of history has also been made here since then. Duty, Honor and Country are now the pillars of service taught here—but it was at West Point that Benedict Arnold unsuccessfully betrayed Washington's army. That's a fact that I was completely unaware of and find quite ironic!

Probably every cadet's favorite view is from Trophy Point, where the Hudson River is spread out under your feet in a breathtaking panorama. West Point is often called the "Gibraltar of the Hudson." The view to the north is the prettiest, I think. In particular I love the huge links from the Great Chain, and the 2,230 names on Battle Monument never fail to move me, however many times I pass it. These were heroic Regular Army officers and enlisted men who fell in battle preserving the Union. There's something about a name carved in granite that stirs the soul. Lots

Battle Monument

of people think that the winged figure at the top of that huge column is Victory, because she holds a wreath—but blowing a trumpet as she is, it must really be Fame.

I survived Beast Barracks, but didn't have any time for writing down my thoughts along the way (probably a good thing, since some were unspeakable). After that first day, when we thought we were pretty busy, the pace picked up considerably, as did the hazing. Yet, once the dust had settled, it turned out that we had done better than most classes; we only had a few drop-outs.

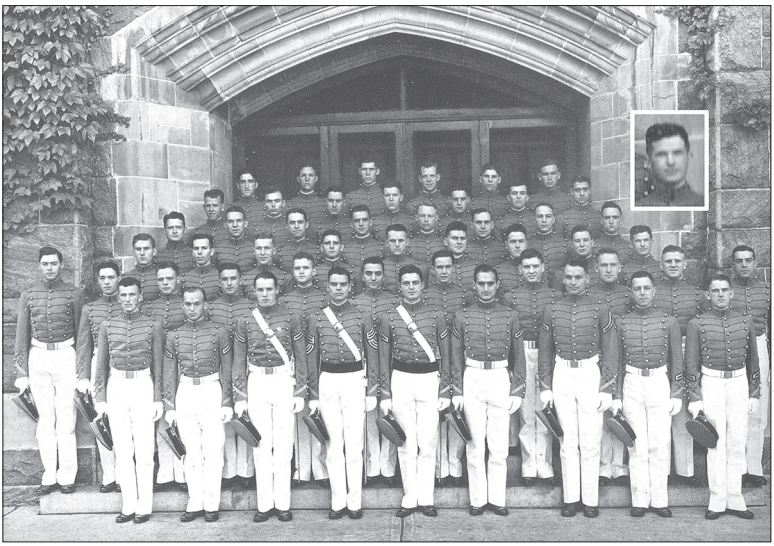
There are constant reminders that we have a lot to live up to here. For example, the West Point symbol is everywhere, even stamped upon the china in the Cadet Mess. Funny, when I was at Fort Scott it was just called a "chow hall". Speaking of which, Washington Hall is an astonishing example of efficiency, where at breakfast and lunch the entire corps of cadets is fed at the same time—in less than half an hour! There are rank after rank of ten-person tables, and we serve ourselves family-style. Plebes aren't allowed to speak to each other and may only answer when addressed directly by an

Washington Hall

upperclassman. The best thing to do then is keep your answer very short (YES SIR or NO SIR)! And it's always prudent to sit perfectly upright and look at nothing but your plate. (The artifacts around the hall are also worth a look if you can sneak it in: some date back to the Revolutionary War!)

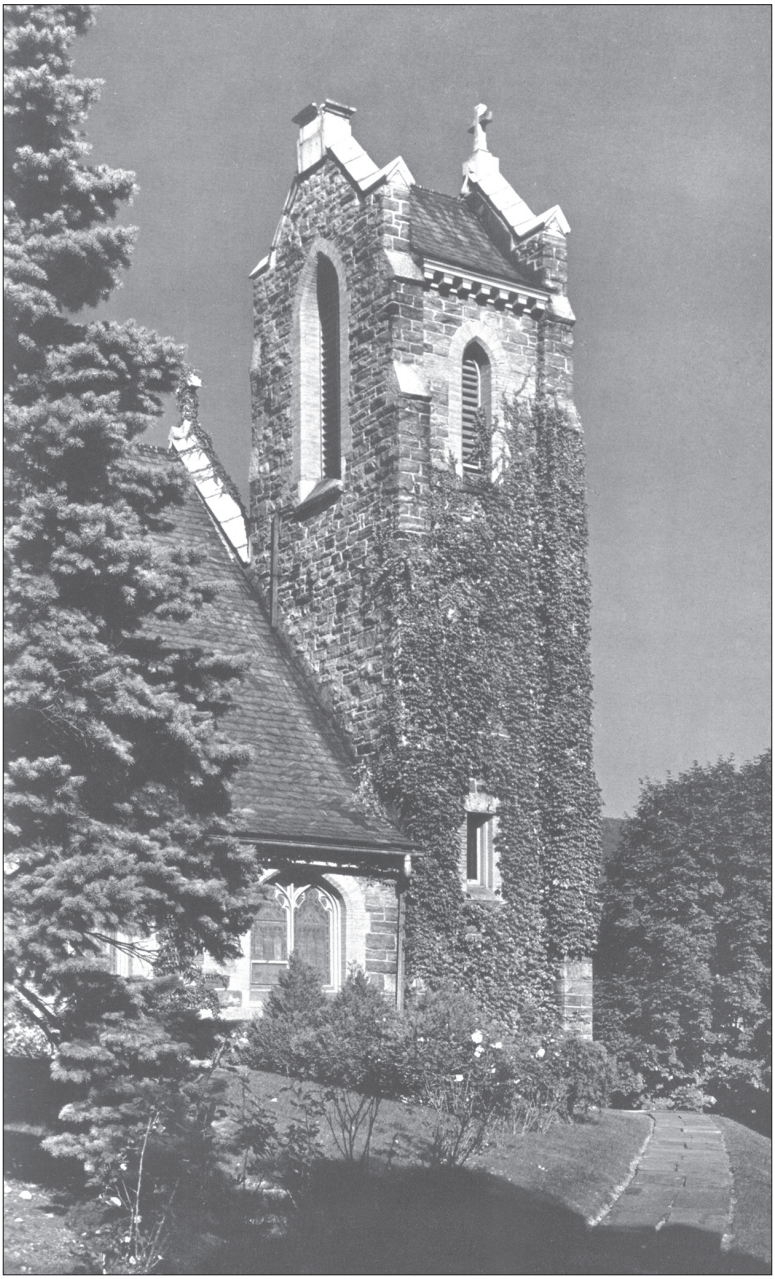
Even when Beast Barracks was at its worst, I took a lot of comfort from the surroundings here. The first time I saw the amazing West Point Cemetery it took my breath away! Standing before the tombs of George Armstrong Custer, Sylvanus Thayer and Winfield Scott gave me chills all the way up my spine. I felt like they were standing alongside of me—it was an eerie feeling, scary almost but somehow comforting at the same time. I stood before General Custer's tomb for what seemed like forever, though time is an elusive thing here. I couldn't shake the melody of Garryowen that kept repeating itself in my mind. It's an Irish tune that my father used to whistle in the farm yard as he worked. It was also the marching tune of Custer and the 7th Cavalry and, according to Army history, it was the tune that was playing at Fort Riley as Custer and his men marched out to meet their destiny at the Little Big Horn.

All of the buildings here are like something from a feudal estate, but I'm particularly partial



1941/1942 Catholic Chapel Choir
Bill Cramsie row 3, far right and inset

1942/1943 Catholic Chapel Choir
Bill Cramsie row 2, third from left



Chapel of the Most Holy Trinity - USMA West Point

to the Catholic Chapel—Most Holy Trinity. The bell tower is wrapped in a blanket of hale green ivy, giving it a real sense of permanence and subtle majesty. I've never seen a more inspiring place of worship. I'm auditioning for the choir there on Thursday; it's a very good choir, and they sometimes get invited to perform at nearby churches and cathedrals, so I'd love to make it. Practicing for the audition, however, is practically impossible! You can just imagine the reaction of my two wives (relax!—that's what we call our roommates here) if I so much as hum!

Monday: October 14, 1940

Intramural Basketball started today. Those of us who don't participate in one of the competitive school sports are required to play in an Intramural League. Our company has a basketball team that I play on, but being the "runts" we have, to be frank, some trouble dominating the court when we play those tall "flankers". Unfortunately, we're not all that athletic either. It's fun though and we give it a good try.

Thursday: November 7, 1940

This has been a lousy week for demerits. I usually don't have any trouble passing inspections or meeting formations but I was late for breakfast formation this morning and late for the first call reveille last Saturday. Captain Tarant gave me three demerits, which brought my total for the year up to thirteen. I'm still in pretty good shape, but have to be careful that I don't

mess up any chances for liberty in Manhattan.

The class that we're in is reflected in the number of stripes on the lower sleeve of our dress coats, so anyone can tell who upperclassmen are—regardless of cadet rank. The 1st class have three thin stripes of braid; the second class two stripes and the 3rd class one stripe. (We plebes—as you might expect—don't have any stripes yet.) The distinguished cadets are easy to spot, because they get to wear a five-pointed star on each side of the collar on their dress and full-dress coats. When I first saw them I thought they were West Point staff! Some of them are smart enough to be.

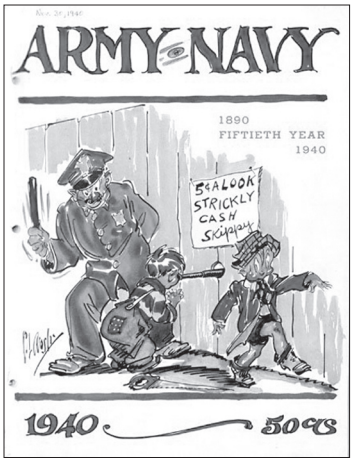
Thursday: November 21, 1940

Today is Thanksgiving Day, which seems odd since it's only the third Thursday in November. Last year, President Roosevelt changed the day of celebration to the third Thursday in an effort to extend the Christmas holiday shopping season—as if a month isn't enough to empty one's wallet! Anyway, we'll have a sumptuous meal at Washington Hall today.

Thursday: November 28, 1940

Tonight was a sight to behold. All 1850 cadets, most of us clad only in bathrobes and slippers, paraded by torchlight through the snow to the Fort Clinton summer camping grounds for a Pep Rally. This Saturday the 50th annual Army-Navy game will be played at Municipal

Stadium in Philadelphia. There were chants along the way, including: "We want the superintendent!" and General Eichelberger didn't fail us. Though he did make it abundantly clear that we had best not have roused him only to lose to Navy! A fifteen foot high bonfire helped temper the cold weather as we all cheered for our grid-iron warriors. The rally lasted a half hour and ended with the whole corps whistling taps for Navy. I hate to admit it, but Navy is the odds-on favorite with our team's record of one win, six losses and one tie.



Army-Navy football program - 1940

P.S. It's Saturday evening now and we just got back after a long, and unusually quiet, train ride. Though we lost 14-0, the game was actually better than the score. And, the way things are looking in Europe, the real battle is probably ahead of us—where we'll all be on the same side.

Tuesday: December 24, 1940

It's sad and quiet in the barracks tonight—a lonesome time. For many of us, this will be our first Christmas away from home. My spirits were lifted considerably when I finally managed to get a telephone call through to Mom and

Dad. It was so nice talking with them, but we were only allowed ten minutes because of the long line of cadets waiting. It was the shortest ten minutes of my life, but at least I was able to say hi to everyone and wish them a Merry Christmas. It was particularly hard not being with Ruth. It's the first time since she was born that we haven't been together at Christmas. While still wishing that I were home, it strikes me as important somehow that sharing this time together here has caused all of us to bond in a way that even our well-planned training can't do.

Monday: January 6, 1941

I can't believe I missed Dancing class today! With all of the classes that I would rather miss, wouldn't you know it would be this one? I got seven demerits—ouch! The worst part is that I should have been there but I got carried away in the Library looking at a display of class rings that were donated by former cadets. It was really a fascinating and impressive display and I lost all track of time reading about the donors and their feats. I can't wait 'til we get to buy and wear our own rings.

Friday: March 21, 1941

I was qualified today in Swimming and as Master of Sword in fencing. I was a little surprised that I did so well in fencing, since I had no experience at all with it before coming to the academy. Our instructor, Mr. Dimund,

is a Chief Warrant Officer and is a world class fencer. We actually have several enlisted instructors too, especially in military subjects, and even a few cadets are scheduled to teach on occasion. Intramural baseball will be starting soon and I'll be playing on the Company E softball team.

Easter Sunday: April 13, 1941

Today was great. I sang with the Catholic Chapel Choir, where I had to fill in for Mike Davis (another California boy) who was meant to sing the solo. I felt nervous but surprisingly capable at the same time, and I guess it must have gone all right because the conductor invited me to sing the third solo line with the choir at Blessed Sacrament Church in New York next weekend. Can't wait!

Sunday: April 20, 1941

We left West Point yesterday morning and were bused to the Astor Hotel. We all felt rich—not only because of the experience, but because we'd been allowed up to $15 for expenses each (from our personal accounts). It felt funny to have money in my wallet again—it's considered contraband in our dorms!

The sound in the church was amazing: every tone resonated and grew and then died away, without our having to shape it. Our conductor looked as if he'd died and gone to heaven (he had his eyes tight shut as if he was afraid to open

them and find out that here we were, still stuck on earth, at 71st Street and Broadway!) Didn't think my solo went as well as at rehearsal, but I'm not a pro and looking down at all those people (I hadn't expected nearly so many) made me snatch at my breathing a little.

Friday: July 11, 1941

Yesterday I was promoted to the rank of Acting Corporal, which allows me to wear a single chevron on my dress uniforms. With all of the Plebes from the class of '45 running around here right now, that makes me feel pretty confident. Of course the program won't get any easier, but it's nice not to be at the bottom of the pyramid any more.

Thursday: August 28, 1941

Today was a big day: we had two qualification rounds on the small arms range—on the M-1 rifle and on the pistol. I felt pretty self-assured with the rifle, but the Colt .45 automatic kicks like a mule and it's hard to hold a steady bead on the target. It's all in the breathing—and remembering to exhale and squeeze. I was happy with the results; I qualified as "Expert" (the highest possible rating) on the M-1 and as "Marksman" on the pistol.

Friday: October 17, 1941

Captain Tarant is now a Major and his eyesight must have improved with his new rank because he's getting to be a real stickler on inspections. This morning I picked up two more demerits for not having the floor swept clean enough. Last Saturday, he wrote me up for not having my pajamas and towel displayed properly and Monday he dinged me for not having the soles of my shoes polished—can you believe that? At this rate, I'll be spending the winter walking guard duty! I signed up for our company's Intramural Lacrosse team and have been enjoying that. It's something I've never tried before and it seems to

Tactics Training "Charge" - 1941 (Bill Cramsie, center)

suit me better than most sports—as being fast and accurate seems to be more important than being big and muscular.

Sunday: December 7, 1941

The news of Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor spread through our barracks like a bomb burst today. Some of the boys were listening to the NFL football game between the Brooklyn Dodgers and the New York Giants on WOR radio—the CBS station out of New York—when they heard a flash bulletin from the United Press. (A few minutes later the NBC station was interrupted too.) Of course, we'd all expected that war was on the horizon, but we were shocked that it came this way! It's very quiet here this evening as everyone is pondering our future and waiting for President Roosevelt to address the nation.

Saturday: December 20, 1941

With the U.S. entering World War II, we felt that our long-awaited Christmas leave might be cancelled, but here we are at West Point Station boarding a train for Philadelphia. I'm really thankful that the West Shore Railroad stops right here at the academy. Without the train, it would be a difficult journey to just about anywhere. There are ferries across the river to the New York Central Line, but that's not nearly as convenient. I'll head west through Chicago and Salt Lake City toward the friendly Sierras. I'm sure that Truckee will never have looked so good as it will when I see it in a few days!

West Point Station

Crossing Donner Pass by train in the winter is an exhilarating experience with the snow-covered tracks at times seeming suspended in space. Down in the valley at Auburn there won't be any snow at all and the weather is typically quite nice in the winter. I can't wait to see my family—and my friends from school. I wonder if Glenn Edwards will be home on leave? It'd be great to see him again and find out how his pilot training is going. (Soon, I'll be doing the same...)

Tuesday: March 10, 1942

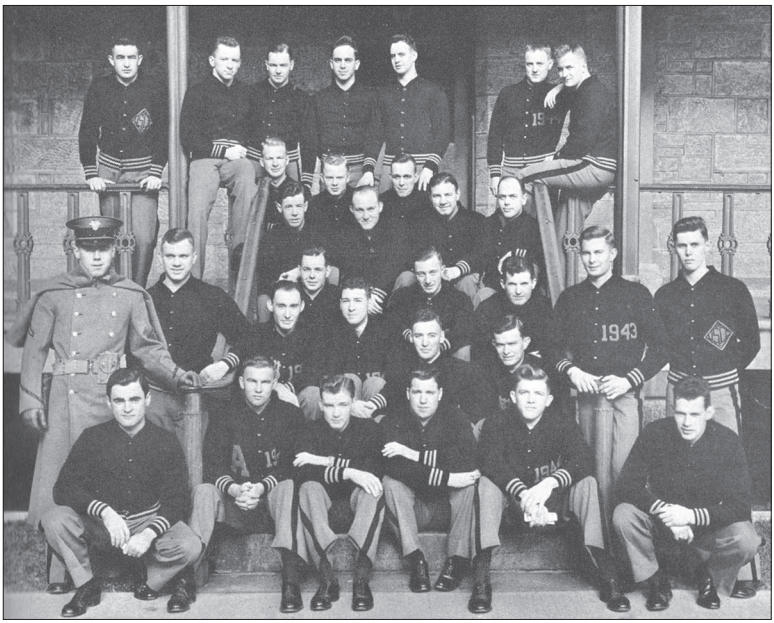
The place is buzzing tonight with Military Police and National Guard troops. From the reports floating around, which are supposedly true, six men (four Italians and two Germans)

New York Central - West Point Station - Christmas 1941
Bill Cramsie, lower right

were arrested near here by the FBI under new laws that require reporting possession of certain materials by anyone of Axis country nationality. It sounds like they are locals who may be either sympathizers or just curious. The scuttlebutt is that they had a couple of pistols, several rifles and a dozen or so shotguns – hardly any major threat, but apparently enough to concern the FBI. They also had some Nazi propaganda brochures, which was not smart—to say the least. There's an army arsenal near here at Iona Island, which only adds to security concerns. Everyone is a little touchy these days about enemy infiltration, but this sounds more like a round-up of relatively harmless people who happen to have a few unreported guns and other controlled items. Still, if they don't have a good explanation for having the stuff they could be interned for the duration of the war.

From his Cadet Service Record, we learn that Bill was just shy of 5'-8" inches tall and weighed 130 pounds at the time of reporting. His blood group was "B" and he had completed his series of tetanus shots in 1940 at Fort Scott. (That at least was a blessing, as he had enough difficulties in store without having to suffer through those wretched tetanus shots.) Blue eyes inherited from his father, and wavy dark brown hair, made him very photogenic.

Cadets were assigned to companies according to height, with the purpose being to provide a uniform appearance when in formation by company on the parade ground. Respectively, the short and tall cadets were jokingly referred to as "runts and flankers". As West Point enrollment reached a peak during World War II, the companies were reorganized to include an



Back Row: Weyrick, Crump, Lucas, Street, Teague, Hoffman, Umlauf
Row 5: Orphan, Taylor, Cobb — Row 4: Aaron, Richardson, Lacoutre, Wiener — Row 3: Giffin, Sembach, Cramsie — Row 2: Harter, Ott, Burnette, Mitchell, Black, Hoffman, McGregor, Burr
Row 1: Pulos, Beckett, Magathan, Rooney, Kengle, Boyle

Robert "Bob" Rooney

Marion "Scotty" Street

Joseph "Joe Bill" Weyrick

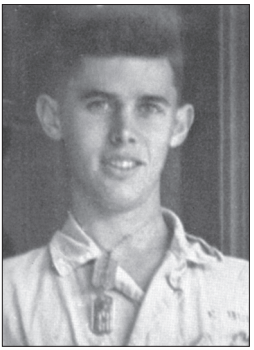
alphanumeric designator, with companies being termed A-1, A-2, B-1 and B-2, etc. (In fact, the incoming class of 1943 was the largest in history at 1,075 plebes.)

Although originally assigned to "Easy Company" as a plebe, under the new designations Bill became a member of Company G-1, a team that would earn their place in history, despite being referred to by their classmates as "G-nomies." The bonds created at West Point are the epitome of fraternalism. Also in Company G-1 were fellow Irishman Robert (Bob) Rooney and Marion (Scotty) Street—both of whom later flew with Bill in the 416th Bomb Group.

According to Scotty Street, he and Bill Cramsie became pretty well acquainted when they shared a room in the infirmary one week during their second year at West Point. Scotty was recovering from a minor surgery and Bill from the measles. The two spent their hours together playing Bridge. As a result of their hospital stay, both of them missed the class photo for the 1942 Howitzer yearbook.

Classmate (later Colonel) Joe Weyrick, was in G-1 as well. He recalls that his girl friend at the time (later to become his wife) arranged a blind date between Bill and one of her friends. The girl that Bill dated eventually married a West Point graduate of the class of 1941, who later became Joe's best man. Like Rooney, Street and Cramsie, Joe

started out as an aviator, but broke his leg in flight training and was eliminated from the flying program. He transferred into artillery and served in the Philippines.



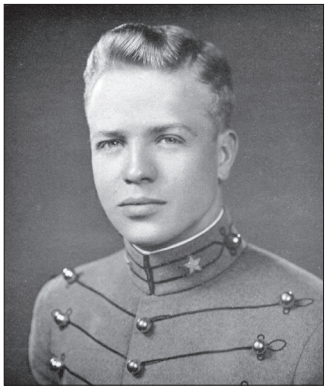
Edward "Ned" Burr

Edward (Ned) Burr, also in Company G-1, retired from the Army as a Colonel in 1967. Ned, who earned a Bronze Star and Purple Heart in WWII, is now president of the West Point alumni of June 1943. He remembers Bill Cramsie as a friendly and respectful classmate who was universally liked. On July 4th, 1944, Lt. Burr was a forward observer with Easy Company, 331st Infantry, 83rd Division in France, just south of Carentan. That unit was positioned to launch an attack against solidly entrenched German paratroopers of the 6th Fallschirmjaeger Regiment. Ned's job was to coordinate artillery fire from the 908th Field Artillery Battalion. Barely three minutes after the attack was launched, an enemy artillery shell burst nearby and severely wounded Ned. Following more than two months of hospitalization, Ned returned to duty with the 324th Field Artillery attached to the 32nd "Red Arrow" Division.

Tactics - 1942, a lesson at the Sand Table (Bill Cramsie far left)

Cramsie's nickname in the class yearbook was "Wild Bill", though in fact he was never mentioned by name in any of the numerous accounts of notoriety involving his class. Academically, his plebe year was notable. Of

the 546 cadets enrolled at the end of that year, he ranked #36 overall with his highest individual class ranking being #11 in English and the lowest being #122 in French. It's perhaps a little ironic that he did least well in his mother's ancestral language. It might cause one to wonder (had it been offered) how he would have done in Gaelic, the cryptic tongue of his paternal ancestors? Bill ranked #58 overall in his second year.

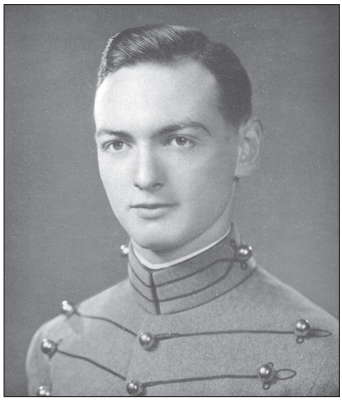


Richard Francis "Dick" Shaefer

Oddly, a jesting entry in the academy yearbook, the *Howitzer*, reads, "Three years have not failed to change him in his disregard for academics". Still, Bill's final rank of #41 in a graduating class of 514 cadets was exceptional. Perhaps the fact that academic studies came easy to him led some to mistake his lack of stress over coursework for disregard. Among the 16 West Pointers assigned to the 416th Bomb Group, only Dick Shaefer (#11) ranked higher. Shaefer went on to retire from the U.S. Air Force in 1975 as a Lt. General. It is generally true that the stars fell most frequently on those West Pointers who ranked highly in their graduating class.

Classmate Dick Wheeler, who now lives in southern California and faithfully attends both the West Point and the 416th Bomb Group reunions, still talks emotionally about Bill Cramsie. The two often went to Catholic Mass together on Sunday mornings at Holy Trinity Chapel. Bill was a member of the Cadet Catholic Choir all three years of his academy life and Dick was an acolyte for Father Murdock and Father Moore. They were close friends, and a half-century has done nothing to erase that special bond. Dick recalls Bill as being a quiet and serious person but also very friendly and approachable. He was not a loner and could often be found socializing with the guys. In a letter to Frank and Idella Cramsie, Wheeler wrote:

"Bill was very sociable and democratic. Consequently, he was very popular with the other officers in the group as well as with his own classmates. As a pilot, he was tops. In fact all of us in the squadron conceded the point that Bill could fly better formation than any of us...."



Richard Vincent "Dick" Wheeler

Bob Cramsie still recalls seeing that letter, and a photo of his uncle, at his grandmother Dell's home in San Francisco.

Dick Wheeler remained in the Air Force after the war, making a world-record parachute jump of 12,938 meters (42,449 feet) at Holloman Air Force Base, New Mexico on September 29, 1950. He was awarded a second Distinguished Flying Cross for this achievement, the first having been earned while still flying with the 671st. He retired from the U.S. Air Force in 1968, as a Colonel.

The class yearbook also noted Bill's love for the Air Corps, and his "desire to drag pro." The latter reference, in cadet vernacular, meant he possessed a native ability to attract lovely ladies. This might have been of particular benefit at the frequent "hops" where cadet hostess Mrs. Lystad introduced the men to a degree of etiquette and culture. And it was surely an advantage during the six visits to New York City authorized during a cadet's final year. The Big Apple was only 50 miles down river on the Hudson and a short but pleasant ride by train through rolling and lush green countryside.

Tuition was free and cadet pay was $780 per year—a healthy sum in 1943. From this money, they were allowed to draw $25 from the quartermaster for each excursion to New York. Since they were not allowed to have any money in their possession at the academy, it clearly was desirable to spend it

or send it to family if possible. To put the value of $25 in perspective, The NYSE index was then at 136, minimum wage was 30 cents per hour, gasoline was 19 cents per gallon and a new car cost about $1,100. Catering to West Point cadets was a minor cottage industry for small businesses that found in them an eager market. Ed Wallnau at the Hotel Piccadilly, on 45th Street, offered 705 rooms with private bath, shower and radio to cadets and Army personnel with special rates from $2.50 per night and up. An ad in the 1943 West Point yearbook touts the Piccadilly as "The cadet's best friend in New York" and extends a welcome to their Original Cadet Lounge. The New Yorker hotel at 34th Street and Eighth Avenue advertised 2,500 rooms from $3.85 per night with a 25% discount to members of the armed forces.

The list of national and international leaders initially nurtured at West Point is very long and distinguished. Which is why, along with the discipline and leadership skills that formed a daily part of the regimen, social skills were reckoned an equally important part of the training. The officer corps at the start of World War II was still steeped in the traditions of cavalry and equestrianism. Consequently, cadets were trained to ride in the huge riding hall that was as large as a football field. It was only after massive war games in late 1941 that the army finally accepted the fact that horse cavalry could not compete with mechanized infantry—though the latter is still called cavalry out of tradition. Another skill hanging on from the days of chivalry was fencing, with cadets trained by a world class master of the sport. These activities, with a ring of *noblesse oblige,* helped to legitimize the academy graduate as leader.

Several Catholic colleges for women were located close to the academy in the 1940s, and the academy social calendar included formal dances where debutantes from these schools were welcomed by the Commandant, though surely still more so by the student body—which, in those days, was entirely male. Of the schools that Bill Cramsie would have recognized, Ladycliff College has since closed its doors, selling its

property to the U. S. Military Academy. Marymount College in Tarrytown, New York, then run by the Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary, was later incorporated into Fordham University, which until very recently still sponsored an active social program for students and cadets. In the past year, Marymount also ceased operations. Seton-Hall, in South Orange, New Jersey, was another school that welcomed social interaction. The weekly "hop" was a regular feature of academy life. Some cadets went to meet the girls, some for the "boodle" (fancy foods—of a kind that seldom appeared in the mess hall!) Others just went to dance. The typical dance card at a hop had up to 30 spaces in which to sign up partners for the evening.

Cadet dance card

One of the girls who came up to the academy from Marymount caught Bill's eye. Dolloretta ("Dee") Rogers was an attractive brunette who had grown up in Connecticut and moved to White Plains, NY with her family. She had been named after her mother, Dolloretta Coyle, and inherited the magnetic Irish gene from both sides of her family. From the moment they met, a special relationship existed between Bill Cramsie and Dee Rogers.

Sunday: May 10, 1942

Dad was disbelieving when he heard that we were examined in dancing! I tried to explain that this wasn't some time-wasting elective. After all, some of us (I hope, including me!) will have important positions to fulfill: generalships, ambassadorships, and—it's not impossible—even President. Diplomacy and even dancing can be important skills, as the Colonel said the other day, suggesting that we all had two left feet. (Though I couldn't have been TOO bad as he picked me to demonstrate the foxtrot.)

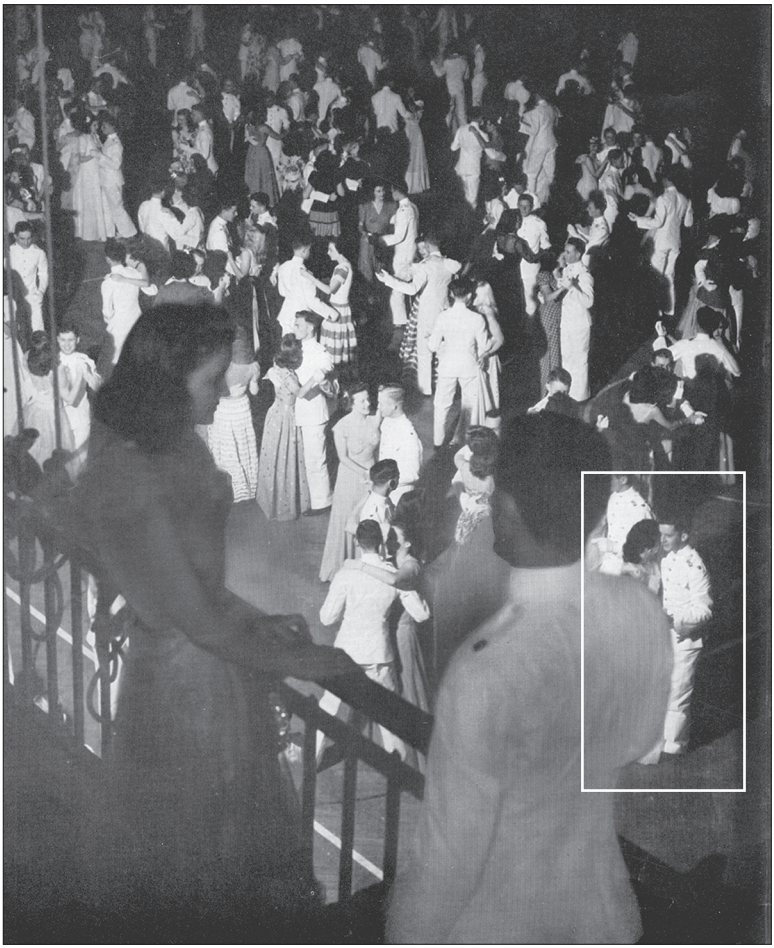
Last night, at the weekly hop in the gymnasium, I got to dance with someone really special. I first met her a few weeks ago, through an upperclassman no less, but I never imagined she'd remember me!—which she seemed to, at least she agreed to put her name on my dance card.

Her name is Dee, short for Dolloretta (which is a name I've never heard before, but it suits her just as well as Dee does, in a way). She has lovely dark brown eyes and short, dark brown hair, and a way of looking up at you under her really long eyelashes: somehow flirtatious and yet serious all at once . . .

She wore a creamy yellow dress with lace on top and a full, filmy skirt. You never saw anything half so beautiful as Dee in that dress (!!), and—though I did dance with several nice girls and also, to please him, with my roommate's friend Rosanne, I found that I just kept looking wherever Dee was, catching her in a whole range

of moods from pensive and serious to radiant and laughing.

At the dance she gave me her telephone number—in fact, seemed to have gone out of her way to do it, as I was being bothered by this other girl at the time. That gives me a little hope—but, of course, a girl like that—well, she can pick and choose as she likes! There was no one half so fascinating last night. . .



Social activities at USMA, 1942 — Bill and Dee? lower right

When I call (because I will call, of course!) she'll probably be busy, or out with some upperclassman, or something.

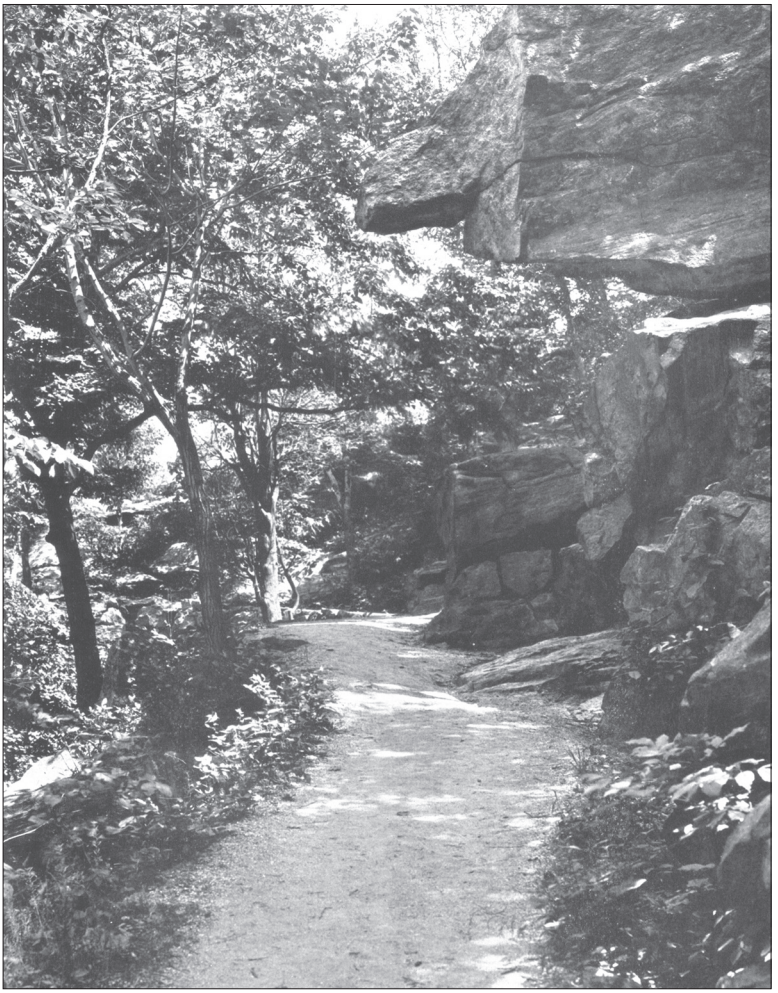
It seems to me that there are girls who are beautiful and girls who are interesting—who really have clever things to say—but very few who have both of these qualities, like Dee.

Saturday: May 16, 1942

Dee was at the dance again tonight: the same swift glance from those dark, dark eyes, a different dress: this time a vivid blue skirt with a top the palest possible blue, like the blue you see when flying above billowing white clouds. There were lots of nice girls and one who made a tremendous stir with the other guys with her frequent giggles, her long blonde hair and her pretty face—but only one like Dee.

Later in the evening I asked her if she'd come out on Cullum balcony with me, because the river always looks its best from there. She'd always seemed pretty chatty before, but something about the river, spread out like a long silver snake under the stars, must have got to her because she grew quieter and quieter and said, "I'd never noticed it was so beautiful here," and tucked her warm gentle hand in mine. And I was just wondering whether I could get away with kissing her (I was only nervous because it felt so important somehow, because she isn't like other girls) when an upperclassman came up with dance card in hand and threw his arm around her saying, "Dee! Here you are! I was just wondering where you'd got to!"

Then I felt relieved that I hadn't imposed, because she gave him a stern telegraphing look that he, with an utter lack of sensitivity, failed to grasp...anyway, with public displays of affection forbidden, an innocent kiss could have gotten me into very hot water. The only place one can get away with that here is on Flirtation Walk by the Kissing Rock.



Flirtation Walk and the Kissing Rock

The next thing I knew, he was pulling her back onto the dance floor and they were dancing, though there were little bits of pink on her cheeks that suggested she wasn't very pleased and she refused to—quite—look him in the eye. I didn't get a chance to say good night but she did tell me to call next weekend, so here's hoping . . .

Thursday: May 28, 1942

Archbishop Spellman visited tonight and spoke to a large group of us in the courtyard. The gathering was held after "Lights Out", so we were required to be in lounge robes. It was pretty chilly, even for this late in May, but I put a sweater over the top, which helped a lot. The

Visit of Archbishop Francis Joseph Spellman—May 28, 1942
Bill Cramsie seated on ground to right

Archbishop's talk about salvation of the spirit was very inspirational and appropriate for this place where spirits seem to wander amongst us. I've sometimes found myself standing alone in a quiet place and chills suddenly run down my spine and leave me tingling all over. There is a very strong feeling that I am "connected" to something beyond my normal senses. It's an eerie feeling and happens more often than I'd like to admit.

Friday: October 2, 1942

Today President Roosevelt signed a bill cutting our course from four years to three years. The class of 1943 will graduate this January, five months ahead of schedule. That will make us Firsties in January instead of next June. It also means that Ring Day will be in January, so we will get our class rings early. I'm looking forward to that! We'll graduate and be commissioned next June, a full year ahead of schedule. It's a happy day at USMAY!

Sunday: November 8, 1942

The seventh annual Military Ball was held last night at the Astor Hotel in New York City. Surprisingly, I was selected as one of a small group of cadets that represented the academy. I'm not sure why, maybe because I'm in the Catholic Chapel Choir or because I never miss one of the local dances. We were taken by bus and spent the night at the hotel, returning this morning. The event is a fund-raiser organized by the Most Holy Trinity Catholic Guild of West Point. The money raised is used to support the

Catholic Chapel and its programs at the academy. It was a grand event for sure, with officers in their Mess Dress (the military equivalent of a tuxedo) and ladies of high society in very fashionable formal gowns.

Mrs. Lystad, our cadet hostess, was there and introduced us cadets to various guests—mostly major donors I presume. She's a very classy woman, the widow of a West Point graduate. Many of the people that we talked with were curious about life at the academy and asked what it was like. Some of the teaching staff and members of the administration at USMAY were also on hand to support the chapel. I was hoping that I might see Dee at the Ball, but she wasn't there. I did see Clemie Smith though, who had come with her sisters Cloe and Elda. It was great to talk with her and she looked radiant, as usual.

Thursday: December 24, 1942

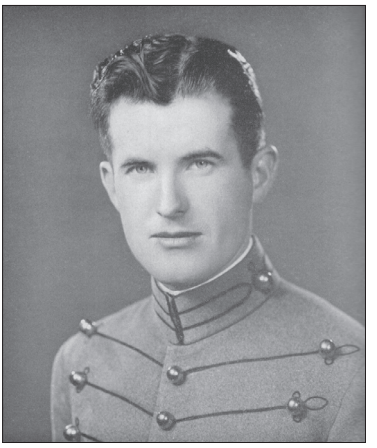
Because of the war-shortened program, our Christmas leave was reduced to five days. That's barely enough time to get home and back, so I chose to stay here at the academy and save my leave for a better time. It's disappointing not to be able to be back in Auburn, but the quiet time here will be a blessing. There are no classes or formations, except for occasional guard duty, and everyone is in a more or less relaxed frame of mind for a change.

Monday: January 4, 1943

Word is spreading like wildfire through the barracks that I-corps under General

Eichelberger, our former Commandant (and a graduate, class of 1909), has taken Buna in New Guinea in a heroic effort. When the war broke out, the general immediately requested combat duty and was transferred from here to the Pacific. Rumor is that General McArthur told him to "take Buna or don't come back alive!" There was a lot of fighting in the swamps and three general officers were killed in action. It must have been a horrible task, but McArthur picked the right man for the job. We're all tremendously proud of him and of the honor that he brings to West Point and all of us just by the association. It makes some of us feel pretty guilty about complaining over the short Christmas break.

Wednesday: January 27, 1943



Cadet Sergeant Cramsie

With the beginning of our final term, now abbreviated to six months, I was promoted a week ago yesterday to Cadet Sergeant. The rank looks the same as a Corporal, except that the Sergeant rank has two chevrons while the Corporal has just one. It's really snowing hard today and some of our classes were cancelled because it's so difficult to get between buildings. Of course that deeply

saddens all of us cadets! Also, anyone trying to move outdoors faces an artillery barrage of snowballs—though you have to be a little careful who you target. Even some of our classmates can get pretty annoyed for no good reason...

Saturday: March 6, 1943

Tonight is a special night as the First and Third Class cadets get to enjoy the 100th Night Hop with the Ward Harrison orchestra performing. The hall is bound to be jumping! (We're really lucky to have his band as frequent performers here as Ward Harrison is very popular these days. He plays in the same nightspots as Ozzie Nelson, Benny Goodman and Tommy Dorsey.) Since this is a special occasion, the normal 9:00 pm to midnight hours are being extended until 1:00 a.m. This event marks the arrival of our countdown to graduation. In a mere 100 days, we will become full-fledged officers in the U.S. Army. The Third Class "Yearlings" are just as excited by this milestone on the way to their first major furlough—and a chance to spend some time at home.

Friday, March 12, 1943

I took my commissioning physical today and passed with flying colors—lots of "Normal", "Negative" amd "None" entries. My blood pressure and vision were perfect and except for missing wisdom teeth and a small bridge I'm apparently a physically perfect specimen—at least by their

measurement. (I guess they would know, there were three doctors and a dentist poking around.) The cooks did a good job of feeding me here—at 136 pounds I weigh just six pounds more than I did in my appointment physical three years ago!

Tuesday, June 1, 1943

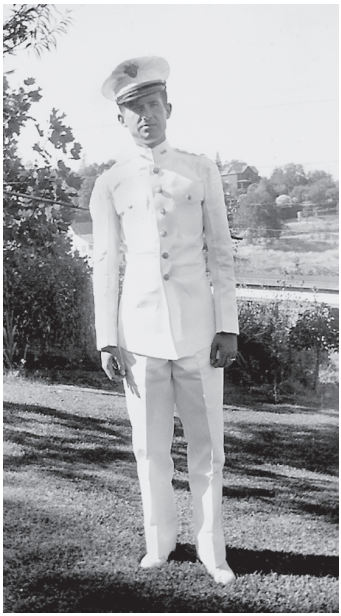
Finally! Graduation Day. I'm so pleased that Mom and Ruth could come to share this with me, and could be here for the Superintendant's reception and our graduation hop. They were able to meet Dee, which was really important to me. I know my whole family is proud of me—the look in Ruth's eyes said it all—and I'm determined never to let them down. Mom and Ruth were

Graduation dance, class of June 1943
Bill and Dee? far left

surprised by the size, weight and beauty of my class ring. It was the first time they'd seen it and they hadn't anticipated that it would be so impressive. I was thrilled that they could also visit New York City, where they saw Frank Sinatra perform at the Radio City Music Hall. Ruth was teasing my mother incessantly about swooning over the crooner. It was the first time that I've ever seen Mom blush! Ruth has grown so much in the few years that I've been here at West Point. She looks so much like Mom that it literally makes my heart sing to see her. I miss them all dearly.

Just as important to me personally as the graduation today, was the ceremony at Stewart Field yesterday where we officially became pilots. That was a proud and long awaited moment for

Cadets receiving their wings at Stewart Field, 1943



Cadet William E. Cramsie
June 1943

me and having those wings pinned on by General Arnold was a very special honor. Though he looked very serious as he did it, I saw an unmistakeable twinkle in his eye. I think he was as proud of the moment as we were.

There was a tremendous downpour this morning, but the rain passed quickly and people started streaming into the grounds. I've never seen so many people here before—there are dignitaries everywhere. British Field Marshall Sir John Dill is here as well as Admiral King, who serves the dual role of U.S. Chief of Naval Operations and Commander-in-Chief of the U.S. Fleet. Much to my surprise, I learned that Admiral King is also a pilot and former Captain of the aircraft carrier Lexington! The Field House was packed for the graduation ceremony where we received our diploma and our gold 2nd Lieutenant's bars.

In his commencement speech, General Arnold spoke about the tough war that we are engaged in and how air power is turning the tide against the Axis partners. In particular, he talked about the civilian casualties and how we need to remember the bombings of London, Warsaw, Rotterdam, Manila and of course Pearl Harbor where civilian refugees from the battle

were machine-gunned by Axis troops. This brought "every square mile" of the Axis nations into the combat zone. While we continue to target only military objectives, civilian casualties are unavoidable, he said, and we should not let sentiment weaken our effort or determination. It seemed to me as though the address was really for someone else's benefit, perhaps the press, since we all understand the situation—even though we haven't yet been personally exposed to it. However, one point that he made really did amaze me. In the past five months, the American aircraft industry has built more airplanes than in the whole 36 years from the Wright brothers' flight at Kitty Hawk to the start of the war!

2Lt. William E. Cramsie
US Army Air Corps

The whole day seemed to go by in a blur and in what seemed like moments it was over. We'll all split up now to our specialized training and to our first assignments as officers in the U.S. Army—sort of like the first day at Beast Barracks, but this time without the hazing!

I don't know, of course, what graduation has meant in other years—in a time not gripped by a world war—but as I looked around at the guys I've spent so many good (and not so good) times with, I had a real lump in my throat. It's impossible to forget where we are all headed. Please God we will help to win the war—though with friends and comrades like these, how can we fail?

How easy it is to imagine Bill and Dee, formally attired, standing on Cullum Balcony beneath a harvest moon, taking in the beauty of the placid Hudson. Perhaps, on occasion, they also wandered down "Flirtation Walk"—a West Point landmark that had enjoyed a romantic history long before Bill donned cadet gray. As early as 1909 it was mentioned in a *Putnam's Magazine* article, while "Flirtation Walk" was also featured in the eponymous 1934 musical, starring Dick Powell and Ruby Keeler. One popular stop along the secluded path is Kissing Rock, where West Point's prohibition on personal demonstrations of affection was—as a general rule—discreetly overlooked (the overhanging rock was considered a sort of year-round mistletoe). In any case, it was clearly an escape where the rules of West Point were not rigidly enforced.

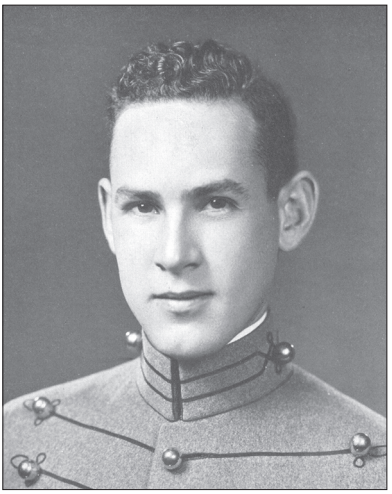
The spiritual needs of the cadet corps were always treated as an important component of their West Point experience. In 1939, the Archbishop of the New York Diocese, Francis Joseph Spellman, was appointed by Pope Pius XII as the Apostolic Vicar of the U.S. Armed Forces. Bishop Spellman made several trips to West Point, at least one of which coincided with the residency of Bill Cramsie. It was undoubtedly a thrill for the young Irish Catholic.

In the summer of their second year, those cadets who were being assigned to ground forces were sent to Pine Camp, NY for maneuvers with the Fourth Armored Division as part of an accelerated summer training program. The 208 cadets destined for service with the Army Air Forces were sent instead to one of the primary flight training bases located around the country for "Elementary Flying Training." At these flying schools the cadets—ironically enough—found themselves effectively becoming "plebes" once again. They underwent ground training and initial flight training with an instructor in a two-seat trainer such as the Stearman PT-13/17 Kaydet biplane or the Fairchild PT-19 monoplane. After eight hours of flying time they "soloed" and were thereby advanced to cross-country flying and aerobatics.

Bill was assigned to the West Coast Air Corps Training Center at Ontario, California on Special Order 108, dated 26 May 1942. His group departed West Point only three days later, on May 29th. Cadets training at Ontario at the same time included: Paul Atkinson, Albert Bowley, John Chandler, Arthur Holderness, George Ingram, Harry Kenyon, Richard Reitmann, Coleman Richards, John Swisshelm, Jonathan Vordermark and Harold Young. The cadets were given meal tickets for meals in route or, in places lacking facilities, were authorized actual expenses up to $3.00 maximum per day for meals and lodging.

Harold Aldrich ("Whirlaway") Young played in the intramural lacrosse league with Bill and the two were well acquainted, in addition to being very similar in both temperament and ambitions. Harold's parents lived in Long Beach, not far from the training facility at Ontario. Friends at USMAY often marvelled at the fact that "the interior of his textbooks rarely saw the light of day; yet he always did well in academics."

After completing their elementary flying training, the cadets were placed on furlough until 12 noon on 24 Aug 1942 (the whole furlough amounting to 25 days in total). Once back at the academy, the aviation cadets trained at Stewart Field on the BT-15, more commonly, if not very affectionately, known as the "Voltec Vibrator". They flew every other afternoon, five days a week. (Bill Cramsie must have loved it!) Twin-engine training was conducted in the Beech AT-10, at that time a comparative luxury.



Harold Aldrich
"Whirlaway" Young

Harold Young was killed in a training accident that must have served fair notice to his friends that flying could

be a dangerous occupation. In an apparent attempt to "buzz" Vassar College, Harold flew too low and was unable to pull up in time. The resultant crash killed Harold Young and badly injured his classmate Dick Snyder, who survived and overcame many obstacles to fly P-47s until he was shot down supporting Operation Market Garden and became a POW in Stalag Luft 1. The class of June '43 was certainly not short of exploits and many of these—usually humorous, in retrospect—are included in Tom Carhart's *Still Loyal Be*. (Predictably, aviators were involved in more than their share . . .) A humorous "diary" of life as a cadet was written by Ronan Grady (class of June '43) who contributed satirical vignettes to *The Pointer,* the school's monthly student periodical. These were based on a fictitious cadet named Ducrot Pepys, but are said by some to relate actual incidents. A compilation of these tales was published in 1943 as *The Collected Works of Ducrot Pepys*.

On November 30, 1942 Lieutenant General H. H. (Hap) Arnold penned a letter to the graduates of June 1943 to prepare them for the role they would play in the world at war. The Army was desperately in need of leaders for the rapidly

BT-15, the "Voltec Vibrator"

Lt. Gen. H.H. "Hap" Arnold

growing Air Forces. General Arnold's son Henry H. Jr. was a member of the class of 1940 that had "welcomed" Bill and his classmates to Beast Barracks, while the general's younger son Bruce had entered West Point in the same class as Bill. In fact, there were many sons of generals at West Point between 1940 and 1943, including those of Eisenhower, Patton, Clark and Doolittle. There were 23 of them in the class of June 1943 alone.

It was probably a day for grand celebration among cadets when, due to the wartime demand for officers, Congress approved shortening the curriculum by a full year for cadets graduating in 1943 and later. This was not an original idea—during World War I, the graduation dates for several classes were accelerated. One class graduated after only two years.

Final exams for the class of June 1943 were held on May 27th and the following week was rich in rewards for the effort expended. Those cadets who chose assignment to the Army Air Corps, and had completed their flight training, received their wings from General Arnold on May 31st. For time already served during a period of war, they had been awarded the American Defense Service Ribbon two days earlier. On June 1st, Cadet Cramsie was appointed by the president, under Adjutant General order 201, as a second lieutenant in the Air Corps with serial number O-25895.

One of the highlights of graduation week for cadets and their families was the Superintendent's Reception. The outdoor gathering, a lawn affair set amidst towering pines and hardwoods, was a social rite of passage for those soon to become officers and gentlemen. Dell and Ruth Cramsie had

TO THE GRADUATES OF JUNE 1943:

The rocky crags upon which the Military Academy is built symbolize the strength of our mighty Nation and from here come great fighting men - courageous men who have proved the bulwark of our strength in the past in time of danger.

You who approach the completion of your course at West Point this year have been selected to serve your Country at the time of its greatest peril since its birth. There have been unleashed upon the world might forces of evil and aggression which threaten the very existence of our land—it is part of your job to overthrow these evils.

It will be your lot to meet the enemy face to face - and with your comrades in arms to attack him - to destroy him utterly. There are no agreed upon rules in this game. There is no quarter expected or sought and no respect for the other fellows principles. Our ideas of fair play no longer govern. It is a question of playing the game as our opponents have dictated - kill or be killed. We must be coldly blind to but one thought - that we must and will win.

Some of you will have an opportunity to participate in spectacular achievements - others may be assigned to less spectacular but equally important duties. However, the greatest contribution you can make to the common cause is to perform your duties, whatever they may be, to the best of your ability, without stint and in the spirit of the traditions with which you have been imbued in the days of your preparation at West Point.

We of the Air Forces look forward to your coming - to fill gaps in our ranks - to fly side by side with those graduates who have preceded you and whose brave deeds in aerial combat now are history. We welcome you.

As Commanding General of the Army Air Forces, my complete confidence rests in you.

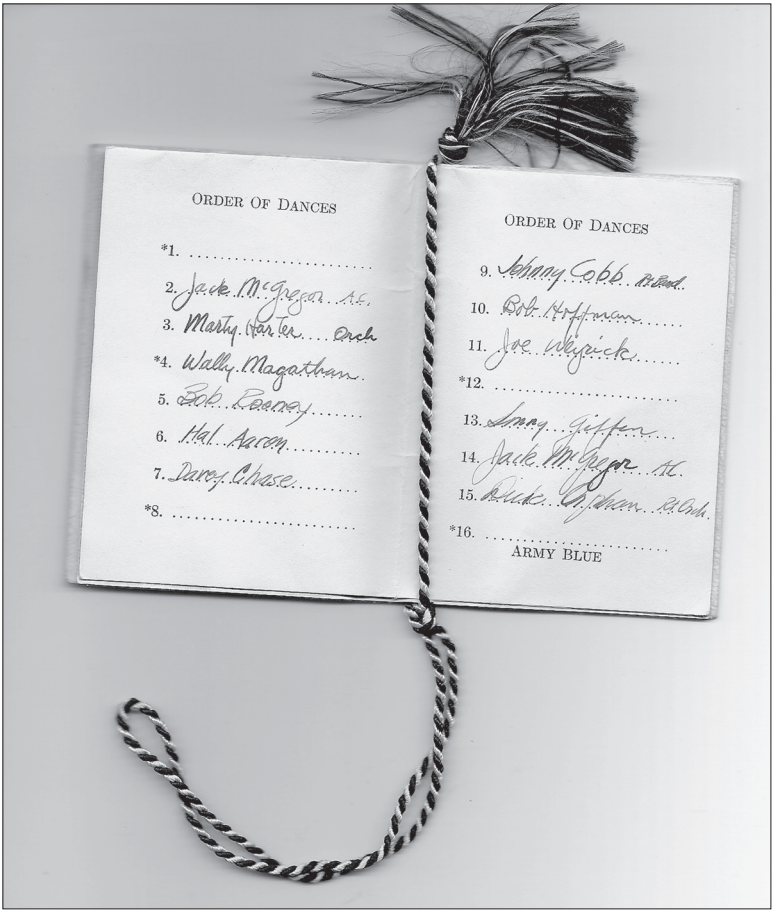
//s// H.H. Arnold, Lt. General USA

traveled four days by train to be a part of this experience. Ladies in colorful sun dresses and men in suits or uniforms, as the situation dictated, basked in the pride of shared accomplishment and formed a bond that in many cases lasted a lifetime. Their sons had created a new entity, with its own heartbeat, the class of June 1943. That bond was accentuated by 32 marriages during graduation week. Chaplain Walthour officiated at 14 ceremonies in the Cadet Chapel, another six were performed at the Old Chapel by Chaplain Wheat and 12 Catholic weddings were held at Holy Trinity by Father Murdoch.

Another highlight of graduation week was the much anticipated Graduation Hop—which was a particular thrill for Bill's sister Ruth. Her son Tom recalls that his mother was quite taken with the aura and the glamor of the cadet corps and spoke of that memorable trip often. The event was held in the gymnasium, which had been decorated by the cadets themselves. Dancing to Big Band music, the Lindy Hop was a popular step of the day. Ruth's dance card for the evening,

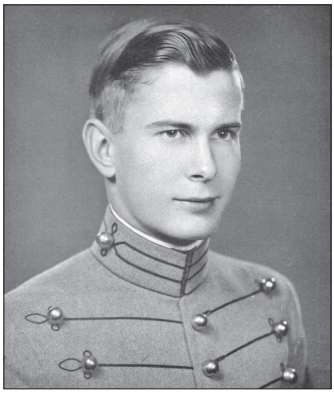
The Superintendent's Reception - USMA, June 1943

still preserved by her children as a tangible link to one of their mother's greatest adventures, is in effect a list of Bill's friends in Company G-1. There are eleven names on the card. I was fortunate enough and honored to be able to reminisce with three of them: Wally Magathan, Joe Weyrick and Dick Orphan. Four dances are vacant on the card and we might presume that Bill commandeered one or more of those. Without a doubt, Bill escorted Ruth through the formal receiving line, following a well established tradition, and danced the first dance with his "little sister".

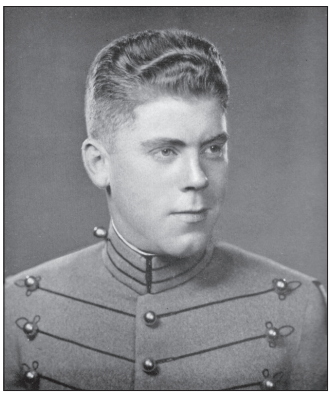


Ruth Cramsie's Dance Card for the Graduation Hop

The first name on the card is that of Jack McGregor for dance #2. Jack also was signed for dance 14. Although USMA records of room assignments from 1943 are no longer available, and no living member of the class has been able to recall who Bill Cramsie's room mates were, a process of elimination and this appearance of Jack twice on Ruth's dance card suggests that he may indeed have been one of Bill's room mates. Jack would fly the B-29 out of Saipan in missions over Japan and become a Purple Heart recipient. He retired from the Air Force as a Lt. Colonel and worked with NASA and the National Air and Space Museum until his death in 1992.



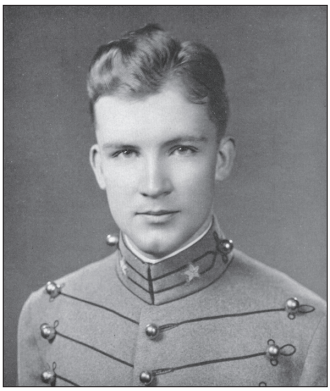
Jack "Mac" McGregor



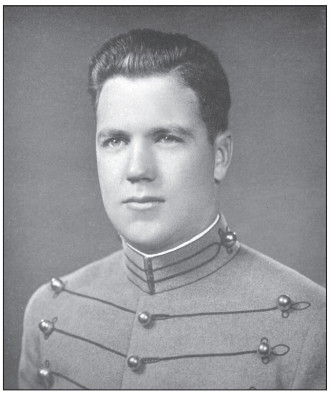
Martin "Marty" Harter

Fellow Air Corps cadet Marty Harter, born in the state of Washington, but entering the academy from Illinois, landed #3 of the 16 scheduled dances. Marty was a red-headed Navy "brat" who chose the Army over his father's branch of the service. After graduation, he would train on the B-26 Marauder and fly with the 394th Bomb Group (9th AF) out of England. He would be killed in action during an air mission over Kyllsburg, Germany on February 19, 1945. By then, he had already been promoted to Captain and had earned eight Air Medals, not counting the one that came posthumously with his Purple Heart.

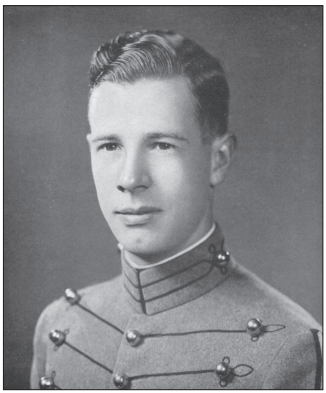
Wally Magathan, dance #4, was also a member of Company G-1 and roomed with Bob Rooney. Wally graduated number seven in their class, surpassing even Bernard Rogers, and later earned a PhD at Princeton. Like Rogers, he remained



Wallace "Wally" Magathan



Robert "Bob" Rooney



Harold "Hal" Aaron

at West Point after graduation as an instructor. Serving most of his career in Field Artillery, he retired from the Army in 1973 as a Brigadier General, having been awarded the Legion of Merit three times as well as the Distinguished Service Medal.

Bob Rooney, #5, was one of the roommates of Wally Magathan. He joined the elite group of West Pointers that would fly the A-20 attack bomber with the 416th Bomb Group out of England. His academy classmates had nicknamed him "Fat Stuff". Fellow pilots in the 416th knew him as "Pat". Rooney was an excellent athlete and a jovial person who was much admired by all. His service and tragic fate are described elsewhere in this book.

Hal Aaron, #6, was enamored with the Air Corps but less than perfect eyesight led him instead to the Infantry. Though graduating in the lower third of his West Point class, Hal had boundless ambition. That ambition served him and the nation well. Over the course of his career, he earned three Bronze Stars, the Purple Heart, two Distinguished Service Medals, the Defense Distinguished Service Medal, three Legion of Merits and two Air Medals. He moved from Infan-

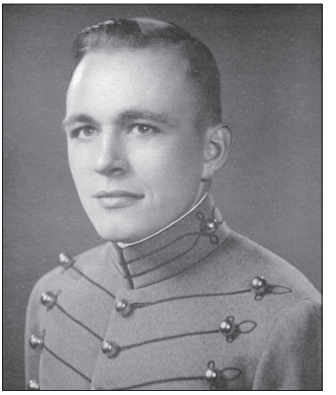
try into Intelligence and rose to the lofty position of Deputy Director of the Defense Intelligence Agency. He retired as a Lieutenant General in 1979 and died the following year. He is a member of the Military Intelligence Hall of Fame.

Davey Chase, from Maine, signed for dance #7. Davey was regarded by his classmates as quiet and efficient with a strong sense of humor. He went to the 11th Airborne Division after graduation and fought in the South Pacific, earning the Bronze Star, Purple Heart and Air Medal. Serving in the Judge Advocate field, he retired from the Army as a Colonel in 1973. He died at Melbourne, Florida in 1992.

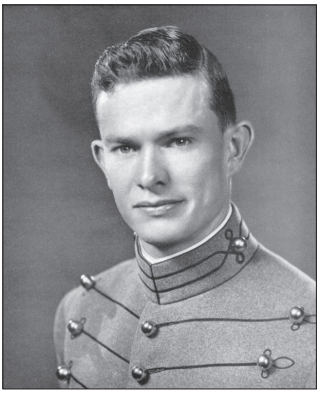
Johnny Cobb, who roomed with Hal Aaron and Dick Orphan, danced #9 with Ruth. He was described in the yearbook as a "Southern Gentleman and a good friend." Born and raised in Kentucky, he joined the 82nd Airborne Division after graduating and earned a Bronze Star during WWII. He retired from the Army as a Colonel in 1973, having twice been awarded the Legion of Merit. He died at Austin, TX in 2001.

Bob Hoffman, #10, was a Texas boy with "an infininte capacity for friendship". He flew a B-24 in the

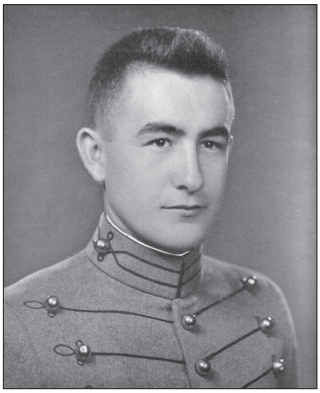
David "Davey" Chase



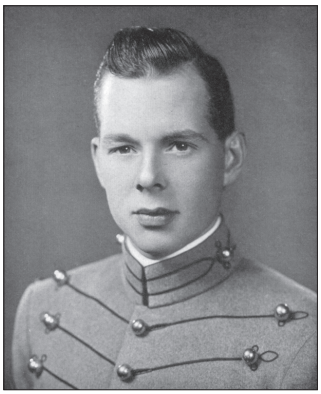
John "Johnny" Cobb



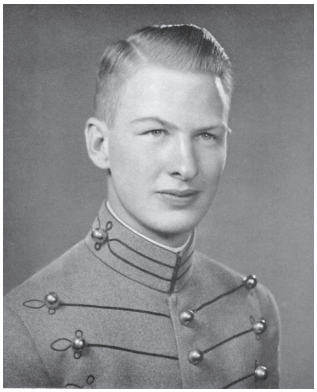
Robert "Bob" Hoffman



Joseph "Joe" Weyrick



Stewart "Sonny" Giffin



Richard "Dick" Orphan

453rd Bomb Group (8th AF) and earned two Distinguished Flying Crosses and four Air Medals during that tour. He retired from the U.S. Air Force in 1972 as a Colonel.

Joe Weyrick, #11, hailed from Arizona and earned a reputation among his classmates as being ready for fun. His memory of Bill is described earlier in this book. Joe earned a Bronze Star in Korea and a Joint Service Commendation for his service in the Dominican Republic. He retired from the Army in 1973 as a Colonel and now lives in South Carolina.

Sonny Giffin, the son of a West Pointer, signed for dance #13. Sonny was remembered by his classmates for his "energetic and forceful personality." He was born in the Canal Zone and received a congressional appointment to the academy from the 11th district of Ohio. Serving in the 289th Infantry Regiment of the 75th Infantry Division, he earned a Bronze Star and Purple Heart during WWII. He earned a second Bronze Star and an Air Medal while stationed with MACV in Vietnam, and a Legion of Merit before retiring in 1969 as a Lieutenant Colonel. He died at Monterey, California in 1980.

Blonde-haired Dick Orphan, #15, was a native of Colorado. He's described in the class yearbook as having a conservative nature—steady and dependable. Serving with the 314th Infantry Regiment of the 79th Infantry Division in France and Germany, he earned two Bronze Stars and a Purple Heart.

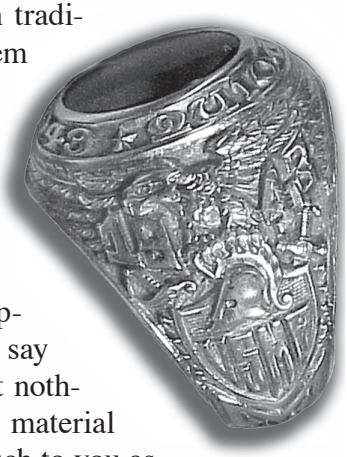
It certainly was a special group of young men that Ruth Cramsie danced with that balmy June evening, and that her brother Bill had come to know so well. He obviously was proud of being their peer.

As they passed in review at graduation to the strains of Colonel Bogey, the 514 graduating cadets of this class could not have imagined the calling that was theirs. It was their destiny to become the "greatest generation" and to accomplish the seemingly impossible. Many heroes were to emerge from this class, including 62 who were killed in action during wartime and 45 who earned at least one star and General Officer rank. Thirty-six became prisoners of war. Classmate Bernard W. Rogers rose to the post-war position of Supreme Commander Allied Forces Europe.

DUTY
HONOR

Chapter Four

Spirit of the Ring



West Point is steeped in traditions and among them few surpass that of the class ring. Graduates are very protective of their rings and treat them with an almost eerie reverence. In the 11 October 1940 issue of *The Pointer,* the West Point student periodical, Captain E. Parmly, III wrote: "I can say without fear of contradiction that nothing you ever gain in the way of material possessions will ever mean as much to you as your ring... yes, it's a symbol of accomplishment... it's always with you, a part of you...and you just can't let such an inseparable pal down." These words would surely have inspired Bill Cramsie, being a plebe at the time and longing to reach the point where he could wear that peerless symbol of achievement.

The ring itself becomes a sort of Ark of the Covenant, embodying the core values of duty, honor and country that each cadet honors above self. Today, the Association of Graduates sponsors an active program to recover class rings lost by former graduates over the years. In April of 2004, a ceremony was held at the Air Cadet Memorial in which the miraculously recovered ring of cadet Robert Edward ("Robin") Horn, class of June 1943, was returned to his family. Cadet Horn was killed shortly before graduation when his plane crashed in the Catskills during a training flight.

Another program was instituted recently, through which rings donated by former graduates, or their heirs, are melted down and made into a gold bar. This bar is presented to the current firsties. Shavings from the bar are then added to each

ring produced for the new graduating class. There is a strong feeling among those on both ends of this exchange that the spirit of those who have passed before will live on in those present.

Although the cadets themselves help design their rings, the firm of Bailey Banks and Biddle in Philadelphia has been the main source of these rings since 1878. This company, which also makes the Purple Heart and the Congressional Medal of Honor, retains the dies for rings from previous years so that replacements can be made if necessary. From these dies, new molds can be generated.

The idea of a class ring was adopted at West Point in 1835. In fact, West Point is acknowledged as the first college to designate a specific ring as a class emblem. For some unknown reason, there was no ring in 1836 but the tradition has been continued every year since. In 1869, in an attempt to establish some uniformity of design, the policy of presenting the academy crest on one side of the ring and the class crest on the other side was instituted, although oddly, the

New Firsties on Ring Day — 1943
(Bill Cramsie seated first row center)

class of 1879 opted for cuff links instead of a class ring. The academy crest that appears on rings today and on the ring of June 1943 was adopted in 1898. The class crest, which is still designed by cadets, must by regulation include the letters USMA, an eagle, an officer's sabre, a cadet sabre, the arrows and leaves from the national emblem and the class motto. By academy regulation, rings must be purchased through the USMA Treasurer.

Cadets are not authorized to wear the ring until their final year, as firsties, when a special ceremony on Ring Day marks the occasion of this privilege. This much anticipated event, held at Trophy Point, normally takes place in the summer at the end of the plebe indoctrination period called Beast Barracks. Due to the shortened schedule for graduation, the class of June 1943 enjoyed Ring Day in January of 1943. At this time, plebes were allowed (though on bended knee) to haze the firsties with a ritualistic oration called the "Ring Poop":

"Oh my Gosh, Sir, what a beautiful ring.
What a crass mass of brass and glass.
What a bold mold of rolled gold.
What a cool jewel you got from your school.
See how it sparkles and shines.
It must have cost you a fortune
Please Sir May I touch it,
May I touch it Please Sir."

Part of Ring Day tradition was the preparation of a skit for dinner that evening. In this skit the plebes would inspect and admire the new rings and engage in a mock destruction of the table commandant's ring. In spite of the jovial merriment, the event was not entirely light-hearted. Ned Burr, now president of the class of June 1943 alumni, recalled a poignant moment: "The presenter said that over the years the gold on the ring will wear, finally reaching a point where the words 'Duty, Honor, Country' are no longer visible. After

the owner has died and his heart is examined those words are found engraved on it."

It should perhaps not surprise us that some of these rings come back permanently to West Point after the course of their owner's career and life have run. Over time, I found myself thinking more and more frequently about visiting West Point myself and taking the ring of Bill Cramsie back home for a visit. In January of 2008, I was off on business again to New York City. This time, I set aside a day for a trip to West Point. New York city never sleeps, but it's relatively quiet at 6:00 am and the 10 minute walk from my hotel near Times Square to Grand Central Station was actually pleasant. The area was experiencing an abnormally mild spell of weather and there was a briskness in the air of Fall, even though it was early January and should by all rights have been frigid. I had never taken a train on the Hudson Line and stopped at the information booth to get my bearings.

"Sir, can you tell me which train I'd take to Peekskill?"

The tall, slim and neatly dressed attendant peered over a pair of half-eyes without bothering to check a schedule,

"Poughkeepsie, Track 37 at 6:41"

I thanked him and wound my way through the underground tunnels to track 37 without difficulty—much to my surprise. Right there at the gate was a Starbucks coffee shop, offering a chance to enjoy one of New York's justifiably famous bagels and collect my thoughts for the day ahead. I was in the Big Apple for a numismatic convention and was taking Thursday off for some personal business. The Special Collections staff at the U.S. Military Academy had graciously invited me to peruse their records in search of information about Bill Cramsie's attendance.

As the North Metro train wound its way up the Hudson, I was struck by the enormity of this river, fully as wide in some places as the Mississippi or the Ohio. Mile after mile

of shoreline was dotted with marinas. Boats, large and small, were in abundance and though I have been around boats all of my life I had never noticed until this day how similar the names of boats are to those of World War II bombers. At 7:20 we pulled into the station at Tarrytown and my mind raced with details of the West Point link to Marymount College. I could envision Clemie Smith standing on the platform in 1943 waiting for a train to New York City. Pulling out of the station, the high bluffs on the west side of the river offered an impressive reminder that West Point was once a strategic military location. In the '40s, there was a passenger train link from New York to West Point, with a station right at the academy itself. Today, the track running along the west side of the Hudson is used only by freight trains. The passenger trains run on the East side of the river and one must take a taxi from Peekskill to cross the river and visit West Point. As the train approached Peekskill, I experienced a growing sense of anticipation. Bill Cramsie's class ring would soon be back where its journey had begun.

The Hudson River Valley is very picturesque and Peekskill is a quaint town not unlike a miniature San Francisco. After a pleasant ride through beautiful terrain we arrived at the Thayer Gate. This magnificent Gothic entry to the military post—which, ironically, Bill Cramsie was never to see—was donated by the alumni of the class of June 1943. The post at West Point has few flat and level areas and the views are stunning. Arriving at the Academy Library, I found a remarkably congenial and relaxed atmosphere—not quite what I had expected. Cadets seemed to move freely and independently about the facility, coming and going without any apparent regimentation. All were very military in bearing and appearance, and not at all stressed by the mileau. That small corner, at least, of USMAY was more like a private college than a military training center. It was a bit of an eye-opener after a lifetime of thinking that everything at West Point was done at a brace. My initial perceptions were probably skewed by a shroud of myth, that common sense should have dis-

pelled. Even combat zones have times and places to lighten up—yet I couldn't help but think that any one of these cadets could be a Bill Cramsie or a Norman Schwarzkopf.

Taking the elevator up to the Special Collections section on the fourth floor, one encounters a simple and easy "do it yourself" sign-in procedure. No checking of IDs, searching bags or standing in lines. Wandering back to the research desk, I found a work table stacked with references to Bill Cramsie and the years that he served at West Point. This preliminary research on my behalf was all the more remarkable as the library had been given only three days advance notice of my visit. The research assistants were so pleasant and helpful that it seemed impossible this was a government facility. The staff had already made a photocopy of Bill's Cadet Service Record for me to keep. This document included entrance documents, physical examination records, full academic transcripts and a complete running list of every demerit earned by Bill Cramsie as a cadet. This record was the second message in a bottle. After two years of searching, I now had a pretty good answer to the question, "Who was Bill Cramsie?"

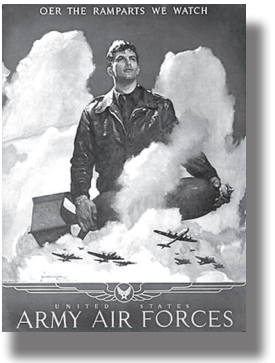
The time passed all too quickly as I poured over records, documents and photographs. In what seemed like a heartbeat, the day was gone and it was time to head back to the city. Back in the library reception area, I paused to examine the extraordinary collection of West Point class rings from years past. Many of these rings were earned by graduates who since had been killed in action defending America. It was an inspiring display, and with the ring of Bill Cramsie clasped tightly in my hand I could imagine that he would have been equally impressed.

I caught one of the military shuttles that make regular rounds and got off at the Thayer Gate, thinking I would call a taxi to take me back to the east side of the Hudson and board the southbound train at Garrison. It never occurred to me that a taxi might be hard to locate. I guess I was thinking in terms of Manhattan, where a raised hand typically is met within

seconds by a yellow transport. I quickly discovered that in nearby Highland Falls there was only one taxi with a dispatch service and it was on a call in Newburgh, some 20 miles away. The alternatives were to call for a taxi from Peekskill or Newburgh—which would be slow and expensive.

As a young boy, my mother wisely told me that if I ever were to find myself in trouble, go to the nearest police station. They would help me. In many decades of knocking about unusual places around the world, some of them probably ill-advised, I never had occasion to put my mother's advice to the test. As I pondered my self-created predicament, I happened to look up and see that near the gate was a Military Police headquarters. I can only imagine what was going through the mind of the desk sergeant as I related my dilemma. As he was explaining the less-than-friendly local transportation system, which requires advance reservations, a young captain (probably the commander of this MP detachment)walked up and asked if he could help. That was all it took and before long there was a taxi waiting for me at the gate. I didn't ask where it came from, but I did think kindly of the captain and of my Mother.

As the sun set on the Hudson, the train ride back to New York City was much shorter, it seemed, than going the other direction earlier that day. My mind was processing information in a steady stream that made the time fly by.

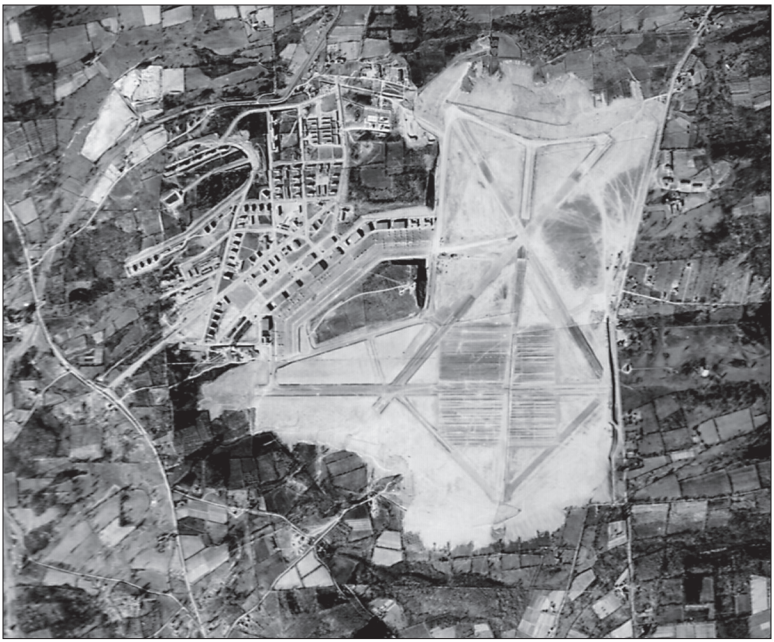

O'ER THE RAMPARTS WE WATCH
UNITED STATES
ARMY AIR FORCES

Chapter Five

Preparing for War

Following graduation, Bill completed his Advanced Pilot Training at Stewart Field in Newburgh, NY just north of West Point. The tract of land on which this airfield was built was donated to the city of Newburgh in 1930 by Samuel Stewart and the field was named after his father, a Scottish-born 19th-century sea captain. In October, 1941, the city sold the airfield to the U.S. Military Academy for $1.00, and in the summer of 1942 the field was officially dedicated as the "Wings of West Point."

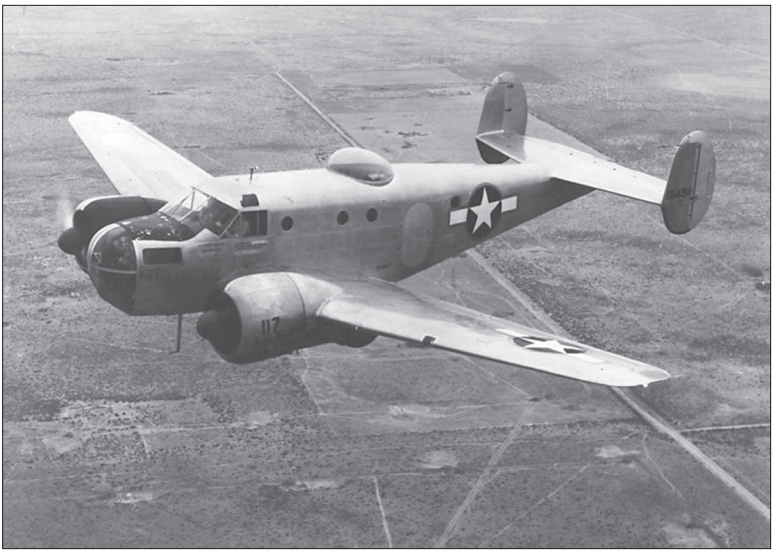
The 657th School Squadron, commanded by Captain Lamar Plunkett, was assigned the advanced training responsibility in May of 1943 and the 206 freshly graduated second



Stewart Field — 1943

lieutenants from the academy were Plunkett's first charges under that program. Dick Wheeler, one of those students, recalls those days:

"The class of June '43 was the first class of cadets to receive both Basic and Advanced flight training at Stewart Field. During the summer of 1942, our class was sent to train with their chosen branch of service. Those who chose the Air Corps were sent to receive Primary flight training at civilian Primary Schools throughout the southern part of the country. Upon completion, they returned to the Academy to finish the academic classes for their engineering degree as well as Basic and Advanced flight training for their pilot rating. In Basic Training, we all flew the BT-13. In Advanced, we were separated into single engine for fighter pilots and twin engine for bomber types. The fighter types flew the AT-6 and the bomber types flew the AT-10."

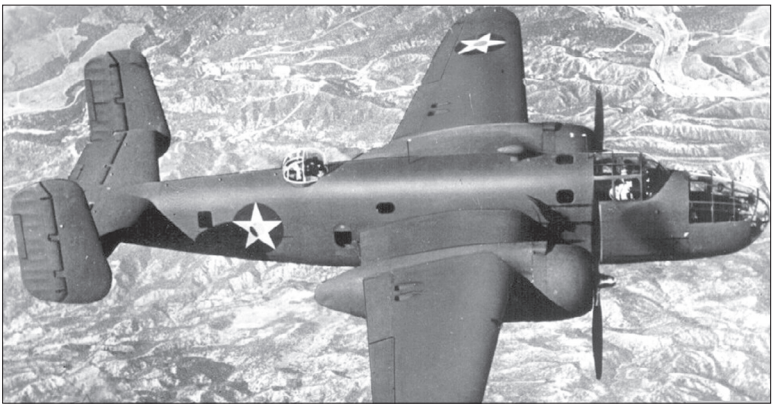


Beach AT-10 twin engine Advanced Trainer

Frank, Ruth & Idella Cramsie
Fall of 1943

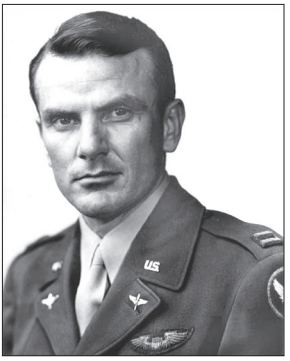
After a short vacation, Bill and several of his classmates were transferred from Stewart Field to Mather Field at Sacramento, California for two months of intensive twin engine bomber training in the B-25 Mitchell. The Mitchell was the same type of aircraft that Jimmy Doolitle had flown on his raid against Tokyo and other Japanese cities a year earlier. Mather Field, located on the south side of California's capital city, and now deactivated, was for decades considered one of the most beautiful bases in the Air Force. It was only a short drive, even in those days, from Sacramento to Auburn and Cramsie's family must have been happy to have him so near for a change. As fate would have it, both of the Cramsie boys would soon be serving in England with the Army Air Corps, but their paths would never cross again.

West Point graduates were given the choice of training on single engine or multi-engine aircraft. The prevailing view at that time was that a pilot's value to the Air Corps was determined by the number of engines on the plane that he flew. For career-oriented pilots, that suggested a multi-engine path. On the other hand, four engine bomber com-



B-25 twin engine bomber used for training at Mather Field

mands did not go to junior officers. So, if one longed to be an aircraft commander, a single engine aircraft might have been preferable. A light twin engine bomber, like the Douglas A-20 Havoc, offered the best of both worlds. It flew like a fighter and was designed to be flown by a single pilot. The trainees who ranked highest in their classes were given their choice of aircraft and many opted for the Havoc. In 1943, it was the most powerful light bomber in the world, and Air Corps pilots considered it the sweetest aircraft in the inventory. After graduating from training at Mather Field, Wheeler and Cramsie were both assigned to the 671st Bomb Squadron of the newly formed 416th Bomb Group—flying the A-20G.



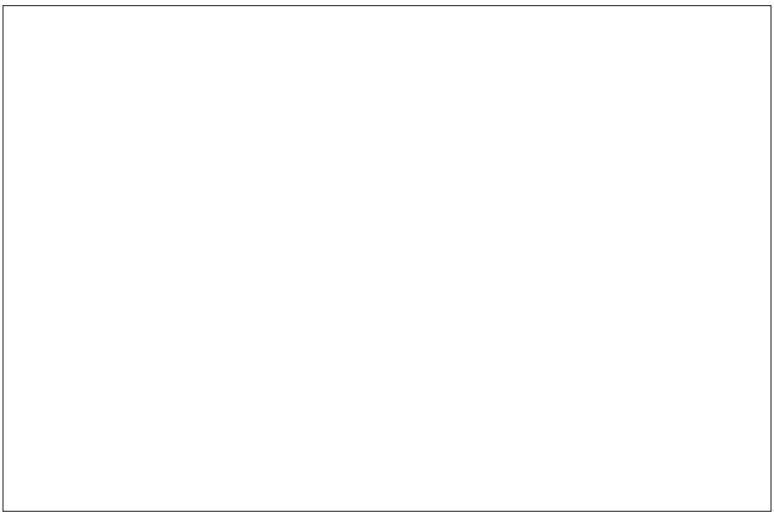
Captain Glen Edwards

The 416th Bombardment Group (Light) was formed on January 25, 1943 and activated at Will Rogers Field in Oklahoma City on February 5th of that year. The initial assignment of personnel, 51 officers and 241 enlisted men, came from the 46th Bomb Group—which was already flying A-20s out of Will Rogers. Additional personnel were added throughout 1943. Oklahoma City was a major training center for A-20 attack bombers in the early days of WWII. It had previously been home to the 47th Bomb Group, actively engaged in Operation Torch—the Allied invasion of French North Africa. As the 416th was being formed at Will Rogers, the 47th was learning important lessons in Tunisia and Algeria about tactics and capabilities of the A-20. One of those A-20 pilots heavily engaged in the African and Mediterranean theaters of operation during 1942 and 1943 was Glen Edwards from Lincoln, California.

The lives of Bill Cramsie and Glen Edwards intersected in several ways, with both ending tragically. Edwards graduated from Lincoln Union High School in 1936, the same year that Bill Cramsie graduated from Placer Union High School—

barely 13 miles east, as the crow flies. Both were members of their high school track teams and were frequent competitors. Both of them graduated near the top of their respective classes and entered the tiny Placer Junior College as classmates in the Fall of 1936. The school had just reopened at Auburn following a 16 year hiatus. Although the enrollment at that time numbered only about 100 students, the school (now Sierra College) quickly earned a very high academic rating. While Cramsie went on to West Point, Edwards enlisted in the Army as an Aviation Cadet and was commissioned after completing flight training at Luke AFB, Arizona.

While serving with the 47th at Youks-les-Bains, Algeria, Edwards learned the ropes from Major Charles Kegelman and Captain Harold Radetsky. Kegelman had earlier flown an A-20 on the first 8th Air Force combat mission in Europe. From England, Kegelman's 15th Bomb Squadron of A-20s had been deployed to North Africa. Radetsky, one of Kegelman's lead pilots, was promoted to Major and served as Operations Officer of the 416th Bomb Group. Radetsky joined the 416th at Lake Charles, helping to organize the unit and train its personnel. He then served a second combat tour



A-20 bombing practice at Fort Pierce, Florida

wtih the Group at Wethersfield. It would seem incredible if their mutual acquaintance with Glen Edwards failed to crop up somewhere in Radetsky and Cramsie's encounters.

The 416th Bomb Group had been transferred from Will Rogers Field to Lake Charles, Louisiana for operational training—where sixteen young pilots from West Point joined the group in September of 1943. They were divided equally among the four squadrons: the 668th, 669th 670th and 671st. Bill Cramsie was assigned to the 671st. A hurricane scare welcomed the new arrivals as a tropical storm developed in the western Gulf of Mexico on September 15, turning into a hurricane the next day with winds of 95 miles per hour. Fortunately, by the time it hit Lake Charles it had been downgraded again to a tropical storm.

The unit trained at Lake Charles through October and then moved en masse on November 1st by truck convoy to Laurel, Mississippi for continued training in air and ground operations, including war games and operation under field conditions. Laurel Army Air Field, now Hesler Noble field, was located two miles southwest of Laurel, not far from Hattiesburg. The 416th was quartered in comparatively rough conditions, living much of the time out of tents. The experience would prepare some of them for the conditions they later had to cope with in Europe. Daily training was conducted on subjects like chemical warfare, care and use of small arms, first aid and sanitation. Group communications personnel set up field phones and a field mess (a somewhat less than exquisite dining facility) was established.

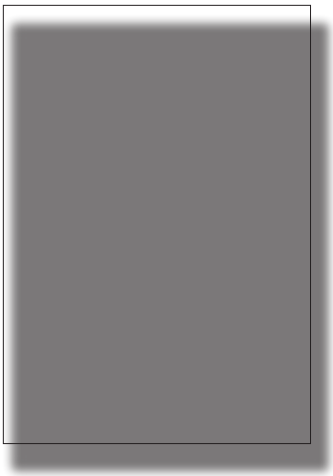
Firepower demonstrations and bombing practice were carried out at a number of training facilities in the southern U.S. and at ranges along the Gulf Coast. The unit had its share of training mishaps as recorded, for example, in an excerpt from the official 669th history:

"On the 1st day of October, Lt. Walter C. Morris and his two gunners, Sergeant Everette L. Bass and Sergeant Hughes M. Graud, crashed in the Gulf of Mexico. None of the bodies were recovered. The cause of the accident is unknown. On

the 10th, while flying cover for our Convoy to Gillis Airfield, the plane flown by Lt. Robert F. Kempernolte, with Lt. John W. Wisdon, his B/N, collided in mid-air with a plane from the 671st Squadron. The occupants of both planes were killed. The cause is unknown. On the 23rd, Lt. Wilfred Siggs was involved in the last of the unfortunate series. This time there was no personal injury. Slight damage to the plane resulted when the left landing gear buckled as the plane touched the ground at the home field."

Two similar incidents involved pilots whose lives were entwined with Bill Cramsie's. On November 5, 1943 Lt. Arthur Raines was involved in an aircraft accident flying a RDB-7B, an early version of the A-20 that was used for reconnaissance and anti-submarine operations. The accident took place 15 miles south of DeRidder, Louisiana while supporting infantry training operations. Just two weeks after the Raines incident, Bill's West Point classmate, Bob Rooney, was injured in another accident flying A-20C tail #41-19169 out of Laurel. That accident took place at the Hancock County bombing and gunnery range in Mississippi. Both of those pilots returned to duty.

On 1 December 1943, just six months after receiving his commission, Bill Cramsie was promoted to First Lieutenant. Having experienced that same event in my own military career, I could well appreciate the significance to Bill. Though rank is seldom exercised between lieutenants, the glint of silver on your shoulder, rather than brass, is a comforting transition.



Chapter Six

Last Stop USA

Laurel, Mississippi
Sunday: New Year's Day, 1944

Last night we had a good party. They turned the mess hall into an "all ranks" beer garden and each squadron showcased their theatrical talent (ours didn't have a whole lot, but the girls all liked it). I liked Colonel Mace's order that all notions of rank were "temporarily parked at the coat rack!" Combat veterans, West Point graduates, aviation cadets, volunteers and draftees all mingled in good fellowship.

That felt right to me. After all, we'd suffered together and laughed together and worn ourselves out training together, so it felt right to party together (Bob even "cut in" on one of the captains, that's how far some guys went!) It was a great farewell to Laurel: lots of pretty girls, and every man around full of pride, confidence and enthusiasm for what we're meant to do. I can't remember most of the Colonel's speech, but he ended with, "This is our chance to prove what we've got to the whole world!" (Lots of cheers for that!) When I danced with Mike's sister Milly she said she sure hoped I'd remember her after we'd won the war, and I laughed and said of course I would. She has nice eyes, but nothing like Dee's.

Today the entire unit headed off on the two-and-a-half day train journey to Camp Shanks (Orangeburg, New York). With flags waving and lots of family and friends there to say good-bye the Laurel Army Air Base military band gave the 416th one great send-off; those Germans aren't going to know what hit them after we get over there!

At the moment, we're sitting on the train and most of the guys are playing cards or just dozing off—but my aim is to try and keep up my diary or journal (whatever you'd call it) of what it's like, so I can remember it, even if I pretend I'm doing it for my Mom. Some of the things that happen to us can't be written in a letter home, for security reasons, so this is a good way of jogging my memory later. (As we passed under some lights at an intersection, I could see that it's wet: sleet heading into snow is my guess. Bet some of the guys here will never have seen anything like it!)

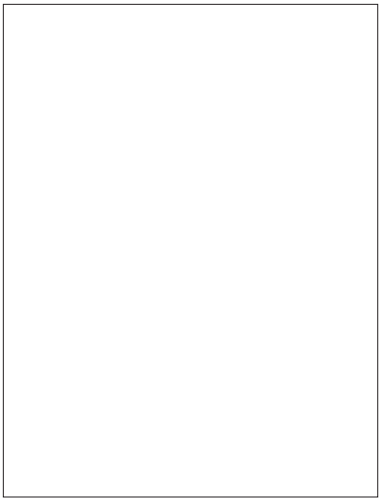
Saturday: Jan. 8, 1944

I was right enough about the snow. By the time we hit Camp Shanks we ran into a blizzard of wet slushy snow—the kind that makes wicked snowballs. Many of the northern boys knew how to handle this situation and gave no quarter to their less experienced southern comrades. I got a wet snowball down the back of my neck that I can still feel now!! It was a cold reception to austere wooden barracks that were themselves anything but inviting, but our spirits

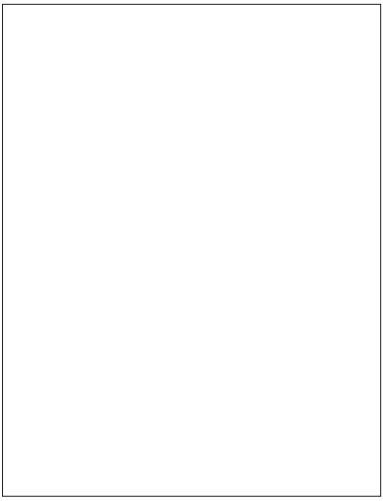
remain high. It turns out that the camp was officially activated as a personnel processing center on 4 January—making us the first unit to officially process through!

This 2000-acre facility, built specifically for assembling troops, has already been nicknamed "Last Stop USA!" It's near the Hudson River, about 15 miles north of New York City, which is only a short train ride from camp. Twelve-hour passes are granted pretty freely, but the mandatory eight-mile hike every day isn't so appealing after a night on the town!

The first chance I had for a pass I called Dee Rogers, the Irish girl I'd known from West Point. When she answered, my pulse skipped a beat! Anyway, she said she was free so we arranged to have a late New Year's celebration. Dee suggested bringing Clemie Smith, a girl I had also known from dances at the academy. Clemie



Clemie Smith



Bob Basnett

and I often had long talks about our common interest in music and competitive swimming—great girl. Under the circumstances, I had my pick of officers for this double date, so I asked Bob Basnett, a bombardier/navigator from our squadron that I've gotten to know well. Bob and I just naturally seem to get along.

We hopped on a train from Camp Shanks to Manhattan and on the way Bob told me about the place where he grew up. He's from Webb City, Missouri, a small town near Joplin on the Ozark plateau. His family lives at the edge of town on enough acreage to raise some livestock and keep a garden. His description of the place reminds me of our family home in Applegate, before we moved to Auburn. The Sierra foothills where I grew up are very rural. Bob enlisted in the Army partly to see what lies beyond those Ozark hills. While training as an aircraft mechanic, he noticed a posting on the unit bulletin board advertising vacancies for Aviation Cadets. That's how he entered the pilot training program.

During the trip, Bob also explained to me why the vacancies came up in the first place. A couple of years back, the Army couldn't recruit enough college-trained officers to fly all the aircraft they were buying, so Congress established the grade of Aviation Cadet and launched a flight-training program like the one Bob spotted. Bob described a few "testy" encounters with his instructors and though he passed his solo flight without a problem, he found himself on the wrong end of a test of wills. He was transferred out of pilot training and sent to bombardier training at Victorville, California and

then on to navigator school in New Mexico. He was commissioned in the Aviation Cadet program, so both of us are technically "Mustangs" having had prior enlisted service before we became officers. Bob was transferred to the 416th last Oct. while we were still training on an assortment of early version DB-7s and A-20s at Lake Charles, Louisiana.

Along the way, he kept asking me questions about Clemie, How old is she? What does she look like? Is she stuck-up? I was tempted to tease him, but thought that might not be a good way to start an evening together. So, I just told him the truth—that, when I had seen her last, she was a student at Marymount College in Tarrytown and was always fun to be around (and that she was a bit of a tomboy). That helped put Bob's mind at ease. I didn't tell him that Marymount is an exclusive girl's school—or that Clemie, with her sisters Cloe and Elda, perform

Marymount College — Tarrytown, NY

in a trio as the Smith Sisters. They've played at the grand ballroom of the Plaza Hotel, the Starlight Room of the Waldorf and at the Latin Quarter. The New York Times referred to them as "nationally known harpists" in the review of a benefit concert they did last year—and every one of them is pretty and high-spirited too. Dee told me that the sisters have been offered a contract to perform every Thursday night on one of the first TV stations in New York City! They're really becoming quite famous—but that isn't why I like Clemie: her sense of humor is what I like most about her, though (if I'm honest) it's Dee I really keep thinking about.

We met the girls late yesterday afternoon at Grand Central Station. They were staying at the home of Clemie's parents in Pelham Manor, north of the city. Dee and Clemie know each other from Marymount and from a beach club that they belong to in Mamoroneck. They're "best friends" (something, I swear, only girls know how to be!). Stopping at one of the small coffee shops above the station (which is actually underground), we got to talking about families and Clemie mentioned that her father is president of Telegraphic Cable and Radio Registrations, a company that produced the first New York City telephone directory. Her great-grandfather was a Confederate General who was killed in action at Petersburg during the Civil War. So we all started kidding her (Dee too) saying she was "too high and mighty" for the likes of us! Clemie just laughed, but even I felt a little surprised when she admitted that, before the war, she'd always had a chauffeur and had never been on a

train! She just seems normal, like the rest of us—but the family chauffeur still took the girls to Pelham Station and picked them up when they got back last night.

I started to hail a taxi as we left the station, but the girls stopped me and said they preferred to walk—so we walked a long way, all over the middle of Manhattan, from the Empire State Building to Rockefeller Center and Times Square. It was a perfect night—one of those nights when, for some reason you can't put your finger on, everything feels right. Dee looked even more bewitching than the last time I'd seen her. Clemie and Bob hit it off right away, cracking jokes and flirting like a couple of pixies. The weather was brisk enough to make walking a pleasure with a girl on your arm—though surprisingly nice for this time of year. Come sunset, the whole sky was lit up with lights and flashing signs.

We had dinner at an Italian restaurant on 50th street just east of Seventh Avenue. The food was great and the atmosphere was really special. Being early in the evening, the place was very quiet and we found a wonderful table in a corner near a small indoor waterfall. The conversation eventually worked its way around to West Point, and everyone genuinely admired my class ring. It does have a way of catching one's eye! I think they could sense my pride in that chunk of gold and what it stands for.

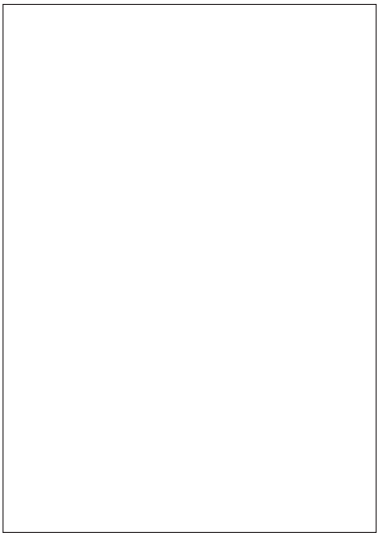
Everything we did seems stuck tight in my mind, like pages of a book you never want to stop reading: the crisp feel of the air, the way the

cigarette smoke curled up in the restaurant, the silhouette of the Empire State Building against the sky. The Christmas tree was still up in Rockefeller Center and there were a bunch of kids ice-skating there. I'd seen New York City before, of course, but somehow it hit me more last night than it's ever hit me, what an incredible country this is and how much I care about it. Going back on the train with Bob I tried to explain what I felt. I didn't quite have the words, exactly, but it was odd how immediately he seemed to understand and feel the same. We were both almost asleep by the time the train stopped, and I was already dreaming of Dee.

Friday: January 14, 1944

It's been a long week—training on boarding procedures, lifeboat drills, shipboard etiquette and getting indoctrinations about security and customs in other countries. We had several of the (universally despised) conditioning hikes. They must think we're infantry! We don't need muscles of steel, but nerves of steel! Fortunately, Bob and I were able to get passes and will meet Dee and Clemie again in Manhattan this afternoon. This is probably the last time we'll get to see them as I'd guess that we'll be shipping out very soon.

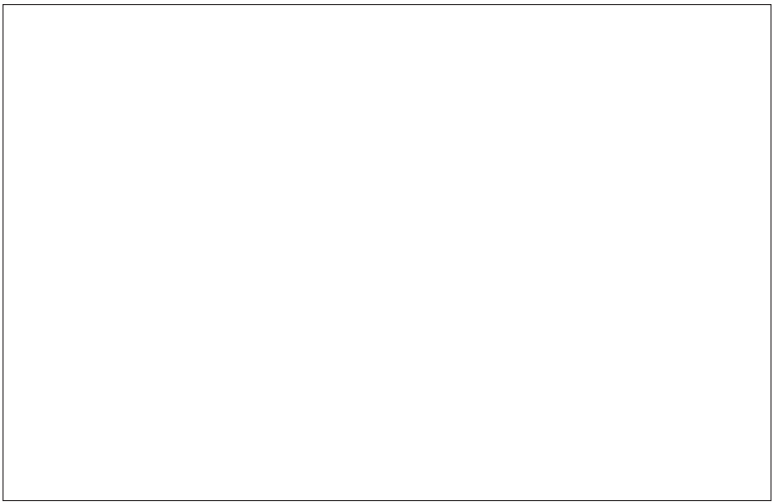
We plan to take the girls to Jack Dempsey's Restaurant tonight. It's really a great place to see famous people and has become known as "The Meeting Place of the World." That's probably true, since practically everybody goes



Jack Dempsey

there. If you come in uniform Jack will personally visit at your table and sign autographs or have a picture taken with you. He's even been known to pick up the bill for a GI who looks strapped financially. The restaurant is quite large and is generally very busy. The food is great. It's right next door to the third Madison Square Gardens, the one that opened in 1925 up on Broadway and 50th.

Jack is a Lieutenant Commander in the Coast Guard and is on active duty now at the Manhattan Beach training station in Brooklyn. I



met him a couple times while I was attending the academy and he was very easy to talk to—not what you would expect from someone called the "Manassa Mauler." I sure hope that he's there tonight so Bob and the girls can meet him. Although I'm looking forward to seeing Dee tonight, I'm a little sad that we don't have more time to spend together. I feel like this could become more serious and Bob is pretty enamored with Clemie too, even though he has a girl back in Missouri that he's fond of, but the war isn't going to wait—and we have a job that needs to be done. I sure hope they'll write to us when we get to our next station. I think they will.

Chapter Seven

Bonding with the Greatest Generation

By the summer of 2006, it became increasingly obvious that I needed to be at the Louisville reunion of the 416th. Realizing that these veterans are a gold mine of information, I offered to do a presentation about Bill Cramsie and the mission of April 10, 1944. It wasn't that I felt particularly knowledgeable about the subject—far from it. However, I reasoned that a short presentation might serve as a catalyst to discussion and perhaps a trigger for the release of distant memories. With my military background in electronics and a second career in journalism/desktop publishing, I found Power Point presentations a natural tool for public speaking. Actually, I took to them like a duck to water as soon as digital projectors became affordable. During my Air Force career I had served a tour on the Inspector General team of the Military Airlift Command. One of my duties was delivering outbriefings at the conclusion of each inspection. In lay terms, that means standing before a group of prideful military commanders and supervisors and telling them what whey needed to do better. It never seemed to matter that we also told them what they were doing quite well. Compared to that intense and often gritty experience, Power Point was a snap. Gathering up some information from Ralph Conte's book, from the family history provided by relatives and from public records (including the Missing Air Crew Report) I wove together a 20-minute slide show.

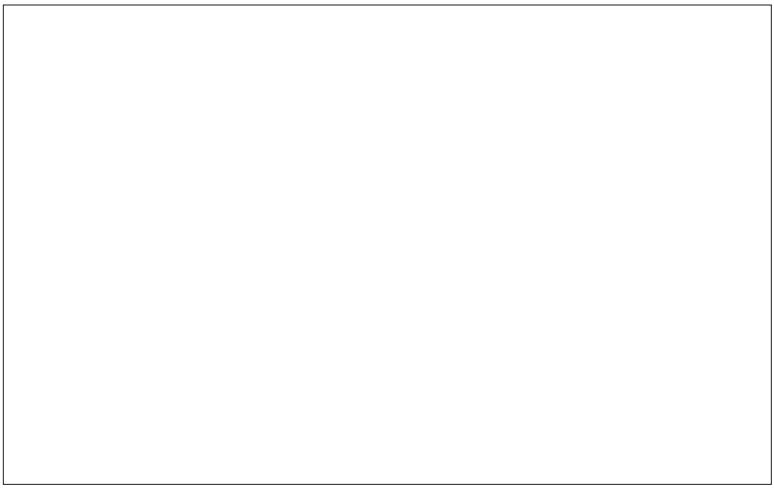
The reunion was held at the Holiday Inn in Louisville and was organized by a group called the "Reunion Brats", a company that specializes in hosting reunions for military and veteran groups. In addition to a schedule of events that included tours, dinners, and a business meeting, a hospitality room was available throughout the three-day affair and it

quickly became apparent that the hospitality room was where the action was. In addition to an open bar and snacks, it was a room where those who wanted to talk could gather. And gather they did. Any apprehension that I had about making phone calls to these people vanished in a heartbeat. Though only 13 veterans were able to attend, many of them came with family members. That raised the total to more than 50 registered participants—half of them, it seemed, from the Billy Brewer family. In retrospect, it seemed as if they were all part of the same family and they immediately embraced Doris and me as additions to the fold. The Power Point presentation worked as planned and Bill Cramsie was a central topic of discussion, even though many of the veterans there had joined the group after his death. His ring, which everyone wanted to see and hold, was treated with a reverence that was both surprising and genuine. Everyone who touched it understood why this story had to be told.

Bob and Puz Basnett at the 416th reunion - 2006

Meeting Bob and Puz Basnett in person was a real highlight of the trip. As the youngest member of the group, Bob has more or less inherited the role of coordinating the activities. We talked about Bill Cramsie and the days at Laurel and Wethersfield. Bob had a Mercury that he had brought to Lake Charles from his previous assignment in Florida—making him one of the few airmen on station with a private vehicle. It was a sure ticket for weekend dates. Bob talked about the dates that he and Bill had with Clemie and Dee, and about the conditions at Wethersfield and their missions over France. There was simply not enough time, but I already was sure that there would be more opportunities to listen and learn.

Another highlight was the opportunity to meet and talk with Dick Wheeler. Dick was more than just a classmate of Bill Cramsie at West Point, they were close friends. After Bill's death, the task of writing to his family fell to Dick, who was also a pilot in the 671st. They had been together for four



416th Bomb Group veterans reunion, Louisville, KY - 2006
Left to right: Row 1 - Dick Wheeler, Bob Kehres, Billy Brewer, Ray Jones, Don Sorrels, Eldon Kreh. Row 2 - Bob Basnett, Al Damico, Carl Weinert, Jim Kerns, Wayne Downing, Robert E. Lee, Jack Sittarich.

years, through good times and bad. Having a chance to talk with someone who knew Bill both at West Point and in the 416th was an invaluable experience. After my presentation at the afternoon business meeting of the group, Dick stayed behind to talk with me as I packed up my computer equipment. As he recounted the trauma of Bill's loss, through misty eyes, the words welled up in his throat. I felt very close to Bill Cramsie at that moment and sensed that we were near one of those "thin places" where the boundary between our world and the other world, by whatever name one chooses, barely exists. I felt certain that there was a manifest purpose to the quest I had undertaken.

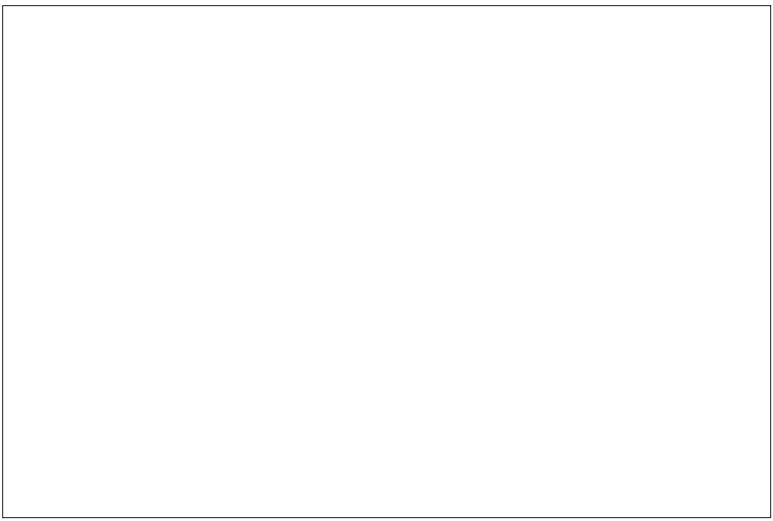
It was at Louisville that I first met Wayne Downing. At that point, I had seen only the load list of the 671st Bomb Squadron for the April 10, 1944 mission. I knew which crews flew from that unit, but not from the other 416th squadrons that participated in the mission. Wayne had flown in the 668th Bomb Squadron for his first 65 missions and then transferred to the 670th Bomb Squadron to fly 21 more—setting a record that nobody was anxious to challenge. My heart skipped a beat when he told me that he was on the mission during which Bill Cramsie was killed. Wayne described that mission as being plagued by heavy flak. He was not in the same box as Bill and did not see Bill's plane get hit, but was well aware of the details.

Wayne Downing and his granddaughter Sara

Wayne, 86 at the time of that reunion, talked with me for at least two hours about the A-20, the facilities at Wethersfield, bombing tactics, flak and a variety of other topics. His encyclopedic mind was as sharp and clear as if the events had happened yester-

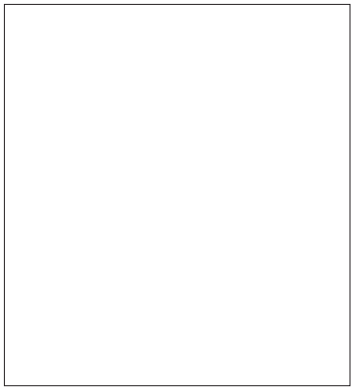
day. He cited names, numbers and places without pause and the information just kept on flowing. Fortunately, I made lots of notes to carry back home with me and to devour after the fact. I was simply astounded by such powers of recall and knew that I would be going back to that well again.

Shortly after the reunion, Doris and I made a trip via motor-home from the Ozarks to Georgia, up the Atlantic seaboard to Maine and then back through Niagara Falls with a stop at the home of her sister JoeAnn in Pulaski, Pennsylvania. By chance, Pulaski is not far from Beaver Falls, where an A-20G is being restored by the Air Heritage Museum. JoeAnn's husband Bob is a pilot and was interested in seeing an A-20, so the two of us headed out one morning to Beaver Falls and found the museum without difficulty. It's a small private museum, but interesting and worth a visit. It happened that on that particular day, one of the A-20 restoration team members, Ed Klacik, was in the work area. I explained my interest in the A-20 to Ed, and the story of Bill Cramsie. Ed gave me a real "nuts and bolts" tour of the aircraft and allowed me to explore the plane inside and out at will. It was a magnificent experience and I could easily imagine the sounds, smells



Air Heritage Museum A-20G Restoration (2006)

and feel of a combat mission in this bantam bomber.



Ralph Conte

It happened that I had business in Washington DC on another matter in the Fall of 2006 and was able to make a side trip to the College Park, Maryland facility of the National Archives and Records Administration. Well hidden and beautifully designed, this repository houses many of the World War II photographs that the government has preserved. Before being allowed to review records, I was required to register as a NARA researcher and obtain a special photo ID. With my new card in hand, I felt like a VIP. A research assistant assigned a table for me to work at and helped me fill out request forms for the record groups that included A-20 aircraft photos. After about 30 minutes, a library assistant appeared with a cart full of boxes, each about the size of a large briefcase. I had brought my flatbed scanner, a thin Canon unit that fits easily into my travel bag, and my Macintosh I-book laptop. For about six hours, I poured over photo after photo, scanning those of relevance and saving them as digital files on my laptop. I was elated to find so much material, but disappointed not to find a single photo of aircraft #43-9699.

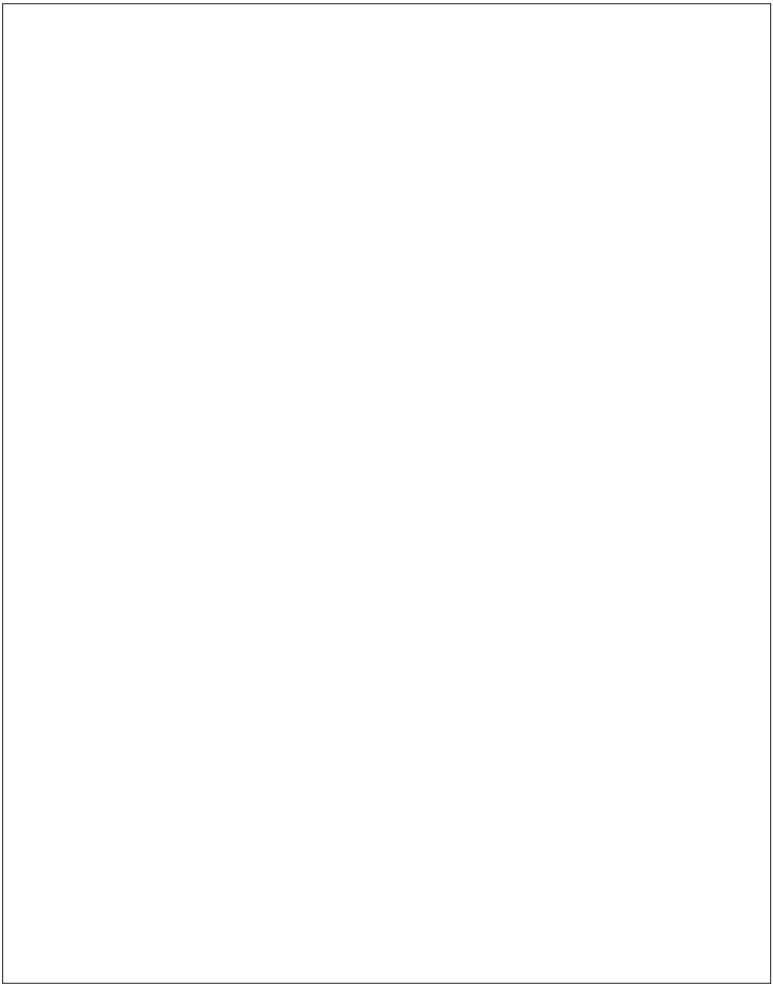
That Fall, Doris and I enjoyed an afternoon with Ralph and Norma Conte at their retirement community residence in Columbia, Missouri. Ralph shared stories about his service with the 416th and we made many photocopies of helpful Group records that he had preserved. Ralph had for many years been a central figure in holding the group veterans together in a rather loosely organized association. He has a remarkable background that includes corporate management, talk-show host, college professor, city councilman and freelance writer. Being with Ralph was a strong reinforcement in my feeling of attachment to the 416th.

"Just down the road a piece," as they say in the Ozarks, live Bob and Puz Basnett. We enjoyed the gracious hospitality of dinner at their home in Fulton that evening and shared many memories from our aggregate past. Bob recounts his early days in the Ozark hills with the sort of pride that only hill people understand. Though I was born and raised in Wisconsin, the Ozark hills have been home long enough now for me to appreciate them as well. Bob is retired from his veterinary practice and, like most Missouri natives, he can tell an entrancing story. Puz was ever so attentive to our comfort and I was reminded, nostalgically, of my youth when that did not seem so unusual. This truly was the "greatest generation" and I savored every moment of it.

Midway through the evening Bob paused and rose from the table without saying a word. A moment later, he returned with two pieces of paper. The first was a photograph of Bob and a close wartime friend, Joe Lackavich, standing before their quarters at Melun-Villaroche in France, near Paris. The two were tent mates in the Fall of 1944. Joe was an amateur photographer and thanks to his innovative "darkroom", photos exist today that otherwise would not have been possible.

The second piece of paper was an original V-mail to Bob from Clemie Smith. Here in my hand was a tangible artifact—much like Cramsie's ring—bringing life to events that had previously existed in my mind only through records and the memories of others. It was dated shortly after D-Day and spoke of Dee hearing that Bill Cramsie was Missing in Action. These were Clemie's own words and they held me spellbound. As I read them, I felt that I was in a "thin place" again. When Bob told me to keep the V-mail, a cold chill passed through my body serving notice that we were on the edge. This was the third "message in a bottle", speaking directly to me from the past. It whetted my appetite for more revelations, whose impact could only be conjectured. I felt sure that there was a manifest purpose to the quest I had undertaken, and that someday that purpose would be made clear to me.

As I lay in bed that evening, my mind was racing with impulses that both excited and shocked my consciousness. I knew that I was into something very powerful and strangely important. I wondered, indeed, if I was in over my head. It seemed almost like I was living in another dimension, feeling things that I had never felt before and being led involuntarily down a path to a place that I could not imagine. For a natural cynic and a person who believes that what you see is what you get, I was having a real conflict psychologically with the



process that was evolving. Bill Cramsie—and even Clemie Smith—were no longer just names, our spirits were oddly linked. In fact, I was beginning to feel the number of links expanding rapidly and exponentially. That first telephone call to Bob Basnett had really launched this extraordinary journey and the V-mail to Bob from Clemie Smith sealed the deal. I had no options left, there was only one path to follow.

Chapter Eight

Wethersfield

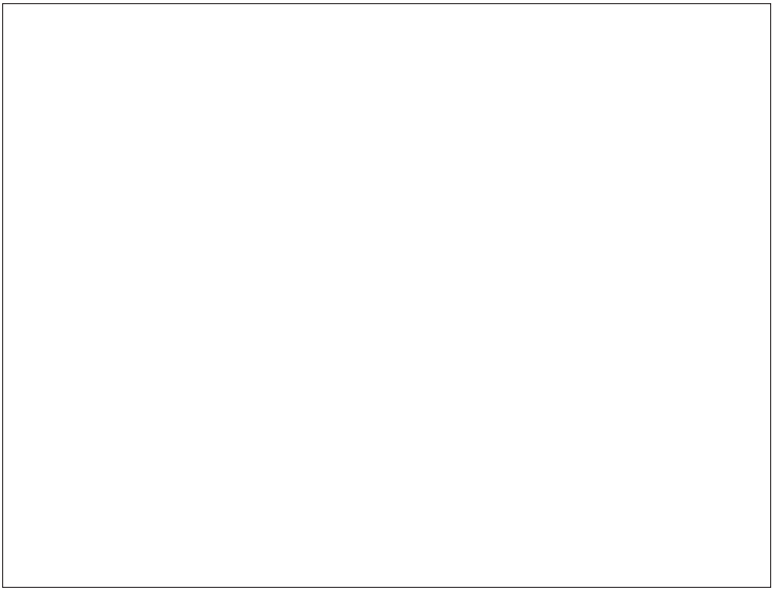
Tuesday: February 1, 1944

After being treated by the American Red Cross to what will probably turn out to be the last real American coffee and donuts we'll see for a long while—which is seriously tragic, especially in regard to the donuts—the 416th boarded the SS Colombe on January 18th at Weehawken, New Jersey, for transit to our next station. It's supposed to be classified, but we all pretty much know that it will be England. It was shortly after noon and we were below decks as we pulled out of the harbor. The weather was so fine that many of the guys crowded around the portholes for a final glimpse of the Statue of Liberty--of American soil. There was also a grand sight off the port bow: the New York Naval Shipyard and the magnificent U.S.S. Missouri, which somebody said was about to be commissioned . . . I'm glad that it's one of ours, it's massive! Those guns would dwarf the German 88mm anti-aircraft canons that we hear so much about. And then, all too quickly, we were at sea, and surrounded by wide waters and the wider sky.

We joined a convoy of 150 ships carrying mostly personnel and equipment. It was a remarkable sight, with ships (and I mean big ships) everywhere. We were at the outside edge

of the pack, a little disconcerting, but we could always see destroyers and their anti-submarine escorts patrolling nearby. That was a comforting feeling out there in the middle of the Atlantic.

The Colombe was a French luxury liner before the war, but those were better days for the old girl. Still, the crew did their best to treat us well, especially us officers. We even ate off of white linen table cloths—a big improvement over the bivouac at Laurel or the wooden mess hall tables at Camp Shanks. The enlisted guys ate the same food, but served a little less delicately. Personally, I'd have happily given up the table cloth just to boost their spirits. Not all of the officers share that feeling, but I suspect that their attitudes will change a little after a few combat missions when they have to depend on



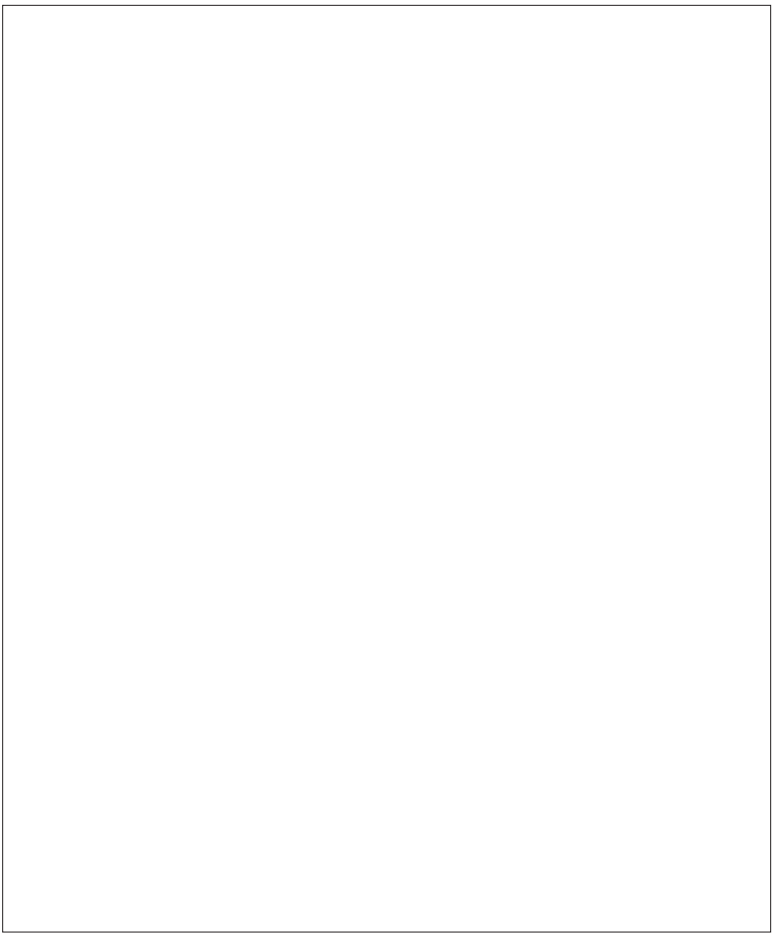
Wethersfield RAF Station during WWII

those same gunners and support personnel for their ticket back home.

The voyage lasted ten days, which was ten days too long for some, as we hit unusually rough weather in the North Atlantic, and many in the unit suffered motion sickness (the French crew called it "mal de mer"). To be honest, I enjoyed it, even the roughest weather didn't turn my stomach; up on deck the breeze was amazing, and the ship churned wonderfully through the high waves. I was almost sorry when we made landfall on January 28th at Gourock, Scotland and proceeded up river the following day to Glasgow, where we disembarked. (Talk about sea legs: we all wobbled for a day or so on solid ground!)

Wethersfield RAF Station
416th Bomb Group Facilities

What most surprised me about Scotland was the greenness of it: green grass right up to the tarmac! I know I'm of Irish descent and Ireland is supposed to be the greenest place, but Scotland must run it a pretty close second. Also, the Scottish accents were puzzling, attractive but strange; and at first I wasn't even sure I recognized the words! I've been told that my Grandfather had a strong accent, but he



A-20G landing at Wethersfield

died seven years before I was born, so I never heard it. My uncles John and Bill still have a trace of their father's tongue and some people say that I have a hint of it also.

I enjoyed crossing down the spine of England by train, and we did see some snow (I made some notes on the views but seem to have mislaid them.) Most of it was rural, tidy, full of sheep and cows, with centuries-old walls created by years and years of stacking field stone. It was very cold this afternoon when our train completed the transfer of all 2,268 men of the 416th: we're the first A-20 Group to be assigned to the European Theater of Operations (another first for the 416th!) Colonel Harold Mace is in command; and we now form part of the Ninth U.S. Army Air Force. General Brereton, who reestablished the Ninth's headquarters at Bushey Hall in Watford, Hertfordshire, has become quite famous since he formed the Ninth out of units in the Mediterranean. Our Group, one of the Ninth's "Light" bomber units has four squadrons of A-20s. The 416th was officially placed in operation at Wethersfield, Essex today—being assigned to the 97th Combat Bombardment Wing headquartered at Little Walden. We are all part of the IXth Bomber Command led by General Anderson at Marks Hall, Essex. I know it seems like a lot of "organization", but—believe me—there are a lot of airmen and a lot of airfields over here.

Apparently we're short of aircraft at the moment. The A-20s we trained on at home didn't get shipped over; instead, they're ferrying new

aircraft across the Atlantic to the Ninth Air Force for further assignment. As a result, our crews here have to wait for headquarters to assign and deliver them—a detail complicated by more snow and bad weather, something we could do without! I've really missed flying and I know most of the guys feel the same, but—just now—there's nothing we can do about it!

Here at Wethersfield we're quartered in Nissen huts (a metal-roofed pre-fab building designed for the Brits during World War I by an engineer named Peter Nissen). Some of the guys call them Quonset Huts, because in the U.S. they're apparently manufactured in Quonset, Rhode Island. They are actually reminiscent of the "Quonset" dwellings built by American Indians of the northeast and that name is more popular with us American airmen. The standard size is 20 feet wide and 48 feet long, with a semi-circular steel-ribbed frame. Each pilot shares a room with another pilot and there are two rooms per hut. (The enlisted personnel are apparently packed a little more tightly.) All in all, conditions are superior to bivouac but still pretty austere, especially in this weather. However, until the flights get organized we do have some time for rest and relaxation, with Special Services booking a number of events ranging from variety shows to ping-pong and checkers tournaments (I lost in the semis in the ping-pong, but it was a great game!) The base has two clubs, one for the officers and one for the enlisted, both with a bar and food, though as I wrote to Mom I'm not too crazy about the English food (stodgy and unimaginative, and—would you believe—cabbage!).

Only the fourth day after we arrived we had our first air raid warning—a very weird, almost howling noise as if from something electrical in pain! As instructed, we all took cover so I didn't actually see any of the German aircraft, unfortunately, because I've read a lot about them and would like to have had a look. Our airfield wasn't hit, but apparently various airfields in Britain were targeted and I haven't heard how they fared . . . That night as I lay in bed I thought about the siren, which brought home to me a little of what it must feel like to be a London civilian—hearing that noise and making for the underground, maybe with kids in tow, maybe old, maybe afraid. At least our relatives aren't being bombed.

Wednesday: February 29, 1944

I never thought much about leap year, but some of the enlisted guys who always seem to be short of money were complaining today that they have to wait an extra day to get their pay this month. I guess it matters to them, though the guys who have the least money still always seem to have enough for a poker game!

Some of the planes have finally come: 27 altogether, and some of them are the older A-20B models from the 2911th bomb squadron. At the officer's club, I overheard Captain Bob Kehres talking with someone about the supply problem. Bob's the Engineering Officer for the 670th. He's getting worried about finding replacement parts when we need them. I hope they solve that problem quickly, the rest of us are impatient to get going! The aircraft weren't

designated before being shipped; so our ground crews have been kept busy painting unit markings and Squadron designators on the fuselage: 5H= 668th Bomb Sq., 2A=669th Bomb Sq., F6 = 670th Bomb Sq., 5C=671st Bomb Sq. All of our Group's aircraft are identified by a plain white tail flash. Of course I couldn't tell Mom or Dad any of that because of the strict security here. (They know that I fly a Havoc, but that's about it.)

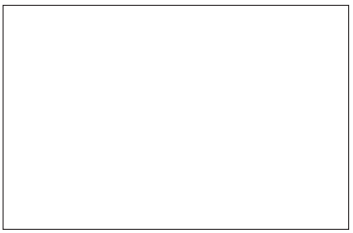
Last week, 13 pilots from the 2911th joined us (they had previously been flying their A-20Bs out of Keevil Airfield). Some of these American pilots have already flown combat or reconnaissance missions with the RAF or RCAF so they have some useful tips about flying conditions and aircraft. They're pretty popular because there aren't many pilots here right now that can tell war stories around a pot-bellied stove.

Once in a while the USO, or our unit morale officer, puts on a dance and they bring in a group of English girls from the nearest town with any nightlife (Braintree, about ten miles away). It reminds me of the days at West Point when girls from Marymount or Ladycliff would magically appear on Friday evening for a dance. Each night the Group runs a couple of two-and-a-half ton trucks (we call them a "Six By" because they are six x six wheel drive) into Braintree around 6 p.m. for anybody interested. The trucks usually head back at 10:30 p.m.

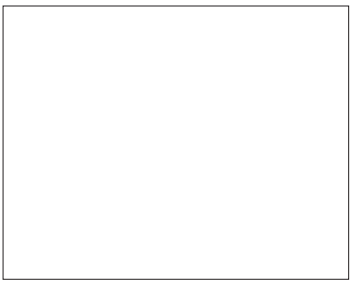
Braintree itself has no shortage of pubs, open from six to ten, where you can buy English beer (both mild and bitter), port and sherry. We're

rationed to only one bottle of Scotch an evening so that never lasts long! The usual routine is to have a beer at each pub until we find one that has some action, (i.e. friendly natives and/or a good darts tournament!) then we stay a while. The girls are nice but mostly very shy; you often have better conversations with the guys around the bar—or the bartenders.

Whenever we can wangle a two-day pass, Bob Basnett or Dick Wheeler and I head into Braintree and catch a train to London for some big city activities. I must admit that one of my first trips included a visit to a tailor's to order an "Ike jacket" (optional, but I really wanted one!) We were issued the standard A-2 flying jacket and a B-10 flying jacket. The B-10 is light green with a fur collar and a warm inner lining—neither being a luxury, as none of our airplanes boast heaters and the temperature at 12,000 feet can be as low as 20 degrees below zero this time of year. Around the base we all wear wool pants and tan shirts.



High Street, Wethersfield before the war



White Hart Hotel & Pub Braintree, built in the 16th century

But it's not all anticipation and enjoyment. We were all saddened when 2nd Lt. William D. Minnicks (who came from Franklin, Kentucky) was killed when his plane stalled

and crashed near our base. He had taken it up on a routine test flight. With little chance to build experience we take on-the-job training very seriously, and especially after the Minnicks tragedy.

Now that we're operational, we've been authorized to wear the ETO ribbon for service in the European Theater of Operations on our dress uniforms. And, though people don't tend to talk about it, I'm sure I'm not the only pilot here hoping soon to have the chance to earn many more decorations for our country.

1 Lt. Garrison Cap

USAAC Service Cap

B-10 Flight Jacket

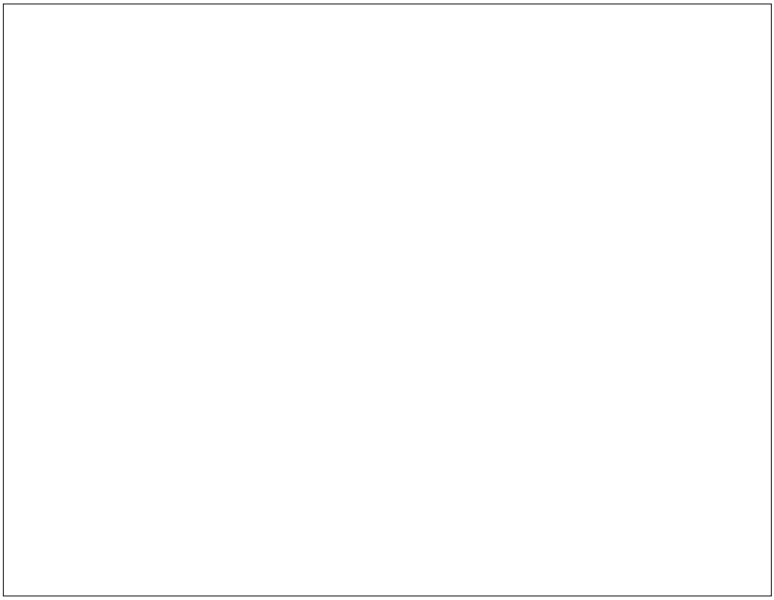
9th AF "Ike" Jacket

Chapter Nine

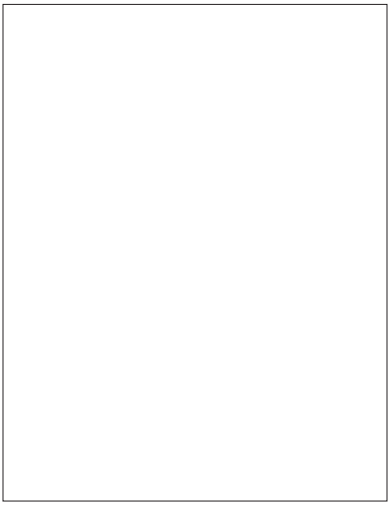
"9699"

Oddly enough, finding information about an airplane built during World War II is often easier than finding information about the men who flew it. Each plane had an Individual Aircraft Record Card that tracked its movement and eventual disposition. This fascinating record also gives us some insight into the date and place of manufacture, any modifications performed and the method and dates of delivery to the unit of assignment.

Under contract AC-32732 with the U. S. Army Air Corps, A-20G number 43-9699 rolled off the assembly line at the Douglas Aircraft factory in Santa Monica, California on the 29th of December, 1943. It was one of 2,850 of the solid-nosed "G" models to be manufactured. Because of the manpower shortage created by conscription, many of the production jobs in industry were filled by women—some six million of them.

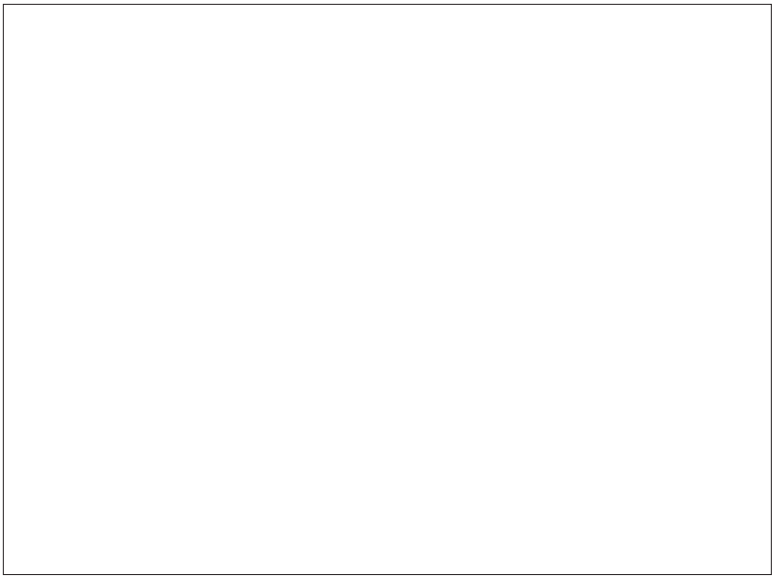


Riveter on an A-20G at a Douglas aircraft plant in California



Rosie the Riveter - WWII poster

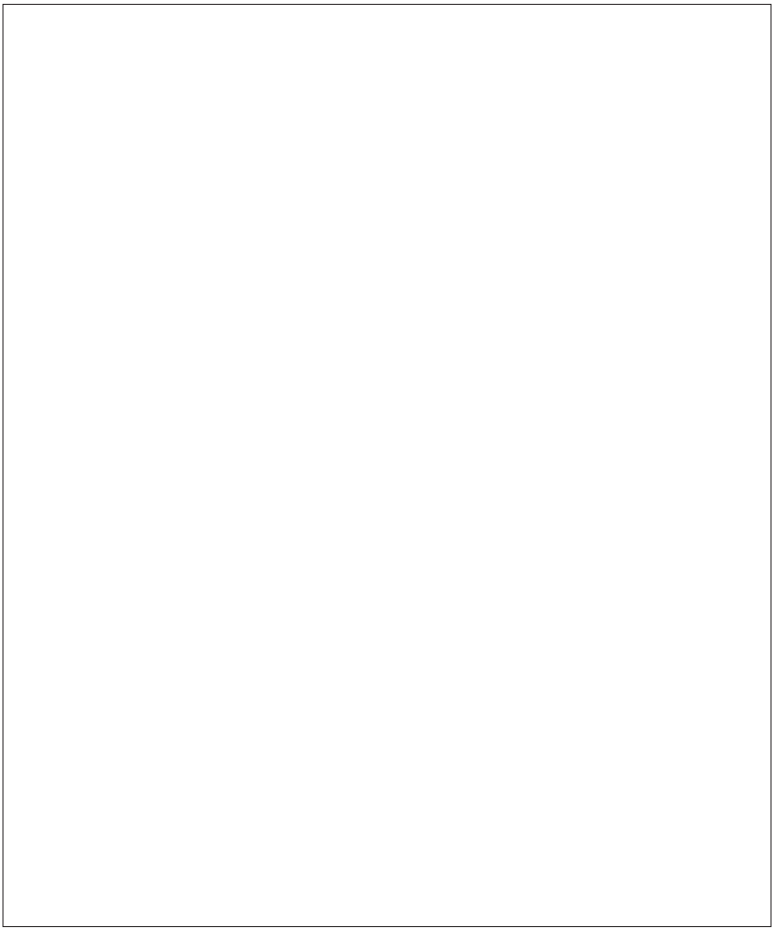
The recognition that women could excel in these critical skills was highly publicized both by the government and the media. Selected to head a publicity campaign was the real-live riveter, Rose Monroe, who worked in a plant in Michigan building B-24s and B-29s. The theme "Rosie the Riveter" became a national badge of honor for these women, later immortalized in the eponymous pop-song (released in 1943 by the Kay Kyser orchestra). The mass production of A-20s began well before America entered the war, with the Douglas Aircraft Company proudly coining the slogan "Quality in Quantity with Speed". The secret to fast production for Douglas was a battery of hydrau-



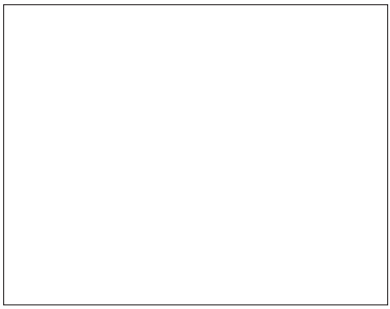
A-20 wing sections on tracks at the Douglas Aircraft plant

lic presses capable of cutting and forming aircraft parts of all shapes and sizes. In addition to their versatility, these presses could produce an impressive 44,000 parts every 24 hours. The production quota for A-20s in 1941 alone required engines capable of generating in aggregate some four million horsepower—far exceeding the power generated at that time by Grand Coulee and Bonneville Dams combined.

Although Douglas had contracts in place with several nations, the majority of A-20s produced in 1941 and earlier went to France and Britain. Once America joined the war and demand increased, Douglas opened additional plants at



Long Beach, California and Tulsa, Oklahoma. While the bravery and skill of U.S. pilots was decisive in WWII, the contribution of America's industrial complex also proved critical to Allied success.

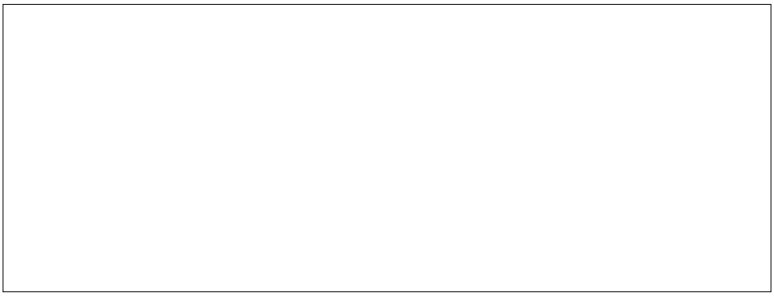


A-20 on the gunnery range

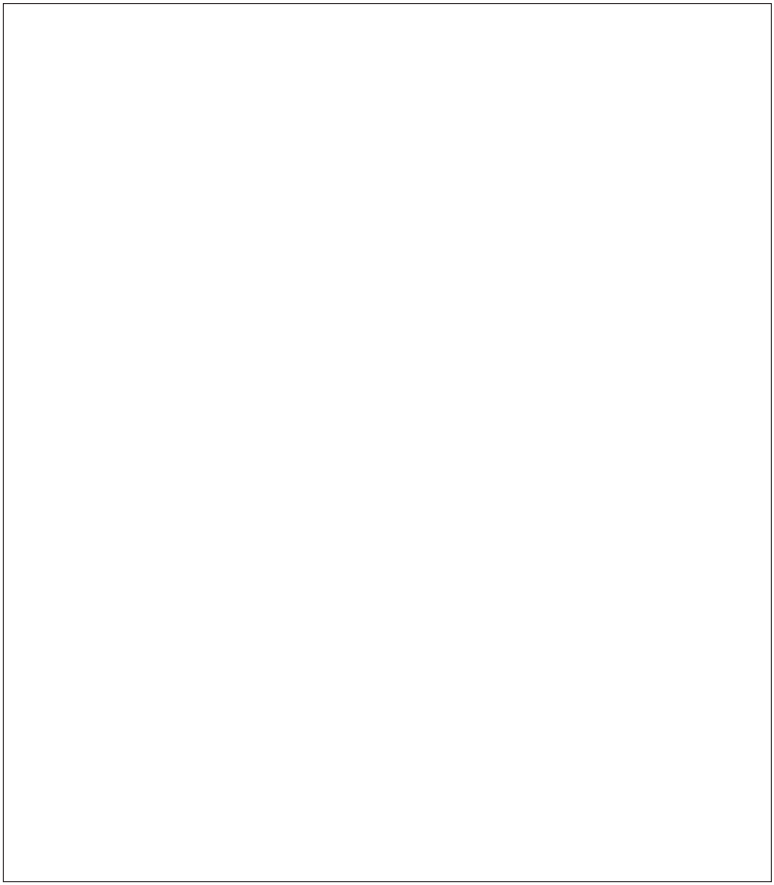
The same day that it came off the production line, the plane with tail number 43-9699 was turned over to the Army's Air Transport Command and flown to Daggett Field, east of Barstow, California. There it underwent various modifications and adjustments at the gunnery range—leaving Barstow on January 8th, 1944, bound for the East Coast with stops en route at Phoenix, Tulsa, Stout Field (Indianapolis), Pittsburgh and Fort Dix (New Jersey).

9699 arrived in Newark, New Jersey on January 14, where it was scheduled for the next ferry mission. (Ironically, those who would soon be flying the plane in combat were just a few miles up the road at Camp Shanks, preparing for an Atlantic crossing of their own.) While some A-20s were apparently dismantled and shipped as sea cargo, 9699 and others were flown by ferry pilots—often women—across the North Atlantic. The typical route for ferried aircraft was from New Jersey to Goose Bay in Labrador for refueling. The second hop took them to Greenland and from there to Iceland. The last leg of the flight saw them safely to Ireland or Scotland for more fuel and thence to England. 9699 arrived on January 21st and was turned over to the Army Air Corp's newly arrived Ninth Air Force—and eventually to the 416th Bomb Group at Wethersfield.

As one might surmise, Atlantic crossings in an A-20 were far more complicated than the transatlantic flights of today. The range of the aircraft was extended by adding a 200-gallon external fuel tank in the bomb bay. Even with this extra tank, the Havoc's range was still only about 2300 miles,



A-20G with bomb bay fuel tank for ferrying

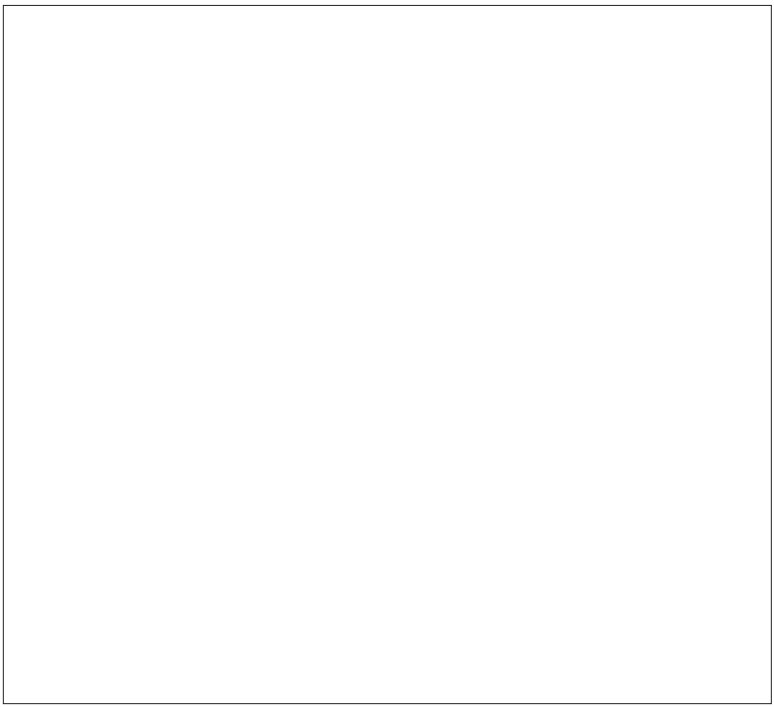


A-20G Havoc Cockpit

which meant several stops and very careful monitoring of fuel consumption. To extend the range of the aircraft, they were flown at the optimum speed for fuel conservation—an excruciatingly slow 170 mph.

Winter crossings were particularly hazardous due to unpredictable weather, especially since the only route that offered landing options was the northern one. On more than one occasion, a flight reaching Greenland was forced to retrace its route back to the point of origin because landing proved impossible. Pilot comfort had to be sacrificed, as the round trip could encompass up to eleven hours of flying time in a very cold and cramped cockpit with no relief. Needless to say, there were disasters.

The plane had a wing span of 61' 4", a length of 48 feet, and a ground clearance of 17' 7". Carrying a maximum bomb load of 2,000 pounds, it could handle a range of just over 1,000



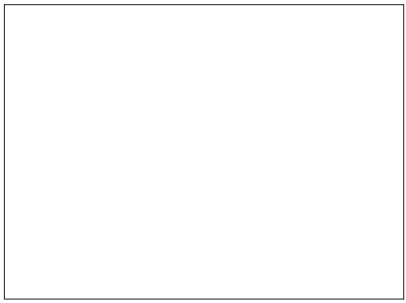
Left side of A-20 cockpit

miles. Early versions had four 20mm cannon in the nose but, as these proved to be troublesome and ineffective, they were replaced with four 50-caliber machine guns. The turret gunner's position on early models of the A-20 had rather impractical emergency flight controls, which were eliminated in the G model. (In fact, bailing out was the preferred option for the crew if a pilot was unable to fly the plane.) Additional equipment introduced with this model included about 400 pounds of armor plate and carburetor de-icing equipment.

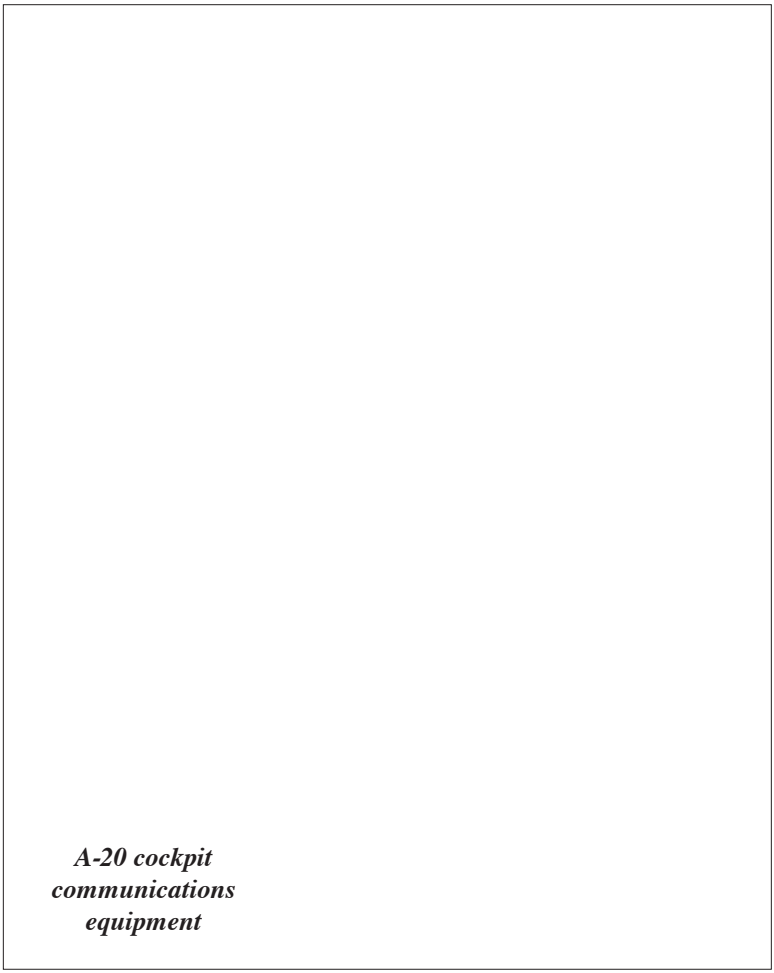
Prior to introduction of the "G" model, all A-20s had been glass-nosed versions with provisions for a bombardier/navigator. In North Africa, the combat experience of Kegelman's unit made more forward-firing capability imperative. Some early A-20Bs were modified in the field, generally to encase the glass nose and include additional machine guns.

Right side of A-20 cockpit

Tail number 43-9699 was one of the first of the new A-20s to arrive at Wethersfield and was readied for action in early February. The plane had not been assigned to a specific crew, and so it had yet to be christened with painted "nose art" or dubbed with



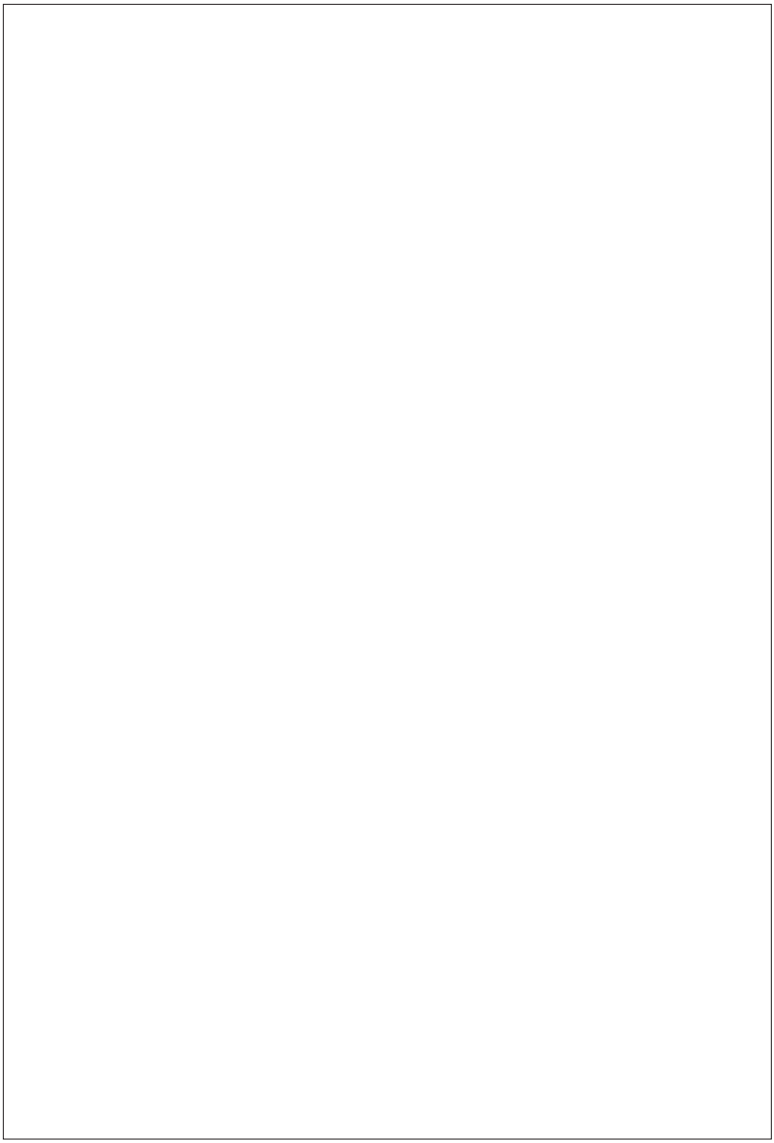
Ventral "tunnel" gun - 50 caliber



A-20 cockpit communications equipment

one of the affectionate names that were typical of the heavy and medium bombers flying out of England.

The A-20 was a versatile aircraft—as much a fighter as a bomber—with an impressive climb rate of 1,300 feet per min-



The 1600 hp Wright Cyclone engine (Air Heritage Museum)

ute and very responsive controls. It served in such diverse roles as night fighter, dive bomber, skip bomber, reconnaissance aircraft and lead ship on "window" missions (spreading metal chaff to confuse German radar-controlled anti-aircraft guns). With certain modifications, it became the P-70 pursuit aircraft. It even earned a small place in U.S. Navy history as the BD-1 and BD-2 used in anti-submarine warfare. On D-Day, thousands of ships approaching the Normandy coast enjoyed a cover of smoke laid at low level by A-20s.

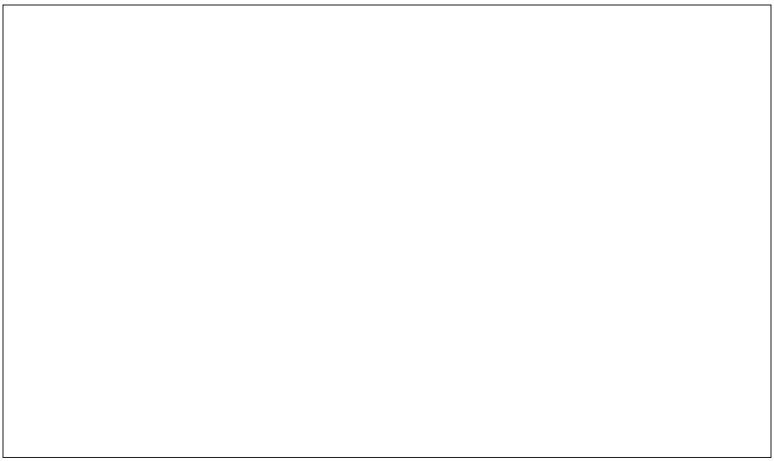
This design by Jack Northrop & Ed Heinemann was the first "Attack Bomber" to enter the Army Air Corps inventory during WWII and was designed primarily to destroy or neutralize enemy air forces, preferably before they became airborne. Like the A-18, an earlier twin engine attack bomber designed and built by Curtiss-Wright in 1937, the A-20 was designed around the Wright Cyclone engine. The A-18 had been a tail-dragger, as were a few of the earliest A-20s. The newer model had a top speed of 340 miles per hour, more or

A-20 of the 668th Bomb Sq. laying "smoke" over the English Channel

less, depending on whom you ask. It was extremely effective at low altitudes, and as a dive bomber, but its two 1,600 horsepower engines gave it a ceiling of more than 25,000 feet. One of those powerhouses alone was enough to keep the Havoc airborne and the plane was a good deal tougher than its size would suggest. It was a plane that a pilot could love.

After the disastrous results of early low-level missions flown by the British with their A-20 Bostons, most bombing missions were carried out between 12,000 and 15,000 feet—the altitude deemed, theoretically, to be the least vulnerable to German flak. However, there were plenty of pilots and crew who would dispute that assessment. In fact, it remained a tactical dilemma: fly high and risk missing the target or fly low and risk being shot out of the sky. After D-Day, when Crossbow missions gave way to tactical priorities, the A-20's mission in Europe slowly began to return to the ground combat support and interdiction role that it had originally been designed for.

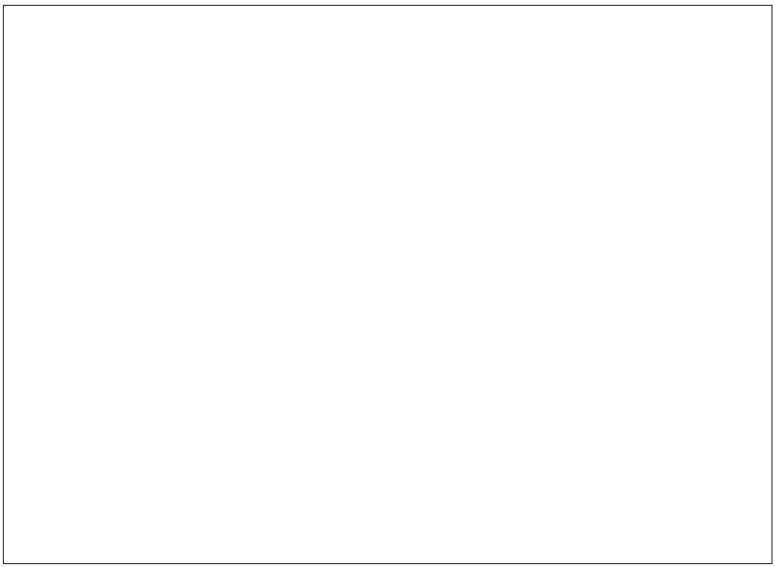
When flying in combat formation, aircraft were arranged in a "box" designed by the legendary General (then Colonel) Curtis LeMay for the 8th Air Force. The box was not shaped like a typical square box, as one might assume. Rather, the



A six-aircraft "flight" of A-20s over France—Spring of 1944

name was a generic term among aviators used to describe certain types of combat formations that varied with the type of aircraft and the type of mission. LeMay's carefully calculated aircraft positioning provided both the highest degree of protection against enemy aircraft and the optimum pattern for target saturation when bombs were released. Light bomber formations typically consisted of two or more boxes, each consisting of three flights of six planes flying in a "V" formation at staggered altitudes.

The lead plane of each "box" was a glass-nosed version that carried an extra officer as flight bombardier and navigator. When the lead ship dropped its ordnance, pilots of the following ships would release their bombs as well. The "G" model normally carried a crew of three, with the majority of A-20 pilots being junior officers and the gunners being mostly staff sergeants. The pilot, who had the added responsibility of being the bombardier in the A-20G, was cocooned in a spartan but functional single-seat cockpit. In addition to the four 500-pound bombs loaded internally, some models of this



Tail # 43-9699 (foreground) over France - March 1944

bantam bomber were equipped with additional bomb racks under the wings. The A-20G sported nine machine guns—four mounted in the nose and two on the forward fuselage. Altogether they provided as much forward-fire strafing capability as a P-47 fighter.

The engineer/gunner, with 1,600 rounds of ammunition, manned twin 50-caliber machine guns mounted in the electrically powered Martin 250 CE turret (the same turret that was used on the B-17, B-24 and B-26). The armorer/gunner controlled another 50-caliber machine-gun operated through an opening on the underside of the fuselage. On earlier models, this lower gun had been the hand-held 30-caliber machine-gun commonly called a "tunnel gun". The ventral opening for this gun was behind the bomb bay and remained open in flight. In fact, it was so rarely closed that some gunners remained unaware that it could be closed by removing the gun from its mount. (During a practice mission, 671st bombardier/navigator Al Jedinak was riding in the tunnel gunner's compartment and actually fell out of the aircraft through this

View of an A-20G through the tunnel opening of a leading aircraft

opening,) When flying in combat formation, with aircraft tucked in close to each other, a fall like this could put the unfortunate victim right in the path of another A-20. Fortunately, Jedinak was wearing a parachute and landed unharmed in an English farmer's field. Though he joked about the experience, everyone knew that manning the tunnel gun at 20 degrees below zero could be a chilling experience in more than one sense.

Surviving A-20 Havocs

(including partial airframes)

Type	*Serial #*	*Current Location*
DB-7B	*A28-8*	*RAAF Museum, Point Cook, Australia*
A-20C	*41-9393*	*Hunt Aircraft Recovery, UK*
A-20G	*42-86615*	*RAAF Museum, Point Cook, Australia*
A-20G	*42-86772*	*RAAF Museum, Point Cook, Australia*
A-20G	*43-9686*	*RAAF Museum, Wagga Wagga, Australia*
A-20G	*42-86786*	*Papua New Guinea*
A-20G	*43-9401*	*RAAF Museum, Point Cook, Australia*
A-20G	*43-9436*	*Pacific Air Museum, Australia*
A-20G	*43-9491*	*RAAF Museum, Amberly, Australia*
A-20G	*43-9628*	*Boston/Havoc Preservation Trust, UK **
A-20G	*43-9629*	*RAAF Museum, Amberly, Australia*
A-20G	*43-9686*	*RAAF Museum, Amberly, Australia*
A-20G	*43-10052*	*Monino Museum, Moscow, Russia*
A-20G	*43-21627*	*Pima Air & Space Museum, Tucson, AZ*
A-20G	*43-21664*	*Hunt Aircraft Recovery, UK*
A-20G	*43-22197*	*N34920 - Aero Trader, Ocotillo Wells, CA*
A-20G	*43-22200*	*USAF Museum, Dayton, OH*
A-20G	*43-22210*	*N67921 Confederate AF, Harlingen, TX ***
A-20H	*44-0020*	*Air Heritage Inc., Beaver Falls, PA*
A-20J	*43-21709*	*N3WF Lone Star Flight Mus., Galveston, TX****
A-20K	*44-0337*	*N5069N *****
A-20K	*44-0539*	*Museu Aerospacial da Forca Area, Brazil*

** Fuselage only, present location uncertain.*
*** Crashed at airshow, San Benito, TX location of wreckage uncertain.*
**** Sold in 2007 and in transit to Australia via Aero Trader*
***** Registered to Roberts Aircraft Co., Boise, ID, location uncertain.*

Despite the large number produced, there remain few A-20s extant, with most having been scrapped after the war. The largest number in one place are those recovered from the jungles of New Guinea and subsequently restored in Australia. This was done as a cooperative venture in which New Guinea received one of the fully restored aircraft in return for the salvaged parts. A few A-20s were sold to South American countries and a few of the Lend-Lease aircraft have been recovered in Eastern Europe. Only four remain in the United States since the sale of 43-21709 to a private collector in Australia. Of those four, two are fragmentary and one is currently being restored. In addition, a few sundry parts survive in collections, salvage yards and crash sites. The unit being restored is at Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania and is reportedly owned by David Tallichet, though the restoration is being done by a non-profit group. The fourth aircraft, at the USAF Museum in Dayton, is fully restored but not flyable. One other A-20, owned and flown by the Confederate Air Force, was destroyed when it crashed during an air show in Harlingen, Texas, in October of 1988. That crash sparked a wave of lobbying by preservationists to prohibit the flying of rare WWII vintage aircraft. The fate of A20-K serial #44-0337 last registered to Roberts Aircraft Company of Boise, Idaho, is uncertain, but it may remain in the United States either intact or in a fragmentary state.

Chapter Ten

The Crossing

Friday: March 3, 1944

Although I'm proud to say that our unit is the first A-20 Bomb "Group" to operate in Europe, it turns out we're actually not the first unit to fly A-20s over here. Some smaller units have flown A-20s as part of a broader mission. A couple of the guys who transferred over from Keevil RAF Station told me the other day about a mission flown on the 4th of July, two years ago. Captain Charles Kegelman and six crews of the 15th Bomb Squadron flew on a raid that day against the Luftwaffe airfield in DeKooy, Netherlands. His was the first combat mission flown by the U.S. Army Air Force in Britain against the Germans—so it made him quite famous. He was even in Time Magazine. I asked what happened to Kegelman after that and learned that his unit was transferred to North Africa and apparently saw a lot of action there. Some of the guys have no interest at all in details like that, but I've always found history interesting and it's certainly being made here and now! I hadn't realized it before, but Glenn Edwards—a buddy of mine from Placer College back in Auburn—flew the A-20 with Kegelman in Africa. I haven't seen Glenn since we graduated, but Mom mentions him whenever one of his exploits makes the local newspaper. I still

remember competing against Glenn in a high school track meet!—he went to Lincoln High while I was at Placer Union. I'm glad we're on the same team now, since the stakes are a lot higher!

In addition to the "Bostons" of the RAF, another American unit—the 2911th Bomb Squadron—used the A-20 to fly reconnaissance and a few combat missions over enemy territory. They were attached to the 67th Observation Group, an Eighth Air Force unit, before General Brereton arrived here with the Ninth. (As I mentioned earlier, the pilots from that squadron were transferred into our Group.)

This was a momentous day for all of us! The first combat mission of the 416th was launched today with Major Harold Radetsky leading a sortie of 18 planes. I was pretty disappointed when my name didn't show up on the mission roster, but it can't be long now before all my hard work will start paying off.

Major Radetsky also flew with Kegelman and Edwards in Africa (it's a small world) so we have our own resident hero. I could see the frustration on his face when they returned—the mission had to be scrubbed when the scheduled fighter cover failed to make the rendezvous over the Channel. I guess there are still too many German fighters around for us to chance a bomb run without some help from our fighter escorts. Actually, if we weren't carrying a ton of explosives, we could leave all those fighters in the dust. The Havoc can really roar when you turn the reins loose. I've even heard a

story—supposedly true—about an A-20 pilot involved in a dogfight with a German fighter. Probably not too good of an idea though!

Saturday: March 4, 1944

Finally, after more than a year of training and mental preparation, my name appeared on the load list this morning for an attack on the Bernay-St. Martin airdrome in France. I'll admit to a rush of adrenalin and some nervous feelings! My gunners for this mission were TSgt Felix Larronde and SSgt Henry Lempka. I've gotten to know both of them pretty well and felt full confidence in their ability. A detailed mission briefing was conducted by Captain Bailey, our Group Intelligence Officer. —

"Bernay/St. Martin Airdrome - located two miles WNW of Bernay, 35 miles SE of Le Havre and approximately 80 miles West of Paris. The Airdrome is bounded by the Bernay-Thibeuville road on the South and the Bernay-Malouy road on the north. The curve in the railroad is less than 1000 yards from the south boundary. Dimensions of the landing area are 1,000 yards by 700 yards—the longest run being NW/SE. There are no improved runways, the surface is clay and chalk that is sodden in the winter. There's a dispersal area to the south with 24 covered aircraft shelters. These are substantially

built of concrete and are splinter proof. They have cement floors and the doors are vertical roller curtains. They are well camouflaged, dispersed and tone in well with the surrounding trees and hedges. The shelters are connected to the landing ground by taxiways.

Aircraft are normally parked in the shelters at night and are brought out on the south edge of the landing ground during the day. Sometimes they take off in the evenings for the Beaumont-le-Roger area and return the next morning. The landing ground has been well equipped by the German Air Force and has had lengthy spells of inactivity, probably due to unserviceability of the landing surface. It has been used by groups of ME-109's and can be regarded as a satellite to Beaumont-le-Roger. It's not considered suitable for heavy fighters or bombers. Everything of importance is concreted in the area to the South between the railway and the Thiberville road.

Your route brings you past the heavily defended area of LeHavre, closest point being about 10 miles to the west. You may experience light flak at landfall and along your route in. There are several light flak positions around the target. The existence of flak towers is highly

probably and you may experience light flak on the bomb run. At your altitude however it should be inaccurate. There are also reported heavy flak positions in the vicinity of Bernay. It's possible that they may engage you during your bomb run. Your route out is comparatively clear of heavy flak.

There are approximately 60 single engine enemy fighters consisting of ME-109s and FW-190s based within 50 miles of the target. There has been slight fighter reaction for the past few weeks, however it is possible that you may be attacked. The trend of attacks on medium bombers has been from 6 o'clock high, level and low, and from out of the sun."

A-20s of the 416th Bomb Group homeward bound to Wethersfield

— I was pleased to have Major Farmer, an experienced pilot that we all admire and respect, leading the mission today. He knew it was my first time on a hot run and lightened things up a bit with a pat on my shoulder and a simple "Nice to have you on board, Cramsie." Unfortunately, the mission turned out to be anti-climactic. Though we were over enemy territory for 42 minutes of the three-hour flight, it ended in frustration, exactly like the mission yesterday, when 100 percent cloud cover obscured the target. Still, it felt great to be part of the team and the plane felt good under my hands. I guess I'm glad that my first mission wasn't a hair-raiser, but I would have felt a lot better if we had dropped our bombs on the target.

Tuesday: March 7, 1944

Today, a three-flight box of our birds hit the Conches Airdrome in France with demolition bombs, destroying the runways and taxiways. This was the first mission where our Group actually inflicted damage upon the enemy and definitely will not be the last. It's great to feel that we're making an impact, after all the training and the hanging around.

I flew aircraft #219 in slot 3 of Flight II, on the left wing of my squadron commander, Major Dave Willetts. S/Sgt Ben Fandre and Sgt. Frank Chvatal flew with me as gunners. The Air Corps picked some top-notch boys to protect our planes and pilots—I'm sure glad they're on our side! I feel proud to be in slot three already,

which I hope means that I've received good evaluations. (Someday I'm going to lead!)

Our box was led by Major Towles (668th Bomb Squadron). Later on, in the Officer's Club, I realized that four of my West Point classmates, Dick Wheeler, Mike Zubon, Tony Durante and Frank Harrold also flew on this mission—which is pretty good going for the academy! (Flying directly behind me in the number six slot was Dave Andrews. Although Dave is new, this being his first mission, he's an excellent pilot and a good guy to have around.)

We had six five-hundred pounders on board, with one on each wing in addition to the four in the bomb bay. All of my bombs were dropped on target. I couldn't see them fall personally, of course, but I did enjoy a great view of the leader's bombs hitting the runways. Nobody was injured in our ship and there was no damage to the aircraft—and no enemy fighters were encountered. What a great day.

The official After Action Report that we sent to IX Bomber Command reflected the results of a well-planned and well-executed mission. —

"The Box of 20 A-20 aircraft scheduled took off at 1335, assembled and began climbing on course at 1346, leveling off at 12,000 feet indicated altitude just South of Gravesend. The English coast was crossed (outbound) at Beachy Head. All rear guns and turrets were test

fired approximately half way across the English Channel. Rendezvous with escorting fighters took place at the point and time scheduled and the formation proceeded on into France entering the coast at the point briefed on. Evasive action was taken on crossing the coast and until leveling out on the bombing run.

The bombing run was level at 12,000 feet and at 230 mph, with a heading of approximately 50 degrees. Some 15 to 20 bombs burst along the SW-NE runway with a cluster of approximately eight bombs bursting 150 to 200 feet to the right of the first cluster. A left turn onto the target followed by a left turn off the target was completed. The formation at the time of the release was good with both the right and left flights well in and forward.

The route from the target and leaving France was as briefed and mild evasive action was taken. Slight inaccurate flak was encountered on the completion of the bombing run and at two points on the route back from the target. The landfall was at Beachy Head at an altitude of 8,000 feet and the colors of the period were fired. At this point, 3 A-20B's dropped out and landed at Friston

for lack of gasoline. One A-20G-25 landed at Hawkinge because of minor engine difficulty. The box closed up and continued on to base and landed without mishap at 1600."

Sunday: March 19, 1944

My name appeared on the mission roster again this morning flying A-20G #218 with S/Sgt Jack Brower and Sgt. Earl Corrin as gunners. This was my third mission, with three different planes and three different crews! -- The folks at Operations are promising to get permanent aircraft and crew assignments worked out so we can work better as small teams and get to know our equipment more personally. We were earmarked today for the #6 slot in the lead flight of Box Two. At the head of that flight was Major Willets, with my friend Bob Basnett as bombardier/navigator. At 1445Z, (that's 2:45 pm, London time) Captain Bailey briefed us. –

"The target today is a NOBALL site at Wisques, France, three miles SW of St. Omer and lying between two roads leading from Setques NE to Omer. This target has been attacked previously, but there was no visible damage to essential installations on the site. The target is in a wooded area and is 1500 ft. by 2500 ft. in size. There are several buildings visible in the target area—two rectangular, one square and two ski-shaped."

— This was a Sunday to remember and one that, for those of us involved, amply demonstrated the dangers of war in the air. On the way in, we picked up an escort of P-47 fighters from the IX ASC and passed a group of B-26s heading out—already having finished their run somewhere over France. I saw a long explosion, like the last moments of some oil storage depot, just about two minutes inside the coast—but have no idea what caused it. As I looked out the right side of my cockpit I could see Joe Schouten directly across from me in #699, the "I" plane of the 671st. I haven't flown in that bird yet, but probably will get the chance the way we are shuffling around.

The mission today was a coordinated attack with heavy bombers above and our speedy light bombers below at 12,000 feet. Due to heavy low cloud cover (a regular occurrence these days) three passes were required before all of the flights could drop their bombs. One pass over a target defended by flak batteries is bad. Two passes can be unnerving. Three passes could drive an atheist to prayer! The ground was covered with snow and the navigators had great difficulty locating the target. Every ship in our formation suffered battle damage and several crew members received injuries from flak. All of us were grateful for the armor plating built into key locations by the Douglas engineers.

On our initial bomb run, our flight was diverted by a B-17 tumbling down in flames and exploding above and in front of us. On the second run, two B-26 medium bombers and at least three P-47s were seen going down out of

control. We were a battered group as we left the coast of France behind us and headed home to Wethersfield. With the extent of damage uncertain, landing with a plane shot full of holes is a nerve-wracking experience. I tried to follow procedure closely with careful attention to detail.

I've always believed that the checklist is a pilot's Bible. In preparation for landing, I increased engine rpms to 2200 with the fuel mixture set on auto rich and started an approach at 165 mph with flaps down at 22.5 degrees. On final, I throttled back to 130 mph, increased flaps to full down and touched down at 115 mph, precisely "by the book."

In my post-mission interrogation, I mentioned that on the route in—four minutes inside the coast—we ran into intense and accurate flak. Further in there was some sporadic flak ranging from light to heavy. We ran into intense, heavy and accurate fire at the target area. Our evasion was good and the flak was often left behind in the turns. Without evasion procedures, we would have suffered extreme casualties. I reported seeing one of the B-26s on fire in a flat spin over the target area and seeing one parachute emerge. Although we all try to block out thoughts of the poor souls that don't get out, it's impossible to see that and not be affected. I really felt like Michael the Archangel was my co-pilot today, even though there's only one set of controls.

One plane, flown by Lt. Horace Pair, was lost while crash-landing on return—but the crew

survived. If luck has a limit, a lot of it was used up on our mission today. Bob Basnett told me, after we got back on the ground, that he remembers thinking as we passed St. Omer "I'll never make 35 of these!" I didn't have the heart to tell him that I've heard rumors we are going to have to fly more missions than that to complete our tour.

Friday: March 31, 1944

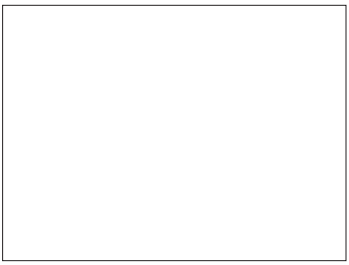
Except for that difficult mission of March 19th, the month was a comparatively mild introduction to war and we were thankful to have it. Still, we sent 229 planes out this month to wreak havoc on enemy airstrips, road junctions, marshalling yards, bridges and railway overpasses in France—as well as to disable the coastal NOBALL sites. Although eight airmen earned Purple Hearts for their flirtation with enemy flak, our group dropped 287 tons of bombs and suffered no combat casualties in our first month of operations.

Chapter Eleven

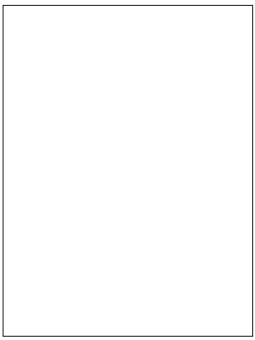
Operation Crossbow

Throughout the Spring of 2007, I continued to compile information about the 416th and the A-20. Internet contacts with Tristan Cools of Belgium and Peter Appleton of Britain unveiled some exceptional photos of German V-weapon sites along the Atlantic Wall. The information on their websites helped considerably in forming a picture of Bois des Huit Rues, the target area for the 416th's mission of April 10, 1944. This research broadened into a study of 9th Air Force tactics and German defenses in occupied France. The database of resources stored in my computer was growing at an exponential rate.

Fi-103/V-1 "Buzz Bomb"



V-1 diving on London



In the Spring of 1944, there were three major Allied campaigns competing for resources. Britain had become one huge military encampment and these campaigns taxed the logistical, planning and political capabilities of all Allied forces—but primarily the British and Americans. Operation Pointblank targeted German industrial capacity. Operation Overlord orchestrated the Allied invasion of Europe and Op-

Fi-103/V-1 launchings

eration Crossbow was employed as a counteroffensive against German attacks on British population centers. American and British war planners argued incessantly over the priority that each of these operations should be assigned in terms of the deployment of limited resources. In immediate terms, the British placed a very high priority on Operation Crossbow, while American commanders wanted to employ as much airpower as possible to soften the Normandy coast prior to D-Day landings. Both of these points of view clashed with those of long-term strategists who wanted German factories and infrastructure eliminated. In the end, politics outweighed both tactical and strategic considerations when it came to deployment of the light and medium bombers of the 9th Air Force—and even of a surprising number of the heavy bombers belonging to 8th Air Force. With the 20/20 perspective of history, we can see that the diversion of resources to Operation Crossbow probably cost more lives on the battlefield than it saved in British cities and ultimately prolonged the war—though that assessment would still be fiercely debated in some circles. Yet it may rank as one of the most colossal failures of military intelligence and planning in the history of modern warfare.

V-1 production line

V-1 on display after WWII

The Fi-103/V-1 missile, actually an unmanned aircraft, was commonly known as the "buzz bomb" or "doodlebug" because of the distinctive noise produced by its pulsing jet engine. It had a range of just over 200 miles and could reach speeds of up to 400 miles per hour. It was a small craft with a wingspan of less than 19 feet and had few working parts. Consequently, it was difficult to shoot down even though it flew on a flat and level trajectory until just before impact. Initially, the V-1 was designed to be launched from a hardened ramp (the ramp being protected by concrete barriers on each side). At 152 feet in length, the ramp was fixed in elevation and bearing toward its target—usually London. The weapon was produced by the Fiesler company using an Argus Schmidt pulse-jet engine that ran on 150 gallons of low-grade 80 octane gasoline. Its lack of lift at low speed and the low initial thrust of the engine necessitated the use of a steam catapult in launching. Some V-1s were launched from aircraft, despite Allied air supremacy and the danger that the V-1 would light up the entire sky around the launching aircraft—thus exposing it, as well as the flying bomb, to Allied night fighters. Even so, the Luftwaffe launched more than 1,100 V-1s from modified Heinkel bombers. Designated also by the Germans as the FZG 76, the name V-1 came from Joseph Goebbels, Hitler's Propaganda Minister, who referred to the bomb as "Vergeltungswaffe Eins", which translates loosely into Vengeance Weapon-1. It was heralded to the German people as a retaliation for the Allied bombing of German cities. The fact that many of them were built in Volkswagen factories is cosmic irony—a generation later, the Volkswagon Microbus would become an icon of the "Peace" movement in America.

The simplicity of the V-1 was both its greatest asset and its ultimate shortcoming as a decisive weapon. A weighted pendulum controlled the pitch, while gyro-compass mechanisms controlled yaw and roll. There was no need for a banking mechanism since the weapon flew on a straight, predetermined course to its target. In some versions, a small nose propeller acted as a countdown timer and could be adjusted to compen-

sate for varying wind conditions. It also registered the distance flown and armed the bomb. When the preset distance was achieved, a simple relay device put the V-1 into a dive. The change in attitude caused an interruption in the fuel flow, killing the engine and (unintentionally) causing the "buzz" to stop. Londoners quickly identified this quirk, waiting with bated breath as long as they could hear the racket above—knowing that, when the noise stopped, it was time to dive for cover.

On other versions, the distance traveled was apparently determined by the amount of fuel carried. When the fuel was exhausted, the flying bomb simply fell from the sky in a free-fall dive. Obviously, the accuracy of either system was poor, yet with a target the size of London it made little difference to the Germans where the bomb impacted. The V-1 was a weapon of terror, not a systems countermeasure.

V-1 operations were assigned to the German Luftwaffe, Flak Regiment 155(W), under the command of Oberst Max Wachtel. The overall plan included other weapons like the V-2 and V-3. The unit implementing this purely offensive initiative was designated a Flak unit in an attempt to misguide Allied intelligence. Although the first test flights of a V-1 occurred in late 1941 or early 1942, the plan to launch them against Britain was delayed until June of 1944. This was largely due to design and production problems, but also partly due to the early concentrated attacks of Allied Air Forces on distribution centers and launch sites. In any case, had these weapons been deployed and made operational against British ports according to the original timetable, Operation Overlord might never have happened.

The initial plan was to launch V-1s and V-2s from four enormous reinforced-concrete sites along the Atlantic Wall. This region extended along the Dutch, Belgian and French coasts facing the English Channel. That plan was later revised to include 96 smaller sites, with hardened ramps and assembly buildings, to launch V-1s. One of the building types peculiar to these sites was a bomb storage building with a distinctive "J" (or "ski") shape to it, when viewed from the air. This long

narrow building, with a curve right at the end, was apparently designed to reduce the impact of nearby bomb bursts. In the absence of particular knowledge about the weapon itself, these sites became known to many airmen simply as "ski sites" and to mission planners as "NOBALL" sites. Although I have yet to find an official description of the term, it would appear that it is an acronym and possibly derived from Non Operational BALListic weapon site. Though intelligence analysts were fairly confident that these were missile sites, they knew little about the weapon.

The logistical problems of this huge construction project, exacerbated by the success of Allied bombing raids in late 1943 and early 1944, convinced the German high command to abandon the hardened sites and redeploy the V-1 to more obscure locations using re-locatable camouflaged ramps. These "mobile" launch sites could be assembled in six days and easily moved once discovered. As a ruse to throw off Allied intelligence, work continued on rebuilding the bomb-damaged hardened sites. The general thinking of the German command was that bombs dropped on these sites were bombs that would not fall on Germany. The logic was sound, as Operation Crossbow diverted about 20% of the Allied bombing capability away from strategic and tactical targets.

Much of the work on V-weapon facilities was done with impressed labor. It has been estimated that as many as 10,000 political prisoners, many from Jewish concentration camps, died during the bombing of V-weapon production and launch facilities. In December of 1943, the Luftwaffe encircled the hardened sites with anti-aircraft batteries. For the Germans, this was not unlike duck hunting; they set out their decoys and waited in their blinds for Allied bombers to show up. Even if a bombing run was successful—and often they were not—the V-1 launch capability was not materially affected as the Germans were busy building more than 100 second-tier sites, without permanent buildings, that could be much better disguised. The decoys worked.

In January of 1944, ski sites became the sole target of 9th Air Force planners. Over 1,100 tactical bomber sorties were launched that month against targets that (for all practical purposes) were already obsolete. Once Allied bombing had convinced the Germans to abandon the hardened site launches, further bombing was actually counterproductive as it diverted resources that could have been used more effectively to prepare for Operation Overlord and the invasion of Normandy. The Germans responded by increasing the number of guns around hardened sites, increasing Allied casualties and furthering the belief among Allied intelligence that the sites represented a continued threat. By March of 1944, the medium bombers of the 9th Air Force returned mainly to strategic missions and the continued assault on the hardened sites fell to the A-20 attack bomber groups that had just arrived in Britain—including the 416th Bomb Group to which Bill Cramsie was assigned. The focus on bombing these sites, in retrospect, is inexplicable.

The Allied Joint Intelligence Committee appointed a special subcommittee for analyzing the impact of V-weapons. This subcommittee reported in December of 1943 that, within a month of their report, the Germans would be able to deliver 300 tons of bombs on Britain via their V-1s in an eight-hour period. Certainly, some analysts were skeptical of this report but the Blitz bombing of London during the Battle of Britain was still fresh in the minds of decision-makers. It was not something that could be considered an acceptable risk.

In January of 1944, as personnel of the 416th Bomb Group were en route by ship to England, General Hap Arnold became involved in Operation Crossbow. It was his opinion that low-level attacks would be more effective against hardened sites than the higher-level attacks of the B-26 groups. General Arnold tested his theory by having a ski site replicated at Eglin Field in Florida. A series of tests confirmed beyond doubt that medium-altitude and high-altitude bombing was the least effective method to destroy the sites. The best approach was to use low-altitude bombing by fighters. This view was supported unanimously by American commanders and war-planners,

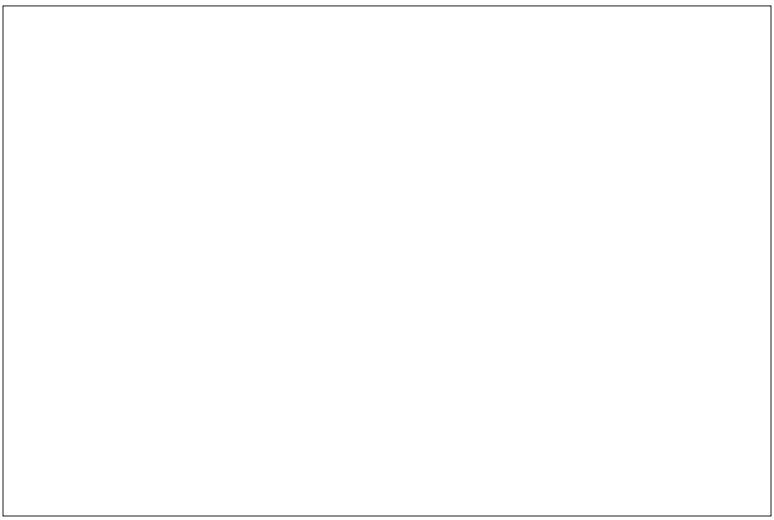
but the British opposed it because the projected loss ratio of fighters was higher than that of bombers and Britain needed as many fighters as possible for air defense. When the decision finally came down to General Eisenhower, the need for cohesion of the coalition trumped the recommendations of his own staff and field commanders. The 97th Bomb Wing would continue to attack the hardened ski sites with their light bombers. This decision played right into the hands of the German Flak Regiment as they were becoming adept at hitting high-altitude targets with their radar-controlled 88s.

On April 19, 1944, the same day that the ski site at Bois des Huit Rues was finally destroyed, British Air Marshal Tedder informed Army Air Corps General Spaatz that Operation Crossbow missions took priority over all others. USAAF headquarters objected strenuously, calling the missions "wasteful" and suggesting that they be curtailed. Nevertheless, the Crossbow missions against hardened targets continued and the Germans kept patching the targets back together to encourage further attacks. In May, to prove their point, four P-47s of the 365th Fighter Group attacked four ski sites at low level with two 1,000-pound semi-armor-piercing bombs each. Three of the four sites received damage that would put them out of commission. Where heavy and medium bombers at high altitude had required an average of 1,947 tons of explosives to neutralize a ski site, the fighters had needed only one ton each and no planes were lost on this mission. Although the British acknowledged the success of the low-altitude attack, they continued to insist on high-altitude bombing for these sites.

The Army Air Corps was tasked with primary responsibility for Operation Crossbow. Although the statistics vary for different types of aircraft, the ratio for A-20 attack bombers was more than 300 tons of ordnance per plane per destroyed target. Even the most rudimentary grasp of mathematics would suggest that many missions were unsuccessful in target destruction. The situation was still worse for B-24s, which required over 400 tons per plane per target. Between December 1943, when the air attacks against V-weapon sites became a

high priority, and D-Day, over 25,000 bombing sorties were launched against these sites. Far worse than the 36,000 tons of bombs that were expended, U.S. Army Air Forces lost nearly 800 airmen and 79 bombers. Over 4,000 additional missions were flown for photo-reconnaissance of Crossbow-designated sites. The reconnaissance flights were typically flown at low level by fighters, which is ironic since the use of fighters for bombing these installations was deemed too risky. The cost of this effort in every sense was huge. In retrospect, the German deception that resulted in extensive bombing of hardened V-1 sites after December 1943 caused of the costliest Allied mistakes of the war—as the Allies learned soon after D-Day.

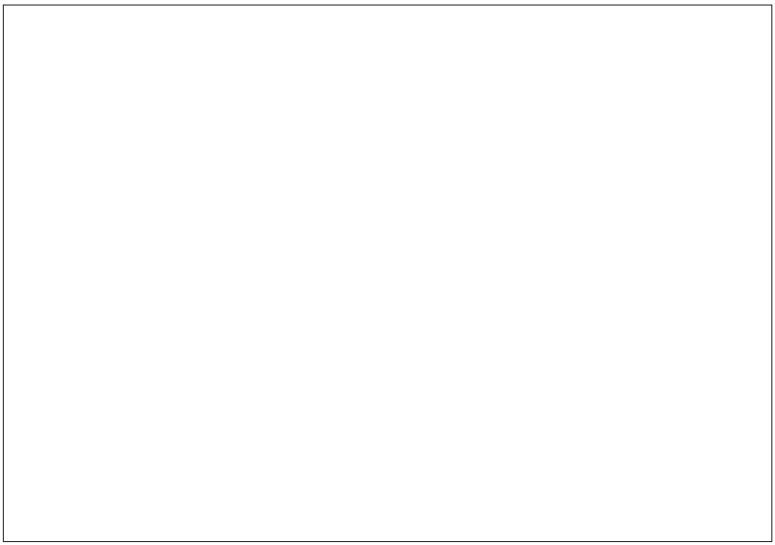
From the very beginning of combat operations for the 416th Bomb Group, the V-1 hardened sites were a frequent target of group missions. During the month of April 1944, the group flew almost exclusively on NOBALL missions. As D-Day approached, the targeting shifted dramatically to marshaling yards, aerodromes and coastal gun emplacements. By June 6th, the 416th had flown 27 of its 66 missions against V-1 sites and 39 missions against other targets. This shift in



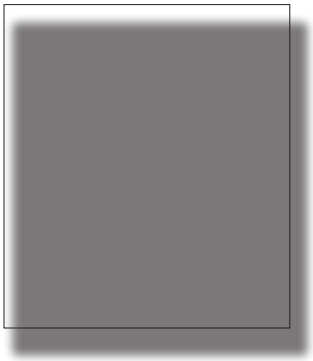
416th Bomb Group A-20s on an Operation Crossbow mission April 1944

targeting reflected not only the increased priority at Air Forces headquarters for support of the impending invasion, but also the erroneous view that the V-1 threat had been marginalized. The failure of Allied intelligence to realize in the winter of 1943/44 that V-1 operations had shifted from hardened to mobile sites proved costly not only for the 416th and other 9th Air Force units, but also—crucially—for the population of London. While delayed deployment of the V-1 clearly saved many lives, the Luftwaffe still launched some 9,000 Buzz Bombs against Britain—with about 25% reaching their target. More than 6,000 civilians were killed and nearly 18,000 were injured in the attacks. An equal number of V-1s landed on the city of Antwerp in Belgium. Most of these were fired from portable launchers that evaded the reach of Operation Crossbow.

Ultimately, the elimination of this threat against the civilian population of London was accomplished by Allied ground forces pushing east through the Pas de Calais and driving V-1 launchers out of range. (However, the civilian populations of Antwerp and other liberated cities along the Atlantic Wall were less fortunate.)



416th mission #20 - Bois des Huit Rues - 19 Apr 44. (note the bomb craters outside of the target from previous 8th and 9th AF missions.)



Chapter Twelve

Bois des Huit Rues

One of the sites that captured the attention of mission planners in early April of 1944 was ski site #623 at Bois des Huit Rues (pronounced "bwah day weet roo") near Hazebrouck, France. The unit responsible for operation of this site was the First Battalion of the 155th Flak Regiment (German Luftwaffe). The French place name Bois des Huit Rues translates into English as the Forest of the Eight Streets. It is a patch of wooded land nestled amongst small farms to the southwest of the city of Hazebrouck and just northwest of the village of Morbecque. Several isolated patches like this are considered part of the larger Nieppe Forest. The terrain consists of rolling hills and is located geographically in the Pas de Calais region of France familiar to many as Flanders. It was here where some of the bloodiest engagements of World War I took place, inspiring the poignant poem by Canadian army surgeon Lt. Col. John McCrae.

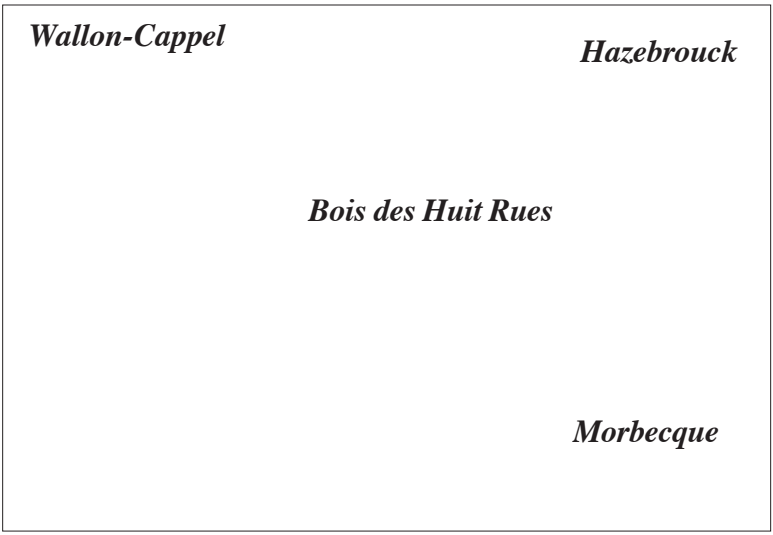
IN FLANDERS FIELDS the poppies blow
Between the crosses row on row,
That mark our place; and in the sky
The larks, still bravely singing, fly
Scarce heard amid the guns below.

We are the Dead. Short days ago
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,
Loved and were loved, and now we lie
In Flanders fields.

Take up our quarrel with the foe:
To you from failing hands we throw
The torch; be yours to hold it high.
If ye break faith with us who die
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow
In Flanders fields.

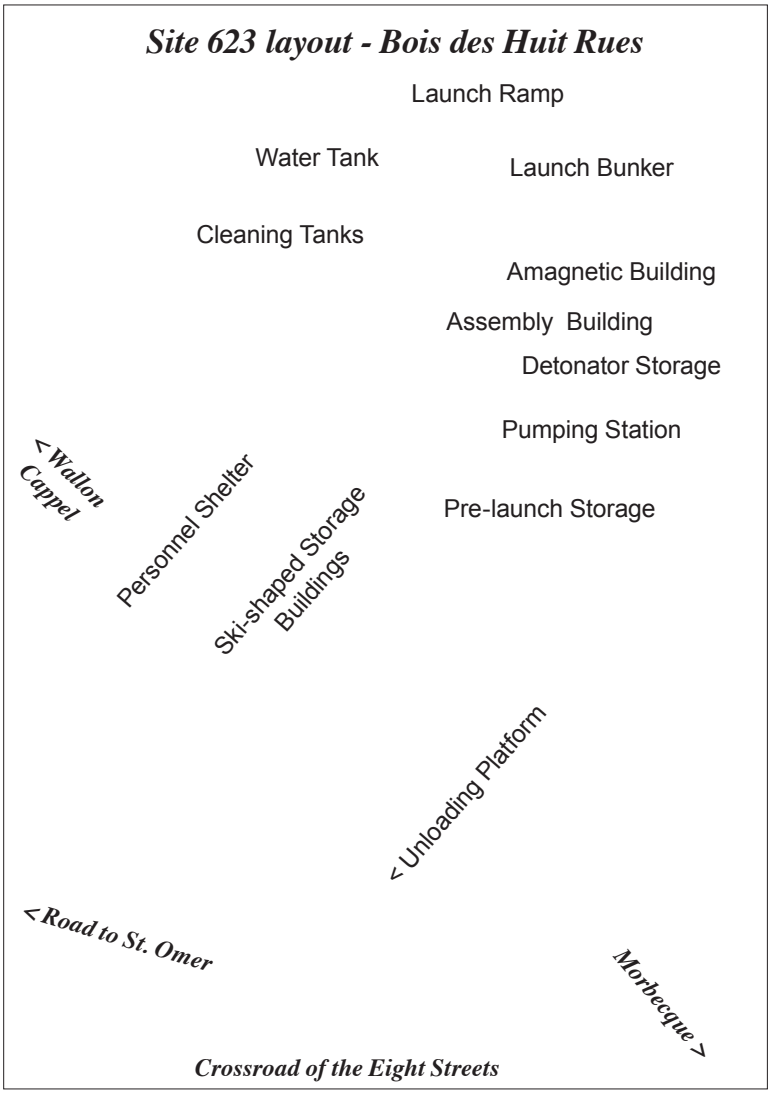
Surrounded by the dead and dying, Colonel McCrae touched on the restless spirit of those who die in vain—even for a noble cause. It seems that, in his mind, the fields of Flanders epitomized the virtue of man's struggle and the futility of war. A generation later, those fields once again brought that strange dichotomy into the spotlight as young men died in vain—leaving behind even more restless spirits.

The heavily wooded Bois des Huit Rues lies in a direct line between the small villages of Wallon-Cappel and Morbecque. The installation here was a traditional ski site, but was located only a few miles from one of the giant hardened bunkers built by German armament minister Fritz Totz in 1943. Also very close by, to the west, was another NOBALL launch site at Wizernes. One of the eight streets that intersect within this small forest is the road to St. Omer, a larger city not far to the west where a large German infantry unit was headquartered. Consequently, the entire region from St. Omer to Hazebrouck, though only about a minute's flying time for the A-20 Havoc, was very heavily defended by some of the best anti-aircraft units and equipment in the German military.



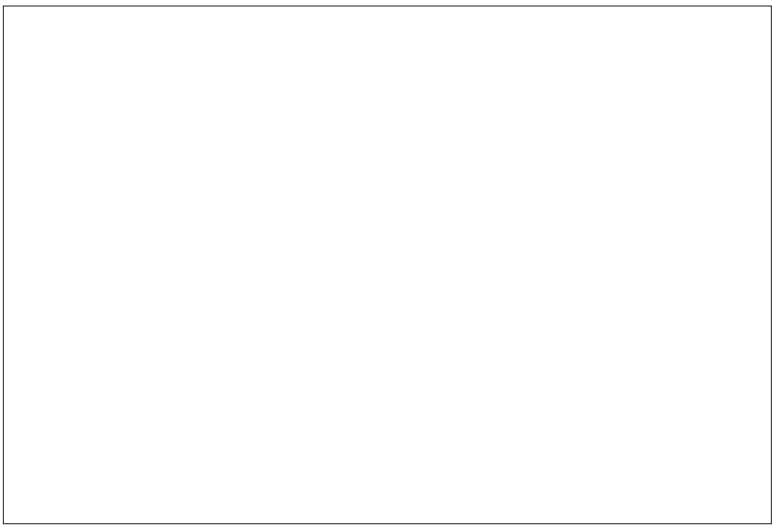
Modern aerial photo of the Hazebrouck area, France

Construction of the site began in the spring of 1943, to which cold testimony still remains. Grafitti etched into a lintel of one building includes the inscription "Hazebrouck 1943". One can only speculate as to who left this brief chronicle behind. A German soldier? A forced laborer? An eventual victim of



the Holocaust? German engineers supervised the work of paid French and Belgian workers as well as that of prisoners from the Buchenwald concentration camp. The hardened buildings included three of the ski-shaped storage buildings, each ca-

Ruins of V-1 Amagnetic building, Bois des Huit Rues



Ski-shaped V-1 assembly building, Bois des Huit Rues

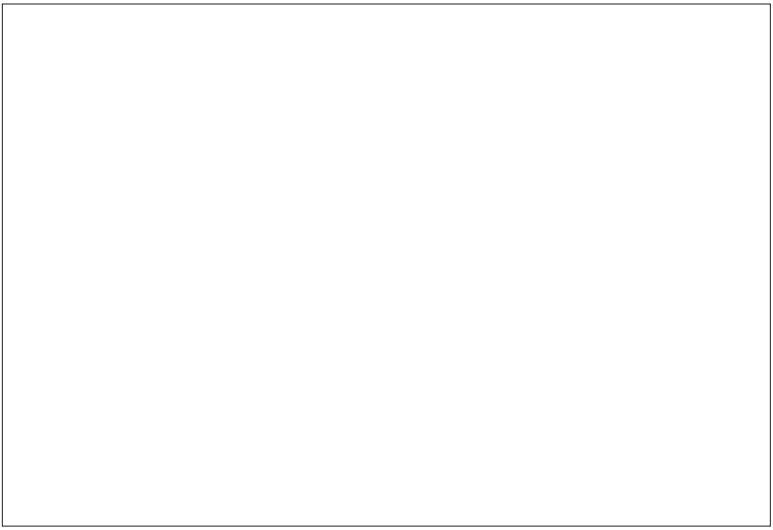
pable of holding a dozen missiles. Other buildings included shelters for personnel, an assembly building, a temporary storage building, a building for detonator storage, a demagnetized building for adjusting the guidance systems, a water pumping station and a launch control center. The launch ramp itself had protective sides. Most of these buildings still survive, though some are battle-damaged. The state-owned forest, with the V-1 site remnants clearly marked and explained, is today part of a local walking tour.

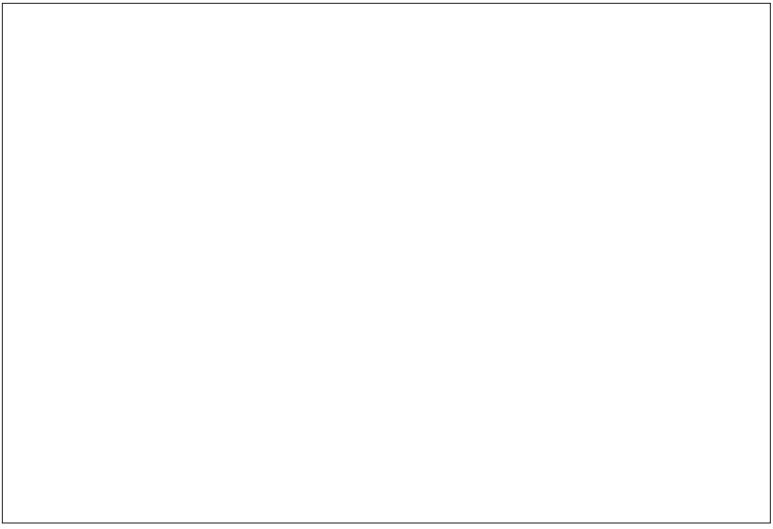
The flying bombs were brought into these sites by truck and assembled locally. After fueling and positioning on the ramp, a steam-driven piston was attached. The steam pressure was generated by a chemical reaction of hydrogen peroxide and potassium permanganate. Residue in this steam boiler was removed after each launch by immersion in special cleaning tanks near the launch ramp.

We do not know if the site at Bois des Huit Rues ever received any of the flying bombs, but in view of the production delays, the probability must be against it. Certainly, they were not able to launch any, as the site was destroyed before mass

V-1 Assembly Building, Bois des Huit Rues

production of the V-1 became a reality. Had the site been ignored by the Allied Air Forces, the story would probably have been quite different. The decision of German war planners to abandon the hardened sites was driven by the fact that they could be located and bombed. That decision probably would not have evolved had the Allies ignored the original sites when





Launch ramp at Bois des Huit Rues

they first appeared in the Summer of 1943. The bombing raids launched in the Summer and Fall of 1943 drove the Germans to abandon operational plans for these site and to use them instead merely as decoys. Consequently, the bombing of NO-BALL sites from December 1943 to April 1944 accomplished little or nothing.

Ironically, the official USAAF chronology of missions for April 10, 1944 does not even list the mission to Bois des Huit Rues or the three aircraft and two crews lost in that effort. It alludes merely to A-20 attacks on "NOBALL targets at Charleroi/Montignies, Namur, Coxyde, Nieuport and 'other points' on the N coast of W Europe."

In June of 2007, another business commitment took me back to Washington. This time, I scheduled an extra two days—spending one at the Air Force Historical Research Agency repository on Bolling Air Force Base and the other on a return trip to the NARA facility at College Park, Maryland. Finding the AFHRA office at Bolling was an adventure. The office is located in a nondescript warehouse-type building in a complex without building numbers. Although the address is listed as Bolling AFB, it is actually on the Anacostia Naval Air Station overlooking the Potomac. Fortunately, my taxi-driver was patient and good-natured and together we stumbled on the building by pure luck. The library is well hidden on the fourth floor behind unmarked doors with no directions whatever, either at street level or elsewhere: indeed, it became clear that this facility does not go out of its way to encourage visitors. (I later discovered that the "library" is really an information gathering service for Washington officials, both civilian and military, who require background information. The office is understaffed in terms of handling private research.) Nevertheless, the staff were hospitable and the facility well repaid my trouble. A research volunteer (a retired Air Force officer) showed me where the microfilm was for the dates I was interested in and gave me a short training course on the use of the microfiche reader/printer. The very first film that I loaded was a goldmine. It contained all of the

documentation related to missions of the 416th from January through April of 1944. Consequently, all of the missions that Bill Cramsie flew on were covered in this one roll of film.

Skipping over the first sections, I went directly to April 10, 1944 and there before my eyes was the complete load list, the pre-flight intelligence briefing, the weather report, the post-mission debriefings and complete battle damage reports. Appended was a handwritten informal report about the loss of aircraft 43-9699 and crew. This was the fourth message in a bottle and I was becoming a believer that some things in life are just meant to happen. After spending the entire day reading and copying microfiche documents, I caught a ride off base with one of the retired military volunteers at the library and returned to my hotel. Although physically and emotionally exhausted by the experience, I could not turn off the adrenalin. It was the wee hours of the morning before I could finally put down the huge stack of data and get some badly needed rest.

The next morning, I rose early to catch the Metro from my hotel near George Washington University up to the National Archives building. There, a NARA shuttle provided free transportation to the College Park facility. Having been to this research center before, I knew the procedure and things went very well. I focussed this time on photos of 416th facilities, personnel and missions. The familiar cartful of boxes kept me busy throughout the day and I scanned dozens of interesting and informative photos. Returning home with all of this data, I felt like the Greeks returning from Troy, loaded with booty. The original problem of finding enough data had now become one of sorting, evaluating and coordinating an overflow of data so that it could be presented in something approaching a logical and concise manner. . . Yet the personality and fate of this one airman drew me more powerfully than ever, and the more I discovered, the more I wanted to know. The piles of documents on my desk kept growing.

Chapter Thirteen

"Before the Storm"

Saturday: April 1, 1944

We've had bad weather this week that's kept us from flying anything but maintenance checks and new pilot orientations. A few missions were called up, only to be scrubbed at the last minute. Sitting around waiting for the weather to break is starting to raise tensions—in fact, any extra time on your hands is bad for a combat pilot. It's best to stay engaged and think only about the task at hand. When we can't fly, it's good to have distractions: cards, ping-pong, anything. I always think these kinds of activities work better than talking, as almost every conversation tends to work its way around to the subject of combat perils, sooner or later.

So far, enemy fighters haven't posed a serious threat to us—partly because we have good fighter cover ourselves, but also because the Germans would rather send their pursuit planes against the heavy bombers that are pulverizing their industrial centers. They seem much less concerned about us bombing targets in France and Belgium. However, the German flugabwehrkanone or "airplane defense cannon" has turned out to be a formidable and deadly weapon in the enemy's arsenal. When the round of an antiaircraft gun explodes, it sends out chunks of metal in every direction—like bullets but larger and

even more destructive. Nobody jokes about flak once they've had a taste of it.

The Brits devised a protective vest of manganese and ballistic nylon for air crews to wear, but it proved too bulky for the limited space in a Lancaster. So, in an amazing stroke of brilliance, they donated them to the Army Air Corps. Flak helmets and vests are exceedingly uncomfortable, and far from stylish, but we're very happy to have them. Some guys even take along an extra flak vest to sit on—we always get a few laughs out of that!

We've all seen enough flak now to give it due respect, but there's no way to avoid it because the Germans ring their military and strategic priorities with a mix of guns designed to cover almost every situation. Their gunners are extremely well-trained and by now they've had a lot of practice. It's not so much a question of whether you'll be hit by flak but rather if the resulting damage will disable either your plane or your crew... We try all sorts of evasive action and that does help to a degree, but there comes a time on every bomb run where you just can't change course any more if you want to hit anything. It's like playing a game of chicken with a cobra—pretty easy to get bit.

Sunday: April 2, 1944

It's a quiet Sunday here with everything pretty much shut down by the weather. Dick Wheeler and I caught a train into London this morning and went to Mass at St. Patrick's

Church on Soho Square. The church itself is yet another reminder of how close London is to the war. On the night of November 19th, 1940, a German bomb pierced the roof of the church and buried itself in the Nave—providentially, it failed to explode. One of the most memorable parts of this church, aside from its Irish flavor, is an impressive three-story marble shrine to Our Lady of Lourdes. I felt strangely moved as a young novitiate from Belfast joined Dick and me in saying a rosary together for the boys who'd died in training and for those facing the enemy in days to come. I couldn't wait to ask him about Belfast and County Antrim, since that was my ancestral home.

His eyes glowed. "How can I tell you about it? You have to imagine green, greener than the greenest green you've ever looked at, and girls pale but beautiful, and their proud head and shoulders. You have to imagine little pubs set into the hollow of a valley, and some fiddler playing to himself in the firelight. How can I describe County Antrim? I cannot. You must use your imagination, or come to visit me after this long sad war is over."

How I'd love a chance to walk those green (green!) fields at least once before we go back to the States! — That would be completely magical for me.

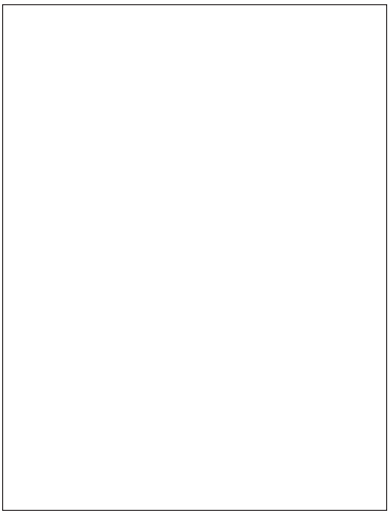
After strolling through the local market and marveling at the fine linens and huge vegetables, we had lunch at a quaint pub called the "Boar's Head." The foundation and some of the massive rough-hewn beams in this establishment are said

to date back to the 13th century—as, I have to suspect, does some of its ale!—Next time I'd like to find an Irish pub, with a fiddler, like the fiddler the young Irishman spoke of. Still, it felt so good spending the day with Dick since we haven't seen much of each other lately. We got to reminiscing about our appointments to the academy and had to laugh at how much we each went through to create so much pain and anxiety for ourselves. Failing to land a slot from his state legislators, Dick went to Washington, D.C. and paced the halls of Congress asking every legislator he could find whether they had a vacancy. His persistence paid off when he received an appointment "at large" from an elderly Senator with a spot to fill and no local candidate earmarked for it. As for me, though I did finally land an appointment through our Congressman, Harry Englebright, it took several tries and a year at the Academy Prep School in San Francisco. I could have gotten a PhD from Berkeley faster!

Thursday: April 6, 1944

Today is Holy Thursday and I'm already thinking about Easter back home. Mom used to boil eggs and we would all sit around the kitchen table to color them with dyes and designs from a chunk of beeswax sharpened with a knife. Even Ruth, who is six years younger than I am and eight years younger than our brother Bob, could color a mean egg. On Easter morning, Mom and Dad would always hide the eggs out in the tall grass by our home near Applegate (a small town north of Auburn on the road to Donner Pass and

Reno). We used long sticks that were cut from a pine branch to search for the eggs as reaching into tall grass in the Sierra Foothills can put you into very close proximity with an unfriendly and irritable snake. (Bob and I always let Ruth find most of them, though we would never tell her that.)



WWII V-mail poster

I'm so thankful that we get V-mail here. If it weren't for the letters I get from Mom and Dee, all this hanging around could make me feel pretty low. Dee said she is going to go to the Catholic Chapel at West Point for Easter services. She still goes to some of the dances there, but seems less enthusiastic about those than she used to be. Just the other day I was thinking about the time we met. She was talking to some upperclassmen near the entrance to the Academic Library and I was waiting for my formation to assemble. When one of the Firsties called me over and introduced me to her I was shocked, first of all because she was a heart-stopper and secondly because upper classmen never spoke informally to a yearling. Later, she admitted to me that she had asked them to make the introduction. We've been close friends from that moment on.

While waiting for some action here, I also find myself wondering what Bob's up to.

(Ironically, he's in England too, serving as a Medic with the Air Corps.) It's such a shame, two brothers both so far from home and so close to each other—but still finding it so hard to connect! We're hoping to get together as soon as we can both nail passes to London on the same day.

It's strange how you go through life looking forward all of the time and hardly ever taking the time to look back. That mission two weeks ago to Wisques has had a real effect on me in that regard. I don't think I'll ever again forget to appreciate the people and places along the road I've traveled. I'll always be a more thoughtful person, just because of that day.

Saturday: April 8, 1944

Today I had a pretty surreal experience. As it was a down day due to the continued bad weather, I was hanging out in the maintenance hanger with Bob Rooney talking to some of the mechanics. Bob and I were in the same company (G-1) at West Point and have always felt close—though he seems to have inherited more of the Irish blarney than I did. We don't get to see each other very often these days, even though we're in the same Group and on the same base.

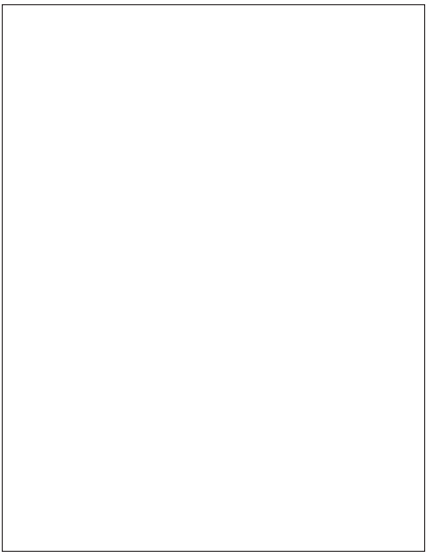
Anyway, we were sitting there having a cup of coffee and chewin' the fat while one of the sergeants rebuilt a leaking hydraulic cylinder. Colonel Mace, our Group Commander, happened to walk by the hanger door and saw us doing nothing. He stopped abruptly and said, "Say

lieutenants, I have a little errand that you could run for me if you'd like." (What did he think, we WOULDN'T like?) Apparently, his orderly was off chasing down some paperwork and there was a dispatch that needed to be couriered over to Headquarters at Marks Hall. Naturally, Bob and I were delighted to get off-base for a while and jumped at the opportunity.

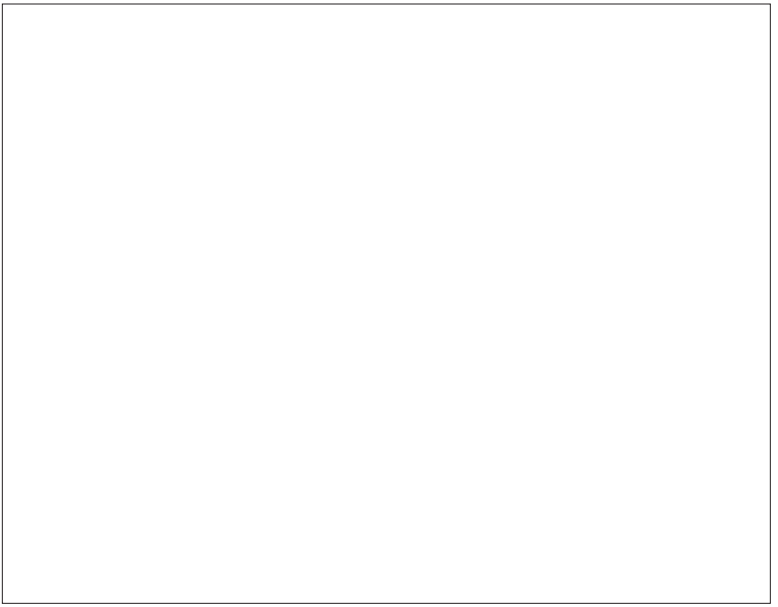
We gassed up the colonel's jeep and headed off toward Braintree. Marks Hall is only about fifteen miles from here, so it was a fairly short ride. Still, it was fun to wind our way through quaint places like Shalford and Churchend. As it was almost noon, we stopped at the little town of Bocking, which is just on the north side of Braintree and had a quick lunch. Coggeshall Road took us east out of Braintree to the historic mansion that has been converted these days to 9th Air Force headquarters. We parked the jeep right in front of the impressive entrance—a staff car to our left bore the flag of a Major General (two stars) and another jeep to our right had a Brigadier General's flag attached. There were no drivers around, so we figured that parking there would be OK since we didn't plan to stay long.

The entrance leads directly into a long foyer with rooms off to each side. We didn't know exactly where the Officer of the Day was located, so we walked into the first room with an open door. As I recall, Bob was just saying, "Not a bad little shack," when I nudged him--hard. Because there, much to our embarrassment, sat the two generals whose vehicles sandwiched our jeep—Hoyt Vandenberg and Maxwell Taylor! We tried to back out gracefully, without success.

I knew immediately who they were because both are West Pointers and are rising stars in the Army. The stories about their youthful appearances are not exaggerated, I felt like neither of these generals are much older than I am (though in fact I was still playing with model airplanes when they graduated.) As we were trying to effect an orderly retreat, Taylor flashed a warm



BG Maxwell Taylor - 1944



Eisenhower pinning the DSM on MG Hoyt Vandenberg - 1944

and disarming smile. "Are those West Point class rings you two are wearing? Tell me, lieutenant, where are you based at the moment?" So I told them, and they looked at each other—it seemed to me significantly. Vandenberg said, as he glanced at my silver wings, "A little bit of luck for us. You're flying A-20s, aren't you? Have you gotten much time over France?" He motioned for us to have a seat, and of course we told them everything we knew about the coastline, the German defences that we could see, and the possibilities of the A-20 for close air support of ground forces. At first I felt a little guarded, but I can never discuss any aspect of flying without enthusiasm—and anyway, they were very easy to talk to. Rooney was his typical chatty self, which I have to admire.

It was amazing, there was no part of our job that didn't interest them—but Taylor was especially curious about the coast of France while Vandenberg seemed to focus more on our NOBALL site missions. He was candid in explaining, almost apologetically, that there is considerable controversy over those missions as most U.S. field commanders would prefer our light bombers to concentrate on tactical targets like bunkers, fuel depots, bridges and railroad marshalling yards. The bombing of NOBALL sites is apparently a concession that the British high command insists upon, due to their concern with the safety of London's civilian population. It was fascinating to be talking with people of this caliber about the job that we're doing.

General Vandenberg is a highly-decorated combat pilot (now Deputy Air Commander-in-

Chief of the Allied Expeditionary Forces). There is some talk that he might replace General Brereton as 9th Air Force Commander—that would make him our boss. I suppose that may have been one of the reasons he was there at Marks Hall. General Taylor is the new Commander of the 101st Airborne Division (the Screaming Eagles). Paratroopers are a different breed, as everyone knows. During our chat, which was refreshingly informal, I asked Taylor why anyone would want to jump out of a perfectly good airplane? He laughed and said he had once asked a young soldier the same question. The soldier looked him square in the eye, he said, and told him that he hated jumping out of airplanes. He only did it because he liked being around guys that did like jumping. I think that says a lot about the kind of people that do that difficult and dangerous job. I have the greatest respect for them.

In the back of my mind, I couldn't help but wonder what brought Vandenberg and Taylor together—perhaps planning sessions for the long-awaited and much expected invasion of the continent? After what seemed like a lot of questions, General Vandenberg graciously thanked us for our assistance(!) and Taylor said "You're doing a wonderful job, men, and I hope you know how important it is."

Later, once we'd delivered the package we came with, Bob joked, "Now let's go to Goodge Street and see if we can hang out with Eisenhower for a while!" But it did mean a lot to both of us, the way they treated us, and their attitude. It made me realize that the top brass

do appreciate what we're doing—and secretly I thought that, when and if I get as high up in the profession someday as they are, I'll try to be the same.

Sunday: April 9, 1944

We were able to sleep in this morning, if you call 7:00 am reveille sleeping in! A brief Easter morning service was held in the makeshift chapel on base. We thought it would be a down day, since no mission was called for, but Operations decided we needed some more practice. A formation of two boxes (36 aircraft) was launched and bored holes in the sky over Cambridge for a couple of hours. Some of the pilots flew night navigation practice missions in the evening. All in all, it was a peaceful and pretty uneventful day. All the same, I keep having a nagging feeling that something bad is in the wind. It's probably just nerves from that day at Wisques—or maybe just all this constant waiting—but it doesn't seem to want to go away. There's no point in worrying. I just need to concentrate on doing what I've been trained to do, to the best of my ability. After all, the rest is in the hands of a greater power.

It's 10:00 pm and everything is unusually still tonight. There's hardly a breeze at all, which is rare. On the other side of the field I can hear a lonely bugle playing Taps like they do in the States at this time every night. It's strangely nostalgic over here, because we don't hear it very often. I'll never forget the poignant words that go with that lonely bugle's report:

Fading light dims the sight
And a star gems the sky, gleaming bright
From afar drawing nigh,
Falls the night.

Day is done, gone the sun
From the hills, from the lake, from the sky
All is well, safely rest;
God is nigh.

Then goodnight, peaceful night;
Till the light of the dawn shineth bright.
God is near, do not fear,
Friend, goodnight.

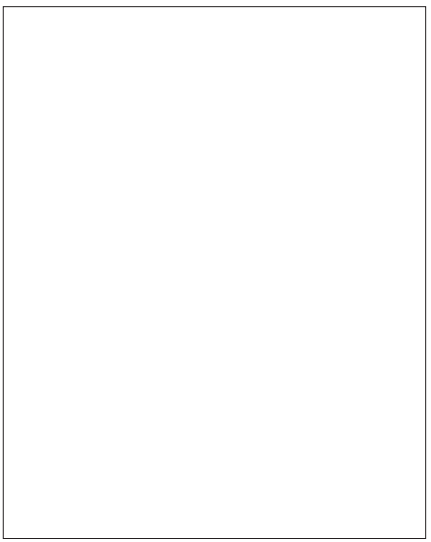
Chapter Fourteen

Elation to Tragedy

The day after Easter, April 10th 1944, was welcomed with undisguised enthusiasm by crews of the 416th. The unit had been idle for two weeks due to miserable weather shrouding the Channel, frustrating airmen determined to do their part in preparing for the much-anticipated invasion of France. When 1st Lt. Castle, the Staff Weather Officer, forecast low clouds topping between 4000 to 5000 feet over the base, spirits lifted. Low clouds were also expected over the Channel, but the forecast improved for areas to the south over France.

With this slight break in the weather, 9th Air Force operations at Marks Hall called for two missions on this cold and dreary Monday. The first, with two "boxes" of 18 planes each, was targeted at Bois des Huit Rues, the NOBALL site in Flanders between Morbecque and Hazebrouck. This target had been hit before by B-26 Marauders, but Intelligence analysis concluded that it needed to be hit again.

Bill had been assigned a slot on the early mission, flying aircraft number 9699. This new "30 block" G model was one of the newest and hottest airplanes in the group. This was only his fourth combat mission, but he had already earned a reputation as one of the best formation flyers in his squadron. For this mission, he would fly right



9th Air Force officers discuss targeting

Mission #10 - Bois des Huit Rues - 10 Apr 44

Box 1 - Flight 1

#640 = "Z"
Maj. Willetts
Lt. Arrington
Lt. Royalty
Ssgt Larronda
Ssgt Lempka

#699 = "I"
Lt. Cramsie
S/Sgt Henshaw
S/Sgt Steward

#937 = "B"
Lt. Durante
S/Sgt Best
S/Sgt Williamson

#218 = "C"
Capt. Dunn
S/Sgt Worden
S/Sgt Rzepka

#219 = "D"
Lt. Andrews
S/Sgt Cook
S/Sgt Werley

#393 = "K"
Lt. Hixon
S/Sgt Foster
S/Sgt Rust

Box 1 - Flight 2

#743 = "R"
Maj. Campbell
S/Sgt Alden
S/Sgt Ballinger

#370 = "D-1"
Lt. Street
S/Sgt Prindle
S/Sgt Huber

#673 = "I-1"
Lt. Dontas
S/Sgt Nielson
S/sgt Fields

#895 = "Q"
Lt. Raines
S/Sgt Bender
S/Sgt Nielson

#941 = "D"
Lt. McDonald
S/SgtShields
S/Sgt Epps

#211 = "C-1"
Lt. Shainberg
S/Sgt Bresnak
S/Sgt Cope

Box 1 - Flight 3

#711 = "M"
Lt. Marzolf
S/Sgt Feistl
S/Sgt Kutzer

#707 = "H"
Lt. Zubon
S/Sgt Tanner
S/Sgt Russell

#221 = "F"
Lt. Merchant
S/Sgt Harp
S/Sgt Brown

#223= "F-1"
Capt. Prentiss
Pvt. Newell
S/Sgt Perkins

#182 = "B-1"
Lt. Miracle
S/Sgt Sieg
S/Sgt Burkhalter

#963 = "N-1"
Lt. Hill
S/Sgt Newkirk
Sgt Anderson

Mission #10 - Bois des Huit Rues - 10 Apr 44

Box 2 - Flight 1

#439 = "J"
Maj. Meng
Lt. Powell
S/Sgt Stobert
S/Sgt Glynn

#200 = "A"
Lt. Rudisill
S/Sgt Conopask
S/Sgt Allred

#207 = "B"
Lt. Harrold
S/Sgt Griffin
Sgt Stephens

#892 = "L"
Capt. Hulse
S/Sgt Dinapoli
S/Sgt McCleary

#224 = "E"
Lt. Monroe
S/Sgt Kidd
S/Sgt Risko

#217 = "D"
Lt. Johnson
S/Sgt Donahue
S/Sgt Brayn

Box 2 - Flight 2

#360 = "S"
Capt. Conant
S/Sgt Molver
T/SgtRobbins

#216 = "E-1"
Lt. Meredith
S/Sgt Shaw
S/Sgt Gray

#195 = "D-1"
Lt. Downing
S/Sgt Love
S/Sgt Adair

#194 = "C"
Capt. Battersby
S/Sgt McCreery
S/SgtYost

#893 = "P"
Lt. Bartmus
S/Sgt Hibbs
S/Sgt Daugherty

#701 = "H"
Lt. Col. Aylesworth
S/Sgt Judd
S/Sgt Fejes

Box 2 - Flight 3

#181 = "A-1"
Lt. Sommers
S/Sgt Lanave
S/SgtKaspar

#203 = "P-1"
Lt. Gullion
S/Sgt Webb
S/Sgt Coffey

#390 = "G"
Lt. Behlmer
S/Sgt Kelly
S/SgtFerguson

#750 = "M"
Lt. Ostrander
S/Sgt Wilson
S/Sgt Binney

#227 = "F"
Lt. Nordstrom
S/Sgt Gossett
S/Sgt Mill

#387 = "H-1"
Lt. McGlohn
S/Sgt Moran
Sgt Driskill

up front in Box One, Flight One, Position Three—on the left wing of the lead aircraft piloted by Major David Willetts, Commander of the 671st Bomb Squadron. Directly to his right in the formation would be Lt. Tony Durante. Behind Bill, in the number 6 slot, was Dave Andrews. Though he was technically a part of "B" flight with Tsgt Felix Larronda and Ssgt Henry Lempka as gunners, Bill Cramsie hadn't flown with either of them in the past six weeks. On this mission, his crew would be Staff Sergeants Charles R. Henshaw from New Jersey as armorer/ tunnel gunner and Jack Steward from Arizona as engineer/turret gunner.

The weather remained hazy, but with visibility of one mile the launch order was given. The morning mission drill was starting to become routine—up early, layer down with double socks and long underwear, off to the mess hall for the standard army breakfast of eggs (scrambled and undercooked), "S-O-S" and coffee, thick and black. For the uninitiated, I should explain that S-O-S is chipped or ground meat in a white gravy (sort of) and served over well toasted bread. It can be very unappealing when slopped in a stainless steel mess kit cover. The acronym is a polite and more socially acceptable version of its popular name "Shit on a Shingle." Mission briefings, which were secure and highly classified, included gunners as well as pilots and bombardier/navigators. Everyone crowded into a hardened Quonset Hut to be given their orders. (A "hardened" hut simply meant that a metal or plywood covering was attached to the outside of the basic canvas structure.) At the front of the briefing room a large map of England and northern Europe was attached to the wall. Strands of bright red yarn marked the flight plan. A chalkboard with takeoff time, target coordinates, bearings and details of the attack was propped on an easel. Rows of simple wooden benches, like those at the sidelines of a football game, were a reminder of the austerities of war.

As Bill donned the remainder of his cold weather gear and prepared to warm up 699, he removed the West Point class ring that represented so many years of effort and dreams

and placed it with his few other valuables in a foot locker near his bed. It was clearly his intention that, if he should fall, this ring would survive as a testimonial to his values and beliefs. It's hard for us, with the years that have passed, not to wonder whether some intimation of mortality might not have prompted Cramsie's gesture—or whether he might even have thought to console his family with this ring's richly historic presence. It seems that he must have left it behind him on this mission, just "in case" he could not return.

Under the shadowless early light of dawn Bill ran through the pre-flight list, checking the landing gear, tires, fuel tanks and fuselage for leaking fluids. Using the built-in fuselage step and handhold, he climbed onto the port wing and into the cockpit where he immediately reached for the seat-adjusting lever to his right—one disadvantage of being short is that the seat is always set too low. He jiggled the seat back and forth a little to lock it in place and adjusted his parachute and life vest until they were at least tolerable—forget comfortable. Working through the checklist, he set the parking brake and turned on the cross-feed fuel pump and booster, instinctively looking at the fuel level and fuel pressure gauges. The engines fired up immediately, sounding as rough as they usually did at low rpm. As they warmed up and the rpm was increased they began to resonate like a throaty Irish drone. The oil temperature looked right on at 50 degrees centigrade. The normally relaxing strains of Garryowen floated through Bill's mind, but today they would be an unrecognized harbinger of danger. As he taxied into position, watching the oil pressure climb from 40 lb/sq inch to a comfortable 85, he thought of the captivating Irish lass who had softened his heart at West Point. Dee would be sleeping peacefully at home in White Plains...the dichotomy could not have been more stark. Beneath him was strapped a ton of high explosives and loaded in the nose of his A-20G were thousands of rounds of armor-penetrating 50-caliber machine-gun ammo.

Takeoff began at 0844, with the ships lifting off at 15-second intervals. Bill was third in line, behind Tony Durante,

taking off at 0845. He closed the upper cowl flaps that had been opened for cooling while stationary and taxiing and lowered the wing flaps 22.5 degrees for added lift. Releasing the landing gear brakes, he allowed the aircraft to start rolling forward before turning into position for takeoff. Pushing the throttle forward to maximum power, 3200 horses strained to free themselves from a tether of cables and engine mounts. All of that "sweetness" that pilots so admired in flight was notably absent on the ground. Every nut, bolt, screw and fastener threatened to pop and even the rattles developed rattles once the ground speed climbed to 100 mph. Lifting the nose slightly, as his speed edged to 115 mph, the plane literally "slipped the surly bonds of earth" into an environment that it found more comfortable. Fifty feet above the runway, with the landing gear retracted, the airspeed indicator crossed 165 mph and Bill pulled back on the stick, to let the Havoc do what it did best.

Each A-20 carried a load of four 500-pound general purpose bombs—a ton of high explosives addressed to the German Wehrmacht. Reaching cruising altitude, Bill throttled back to 1800 rpms and 25 inches of manifold pressure as the ships formed up into their designated flights and boxes. The course was straightforward: Wethersfield to Tonbridge, just south of London, and then to Dungeness on the southern coast of Britain where they would be met at 14,000 feet by Spitfire escorts from the RAF 11 Group, whose task was to neutralize any threat from enemy aircraft. Flying time from Wethersfield to the coast took 45 minutes, but crossing the English Channel to Le Touquet in France would take only eight. Turning east, their first checkpoint was four miles north of Montreuil-sur-Mer, then three miles south of Hucqueliers and then to a point three miles north of Fruges where they were to turn northeast to the IP (or point of initial approach) for the bomb run. The run from the French coast to the IP took only nine minutes. At this point, they should have been about two miles from the target flying at 215 miles per hour. Assuming all went according to plan, it meant a bomb

run of 30 seconds on a straight course. Unfortunately, that would be more than enough time for radar-controlled German antiaircraft batteries to lay up a solid curtain of flak.

The mainstay of the German antiaircraft defenses in Northern France was the 88mm cannon, controlled either optically or by radar. The heavy cannon fired altitude or proximity-fused shells at a rate of several per minute, with a range of more than 30,000 feet. A direct hit was capable of bringing down even the largest Allied bomber. In some cases, up to 40 gun emplacements were coordinated to create unnervingly effective "box barrages." More than 3,500 American planes were destroyed by flak in 1944 alone.

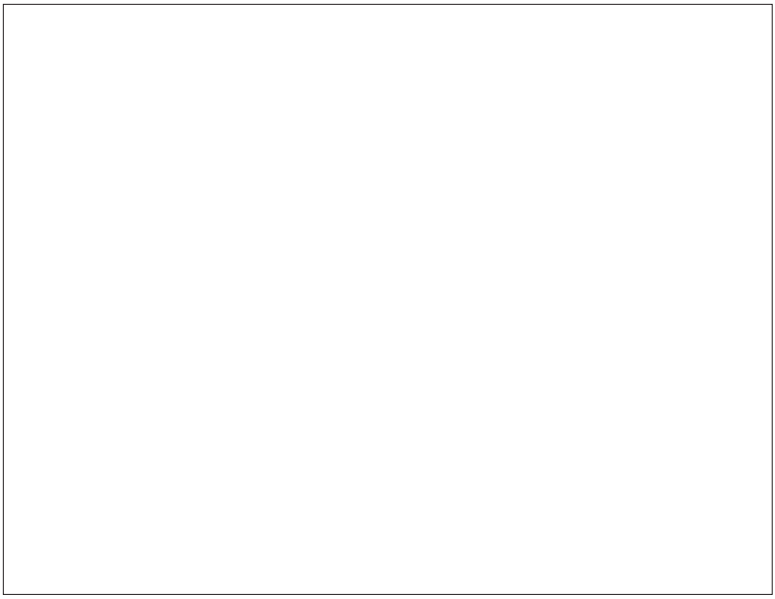
Even with a ground speed of 295 miles per hour, and an altitude of 14,000 feet, the flak was intense over St. Omer as the formation of A-20s approached their target. These antiaircraft gunners were not raw recruits, they had been hammered by the B-26 Marauders of the 322nd Bomb Group twice in the preceding month and had logged plenty of practice against medium and light bombers.

Lt. Wayne Downing, a 668th Bomb Squadron pilot flying in Box II that day, recalls that aspect of the mission clearly—"flak was heavy and we did a lot of evasive action.... The visibility on the ground over the aiming points was very poor." Lt. Harold D. (Dave) Andrews was flying only his second combat mission and was surprised by the flak. "When I first saw it, I didn't know what it was. Just an orange flash with greasy black smoke."

It was 0947 when the lead flight began its initial approach on a heading of 45 degrees magnetic. The bombing run went poorly. Due to broken cloud cover over the target, whichcaused difficulty identifying the proper wooded area, the lead box navigator was unable to pick up the target until it was too late to release bombs. Ultimately, in spite of multiple passes and a total of 111 five-hundred-pound bombs being released, lead navigators of both boxes reported the results as a "bad miss". Unfortunately for the airmen, the German gunners were more successful.

Dick Wheeler flew on the afternoon mission April 10th, targeting a NOBALL site at Lingham-Zadausques in France. He did not witness the events personally, but recorded the details at the time as they were related to him by fellow pilot, friend and West Point classmate Mike Zubon who flew on the morning mission in the same box as Bill.

> "The sky was black with flak when Bill received a hit in one of his engines—but the formation did not drop [their bombs]. He stayed right in his position for the second run, and again the formation failed to drop and had to make a third run. Bill's engine was hit again and he was forced to feather it to prevent a fire. It was becoming increasingly difficult for him to hang on to the formation with only one engine and all this time the flak was getting thicker. It was quite a feat for Bill to keep his ship in formation for three runs on one engine.



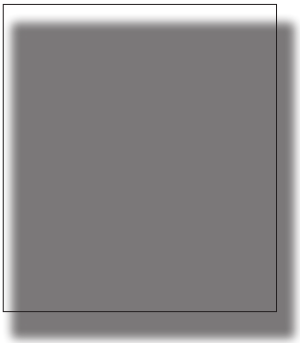
Bomb release on the third pass, 416th Mission #10 Bois des Huit Rues, 10 April 1944. Note flak above the clouds. (Official mission photo)

By so doing, he burned out his remaining engine which had to be at full power all of this time. After leaving the target, Bill was forced to pull out of the formation and could not maintain altitude."

Also in the lead box with Bill, the plane commanded by 2nd Lieutenant Art Raines was shot down by flak over the target. One parachute was reportedly seen, but none of the crew were ever recovered. When Bill Cramsie was forced to leave the formation, Dave Andrews pulled up from the slot immediately behind him to close it up. Dave remembers that mission well, even though he was about as green at that time as combat pilots get: "I didn't have any idea where we were at when Bill Cramsie left the formation. I was just following the guy in front of me."

Although Bill remained in position through the final bomb run, it was probably not long after that point that he fell out and throttled back his remaining engine. Descending from 14,000 feet to 300 feet would have helped to maintain his airspeed above the stall mark.

A precise coordinate, 51.06.00N and 02.35.00E, had been established for the exit from France—a spot just east of Dunkirk. From there the returning planes would cross over North Foreland and return to Base. Box I was terribly hard hit. The aircraft flown by Lt. Marion "Scotty" Street of the 669th (in the same flight as Lt. Raines) also lost an engine, and failed to keep up with the group, though he did manage to maintain altitude at about 10,000 feet across the Channel. Street still recalls seeing the main group off in the distance ahead of him, while trying to follow them to friendly territory. The main group passed over North Foreland and the relative security of England at 1005.



Chapter Fifteen

Alone

Menacing gray clouds stretched endlessly ahead as Bill Cramsie strained to see through a flak-shattered windshield. The pungent smell of hydraulic fluid and burnt electrical wiring permeated the cockpit. He knew the situation was becoming more desperate with every passing moment. Trained to think rationally under pressure, he nonetheless was racked by a vise of physical and psychological demons. All the adrenalin his body could muster had been spent a half-hour earlier running that gauntlet over Flanders. Now, everything seemed cold and foreboding. Fear, a constant but closeted companion of combat pilots, now sat boldly on his shoulder screaming to be heard—reminding him that the cockpit of an A-20 is a lonely place to die. At times like this one needs the lingering touch of a loved one, not the confined embrace of cold steel and glass. He tried to block out a sense of panic by concentrating on the basics. All of those hours reading training manuals and watching films suddenly seemed worthwhile.

A voice within him recited the rules for staying aloft.

"Maintain 135 mph minimum airspeed."

Well and good, he thought, if you have at least one healthy engine. The coast of England was only fifteen miles—less than seven minutes—ahead. But it might as well have been seven hours. The single remaining engine of his A-20G Havoc was overheating and barely 300 feet separated his ship from the perilously icy waters of Bradwell Bay. He could

already feel the yaw induced by the unbalanced pull of one engine. Lowering the flaps was not an option with barely enough power as it was. The odds of making landfall were not good. Even worse were the odds of a successful ditching in this frigid western finger of the North Sea. Even if he managed to avoid cartwheeling, the Havoc was prone to going down quickly—nose first. Getting free of the wreckage, breaking out the life raft lashed behind him in the cockpit and inflating it would take a superhuman effort.

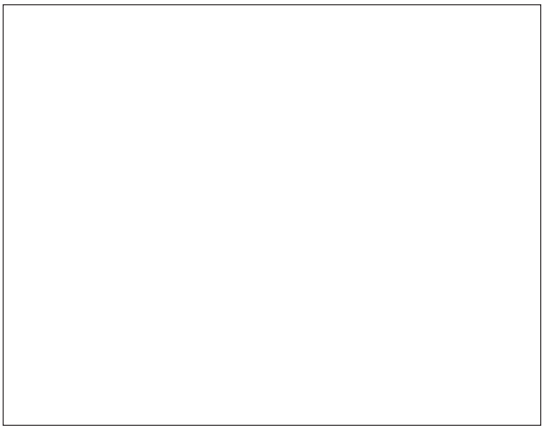
"Never bank more than 15 degrees on one engine",

came another platitude. At 300 feet, he had no intention of banking at all.

"Never bank into a dead engine."

Okay, Okay, no banking! He shouted at himself out of frustration.

Bill reached down and threw the switch to INT on his interphone jack-box and VOICE on the box beside it. He adjusted his throat microphone, and called to the gunners' compartment hoping to get a response from Charles Henshaw or Jack Steward. Bill had heard nothing from his gunners



9th Air Force plotters in England mark coordinates for tracking of aircraft in distress. To the left , a radio operator records data from air crews.

since crossing over Hazebrouck. He hoped that it was just an equipment malfunction and not more desperate consequences from the barrage of heavy flak they had just encountered. There was not much to say in any case. They both knew the drill and if they were conscious they could see what was coming. The 30-year-old Henshaw was one of six boys born to a mine worker for the Northern Ore Company in eastern Pennsylvania. His father had died young and his mother, Rose, was living in New Jersey when Charles enlisted in the Army. Jack Steward, still just a kid, hailed from Arizona where his father was a teacher. Bill knew that bailing out under circumstances like this was suicide and he fought a natural impulse to activate the alarm. Even if they had bailed out earlier, the deck was stacked against them. According to mission briefers, a human could only survive 18 minutes in the sea at this time of year. Even with the lousy odds, their best chance of survival was to stay with the aircraft and head for land.

The Havoc, once a feisty warhorse, now labored on like a tired draft animal burdened beyond reason—the throaty roar of its twin Wright Cyclone engines was already a distant memory. Every ounce of power was being sucked out of the surviving engine's 14 massive cylinders and yet it was barely enough to keep the ship airborne. Although the interphone and VHF units were out, Bill gave the HF radio a try. Switching to the emergency frequency, the young lieutenant radioed the 9th Air Force control center, code named Parade, requesting a bearing to the nearest base.

"Parade, Parade, this is Oak Chest Fiver Charlie India, do you copy? — Over".

Oak Chest was the call sign for the 416th Bomb Group and 5C or "Fiver Charlie" was a designation for 671st Bomb Squadron aircraft that was painted on the side of each of that unit's birds. "I" or "India" in the international radio code was the individual aircraft identifier—shorter and easier to

communicate than the actual tail number 43-9699. Bill's earphones crackled with static, and the obnoxious whine of a DC generator, but almost immediately there was the pleasant and reassuring reply of a WAC coordinator.

"Fiver Charlie India, this is Parade, we copy your transmission, Over."

It was the first thing that had gone right since all hell broke loose over Flanders. With the heavy demand for combat and maintenance personnel, many of the communication and plotting positions in England were staffed by members of the Women's Army Corps. Her voice was like that of an angel. Bill's spirits lifted for a moment as he keyed his microphone:

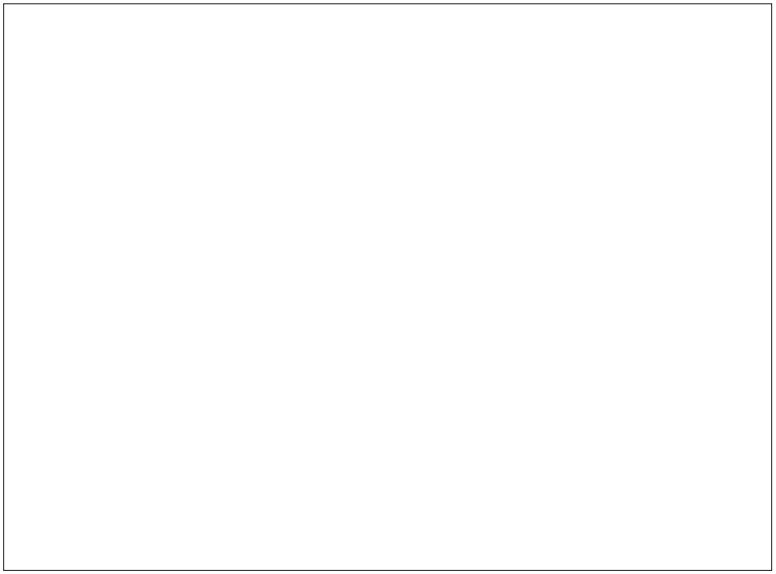
"Roger Parade, this is Fiver Charlie India. Altitude 300 feet in heavy overcast. Right engine is feathered, left engine overheating. Interphone is out and crew sta-

Two 416th A-20s leaving the target area over Flanders with engines damaged by flak. (Undated mission photo—possibly April 10, 1944)

tus is uncertain. Heavy battle damage. Please transmit bearing to RAF Bradwell Bay, over."

When an engine fails and is unable to rotate its propeller, the resulting drag can drastically reduce flying speed. Variable pitch propellers can be turned with an edge into the wind. This "feathering" lessens the drag and allows many twin-engine aircraft to continue flying on the remaining engine. Of course the added stress of running that engine at full power under a heavy load eventually takes its toll. The Douglas A-20 Havoc was designed to be flown by a single pilot. The cockpit was isolated from the gunners' compartment and bomb bay. Once airborne, communication between pilot and crew was possible only through an interphone system and a warning alarm system. Communication failures of one sort or another due to flak damage were a fairly common occurrence.

Although radar tracking was available at the time, Bill Cramsie was flying too low for coverage. But, even as he transmitted his report, radio direction finders in England were



671st tail # 43-9699 over Bradwell Bay (digital creation)

already locking in on the signal and passing his triangulated coordinates to controllers.

"Fiver Charlie India, we have your location as 15 miles south of landfall, proceed on course 320 degrees. Contact Boatdeck Control [Wethersfield Tower] for emergency landing instructions."

Through a momentary break in the clouds, Bill could see that above him another lone Havoc was in distress. One engine was feathered and a sooty stream of smoke and oil trailed off behind it. The large squadron code 2A on its fuselage and its gleaming white vertical rudder stripe marked the plane as a 416th bird. As the bomber dipped its wing in salute, Bill could see a prominent D-1 on the fuselage. A quick check of the load list confirmed that it was Scotty Street from the 669th flying "Pagliacci", named after the opera popularized by Caruso. Bill's thoughts darted back to that time at the academy when he and Scotty found themselves sharing a room in the hospital and discovered that they shared a mutual passion for the game of Bridge. He was relieved to see that Scotty had survived the brutal assault by German 88s east of St. Omer.

It had been less than a year since General Henry "Hap" Arnold, Commander of the Army Air Forces, pinned aviator wings on their chests at Stewart Field. Few cadets at that time had received their diplomas and wings from a living legend in aviation. Little did they know that within their class some new legends were already in the making—fighter ace Robin Olds among them. With a flush of emotion, Bill recalled the faces of his mother and sister Ruth, beaming with pride as they watched his lifelong dream come true. They had made the arduous trip from California just to share that experience with him. Nothing could have made him happier than that moment, at a point high above the beautiful Hudson River as it wound its way through the Poconos, when General Arnold returned his salute, pilot to pilot.

After graduation, Bill and Scotty found themselves together again for Advanced Pilot Training at Stewart Field and then for twin-engine bomber training in the B-25 Mitchell at Mather Field, California. It seemed inevitable that they would both be assigned to the 416th Bomb Group flying A-20s and ironic that they would both be limping home from Bois des Huit Rues on one engine.

Jolted back to reality by a stall warning, Bill felt the Havoc shudder as it rolled and started to spin. He struggled to keep it upright; but it had given all it had. The end must have come suddenly and quickly.

N.B.

Obviously, we do not have a first-hand account of those final minutes. The best that we can do is to create, as above, the most likely scenario—based on the few facts that are available and the characteristics of the A-20 and its pilot that we do know. But, there is perhaps more to it than that. At times, in the process of writing this account, it has seemed to me that the words of Bill Cramsie were literally flowing through my fingers as I typed them. I wouldn't go so far as to say that I've heard a "voice" from the past, but it is impossible to deny or to explain the remarkable connection that exists between Bill Cramsie and myself. If there is a wavelength through which two spirits can become linked in a continuum of time and space, as twins often seem to be, then Bill Cramsie and I must indeed be connected—and what some might call intuition may in effect be a form of metaphysical experience. I will leave that for the reader to decide. My aim here is simply to relate the story of Bill Cramsie as it has come to me.

Chapter Sixteen

The Aftermath

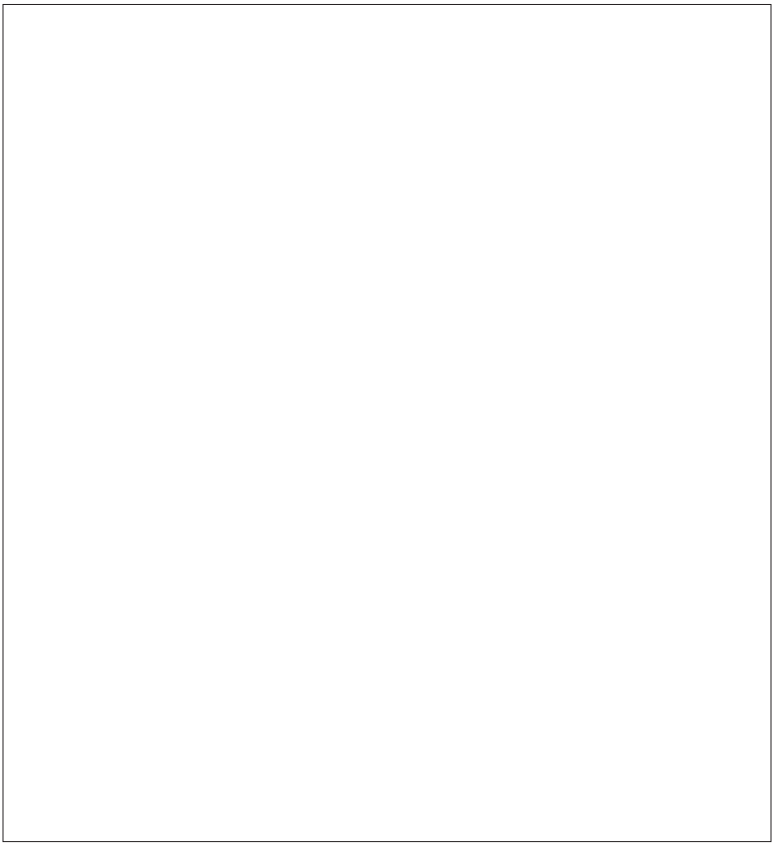
The news of Bill's disappearance was passed swiftly to his family. JoAnn Hughes, the daughter of Bill's cousin Marnelle, remembers the arrival of a telegram from the War Department. Still of Junior High School age, she was visiting with Frank and Idella Cramsie at Auburn during Easter vacation when the devastating news came. When it became clear that Bill had perished, the task and honor of notifying his family and returning personal effects fell to Dick Wheeler. In Bill's locker, Dick found, in addition to the West Point ring, a few personal letters and photos, a neatly folded black West Point sweater with gold trim, a gray lounging robe from the academy and some clothing from a New York City tailor that Bill had purchased while a cadet. These were things that were important to him and that he carried with him to war—remembrances of West Point and home.

With the ring before him, Dick Wheeler penned a very personal and emotional letter to Frank and Idella Cramsie. He commended Bill's dedication to Duty, Honor and Country—ideals that his ring exemplified. Bill could have left the formation after his engine was hit on the first run, or even after the second run, but he knew that the formation was designed for mutual protection and his duty was not only to his mission but to his fellow airmen. He knew that if he had left the formation he might well have endangered both. That sense of duty and honor exacted a heavy price.

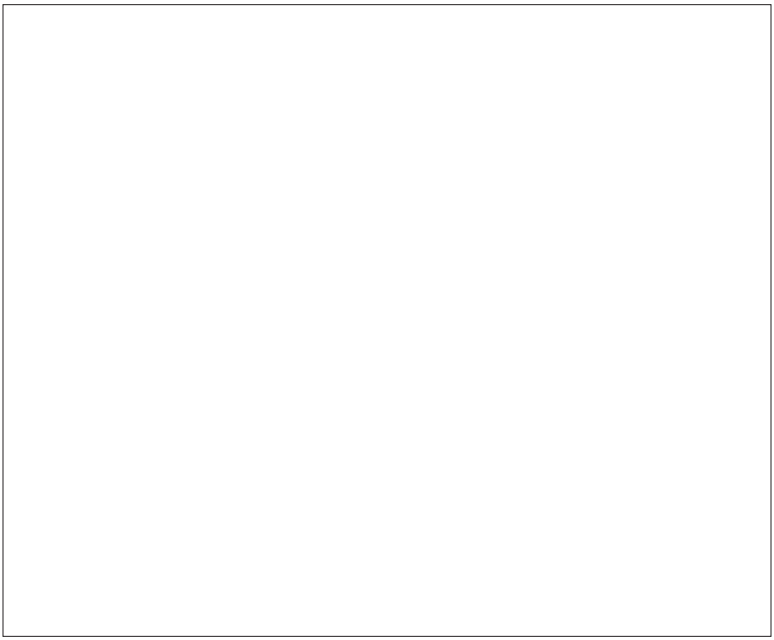
Major William P. Thomas, 416th Group Intelligence Officer, submitted a handwritten situation report at 1908Z on the evening of April 10th:

"One plane piloted by Lt. Street crash landed at Bradwell Bay. Gunners bailed out near Woodham. No injuries to any of crew. Plane

a complete loss. Was hit by flak between Bruges [actually Fruges] and Hazebrouck on tail section. On second run over target an engine was knocked out. Followed formation over channel. Was flying No. 3 in high flight, 1st Box. Dropped 4x500GP. No EA...[Enemy Aircraft?]. Turned on IFF after leaving enemy coast and no trouble contacting Bradwell Bay. Heard Lt. Cramsie in another plane call Bradwell Bay telling them he was flying at 300 ft. Saw an A-20 flying low 15 miles off English Coast flying a 320 degree course and line from landfall out to North Foreland."



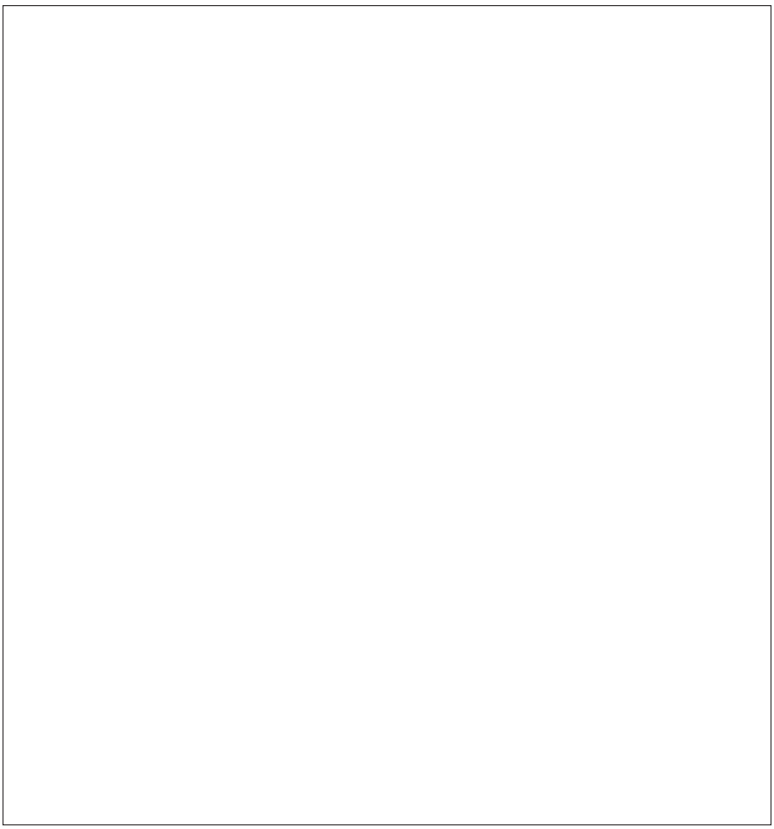
The RAF station at Bradwell Bay, near Bradwell on Sea in Essex, was at that time home to two units: the RCAF 418 Squadron flying Bostons and the RAF 23 Squadron flying Mosquitoes. The base was heavily used as an emergency landing strip for light and medium bombers because of its handy proximity to the English Channel. Lt. Street's gunners bailed out over Woodham, which lies to the west, midway between the RAF station and the Thames estuary. (The line from Woodham to Hazebrouck is on a direct course of 320 degrees from the target area in France to the home base at Wethersfield.) Major Thomas' report makes it clear that Bill Cramsie was between landfall and North Foreland on the same course. On the southern edge of Bradwell Bay, North Foreland protrudes like a finger into the North Sea approximately half way between Hazebrouck and Wethersfield. A position fifteen miles from landfall would place Cramsie halfway across Bradwell Bay at 300 feet and closing at the rate of at least 135 miles per hour—a bit more than six min-



RAF station Bradwell Bay

utes to land west of Clacton-on-Sea. In stark contrast to the forbidding cliffs of Dover, the north shore of Bradwell Bay is mainly low land with expansive beaches. It is not difficult to imagine, once it was in view, a pilot's sense of optimism about reaching either that relative sanctuary or even RAF Bradwell Bay itself.

The exact location of Havoc #699 remains a mystery, but one could reasonably deduce that it rests somewhere in Bradwell Bay on a course of 320 degrees from North Foreland toward RAF Bradwell Bay. Based on the fact that there were no final distress calls, it might be assumed that Bill Cramsie anticipated reaching landfall—perhaps land was within sight.



Missing Air Crew Report (MACR) last known position

The end apparently came with little warning, as there were no reports of wreckage or survivors. Did Henshaw and Steward go down with "699" as well? We can only assume they did. Neither the plane nor its crew was ever recovered.

Why didn't Bill bail out? Bailing out of an A-20 was not an easy task, particularly at low altitude and especially for the pilot—who could easily be hit by a propeller or by the tail assembly. It was nearly impossible to do under power from a single engine. Scotty Street tried it:

> "As soon as we got over land, I ordered my gunners to bail out, which they promptly did. I tried to open the canopy so I could bail out myself, but if I let go of the wheel for even a second the plane would dive violently to the side. I had no choice but to ride it down."

The textbook procedure for escape, which nobody apparently tried, was to open the canopy, feather both engines and climb out of the cockpit while holding onto a tether. The pilot then theoretically lowered himself back along the fuselage past the wing and tried to drop down under the tail. One clear problem with the idea was that nobody was actually flying the plane during this tricky maneuver... As bad as the odds were, ditching was preferred by most pilots given the choice.

All 36 aircraft dispatched against Bois des Huit Rues on April 10th received battle damage from flak, some of it severe. According to the official Malfunction Report, Lt. Hixon had control cables shot up; Andrews had hydraulic failure; Marzolf had damage to his water cooler, aileron, elevator and turret; Zubon had 13 holes in the aileron; Hill had 20 holes in the leading edge of the right wing; Downing had a hole in the pilot's windshield; Behlmer had an incredible 390 flak holes; Ostrander had a shattered windshield, and everyone else had something wrong.

Seven aircraft failed to drop their bombs for various reasons. Mechanical problems forced one plane to jettison bombs

on the return flight. The six aircraft in Box Two, Flight Two returned to base with bombs aboard. The lead aircraft in that flight, flown by Capt. Conant, failed or was unable to release bombs over the target; consequently none of the trailing aircraft in that flight were able to drop. Wayne Downing, then a 1st Lt., flew A-20G #195 in the #2 slot of Conant's flight. With absolute clarity, more than sixty years after the fact, he explains that the rules of engagement were clear.

> "When bombing in a flight of six, we were ordered to release our bombs only after we saw the first bomb fall from the lead aircraft. In this case of Conant's flight, all the other pilots followed orders. On low level individual aircraft bombing there were other rules. The reason of course was to avoid bombing any innocent French civilians."

When asked who took over when the lead ship with a navigator was shot down or had mechanical trouble, Wayne replied:

> "Normally the #2 position on the right wing because it had a glass nose plane with a BN in it. Most planes had a solid nose with machine guns. If #2 was shot down before target, or did not have a BN, then one of the other flights would take over the lead of the 18 ship formation. Generally, each flight of six had one glass nose with BN."

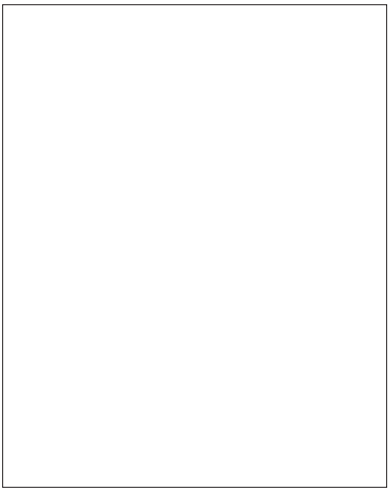
Since the A-20G did not carry its own navigator, bomb release was a responsibility of the pilot, who acted on visual recognition of release by the flight leader. The bombardier/navigator flying with Major Willets in Box One on April 10th was 2nd Lt. Harry T. Arrington. In his Interrogation Report after the mission, Lt. Arrington stated that there was difficulty acquiring the target due to overcast conditions, accurate flak and the confusion of other woods in the area being mis-

taken for the target. This all led to the need for three passes, devastating to both planes and crews. Lt. Vernon H. Powell flew with Major Meng of the 670th as bombardier/navigator in Box Two. His report confirms that of Lt. Arrington that there was a cloud bank over the target area. Powell added, however, that there was "too short of run from break in clouds to identify target." In the final analysis, both Lt. Arrington and Lt. Powell reported that the right target had not been aimed at and the result claimed was a "Bad Miss". A Flash Report submitted at 1150Z by the 21st Weather Squadron documented the weather over the target as clear, with visibility 8 to 10 miles and a cloud bank to the southwest. It states specifically that weather did not affect the bombing. It seems all too likely that the run was in punchy G.I. vernacular: FUBAR - "Fouled Up Beyond All Recognition".

What seems to have happened is that the group was southwest of Bois des Huit Rues when it encountered the same flak batteries near St. Omer that had caused so much damage on the Group's March 19th mission. In the confusion, a lot of 500-pound bombs fell on some indiscriminate objects. Earlier reports indicated a German Infantry Division encamped south of St. Omer, so perhaps all was not lost. One might presume that all those German 88s were protecting something other than the pastoral fields of Flanders.

What became of the NOBALL site at Bois des Huit Rues? The 416th revisited that site nine days later with thirty-five A-20s dropping 138 five-hundred-pound bombs right on target. After this mission, and a visit that same month from the heavy bombers of the 8th Air Force, the Germans vacated Bois des Huit Rues. Ironically, and unbeknownst to Allied intelligence, the German high command had already abandoned the idea of launching the V-1 from this site and had redeployed its assets to mobile launchers. As the fortunes of war would have it, 9th Air Force attacks on marshaling yards and transportation systems probably caused greater disruption to the V-weapon program than the bombing of hardened sites did.

ries, wrote: "I remember my grandmother listening to the SF Giants baseball all the time on the radio when we would visit her in SF. She always loved the Giants because of her brother's connection with them." Tom Rickels (Ruth's son) also shared some of his childhood memories about Frank and Dell in their senior years: "I have little memory of my grandfather, Frank, as I was only 4 or 5 years old when he died. However, my best memory of him is that one day (my mother and I had taken the train from LA to visit my grandparents) sitting down at a meal he made a great display of making wrinkled-up faces and sounds as to how he hated cottage cheese which was being served by my grandmother. His antics (for my benefit) left me is stitches! I also remember being held lovingly in his lap.

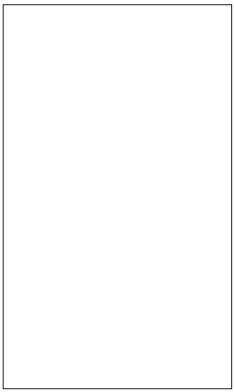


Ruth Cramsie - May 1944

Grandma was always serious and stoic (except when the San Francisco Giants were losing), but she certainly would display a very mischievous side to her on occasion, usually to get my mother to "lighten up". Grandma was without a doubt the matriarch in the family." Dell moved to Glendale, California in 1970 and lived briefly with Ruth and her husband Gerald and their three sons. She returned to the Bay area in 1971, where she lived in a nursing home at Millbrae, California until her death in 1972. Ruth died in 1990 at Fullerton, California. At that time, Gerald passed Bill's Purple Heart and some other remembrances on to the sons of Bill's brother Robert.

When Robert had returned from England after the war, he was allowed to keep some of his brother's personal effects, including the ring that Bill had proudly earned. Robert went to work for the Kraft Cheese Company, remaining at that firm

until retirement. The ring must always have been a painful reminder to Robert, but it was not something that he could let go. Although he had that ring in his possession after the war and throughout the rest of his life, he never spoke about it to his children. His wife Marjorie still recalls that, when she came from England to join her husband in 1946, he was wearing Bill's West Point cardigan and a pair of Bill's military uniform trousers. Yet, Robert never wore the ring—out of respect for his brother. Marjorie confirmed that in 1996 Robert was suffering from pancreatic cancer and sometimes lost coherency. He talked frequently of joining his brother Bill. Shortly before his death he sold the ring to a pawn shop in Millbrae, California—without any discussion or explanation.



Robert Cramsie
1946

The story might have ended there, except that someone noticed the ring and instantly understood its significance. This was no family heirloom, once saturated with power and pride—yet now reduced to meaning almost nothing to anyone. This was the passionately desired, hard-won and seriously carried West Point class ring, that someone had—possibly at the last possible moment—refused to carry on his last journey. This was a ring with a story to tell. Even though the spirit of Bill Cramsie lives on in the memory of those who knew and served with him, or through the stories told at reunions of his family and fellow soldiers, each passing year has further dimmed the flame. The most tangible and vibrant expression of that spirit remains his West Point class ring.

Epilogue

After three years of concerted research about Bill Cramsie, West Point, Operation Crossbow and myriad related details, the one thing that kept nagging at me was that we had still not found Dee. Clemie Smith's son-in-law, Chris Danielle, had helped me scour the possible sources from West Point to Pelham Manor. We came up dry on every lead. Finally, it occurred to me late one night to try searching the *New York Times* archives for information about Clementine Smith. Since she was a well-known musician, I thought maybe there would be some mention of contemporary performances by Clemie and her sisters.

The beauty of an internet search engine is that it can bring up every occurrence of a word or phrase regardless of the context. Reading through the short list of "hits" there appeared an article with a dateline of White Plains, N.Y., October 8, 1949. The headline read "Dolloretta Rogers Wed to John Cleary". Odd, it seemed, that this should come up in a search for Clemie. But, determined to leave no stone unturned, I read on. The answer quickly became apparent and my heart skipped a beat on finding listed as a Bridesmaid "Miss Clementine Smith of Pelham". Could it be? Was Dolloretta the Dee I

had been searching for? The article mentioned a reception at the Orienta Beach Club. Clemie's daughter, Sherry, had told me about her mother's family holding a membership for many years at that exclusive club in Mamaroneck. In the last sentence of the article came the final message in a bottle — "The bride attended Marymount College in Tarrytown." Little doubt remained in my mind: this was Dee.

As an amateur genealogist, it took very little detective work on my part to determine that Dolloretta Rogers was Irish through and through. Since she was born before 1930, she appeared in the Federal Census of that year, which provided the names and ages of her siblings. A 1964 *New York Times* obituary for Dee's father, William Rogers, revealed that her mother, Dolloretta, was a Coyle. Dee attended a Catholic college for women and she married a Cleary at St. Bernard's Roman Catholic Church. It was not hard to understand how she and Bill Cramsie might have had common interests.

Several more nights of internet sleuthing finally generated some light at the end of the tunnel. A Dolloretta Cleary, plausible age, was living in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. How many Dolloretta Clearys could there be? Needless to say, this was exhilarating. It didn't take long to track down a phone number and call—only to be greeted by an anonymous answering machine. In a brief message, I promised to call back in a day or two. On my next call, a telephone company recording advised that the number was no longer in service. It was easy to fear the worst and assume that one of those golden windows of opportunity, that come but once, had just been missed. The search now widened to relatives of Dolloretta Cleary who might shed some light on her whereabouts or be able to confirm at least that she was the Dee we had been looking for. One of the many "People Search" websites bookmarked as a resource on my browser toolbar provided not only the name and address of Dolloretta, but also her relatives in the Fort Lauderdale area. One of those listed was John R. Cleary, Jr. Another revelation—Dee has a son.

Back on the roller-coaster of emotion, I waited until an appropriate hour the next day, a Sunday, and called the number listed. Half expecting an answering machine or a recording, the adrenalin started flowing when the phone stopped ringing and the words reverberated in the earpiece.

"Jack Cleary"

The feeling was akin to hearing your missing "B-6" called as the last qualifying number for a $1,000 bingo jackpot. I very quickly explained the purpose of my call, hoping that I could get enough words out before that painful "click" that suggests you have been tagged as a telemarketer. Instead of the click came a friendly question:

"What was the name of this pilot that you're writing about?"

"Bill Cramsie", I replied.

The confirmation came immediately,
"Oh yes, I've heard my mother speak of him."

It's hard to describe the impact and implications of such a simple statement. The moment had been so long in coming! When I explained having tried to telephone his mother to ask about her memories of Bill, his reply was more tentative.

"Unfortunately, she's now living in a rehabilitation center and may not be of much help. How did you find her?"

I told Jack about the dances at West Point, the dates in NY city, the wedding announcement in the NY Times and the online people searches. Jack explained that he was going to visit his mother on the following Monday afternoon and offered to call me from the center and put her on the phone if possible.

The next conversation that I had with Jack Cleary was one of those quietly satisfying experiences that often come

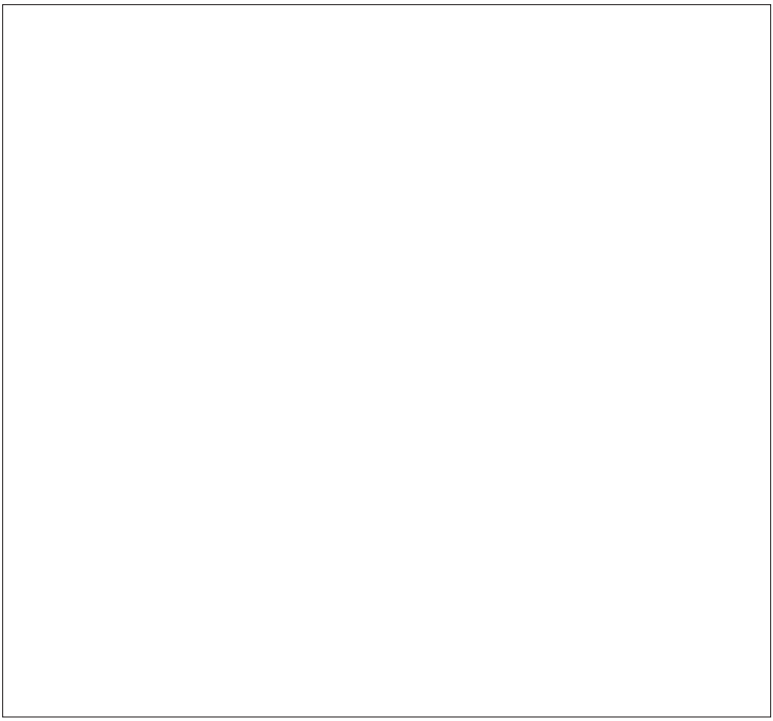
at the end of a long search. Although suffering from the effects of dementia, Dee was able to reach back those sixty-plus years and shed further light on the events of 1944. She recalls meeting Bill Cramsie when he was a third classman (1941/1942). While talking to some upper classmen one day, friends of her sister Kathleen, she saw Bill nearby and asked who he was. One of them called Bill over to introduce her—a rather extraordinary thing at the time. She and Bill became good friends and saw each other often at programmed social events and on occasional passes. After the 416th shipped out for England, Bill and Dee continued to keep in touch through V-mail. She remembers that he wrote about the austere conditions in England, and particularly the cold, wet weather. After he was lost on the Flanders mission, letters from Dee were found in Bill's foot-locker. It was then that the squadron commander wrote to her, breaking the sad news. Her voice shook as she mentioned it, though she didn't go into further detail. She didn't have to, of course. Anyone can imagine what she felt at such a moment. There can be little doubt that Dee could have added much to this story if I had been able to locate her early in the search. Unfortunately, that was not to be. It is comforting at least that we now know who Dee was and the course that her life took.

The research for details about William E. Cramsie also uncovered a fascinating coincidence. There were two William Cramsies in the Army Air Corps during WWII. William J. Cramsie was a 2nd Lt. from New Jersey, serving as bombardier on the B-17 "Shangri-La Lil" of the 303rd Bomb Group. He was killed in action on his sixth mission, 27 August 1943, while targeting a V-weapon site at Watten, France. The formation crossed the French coast south of Le Touquet and flew an easterly course over St. Omer, just as Bill Cramsie and the A-20s of the 416th did eight months later. Shangri-La Lil encountered the same heavy flak and virtually disintegrated in the air from a direct hit in the bomb bay. The B-17 came down near the village of Morbecque and Bois des Huit

Rues, precisely where William E. Cramsie's A-20 was hit.

If that is not extraordinary enough, William J. Cramsie was born in Belfast, Ireland in 1919 and came to America with his mother in 1923. His father had come the year before to prepare for their arrival. William E. Cramsie was also born in 1919 and his grandfather had come to America from the Belfast area. The chances are very good that the two William Cramsies killed in action during bomb runs over the same field of Flanders, even though they never knew each other, were kin.

The search for Bill Cramsie started without a plan. At no point along the way did it become obvious that there was a direction to go. There was simply an impulse to follow those "messages in a bottle" as they appeared. It was perhaps like a gardener picking roses and putting them into a



The Crew of Shangri-La Lil, William J. Cramsie back row far left

basket. But, every time the basket was filled a new basket suddenly appeared. Unlike one of those exasperating Promethean dreams, that never find an ending, this search filled one basket after another with fragrant treasures. The result was a huge bouquet of beautiful memories, warm acquaintances, exciting adventures and insightful revelations. I felt very strongly throughout the process that Bill Cramsie was introducing me to people who were important to him and was personally guiding me through the process.

The 416th reunion of 2007 was held at Oshkosh, Wisconsin, which is home to the AirVenture Museum of the Experimental Aircraft Association. One of the permanent displays at the EAA museum is a mock-up of a WWII quonset hut briefing room. For the arrival of the 416th vets, the curators set up mission details for the D-Day raid of the 416th at Argentan. It was a touching and very much appreciated gesture. Only eight veterans were able to make this assembly. Ray Jones had succumbed to cancer just a short time before the reunion, hoping until the very end that he could rally for one more muster. Jim Kerns, the first person to welcome Doris and me at Louisville was unable to make Oshkosh due to illness. He passed away the following January. Although a very small group remained, the enthusiasm was very high and everyone voted to hold one more reunion in 2008 at Topsail Island, North Carolina. Meanwhile, the losses continue and in July, 2008 Scotty Street joined those who have made a final journey.

The nearer this search came to the point of closure the more confident I became that Bill Cramsie's spirit had found some level of peace. Indeed, it was a peace that we shared. I no longer felt such a furious compulsion to search. Holding his ring in my hand had once induced a restlessness, but now it brought contentment and satisfaction. The ring had forged a bond between Bill Cramsie and myself in perhaps the same way that steel from the World Trade Center bonds victims of 9/11 with some of those who built or will serve on the

U.S.S. New York. There came a point in that process when it became apparent that closure for Bill Cramsie was going to mean closure for me as well. It was, as mentioned in the Prelude to this book, a bittersweet realization because the search had become a quest and because the journey was nearly over. There will be some continuing contacts, especially with the surviving veterans of the 416th Bomb Group, but this story has esentially reached an end.

I had an exceptionally vivid dream once, where I watched as powerful machinery dredged up from the murky depths a strangely pristine Havoc carrying the fateful number 43-9699. There were people all around me, some of whom I recognized from old World War II photos . . . Yet when I woke, it was still at the bottom of Bradwell Bay, spent and lying uneasy beneath a dome of thick alluvial soil.

And I have another dream sometimes, even more strange. In this dream I'm floating, weightlessly, up a long tunnel that radiates warmth and power. And at journey's end I find my father and grandfather welcoming me, and everyone else whom I have loved and lost. Yet, standing alone behind all these, I see Bill Cramsie, still boyish (as were so many of those who had died) and he moves forward to shake my hand, as if he has known me always. And though he says not a word, I hear his voice within me reciting those lines from West Point's "Alma Mater": "Well done: Be thou at peace."