Achtung! Achtung! Die Flugfestungen Kommen!

Memoirs of WW-II

by

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*** Attention! Attention! The Flying Fortresses Are Coming!**

Cover Photo: B-17's of the 381 st Bomb Group (H), © 381 st Bomb Group Memorial Association, Inc.

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Editor's Forward

This account of my father John Carah's World War II experience was a long time in coming. While he had no particular phobias about his experiences, Dad seemed reluctant to sit down and write about his war-time activities. Finally, in 1988, a call from one of the former crewman aboard his Army Air Corps B-17 bomber seemed to galvanize him into action and he started gathering all the material he had on what had happened some forty-five years earlier. Fortunately, Dad was a precocious string saver and he still had possession of many of the early military documents, photographs and memorabilia.

At about the same time, he had the opportunity to visit with some of the French families he met while he was evading capture from the Germans in 1943 after being shot down near Le Mans . On several European trips, he had the opportunity to greet his rescuers again and he helped dedicate a monument at La Coulonche, Laval , Normandy , to the members of his airplane crew that were killed on American Independence Day, 1943.

John also began getting active in the reunions of his former military units and he found himself getting invited to more and more gatherings of his former comrades who enjoyed his talks on his World War II experiences. So while it was still all fresh in his mind, he began these memoirs in the early summer of 1990 and finished that September.

From the memoirs, it is obvious that John Carah was a smart, resourceful, and very lucky man. He was born on 8 February 1922 , in Chico , California , the son of a former Mariposa , California gold miner and a nurse from Colorado . He was the

third and last son and his older brothers evidently never let him forget who was senior. This circumstance certainly helped hone his skills at both diplomacy and being self-reliant.

Although Dad grew up in the middle of the depression in a family of modest means, he said he recalled no particular privations. The family lived on a small farm which supplied them with most of their food and he said he had plenty of time to read, make "things," participate in Boy Scouts which he loved, and dream of flying.

My father was quite taken with airplanes long before World War II. His early scrapbook photos show a boy oftwelve or so running around wearing an aviator's leather helmet with goggles. Other pages of his photo albums are filled with snapshots of airplanes that visited the small airfield in his hometown of Chico , California in the 1930's.

Designing and making things seemed to be in the blood of the Carah family. Only shortly after casting aside the implements of their Cornish mining heritage, the Carah children started attending college to learn to be engineers, builders and the like. Dad's eldest brother Alfred attended Stanford University to become an aeronautical engineer and eventually became head of the missile division of Douglas Aircraft Corporation. Dad's next oldest brother William ultimately became the head of the California Water Project. And Dad elected to become a career military officer in the U.S. Air Force after the extraordinary experience of World War II.

Although my father never thought of his war experiences as particularly remarkable, the facts clearly speak to his resourcefulness and perhaps, more important, his sheer will to survive in a desperate situation. These qualities served him well for the duration of his life in his post-war military career and as a businessman.

It is now some 13 years since the memoirs were originally written in September, 1990 and six months after the passing of their author. For his many friends and comrades who have asked for a copy of his memories, I am pleased to act as his editor and present to you *Achtung! Achtung! Die Flugfestungen Kommen!*
Warren B. Carah
September 25, 2003

The Memoirs

On a bright but cloudy day in early December, 1941, my companions and I were making our way through the spacious harvested rice fields of Northern California with our eyes scanning the partially overcast sky for flights of the elusive Canada goose.

Little did we know what events had been formulated and were being executed at that very moment on several Pacific islands thousands of miles from our tranquil rice fields.

As I remember, upon our return to Chico , groups of the local citizens were in the streets, and we were quickly informed of the surprise attack on Pearl Harbor and other United States military installations in the far reaching Pacific Ocean . A full comprehension of just what and how this unprovoked attack would affect the life of this 19 year old college student did not begin to have a full effect until later in the day after listening to forecasts of doom from the radio networks.

Life somehow returned to as near normal as was possible under the strange and unusual circumstances which influenced and governed our lives during this period. Completely fabricated stories appeared in the nation's press which added to the panic and fear widespread among the old and young alike: "Massive air armadas of Nazi bombers are reported approaching New York" and "Jap submarines are lurking along the California coast armed to cause extensive damage and prepared to invade the United States mainland", also "southern California anti-aircraft batteries fired at unidentified aircraft last night." As it turns out, in the latter incident the aircraft were our own.

To listen to and read all of these rumors, allegations, and out-and-out lies, one would suspect a "Jap" to be lurking under every bush and hiding behind every tree. One must remember that the events which had transpired and were developing were completely foreign to our languid and peaceful existence in a small community.

Every Japanese, Chinese, and every individual who even remotely displayed oriental ancestry was suspected to be capable of the most dire deeds. This was soon evident in the thinking of our government as a massive undertaking was initiated to round up every person of Japanese origin and herd them into "relocation camps" (spell relocation camps as concentration camps).

Certain historians and bleeding hearts have written volumes alluding to this action as a dark and disgraceful period of our history. I strongly disagree. Only those among us that shared the turmoil, fear and suspicion that prevailed at the time, I feel, are qualified to arrive at a logical and rational judgment.

There were documented cases of local Japanese individuals who owed allegiance to the Imperial Japanese Military Forces. One in particular, I remember, was a man by the name of K. Ono, who with his family, owned the K. Ono grocery store, which I believe was located on East 4 th or East 5 th Street . My family and I had shopped there on occasion. As I remember, he was on the small side and between forty and forty-six years of age. He was always well dressed, wore a tie, and displayed and erect, formal quasi-military bearing. It was alleged that Mr. K. Ono was a Rear Admiral in the Imperial Japanese Navy.

Needless-to-say, he and his family were among the first to become guests of Uncle Sam.

As the days went on it soon became evident to us that our nation was faced with a seemingly overwhelming foe on both sides of the continent. Accordingly, a group of about seven of us who were attending Chico State College arranged our collective thoughts to determine how we could win the war, "make the world safe for democracy," and save the world. A pretty tall order!

As idealistic as we were it was determined that the most comfortable and glamorous way to achieve our goal was to enlist in the Army Air Corps and become pilots. And so we did.

As soon as the U.S. Army recruiting office in Sacramento opened, we went down as a group and took the written aptitude test and the physical, which we all passed with flying colors. We were sworn in as Aviation Cadets, U.S. Army Air Corps, and sent home to await openings at the training facilities. [Editor's Note: At least two of those youths who were sworn in on that late Winter day in 1942 were Rusty Bales and Bill Byerly, old friends of John Carah]

I was called up in early March and went to the Presidio of San Francisco for issuance of uniforms and ancillary items. Here I soon learned the right way, the wrong way and of course the omnipotent " Army Way ." I soon became increasingly familiar with the Army adage: "If it moves salute it, if it doesn't, paint it." About all we did during our stay at the Presidio was drill, drill, and more drill. In two weeks I wore out a pair of high top Army issued brogans which was not easy to do. [Editor's Note- The drill field and barracks used by John Carah at the Presidio are still in existence].

When I first entered the service, my pay was $17.00 per month, although this was soon raised to $21.00 monthly. Considering what things cost at that time, this salary really went a long way. Typical of some of my expenses were: pitcher of beer-.05; cigarettes-.40; laundering of shirt--.07; movie--.10., etc.

The following month [April 1942] I was transferred to the huge Aviation Cadet training base at Santa Ana , California where we were issued Cadet uniforms that somewhat resembled those of Air Corps officers. This is where they separated the men from the boys.

In order to prepare us for the rigors of flight training, our days at Santa Ana were divided up into extensive classroom training and what seemed like hours of calisthenics and drill.

The concentrated classroom instruction included mathematics and algebra, meteorology, aerodynamics, theory of flight, and customs of the service. This phase of our training was much more demanding than college. Nothing was repeated and either you got it right the first time or one was lost in the shuffle. Of necessity copious notes were taken and studied far into the night in our somewhat primitive living accommodations. These consisted of tents arranged over a wooden floor and wood frame. The latrines and showers were located in adjacent buildings.

Every Sunday all *eight thousand cadets* in the camp assembled on the vast parade ground and passed in review in one huge formation. To me this exercise was wasted time and had little to do with accelerating our pre-flight training; besides we had to wear Class A uniforms and the temperature at times was fairly high.
The most important day of our pre-flight was the interview with the psychology and psychiatric staff, a bunch of weirdoes in my view. These learned gentlemen questioned me about the most far reaching subjects totally unrelated to the business of flying an airplane or fighting a war. However since their decision was final, I went along with whatever they were seeking in their warped minds [Editor's Note: Mr. Carah's opinion of "head doctors" did not appreciably change for the rest of his life].

I was asked: "Why do you want to be a pilot?" I answered with "my brother designs and builds the planes that I may be flying, and I want to incorporate this effort as a family affair." Apparently this answer satisfied the head shrinks for I was classified and certified for pilot training. Thank the Lord that this ordeal was over and I was on my way to the more simple (I thought at the time) task of learning to fly.
Our ranks thinned out at pre-flight. I do not know the percentage of washouts but it was high. These unfortunates ended up slogging it out in the infantry.

Army Air Corps Cadet John Marshall Carah, Primary Flight Training, King City , California , June, 1942

Earlier, I mentioned the selection process for pilots. A certain percentage of the cadets were selected to train as navigators and bombardiers consistent with their scholastic achievements and outcome of interviews with the shrinks. I would assume that the percentages were about 5 to 1 for pilots versus bombardiers, as the latter were assigned only to bomber aircraft, and about 5 to 2 for navigators as this specialty was incorporated into both bomber and transport aircraft. Pilots, on the other hand, were allocated to bombers, transports, reconnaissance and search & rescue aircraft.

And now for our first taste of the wild blue yonder, at least in the Army's aircraft and on their terms.

We were transported by charted bus to King City , California where we were introduced to the Ryan PT-22, a single engine, two place low-wing airplane with a top speed of about 130 MPH and powered by a five cylinder radial engine.

The King City facility apparently was formerly used as a civilian aviation training base as the living quarters more closely resembled a one-story motel. We were assigned four to a room. I recall that there were about 40 cadets in our class which was assigned the designation 43-B.

The flying instructors were civilian, but the entire training and operational aspects were administered by U.S. Army officers. The commanding officer was a Major Fuller of the Fuller Paint Company, and was what we termed a "retread" from World War I. Later on, he met an untimely death in an airplane crash while trying to land in heavy fog.

One day after about 8-10 hours of dual instruction, the instructor had me land, taxi to the ramp, and he then vacated the front seat. This was it! Either I would solo or become a statistic. I made about three takeoffs and landings and taxied to the ramp where I received the congratulations of my instructor and my fellow cadets. Quite obviously the instructor had more confidence in me than I had in myself.

Our time in Primary Flight Training was filled on alternating mornings with flying and ground school in the afternoons. All started off with rigid calisthenics and a certain amount of drill, all designed (from the Army's point of view) to make us the world's most physically fit cadets.

We encountered two fatal crashes, and the class experienced a washout rate of about 35% for flying deficiency and/or academic causes. After two months of the now familiar landmarks around King City we hailed graduation day, and across the mountains we went to Lemoore Army Air Field. Here we would commence basic flying training in the Vultee BT-13, a much larger and more powerful single engine low-wing trainer with fixed landing gear. The engine produced 450 horsepower, and the cockpit featured full flight instrumentation.

Air Cadet John Marshall Carah at King City , California . Primary Flight Training, June, 1942

Vultee BT-13 Trainer

Our entire training staff, both air and ground, were U.S. Army personnel. The outline of the training closely followed that of the instruction we received in primary; however the flying phase included formation flying, night flying, night formation flying and cross-country flights.

I soloed in the Vultee "Vibrator," as it was known because of the excessive noise and vibration, in about four hours. Despite its reputation, I enjoyed flying this machine because of the response from the engine when I advanced the throttle.

We had two very horrible crashes occurring on take-off when one cadet lost control and collided with another and then another. This happened right in front of me, as I was beginning my take-off roll. Three cadets burned to death. At the time, the words from the Air Corps song "nothing can stop the Army Air Corps" came to mind, for we were directed around the wreckage by ground control and our flying continued.

Our washout rate in basic was about the same as in primary, and as we finished our two month assignment at Lemoore Army Air Field, I was beginning to feel like an accomplished fledgling pilot.

Following a very uncomfortable train trip, we arrived at our last training assignment as Aviation Cadets: Douglas Army Air Base, Douglas , Arizona [Arrived December, 1942].

As in basic training, the advanced phase of our continuing education was conducted by military personnel, both on the ground and in the air. Since we were the upper class, the customary hazing that we had endured since becoming cadets ceased. Instead, we were able to inflict these humilities on the incoming lower class. Such was the dubious privilege of advancing up a step or two of the military ladder.

It become quite obvious that we were destined to become bomber or transport pilots as we were introduced to the Cessna AT-17, a twin engine six-place trainer known as the "bamboo bomber" as it was a fabric covered airframe with engines. We were also introduced to the more powerful and unforgiving Curtis AT-9. This plane was all metal and would also carry six people. Both had retractable landing gear, and if I remember correctly, hydraulically or electrically operated wing flaps.

If you lost an engine on this plane it behooved one to find a suitable landing site as it was not prone to stay airborne on one engine for long. Once I had mastered the mysteries of the AT-9 and was able to land it without bouncing down the runway, I fully enjoyed flying this plane. The power surge of two engines as I advanced the throttles was exciting. It had a top speed of about 160 MPH and was a very stable aircraft.

Cessna AT-17 Trainer

The AT-17 on the other hand was very loose on the controls and unstable. When you pulled back on the wheel you waited for awhile for a reaction from the elevators. Because of this feature, landing this plane was uncertain as it was difficult to establish a positive glide path for the approach.

Our flying training was intense as we devoted many hours to extended day and night formation sorties and to extended cross country flights. At this time we were introduced to instrument training, both in the air and in the famous Link instrument trainers. Our ground school was also intensified and we were required to send and receive eight words per minute of Morse Code.

Rigid exercise was still the order of the day until our graduation and abruptly dropped as we made the transition to heavy bombers. More and more ground instruction was linked to our soon-to-be officer status and included proper relationships with enlisted men as well as our responsibilities to them. One day the instructor announced that the day's lecture would be "how to cheat the government" and promptly told us the details of claiming per diem and travel allowances. Indeed, very important training for going into combat!

I was appointed editor of the class yearbook, or rather "two-month" book. This entailed quite a bit of extra work, and I was hard pressed to complete everything in time; but it was finished and printed in Tucson , Arizona . [Editor's Note: John Carah was also an editor of his college yearbook, the Wildcat, while attending Chico State College].

Curtis AT-9 Trainer

One of the outstanding landmarks in this land of Cochise was the Phelps-Dodge copper smelter at Bisbee , Arizona . The smoke stack could be seen for over a hundred miles and was an excellent navigational aid after being on an extended cross country. Because of this very few cadets become lost, although, despite

repeated warnings concerning minimum altitudes, several cadets managed to kill themselves in attempts to move a mountain during night flights.

About three weeks before graduation, those of us that had endured the washout mill, and who were reasonably certain to graduate, were given a clothing allowance of $250 and transported to a local clothing store in Douglas where we purchased our officer uniforms and accessories. These we would wear upon becoming 2 nd Lieutenants and pilots in the U.S. Army Air Corps.

As I write this, I cannot help but reflect back on my feelings as I was commissioned and pinned on the silver pilot's wings. There was elation that I had accomplished so much in the past ten months; there was a feeling of great pride in myself and for my family; there was sadness also for those cadets who had fallen by the wayside through unfortunate crashes or personal failure; and there was a deep apprehension of the unknown as I was rapidly approaching the most massive contest of our time.

I graduated 6 February 1943 , just two days short of my 21 st birthday. Happy birthday to me. This was just one year to the day that I had entered military service.

A selected group of we young "shavetails" as 2nd Lieutenants were often called, were assigned to Blythe Army Air Field, Blythe, California, where we were introduced to the biggest and scariest monster I had ever seen-the B17E, or as it is better known, the Flying Fortress.

B-17F Flying Fortress

As I sat in the cockpit of this huge aircraft, I wondered how a mere human could ever get this thing off the ground, let alone control it once in the air. But fly it would, and as the instructor advanced the throttles on the take-off roll, I could feel the great power of the four Wright-Cyclone 1200 horsepower engines as they surged and pulled is away from the runway.
Amazing as it may seem, this great giant turned out to be one of the gentlest babies I have ever flown. Extremely gentle in response to the controls, this airplane would do anything one directed it to do with no questions asked. With a gentle turn or two of the trim tab, this multi-ton craft would smoothly rise into the blue. Once airborne one could forget the rudder controls, as all flying was achieved through prudent use of the aileron and elevator. This was an extremely forgiving airplane as I learned during my first few landing attempts in which I bounced it half way down the runway. The B-17, contrary to its size and large wing lead ratio, was extremely stable in rough air or storms, thus rendering steady platform for instrument or "blind" flying.

The fuel tanks or "bags" carried 2,100 gallons of 100 octane gasoline, and de-icing equipment consisted of anti-icing fluid (or alcohol) for the propellers and de-icing contracting and expanding rubber boots on the surfaces of the wings, horizontal stabilizer and rudder. Turbo superchargers in each engine enabled us on one occasion to reach 32,000 feet, although the poor Fortress was struggling to breathe.

If the readers deduce from this that I was in love with the B-17, they are right. I was.

Upon completion of B-17 training at Blythe, we were transferred to Pyote Army Air Field, Pyote , Texas , which was located exactly in the middle of nowhere. If there was a city or town of any size nearby, I never found it [Editor's Note: Pyote , Texas is indeed remote. It is about 13 miles northeast of Pecos in Ward County].

In Pyote we formed into a combat group and from that time forward we were a part of the 381 st Bombardment Group (Heavy). The Group contained four bombardment squadrons that included the 532nd, 533rd, 534th and 535th. I was assigned to the 533rd . Our training was now very serious as the effort we put into the group operational precision flying and maneuvers would in a very short time be a key to our survival.

We were assigned factory fresh B-17F's, which were a vastly improved version of the E model. We would later fly these same planes to England .

The armament was located as follows: two single .50 caliber machine guns in the nose section; twin .50 caliber guns in the top turret directly behind the pilot's seat; one single fifty in the radio compartment; twin fifties in the ball turret just aft and below the radio room; two waist gunner single fifties; and twin fifties in the tail-eleven fifty caliber machine guns total. The bomb bay would carry up to six 1,000 pound bombs. Combine this armament with 36 bombers [Group complement of aircraft] and we presented a formidable defensive and offensive platform. The B-17G, which the Group would later receive in England , would be equipped with even greater firepower.

We now concentrated on formation flying as an individual squadron and as a group, and much of this was cross country to test the integrity of the group in a simulated long distance bombing mission.

Aerial gunnery was another phase of our daily training, and we all took part in these exercises including the pilots.

One day an over-zealous, unidentified gunner let loose with his fifties into a herd of cattle. There was hell to pay over this incident as we were all awakened at three o'clock in the morning and questioned about the incident. Obviously, nobody confessed.
I forgot to mention earlier that my monthly pay while an aviation cadet was $75 per month, considerably better than the $21 I had previously earned. I managed to save enough to purchase a nearly one-quarter carat diamond engagement ring for my soon-to-be wife. Upon graduation my monthly pay advanced to $245.

Hot New Pilot - 1943

During the war our group chaplain, James Good Brown, kept a detailed diary of the history of the 381 st and following the war published an 800 page book. Since I have previously made disparaging remarks about the wide spot in the road that was Pyote , Texas , and the severity of the training, I will quote a few paragraphs from his book that back up my contentions:

> *"As I walked from the railroad station in Pyote to the air base, a distance of about two miles, I took off my shoes at the entrance to the base and emptied the sand from my shoes. As I walked to my assigned barracks, I proceeded through loose sand, for the roadways had not yet been completed on the base. When I entered the barracks and was assigned a bed, I took my finger and wrote my name in the sand on the bed. Being hungry, I walked through sand to the mess hall and there wiped the sand off the table before I began to eat. This was Pyote, Texas, the laughing stock of the Air Corps."*

Chaplain Brown found other, more important, things to talk about in his book and he was very complimentary to the group and its leadership:

> *"I was assigned to one of the first bob groups in the Second World War, written in history as the 'hottest outfit to reach the European Theatre of Operations, an organization noted particularly for its ability to fly formation. The foregoing statement will be borne out by the official combat records of the 381 st Bomb Group during World War II. No bomb group in England had a better record."*

Chaplain Brown, who later was to rise to Lt. Colonel, was unreserved in his comments of where the responsibility lie for the good performance of the 381st:

> *"There is a reason for this, and it must be quickly stated that the credit goes to one man and to all the men under his command. That man is Colonel Joseph J. Nazzaro. That which made the 381 st superior was the fact that the group was virtually hand picked by Colonel Nazzaro. He personally screened every man who came into the group, and if the man did not meet his expectations and standards, out the man went. I can give instances where I saw him do this. His words were sharp and final. Within a few days the man in question would be off the base. To Colonel Nazzaro there could be none but the best. The men under him thought 'he worked them to death.' Many men came to my office Stating 'Chaplain, we can take it no longer. We are so tired we can hardly move. He is making us fly day and night. It is more than we can take.'"*

I can certainly attest to the Chaplain's remarks as Colonel Nazzaro was indeed a stern and demanding taskmaster and most nights we would fall in bed and pass out from fatigue, only to repeat the process the next day [Editor's Note-Joseph Nazzaro went on to a very distinguished military career which ended with his retirement as commander-in-chief of Pacific Air Forces in 1971. General Nazzaro died on 5 Feb 1990].

Officer Crew of B-17F 42-29992 (OQ-J) Pyote Field , Texas -May, 1943 L to R: 2nd Lt. Paul McConnell-Navigator; Lt. Olaf Ballinger-Pilot; 2nd Lt. George Williams-Bombardier; 2nd Lt. John Carah--CoPilot

Now I can see the reason behind his rigid training schedule, for in combat anything less than precision formation flying jeopardizes the integrity of the group and invites personal disaster.

We completed our first and second phase training at Pyote, and then moved on to Pueblo , Colorado for our third and final phase. The flying routine at Pueblo was essentially the same as at Pyote; however it was more intensified and varied. All shots were brought up to date, and all dental work completed. Personnel files were double checked for accuracy. We were off to war.

But first we were all given seven days leave and I returned to California during this brief interlude. Connie Jane Harris and I were married on 30 April 1943 in Reno , Nevada , with the bride's mother, Thelma Harris Green, and my brother, William M. Carah, in attendance. Our brief honeymoon was spent at the St. Francis Hotel in San Francisco . As I write this in 1990, we have been married over 47 years, which is a fitting tribute to her character and perseverance through all the trials and tribulations we encountered [Editor's Note-John and Connie Carah were married another nine years until her death on 12 February 1999].

After the honeymoon, it was back to Pueblo where we picked up our B-17's and flew them to Salina Army Air Field in Salina , Kansas . Here we were issued full combat gear which included .45 caliber automatic pistols with shoulder holsters for the officers.

We began our long flying journey to England from Salina on 20 May 1943 , and the wheels lifted off the runway at 0900 hours local time. We arrived at Bangor , Maine at 2000 hours local. After refueling, maintenance, coordination of flight routes, etc., we departed for Gander Bay , Newfoundland and arrived at that isolated base at 1700 hours local on 22 May 1943 . Continuing our flight on 27 May 1943 , we left forested Newfoundland and headed out across the Atlantic Ocean with Prestwick , Scotland as our destination.

We sighted landfall at 0900 on 18 May 1943 and landed at Prestwick at 1000 hours local. We left early the next morning for Bovington, England , which was to be our staging and training base for the next ten days.

We took off for Ridgewell Royal Air Force Station on 8 June 1943 and were greeted by all of our ground crews and support personnel. They had come over on the Queen Elizabeth in seven days. Ridgewell was to be the home and operational base of the 381 st until the end of the war.

For the next twenty-four days all we did was fly. Precision formation flying was the prime objective of our training staff. We practiced simulated missions with close interval take-offs and expeditious forming of our battle grouping, and were constantly honing our aerial gunner skills. Familiarization flights throughout the United Kingdom were ordered to enable us to locate a suitable alternate landing site should we suffer battle damage during a raid.

Flying in England was entirely different from Stateside flying as we had been used to established airways and relatively high powered radio beacons. In the United States we were used to high candle power light lines that coincided with the airways for use in night flying. None of this was available to us in England , with the exception of very low power radio beacons that had a maximum range of about 25 miles. Also available, and for use in an emergency, were the "Darkie" radio direction stations which were also of low power. When one called "Darkie" with the planes identification and call sign, "Darkie" would respond with a compass heading or radio fix to your destination.

The ignoble surrender of France, with Adolph Hitler sitting in the same railway car where Germany surrendered in 1918, took place on 22 June 1940. As Chaplin James G. Brown observed, the irony of this date is that it is the same day, 22 Jun 1943 , three years later that the 381 st Bomb Group went on its first combat mission to Antwerp , Belgium .

The Group and I were at war!

The objective that day was to bomb the General Motors assembly plant in a populated area of Antwerp . The planes were loaded with five 1,000 pound bombs. Briefings were finished, fuel cells were topped off and the guns were being loaded with .50 caliber ammunition. We lined up on the perimeter and awaited our turn for take-off.

This was it! This was our first foray into combat and the unknown.

We were joined in the assembly area by one other B-17 group and we were a total force of 64 planes. After what seemed like an eternity of confusion and misinterpreted formation direction, we crossed the coast of England and began the crossing of the English Channel .

Achtung! Achtung! Die Flugfestungen Kommen!

This phrase was soon in widespread use in the German early warning centers as they spread the alert to the anti-aircraft gun batteries and to the Luftwaffe airfields in occupied France , occupied Holland , occupied Belgium and in Germany proper.

The early detection devices that the Germans used would tell them that an armada of B-17's were coming and their heading, but not, of course, the destination. It was therefore essential to alert all of the defenses along a general compass heading.

We were intercepted by yellow nosed Focke-Wulf 190's near the Belgium coast. These planes were latter day members of the 1917-1918 "Flying Circus" squadron made famous by its leader, Baron Manfred Von Richtofen. The crew responded to the attack and the noise from the firing cartridges in the top turret was deafening and the entire plane shook from the firing of eleven machine guns.

We were flying at 25,000 feet and the condensation trails of both our planes and those of the enemy were streaking the sky. Although we had a fighter escort of P-47's (Thunderbolts), the Luftwaffe fighters continued their attack with a vengeance. What frightened me so much was the head-on attacks from the FW-190's. As soon as the 190 was within range of our guns, the pilot would invert the plane and commence firing its 20 millimeter cannon and machine guns. With every eighth bullet being an incendiary which I could see, I knew that the hail of bullets were heading in our direction.

Our bullets would bounce harmlessly off the armored belly of the 190 fuselage and the effectiveness of our guns was only apparent when the Focke-Wulf made a right-side-up attack. In the meantime, the antiaircraft ack-ack was creating puffs of smoke and exploding charges that seemed thick enough to walk upon.

I saw one of our squadron B-17's going down in a spin with one engine on fire and several parachutes appearing to the right below me. Then, to my horror, I saw the German pilots machine gun my friends while descending in their parachutes. I would remember this brutal disregard of the rules of war and deliberate murder at a later time when I was in the same vulnerable situation.
We lost four Flying Forts that day, two shot down over Antwerp , and two crash landing at the coast of England with several crew members killed and more wounded. We returned to Ridgewell without a scratch, as indeed we should have, for we were carrying Brig. General Hunter, commander of the 8 th Air Force Fighter Command, and our Group commander, Col. Nazzaro. I wish I could have had a General officer aboard every mission as they seldom became casualties [Editor's Note: Gen. Hunter was flying in 42-30024 (Lt. R.L. Withers) as an observer. A number of junior officers, including John Carah, were also assigned to the plane as gunners. The inclusion of Col. Nazzaro in this aircraft is in error; he was flying lead in a 91 st BG ship].

Lt. Carah's Original B-17F 42-29992 (OQ-J) 23 June 1943. Nearby Bomb Loading Accident Destroyed the Aircraft "Connie," Named after his Wife. Note Blown Off Astro Dome

The very next day, 23 June 1943 , was one of the darkest days in the history of the 381 st Bomb Group. Early in the morning the entire base was shaken by a tremendous explosion which was followed by a cloud of smoke. I was in the ready room preparing for a mission, and headed for the scene of the explosion. What I saw I will never forget.

A B-17 [42-30024], three or four down the line from mine, was being loaded with sixteen 300 pound bombs, and apparently an error in loading and fusing led to the explosion. There was nothing left. Where a B-17 once stood, was nothing but a hole in the ground. The plane had been blown to bits no larger than my word processor. Twenty-four ground and air crewmen had also disappeared and all that remained were scattered bits of flesh. I remember finding five toes, without a

foot attached, beneath our number one engine [Editor's note: Ballinger/Carah were reassigned from A/C 42-29992 to 42-29928 on 23 June. Based on the accident testimony, it appears that Lt. Jim Anderson had assumed command of 42-29992 ***before*** the accident. Anderson 's bombardier, Lt. Paul E. Tull, was inside 42-29992 at the time of the accident and was killed by a piece of flying metal from the nearby explosion].
We lost three B-17's in the explosion, with several others damaged, mine included. I therefore did not go on the mission that day to St. Martin , Bernay , France . In spite of the tragedy the Group had encountered, the 381 st joined other 8 th Air Force groups and completed a successful mission only hours after the disaster [Editor's Note-Lieutenants Ballinger's & Carah's damaged former aircraft, Serial No. 42-29992 (OQ-J), never flew again. The damage was so extensive the plane was scrapped].

Our next three missions were as follows:

- 25 June 1943 - Hamburg, Germany. One B-17 and crew lost. Three killed and several wounded.
- 26 June 1943 - Villacoubly, France. All planes returned.

28 June 1943 - St. Nazaire France. We carried two 2000 pound bombs in a raid against the German submarine pens in the harbor area. Although we hit the target right on the nose, the damage was slight as the pens were constructed of four foot thick reinforced concrete. We encountered heavy attack from FW-190's and Messerschmitt 109's which moderately damaged several B-17's.

The group went on another mission on 29 June 1943 to Triqueville , France and all planes returned safely. My crew was allotted rest time and we stood down. We had a relaxing few days, but, as the fourth of July loomed, we knew that the 8 th Air Force should celebrate Independence Day with a big raid against the Nazis.

Sure enough, we were awakened in the early hours of 4 July 1943 and briefed for a mission to bomb the Focke-Wulf motor assembly plant at Le Mans , France . Ten 500 pound bombs were loaded, along with ammunition, and a full load of high octane fuel. The control tower fired a green flare, and we commenced our take-off roll from Ridgewell Air Base, which I would not see again for over ten years.

We assembled the formation and, as I remember, proceeded to the target at 21,000 feet which required the use of oxygen which was needed above 10,000 feet. As we approached the initial point (IP) of our bomb run, we encountered heavy flak or antiaircraft bursts. The IP is the point where the bombardier locks the autopilot with his Norden bombsight and actually flies the plane in a straight and level position to the bombs-away release point. The bomb bay doors are opened at about this time and we are extremely vulnerable to attack by enemy fighters as we cannot take evasive action.

Right on schedule several Me-109's came down out of the sun and with guns blazing raked our formation. I did not realize we were hit until I heard a voice on the intercom scream "We have no oxygen back here!" I can assume that this was the tail gunner or the radio operator. I later found out that a 20mm shell had exploded between the waist gunners killing them and apparently severing the oxygen lines feeding the rear of the aircraft. The ball turret gunner was also killed [Editors Note-The crew members of B-17F 42-29928 are identified in the Appendix].

Since the surviving gunners could not live without oxygen and the bailout bottles would not last long enough to complete the mission, we immediately left the formation and with maximum throttle headed down towards terra firma and set out a course for England .

The Luftwaffe pilots sensed a kill and three of them attacked us continually down to about 6,000 feet when I heard a heavy "thump" and immediately encountered a frozen elevator and rudder control. The B-17 started a climb which we could not control. If we continued, the plane would stall and we would spin in, so I hit the bailout alarm and proceeded to snap on the chest parachute. Because of their bulk, the pilots stored their chutes behind the seats and two buckles attached each to the harness which we always wore.

Because of our eminent danger, there was no time to radio our base in England and inform them of our big, big problem.

As I reached the front escape hatch, I encountered the bombardier, Lt. George Williams, with his parachute unfurled in his arms. I told him to jump anyway, but he just shook his head. I will never know why Lt. Williams chose his fate as he did, for we had been briefed that in the case of accidentally pulling the rip cord, to bundle up the spilled chute and jump anyway.

I exited the aircraft, and remembering the massacre in the air over Antwerp , delayed opening the chute until I was approximately 1,000 feet above the ground. I estimate I was in free fall between 5,000 and 5,500 feet. I pulled the ripcord and the 28 foot canopy billowed out above me. As I looked down to ascertain my landing area, I heard the unmistakable roar of the 12 cylinder Me-109. As I glanced in the direction of the noise, I saw, to my horror, the enemy fighter heading right toward me. I thought-this is it!

Since I am writing this episode in 1990, he obviously did not shoot, but for those few seconds over Brittany , I thought I was a goner. He was so close, that as he was turning away from me, the prop wash rocked me back and forth in my chute.

I saw our B-17 spinning down, and just before it crashed and exploded, I saw a body exit from the front escape hatch. I can only assume that George Williams finally decided to give it a go, but he was too close to the ground and went to his death quickly. The shock waves from the B-17 crash and explosion rocked me back and forth for a few seconds. Our bombs had been fused and armed.

I was rapidly approaching the ground which was in the form of an apple orchard, and I made a last second effort to guide my chute away from the crotch of a tree. I narrowly missed the main branches of the trees and slammed into the ground uninjured.

I hastily took off my insignia and buried it and the parachute in a pile of dead branches. I got out my escape kit which included a compass, silk map, French francs, knife and matches, and struck out on a southerly course toward Spain through some adjacent thick woods.

Paul McConnell & John Carah-France-1996

For many years I had assumed that a direct hit on the control cable convergence area just forward of the bomb bay from anti-aircraft fire was the reason for our controls jamming. In the fall of 1988, I received a telephone call from Lt. Paul McConnell, our navigator. This was the first communication from any member of the crew to me since about 1200 hours GMT, on July 4, 1943 . Paul was one of the first to leave the plane and was in his parachute when he witnessed the final attack on our plane by three Luftwaffe Me-109 fighters.

Paul told me that the right horizontal stabilizer apparently had taken a hit on the main spar, and that the stabilizer was jammed up against the rudder. No wonder I couldn't control the plane. Paul also informed me that I had landed in an area where about 10,000 German Wehrmacht troops were billeted, and a good number of them were looking for me. How I blundered through this massive manhunt, I will never know. Just plain dumb luck, I guess.

Since I have digressed from the story for a bit, I will include another sidelight to show that even the most trying circumstances can generate a bit of humor.

On the base at Ridgewell, there was no scheduled transportation furnished except for briefings and to the aircraft for combat missions. Accordingly, most of us bought bicycles to get around the base, and to make excursions to the local pub.

The fate of my bicycle is described in Chaplain Brown's book:

> *"When Lt. Carah did not return from the raid over Le Mans , his bicycle came into the possession of Dr. (Capt.) Ralston, he 'believing that Carah would have wanted him to have it.' "*

Dr. Ralston was our squadron flight surgeon, and I was happy that this close friend took it upon himself to appropriate my means of transportation, for I certainly had no need for it in my present circumstances.

We were repeatedly briefed that in the event we were shot down and came upon a farmhouse, to observe it for several hours to determine who came and went, and then along about dusk, having satisfied myself that the occupants were truly French, I approached and knocked on the door. At this time my knowledge of the French language was almost non-existent, and I had no idea of how to convince the people in the farmhouse that I was an American airman who had been shot down that day. A lady came to the door and I tried through sign language, etc., to explain my situation. She got the man of the house and they invited me into the kitchen. I think I got across to them my good intentions for there was much discussion, which of course I did not understand.

At this time I noticed a carafe of clear liquid on the table, and being hot and thirsty, pointed to the carafe and indicated by sign language that I would like a drink. They poured me a generous tumbler of the liquid which I thought was water and immediately took a large gulp. I thought I was going to explode! For what I thought was water turned out to be Calvados, a potent and strong apple brandy that must have been distilled the day before. The French got a big kick out of that incident.

They kept me in the house until later that night, and apparently after suitable contact had been made, escorted me to a house in a small village where I made my first contact with the Maquis, the French resistance or underground. I tried my Spanish on one of the young men, and he responded that he understood. He told me that the underground group were very suspicious of me and that possibly I could be a German posing as an American airman. It took a great deal of persuasion to convince them that I was genuine. In any event, they put me in a bedroom that night and locked the door. For all I know they may have had an armed guard outside the door.

The next day we had the great clothing exchange in return for my "pinks and greens" I emerged as a genuine French peasant who couldn't speak a word of French. I turned over my automatic pistol, holster, and money from the escape kit to the apparent leader of the group, and he seemed pleased to receive them.
After a few days I was taken to a remote farm house belonging to the Louis Breteau family where I found another American pilot, Lt. Rene. This family turned out to be our host for the next several weeks, providing us with sleeping quarters, food, and even cigarettes.

Our stay at the Breteau farm was mostly uneventful and we had quite a few visitors, too many to my way of thinking, for in the event of capture or questioning under torture by the Gestapo, our presence might be revealed. The members of the underground viewed their activities with a spirit of levity that truly astounded me. Stealing supplies from the


ETAT FRANÇAIS
CARTE D'IDENTITÉ
11.723.143
Nom DUPONT
Prénoms Jacques
Domicile Avenue Foch 2 Lyon
Profession Commerçant
Né le 2 janvier 1917
à Lyon Dpt
fils de Jean
et de Fabre Juliet
Nationalité Française
SIGNALEMENT
Taille 1 m. 72
Visage ovale
Teint mat
Cheveux châtains
Moustaches néant
Front haut
Yeux bruns
Nez rectiligne
Bouche moyenne
Menton rond
Signes particuliers néant
Changements de Domicile
COMMISSARIAT DE POLICE
DES
PROT

Courtesy of the French Underground, 2nd Lt. John M. Carah, USAAC, Becomes Jacques DuPont, Salesman from Lyon.

Germans and evading road blocks, to them, was the greatest sport in the world, and they would frequently re-tell and laugh about their exploits.

The support of our sojourn with the Breatau's was truly a community effort, as we had visits form the village doctor, druggist, local police and one Paul David, who owned the Hotel De Tesse in nearby Tesse-La Madeleine, Orne. He helped me when I was initially shot down and was subsequently jailed by the Gestapo.

In the short time that he was free he took delight in stealing from the Germans and getting clothes and cigarettes for me. He also provided us with foodstuffs intended for the Nazi occupiers of his hotel. He was one fine and resourceful man [Editors Note-a letter from Paul David to John Carah later in the war is in the appendix].

The village in which we were located was called Lassey, in the Department of Mayenne. The Breteau family consisted of Louis, about 63, and his wife of similar age and his three daughters: Margrette, Madeline, and Odette. I would estimate their ages from 15 to 18, with Odette being the oldest.

The Breteau Sisters of Lassey, Mayenne, Who Cared for Lt. John Carah in the Summer of 1943 Top: Odette; Bottom Left: Madeline; Bottom Right: Marguerite

Meal preparation was a family affair and would begin in the morning when various ingredients were combined in a huge iron pot and placed on a hook in the fireplace. Thus our soup or potage would simmer throughout the day and in the evening would be a delicious repast. This would be consumed with very sour French bread which usually was delivered by the doctor, who picked it up from the village bakery on his way to the daily treatment of Louis Breteau.

The doctor, whose name I cannot remember, initially treated a puncture wound in my left foot. A sliver of flak apparently penetrated my shoe and pierced the skin [Editor's Note-It was a bit more serious than that and upon his return to the United States in 1944 John Carah was awarded the purple heart among other decorations].

I wanted to proceed south to Spain and get back to allied control; however the underground told us the frontier was too heavily guarded by the Germans at this time. Unable to guide us into Spain , the underground decided to get us into Switzerland , thus making room for the ever increasing number of allied airman that were showing up on French soil.

The underground network went to work with an ingenuity that continues to astound me, considering what limited equipment they had, and the constant threat of exposure and death by the Gestapo. I was soon equipped with a proper identity card complete with photo, and I became Jacques DuPont, born in Lyon , France on 2 January 1917 , the offspring of a union of Jean Dupont and Marie Miallet, and my occupation was a salesman. This card was duly authenticated with various official seals and signatures, all forged of course. They also provided me with a certificate that attested that I was gainfully employed.

Our guide for the impending journey was a young French boy of about 16 years who had volunteered for this dangerous trip. Once in Switzerland , he wanted to make his way to Morocco and join the Free French forces of General Giroud.

We left Laval , France by train for Paris where we would change trains for the continuance eastward. Going through Paris we caught a glimpse of the Eiffel tower and other landmarks such as the Seine River . I believe we arrived at the Gare du Nord and departed from the Gare du Oest.

Lt. Rene was stopped at the train station by a French policeman. We had previously agreed that if one of us was detained the others would continue on our way. We had given up hope, when suddenly he appeared beside us. I asked him what happened and he said he showed his identity card and without a word being spoken was waved on his way. Quite a miracle.

The Breteau Family Farm, Lassey, Mayenne, France

We arrived at the Dijon train station early the next morning and found utter confusion. The Royal Air Force had bombed the town the night before and had scored several hits on the station. A Wehrmacht colonel was shouting at the top of his voice at us to "rouse mitt" from the station. He was backed up with German troops carrying machine guns. We exited the train and the station in record time.

Our young guide appeared to be a very cool teenager and soon led us out of Dijon to rendezvous with country underground contacts. Never did I see him refer to notes, and probably, because of the extreme danger in event of capture, kept all names and addresses in his head.

I do not remember the name of the first farmhouse where we stayed, but it was typical of most peasant dwellings in that area. The stables, which housed whatever livestock the family owned, were located on the ground floor. And the living quarters were above in a one or two story home [Editor's Note-this country style architecture has been in existence in Europe since the Middle Ages]. You may imagine the odors that wafted upward from the cows, pigs, horses, chickens and whatever else was housed down under.

My very first meal in the farmhouse was my introduction to tripe which is the stomach lining of cattle. I gagged on this so-called French staple, but managed to wash it down with the vin ordinaire which was plentiful.

Several days passed before transportation arrangements were finalized with other underground cells along the route to Switzerland . From that time forward our transport was anything and everything that could be pressed into service.

At first we traveled in a hay truck, then a horse drawn dray wagon, then even by bicycle. However the majority of the 125 kilometers was accomplished on foot. This was the longest distance that I ever walked. We proceeded through the outskirts of Besancon and then approached the foothills of the French Alps, or Jura Mountains , which lay immediately in front and east of us. The mountains average 6,562 feet in elevation, and it being mid-August, the night time temperature was moderate.

We finally spotted the Swiss flag flying at a border post and knew that our journey was nearly over. Our biggest concern at the time was to evade both the German and Swiss border guards, so it was decided to spend the night in the Juras and observe the patterns of the patrols. As dawn was breaking the next morning, we carefully and silently crossed the Swiss frontier without detection. It was then on to the American Military Attaché, American Legation at Bern , Switzerland .

Since we had no Swiss money with which to pay our fares on a train, we decided to hire a taxi to take us the rest of the way. We arranged this in Neufchatel and proceeded via Bienne to Bern where we had the cab driver take us to the office of the American Military Attaché.

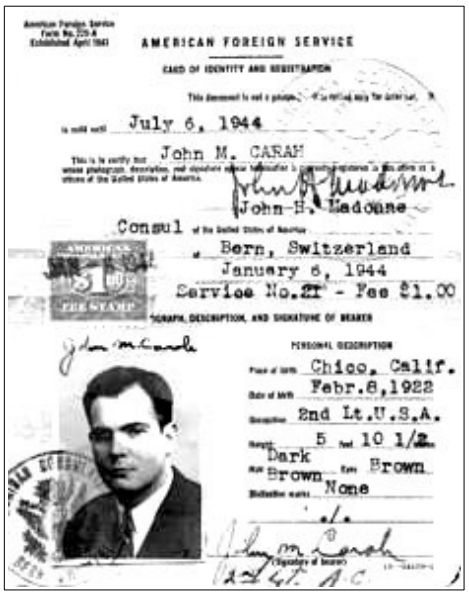
I knocked on the door of what once had been a private residence and informed the gentleman who answered that we were American airmen who had crossed the border from France , and that we needed someone to pay the taxi driver. I could see that he did not believe me, but he asked me to wait and went back in the house.

The door again opened and a man in civilian clothes identified himself as Colonel DeJonge, and I again explained our circumstances. His reply was ambivalent: "You What !?!" I could see that he also had doubts about our identity. Finally a conference with other officers in the building convinced them to accept our explanation. We were the first Americans to enter Switzerland in this manner, and they were very suspicious, especially since we had the nerve to hire a taxi and had been able to outwit the Swiss border guards.

Once our identity and serial numbers were confirmed by cable from Washington , I was appointed Assistant Air Attaché and General Aide de Camp to Brig. General Barnwell Legge, the military attaché [Editor's Note-John Carah's family was notified of his safe return to Allied control but they were not informed of where he was and they were admonished not to reveal this information to anyone outside the family].

During the next six months my time was occupied with intelligence gathering and liaison with the British, and with Allan Dulles, head of the OSS , whose office was across the street. Mr. Dulles was a wonderful man to work with as it seemed he had contacts throughout Europe , including Germany and Italy . The OSS was later named the CIA.

The general and I were also kept busy leasing hotels in the mountain ski areas as every day we would get one or two B-24's or B-17's landing at Swiss airports. The planes would be too shot-up to get back or lacked sufficient fuel for the return trip from wherever they were bombing. Quite often the crews would bail out over Switzerland or crash land. The Swiss promptly interned these flyers, and it was our responsibility to feed and house them according to Air Corps standards. Otherwise the Swiss would have placed them in detention camps.


AMERICAN FOREIGN SERVICE

CARD OF IDENTITY AND REGISTRATION

July 6, 1944

John M. CARAH

John B. Madonne

Consul

Bern, Switzerland

January 6, 1944

Service No. 21 - Fee $1.00

PERSONAL DESCRIPTION

Chico, Calif.

Febr. 8, 1922

2nd Lt. U.S.A.

5 ft. 10 1/2 in.

Dark

Brown

Brown

None

The Recently Trained Army Air Corp Pilot is Suddenly a Newly Minted Diplomat. U.S. Legation, Bern, Switzerland. 1943-1944.

By the time the war was over there were over 4,000 American flyers interned in Switzerland [Editor's Note-The Swiss, in accordance with the Geneva Convention, made a distinction between allied military personnel who entered the country under threat of harm or fleeing an enemy as opposed to entering the country because they lacked fuel or other resource to get back to their bases. John Carah fell under the provisions of the first type of entry and was therefore allowed freedom of movement and not subject to being interned]. On Thanksgiving Day, 1943, the American Minister, Mr. Leland Harrison, had invited a group of us to his home to celebrate the holiday. The Swiss cooks went all out as we had a typical Thanksgiving dinner such as would be served in an American home. This kind gesture on the part of our Minister will be forever remembered.

Toward the end of 1943, the 8 th and 15 th Air Forces (Africa) began to mount 800 to 1,000 plane raids against the heartland of Germany , including Berlin , and we hosted ever increasing numbers of allied flyers unable to make it back to their home base.

I was invited by a group of our diplomatic attaches to move into their spacious home where all expenses were shared and included the services of a cook, butler and maid. Very upscale for a relatively new 2 nd Lieutenant; however because of the generous currency exchange loss provided by the U.S. Government, my salary was $601 monthly, more than that of the Swiss President.

Shortly after our entry, Lt. Rene's and my presence quickly became known to the Swiss authorities, and I was frequently interviewed by a Swiss Army captain. The General directed me to admit nothing; however the captain had performed his home work and even produced the taxi driver. It was useless to deny the facts that his organization had compiled. Slipping into the country the way we did was most embarrassing to the military and to the government [Editor's Note-Conversations with my father on this point suggest that when he finally did leave Switzerland it was with the heartfelt blessing and relief of the Swiss authorities].

The gentleman with whom I first made contact with at the door of the office of the military attaché was a British subject named Hart, who with his wife lived at the converted home. He served as caretaker, driver, and overall assistant while his wife attended to the housekeeping. On our first trip back to Europe after the war, my wife Connie and I went back to 29 Thunstrasse, Bern and renewed the acquaintance.

During my stay I constantly reminded the general that as soon as an escape route could be set up through France to Spain, I would avail myself of the opportunity. Air Commodore West (Royal Air Force Attaché), General Legge, and Allan Dulles eventually organized such an escape route.

The reader may wonder how I was able to wander virtually everywhere in Switzerland however and whenever I wished. The answer lies with the Geneva Convention which defines rules and conduct of war, and which was subscribed to by most major powers.

Since I crossed the Swiss border fleeing from enemy forces, I was classified as an escapee, and thus granted freedom of movement and domicile. On the other hand, the flight crews that crash landed or bailed out over Switzerland were classified as internees and were confined to a given location with restriction of movement. In addition, they were pledged not to escape or attempt to escape.

While I was crossing the French Alps into Switzerland , I experienced a pain in my lower right abdominal area.

Since the pain persisted, I was sent to the legation doctor as soon as I was settled. His finding was acute appendicitis and I was operated on almost immediately.

As soon as I was able, the Military Attaché sent me to the southern canton of Tessin for rest and recovery. I stayed in the little town of Locarno on Lac Maggiore, a most picturesque part of the country.

Meanwhile, preparations were underway through the various intelligence agencies of the Allied services in Bern to arrange and to coordinate the escape route to Spain . I have no idea how detailed and how many resistance units were involved in this project as I was not brought into the planning, only the execution of the plan by being a participant.

We were alerted to be ready to go shortly after Christmas, 1943, and I arranged to gather the things that we were briefed to take with us such as Swiss and French currency. Our group was finalized at ten Allied flyers: two American, one Canadian, and seven British.

Finally we were directed to board an early morning train to Geneva on 31 December 1943 . A representative from Allan Dulles' OSS would accompany us and arrange the rendezvous with a representative of the French Maquis. It was a great disappointment after our arrival in Geneva for our OSS agent was unable to make contact with the French counterpart, and we had to retrace our journey back to Bern .

As I am writing this I am thinking back to those last days of 1943 and the early days of 1944, and wondering what possessed me to volunteer for this dangerous mission. I was secure in Switzerland , and could have remained there until the end of the war had I chosen. I honestly can't say what the motivation was to get back to Allied control, and I most certainly did not think of it as a life threatening journey; rather I probably approached the whole thing as one grand adventure. I believe all of my companions felt somewhat the same way, for hadn't we all experienced the dangers of the unknown in making our way to Switzerland ?

I went back to the home of Gen. Legge and stayed hidden there for several days until contact with the Maquis was re-established. I had to remain out of the mainstream for my sudden disappearance could have been rationalized in any number of ways. I must remind the reader that Switzerland, Bern especially, was crawling with foreign agents and German Gestapo, and any indication that a planned escape was in the process of happening would not only jeopardize our lives, but countless French resistance members.

I often wondered what my diplomatic associates and the Swiss employees thought when I turned up missing. One day I was there and, poof, the next day I wasn't. They probably contacted General Legge and, at a later date, he informed them of the details [Editor's Note-Based on the previous diplomatic and security embarrassments suffered by the Swiss, it is unlikely General Legge said anything to the host government; he certainly did not want to implicate the American legation in schemes to smuggle out Allied military personnel and in doing so flaunt Swiss security and political niceties].

About 4 January 1944, we again received instructions to assemble in Geneva . Late that night we made contact with our Maquis guide and proceeded to a small French village called Frangey near the base of Mt. Blanc . The province or district of Haute Savoie, in which we were temporarily located, was the stronghold of the French Maquis, and the organization had more men and arms/equipment than any other branch in France . They were well organized and possessed an excellent intelligence network. I will never understand how they failed to guard against what happened next.

We had been taken to an older building which at one time may have been a small warehouse as it was situated on the outskirts of the village. Our main guide had left and two of the less important members of the Maquis remained with us as we tried to get some sleep in the early morning hours. The next thing I knew there were loud voices and lights shining in our eyes. Our intruders were members of the Vichy police and the German Gestapo. The Vichy government was formed after the fall of France , with Marshall Petain as president and Pierre Laval as prime minister. In general this government was considered as a puppet organization that bowed to the wishes and whims of the German government.
It seemed that suddenly we were Prisoners of War.

Memorial to those Killed in A/C 42-29928 on 4 July 1943 at La Coulonche, Laval, France. Erected in 1994.

To this day I have no idea if this raid was the result of a long planned attack, or if it was triggered because somehow word of our presence had filtered back to one of the enemy organizations. I guess I'll never know.

We were marched to the local headquarters of the Gendarmes and the two room jail, where we were incarcerated. I could speak and understand French pretty well at this time as well as being able to hold my own in German, so I fully understood what was liable to happen to us. We maintained almost complete silence except to say "no" or "I don't know" to their questions. Our captors were trying to telephone their superiors apparently for instructions when it became evident that the line was dead. About that time a group of heavily armed men stormed the entrance to the jail and began shooting. During all of this we hit the deck and stayed there, as bullets were flying all over the area. Afterward I noticed about five or six bodies lying about. Almost as fast as we had been captured, we had been rescued and were free men. Well, as free as one could consider oneself in such a situation. Fortunately the Maquis had trucks and we quickly distanced ourselves from Frangey and fled to our next destination. So much for my brief existence as a Prisoner of War!

Although I do not remember our exact route, nor all of the means of transport, I believe we headed for Lyon and then south for Marseille. I do remember being in Marseille, and then heading west for the city of Perpignan , about 55 kilometers from the frontier with Spain .

I believe our mode of transportation approximated that which we had previously utilized in our journey to Switzerland . We continued our trip with no further incidents or close encounters. I guess Lady Luck was still riding high on our shoulders.

Upon our arrival in Perpignan , we were placed in the apartment of one Mlle. Suzanne Dedieu, a dedicated member of the resistance movement, and formerly a teacher at Mount Holyoke College in South Hadley , Massachusetts . We stayed with her for four or five days while arrangements were made for a rendezvous with our Spanish guide.

At this point I wish to state my genuine admiration and gratitude for the members of the French Resistance movement, who at every hour of every day risked their lives so that a considerable number of Allied flyers could return to combat and perhaps shorten the war. Capture, to these courageous people almost always meant torture and usually death.

We joined our Spanish guide on an almost pitch black night and started our last walking trek through the Pyrenees Mountains and true freedom. Since I spoke Spanish, I was the point man for our group as we rapidly made our way through the flatland and foothill areas of the mountains. The guide did not believe in taking frequent breaks and drove us at a pace that was difficult to endure.

At one point, as we approached the summit of the Pyrenees , I wanted to lie down and die as I did not feel I had the physical capability to continue. But continue I did, and it was a happy time when we reached the top and the guide pointed out the town of Burgos, immediately inland from the border, and the lights of Figueras, about 28 km inland.

Our guide pointed out the direction to travel and then left us high in the Pyrenees to return to France and another group of flyers.

Since we did not have our guide any longer to prod us on our way, we settled in as best as possible and attempted to get some sleep. This was most difficult as this was 2 March 1944 , a little after midnight , and very cold at our elevation. The total elapsed time since we left Geneva and set foot on the Spanish border was 57 days. Quite a trip.

Some pictures of me taken in Madrid later that month reflect the rigors of the trip as I had lost considerable weight and hardly looked like an American.

We proceeded down the south slope of the Pyrenees , past the village of Burgos , and on to Figueras, where we had been told by the guide that we could hop a freight train to Barcelona . We watched the rail yards, and when we saw a train heading south we jumped aboard. Blind luck was with us again, for late that night after a 150 mile ride on a dirty freight train, we entered what had to be Barcelona . We slept in a secluded wood for the remainder of the night. The next day I asked several local Spaniards if they knew the location of the British Counsel. I learned the location and we were admitted into the inner sanctum. Allied Control at last!

Following a couple of days of rest, getting cleaned up, and being outfitted with new clothes, the Counsel, who was a young woman, arranged limousine transportation to the British Embassy in Madrid.

The reason I went to the British, rather than to American facilities, was that we were briefed to do this because the two allies had an agreement that the Americans would patrol the border jails and extract allied flyers and then turn them over to the British who would arrange transportation out of the country.

We stayed in the basement of the Embassy for a few days and were then driven to the southern town of La Linea where we transferred to a Royal Air Force ambulance for the short trip to the Little England of Gibraltar. Here I was taken in tow by the American Liaison Officer, issued a uniform, and was soon on my way to Casablanca via a Royal Air Force transport plane.

Since I was the first American flyer to get out of Switzerland , I was directed to proceed directly to Washington , D.C. and not to return to England . I would not be leaving until the next day, so that night I proceeded to a local night club and ordered a bottle of champagne with which to celebrate my new found freedom. I heard a voice call, "John, you're dead!" It was Lt. Ira Hume, a college mate from Chico . He repeated the statement, but I assured him that I was indeed alive. I guess the local papers back home assumed that being listed as "missing in action" meant the same thing as "killed in action."

The next day, aboard a U.S. Army Air Corps DC-4, we flew as far as the Azores Islands where we refueled for the balance of the trip to the United States . I was escorted to the Pentagon, where I was interviewed by Gen. H.H. Arnold, and other high ranking general officers. I still do not know why, as I didn't feel I had any vital information to disclose.

Then it was home and a glorious reunion with my wife Connie and our families. Following leave, I was assigned to the Air Corps re-distribution center in Santa Monica , California , where for two weeks we did absolutely nothing in terms of a military nature.

Remains of B17F 42-29928 (VP-W)
Recovered in 1996 at LaCoulonche

What followed next was the first of many cross country trips back and forth across the United States . I think we could tell you today every city, town and hamlet that is situated on U.S. Route 66. Our assignment was to Tyndall Field , Panama City, Florida , where I would be a B-17 pilot flying gunnery students. The students fired at towed targets or the flying Pinballs, P-39's equipped with skin sensors that picked up the impact of plastic bullets.

Life at Tyndall was pleasant enough, but a group of us who were ex-combat pilots soon became bored flying around on gunnery missions. We asked for a transfer to the Ferry Command where we would be able to fly every plane in the Air Corps inventory. Next stop- Fairfax Field , Kansas City, Kansas . At Fairfax Field I joined the 33 rd Ferry Squadron, and was checked out in the North American B-25 and the Douglas C-47.

I immediately started to build up a lot of flying hours in the B-25 as the factory was located at the field. I delivered the planes to every conceivable state and also to foreign locations such as Montreal , Canada and to the RAF in the Bahamas . I also delivered the planes destined for the Russian Air Force to either Great Falls , Montana , or Ladd Field, Fairbanks , Alaska .

I was amazed that the Russian B-25's were equipped with auto-pilots, while ours were not. I wonder if we ever got paid for those aircraft.

As the war in Europe was drawing to a close, we began ferrying factory fresh B-25's to huge storage areas in Hattiesburg , Mississippi , and to Arizona . These planes all had less than ten hours flying time. The routine of the Ferry Command was to deliver a B-25 to say Long Beach , then pick up a B-17 and deliver it to Savannah , Georgia . At Savannah I might pick up a C-47 and take it to Tinker Field , Oklahoma City, Oklahoma . Thus went our routine during my assignment to Ferry Command. If the location where I had delivered a plane had nothing to ferry, we would take a commercial airline back to Kansas City and the routine would start all over again. This kept me very busy, but was not an endearing activity to my wife.

With the European war over, and the North American Kansas City plant closed, the entire squadron was transferred to Rosecrans Field, St. Joseph , Missouri . Here I was introduced to the Curtis C-46, and sent to Tulsa , Oklahoma for

schooling in the Douglas B-26, which was one of the finest airplanes I have ever flown. One pilot only, but all of the controls were positioned within easy reach and in a logical sequence. I had this plane up to 425 miles per hour at one time.

With the need for ferry pilots dwindling, I was assigned to Adams Field, Little Rock , Arkansas ; and later to Ellington Field, Houston , Texas , where we were to train reserve organizations. We received North American P-51's and of course I had to get checked out. This plane had more power in one engine than some of the multi-engine craft I had flown. It was an absolute dream to fly. From Ellington Field our next assignment was McClellan Air Depot, Sacramento , California , where I was once more involved with training reserve pilots.

The War was now over and I had some decisions to make. While the civilian world was being flooded with ex-servicemen, I saw a great future as a military officer in the post-war Army Air Forces. The war had done so much to completely transform our nation and our world view. Thousands of young men and women had been exposed to a level of sophistication and capability that would not have readily occurred in pre-War America . The military had given me an opportunity to see and do things that would not have been otherwise possible. So I elected to stay and I have never regretted a minute of it. I made the transition to the U.S. Air Force when it was formed in 1947, and stayed on active duty until my retirement as a Lt. Col. at Sheppard AFB, Texas in 1966.

Editor's Epilogue

John Carah's post-war military career was as successful as his combat and evasion experiences. He continued to fly of course, but soon developed project management skills that put him into critical assignments at U.S. Air Force Bases throughout the world. He became a communications expert and developed sophisticated communication installations for a variety of service missions. His biggest heartbreak was losing his wings in the late 1950's due to medical causes, but he redoubled his efforts in his other Air Force assignments and was awarded numerous decorations for superior service. After 24 years of military service, it was time to retire and John Carah repaired to his home state of California to enter the business arena.

Lt. Col. John M. Carah, O-737353. Retirement Day-June 1966. Sheppard AFB. Texas

He started several successful businesses in the San Francisco and Lake Tahoe areas of California before going into full retirement in 1986. In retirement, he was as active as ever and frequently could be seen making presentations to veteran's groups or hosting affairs at military reunions. He attended all the reunions of the 381 st Bombardment Group and towards the end of the last decade was one of the few members still around from the early days of 1943.

He also never forgot the debt he owed his French protectors and he traveled to France several times in the 1990's to meet with his old friends. In 1994, he dedicated a monument to his fallen comrades killed in the raid on LeMans on July 4, 1943 and in 1996 he was presented with some of the remains of his old B-17F which had been resurrected from a deep hole in the

ground in that apple orchard at La Coulonche, Laval, Normandy. He also sadly said goodbye to the last surviving wartime bomber crew member with the death of 2 nd Lt. Paul McConnell, Navigator, in 1996.

Dad's beloved wife Connie past away in February, 1999 and my father folded his wings for the final time on February 3, 2003 .

WBC 3 Nov 2003

- **Crew Members of B17F 42-29928 (VP-W). Lost at LeMans , France , 4 July 1943 ,**

381 st Bombardment Group (H)-533 rd Squadron, Ridgewell Field, Station 167, East Anglia , England . Missing Aircraft Report (MACR)-161

1 st Lt. Olaf M. Ballinger, Pilot, Evaded Capture (b. 21 Apr 1919 -- Newton Falls , OH ; d. Sep 1955)
2nd Lt. John M. Carah, Pilot, Evaded Capture (b. 8 Feb 1922-Chico, CA; d. 3 Feb 2003-Placerville, CA)
2nd Lt. Paul H. McConnell, Navigator, Evaded Capture (b. 14 Mar 1920-Montgomery , AL ; d. 15 Aug 1996-Westminster, CA)
2nd Lt. George C. Williams, Bombardier, Killed in Action (of Warren, OH)
T/Sgt Byron J. Gronstal, Top Turret Gunner, Prisoner of War (b. 27 Oct 1912-Van Nuys, CA; d. Oct 1981, Pacioma, CA)
T/Sgt John K. Lane , Radio Operator, Prisoner of War (of Deland , FL)
S/Sgt William C. Howell, Tail Gunner, Evaded Capture (of Goldsboro , NC)
S/Sgt Francis E. Owens, Waist Gunner, Killed in Action (of Pittsburgh , PA)
S/Sgt Harry W. Bauscher, Waist Gunner, Killed in Action (of Cincinnati , OH)
S/Sgt Albert G. Wackerman, Ball Turret Gunner, Killed in Action (of Salinas , CA)

Letter from Paul David to Lt. John M. Carah, 1 March 1945, pages 1 and 2.

STATION THERMALE INTERCOMMUNALE DE BAGNOLES-DE-L'ORNE

HOTEL DE TESSÉ

TESSÉ-LA-MADELEINE

(ORNE)

R. C. Flers 7969

Paul DAVID, propr

Adresse Telegr. DAVID TESSE LA-MADELEINE

La situation la plus saine à l'abri de la poussière et des bruits de la route

TÉLÉPHONE 535

TESSÉ-LA-MADELEINE, le 1er Mai 1945

Dear Sir

I had your address by Madam Bretaud Lassay (Mayenne) I have not forgotten you. Do you remember when I took care of you when you had an accident on a Sunday evening in Normandy. I took you to a farm at Mr Monsallier's where you stayed till you were able to go to Lassay because the German Patrols were searching for you everywhere. But I could not take you in my car because I was arrested by the Germans and put into prison at Alençon. I can assure you I was sorely afraid and so were my wife and my daughter. I was questioned and thrashed by the Gestapo I never said a word about you or your friends. When I was released I was very glad to know that you were quite safe abroad. Six of your friends who were with you in your aeroplane have been saved too; perhaps you have met them in America, they went back by air or by sea during the German occupation.

EAU COURANTE CHAUDE ET FROIDE

CHAUFFAGE CENTRAL

GARAGES

Parc ombragé

Au milieu de la verdure « l'Hôtel de Tessé » est l'endroit idéal pour faire cure et passer des vacances tranquilles