

More Stories About Falmouth Veterans of World War II

William Banks

Bill and Caroline Banks ran The Market Bookshop in the former E.E.C. Swift Meat Market on Depot Ave. in Falmouth for years. Bill was active in town government and a civic leader.

The War Years 1941-1945

Before I graduated in June of 1941 I applied for a commission in the Naval Reserve, but was turned down because of my vision. I also took an exam for a job – any job – with the Federal Government. Offered a position with the Social Security Administration, I reported for work about July 1. After three months of office work I was chosen to get further training and a promotion. I went to Washington about November 1 and was there for Pearl Harbor.

I lived with the first batch of interns in a big rooming house. There were about 20 of us, all just out of college and excited at



Photos of Bill Banks from his memoirs.

being in Washington. All of the men/boys were of draft age and we had great debates about being conscientious objectors or looking for good spots in which to serve.

After my six weeks training I came back to Kansas City. I tried to enlist in the army, but again my vision was too poor for the regular army. I found out I could volunteer for the draft rather than waiting for my number to come up so that is what I decided to do.

There were several weeks of basic training at Jefferson Barracks in St. Louis. I was fortunate that the Army Air Corps was expanding rapidly and all of us enlistees were assigned to the Air Corps. From Jefferson Barracks we went on to technical schools.

The really high scorers on the battery of tests we took went to cryptography school. The next group went to weather school. The third tier, including me, went to Link Trainer School at Chanute Field in Illinois. After several weeks training we were shipped out to Air Corps training bases to instruct cadets on instrument flying simulators.



I bumped into a girl I had known in college. She worked



in the department that assigned men to different bases. She said she could get me sent anywhere that Link Trainer instructors were needed. So not only did I put in for Texas but I arranged for my buddies to be sent as close to home as possible.

I arrived at Randolph Field in San Antonio and immediately used every pass I could get to hitchhike to Fort Worth to see Caroline, my fiancée. She was working at Consolidated Aircraft where B-24s were being made.

Bill and Caroline married on October 3, 1941.

Caroline's uncle, Major General Barton Yount, gave her away. He was commanding general of all Army Air Corps (later Army Air Force and still later USAF) training with headquarters in Fort Worth. In about two weeks I was summoned to base headquarters and was told that I was going to Officers Candidate School immediately, even though I wanted to spend more time with Caroline. It was evident that General Yount's wife, Aunt Mildred, had directed the base commander to pack me off to OCS forthwith.

All officer candidates had the nominal rank of corporal and I had to be promoted from private to corporal. Most of the other 60 or so candidates were of a higher rank. Because the Army had such rigid rules and because I was first on the alphabetic list, I was in charge of the group and was given the special orders and meal allowances. There was some resentment from fellow candidates of higher rank who had waited for months to be shipped off to OCS. OCS was dull and tedious. We lived in hotels in Miami and marched back and forth to classes and meals and PT (exercises).

Bill transferred to Harvard Business School for the last half of the program.

The B-school was infinitely more interesting and challenging than Miami. We traveled from Miami to Boston on ancient railroad cars, definitely last century vintage. We were the first class after the famous Coconut Grove night club fire. Some of the class ahead of us had been injured in the fire and graduated with us in late December of 1942.

In September or October I was assigned to a new B-24 heavy bomb group, the 485th. As one of the original members I stayed with the group until we came back from Italy in 1945 and the group was together again.

Our final training base was a bleak, barren, frozen wasteland in central Nebraska. The planes arrived from the factories in Detroit and Fort Worth. In a few weeks there were about 2000 of us training for combat. The same thing was happening at other bases.

In February of 1944 we passed our final inspection and received our orders to go. The flight crews and some ground support people left in the planes – about 1200 men – and the rest of us boarded a troop train under sealed orders.

Two days and nights on the troop train and we arrived at Camp Patrick Henry in Newport News, Virginia. We still did not know whether we were going to the 8th Air Force in England or the 15th which was moving from North Africa to Italy. After two or three days we boarded Liberty ships and joined an enormous convoy of cargo ships, destroyers and destroyer escorts for our trans-Atlantic crossing.

I don't think any of us had ever been to Europe unless some of the really old guys were there in 1918.

There were about 550 or 600 of us crammed into *SS Gideon Welles*. The passage was rough at first with winter storms and high seas. It was a slow convoy – it took about 25 days from Newport News to Augusta in Sicily. Off the coast of North Africa on April 18, Hitler's birthday, we were attacked by bombers and submarines. One ship was sunk with about 800 on board – no survivors – most of them were the ground personnel of one of our four squadrons.

We anchored in Augusta harbor and traded cigarettes and candy for oranges with people who came out in boats. The rate of exchange was one pack of cigarettes for one orange. They threw the oranges up and we tossed the cigarettes to them. I recall that the oranges were blood oranges, which we had never seen.

From Augusta we came into the Adriatic and docked at Brindisi. From there we took a train to Bari – about 40 or 50 miles – and then by trucks to our new, unfinished base at Venosa, Italy. Since we were the headquarters unit we went ahead of the squadrons.

We learned that the 831st had lost almost all of its ground people when their ship went down and we scrambled to fill in the gaps. The planes and flight crews were in Tunisia for about two weeks while we, the engineers and ordnance corps, readied the base for them.

As the group statistical fighter control officer I made daily reports on the status of the planes and crews to wing headquarters which was not enough to keep me busy so I was also mess officer for the headquarters squadron and assistant adjutant and served on both sides – prosecution and defense – in court-martials for less serious crimes.

At first I shared a tent with three other officers but by October we had had the Italians build us a small house which was more comfortable than the tents in the surprisingly cold Italian winter.

There were spells of bad weather – sometimes as long as a week – when there was no flying but the ground echelon was always busy.

The 485th.

The bomber group flew 187 missions between May 10, 1944 and April 25, 1945. The B-24 was sort of an ugly work horse compared to the glamorous B-17, but it could fly higher and carry heavier loads. The British called them Liberators but we always said B-24. Most of the bombing missions were over heavily defended German forces. Once in a while there would be a milk run to someplace in Yugoslavia to train replacement crews. We lost four or five group commanders to enemy flak and fighters.

The oil refineries in Ploesti, Rumania, were the most eastern targets. Vienna was the northernmost target. These long missions lasted 8 to 10 hours and suffered heavy losses. A typical mission was a formation of 32 planes, eight from each squadron.

Each plane had a crew of 12 on a typical mission. Most of the time the group joined other groups of B-24s.

A total of 10,550 tons of bombs were dropped. The bomb load depended on how much fuel would be needed. Planes and crews were lost to enemy fighters, anti-aircraft fire and equipment malfunctions. Overall we lost 59 planes but some of the crew members parachuted to be rescued by the partisans in Italy and Yugoslavia or be captured by the Germans and join others in the Stalag Lufts.

Most flight personnel returned to the States after 25 missions, but some flew as many as 30. Fresh new crews arrived regularly to replace those that finished their missions.

Each of the four squadrons had 16 crews or about 180 flight personnel. The remaining 400 officers and men were the support staff needed to maintain the planes and all the other things that had to be done – transportation, mess halls, communications, bomb loading, intelligence, etc., etc. – all the things for a community of about 2,800 men.

New Year's Eve 1944

We knew that the war in Europe was coming to a close. German flak and fighters had become much less serious. The last mission in 1944 was almost a milk run to a railroad yard in Northern Italy.

From December 29 to January 7 we were “stood down” because of winter weather. Most of the original flight crews had finished and returned to the States.

Christmas had been a quiet time, but December 31st of 1944 was celebrated with great displays of impromptu fire works. Each airplane carried a supply of red, white and green flares. There was a special pistol for firing them. At midnight the sky was ablaze with all colors arcing across the sky. The ordnance officer reported that every available flare had been exploded. He had to requisition replacements on an emergency requisition.

It was a good thing that no flying was done in the first week of 1945.

Rome

Four of us drove to Rome in a “recon” air command car. It was quite an adventure because the Germans had just retreated and had blown up bridges and mined the shoulders of some of the roads. We carried food from the mess hall and gave it to the hotel staff to prepare for us.

It is difficult to overestimate the pleasure of being in Rome at that time. We were welcomed as liberators and spendthrifts. It was the first time any of us had been to that fabulous city. There were very few other Americans or other Allied soldiers there. On the next trip to Rome the place was crowded with “rest and relaxation” contingents. We did the usual sight-seeing things by day and partied at night.

The Pope gave audiences to two or three hundred in a large hall in the Vatican. Quite a spectacle to the eyes of an Arkansas Methodist.

On my second visit our Jeep was stolen, either by the Italians or other American or British soldiers. Jeeps were very easy to steal. They had no ignition keys, only a switch on the dashboard. You removed the rotor, but my smart thief had extra rotors.

We telexed the base and said we were marooned. It had been raining for several days and the Rome airport was closed to heavy bombers. It took almost a week before we were picked up in a borrowed B-25 – a light bomber – and ferried back to our base.

The liberator sheen had begun to tarnish on our second visit. The Romans were beginning to find us crude and arrogant and disrespectful of the 2000 years of Roman history.

Eleanor Daniels Bronson-Hodge

Eleanor Bronson-Hodge was on the original editorial board that created Woods Hole Reflections, published in 1983 by the Woods Hole Historical Collection. She worked on The Book of Falmouth, published by the Falmouth Historical Society in 1986 to honor Falmouth's tercentennial. And she was on the editorial board of Spritsail until just last winter. Meanwhile she wrote and published her own travel stories and three booklets of memoirs. Here is her description of serving overseas in the Red Cross in 1945 excerpted from Sojourner, People and Places I have Loved, by Eleanor D. B. Hodge published in 1997 by The Village Printer, Falmouth Massachusetts.

The night we Red Cross personnel set sail from New York, overseas bound, was an ordinary sort of night, except to us recruits. The few people out at that late hour tended to their own concerns and paid scant attention to the shadowy line of women, bulky in great coats and boots, toting helmets and gas masks, who clumped into the vans that drove us to the docks.

Soldiers were boarding, faces taut as they stumbled past, shouting out names to the checkers. One leaned down and touched the pier as he stepped onto the gangplank. It symbolized what all of us were feeling, despite the wisecracks and catcalls our presence inspired.

We women are supposed to stay on the "officer" deck; as assimilated lieutenants, we, too, are "ranks"! Mindful of our Red Cross mission to befriend the GI's, not socialize with the brass, we spend time on the lower decks, an experience without parallel in my ordered life. The men are packed solid, barely enough room for the files of walkers who go round and round, as in a prison yard. Whenever a girl passes by, they

let loose a chorus of whistles and wolf calls. If you stop to chat, it's impossible to break away. You conduct a routine conversation: name, hometown why you joined up, how much you are paid – nothing! – and what you get for breakfast on board. It's all part of the job!



Eleanor Daniels, 1944. Courtesy Eleanor Bronson-Hodge.

Later: We didn't dock for another 24 hours, then our big vessel slipped slowly up to the quay. There was a band playing the Beer Barrel Polka, and a few people to greet us even at so early an hour. Much waving and general goodwill.

By train to London, all of us loaded down like so many Tweedledees. Our first K-rations for breakfast. Little evidence of bomb damage in the countryside until we reached London. Block after block demolished or gutted, tidied up now, but useless. Many cellar holes full of water, in case of fires. Cheerful "thumbs up" signs in gaping windows: "Buy Now for Profitable Postwar Development." It seems indecent, somehow, to look in through parlor windows at all the wreckage inside.

But London is a survivor: beefy charladies on their knees, scrubbing down the stoops. Flower stalls on street corners; violets, snowdrops, jonquils, and it's early February! Cabs like oversized prams and cabbies with walrus mustaches. Women in "utility model" cloth coats, carrying small suitcases in lieu of pocketbooks, the better to carry unwrapped purchases, bread that's dirty grey, dark brown toilet paper,

scrawny newspapers. Swaggering British military; slouching Yanks. The preponderance of American uniforms. The blitz damage you cease to notice after the first few days.

My first assignment was a Clubmobile Unit in the Midlands, a B-17 base, 8th Airforce 401st Air Group. There was a village nearby, Deenethorpe, with a manor house lodging a company of Polish soldiers; we were billeted over the Sea Horse Pub. We had a small sitting room with fireplace and grate and a wind-up victrola on which we played the Cornish Rhapsody, endlessly. Three feather beds for the six of us girls. We kept on our woolies to stay warm.

We worked night shifts, feeding and cheering the ground crews as they loaded the planes with bombs for the next sortie. It was odd to stand at midnight under a giant B-17 wing, handing out coffee and doughnuts. We were proud of these doughnuts, for we made them ourselves. We mixed the batter by hand, then fed it into a machine that turned them out by the hundreds. I gave up wearing red nail polish after the first day when the viscous batter stripped it off in the mixing bowl!



The Clubmobile Unit serves doughnuts. Courtesy Eleanor Bronson-Hodge.

Driving a Clubmobile was an art. Since we served several fields in the area, we did a good deal of night driving between hedgerows on narrow winding roads, unnamed for the duration, a tricky business. The gears ground in protest if you didn't shift down properly and starting up in cold weather took diving under the bonnet to activate the choke. There was no petrol gauge on our van, so you could run out of gas, and I did.

Our work was sobering. After a doughnut run, we had breakfast with men who were about to fly over Germany, drop their bomb load, and maybe not make it back...

VE Day, the official one, finally arrived. It had been so long awaited, with so many false alarms, I wondered that people felt like celebrating, but celebrate we did. On this Day of Days, I flew in a B-17 over Germany, our defeated enemy. The Base Commander ordered a series of observational flights for non-combatant personnel and we Red Cross girls went along. I was lucky enough to fly in the lead ship and sit right in the nose of the bomber. For five hours I had my eyes glued to the plexiglas, looking down at cratered fields and rubble-filled ghost towns. From an altitude of 500 feet, the impact of war's destructive wrath was numbing.

We flew low over Aachen, Essen, Cologne, Koblenz, Frankfurt, Mannheim, major targets. Cologne seemed hardest hit, no walls left standing, save the Cathedral, miraculously spared. The bridges over the Rhine were a shambles and the roads were empty of vehicles.

On our return flight, the sight of the English coastline and serene countryside were welcome after the scarred fields and devastated cities we had witnessed. We were exhausted physically and drained emotionally. It had been a day to remember...

Russel McCallum

The following excerpts are from a collection of letters written by Russel McCallum to his father, Edgar McCallum, in Falmouth. They date from late May 1944 to late September 1944. Russel, who did his basic training at Camp Edwards, was a medic attached to the 90th Infantry Division. He took part in the invasion of Normandy in June and stayed with the 90th until the end of European Theater of Operations (ETO). Russel was 30 years old at the time, married with two children, one born while he was in Europe. All letters from soldiers were "censored" in the sense that the writer was forbidden to tell specifically where he was or what, from a military point of view, he was doing. Unless a typewriter could be found (which, surprisingly, it occasionally could) all letters were handwritten. Ink, paper, envelopes, and stamps were valuable commodities for those who wrote home. The letters are the property of Edgar McCallum's grandson, E. Graham Ward, a member of the Spritsail editorial board.

[On occupied French Chateaus]

24 June, 1944

Dear Papa,

...I have just visited an old French chateau which the Germans had occupied for four years, and I thought it might be interesting to you if I told you about it.

The chateau itself is very old – one part of it, a wing being built in 1300 AD, and the rest copied at a later period, some at the time of Louis 14th. While there were signs posted all over it "OFF LIMITS" we couldn't refrain from going thru it – and I'm glad we did. It must have been very beautiful, and great wealth certainly was required to maintain it. Some of the furniture was excellent and all in superb taste...

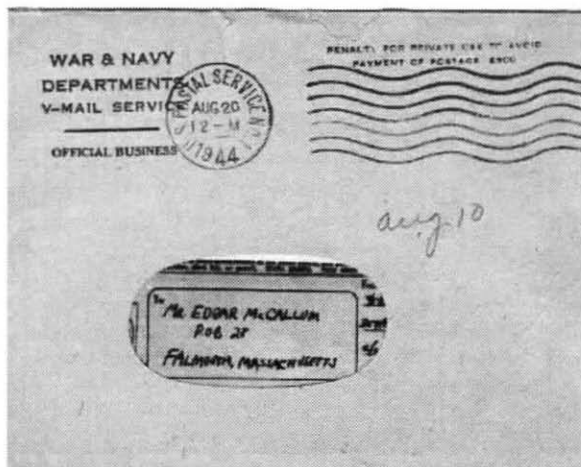
It was so easy to visualize the great pomp and hospitality the chateau halls must have once seen, but now they

were filled with dust and mortar which war's toll had taken of them. Broken glass lay strewn around, and that it had been evacuated quickly was evident.

It had been used by German officers before our paratroopers had rudely, roughly, and terrifyingly removed them June 6. Apparently a great many troops lived around it – the last being a Panzer division for in the outlying buildings were beds, pictures on the walls of fat German fraus and little blond-bedeveled Aryans, and a canteen, I suppose, our German antagonists had often drunk their beer at – before the kick (swift) in the trousers had been applied by paratroopers who know how to be as rough as any Gestapo Hitler can dream of or wish for.

A few graves were seen around with hastily constructed wooden crosses marking them I believe put there by the Germans. Herman, Zilzh, Wilhelm Goebbels, etc., were examples of names, and, unfortunately there were a few American graves with the same cross. In death all men are equal!

Some unseen hand had placed a few daisies and roses at the feet of the graves – and one couldn't help but reflect



V-Mail envelope with cutout for address. Courtesy E. Graham Ward.



Russel McCallum. Courtesy E. Graham Ward.

about the struggle which must have taken place there.

A few German vehicles lay around like a kid's discarded toys, and evidence of war's waste was rampant. Equipment galore, unspent bullets, broken gas masks, old ration cans, German newspapers, American comic strips, a battered English version of the New Testament, and various other examples and

signs of a struggle which like a strong wind came and went leaving in its wake mute evidence of its destruction.

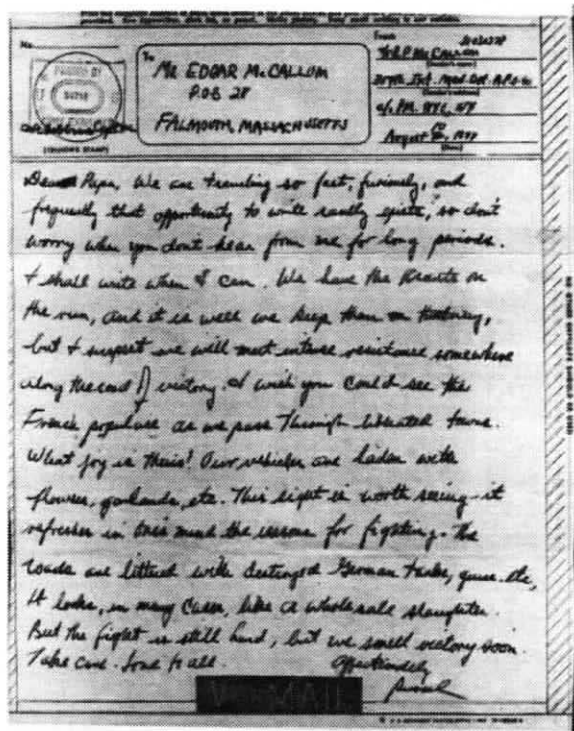
As I walked thru the chateau I spied a couple of French pictures about 4" x 6" I dearly desired, and I went so far as to cut their cords and take them with me, but I couldn't help but feel like a vandal and I am not in accord with the idea "to the victor belong the spoils" — furthermore altho' no part of my decision to leave them there intact — I discovered that the woman who owned the chateau was still around, and of course, it was her property I would have been taking.

I later talked to her, and she spoke excellent English, due, perhaps, to her mother who was an American (and probably supplied the money for the chateau's purchase). She had been there since the German occupation and in her enigmatic manner seemed glad enough the Yanks had come.

It is hard to tell about these French, however, German occupation seems to have done something to their spirit and, perhaps, the freedom we bring them is like a sudden burst of fresh air after having lived in and breathed sordid, sultry air.

I asked her about the German officers who had occupied her chateau, and she said — and it is true enough — they had all been most correct in their demeanor and manner.

I asked her if they had ever given her any food, and she said, "Heavens no, they took everything they could get their hands on." Of course, she had dealings with them and was visited by the German major occasionally, and he told her, when he finally left — he was humiliated



Handwritten V-Mail from Russel McCallum to his father. Courtesy E. Graham Ward.

to say so — yet he couldn't understand why he had been unable to convince her of the trueness of the German ideology.

There is no question that many of our foe are cultured and brilliant, but how distorted their minds have become, and no sooner is a war lost than they prepare for another. This must not be allowed to happen again...

Love,
Russel

[On fear-fueled stress]

July 28, 1944

Dear Papa,

...As you probably now know I have a new job. Whether it is a permanent one remains to be seen but it consists of running a rest camp a few odd miles back of the lines for men who are battle fatigue casualties — yet not bad enough to be evacuated to a hospital. ...I thought at first it would be easy, but insofar as running around, etc., one is always on their toes, and the hardest thing about it is talking to these men, impressing upon them the necessity of going back and endeavoring to instill into them some Faith and Courage. It is particularly hard when one knows as do I what the front is like. And when a man loses his nerve he has a hard job finding it again, altho' the man who is fundamentally sound will snap out of it and realize his duty and obligation and accept the responsibilities. What I hate most is to see these young kids around eighteen or nineteen, comparatively new to Army life — and completely new to battle. It is so hard for them, and the shock to their systems is untenable to all they have ever known or seen or expected to see.

One young chap who is now with me and returning to duty today was when he first came in a pathetic old boy, but a chaplain has talked to him, I have, and our

medical captain, and he's all set to go back. He remarked to me he — when he returns to the States — would never be able to tell his family he had been afraid and had had to return to an aid station. We convinced him he had absolutely nothing to be ashamed of, that we all were afraid — indeed, we'd be strange if we weren't, but I'm sure when he goes back he will be a first class soldier, but as I remarked before the first shock to his nervous system was more than he could take, and, of course, he is just one of many. Some of the boys will return again and again — that is not their fault — they can't take it, but I always try to subtly let them know their buddies in the front lines are taking it and that they are letting them down when they quit...

Affectionately,
Russel

August 23, 1944

(France, handwritten on onionskin)

Dear Papa,

I hope the first good drink of brandy I have just gulped in a toast of good health and long life to my loved ones will also stimulate my limited mental capacities and enable me to tell you a little about recent experiences. I don't think the history of warfare knows any exactly parallel situation, and altho' I don't doubt that such similar undertakings have occurred I'm sure none of them have been on such a large scale — so grandiose or noble in conception or undertaking (end quote). Naturally, I am not in a position to tell you about the military situation, but I don't think it is necessary to elaborate about that in endeavoring to describe what we have experienced. Suffice it to say I have just come through a fierce battle with God's help an unscathed but well-experienced boy — man, now!

For two days I have slept, talked, laughed, joked and worked with Germans. In our aid station has been a

conglomeration of the world's nationalities. Russians, Polish, French, German, Canadian, English, and Americans – all working with one accord, one purpose – that of saving German lives, evacuating them to the rear, braving continuous fire, treacherous sniper fire to save lives. Parts of the battle field would be raging in the murderous intensity of battle heat while in others our artillery would be stopped while we would go into the German lines, their aid stations to carry their literally stinking wounded to our lines, and then to our hospitals. I have seen German aid men run under the terrible power of our deadly artillery with no more than a Red Cross arm band – and rescue an American wounded soldier.

But Americans have risked their precious necks to evacuate the Germans. It has been unique. It is almost impossible to describe, because while there was no exact surrender there seems to have been a tacit understanding between our troops.

Through the limited capacity of our own small aid station on the front lines we have evacuated to the rear echelons over four hundred German wounded. No American soldier could have been accorded greater care – innumerable life-saving bottles of plasma, medical supplies, etc. were expended in traditional American sportsmanship to help, help, help the suffering. The casualties were so great we naturally had to have German medical help of which there was ample. We had with us two German doctors, two German litter teams, a few German medical technicians. I myself made countless trips to their aid station which was, I think, then in our territory – and with our captain and our sergeant we organized their wounded – put them in their trucks, our trucks and jeeps and made countless trips back and forth between the lines.

The situation was such that around their aid station were countless soldiers who were and were not prisoners.

Fire arms of all kinds – and no American troops near by. Faith and faith alone between mankind made all this possible. Of course, the situation was such that had we been shot it would have gone hard for their soldiers, and at last we three medics loaded their soldiers hanging around the German aid station on a truck and had them drive themselves to our lines as prisoners. Chaos and disorganization of all kinds was rampant – and the additional fact that none of us understood each other made it more difficult than ever. I am quite proud of the job we did evacuating their men to safety and hospitals. The days were not long enough. We worked night and day. Often I would drive a jeep with only a German aidman as a companion back and forth between lines. Altho' I must confess I felt much better back at our own station.

Oh, it was tragically pitiful to see these wounded. Frightful! Unbelievable wounds – and the situation was such we had to have German medical help. Of course, also, it was German wounded we were attempting to save. But with us – the Red Cross – it was not a question of killing – rather of saving lives – even at the cost of our own.

I became quite friendly with a few of the Germans, but I have no use for their officers as a whole. I find them arrogant, expect to be waited on hand and foot, and rough in their treatment of their men. We had an S.S. Doctor who was most amusing – in fact funny as the deuce, but what a liar. We couldn't trust him so we sent him back to the rear – even German troops distrust an S.S. man. On the other hand we had a hell of a good German captain (doctor) who came from Munich and he couldn't have been a better chap. I hated to see him leave, but the war goes on!

Knocked out German tanks were as common as the daisies of the field, and German dead strewn about like autumn leaves. They fought bravely, savagely,

hopelessly. Some rather than submit to capture killed themselves. One, Cy was telling me this morning, said it was a disgrace to be captured so, and when an American said, "Okay buddy, I'll make it easy for you," he promptly stood up and waited to be shot. But, of course, he wasn't. Americans are brave fighters but not instinctively killers.

In our aid station we naturally talked to those who spoke English and politics was discussed — but it was a hopeless discussion. They still believe they are going to win the war, still believe their own propaganda, and are actually fighting on hope alone. They pin the greatest faith on their new secret weapon which is yet to come — and one German was terrified to go to England because of it. Maybe! I myself believe they have yet something up their sleeves in the form of a larger, more destructive super robot bomb, but that it can conceivably alter the course of the war is untenable in thought. On the other hand, there are many who know the war is lost. Many of them are terrified of becoming American prisoners because they have heard that we turn them over to the Russians. They prefer death! Such stupidity, but it prolongs the war as long as they believe it!

It would take a novel greater in scope and length than "Gone with the Wind" to write all we have experienced. This is just a swift kaleidoscopic impression.

As far as German equipment is concerned there is nothing I couldn't have had had I wished it. I already have a German pistol, but I don't know what in hell to do with it, because, of course, we do not carry weapons. Money, French francnotes litter the ground like a heavy dew. I'm practically a millionaire — or could be if I wanted it. The catch is that we can't send it home, and somehow or other I have an aversion to anything which is German.

I had to laugh at the stupidity of war, tho', because as I say there were, at least, seven nationalities all fighting yet

helping to save lives. And few of them knowing what in hell they were fighting for. Yet tomorrow or soon again we will be fighting bitterly.

The peace of Europe will be a tremendous undertaking. Everyone hates everyone else. Succinctly put I must say Europeans give me a pain in the ass. It is almost a hopeless job of correcting the terrible situation.

Well, old boy, I must stop, but now you understand why I sometimes don't write frequently. I had mail from home for three days before I could find a chance to read it. However, take a chance and write me a letter, will you? I find it difficult to understand why you write so infrequently sometimes. Certainly under circumstances more difficult than yours I write.

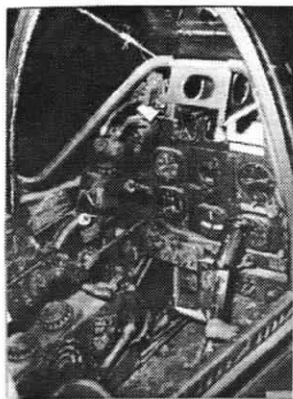
Love to all.
Devotedly,
Russel

Albert Wilson

Albert Wilson contributed an earlier article to *Spritsail*, Vol. 18, No. 2, describing his boyhood summers in an Aladdin cottage in Woods Hole. He wrote that after the Great Hurricane of 1938 flooded the cottage, his parents just hosed it out as if it were a boat. "Just three years later, the country was at war and suddenly, without transition, childhood and adolescent priorities evaporated... Only a few years away from building balsa models I was learning to fly a fighter plane. There was one short leave at the cottage with none of my friends in town and then, overseas."



Al Wilson & P51D, Chengkung, China, Field elevation 6,400 ft., faster landing speeds. Courtesy Albert Wilson.



P-51 Cockpit. Courtesy Albert Wilson.

Al Wilson begins this story in July of 1945 as he is about to fly a new fighter plane, the P-51K, from India over the "Hump" to Chengkung in southwest China. The Hump was a 10,000 foot high section of the Himalayan Mountains in the northeast corner of Burma, a range so steep that planes had to circle upwards several times to

gain enough altitude before they approached it. Al was part of Major General Claire Chennault's 16th Fighter Squadron.

Mission to Hanoi

In early July of 1945 I was in Assam, India poised to fly a brand new P-51K back over the "Hump" to China. As I sat in my cockpit waiting to take off, an incredible celebration erupted on the airbase. Flare pistols were being fired into the sky. One of the latrines was on fire. Word had arrived that some sort of revolutionary bomb had been dropped on Japan and the war was probably over.

The next day, back in Chengkung, I discovered that the 16th Fighter Squadron was still being relocated to a base on the South China coast, with the help of a Combat Cargo Squadron. Their C.O. was desperate for new pilots and six of us made a swift decision that the fastest route back to the States might well be as pilots of returning transport planes. Two days later I was in the co-pilot seat of a C-47, bound for Hanoi with a cadre of OSS men in the cabin.

By then, the second A-bomb had fallen and a cease-fire was supposedly in effect. But there were a

few uneasy moments as we approached the heavily defended Hanoi airfield, wondering whether the Japs had actually got the word. We landed without incident, though our hosts still had all their weapons. A truck was mobilized to transport the OSS men into town and the flight crew hitched a ride to the Metropole Hotel long enough to have a meal.

Wartime Mementos

It had been nearly 60 years since I last wore my WW II uniform. Then a letter came from a man whose hobby was collecting and exhibiting memorabilia from former members of Chennault's Fourteenth Air Force in China.

Like most veterans, I had a collection of stuff, most of it somewhere in the attic. Old uniform shirts I couldn't button anymore and a flight jacket that only my wife could wear. I still had my Pilot's Information file on the P-51, a Samurai sword, an Air Medal and some equally insignificant ribbons. Why hang on to them, I wondered? Mementos that really had meaning only to myself. Things that a wife or future generations would feel too guilty to throw out? So I sent the guy a list. He mailed me a check for \$1,000 and I boxed up everything and shipped it off. All I kept were my pilot's wings.



16th Fighter Squadron Roommates (Al Wilson lower right.) Courtesy Albert Wilson.

George F. Kelly

Spritsail editor Jane A. McLaughlin interviewed George F. Kelly for the following story.

George Kelly was working with Bostwick "Buck" Ketchum on the antifouling project at WHOI during 1941- 1942 when he enlisted with U.S. Marine Corps. He was activated in December 1942 and sent for six months training at Quantico Base before being sent to Neuse River Marine Base at Wilmington, N.C., where it was determined he would train as a Communications Officer. However, since the Marine Corps did not have its own Communications Training Center, he was sent to those centers of each of the other three branches of the Service: the Army in New Jersey, the Navy in California, and the Air Force in Wisconsin.

In November 1943, he was sent to California from where he went to join the Aircraft Carrier *Wasp* as a 1st Lt. Squadron Communications Officer at Ulithi Atoll, a general Transport Base in the Caroline Islands of the Pacific.

At Ulithi, the *USS Wasp* was berthed alongside the Carrier *USS Randolph* in the same harbor as the carriers *USS Hornet* and *USS Essex*. In March 1945, a Kamikaze pilot bombed the *USS Randolph* with a loss of about 250 U.S. men. The fleet, including the three remaining aircraft carriers and numerous other vessels, later bombed several locations, including Iwo Jima, Okinawa and mainland Japan. They were the first to bomb Tokyo. It was estimated that about 650 Japanese planes were destroyed on the ground.

It was noted that the destroyed planes did not burn because the Japanese were out of fuel.

The war twisted many lives together over brief intense days and over long years. After the war, George Kelly obtained a Masters Degree in Vertebrate Zoology at Cornell University before returning to Woods Hole to work at the U.S. Bureau of Commercial Fisheries in 1950 as a manager of one of the Fisheries research projects. He became a long time Sippewissett resident and served on the Falmouth Conservation Commission for 18 years. In the mid-1950s he learned that a new colleague at the fisheries, biologist Fred E. Lux, who would become another long time Falmouth resident, had also been based at Ulithi when the *USS Randolph* was bombed.

Dick Brooks

Nantucket native Dick Brooks recorded this piece about Black Widow fighter bombers coming home from Europe for the Cape and Islands NPR radio station:

"Sometime after World War II when they were bringing all the men home and bringing the planes home, the main navigation point coming in to America was the Conselin tower in Madaket.

My recollection is of the Black Widow fighter bombers coming back from Europe. You'd hear them but not see them for maybe 15 to 20-30 minutes before they arrived.

And then they'd come into view and there were literally hundreds of them with the engines droning. You could actually feel the ground shake with the vibration there were so many of these planes. And it would actually turn the sky dark. There were just hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of them in formation.

It was an eerie but proud feeling."