

Charles **Gallagher** - August 27, 1997

For the record, Margaret Weaver interviewing at the 1997 **95th** Bomb Group reunion in Portland, Oregon. First, what were your dates of service with the **Army** Air Corps?

March 4, 1943 to July 15, 1945.

And what about with the **95th** Bomb Group?

Early July 1944 to January, 1945.

And what squadron were you in?

336th.

What was your job?

I was an aerial engineer, top turret gunner.

Let's get go back to the very beginning and tell me where you went into the service and how old you were.

I was just 21 and went into Los Angeles Induction Center as a draftee. From there I went to Salt Lake City and then to Sheppard Field, Texas for basic training. After basic training I went to AM school, Aircraft Mechanic School. Finished that. Went to Tyndall Field, Florida for gunnery school. Finished that. Went home to Los Angeles for 10 days • delay **enroute**. Then to Salt Lake City for a crew assignment. From there I went to Dallas, Texas for air crew training. Then to Camp Kilmer New Jersey. Boarded the British tramp HMS Rangitata. Went to Liverpool. From Liverpool, we went to the Wash for further gunnery training and to Horham, **95th** Bomb Group, AF Station 119. Flew 35 missions. Finished January 2⁸, 1945. Hit some reassignment station, back to the States, and then on to **Santa** Ana and out of the service on July 15, 1945.

Quite a career. During all your training, and you went several places for training, did you have any memorable training experience?

Well, basic training at Sheppard Field was **kind** of tough. I remember one day we killed nine guys on the drill field - physical training. I learned a lot about the aircraft in a short time and then of course, the gunnery at Tyndall Field. I have always maintained that it didn't take a year to train us to be combat ready; it took them a year to convince us that there was a good chance we weren't coming back. If you were worried about coming back, you couldn't do your job. I had some great experiences with the different people. I had a few nice trips to London. I went to Southport for a flak ~~check~~ ^{check} and met some real nice English people there. Later on I sponsored some English people from London to the United

States. I've had a great life! I got distracted and got off track, didn't I?

No, nothing is off track. Tell me a little bit about **your** crew.

Our crew was Jack **Cottner** and Val Matthews, both flight officers at the time. My radio man was ^{Ptacek} **Ray** Patasic, waist gunner was Ken Barning, ball gunner - Don Matthews. The other waist gunner was Dan Matthews, twin to Don. Both of these fellows had enlisted at 16 and I don't know to this day how they ended up on the same airplane. And then our tail gunner was Carroll Watts. The bombardier was Lowell Wagner and **Al Hillman** was the ~~engineer~~ **navigator**. Unfortunately, another guy stole our fantastic navigator. Funny we had no contact ^{with} ~~from Tim, Al Moslund;~~ ^{Moslund} but a year ago I got **looking** on a phone disc, found the name and it was him. He was supposed to be here this year but he didn't make it. After 10 missions, they took the tenth man off the crew and that would have been Dan Matthews, the ^{youngest} young - well the only married enlisted man on the crew. We had a very,

very compatible crew • the pilot, co-pilot, we trusted totally. There's ~~three of~~ ^{SIX} us alive today.

Did you keep up after the war?

In 1950, I made a tour of the United States and saw all of the fellows. I would call them on the 28th of January every year, which was our last mission. Then in, ~~oh~~ probably, 1970, I dropped out of the habit, but then I got back with them and I still call all of them on ~~the~~ 28th of January. Ray ~~Patashnik~~ ^{PLASHNIK}, Val ~~Matthews~~ ^{PLACEK} and I used to go to meetings, reunions. ~~Ray~~ died two years ago. Don ~~Matthews~~ was at Fort Lauderdale. I still write occasionally. I'm funny that way; I keep track of people.

Well, tell me about your very first mission over there.

Oh, scared. I forget exactly where it was. It was not a heavily fortified target and we didn't get any flak damage • we survived. Had cotton mouth. Our crew was a flak magnet, If we were on a mission, we'd get flak. No fighters, only once or twice did we get fighters. Most of the guys were glad to see us fly, because if there was flak, we'd get it • they didn't. One time after a mission that was a little rougher than usual, I started at the nose and I counted over 200 holes by the time I got to the wings • I quit counting.

Did you ever have any emergency landings or have to ditch or anything like that?

No, we led a very calm life. We had three of the guys hit, but none of them got a Purple Heart. My ball gunner got hit three times in one day. The pilot & navigator got hit by the same burst. It tore up the pilot's rudder pedal, cut the sole of his shoe, and cut his sock • but didn't break the skin. The flak had gone down through the navigator's chute harness, down the slot of the flak ~~harness~~ ^{suit} took his seat, ~~his~~ uniform, hit his ~~suit~~ ^{flak} ~~but~~ didn't hit him.

The ball gunner, he was always worried about oxygen and if the regulator blinked wrong, he'd crawl out. This one day, he crawled out and he got hit in the back and he went down. The waist gunner went over to see what he could do. He got hit in the leg, and while Ken was tearing the clothes apart so he could get down to see what happened, he got hit in the chest. Ken told him to get back in that turret and get away from him. Don never again got out of the turret in flight. Believe it or not, he weighed 165 pounds. He would go in with his chest chute, he had his flak suit and put it on the door, he took the walk-around bottle in and he took his emergency kit in. It was packed, but he wasn't getting out of that turret anymore.

Tell me a little bit about your job, what your job was like.

Well, theoretically, I was responsible for the aircraft. I'd do the ~~ground~~ ^(the air crew's) pre-flight and then in flight if anything went bad, I was supposed to do what I could to get it back in service. And, of course, I was the top **turret gunner**. One thing I do remember after that one mission where I mentioned we had so many hits, we lost control cables and things like that. When we got over the target on the next mission, the pilot told me that our rudder cables were binding up. I went back through the aircraft and found that when the ground crew ^{strung} string new cables, ~~they take and tape~~ ^{the cables} each side of the pulleys so that the cables stay in position while they get it rigged. Well, they missed one set of tape and it was getting in the pulley cluster and binding up. I finally found that and it was in the back just before the tail gunner. It took me quite a while to find it. I reached back and tapped Carroll for the signal that I wanted his headset. He ignored me. I reached back and tapped him again

and he reached back and slapped at me. As soon as he went back to looking out the rear end I stole his mike leads and plugged them in. **All** I heard was "Here they come again." I took off for the turret - for the front - got up in the turret and by that time the fighters had gone. I was going to go back and check that tape again and I was feeling around for my walk-around bottle and couldn't find it, So, I called "Has anyone seen my walk-around bottle?" The radio man said, "Well, a minute ago a streak went through here and when the streak was gone the walk-around bottle was here." I wasn't going to go through that bomb bay ~~with~~ ^{it was out of sight & gone} a walk-around bottle. But we got hit very seldom by **fighters**. We were fortunate.

So you didn't have that much fighter action to shoot at?

No. No. I didn't fire on an enemy aircraft in the 35 **missions**. **Like I say**, we were **flak** magnets - we never attracted a **fighter**. **Another** interesting incident we had was when we went on a shuttle mission to Russia and ended up in Italy. We were waiting for the **Southern France** invasion and our bombardier got malaria while we were there. Well, we went one month without flying a mission. One day we got a spare gunner for a mission and he came onto the crew and, looking around scared to death, he said "**What's** wrong with you guys, aren't you scared?" We **said** yea. "But you're talking," he said, "our crew never talks, never does anything." So we went on a mission and after the flak area we have an oxygen check and we didn't hear from the waist gunner. The radio man looked back there and this guy was down. He went back and couldn't see any blood or anything so he turned the oxygen up on emergency and the guy came up fighting. Ray shuts him off again

and out he goes. He looks him over and finds this little sponge cap in the oxygen mask had popped out. They'd freeze and you'd squeeze them to break the ice but it popped out and he didn't know it. So here he was breathing ^{ambient air} ~~ambient~~ at 25,000. Ray ^{the sponge} ~~crushed it,~~ put it back in, gave him more oxygen and he came up fighting. Ray turned him off and looked and his eyes were frozen shut. So he put his thumbs on his eyes, thawed ^{his eyes} ~~his eyes~~ ^{lids} ~~out~~ and gave him his oxygen. He thought we were the greatest crew **that** ever was.

Well, which would you consider your most memorable mission?

One to Hamburg. We had 20 minutes of **flak** that was just like riding on a real rough washboard road. On that and the following mission we lost two wing panels, four engines --they had to change four engines, nine fuel ^{cells} ~~panels~~, nine windows, landing gear hydraulic system, few other things • I can't remember it all. Those ground crew people, they were out of this world. They worked themselves to death.

Did you have just one crew assigned to your airplane?

Unfortunately, we weren't assigned to an airplane because if we flew one it probably didn't fly the next day. But they **never griped**, never griped.

Were you the liaison with the ground crew?

Yeah, uh huh.

Then you got to know them pretty well?

Became acquainted, yes. At that stage of the game, they weren't interested in becoming friends, because they had lost so many people. So you were just a body, which had to be.

I did contact one of my crew chiefs in Nebraska after the war was over, but I couldn't

locate the others.

You mentioned being on that shuttle **run** to **Russia**. Tell me more about that.

Well, we bombed **Gdynia** up on the, I guess the **North** Sea, and landed in Poltava. It was an 11-1/2 hour mission. Air crews weren't really conscientious in maintaining legal landing procedures because you always kept a few miles higher air speed on landing than was necessary. When we went into Poltava that day • you fly a circle and you land behind other guys • the guy ahead of us got idiotic and decided to fly by the book and we ended up **right** on his tail. When he touched down, he didn't fly by the book, he gunned his engines and created a tremendous airfoil. When we flew into it, we turned 90 degrees • our wing tip was within a few feet of the ground. The Russians were quite interested in our activities. We got straightened out and went around again. We had never landed on a metal strip before. We didn't know anything about this stuff. We landed and it sounded like the world was coming apart. The metal strips ~~take and~~ **roll up** in front of your wheels • bang, bang, bang, bang. So that was quite an experience. Since we were late landing, we were late getting over to get our ^{spiritus} **"spirits fermenti"** (?) After every mission, we got 20 **cc's** of booze. We got over to this table and there was no medical personnel **there**. Everybody else had gone to debriefing. No they had gone to their quarters, their tents. We went over there and they had those enamel tin cups that looked exactly like 20 **cc's**, but were probably about an eighth of a pint. The other people had the same trouble judging too. There **was** a little gully **between** there and the tent and we walked across bodies going to our tent. The next morning when we got up, there was a guy still laying in our tent entrance. He had

gotten more than his 20 cc's. We were late to briefing • so we were really flying blind. We went into ^{Kracow} ~~Poltava~~ and on the way out of ^{Kracow} ~~Poltava~~, let's see the sequence now, when we got out of the target area, I always looked back and there was a bomb hanging in the **back**. The fuse was armed and one ring on the rack had not been properly latched. I called the bombardier and ball gunner and they got back in there and they were standing with one leg on this beam and the other on the outside door hinge. They were standing there shaking **that** bomb trying to get it to release. We're flying at 20,000 or so and all of a sudden that bomb released and the fin caught the ball gunner's glove, took his heated glove silk glove and wristwatch - but he didn't go. Shortly after **that** I looked out and there were nine Foch Wolf 190s coming in on us. I used the intercom and was told "fire when in range". We had a ranging site • a computing ~~site~~ ^{sight sight} • so I set it up for Foch Wolf **190s**, which would be about a 30 foot wing span. When they came in range, I started firing. All the other guys started firing, except the tail gunner. He said "what are you shooting at? I can't see it." Anyway, we fired and pretty soon those darn airplanes turned into **ME210s**. That's an airplane with about a 70 foot wing span. We reset the site and started firing. All of a sudden they turned into nine B-17s. Fortunately, with the ranging ~~site~~ ^{sight}, we were firing very low. To make it worse shortly after that, it came over the radio that one of the B17 outfits had been hit by 50 calibers. As it turned out, they were 100 miles away. When we got back to debriefing, somehow or other, we forgot **to mention** that. Nobody said anything about where all the ammo went or anything. Several months later • we had a crew chief who cut hair • we'd all get together and yak • war stories and that kind of stuff •

was it? He would sell us bootleg, illegal Well, it was real liquor but maybe \$15.00 or something like that. Finally he was telling us one time, "**You** know, you're not dumb. You see that you're paying three or four times as much for your dinner as that Canadian is; you're paying three or four times as much as that Britisher is; you can afford it and they can't and they deserve it." And that's how he justified his black market stuff. We met the waitress there and we met Michael ^{Koulophus} ~~Colophus~~ was his name ^{and} ~~met~~ his wife. I went back to England in the 50s as a tech rep for an aircraft company • supporting a patrol squadron for the RAF Coast Command. I used to go down to London every month • I had to go down for reports and things with the RAF and Coast Command. Then I'd go over to Soho and visit Michael's wife's sister and we would have a delightful time just sitting around talking • they had kids, oh 5 and 7. Eventually, I sponsored them into the States. And **they** just retired two years ago. We saw them last year. They are in Palm Desert now. All the strands that you've run across • I'm the lucky one.

We are almost at the end of our tape, **I'm sorry** to say. It has gone so quickly. Is there something else you would like to put on the record for us?

I was very, very fortunate. I wasn't married. I had ten months overseas. Two years and something in the service. When the point system **came out** I had a number of air battles • they were worth five points a piece • I had 75 points. I got out the 15th of July before the war was over. I went back to work at my old job July 30, 1945 • the same day that I had gone to work for the company in 1941. The Army service indirectly got me into the experimental armament business. I did all the armament development for **Lockheed** Aircraft

**gunneries, did rocket work, did high speed track tests all because of the Army experience -
43-1/2 years of heaven.**

I think that was a wonderful career and a wonderful life.

Oh, I'm still having it. 

I know you are. **Thank** you for putting this on record.

Glad to — very glad. I'm not very good at talking — I run on.

Oh, I **think** you have given us a wonderful.....