

#25 (Tab 18)

Morton Terrill

OPTION # 2

(O.K. to be checked out but no copies)

Morton Neil Terrill  
December 12, 1918 to December 20, 2001  
Beloved Husband, Father, Grandfather and Friend

Flight of the Fortress  
By Morton Neil Terrill

It is cold this morning and dirty and gray,  
We're awakened at four, there is a target today:  
We dress in fur boots and long underwear,  
We'll soon be heading for the frozen air.  
As we hike to chow before dawn's first light,  
I think of the mission and yesterdays fight.  
We pasted them good, but in return,  
Had seventeen's fall, explode and burn.

At mess we gorge on one of war's treats,  
Fresh fried eggs over easy, delicious to eat.  
With toast and bacon we enjoy the repast,  
Knowing full well that it may be our last.  
At briefing we learn the plan of the day,  
Note weather and bomb load and ETA.  
The strike will be deep into Germany's heart,  
We synchronize watches at missions start.

We head for the line and board our ship,  
Ten focused guys, too busy to quip.  
A job's to be done, this we will do,  
Engines are started and we wait for our cue.  
The lead ship taxis out for the take of strip,  
A flare arcs skyward to begin our trip.  
One by one we take to the air,  
It's our turn now and we follow them there.

England's green falls away in day's new light,  
Our group assembles for the coming fight.  
Higher and higher we climb in the skies,  
And now we're approaching enemies eyes.  
At thirty thousand we level off,  
No place to be for a man who's soft.  
Everything is frozen at fifty below,  
But the flak and the fighters the German's will throw.

There'll be no surprise now, no turning back,  
We'll follow our course into a hell of flak.  
Their gunners aims adjust to our height,  
Black bursts of shells turn day into night.  
Fighters attack and roll through our midst,  
Spewing death from cannon winged tips.  
Our gunners respond with patterned aim,  
And planes fall in this most deadly game.

We tighten formation, replacing lost crews.  
And concentrate only on paying our dues.  
We bore ever onward through murderous skies  
To put an end to all of Hider's lies.  
Fires illuminate our target just ahead,  
A familiar monument to the dying and dead.  
But all such thoughts are put "on hold".  
As bomb bay doors open to drop our load.  
The happiest words I've heard today,  
The bombardier's shout of "Bombs Away!"  
With the group we turn for the flight back,  
A long running battle of fighters and flak.

There's a ticking clock in the soul of man,  
Of his fourteen mission "expected life span"  
I've already gone very far beyond that,  
And I watch another Fort become a stat.  
Over France the Krauts finally leave us alone.  
Our old 17 takes us strongly toward home.  
We break out cookies which taste so fine,  
I'll save mine for the guys on the "line".

"Well done, guys" I'll tell the crew  
Tonight it'll be laughter, women, and brew,  
We'll sing "Bless Them All" and "Lilli Marlene"  
A fun respite from a nightmarish scene.  
We finally "touch down", tired and spent,  
And study the holes the Germans have rent,  
We relax and debrief and feel life anew,  
I'm just happy to be twenty-two.

The party that night is wildly insane,  
A packed house of fliers who feel no pain.  
A few hours later I collapse into my bed,  
And smile a memory of jokes that were said.  
Then a serious thought creeps into my mind,  
That I actually like this life of mine.  
Not the killing, or bombing, or seeing men die,  
But flying, and doing the best I can try.

Tomorrow I hope to add to this poem,  
For the sole benefit of the folks back home.  
I make no pretense of poesy and art  
Just a B-17 pilot speaking from the heart.

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