

3

#3

Vern Holmqueist

(Stories 8,9,10,11)

OPTION # 1

(O.K. to Check-out & O.K to Make Copies)

To Joe Conroy,

Feb.

8

The 390th non-com watering hole was affectionately known as the "Bitchin Post". I have forgotten just how many gallons of beer were in those high iron bound wooden kegs but they had to be rolled up ramps from which they gravity fed those long handled dispensing pumps. It seems these kegs must have been at least four feet in diameter and would have taken more than one stout hearted man to handle it but one night one of these kegs was rolled from its position at the Bitchin Post to the 568th squadron area, the iron bands around the keg had laid an easily followed trail. On the CO's orders the squadron was restricted to base until someone confessed to the theft.

There was another theft of note I remember; You will remember those little round heating stoves with their fire brick linings that the Englished had furnished to heat our quanset huts, they didn't heart much of anything. The sheet metal shop on the base made up a few stoves which did put out sufficient heat and these were put into the community buildings first. One night as four men were seriously engaged in a game of Bridge in the Red Cross Club one of these stoves whose heat was much appreciated by the players disapeared. It seems that three men wearing gloves had entered the room, one lifted the stove pipe and the other two walked off with the stove, fire and all. The theft was not noticed by the players until the room got uncomfortably cold.

On one of those rare evenings when the sky was clear and the temperature reasonably warm I was taking my time, stopping every few feet to watch the display in the sky overhead, Jerry planes were overhead and the search lights were following them, the arc of shining tracer bullets from our anti-aircraft guns made interesting patterns in the sky, I was headed for my bunk after my duties were done on the flight line and in no hurry. Just on the other side of the hedge row bordering our squadron area was a new man in the squadron who had been put on guard duty, suddenly I hear the command "Halt" and I looked at a 45 in trembling hands of a man just as frightened as I was. After I succeeded in identifying myself we sat on a little curb and puffed on cigarettes until the shaking subsided.

Then there was the night when one of our officers, prompted by shell shock or booze, I never found out which, with gun in hand made

2/20/01

#9
V. Holmquist Box 436

Mt. Angel Or. 97362

To Joe Conroy,

I have often said one of the most pitiful sights of WW11 was that of US service men returning to their base after a two day pass in London, unshaven, red-eyed, financially broke and a bit shaky, hanging onto those straps on an over crowded train.

During the blackout finding ones way through the London streets was quite an effort in itself, "Just walk straight ahead till you come to the round-a-bout" what the hell is a round-a-bout. Fog so thick it seemed you could take a knife and cut out a cube of it, along with the blackout and with a shielded torch (that's English for flashlight) trying to follow the street curb, and then there always seemed to be a helpful Englishman declaring that he was going to where you wanted to go and offering his help, and after a few blocks he would say "I turn off here but where you want to go is just around the corner" and then he would stick his hand out expecting a tip, and when you got around the corner you were no where near where you wanted to go, it happened to me and probably you .

One morning after a very heavy fog the morning London paper reported "Jerry planes were over the city again last night and dropped their bombs, this morning they were heard to hit with a soft thud" Wartime London was just not a place to rest up.

On the trip back to our base on a very crowded train with those, I should say us, disappated service men hanging from those overhead straps and swaying with the movement of the train was not a pretty sight. On the short rail line to our base the pedestrians and motor vehicles had the right away at the road crossings and the train conductor had to get off to raise the barrier that crossed the tracks, before the train could proceed and after clearing the intersection the train again stopped while the barrier was lowered again. At our depot we left the train and boarded one of those 4X4 army all purpose trucks with the benches along each side and the canvas cover which took us on to our base.

One night under the described circumstances while we were halted at the base guard post one of our Group officers, Major Harry Price of the 390th handed boxes of crackers to the men in the truck, I eagerly opened a box and took out a handful, I found the crackers rather tasteless but welcome, a religious un=sophisticate, how was I to know it was Jewish unleavened ceremonial bread, Forgive me Major Price.

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Joe

Eldon, I did not include this in what I sent to Joe but as long as I'm sitting at this machine I thought you might enjoy it.

You probably remember the name "Picadilly Commandos" I was walking down the street one day while on one of my London passes when I see this long que of women lined up three deep for half a block waiting to get into this shop, while I stood there wondering why a Catholic Priest stood next to me and said "Isn't that the most pitiful sight you ever saw? When I was able to see the big sign in the shop window it read "Just received, fresh shipment of gentlemens goods, three for two and six" , talk about wartime shortages.

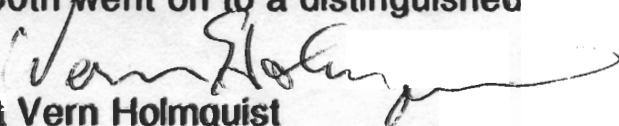
As you can see I had not intended to send you this fearing I might offend but _____

#10

To Joe Conroy,

The 390th Bomb Group had assembled during the early Spring of 1943 at Geiger Field, Spokane, Washington and then to Great Falls, Montana where the group was split into four squadrons, the 568th, 569th, 570th, and the 571st, the 569th was stationed in Cut Bank, Montana which still had much of its Wild West image. Captain Tuttle and eleven other officers had been had been inducted into the Blackfeet Indian tribe and Lt. George Nelson had been presented with a small brown bear cub by a park ranger. The bear cub was promptly named Roscoe and was the official mascot of the 569th which became known as the "Bombing Bruins" Roscoe was flown to England in the radio room of Lt. Beckers B-17.

Roscoe had the run of the 390th base and his choice of bunks he chose to sleep on. He would take a stroll into the village of Parham to the delight of the English children who had never been confronted by a bear before. Of course Roscoe grew and became more adventurous one day strolling into the Parham Church right up to the pulpit and stood staring at the Vicar, not considered a welcome sinner there were some complaints from the weak hearted. By now it had been discovered that Roscoe was a female and her name was changed to Roscoe Ann. Begging the men coming back from the PX for candy bars which she relished she took on some health problems and about six months after joining the men of the 390th she had to be put away, the officer who had to waste her claimed it was the toughest assignment he had. The 390th went on to a distinguished war record .


S/lt Vern Holmquist
569th Squadron
390th Bomb Group

***The A-1 Autopilot Could Not
Outsmart The Navigator***

"I joined the 390th when it was forming at Geiger Field and was assigned to the 571st Squadron, as I remember I was transferred to the 568th Squadron and later to the 458th Sub Depot. These changes were made to accommodate raises in grade. Can you inform me as to what or which squadron roster my name is on. I was with the 390th until the end of the war in Europe.

I am looking forward to the reunion in Spokane, it is in my neck of the woods.

Having spent most of my time with the A-1 autopilot I was kidded about how easy the flight back to the States was going to be, the crew had with them the man who had flown with them on their precision bombing training.

I had checked the autopilot system over from head to stern, the system worked fine. We were on our way the pilot set up for automatic flight and all was well until this B-17 started wandering all over the sky. With a few choice words the pilot turned the system off.

We landed in Wales and I had ample time to check out the system but between Wales and Iceland

the system failed again. Again in Iceland plenty of time to check out all components but a few minutes out of Iceland the aircraft was again all over the sky.

With a portable oxygen bottle I crawled from the tail section to the nose to find the Navigator was using the bombsight stabilizer as a place to sit while he carried on a conversation with other crew members and each move he made put an unwanted signal into the autopilot. The pilot was not the only one angry on that flight.

Perhaps not a great story but an enduring memory.

Sincerely,"

Vernon C. Holmquist, 571st, 568th and the 458th

Vernon, it's a great story! Guess we all have been accused of sitting on our brains, at least once in our lives. By the way, Al tells me that you are carried under the 458th banner. Thanks for sharing your experience with us.

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2/11/03

Joe Conroy

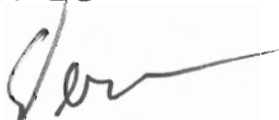
Way back in '42 the Air Force shipped me down to Keesler Field, Miss. for basic training training and since I did not cater to marching in formation, calisthenics, and non-sensical things like that I looked for a way out. Lo and Behold, to use an old phrase, I applied for service in the Special Services Department which was in the process of producing a play called "HIGH FLIGHT" to rival the Army's show "THIS IS THE ARMY" which was playing on Broadway and spent several months working on the show.

This brings me to the reason for writing this, the show was inspired by a poem written by a WW11 Air Force pilot, name unknown, that was dear to me. Since I had forgotten some of the words I had considered doing some research to locate it but as is my habit I never got around to it.

A couple of days ago I got a E-mail that was a memorial tribute to the crew of STS-107, and again Lo and Behold there was the poem HIGH FLIGHT, copy enclosed.

I am sorry to report that to try the show out we went to Gulfport, Miss. to a Aircraft mechanics school. We were to do two shows with a four hour break in between and during those hours the cast found the base watering hole. During the second show the script just sounded different, funny but different, to the point where the officer in charge and the director abdicated and that was the end of HIGH FLIGHT.

Veteran of the Mighty Eighth
Vern Holmquist- 390th BG



This poem was written by an Air Force pilot during WW1 and became the inspiration for an Air Force show called HIGH FLIGHT which was being produced at Keesler Field to rival the Army's Broadway show called THIS IS THE ARMY. The poem has been used now as a memorial to the crew of STS-107

HIGH FLIGHT

Oh! I have slipped the surly bonds of earth
And danced the skies on laughter-silvered wings;
Sunward I've climbed, and joined the tumbling mirth
Of sun split clouds - and done a hundred things
You have not dreamed of - wheeled and soared and
swung high in the sunlit silence, Hov'ring there.

I've chased the shouting wind along, and flung
My eager craft through footless halls of air.
Up, up the long delirious, burning blue
I've topped the wind-swept heights with easy grace
Where never lark, or even eagle flew-
And while with silent lifting mind I've trod
The high untrespassed sanctity of space,
Put out my hand and touched the face of God.

Author unknown

The Norden Bombsight Department

In retrospect the men in the bombsight department seemed isolated from both combat and other ground personnel, this is brought to mind when looking through the history of our 8th Air Force bomb group I see few names and faces I remember but this is understandable when knowing of the process we went through getting there.

The Norden Bombsight was our secret weapon, the jewel of the Air Force, it was closely guarded first by an FBI security check which was quite rigid, not even the commander of the base could enter the bomb sight vault without specific security clearance. At Lowry Field where the bombsight school was located we were taught our work in a small building (vault) with thick concrete walls, a steel door with a quartz peep hole, air conditioned, and surrounded by a high security fence. The bombsight depended on a directional stabilizer to guide our B-17s to the target through the C-1 auto pilot so the study of automatic flight control was an integral part of our training, the bombardier controlled the directional flight of the air craft through the bombsight through the auto-pilot.

Security demanded that whenever a sight was removed from the vault to be installed in an air craft it had to be done so under armed guard and the bombsight personnel had to be armed when carrying any information out of the vault even such trivial information as to personnel off base passes.

Let me say at this point that many of these security measures were abandoned shortly after our arrival at our base in England assuming by that time the Germans had captured enough of them to make their own copies but we still worked in our secure vaults away from other base personnel

Our work was to maintain and calibrate the accuracy of the sight, cleaning and adjusting the equipment, little in actual repair was required. This also applied to the directional stabilizer.

There were 3 or 4 of us in the department who were on flying status. We would fly with lead crews on training missions to familiarize the combat crews on bomb run procedures and this way we did get to know some of the combat crews

Our usual routine was to carry a sight in its canvas bag out to one of the B-17s leading the days mission, hoist the sight up through the front hatch, pull our body up and into the bombardiers compartment (a feat I could not attempt today) and install the sight on its directional stabilizer, it took a little getting used to to be sitting on top of a full bomb load while flames from fuel dumped on the hardstand caught fire while the engineers were priming the engines

When the mission was completed we removed the sight took it back to the vault

we did our work as we were trained to do without much worry about what else may have happened on the mission. We were aware of the casualties suffered by the combat crews but not in the personal way of the affected crew members, our job was hardly more dangerous than that of the civilians in the area

If you were not personally acquainted with those of us who were in the bombsight department this little bit of information should explain.

Submitted by S/lt Vern Holmquist
571st squadron of the 390th Bomb Group (H) -
The Mighty Eighth Air Force

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Vern Holmquist", written over a horizontal line.