

Norman Morrow  
Memoirs, World War II  
Written to his children and grandchildren on August 9, 2001

In February of 1943 I received my "greetings" to report for examination for the Armed Forces. I passed and shortly after I was ordered to report to Ft. Leavenworth, KS for induction. I got on a bus in Kansas City, MO and arrived at the Fort I think on Wednesday. There were lots of us there and they assigned us to barracks. We did not do a thing on Thursday or Friday. They did not issue us any uniforms and all I had was the clothes I had on when I arrived. I figured they would not do anything with us over the weekend so on Friday evening I went into the town of Ft. Leavenworth and caught a bus to Kansas City. I spent the weekend at the Yates and Sunday evening caught a bus back to Leavenworth. I went back to the barracks and as far as I know they never knew I was gone.

Monday morning they got serious and started the process of inducting us. I never did figure out how the army operated but after a lot of physical and mental examinations I was assigned to the Army Air Corps (as it was called then.) I shipped out to Lincoln (Nebr.) Army Air Field. Somehow they picked some of us out and sent us to the University of Nebraska in Lincoln for a 45-day class. This was my first, last and only experience in a university setting.

When that was over we went back to the Air Base and shortly I was on a train headed for Las Vegas, Nevada to an aerial gunnery school. That lasted about eight weeks. At first we had classes to learn about 50 cal. machine guns, airplane identification both Allied and German. Also the tactics of aerial gunnery. It is considerably different than if you are standing on the ground firing a machine gun. Next we practiced shooting skeet with a shotgun. After that we practiced shooting skeet from a jeep that was driving out through the desert. Then at the last we went up in a B-17 bomber and practiced shooting at a target that another plane was towing. The pilots of the tow target planes were combat pilots that had survived and come back to the states. Once in a while you would hear that one would get shot down towing a target. I never heard of one getting killed, they bailed out and were picked up on the ground. Las Vegas was the gunnery school. At another base they were training pilots. At another base they were training radio operators. Other bases they were training bombardiers and navigators and engineers.

From each of the bases as the classes would complete the training, someone in the hierarchy would combine the graduates into a combat crew for a B-17. There were 10 men to a crew. Pilot, co-pilot, navigator, bombardier, engineer, radio operator, two waist gunners, tail gunner and a ball turret gunner. When my turn came I was put as a ball turret gunner. That is the round turret on the bottom of a B-17. I have no idea why unless maybe because of my size. I wasn't very big and that is a small turret. From the various schools we were shipped to Ardmore, Oklahoma and for the first time we met as a complete crew. This was the beginning of a very special bond between ten of us because we were headed for combat from Ardmore. An

interesting thing happened not long after we arrived in Ardmore. One of our waist gunners was kind of odd acting, I can't explain it. Anyway the six of us enlisted men talked it over and we decided that we would tell our pilot and co-pilot that we didn't feel comfortable with him on the crew. The pilot said that he would report it up the chain of command. We never heard a word from the higher ups but in a couple of days the guy was transferred from our crew and we got a new kid that we all liked and felt comfortable with. This was our final crew and we went overseas together.

Note: The pilot, co-pilot, navigator and bombardier were commissioned officers and they were in different base housing.

We left Ardmore and rode a train to New York City. They took us overseas on the Air Transport Command. That was the military planes they used to ferry men and supplies to the European Theatre. Just before we took off to fly all night, word came that it was D-Day that morning in France. June 6, 1944. We landed at Prestwick, Scotland about daylight. We spent about two days there before boarding a train and traveling all day to Bedford, England. Before boarding the train they gave us some K-rations for lunch. Lucky for me that was the only time I had to try to eat them. I threw them away, they were awful. The train stopped at a station along the way and let us off for a bit to stretch our legs. There were several English women that had baskets of rolls that they were passing out to the "Yanks". They would not take any money for them. I had one roll for my lunch that day and it was much better than a K-ration.

We arrived at Bedford late that evening and after riding a truck for about ten miles we arrived at the air base. After about a week of orientation, assimilation and indoctrination we started our tour of bombing missions over Europe. At this time all of Europe was controlled by Germany so our missions were over France, Belgium, and the Balkan countries as well as Germany itself.

You might be interested in this period of my life so for the first time ever I will try to tell you what it was like. To start with, the Air Corps had a policy that if you survived 35 missions you would be sent back to the United States. What they did not emphasize was that they would then put you in training on B-29's and send you to the Pacific to fly missions over Japan. To be counted as a mission over Europe your plane had to get to the target of the day and actually drop the bombs on it. You could go into Germany, get shot at and arrive at the target. If it was cloudy, you could not drop bombs, so you took them back to base, and the mission did not count. Also if the plane developed mechanical problems at the first of the mission and you turned around and went back, it did not count either. I did not keep track of how many missions I was on that did not count but it must have been at least fifteen or more. I did survive these and thirty-five complete ones. What was a mission like? About three thirty or so in the morning they would come in our Quonset hut and wake us up. After washing our faces and shaving etc. we would go to the mess tent and have breakfast. Actually the food was pretty good. After that we would go by a building and pick up a parachute then get in a truck and they would deliver us to our

plane. The planes were dispersed in groups of three around the large airfield. The reason was to make it harder for German fighters to destroy if they made an attack. Each of us would then inspect and make sure that everything was in working order in our respective positions. Mine consisted of checking to see if the ammunition was in place and that the guns were working mechanically, the gun sights were operating, the turret would operate electrically and other miscellaneous checks. The turret was a round ball and I was curled up in it with two 50 caliber machine guns, one on each side of my legs and the barrels stretching out of the turret. At the appointed time the planes started taking off. The pilots had a rendezvous point over England that they would all meet. Then they had a formation that they would get in. There were nine planes in a group and the groups were spaced so far apart. The idea of this was to give maximum firepower to the gunners on all planes against any German fighter attacks. Sounds kind of chicken but all we were doing was to try to keep from being shot down. A case of them or us and we certainly didn't want it to be us. When we were all in formation we headed for the coast of England. At this point our altitude was around seven thousand feet. As we headed out the pilots started a slow climb. When we left the English coast we were at ten thousand feet and we all had our oxygen masks on and our electric flying suits plugged and in our assigned combat positions. I was not allowed to be in the ball turret during the take off or landing so I would ride in the waist of the plane until we were airborne. The pilots would continue their climb over the English Channel until they reached the normal altitude of around 28,000 feet. This was generally the altitude we flew but depending on the cloud cover we might drop down to 25,000 or on up to 32,000. If all went well we would just truck on over the target and drop our bombs and turn around and go back to our base. When we would taxi in to our parking spot there would be a truck waiting for us and take us to the de-briefing building. That consisted of a couple of officers that asked us if we saw anything out of the ordinary, what the enemy opposition was like, what if anything went wrong, stuff like that. When that was over they gave each of us a shot of whiskey and we would head for a shower and then the mess tent. We hadn't eaten since breakfast and by the time we got something to eat it would be 5 or 6 in the evening. I was the only one on the crew that did not drink so I would give my shot to one of the other guys. Whoever got it seemed glad to get it. There wasn't much to do so we would usually just read, play cards, write letters or lay around on our cots. Went to sleep early because we did not know but what we would be awakened real early for another mission.

I have described an "uneventful" mission. I suppose I should tell you about our most eventful mission, ok? On Sept 12, 1944 the day began as usual. The target for the day was Berlin. Things went as usual until we got almost there and all at once there were lots of German fighter planes trying to stop us. They must have been unusually angry because they proceeded to do a job on us. Rather quickly they shot up one of our four engines and our pilot had to shut it down. With only three engines we started falling behind the others. We were over Berlin by this time and the anti-aircraft gunners on the ground must have been mad too as they put up a heavy bombardment. There were thousands of exploding shells. We were still close

enough to our other planes that our bombardier was able to drop our bombs on the target. We had ten 500 pound bombs and when they were gone it lightened the load on our three remaining engines. Shortly we were able to turn back towards home base and get out of the "flak" as the ground fire was called. In a way the flak was a pretty sight from the ball turret. I could see flashes of light on the ground and then hundreds of puffs of black smoke as the shells exploded around the B-17's. If they were close enough you could see the flame as they exploded. Sometimes our plane would shake from the concussion of the explosions. Kind of like sitting in the middle of a fireworks display only not colorful. We encountered more or less flak over the target on every one of our missions but not always the German fighters. Anyway, we started home but we could not keep up with the other planes. Also we could not maintain our altitude on three engines so we were very slowly going down. About this time the pilot called for an intercom check of all the crewmembers. The tail gunner did not respond so the pilot asked me to check on him. I came out of the ball turret and put on a portable oxygen bottle and went to check on him. The tail section is real small and you have to crawl on your hands and knees to get in there. When I got there I found that he was dead, shot through the chest from the fighter attack over Berlin. He was frozen almost rigid and there wasn't anything I could do for him so I backed out and went back in the ball turret and reported to the pilot what I had found. We were over the western part of Germany and slowly losing altitude. All at once a single German fighter made one last pass at us. We didn't know how much damage he did to our plane except he shot out one of our three engines and now we were down to two. Also he ruined our intercom and we couldn't talk to each other. We started losing altitude even faster but by this time we were over Belgium. It is a small country so rather quickly we were out over the North Sea. I came out of the ball turret and put my parachute on and started up to the cockpit to talk to the pilot. After going through the radio compartment I discovered that the bomb bay doors were standing wide open. Apparently the closing mechanism was shot up over Berlin. There was about a six-inch catwalk in the middle so I walked on it up to the cockpit. I did not look down but once and all I could see was water. I have always had some fear of water and I did not have any desire to ditch the plane in the sea. I asked the pilot what he thought about turning around and at least come down on land. His reply was, "I think I can get back to the English coast." I had total confidence in his and the copilot's abilities so I turned around and went back to the waist. The two waist gunners and I started throwing everything we could out the window to make the plane lighter. Finally we could see the English coast in the distance but we were getting pretty low. We crossed the coast just north of the White Cliffs of Dover. Later it was estimated that we were at about 500 feet. There was only time for four of us to bail out, the rest of them crashed with the plane. I don't remember how we decided on who bailed out first but it turned out that I did. I pulled my ripcord as soon as I was out which was not ideal but we were too close to the ground not to. The parachute opened but with such a hard snap it felt like it broke my back. It seemed almost instantly I was on the ground in a pile. I tried to stand up but my back wouldn't let me, which was very fortunate. I had landed in the middle of a minefield. The English had their coastline completely mined in case of a German

invasion. Before I could think what to do I heard voices and then about six English Coast Guard soldiers were standing there looking down at me. They asked me if I was hurt and I told them my back was hurt and I couldn't walk. They got a stretcher and put me on it and carried me to their post. They knew exactly where the mines were so they could walk around safely. Later one of their ambulances showed up and they put me in and took me to their hospital. When we got there my three other buddies were already there. The English soldiers had to pull one of them out of the water. They gave us a cup of tea and a piece of toast. This must have been around seven o'clock and we hadn't had anything to eat since about 3:30 that morning. The next morning they brought us another cup of tea and a soft fried egg and a piece of toast for breakfast. By morning my back was feeling better and I could move a bit. About noon an ambulance from our base showed up and they took us back to our hospital where we finally got something to eat. After the doctors examined us they let the others go but I had to stay overnight and they let me go the next day. They did not schedule us on another mission for about a week. I forgot to tell about the other crewmembers. That went down with the plane. There were six of them. The tail gunner was already dead, the bombardier was killed in the crash and the other four survived but the plane burned and was a total loss.

This was our worst mission but there were several other incidents that were "memorable". Like one day over Leipzig, Germany we were flying through hazy clouds and met a squadron of B-24's that were going in the opposite direction. You could just see them flash past and it was kind of scary. Our pilots kept the level even flight as it was safer that way. Another time we were coming home and just as we left the Belgium coast a single burst of flak from the ground came through the top turret and a piece hit our engineer in the head. We joked with him after that about acting "funny". Another time we had just returned from a mission and were getting our equipment out of the plane. It was cloudy and foggy when two squadrons approached us at an angle and met right over us. Two planes collided and exploded. I dove under our plane to avoid the falling debris. Another interesting experience was when we were almost back to our base from a mission. It was foggy and we were pretty close to the ground when we looked out the window and saw a farmer's barn go by the window. It scared one of our waist gunners so bad that in a short time his hair turned white and he was only 26 years old. He lived in Dothan Alabama and your Mom and I stopped to visit him on one of our trips to Florida in about 1987. This ought to be enough about our combat experiences.

In early 1945 I finally flew my last mission and I was rotated back to the United States. We had flown over to England but they sent us home on a transport ship. There were plenty of German submarines around so the navy used convoys. The troop ships were in the middle and out around the outside were destroyers to protect us. It was quite an operation. Ships almost as far as you could see. It took about a week to come across the ocean. The convoy could only travel as fast as the slowest ship. It was a great moment when we finally pulled into New York Harbor passing the Statue of Liberty. After getting off the ship they sent us to Camp Kilmer, New Jersey. We were there for quite awhile and finally I had orders to report to an

air base just outside Los Angeles. That meant a train ride from New Jersey to California. I had a lot of leave accumulated because I couldn't use any while in England. They let me stop in Kansas City for thirty days. Before my leave was up V-E day came. That was the end of the war in Europe. When the news came I was in Independence with the Yates. That night we all went to downtown Kansas City and joined thousands in the streets celebrating. An amusing thing happened. I was in uniform and the crowd was going crazy. All at once a BIG, FAT, woman grabbed me and started kissing me. She had me literally buried in fat and I couldn't get away so I thought I would give up and enjoy it. I couldn't get my arms near around her, I tried. She finally quit and I was able to escape. I didn't have a clue who she was. I don't remember whether she was even pretty or not.

After my leave was up I got back on the train and went back to California. The normal routine was the Air Corps would send us from this base to a training base for B-29's and on to the Pacific. All the training bases were full so they just let us sit there. After about two months I was ordered to Laredo, Texas but they let me have another leave so I went to K.C. again. While I was in K.C. Harry Truman had the Air Corp drop the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japan. That was the almost instant end of WWII in the Pacific. When my leave was over I went to Texas but they had nothing for us to do so we just did nothing. I discovered that they needed some one to drive a truck. For a while I drove a truck all over the base while some other guys loaded trash and then we went to the dump where they had to unload it as it was not a dump truck. Most of the guys just sat around the barracks playing cards. I had one buddy that told me he was going to play poker non-stop until he won enough to buy some civilian clothes. He started playing one morning. Played all day and night and the next afternoon he had won enough so he quit and went to bed and didn't wake up until the next day. I had brought him some food from the mess hall so he didn't quit to eat.

All the different branches of service worked out a point system for discharge. So many points for length of service, time spent overseas, whether you were in combat or not, etc. It was a time consuming job to get this added up meanwhile we were just waiting. I had a pretty high point score but I did not get discharged until October, 1945.

I went back to Independence and stayed with the Yates and back to my old job at Clay and Bailey in K.C. I began to get discouraged at the job I was doing so in the spring for 1946 I decided I would like to go to a trade school and learn to be an auto body and fender repairman. I enrolled in Stevinson's school on about 18<sup>th</sup> and Main in KC in their evening school. I would get off work at Clay and Bailey and then go there until 10 p.m. At the school I made friend with a fellow by the name of Charles Lewis. We had a lunch break at school around seven thirty and we started going to a nearby restaurant to eat. One evening in the last part of May we were eating when Charles' sister came in and asked him for some money. You guessed it, turned out her name was Alta.

Epilogue:

Dad married Alta Lewis (mom) on May 10, 1947. They raised three children: Gene (1951), Judy (1953), and Kathy (1954). Dad was a control operator for Kansas City Power and Light for over 30 years. Mom passed away July 9, 1999. Dad married Sarah Hays in December 2000. He passed away August 13, 2015 at age 91. Mom and Dad were much loved and are missed by family and friends.

367<sup>th</sup> SQUADRON COMBAT DIARY

306<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group – 1942-1945

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My father, Norman Morrow highlighted the following as missions he flew. This most likely is not the complete list.

Year and Month	Date	Target	Pilot
1944			
July	10	Munich	Gordon L. Donkin
	12	Munich	Donkin
	13	Munich	Donkin
	16	Munich	Donkin
	17	St. Quentin/Jassy	Donkin
	18	Peenemunde	Donkin
	20	Kothen	Donkin
	21	Ebelsbach	Donkin
	25	ST LO Area	Donkin
	28	Merseberg	Donkin
	31	Munich	Donkin
August	3	Merkwiller	Donkin
	7	Montaubon	Donkin
	13	Rouen	Donkin
	16	Bohlen	Donkin
September	12*	Ruhland - Crash landed, pg 90 has a list of the Donkin Crew, shown below	Donkin
October	3	Nurnberg, Germany	Donkin
	9	Scheinfurt, Germany	Donkin
	22	Hanover, Germany	Donkin
December	9	Stuttgart, Germany	Donkin
	24	Giessen A/D, German	? pilot
1945			
January	17	Bielefeld, Germany	Donkin
	29	Kobenz, Germany	Donkin
March	12	Swinemunde, Germany	Donald C MacDonald
	24	Vechta, Germany	MacDonald
	31	Halle, Germany	MacDonald
April	8	Halberstadt, Germany	MacDonald
	11	Kraiberg, Germany	MacDonald

\*Donkin Crew listing September 12, 1944: Lt. Gordon L Donkin, pilot; Lt. Donald C Mac Donald, copilot; Lt. Gerald A Weiler, navigator; Capt. Arthur S. Hostetler, bombardier; T/Sgt. Clarence E. Tuers, engineer; T/Sgt. Willard M. Colvin, radio operator; S/Sgt. Norman Morrow, ball turret; Sgt. Lawrence G. Joslin, waist; and S/Sgt. Jack B. Eppler. Capt. Hostetler died in the crash landing at Manston and Sgt. Eppler had been killed by 20 mm cannon fire in the fighter attack.