

THE MILITARY POLICE SCHOOL

Department of General Subjects

Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania

OFFICERS' BASIC COURSE

CLASS NUMBER 1

A

LIAISON PILOT'S

LIFE DURING COMBAT

(As written in early 1947)

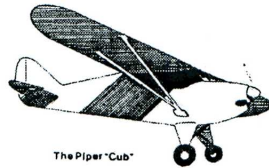
PERSONAL EXPERIENCE OF A LIAISON PILOT

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Corps of Military Police

Awarded Air Medal with three Oak Leaf Clusters for Meritorious Service in Action

From Field Artillery to Military Police How and Why



There are those who may wonder why a Military Police Officer would be the author of a story about a WWII Field Artillery Liaison Pilot ---- here's how and why:

The war in Europe was over and most everyone was heading home to the U.S. via one of the re-deployment depots. My Piper Cub and I ended up at Camp St. Louis near Reims, France. The Provost Marshal – MP Command Headquarters – was at Reims and some smart staff officer there came up with the idea of using me, my plane, and an observer to fly over wooded areas looking for stolen or abandoned US government vehicles and to observe and report on vehicle traffic problems and refugee movements. All were major problems of the time.

I was assigned to the Provost Marshal – MP Command – at Reims and my MP career began. I liked the Corps and enjoyed the work so when I returned to the U.S. in 1947 to attend MP school, I made a formal request for change of branch of service from Field Artillery to the MP Corps. This request was granted.

Larry G. Genebach – Major, CMP (ret)

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BIBLIOGRAPHY

Liaison Pilots Personal Experiences:

- 1. All information for this Monograph was taken from the notes that were written in my Pilot's Log Book as the war progressed.**
- 2. No outside information was used because of the type of story being told.**

PRE-FLIGHT

My flying career started when I graduated from OCS at Fort Sill, Oklahoma and went to the Pre-flight school at Pittsburg, Kansas. There I spent eight weeks going through the basic maneuvers with light aircraft. Upon graduation from this training, I was placed on flying status as a Liaison Pilot.¹ From Pittsburg I returned to Fort Sill and went through eight more weeks of flight training. From here I emerged a full-fledged 'Liaison Pilot' ready for the Hells of Battle and raring to go.²

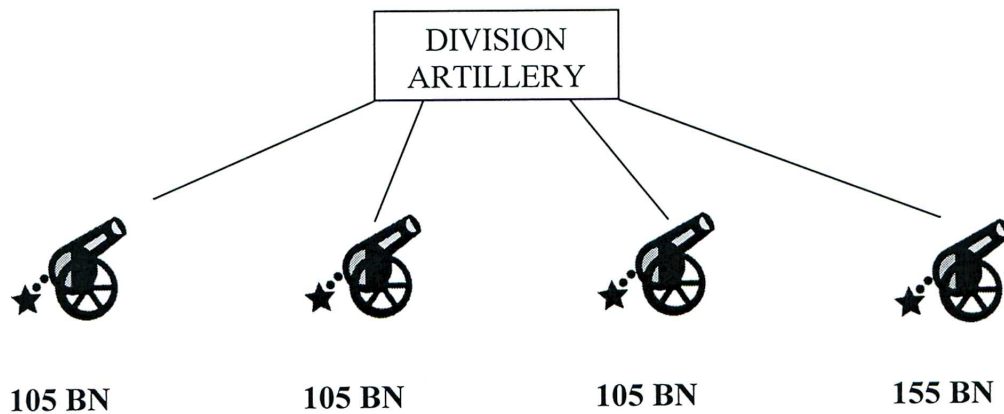
SO INTO BATTLE AS A FLEDGLING³

1. Ref. Personnel Orders #9, Par. 32, Hq Army Air Force's Flying Training Command, Randolph Field, TX dated 20 March 1944.
2. Ref. Special Order #79, Par. 42, Hq FAS DAT dated 3 April 1944.
3. Slang term for new Liaison Pilot

INTRODUCTION

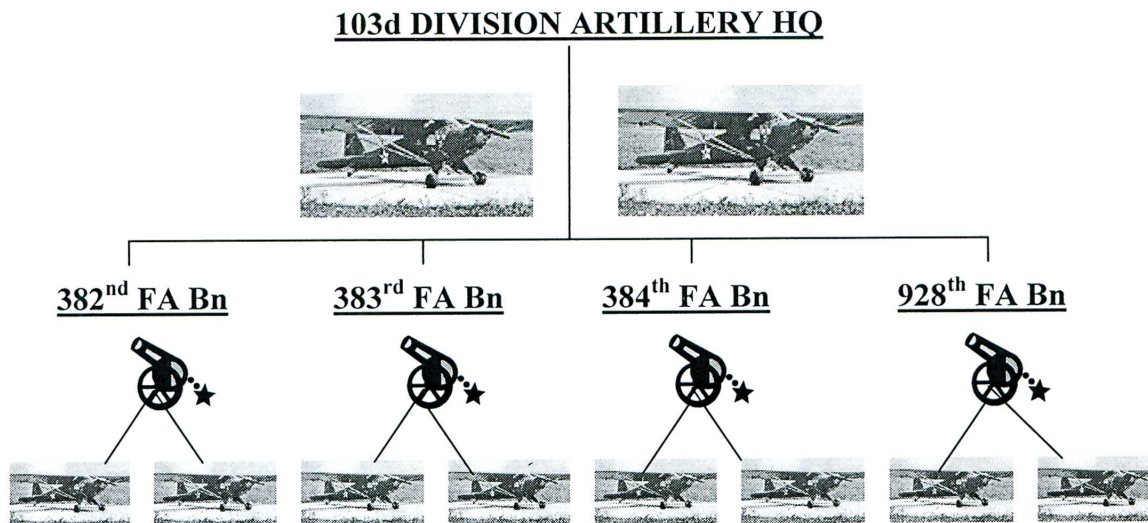
The life of a Liaison Pilot with an Infantry Division is one of continual 'hub-bub'. Between flying for our own Artillery Battalion, working in assigned Division missions and trying to keep all the "flight happy" Brass satisfied, we are continually on the go and in the air. But then it all isn't really as bad as I make it out to be. Life seems to always have its pleasant little moments and it seems that we were able to have more than our normal share. But before I go into the story behind the fighting fledglings who flew the 'flying orange crates',¹ let me explain in brief how we are set-up within a Division and how we operate.

Each Infantry Division, we know, has organic Division Artillery which consists of three 105mm Howitzer Battalions and one 155mm Howitzer Battalion.



1. A slang term used to mean Liaison Plane, L-4, L-4J

Division Artillery Headquarters has two Liaison Planes¹ assigned. Then each Battalion has two Liaison Planes assigned making a total of ten planes to the Division.



Each plane had an assigned pilot so adding the ten planes together, we get ten pilots. All these planes, pilots and their ground crews massed together are known as the Division Artillery Air Section. From this let me extract pieces and place them together to form sections as they are in our Division Air Section; First there is the Division Artillery Air Section Headquarters proper, which consists of one Major (pilot), one Captain (pilot), one T/2 who is the Division Mechanic, supply SGT and paper man, one T/3 who is the airplane mechanic for the two Division Artillery Air Section Headquarters planes, one T/3 who is Radio Technician for Air Section and Division Air Section radio operator, one T/4 who is asst. mechanic for two planes, plus one driver-machine gunner. The vehicles for this section consist of one ¾ ton and one 2 ½ ton.



Major



Captain



T/2



T/3



T/4



¾ ton



2 ½ ton

1. L-4 light aircraft, 65 horsepower.

Each of the four Artillery Battalions then has two pilots, both 1st LTs, of which the ranking one is senior Battalion pilot, one T/3 who is the airplane mechanic for the two planes, one T/4 asst. mechanic, one driver-machine gunner. The vehicles are one ¾ ton truck and one ¼ ton jeep.



1st LT



T/3



T/4



¾ Ton



¼ Ton

For the Division Air Section we have the following personnel and vehicles:

Commissioned

Major (1) Commanding
Captain (1) Ex. O
1st Lt. (8) Pilots

Non-Commissioned

T/2 (1) Chief Mechanic
T/3 (6) Five Mechanics and one Division Radio Tech
T/4 (5) Asst. Mechanics
Pfc (5) Drivers – Machine Gunner

Vehicles

2 ½ ton (1)
¾ ton (5)
¼ ton (4)

The Battalions then assigns two Officers who work with the pilots as Observers. These officers may or may not be permanent with the section.

In our Division we operated off a central Division airfield. Therefore, we were under direct supervision of the Division Air Officer. Our flights were set up on a Division basis with flights beginning at daylight and ending at darkness. Although we were able to operate during either daylight or darkness, night flights were few and far between so no scheduled flights were arranged during darkness. If it was necessary to fly a night mission, the pilot whose Battalion was supporting the Infantry Regiment making the movement was responsible for the flight. Each flight was set-up for 1 hour duration and to each flight a pilot was assigned, excluding the Major and the Captain. Each pilot flew at least two Division missions per day. If the Battalion required any special missions to be flown, one of the Battalion pilots then flew these. A day's flights might look like this:

0600 x
0700 Genebach (Div.)
0800 x
0900 Bn. Mission
1000 x
1100 x
1200 x
1300 Bn. Mission
1400 x
1500 Genebach (Div.)
1600 x
1700 x
1800 Bn. Mission

Our means of Communication was by voice-radio. Each plane was equipped with a SCR 610 radio. This radio had two channels; A Channel, which was set for the Division Fire Control Net and B Channel, which was set for Battalion Fire Control Net. At the airstrip, we had a home station which was used for flight control as well as a 'Hostile Aircraft Warning System'.

On Division Channel thru Division Fire Control it was possible to talk direct to any of the separate Artillery Battalions. Therefore if I had a fire mission, I would contact Net Control (Division Fire Control) and state mission. They would then clear mission and give me the Battalion I was to adjust on target. I would then call this Battalion, state fire mission and adjust on target.

Example

Plane to Division Fire Control --- Fire Mission

Division Fire Control to Plane --- Bn. To be fired on mission

Plane to Battalion --- Adjustment and firing.

While flying on Division Channel, pilots were subject to call from any Battalion within Division Artillery, through Division Fire Control, for any mission needed.

From the air, at our low altitude, it was fairly easy to tell where the front-line of our troops was at all times. To aid us in this, we were continually checking our information with Division Artillery S-2. Knowing where the front-lines were was of utmost importance to us because of our own safety and to prevent us from firing on our own troops. We flew at altitudes of between 4000 to 5500 feet just over or just beyond our own front-lines. It was never too safe for a Liaison pilot to get too far out over enemy territory because of several reasons. The speed of the liaison plane is slow and it would be impossible to get back to safety quickly. If we ever got out too far over enemy land we are subject to fire from all directions. Unless we were flying for a Task Force, we seldom got more than two or three miles out beyond our own front.

So with these basic ideas of Field Artillery Air Sections and how they operate in mind and with a little knowledge of the way we fly explained to you, I am ready to tell you a story containing humor, death and victory concerning my time as a Liaison pilot with the 103d Infantry Division during the later phases of war in the ETO.

This Division entered the war near St. Die, France. They had never seen battle and had already had a serious misfortune. I was informed on my arrival, to the 103d Division, that the Air Section Major was leading two 103d Air Section pilots up to their airstrip at the front (assumed to be approximately November 9th or 10th) when they got off course. I do not know the details of this mishap, but from what I've now been told; one plane had fuel problems and was grounded before reaching their destination. The other plane was carrying a pilot and a mechanic when they crashed into a hillside. The pilot and mechanic were killed.

I joined the 103d on November 17th and was assigned to the 383rd FA Battalion, on November 18th, 1944. I was a replacement for the lost pilot and here is my story.

LIFE AS A LIAISON PILOT in WWII

We were flying off a little strip¹ near Fouchy, France. The weather had been pretty bad and we weren't able to spend much time in the air. The ceiling was so low that we couldn't get high enough to see much and still stay away from enemy ground fire. Our strip laid right along side a woods and it was here that we had set up our tents. Since this Division had just moved into the line, the men hadn't learned the tricks that the older soldiers knew. Lt. Whickcliff and I had just come up from the Replacement Depot at 7th Army, which was at Epinal, France, so we knew a good place or rather supply point for a moonlight requisition². There was no need for us to be sleeping in bed-rolls on the ground so I took our jeep and headed back to Epinal for seven army cots (Complete). Since I want to bring the Military Police into this someplace, I will have to do it now because the only time that I saw an MP during the whole combat era was on this little trip of mine. As I said, I was headed for Epinal dressed in combat clothes, OD pants, boots, shirt with no tie, flight hat, sun glasses and a dirty old leather flight jacket. It had been raining steadily for four or five days so I was fairly well spotted with mud. I was cruising right along when I came upon a check-point; the MP didn't stop me, but waved me on so I entered the 7th Army Headquarters area and Epinal, France. Minding my own business, I headed towards the Replacement Depot. Suddenly along side of me I found a motorcycle and an MP who motioned me over to the side of the road. Seems that I was out of uniform, NO TIE, so down to headquarters we go! I explained to the Provost Marshal, who was a Lt. Col., what my position was. I let him know that there was a war going on up front; doughboys are dying; we haven't got ties; it's been raining for weeks; the Germans just shot us up with Artillery; we haven't got ties; how can a war be won when the fighting men are delayed; we haven't got ties, etc., etc. I was booked and sent on my way. I proceeded with my mission and managed to find seven cots, which I loaded into the jeep. When I left Epinal this time and passed the MP check point, I looked like a lumber wagon; A huge cot on wheels. These cots, of course, weren't for comfort, but were used to boost MORALE. It was wonderful for our morale to get off that wet ground and onto nice comfortable army cots. Two days later, every section, including the Major and the Captain, had cots to boost their morale. -- So the war progressed and the rain continued and we stayed down. It was worse being unable to fly because we had to sit around and just wait and listen. Behind us at the edge of the woods was a Battery of 240mm Guns. At just about dusk every night, these babies would start firing. It is funny to sit here now and know that

1. term applied to airfield for Liaison Plane

2. supplies gotten after dark illegally from another unit

back then I could sleep through Atomic explosions and that today a radio playing at the end of the hall upstairs bothers me. For us these first few days with the 103d was a battle of nerves rather than a battle of guns and men. We did manage to put our time to good use during the daylight hours. The planes were all checked over, radios adjusted, vehicles maintained and supplies and rations improved. For one can of GI issue ration Beef Stew, we could get a chicken at the farm houses of the local people in the rear. I got my pistol practice, which later came in handy as you will see, shooting the heads off chickens. The weather finally cleared up enough for the 103d doughboys to find out that they had brought their Artillery Air Sections with them from the States. Since I'm not going to go into anything except my actions, I won't attempt to report on all that each different air section did. On the 26th of November '44, we moved to a little strip just outside St. Die, France. On the 27th of Nov '44 we fired on an enemy battery, my first big fire mission. From St. Die we moved to Ville where records show that the 383d Field Artillery Bn. fired some beautiful concentration on enemy trucks and another enemy battery. Oh, how those Germans hated to see that little plane up there in the air hanging over their heads all day. To an air observer, the flash of an artillery piece is like the flash of a match in a dark room. We only spent two days at Ville, but in those two days we met a lot of swell people. An airfield for us can be anything from a road, a grassy field, the side of a gentle hill, a cow pasture, to anything that is wide enough for us to get our two wings through and long enough for us to get a running start. No matter where we happened to land, it wasn't long until we had a crowd of curious French people wandering around offering what they had, taking what we could give, talking, pointing, smiling and trying to make themselves understood. I spoke a little German that I had learned in school, and with the help of the soldiers dictionary, I managed to carry on a semi-intelligent conversation with those that had the patience to listen to me. At Ville, I met a little brown-eyed, black haired, sharp tongued girl named NELIGA. I can't remember her last name, but we nicknamed her NELLIE for short and also for convenience sake. It was wonderful what she could do with GI issue rations. The whole air section ate like Kings for (that much too short) two days. When the war moved, we had to go with it so our next stop was Selestat, then to Strasbourg, to Bouxwiller, and then to a strip on the side of a hill near Pfaffenhofen. We stayed here from the 8th to the 12th of December, 1944, rocking back and forth with the Germans. Our strip, being on the side of a hill, only allowed us to take off one-way and land one-way. We would taxi to the top of the hill, hold our brakes and rev up the engine. To take off, we would release the brakes and start down hill. Every time I made this running start I could see them pinning the Purple Heart on my sister here at home. Luck seemed to be with us because we didn't have a single mishap. To land, we would approach from the opposite direction and land

going up hill. This wasn't so bad because there was always the trees at the top of the hill to stop us if we misjudged our speed. Quite a few interesting things happened outside our normal flying. The ceiling was about 1500 feet on the 10th and the sky was almost completely full of clouds. I had just come back from a Division mission and was still near my plane at the edge of the woods, at the top of the hill. Rusty Glover, my mechanic, and I were talking about something or other, probably women, when we heard the whistle and roar that a 'Dive Bomber' makes when it is on its sighting run downward. All day long, flight after flight of planes had been going over above the clouds. Not only in the direction of Germany, but towards our side as well. It was always a guess as to which side it happened to be. This damn roar kept getting louder and louder and then suddenly there wasn't just one, but two. My foxhole was some-odd eight hundred yards away so I headed into the woods followed by Rusty. We knew we were being bombed and that this was the finish, and me with a dirty pair of pants on and NO TIE. It would have been hard to tell where the ground ended and I began, I was sprawled so flat. They had always said that when the shells start falling, a soldier can get his whole body underneath his steel helmet. Had I had one at this time, I'm sure I could have proved that to be fact! The roar got louder and louder and I can remember very plainly thinking about why the damn fool flying didn't pull out before he hit me. Everything ended as suddenly and with as much surprise as it had all begun. Just across from our field there was a sickening crash and then further on, another crash and then silence. Like a bunch of bees, we took off for the downed plane. To cut the story short, two of our own planes had crashed into each other someplace up in the clouds and both planes and crews had crashed. That was our bombing enemy. That evening, no one had much to say. The next day some more excitement came our way. Our aircraft warning system started bellowing, "Red Alert¹ - enemy aircraft - - enemy aircraft --" and all we could see in the sky, flying low, were two American P-47s. The old circle and star were there just as big as life on the side of the plane. They went out of sight towards the front lines but in the distance we could hear them. Then, *Bang*, our ack-ack up at the front opens up and cuts loose with everything. We see these two planes shoot up into the air, turn and dive down amidst more ack-ack. All this was well and good but then we see these planes headed in our direction again. So again I'm making for the holes in the ground. This time it is my own little pre-dug foxhole with helmet and all. One of the planes passed right across our field, but he had too much to worry about to waste time with us. Our two multiple fifties at each end of the strip opened up on this one plane. As he went by I noticed the beautiful big white star in the blue background on the side of the plane, but also this time I noticed something else. Underneath the wings, right at the tips, were two

1. The code words used to alert our troops that there were enemy aircraft in the area.

big black German crosses. We later found out that there had been two German pilots flying captured American P-47s. They had bombed and strafed our own troops.

From Pfaffenhofen we moved to Eberbach for two days and then to a field outside a small town named Merkwiller. Here again I spent a couple of humorous days and nights. We set up at Merkwiller on the 15th of December, early in the morning. Our strip was a cow pasture that lay on a very gentle hill running towards a woods in one direction and towards a valley in the other. Off to our left, facing the valley, was a grape vineyard and to the right, our front. The Division was stuck a little out ahead of the rest of the 7th Army leaving our flanks just a bit exposed. I had just received a new observer from Battalion who had never had much time in the air. He had formally been a forward observer for the 383rd FA Bn. and he had a house shot out from under him, had spent a day and a half in a ditch under crossfire from the Germans and then had been chased around a town by mortar fire. He was almost a nervous wreck and had been sent back to the air section because at this time the life of an air observer was fairly easy and quiet. Ha! Lt. Huskins was the officer's name and he later became one of the best observers in the Division. He received the Bronze Star for some expert adjustments at critical moments. Anyway, before I start this, let me say a little more about our strip. It was about twenty yards wide and bordered on both sides by drainage ditches about a foot and a half deep. About $\frac{3}{4}$ of the way down the strip, one of these small ditches ran across the strip, but this had been filled in with dirt by the ground crews. At the extreme end of the strip there was a bump that when you hit it, if you weren't in the air before, you were afterwards. It served the same effect as when a Navy plane is catapulted off a ship. Not a nice strip to take off from and especially for a new observer to start his career on. – So, with Lt. Huskins in tow, equipped with a parachute on which he had received the basic and bare operation procedure (Jump, 1,2,3, pull, pray, open your eyes), a flight helmet that was a little to large and a map board, I loaded him into old faithful. Our take-off was a credit to the strip, 'bumpity-Bang-Bang' and then that awful final jolt and we were in the air. I looked back and found that Lt. Huskins was still with me, this far at least. We were interested in the town of Climbach on this flight so I headed out towards that area. We flew back and forth along the front around Climbach watching for any signs of activity. I noticed that every time the city of Climbach was on our right, Lt. Huskins was sitting way over on the left side of the plane. He acted as if that added eight or nine inches was hiding him from the enemy and the piece of tissue paper that makes up the side of the plane was protection. I guess the guy was still living in that hell he'd just gotten out of. Our flight was finally over so I headed for home. I came into the strip and let down in a normal glide path.

Everything was going fine so I cut the engine and got ready to level off. When we hit the strip, however, we weren't going in the direction that I had intended to go, but we were running right for the ditch on the left of the strip. I couldn't move the stick so I hit the brakes hard and prayed again. We rolled into the ditch and stopped. No damage was done but I was plenty mad. My boy (Huskins) had leaned way forward when we started our landing run and in the process he had gotten the chest strap on his parachute hooked over the rear stick (dual control). If he wasn't scared when we took off, he sure was after we finished landing. I didn't say a word because he was white enough as it was. I had learned a lesson. From then on, I removed the rear stick whenever I was flying someone who hadn't been up before or who was a little scared of the plane. The next couple of days moved along without excitement. We did a lot of firing, most of it in and around Climbach. Then the night of the 17th, about 2300 hours, I got another good scare. All of the pilots were up at the Major's headquarters which was situated in a house at the edge of the woods, about nine hundred yards from our tents. Everyone's nerves were on edge because our flanks were exposed and, of course, we expected to be cut off from the rest of the 7th Army at any minute. We suddenly heard this burst of firing outside the house. We all hit the windows and doors to find out what was going on. All I remember seeing was this stream of tracers coming from the woods and ending in our tent area. The next 30 minutes was a maze of crawling, listening, watching and waiting. A yell from the Major finally got us all assembled again in the tent area. One of our ground crew members had found a German automatic rifle and a bunch of tracer shells. They had been trying out the gun by firing into the woods. Needless to say, a lot of chewing was done that night. The situation was quite humorous afterward and caused a lot of kidding to be done. However, at the time I was digging new drainage ditches headed toward the rear. While at Merkwiller, we fired on two enemy artillery positions on the 18th and on 3 batteries on the 19th. From Merkwiller we moved to Saverne and then to Morhange. At Morhange we watched the 42nd Infantry Division move up toward the front. I had a great time yelling, "Rookie" at them as they went by. On Christmas Day we moved into Puttelage. To celebrate Christmas we fired on two trains and a factory; Our Xmas present to the Krauts. I guess I'll never forget this Christmas. Our strip laid in sort of a valley along side a stream. On this strip we could only land and take-off in one direction, under some telephone wires. We had to come in over some trees and then slip down onto the strip. One good thing, we had plenty of strip to land on. Puttelage held quite a bit of interest for us. I had just landed on the strip on Christmas morning and we were engaged in watching flight after flight of American bombers go over, coming back from bombing Germany. One of the planes fell out of the formation and started losing altitude. As it got lower we could see that there

was only one engine still working out of the four. Since my plane was still warm, I took my mechanic and we got ready to go in the same direction of the B-17. We circled around in the air until the plane made its crash landing in a big open field near a highway. Like a shot (as fast as one of those 'orange crates' will go) we headed for the field and landed there also. The crew members from the B-17 were piling out and much to our surprise, not any of them were hurt. The pilot had made a wonderful crash landing. We asked the boys if we could do anything for them and then we went to work on the plane. We wanted radio wire, B-9 bomb racks, volume control speaker-head sets, boxes and anything else that we thought might come in handy. We hadn't been any too soon in getting our mitts on what we needed because it wasn't long before the place was covered with vehicles. The members of the B-17 got a hearty welcome anyway. We won't call this act "Cannibalism" because in a combat area, supplies are supplies, no matter where you find them. ---

The Battle of the Bulge was going on about this time so our Division was spread thin over a long front, just holding and waiting. Activity on both sides, ours and the enemy, was at a stand still. It was a good chance for getting all the little things straightened out. We sent two planes back to the supply depot at Luneville, France to pick up supplies that we needed. I put a new propeller on, changed to winter oil, cleaned cylinders and Rusty re-ground the valves. I gave the old ship a test hop, put her through the maneuvers and found out that she flew better than ever. On New Years' Eve, I flew a "Special Mission" with General Wicks, Division Arty Commander, to check the Division camouflage. Then on New Years' Day, I flew the Division Arty S-2 to check bridges along the division line beyond the front lines. We were flying approximately 4300 ft when I saw this German ME-109 coming up underneath us from our right. I thought that this time I was going to get my one-way ticket, but Thank God, I was wrong. Right on the tail of this German plane was two of our P-47s and they were really giving him a hard time. I'll never know what happened to the guy, but for one time in my life, I was happy we had an Air Corps. Of course the S-2 was excited and I guess he figured he'd get a couple more Bronze Stars for having come so close to the enemy. I hope they let the poor guy down easily. For the next few days, we varied from ceiling zero to ceiling 700 ft, visibility - Zero. Flying was at a stand still. Then on the 9th of January I had another big thrill and a lesson taught me. The Division S-3 came out and wanted to check the flanks to see what kind of terrain there was and just how much Artillery support could be concentrated to aid either flank. The ceiling was just a hair over 1000 ft. but we decided to risk it anyway (1000 ft is just three good football fields and a three lane highway). A nice rifle or machine gun shot could bring us down from that altitude but everything went fine over our own section. However we did receive a

little ground fire, but only from small guns and none even close. From our front we moved over to the left flank of the Division where the unit on our left was dug in. Since we were fairly well out over enemy territory, I was flying mostly in the haze (clouds) and coming down at intervals to see where we were and to let the Major observe. Up & down and back & forth we went until I had no idea where we were. To make things worse, we received a 'Red Alert' in our square so I had to go down and start some hedge hopping. The only thing I was sure of was the direction of the front. I flew 180 degrees in the opposite direction just skimming over the ground. When "All Clear" sounded, I started worrying about where we were. I told the Major we were lost. We found a railroad track and started following it. I flew low over the first town we came to as to find out the name of the place. With the name of the town and the railroad track as guides, the Major started hunting around the map to spot our current location. After about fifteen minutes searching, he finally found the town and then from there on back to the strip. Our only worry was the gas. Everything turned out alright, but never again did he come out to fly with us.

On the tenth of January the 409th Regiment sent out a strong daylight patrol on the left of our Division Sector. I was flying air support for them and had Lt. Lloyd Huskins as observer. He was completely broken in by now and had turned out to be a pretty good fellow. We flew around watching the doughboys move slowly forward and keeping a steady eye for signs of enemy movement. Just after we gassed up the second time and about an hour before dusk, all 'Hell' broke loose on the German side. Artillery shells started falling in the vicinity of our patrol and it was pinned down good. We could see the flashes from these German guns all over the front. There were three separate Batteries of four guns each firing and all at our boys on the ground. Lt. Huskins was frantically plotting in positions and coordinates while I was yelling fire missions over the radio and relaying information as fast as possible. My entry in my Log Book reads, "Saw so much, so fast that it was almost impossible to call it all in." We started two separate adjustments on two of the enemy positions and managed to stop fire from them. Our situation was getting desperate though because it was getting steadily darker. To add to our trouble, the BA-40 battery went dead on the radio. We were able to transmit but we couldn't receive a thing. We continued fire on the two battery positions and plotted in the remaining one as close as we could by coordinates. These coordinates we called into fire direction but told them we would be unable to adjust. Our radio receiver was dead, our gas was low, it was dark and the strip had no lights. I didn't cherish the idea of coming in over those trees in the dark, but there wasn't any choice left. We called the radio at the strip and told them to be ready to turn on jeep lights when we came into

the vicinity of the field. Security was being sacrificed for safety of a plane and two persons. The only way we knew that our message had been received was the flash of two jeep lights marking either end of the strip as we came into the area. It was fun as I set here and think about it now, but then, NO! The rest of our stay at Puttelange was uneventful. However, it was at this place that we first experimented with dropping 60mm mortar shells from our planes. We had marked out a spot on a frozen lake just to the rear of our strip and we would fly over at 1500 ft and drop the mortar shells out onto the ice. Some exploded and some didn't. We gave this up for two reasons. First, the shells were too heavy and too clumsy to use and secondly they didn't always explode on impact when the safety pin was still in. Later in this story I will explain how we finally came to using Bazooka shells and hand grenades.

From Puttelange, we moved to Hattmatt, France where we stayed from January 23 to March 15, 1945. I will just cover the main events that happened to me during this prolonged siege. I guess the most vivid thing in my mind and the first to happen at this new field occurred on the 30th of January. I was adjusting a 928th FA Bn fire mission on some German troops we'd seen go into a house in one of the villages across the lines. They'd (928th) previously fired three rounds; the first was over, the next two short, when I noticed two Germans come running from the house and spread this big Red Cross flag in the road. Of course, the only thing to do was to cease fire and call into the Division Fire Control for instructions. I explained what had happened and waited while the S-3 figured out what we should do. In a few minutes I received orders to continue the adjustment. I proceeded to direct the 928th to blow the "Hell" out of the building, road and Red Cross flag. I later received word that adjustments were continued because it was believed that the Germans were using Red Cross flags and vehicles for bluffing purposes. German ambulances were carrying troops to the front under protection of the Red Cross symbol.

On February 1st (the day I was promoted to 1st Lt.), I cracked-up my plane while attempting to take off from a narrow strip which was under water and with a strong cross wind blowing perpendicular to the strip. My Pilot's Log entry goes like this, "Attempted take-off on narrow strip with strong cross wind. Strip under water, was blown off strip into snow to left, turned back on strip and ran into water wheeling plane around to right, hit snow bank and nosed up almost turning over, but wind pushed tail back to prevent complete upset. Result: Smashed Prop, wing tip, front of engine, sheared off both ends of prop, bent oil sump back. Injuries: Head cut, minor."

On the 2nd of February, flying the other ship in the Bn., I fired the 384th (155mm) on three enemy tanks. We scored one direct hit, ricocheted two off a second tank and had no visible effect on the third tank.

On February 10th, I got the unfortunate assignment of flying Col. Brown, Division Arty Ex. O., to inspect Bn. positions from the air. The day was one of those we all dread. The air was filled with turmoil and just bumpy as hell. Our Air Section Major (Preston) was running around inspecting everything and just generally sweating the arrival of the Colonel. I spent my time checking the radio and the plane. Of course, I have to add that we were again on one of those one-way strips that Major Preston always seemed to be able to find. The planes were all parked along a road, under some trees and we would take off right from our position, straight down the side of a hill and into a valley. As soon as we got in the air, we had to bank left (left hand turn) and fly out down the valley. Upon the Colonel's arrival, and after the multitude of salutes, we got him into a parachute and then into the plane. A Cub plane wasn't suited for a man of his size or height. Where he put all of those legs, I'll never know. I took off and mused into the air at the extreme end of the strip and prayed all the way around that left bank. We finally got into the air and headed out over the Bn. positions. As I stated prior, the air was rough and we were really bouncing around; up and down, snap, flip, level off, etc. We bounced for the entire hour. I felt sort of sorry for the Col. because I was supposed to be used to this activity and it was bothering me. He finally decided he'd had enough and wanted to go back, so I flew back to the strip and landed. The Major was there to meet us and the Col. got out and uttered these words for posterity, "Major, Sir, why didn't you inform me that this wasn't 'Field Grade Officer's' weather?" With that, he left and I never saw him at the air strip again, except for inspections. On the up side, the Air Section did receive some good publicity from him as to how difficult it was to fly one of those "bucking wildcats" on a windy day.

My little stay at Hattmatt is one of the most pleasant memories I have of the War. We were all taken into homes by the French people and the family I stayed with was wonderful. I could go on for thousands of words about all that I did, saw and remember about those days. Suffice it to say that these days were as pleasant as the war would allow.

On March 15th, 1945, the 7th Army began an attack that carried them through to the end of the War (Operation Undertone). It was during this attack that I learned quite a few lessons as did all Artillery Observers. At 0600, the Division Artillery started firing preparation for the attack.

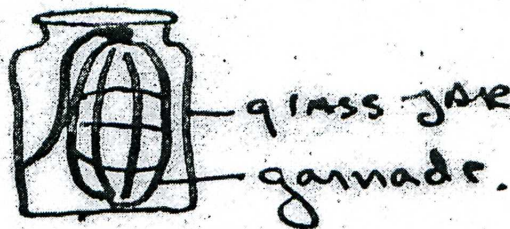
Shell after shell and smoke shell after smoke shell was fired. There was hardly any wind this day and the smoke hung over the area like a huge cloud. It was impossible for us in the air to see anything that was going on under this smoke concentration. All we were able to do was watch the rear of the enemy territory for any movement. Our Infantry finally moved up far enough so that German elements started appearing from under the smoke. It was only then that I could help the doughboys. Our first fire mission in the attack was called to us from the F.O. of the 409th Regiment. One Company was being held up by two machine guns that were someplace in a small town ahead. Ground observation on the area was impossible, so I started a systematic search with shells through the town. I knew the general location of the guns so I adjusted fire on that whole sector of the city. Mission accomplished! All morning and afternoon - - - - I called - - - - they fired; Horse-drawn Artillery moving in the rear, an Infantry Company moving towards the front and two different artillery positions, one with 4 guns and one with 6 guns. It was here that I discovered that the Germans were transporting troops to the front under cover of the Red Cross. They were using ambulances to carry fresh troops to forward positions.

On the 16th, 17th, 18th and 19th, I flew for a Task Force (Cactus) that was moving out to Climbach. We dropped Blood Plasma to the Task Force Commander, relayed radio messages to Division, fired on two enemy tanks and troops and flew horsefly missions for the P-47s. On the 20th, we got a couple holes shot into the plane from machine gun fire. On the 22nd of March, we fired on eight vehicles and destroyed all eight. We also fired on four more vehicles with good effect along with troops moving through a valley. On the 23rd, I flew out to meet Patton's Third Army at Landau. My Log entry for those two days reads as follows:

"The Germans are caught in a trap between Patton's Third Army and the 7th Army. There is a great state of confusion and Germans are all trying to escape out through one narrow valley. It was mass slaughter today as we shot up column after column on the road. Sixty to eighty vehicles were destroyed or disabled by the Air Sections. P-47s were continually bombing all day. A mass scramble is on."

During this attack, our airstrip moved as much as twice a day. We followed a general route from Kirrwiller to Gundershoffen to Woerth, to Lembach and then Wissembourg. On the 23rd and 24th, things got so bad that we were flying low over enemy troops firing .45 pistols and Thompson Sub's out the window of the plane. We had homemade bombs that we dropped whenever we could find a stable target. These bombs were made with hand grenades and glass jars.

The jars had to have a mouth large enough to admit the grenade, but still not too large to allow the handle on the grenade to spring off after the pin was pulled. The bomb worked on the principle that the pin was pulled from the grenade and then inserted into the glass jar. The sides of the jar would keep the handle in place. This device was then dropped from the plane and when the jar hit the ground, it would break and the handle would fly off and activate the grenade.



The war wasn't over yet, but the fight and spirit of the Germans was broken. From Wissenbourg we moved to Eschbach and then to Mannheim, Germany where we crossed the Rhine River on April 7, 1945. The War ended 1 month later. VE DAY!!

Sample Log Book:

DATE	AIRCRAFT FLOWN			LOCAL OR CROSS COUNTRY		REMARKS OR INSPECTOR'S SIGNATURE, CERTIFICATION NUMBER AND RATING
	MAKE OF AIRCRAFT	CERTIFICATE NUMBER	MAKE OF ENGINE	FROM	TO	
11/26	L-4J	USA	O-170-3	airfield near St. Dis		OVERSEAS ON OCT 22 1944 - Beginning of overseas flight (accomplished)
11/27	L-4J	USA	O-170-3	"	"	Enemy Battery
11/30	L-4J	USA	O-170-3	"	"	Radio check
12/1	L-4J	USA	O-170-3	"	"	Dir. movement
12/2	L-4J	USA	O-170-3	airfield near Villis-		B.P. Registration, 13P Registration (2184) 383
12/3	L-4J	USA	O-170-3	"	"	Enemy Troops - Enemy City
12/4	L-4J	USA	O-170-3	Saaleskopf	Strasbourg	Dir. movement
12/5	L-4J	USA	O-170-3	Strasbourg	Bonnwiller	Dir. movement
12/9	L-4H	USA	O-170-3	airfield near Haguenau		Dir. patrol
12/10	L-4H	USA	O-170-3	airfield near Haguenau		Dir. patrol (383 Chant)
12/10	L-4H	USA	O-170-3	airfield near Haguenau		Dir. patrol - Radio Troops

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THE FOREGOING ENTRIES ARE TRUE AND CORRECT.

SIGNED *Darryl G. Gombach* PILOT SIGNATURE

PAGE TOTAL -
 AMT. FORWARD
 TOTAL TO DATE

LESSONS LEARNED

To enlarge on the lessons I learned during combat would mean just re-writing what I've already stated herein. Therefore, I'll just list what I have in mind.

1. Never fire a tremendous concentration of smoke into an area and expect to have efficient and effective air support and air observation in the same area.
2. There is a difference between 'Company Grade Weather' and 'Field Grade Weather'.
3. THE LIAISON PILOT IS HERE TO STAY. GOD BLESS THEM!

PHOTOS



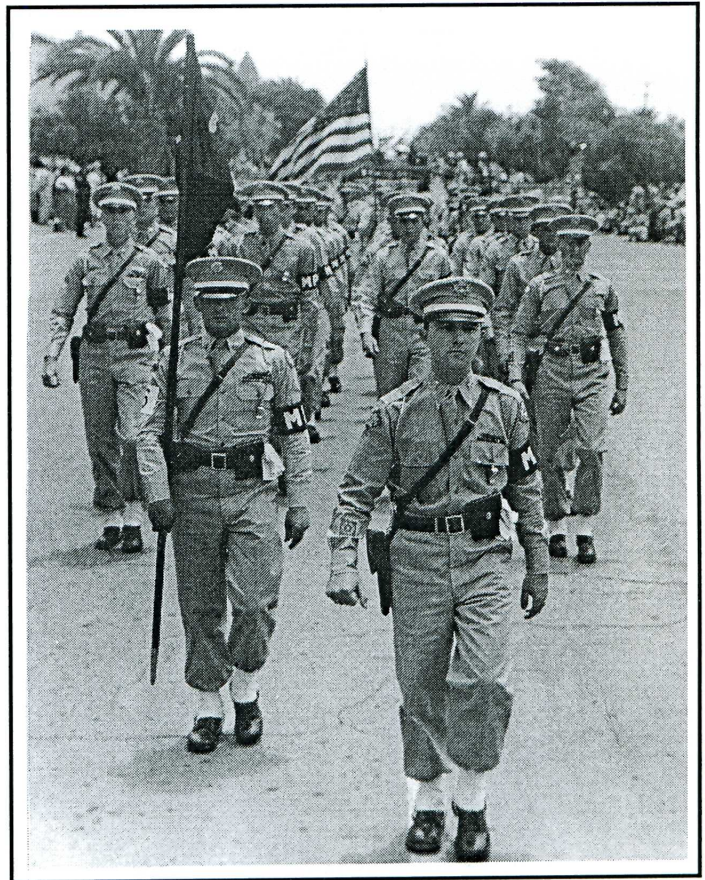
Lt Larry G. Genebach



Lt Genebach with his weapon of choice!



**Lt Genebach with his L4J
Piper Cub**



**Postwar -1st Lt Genebach (CO) leading his
Co-C, 701st MP Bn during parade**