TOUR OF DUTY IN WORLD WAR II

Wren Bowyer

It began when I took an Army Air Corps Cadet examination at the Post Office in Oklahoma City. I told them I was a highschool graduate even though I was not. All they had to do, to find out about this, was go four blocks North of the Post Office to Central High School and check the records; just go from 3rd and Robinson to 7th and Robinson.

I passed the examination and was admitted to the Army Air Corps as a Private, unassigned. A Private unassigned was a Cadet who was waiting for a space in the program. I was shipped to Shepard Field in Wichita Falls, Texas. I was there for one month. Since I was unassigned, there was no formal training for us during this waiting period, so we marched and ran the obstacle course all day and then returned to our barracks. I soon discovered that while marching to the drill field, if I got into the rear of the ranks as we were marching down, and if I did an about face and wandered off, nobody missed me as there was no roll call. So, I did this often. I would go to the air-conditioned service club and lay on the floor and sleep, or play ping pong or some other game. Then I would return as the boys were marching back after the calisthenics and drills, and rejoin the ranks at the end of the line and march back to the barracks. I was there to learn to be a Pilot. The hoop-de-la of playing little toy soldiers was silly to me; so, I made the "nonsense" as easy for myself as I possibly could. And, I guess I did just that, through much of my service career!!

After a few days of doing nothing, I decided it would be nice to see Jeanne and the kids. I discovered they only had roll call twice a week - - when the new Cadets were being processed in, and when they were shipped out. I walked out the gate one day and hitch-hiked to Oklahoma City and spent two days with my family, and then returned to the Base. I arrived back about 5:30 or 6:00pm and went directly to the barracks. Nobody was in the barracks and it didn't take me long to figure out what to do next. I hightailed it to the parade field for roll call to find out who was being shipped out. Sure enough - - my name was called. I had made it with about 10 minutes to spare.

The next day we were shipped out to San Antonio, Texas for three months. There we had classification and then pre-flight. Class consisted of preparing to go into preflight, which was the actual study of becoming an Aviation Cadet.

The salary for a Private at that time was $50 a month. If you were married, you took and put up $22 out of your $50, which left you $28 to live on. The Government, in turn, would take $28 and put with the $22 you put up, giving your wife $50. If you had children, they would give $12 for the first child and $10 for each additional child -- thus Jeanne received $72 per month, and I received $28 per month.

I was a Private for only one month at which time my application for Aviation Cadet went through. My salary as a Cadet was $75 a month, which I in turn made an allotment out for Jeanne for $50 a month and I lived on $25 a month. Of course, food, clothing and all of those things were paid by the Government, so it was $25 pocket money for me.

I'm telling you this because after I returned from overseas at the end of the war, Jeanne had received checks for 8 or 10 months from my status as a Private, even though they had written her and told her I was no longer a Private. At the same time she was receiving my Aviation Cadet allotments also. So, for 6 or 7 months she was receiving two different checks but was entitled to only one.

When I became an Officer, I again submitted an allotment application for Jeanne. The Government continued to mail the Cadet paychecks to her. This continued until after I returned from prison camp. After I arrived home I took the checks to a friend of mine, who was an Attorney. He wrote a letter to the Government requesting they discontinue sending these checks. They discontinued sending the checks, but we were never asked to return any of the checks already received.

When I arrived in San Antonio for three months of classification and preflight there was little for us to do until we were assigned - - except KP, march and drill. As I have already stated, I was not overly fond of such tasks, so I approached the Squadron Commander and mentioned that there were no garbage racks for the containers and told him that I was pretty good with a hammer and saw. He appointed me Squadron Carpenter and I proceeded to build garbage racks. I was on this duty for approximately a month.

During preflight I kept my nose to the grindstone. Classes were held part of the day. The other part was spent in drill. Fortunately, I learned from another Cadet that he had been excused from drill because of stone bruises on his feet. Strange though it may seem, I developed stone bruises on my feet overnight - - so, the next day I was also relieved from drill. However, our Commanding Officer was nobody's fool, and he decided that if we couldn't walk, we could still use our arms. So, we got to use our arms while we scrubbed various places in the barracks. Consequently, very few of the men complained of stone bruises after that.

I recall an amusing incident during preflight. The upperclassmen were upstairs and the underclassmen downstairs. This was a two-month program and you were an underclassman for one month and an upperclassman the next month. The policy was: when an upperclassman entered the barracks, someone would yell "ATTENTION" and you were expected to stand at attention and he would walk through and say "at ease" and go on upstairs. During my stint as an underclassman, one day I was on the floor changing my shoes after KP duty when a Senior Cadet walked in. I yelled "Attention", but failed to stand up. He came over to me and reprimanded me for not standing at attention. This was the first mark against me during preflight.

During my month as an upperclassman I had an experience that I thought was terribly unfair, but turned out to be a blessing in disguise. Unfortunately, I drew Senior Cadet Officer of the Day on Christmas Day. Jeanne, Brenda and Ralph had traveled to San Antonio to visit me, and I was unable to spend the day with them. They came to the Base to see me while I was on duty. Our Squadron Commander, Lt. Green, came in while they were there and I introduced him to Jeanne and the children. The Cadet works from 12 noon to 12 noon. The next day, just prior to my going off duty, Lt. Green came in and commented on "what a nice family I had, and the fact that I had volunteered instead of being drafted." He asked me if there was a Primary Base near my home. I told him there was a Base just outside Oklahoma City - - - - - Cimarron Field in Yukon, Oklahoma. When my orders came after preflight, I was the only man in our outfit that was assigned to Cimarron Field. Special orders had been cut for me!!! I was in Primary training at Cimarron for two months. I flew the PT-19-A's, and got my first solo!!

During Primary, I saw some pretty sad men who had become ill and fallen behind in their flight time, so they would require them to take a 20-day leave, wait for the next class, and start over. One day I got sick and had to report to sick call. I was ill for about 3 days and got behind on my flying time, so I was told to report to the Commander. He sadly informed me that I was behind in flight time and would have to go on a 20-day leave to wait for the next class. He said he "hoped I had time to go home for a visit and make it back in time for the next class." I said, "Yes, Sir, I think I can. My home is only 20 miles away." He smiled at me and I grinned back at him.

Also, during Primary, I discovered that Cadets washed out so quickly, that all they did was roll up the mattress on the bunks of those who washed out. There was no formal roll call. You were expected to attend classes where they did call the roll. On Saturdays you had inspection, no roll call, and were then given an overnight pass. Being dissatisfied with only one night out, I would roll up my mattress on Friday evenings and sneak out under the fence. They assumed the empty bunk was another washout. I would sneak back onto the field on Sunday. I did this for three or four weeks before I got caught coming in too late. I was sent before the Commandant of Cadets and given several tours to do. A "tour" was one hour of solitary marching back and forth from one point to another. However, we were shipped out the following day. So, I wound up in Basic Training and my tours had been left behind. I didn't have to walk them and I started with a clean slate at Strother Field, Winfield, Kansas, in Basic Training. I flew the BT-13, which was a basic trainer.

I didn't make many mistakes in Basic because there weren't many you could make. I had a very understanding Commanding Officer who somehow knew I was married and had a family in Oklahoma City. Every week I walked in, saluted, and he would say, "Bowyer, I guess you are here for a pass." I would answer "Yes Sir" and would be given my pass. But I had an instructor named Lt. Finch who was a fat blob. He was always telling us how easy we had it and how rough it had been when he went through Basic. He said he had to do 25-50 pushups and I replied, "You do 50 pushups - - - HA." That was the wrong thing to say. I graduated with the rank of Flight Officer rather than Second Lieutenant and I found out Lt. Finch was responsible for that.

From Basic I went to Advanced Training at Frederick AF Base in Frederick, OK. Jeanne was scheduled for surgery, so I immediately asked for a leave and was given a 3-day pass to Oklahoma City. After that I tried to behave myself. I flew what I was told to fly and did what I was told to do. Here I flew the first twin-engine plane - - the UC-78. I graduated from Advanced as a Flight Officer and received my pilot's wings on a hot August day in 1943 - - I remember it was 119 degrees on the ramp!! (A Flight Officer is not a commissioned officer - - he is like a Warrant Officer.)

Through all my training so far, I was in the Gulf Coast Training Command - - Cimarron, Strother, and Frederick, where I got my wings. Then, I started the B-24 Transition Training at Tarrant Field, Fort Worth, TX for two months. I graduated from there November 1943.

From Fort Worth, I was shipped to Salt Lake City, Utah for crew assignment. This was in the middle of winter and it was bitterly cold there. We were housed in a big coliseum where livestock shows were held. There were bunks everywhere and men milling around. Some had been there for months waiting for assignments. I could picture myself sitting there for a month to a month and a half doing nothing. I then ran into a man I had known in Oklahoma City - - he was the one who made the crew assignments! I said, "Buddy — Old Pal — you could sure help me out by putting me on a crew and getting me out of here." He said, "No problem, I'll bump some pilot and put you in his place." That is just what he did!

I was shipped to Peterson Field in Colorado Springs for the first stage of phase training of one month. There were three phases we were required to go through with our crews on the B-24. My family joined me there and we had Thanksgiving dinner in a house I had rented. It had a wood burning cook stove! After the one month we were transferred to Harvard Air Force Base in Harvard, Nebraska. This was for the next two phases of training. Everything went well there and we stayed for two months and the family lived in Clay Center.

The time then came for us to fly our planes overseas with our crews and that would conclude our training. I went to our Commanding Officer and asked for a 48-hour pass so I could drive my wife and children back to Oklahoma City.

Permission was denied. I saluted him, did an about face, and went home to move my family. I put them in the car and drove them to Oklahoma City. I turned around and took a train straight back to Harvard. They knew I had been gone. I was called before my Commanding Officer and he severely reprimanded me for being AWOL. I said, "Sir, my wife and family come first; you come second; and, if I had it to do over, I would do the same thing." I received no punishment -- just the reprimand!

March 24, 1944 we left Harvard for Lincoln, for our staging, and my crew was assigned to the Headquarters Station #11 at Caribbean Wing, Morrison Field in West Palm Beach, Florida on March 25, 1944. My Bomb Groups were in 15th A. F..

From Florida we flew to somewhere in South America; then, flew from South America over to Africa; then up to our place in Northern Africa where we waited to go to Cherignola, Italy to our Base.

While we were there in Marrakesh, Africa, one of the clever things they did for showers was heat the water in wingtip tanks by letting it sit out all day. We were told while we were there that if we found any Arabs around the Compound -- sneaking around or anything -- to kill them! Shoot them! All it cost the U.S. Government was $50 for each dead Arab. They would rather have them dead than stealing or stabbing any of us!

Also, while in Marrakesh, we went into town one day on a booze run. Tom Elder was our "official taster". Inasmuch as he had operated a still of his own in Georgia, back in the hills, he would take a sip out of a jug and swish it around in his mouth. If he drank it, we drank it! If he swished it around for a while and spit it out, you couldn't have paid me to drink it!

All this time I was with the 484th Bomb Group. We were to go to Cherignola, Italy to join the 461st Bomb Group (in the 767th Squadron). The 461st had flown some combat missions and were short some crews. So, they requested some crews from the 484th to fill in their roster. Since I was the guy who was AWOL while taking my family home, you know "who" was transferred out of the 484th to the 461st! This was no doubt the best thing that could happen to me -- becoming a member of the 461st Group. I would be flying with seasoned combat pilots who knew the score!

I flew with the 461st, and our losses were the fewest of any of the 15th Air Force planes flying these missions. The fighters would watch for a group flying in bad formation and would try to shoot them down. Our Group was a hot Group and as a result, the fighters left us alone! I flew my first mission in April 1944, and being new with the 461st, I was assigned "tail-end Charley". In a formation of seven planes -- three in the front, three behind and one in the rear to fill the slot of any plane that became disabled, or shot down -- tail-end Charley was the one in the rear! This is where I stayed during the time I was with the 461st.

I was still a Flight Officer, but when they discovered I had a Second Lieutenant Bombardier, and a Second Lieutenant Navigator, they promoted me to Second Lieutenant on January 22, 1944. An enlisted man couldn't command commissioned officers. I made First Lieutenant July 9, 1944.

The "Liberator", the B-24, is a four-engine aircraft. It had a nose turret gun, a tail turret gun, a ball turret gun at the bottom, a top turret gun at the top, and two side window guns -- so there were actually six Gunners in the crew. Besides the six Gunners who were enlisted men, there were four Officers. There was a Pilot, Co-Pilot, Bombardier, Navigator. The Radio Operator and the Flight Engineer were also gunners -- in other words, these two men pulled double duty.

Normally, the Engineer was the top turret gunner, but my Engineer chose to be a waist gunner. He chose to be back there so he could watch the engines to be sure they were running well. In our crew, we had four men who had gone to Flight Engineer School and all four graduated. I had to choose which one of the four I would designate as the Flight Engineer. I went to the four men and told them that my life and their lives could very easily depend upon who we chose as Flight Engineer. They went off into a huddle and decided that Paul D. McDaniel was the most knowledgeable engineer, so they chose him. He was from Missouri. The Radio Operator was Charles W. Weatherly. The Tail Gunner was Edmund Vanella. The Ball Turret Gunner was Gus Mitchell. The Nose Gunner was Robert N. Suitts (he joined us after we arrived overseas). Elton E. Cheshier was the Top Turret Gunner. Gus Mitchell was the Ball Gunner. The Bombardier was Tom Elder. The Navigator was Archie P. Hanson. The Co-Pilot was Clarence E. Stauffer.

One day we were flying in our usual position, and we were flying in the "prop wash" of the group in front of us. So, I fed the coal to my plane and went up and joined the other Squadron in front. When we got back down, my Operations Officer (who was apparently leading that flight) berated me for my actions! I replied, "Sir, you had me flying in the other planes' prop wash so much I figured you wanted me to fly with them, so I went up there and flew with them." He saw to it that I flew tail-end Charley for the remainder of my time there! This was fine with me, as I was there to fly just 50 missions and then come home.

"Prop Wash" is the same thing as the exhaust of a jet engine. In other words, what a propeller does is pull air through it, and it goes toward the back of the plane - - so, prop wash is the air that moves behind it. When you get into prop wash, you will flutter. It is very turbulent!! You can not fly in it!!! When we were flying in the prop wash of the planes ahead, I was flying in a seven-plane "V" Formation along with three other Squadrons. There were four Squadrons in a Bomb Group - - or 112 planes.

From take-off to landing, a mission to a target and back could last anywhere from six to nine hours. I wasn't too happy with my co-pilot, so I flew practically all the time. Formation flying is the hardest flying in the world to do, because you can't set it on automatic pilot, sit back and prop your feet up, and go to sleep or just watch the instruments. Your wing is right down here on this next plane over there, and you're flying "exact" flying all the way. It's a funny thing, you sort of get into an automatic numb feeling, and it's just one of those things you don't realize. Time goes so fast when you're in the air. I don't know why, but it always has with me. When you're flying a plane, time flies.

The seasoned fellows that started out with the 461st Group finished their tours and went home. Replacements were coming in daily. Some of the places where our missions were flown were Ploesti (Rumania), Southern Germany, Northern Italy, and Austria. We were shot down over Lintz, Austria, bombing the Hermann Goring Tank Works factory, on what I call my "shot down day" -- July 25, 1944. I was 27 years old. I was flying my 50th and last mission!! I had my bags packed and was ready to come home. My bags came home without me!!!!

These replacements coming in were unseasoned and new crews. We were flying a very sloppy formation when our plane was shot down. It went down in flames, and in a spin, and the controls were shot out of it. I cut a gash in my head getting out of the plane, for which I later received a purple heart. The first thing that went through my mind after we were hit was self-preservation. Get out of the aircraft!! When the aircraft sliding hatch door stuck, and we had trouble getting it open, the only thing that went through my mind was "Is this the way I'm going to die? What about my wife and children?"

When we were shot down, some of the crew had already flown all their missions. Some of them had flown missions with other crews. When the plane went down, five of my original crew got out of the plane. Arnie Hanson was in the tail of the plane taking pictures. It was his 50th mission also, but he didn't get out of the plane. He was the only one killed out of my original crew. That particular day there were four replacements flying with me, and none of them got out of the plane. Three of them were in the tail with Hanson, and one was in the nose gun. They couldn't get out. I had had Suits grounded because he had become hysterical during the last two missions. Vanella, my tail turret gunner, had had his arm blown off by flack, so he was not in the crew when we went down. One man in the tail got out and that was my engineer, McDaniels. He said that he pulled himself up to the waist window by sheer strength and went out over the side. So, five of them went down with the plane. The ball turret gunner couldn't get out of the ball turret. The tail gunner couldn't get out of the tail. The other waist gunner couldn't get out and Hanson was back there so he didn't get out either.

The only way a Pilot in the cockpit can get out is through the nose wheel door or the bomb bay. I went out the bomb bay. At each briefing before a mission, it was emphasized that if we had to bail out, we were NOT to pull the ripcord until we were very close to the ground - - the German fighters loved to use us for target practice. My burning plane was in a spin, so it would go around and around and make passes at me. When my spinning plane got too close for comfort, I decided to "pull that ripcord" and take my chances with the German fighters.

Once on the ground you were supposed to try to escape. I had an escape kit with maps and a compass in my flying suit, but apparently the buttons weren't buttoned securely because that was all gone. I landed in a corn field that had been harvested. Corn stalks were stacked up like teepees. I got inside one of the stacks of corn stalks. I was going to escape!! I was going to walk out!! I said to myself - - "my head is bleeding, I don't know which way is North and which is South. I could get an infection from the insects buzzing around my head wound; I better give myself up." So, I went looking for someone to give myself up to!! Someone came along and grabbed me. Tom later said he saw me sitting beside the road as the Germans were collecting the others. They took us to a prison for Polish prisoners. A Polish prisoner stitched my head up. He put four stitches in it. The gash was about six inches long. They stitched me up with no medication. (I have a picture that was in the file at the prison camp. I had hair then - - the hair on one side of my head was longer than the other side. That was because of my wound. They had to shave one side of my head to sew up the wound.)

We were then taken to a place where they interrogated us. They interrogated everybody. They knew what group I was assigned to, and that I was nobody important, and that I didn't have an important position, and my rank was that of First Lieutenant. If I'd been a Major, Lt Col, or above, I'm sure my interrogation would have been far lengthier. With me, they just went through the motions.

We were taken to a prison camp in Barth, Germany where we were imprisoned in tents, and we slept most of the time. This was an Officers camp, so the only people there were Pilots, Bombardiers and Navigators - - all Air Force Officers who had been shot down.

Some of the fellows in my tent found some German cheese. It was the worst smelling cheese. They put some under my pillow, cause all I wanted to do was sleep. For some reason I couldn't smell it and they couldn't stand it. So they threw it away.

From time to time, we received Red Cross food parcels which contained among many things, five packages of cigarettes.

Some of the men didn't smoke so there was an abundance of cigarettes. A lot of the men gambled, played poker, or had floating crap games. They started using the cigarettes for money to gamble with. Poker games were being played from morning until night. Some of the men lost heavily and would make hand-sketched checks to pay their losses. Some of these checks were a work of art. They were for various amounts — some quite sizeable. I didn't gamble so I didn't indulge in the games.

At Barth, Germany there were two Compounds — the South Compound and the North 1 Compound. When the North 2 Compound was completed, those of us in tents were the first to be moved there. We were put into an 18-man room. Again, we received Red Cross food parcels, so we cooked our own meals. Some of the guys cooked their own; some would pool their food and cook meals for six or eight. Our Red Cross parcels consisted of a small box of graham crackers, a can of powdered milk, a box of cheese, a can of either tuna or salmon, a chocolate "D" bar. five packs of cigarettes, a box of sugar cubes, a small can of instant coffee, a small can of butter or oleo margarine, and either a box of raisins or prunes. The Germans would puncture the cans - - like the tuna or salmon - - so we would have to eat them and couldn't save them for escaping.

Some of our fellows built a container and put prunes, yeast and water in it and let it ferment. They traded cigarettes to the Germans for the yeast. When that stuff fermented and got ready to come off, it was really potent, especially if you hadn't had anything to drink for a few months. I don't know how often they ran the batches off, but I do know they used to get pretty high, and have a grand old time! The next day, there would be cases of delicate stomach and, shall we say, diarrhea!!!

When the North 3 Compound was built, I put in for and got to be the food "ACCO" Officer. This meant being put in a room at the end of the Compound. This room contained a storage cabinet. It was a job I thought I would like so I took it. ACCO was run on a points system. It was done this way before I arrived there, so I continued. I would take in things like graham crackers for so many points. Each thing was given points. A fellow would bring in something for a certain number of points and trade for something else for a certain number of points. It was just an exchange, with a 2% charge for the food ACCO Officer. The points built up so that we had more food than some of the others.

Tom Elder, my Bombardier was in my room with me. He was the head Librarian of the new Compound. Meilhoff was in my room also and he was the Compound Interpreter. Three of us could sleep in the room, but Teskee, our painter, stayed with us except for sleeping. Meilhoff would talk with the German guards at night through the window and trade with them for things that we needed. Onions were one thing that we didn't get and he would trade cigarettes for onions. Some of the trades were far more "sensitive" than that! We had a hidden radio in the barracks that picked up BBC and, from time to time, parts were needed to keep it operating. Cigarettes were traded for radio parts. Of course, the radio was strictly forbidden, and the guards would search our barracks at times to try and find the radio they knew was there. But -- they never found it!!!

Jim Teskee was an artist and he painted some really beautiful pictures while he was there. He gave me one that I admired very much, but when I left prison camp, I forgot and left it behind. I would very much like to have had that picture, but I was more interested in getting out of there than carrying around a souvenir. I haven't the slightest idea what happened to it.

Some of the Officers in the Compound were teachers in civilian life, so we actually held classes there. There were classes in math, foreign language and others I don't remember. I never attended any of the classes, but a lot of the guys did.

I remember one man who built a clock while he was there. It was made entirely of wood and had no metal parts at all. It was an old-fashioned pendulum clock and it kept perfect time.

Our Commanding Officer in North 3 Compound was Colonel Gabrinski, a fighter ace. We became good friends. As a matter of fact, he flew through Oklahoma a couple of times when I was in the furniture business in Midwest City and we had some nice talks.

I was in prison camp for nine and one-half months. We were liberated from the Germans by the Russians. It was complete chaos!!! Everybody was running helter skelter. The Russians became our guards, just like the Germans had been. We were allowed to run around the prison camp but were not allowed outside the Compound.

A few days after the Russians took over, one of the men said he was going to just "walk out". We had heard several of the guys already had walked out through the lines. So, some of us took off and started walking West. We had no maps and didn't need them. We walked for three days. We did not sleep outside during this time. Each night as it was getting dark, we would find a farm house and knock on the door. They would take us in, feed us, and give us a place to sleep. Early the next morning we would get on our way again.

When we arrived at the Canadian Front, I was taken, and I don't remember why, to the four Sergeants who were in charge of communications, and I spent the night with them. I met a Canadian Officer who took me out to the airfield the next day. They had confiscated all the German cars and put them out on the field. The officer took me out on the field and told me to take my pick of the cars. He then took me to his room where he had many confiscated guns. He told me and another man to take our choice. I chose a couple of guns - - a "burp" gun and a pistol. We put our guns in the car and drove away. We had no money -- we didn't need any. We obtained gas at the Supply Depots along the way and ate at the Officers Clubs until we arrived in Brussels, Belgium. I drew a partial pay after we arrived there, and proceeded to spend it on booze and women. We then went on toward Paris.

I later found out, that the men who had stayed behind in the prison camp, were there while the American and Russian authorities negotiated their release. They finally flew them somewhere in Northern France where they had large Prisoner of War camps. There were a large number of prisoners there. The fellows had to stand in line for everything - - they stood in line for breakfast - - stood in line for lunch - - stood in line for dinner! They named these camps. One was Camp Lucky Strike. It took quite a while to get all of them out of the camps and home! While those poor bastards stood in line, I was on a hospital ship out of Paris, heading home. Found out later that these fellas, and their wives and families, were treated to two weeks in a hotel in Florida after they got back. I didn't know anything about that, so maybe I wasn't so smart after all.

We finally arrived in Paris. The guy with me disappeared - - I have no idea what happened to him. I sold the car for almost nothing. If I had picked a passenger car instead of a sports car, I would have had lots of money. Passenger cars were needed and sold for a premium.

In Paris I went to a hospital and told them I was a Prisoner of War. All prisoners must go to a hospital first. They immediately sent me to a Psychiatrist. We talked a lot!! He admired the pistol I had!! I asked him if he liked the pistol and he replied, "Yes, very much." I told him if he would get me on the next boat for home I would make him a present of it. He really wrote up a report on me. (I came home with the "burp" gun but have no idea what happened to it). I had a few days to wait in Paris, so I drew another partial pay. I bought Jeanne a beautiful necklace, which Brenda now has. I blew the rest in "Pig Alley".

This Psychiatrist kept his word and got me on a boat right away. It was a hospital ship on its way to the United States. July 3, 1945 we arrived back in the States, and my first official station was Camp Edwards, Massachusetts. I called my family from there and let them know where I was. Prisoners of War were given preference of any general hospital they wished to go to. I chose Borden General in Chickasha, OK.. I went there by train, and after checking in I immediately asked for a leave. I was entitled to a 60-day leave, so I was given a leave.

After the leave was up I spent about a week in the hospital. They then wrote up orders for me to go to an Army Base in Ft. Smith, Arkansas. I went to Ft. Smith - - they looked at me and my orders and told me I shouldn't be there but should be in San Antonio. So they cut separate orders to send me to San Antonio. I asked for a delay en route. They gave me a 20-day delay en route so I went back to Oklahoma City!! After the 20 days I reported to San Antonio. When I arrived there, I discovered that the woman who filled out my report was a relative of Tom Elder, my Bombardier. SO -- she forgot about the 60-day leave I had already received and gave me another 60-day leave!!! I went back to Oklahoma City for another 60 days!!!

After that last 60-day leave, I went back to San Antonio and reported in. But they still gave me various leaves.

The last one was a terminal leave or something like that. I just know I arrived back in the U.S. in July 1945 and had various leaves until February 4, 1946, when I was officially discharged, I was paid by the Government for leaves of one kind or another.

In the meantime I had gone to work for the Hoover Company in Tulsa, Oklahoma, sometime during the month of November or December 1945. I had to take off a few days to go back to San Antonio to be discharged. Then, I went back to Tulsa to my job.

Besides the Purple Heart, I received air medal awards for meritorious achievement in aerial flight while participating in sustained operational activities against the enemy:

(1) April 16, 1944 to May 5, 1944;
(2) May 7, 1944 to May 17, 1944;
(3) May 18, 1944 to June 6, 1944.

This means I was entitled to one air medal and three oak leaf clusters. I have two oak leaf clusters on the air medal, so I am missing one oak leaf cluster. There are also three battle stars on the air medal.

I was put in for promotion to Captain after I returned from overseas. I was a prisoner of war and had flown 50 combat missions, so I was recommended for promotion to Captain.

"The Secretary for Personnel Board has not favorably considered the recommendation for promotion for First Lt. Edwin Wren Bowyer to the grade of Captain." "There is insufficient justification for a presumption that subject officer would have been promoted but for his capture."

Even with some of the "bad" reports still in my records -- example: Lt. Finch -- they told me if I had stayed in the service, they would have automatically made me a Captain. I could have cared less -- "I wanted out!!!!!!!!!"

In 1983, a Government nationwide program was started, to contact all former Prisoners of War, and all Vietnam Veterans (for Agent Orange). I started my appointments January 1984. The Paris Psychiatrist's report was missing, along with many other orders and forms. I was told many records were burned in a big fire in the "vault" in St. Louis. I went through

many tests of all kinds, three of which were by the Psychiatrists in San Antonio. None could furnish a final report stating I had physical or mental damage from being a Prisoner of War. But, naturally, "I knew that all the time!!"

(Further conversation on a tape):

BRENDA: You talk about overpowering them so much by the sheer number of planes; but, I think it would be interesting why a ball bearing plant or tanks works factory would be important to destroy.

WREN: When you figure that the Allies put up somewhere in the neighborhood of about 5,000 planes a day - - that they are bombing aircraft manufacturing plants, ball bearing plants, ammunition dumps, oil refineries - - the idea of bombers, is going behind the lines and destroying their sources of supplies. You can have the manpower; but, if you don't have the machine power to go with the manpower, you can't win a war. Same thing with tanks. The tank works with the manufacture of tanks, manufacture of artillery, guns and everything. They are not manufactured up there on the fighting lines. They're manufactured way back behind the lines, and that is why the bombers were so important.

And, like Russia, probably the best way to beat an enemy is, if you have the territory to do it, is to let them advance - - advance - - advance - - and finally they get so far away from their sources of supplies, that you can swoop in a pincher movement and cut them off and they are dead dodos. They have exhausted all their supplies. Patton ran out of gas once in his attack. They had to sit and wait for gas. Now, here is a perfectly good tank - - the men and everything else - - but it can't go anywhere without gas. So, you have to be careful in a war that you don't outrun your sources of supplies. If you can cut them off to where there are no supplies, that's even better.

BRENDA: I guess the thing that most of all mystifies all of us, that weren't there, is "Why do we tend to glorify it"? It is a war of all wars, and God knows we all hate wars, but there is more history on this war.

Cadet Wren Bowyer
1942 and 1943

1st Lt. Bowyer -- June 1945
in Boston, Mass. after returning
from World War II.

WREN -- 11 years old (1929)

Oklahoma State Champion
selling Liberty magazines

June or July 1945

Wren and Jeanne Bowyer
Ralph and Brenda
Frank Shepherd

January 1944

Wren Bowyer and Crew

Lower Left: Wren
Lower Right: Tom Elder