TRACING OUR MISSING IN ACTION
Part II

EDWARD K. SIMPSON
by Merle Olmsted

On the 10th of August, 1944, most of the 357th Fighter Group's P-51s and pilots were in sunny Italy, on their way home from the shuttle mission to Russia. However, those pilots and aircraft left at Leiston continued to fly missions, altho at reduced strength.

LtCol Tom Hayes led the mission on the 10th, 14 Mustangs on a 5 hour escort of an equally small group of B-24s, which bombed a target at Nevers France. Hayes reported no enemy aircraft seen, and it would have been a routine mission it it had not been for the mid air collision of two 363rd P-51s.

Lt. Marion Burnett was a witness: "We were escorting B-24s at approx. 1110 hours, at 22,000 ft, 10 miles east of Sens, France. Lt. Simpson was leading the flight and he started a medium turn to the left. Lt. Ferron immediatly crossed from the left to the right and I began to slowly move my element in trail. I had nearly completed this move when Lt. Ferron apparently thinking I wasn't going to cross over, did a sharp turn to the left and over Lt. Simpson. The two ships collided and locked themselves together and one caught fire. After spinning once or twice, the planes seperated and the fuselage tank in the burning plane exploded, practically destroying the ship. The other plane began a slow spiral seemingly under full control. I was a few miles behind and above this plane and started to follow him, but after dropping down to 14,000 ft, I lost him in the haze.

Both Lt. Simpson and Lt. Donald J. Ferron were listed as Missing in Action, although in fact, Ferron had died in the burning P-51.

Early in September, a bracelet with the name of Edward K. Simpson was delivered to the 357th, which had come down through channels from the Office of the Director of Intelligence of U.S. Strategic Air Forces In Europe. It is endorsed by 8th Air Force, 8th Fighter Command, 66th Fighter Wing, and finally to the 357th. The exact action that was to be taken is unknown, but all endorsements say the same thing: "For your information and necessary action". Perhaps it was meant to be sent on to Simpson's wife in Pomona, California.

About a month later, on the 9th of October, a report from the intelligence Officer of the 302nd Air Transport Wing, based in France, provided the facts's of Simpson's death. This report states that Simpson had survived the crash uninjured, but was killed in action 4 days later, on 14 August. He had been buried in the village cemetery at Ouzouer sur Loier, Loiret, France. After the crash he had made contact with the FFI (The French resistance movement) and they were escorting him, along with 7 other Americans, and two Britishers, when they became involved in a firefight with German troops. Simpson was killed and the two Britishers were captured and later executed. Three of the FFI men were killed, but the other seven Americans made it to Allied lines and provided information on the events.

On the 12th of March, 1945, Simpson's status was changed from MIA to KIA, on 10 August, 1944. Note that the date is incorrect.

In 1950, action was taken, at his father's request, to change his rank from 1st Lt. to Captain, as the records showed that he had been posthously promoted to that rank.

The final paperwork on this affair is dated 15 years later, in 1960! Under date of 31 March, 1960, the Casualty Section of the Adjutant General's office wrote to Chief, Personnel Services Branch. It relates the above facts, and adds that the 25 November, 1959 issue of Stars and Stripes newspaper had a detailed article about the action in which Simpson died, titled THE DEAD YANK OF ORLEANS FOREST.

Upon learning of these clippings, the Army Records Center at St. Louis, sent them on to the Casualty Branch for investigation, which in turn, passed them along to the Commanding General, U.S. Army Communications Zone, Europe, asking for sworn statements from witnesses to the event.

Although two persons were found with knowledge of the event, neither had actually witnessed it. The letter concludes: "It is not possible to obtain an eye-witness account of Capt. Simpson's death. However, in view of official information contained in AG 201 file (burial report and report from intelligence officer and record at Mairie (?) there is no doubt that Captain Simpson was killed in action on 14 August, 1944. Although every detail of the circumstances attending Capt. Simpsons's cannot be verified by an eye-witness statement, the information is confirmed, in part, by the official records and there is no reason to question the authenticity of the information contained in the newspaper article. It is recommended that a report of death be issued showing that Captain Edward K. Simpson was killed in action on 14 August, 1944 in ground combat with German forces while fighting with French Maquis."

If a copy of the 25 November, 1959 issue of Stars and Stripes can be found, it would shed more light on the tragic death of the 357th's Eddie Simpson.

Simpson's widow apparently made the decision not to return his remains to the U.S. and he is buried in the American cemetery at Epinal in France.

END

STRANGE HAPPENINGS

Our member Wally Baldwin lives just outside of Dayton and the Wright Patterson Field area. As the "Freedom Flight" traveled from the west coast to the east coast, some of the aircraft were scheduled to stop over-night at Wright Patterson. Wally went to the airbase on that occasion to observe the various restored military aircraft.

As Wally stood by a restored P-51, there was another man who wore a white cap and shirt with a P-51 logo standing there. As the man lingered at the restored aircraft, Wally asked "Did you ever fly one of these"? The man replied that he did over Europe until he was shot down by flak and became a P.O.W. Wally asked him what Group he belonged to and the reply was the 357th Fighter Group. So Wally continued and asked his name and the man told him Lepore.

Wally did not know it but Rocco Lepore (364th) had been sought by Ray and Annette Bank and Dr. Neil Harris ever since May of 1992. At that time Joe De Shay got into the search with them. All manners of research were exhausted with no success. Ray and Neil and Rocco had been P.O.W.'s together and Ray and Neil hoped to locate Rocco for a 50th Anniversary of their confinement.

Upon returning home, Wally phoned Joe De Shay that he had found a "Lost Sheep". That evening Joe phoned Rocco who promised to phone the Bank's home. Rocco kept his promise! You old soldiers know what the rest of this story will be. Today Rocco goes by the name of Ray. Phone number is 219-925-1498.

TRACING OUR MISSING IN ACTION
Part III

CAPT. WILLIAM H. MOONEY JR.
by Merle Olmsted

It is Christmas Eve, 1944. The weather has been miserable all month. In the Ardennes Forest of Belgium, American troops - short of winter clothing and everything else, have been fighting desperately for a week to stem Germany's last massive attempt to change the course of the war. Their efforts will ultimately be successful - the powerful German offensive will fail

The 8th Air Force is out in huge numbers (the largest of the war) to help the beleaguered ground troops, and so is the 357th Ftr. Grp. Col. Dregne and Major Peterson lead 75 P-51s, in two groups, off Leiston's runways shortly before noon. The Luftwaffe is also out in force, and it will be an eventful Christmas Eve.

Before evening chow, the Mustangs have returned and it has been a good day with claims for 31 enemy fighters shot down. Statistically, the cost has been reasonable - 3 pilots failed to return, all three are dead. However, for those lost and their familes and friends, it is not a resaonsble statistic.

Among those lost is Lt. Wendall Helwig. He and his wingman Lt. Saul Sitzer flew thru a flight of 352nd Grouo P-51s. Sitzer was lucky, but Helwig flew broadside into one of the blue nose P-51s, and both men died.

Lt. William T. Gilbert shot down two PW 190s, and then, seperated from Dollar Squadron, he engaged another 190. The two shot each other down, and both German and American died in unsuccessful bailouts.

Captain William H, Mooney Jr, along with Lt. Jesse Frey, were spares on the mission, and would not have had to fly the mission. Both continued however, flying above and behind Dollar red Leader. Jesse Frey's statement from the Missing Aircrew Report:

"Captain William H. Mooney Jr, 362nd F.S, and I were flying Dollar spare, above and behind Dollar Red leader. When the FW 190s were called in below us in the vicinity of Fulda, Germany, Capt. Mooney split-essed into the trailing gaggle of 190s. A 190 from the right side crossed in between Mooney and me and broke into me. I broke into him, but the 190 reversed his turn into another P-51. By this time I had lost Mooney. When I last saw him, he was tacked on to an FW 190. Several pilots of this squadron testify that theys aw an olive drab P-51 of this unit on fire and saw it's pilot bail out. Since Captain Mooney's ship was painted this color, it was possibly he. All of the foregoing took place around 1425 B.S.T. on 24 December, 1944."

There are several translations of Luftwaffe documents with Mooney's MACR, all of which indicate the aircraft was totally destroyed and the pilot dead. He was buried in the village cemetery of Laubach. There was no marker on the grave. As an unknown U.S. soldier, the case was investigated postwar by a Quartermaster Grave Registration Company and this determined his identity. The final report was dated 5 August, 1947.

During the investigation, however, in August, 1945, the team obtained the following statement from the mayor of Laubach: "The pilot, unknown, made a crash landing and was then shot in the back by a man by the name of Hoffman who is now in a prison camp in the vicinity of Marburg.

Altho initially carried as an unknown by U.S. authorities, several Luftwaffe reports dated 31 Dec, 1944, give his full name and service number. Whether they were aware of the circumstances of his death are unknown.

In the latter part of 1993, I was contacted by a Hans-Peter Koller of Offenbach, Germany. Koller was researhing the death of Mooney, and asked for my assistance. in December of 1944, he had been a school boy about 11 years old and lived in the area where Mooney landed. He had been a school mate of the son of Hoffman (referred to above.)

The results of Koller's research were published in 1995 in the form of a small book titled "Der Fliegermard Von Freienseen". Mr. Koller has kindly sent copies of the book to myself and to Arch Mooney, William's brother, and member of our association. It is well illustrated with photos and appears well done. It is, of course, in German, but since my knowledge of the language hovers near zero, I cannot read it. Arch has promised a translation.

However, Koller sent a copy of the original trial transcript, which is, of course, in English, and this provides us with the circumstances of the affair. We will quote here the evidence of the prosecution: (all references here to the accused refer to Emil Hoffman)

"The accused, and Ortsgruppenleiter in the NSDAP since 1933, arrested an American flyer, 24 December, 1944, at Freienseen, Germany. The American flyer was in the custody of Heene (Otto). After winning an argument with a German noncommissioned officer for the custody of the flyer, the accused left the flyer in the custody of Heene while he returned to his home. Shortly thereafter the accused reappeared in his party uniform carrying a revolver in his hand. The accused and Heene together with another German then marched the flyer toward Jubach, Germany where the flyer was to be turned over to the Kreisleiter's office. Heene was on the left of the flyer and the accused was on the right. Suddenly the accused jumped up behind the flyer and fired a shot into him. The flyer staggered and the accused grabbed him by the arm and shot him again. The flyer fell to the ground. The accused returned to Freienseen, secured his horse and wagon, and returned to fetch the flyer to Lubach, where the victim was buried.

"The pathologist's report shows only two gunshot wounds in the victim's body. The flyer at no time tried to escape on the way to Lubach."

It is odd that nowhere in the trial papers I have is Mooney's name mentioned. He is referred to only a "flyer", and for a time, he was unidentified. This may be the reason.

Heene and Hartman were both acquited, but despite a skilled presentation by the defense (a U.S. Army captain Morse), Hoffman was convicted of the murder, and sentenced to be hanged. After the conviction, the defense again pleaded for clemency, referring to the fact that he had a family and no previous record. However, the conviction was upheld, and Hoffman was executed by hanging at the Landsberg War Crimes Prison in August, 1948.

MOONEY PAGE 3

At the request of his father, William H. Mooney Sr, the remains were returned to the ZI in January, 1945, to his home at Hawkinsville, Georgia, and then to the cemetery at Columbus, Georgia.

Mooney was the 2nd 357th pilot known to have been murdered by a German civilian, the first being Captain Fletcher Adams in May, 1944.

As we have indicated in the first part of this article, Major Alva Murphy's death is still a question mark, since it is not adequately explained by the available documentation.

Merle Olmsted 1995



CREW CHIEF
S/Sgt. Robert Hall

PILOT
Capt. William Mooney

LIBBY-B

G4-X

photo

Arch Mooney

THE ADVENTURES OF A FRANTIC V CREW CHIEF

Those who were part of FRANTIC V, and those who have read past issues of the 357th News letter, will recall that FRANTIC was the code name for the various shuttle missions to Russia, from both England and Italy, in August, 1944. There had been four previous shuttle missions, none very productive. For number five the 357th was tasked to provide escort on the final leg into Russia. For all of those on the mission - the pilots and some 30 plus ground crews, it was a memorable event. With the advantage of 50 years hindsight, the ground crew participation appears to have been a total fiasco. Although there are no documents in the writer's files that spell out their intended duties, it seems obvious that the P-51 technicians were meant to service and repair the fighters in Russia and Italy. If they had performed that duty, the disasterous episode of servicing many of the Mustangs with the wrong fuel, might have been avoided. In fact, the 357th ground crews never saw the P-51s in either country, and spent their time with the bombers where they probably accomplished very little useful work.

The B-17s, from the 95th and 390th Bomb Groups were scheduled to land and be based while in Russia, at Poltava, while the P-51s occuppied an airfield at Piryatin, about 100 miles away. Surely the base selection had been done at 8th AF Hdqers, and were well known to the mission planners. Why they bothered to send the 357th technicians at all remains a mystery.

All of those who participated have stories to tell and some of them have done so in earlier publicatons. We intend here to relate the adventures of 364th crew chief, SSgt Richard Eagan. He, like many others of the 357th, was assigned the totally unfamilar duty as a waist gunner in one of the B-17s. The mission itself was long and relatively uneventful, but probably the experience of a lifetime for the neophyte gunners on their first mission.

According to Eagan's diary, his B-17 landed at Poltava at 1730 hours, on the 6th of August, after a ten hour mission.

Part of the B-17 force, with a small P-51 escort, flew a bombing mission the next day - the only one from the Russian base. The extremely short stay on Russian soil may have been due to the memory of the many B-17s lost to German bombs on the previous shuttle. It was a case of "getting the hell out of here".

On the morning of the 8th, the two bomb groups, along with most of the 357th departed Russian bases, bound for Italy. It was at this point that Dick Eagan's war took a divergent path from the rest - while taxying into take off position, his B-17 dropped a wheel into a hastily filled bomb crater and became mired up to its hub. By the time the aircraft was extricated from the mud, the rest of the B-17 force was well on it's way to Italy and Eagan's aircraft was not allowed to proceed alone.

Sometime during this idle waiting time, Eagan engaged in a bit of espionage type burglary with a Russian accomplice.

On the second day at Poltava, a Russian photographer had taken at least two photos of a mixed group of 357th ground crews and Russian airmen. At about this same time Eagan had several conversations with a Soviet officer who spoke some English. Eagan recalls the episode:

"Sometime after the pictures were taken I asked him about getting a copy of the photos for myself. He said he would try but would I do him a favor in return. He asked if I would go to one of the medics on the base and see if it was possible to obtain some penicilin. He had a venereal disease and there was no way he could get what he needed in the Russian armed forces.

"It so happened that the GI medic was from a city not to far from Peabody, Mass, and he and I had gotten friendly. I approached him about getting some penicilin and his answer was "sorry, no". At least I had tried. I went back to the Russian, told him I tried, but would still like a copy of the photos. He believed me, and set up a meeting with me that evening.

"He and I went into Poltava late in the night and while I stood guard, he broke into the photo-lab and stole two copies for me. As I look back, we were both crazy, we could both have been shot on the spot and no one would ever know what happened."

The two photos that could have caused an international incident, are seen with this article.

Three days later, on the 11th of August, the B-17 with Eagan (and his purloined photos) departed Poltava with a Russian navigator, bound for Teheran, Persia (now Iran). On the day they left for Teheran, most of the 357th and the bombers returned to their bases in England. Eagan kept a brief diary of events for the next two weeks and we will quote from this to follow his activities.

11 August: Left Russia 7 AM, arrived Teheran Persia 1500 hours. Put up in ATC (Air Transport Command) section of Camp Aaminabel, American camp just outside Teheran. Went into Teheran at night and saw some of the sights.

12 August: Troubles with aircraft, decided to wait until the next day before take off. Had all the ice cream in the world to eat and I saw an old movie at the open air theatre.

13 August: Left Teheran 0630 Sunday, arrived Payne Field, Cairo, Egypt 1400. Put up at ATC camp. Went into Cairo at night and saw a bit of the city. Had ODs on and were the only soldiers in town with ODs.

14 August: Drew some Tans from quartermaster, will be normal again now. Went into Cairo for the day but there wasn't much about Cairo that I cared about.

15 August: Another whole day and all of it spent here on the field. I didn't feel like going into Cairo, so instead hung around the service club. Think I'll go to the movies tonight.

16 August: We took off this morning around 0800, but had to turn back on account of a bad engine. They are pulling an engine change and it should be ready some time tommorrow afternoon, which means that we probably will take off Friday. I haven't any money so I'd just as soon get back to England as soon as possible. Looks like the movies again tonight.

17 August: Hung around all day, our plane being worked on and it doesn't look as though we would be out of here for a couple of days yet. Saw a ping pong match between the RAF and Payne Field last night - pretty good, but the RAF won.

18 August: Another day just hanging around. Saw a soft ball game between the WACs of Camp Huckstap and the boys of Payne Field. Afterwards saw a very good movie, THE CANTERBURY GHOST.

19 August: Still here but it looks as if the plane would be ready tommorrow. It will be test flown this afternoon and I think I will go along for the ride. I want to get a good look at the Sphinx and the Pyramids

28 August: Cairo to Tunis.

30 August: Tunis to Marrakish

1 Sept: Marrakish to Horsham.

Total flying time, 54 hours, 8,499 miles.

End of Eagan diary.

The long gap from 19 August to the 28th is explained by the fact that they departed Cairo several times during that period, but turned back each time with engine problems. In addition, by now he was eager to get home and simply let his diary entries taper off.

Sgt Eagan was not the only one who came home late from FRANTIC V. Captain Maurice Baker, 362nd pilot, crashed on takeoff from Italy, and he also returned much later in a B-17 via Casablanca and Algiers. It is believed that several other pilots returned late due to mechanical problems in Russia or Italy.

At least one of the 357th technicians did not return at all from the shuttle. There is considerable mystery and uncertainty about MSgt George Metcalf, 364th Hangar Chief. Eagan thinks they may have left Russia on the same B-17, but somewhere along the line, Metcalf was transferred to the 15th AF, and never returned to the Group.

Joe DeShay, who knew Metcalf well, has dug into this mystery and has his own ideas which he may, or may not, add to this story.

Soon after the return of the mission, Group Headquarters published a citation awarding the Air Medal to 3 officers and 32 enlisted men on the shuttle. The 35 men on the list did, in fact, recieve the Air Medal, but neither Eagan or Metcalf were on the list. Metcalf, of course, never returned, but Eagan did and should have also recieved the medal.

The fact that he did not can probably be explained by the fact that no one in his squadron, or in Group, knew what happened to him. When he finally did report in two weeks late, 1st Sergeant Clifton Ferguson was surprised to see him and was preparing to list him as missing. By that time the Air Medal list had been published, and was simply not amended to include Eagan.

Today, 50 years later, Dick Eagan still thinks he is entitled to the Air Medal, as he undoubtedly is.

How to get it is something else again. Anyone who has had experience in obtaining 50 year old awards is encouraged to contact Eagan, or Exec Sec Joe DeShay.

fini

Merle Olmsted 1995.

George Metcalf

George was the second 364th Fighter Squadron Hangar Chief. He replaced the original Chief, Steve Cianci who chose to depart from Santa Rosa, CA Airbase to go to Aviation Cadet Training.

(next page)

Joe was well aware that George left Leiston to participate in the shuttle mission to Russia (Operation Frantic V). When George did not return to Leiston, Engineering Officer Capt. Robert Dottery asked Joe to return to the hangar crew to become the third Hangar Chief of the Squadron. At that time, Joe had been serving as Flight Chief of "D" ground flight.

George Metcalf's departure was a mystery to all of us. Long after the war was over, it was only natural to wonder whatever became of some of those who served with us. In 1992, Joe decided to search for Metcalf. By that time certain ways to do research had become available. On 8 March, 1993, Joe used the "U.S. Social Security Index of Death Benefits" and found a George Metcalf listed. By using the given Social Security number, Joe sent for this persons original application for a Social Security account number. Upon receiving a copy of the above request, Joe learned that this man had the correct middle initial "L". Born 1921 and died in October 1949 at a young age of 28 years. Metcalf had requested a Social Security number in August 1943 in order to work for the California Packing Corporation at Yuba City and gave his address as 364th Fighter Squadron Airdrome, Marysville, CA. While we served at Marysville, it was peach canning time and some of our men worked the night shift at the base and worked days at the fruit canning plant to earn a few extra dollars. This was a rough ordeal in the heat of the summer in that part of California. We have no idea as to the cause of George Metcalf's death.

"The Write Stuff"
by Joe De Shay



At Polatava, Russia, August 1944
On top of aircraft:
L to R.--Bill Hood, a Russian, Eagan's Russian accomplice, Dick Eagan, Don Lumley, and two Russians.
On the ground:
L to R,--a Russian, Sgt. J.L.Pigani (363rd), a Russian, S/Sgt____?_____, S/Sgt. Amos Langdon, a Russian. Other 357th F.G. men of the 364th F.S.