TRACING OUR MISSING IN ACTION
Part IV

MAJOR ALVA C. MURPHY
by Merle Olmsted

The circumstances surrounding the deaths of Captain James Browning and Captain Edward Simpson have been covered in previous articles. Besides there two men, I had also requested information on Major Alva C. Murphy of the 364th sqdn, and Capt. William H. Mooney Jr, of the 362nd, and the facts concerning their deaths will be covered here within the limits of the information recieved from the U.S. Army.

Alva Murphy was not an original member of the group, and it is not known when he joined the 357th. However, since he scored his first two victories on the 27th of November, 1944 (and added two more on 2 Dec), he had probably arrived in early fall. He was a Captain at that time, and possibly come from a staff assignment or had been an instructor.

Assigned first to the 362nd Sqdn, he was transferred in January, 1945 to the 364th, as Operations Officer.

The 2nd of March, 1945 was a very bad day for the 357th, as five pilots failed to return from a long mission to Ruhland. Captain Donald McGee led the mission that day with take-off at 0806 hours, and "down" time of 1320 - well over five hours. The group pilots claimed 13 e/a shot down, and another 25 destroyed on the ground. Two of the air victories were Me 109s shot down by Murphy. Bank, Crawford, Lepore, and Murphy were shot down by ground fire, and Patrick Mallione was probably the victim of an enemy fighter. Ray Bank and Rocco Lepore became POWs, and the other three were KIA.

Murphy was leading 364th Red flight with Howard Wesling on his wing. In a recent letter to the author, Wesling says he recalls the incident well: "We were strafing an airfield with quite a number of planes on it. Murphy was hit in the coolant. We pulled up to about 3,000 feet and after a few minutes his engine quit. He rolled over and bailed out. His chute did open, but I did not follow him down."

WEslings statement in Murhpy's Missing Aircrew Report (MACR), confirms his two 109s shot down and relates his bailout, as above, but adds that he saw him land in a field.

The picture clouds up at this point as the records I recived from the army do not tell us what happened to him except that he was KIA. This is in sharp contrast to the extensive investigation in the Browning/Simpson cases and also with William Mooney (to follow).

The group records for March tell us that there would be no more airfield strafing unless ordered. "At this late stage, results do not justify the cost."

Many MACRs contain translations of Luftwaffe records pertaining to that particular case. One of these German documents, "Report of Captured Aircraft", under "Fate of Crew" says: "1 dead, officer, Murphy, Alva C. O-441009, name asertained by 1st Lt. Oertel, Airbase Hq, Koethen, buried in Grosbzig cemetery." The document also says "probably shot down by an FW 190", which would appear to be in error.

MURPHY, Page 2

Murphy was listed as MIA until September of 1945, when enough evidence had been gathered to change his status to KIA.

His father, Joseph Murphy, of Knoxville, Tenn, apparently made the decision for his son's body to remain permanently in Europe, and he is in the American Military cemetery in Luxembourge.

The question of what happened to Major Alva Murphy must remain open since we know that he bailed out successfully and apparently landed unhurt. What happened after that is still inknown.

Merle Olmsted 1995

JULY 1995 NEWSLETTER FOLLOW UP

Daniel N. Myers, a Pilot of the 363rd Fighter Squadron had the following to say after reading the story about Pilot James W. Browning disappearing on the 9 February 1945 mission.

Myers said "The article about Capt. Browning was especially interesting. I flew radio relay that day flying back and forth along the French Coast between Calais and Dunkerque". Myers had heard over his radio that Group had spotted at least one ME-262 and then he heard Capt. Browning say "I'm going to catch that S.O.B. if it's the last thing I do".

Myers continues that if his memory is correct, this was the same day that Glenn Miller, the band leader was reported missing on a flight to Paris. Myers has often wondered about this as it was a perfect day with not a cloud in the sky and he feels he should have seen or heard something.

NEW BOOK

Arthur Swanson has checked out a pre-publication of a book some members may be interested in purchasing. Art claims it to be well written.

"Fighter Losses" by Bill Adams. Price $34.00 includes packaging.
Send checks to: Project Bits & Pieces
P. O. Box 3010
Warrenton, VA 22186-1710

Our former reunion site at Marietta, GA has Linz, Germany as a sister city. On September 5, 1995, the Marietta Choral Group of which Bob Shearer is a member, traveled to Linz for a one week performance. Included in the tour was a visit to Remagen, Koln and Koblenz with an enjoyable time had by all.

The following article was photo-copied by Jim Roughgarden (362nd Fighter Squadron) when he went to the Maxwell Air Force Record Center to search for his own military records. It is a 362nd Fighter Squadron record typed on a G.I. typewriter and somewhat in the need of a new ribbon.

We have no knowledge as to who wrote this interesting story. Most likely someone in the Intelligence Section of the squadron. We have re-typed the story for better legibility and to save space in our newsletter. Thanks to Jim for sending this story to our Historian Merle Olmsted and then on to your newsletter editor. Story as follows:

SECRET

It was around 11 bells in the morning and the M.P. on guard at the gate leading into Leiston began to move about restlessly for he was hungry and hadn't made the Chow Hall that day. He glanced up into the sky every now and then noting the patches of fluffy clouds and the bright sun. It was pleasantly cool. He thought about back home in New Orleans where the folks would be sweltering and dropping into bars for short beers. He said to himself, "Golly here it is June the 5th and I'm gettin' old".

A G.I. rode up to the gate on a bicycle well showered and wearing O.D.'s with a musette bag slung over one shoulder. He grinned at the M.P. in friendly fashion and at the same time producing his pass. Got a shack-up date with the loveliest wench in London he confided and winked significantly. The M.P. nodded knowingly and warned the G.I. that he would have to work fast for he only had 24 hours.

Just then the field phone rang and the M.P. picked it up lackadaisically, his eyes resting on the G.I. who was growing impatient. Sergeant Fields, Leiston Gate .....YES, SIR .....NO, SIR .....NO, SIR ..... YOU BET, SIR. He replaced the phone in its compact leather box and assumed a brusque, business-like expression. Suddenly he barked, "NOBODY LEAVES THIS BASE! T.S., Joe", he said. The G.I. started to protest, then changed his mind and slowly rode back towards his area looking forlorn.

Several minutes later, another G.I., a Staff Sergeant strode up to the gate coming back from town. He looked tired and as though he were ready to hit the sack and not especially anxious to win friends or influence people at the moment. However, just for the sake of politeness, he said, "Ain't had a solid meal since I left". The M.P. smiled and waved aside the outstretched pass and said, "That's just too damned bad! Nobody enters the base until further notice". The G.I.'s jaw dropped a couple of inches and he repeated in an incredulous tone, "Nobody ENTERS the base? JESUS CHU-RIST"! This was a new one on him, all right. He turned around and shuffled back towards Leiston, also looking rather forlorn. Then the possibilities of a YANK-FREE town and the realization that he couldn't go A.W.O.L. seeped into his consciousness and his gait visibly quickened. He started whistling "Happy Days Are Here Again" and stuck out his chest, covered with a Good Conduct Ribbon. The M.P. looked at his retreating figure. Lucky stiff, he said to himself.

Around 1300 hours and just after noon chow, the Tandy blared out an announcement which further heightened the air of mystery. No personnel, military or Civilian will be permitted to leave the base. Civilians may purchase soap and cigarettes from the P.X. The voice sounded rhythmical and precise as usual but there was a note of crisis in it as the proclamation was repeated. Limey workers leaned on their shovels and looked at each other wondering. Even the chance to buy Camels and Lucky Strikes was not worth a night away from home and the Missus. Then they went back to digging as though nothing had happened, these men who had lived through the Blitz.

That night starting at 8 o'clock, we painted our Mustangs with wide white stripes. You don't paint wide white stripes on airplanes unless you want to make sure that everyone, friend or foe, ground troops or air personnel cannot mistake your identity. It's a thing you'd logically do for example, in case an invasion were imminent.

Few of us believed that D-Day had come. Many of us were willing to bet our so-easily spent English pounds that it had not for false alarms are an accepted part of army tradition. We've been on dry runs before. In our hearts, we prayed that the waiting was over at last and that this was the beginning of the real thing and that the curtain was really rising. We prayed but we didn't believe it, even yet!

In the group briefing room at 4 o'clock the next morning were all the pilots, all the paddle feet. The black-out curtains were still tightly drawn and the air was thick with cigarette smoke which gave a dull glow to the lights above. Small bunches of men had formed, discussion was animated. This must be the pay-off. Forgotten now were the personal differences, the rank, the fact that this fellow was an Ace and that one a Virgin, that this one hailed from Georgia and that one from Brooklyn, that this one belonged to the 362nd F.S. and that one to the 364th F.S. Forgotten was the fact that this one was PHI BETTA KAPPA and that one an ex-coal miner, that this one had flown with the R.A.F. and that one had been an instructor in AT-6's for two solid years back in the states.

Here we were on June 6th, 1944 seeing thousands of years of history being made, helping to make it. WE KNEW THAT! Behind the buzz of conversation, a myriad of remembrances were flashing through the mind of every man. We thought of the people and the places and the experiences closest to our hearts and treasured, of the hopes and dreams of the future, of the moment's urgent necessity. Comrades in arms now, coming at last to the waterfall, each man to himself a Crusader, a Liberator. But these things remained in the back of the mind, unexpressed while the talk of planes, ships, tanks, guns flowed on, while the smoke grew thicker, the sweep second hand of the clock on the wall steadily orbiting around and around, the chairs scraping and someone sneezing violently to be greeted by a humorous GESUNDHEIT!

Then like a shot, someone bawled ATTEN--SHUN! Everyone arose hurriedly, standing in awkard rigidity as the Group C. O. walked briskly towards the front. This time it was more than perfunctory formality, it was an expression of unity of purpose, the way five basketball players with crew cut hair will clasp hands in a huddle just before the game gets

SECRET

under way. Young and slim, his face seemed much older this morning, drawn and intense. He said, "Be seated, please, Gentlemen" and the stillness became oppressive, quickening the pulses. Nervously fingering a sealed brown envelope, Colonel Graham peered around into the expectant faces, sensing the drama of the moment. Then in a slow subdued voice he said, "Under the command of General Eisenhower, Allied Naval Forces supported by strong Air Forces, will begin landing Allied Armies this morning on the Northern Coast of France".

D-DAY.....

Major Broadhead, our Commanding Officer led sixteen planes out onto Runway 35. At exactly 0512 hours, the P-51's were airborne. We were to patrol Area 22 in France. Higher Headquarters had carefully planned the whole thing, assigning certain regions and duties to certain groups well aware that scrupulous organization was more than ever important for an unprecedented number of Allied Planes would be operating over a limited area. We patrolled the area encountering neither allied Planes nor the Vaunted Luftwaffe and came back home. Just short of seven hours in the air. The pilots rubbed their butts and shouted for hot coffee.

Fifty-one minutes later, we had fourteen planes loaded with 250 lb. general purpose bombs, streaking back towards the same area. We bombed a highway bridge crossing the Mayenne River west of Chateau Gontier or tried to bomb it for results were poor. But we tore up some railroad tracks in the same vicinity. Nobody saw anything of battles, ground or air. All planes were down by 1643 hours.

Eighty-four minutes later, we had fifteen more planes circling the field getting into formation for a Fighter Sweep over our assigned area. This time the pilots had to turn back however for heavy cloud and icing conditions proved too much of a handicap.

What could we say about this first day of invasion flying? Most of all it had been gruelling, a test of endurance rather than combat skill. It had been urgent! Everyone knew that the ensuing days would determine whether or not all the months of steady hammering had been in vain, whether or not a buddy in some Parachute Battalion or a brother in some Tank Corps or a cousin in some Artillery Unit would live or die as a result of the air protection we would provide. If we had been extremely important before D-Day, we were certainly indispensable now.

The pilots room was a mess. Iron cots were all over the place covered with grey lumps which were the pilots buried under English blankets for some much needed rest. The new radio was tuned in constantly for latest reports of Allied progress. PFC Ayers, in supreme command of the snack bar, forgot the hours for serving and set a new record for eggs and hotcakes prepared. The operations board had new schedules prepared before the preceding mission had been completed. Intelligence Officers, Capt. Pickrell and Lt. Brown were barely through calling in their reports and recording interrogations before another four flights were wearily straggling into the S-2 office. The orderly room took over night C.O. and excused enlisted men from latrine duty. The chips were down and each fellow on the field was more than willing to forego sleep, meals, entertainment,

SECRET

ablutions, in order to work. GOLD-BRICKS JUST DIDN'T EXIST!

If you happened to be up in the control tower at 0350 hours on June 7th, you'd have felt a curious thrill running up and down your spine. Sixteen of our planes, loaded with bombs were taking off in the darkness. You couldn't see the planes, only the navigation lights as they streaked down the runway, bobbing a little and then slowly getting higher off the ground as you held your breath. When they were airborne, you'd have sighed in relief and listened to R/T conversation, trying to recognize the indiv-idual voices. Blink those lights, ROUGH .... that must be Capt. Williams calling and sure you couldn't mistake Carson. A slow drawl, then ..... "That ain't me below you all, Mitch, that's the field cause I'm above you all"..... good old Tex. Somebody laughed. Roger. Good luck, men and you'd have headed back for a couple more winks.

The squadron was down by 1010 hours. Weather had been P. Poor but a fair amount of havoc had been wrought. An Airdrome had been missed, a highway bridge had been damaged, a locomotive and twelve box cars had been strafed and destroyed and two other locos had been destroyed. The boys were getting BLOODTHIRSTY.

Two other missions had been flown on that day, both area patrols and fighter sweeps without anything happening. At ten o'clock that night, June 7th, everyone was pretty well worn out, anxious to catch up on rest knowing that the morrow would probably be a repetition of the grind.

BUT WE HAD AN UNWELCOME VISITOR THAT NIGHT!

At around 1145 hours, the Tannoy blared out, AIR RAID WARNING RED! AIR RAID WARNING RED! Most lights were extinguished, most personnel paid little attention for this was routine and Jerry hadn't molested us directly before. For the ground troops, the war was still across the Channel.

War came to the ground troops as well as to the pilots at 0100 in the form of a Black Junkers 88, strafing to beat Hell, rudely dispelling our sense of security with Red Tracers. Those of us who were in the line of fire found it hard to believe .... Like a dream it was .... and we just stood there and gaped until BANG! THE LIGHT WENT ON IN OUR BRAINS AND WE HIT THE DIRT. An airplane guard made the sign of the cross believ-ing it to be the end. A number of G.I.'s starting to go into the mess hall just about dove into some garbage cans, bracing themselves for the Frag Bombs which they were sure had been dropped. Capt. Beal, sleeping up in the briefing room came running outside in his shorts after the pass had been made. The ditch alongside our area was suddenly filled with helmeted G.I.'s and Officers still rubbing their half closed eyes. We waited for another pass, having put our weapons in firing order, growing more angry with each moment that elapsed, anxious to shoot at the Son-Of-A-Bitch. He kept on going, though and only several gunners handling the .50 caliber jobs mounted on weapons carriers actually pressed the trigger. Next morning there was very little concensus as to the type of plane, the type of ammunition, the direction in which he had come over. On one thing we all agreed .... WE HAD BEEN SURPRISED AND WE HAD BEEN SCARED.

SECRET

up fifteen planes to locate their position. But our consistent nemesis, the weather, cut the project short and a scheduled six hour mission ended way ahead of it planned length. Of course we had dive bombed and strafed earlier in the day, destroying a loco and two railroad cars loaded with tanks north of Moliens and repeated the performance north of Abancourt. We had tried to wreck a pier unsucessfully at Boulogne but all of this, we felt was minor when compared with the magnitude of locating two whole divisions.

JUNIOR IS BACK!

1st Lt. Lynn H. Drollinger, the enlisted men's favorite who had bailed out over France on March 28th, became our first successful evader. Talk about the center of attention! He has the Purple Heart for a chin cut incurred when he parachuted but remains too reticent about his experiences for everyone's satisfaction. We did learn that he lost most of his money on the races, that he dutifully brushed his teeth, that French women were "nice" to him, that narrow escapes were plentiful. He claims that the only complete sentence he knows in French is, will you sleep with me? Morale is certainly higher. Junior made it. Now he'll go back to the states.

Something strange happened the night of June 15th. We had an Air Raid Red Alert but it turned out to be somewhat unusual and ominous. The German's began sending over their new "Secret Weapon". We could hear the low drone of whatever it was flying overhead, sounding like four engines poorly synchronized. It seemed to get lower and lower and then we heard a dull boom way off in the distance. Next day we discovered that the pilotless planes had invaded the island in numbers, that they cause a terrific blast, that they destroy themselves upon alighting. We don't like these things, these Buzz-Bombs.

The pilots who flew on the 16th wore smiles of destructive satisfaction as they straggled into the pilot's room. On their fighter sweep to France, they had shot up an ammunition train, a train with 8 to 10 box cars, a couple of oil tankers and a warehouse. They had done a good job dropping belly tanks on the targets leaving them burning fiercely and exploding. The railroad line near Montmorillon won't forget the Yoxford Boys so soon.

Capt. Hagan had to crash land south of Caen on the bomber escort mission which took off at 1012 hours on June 17th. He called that all was well but everyone's sweating him out because it's about in the middle of a battle zone. Hailing from Illinois, one of the old timers in our squadron, Hagan was doing a fine job in operations, he'll really be missed. Ironically, his plane, "My Bonnie" crewed by S/Sgt. Joseph Flanagan was the first completed victim of the white paint bucket before D-Day and was the first ship to go down in occupied territory after the invasion started. He was the only loss of June but we don't figure flyers like Hagan in terms of percentages.

The days kept flying by with the squadron performing bomber escort and patrol missions without meeting opposition. But on June 20th, the pilots took off at supper time on a fighter sweep, returning with the

On June 8th, our pilots flew three more missions. They dive bombed an over-pass, track and steel shed at the road junction at Lou-Fougeres with fair results and four frieght cars besides patrolling the assigned area. Still the Luftwaffe refused to give battle. Still we were finding a scarcity of targets.

From the last mission of the day, Lt. Ollie Ed Harris didn't return. He had been flying Lt. Mitchell's wing, lagged behind after dive bombing a railroad shed, apparently had been bounced and shot down. We cleaned out his locker, drew the necessary sketches, typed out the missing Air Crew Report. Felt miserable because the kid's number had finally come up. Nobody really knew what had happened and that made it worse.

During the night, the weather became even more dismal and overcast. We rose the next day, cursing the German's luck and our own lack of it, knowing that there would be blessed little in the way of air support from us on June 9th. But something helped compensate for the weather. We learned that Lt. Harris was alive. He had been picked up by Air/Sea Rescue. The sandy-haired kid from Kentucky looked pretty pale when Major Gates brought him back from the R.A.F. Hospital in the At-6. He had been bounced by six FW 190's, turned into them and was riddled from prop to tail. Trying to get out of his Mustang, the canopy came down instead of going up and he literally pushed his way through. Then his foot got caught and he was just about banged to death against the side of the plane. Finally, getting free at about 1500 ft. over the Channel, he yanked the ripcord and his chute opened. He swam for about ten minutes, managed to get the dinghy open and floated some 45 minutes, waiting for a walrus to pick him up. The sea was so rough however, that a launch had to be summoned to tow them back. When asked how his plane had remained air-borne from the time it was shot up until he bailed out some eight miles off the coast, Harris replied , "I prayed it there". We showed him the reports and he marvelled at their correctness by emitting a loud, long WHEW-EW-EW!

Around five o'clock in the evening, five graceful P-38's unarmed, swooped over the field. We sent up sixteen planes to escort them to Brussels on a photographic reconnaisance flight but the overcast kept getting lower and lower until our planes were almost skimming the lapping waves of the sea. At 1805 hours, all planes were back and the mission called off.

Next day, June 10th, we flew three more times. Five army trucks were destroyed near Fourges, a concrete railroad bridge was cracked and tracks torn up north of Bueil. We continued to patrol the area assigned and still no sign of the Luftwaffe. The pilots were growing sick of flying but they were also perplexed by this absence of opposition. A rumor started going around that this invasion is somewhat ahead of schedule largely as a result of VIII Fighter Command's good work. Most of us found this hard to swallow though because we raised more Hell before D-Day than at any time since.

There was a splendid opportunity to appreciably alter the course of events, probably in the mission of June 11th. A couple of Panzer Divisions were believed to be moving up from Southern France and we sent

following damage claims made in the vicinity of Soissons, France. 1 Personnel Carrier, 10 Box and Flat Cars, Control Station on Canal, 15-20 Flat Cars hauling military cars, 10 Tank Cars, 1 small Loco and 6 Coaches, 1 Armored Car (gunner killed), 1 Truck loaded with equipment.

Nothing eventful happened then until a week later when a dive bombing and strafing mission was scheduled. Up at supper time again, the squadron blew up 1 Loco, 6 Trucks loaded with inflamable material, Damaged 5 Box Cars, 1 Dam and 5 Army Trucks.

The day before pay call, we finally had some air competition escorting the bombers to Leipzig, our pilots shed Nazi blood north of Naumberg, Germany. Capt. Smith who really hates Jerry, managed to destroy an FW 190 and damage another, Lt. Norris knocked down an ME 410 and Capt. Pugh (whose promotion just was announced) depleted Goering's forces of one Messerschmidt 109. Although the 363rd and 364th squadrons had a better day, we were nevertheless thankful that the monotony was at last broken, that there was actually a Luftwaffe left to fight. Besides not a bomber was lost. Here's what our old man Kepner had to say:

"I wish to commend all Gps. and particularly 357 and 361 Gps. for the most outstanding escort job ever performed on 29 June 1944. No bombers were lost due to enemy aircraft. In providing protection, you destroyed 48 Huns and damaged others. You made the enemy pay dearly for his attempt to intercept our bombers. We strive for perfection and on yesterday's mission, you made the closest approach to it under difficult conditions ever recorded. I am proud to be "The Old Man" of you who carry the fight to the Hun where-ever you find him".

357th Group score for day: 21-0-4 (Air) -- Locos 1-0-1
361st Group score for day: 15-0-7 -------- Locos 1-0-1

Our Ground Crews proved that their Slogan, "Keep 'Em Flying", is not a lot of Hot Air this month.

Before June was 20 days old, the seventh candidate for a Bronze Star turned up. S/Sgt. George E. Roepke, Wayne Zimmerman, Avery G. Goodrich, Arthur A. Rousse, Phillip L. Bruse, Edward L. Kaiser and Jacob J. Oberst each had ships to fly 175 operational hours without mechanical abortion. S/Sgt. Oberst's "Texas Ranger" topped all records with more than 250 hours and still had not returned early.

Dispatched over enemy territory during the first 15 days were 325 aircraft, three more than the 364th and nine more than the 363rd fighter squadrons. We maintained our first place in the record of fewer aborts. The first 15 days - percentage abortive: 362nd -- 6.8, 363rd -- 8.9, 364th -- 8.4. Also impressive is the fact that eight engine changes were completed during the month, a record not equalled in the history of the squadron. During the month, Tom Dewey became Republican candidate for President, the G.I. Bill of Rights became law, Babe Didrickson won a golf championship, the St. Louis Brown's stayed up on top, the Russians opened their summer offensive and everywhere you looked were pictures of Betty Grable's Baby.

OVER HERE, JUNE WAS A BIG MONTH, TOO!