FILE TITLE: Sgt Elmer N. Horey, First Enlisted Navigator

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BOMBARDIERS IN THEIR P-38s?

(Bombardier Unknown, Photo from July 1945 Air Force Magazine, Pg 19)

YOU BET YOUR DROOP SNOOT!!

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

Cover Story, Begins Pg 4
Chit Chat, Begins Pg 6
Searching For, Begins Pg 40
Last Salvos, Begins Pg 44
Reunion Schedule, Pg 46

Were The Wright Brothers First?

Read the special series on Mobile's
John Ellis Fowler, Begins Pg 25
FIRST (ONLY ?) ENLISTED NAVIGATOR?

Jim Goar and Birdie Larrick, co-editors of the 392nd Bomb Group newsletter entitled NEWS, wrote in their May 1993 issue of some most interesting information that turned up a rare specimen—an enlisted navigator.

1. From a 392nd Bm Gp tailgunner, Jack Stewart, it was learned that The Encyclopedia of the World's Combat Aircraft, printed, among its many aircraft sketches, one of the 392nd's B-24 #42-109835.

2. In an entirely unrelated disclosure from another 392nd gunner, Jack Bode, the Revel Company, aircraft model makers, used the same number markings on a B-24 model they produced.

3. This stirred research activity on the part of the NEWS staff who learned from the author of the book The Liberators From Wendling that the original B-24 had been shot out of the skies 11 April 1944 while on a mission to Bernberg, Germany.

4. Records indicated this 392nd aircraft was actually flying the mission as part of the 44th Bomb Group! The Germans reported 9 of the 10 crew parachuted; were captured and interned as POWs; and the co-pilot was killed by enemy 20mm fire.

5. The bombardier of the crew was listed in the article as 2Lt Sunny J. Craig but further checking with the navigator on the mission revealed that the correct name was 2Lt Sunny J. Gragg of Midland 43-11 (5 Aug 1943).

6. The navigator manifested for the mission was Sgt Elmer N. Horey. The story behind him flying as an enlisted navigator is something in itself.

Horey was on his 7th combat mission when his B-24 was shot down on 11 April 1944. His first four were flown as right waist gunner and his last three as navigator, all as part of the 576th Sqdn, 392nd Bomb Group flying out of Wendling, England (Station 118).

How did he become crew navigator?

Apparently from his records it was learned that Sgt. Horey had previously been "within weeks" of graduating from the Army Air Force navigator's school at Hondoo, (San Antonio) Texas. Horey says his air work was good but something went wrong with his applying an angular value to a celestial calculation during a written examination and proof, he was 'washed out', reclassified as a gunner, and on his way to joining a forming B-24 crew!

After his fourth mission as a gunner he was given a navigator check ride. When he attempted to turn in the navigator's tools and equipment he had checked out for the ride, he was told 'to keep it all, that he would from then on fly as a navigator!'

Not only did the 392nd have an acute shortage of navigators but the navigator on his crew had been sent off to Pathfinder crew school and Horey was told that he was his crew's 'replacement navigator'! Also, somewhere along the line he was told that he would be advanced in rank, most likely to a flying officers' rank [flight officer or 2nd lieutenant].

Sgt. Horey never saw any of the officers of his crew after their shoothdown. The last time he saw his bombardier was just before bailout when Lt. Gragg was screaming for help in getting out of the front turret! Sgt. Horey opened the turret door for him and followed him in bailout over the nose wheel!

Horey remained a POW, never heard anything more about being advanced in rank; and was never awarded a Purple Heart after breaking an ankle when he hit the ground. His Mother had been given his earned Air Medal, (awarded posthumously) and did not learn of his being a freed POW until Elmer called her from Buffalo, enroute home!

But, Sgt. Elmer N. Horey can claim the unique distinction of having served in the 8th Air Force as an enlisted navigator! There doesn't appear to be many who can make that claim...in fact this writer knows only of one—Sgt Horey!

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FOR INFO ON FROM WHOM AND HOW TO ACQUIRE VITAL RECORDS (Births, deaths, etc) send $2.25 to U.S. Government Printing Office, Dept SSMC, Washington, DC 20401 and ask for publication stock number 017-022-01196-4...provides info about individual vital records maintained only on file in State or local vital statistics offices. [Ed: For youse guys interested in genealogy and tracing bombardier 'lost souls'].

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RETURNING A/C CRASH LANDS NEAR BASE

ALL WALK AWAY; CREW SERVED TEA BY VILLAGERS

It was New Year’s Eve, 1944, and the 392nd was briefed for a mission to Euskirchen, Germany. 229, 230, and 231 were to take off at 0800, in intermittently snow and rain showers. During the bomb run the low squadron was hit by 80-15 enemy fighters. Two crew members of Lt. Majesky’s crew of the 576th were wounded and the bomber landed in Belgium. A/C #44-010528 with the 576th’s Lt. Blakely in command had returned to Wending but due to a landing procedure mix-up had to go around, and all engines quit; as the tanks went dry, Blakely was able to crash-land the A/C near Belet, a village about 3 or 4 miles from the base. (Photo courtesy Richard Spades, Jr."

The entourage of blakely and his crew had to crash with one of them sustaining a sprained ankle. The nearby villagers hastened to the crash scene with hot tea and biscuits for the grateful airmen. The crew had another close call on Jan. 16, 1945, when they were hit by ack ack from a battle of at least 30 ack ack guns, and the bomber crashed and landed at Luneville. Then on March 29, a mission to Magdeburg the Blakely A/C was hit by friendly fire from the tail turret of another A/C and went down in flames. Five bailed out and become POW’s and five were KIA.

Two survivors are Richard Spades, the radio operator-gunner and Stanley Robens, the tail gunner. Robens went by the name of Rubenstein in 1945. (See accompanying photo) He is still alive as is Richard Spades and Robens. A/C #44-010528 with the name of Spades was on board; when the A/C crashed at Beletky, Robens was not hit."Richard Spades tell this story, "I do recall that we had lost fuel, but we made it back to Wending. In our landing approach a smaller plane cut in front of us and to avoid collision Blakely nosed upward and recircled the field. We were saved as all A/C landed safely.

The New Year’s Eve, 1944 "crash at Beletky" (Photo courtesy Richard Spades, Jr."

During the 576th’s trip to Luneville, the crew was served tea by friendly villagers and went on to fly the next day. The 576th flew missions until the end of World War II and continued to be active until the 1970s. During this period, the squadron flew over 1,000 missions and dropped over 2 million pounds of bombs. The 576th was disbanded in 1976.

Here is Denis’ story about the crash, in his own words; "It happened on a Saturday or Sunday afternoon around 3 or 4:30 pm. My old Dad was out poaching rabbits at the time in some fields at the back of our house. At that time if you caught a rabbit "you" caught a dinner as meat was rationed and scarce at that time in England.

"We heard some cracking and bing and then less that five minutes later we saw the flames and we ran toward where they were going up as we knew then that it was a plane down. As we got closer " rumbling ""When we arrived there we found all the crew members standing by the a/c as there was no fire. I think the only injury was a sprained ankle. We spoke to all the crew and were given some of the goodies that they had no further use for a vehicle or plane. ""I will have the mechanic's cap I found at the wreck."

"I think the lady who brought the tea and biscuits to the field was a Miss Mary Beckett who lived in a farm house just opposite the crash site. If the a/c had gone a little further it would have ended up in her front room."
SAME 576 SQRN A/C USED BY REVEL CO TO MAKE MODEL

The Encyclopedia of the World's Combat Aircraft, by Bill Gunston, was produced by Chartwell Books in 1976. Among the many aircraft depicted in it was a 92nd B-24, N#42-109835, flown by Jack Stewart, a World War II young man pilot, on the Marxcrew in the 576th Bomb Group, brought back by a group of young men from the 92nd, who lived, worked, and played during the war. They are the ones who attended the reunion of the 92nd Bomb Group at Fort Story, Virginia, in 1996, where the reunion was held. They saw the pictures of the plane in the Encyclopedia, and they recognized it as their plane. They then contacted the Air Force Museum in Dayton, Ohio, and they were able to locate the plane in the museum's collection. The plane was restored and put on display at the Air Force Museum. The young men were then able to see their plane again, and they were able to see the pictures in the Encyclopedia. The Encyclopedia was then able to be used as a model by the Revel Company, who captured the image of the plane in the Encyclopedia, and they were able to use it as a model for their products. The plane is a wonderful example of the importance of the Encyclopedia, as it was able to help the young men find their plane again, and it was able to be used as a model by the Revel Company.
Crew - Topeka, Kansas - Nov. 1943


Lt. Sgt. R. Blackman 2nd Lt. H. Smith 2nd Lt. Repley 1st Lt. Morey (Left)

Sgt. H. Sooy

Mr. Blackman left the crew in Ireland.

We wanted to name our plane - "My Room Draggin"

Mr. Morey,

Thank you for loan of picture. Enclosed is a copy of the article that is in Sept. '33 edition of CROSS HAIR.

Best regards,

Verna

For Col. Humphreys

Horey, Elmer N.
SGT. ELMER N. HOREY IS IN BOTTOM ROW, 4TH FROM LEFT