

Mission to Pas de Calais:
First Lieutenant Donald White
Remembers His Journey from Thurleigh to
Stalag Luft III, March 26, 1944

Donald H. White

Flight crews were roused out of bed by the barracks orderly at approximately 0130 hours and informed that breakfast would be at 0200 hours. I'd been fortunate during recent weeks in lining up a regular fresh egg barter and had developed the habit of taking two eggs with me to cook for breakfast on combat mission days. Briefing was to be at 0300 hours. When flight crews were called at these early hours, prospects of a mission of long duration were always inevitable.

Briefing proved this hypothesis to be only too true; the target was again to be Berlin (the Big "B") – out over The Wash and across the North Sea, the Danish Peninsula and then on down into Germany and then into Berlin. Crews were boarded and ready to taxi by 0400. Somehow, things never got moving and following a take-off delay of at least 1 ½ hours, the mission was scrubbed due to extremely poor weather conditions over most of the European continent. Needless to say, there was cause for great jubilation and plans were immediately prepared to get into Bedford for a day of relaxation and fun, something which happened all too infrequently during these winter months.

Such plans proved to be short-lived, however, for the entire group was recalled for a new briefing and mission at about 1000 hours. Briefing this time

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was for the Pas de Calais area (St. Omer, France) to bomb the V-2 rocket emplacements the Germans had been building for some time. These rockets were only then beginning to be used in the bombing of London and therefore made for a priority target. Take-off was scheduled for about 1130 hours. The whole concept of the mission was again cause for great elation; it was to be a “milk-run” across the English Channel and back – certainly a much better deal than the earlier 24-hour mission to Berlin! Weather conditions just across the Channel were excellent with the exception of strong winds at bombing altitude.

Almost from the beginning after take-off, things just never felt completely right about this mission, my 19th in combat. An oxygen check after reaching altitude (usually around 10,000 feet) produced a faulty oxygen tank. So I had to plug into one of the portable spare tanks and carry it around with me – at least keeping it close enough so that I could do my navigational work. A closer check of equipment showed that the fire extinguishers had all been removed from the plane – apparently for servicing. All machine guns, however, were in good firing condition and were duly test fired out over The Wash. Rendezvous with squadron, group and wing was effected without undue stress, and we were “go” for the raid on St. Omer and the V-2 rocket bomb emplacements. The entire Pas de Calis area was heavily fortified with German 88 anti-aircraft guns, guns notorious for their deadly accuracy!

Within seconds after our bombs had been released, I felt four distinct and heavy hits to various parts of the plane. There was no question but that we had been hit and hit hard. I had, however, no idea of the severity of the damage for all inter-communication systems had been knocked out. Things became a bit tense when I saw the bombardier rip off his oxygen mask, go by me like a shot, kick the retaining pins out of the nose escape hatch and bail out of the plane. He motioned to me to follow on the way by. Still without any kind of aural communication, I stuck my head up into the astrodome and checked visually back with the pilots. Both were motioning vociferously to get out of the plane. By this time, I was aware that we were seriously on fire. I removed my oxygen mask, checked to be certain that my back-type parachute was still on my back, and followed the bombardier out the escape hatch.

All of this activity had occurred at a bombing altitude of 23,500 feet. Following the impact of the flak, we lost altitude to the point of being unable to remain in formation with the rest of the group. As a result, we had probably lost a good two to three thousand feet of altitude before I was able to bail out. My guess is that I left the plane at around 21,000 feet, went into free fall for a bit and then pulled the rip cord and threw it away. One of my strongest recollections relates to the extreme contrast in sound levels between being in the plane and after I exited the aircraft. I passed from sheer cacophony to utter peace and tranquility, outside the plane. I could even hear the sound of bird calls set against the drone of the disappearing B-17 formations. Some 41 years later at the Boeing Corporation celebration of the 50th anniversary of the B-17, I was able to meet with my co-pilot on that mission (1st Lt. William DeWolf),

who confirmed this sense of aural contrast and who filled in some of the details of the damage to the plane, which he had been able to observe from his cockpit vantage point. (We hadn't seen each other since getting shot down!) Apparently, one of the flak bursts had hit the left wing, rupturing a fuel tank and releasing aviation gasoline which was swept out across the red hot exhaust manifold and ignited, streaming into the open bomb bay. Those doors were still open for we had just managed to release our bombs prior to being hit by the 88's. (Thank the good Lord, or I would not be sitting here today writing about that event!)

There was some initial difficulty with the opening of my back-type parachute. I distinctly recall pulling the rip cord and throwing it away; all that happened was that a small bit of white silk appeared in the middle of my back during the continued free-fall. Somehow (I have never to this day been able to reason out just how) I was able to reach around and tug on that small bit of white silk, pulling it the rest of the way out of the chute pack. It just took a short tug and the big canopy finally opened, and I drifted lazily the remaining distance to the ground, ultimately having the misfortune of landing in some Frenchman's backyard, my right leg striking a partially overgrown low brick wall. This misadventure was enough to cause breaks in both the right ankle and tibia bones. To make matters worse, I was immediately surrounded by about a dozen Wehrmacht soldiers, all of whom were armed with either rifles or sub-machine guns. I was captured right away and taken to the hut of a Wehrmacht non-commissioned officer.

Curiously, all of this activity occurred without any thoughts on my part of the risks involved with parachuting or other aspects of combat flying. (It's really quite amazing what reflex action will do during times of crisis!) It was not until much later that day that I developed one of the worst cases of the "shakes" I have ever experienced. A kind of delayed fright, I suppose. Indeed, my most paramount concern after leaving the aircraft was for mom, dad, and Dot and what emotional agonies they would be subjected to upon receiving notice from the War Department that I had been listed as missing in action (MIA). I was also concerned about the rest of the crew on that mission – did they all get out of the plane, were they alive, wounded, or what!

The answers to many of these questions were provided the following morning when I was transported by truck to a nearby railway station. I recall that truck ride vividly! I was lying on the bed of the truck facing to the rear and staring into the barrel of a Mauser sub-machine gun being held by a Wehrmacht private who was not more than 17 years old. (I kept wondering if the safety was off!) At any rate, upon reaching the railway station, I found to my great relief that most of the rest of my crew had already been gathered at the station and were waiting for whatever was to provide transportation for wherever we were headed. All of the crew had managed to get out of the plane with the only real

injury being to Radio Operator Ray Decker, whose left arm had been shot up pretty badly. All of us were accounted for, and, after a seemingly interminable wait, we were finally loaded onto a train bound for somewhere into Europe's interior.

Our initial destination proved to be Lille, France, and we arrived there sometime in late afternoon – not a very lengthy journey. After being off-loaded from the train, we were ensconced in the town jail of Lille (my first night ever in a town facility for the incarceration of convicts!). We slept the night as best we could on a beds of boards, something which was not all that comfortable since I was nursing a couple of broken bones in my right leg! Next morning we were again placed on board a train still bound for interior Europe and wound up late that night on the 4th floor of the railway station at Köln (Cologne), Germany. Again, our beds were boards and the food was minimal to say the least. That upper floor of the railway station was in effect a series of small rooms equipped with doorways covered with blankets. We later discovered that the entire floor was set aside at that time for use by German soldiers as a brothel as they were traveling from one post to another. Next day (the 4th day) saw us finally arrive at Frankfort am Mainz where we were again loaded onto trucks for transportation to a Dulag Luft¹ (a Luftwaffe – German Air Force) interrogation center. This occurred about mid-afternoon and, as it turned out, it was to be the last I would see of any of my crew until ultimate liberation from POW status.

I was placed into solitary confinement and remained there for several days – I can't recall now exactly how long I was kept there. I was interrogated on several occasions by a variety of German personnel, attended to by an elderly German orderly who was kind to me, and was ultimately moved into a quasi-hospital facility being used at that time for the recuperation of Allied POW's who had undergone a newly developed technique for bone fracture surgery develop by an Austrian physician. The new technique involved insertion of a stainless steel pin (rod) through the hip area into the marrow of the thigh bone; a quite remarkable technique for the early 1940's. My food situation improved somewhat and the meals were at least edible and adequate. In addition, I had access to whatever books and things available to POW's in that facility.

Questions invariably arise concerning my broken ankle and tibia. I can only state that they were not attended to immediately due to the British RAF bombing of the town of Frankfort which knocked out the hospital facilities, in particular all of the available X-ray equipment. So the bones went unattended for the time being. At a point approximately 2 ½ weeks following being shot

¹ A Dulag Luft had three sections in its operations: a hospital, an interrogation center, and a transit camp,

down, many of us in the Lazarette (a military hospital facility) were moved by 40 & 8's (small box cars capable of carrying 40 men or 8 horses and of World War I vintage) to a larger and better equipped hospital in Obermasßfeld, Germany. There, 3 weeks to the day after being shot down, my bones were re-broken and set by an Australian physician who have been captured in the African campaign against "the Desert Fox," Erwin Rommel. The anesthesia used was sodium pentothal and the lower leg was encased in a plaster-of-paris cast. After about three weeks at Obermasßfeld, I was shipped with other recuperating POW's to another Lazarette in Meiningen, Germany.

At Meiningen, much of our daytime was occupied with reading, card playing, mild exercise, walks under guard through the town (those were quite pleasant times), and once in a while with a game of softball. I wish I could describe the hilarity, poignancy and even heartbreak which accompanied such a game, a game that included a variety of amputees; some without an arm or a leg, others without an arm and a leg, yet who had the courage to stand in at the plate and swing! I doubt I will ever forget some of those moments. I recall the story of one American GI who made the trip on the 40 & 8's with me to Obermasßfeld. He had left his plane a whole man, landing in a tall fir tree and falling to the ground in attempting to free himself from his chute harness. His fall broke both legs and an arm. This happened in somewhat isolated country and before he was discovered, his limbs were frozen so badly, the medics could only save one of them. Yet, his spirit was terrific. I have often wondered what became of him for I never saw him again after leaving Meiningen. Six weeks were enough for me to adjust to walking both with and without a cast, and I was finally transported by train to Sagan, Germany, a town located about 90 miles each of Berlin in the area known as Silesia, the site of Stalag Luft III. There I was duly entered into the center compound, an area set aside for the incarceration of American flying officer personnel. Stalag Luft III was the site of "The Great Escape" which occurred in December of 1943 and involved a major escape from the north compound; about 6 months prior to my arrival in Sagan.

The German word for prisoner of war is Kriegsgefangener, always abbreviated by American POW's to "Kriegie." Standard operating procedure at any POW camp during World War II when new kriegies arrived at a permanent compound was to meet new arrivals at the main gate with old timers. Invariably, some of the POW's already in the compound were able to recognize the newcomers. Security of the camp was always a concern to the kriegies for the Germans (goons) were always trying to slip a ringer into the compound for spying purposes. (Where were the contraband radio being hidden, where were the tunnel entrances, etc.?) As it happened, the first person I met when I stepped through the main gate into the center compound of Stalag Luft III was Lt. Robert Schoch, the pilot whom I had trained with in Kearney, Nebraska.

He and I and the rest of that original flight crew had all come over to England together on the Queen Mary (now berthed in Long Beach, CA). Bob had been shot down on his 2nd mission flying co-pilot on another crew, something which was standard procedure for new pilots – fly them for a few missions to gain experience in combat and then let them thake their own crews. It was after he was listed as MIA that the remaining nine members of our original crew ere assigned to Lt. William Hilton with whom I then flew the bulk of my combat missions. We also flew many hours together in formation practice missions and as tow target plane for the rest of the group. Bill’s original crew had been split up for one reason or another. Eventually, Bill DeWolf was assigned to Hilton’s crew as co-pilot and remained in that position until we were shot down. (By this time, our original co-pilot, Red Jorgensen, had been given a crew of his own as pilot.) Red was my roommate for most of the time that I was with the 306th at Thurleigh, England. At any rate, it was good to see Bob Scchock again and to know that he was in good physical shape. Word had filtered back to the base in England that he was indeed a POW.

Stalag Luft III in Sagan, Silesia, Germany was to be my home for some time to come. It was a large camp and its center compound was in the middle of a cluster of five such compounds. Each compound contained a large number of barracks, divided at mid-point and with each end subdivided into six areas, each containing 14 kriegies. The divisions served the function of scheduling use of the small cook stove at each end of the barracks. From early morning until well after dark, there was an endless succession of cooking teams for each of three meals per day with six chairs which were in constant use for card playing, barbering, etc.

German food staples consisted mainly of ersatz black bread (loaves which were quite small, hard as nails on the outside ad quite moist on the inside – rumor had it that a loaf placed upon the gloor could be stood upon without breaking!), kohlrabi (huge turnips that could never be cooked until tender and which were great gas producers!), cooked barley which we received about once each week, occasional meats, some of which was definitely horse meat (and other meats were of questionable origin!). Plus an occasional ration of a thin potato soup. All of this was thankfully supplemented by Red Cross parcels which were delivered with fairly consistent regularity to the compounds by the German camp overseers. For the most part, the Germans tried to abide by the Articles of the Geneva Convention with regard to treatment of POW’s. I cannot say enough in gratitude to the International Red Cross and the International YMCA for their efforts in getting things into the POW camps under what were extremely difficult conditions. The Red Cross was primarily concerned with delivery of food parcels; the YMCA with sports equipment, books, Bibles, musical instruments, writing equipment, etc. All of these efforts certainly made kriegie life much more bearable according to our individual tastes.

Living in such cramped quarters made friendships easy to acquire (you just had to get along!). Out of the 14 in our living unit, one person has to be singled out as a real friend. He is Roy C. Ranck of Kansas City, Mo. He had been shot down on the Gdynia raid in early October of 1943 and became my closest friend in POW camp. The friendship has remained close all these years even though we don't see each other very frequently. Roy and Betty stopped in Greencastle one time; I've been to KC by myself on two occasions, and Rosalie and I have visited them in KC a number of times. Roy is one of the most remarkable men I have been privileged to know with interests ranging from architecture to cut glass, family trees to business, ancient glassware to historical societies, etc. In POW camp, I was his piano teacher; he was my barber! We were bridge partners and generally beat the pants off of other kriegie bridge teams. Liberation in April (29th) found the two of us fixing and eating a mess of prune whip put together out of Red Cross parcels as a king of dessert. I'll write more about the two of us later.

There were, of course, other friendships; those associated with music, for I was involved in teaching some of the other kriegies piano. I also conducted one stage revue and participated in several musical programs as soloist and even wrote on small piece for a group of instruments that happened to be available in the camp. There was a kriegie jazz band for which I played occasionally and made arrangements. There were weekly Bible study meetings, and I recall that the Book of Romans was one of the highlighted areas of study for many of us. We walked the perimeter of the compound any time the weather was decent (which was frequently), played softball, read the books which were in the camp library (one was "The Earth is the Lord's" by Taylor Caldwell), wrote letters home and to others, and in general kept ourselves occupied with what everyday tasks and recreational things we could creatively think of.

Personal hygiene was difficult. There was always soap and cold water, which might be heated on the cookstove if there happened to be a small corner available among the utensils being used for cooking. We were provided with showers only infrequently and every so often one of these was a de-lousing shower. Clothing was laundered as best we could given the restrictions on hot water and soaps. Various kriegies turned into barbers in return for chocolate bars, cigarettes, other services, etc. I mentioned earlier that Roy cut my hair. In return, I provided him with piano lessons.

One of the highlights of my time as a POW came shortly prior to Christmas of 1944. As a matter of fact, that whole period is one of the most memorable of my time in Stalag Luft III. Several days before Christmas, a large shipment of mail arrived in the compound, including a package from home addressed to me. Inside were some wonderful things such as a stocking cap, a wooden muffler, wool socks and things. But best of all, there was a good-sized fruitcake, baked by mother according to my grandmother's recipe. This had

been wrapped inside a white linen napkin which had been soaked in brandy. (I discovered after getting home that mother and Aunt Ida had first soaked the fruitcake in brandy and then wrapped it in the brandy-soaked cloth!) It was just as fresh as if it had just come out of the oven! And the smell emanating from the package attracted booze-starved kriegies like flies! These guys were willing to trade anything just for a smell of the cake! We saved it for our dinner on Christmas Day and ate it as dessert following a meal of turkey (canned), cranberry jelly, and the usual fixings which we scrounged out of the Red Cross parcels – all saved for this very special occasion. It was a festive time in spite of the general conditions existent in the camp. As is the case with any major holiday, the thoughts of most of us were with loved ones thousands of miles to the west. I believe, however, that the most poignant moment of that holiday happened at midnight on Christmas Eve when throughout the dark barracks was heard the voice of Dinah Shore singing the songs we remembered during our training days in the early 40's! Another kriegie had received the album only recently – perhaps the same day as I had my fruitcake. He had saved it for just that moment. I simply cannot describe the emotion-packed atmosphere these songs created, for at the time, Dinah was singing the epitome of everything associated with wives, sweethearts, and girl friends. To this day (some 45 years later) the moment remains as precious as it was at the time.

Our contraband radios had kept us informed very well relative to the progress being made by Allied invasion forces following the Normandy landings back in June of 1944. We probably knew more about the course of the war than the goons guarding us! Some time around the middle of January 1945, we knew that the Russians were getting close to the Oder river, a short distance east of Sagan. The Germans knew this as well. On January 28th, we were moved out of Stalag Luft III at about 0200 hours. And so began the famous (infamous) European death march. All of us had seen this moment coming and had prepared for it as best we could. Roy and I had scrounged a can of bear grease and had been treating our high-top shoes for at least a week, making them as waterproof as we were able. We had also decided (much to the derision of our fellow kriegies) to stitch our GI blankets together for the march. And we made back packs out of whatever materials we could find for the carrying of food and other gear. With the temperature hovering around 10 degrees F, and with about two feet of snow on the ground, we set out on the march for wherever it was that the Germans were taking us.

We trudged all that night and all the following day, finally arriving after dusk at a tiny Lutheran church into which we were herded for the night. Try to imagine 1900 POW's jammed into that tiny space! Every available inch of space (floor, pews, corners, altar, etc.) was jammed to the gills with kriegies trying to find a moment of respite to soothe aching feet, legs, back, etc. One good thing was the warmth generated by all of those bodies in such a small area.

Somehow we manage to get a bite to eat, and then Roy disappeared for a little while, returning with a small sled he had found belonging to a small German boy. A little barter took place and Roy got the sled, while the German lad got a candy bar or two. Next morning we were on the road again. This time, however, we had our duffle on the sled which we took turns pulling. It was certainly a lot easier than carrying it and for fun, we each took short turns riding while the other pulled! One of my strongest memories of that long march in the cold and snow has to do with thoughts I had of Washington at Valley Forge. I kept thinking if those guys could bear similar conditions, then we could do it as well!

The second night on the march found us spread out among some out-buildings of a German farm; small stone structures with only the barest amounts of straw scattered about on the dirt floors. Roy and I scraped together as much straw as we could legitimately claim for ourselves and made the most of an uncomfortable situation. On the march, eating events were always in pairs and Roy and I always managed to have a satisfactory meal. Temperatures were still in the low teens and that barn was really cold! Boy, were we ever glad we'd had the foresight to sew our blankets together into a sleeping bag! Body heat really makes a difference! Interestingly, we began to notice other pairs of kriegies discovering that it hadn't been such a bad idea after all!

On the road the next day (and for several days following in the clear, cold weather) we observed huge formations of B17's and B24's on the way to some target area deep in Germany. The goon guards had difficulty in controlling us during those moments for it was only natural to send up a few rousing cheers! Those formations were always somewhere between 20,000 and 28,000 feet and forming contrails like mad. (A contrail is actually a cloud formed in the wake of piston engine aircraft exhaust by condensation.) The third night on the road was best for we were able to bed down in the hayloft of a small German farmer's barn, a loft full of the sweetest smelling hay I had ever come across. That night we really slept warm and comfortable for the hay made a very soft bed.

Eventually (my recollection is that we had traveled as far as Nuremberg) we were loaded onto freight cars in service since the 1st World War – our old friends, the 40 & 8's again. The Germans were not sticklers on the 40 men bit, however. They packed at least 100 of us kriegies into each of those 40 & 8's! Each car had its German guard, most of whom were too old for active duty at either the Eastern or Western fronts. Our guard was particularly old and was carrying an ancient model rifle. He was given to sleeping during travel and the men in the car were forever stuffing raisins, chewing gum, etc. into the barrel of that old rifle. If he had ever tried to fire it, it would have blown up in his face! Escape at that time seemed pointless. We knew the war was about over and none of us had proper clothing or equipment or resources to last very long

in that wether and so deep inside German territory. Our ultimate destination proved to be Stalag VIIB at Moosburg, Germany which is quite close to Augsburg and the Bavarian Alps. This was a major stalag, housing about 14,000 prisoners divided among several compounds. Those of us from Stalag Luft III were kept together and assigned barracks in one of the compounds. Roy and I shared side-by-side bunks and spent many a long night in conversation about a variety of things. It was helpful for each of us to have someone to share with our concerns, thoughts, hopes, and dreams. Because of the crowded conditions at Stalag Luft VIIB, many of the recreational activities we had become accustomed to at Stalag Luft III were not available; no musical instruments, little of any sports equipment, and a general lack of space to engage in any kind of outdoor games. There were a few books floating around, and I think I managed by one means or another to read them all. Our prime physical activity was walking.

April 29th will forever remain a memorable day in my life. It was on that day that a detachment of Patton's Third Army, working with Patch's Seventh Army, came through Moosburg and liberated us! What a wonderful sight and feeling it was to watch the Stars and Stripes being hoisted above the town hall in Moosburg! We watched it from the camp perimeter fence. Our German guards had fled the night before so there was little or no resistance at the Stalag and the moment of liberation found Roy and me eating our mess of prune whip (mentioned earlier). A little later that day, while walking down the main artery of the stalag, I ran into Cal Bachelor, a boy I had grown up with and a member of my hometown church! Later, Roy and I walked as free men out of camp, borrowed a .30 carbine from one of the GI's and went for a hike across the hills looking for rabbits to shoot. We found several, but hits were doubtful at best. The big treat came from a visit to one of the army field kitchens where we had our first taste of white bread in many, many months. After all of the German ersatz black bread, it seemed like eating angel food cake! I was also able to visit an army field dental unit at which I had my right rear lower molar extracted. It had a hole in it large enough to push a wooden match stick through and had been giving me considerable trouble with toothache. What a relief to have it gone!

Several days later (it seemed an eternity) we were trucked out of Stalag VIIB to an abandoned German Luftwaffe base. While waiting for the C47's to fly us out of there to the coast of France, several Focke Wolf 190's landed with white scarves flying in token of surrender. Usually the pilot would part the fighter near the tower and walk in with arms on top of the head to the nearest Allied authorities. Those of us waiting for transport to the coast roamed all over the base. It was there that I picked up a "needle and ball" instrument from a German plane which I brought home as a souvenir. It still sits on top of my

bookcase, a reminder of that period of my life which now seems so completely remote.

We were flown to somewhere on the coast of France near Le Havre for processing and debriefing. It was wonderful to among friends again (Americans, that is), to have really decent food for a change, get a haircut, a shave with hot water, new clothing, toilet articles, and all those good things we all too readily take for granted. Actually, time hung rather heavily on our hands – purely psychological, of course, for we all had but one thing on our minds – GETTING HOME! After some time, we were taken to the port of Le Havre and were loaded onto a naval troop ship thinking we were at last set to go directly to New York City. At the last minute, however, 3,000 Air Transport Comand troops were boarded and their destination proved to be Port of Spain, Trinidad! So, off we went to the South Atlantic, eventually winding up at Port of Spain where we were immediately placed in quarantine. None of us (save for the ATC troops) were allowed off the boat. I would have loved to explore that exotic spot in the South Atlantic just off the coast of Venezuela! After two days in the harbor (it was so hot that most of us slept up on deck) we set sail for New York City. One of the real treats of those two days for me was to finally get to see the southern constellation, the Southern Cross. And, the flying fish that always seemed to accompany the ship were fascinating to watch. Then, almost suddenly, there was the Statue of Liberty in New York Harbor! What a sight! I believe it meant something very special to a person like myself at that time, someone who had been deprived of freedom and liberty, and for whom the statue's symbolism had become so much more relevant. I could also understand (perhaps for the first time) the mind set of immigrants seeing the Statue for the first time, but even that has to be somewhat different from what each of us ex-kriegies experienced on that day. The harbor was crowded with small boats loaded with well-wishers providing a "welcome back to the US" atmosphere. All in all, it was a day well worth remembering! The journey from Le Havre via Trinidad to New York City had lasted 17 days! In the process, I was able to gain 17 lbs. (My POW liberation weight had been down around 120 lbs.)

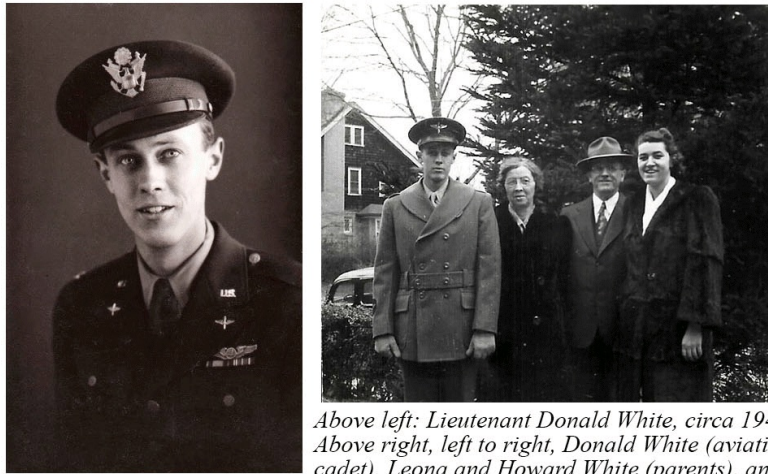
Buses were the transport to Fort Dix in northern New Jersey where we would again go through a complete debriefing pertinent to all of our experiences. We were permitted to make phone calls of limited duration, and I recall the joy of being able to finally talk with mom, dad, and Dot after the lengthy POW period. For all of us who had lived the POW experience, these were days of total elation; to be back in the States again was really something! One of the highlights of the Ft. Dix stay was an eight-hour pass which many of us used to go by bus into New York City where we had a fine meal in a Manhattan restaurant followed by a Broadway show. The musical I saw was starring Martha Raye in "Follow the Boys."

Memory plays strange tricks at times. For the life of me, I cannot remember the actual date that I arrived home at 508 Brookhurst Avenue in Narberth! My feeling is that it was in early June, perhaps around the 6th or 7th. I know that I took a bus from Fort Dix into center-city Philadelphia where I went directly to the Pennsylvania Railroad station at 15th and Market. I recall telephoning my folks to give them some idea concerning my arrival time, and I remember Mr. Beltz, Dick's dad, meeting me at the Narberth station to drive me home. Everything seemed the same as when I had last seen the town; our troop train on the way to the point of embarkation to go overseas back in November of 1943 had gone right through town! All of the neighbors had flags up – I found out later that they had done this to welcome me home. Actually, I don't recall even seeing them for my mind was on the more important matter of family reunion. It was so good to see mom and dad and Dot again! The realization of actually being home, however, did not fully sink in until much, much later.

The writing of this narrative has in its progress jogged my memory perhaps more than it should have been. A detail recalled seems to set into motion a kind of chain reaction, each new memory triggering others. Much has been omitted either by design or by lack of recall. Some of the omissions may be only for the reason of leaving something of my experience in record form for my children (and theirs) to possess. Along with it is expressed the almost desperate hope that none of them or theirs will ever have to go through any experience even remotely similar. War is hell! It is my hope and prayer that mankind will ultimately come to understand the folly of war as a means of solving the problems of man. It is my belief that all of us who participated in any part of World War II share this prayerful hope.

The few recollections have been set down for my wife, Rosalie, and for my daughters, Phyllis, Barbara, and Jeanne, because I love each of them dearly.

Dated this 26th day of March, 1990



Above left: Lieutenant Donald White, circa 1942. Above right, left to right, Donald White (aviation cadet), Leona and Howard White (parents), and Dorothy "Dot" White, sister; circa 1942.



Donald H. White's original crew: Left to right, front: Donald H. White, Robert E. "Mike" Michaelis, William B. Hilton, Jr., Carl M. Frantz. Back: Philip Mundell, Kenneth D. Simpson, Carl R. Kalback, Gerald E. "Pappy" Weaver, Raymond R. Decker. Not all these crewmen flew with White on the mission to Pas de Calais on March 26, 1944. Only White, Kalback, and Decker flew the mission.



Selected individual crew pictures from crews where Donald White was a member during his service in the Eighth Air Force. Left to right, top row: Carl M. Frantz (bombardier), Carl R. Kalbach, (engineer/top turret), Frederick J. Kappan (tail gunner), Gerald E. Weaver (left waist gunner), Kenneth D. Simpson (right waist gunner), Leslie J. Johnson (ball turret), Phillip Mundell (ball turret), Raymond R. Decker (radio operator), Donald White (navigator).