Reflections of a World War II Bombardier

(2005 – 60 Years After the End of the War)

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War Story/ Anecdote for W & M Olde Guarde Panel 2 May 2005 (Jim Goodwyn)

Before proceeding I would like to take a moment to describe the William and Mary Olde Guarde. It consists of William and Mary alumni who are inducted into the organization 50 years after graduation. In my case, since I graduated in 1948, I was inducted in 1998. The Olde Guarde was created by the Alumni Association primarily to foster support of senior graduates. It meets once a year at the College around the first of May. This year’s meeting was held from April 30th through May 2nd. Six of the Olde Guarde graduates who served in World War II were asked to speak to the group about World War II experiences. We were asked to relate short anecdotes, so I checked the definition of an anecdote in Webster and found the following: “a short account of some incident or event usually intended to amuse, inform or illustrate”. So I selected the following two anecdotes.

(I embellished this a bit for BAA by adding background on the Isle of Capri)

I was told that my WWII story should be funny and not serious. I always thought that WWII was a serious business, at least I treated it that way. However I will relate an incident which was enjoyable when happened but hilarious years later.

I was stationed in Italy during the War at an Air Base as a Bombardier on a B-17 Flying Fortress. I had enlisted in the Army Air Corps in 1943 and after training stateside was sent overseas on a Liberty ship out of Hampton Roads in September 1944. The first combat mission over Vienna wasn’t funny – in fact it scared the “H” out of me. We discovered 165 holes in the plane from flak bursts when we returned.

To get to the funny story – Flight crews were given 10 days rest leave after 10 missions. My first leave was to the Isle of Capri. Our base was near the Adriatic Coast North of Bari. About 15 or 20 of us were transported across the Peninsula in an Army truck to Naples – where I had disembarked when I first arrived in Italy. From there we took a Ferry over to the Isle of Capri. The time was in January – not the best time for a vacation on Capri.

I will take a moment to give you some background on the Isle of Capri. I never knew there was such a place except in a song, which begins “Twas on the Isle of Capri that I found her—”. The Island is located about 5 kilometers off the coast of Italy in the Gulf of Naples, and is considered one of the loveliest and most popular of all tourist destinations in Italy. It is about 6 kilometers long and 3 kilometers wide, with a coastline of about 17 kilometers. It has always been a favorite vacation venue for the rich and famous. (A couple of slides will show some of its features). The first view (Figure 1) shows the Marina Grande where
that it was exposed.

The Fed chose China first, and theroses were to get on the stage.

The appearance was polite but it was not to get on the stage.

I decided to give it a go. The consumer yet we played the tune. 'There, for today.'

I've been there, but I must get up and have done. I had been there a few times in a row at My room. The day was foggy and the smoke was from the cooking. My room was a little foggy, but the smoke was from the cooking.

They folded up the paper and went to bed in the room.

The initial plan was that the community event occurred when I was blind sided.

Or that a balance.

They decided to write a summary and I was known to write a letter. The mouse ran into the...
picture of the two of us (the chaperone was out of the picture) (Figure 5). I had completely forgotten this until an event occurred 50 years later.

I returned to the States in 1945, resigned from the Army and married my sweetheart. We had exchanged almost daily letters while I was overseas. We were married February 1, 1946 in the William & Mary Chapel. She picked the location as she had attended W&M for about 2 years. I enrolled at W&M on February 14, 1946 under the GI Bill. We had a wonderful happy life together until she died in 1993.

About a year later, I was visiting my older brother and his wife in Chester. At some point during the conversation his wife left the room and returned with an envelope in her hand. She handed it to me and said this belonged to me. When I opened it I found the picture of me with my arm around the Italian girl from Naples on the ferry. When I asked how she came by this picture she told me that my mother had asked her to launder my uniform when I returned from Italy, and she found the picture in my shirt pocket. I asked why she had waited 50 years to return it and she said that she thought my wife wouldn’t like it. I explained to her that it was an isolated moment and I had not seen the girl before or after that time. Further, it was a USO-type encounter arranged by US Red Cross Girls on the Isle of Capri, and I was aware that my sweetheart had attended USO sponsored dances down the road from here at Camp Patrick Henry where she worked during the War.

I brought the original snapshot along in case anyone would like to see it. The name written on the back is apparently that of the man who took the picture, but I don’t recall how I got it. I believe I have it here in my shirt pocket.

I named the second anecdote, “The 36th Bombing Mission”

The 36th Bombing Mission

Some people in the audience may be aware that the required number of combat missions was 35 to be eligible for return to the States at the time I was there. If they saw the movie, “Memphis Belle”, they would know that the number was 25 in England earlier in the War.

After my 35th mission I was celebrating that night with some members of my Squadron, and one of them told me I was premature as my name was on the board to fly the 36th mission the next day. (In a non-fiction book, “The Wild Blue” written by Stephen Ambrose, a prolific author of history books including World War II, he quoted George Mc Govern as saying that the Army would not allow crewmen to fly more than 35 missions)

Needless to say, I rushed down to the Squadron CO’s tent and asked
I would like to end this episode of my story with a view of a memorial.

I became aware of the memorial on the front of the church, but I didn't want to go there. It was too far from the town center. I decided to visit it later in the day.

The memorial was dedicated to the soldiers who died in World War I. It was a large statue of a soldier in uniform, with his sword raised high. I couldn't help but feel a sense of respect and admiration for the men who fought and died for their country.

I took some photos of the memorial and decided to return to it later in the day. I wanted to spend some more time there, to reflect on the sacrifices made by the soldiers who fought in that war.

I hope this episode of my story has given you a sense of the events that took place during World War I. I look forward to hearing your thoughts and feedback.

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**Assessment Group was as follows:**

- Found the location of the memorial on the street.
- Identified the dates and events.
- Recognized the significance of the memorial.

**Improvement Suggestions:**

- Include additional details about the memorial.
- Provide more context about the soldiers who fought in the war.

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**Border Notice: PILAR NAVIGATOR**

**Mission No. 4A**

**Date: 11 April 1915**

**Primary Target: Dogana, Booqa, Abe printed Engraving, Border Line**

The effects of the results of this mission by the Bond Damage

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**Account in Google by My Blog who was on this mission (Figure 6):**

April 29th, The Week in Europe ended on May 7th. I discovered the following facts: 1. The entry was successful and helped lead to the exposure of the Government Army. 2. The entry was made on April 16. 3. The Germans were able to cross the line and get away. 4. The Allies managed to cross the bridge. They were able to cross the line and get away.

I was happy about this discovery. He said we would be the first. I would be trying with him (get it?). He was a Colonel and I was an Ordinary Artillery man. I was looking forward to the next day. But the news was not good. I was going to be in the front line. I was ready to get there. I was going to be there on the next day. I was ready to fight.

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**Box:**

C. Burt: PILAR NAVIGATOR. PILAR NAVIGATOR.
which I received from a member of my 20th Squadron. It is a memorial to World War II Bombardiers and contains a very perceptive comment by Major General USAF Retired Eugene L. Eubank. The origin of this is Bombardiers Incorporated (Figure 8). It reads as follows: 

"THE GREATEST BOMBING PLANES IN THE WORLD TAKE HIM INTO BATTLE THROUGH EVERY OPPOSITION AND IN THIRTY SECONDS OVER THE TARGET HE MUST VINDICATE THE GREATEST RESPONSIBILITY EVER PLACED UPON AN INDIVIDUAL SOLDIER IN THE LINE OF DUTY."

I expect many of you will agree with this comment.

I have included some news dispatches from early 1945 (Figure 9). These are for general interest and to lend credibility to my discussion of my 36th Mission, and the serious state of the 15th Air Force upon my arrival. I also learned from records on the Internet that my 20th Squadron was wiped out by German forces a month before my arrival.

When I examined this briefing after completing the package, I discovered that I had not shown a picture of me on the Isle of Capri. In the interest of reality I searched my files and discovered a snapshot of me posing in the manner of FDR near the summit of Monte Solaro, the mountain shown in figure 1. This pose is shown in Figure 10. This is somewhat out of order but I did not want to reorganize the complete briefing.
Figure 3
Hotel Quisisana
Drummer Boy
Figure 4
The 15th Air Force was flying missions out of Foggia, Italy. The operations from Foggia began Nov. 2nd 1943. The 15th consisted of several bomb groups and a multitude of squadrons. The Second Bomb Group was a principle player in the fortunes of the 15th Air Force having already served in Algeria, Tunisia in Northern Africa. It arrived at Amendola, Foggia, Italy on December 10, 1943.

The last ground battle of the war was launched by the Fifteenth Air Force from the air. An offensive performance described by Field Marshal Alexander as the "Last Battle to End the War" was held April 9th-18th 1945. A bombardment by 1233 heavy bombers of the Fifteenth Air Force saturated the German defenses by dropping nearly 25,000 bombs within five miles of Allied Forces. This bombing allowed the U.S. Fifth Army and the British Eighth Army to penetrate into Northern Italy. (I was on this mission and it was a sight to see! B17 aircraft wing tip to wing tip as far as you could see either to the right or left from my pilots seat.) A bombardier on each plane. Many precautions were taken to alleviate any errors such as variations in altitude, time etc. No bombs were to be released after 3:20 the British Eight's H-hour. The map below shows the line of combat. The British and American forces and the German troops.

Figure 6
2nd Bomb Group – WWII Last Mission
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Figure 6
2nd BombGroup – WWII Last Mission

http://www.2ndbombgroup.org/15thAirForce.htm
March 1945

The strength in one year and I was there to know what it was. 100% of the men that were in September 1944. I never knew if and were referring to the year 1944. How the date of this article, 25 March 1945.

FAKE REPORTS
Losses 20.70%

15th Air Force

March 1945

News Despatches - Early 1945

Figure 9
and 95 per cent of them took to the air to attack targets in the Italian front.

When the Fiftieth Air Force arrived in Italy, aircraft were in short supply. On April 15, 1945, 726 aircraft were assigned to the Air Force, in the face of the increasing needs of the front. The Fiftieth Air Force was not equipped with the right sort of aircraft. The average age of the aircraft was not recognized as something that could be ignored.

Europe had dropped 999,128 tons of bombs on enemy territory in 17 countries of Europe.

If dropped 999,128 tons of bombs on enemy territory in 17 countries of Europe. This was the amount of the territory of one Allies.

If given a number of casualties to the air forces of the land-operated ground forces of Europe by the enemy's air forces over half of the occupied Europe.

If contributed the movement of what supplies in the lands of Europe by the enemy's air forces over half of the occupied Europe.

If destroyed 65 per cent in the air and on the ground.

If destroyed all air defense production within its range in Southern Europe.

A summary of the operations and results issued by the Commanding General, Major General Nathan Twining.

1945.1-74945
The Fiftieth Air Force
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Date of Birth</th>
<th>Date Enlisted</th>
<th>Date Discharged</th>
<th>Reason for Discharge</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>Captain</td>
<td>12/12/1980</td>
<td>01/01/1985</td>
<td>01/31/1990</td>
<td>Retirement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:** Additional information and details may be present on the form, but the current view does not include them. The table above includes basic personnel information typically found in military discharge records.
My WWII B-17 Crew

Front Row (L to R): John Gallagher (Pilot), Ed Mirowski (Co-Pilot), Bill Hughes (Navigator), Jim Goodwin (Bombardier)

Back Row (L to R): Darrell Jensen (Waist Gunner), Maurice Tilby (Tail Gunner), Warren McKane (Engineer), Maurice Johnson (Radio Operator), Alfred Novak (Ball Turret Gunner), Harry Hollinger (Waist Gunner)
16,112,566 American men and women served in uniform plus Merchant Mariners in World War II

11,260,000 - Army and Army Air Corps
689,000 - Marines
689,000 - Coast Guard
4,184,000 - Navy

1,079,000 total USA military deaths, wounded, MIA

291,557 battle deaths
113,842 non-battle deaths
(incidents, illness, disease, suicide)
670,846 wounded
78,750 still missing & unaccounted for
194,879 POW/MIA
116,129 POW's returned

Worldwide Casualties (military and civilian) ~ 55,000,000

USSR: 25,568,000
Germany: 7,000,000
Japan: 1,806,000

Data taken from World Almanac, 2004 and the Ev-POW Association

World War II was the eighth war for William & Mary. The 1944 Colonial Echo opened with the following passage:

"The war was in its fifth year. The sound of marching feet along the campus walks, members of the WAM Corps besieging the Wigwam with defense and salvage drives, military balls and naval reviews—all a part of a new and ready William and Mary at war."