

Some Wartime Memories of Ivey (Brownie) N. Brown

From Letter from Ivey (Brownie) N. Brown to Sharyn Bruno, daughter of Fred and Dee Fastenau, dated November 12, 2011

We left the States from our last camp—Camp Patrick Henry in Newport News, Virginia. The area is now a large public airport by the same name.

After a short stay we were loaded, and I really mean loaded, on to a small ship called the *J.W. McAndrews*—joined up with convoy leaving from the Chesapeake Bay and landed in Naples, Italy. It was a miserable trip: sleeping 4-5 deep and stand up to eat all the way.

We were loaded on another much larger ship called the *Arundel Castle* and finally landed for good at the Italian Naval Base at Taranto in the heel of the boot [southern Italy].

From there we were trucked up to Bari and then on to Cerignola. We arrived late at night; it was cold and raining and they gave us a tent that we had to pitch up in all that weather—at night—in mud and water and that is how we spent the first night—another miserable experience. But! We all survived.

I was the Armorer-Gunner on the crew. I had completed armament school in Lowry Field, Denver, Colorado and was responsible for guns and turrets.

The Intererlomeitor that was set to measure the distance that the bombs were set to land apart, shackles that held and released the bombs, and to arm or disarm the bombs in flight, whichever the case might be. But! what about your dad [Fred Fastenau].

The most memorable mission we flew that involved your dad was on February 13[1945?] when we went to Marabor, Yugoslavia. Let me recount. It was a relatively warm day. The rest of the squadron had gone off earlier on a regular mission. It was about mid-morning with several of us out tossing a football when, I believe, it was Russ Wells who came running up—yelling go get your stuff—we have a mission to fly!! Seems as though our reconnaissance aircraft had discovered a crowded marshalling yard for people fleeing the Balkan Front. First thoughts were—this one will be a “milk run”—but this did not turn out to be the case. Once we got over the target, flak from anti-aircraft guns below hit the plane directly in front of us—it rolled over on its side, went down, and several of its crew were seen parachuting down over the heart of the town. At the same time, more flak hit our plane but without major damage. But! the thing that I recall about your dad was that when we all returned to base, got out and looked around, I recall that a small piece of flak about the size of your thumbnail had come thru and lodged itself in the back of your dad’s heavy flight jacket without going thru. He, your dad, I don’t believe ever knew it had hit him until someone on the ground saw it first. The piece of metal had lost enough force so that it did not pierce the thick fabric.

There are other things like a mission to Zeltweg, Austria on April 1st (Easter Sunday) [1945?] and over Venice, Italy that stand out in my memory. But! none that stand out so vividly like that mentioned above. . . .

But—I just want you to know that every time I hear the phrase “a band of brothers” I think back about your dad and the rest of the crew as a truly *our own* “band of brothers.” I shall never forget!!

From Letter from Ivey (Brownie) N. Brown to Maureen Fastenau, daughter of Fred and Dee Fastenau) dated March 8, 2012

About the mission to Zeltweg, Austria on April 1st, Easter Sunday, 1945. I don't know what to add, except: the marshalling yard was reported to be loaded with refugees fleeing the Balkan Front. God only knows what might have been—best we just will never know. After each mission, each crew member (if he wanted) got two shots of liquor. I believe this was the only time I got my two shots of “Old Forrester.” And I don't drink.

. . . .

Your dad [Fred Fastenau] completed his missions before the rest of us and came back a little early. It was the 459th's policy for pilots and navigators to fly several missions with an experienced crew before taking their own crew, so we had another navigator to bring us home. . . . He was not as good a navigator as your dad. He got us lost over the Brazilian (Amazon) jungle coming home—but we got home, and that's the good part.