



Two YANK correspondents flew as gunners with the 8th and 9th Air Forces on D-Day. Sgt. Saul Levitt went with the Forts above 5,000 feet. Sgt. Walter Peters went with the A-20s, as a tunnel gunner, below 5,000 feet. Both these men, who have many combat missions to their credit, tell their stories on these pages

By Sgt. WALTER PETERS
YANK Staff Correspondent

AN A-20 BASE, ENGLAND—Inside the hut, in a small ante-room, a little group of men stood before the large maps of France on the wall. Outside the room, a white-helmeted MP, with an air of great importance, watched carefully to see that nobody but authorized persons could enter. For many days now the MP had been standing guard in that same position, the same look on his face, the same scrutinizing eyes. Prior to this particular morning, only the colonel and his immediate staff members had been allowed to enter the little room which the men of the Group called the Second Front Room. Now there were the colonel, his staff, and the box leaders and their deputies—men who were to lead the Group over the target in support of the ground troops already in France.

"Well, gentlemen," said the colonel, "this is it."

Col. Preston P. Pender, of Hendersonville, N. C., the CO of the Group, didn't elaborate any further. To the men around him it was quite obvious what their chief meant by *this is it*. For months now the men of the Group had been sweating and fighting in flights over "secret" targets in Northern France—secret targets whose bombing they understood to be the prelude to the invasion of the Continent. The more they bombed these "secret" targets the more they wondered if D-Day would ever come. Now they no longer wondered. It was here.

"The Huns," said a lieutenant colonel, "are expected to rush troops here (pointing to a spot on the map) and we have got to attack at these crossroads at exactly —hours."

The men looked at their watches. There was a slight pause.

"Christ," said a major, "that doesn't give us much more than a half-hour for takeoff."

"Yes," said the lieutenant colonel, "maybe thirty-five minutes at most. Bomber Command says you will fly at —feet."

A pilot with first-lieutenant bars on his collar protested. "Hell, that's suicide," he said.

Another lieutenant interrupted. "No, no," he said. "It'll be all right. Anyway, there's not a damn thing we can do about it. The men are in there and we've just got to do the job."

The lieutenant colonel continued. "Whether you fly at —feet or —feet depends on the weather over there."

There was a slight recess. The lead fliers began to discuss the invasion of France in general terms. The officer who had said, "Hell, that's suicide," laughed aloud. It wasn't a forced laugh. You could see it was genuine right to the wrinkles on his forehead. "Dammit," he said. "We'll probably get home for Christmas yet."

In the crew room, about ten minutes' walk from the secret map room, other flying officers and their EM gunners stood around in little groups. Some sat, two in a chair. The place was heavy with smoke, loud

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with conversation.

"We want a 48-hour pass in Paris," one of the guys said.

"I like French wine," said 1st Lt. Walter Conner, a pilot, from Lexington, Ky.

"And I want to see the Arc de Triomphe," said 2nd Lt. William W. Deane, of Washington, D. C.; pilot of the A-20 *Terry K.*, named after his daughter.

"And I want to see Hitler—dead," said S/Sgt. Eugene B. Nelson, Detroit tunnel gunner.

"And," said another sergeant sourly, "who the hell doesn't?"

Peeps, trucks and trailers raced along the roads leading to the hardstands, at speeds that violated all post regulations. MPs drove by, too, slowly and showing no inclination to chase traffic violators on the morning of D-Day. The trailers were filled with mechanics and other ground personnel. In the trucks and peeps were flying men, hurrying to their planes.

By a ship called *The Avenger*, a truck stopped and discharged the plane's pilot, 1st Lt. Gilbert L. Farr, of Sturgis, Mich.

Farr collared his crew chief, T/Sgt. James M. McDonough, of Scranton, Pa., and went into a huddle with him. Suddenly he stopped talking and, grinning, nodded his head approvingly at the slogans the armament men had painted on the bombs. They read:

"Down with the Hun!"

"—on Hitler!"

Somebody had even taken the occasion to extend personal greetings. "Love to Adolph, from Annie and Janie Fowler," was written on one bomb.

Farr introduced me to his crew—Lt. Morris Rafalow, a former Bronx salesman, now a bombardier-navigator; S/Sgt. Neicy Clopton, top-turret gunner from Henderson, N.C.; and S/Sgt. Nelson, the tunnel gunner from Detroit.

"The colonel said Peters will fly in your place on this one," Farr told Nelson.

Nelson looked at me; rather enviously, I thought.

"Just what I've been waiting for," he said. "Well, anyway, good luck."

In a way, I felt like a heel.

THE engines began to turn over boisterously. There wasn't the usual time allotted for warming up. In less than five minutes *The Avenger* taxied toward the long runway and a few minutes later it was taking its place in the formation.

There was no time to lose on this mission. Hitler's armies might well be driving over those crossroads toward the beachheads at this minute. This was

not just an ordinary mission. It was the beginning of a mission that some day might end all combat missions.

"There's London," Rafalow announced, over the inter-com.

I glanced down. The acres of buildings looked quiet and peaceful.

"You'd almost think there wasn't a war on," Clopton said.

A few minutes later his voice came over the inter-com again, but this time it was high-pitched with excitement. We were over the English Channel where it was quite obvious that there was a war on. "By God, look at the ships!" he yelled.

It was a sight never to be forgotten. The navies of the world seemed to be concentrated in the Channel that day. For miles, you could see ships, like spots of pepper in a light soup. There were ships passing each other like traffic on Times Square during a pre-war holiday week-end. Those heading back seemed to be travelling faster. Maybe the fact that they had already unloaded their cargo was the reason for the speed. Major Arthur Milow, of Omaha, Neb., flying in one of our lower elements, reported that he actually saw men standing side by side on ships heading toward the French coast. The England-bound ships, Milow observed, were empty.

"About two more minutes before we hit the French Coast," Farr announced. I checked my watch. I grabbed the camera as I noticed a large warship below, apparently belching out hot lead and smoke at the Coast. But, on second thought, I put aside the camera and held on to my calibre .50 a little more fondly.

Now we were over the French Coast. Peering through binoculars, I could see no sign of life anywhere. There were the little French farm houses and long, white roads without traffic. We passed over the flooded section. Then over enemy land again.

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Just at the tip of the peninsula, there were great columns of smoke, maybe about 3,000 feet high. Some of the other planes had been over that area shortly before. We wondered if it had'been the heavies that we had seen heading for the English side of the Channel.

OUR plane began to weave. Other planes did the same. We were on the bomb run now and Jerry was shooting flak at us. There were two bursts to one side. Big black stuff that broke off in small raggedy pieces, shooting all over the sky and cutting like a razor. But we were enjoying a holiday compared to the elements below ours.

"My God, look at the stuff!" Major Milow yelled over the inter-com.

His box was far below ours. Maybe about 3,000 feet from the ground; rich gravy for enemy anti-aircraft batteries. There was no use for the Major and his box to take evasive action. There was no room to evade the stuff. The flak bursts were everywhere, like raindrops in a heavy spring shower.

"It was more concentrated than a ring of water," the Major said later.

One of the planes in the lower box went down. Others, a little luckier, began to limp toward home with battle damage.

On the way back from the target, everything looked peaceful again. There were the little French farm houses and long, white roads, still appearing deserted. Then there were a couple of fields in which there appeared to be glider planes. Off in another field were large dots of a variety of colors. They were the parachutes discarded by the paratroopers who had landed hours before. We took a last look. We felt that those parachutes didn't look too good for the Hun.

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