

One Man's Tale

Or "How I came to be a 464th member"

by Anthony Schneider (776th)

A picture was given to me by Walter Kuzmak (776th), copied from his Turner Field, Albany, Georgia twin engine advance flight training WW-II book. He noticed that the lad (with all the hair) behind the counter bore a striking resemblance to your editor of the 464th BG Newsletter (me) and he was correct.

The photo is of the Cadet supply shack at Turner at that time, I was grounded for buzzing in an AT-10 while we were celebrating our up-coming graduation. The event occurred during our last hour of training when the co-pilot in another "ten" flown by a long-time cadet buddy, Cliff Swanson, of Batavia NY, jokingly radioed "Triple three (ship 333) turn your name into the latrine." Cliff's co-pilot was also an old friend, all three of us trained at Douglas, GA in PT-17s, at Lynn Field, Bainbridge GA in BT-13s and we were in the same training squadron at Turner.

Unfortunately, Turner Tower heard the transmission as "Triple three is going into the trees." As a result, Turner had everything flying searching for 333 along our intended cross-country flight path, which Cliff and I were not following since we were in the vicinity of Raymond-Richardson airport at Douglas, dueling with the PT-17s as well as chasing cows as we hedge-hopped across the countryside.

Upon returning to Turner and requesting landing instructions, I was ordered to report to the Director of Training, Colonel Stelling, immediately. My instructor pilot, Lt. Kinard, met me on the ready-room steps with these words - "Schneider you're dead."

After reporting to operations, where Colonel Stelling was not present, I saluted the Captain who was in his office, turned and left. (Bad move) The MPs met me at our barrack and placed me under "barracks arrest." A special court martial was convened a few days later, with two instructor pilots and three "ground-pounders" on the CM board. (At that time, enlisted personnel were not used on CM boards.)

The CM authorities convinced my co-pilot, an older National Guardsman, who did have some white knuckle moments during our flight, to testify against me, by telling him that he would be committing perjury if he did not do so.

My defense attorney was the PX officer, who knew little of the CM Manual and who did little to convince the court of my innocence. The final outcome was a delayed commissioning, grounding for six months and restriction to Turner Field. (No stockade or "bad" time, however).

The last wartime CO of the 464th, Colonel A. J. Bird (Schroder's successor) was CO of Turner at that time and he reduced my sentence to three months. I have often wondered if his WAC secretary, who I was dating at the time, had any influence on his decision.

The three months were spent in the Cadet supply with Lt. "Uncle Ed" Downey, a New England school teacher, who was recalled to active duty in his 40s. An avocation to cadet supply duties was building bird houses with Major Taube, Cadet Commandant, a recalled WWI balloon pilot who spent much time with Uncle Ed and myself in the supply building.

Although I was officially restricted to Turner, I had to get a G.I. driver's license, which by the way the guys at Pantanella said was very useful when they wanted to go to Bari or Lavello etc. Many times I drove "off-base" to pick up supply items. One incident vividly recalled, involved the commander cadet of a following class (maybe Kuzmak?), whose surname was Messerschmitt like the BF-109 designer. Early in 1944 or perhaps late 1943, the Army decided the olive drab clothing was easier to camouflage than white and accordingly supplied underclothing including stockings in OD.

Cadet Messerschmitt had turned in some well-worn stockings, white, for salvage and when I picked up the salvage at the supply depot, everything was OD. He was very incensed when I handed him his OD stockings in exchange for the white ones he had turned in and insisted that he wanted white.

After rejecting my explanation about the change in color, he stormed out of supply, going directly up the hill to Cadet HQ, threatening to report me to Major Taube. (I thought, "Help yourself, bud".) He soon returned and very quietly said "May I have my stockings, please?" I learned later that Major Taube - usually a very quiet man - hit the overhead and really chewed out Mr. Messerschmitt, explaining that I was also a Cadet who had completed all training, etc.

Never did I find out if he explained my CM and the reason for same. The only info I could obtain was that the Major was upset knowing that his 'carpenter buddy' was being harassed.

After the three month period expired on 2 May 1944, I received the 'gold brick' as a second john, surprised that a Flight Officer blue bar was not my fate. This created the situation that I have had two officer's serial numbers. The original 0-823712 was pulled when I was court martialed and the second 0-830779, carried thru WWII. Needless to say, all this paper-work did not make the cadet first sergeant very happy. Luckily, I was looked upon as a "fall guy". In fact, the officer who swore me in as second lieutenant admitted that I got caught doing something that "we all do" and that I was used as an example for cadets not to follow. C'est la guerre!

After graduation leave, I returned to Turner for a short stint as an instructor until being levied upon for a combat crew assignment at Westover Field, Springfield MA as co-pilot to Matt Arlington, since I never had any B-24 transition time at Maxwell or wherever.

After RTU at Chatham Field, Savannah, GA and a stint at sub-patrol of Langley Field, VA, we departed for Italy and the 464th in a new Ford-built B-24 including two Eagle radar sets in the bomb bay.

The route across the Atlantic included stops at Grenier Field, Manchester, NH, Gander at Newfoundland, Lagens Field in the Azores, Marrakech in French Morocco, El Ouina at Tunis, finally Gioia del Colle in Italy, where we were picked up after a brief stay (overnite) by Major Waggoner and K. Q. Morrow in "Pistol Packin' Momma" and delivered to Pantanella, our home, off and on until May 1945.

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