

## INTRODUCTION

When Klaus Zimmer indicated that "these things have a way of exploding," little did I know what he really meant, but that's getting ahead of this story, and you'll have to wait to get to know more about Klaus and how he fits into this narrative.

There are so many times and places this account could start. Perhaps in Kearns, Utah in February of 1944 when the Shaffer crew was first assembled, or back in the 1920s when most of these boys were born, or even when flak scored a direct hit on Ginger, their B-24 heavy bomber at 25,000 feet over Ludwigshafen. For me the story starts with vague recollections of bits and pieces of reflections by my Dad of events that happened in "The War," and names such as Lesko, Loichinger and Phillips. It didn't all mean that much at the time, but now, well into the latter half of my life, these events seem to have come to life in a certain uncanny way, almost like they were trying to find me.

Keeping in mind that I grew up hearing these stories as they fit a particular situation, it is difficult to arrange such recollections in a neat package, advancing all the details sequentially. When many of the facts of the proceedings of those days were uncovered, as could be expected, they too were not found in any sort of precise time-order. Therefore, I will

take you on a bit of a chronological roller coaster ride throughout this narrative, but I'll do my best to make the whole thing make sense, as much as war can make sense.

I expect as good a place and time for this story to start would be Memorial Day, 1994 at Mom and Dad's house in Euless, TX. There was a lot of focus on events and stories in the media surrounding WWII because it was the 50th anniversary, and since this was Memorial Day, even more so. Over more than one pitcher of margaritas shared by myself, my sister Nancy and her husband Dave, sister Jenny and her husband Troy, and Mom and Dad, it was decided that "next year we all must retrace Dad's footsteps and be there for the 50th anniversary of his release from the P.O.W. camp."

At that time I had no concept of the extent of what he and his crew experienced throughout those dark days from August until their release in April. I didn't know where their plane, Ginger went down, what their target was or any of those details that have come to mean so much to all of us. It seems hard to believe today, especially after having been there and spoken to so many who share this interest, or who witnessed the crash, that it has taken over 50 years to know what really happened. Now we have a very strong sense of the events that occurred on that August day in 1944. If for no other reason than to let you know about the passing of 7 fine young men, and the sacrifices by others from the crew of the Ginger, I feel compelled to present this history.

As it turned out, and I am sure statistically contrary to most plans made under the influence of alcohol, we did make the trip with our (grand) parents back to Germany to, among other things, retrace Dad's war-time foot steps and see the home of our "Lang" ancestors in Marburg, just north of Frankfurt. At least that was the agenda. So, coming from different parts of the United States and other parts of the world, including Berlin and England, the family tribe ascended on the "Father Land" in early April of 1995.

I recall it was the third day when we visited the fateful "target" site of Ludwigshafen (Ludwig's Harbor). Ludwigshafen is very much an industrial town, located on the Rhein river, it is the chemical center of Germany, and for all I know, the world. It is smoke stack city. It isn't very pretty, but certainly provides many jobs for the area. After visiting what we believed should have been close to ground zero for the bombs from the group of B-24s that August day, we decided to stop and get some coffee and pastries at a small sweets shop located on one of the rather bleak, rain soaked streets of this industrial town.

While in this little shop, I asked Dad about details of August 26th, 1944. I discovered that the group bombing the target was rather large, dropping 500 pound bombs, and that their plane was hit by 88MM anti-aircraft fire immediately after all the bombs were dropped. Otherwise, had the ack-ack hit sooner, this whole story would have probably been different. Five hundred pounders don't like being disturbed! Dad also talked about how at 25,000 feet when they were hit, their B-24 suffered an immediate loss of altitude since 2 or 3 of the 4 engines were taken out of commission.

The story went on about how they limped for another 50 miles or so, but they ended up bailing out just shy of the French border in some place called Saarbrücken. Of course, this will be dealt with in much greater detail later, however, the important thing about this brief conversation was that a gentleman at a nearby table overheard our discussion and when we were about ready to leave, approached us and requested Dad's address. He said he "knew someone who might be interested in contacting Dad at a later date to get more details." Little did I know where that chance meeting would eventually take me.

While we were in Germany we also visited several camps where Dad served time, including the hospital and recovery center in Meiningen, the general area in Nuremberg where a camp used to be, and Moosburg where nearly 100,000 P.O.W.s were incarcerated before being liberated by General George (Blood and Guts) Patton on April 29th, 1945. Most of these

places were only skeletons of what they were during the war days, and Dad didn't recognize much of what was left. I think it is accurate that in many ways the experience was incomplete for him. Obviously, many things had changed and he said, before we ever left for Germany that he hoped to find the graves of his fallen comrades and presumably have the chance to experience closure from that terrible experience. There were also many mysteries about what had happened to his crew, and at such a late time in his life, I think he was feeling despair, for he recognized he may never find those answers.

Perhaps because of this, I found the energy and the motivation to have sought many of the answers to these mysteries for my Father and, as it turned out, for two others from his crew. It has been very rewarding, and a surprising adventure that I would like to share it with you.



**Shaffer Crew**

*Top Row (left to right)*

*Vince "Ralph" Shaffer, George Lesko, Norm Phillips, Herbert Rubin*

*Bottom Row (left to right)*

*Charles Wyatt Jr., Ted Zemonik, Frank Loichinger, Albert Lang, Jack Staton, William Fetterhoff*

## **Chapter 1**

### ***The Day Everything Changed***

August 26th, 1944 was a clear day over the Saarland of Germany. It was a day that started very early that morning, well before dawn in the English village of Bungay for the Shaffer crew. This would be the ninth mission for most of these boys from the 446th bomb group, 706th squadron. The plan was, just before noon they were to be unloading over five tons of death and destruction into the chemical factories of Ludwigshafen Germany. It was a substantial mission on an important target, and Ludwigshafen had a reputation of being very heavily defended with those extremely effective German 88 mm anti-aircraft guns.

On the way to the target, the mission could be described as routine. No Luftwaffe fighter aircraft resistance was encountered. By August of 1944, the war was well under way, and Allied bombers were encountering fewer and fewer German fighters. As the crew of their plane, Ginger cleared the target area, having just dropped their load of 500-pound bombs, the airmen on the flight deck had a clear view of anti-aircraft fire dead ahead. They could see that the German gunners, some 25,000 feet below, had a precise bead on the group. As it was in those days, all a pilot could do was stay in formation and "gut it out". Ginger was in a lead position on this mission, so it seemed they would be first to test the accuracy of the German flak. Each cluster came closer and closer. Anti-aircraft fire looks somewhat innocent, like puffs of black smoke that wouldn't seem capable of taking down one of these substantial Liberators. However, hundreds of small pieces of metal burst from within each of these benign looking smoke clouds, and soon some found Ginger.

The noise was like huge balls of hail hitting a tin roof. Instantly the flak took out 2 or 3 of the Liberator's powerful Pratt and Whitney Twin Wasp 1830-43 radial engines. Remarkably, however, no one aboard was injured, but Ginger nearly fell from the sky as the crew scrambled to deal with the situation. One of her disabled engines was somehow restarted, but control of the large aircraft was difficult. Norm Phillips, navigator, scrambled to determine a best course, hopefully landing behind enemy lines in France. The problem was, there was little control of Ginger's flight path. Simply keeping her airborne was all they could hope for. Ginger was losing altitude rapidly and Norm could see they were headed straight for Saarbrücken, a town with numerous anti-aircraft gun installations, a well-defended Nazi strong hold. Even with all of the equipment that was being jettisoned by the crew, the ground was closing fast. This was not a good situation.

Probably about this time, Otwin Bredel, a 15-year-old Hitler youth and gunner's aid was hurrying on his little motor scooter to help shoot down any Allied aircraft over the region. Radar reports were excellent and it was clear something was coming in their direction. Otwin wrote in his journal that Ginger was an easy target, like "shooting a box out of the sky." She simply didn't have a chance, and Otwin was right.

By now, Ginger's crew was in even deeper trouble, losing altitude at an ever accelerating rate, and now taking hits from the dead-accurate ground fire from Otwin's gunnery group. Vince "Ralph" Shaffer, pilot had no other option but to give the order to bail out. The boys in the back of the plane went first. Shaffer, co-pilot George Lesko, navigator Norm Phillips, and top turret gunner Al Lang were some of the last to get out. Miraculously, every crewman did get out safely, and all of their parachutes opened. As they hit the silk there was a sudden contrasting silence except for a few excited voices and the familiar sounds of farm animals. However, more frightening sounds of bullets whizzing by soon accompanied them on their trip back to earth.

It wasn't long before these ten, human laden parachutes started landing everywhere. The region was heavily forested, so a real danger of a chute hanging up in a tree turned out to be a reality for Lang and Phillips. Lang's chute was at first caught in the top of one of the tall trees, just long enough to let the air out of it, releasing him to gravity and sending him free-

falling for thirty or forty feet. As Al gathered his wits, he knew immediately that he was in bad shape with bones protruding from his bleeding right leg and intense pain in his back. He wasn't going anywhere on his own for a while, and morphine was in order.

It was understood by airmen that it was not a good idea to have a side arm in one's possession when captured, so Lang quickly dug a makeshift hole and buried his standard issued Browning 45 automatic pistol. He also buried other artifacts, including some local currency that the Army Air Force supplied to airmen. It would be safer there, and perhaps an opportunity might come up later to reclaim it. He knew he would be captured, so it seemed to make sense.

By now, dogs were barking and young excited voices could be heard as they sought out the enemy. Soon, perhaps as many as two hundred youth, supervised by the gunnery crews were combing the woods. And soon, Lang, Lesko, and Phillips were captured. A make shift stretcher was fashioned from branches and his parachute, for Lang's transportation. Phillips was skinned up a bit from his "ride" down the trunk of another tall tree, and Lesko was in good shape. So, as they were ordered, they carried Lang down the long hill to a Russian work camp for further processing.

But what about the others? It would be 54 years before Lang, Lesko and Phillips would know the whole story of their buddies. 54 years would pass before Ginger's crew would be recognized for their deeds on this, their 9th mission, and nearly as many years would pass before they would discover the sad fate of the rest of their crew.



*Al Lang at the Luftwaffe Transit Camp in Frankfurt.*



*Fifty-three years and 6 days prior to this photograph, 15-year-old Otwin Bredel (right) helped capture the author's father, Al Lang, co-pilot George Lesko, and navigator Norm Phillips in the woods behind. (author, left)*



*The location of the former Russian work camp where Lang, Lesko and Phillips were taken after their capture. Today, an apartment complex resides on the property.*

## CHAPTER 2

### *Ginger: The Story of a Plane*



*Ginger, B-24H, Serial No. 41-29177*  
*Photo, Courtesy Albert Krassmann, June, 1944*

Ginger was a special plane, and not only because she carried my Father and his best buddies. Actually, none of the Shaffer crew even knew they were in a plane called Ginger at the time of their last mission, and if they had, they would have had no knowledge of her significance. As it turns out, she was a very extraordinary plane, and her last crew would only add to her significance.

The U.S. government paid \$306,592 for Ginger. She flew numerous missions, but this author has been unable to determine exactly how many. She was of the "H" series and was manufactured in Ft. Worth, TX by Consolidated Aircraft Co. Her invoice records show she was modified in St. Paul, Minnesota on, or about 9/11/43. The following account of her flight over to England was detailed by Doug F. Willies in his excellent book about Ginger's first crew, *Not Forgotten*.

*"B-24H Liberator, serial number 41-29177 was handed over to the USAAF on 8 September 1943. The aircraft subsequently arrived at Herington in Kansas on 29 September where Lt Colby Waugh and his crew met up with it for the first time, two days after their own arrival at the Base. They learned that it was the aircraft in which they were to fly overseas- and to War. Based on the recorded experiences of other crews, they were probably not aware at this point that they were bound for the European Theatre of Operations (ETO). However, back with the Waugh crew. Reflecting the mood of the times and the calibre of the young men involved, we do know for certain that they were keen and enthusiastic to get involved as soon as possible in order 'to do their bit' in the cause of Freedom. Earlier fears that they might have been held back in the US as Instructors because of their high ratings as a crew during recent training sessions had been alleviated - if only by somewhat devious means!*

*It was probably here at Herington, or at their next and final destination in the US, that the crew persuaded someone at the Base to add some personalized decoration on their aircraft -nose art, as it is known today. This was common practice and must have been a morale booster for the individuals concerned. Pilot Lt Colby Waugh's wife Doris had given birth to a baby daughter a few weeks earlier, whom they named Ginger. What better name for their B-24! So "Ginger" was painted on the nose and*

*that must have been a wonderful thrill for this young 'family man', Colby Waugh. We know too that below the tail turret in Henry Wilk's territory, the name "Donna" was inscribed. That name too was very pertinent as fifty plus years later, Henry Wilk and his charming wife Donna have brought up a fine family and are now enjoying retirement together in Florida. It is believed that "Ginger" and "Donna" were painted on the aircraft by the same person - but it was not done by Henry. However, as a very personal touch, Henry did inscribe the name "Tiny" on the left-hand 50 calibre (0.5 ins) gun in the rear turret, the nickname given to Donna. On the right-hand weapon, he painted the name "Hank," the name by which he was known to the crew. It could be that additional names or decorations were added elsewhere on the aircraft at this time but none can now be recalled or identified.*

*At Herington they were kitted out for overseas-new parachutes, various pistols, First Aid Kits, binoculars and other pertinent items, including 0.45 automatic revolvers. Personal items were made available for the crew. These included toothpaste, hair oil, shaving cream, etc.*

*From Herington, in the early hours of 4 October 1943, Colby Waugh and crew flew their B-24 southwards towards Morrison Field, West Palm Beach, Florida.*

*Mrs. Mary Barton, the young wife of the Co-pilot, had been able to join her husband Jimmy for the few weeks before their departure from Herington. To this day she recalls "that very, very early morning flight, of the horrible quietness when he was gone and the lonely trip home ..."*

*Of Morrison Field, other crews have commented: 'not much to say about it except that it had a fence around it and we couldn't get out.' This was their last stop-over before leaving the shores of the US.*

*"Ginger" and crew left Morrison field on 5 October 1943 and assuming that the same procedures were adopted that applied to other crews, they opened sealed orders whilst airborne and only then discovered their final destination. In any case, we know that they were flying alone and that their next stop-over was to be at Borinquen Field in Puerto Rico. They found green grass, trees and rolling countryside on arrival. We know too that they were allocated 21 days in which to reach their destination in the UK. They were to arrive in just 13.*

*From Puerto Rico, "Ginger" and its crew flew the 1,000 miles hop to Atkinson Field in British Guiana, South America. (As from 1966, known as Guyana). Parke Kent later reported that by this time 'the crew were settling down and working well together'.*

*Then another 800 miles flight to Val de Gaens Field (Valley of the Dogs), Belem in Brazil, beyond the mouth of the mighty Amazon River, which alone took almost an hour to cross! This airfield was built upon sand alongside the Para River, close to the ancient city of Para-Belem. Maybe Henry remembers the notice on the door of the Flight Office and which brought many a wry smile to the face of aircrew passing through. It read: "Aviso. E'terminantemente Prohibido Estacionar N'Este Lugar". Translated: "It is strictly prohibited to park here". Crew members shared guard duties, sitting under the wings of their aircraft in order to avoid the heat of the sun. Note:*

*In July of this year (1995), military investigators recovered wreckage and human remains from a B-24 that had crashed in the Amazon jungle fifty-one years earlier. The Liberator went down in remote jungle on 11 April 1944 after encountering a storm whilst flying from Trinidad to Belem. There were no survivors.*

*“Ginger” continued her journey. Still within Brazil, almost 1,000 miles to Natal on the very eastern tip of the Continent of South America and the point nearest the west coast of Africa, nearly 3,000 miles distant. Here they landed at Parnemirim Field, an airfield set amongst the sandy scrub close to Natal. Only a few hundred miles south of the Equator, the hot tropical sun was notorious for its intensity at this busy airfield with its constant arrivals and departures of B-24’s, B-17’s, C-46’s and 47’s. There were swimming facilities for the crew to enjoy whilst their aircraft was checked and readied before they left on the next stage of their flight-the arduous sea crossing of the South Atlantic. No doubt they took advantage of the locally grown fruits, particularly the bananas and oranges which abounded. We do know that they succumbed to the sales pleas from the hordes of local vendors offering just about ‘everything under the sun’, including leather boots and similar items! Henry bought a monkey!!*

*Refueled, they set course eastwards across the South Atlantic for Ascension Island, 1,400 miles distant. This tiny British governed outpost in mid-Atlantic, no more than nine miles in length and six in width, was a convenient stop-over en route to the West African mainland. Navigator, Arthur Cound, meticulous and professional, was proving his expertise. A radio beacon had been installed to assist with the navigational needs of those crossing the Atlantic at this point but there was no room for error.*

*A few years earlier, this sparsely populated island was known for its booster station for the submarine cable between Europe and South America and as a radio relay station and little else. Both enterprises were operated by ‘Cable and Wireless’. The overwhelming need to transport aircraft and war materials from the US to the UK saw the establishment of the Northern route of what became known as the “Atlantic Bridge”. The Southern route was created initially in order to provide a link from the US to the Middle East war zone via South America and West Africa. This route was later extended northwards from Africa to the UK, thereby providing an additional and alternative link to Britain. With the provisioning of the Southern route, the importance of Ascension suddenly escalated. It was decided that a landing strip had to be produced and produced quickly, that would be capable of accepting the largest aircraft of the day. It was agreed that the Americans take on this formidable engineering task. An American reconnaissance party arrived on the near deserted island in late 1941. In March 1942 the main Task Force arrived and by June of that year they had, literally, blasted out a single runway from the solid, jagged rock. A very considerable feat of engineering, even by today’s standards. By chance, the very first aircraft to land on this newly constructed runway in mid-Atlantic and hundreds of miles from the nearest land mass, was not a big heavy bomber or transport but a single-engine Fairy Swordfish biplane of the Royal Navy’s Fleet Air Arm! Dispatched from a RN aircraft carrier operating in the vicinity with instructions to drop a message to the Islanders, Lt E Dixon Child discovered the magnificent new runway, hastily exchanged messages with those on the ground and had the privilege of being the very first to land an aircraft on the Ascension Island! Now known as Wideawake Airfield - and may well have been known by that name in the 1940’s- it was so called because of the thousands of birds of that name which live and breed upon that rocky island. The birds, also known as the Sooty Tern are somewhat larger than gulls, fly throughout the night and return to their rocky home in the early hours of the morning. When disturbed they fly up in such dense hordes that they present an extreme hazard to aircraft in flight. For safety’s sake, aircraft had to be scheduled to arrive and takeoff at times that minimised the risk of bird strikes.*

*Before our crew left Ascension, Henry’s South American monkey was given away! Because of its obnoxious smell, it was decided that it was not such a good pet after all!!*

*Onwards across the South Atlantic for almost another 1,400 miles, Colby Waugh and his Co-pilot Jimmie Barton, flew them into Roberts Field, Liberia on 13 October. Safely down in Africa, just north of the Equator and nestled between Sierra Leone and the Ivory Coast, the tropical heat must have been intense. However, this was the point at which Henry Wilk and the other gunners removed the grease from their guns. Liberally coated to protect them from the elements, particularly the corrosive air of the South Atlantic, they were progressively approaching the War Zone and the initial preparations were put in hand. However, they did have time too for brief relaxation. Parke Kent reported later that he and Virgil Thomson watched a movie.*

*Then north west along the coast of Africa to Eckens Field, Dakar on the most westerly tip of the continent and capital of French Senegal. They landed on a runway composed of steel matting and were probably initially alarmed by the roughness of the surface and their landing! As they taxied "Ginger" to its dispersal point, the clouds of dust blown up by the props from the dry sandy surface were in complete contrast to the conditions experienced in the tropical areas that they had just left behind. French Bengalise soldiers guarded their aircraft at the dispersals. The crew quickly became aware that mosquitoes and the risk of malaria were high on the list of hazards. At night they slept under a mosquito net and if they ventured outside, complete coverage of exposed areas of the body was essential.*

*Now onwards and northeast to Marrakesh in French Morocco. Accounts by crews taking the same route a few months later speak of having to skirt around unfriendly Spanish Morocco by crossing the Sahara Desert (almost equally unfriendly) and taking the 'back door' route into Marrakesh. It seems highly probable that this too was the routing taken by "Ginger" and her crew. In any case, it must have been an arduous and tedious flight of over 1,500 miles, crossing the seemingly endless sands of the Desert, then over the 13,600 ft Grand Atlas Mountains before letting down into Marrakesh. Similarly, we are not certain if the crew had the time, or the inclination, to visit the famous Casbah within the Walled City. Maybe wartime restrictions prohibited such visits? Many crews seem to remember the Italian POW's who worked in the Messes and generally performed many of the routine tasks around the airfield.*

*Then the final leg of the long and hazardous journey and one which posed a new and very real danger to "Ginger" and all those who flew in her. For the first time they would be entering hostile air space. From Marrakesh to England was a distance of some 1,300 miles and flying northwards they would skirt the infamous Bay of Biscay before their final run, in to a UK airfield. They needed no reminding that they were entering the active war zone and they were slightly taken aback when they were allocated just 50 rounds of ammunition for each of their 50 calibre (0.5 ins) machine guns, a surprisingly small amount. However, and much more significantly, they were recalled to Marrakesh on two separate occasions after setting out for the UK because enemy air activity had been reported along their intended route. When finally on their way, the whole crew must have been at their most alert. Pilots Colby Waugh and Jimmie Barton knew that they had almost 'made it' to the UK without mishap after what must have been their most grueling flight thus far. Navigator Arthur Cound surely must have felt real and justified satisfaction in providing courses and headings that got them where they needed to be. The role of the Radio Operator, Parke Kent, was also essential in providing communications and radio navigational facilities for the Navigator, Pilot and Co-pilot. The Engineer, Lester Wagner, undoubtedly had some harrowing thoughts and concerns about the fuel states and engine performances during those long hops between landing grounds. Bombardier Virgil Thomson and the Gunners Henry Wilk, Don Belden, Earl Johnson and Edward Murphy no doubt had a myriad of tasks to perform but you can bet your bottom dollar that during those last few hundred miles before reaching Britain that they were the most alert and keenest-eyed crew in the 8th Air Force! The JU88's still roamed the Bay of Biscay and many*

*an Allied aircraft came to grief in that area. If they were unfortunate enough to come down in those seas, the chances of survival were very slim indeed. Additionally, it was not unheard of for a crew to find themselves over Occupied Europe and lost to AA fire or to enemy fighters. A small error of navigation or succumbing to the German radio signals designed to lure unsuspecting aircraft off course, accounted for many a crew that 'didn't make it' and who joined the Missing In Action (MIA) roster. As if this was not enough, as a final hazard on their final leg to England, they encountered a violent storm, probably over the Bay of Biscay. Maybe it was a blessing in disguise and helped to keep the area clear of enemy aircraft? In any case, Navigator Arthur Cound gave them a new course to steer in order to bring them into an alternative airfield and clear of the worst of the adverse weather.*

*Then suddenly, out of the murk and the drabness, there it was! The Atlantic rollers breaking on the shores of England. The green fields and reassuringly, the very wonderful sight of a long and most welcome runway stretching inland from the very edge of the Cornish cliff tops. Royal Air Force Station St Mawgan, on the south western tip of England. After all those monotonous miles over the ocean, they were there, in the ETO. Tired but jubilant and 'rearing to go'. They had 'made it'. It was 18 October 1943, just 13 days after leaving the*

*US. "Ginger" had brought them all safe and sound a distance of over 9,000 hazardous miles! One more short journey and then the crew were to separate from "Ginger" and crew and aircraft were to go their different ways to War." (Willies, 1995)*



*Ginger can be seen here with her serial number ("4"129177) clearly visible. She is certainly a little worse for wear! (note: ball turret has been removed). Photo courtesy Albert Krassmann*

Sadly, five of the Colby Waugh crew perished on January 4, 1944, crash landing short of their home field in England in another B-24 named Alfred. After a long and arduous struggle, limping home on three or less engines and nearly out of fuel, the first crew of Ginger were never to be together again.

Those who died were:

2/Lt Colby A Waugh, Pilot.

2/Lt Arthur L Cound, Navigator.

2/Lt Virgil E Thomson, Bombardier.

S/Sgt Don C Belden, Gunner.

S/Sgt Edward R Murphy, Gunner. Died four days later from his injuries.

Through the course of researching this brief history, many things have touched my heart. The following letter to Colby Waugh's widowed bride and recent mother of Ginger is most certainly one of them. This letter from Waugh's fellow crewman, Hank Wilk, provides only a small sense of the tragedy of the day. Rather than retype it, I have decided to include it in its original, somewhat rough appearance. To my eye, it is more significant in this format.

Newton Falls,  
Jan. 20, 1946.

Dear Mrs. Waugh:

I received your card quite some time ago and am sorry that I'm just getting around to answering it.

Yes, I was in the plane when it crashed and must say that I am very lucky to be here. I really don't know what to write about or how to say what there is to be told, but I'll do my best.

Jan. 4, 1944 we were and did bomb the target Kiel. It was a very bad day and the weather was terrible for flying. We were throwing contails all the way because of the weather. We were very late reaching our target and missed our fighter escort. At the target and most of the way back we encountered enemy fighters and we certainly took a beating. About ten or fifteen minutes after bombs away, we had to leave our formation for we were badly shot up and couldn't keep up. That meant a trip home alone with one engine gone--the others running, but we didn't know how long--the radio shot up, well, to be honest, the ship shouldn't have been in the air.

As far as I know, no one was wounded, tho we're not sure about Lt. Waugh, for he did act awful funny, tho he wouldn't say if he was or not. He sure was a great pilot, and I still don't know how he and Lt. Barton brought the ship back as far as they did, for, twice on the trip home, the remaining three engines quit on us and each time they got them running again after a short dive. After they cut out the second time Lt. Waugh gave the order to prepare for ditching, that is, a water landing. We were coming down gradually, and at a few thousand feet above water we sighted the coast of England, so we were going to try to make it on to the base. Just as we got to the coast the engines cut out for the third time and we never did pull out of the dive. Lt. Waugh did do his best to make a belly landing but our wing caught in a grove of trees and spun us into a large hill, nose first. I managed to crawl out of the plane after a time but could do nothing. Sgt. Murphy was pinned in the side of the plane and we couldn't get him out until later. Sgt. Belden was beyond the ~~stage~~ stage of being helped and as for Lt. Waugh, Lt. Cound, Lt. Thomson, I never did see, as they carried us away to the hospital. I later found out they were buried outside of London, at the Greenwood Cemetery (I believe that is the name of it). They buried Murphy in Cambridge. Don't know why they weren't all together. Guess because Murph didn't pass away until a day later.

This has been a very crude way of writing it all, but I didn't know of any other way of putting it. If I've omitted anything please write and I'll do my best to explain it. Wish we could have flown our ship "Ginger" in combat, she would have brought us all back.

I'll close this now and if you wish I'd like to hear from you again. Give my regards to Ginger.

Sincerely,  
Hank.

*Letter, courtesy Ginger Waugh-Borden*

Of Special interest to this author is Hank's comment about how the ship Ginger would have brought them all back. The day Waugh and his other crewmen perished, baby Ginger was 4½ months old. Colby Waugh never saw his little daughter!



Ginger Waugh-Borden, 53 years later (1997)

As I indicated, Ginger was a special airplane for many reasons. The Following information, also contributed by Doug Willies provides more insight into the Airplane, Ginger:

*“B-24H serial 41-29177 was manufactured by Consolidated at their Fort Worth facility in Texas. The aircraft was handed over to the USAAF on 8 September 1943 and its cost is recorded as being \$306,592.00. It was flown to the St Paul’s Modification Centre on 11 September. Following the installation of the latest modifications to bring it up to combat readiness, 41-29177 was flown to Herington, Kansas on the 29th of the same month.*

*What we do know is that “Ginger” went on and for a period of a few months, served the Air Force of the United States in an almost unique capacity. At Burtonwood she was installed with British H2S equipment, one of just eight B-24’s so equipped.*

*The H2S equipment was a 10 cms airborne radar system, utilising a revolving scanner and which provided a form of ‘map’ of the ground over which the aircraft was flying. This information was displayed on a cathode ray indicator and could be used to enable ‘blind’ bombing to be carried out under conditions of darkness or cloud cover.*

*Invented and pioneered by the British, H2S utilised their revolutionary pulsed cavity magnetron-the source of the centimetric power radiated by the equipment. Top priority had been given to the development of the system in an effort to provide the RAF with a precision bombing aid for use at night. The American 8th Air Force took an interest in the system in mid-1943. The overcast weather conditions in Europe had been experienced first-hand and the adverse consequences to their visual bombing techniques had been appreciated. The British were asked to modify and fit H2S to a small number of B-24 Liberators and B-17 Fortresses. The purpose was to allow the 8th AF to assess the system for their needs. In the meantime, it was also hoped that it would allow them to continue the daylight bombing offensive during conditions which would otherwise have prevented operations.*

*The small team of scientists involved with the project were faced with many problems with the installation of the H2S equipment in the American aircraft. The most major being the need for the equipment to operate satisfactorily at altitudes of up to 30,000 ft. This was very considerably higher than the height flown by the RAF bombers on their nightly missions to Germany. The aerial (antenna) scanner for the H2S equipment on the B-24 was housed in a ‘trash bin’ under the fuselage of the aircraft and occupied the same position as the ball turret. Because of the greater height requirements, the scientists experienced sizeable problems achieving an acceptable ‘polar diagram’- one that would provide an adequate ‘picture’ of the ground below.*

Another formidable difficulty was to overcome the 'arcing' problems encountered with the very high voltages involved in the equipment when operating in the rarified atmosphere around 30,000 ft.

The research team was very small, the pressures upon them were enormous. It was not just the requirements of the 8th Air Force but also from the RAF and others. RAF Bomber Command were pressing very hard for more and better versions of H2S. RAF Coastal Command demanded more and better radar aids needed in the fight against the German U-Boats. The anti-surface vessel radar (known as 'ASV') was a direct derivative of H2S. Even the British Army required a modified version of the device for use on Landing Craft. Two members of the scientific team, Ramsay and Hillman, spent day after day flying at 30,000 ft, taking measurements and conducting trials. One of them collapsed with pneumonia but eventually an installation was devised that gave acceptable results. Sadly, during flight testing of one of these early installations in November 1943, a young RAF airman, LAC Minsen, lost his life through a lack of oxygen and extreme cold at 30,000 ft in a B-17.

On 15 December 1943, "Ginger", complete with H2S installation, was assigned to the 8 AAF, 14th Bombardment Squadron of the 482nd Bombardment Group, based at Alconbury. The Group had arrived at the Cambridgeshire airfield on 20 August 1943, tasked with providing 'pathfinding' facilities (PFF) for the 8th Air Force. Three of the Squadrons were equipped with B-17's and one with B-24's. All were provided with various and special navigational and bombing aids. Their first operational mission was on 27 September 1943 against Emden. They continued in these duties until March 1944 when the 482nd drastically reduced their operational role in order to concentrate on providing PFF training for crews. However, they still continued radar mapping of enemy territory, they were involved in the D-Day activities and carried out trials on new radar equipments, as required. In due course, these trials included those on the American manufactured 3 cms H2X equipment, derived from the British H2S and as fitted earlier to "Ginger". H2X, codenamed 'Mickey', became the standard radar bombing aid for the US 8th AF and saw extensive use.

We know that "Ginger" was withdrawn from her PFF duties when the operational role of the 482nd was reduced in March 1944. The H2S equipment was removed and "Ginger" was transferred to the 446th BG(H) based at Flixton, near Bungay (and sometimes referred to by the latter name), on the Norfolk/Suffolk border. Here she was allocated to the 706th BS during the summer of 1944, for use in the conventional bomber role.

The 446th arrived at Flixton on 4/5 November 1943. On 16 December 1943 the Group conducted its first Mission, against Bremen.

Mission number 150 was carried out on 26 August 1944 and was directed against the chemical works at Ludwigshafen. The 446th led the Wing. Nineteen aircraft from the Group hit the primary and another two dropped on 'a target of opportunity'. Three aircraft were lost and another received flak damage. Amongst those three aircraft lost was 41-29177, Ginger.

Piloted by I/Lt Ralph V Shaffer, the aircraft was hit by flak whilst over the target area. "Ginger" went into a steep dive but leveled out at approximately 8,000 ft. I/Lt Joseph J Savage in another of the Group's B-24's was the last person to have contact. At 1025 hrs this was lost, both visually and by radio (on VHF Channel 'C').

They left the formation near the point of bomb release. The 'bail out' order was given by the Pilot. Survivors later reported that all the crew were uninjured and successfully exited the doomed aircraft. The Pilot, Ralph Shaffer, the Copilot 2ILt George Lesko,

*Navigator Flight Officer Norman H Phillips, Radio Operator S/Sgt Frank Loichinger and ball turret Gunner Sgt Albert H Lang, were all taken Prisoner.*

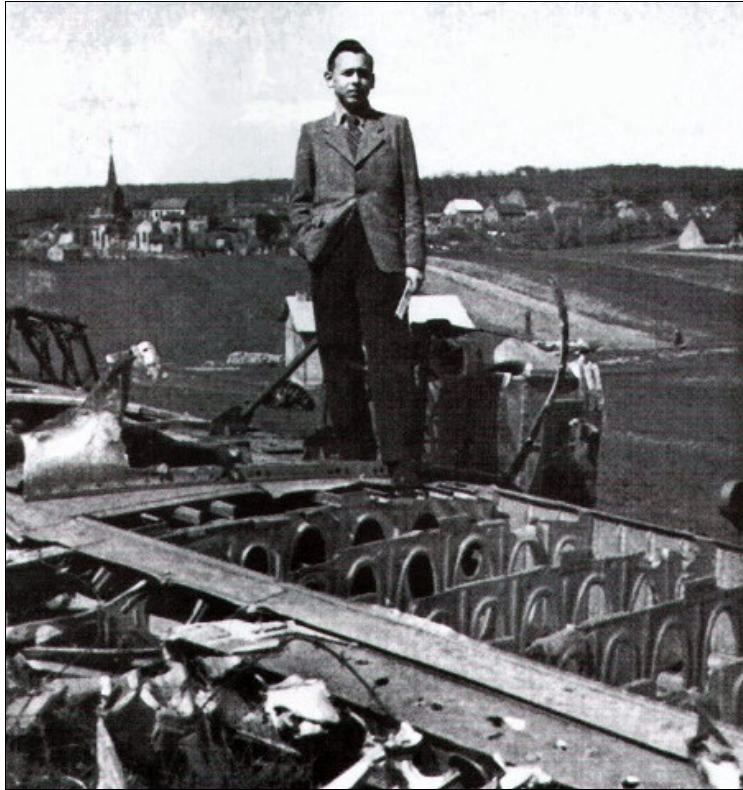
*Sadly, nose turret Gunner Sgt Jack W Staton, top turret Gunner T/Sgt Charles E Wyatt, waist Gunners Sgt Ted Zemonek and Private Jack A Maxwell, along with the tail turret Gunner Sgt Willard R Fetterhof were all listed as 'Killed in Action'. It is the opinion of the survivors that they were all killed by German civilians, after safely reaching the ground. [Correction: The fliers were murdered by a squad of SS people from Saarbrücken, not civilians. Staton fell into the Saar River with his chute and got drowned there.]*

*German records report that "Ginger" was shot down at 1105 hrs on 26 August 1944 by Heavy Flak Detachment 63 1(0) and that the aircraft had received 90 per cent damage. The place that it came down is described as being south of Schoenecken b. Forbach Westm., about 6 km south-west of Saarbrücken. They also report that George Lesko, Norman Phillips and Albert Lang were captured at 1120 hrs on the 26th at Gersweiler Wald. Additionally and rather oddly, they recorded that 20 years old Charles Wyatt did not have an identification disc ('dog tags') and was identified "from a slip of paper found on him". He was buried at Saarbrücken-Burbach Cemetery on 28 August 1944.*

*So ended the story of B-24 Liberator, serial 41-29177 and named "Ginger" by the Colby Waugh crew in recognition of the Pilot's young daughter. As the ONLY aircraft of that name in the entire US 8th Air Force, it truly was unique. Her role in the development of radar bombing aids for the 8th Air Force with the installation of the H2S equipment, also put the aircraft into the 'elite' category. "Ginger" had fought her War and made an above average contribution to Victory and Freedom. When the end came, in combat, all the crew escaped successfully. Sadly, some were to unfairly succumb to the wrath of the enemy. The search for further information on "Ginger" continues. In particular, the author would like to discover whether she ever provided PFF facilities for her old crew in those earlier days whilst flying with the 482nd BG." (Willies, 1995)*



*Pictured above (left to right), Sgt. Landon Hunt, Crew Chief, Cpl. Albert Krassman, turret and gunsight mechanic. Photo, courtesy Albert Krassman*



*Ginger, Sometime after August 26, 1944 in Schoeneck France.  
Photo, courtesy Raymond Engelbreit*

The author was fortunate to have obtained a limited edition of this print. There are some errors regarding the color scheme on Lyon's interpretation from the original black and white photo. The vertical stabilizers should be colored orange, and the white area of the engine cowl is much smaller than detailed in this rendering. Also, the cloverleaf should be white in color (see previous actual photos of Ginger)

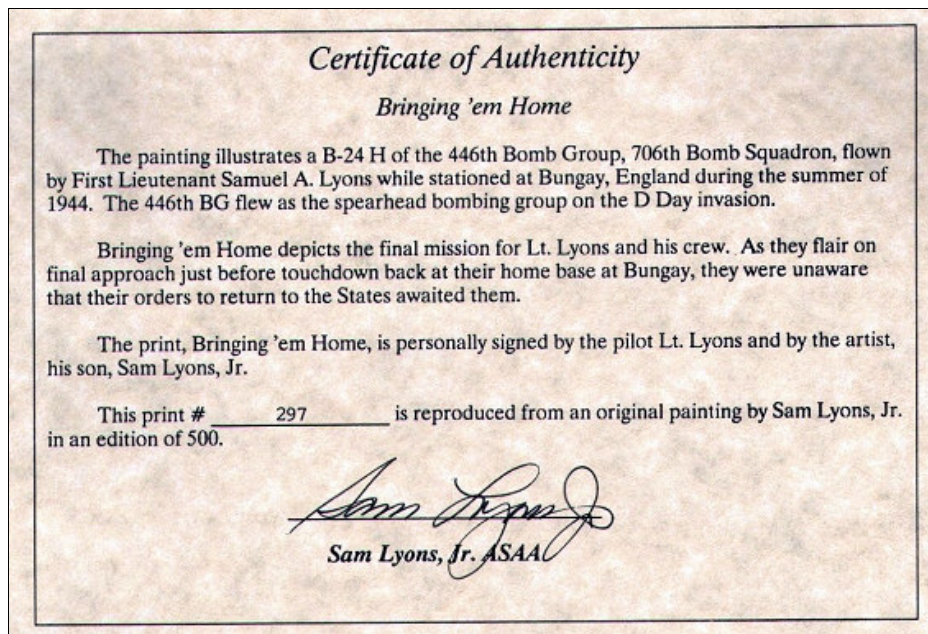
Other than Ginger's H2-S radar equipment, her totally unique name and memorable crews, she was also historically worthy for other reasons. One of America's most noted aircraft artist, Sam Lyons, Jr. recreated Ginger's return from her D-Day mission in his famous painting, *Bringing 'em Home*. The painting is based upon a black and white news photo that appeared in many newspapers throughout the world. Sam's father was the pilot on that mission, his final mission (see above certificate of authenticity). Stories abound that Ginger was the first Allied Aircraft to drop bombs for the D-day invasion, but the following information from the book, *446th Revisited*, presents different evidence.

*"Some say the most important event in the 20th Century history was D-day—and we were a part of it! While it did not turn out as we had hoped, it was nevertheless an honor to lead the 8th Air Force over the invasion coast. Some time ago a brouhaha developed over who led the formation. A 389th PFF crew claimed they were first. However, it was a 446th plane No. 42-95203 named 'Red Ass' with Jacob Brogger, Charlie Ryan and crew that led the Group and the entire 8th Air Force. In view of the results, the whole question seems rather insignificant after fifty or more years. The important consideration is it was a momentous occasion and we were an important part of it.*

*D-day referred to the day on which Allied forces would land on the Continent. It was Tuesday, 6 June 1944 a day never to be forgotten by the men of the Group.*



Famous Sam Lyons painting, *Bringing 'em Home*



*Field Order No. 328 from Second Division spelled it out. It was said it was probably the longest and most detailed FO ever sent. The 2nd, 14th, 20th (our Wing) and the 98th were to provide over 100 aircraft each. They were directed to fly over their targets in six-craft flights. Once there, they were to drop their bombs and fly out. There were to be no second runs. It was one-way traffic. The order was: "drop your bombs and get out!" If a plane was hit or had mechanical trouble the pilots were directed to crash-land straight ahead.*

*The main briefing was scheduled for 22:30 hours Monday. That was the first one; there were four briefings in the hours that followed. Captain Hurr briefed for Operations; Major Stahl for Intelligence, "You are to strike the beach defenses at Pt. de la Percee," Stahl said, "dropping your bombs not later than two minutes before the zero hour." The zero hour was 06:30. That day the sun was to rise above the coast of*

France at 05:58. "Landing craft and troops will be 400 yards to one mile off shore as we attack," he continued, "and naval ships may be shelling our targets on shore. Deadline on our primary target is zero hour minus two, or 0628. After that, bomb the secondary target which is the road junction in the Forest Cerissy, or the target of last resort which is the choke point in the town of Vire."

Pointe-de-la-Percee was at the western edge of Omaha Beach. The Germans had a major fortress at Pointe du-Hoc that was just west of the Omaha Beach sector. Pointe-de-la-Percee was about halfway between the Vierville draw and Pointe-du-Hoc. Between the shelling from the naval vessels and our bombing the coast was to be saturated. Again, as happened so many times, the weather was a factor. The GIs called it "Hitler Weather." The cloud cover was thick. There were scattered clouds from three thousand to seven thousand feet above the English Channel. Our crews saw little of the great armada that stretched twenty miles from beginning to end, embarking the greatest invasion in history. The Luftwaffe was beaten and not in the air.

Crews were frustrated by the overcast they encountered. Some fellows reported seeing flashes from the big guns below. They were forced to bomb on the PFF plane from the 389th that started the controversy over who was first over the invasion coast. Now, more than fifty years later, especially with the results, it seems unimportant. The bomb line was moved back to insure the safety of the assault troops. Bombardiers were ordered to delay their release by as much as thirty seconds to avoid accidentally hitting our troops landing below. It was too long. Few bombs hit the beaches or the forward German defenses.

Omaha Beach was unscarred and the Germans manning the defenses in the sector escaped almost unscathed. Some 15,000 bombs dropped fell from a few hundred yards to three miles inland. It was a bad day for the cows grazing in the Normandy fields." (Castens, 1998)



General area where Sam Lyon's crew dropped bombs from Ginger for D-Day Invasion (Normandy, June 6, 1944) Photograph by author, August 6, 1998



*August 22, 1998, Schoeneck France. (Left to right). Celia Willies, the author, Doug Willies (author of Not Forgotten) and Cathy Engelbreit.*