





An Aviator's Dream: The Men From Painted Woods
Lt. Ernest Anders Erickson - 95th Bomb Group Air Corps 1942 - 1945
Pvt. Frank Gustaf Severin Erickson – 308th Infantry - Lost Battalion 1917 - 1919
Pfc. Ernest Julius Alfred Erickson - 361st Infantry – Meuse Argonne Offensive 1917 - 1918

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Lt. Ernest Anders Erickson

8th Army Air Corps * 13th Combat Bombardment Wing * 3rd Bomb Division 95th Bomb Group * 334th Squadron Horham Airfield * Station 119 * Suffolk County * England

Lt. Ernest Anders Erickson Piloted Twelve B-17s

Lili of the Lamplight (44-6085) * Taint A Bird II (42-30342) * Fireball Red (42-31876) * Able Mable (42-31920) Mirandy (42-31992) * Gen'ril Oop & Lili Brat (42-31993) * Ten Aces (42-38178) * Smilin' Sandy Sanchez (42-97290) * Paisano (42-102450) * Stand By / Goin' My Way (42-107204) * The Doodle Bug / What's Cookin? (42-107047) * To Hell Or Glory (42-38123)

Lt. Ernest Anders Erickson - Photographs and Articles http://markerickson.com/Family_History/Ernest_Erickson/

Lt. Ernest Anders Erickson – Downloadable - 35 Mission Details http://markerickson.com/Family_History/Ernest_Erickson/Lt.%20Ernest%20Anders%20Erickson-95thBG-334th%20Sq.pdf

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10,000 Feet Above Normandy

Sometime in the evening of June 9th, 1944, my father, Lt. Ernest Anders Erickson wrote a letter home to his family in North Dakota from Horham Airfield in England. He was a pilot with the 95th Bomb Group and flying heavy bombers for the 8th Air Force. Operation Neptune was underway in France, and the Invasion was moving forward at full throttle. Ernest's letter included these passages below, as his thoughts pondered the beach landings of the Invasion. While writing he was reflecting on the experience of flying over Normandy and viewing the mass of ships & men heading onto shore as his squadron was returning to England from a mission in the early morning hours of June 6th, 1944.

For the Kings of Hearts & Coronets and jolly old England, the boys of June 6th, 1944 live on in perpetual memory. In the early morning hours, on the far west side of the eastern shore of mainland Europe, the gallant men of that early daylight assault have already caught their hell. They wade onto the beaches of dense fields of ferocious German fire, hiding in the sand, behind beams of steel, sculptures of memory, men running, slipping and dropping like flies in the French waves on the shores of Normandy. Clusters of animated figures pushing inland, a slaughter of their times, but so many still standing, striving, hauling their gear, desperate for cover and pointing towards the eventual way to Germany.

By now things have calmed, trapped along the sea wall, making it up to the concrete bunkers, burning them out one at a time....twenty at a time, a brutal game being played for real. Home seems so far away at this very instant. Amazing feats of heroics and sad endings of small mistakes, tripping over reality, being at the wrong place in the instant of a blinking eye. For the ones that never left the beach, the sea wall and the rocky cliffs in the Majesty of their gifts and regrets, we remember their courage. To their awaiting families at home and to the men ever vigilant struggling forward, far below the missions passing over heavens gate we marvel. Gaze into the Heavenly Skies, kiss them goodbye and pass the Ammunition.

From the Beginning

Time holds still in our memory, and if we pay attention, the days we spend with our families will provide stories we can hold onto from childhood through adulthood. The life we lead reflects the lessons held in these memories. They push us forward-- legends in our minds which over time become truths upon which we rely, and upon which we base our life's most important decisions. "When the legend becomes fact, print the legend," suggested the newspaper reporter in the film "The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance," one of my father's favorite westerns. We reflect on past adventures, even as they become part of our future.

For my father, like most others of his generation, memories of his experiences in World War II formed the truths upon which he based the important decisions of his life. He shared many of these memories with me during his lifetime, and these shared memories have helped define my life, as they had my father's. As his Father Frank and Uncle Ernest Julius before him had served when the country faced head-on the conflict in Europe in 1917, my father jumped at the chance to join the Army Air Corps in 1941.

Since his death in 2013, I have learned a considerable amount about his wartime experiences piloting a B-17 bomber by looking through his memorabilia, recalling countless conversations we had, and reading about the experiences of his contemporaries. The more I have learned, the more I have come to appreciate the extraordinary challenges he and his wartime companions faced, and the extraordinary courage they demonstrated.

The Tale of Painted Woods

My father grew up in North Dakota in an area called Painted Woods. It was originally named by the local Indians. A group of large cottonwoods stood where Painted Woods Lake empties into the Missouri, and one of these trees in particular--a large dead one, whose bark was peeled--was used by the warriors as a bulletin board.

They painted their picture writings on the bleached wood, threatening, warning, declaring or boasting as the case might be, hence its name—Painted Woods. A fire swept thru in 1851 and burned these particular cottonwoods. The country around them was long the scene of conflicts between the various indigenous tribes of the Great Northern Plains, the Dakota tribes being the Mandan, Hidatsa, Arikara and Sioux (both Yanktonai and Lakota). As nature will have it, the trees grew again and the locals again congregated around these sacred remembrances.

The Legend of Painted Woods was told by Frank (Frans) Severin Gustaf Erickson to me, his grandson, when I was a teenager on a visit to the family in Bismarck. Frank was born in Sundsvall, Sweden and immigrated to North Dakota with his family in 1903. After his time in the Army and surviving the "Lost Battalion fiasco during the First World War, Frank returned to home and eventually got married. My father, Ernest Anders Erickson was born on the family farm in Painted Woods, along the Missouri River, on August 4th 1922. Frank recalled this story from childhood:

Over a hundred and fifty years ago at the southern end of McClean County, south of Burleigh County, north of the state capital, Bismarck, North Dakota, on the east bank of the Missouri lies Painted Woods Lake. The lake was originally part of the Broken Axe Lakes of the Sioux Tribe, and known to early day trappers and fur traders as Medicine Lodge Lake. Some say the name Painted Woods also derives itself from the natural colors that follow the first frost along the former lake.

This elbow of the Missouri became known to the river men that eventually traversed the waterways of the Plains, not long after Lewis and Clark's Corps of Discovery Expedition concluded in 1806. The story of most significance comes from the farm-land way before my father's birth, in the township of Painted Woods. The tale my grandfather recalled about the Dakota Territory is intriguing in more than a historic fashion, it is far closer to a cinematic scope.

When history meets fiction and lore becomes a fact is the core to many tales of the past. There are many mysteries about the north country lands. One can only hold onto the stories told by people that lived there, and who knew the ancestors of the folk that adventured these lands many years before them.

Venture back to the early 1800s on the Great Northern Plains, not far from Wilton by Painted Woods Lake, an area where the waters funnel into the Missouri, and witness this intriguing account. The story begins in what would be decades later referred to as Burleigh County, which was neutral ground between two tribes of the Sioux. A young girl from the Mandan tribe fell in love with a Yanktonai Sioux warrior, meeting daily on the banks of the river.

The two lovers had kept their relationship secret until the day the girl planned to leave with her lover to start a new life. The elders of the Mandans, once realizing she was gone were extremely displeased, and sent out warriors to find the girl and bring her back to the village. Upon finding the couple, the young man attempting to protect himself was slain by the warriors. As the girl knelt down to the young man, avenging Yankotonai arrows streamed in and killed the young woman.

The bodies of the lovers were placed in the branches of a cottonwood tree in the woods along the river. Soon the tree withered and became white and bleached, just like the bones in the branches. As time passed the two tribes began a bitter and bloody war. Yanktonai warriors preparing for battle came to the woods to paint their faces, preparing for the confrontations to come. They would leave messages, mostly threats to their enemies on the cottonwoods, often peeling the bark off and painting on the shards leaving them behind for others to read. The Yanktonai warriors boastfully portrayed their victories on the trees, and in retaliation the Mandans painted the surrounding trees with war paint to mock their enemy. As decades passed and the couple became legend, celebrations were held on the shores of the Missouri River in their honor. Indians painting the trunks of the trees and tying colorful clothes to the cottonwoods, fires burning bright into the night, the whole area lit up bright in a full moon.

On a crisp late fall morning when walking out by the riverside, the great Missouri spreading out wide before you, one can stop at a point called Painted Woods and visualize the colors on the trees and see the shadows of the times gone by. During these quietest moments, with fresh snow on the ground, you can imagine the whispers of the two young lovers sitting along the river, staring out into the clear blue day of another stark North Dakotian landscape.



Frank Gustaf Severin, Ernest Julius Alfred and Carl Erickson in Tacoma, Washington 1917. Tacoma is near Camp Lewis where both Frank and Ernest Julius will begin their training in the Army.

The Men From Painted Woods Frank Gustaf Severin Erickson Ernest Julius Alfred Erickson Ernest Anders Erickson

No matter what we had to do, it was always the same with him. He was one of the gamest men in the regiment, and one of the most willing.

Commanding officer speaking of Pfc. Ernest Julius Erickson

My father, Ernest Anders Erickson was raised on the Erickson-Nelson family farm near the banks of the Missouri River. He was named after his Uncle Ernest Julius and that set for a life of proving his worth, which he certainly did in 1944 in England. Ernest's father, Frank Gustaf Severin Erickson named him after his older Brother Ernest Julius. Frank was born on December 12th, 1892 in Sundsvall, Sweden, and not long after his return from the war, he knew what his first son's name would be.

Ernest Julius Erickson was born in Torpshammer, Sweden on January 9th, 1889. When he was 28 years old, after living most of his life in North Dakota and Oregon, he joined the American Expeditionary Force (A.E.F.) in the Summer of 1917. It was after an adventurous year in Oregon, that the two brothers signed up together for the army out of Baker, Oregon.

The Erickson family emigrated from Sweden to North Dakota in 1903, when Ernest Julius was 14 years old and Frank was 11. For the next 12 years Ernest Julius lived on a farm with his family on the Great Plains along the Missouri River. He went out west, to join Frank who had left for the Pacific in 1910. The two bonded well, working at various jobs, in lumber mills and on the railroad. When they finally ended up as Railroad Deputies out of La Grande, Oregon, it coincided with America just about to enter into the European conflict. The decisions they made at this point would be etched in stone and metal for the rest of their lives.



Pfc. Ernest Julius Erickson

Ernest Julius's time in the service was short and violent, a little over a year since he began training at Camp Lewis, near Tacoma, Washington, he was killed in the Argonne Forest in France. On October 10th, 1918 just weeks before the Armistice, that ended the war on November 11th, Ernest Julius was felled by a German sniper. He was a runner for the 361st Infantry during the Meuse Argonne Offensive, and in the midst of a mission when killed. The report from the American Red Cross was sent on May 28th, 1919 to his parents, Anders Alfred and Christine Brita (Olson) Erickson on the family farm in Regan, North Dakota. It had been over five months since Ernest Julius was killed, and up to that point no one in the family knew any details of Ernest's fate. The report's directness is unnerving, when you think this man was a relative, that meant so much to so many, an uncle you would never meet.

The document reads:

A report on the death of Private Ernest Julius Alfred Erickson of Company C, 361st Infantry, 91st Division.

The 361st Infantry's Company C of the 91st Division slept the night of the 8th of October, 1918 in an old German trench system across the canyon from the destroyed village of Epinonville, which is five miles north by northwest of Avocourt and 20 miles northwest of Verdun.

After Hills 255 and 269 were captured, the 181st Brigade moved on to Hill 288. The Brigade did not lose many men on October 9th, but did lose a number on October 10th, including Private Ernest J. Erickson of Company C, one of the gamest men in the regiment and one of the most willing. Private Erickson and Private Jesse A. Keene had been sent out to locate Company B of the 362nd Infantry, a gap existing at Company C's left. They had a message for the commander of Company B, and while carrying it got ahead of their lines and were shot at by rifle snipers. There was brush at the edge of the road and so they ran toward it. Keene was about 40 feet ahead of Private Erickson and had 30 feet to go to get into the brush, but succeeded in getting there. Private Erickson had about 40 feet to go and was shot by the sniper just after he started. "He fell at the edge of the road and lay there in a heap without moving." said Private Keene to the writer. "I could see him for four or five minutes before I made my way back.

Private Erickson had been sent on this mission because he thought he knew where company B was. Two of us were sent so that if one of us were hurt the other could go on with the message. When I reported back that company B could not be found where Private Erickson had thought it was, I learned that the company had indeed been located just behind where Private Erickson was killed.

He had been so close, yet never made it. This was between 1 and 2 o'clock p.m. In front of the horseshoe at the foot of Hill 288. About the last thing Private Erickson said was 10 or 15 minutes before he was shot; "We've got to find that company and find it soon."

He had been in the intelligence section of the First Battalion through both Argonne drives in which the 181st brigade participated, and had been a scout, sniper, observer and runner. On the night of October 3rd when the nine men were killed by the one shell, Private Erickson was struck in the small of the back close to the spine by a fragment. He got fixed up at the first aid station, however and joined the company again. No matter what we had to do, it was always the same with him.

Very sincerely yours - Lt. Colin V. Dyment - American Red Cross - 91st Division

Clara Amelia (Nelson) Erickson

Every family member who read this report back in 1919 was intensely impacted. Ernest Julius was the golden boy of the family, the one that could have gone far. My father read the report when he was a teenager in High School, not long before he joined the Air Corps, it was hard not to reflect on his uncle's fate.

In the Winter of 1941, my father hoped he would be flying combat as a fighter pilot, like so many young men that joined the Corps after Pearl Harbor. My Grandmother Clara was not amused at the prospects of her son flying dangerous missions on the other side of the world. Before she knew it, in early part of 1942, her son would be off to war. Ernest Julius memory hung heavy over the family, as they saw yet another Ernest, leave for military service.

Clara held a hopeful vigil at home the whole time her son was in the military. She knew too well the war stories of her husband Frank, and his two brothers, Ernest Julius and Anders. The reality of it all had hit her directly, but was comforted by her family and her two year old daughter, Dian. Her oldest brother Sture Albin Nelson had served in the Navy in the war. All too familiar with the stress of waiting for loved ones to come home, Clara would be focused on receiving letters from her son. Over the course of the war, Ernest obliged easily by writing countless letters and cards home to his parents and kid sister, he called, Dinny. Often in these letters he tried to comfort his mother's fears, yet youth and bravado took over in some. He became far too frank in many of details of the dangers he faced on a regular basis.

My grandmother, like most of her family was born in Landskrona, Sweden. Her birth on April 25th, 1903 brought along the only daughter for the Nelson Family. When Clara was 8 months old, along with her family of three brothers, Sture Albin Nelson (born May 2nd, 1896), Anton Tony Nelson (born June 12th, 1898), August Valentine Nelson (born November 5th, 1900), and her Parents Gertrude 'Gerde' (Miljander) (born August 12th, 1865) and Anders Nelson (born May 5th, 1860), immigrated to the United States in 1903.

The family made it to Painted Woods, North Dakota, after a long, half way across the country train ride. The travelers were met at the train station by Anders' brother, August Nelson, who had emigrated from Sweden a couple years before. The group proceeded to the family farm and began a long stay with August and his wife, Amelia 'Aunt Molly.' The Nelson's were welcomed warmly and began to settle into their new homeland. After a year went by, they moved onto their own farm near-bye in Painted Woods. For the rest of their lives, they were a close-knit family and shared the difficult and good times easily, grateful to be all together. A fourth son, Albert 'Bob' William Nelson was born two years later, on September 2nd, 1905 in Painted Woods.

Clara grew up on the Dakota plains with her siblings and helped around the farm, and as a young teenage girl she would meet her future husband, Frank Erickson who was a friend of her older brothers. Frank's family farm was close by in Regan, and Wilton was the closest town where many young men and women came together at town events and dances. The Erickson's and Nelson's saw each other often in the county. A year after Frank's return from France in mid 1921, certain innocent actions by today's standard would shift everything in Clara's life, when she fell in love with the handsome veteran and she became Mrs. Frank Severin Erickson. In 1922, their first son, Ernest Anders Erickson was born in Painted Woods and then sixteen years later in 1940 in Bismarck, their daughter, Dian Marcella Erickson joined the family.



Ernest Anders with his mom, Clara Amelia (Nelson) Erickson in October 1943, before he flew to England for combat duty

Read These And Get To Know Your Uncle

My father handed me Ernest Julius' journals one day on a visit to the family house and said: "Read these and get to know your uncle." There were five books, one I quickly noticed after breezing through them was the last journal he wrote in the Argonne Forest in France, starting on September 25th 1918. Ernest Julius' dried blood was noticeably smeared across the cover. My father had kept them since he received them from his mother Clara soon after his Father Frank passed away in Bismarck. I kept them safe, waiting my time until I was ready to read them. I had always been curious about my uncle EJ, especially with the knowledge that my father held him in such high regard. I was quite aware that Ernest Julius had been killed in the last month of the First World War, and it had left a hole in the life of my Grandfather Frank. When I began to concentrate on EJ's journals, all written in fountain pen ink, his looping cursive text unfolded a fascinating life. I realized they held specific tales of which I was unaware.

Ernest Julius's four brothers, my Grandfather Frank, Uncles Anders Sebran, Helmer Erick, Alphonso 'Al' and his two sister's, Abbie Kristina (Lincoln) and Vera (Gallagher) Erickson lived with the memory of their lost brother. It was through them, as they passed on the stories, photographs and writings of EJ to the family, that I began to see him as real, a true spirit, living on.



The Anders & Christine Erickson Family 1910

left to right - top row:
Ernest Julius, Anders 'Andy' Sebran, Frank Gustaf Severin and Helmer Erick Olaf Erickson.
left to right - middle row:
Vera Elivira (Gallagher) Erickson and Abbie Ebba Kristina (Lincoln) Erickson
left to right - bottom row:
Great Grandmother Christine Brita (Olson), Alphons 'Al' Fred Alkallar and Great Grandfather Anders Alfred Erickson

My father later pointed to a particular part of the military report about the death of Ernest Julius, "No matter what we had to do, it was always the same with him, one of the gamest men in the regiment," High praise, and something obviously taken note of by my father.

The bloodbath, once referred to as, 'The War to End all Wars,' would poetically end on the eleventh hour, of the eleventh day, of the eleventh month of 1918. That stood out in my father's consciousness for years. He often imagined if only his uncle had lived, but what if he had, then what? Would my father's very existence have occurred?

The memory of Uncle Ernest Julius hovered over my father, the stories handed down were reminders of the man he would never meet. He would spend a lifetime trying to familiarize himself with his uncle and trying at the same time to understand this mysterious man. Ernest Julius would become the protective ghost following my father into the shadows of his life. When my father's turn came to go to war, he took his uncle along, like someone else would hold tight a rabbit's foot. Caution was the word, yet my father was headed to fight a war in the sky, and from everything he told me, and what I know about my father's character, he could not wait another moment to get started.

My father was known to his wartime buddies as 'Lindy' and to his later colleagues at Lockheed Aircraft as E² (E Squared) was born on August 4th, 1922 in Painted Woods, North Dakota. That place on the edge of the Missouri River in the Dakotas became a mythical land in my mind as I was growing up; a land filled with Indian lore and western Cowboy tales. In my imagination I visited the Northern Great Plains both before and after Lewis and Clark's Corps of Discovery journeyed into the land of the Mandan, Hidatsa, Arikara, Lakota and Dakota Sioux. Ernest's life spread across the plains as he hunted and fished with his Father Frank.

The two discussed the journey's of life and what might lay ahead for my father, who at the time was a young man growing up deep in the Depression. The conversation would drift back to Frank's time in the Army and his most intense assignment with the 308th Infantry in the Argonne Forest. Ernest of course had his head in the sky since 1927, wanting someday to be an aviator, when everything in the news was Lindbergh. Frank told stories of the actions of his commanders, Major Whittlesey, Captain George McMurtry and the commander of Frank's own Company H, Lt. William J. Cullen. My father's memory of those talks emboldened his desire to join the Air Corps someday. Ernest listened intently to the specific recollections of Frank's departure from New York in Summer of 1918.

Heading To France

On August 8th, 1918, Frank departed from Brooklyn Harbor on the Steamer Nestor, as part of Company H of the 160th Infantry. Upon arrival in England, Company H was transferred to the 308th Infantry of the 77th Division. Frank soon enough, proudly wore the 'Liberty' patch on his uniform, it was the name given to the 77th, 'The Statue of Liberty Division.'

Frank had hoped to catch up with his older Brother Ernest Julius, with the intent to keep an eye on him, as they had joined the Army together, mainly due to Ernest Julius's insistence, and he felt an obligation to watch over his brother if he could. Frank felt it only right that they would be somehow close even on the battlefield. Frank was younger, but by far more the rough-neck cowboy, and his skill with guns and knives were well known in the family and by friends. His skills would serve him well in 'The Pocket,' of the Argonne months later, once things got dicey.

The Lost Battalion * In The Pocket

Frank's survival in the First World War depended on many factors, an equal amount of skill and luck came to be the main ingredients. It was in the Charlevaux Ravine, in the Argonne Forest of Northern France which became known as 'the pocket' by the men of the 77th Division. The concave bowl of the Ravine was not far from the township of Binarville in the Marne that Frank's first dose of battlefield reality took place. He would survive a week long bloody calamity referred to as the 'Lost Battalion,' but at the same time, be eternally scarred by those events. Remembering back to one point where the men were bombarded by their own American artillery, and that horror show only ceased when a carrier pigeon, 'Cher Ami,' got through to the main lines with this message, written by Major Charles Whittlesey:

We are along the road parallel 276.4...Our artillery is dropping a barrage directly on us.

For Heavens sake stop it!

"The chances to get through that ordeal was the luck of a drawn straw in the midst of hell." Frank would say, "We were never lost, we were just surrounded by the Germans for almost a week, but fortunate moments and a pigeon named, 'Cher Ami,' saved us. The generals never did their part."

The misnomer name, yet good for headlines, the 'Lost Battalion' was originally given to the 77th Division by a newspaperman, in an article describing the extraordinarily treacherous situation that befell the 77th on October 2nd, 1918 in the Argonne.

Comprised of nine companies of the 77th Division of the A.E.F., the Lost Battalion consisted of 554 men that were surrounded by German forces in the Argonne Forest in France between October 2nd through the 8th of 1918. The division had advanced toward the German line, believing themselves to be supported by French forces on their right flank. However, the French advance was stalled, and the division found itself surrounded by the Germans and cut off. For six days the division sustained heavy casualties, but held it's ground. Roughly 197 were killed in battle and approximately 150 went missing in action and or were taken prisoner. Only 194 remaining men walked out alive.

Frank and Company H, as he told me years later, "We literally walked onto the battlefield as if nothing was occurring around us. Everything was quiet, hard to even imagine what we were about to encounter just a week later. The previous night we had heard the canons off in the distance. Many of us, especially my Company did not know what combat was all about, but we soon found out. I lost a lot of friends in the following weeks."

Frank had been a runner / rifleman for Company H, and dealt with tremendously harsh events as he plotted the gauntlet of his job of jockeying messages between Major Charles Whittlesey and the Company H commander, Lt. William J. Cullen. On the last day the men were holding their position in the Argonne, Frank was mustard gassed as he was escaping machine gun fire, stuck in a low gully. The machine guns were blazing in both directions, the 77th was low on ammunition by this time, and Frank and the few men he was with held their ground. He'd had enough time to get his gas mask on and hoped for the best. Frank suffered affects of the gas, enough so that by early part of 1919 his left lung collapsed. Hospitalized in France he was able to get sufficient medical attention.

By October 8th, after a week of sheer intensity, Frank became part of an elite group that newspapers around the world jumped on; a story that was hard to resist. The culmination of a week surrounded by the enemy, cut off from outside communication and relentless attacks by the Germans, ended when Frank and a lucky group of men became the fortunate survivors of the 'Lost Battalion.'

My father grew up with these stories, and when he was fourteen in 1936, the family moved to Bismarck from Painted Woods. He would often visit the woods on hunting trips along the Missouri. Growing up during the Depression, Ernest was fixated on airplanes, he carved them out of Cottonwood, read about them in magazines and dreamed of flying. He searched the skies for airplanes as he walked home from school each day. He enjoyed going with his father Frank to see the barnstorming flyers who put on exhibitions in the area. His childhood hero was Charles Lindbergh, and he kept a keen eye on Lindbergh in the news. Along with tales he heard from his Uncle Anders Sebran, about his service in France with the 101st Aero Squadron in the Air Corps, Ernest was homing in on what he would finally do. The Air Corps was on his mind, and he proudly wore aviator clothes in the Dakota winters. It was becoming clear, it would be only matter of time before he would join the Army Air Corps.



Ernest Anders and his Cousin Robert (Bob) Nelson and their Grandfather Anders Nelson in Painted Woods, ND in 1936

The Road Less Travelled

A philosophy that my Uncle Ernest Julius (EJ) held onto till the end, a line that comes from his favorite Robert Frost poem, 'The Road Not Taken.' It states plainly and he followed bravely:

Two roads diverged in a wood, and I took the one less traveled by, and that has made all the difference.

In those words I have learned a lot of my uncle's life and attitudes that led up to his decision to join the American Expeditionary Force in 1917. Also in that, I can see how my father operated in his life, his road led to the sky in WWII, and in many of his decisions, he would be risking his life like his namesake. Twenty five years apart, in 1944, the two Ernest's strode together into the breach of the unknown. One a young man and the other, a spirit of protection.

Ernest Julius and Frank trained at Camp Lewis, near Tacoma, Washington, and both headed separately for the east coast, bound for France, in the Summer of 1918. Ernest Julius who was a member of Company C of the 361st Infantry, left first, taking a direct route towards New York. Company C arrived at Camp Upton in Long Island. Days later he was at Camp Mills, a debarkation camp for soldiers heading to England. Two days after the 4th of July, leaving out the Brooklyn Harbor, aboard the Steamer Karoa, Company C headed to England. The brimming ship of soldiers ported in Liverpool. Soon after their arrival they were transported to the English Channel by train, and then by boat to the battlefields of France.

Frank left by train on July 16th leaving Washington, heading south to California, arriving a couple days later in San Diego and Camp Kearny. He and the men practiced on the firing range for the time he was there and waited for orders. He wondered when he might be heading to France. Frank wrote this letter to his parents a few days later.

July 21st, 1918 Camp Kearny San Diego County, California

Dear Parents,

I am now in Camp Kearny California, we traveled from Camp Lewis July 16th. I don't think we will be here longer than two weeks, but I don't know where we are going after. Could be that we are going to France.

I sent the trunk home before we left Tacoma, but I didn't pay the shipping charge. The trunk is coming to Regan. Write to me and let me know the cost and I shall send money. The trunk was \$10.00 and it costs me \$6.81 a month to store. So best I send it to you.

I don't like Camp Kearny as much as Camp Lewis, it is awfully hot and dusty. We go to the riflerange and shoot regularly. I will now end my letter with a dear greeting to you all.

From your loved son, Private Frank G.S. (Gustaf Severin) Company H - 160th Infantry

Two weeks later, after a cross-country train journey from Southern California, Frank was now with his company on the east coast at Camp Mills, awaiting transport across the Atlantic to England. He wrote another letter to his parents:

August 6th, 1918 Camp Mills, New York

Dear Parents,

I received your awaited letter yesterday. I see that you are alive and well. I can say the same for myself. I do not think I will be in U.S. for many more days, but we do not know where we are traveling.

I have traveled through Bismarck, so feel fortunate I have had family visits before I go to the war. It may now be a long time before we meet again. We stayed in Camp Kearny in California long enough, glad to be underway. It took us seven days from California to New York. It was a good trip. The Red Cross ladies met us by the station and provided lunch and cigarettes.

Has the trunk I sent home arrived yet? If you have not received it, write to tell me so. With a dear greeting to you all from your son.

Frank



Frank G. S. Erickson in Tacoma, Washington in late 1917, just before enlisting in the American Expeditionary Force

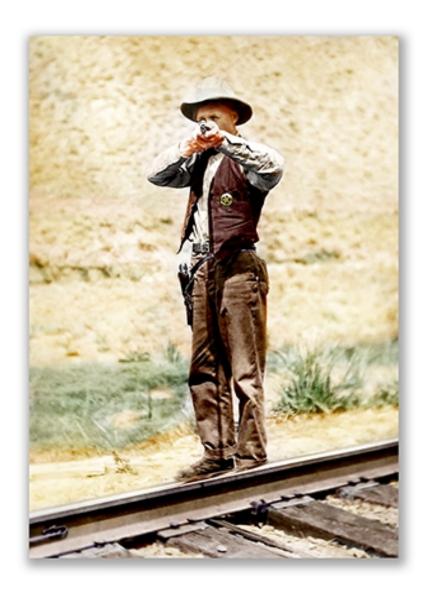
The Western Myth

Going back just a couple years before both Frank and EJ found themselves on the battlefields of France, you just have to view the many cowboy photographs of the boys and read EJ's diaries to see how the adventurous spirit took them to France. The photograph of Frank taken outside a tavern in Tacoma, Washington comes to mind every time I watch John Ford's 1946 western, 'My Darling Clementine.' Henry Fonda's role of Wyatt Earp, pantomimes a two-step while sitting in a wooden chair outside the saloon in Tombstone, Arizona. When you compare the photographs, one can come to the easy assumption how the western myth blossomed in Frank's life not long after he arrived in the States from Sweden. Even though Fonda's image was 30 years in the future of Frank's, for me, the two are intertwined in my Hollywood gaze.



Henry Fonda in John Ford's 1946 'My Darling Clementine'

The tale of Earp Brothers and the 'Gunfight at the O.K. Coral' was a myth turned up bright on the silver screen. Witnesses at the time of the actual event, said the shoot-out was over in less than a minute. On October 26th, 1881 after months of escalating tensions between members of a loosely organized group of outlaws called 'the Cowboys,' and the Lawmen of Tombstone, had reached a deadly confrontation. The ensuing gunfight was the result of a long-simmering feud with Cowboys Billy Claiborne, lke and Billy Clanton, Wes Fuller, Tom and Frank McLaury on one side. They came up against town Marshal Virgil Earp, Special Policeman Morgan, Wyatt Earp, and Deputized Doc Holliday on the other side. In the ensuing gunfight, the McLaury brothers were killed as well as Billy Clanton. Ike Clanton, Wes Fuller, Billy Claiborne ran from the fight. Virgil and Morgan Earp and Doc Holliday were wounded. Wyatt Earp was unharmed. The consequences of the encounter were both deadly and became one of the forefront moments in the history of the Old West. The story spread across the country, creating heroes and villains from real life, not myths and legends — even if that's what they became eventually.



Frank G.S. Erickson when he was an Oregon Railroad Deputy in 1917 out of La Grande, Oregon

Frank reflected back on his early years growing up in North Dakota, where he had read countless cowboy tales voraciously in the pulp magazines that had become popular at the turn of the century. They were all colorful western myths brought to life in three dimensions that filled his head with ideas. The desire to be a Cowboy had been on his mind for years. He had lived in that realm in the Dakotas most of his life since he arrived from Sweden, when he was eleven years old. He chose to go out West in 1910 to find his Western dreams. The tales he read left indelible marks, and the photographs Frank sent home from 1910 through 1917 to his family testified to this new lifestyle. Years later the images echoed in my father's imagination, they presented what was possible out in the world. What true adventure was all about, or could be. Time was ticking by and Pearl Harbor became the impetus for hundreds of thousands to join the service. My father's decision on where he would sign-up was only obvious.

When I was a boy these same photographs pushed into my perceptions of what it was like back then, and in the end, with time and memory always at work, I could see how the continuation of things can exist inside a family. Whether riding a horse, marshaling on the railroad, dodging bullets in the Argonne Forest, flying dangerous missions in a B-17 over Germany, sliding down the cold surf of the Pacific or spreading paint across a vast canvas, it all becomes the path one takes and where that path might lead you.

My life was fortunate due to the sacrifices my grandfather and father made in their youth. But my thoughts always ran rampant as I studied their lives and acknowledged their incredible accomplishments. One specific commonality they shared in 1918 and 1944 respectively, was doing their best to stay alive and be able to go home to their families. They succeeded against incredibly low odds, and the stories they later told are inked indelibly into our souls.

Ernest Julius and Frank served as Oregon Railroad Deputies out of La Grande, Oregon in 1917 and 1918. They lived in rooming houses while they were traveling out West, and worked various jobs along the west coast. Deputy work on the railroad served them well, with the freedom of the outdoors and the money being decent. Qualified men were being hired to watch the Railroad tunnels and tracks of the country. Frank and Ernest Julius fit the bill as well as any, in a sense they became like many others, the guardians at the gate.

Railroad security began to be of key importance when war broke out in Europe in 1914. The railroad was the primary method of transportation in America at the time, and even though the country was not yet involved with European conflict, it became evident it was time to protect the rail system from sabotage. There were no superhighways carrying thousands of Semi-Trailers filled with goods across the country, it was up the railroad that transported most everything. Airplanes were past the experimental stage, yet one to two seaters were the extent of air transport. It was the railroad, and there was some cause for alarm, especially by 1916, as suspicions rose of America's eventual involvement in the war. The brothers hung in at their deputy jobs till they were called up to serve in the American Expeditionary Force.

By early August 1918, Frank was serving with the 308th Infantry, arriving in France a month before the Meuse Argonne Offensive began on September 26th. Ernest Julius had arrived a month earlier, and had already seen quite a bit of action by August leading up to the 361st involvement with the Offensive.

Frank wrote letters home to his family and waited. He wrote this letter on September 25th, 1918, a day before they would march, the Meuse Argonne Offensive would commence the very next day.

Somewhere in France September 25th, 1918

Dear Parents.

I am writing a few lines to let you know that I am alive and well and I wish you the same. I do not have time to write a long letter this time. It could be a long time before I can write again. I got the letter that you sent me a few days ago and one from Abbie (Frank's kid sister). But I have not heard from Ernest Julius or Sebran (Anders).

Sebran's first name was Anders and was Frank's younger brother who was serving in France with the 101st Aero Squadron of the Air Corps in Issoudun Aerodrome near Bourges. Sebran's squadron was carrying out bombardment missions until the end of the war.

Frank continues in the letter:

Hoping to hear from them soon. You can now hear the canons thunder at night and day. Next time I write I may be able to tell you what it is like to be in the war.

Dear greetings to you all from your son, Frank G. S. Erickson

P.S. my serial number is 3143116. Do not forget the number.

Company H - 308th Infantry American Expeditionary Force.

"Do not forget the number," is very ominous, but Frank knew the score and in that way he was alerting his family for what might happen. Do not forget the number, just in case.

Not all that far away as the crow flies, Ernest Julius and the 361st Infantry were in the midst of their part what the family later referred to as the Battle of the Argonne Forest (Meuse - Argonne Offensive). It spread across the Western Front of France and the amount of soldiers involved were staggering. It was fought from September 26th until the Armistice on the 11th of November 1918, a total of 47 days.

Commanded by General John J. Pershing, the Offensive was the largest in United States military history, involving 1.2 million American soldiers, and was one of a series of Allied attacks known as the Hundred Days Offensive, which brought an end to the war. The battle cost 28,000 German lives and 26,277 American lives, making it the largest and bloodiest operation of World War I for the American Expeditionary Force.



Frank G.S. Erickson along with men of Lost Battalion at Apremont in the Argonne, France October 1918

Marched All Night

One can ponder back to Uncle Ernest Julius at the very end of his life in the Fall of 1918, as he was

diligently trying to stay alive. He was actively writing in his journal, just as he had throughout the time of Frank and his adventures on the West Coast in 1917. His Argonne diary entries would be his last writings.

Often in the most dangerous situations, he put pen to paper, yet still having an unique sense of humor in those dire situations. I can only imagine what it was like to be down in a cold muddy exposed trench, writing these thoughts. As battles raged, sniper fire sounding and German artillery soaring overhead, ofttimes exploding far too close for comfort must have been a daunting time.

He begins his final writings in his diary one morning on the first day of the Meuse Argonne Offensive, the 26th of September of 1918. Those next 14 days would culminate his thoughts, written with an air that he would live forever, but in the end leaving all that read, wanting more.

Morning of September 26th 1918

We marched all night to a position from where we could follow up the heavy artillery barrage which was just put down on the enemy position for five hours. at 5:30 a.m. We started out crossing the enemy lines without any opposition, until noon when we were held up by machine gun fire by the enemy. Cleared up the woods in a few minutes and took some prisoners, then marched and were held up again upon reaching the open space at a farm - where we lost a few men by artillery fire. we reached our objective but had some stiff fighting that we ran into.

September 27th

Snipers and machine gun nests which caused us some delay. dug in for the night. took up the march again, but ran into some more machine gun fire and snipers which were placed in an orchard round a small village. Here is where we had the worst opposition. First battalion was in the lead and showed that they were real fighting men.

September 28th

Could not go back to previous position today as the enemy artillery had the place under fire. Had to fall back to last night's camp, but did not lose any personnel. Took up the fight again later and gained ground with stiff fighting. A few small losses of men and gained our objective.

September 29th

Took some more ground & arrived at the Huns strong point & had a hell of a time to get them out.

September 30th

Went through the woods and have halted. men are pretty well worn out. Enemy are shelling this woods all the time.

September 31st

We have not advanced anymore. Huns still shelling the place.

October 1st, 1918

Had one of the stiffest shell fires since we started. lost a few men in the woods.

October 2nd

No gain against the Hun. Guns still working on this place, but doing little damage. Our kitchen arrived day before yesterday. Had hot coffee for the first time since we started and I say it was not hard to take.

October 3rd - 4pm

Still here and listening to the music of the Hun guns. Hell has turned loose for certain. Me and my pal Kune have been in our hole face down waiting for the big one with our name and address on it, but evidently Fritze does not know our names yet. One shell struck a dug out only about eleven feet from ours, killing one and one badly wounded. Took the wounded back to first aid and going through the woods I would not have given 2 cents for the four of us that carried the mangled back, for again hell opened up its doors for us. Our road was lit up with bursting shrapnel, but got through without a scratch.

October 3rd - 7:30pm.

Got relieved, but we were halted in the woods when we were again shot to pieces, that's where I got my first taste of shrapnel. Received a small bruise in the back which did not feel good, thought I was wounded bad, but came to find out it was not all that bad. It was that first blow to the back, what put me out.

October 4th

We are now back of the Huns and it seems good to be back to where the big shell are not falling. Also got a letter or two from home which makes things so much brighter.

October 5th

Got cleaned up and feel so much better. how much nicer it is to be back of the big guns than it is to be inbetween them. It always makes things more pleasant when you can hear the shells go over you and towards the enemy than when they come your way. For then you do not know when one of those big ones may take a fancy and want to get in the same hole as yourself. There sure is not room for the both of you and in all, as most cases you go out in pieces.

October 6th

Moved our camp back a few hundred meters. we were all hoping that they would take us back to same billet, but not yet. Had a letter from the best girl in the states yesterday which makes all the world smile so much brighter.

October 7th

This is the date we were moved back. thinking that we was going to get a rest. but was again called to the line. Marched all night in a freezing rain and the vicious mud sure sticks to a man's feet.

October 8th

Got to our destination this morning. all tired out. the Huns sure sent down a heavy barrage behind us, and later in morning amongst us. We did not lose many men. we are now in support of the Engineers which advanced a short distance. S

And with that letter 's' beginning a new sentence, the diary suddenly ends, and his words were forever cut short. Ernest was killed by a German sniper not long after this entry. His thoughts and passions were halted that day in October. He had a lot more to say, those words are left floating in the ether.

Frank was never fortunate enough to catch up with his brother, as he had been caught those same days in his own deadly circumstances. Survival was turning out to be as thin as the blade of a sharpened knife in another area of the Argonne, where Frank and his Company H were dug in on Hill 198. The men made their final stand, defending themselves from the encircling Germans the best they could. Losses were adding up, the surviving and wounded soldiers dug in deep into what was referred to as 'The Pocket.' Shaped into a large round concave circle, low in the Argonne, it was all they had. It became their defensive position, and they held tight for the fight of their lives. For six long days of various German harassment and deadly combat, they withstood. Those times in October of 1918 thrust Frank through a life changing experience, that culminated in a testament to survivors of the Lost Battalion.

Pondering the Past

Looking back at the more innocent times of the brothers who became men during their time in the army where one, Ernest Julius, would lose his life and the other, Frank would come home to a new life without his brother. Frank and Ernest Julius together made decisions in 1917 and 1918, those made in the discovery of new challenges and others to find a better way to go, better pay and warmer climates. It was an escape hatch from the mundane. From their move to Oregon in early 1917 and becoming Railroad Deputies as the war in Europe raged. All that came in-between, led to their decision to join the army together. In Ernest's last years he spent considerable energy keeping a journal with him, and many of his actions are chronicled. Without these hundreds of entries, far less would be known of his and Frank's life out west.

The unfortunate chance happening of the brothers draft numbers being just one off from each other, caused Ernest to be called up first. Frank stayed on as a Railroad Deputy until he was sent notice. Ernest Julius would be off to Tacoma to train at Camp Lewis in the later part of 1917. When Frank was called up, he also was sent to Camp Lewis where his brother was. This period would be their last together. Months later, Ernest was heading to France. Frank would soon follow, but he was never to see his brother again.

Their story reflects the time shift that was happening at the turn of the century in the western part of the States. The industrial revolution was afoot, the world was getting smaller, problems 'Over There' were becoming problems 'over here,' but there were still cowboys, rough-riders and outsiders living in rural America, like Frank and Ernest Julius. They'd headed out west seeking their way, working jobs and wondering where it all would lead them, and in the brother's case, to seek land of their own. In the end it led them to war.

Joining the American Expeditionary Force was the matter at hand, an adventure to the boys and what may have been expected back then. Ernest Julius continued writing in his diary, and below are entries that began on January 22nd, 1917. He was at the train station in Bismarck, North Dakota, and was heading out to the West Coast in the dead of Winter. Frank was waiting for Ernst Julius' train in Dillon, Montana, and from there the two brothers began their journey together. By the time the meat of Ernest Julius's journal entries were written, he and Frank were working as Railroad Deputies out of La Grande, Oregon. There are plenty of inbetween writings, though these particular segments are poignant to their joining the A.E.F. and their last days as civilians. The brothers were even considering joining the Navy. These daily thoughts, often short in length, lead directly to their times on the battlefields of France.



Ernest Julius Erickson on a Deer Hunting Trip on Mt. Baldy in Oregon just before he joined the A.E.F.

* Ernest Julius Erickson's 'Oregon Diary' January 22nd thru October 3rd, 1917 *
http://markerickson.com/Family History/Ernest Julius Erickson/1.html

Ernest Julius Erickson wrote in his journal, beginning with a short two sentence entry. The first sentence was prophetic to his life and the coming decision that would altar everything. The second sentence held the romantic notion of living off the land and being free. He continued on from there with his almost daily activities working as a Deputy for the Oregon Railroad.

Saturday April 7th, 1917 -

War was declared with Germany yesterday. Camping is the life.

Monday April 9th through Saturday April 14th, 1917 -

We have had three bridges to watch, no excitement so far, but some of the guards not far from here have had real work to do. Have been broke ever since we came out here so it has not been very pleasant, but money someday I hope. This place mined some time ago, and it is full of place mines, no work going on at the present. Women are a scarce article around here. Only one that I have seen so far, and that is a farmer's daughter. Fine little lady.

Tuesday May 8th, 1917 -

They are getting stricter every day now, spies are out there most everyday, so we sure have to be on duty.

Sunday May 20th through Friday May 25th 1917 -

All these days have been quite nothing doing, but got up and got on duty and then 12 hours later came back in and got to bed again, such is the life in the far west. Carl left for Alaska today, said he would be gone about 6 months so I probably won't get to see him for some time. All depends on the conscription if I go to France or not.

Tuesday June 5th, 1917 -

Went and signed up for Uncle Sam today, so if he wants me I'm ready to go.

Thursday July 12th 1917 -

Left Weatherby for Baker to enlist in the Navy. Frank will follow, have to take a 4 year term.

Saturday July 21st. 1917 -

Number 1748 was in the first 20 and that is mine, Frank's did not show up.

Sunday July 22nd through Monday July 23rd, 1917 -

Frank's number 1749 did not come out, so I am alone in this new deal. Got to Pendleton today.

- And this specific entry is sadly foreboding -

Tuesday August 21st through Saturday August 25th, 1917

Have been working steady this day, got a notice from the exemption board to be ready to leave on 24 hour notice when notified. So everything is now settled out. I am sure glad nothing to worry me anymore, and I feel that I am pretty lucky to be able to go into Army. I will probably come out a different man, would like to change my ways.

Sunday August 26th through Saturday September 1st, 1917

Have been working steady this week. I heard that they are only going to take 2 men from Baker County, so I won't get a chance to go in the first Quota. But hope it won't be long before they might call. Had some letters from home and see that my brother, Sebran (Anders) enlisted in the Air Corps. He passed his physical, so I guess there won't be any chance to see him for some time.

Saturday September 2nd through Saturday September 7th, 1917

Well another week passed and nothing new, same thing over and over again. This seems to me to be an awful dead place, but I guess it is my own fault as I am not very much of a miser at any case. Frank and I are thinking of taking a hunting trip very soon and it all depends on when I am called for duty. I sure would like to get out for a deer hunt this fall as I am in a grand hunting country.

Monday September 17th, 1917

Getting ready to go out to get our ammunition and our camping outfit.

Thursday September 18th through Wednesday September 26th, 1917
* These entries are covered in Ernest Julius' 'Deer Hunt Diary' September 18th thru the 26th *
http://markerickson.com/Family_History/Frank_Erickson/r19-1.html

Thursday September 27th, 1917

Got back last night feeling fine, hope to get out again someday soon or next year as it may be.

Friday September 27th through Saturday September 29th, 1917

Frank tried to get a side work at the mill again, but there was no shortage as they have too many men for the timber they are getting.

Sunday September 30th, 1917

Getting tired of laying around town, but will have to just deal with it and keep steady with the Deputy work for awhile. We may quit and head into the woods for some camping and hunting.

Monday October 1st, 1917
Frank left for a job at the lumber camp today.

Tuesday October 2nd, 1917

Frank left for the woods this morning and it was some lonely here. Will leave myself soon enough.

Wednesday October 3rd, 1917

Leaving tonight for the woods to join Frank, so this will be the last entrance in this book this year.

Ernest Julius picks up his writing later in 1918 that begins once he has joined the A.E.F, with some of the most pertinent entries written on the battlefield in France.



Pvt. Frank G. S. Erickson (lower left) with Company H of the 308th Infantry in or near Binarville in the Marne, France 1918

Out of the Pocket

Frank's commanding officer, of Company H, Lieutenant William J. Cullen wrote during the siege of the Lost Battalion that, "between the flat projectory weapon (the machine gun) and the high projectory weapon (the trench mortar) the Germans gave us an awful merry time." Cullen sent Pfc. Frank Erickson, his new company runner, dashing off through the hurricane of bullets and shells to battalion headquarters for reinforcements.

The 308th's second-in-command Captain George G. McMurtry received the message from Cullen, handed to him by Frank. Soon after, McMurtry sent Frank back with eight men, but only Frank and three men reached Company H alive. Dispatched again later in the day with additional troops, Frank started back with twelve

more men, but lost four under the withering German fire. Frank continued throughout the siege, running messages between Lt. Cullen, the commanding officer, Major Whittlesey and Captain McMurtry, bringing around supplies when found and fighting his way through extremely tense and dangerous situations. His power of continuing on was extreme and his survival skills were unmatched.

What seemed like a cruel hell to the men of the Battalion, on the 7th of October, men in the know crawled to the side of their heroic wounded brothers, and whispered the news that relief had come. Food was on the way to their positions and that it was soon to be over, that they would be finally relieved. If tears flowed at that moment, the darkness concealed them. Pvt. John Nell noticed an abnormally large number of men walking around his funk hole and finally asked, "What's up?" A soldier replied, "Relief has come in on our right and more is coming in behind them." Nell confessed, "It was like being reborn." Noncoms came along with cans of meat and, although there was only enough for a few spoonfuls per man, it was wonderful stuff. Pvt. Robert Manson remembered, "It was the happiest moment of my life. I was hysterical. I laughed and cried for joy. I felt like a cat having nine lives."

When the corned beef hash came around, Manson admitted, "I ate it with my hands covered with blood and dirt. I'll tell the world it tasted like sirloin steak smothered with onions." Lieutenant Cullen was sound asleep when Pfc. Frank Erickson, his company runner, woke him. Thinking it was another German attack, Cullen jumped up to do battle, but Erickson said that relief had come and presented the lieutenant with a sack containing some bread and hash. Cullen sent Erickson with a message to Major Whittlesey, his compliments. Cullen then made the rounds of his men, often one by one spreading the good news and giving each man a forkful of hash. After that, Cullen boasted, "we were ready to go on for another six days then."

Four days after the Armistice, Frank wrote this letter to his thirteen year old brother, Alphons. This letter was written after the calamity of his week long hell in the Argonne. He would not be heading home for many months, but he was eager to go home and felt his chances were sooner than later:

Somewhere on the Western Front France 308th Infantry * American Expeditionary Force November 15, 1918

Dear Brother Alphons,

Will drop you a few lines and let you know that I am still alive and O.K. and hope to be starting for U.S. pretty soon. It isn't bad to be on the front any more since the war stopped. We don't have the machine guns and shrapnel any more. The Germans fired their cannons until eleven O'clock November 11th. They wouldn't quit until the last moment, though I guess they are done for all time now.

We sure gave them hell in this drive and probably that's what put an end to the war and believe me we had to fight hard.

Have you heard from Ernest lately? I hope he is alright and will be home soon. I received a letter from Sebran a few days ago, but he didn't send me his address. Will ring off for this time. with best wishes and regards, from your Brother Frank

Ernest Julius had been killed on October 10th, and still over a month later, by the date of this letter, Frank was unaware of his passing and would stay in France with the 308th for another five months. While the boys of 1917 had gone overseas and done their job alongside the British, French, Canadians, Australian and New Zealanders taking care of the Kaiser and his German forces, there was always a lingering doubt as to whether they had kicked his ass hard enough. The answer, sadly, was no. The rise of Adolf Hitler and

consequent advent of World War II tore the very hearts out of veterans of the Argonne, for America's sons, their own sons, would have to go back to Europe and do it all over again.

Having seen too much death, men like Frank from the Lost Battalion embraced life and became devoted to their families. Letters between the men noted exhilarating occasions, such as weddings, births, anniversaries, vacations, and as decades passed, retirements. Many of the men made the transition from fathers to grandfathers with 'obvious pride' in their letters and phone calls. James Carroll put it into perspective when he said, "All of us I am sure have had many trials and tribulations over the years - many of which may have seemed impossible to overcome - yet I wonder whether any of us were ever in a spot quite as rugged as those October days in 1918. In my book we are just forty years to the good, and for that alone we should indeed be grateful." Carroll was right. Nothing that life threw at them could ever be as bad as those five October days, but there was just one thing that came close.

Emulating their fathers, the sons of the Lost Battalion stepped forward and did their part, although most steered clear of the infantry. A multitude of their sons went off to serve in the Army and Frank Erickson's boy, Ernest Anders, flew thirty-five bombing missions over Germany piloting a B-17. Many son's of the 308th lost their lives during the war. Even a few of the 308th's survivors joined in to fight the war. Frank's former commander William J. Cullen served on active duty again. Frank served as a POW guard from 1942 through 1946 at Fort Lincoln in Mandan, North Dakota. In 1943 it fell again onto the shoulders of Frank's son, Ernest Anders, a boy of 19, to go off to Europe to fight a war.

Unfortunately the 'The Great War,' of the early 20th Century, for Ernest Julius, Frank and Anders (Sebran) Erickson, it brought these men, that had only emigrated from Sweden a decade previously, back to fight in the European hostilities. Ernest Julius' death caused an incredible ripple in Frank's life and years later to my father's life and future. He was haunted by his namesake, carrying a ghost along the way, as he traversed his life. I became fascinated by our mutual uncle and like my father, began to search for this mysterious character of the family. Much of the mystery was solved, yet there is more to find out, yet EJ lives in the twinkling smile he showed us all in the photographs.



Pfc. Ernest Julius Erickson during the Meuse Argonne Offensive in September of 1918

Heading Home

On April, 19th, 1919 Frank and Company H and thousands of others from the A.E.F. began their journey over the Atlantic heading home. They left Brest, France aboard the steamer 'USS America.' A German ship originally, called 'Amerika,' it was seized by the US Navy in Boston Harbor in April 1917, and commissioned as a troop ship four months later. With Frank aboard the 'USS America,' it headed to Hoboken, New Jersey.

A fellow soldier, Pvt. Lee 'Buck' McCollum aboard the ship offers his feelings and likely the thoughts of many of the survivors of the Lost Battalion.

"Laughingly we had first boarded these boats, youth bound for France, youth looking for adventure, soldiers on parade. Now less than a year later we were returning home no longer laughing, light-hearted boys in our teens and early twenties, but men old beyond our years. Each of us was bringing home an uninvited guest, a guest that would live with us through the rest of our days, who would sit with us at our tables and would wake us from our earned night's rest, to force us to walk step by step with him, over and over again, across the battlefields of France."

The USS America arrived in Brooklyn Harbor on April 23rd, 1919. After a triumphant welcoming by the crowds assembled, the Lost Battalion members paraded down Fifth Avenue in New York City passing through the Victory Arch. It was a memorable experience for Frank and the boys. Later the men were transported to Camp Mills. There the 308th were stationed for a month, and the men took advantage of the opportunity to head back into New York City and enjoy the city. They continued their celebrations of the War's end. They all imagined what it would be like when they returned to their family and friends. What would they do next and what would all they had encountered in Europe amount to? Questions like this would only be answered by time and memory.



Lost Battalion members on parade, passing through the Victory Arch on Fifth Avenue in New York City in 1919

On May 22nd, 1919, Frank was released from the army and headed back to Dakota by railroad. Days on the train gave him time to reflect on the last eighteen months. As he stared out to the landscape skipping by in murky tones, thoughts of his days in the Argonne and all that occurred after, the sheer enormity of the moment was the burden that followed him for years.

He had recovered well enough from his stay in the hospital in France and was looking forward to seeing his family and friends. Burdened with the reality of his brother's death, Frank knew things would be different from the plans he and EJ had back in Oregon in 1917. Once he arrived at the train station in Bismarck, embraced by his family, he felt a sense of relief from all he had experienced in the war. He settled for awhile on the family farm in Regan, and farmed with his father, Anders. Frank applied for medical benefits from the newly formed Veteran's Bureau. He hoped his injuries sustained in the Argonne would get better with proper medical attention. Frank would need care off and on for years.

As it turned out, this trip home was permanent, his dreams of going back west with his brother, evaporated. With no financial government help, getting a job was going to be a priority. The GI Bill was decades off from being available to ex-servicemen, as my father gratefully received in 1945. Frank first

worked in the Wilton mines in 1919, but that became difficult with his breathing issues and he quit. In short order he utilized his talents in other fields of work. By 1920 he began work as a carpenter in the Badlands of North Dakota in the town of Medora, not far from the eventually named, 'Theodore Roosevelt National Park.' Teddy Roosevelt spent time there in the 1880s after his wife and mother passed away. He grieved, recovered and formulated the philosophy living out in the Badlands that would lead the future president to become one

of America's greatest conservationists. For Frank, needless to say, possibly unaware of Roosevelt's previous actions, these would be enormous footsteps to follow in his own post wartime recovery.

Frank received multiple medals and commendations for his actions as a member of the 'Lost Battalion.' Besides the Silver Star and the Meuse Argonne Medal, a special commendation written by Major General Robert Alexander and his Company H commander, Captain William J. Cullen. It testifies to Frank's actions and heroics in the Argonne. To my family who have beheld this over the decades since it's writing, it is of the highest honor to know what Frank accomplished. Many years later through the work of Frank's son-in-law and my Uncle Floyd Boutrous and Senator Kent Conrad of North Dakota, Frank was recommended for the Medal of Honor. Unfortunately like many things in the cosmic arena of what is right, Frank did not receive it.

November 14th, 1918 General Orders No. 39 Headquarters 77th Division

I desire to record in the General Orders of this Division a tribute to the valorous conduct of the following Officers and Enlisted Men who have distinguished themselves by their splendid courage, service and sacrifice:

Pvt. Frank G. S. Erickson, #3143116, Company H. 380th Infantry who displayed extraordinary heroism in action in the ARGONNE FOREST, near BINARVILLE, between October 3rd and October 8th, 1918, when that Company, together with other Companies of the 1st and 2nd Battalions of this regiment, were surrounded by the enemy and cut off from communication with friendly troops. During this period, Pvt. Erickson was a runner between his Company and Battalion Headquarters.

Though completely without food during all this period, he cheerfully and courageously performed his duties as a runner. During a heavy attack by the enemy on October 3rd, 1918, he carried messages from his company Commander to Battalion Headquarters and Major Charles W. Whittlesey. All of this was under heavy fire from machine guns and trench mortars, Pvt. Erickson succeeded in delivering his messages and in guiding supporting troops to the left flank which was then being subjected to heavy pressure by the enemy.

On succeeding days of the siege, this soldier continued to perform his duties over exposed places and in full view of the enemy and always under heavy machine gun fire which raked the position on the least exposure. These duties he performed in absolute disregard of his personal safety.

Major General Robert Alexander Adjutant General Louis B. Gerow Captain William J. Cullen - Company H - 308th Infantry American Expeditionary Force

By 1922, having known his future wife since she was a young girl, Frank, married Clara Amelia Nelson on March 3rd. Frank was thirty years old and Clara was eighteen years old. Five months later, my Father Ernest Anders was born in Painted Woods. Frank continued working various jobs, plumbing, carpentry and bridge work. In the later 1920s Frank was hospitalized in Minneapolis for near on a year due to complications from his mustard gas experience during the War. His health improved and he continued on in his various trades. The family lived throughout the 1920s along the Missouri River in Painted Woods, and eventually moved to Bismarck by the early 1930s. In 1934, Frank and his Brother Sebran began building a home on Jefferson Avenue in Bismarck, where Frank and Clara would live the rest of their lives.

What would have been if Ernest Julius had returned home in 1919, is anyone's guess. Intriguing possibilities that my father and his sister, Dian Marcella, and a whole family to follow, likely would not have

existed. The brothers' plans after the War were to head back out west and carry on what they had started two years before. The concept of the two brothers heading back on the road towards the Pacific after thewar, to explore their Western dreams has been a pleasant fantasy of mine. The family that existed beyond Frank's return to Dakota in 1919, that can be left for the imagination.

My father heard all the Lost Battalion stories and other family war tales. These accounts seared through him at a time he was searching for what to do with his life. In late 1941 at 18 years old, the cards were laid out for him to see. He loved airplanes and his Uncle Ander's recollections of the Air Corps was icing on the cake.

The films of the day did their trick on a young boy's mind, the local movie houses in Bismarck offered, 'Hell's Angels,' 'Sergeant York' and 'The Road To Glory,' all showcasing the intensity and misleading excitement of warfare.

The film, 'All Quiet on the Western Front' came closest to confronting the pitfalls of the enamored youth and his desires of going into combat. A more contemporary film, 'They Shall Not Grow Old,' brings into focus the horrors that existed through the eyes of the actual young men that traversed the horrific battlefields of France, innocents heading to unimaginable fates. The sharp color footage only adding to the clarity of those century old images, enabling them to be viewed in their true haunting honesty.

The voices of the veterans of the First World War breathed the very concept of the calamity of warfare into their sons, now 23 years in the rearview mirror of 1941. Fading into 1942, and circumstances approaching would change my father's life forever.

In 1918, Frank survived, Ernest Julius was not as fortunate, and it was into this repetition of actions, Frank's son was to pass. This time around it would be from 25,000 feet into the heavens, through massive flak fields and paralyzing attacks by Luftwaffe fighters. Dropping bombs on targets, dodging an enemy that would do everything to bring him down in smoke and flame to the earth below.



The Air Corps

My father's determination hearkened back to the difficult scramble growing up on the Homestead in Painted Woods in the heart of the Depression. Even as he got older, in his mid teens attending Bismarck

High School his expectations of flight grew stronger. Ernest Anders timing was indeed on his side when history and fate met in the Winter of 1941.

He joined the Army Air Corps, soon after the attack on Pearl Harbor in Hawaii. Because he resembled his childhood hero, his bomber crew would nickname him 'Lindy.' He loved that, and it followed him for years. When he received his orders and left Bismarck in early 1942, Ernest was nineteen years old. He boarded a train headed for San Antonio, Texas and reported for flight training at Kelly Field. Over the next 18 months he was thrust into the world of aviation, which he found strange and difficult at first, but to which he applied himself with typical Scandinavian determination.

Ernest wrote 2 postcards to his kid Sister Dian (Dinny) soon after he was set up at the Aviation Cadet Center at Kelly Field.

October 26th, 1942 - Kelly Field - Aviation Cadet Center

Dear Dinny
This card shows you what Kelly Field looks like. I haven't been on the field yet, but am located near it. The only uniforms we got as yet is a pair of coveralls with the Air Corps insignia on the back. Darn near froze to death.
It gets cold, but don't mind it.
love, Ernie

October 28th, 1942 - Kelly Field - Aviation Cadet Center

Hey Kid,
Am sending you this card so you get an idea of the type of barracks we stay in.
The picture is not of our barracks, but of some other ones. Ours are a little different.
I haven't left this area since I arrived. Will be classified tomorrow as
Pilot, Bombardier, Navigator or ground crew member.
The physical is tough, but I think I can make it.
Tell Dinny,'Hello' and ask her what time it is, also how many ducks and pheasants she got.
Your brother Ernie

1942

By his first year in the Air Corps, my father presented himself to be a young man at the end road of his teenager years, preparing himself to be a pilot. Ernest was 20 years old at this time and it was an awesome responsibility he was about to undertake. Reflecting back, Ernest had only been as far as Washington State from his home in Bismarck before that day in 1942, when he stepped down onto the train station in San Antonio. He was there along with other cadets to see if he had what it took to pilot a fighter plane or bomber.

As an Air Corps cadet, he knew to be chosen and to go all the way, one had to be in good health. Just when he was close to graduating from Advanced Flight training in the Late Summer of 1943, he came down with appendicitis and spent a couple weeks in the hospital. By the time he was released, his group had moved on to their assignments. Ernest awaited receiving his wings and in October graduated in Blackland, Texas. He was assigned as a Bomber pilot, received leave and headed home to Bismarck to visit his family. He knew it would be his last chance to see them before being sent overseas for combat duty.

In the realm of the era of 1942, young men were coming from all stations in life and from every state across the country to join the service. Many of these young men were transfixed at the notion of being a pilot, foot to the floor, and onto the plains of the sky blue. Most Air Cadets wanted to be fighter pilots, if that did not pan out they were assigned to become a bomber pilot. Many washed out, being moved to a crewmen position or tossed back into the Infantry. It was never up to the men to select in their position, where and in what airplane they would fly. The Air Corps needs came first and by late 1943 bomber crews had to be replenished regularly, as new ships and crews were slow in arriving to the bases. In 1943, where bomber crew losses were at an all-time high, operations were still far from set in how the 8th Air Force would continue their daylight bombing program successfully. With no fighter cover going into and returning from the targets, the bombers were severely vulnerable. By the time my father was ready to fly combat in November of 1943,

he would be heading into an environment of severe danger, in the seat of a B-17 'Flying Fortress.'

Competent men were in high demand. Handfuls of want-to-be fighter pilots succeeded in flight training, only to become B-17, B-24 and B-25 pilots and or crewmen. Washing out of flight training was common and those that did, often became Navigators, Bombardiers, Gunners or Radio Operators. In that, they had to move to specialty training in their new fields of operation. They still wanted to fly, even if not from the pilot seat, at least they would fly. The thousands of others that did not make these various crew positions, were washed out completely and sent back to the Army. Their fates were in the hands of the ground forces.

1943

As it turned out he had what it took, after sixteen months of exhaustive training, my father graduated from Advanced Flight training at Blackland Airfield in October of 1943. At this point he had received his wings, he became Lieutenant Ernest Anders Erickson and he felt he was ready for combat flying. All things considered, my father knew he would be a flyer. It would change his life and it would lead to a world he would never have experienced had he stayed in Bismarck. It took the war and the Air Corps for my father to fulfill his direction in life.

My father had studied hard, passed all the tests, and did whatever they wanted of him. He was ready, the next step would propel him into the deadly adventure of the Daylight Bombing Campaign that was in full bloom in England. Whether he would ever come home, he was not concerned, he might become like a feather in the wind, but he would fly and that was his mindset. He was drifting in thought of what would be expected of him, what he believed he would accomplish and the possible nightmares ahead he faced. For most an unlikely feeling, but he looked forward with sheer excitement.

Where he would be stationed was the next step, Italy, England or the Pacific. He received leave and headed home to Dakota to visit his family. The reunion was momentous, even though his family knew he would soon be headed overseas for combat duty. Everyone ion the family were hoping the next reunion would be sooner rather than later. He went hunting with his father and enjoyed time with his mother Clara and three year old sister, Dian. Barely two years old when he left for the Air Corps, Ernest felt it time to be sure Dian would remember her big brother, whatever occurred in the next year or two.

Upon his return to Blackland, he was presented with orders to report to Langley Field in Virginia. He was assigned to the 4th Search Attack Squadron. A bomber crew was assembled and the men began the process of getting comfortable with each other, palling around and taking practice flights on a B-17 that was assigned to the new crew. Europe now seemed likely their destination. If it was to be Europe, the ship would take them there.

Their new B-17 was equipped with the H2-X radar device system, also used as a navigation aid, referred to as the 'Mickey.' Originally developed for bombing, the 'Mickey' was a ground mapping radar system that showed the countryside below even in pitch darkness and through clouds. The H2-X, originally called a 'Bombing Through Overcast' system, a ground mapping radar approach for use in aerial bombing. It was developed at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology Radiation Laboratory in Cambridge. At the time H2-X represented a revolutionary advance in target identification technology. So with the need at hand, my father spent time at Langley with the crew, training on the H2-X system. 1943 was soon coming to an end, and he awaited word on his assignment.





Air Mail

My father fulfilled the dream he'd had since he was a little boy and had gotten caught up with aviator exploits of Charles Lindbergh, Wiley Post and Amelia Earhart. They played key roles in his childhood, along with the occasional barnstormer blowing through the Great Plains of the Depression. It began soon after

Lindbergh's 1927 crossing of the Atlantic. Later my father imagined himself in a plane with Earhart and Post flying across the water, free from everything and watching the caps of the waves go by in blurry fast motion. His visions that he would indeed experience this act of flying someday was a certainty.

Health and fitness was his guarantee to fly. The ones that made the grade were young and eager, their heads filled with daring and images of flight and glory. Many thought they were indestructible and in some regards they were.

In 1943, the 8th Air Force stationed in England found survival among bomber crews to be lucky at best, losses were immense. Odds for crew members making it through twenty five missions were low. Later that was extended to thirty and finally settling on thirty five by early mid 1944. The fatalities among air crews in the beginning of daylight bombing of Europe was alarming. Considerations in this regard amongst my father and thousands of others preparing to fly bombers at this time must have been acute. In all reality, what these young heroic men were heading into was the unknown, their survival would be determined by skill and a heavy dose of luck. They entered into the war, bright eyed and seeking their long held desire of adventure.

I have always been fascinated how individual 8th Army Air Corps Men arrived at their Combat Assignment originally whether it was by air or traversing the Atlantic Ocean by ship on their way to England or Italy. My Dad, Lt. Ernest Anders Erickson, mentioned various tales to me of those two journeys that began in late January 1944 and he also made it plain he had looked forward to going to Italy when he was about to be assigned to a Combat outfit. But it was not to be and in the end he was glad he landed in England. He wrote extensively of his specific experiences during World War II through 100s of letters to his folks in Bismarck, ND. I have all of them and have compiled what I have so far for my 'Family Archive Project' website, which I will eventually post when 100% complete. It's a great tale of his two attempts, via two B-17s, at reaching Horham by the North Atlantic route. I added a few of his letters to his folks to show how he communicated and what was on his mind those weeks before he left for Europe. I am still fine tuning all the information, but all in all pretty happy with this long story that my dad helped me with more than he will ever know. As he mentioned often, "It was the beginning of the most exciting adventure of my life."

England or Italy

Just days before my father received his orders for his Combat Flying assignment, as he mentioned, "I didn't have a clue where I would be stationed. England or Italy were the choices I figured, but it was not my place to choose, I just waited for my final orders to arrive." He knew it would not be the Pacific, so England or Italy were the only possibilities. Ernest had his sights on Italy with its warm climate, near the Mediterranean and Adriatic Seas. Growing up in the freezing winters of the landlocked State of North Dakota, his thoughts were of hot weather and swimming in the ocean. He'd heard plenty of reports from fliers coming back to the States after tours of duty beneath cold and cloudy English skies. England intrigued him, he'd heard a lot about the various Bomb Groups stationed throughout the countryside, that were involved with the daylight bombing of Nazi occupied Europe, but Italy had always held a passion in my father's eyes.

My father wanted to get going and England sounded fine. Not giving into intimidation by the immense losses of the bomber crews that were occurring in Europe in 1943, the ten man crew felt ready to begin their combat assignment. My father penned a letter home to his folks and little sister Dian from Langley, dated January 12, 1944. The letter was to inform his family of the possibilities of when he might head overseas.

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My father penned a letter home to his folks and little sister Dian from Langley, dated January 12, 1944. The letter was to inform his family of the possibilities of when he might head overseas.

4th Search Attack Squadron Langley, Virginia January 12, 1944

Dear Dad, Mom and Dinny:

I got the pictures. They're real nice. Dian is a cute little kid. Too bad she has to squint because of the sun in that one shot. You said you hoped that I would be home next Christmas. If I'm not at home I will hopefully be in this country, as the Air Corps sends its men back after 25 raids. I've talked to several men that have completed their missions and are back here on base. That applies only to the English and German areas. In Africa and Italy, where the opposition isn't so stiff as in Germany, a fellow has to make 50 raids.

I'm leaving soon. This is no false alarm this time, as the Bombardier and three of the enlisted men are leaving in a couple days by boat. The rest of the crew will fly over later, so we'll more than likely meet-up in England or Italy. We're waiting for our ship to be ready, the maintenance crew are checking it over. I don't know if we'll fly the Northern or Southern route across the Atlantic. This clipping will tell you why I'm here. It's quite a deal, and our crew will be a lead ship.

There's no chance of getting up to see Angie and Flo again as we have to stand three rolls calls on Sunday at 0800, one o'clock and 5 o'clock. Guess they do not like to see us get too far away. We're free to leave the post and stay out all night, just so we come back in time to fly. But that's not long enough to really go anywhere.

That's quite the hat that Dad has on. Looks like a Russian hat, or one of those that the Turks wear. I see in the picture that the ground is free of snow. Good deal! It makes it easier to get around. Quentin Rudd is overseas I hear. He's apparently went to England and is flying out off one of those bases in the countryside of England. I have a six hour over the ocean mission tomorrow morning. Better get to bed. Love, Ernie

My father followed up with another letter, dated January 18th, 1944 from Mitchel Field on Hempstead Plains on Long Island in New York. This time written just to his father. He was closer to leaving for overseas, yet it turned out he still did not know where he would finally be stationed:

Dear Dad,

I got your letter yesterday and I felt I better write today, as I think we are leaving here Saturday or Sunday. We get our own plane and will fly to New York, then back down to Florida, South America and Africa. I don't know if I'm going to England or Italy. There seems to be a good chance of going to Italy. I'd like that better.

It's not so foggy and damp and cloudy as England. Lots of sunshine, but I guess down there the air crews have to do a lot of their own maintenance on the ships besides flying it. In England they have a pretty good ground maintenance force. Either way I'm happy, want to get going, been too long waiting.

Flying over will be quite an experience, especially the route we take. I hope my camera you sent gets here before I leave. I didn't realize that we'd go all of a sudden when I had you mail it to Langley.

It's good that jacket I sent fits you. Too bad the first one didn't, as black would have been real sharp with your uniform. I'll put one over on Ma by sending this to you at Fort Lincoln. Tell everyone "hello." Love, Ernie

On January 20th, 1944 Lt. Erickson received his orders. Later that day he wrote a letter to his family, "I'm leaving for overseas in a couple hours and will enclose all the money I have on me. \$200 in money orders. Use it as you wish. I'm heading to England, guess I better bring my warm clothes."

With that understated note to his parents, he acknowledged that he was set to go overseas, where a war was raging. In his letters home, my father expressed enthusiasm about playing a part in what the 8th Army Air Corps was trying to accomplish with daylight bombing. Of course flying daylight missions in the skies over occupied Europe was exceedingly treacherous. Casting any serious apprehensions aside, his vision was looking forward to flying.

Browsing through my father's Air Corps archives just days after he passed, I began recalling the countless talks about his wartime experiences. They reel forever in my memory. His Army trunk was chocked full, plus his closet shelves stacked with neatly marked boxes of photographs, letters, cards and documents. His closet held his Air Corps uniform, two A-2 leather jackets, the one I grew up wearing on my first dozen or so birthdays; the renown 'Lili of the Lamplight' painted jacket. It was stunning what he had kept and at first, overwhelming. As the days and weeks passed, I was becoming very familiar with a 19-22 year old young man that I hardly recognized as the adult I would know as my loving father.

Finally On The Way - The First Attempt

On January 23rd, 1944, ten crewmen took off in their B-17 from Langley. They flew up the east coast to New York City and landed at Roosevelt Airfield on Long Island. They billeted nearby for the evening at Mitchel Field.

A day later they embarked from Roosevelt, taking the Northern Atlantic route, and the expectation of making it to Scotland. In my Father Lt. Ernest Anders Erickson's thinking they were following the same path Charles Lindbergh took to Europe on his transatlantic flight of May 20, 1927. My father noted that fact often when he talked of that first attempted journey to England.

The Northern Atlantic route was a treacherous situation for many of the crews attempting the same passage. A considerable number of crews came across difficult navigation issues and horrendous weather. Many ships just did not complete the journey, either lost at sea or forced landings wherever they could possibly ditch the plane. Some crews, if they were lucky to find land, ditched in Greenland or Iceland. For the unfortunate crews that ended up in sudden sea landings in the dark cold Atlantic, survival was dismal.

My father's final stop in the United States was to be at the Presque Isle Army Air Force Airfield in Aroostock County in Northern Maine. Presque was set up for ships heading to England via the Northern route. Aroostook was named for an Indian word meaning 'beautiful river.' It was activated as an Army Air Corps field in September of 1941, where the Air Transport Command was set up assisting the ferrying of bombers across the Atlantic to the battlefront.

The airmen's flight was textbook flying, filled with hours of exciting sights and memories, but as they landed in a dense fog, while taxiing on the tarmac, another B-17 maneuvered into their path, causing a collision. No one was hurt, but both ships were badly damaged and would need extensive repairs. The crewmen were ordered to return by Air Transport to New York City where they awaited instructions in acquiring another B-17.

On February 3rd, 1944 my father wrote a letter to his family. He was so close to the war, yet obstacles were getting in the way of him actually getting overseas. He wrote:

Dear Dad, Mom & Dinny,

Well, here I am back in New York City again. The last time I wrote to you I was at Mitchel Field and expected to take off anytime on the first leg of my trip overseas. I took off a couple of hours after I wrote to you. Got as far as Northern Maine. Our ship and another one had a taxi accident and the repairs will take several weeks.

We were sent back to New York and expect to go to England by Air Transport Command or hopefully we will get another ship. It's all up in the air as I write this now. We can stay anywhere we want to just so we phone in and report personally once a day to the Transport Headquarters.

This hotel (The Commodore) is located very near Grand Central Station and it's on 42nd Street. Lots of action going on here.

It sure was a tough break about the accident. We don't have our own plane now, so don't know what the deal is for us after we get overseas. Of course we may get another plane that's been flown over by Air Transport Command or we may get another one on this side (hope so!)

It sure is a good deal though to be in New York City. Did you get the \$200. I sent? I haven't got any mail since I left Langley. The day I left I received a note from the mail room that I had a package, the camera I hoped, and went over to get it, but the fellow that has the key for the insured mail room wasn't there. I went back two or three more times, but still no luck. I imagine it was the camera. I may be able to get it forwarded here to New York. It'll more than likely be a wreck when I do get it. Tell everyone hello. Will write again in a day or so.

Love, Ernie



The 1943/1944 crew:

Staff Sgt. Marion F. Pratt - Ball Turret Gunner * Staff Sgt. Jackson C. Earle – Right Waist Gunner Staff Sgt. Arthur J. Fitzpatrick - Top Turret/Engineer * Staff Sgt. Conrad W. Roellchen - Tail Gunner Staff Sgt. Gerald B. Engler – Left Waist Gunner * Staff Sgt. Edward R. Sambor - Radio operator Lt. Thomas M. Bachuzewski – Pilot * Lt. Ernest Anders Erickson – Pilot Lt. Haskel N. Niman Navigator * Lt. Earl E. Pirtle – Bombardier (missing from photograph)



Off To England One More Time and Marlene Dietrich

The two Pilots, Lt. Erickson, my father and Lt. Thomas M. Bachuzewski and the Navigator Lt. Haskel N. Niman did receive their ship and were assigned a new B-17, a Command Ship equipped with the H2-X radar device. The Pilot's and the crew's familiarity with the system enabled them to get the 'Flying Fortress' far quicker than expected.

On February 5th, their second attempt to make the crossing of the North Atlantic, they were aboard a sparkling silver Flying Fortress, the three man crew left Langley early that cold Winter morning. They began the first of a half dozen flights that would inevitably get them to England. They looked forward to the elaborate hop, skip and jump journey over the North Atlantic. That traversing odyssey would take five days with multiple stop-overs. This time, as luck would go, following the same Northern Atlantic route, the trip

would be successful. My father was duly impressed with his first long flight experience, the breathtaking horizons and frequent low altitude flying over the Atlantic was forever memorable.

This was my father's first time journeying outside the United States, his thoughts of flying like Lindbergh across a vast ocean with the thrill of flight always was at his attention. The crewmen were full of excitement with their destination, England in each of their thoughts. The airmen headed for Roosevelt Field in New York then onto the Airfield at Presque Isle in Aroostock County in Northern Maine. They left Maine the next day, landing a few hours later at Gander Airfield in Newfoundland. The men awaited on the farthest tip of Quebec, Canada for their next leg of their journey. Leaving North America behind was poignant in the minds of all aboard the Flying Fortress, as they began heading over the Labrador Sea eastward. My father would say about those initial moments, "It was the beginning of the most exciting adventure of my life."

Finally On The Way - The Crossing of the North Atlantic

The next day the Flying Fortress was off for Narsarsuaq Air Base in Greenland. The three Airmen stayed long enough to look around the Air Base and talk to other crews, getting a true feeling of what they were undertaking. Later that day of February 8th, they took off for Reykjavik, Iceland where they awaited final instructions for their flight to Scotland, the final leg to the United Kingdom, where they would be soon, hopefully, assigned a Bomb Group and where they would be stationed in England. As the flight reached the United Kingdom, everyone on board acknowledged that soon they would be applying all they had learned in training. With thoughts of home and all that was occurring presently in their minds, brought the men to quiet contemplation.

The men arrived in Reykjavik at the right time, Lt. Erickson, Lt. Bachuzewski and Lt. Niman were present for a Marlene Dietrich performance. Dietrich made two overseas USO tours during the war. Anyone who was fortunate to see her, lit up with her singing and stories. "I'm here, I'm here," Dietrich would say, and then run down the gangway in her uniform, carrying her case. She would then produce a pair of evening shoes and a dress, and pretend that she was about to change right there on stage. The boys began to hoot and holler. Then two soldiers with grins on their faces escorted Marlene off into the wings. For the sexy comical charade, the whistles of encouragement from the audience continued to be heard. She returned dressed and ready for the show, joked and talked to the men, and sang her songs. 'No Love No Nothing, 'Lazy Afternoon,' and 'The Boys in the Backroom' were staples at her shows, as was the song that would eventually become identified with her forever, 'Lilli Marlene.' One of many unforgettable moments for my father, he would say, Marlene Dietrich and her song, 'Lilli Marlene' were on his mind when he and the crew named their B-17 months later, the 'Lili of the Lamplight.'

On February 10th, 1944, Lt. Erickson and crew took off from Reykjavik for the final haul over the North Atlantic Ocean from Iceland to their first stop, Scotland. The ocean vistas spanning the horizon in every direction as they flew low over the North Sea en-route to England were breathtaking. Lt. Ernest Erickson was transfixed as he thought about the challenges that lay ahead. Over the course of 1944, he would send 100s of letters and cards to his family and friends back home. He would often include the many photographs he took with the camera he finally received. Some of the letters he wrote during his combat flying read like fiction, others just simple requests to his mother to send chocolate, comic books, candy, pretzels and film for his camera. In these moments, I see my father as the adolescent, still clinging to what he was familiar with, yet in regards of his accomplishments of that time, a true anachronism. At this point he was twenty one years old and would soon be receiving a serious dose of the Luftwaffe and the dreaded black flowers (flak) that seemingly floated in the air.







Lt. Erickson's A-2 'Lili of the Lamplight' jacket with the 95th's Red Feather Patch painted on the front

95th Bomb Group * Horham Airfield * England

On February 11th, Lt. Erickson, Lt. Bachuzewski and Lt. Niman touched down in Prestwick, Scotland. They had made it with no difficulties and were excited to be on a Royal Air Force airfield. They awaited orders where they would be serving their combat flying tour of duty. The seven man crew, Bombardier Lt. Earl E. Pirtle, Top Turret/Engineer Staff Sgt. Arthur J. Fitzpatrick, Left Waist Gunner Staff Sgt. Gerald B. Engler, Right Waist Gunner Staff Sgt. Jackson C. Earle, Radio Operator Staff Sgt. Edward R. Sambor, Ball Turret Gunner Staff Sgt. Marion F. Pratt and Tail Gunner Staff Sgt. Conrad W. Roellchen who had come over on the Queen Mary from New York had arrived on the 6th of February and had been awaiting the arrival of their new Flying Fortress. Heavy Bomber Aircrewmen were given at least the rank of sergeant, so in case they were shot down and became a POW, by Geneva Convention rules they would be treated better as officers.

On February 15th the ten man crew took off from Prestwick and later touched down in England in South Ayrshire on the west coast of Scotland. This is the same airfield that in 1960 Elvis Presley, for the first time in England, arrived when his Army transport stopped en route from Germany.

On February 19th, the crewmen were off to the Royal Air Force Station at Stoney Cross. They would billet at Stoney Cross till mid-late February and then would be off to Royal Air Force at Alconbury. Leaving Alconbury, they would fly off to their permanent assignment in England at Station 119 in East Anglia at Horham Airfield. East Anglia comprises the counties of Norfolk, Suffolk and Cambridgeshire. Ironically, East Anglia is derived from the Anglo Saxon kingdom of the East Angles, a tribe whose name originated in Anglia in Northern Germany.

334th Squadron

Having been assigned to the 334th Squadron of the 95th Bomb Group, Lt. Erickson and crew arrived on February 28th, 1944 at the airfield in Horham, England. This my father recalls with incredible excitement and the feeling of time slowing down to where you can appreciate every detail of an incredible experience.

Horham was originally used by the Royal Air Force, but by 1943 Horham was transferred to the 8th Air Corps. My father was pleased he would be assigned to a permanent base and would make it a point to, soon as possible, get comfortable with his new surroundings. The field was located next to the village of Horham and four miles southeast of the village of Eye in Suffolk. The large airfield straddled the parishes of Denham,

Redlingfield and Hoxnethey. Two hangars had been erected on the south side of the airfield and painted in black and dark earth camouflage. The airfield's headquarters, miscellaneous buildings and housing huts, spread to the west of the airfield into Denham. Horham was given the designation of Station 119 by the 8th Army Air Corps.

My father and the crew were billeted on base, though separated into officers and non-com barracks, and each found their comfort in one way or another. The frigid gray-skied English weather was familiar to my father. He commented on the sky being rarely blue and sunny, but when the sun shone, he was one of the first outside to find a spot to lay in the sun.

The B-17 Flying Fortress

Days rolled by and the crewmen flew local practice runs, concentrating on take-off, landing and formation flying, while looking forward to when they would be on a mission over mainland Europe. Orders were issued that seriously disappointed my father, but a common occurrence for rookie crews showing up in England. Before they could fly their first mission in their ship, the soon to be Bomber Boys were notified their airplane was to be transferred to another bomb group. My father and crew, resembling gypsies during their first months at Horham, were once again without a ship. Before their tour of duty came to an end, they would fly in a dozen different ships, completing the maximum of 35 missions over Europe.

The ten-man crew of a B-17 Flying Fortress consisted of two pilots, navigator, bombardier / nose gunner, flight engineer / top turret gunner, radio operator, two waist gunners, ball turret gunner and the tail gunner. The B-17's carried 8,000 pound (3,600 kg) bombs on short runs, and 4,500 pound (2,000 kg) bombs on long range missions. With a total load capacity of 17,600 pounds (7,800 kg) the B-17 was a formidable weapon. Thousands of these bombers were flown by the Eighth Air Force between 1943 and 1945, in a grueling campaign that eventually devastated German military and industrial infrastructure. Between late March 27th and August 26th, 1944, my father and crew flew 35 missions over Europe.

Daylight Bombing and Missions Counts Changing: 25 to 30 to 35

Daylight bombing was an especially deadly enterprise in 1943 and into 1944 when the Heavy Bombers did not have any Fighter cover in the beginning or insufficient cover by early 1944 going into the target and returning to base. It took an enormous toll on the airmen of the 8th Air Force. Losses of anywhere from twenty to fifty bombers during a single mission were not uncommon. With the ten man crews aboard each plane, two hundred to five hundred men could be lost on any given day. The odds of survival were especially grim in those early years of Daylight Bombing. During this deadly period, the odds that a B-17 crew member would survive the war were less than 50/50. By the time my father was half into his 35 mission count, things began to ease up due to increased fighter cover and the fact, by mid 1944, the Luftwaffe was becoming more and more ineffectual.

On some missions, more than one out of every ten planes were lost. When my father arrived at Horham, he was told that crewmen would be asked to fly no more than twenty-five missions. Facing the reality of enormous losses and subsequent depletion of trained airmen, the Air Force disregarded that promise. In his letter of April 9, 1944 my father mentioned that the number of missions he would be flying had increased to thirty. By the time he reached his thirtieth mission, the number had been raised to thirty-five. He would accomplish that on August 26th, 1944, completing his final 35th mission over a target in Toulouse, France.



Lt. Erickson standing in front of the 'Lili of the Lamplight' (44-6085)

Flying Combat and the Days of Flak

Flying Combat and the Days of Flak

Piloting the B-17, 'Mirandy' (42-31992), Lt. Ernest Anders Erickson flew his first combat mission over Cazaux, France on March 27th, 1944, that took the 334th Squadron over the full length of France to the border with Spain. His second mission, again flying Mirandy' on March 28th was over Chateaudun. In a letter home, written after his third mission on April 1st, flying 'Taint A Bird II' (42-30342) over Dunkirk, France, he spoke of it matter-of-factly, mentioning 'Flak' damage with no particular emphasis or surprise. This was his first written revelation of Flak to his parents.

Dear Mom, Dad and Dinny,

I've been on three missions in the last week or so, one was to Southern France, and I really could see clearly the Pyrenees Mountains, they separate France and Spain.

It was beautiful. The place is called Cazaux. The next one was to a place south west of Paris, called Chateaudun. Sure wish we could have got a glimpse of Paris, maybe on another mission. The most recent one was to Belgium. We encountered a lot of flak on all three missions. We got four large flak holes on the underside of the left wing.

Another punctured the main gas tank, had quite a leak over the Channel as we were heading home and it was drizzling out as we landed. Still another hit the wing tip tank (they are called Tokyo Tanks.) Another went through the landing flaps and they were partially dangling when we landed. The last one went through the main span. It took quite a piece out of the span. We got all this right over the targets. I could tell when we got hit the one time. It happened a few seconds before we dropped the bombs. It was quite the jolt. I thought the ball turret gunner got hit, or possibly the tail gunner. I called them up, but they were okay. On the way back from Cazaux we, or rather the gunner boys, shot at some German ships in the Bay of Biscay, just off the coast of France. Tomorrow is Easter Sunday. We are going out on one tomorrow, so I guess I'll have to get up pretty early. Don't mind though! It just means one less to go. We have to do thirty now.

He explained 'Flak,' in another letter he wrote to a Bismarck High School buddy who was still training for service back in the States.

If you look at 'Flak' from an Army stand point, it's similar to a grenade which is made of cast iron and manufactured for fragmentation, meaning smaller deadly metal shards/pieces blow out in all directions. Anti-aircraft projectiles when they explode, produce similar small to medium sized fragments referred to as 'Flak.'

These pieces are made of strong/hard metals, like steel or iron. The original projectiles have brass rings to conform with the grooves in the gun tube for spin stabilization. Brass shells for the powder and primer stayed in the gun tube, and are ejected on the ground after being fired, just like in the movies we have seen. The threaded pieces are from the detonator tip or inside the projectile tip where the detonator is screwed in. There are now these nasty 'proximity' anti-aircraft projectiles that will detonate upon detection next to an aircraft. These are the most deadly, where the older German 88 mm shells would be set on a burn timer to explode at known altitudes. Either way you look at it, no airman, anywhere, on either side, cares for 'Flak' one little bit.

The ferocious German anti aircraft weapons known as Flak Guns were waiting at every target the 8th and 15th Air Forces chose on any given day. On top of that, the Germans set out 'Smoke Pots' to obscure the targets and often it was quite effective. Many missions were aborted or ended unsuccessfully due to weather or the targets being obscured by German smoke screens. 'Smoke Pots' were the responsibility of specialized German units who operated thousands of the devices all across mainland Europe. 'Smoke Pots' were large metal barrels holding 400 pounds of the deadly chemical chlorosulfonic acid, with a large bottle of compressed air attached.

Often put into action an hour before an anticipated attack by the Heavy Bombers, each Smoke Pot bellowed out a massive smoke screen into the atmosphere. Besides being effective against the Bombers, unfortunately the 'Smoke Pots' coughed out considerably dangerous caustic fumes affecting the very soldiers setting up the equipment and anyone else within miles of the target sites the Germans were attempting to protect. The very notion of the number one priority of protecting the facility or oil refinery, considering any safety precautions were lost on the Nazis, overriding any thought of how the chemicals were affecting their very own soldiers and citizens. Like many other instances of deadly warfare, the end result is always the same, everyone is affected and everyone inevitably suffers.

Whether it was severe weather issues or the targets being obscured by smoke, the Heavy Bomber Squadrons often headed to secondary targets. Besides the smoke, there were still the Luftwaffe fighters picking away at the Heavy Bombers before and after Bomb's Away. If a Bomber fell out of formation due to flak damage or engine troubles and slagged behind the main group, they became a strangler and it was hell on wheels just to hope to get back home and not get picked off by a German fighter. Many never made it home.

The Airmen knew the score and most had horrific memories of all those unfortunate contingencies of death and finality flying thousands of miles up in the air. The Airmen had some odds in their favor in dueling with a German fighter homing in for the kill, with the multiple 50 mm guns aboard the ship, they had a fighting chance. As it was, with the innumerable dark bursts of flak's black flowers that bloomed over targets, like Berlin, Munich and over the notoriously dangerous skies of the Romanian oil refineries, flak was the true killer of the Heavy Bombers. These were the moments that rushed a scare through every Airman's chest. Flying chunks of metal knew no boundaries and heaven help the ship that received a dead-on shelling.

There were three commonly used Flak Guns by the Germans, the first one to mention has to be the 88 mm or as it was referred to as Acht-Acht Guns. The 88 mm was the most feared artillery weapon of the Germans. It got its name from the German word, Flugabwehrkanone, meaning aircraft defense cannon. The 88 mm guns were also used by the Nazi's in their Tiger and Tiger II tanks. During the Spanish Civil War, German troops fired the guns at oncoming tanks and fortified bunkers with very effective results. This success in combat led to versions of the 88 mm equipped to engage ground targets that were in view or barrage enemies from long range.

The gun's high muzzle velocity and heavy projectile made the 88 particularly effective against heavily-armored vehicles. In the use against the Heavy Bombers, when an 88 mm shell scored a direct hit, it often completely destroyed the ship. The versatile gun earned nearly mythical status among Allied flyers, infantrymen, and tank crews. Beleaguered troops often attributed bombardment from other types of weapons to the much-feared 88. One Australian soldier commented that the 88 mm gun was not only an effective anti-aircraft or anti-tank weapon—"it was anti-everything." The 88 fired an explosive shell with a diameter of 88 millimeters, had a range of over 25,000 feet and on a good day they could toss up shells weighing twenty one pounds above 30,000 feet, shooting off fifteen rounds per minute.

Another was the 105 mm cannon, it could expel a 35 pound shell at fifteen rounds per minute effectively well over 30,000 feet up in the air, a spot in the cosmos where the Heavy Bombers often flew. The scariest of the three was the 128 mm beast and when needed they were mounted on railway cars. It propelled a 50 pound

shell upwards of 40,000 feet, at twelve shells per minute at the ships, leaving no doubts it's potential impact to any Allied airplane. From these three Flak guns, the Aircrews were being targeted by some very serious weapons, yet they had little time to worry about it. Their duties on board during the melee kept their minds focused. In a short time every Heavy Bomber Airman experienced what Flak could do to man and machine. They came to realize just how dangerous it was to patrol the skies over Nazi occupied Europe.



A German Flakvierling 38 Anti-Aircraft Crew searches for Heavy Bomber formations atop the Berlin Zoo Flak Tower.

Notice the range measuring device the soldier is holding in the foreground and the radar station atop the building in the background.

On April 2nd 1944, Ernest wrote a long letter to his mother, father and sister Dian. He covers a lot of ground, as it comes across genuine, about his current thoughts at the time, and the situation he was beginning to feel comfortable in.

Somewhere in England April 2nd, 1944 Dear Dad, Mom & Dinny,

That was really good mail service on the last V-Mail letter you sent on March 15th. Just a little over two weeks. Also that one of mine that you got in seven days.

Am glad that you got my picture. I was beginning to wonder if you would ever get it. As I have undoubtedly told you before, I got the camera. I have four or five rolls of film so will take some pictures soon. It will take a couple weeks to get them developed. Will then send you some.

Yes, by all means, send me some candy, especially chocolate. I'll put in a request now so that if you have to show the request to someone, you can show them this. Please send me some candy, any kind, chocolate if you can. Also send me a bottle of decent shaving lotion. Can't get it at all over here.

I have enough to last another two or three weeks. I hope to get that small box you sent soon.

If you want, you can send me a couple of cans of popcorn. One of the fellows had some here. Sure was good. We can get butter and salt at the mess hall and can pop it here in the barracks.

Send these packages separate and several days apart. Wrap them good, because the camera could be seen through the package. Was a pretty ragged looking package, however the camera seems okay. When I got to the orderly room for my mail, one of the Sergeants said, "Lieutenant you have a camera here." Was kind of funny.

Tell Dian thanks for the kisses. Tell her I'll meet her at the depot again someday. Maybe I'll just surprise you and not tell you when I'm coming.

I have been on a few missions over enemy territory. None have been real bad, but rough enough, since these are my first tastes of combat. I am getting used to the flying, but the flak is something for sure, and you have to experience it before you know what it is like. You just have to hope it misses your ship. We take things easy when we don't fly. My crew is due for a 48 hour pass in the next week or ten days.

If you want to, you can send the papers to me. Those that you sent with the camera were nice. Sure to look them over, especially Alley Oop. There's a ship over here called 'General Oop.' There are other names like 'Situation Normal,' 'Lucky Strike.' 'Four Nights In A Bar Room' and such. We hope to name a ship down the line. I have some ideas.

I got five letters today. What's the dope on the Air Corps enlistments being cut down. I heard they were stopped. What's the deal with Donny?

The Servicemen's Issue from the Tribune is not coming through. They sure do a piss-poor job of getting those out don't they?

Tell the Folks Hello Love, Ernie



The 334th Squadron arm patch

No Ball Missions * V-1 and V-2 Rocket Installations

The ominous 334th Squadron patch my father wore on his jacket is worth mentioning in all it's seemingly contemporary flair. Two red lightening bolts bookend a standing sarcophagus, with a Buck Rogers era hooded figure of doom splashed across the coffin. He is holding a yellow golden lit bomb vertically, it is pointing to the hovering clouds below, as the landscape spreads out behind. The tension in the image is palatable, the shrouded undertaker about to release the bomb, he screams, "Bomb's Away."

Among the more dangerous missions my father flew, were referred to as 'No Ball Missions,' the code word for the destruction of Hitler's taunting secret weapon of the V-1 and V-2 missile launching sites. As the British came to call them buzz-bomb, they were a menace on civilian populations. Hundreds of V-1s and later in the war V-2s were shot in the direction of England. Over the course of the war 2,340 descended on London. The notorious buzz bombs also terrorized the cities of Kent, Manchester and Birmingham. Hundreds of these launching sites existed just in the Pas de Calais peninsula area of Normandy.

Countless more were hidden in French and Belgium forests along the English Channel and the North Sea coastline. These bases were defended heavily by anti-aircraft guns and fighter planes. The American bomber groups attacking these high value targets paid heavily in men and planes.

Considering the combined effort of the entire 2nd Air Division and the Eighth Air Force, the destruction of the V-1 missile launch capability was nearly complete by late 1944. Only seven more 'No-Ball' missions were flown up to the end of the Fall; however, the menace did not entirely go away. Crews often saw the V-1's vapor trails streaking toward Britain as they headed on bomb missions towards Germany.

The Germans had devised a simplified and exceedingly well camouflaged mobile launching system. Between June and September 1944 they attacked London and vicinity with hundreds of buzz bombs. When the Allies captured the Pas de Calais area of France, the launching sites were moved to Holland. Britain developed a decent defense for the V-1s, but a lot of them got through and their 500-pound war-heads often caused horrific damage.

Although allied losses were heavy, the losses inflicted on the Luftwaffe by the 8th Air Force bombing missions and fighter plane sorte's were devastating. In addition to the disruption of the German aircraft production capabilities, the Allied fighters and heavy bombers of the Eighth Air Force took on the Luftwaffe face to face in aerial combat. The combined wrath of the thirteen 50mm machine guns onboard the B-17s, along with the fire-power delivered by Allied fighters, eventually decimated the enemy's air forces. By late in 1944 the German Luftwaffe, once the terror of the skies over Europe, was practically non-existent.

Ernest's 4th mission was on April 13th targeting Augsburg, Germany. He was flying 'To Hell or Glory' (42-38123); His 5th mission was on April 19th over Werl, Germany and aboard 'Able Mabel' (42-31920); His 6th mission was on April 20th over Cherbourg (St Omer), France, flying 'Fireball Red' (42-31876; His 7th mission on April 22nd targeting Hamm, Germany, flying aboard 'Gen'ril Oop' (42-31993; His 8th mission over Friedrichshafen, Lowenthal and Manzell, Germany was on April 24th, flying 'The Doodle Bug' (42-107047); Ernest's 9th mission was on April 27th targeting Le Culot, France, flying 'The Doodle Bug' and his 10th mission was on April 28th and targeted a No Ball - V-1 installation at Sottevast, south of Cherbourg, France, flying 'Smilin' Sandy Sanchez' (42-97290).

Ernest followed up his last letter with this one written on April 15th:

April 15th, 1944 England

Dear Dad, Mom and Dinny, Still haven't had any mail since I arrived at my new and permanent post. Before I forget, I'm enclosing a piece of metal paper (chaff) the Germans drop to confuse British Radar. I found it outside the barracks.

I hope to get some mail tomorrow. Say, how about sending me a whole bunch of writing paper and envelopes. Try to get the type without lines and a little heavier grade than this. I'm having a hell of a time with stationary, so you can expect letters on almost anything soon.

Be sure to conform to postal regulations and also be sure to wrap it well. If you want you can have Joe out at Fraine Barracks wrap it up. He's got a lot of good stuff to do it. They don't seem to have any writing paper here at all.

Candy is hard to get, but I don't miss it like thought I would. Never have milk as most English cows have T.B.

I get very good food now. About the best available. You see I'm at a base now

that sends crews out over Germany and they try and feed them well.

I hope you haven't been worrying about me. I imagine you've been reading the news about the Big Berlin raids and you probably thought I was on some of them. I can say I have had a taste of combat for sure.

I'm not worried at all. Most of the time we have fighter cover as you've probably read in the paper. It's just the long grueling hours of formation flying that ages a fellow, plus the flak and weather and stuff.

It's not bad though. I get a pass at the end of my fifth mission. May go to London. I've been here almost a month and have been to town a few times. The weather is getting a lot better lately. That's one good thing! At least when the weather is nice a fellow can enjoy himself when he gets time off.

Will go to bed pretty soon. Tell everyone hello. What's Dinny doing? Give her a kiss and a hug for me. Love, Ernie

Berlin

On the morning of Ernest's 11th mission, targeting Berlin on April 29th 1944, he wrote in his journal:

Briefing 0330 hours - Getting up this morning was worse, harder than the many others that have passed this year in England. Whether it was the unconscious anticipation of the day ahead, I do not know. Many times this had happened; the tap at the foot of my bed, my name called out in the cold damp darkness of the barracks, the flashlight and footfall of the CQ (Charge of Quarters) waking the chosen for today's flight; all this at 2:30 am.

As my feet hit the cement floor beside my bed, my head feels dizzy, too many flights and not enough sleep, or was I just tired and afraid of the whole situation. The bad weather, cancelled

missions, changing of targets after the flight had started, the target socked in with two or three layers of clouds, dumping our payload somewhere over the countryside on the way back, ironically called a target of opportunity, when often we knew we were just plowing out something we never see down below, just bursts and smoke as we head back to the Channel and home. Then it was just the miserable, bad weather, back at the airfield, often landing at alternative strips.

Waiting for clearing for another mission, all this plus knowing of the fear in the pit of my stomach even on my weekends in London. "Up Lindy, the truck will pick you up at Barracks C in fifteen minutes." The silhouette with the flashlight said. I noticed my weekend buddy, Taylor in the bed next to me, slept on, grunted at the invasion of

light and then rolled over back to sleep. My crew were the only ones picked for today's flight. I was dressed in less than 10 minutes in spite of the darkness.

We let the rest of the barrack boys sleep away. Many would be fortunate not to be on the day's flights or the unfortunate others if you were in a hurry to get your tour complete go back home. Either way it was our day up and we would be off in a couple of hours. As I crawled into the truck, I hit my head on the canopy support, dam!! everything was going to be bad today!

Breakfast of fried eggs, bread and coffee was followed by the normal briefing. Our target was Berlin, my first time over the 800 anti-aircraft guns that could be aimed at us at any one time. I had heard the stories, and they weren't good. I feel I have to get these feelings out of my head, my men all are a bit jittery and I have to show them, all's fine. Berlin? It's a long way back from Berlin to the airfield with 109's on our tails and coming from god's knows where. I have to get my mind straight on all this. Time to go.

Sixty-three B-17s and thirteen fighters were lost that day on the Berlin mission. Six hundred and forty-three airmen were either killed, missing in action or captured by the Germans. These were staggering numbers to come home from at the end of that day. Many of the losses were caused by hits from 'Flak' gun batteries placed by the Germans throughout Europe protecting important 3rd Reich targets. The Anti-aircraft defenses were first installed in 1943, and were equipped with sophisticated radar, accurate enough to enable the German guns to hone in on the slow moving bombers with sometimes pin-point accuracy.

Once the bombers were within radar range they would be detected and tracked. Approaching their targets, the ships entered a dense and deadly flak field. Combat photographs from that time convey images of a free floating sea of tiny black flowers bursting into bloom. Flak was a constant fear for every crew member in every bomber that flew a mission over German occupied territory. In his letters, my father described the nerve-racking experience of flying through a flak field. Nearing their targets, the bombers were subjected to a continuous barrage of shelling and ear shattering explosions. At times, deadly shards of flak ricocheted inside the fuselage of the plane, adding to the confusion going on outside. Ernest removed half a dozen pieces of flak from around his pilot's seat after returning from one of his missions. He kept them as mementos, in a small box on his dresser. He would take these out occasionally and explain to me the circumstances of their existence. I look at them now and imagine the harrowing experiences he and his crew survived.

Ernest's 12th mission was on May 1st, 1944 and he was flying 'Mirandy' (42-31992) over Saarguemines, France; His 13th mission on May 12th was over Brux, France, flying 'Smilin' Sandy Sanchez' (42-97290) and his 14th mission on May 13th was over Osnabruk, Germany and he was again aboard the B-17 'Mirandy.'

25,000 Feet Over Berlin * The Luftwaffe

On May 24th, my father flew his fifteenth mission, piloting the B-17, 'Ten Aces' (42-38178). It would be their second flight over Berlin. This one would be a wake up call. He would experience the full spectrum of aerial combat bombing, and would be forever impressed. In his mission notes Ernest reports on the flak hits to their ship, the streaming German fighters picking off 17s, casualties onboard ships in his group and the intensity of the battle he was surrounded by. One line is most significant of the whole mission:

"Many fighters were seen. Saw many ships go down in smoke and flame."

The losses were immense. Thirty-three B-17s and ten fighters were lost that day just on the Berlin part of that days bombing. Three hundred and forty men are missing in action. In total for bombing operations that day, May 24th an additional thirteen fighters are lost and three hundred and four B-17s, B-24s, P-38s, P-47s & P-51s fighters were badly damaged. Just one day's undertakings and the numbers are horrendous.

Four days later, in the very early morning of May 28th their sixteenth mission began with orders that aircraft factories in Dessau, Poland and Magdeburg, Germany would be targeted. Once again, they flew 'Ten Aces.' My father continued writing in his mission journal. The words were in the same fiery vein as the Berlin mission. He was telling what was happening, what he saw and felt and as the missions added up, they were getting more extreme:

Flak was intense & accurate. Received large holes on underside of right wing. One of the Ball Turret's guns were shattered by flak. Prior to target, many enemy fighters were observed in near vicinity. They were attacking stranglers and groups of other Squadrons. None were lost from our group up to that time. FW- 190's were seen by top turret gunner. Then we were suddenly attacked by large formation, 20-25 of ME-109s just a few seconds before bombs away, we had to use emergency release for bombs.

In addition to the barrages of artillery fire exploding in and around the formations, Flak continued to ricochet inside the fuselage, as my father experienced on numerous occasions. He had mentioned how eerie it seemed, with the pings of metal bouncing around at fast and terrifying velocity. He said the fear left as fast as the sounds came and went. B-17 crews faced fierce harassment from the Luftwaffe. As they approached their target areas, the B-17s were met by, among others, the swift Messerschmitt 109 enemy fighters swooping through the bomber formations, creating havoc and destruction. After the war, revelations surfaced describing a controversial aspect of the daylight bombing missions-- the use of the bombers as bait to lure the Luftwaffe fighters into the sky, so the Allied fighters could take them on.

Although difficult to accept and something my father was not exactly pleased with, the men that survived and the families of the men that lost their lives had to live with that information. These type of command decisions are treacherous in reality, yet one can only truly dwell on the eventual outcome. Controversial and as an after-thought, it's still is a tough pill to swallow.

The conditions onboard the airplane presented incredible challenges, and the mortality rate among B-17 crew members were grim. To contemplate the nearly impossible working environment and enormous risks facing B-17 crews, you have to understand the basic facts that faced all bomber crewmen in the war.

The bombers were unheated and open to the outside air. The crew wore electrically heated suits and heavy gloves that provided some protection against temperatures that could dip to 60 degrees below zero. Once above 10,000 feet they donned oxygen masks as the planes continued to climb to their operational level that could be as high as 29,000 feet. Nearing the target, each crew member would don a 30-pound flak suit and a steel helmet designed to protect against antiaircraft fire. Parachutes were too bulky to be worn all the time, but crewmen did wear a harness that allowed them to quickly clip on their parachute when needed. Many kept their chutes close at hand.

Prior to 1944, a crewman's tour of duty was set at 25 missions. As a measure of the hazards they would encounter, it is estimated that the average crewman had only a one in four chance of actually completing his tour of duty.

Many of the surviving crew members were casualties of the psychological terror they experienced during the missions. My father spoke of this aspect occasionally and his wartime writings express them more directly. He did his job without complaint, and his often silent approach on how it affected him, was proof of his Scandinavian heritage.

Ernest's 17th mission was on May 30th targeting Brussels, Belgium, flying 'Ten Aces' (42-38178); His 18th mission on May 31st over Osanbruk, Germany was aboard the 'Lili of the Lamplight' (44-6085) and his 19th mission on June 2nd was over Paris (Archeres), France flying 'Paisano' (42-1024). This last mission was in preparation for the coming invasion of Europe.

A letter written on May 19th, 1944 was a light hearted affair.

May 19th, 1944 England

Dear Dad, Mom & Dinny; Just a note to let you know every thing is going okay. What do you think of the flashy blue paper? The paper we buy here isn't too bad except that it's too small. It's almost noon now, not flying today. Most of the other fellows are. You see the same crews don't fly on all the missions!
We're going to eat in a few minutes. Will mail this at the mess hall.
How's the weather been back there? By the way, my crew is due for a flak pass in a week or two. Will head to London, I hope, as we are sent to a rest home. It lasts about seven days.
Say hello to the folks. Give Dinny a boot in the pants from me.
Love, Ernie

One of the more alarming times for my father away from combat was one evening in the Spring of 1944, during one of his 'flak pass leaves' to London. Ernest had been in the city for a few days, staying at the Strand Palace Hotel with a buddy from Horham, Lt. Paul Hintermeier. Paul was the Navigator on the Lili of the Lamplight and he and my father would fly 26 missions together by late August. The two airmen were enjoying the sites, restaurants and bars and sleeping late in the mornings. After 14 missions under their belts, both needed time away from combat.

On an evening my father recalled quite well, while walking the dark streets of London, the two lieutenants were on the way back to their hotel from a night out, when all of sudden air raid sirens filled the canyons of the buildings around them. They knew the drill from past experiences, and immediately ran half a block and

saw the entrance of the underground and quick stepped down the stairs into the dimmed darkness below.

Packed underground were dozens of Londoners of all ages. Children clung to their parents. My father had seen this before on other leaves in London, but this was different, something was happening, now, above from the skies. Suddenly, as if everyone knew what was about to happen, a massive explosion shook the underground. My dad and Paul were obviously startled, having been the bearers of these kinds of situations on others, but now at the receiving end, opened their eyes.

Everyone stayed still looking about in quiet desperation. Ernest taking in the crowd, he looked down and noticed a young girl, maybe 4 years old, standing near her mother. She stared at him with intense eyes, not blinking. He gave her a broad smile and after a few seconds hesitation, she smiled back. He tapped Paul on the shoulder, then pointed at the girl, but she was no longer smiling. Paul leaned over and asked her name. She pulled away a bit, then answered, Anabel. Paul introduced himself and assured her everything would be alright. The girl appeared at ease and the three, along with Anabel's mother talked for awhile. Paul picked up Anabel and showed her the view of all the people standing about the rails. She scanned everything. The cavern of the Underground was dim and the air thick and musty. People began to stir, many being used to these events, though Ernest and Paul were not. Eventually some felt the coast was clear and began heading upstairs. Paul and Ernest decided it was time to go up topside and said goodbye to the girl. Anabel moved towards the airmen and gave them both kisses. Her mother smiled and said, "Be safe." With that, the two airmen headed up the stairway.

Above ground was another story, chaos and a surreal scene was unraveling on the street in London. Paul and my father came out of the underground and just a few hundred feet away from the blazing fire and mayhem. They rushed closer with the thought they could help, and then stopped and gazed at the spectacle before them. They had no clue what to do, the fire was maddening and smoke billowed. Paul and my father backed off a bit as the temperature rose. Two American MPs approached and asked the two for their identifications. The four talked and the MPs soon enough ordered them to go back to their hotel.

The next day my father ventured back with Paul to the place they were the night before during the German attack. There was a sizable crowd huddled around what they discovered was the Queen Mother, wife of King George VI. She was mingling in the crowd, talking with the Londoners. Amidst the entourage of Bobbies and Brit soldiers who were milling about, my father stepped forward and met the Queen Mother with Paul.

My father mentioned how casual she appeared and how she looked at him and smiled, acknowledging him, asking how he was and what he did in the service. It was quite a thrill for everyone and seemed to ease the situation at hand for at least the time being. Paul looked about, acknowledging the destruction and the debris in his stare. It had become all too common in London and other cities during the Blitz. The men both knew how lucky they were and even on leave they were brushing up against serious danger.

Ernest thought of the little girl in the Underground and his sister Dian and they became one in his mind. He hoped Anabel would grow up and forget the madness that had gripped London. It was Anabel and countless others that my dad acknowledged was part of the reasons the 8th Air Force was in England. He felt a sense of empowerment in the dire situations all around him. The clarity of the moment was not lost on him and he considered the almost two dozen missions that lay ahead for him. It was a daunting time for everyone. The next day, Paul and Ernest headed back to Horham to face their 15th mission. They had a long way to go to 35



Eight members of the ten man crew of the 'Lili of the Lamplight' (44-6085) photographed at Horham Airfield in England 1944

Standing - Left to Right:
Arthur J. Fitzpatrick (Top Turret Gunner / Engineer) * Edward R. Sambor (Radio Operator)
Thomas M. Bachuzewski (Pilot) * Ernest Anders Erickson (Pilot)

Bottom Row - Left to Right: Jackson C. Earl (Waist Gunner) * Conrad W. Roellchen (Tail Gunner) Gerald B. Engler (Waist Gunner) * Marion F. Pratt (Ball Turret Gunner)



Lt. General Jimmy Doolittle & Lt. Erickson at Horham Airfield, England in June of 1944 They are standing below Lady Fortune (Carmen's Folly) 42-97858

Jittery Lens Of An Onboard Gun Camera

The evidence mounted daily of the dangers of combat flying my father and other airmen faced on a routine basis, and every time he took off from Horham and headed out on another mission, the uncertainty lingered. The relentless confrontations with disaster continued. From the very start of a mission, taking off and setting up in proper formation could be quite difficult and could end in tragedy. Unfortunate occurrences to the ship and crew on the way to the target were common. Approaching the target, the time over the target and leaving for home was significantly nerve-wracking. Flak was the worst enemy of a B-17 crew. A Luftwaffe fighter blazing in spraying deadly machine gun fire, was at least a challenge the gunners could face and often terminate. The long haul back to England, with bad weather conditions, deadly German 109 fighters hunting bomber crews and pouncing on stragglers, just added to the extreme pressure every crewman felt on every mission.

Crossing the English Channel was a serious challenge. In times when their home field was socked in due to rain, fog and clouds, they made the best of it, landing at an alternative airfield. Each of these events could raise the hairs on your neck. Finding the airfield under certain circumstances, even worse if your ship was battle damaged would be yet another hurdle. Some ships had wounded onboard or even dead crewmen and would get the green light to land first. Occasionally ships belly-landed or exploded on bad landings or due to a seriously damaged ship. The whole experience from beginning to end was an assault on each man's senses. Not until the ship was on the ground taxing to an eventual stop would the crew be totally relaxed. Shattered nerves and exhaustion followed many men to the post mission debriefing and to their barracks.

Today, we can look back on those missions as seen through the jittery lens of an onboard gun camera, or the newsreel footage originally shown in movie houses during the war. Those films tell the story in black and white. The words of the crew members, describing their final moments aboard an airplane spiraling uncontrollably toward the ground, appear in real, fictionally, sounding color. Perhaps more vividly these words describe the terrifying hazards which faced the bomber crews on every mission.

Lady Fortune & Jimmy Doolittle

'Lady Fortune' aka Carmen's Folly (42-97858) was assigned to the 100th Bomb Group on April 30th, 1944 at the Royal Air Force station at Thorpe Abbott, located near Diss, Norfolk, England. The ship was transferred to the 95th Bomb Group and to my father's 334th Squadron on May 1st, 1944.

My father admired 'Lady Fortune,' and especially the ship's nose art painting on the fuselage. At that time he was thinking of the nose art they would have on their ship, the 'Lili of the Lamplight.' On a day he was talking with a crewman about the potential nose art on the Lili he was lucky to meet Lt. General Jimmy Doolittle who was visiting Horham that afternoon. "It was with incredible excitement that we met the General," he wrote. An airmen grabbed my dad's camera and snapped a shot of Doolittle and the smiling Lieutenant.

Frank gave his son, Ernest, one of his Brownie cameras in 1942, and it came in quite handy while he was in the Air Corps, and a second camera, with rolls of film, was sent to him in England by his mother, Clara. He enjoyed photographing in his free time. He photographed his fellow crew members and other air corpsmen. Also any beautiful landscapes he encountered around England, Italy or the Ukraine he took a shot. When he could, he took in-flight images of formations of B-17's over Europe, which really are quite remarkable. As a person who said he was not an artist, just someone who liked to make things, it turned out my father had a keen eye for capturing fascinating images. In the scope of his talents, as I have come to realize, my father was an artist.

My father found out months after he returned to the States, that Lady Fortune's luck ran out on January 10th, 1945 when it sustained serious damage due to flak and went down during a combat mission over Cologne, Germany. Six crewmen were killed, three were captured and spent the rest of the war in a prisoner of war camp.

Ernest's June 4th 1944 mission, his 20th mission was over Calais/Boulogne, France, flying the 'Lili of the

Lamplight' (44-6085). It was an ongoing campaign to saturate bomb German V-1 installations hidden in the forest areas of coastal France. This was another mission of many occurring at this time in preparation for the Allied Invasion on June 6th.

Two days before the Invasion of Europe, and soon after he completed his 20th mission, Ernest wrote a letter to his family. Never giving away anything about what was to be on the 6th of June, this was a sweet letter to tell his family what was going on.

> June 4th, 1944 England Dear Dad, Mom & Dinny,

Received a couple of letters from you lately. Also, I got the after shave lotion and pop-corn. I guess I already told you that, but it never hurts to repeat, or my other letter may have gotten lost. I have written a couple of short letters to you lately.

Today I got in my 20th mission. The last time I wrote you I had 15 or 16.

Did you get that letter with the photographs?

I wrote a letter to Grandma Erickson a day or so ago.

One of the fellows just handed me a book of short stories. Have a couple of

hours before I go to bed, so I guess I'll read.

We're not allowed to mention the number of missions anymore. They check some of our mail, but I know you like to know how I'm coming along. So sneaking this through here, I hope.

Well, Goodnight. Love, **Ernie**



Lt. Erickson stands in front of an abandoned Luftwaffe JU-88 Bomber on a farm field near Foggia Airfield in Italy





gets in Europe and in support of ad-vances by the ground troops in France." Lt. Erickson, also holder of the Air Medal and four Oak Leaf Clusters, is the son of Mr. and Mrs. Frank Erickson, 800 Memorial High-way. He has completed 35 flying missions, including shuttle-bombing missions, care Georgean tree by missions over Germany from Eng-land to Russia.

"Our fourth mission was a rough one, however. Our ship was seri-ously damaged. Although we man-aged to stay in formation, part of the rudder was torn off and the ship

came in contact and the contac

A 1941 graduate of Bismarck high school, he entered by the U.S. army engineers at Fraine Barracks. He also attended Bismarck Junior college and the Capitol Commercial college here.

Following the expiration of his leave the latter part of this month he will report to Miami Beach, Fla. where he will be reassigned.

Bismarck (North Dakota) Tribune Article dated October 5th, 1944

Lucky Lady

A reporter with the Bismarck Tribune interviewed my father about his experiences piloting a Heavy Bomber while he was on leave. The story headline read: "Lili of the Lamplight Was My Lucky Lady, Pilot Says." Ernest is quoted in article saying:

I was not so scared the first time we ran into flak, but that was because I didn't know what flak could really do. Our fourth mission was a rough one to Berlin. Our ship was seriously damaged, shot up pretty good. Although we managed to stay in formation, part of the rudder was torn off; one wing had a couple dozen flak and bullet holes in it. The ship was in bad shape. I learned then what flak could do. It was on our seventh mission when we seriously came contact with enemy fighters, Luftwaffe Messerschmitt 109s. Things happened so fast most of the time that we didn't have much chance to analyze our feelings, we just reacted, although most of us knew what it's like to be good and scared.

The Invasion of Europe - June 6th, 1944

By the time June of 1944 rolled around, Ernest had already survived two missions over one of the more daunting targets, Berlin. High intensity flak and Luftwaffe attacks met the 334th Squadron on both missions. His memories of these missions stayed with him for years. Ernest's fellow crews were attacked mercilessly, flak mushroomed everywhere and he watched helplessly as ships went down 'in smoke and flame.' It was these memories that wore on him, as he counted down his mission total. In the end, he would make it through all of his combat assignments miraculously well.

He spoke often about the Air Corps support in the D-Day Invasion when hundreds of thousands of Allied

forces invaded 'Hitler's Europe' en-masse on June 6th, 1944. Hours before the invasion was to get underway,

my father and crew flying the 'Lili of the Lamplight' would take off from Horham and begin their 21st mission. It was a No-Ball mission over the French coast south of Calais, specifically targeting V-1 and V-2 sites hidden in forest areas outside of Boulogne.

The 'Lili of the Lamplight' and crew would carry out two such missions, the second on June 7th, both supporting the Invasion, bombing German fortifications inland and along the French coast. Ernest's recollection of that day was not so much recalling the bombing by his squadron, but the incredible number of ships packing the English Channel. It was a panoramic vision of thousands of ships in support of the invasion forces. Ernest's view from the cockpit on the way back to England after bomb's away of the spectacle was unique, a bird's eye view of a historic event unfolding thousands of feet below the "Lili of the Lamplight.' As he told me, "Ships dotted the Channel as far as you could see."

Ernest Anders wrote this letter home to his family, only hours after he flew his 21st mission, flying over Normandy and targeting a V-1 rocket installation near Calais, being part of the Allied Invasion.

June 6, 1944 - England

Dear Dad, Mom & Dinny,

Today was the big day. The Invasion finally came off! Imagine there's a lot of forecasting and talk back home? We never got to go on that seven day London flak pass I mentioned in my last letter. Was supposed to leave today, but I guess we won't get it now.

However, I guess if we can make it any easier on the ground forces, it's worth giving up. The Air Corps been in the war for a couple years, so I guess it's the Army's turn now, but we hope for their sake that it's short. The ground forces are going to have it rough. Dad, you probably realize that from your days in the war. But we are glad someone besides the Air Corps is getting into this deal! I hope the day soon comes that we can land at the airports near the cities that we've been bombing.

I'm listening to Fred Waring and his Pennsylvanians. You remember I used to listen to them 'back home? The mail situation has been very poor lately. No one is getting much mail. That's the way it goes! Give the folks my regards. How are they? Tell Grandma that she's going to have to quit getting drunk every Saturday night! Ha! How's Grandpa?

It was five months this coming ninth of June that I left for overseas, so will be glad to see N.Y.C. again. I now have 21 missions. Not bad! I imagine the papers are full of the Invasion? I got a pretty good view of it. Love, Ernie

On the evening of June 9, 1944, just as Operation Neptune was underway, Ernest wrote a letter home that included these passages. His poetic writing, a contrast to the rest of the letter, gave his take on the news hitting stateside of the Invasion.

For the Kings of Hearts & Coronets and jolly old England, the boys of June 6th, 1944 live on in perpetual memory. In the early morning hours, on the far west side of the eastern shore of mainland Europe, the gallant men of that early daylight assault have already caught their hell. They wade onto the beaches of dense fields of ferocious German fire, hiding in the sand, behind beams of steel, sculptures of memory, men running, slipping and dropping like flies in the French waves on the shores of Normandy. Clusters of animated figures pushing inland, a slaughter of their times, but so many still standing, striving, hauling their gear, desperate for cover and pointing towards the eventual way to Germany.

By now things have calmed, trapped along the sea wall, making it up to the concrete bunkers, burning them out one at a time....twenty at a time, a brutal game being played for real. Home seems so far away as they struggle into the fire. Amazing feats of heroics and sad endings of small mistakes, tripping over reality, being at the wrong place in the instant of a blinking eye. For the ones that never left the beach, the sea wall and the rocky cliffs in the Majesty of their gifts and regrets, we remember their courage. To their awaiting families at home and to the men ever vigilant struggling forward, far below the missions passing over heavens gate, we marvel. Gaze into the Heavenly Skies, kiss them goodbye and pass the Ammunition.



Berlin Mission Notes - May 24, 1944 - 25,000 feet

Ernest's 22nd mission on June 2nd was over Nantes, France flying the 'Lili of the Lamplight' (44-6085); his 23rd was over Hanover (Misburg), Germany on June 18th flying the 'Lili of the Lamplight'; his 24th mission on the June 20th targeted Fallerslagben, Germany, was aboard the 'Lili of the Lamplight'; his 25th mission on June 22nd was a No Ball target (V-1 and V-2 rocket installations) was aboard the 'Lili of the Lamplight'; his 26th mission on June 25th was another No Ball target near Salesman, France, flying the 'Lili of the Lamplight'; his 27th mission was two weeks later on July 7th over Kolleda (Merseburg), Germany, aboard the 'Lili of the Lamplight'; Ernest's 28th mission was over St. Lo, France on July 24th abroad the 'Lili of the Lamplight'; his 29th mission on July 28th targeted Merseburg, Germany and aboard the 'Lili of the Lamplight.' Ernest's 30th mission was on August 3rd a day before his 22nd birthday and was over Troyes, France and flying 'The Doodle Bug' (42-107047). Ernest had flown 10 different B-17s so far into combat over a four month period, but the ship he and his crew loved over all, the "Lili of the Lamplight' had finally become 'their' permanent ship.

Shuttle Missions England * France * Ukraine (Poltava Airfield) * Italy (Foggia Airfield)

My father's longest assignment began on August 5th, 1944, a day after his 22nd birthday, when the 'Lili of the Lamplight,' flying with the 334th Squadron took off from Horham and participated in a series of four shuttle-bombing missions which spanned the width of the European continent. Ernest would complete his 31st 32nd 33rd and 34th missions in a little over a week. The August shuttle run was an element of 'Operation Frantic,' a massive enterprise the 8th Air Force command had planned.

In 1943 at the conference in Tehran, President Roosevelt put forward to Stalin the concept for the use of Russian bases by American bombers and fighters. Begrudgingly Stalin agreed to proceed with the plan. Operation Frantic's main intention was to establish multiple bomber groups in Russia. The proposal emphasized bombardment operations and reconnaissance. This would enable Allied bombers to strike missions deep into occupied Nazi territory. Following the missions they would land at these Allied air bases,

re-fuel and load up with armaments and attack new targets. Upon completion of the Eastern European bombing missions, the squadrons would return one last time to the Soviet base, re-fuel and rearm. On the way back to their home airfields in England or Italy, the squadrons would complete one last mission.

From June through August of 1944 twenty-four targets were attacked, many decimated by the Squadron. Russian reluctance to a more aggressive targeting operations began to prevent further effective use of the bases. In general, the American airmen were made to feel adequately welcome by the Soviet personnel stationed on the bases. July and August saw the peak use, and by October the bases began to be phased out. The American ships encountered severe difficulties in the Russian's lack of security at the bases. Often they seemed not to even care, or possibly held resentment against the bomber crews or for that matter the entire 8th Air Force. They refused to introduce radar-guided artillery and night fighter patrols, and often the American bombers were fired upon by Soviet forces.

The operations were again reduced after a fatal German air attack, where the 8th lost dozens of unprotected B-17s left out in the open on one of the Russian bases. Even though crewmen of the 8th warned the Russians of a possible mishap, all was ignored by the Russian commanders.

The final straw was the inability of the American commanders to receive permission to use the bases for support of the Warsaw Uprising that began on August 1, 1944. This action by the Russians soured relations between the two countries. Though the use of the bases were limited, the Americans remained until they were evacuated when the war in Europe was over. Ernest related that this experience, the incredible amount of flying, the countries he visited and the times with his crew, as a premier time of his Air Corps service. He recalled the Russian women with incredible fondness.

During that ten-day shuttle run, Ernest and the crew encountered multiple Me-109 fighter attacks and occasional barrages of deadly flak fire. After flying three consecutive missions out of Poltava Airfield in the Ukraine over three days (August 6th, 7th and 8th) the Squadron bombed aircraft factories and oil refineries near Rahmel and Trzebien in Poland, and Bazau in Romania. In-between and after each mission, the squadron landed at Poltava, where they refueled and rearmed. My father enjoyed his days in Russia, found the ground crews friendly and talkative. He took photographs of the Russians in and around the base.

Ernest carried a unique identification card on the shuttle flights over the Ukraine, which was territory occupied by Russian troops. On one side, my father's name, rank and serial number appears, and on the other side Russian translations for basic words and phrases. This card was provided to the airmen, in case they got into trouble, and needed to "eat, drink or hide," as it states on the card. He kept this ID for the rest of his life.



Lt. Erickson at Foggia Airfield in Italy in August of 1944

Foggia, Naples and Salerno, Italy

After their time in Russia, the 334th joined in formation for a flight to Italy, landing at the 15th Air Force

base, formerly controlled by the Germans at Tortorella Airfield, referred to as Foggia Satellite No. 2. The crews were given some time to relax and Ernest spent a few days in and around Foggia where he and a few members of the crew commandeered a jeep. They drove straight across Italy passing by the remnants of the withdrawn German Army. Each crew member was armed, as a precaution, although everywhere they stopped, the Americans were greeted by friendly Italian villagers. The boys visited the towns of Benevento and Avellino, ending that day's journey at the Mediterranean city of Salerno. Ernest photographed the allied ships which were moored in the harbor and scattered throughout the waterways. One spectacular photograph I look at often was of Mount Vesuvius with a hazy screen of fog hanging in the background, birds perched on wires and the Salerno harbor full of ships in the foreground.

The following day they headed up the coast of Italy to the city of Naples. On that sunny morning, as Ernest stood at the water's edge staring wistfully at the Isle of Capri in the distance, he knew someday he would return when he truly could relax, and take a boat out to the small island. Thirty years later, accompanied by my mother Bernice Lane, and me, his son, we fulfilled that vision.

On their last day on the Mediterranean they drove back through Caserta and Lucera and then on to Tortorella. In Foggia, a crew member captured what I have always thought were classic photos of my father standing in front of various abandoned Luftwaffe bombers. The photos were taken not long after the Allies had taken over the airfield. Equipment and airplanes were strewn across the countryside of Italy, left by the retreating German Army. One can view these photographs and imagine the chaotic withdrawal of the once highly disciplined and invincible German military. The proof of their total collapse was in the offing; these images can only remind us of their war machines, now reduced to junk yard debris.

On August 12th Ernest and crew left Italy and targeted the Francazal Airfield, completing their 34th mission over Toulouse, France. It was then time to head home and the 334th Squadron pointed their way to England.

At Horham, my father awaited his 35th and final mission. In the mean time, the crews were given leave and Ernest and the Lili's Navigator, Lt. Paul Hintermeier took off for London. Ernest was to wait for over two weeks before his next mission would be scheduled. The day Ernest arrived back from leave, the 'Lili of the Lamplight' took off for a mission over Politz, Germany with another crew aboard. The cards laid out differently for Ernest to complete his final mission aboard the Lili.

On August 13th an article was published in local newspapers throughout the States under the headline "Forts Hit France From Italy On Last Leg Back From Soviets" reported on what the 'Lili of the Lamplight' and the other ships of the 334th Squadron had accomplished. The official Air Force account reads: "Heavy

bombers of the 8th Air Force bombed German factories in Poland on their way to Russia. Two days later the Squadrons landed in Italy at a 15th Air Force base after pounding two enemy airdromes in the Ploesti area of Romania on the second leg of their triangle-shuttle flight. All aircraft landed in Russia without loss after attacking Nazi factories in Rahmel, 10miles northwest of the Polish port of Gdynia. Enemy aircraft were encountered, and flak was reported heavy at many points."

Ernest wrote this letter on his 22nd birthday to his family. He was a long way from home, but his letter writing kept him close top his family and friends back home:

August 4th, 1944 England

Dear Folks & Dinny,

Being that it is my birthday, I've decided to write again. I went on my 30th mission yesterday. 35 is now the limit, but there's a possibility I may get by with two or three less. The sun is out real nice today. I was out laying in the sun for an hour. But the sun isn't out enough over here to get a tan or hardly even sun burned.

I was just thinking last night that it was over six months since I've had any milk. We've been told not to drink the English milk. There's supposed to be a high T.B. content.

It's been mentioned that after I've completed my missions that I will take a job as an engineering officer for the squadron. I'll take planes up with new engines and "slow time" them. Would check all the instruments and such. I will learn a lot! I have decided to take it, yet it means I will stay here after my tour of duty is completed.

I will receive the D.F.C (Distinguished Flying Cross) sometime within the next ten days. They give them for completing 30 missions. I figure all the men that receive them, deserve them.

However, the missions the last weeks have been quite a bit easier than they were the first three months.

The mail today is late so I won't know if I got any letters until after I mail this letter. I got two letters from you yesterday. Dad wrote a half of one of them.

I'm getting some designs painted on my leather jacket, so when I get home you can see what it is.

The name of our plane is 'Lili of the Lamplight.' The name isn't painted on the ship yet, but we'll have it put on and want to take some pictures of the crew in front of it. That'll be sharp.

Right now, Rich, a co-pilot on another crew is laying on my sack. We're going to go over and eat pretty soon. Will stop and mail this on the way over. Also look for some mail I sent recently. Added a nice group of photographs.

Signing off for now. Love, Ernie



Distinguished Flying Cross

In an August of 1944 ceremony at Horham Airfield, Lt. Ernest Anders Erickson was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross for 'extraordinary achievements' in more than twenty five bombing assaults on vital Nazi targets in Europe. He was also credited with support of advances by the ground troops in France, my father stood stoic as Colonel Karl Truesdell Jr. presented him with the DFC. Ernest was also awarded Three Bronze Stars, The European Africa Middle-East Medal, the Air Medal and four Oak Leaf Clusters.

In the realm of time and memory, the image of my father receiving the DFC commands significance in my life, and I often reflect on his Air Corps stories. I see my father, yet I see a hero, and at the same instance, I recall his words, "I was not a hero, just doing my job the best I could." Contemplating what he may have been thinking at the moment, recalling his seriousness, I have begun to easily accept that this twenty one year old flyboy, was indeed a hero. Ernest Anders held the moment, dignified and solemn. His intense silent emotion exudes what he had been through and had accomplished. To me that is the key to this photograph. His eyes say it all.

On August 10th, Ernest wrote a letter home. He mentions his shuttle missions that took the 334th Squadron to Russia and his present location in Foggia, Italy:

Dear Dad, Mom & Dinny

August 10th, 1944 Somewhere in Italy

Just wanted to drop you a line so you know where I was, and how I'm getting along. I didn't have time while I was in Russia to wrote a letter to you. And there was no way I could have mailed one from there, doubtful the Russians would have ever mailed it anyway. We have a couple of days off here in Italy though. We all went swimming in the Adriatic Sea yesterday. That was something! There weren't any clouds and the water was warm. It sure was a treat! Never thought I would be swimming in the Adriatic.

The north sea is too cold to swim in. We plan on going again this afternoon, it's clouded up so it may be too chilly, but we plan to go. The weather is always pretty warm, so clouds or not it probably won't be too cold, especially since it is an opportunity we do not have back in England.

I'll write another letter as soon as I get back to England. That letter may get to you before this does, at any note let me know which arrives first.

I've been taking a lot of pictures, hope they come out good. Will send you once I have them developed near Horham.

Say hello to everyone. Love, Ernie

On August 24th, two days before his 35th and final mission, my father wrote this letter to his family. He was laying it out pretty plainly and preparing his Mother Clara for a decision she was in no way looking forward to hearing. My father was considering a lot of things at this point in his life and surprisingly even after a grueling period of combat missions over Europe, he was planning to put in a transfer to fly B-29s. In that thought, he would likely be finding himself in the Pacific and facing a completely different environment and combat assignment. The thought disturbed Clara for the rest of the war.

August 24th, 1944 England

Dear Folks & Dinny,

Did you get that letter that I sent from Italy yet? Still haven't got that last mission #35 done yet. Sure would like to get it in so I could be through. We just got back from a leave in London, was nice to be there, but we are back now waiting. Something could come up tomorrow I always consider.

It's raining here again. However it was pretty nice this morning and early part of the afternoon. Your letters are coming in real good. Seems like I get one every day, which I like. Sometimes I think I get two at a time.

We're the oldest crew on the field now. So many new faces, it seems like I'm at a new field. Sure will be glad to leave. All my buddies from other crews are gone, either sent home, lost on a mission or prisoners. We are the lucky crew so far.

I've been reading about the Super Fortress (B-29) and talking to some guys that have flown her. I plan in putting in a transfer, and may get into one of those when I am done here. Will write again in a couple days.

Love,

Ernie



The Last Flight of the 'Lili of the Lamplight' (44-6085) August 25th, 1944

The 'Lili of the Lamplight' was a workhorse that brought Ernest and the crew to the target and back to Horham many times. When I was younger I was under the impression that the Lili was the only plane my dad flew during the war. As time went by and my curiosity lingered, I found out from my dad that he indeed had piloted twelve B-17s.

Their final mission aboard the Lili, their 34th, was completed on August 12th, 1944. He naturally assumed he would complete his tour of duty aboard that same ship. His stories bare that out, and when he was interviewed later in 1944, this particular luck was quickly mentioned in an article in his hometown newspaper, the Bismarck Tribune. The headline read, 'Lili of the Lamplight was Lucky Lady' Pilot Says. Even though by then the Lili was gone, having been shot down over Germany just over a month previous. It was always his desire to keep her alive in memory and spirit, flying high for all time.

Berlin Mission Number Two

My father's mission notes for his 2nd Berlin raid on May 24th, 1944 were easily one of the most poignant of any of his journal writings. As on most missions, his words mention familiar terms describing a formation's entrance into the dreaded dense flak field of artillery fire and recollection of the mission's activities. This passage reads both excitingly and deadly.

Lost one of our wing men, due to flak, other wing man had three wounded aboard. Received flak hit through No. 1 engine cowling. Just missed oil line. Also a couple hits on left wing. Flak was intense & accurate over target. Many fighters were seen, saw many ships go down in smoke & flame. Was in flak extraordinarily long time. Saw B-17 go into approximately 20 degree turn-spin before it entered clouds. Saw B-17 in deep spiral, enemy fighter was following it down. Saw four men bail out of B-17 to our left, this ship then flew behind us & followed us to Horham.

The 'Lili of the Lamplight' had flown a total of twenty-five successful missions with the 334th Squadron over German occupied Europe. It had been part of the D-Day Invasion missions, with bombings on four targets between June 4th and the 7th over Boulogne and Normandy. The ship had taken part in the second shuttle missions in early August of 1944, with raids crisscrossing the span of Europe. The 334th had made two landings at Poltava Airfield in the Ukraine and one at the 15th Air Force airfield in Foggia, Italy.

In the span of the lifetime of a B-17, the Lili personified grit and craftsmanship, she wore her numbers (44-6085) proudly, bombing dozens of targets over multiple countries in Europe. She had seen action over Munich, Berlin, Merseburg and Normandy. The 'Lucky Lady' had indeed been lucky for the ten man crew. With plenty of battle damage over the months, the Lili had proven a reliable ship and had consistently brought my father and the crew back home to fly yet another day.

As the Lili of the Lamplight stared down it's 26th mission, the next crew that took her out, was not as fortunate as my father's time aboard. The timing, and the luck of my father's 35 missions brought him home as he mentioned, without a scratch. On August 25th, 1944, thirteen days after my father and crew's 34th mission aboard the 'Lili,' another crew took her on what would be her final and most deadly mission.

Lt. Albert Bishop Powell Jr. piloting the Lili of the Lamplight took off from Horham Airfield in England, and headed deep into Europe for a bombing mission over Central Pomerania. The Lili was flying in formation alongside other heavy bombers of the 334th Squadron, towards their ultimate target, the Hydriewerke synthetic petrol factory near Politzan der Oder, a town in a district of today's Poland. Also targeted for the various squadrons were sites near Rechlin/Larz, Germany, where the Germans were developing the Luftwaffe's ME-262 jet.

The Messerschmidt Me-262 was nicknamed 'Schwalbe,' or 'Swallow' in English, it was the fighter version,

the 'Sturmvogel' or 'Storm Bird,' and was a powerful fighter-bomber model. The Me-262 was the first operational jet-powered fighter. Design work started in the mid-late 1930s, but engine problems and Hitler's

interest in bomber production kept the aircraft from operational use with the Luftwaffe until mid-1944. A very fortunate decision for the 8th Air Force as it turned out.

My father had spotted a Me-262 once on a mission in the late Summer of 1944. It had made one pass through his squadron, splashing by like a comet he thought. A swarm of P-51 Mustangs attempted to follow. It was gone as fast as it had arrived.

Chuck Yeager is quoted as saying: The first time I saw a jet (Me-262), I shot it down.

The Me-262 was faster, and more heavily-armed than any British or American fighter. If in fact it had been fully operational in 1943, and used in great numbers, the outcome of the air war might have been entirely different. The Me-262 was the most advanced aviation design in use during the war. It was used in a variety of roles; as an attack fighter, a light bomber, reconnaissance and an experimental night fighter bomber. The Me-262 was a difficult plane to fly, many experienced Luftwaffe fighter pilots lost their lives in this fast swift and often times out of control ship. It was ahead of it's time and yet never was a serious factor in the fading German Air Force's arsenal. By late 1944 the Luftwaffe was running out of experienced pilots. The new recruits were being pushed beyond their experience and the experienced pilots were being pushed beyond their endurability. The 8th Air Force was making sure of that.

The 334th approached their target as 'flak' bursts in and around the formation. Soon enough, Lt. Powell and his crew found themselves in a highly concentrated 'flak' field. Ships were taking hits, one ship dropped out of formation and another was seen in a sharp downward spiral. Things aboard the Lili were beginning to go badly, when it withstood multiple bursts of artillery fire. Two engines began to sputter and smoke was trailing, as the ship's speed and altitude were deteriorating. 'The Lili of the Lamplight' fell out of formation. The pilots attempted to evade the flak bursts in a desperate manner as they fought for control of the ship. As the Lili changed direction and was attempting a turn, it took a direct hit to the No. 3 engine's fuel tank. A massive explosion sheered off a large part of the wing and the controls now had become useless. The Lili began into a free-fall.

The pilots and crew had been hopelessly fighting to correct catastrophic problems throughout the ship. In those final moments, Lt. Powell called out for the men to bail out. Some had already jumped and the rest quickly followed. The ship continued spiraling out of control, beginning a rapid descent. The Lili was splitting apart and in it's last seconds violently hurtled into the woods near the villages of Schwankenheim, Wolfshorst and Schwabacht, eight miles outside of Szczecin, Poland, some seventy-five miles from where the ship first came under-fire.

Three crew members that included a 95th Bomb Group Aerial Photographer were killed. Over the next three days, the other seven crewmen were captured by the Germans, spending the duration of the war in a POW camp.

The first-hand reports of the crew's interrogation by the Luftwaffe give a vivid account of what happened onboard during those last minutes of the mission. Four of the survivors, including pilot Albert Bishop Powell Jr., the Engineer Staff Sgt. Eldred W. Steffens, Waist Gunner Staff Sgt. Henry W. Schneider and Radio Operator Staff Sgt. Peppe J. Delio gave unnerving testimony describing this last mission of the 'Lili of the Lamplight.' Their words are direct and purely surreal.

Top Turret Gunner/Engineer Staff Sgt. Eldred W. Steffens wrote:

The plane broke into at least three parts: The nose, the pilot's compartment and the rest of the plane. The nose was falling in free spin, the bombardier and another crew member were still in the fuselage area. Both at the same time spotted an opening and headed out to that point to bail out. As they approached the opening an explosion threw them clear of the ship. Their chutes opened. The pilot, co-pilot and navigator were in the pilot's compartment. After the plane broke off at bomb bay doors, all three bailed out at the vast opening that appeared behind the pilot's compartment. The side gunner was near bomb bay at the time the plane split in thirds and he bailed out from there. His chute opened. The tail gunner was blown out of the plane unconscious and came to in mid-air, pulled his rip cord and landed safely by chute. He told me this when we met later at Lucky Strike POW camp in France.

Radio Operator Staff Sgt. Peppe 'Joseph' Delio stated:

The airplane lost a wing and dropped several thousand feet and then disintegrated. Those of

us still living were thrown out. The ball turret gunner was either killed by flak, or could not get out of ball turret. I never saw him again.

Waist Gunner Staff Sgt. Henry W. Schneider recalled:

The ship suffered a direct hit below No. 3 engine. Being in the position of the ball turret gunner made it difficult for him to abandon ship as the direct hit on No. 3 hit the main fuel tank and that exploded, taking the wing off almost immediately. I do not think he ever made it out. After a drop of several thousand feet the ship began to disintegrate.

Pilot Albert Bishop Powell Jr. gave this chilling final report:

When the ship was hit we managed to hold it in a slow turn to the right losing altitude at approximately 700 to 1000 feet per minute. We could not gain control of the ship. At this point I called for the crew to bail out. For thirty-eight seconds, I got no answer from any of the crew. Finally, one of the gunners responded, asking, "Did you say to bail out, sir?" I responded, "Get out now! We are trying to hold steady, but I don't think we can. Get out!"

That was the end of the conversation.

Lt. Powell, Co-Pilot Lt. Connor and the Navigator Lt. Overdorff all bailed out soon after this conversation. And in the culmination of that frightful experience, the end of my father's 'Lucky Lady' came to be. He always talked as if the ship were still flying and his memories clear how the 'Lili of the Lamplight' took them to their targets and got them home safely. Intense moments abroad the Lili for the Powell crew, but my father's thoughts were on how he was able to successfully complete his 35 missions and live to tell about them.



The final crew of the Lili of the Lamplight (44-6085) August 25th, 1944

Pilot - 2nd Lt. Albert B. Powell Jr. - Daytona Beach, Florida - POW
Pilot - 2nd Lt. William C. Connor - Los Angeles, California - POW
Navigator - 2nd Lt. Donald W. Overdorff - York, Pennsylvania - POW
Bombardier - 2nd Lt. Phillip F. Whalen - Canton, Ohio - POW
Top Turret Gunner/Engineer - Staff Sgt. Eldred W. Steffens - Greeley, Colorado - POW
Radio Operator - Staff - Sgt. Peppe 'Joseph' Delio - Ashland, Kentucky - POW
Waist Gunner - Staff Sgt. Henry W. Schneider - Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania - POW
Ball Turett Gunner - Staff Sgt. Orlin E. Covel - Canadaigua, New York - KIA
Tail Gunner - Staff Sgt. Melvin F. Whilhelm - Toledo, Ohio - KIA
95th Aerial Photographer - Sgt. Berton E. Briley - Wilson, Oklahoma - KIA

Back To France One Last Time * The Final Mission

With the 'Lili of the Lamplight' being lost on August 25th with another crew aboard, Ernest's thirty-fifth and final combat mission would be accomplished flying another B-17. On August 26th he and his crew boarded 'Stand By / Goin' My Way' (42-107204). The ship having been warmed up and ready, they taxied into position and joined in with the rest of the 334th Squadron. Ernest at this point acknowledged that this mission would be his last in combat in the European Theater. They headed to France one last time.

On this mission, 'Stand By / Goin' My Way' accompanied by 358 B-17s were dispatched to attack gun batteries in the Brest, France area. Targets were Brest/Pte de St Mathieu and the coastal batteries at Kerandieu, Cornovailles, Brest/Ile Longue, Brest/Kerviniov and Brest/Ponscorf. Targets of opportunity were Brest/Pte des Espagnoles II and III. Four B-17s were damaged and three were damaged beyond repair. Eighteen airmen were killed in action. Of the forty-nine P-51s involved as escort/cover fighters, one was lost.

My father's last mission turned out to be, as many of the air men enjoyed calling, 'a milk run.' By now the Luftwaffe fighters were often absent or stayed on the periphery, The Heavy Bombers were regularly accompanied by their own fighter cover, P-51 Mustangs, P-47 Thunderbolts and P-38 Lightnings patrolled the skies watching over the Bomber crews.

When they returned to Horham early in the afternoon, the day marked the end of Ernest's days flying dangerous raids over mainland Europe. When he wrapped up his final combat mission in August, Ernest had just celebrated his twenty-second birthday.

On August 26th Ernest wrote his first letter to his family since finishing his last combat mission:

August 26th, 1944

England

Dear Dad, Mom & Dinny,

I did it, I flew my 35th and last mission today.

I've completed this tour of duty, will not have to fly combat out of England again. It was a fairly easy mission. Not too long, but we did run into some action. I will not miss flak for sure. Some bad weather near and over the target. Bombs Away and we headed home.

I don't know anything yet about going back to the states or what will come of my transfer request.

Pay day in a few days. Will wait until then, and then will to take a couple days off. I think I'll take a dash down to Londola.

I'll say goodbye for now.

Will write again in a couple days.

Love, Ernie



Lt. Ernest Anders Erickson (center and marked with red dot) September 7th, 1944 at Horham Airfield in England

95th Bomb Group's 200th Mission

In his spare time, Ernest continued to write letters to family and friends, sending photos, and writing about life in England and his combat flying. He tried to bring comfort to his Mother Clara and at the same time brought worry. His transfer request lingered in her mind. Clara kept all the letters he sent while he was overseas for the rest of her life. In the end, Ernest Anders piloted twelve B-17s during his tour of duty in England and accomplished thirty five missions between March 27th, though August 26th, 1944.

Ernest posed for a photograph, along with the entire 95th Bomb Group personnel on September 7th, 1944 at Horham Airfield. You can see how creative the 95th's airmen and ground crew were when they used bombs to write '200' on the airfield, celebrating the completion of their 200th mission on August 27th, a raid over Husum, Germany.

On the days of September 9th and 10th, the men and women of the 95th celebrated the completion of their 200th bombing mission. Glen Miller and His Moonlight Serenade Orchestra, was the obvious highlight of the evening's party. My father often talked of seeing Major Glen Miller and enjoying it so much. Sadly on

December 15th, 1944, Miller's flight from England to Paris, that departed from the Royal Air Force airfield in Twinwood Farm in Clapham disappeared while flying over the English Channel. Rumors flew that the German's had purposely targeted the plane, after uncovering information that the Prime Minister, Winston Churchill was aboard. In the end, just another tragedy of enormous magnitude, and when my father heard the news the memory of that evening dancing to Glen Miller's Orchestra just three months before was fixed into his consciousness forever.

By the time of this photo, Ernest had completed 300 combat hours in the air, Ernest was finished with combat flying. He remained at Horham for another six weeks happy to stay in country piloting repaired B-17s and new ships coming in from the states, ensuring their readiness for combat.

Ernest awaited where he would be sent for his next assignment, his transfer request going through Air Force channels and what that decision would be was unknown. In early October, with most of his crew already gone home, Lt. Ernest Anders Erickson boarded a transport for Scotland and then another that would take him to New York City. From there he made it back to Bismarck by train for the reunion his mother, Clara had looked forward to since the last time she saw her son, in October of 1943. It was a sweet reunion and Ernest took time to hunt and fish with his dad, Frank, and spend time with his now, four year old sister, Dian.

He remained in Bismarck for two weeks awaiting to be called up for his next assignment. A telegram came in and soon enough Ernest was off to a base near Miami, Florida. In January his final assignment would take him through till the Japanese surrender in August 1945. He headed to Yuma, Arizona and served as a flight instructor for pilots being sent to the European Theater and the Pacific. His request to fly the B-29 was put on hold. He later confessed, "I think I was fortunate that transfer never happened, maybe after the thirty-five missions, I'd had enough combat. My fortunes had been stretched pretty thin up to that point on those last missions in England."

The Twelve B-17s

His 35 Mission details can be read here at:

http://markerickson.com/Family_History/Ernest_Erickson/Lt.%20Ernest%20Anders%20Erickson-95thBG-334th %20Sq.pdf











Lili of the Lamplight (44-6085), Taint A Bird II (42-30342), Fireball Red (42-31876), Able Mable (231920), Mirandy (42-31992), Gen'ril Oop & Lili Brat (42-31993), To Hell Or Glory (42-38123), Ten Aces (42-38178), Smilin' Sandy Sanchez (42-97290), Palsano (42-102450), The Doodle Bug / What's Cookin? (42-107047), and his final and 35th mission flying Stand By / Goin' My Way (42-107204).

Lt. Erickson 1942 - 1944 - From Kelly Field, Texas to Horham Airfield in England

As The Seasons Change

I have noticed in the various photographs of my father, taken from mid 1942 through to the end of 1944, the striking physical changes that occurred in such a short time. We can begin during his Cadet period in the Air Corps; from his flight training at Kelly Field, to graduation from Advanced Flight School in Blackland, then receiving his wings in October 1943, then off to England, and treacherous missions of May of 1944, and

into the Summer and receiving the Distinguished Flying Cross. The final changes can be seen in the images after the completion of his combat flying in the Fall of 1944.

He had transformed from a teenager to a mature young man in span of a little over two years. The wear and tare, intense life experiences, the flak, the Luftwaffe, the waiting, the weather, formation flying, took hold. These boys of the 8th Air Force, in a short time, dealt with more stressful situations than most deal with in a lifetime. As he said, "I came home with out a scratch, but took a long time to deal with the rest of it all." My father loved his time in the Air Corps. It was difficult at first for him to accept his combat flying days were over. He soon relaxed in his new status, and enjoyed his days as a flight instructor in Yuma.

My father wrote his last letter from Europe on September 21st 1944 from the Royal Air Force Airfield in Reykjavik, Iceland. He was on the way home and wrote:

Royal Air Force Airfield in Reykjavik, Iceland October 2nd, 1944

Dear Folks & Dinny,

Just a line or two to let you know that I'm okay. I left Horham. I shipped my trunk to you, you'll find some interesting things inside. The 45 is for you dad, and the rest is marked.

I imagine that I'll be home in ten days or so. It's pretty rocky and barren up here. It'll probably get quite cold late tonight, as it is quite chilly already. Should be in New York City soon and then will stay there for a few days. Want to catch up with a couple buddies that still might be there. Then the train home. Look forward to seeing you all. Say hello to Dian and the folks.

Lots of love,

Ernie

Lt. Ernest Anders Erickson was finally on his way home. His days of combat flying were over. Visiting his family in Bismarck was his first priority and then off to his final assignment, as a flight instructor in the Southwest. His transfer request to fly B-29's in the Pacific, did not come through. Germany's unconditional surrender was signed in Reims, France on May 7th, 1945. This was followed by Japan surrendering on August 15th and formally signed surrender documents on the deck of the battleship USS Missouri on September 2nd, 1945, in Tokyo Bay.

Coincidentally, my cousin Benet Ripin, who is the son of my Grandmother Blanche Rose (Nathan) Hesslein's sister Sadie was serving aboard the battleship USS Jeffers in the Pacific in 1945. One of the most incredible experiences for Benet, while serving in the Navy, was being aboard the Jeffers when it was the 2nd ship to sail into Tokyo Bay on August 29th with occupation forces. Four days later, Benet was present for the Japanese surrender ceremonies aboard the USS Missouri on September 2nd. Soon after, the Jeffers joined a mine-sweeping group for operations around Japan. Hazardous weeks followed in the Tsushima Strait (Eastern Channel), where the Jeffers swept 100s of mines from the area. The Tsushima Strait lies between the Mainland and Japan, connecting the Sea of Japan (East Sea), the Yellow Sea (West Sea), and the East China Sea. Benet was discharged from the Navy on January 18th, 1946.

As he was heading home in the late Summer of 1945, Ernest began to think of what was next, his future was on his mind. What is next after one serves their country and witnesses the horrors of war? Can all that be forgotten at the drop of a hat? Can one move forward when so much clings to you? The loss of friends and comrades, and contemplating of what you have done to others in the line of duty can be daunting. My father, always the practical man, was guided by flight and he would find his way inevitably with little trouble.

The shortened life of his Uncle Ernest Julius ended suddenly by a sniper's bullet in the Argonne. This act ironically enabled a multitude of events to occur, and in that, reshaped the future of the Erickson family history. Similar to Frank and Uncle Ernest Julius, for my father too, the West would be calling.

95th Bombardment Group Final Statistics

The 95th flew a total of 321 Combat Missions between May 13th, 1943 through April 20th, 1945 and dropped 19,769 tons of bombs and 456.5 tons of food and completed 8,625 sorties (individual B-17 mission flights). The 95th lost 156 B17s in combat and 36 in other operations: 1,362 planes were battle damaged and 61 forced to land on the continent.

The 95th claimed 425 enemy aircraft destroyed, 117 probable, 231 damaged and lost 572 men Killed in Action. The 95th lost 825 men as POWs, 61 internees, 61 evaders, 192 wounded in action and 63 killed in noncombat accidents.

Prologue - Home to Dakota in 1945 and the Rest of the Story



Frank Severin, Dian Amelia & Dian's brother Ernest Erickson in Bismarck in 1945

The Future Starts Now

At war's end, in the late Summer of 1945, Ernest headed home to Bismarck, to the enormous relief of his mother Clara, who had never been comfortable with my father's decision to fly bombers. He spent time with the family, getting acquainted with his five year-old sister Dian, who was just a baby when he left for the Air Corps in 1942. He was happy to be home and he adjusted well to the quiet and familiar environment.

The following year, after winter had moved on from the Northern Great Plains, Ernest and a close friend, Roscoe Corell, who had served in the Pacific during the war, hit the road in a converted Plymouth stationwagon, they dubbed, 'The Dakota Sleeper.' They embarked on a trek across the country that I compare to a 'Jack Kerouac and Neil Cassidy On The Road' adventure. Traveling around the US, the two had time to reflect on their days in the service, and wind down a bit from the stresses of warfare.

After the two returned to Bismarck, following an adventurous journey, Ernest enrolled in the local college, preparing for his eventual enrollment in the University of Colorado. Ernest put in papers requesting benefits under, 'The Servicemen's Adjustment Act.' With a help from Uncle Sam, and the money he had saved during the war, Ernest began a course of studies at the University of Colorado in Boulder. He lived in boarding houses in Boulder and made occasional trips back to visit his family in Bismarck. My father graduated with degrees in aircraft design and engineering in 1949. Soon after graduation in 1950, Ernest moved to Minneapolis and began working at an elevator company in the design department.

California - Lockheed Aircraft

In 1951 Ernest met a job recruiter from Lockheed Aircraft at a project sight in St. Paul and they discussed job opportunities out west. After a couple phone calls and paperwork he was hired the following week. Ernest headed home to Bismarck before he made the drive out to Lockheed's facilities in Burbank in Los Angeles. The aeronautics industry was booming and during my father's forty five year career at Lockheed, he continued to pursue his love of flying, but now as a design engineer. His first assignment was working on the development of the F-104 Starfighter, a sleekly designed jet and it came to be a lifelong passion for my father. The F-104 personified to him his continuing dream of flight.



Bernice Lane (Hesslein) Erickson in Greenwich Village, New York City in the early 1940s

Hollywood High and Bernice Lane Hesslein

After a year at Lockheed, my father's personal life brightened considerably when he made the acquaintance of my mother, Bernice Lane Hesslein, a painter from Brooklyn, New York. Bernice had moved out west around the same time as my father. She took a job as a secretary for an advertising firm in Hollywood, and she had an apartment on Cherokee Avenue. The timing of their arrival in California was most fortunate for both of them. Simultaneously the two decided to take a Spanish language night class at Hollywood High School, the same school I would attend after we returned from living in Italy. My father was living in Burbank near Lockheed at this time and enjoyed driving over the hills to Hollywood to visit Bernice.

Within the year they were married, and settled into a house in Hollywood on Beachwood Drive. Bernice steered my father towards the arts, travel and one particular passion of hers, real estate. If I heard this once I heard it a couple dozen times from her, "Ever since my childhood visiting my grandparents house on Far Rockaway, Queens on the Atlantic, you can not go wrong owning property near the ocean." With that in mind over the years they invested in property along the Pacific Ocean, from Huntington, Seal and Sunset Beaches to Venice Beach all in California. I grew up with Pacific in view often and owe a lot to my parents for those experiences.



Ernest Anders Erickson (bottom row - left) at Lechfeld Airfield (west of Munich) with a German F-104 Starfighter (The Zell Project)

F-104 – The Zell Project - Munich, Germany and Torino, Italy * The Skunk Works SST – SR-17 Blackbird - L-1011 Tri Star – C-5A Galaxy

https://www.popularmechanics.com/military/aviation/a25349308/swedish-pilots-medals-sr-71-blackbird/ A-117 – The Stealth Fighter

For eight years in the late 1960s through the early to mid-1970s, my father was assigned to projects in Europe. Our family moved first to Munich, Germany and then to Torino, Italy where Ernest worked on several projects in collaboration with Fiat and the Italian, German and U.S. Air Forces. In Italy and Germany he was reunited with the Starfighter, working on the Zell Project (zero-length launch system). It entailed the use of a rocket attached to a jet fuselage to power lift-off from a stationary platform. In this case, the F-104 Starfighter was the jet in question for the Zell Project. This concept allowed the airplane to be launched from virtually any location, without a runway. The main goal was to have a successful launch from a flat-bed train car. With a military use and concept that would enable a train load full of armed fighters taking off in the middle of the jungle or in the mountains. It was a tough endeavor and was filled with many disappointments. My father considered the Starfighter the sleekest and most stylish aircraft ever designed.

Ernest was selected to work on special projects under the supervision of Kelly Johnson, chief engineer at the renowned Skunk Works' facility at Lockheed. Kelly Johnson hand-picked engineers to work in small teams tasked with pushing the limits of aeronautical design engineering, to develop the world's most advanced airplanes. Lockheed had received a contract from the CIA to build a spy-plane, and Kelly Johnson needed top designers and engineers to design the new airplane. Soon to be known as the U-2, this aircraft was built primarily for the purpose of flying over the Soviet Union and photographing sites of strategic interest.

Getting in on the ground floor, Ernest continued to work for Kelly Johnson for more than two decades, as a design team engineer. Many of the projects were top secret and still to this day I am unaware of what his participation could have been with certain projects. In addition to airplane design, Ernest also played a role in designs for the Mercury spacecraft, collaborating with engineers at McDonnell Aircraft. Before he retired in 1988 he spent time working with Northrop Aircraft. He spoke about the many flyers and aerospace individuals he met over the years, one acquaintance was the former Air Corps fighter pilot, Chuck Yeager. At the time they met, my father was working on the F-104 Starfighter and Yeager was a test pilot at Muroc Army

Air Field (now Edwards Air Force Base). As my father's aerospace career spanned the 1950s and into the early 1960s their paths crossed again during a NASA project.

Ernest's notable projects besides the Starfighter, included design, engineering and stress analysis work on the C-130 Hercules, SR-71 Blackbird, The Constellation, the C-141 Starlifter, the L-2000 'SST' Supersonic Transport. My father worked on the SST for several years and was quite disappointed when it never came to fruition. He worked the L-1011 Tri-Star project in the 1960s and 1970s and the immense military transport, the C-5A Galaxy.

My father made it a point to take an early flight on the French Concorde in 1977. He described his experience to my mother, Bernice, after he returned home. He explained the feeling of the sensation to travel twice the speed of sound, telling her enthusiastically, "I felt like an astronaut, you know I had wished to be one." My mother smiled, knowing his fondness for NASA and the space program. My father then added, "Well, that was the closest I'll ever get to being an astronaut."

Work on Ernest's final project at Lockheed included stress analysis drawings and designs for the F-117 Nighthawk stealth fighter, which utilizes the 'Have Blue' technology. It was the first operational aircraft designed for stealth application. The maiden flight of the F-117 was conducted in 1981 and it achieved initial operating capability status in October 1983. The airplane was finally revealed to the world in November 1988.

With the Stealth project complete, he thought back on all he had accomplished and the time had arrived, my father decided to retire from Lockheed and move his attention to other ambitions. He and my mother moved down to the Venice, where they had owned property since the mid 1960s.

The Blue Was Calling

In addition to his love for aviation, space travel, science fiction and NASA, Ernest had a passion for visiting historical and cultural sites. Ernest and my mother Bernice traveled extensively after he retired, Egypt, Hong Kong, Russia and South America were some of the locales they journeyed. A lot of the family traveling began while we were living in Europe during the 1960s and 1970s. The family traveled to areas in England and Italy he had seen during the war, and ended up visiting every European country, including East Germany and the former Czechoslovakia. I was ultimately fortunate to visit with my folks ancient historical sites in Lascaux, Troy, Pompeii, Stonehenge, Rome and North Africa; and toured throughout Greece and Turkey. A considerable amount of these have since been shut down to tourism, many worn by the millions that have walked these magnificent sites over the last multitude of decades.

Ernest Anders was a true craftsman and enjoyed making things. Like his father, Frank, they saved things in their shops that could be used in the future. Projects were always cooking in their labs. That Depression era attitude where everything is valuable and is not to be wasted, was not lost on them.

My dad's attitudes from his 1930s upbringing followed him right till the end. His belief that things were precious, nature was precious and it is up to us to do our part. Recycling came into vogue in our family way before that word existed in my vocabulary.

My grandfather Frank was a Jack-of-all-Trades. After he came home from France in 1919, Frank was constantly searching for good job opportunities. One significant period he was employed as a bridge builder

on the Liberty Memorial Bridge that straddles Bismarck and Mandan. That kept him busy for a few years. Frank worked as a stone mason when the North Dakota State Capitol Building was under construction, between 1931 and 1934.

Along with Sebran 'Andy,' his younger brother, Frank began to build a new home for the family in Bismarck on Jefferson Avenue near the Missouri River in 1935. One of the key jobs for my 12 year old father during construction, was to locate every bent and tossed away nail and straighten each one and return them to Frank's bucket.

In 1936, the family moved into their brand new home, and it was there that my father grew up. In 1940, his sister Dian Marcella was born. Ernest would live at the Jefferson home till he was 19 years old, when he enlisted into the Air Corps in 1942 and was off to Texas for flight training. Dian grew up in the house with Frank and Clara while her brother fought overseas. The house still stands on Jefferson to this day and it is where Frank and Clara lived for decades. Clara continued to live there after Frank passed in 1991.



Frank G. S. Erickson (Fort Lincoln POW Guard – Mandan, ND) & Lt. Ernest A. Erickson - Bismarck October 1943 Photograph by Clara Amelia (Nelson) Erickson

Fort Abraham Lincoln

Up till America's involvement in World War II, Frank worked as a carpenter, plumber and electrician. He loved to fish and hunt, and with a large garden that the family tended, brought in a considerable amount of the food needed through the tough Depression years.

In 1942, Frank was a guard at Fort Abraham Lincoln outside of Bismarck, when it was converted into a Prisoner of War/Relocation camp. Both Fort Lincoln's in Bismarck and Mandan, face each other across the Missouri River. There is a long line of history that goes along with Fort Lincoln. The most illustrious goes back to Lieutenant Colonel George Armstrong Custer's command of the 7th Cavalry regiment at Fort Lincoln. Custer and the 7th departed from Fort Lincoln in June of 1876, which culminated in the Battle of the Little Bighorn. Sadly the Indian Wars intensified following Custer's fall.

After World War II, Frank worked with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers on the mammoth Garrison Dam Project from 1947 through 1953. Over 2 miles in length, the dam is the fifth-largest earthen dam in the world. The reservoir impounded by the dam is Lake Sakakawea, which extends to Williston, North Dakota and joins with the Yellowstone River, near the Montana border.

Repairing things around the house and in his shop were regular activities, one of the reasons so many

incredible items still exist to this day. Frank made unique birdhouses, boxes and shelves from local wood he gathered. His knife collection was enormous, many hand-made and others altered for his specific uses. One item I am fortunate to have is a salt and pepper shaker set, made from 50mm shells from a B-17 gunners ammunition box that my father sent him in 1944 from England.



B-17's 50mm Shell Salt & Pepper Shakers made by Frank Erickson



Ernest Anders Erickson - Sunset Beach - oil on canvas 1968

Sunset Beach, California

Following in Frank's tradition of craftsmanship, in 1961, my Father Ernest started making paddle boards. They were oversized surfboards, painted in detail. The boards were of sturdy construction and made to stand on, and with his hand-made oars, we would all paddle around the the canals of Sunset Beach in California. He also carved Tiki and Easter Island heads out of aged wood he found on scavenger hunts along small islands nearby. Huntington Beach at the time was an old school beach community, near Long Beach. My folks bought a few houses down there at this time. He carved and painted tribal masks out of oversized Palm leaves and painted to exact detail, model airplanes and boats.

Ernest also produced stained glass sculptures, carved bowls and cups out of wood. He tried his hand at painting and came away with some nice results. It was a constant with my father to be involved with one project or another. I am fortunate to have some of the items he made and fortunate to be like him in his attitude about making things. He taught me about tools and was an inspiration.



Mark Jon and Ernest Anders Erickson - Sunset Beach, California



Dian Marcella Erickson 1944 - Bismarck, North Dakota



Dian Marcella (Erickson) & Floyd Nick Boutrous

My father's sister, eighteen years his junior, Dian Marcella Erickson was an incredibly beautiful girl and soon enough a gorgeous woman. Dian was born in Bismarck on May 9th, 1940, and grew up like her brother, playing on the Dakota Plains surrounded by dozens of family members all willing to keep a safe eye on this little girl. During World War II she was the recipient of a myriad of my father's cards, letters and gifts. Dian lived most of her life in Bismarck and when the family temporarily moved to Riverdale, ND, while her Father Frank worked on the Garrison Dam, she attended Riverdale High School.

After the family moved back to Bismarck in 1958, Dian was 18 years old and would soon be meeting her future husband. Floyd Nick Boutrous, 23 years her senior, and a full blood Lebanese born in Bismarck. Floyd was 'the lucky man' to meet the prettiest girl in Bismarck, probably in the whole state of North Dakota. Floyd chased her down like any intelligent guy would, that had the opportunity to meet such a young woman.

The two dated over the following year, and soon enough Floyd was asking Dian for her hand in marriage. Floyd was now coming up against two serious Scandinavians, both war heroes, both slightly skeptical of this 'older' suitor.



Floyd Boutrous in 1923

In the end Floyd passed muster, after a varied amount of intense conversations, with Dian's Father Frank and her Brother Ernest Anders. As the years passed, Floyd and Frank became close friends. My father quickly came to realize his Brother-in-law Floyd was the man for his kid sister and respected him.

One year after my father, Ernest was born in 1922, a photo was taken in Bismarck that Floyd's son, Michael calls, 'Roarin' 20's Floyd.' The image becomes a fitting portrait for of Father Floyd. At six years of age in 1923, Floyd is looking sharp as a razor in his Bowler Hat. Stylin' Floyd is what I always called my Uncle Floyd.

Dian was Scandinavian reserved, and a beautiful source of inspiration for anyone that knew her. Of course counterbalanced by the ever gregarious host of all occasions, Floyd, they lived a good life together and each were devoted to each other. Over the next 18 years they would have 5 sons, Michael, Steven, Nick, Al and Attas II.

Maybe Dian's beauty became the story, but that was just in the cards. Once one overcame that Hollywood starlet looks, you beheld quite the woman. I was always struck by her beauty and calm demeanor.

Dian and I wrote letters back and forth over the decades. When I went off to college, she mentioned "Very exciting times ahead for you Mark, take every moment and savor them." I took her advice, and I still think of her often, and still take her advice, to savor the moments.

Dian and Floyd's son Steven, tells the perfect story about his dad.

"One of the many great stories Floyd told me about when he was a very young man driving on the interstate in Colorado was this one. Speeding along in his coup, Floyd was pulled over by a Highway Patrol car, and the officer, taking his time with the good looking 'suspect' thought he might have a gangster on the loose. At the time, maybe he was assuming he had the legendary Bugsy Segal in hand. The cop gave Floyd the 3rd degree, but with Floyd's charm, politeness and smile, the cop soon enough was convinced otherwise. Floyd was allowed to go on his way, and I have to assume, the cop felt he had just met a pretty good guy."

Floyd's parents were Ghattas (Attas) Fares and Delleh binto Jirji Nassif (Boutrous) Attiyeh. Both his parents were born in Ain Arab, Lebanon and emigrated from there in the early 1900s. They had had eight children; three daughters; Florence, Lorna & Sylvia and five sons; Thomas, George, Floyd, Theodore and James. Ghattas called the boys his "steps" as they went from tallest to shortest in a complete natural order.

The Boutrous – Nassif - Attiyeh Family was among the first immigrant families from Lebanon/Syria to settle in the Bismarck area. Not unlike many from his home country, Ghattas Boutrous began covering the territory as a peddler, moving from small town to small town, and from farm to farm, selling the wares of the day — food, pots and pans and medicines. Eventually, the family opened 'The Corner Grocery' in Bismarck at the corner of Third Street and Avenue A — the same site in which the Boutrous Real Estate office is today.

The greatest lessons Floyd ever learned came from that tiny family store. "My parents mentioned often the biggest honor you can ever have is to be an American citizen." That's what Floyd also believed and that's how he wanted to be remembered. In addition to the family business background, there was another important element in Floyd's life — The Attiyeh Society. The Society was made up of innumerable family members born in Lebanon and their decedents born in America. Over the years various conventions, dinners and parties were held in Bismarck and lowa City where many of the members lived, keeping the families close and connected.

In 1952 that Floyd accepted the position of Chairman of the North Dakota Crusade for Freedom — an organization committed to assisting the 70 million people behind the Iron Curtain. He accepted the post for three reasons, he thought it was a good cause; and he hadn't served in the military during the war and with the background of his parents, he thought he should put some effort forth helping where he could.

Floyd also served on the board of Radio Free Europe, an independent American enterprise of private citizens. In 1959, Floyd was honored as being part of an entourage of Radio Free Europe representatives who traveled to Munich, Germany. Boutrous was in Berlin when hundreds of helium-filled balloons containing leaflets were launched to residents of Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria, Albania and other Iron Curtain countries. At the same time in Berlin, Floyd delivered an address on Radio Free Europe—a moment he regarded as one of the "big honors of my life." One of Floyd's prime projects was the promotion of Constitution Week in North Dakota each September.

Floyd was a memorable man, he had class and style, and was a generous and gentle man to the end. He used the term of 'Honey,' a kindness towards people when he referred to folk he cared about. He was a charmer! Dian and Floyd were a couple to remember.



The Family House on the Venice Canals



Ernest Anders & Bernice Lane (Hesslein) Erickson in Venice, California 1999

On the Canals of Venice

For the last twenty five years of their lives, my parents resided along the Venice Canals in California, enjoying walks along the beach and the canals. Often ending up for coffee at the Cow's End Cafe on Washington near the Venice Pier. My Mother Bernice continued as a Real Estate Broker and painted in her studio under the strong sharp light that comes from living along the Southern Pacific Coast. Influenced by the paintings of Bernice and my Grandmother Blanche, my father delved into the arts even further once he retired from Lockheed.

By the time they moved permanently to Venice, my folks had accumulated four properties on the Venice Canals and a home in the Hollywood Hills. They loved to travel, making numerous trips to Europe and the Orient. Ernest loved Venice and the life in the one-time quiet beach town, as did my mother, who passed in 2002. She packed two lives into her long life, and I am proud to say she is still an inspiration to me always. Bernice spent half her life in New York City and half out west, and she enjoyed every bit of the ride.

The contrast for my Depression era father, born and raised on the farm on the Great Northern Plains, his career in aeronautics, time in the Air Corps flying dangerous missions over Europe, and then the switch to the serene environment of living on the ocean, is startling. Yet my father did it with an air of class and open mindedness. He set his sights to the sky.



Mark Jon Erickson, Al, Steven, Attas, Nick & Michael Boutrous in Bismarck, North Dakota

The Trail of the Clear Blue

Ernest Anders Erickson passed away on June 7th, 2013 in Santa Monica, California at the age of 90. He lived life well, worked hard and accomplished incredible things. In spirit now, he and many of the family mentioned in these writings rest easy along the trail of the clear blue.

Ernest is survived by this writer, my wife Elena (of Venice, Oakland, CA. And Switzerland); Nephews Michael Boutrous, Nick Boutrous and son Alex (all of Bismarck, ND); Nephews Allan Boutrous and Steven Boutrous, his Wife Stella and their Daughter Lexi (all of Berkeley, CA); nephew Attas Boutrous and his Daughters Sophia (of Bismarck), Raquel and Olivia (both of Fort Collins, Colorado), and Christiane (of Denver, Colorado); plus numerous cousins throughout the United States and Sweden; and his friends along the Venice Canals.

Have Blue

My father would surely suggest the next time you are flying, for you to peer out the window and share in the wonder of the clouds and the heavens, as you soar through the sky blue. Lindbergh once said, "Life is like a landscape. You live in the midst of it, but can describe it only from the vantage point of distance." Aviators, astronauts and aircraft designers enable us to view the planet which we call home from the vantage point of distance. The Allied aviators who served and sacrificed their lives in the Second World War helped ensure that the landscape we can better describe from this perspective shall be forever richer.

The Endis Only the Beginning of the Blue



Lt. Ernest Anders Erickson took this in-flight photograph of ships in the 334th Squadron during their four mission shuttle run that took him from England to Poland, Romania, Ukraine, returning to the 15th Air Force Airfield at Foggia, Italy. They left Italy a few days later and returned back over France to Horham, England in August of 1944.

Dedicated to my father's name-sake, Uncle Ernest Julius Erickson (361st Infantry) and my Grandfather Frank Severin Erickson (308th Infantry) and survivor of the 'Lost Battalion.'

Both served heroically in 1917 – 1918 and took part in the Meuse Argonne Offensive in France.

Both were, like my father, and especially to my Father, Ernest Anders, forever to be remembered as,

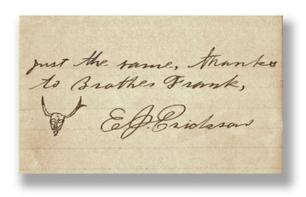
The Men From Painted Woods.



Ernest Julius Erickson in his horse and buggy in Painted Woods, North Dakota 1914 and below is a hand-written postscript from Ernest Julius's 1918 journal:

Just the same, thanks to Brother Frank

E.J. Erickson



FT. FLAK WAS ACCURATE OVER TARGET, WAS IN FLAK EXTRAORDINARALLY LONG TIME. SAW B-17 GO INTO APROX.

SAW B-17 GO INTO APROX.

TARGET) SAW B-17 in DEE REPORT SPIN GEFORE

L'ESPIN GEFORE

TARGET)

AL ENEMY SPIRAL, ENEMY FIGHTER WAS FOLLOWING IT down. SAW FOUR MEN BALL OUT OF 13-47 THEN FLEW BEHIND FULLOW ED US , (APT) 8 HOURS 15, MINUTES DESSAU , GERMANY FLAK WAS INTENSE & ACCURATE Received LARGE HOLE ON UNDERSIDE OF RIGHT WING, ALSO SMALLER ONE BEHIND IT, ONE OF BALL TURRETS GUNS WAS HIT BY FLAKS WERE ATTACKED BY LARGE FORMAMONDOOF ME 109 'L JUST ME 109 'L JUST AFOW SECOND & BEFORE BONBS AWAY. I H. TO OSE EMERGENCY RELEASE FOR BOMBS

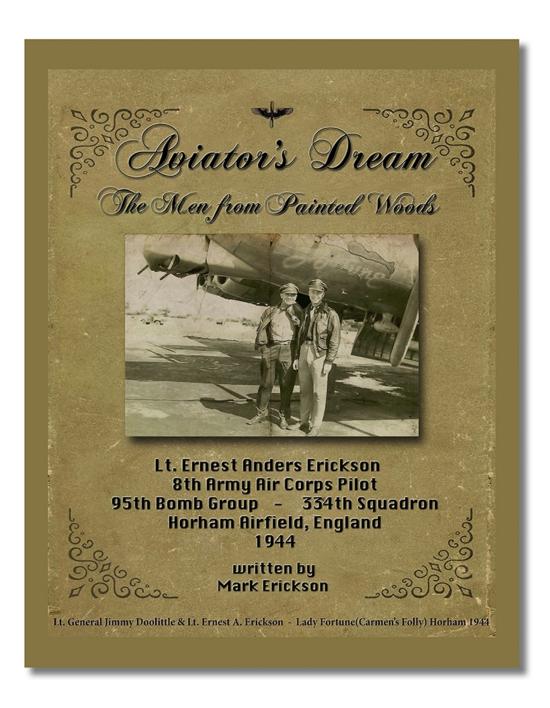
Lt. Ernest A. Erickson's May 24th & 28th, 1944 journal notes from missions over Berlin & Dessau, Germany



Ernest Julius Erickson (on left) in an Erickson Studio portrait Photo by Ernest's brother, Helmer Erickson Wilton, North Dakota in 1911



Frank Gustaf Severin Erickson in an Erickson Studio Portrait photograph Photo by Frank's brother, Helmer Erickson Wilton, North Dakota in 1911



Merry Christmas Lt. Erickson Royal Air Force / 8th Air Force Airfield * 95th Bomb Group * Horham Airfield, England February 1944

