

**Recollections of Experiences in World War II
as a B-24 Crew Member of the 389th BG**

by Bob Dymacek

as Told to Clarence Hickey

**During a Visit and Interview
Phoenix, Arizona, April 8, 2001**

Introduction

On Sunday April 8, 2001, Mary and I were on vacation in Arizona, and we met with Bob Dymacek and his daughter, Linda. It was at Linda's home in Phoenix, where Bob now also lives. We had a very cordial visit for about two hours.

Bob and I talked about some of his experiences during WW II when he flew with Dad (Howard "Tommy" Tomlinson) in England. They were with the 566th Bomb Squadron, 389th BG, 2nd Air Division, of the 8th Air Force, stationed in Hethel, England. We also talked about some of the men who flew on their crew, and looked at Bob's photos and other memorabilia. I took along some of the photos I received from Dad, in the hopes that Bob could identify some of the men. He could and did.

Bob's MOS (Military Occupational Specialty)

Bob's original job on the crew was to be responsible for all of the guns on the plane. He also was the ball turret gunner on the underside of the plane. The ball turret was operated and rotated by moving the guns as they were sighted on a target. It thus rotated automatically. It apparently was a very accurate gun in shooting down enemy fighters.

When the B-24s were first flying, they had no ball turret and no guns in the nose. So, enemy fighters would attack from below and head on. Dad and Bob's plane had both a ball turret and nose guns.

When the 8th Air Force redesigned the formations for bombing missions, the ball turret was eliminated. It created a lot of drag on the plane when the ball was lowered, thus slowing down the flight speed.

When his crew decided to become a lead crew, two navigators were needed. Bob had taken some navigator training, and managed to be re-titled as Engineer. He got another stripe and became the Assistant Navigator working with Dad. Bob would help with pilotage and would sit in the nose during low level missions, like the Varsity mission (March 24, 1945) that delivered supplies to the ground troops.

Christmas Eve Mission 1944

On the way in to the target, at the town of Cochen, Germany, they were hit with a shell containing a proximity fuse that was designed to detonate at a certain altitude. It didn't explode, but went right through the wing and a gas tank.

The pilot, Ernie Davenport, had to decide whether to continue on to the target or abort the mission. He continued on and dropped the bombs. He then turned sharply to head home and figured out which tank was ruptured. The engineer could adjust the flow of the fuel to the engines. Apparently gasoline was spewing out all over the plane.

They were searching for an airfield on which to make an emergency landing. When they were approaching a friendly air field to land, they heard the pleas on the radio from a B-17 Flying Fortress that had a wounded crew member, so Davenport's crew gave way and let the Fortress land. They found another air field, near Bastogne to land on, as they didn't have enough fuel to return home to England. When they touched down and taxied for a way, the plane just quit, apparently out of fuel. They had landed on a field occupied by the Germans in France, but the Germans were evacuating, as the American troops were advancing. There were German troops in the woods on one side of the plane and Americans on the other.

The plane still had gasoline all over it and it contained radar equipment that couldn't fall into enemy hands. So, Davenport had the plane set afire and destroyed, using the gasoline on it. The fire from the plane caught the attention of an American soldier who has a deuce-and-a-half truck [2 1/2 ton truck], and he drove to them. The soldier asked them where their unit was, which of course they didn't know. So, they all got together and drove off.

They found a French chateau occupied by a woman who took them in and fed them. While there, two German soldiers surrendered to Dad and Bob and laid down their arms. The crew apparently wasn't sure the two soldiers could be trusted, so they posted a guard, by having someone awake all the time.

While there, the crew, or Dad and Bob at least, found a small church and attended a service there on Christmas Eve.

The next day, the crew left the chateau, and apparently the German soldiers also, and found an air field occupied by Americans. There was a C-47 transport there that needed repairs in order to fly. Davenport and the engineer, T/Sgt Charles Dawes, fixed the plane, and Davenport flew it back to England. Davenport had never flown a C-47, but he did on Christmas Day 1944.

When they landed in England, they found themselves invited to a Christmas dinner party with some British flyers. Davenport's crew eventually called Hethel and reported in. They had been reported as missing in action.

May 20, 1945

At the end of the war when the Hethel air field was being evacuated and the planes ferried home, one of the newer planes lost a windshield, apparently on take off or shortly thereafter. So, the plane that Bob and Dad were on, with the tail markings "Q+", was delayed so that they could get a new windshield and take it to the other plane.

Bob was the last crew member to get on Q+ and was in the bombay, as the pilot, Jimmy O'Brien, told him the plane was tail heavy. They were transporting others (ground crew) as well. The bombay remained open during flight, Bob was not sure why.

Soon after take off, Q+ ran into bad weather and went into a "flat spin" going up that created terrific G-forces. Bob had crawled up into the nose to get his parachute and had gotten back to the bombay when the spin began. He got his shoulder harness on, but couldn't get the crotch straps in place because of the spin. Then O'Brien got the plane under control and Bob finished getting his parachute on. The plane started another flat spin going down.

While lying on the floor of the bombay, Bob heard God say "Go", and Bob rolled out. He pulled the rip cord three times, not knowing that it had already deployed. The position Bob was in made the chute opening very mild and he didn't feel it.

There was only a 500 foot ceiling that day, and that's about where the plane was when he bailed out. He saw the plane go down, with "the left wing folded, tail section separated and fuselage broken". The plane had broken apart in mid-air from the forces and stress of the storm.

Bob also saw Tommy go flying past him and then his chute opened. Apparently Tommy's chute put a lot of stress on him when it opened abruptly.

Bob and Dad eventually found their way back to Hethel. Bob had all of his possessions on the plane, including a German Lugar. Dad lost all of his possessions as well.

Jack Moss, one of the gunners, was the only member of the crew buried in Cambridge, England, at the Cambridge American Military Cemetery and Memorial. The other crew were sent home to their families for burial. Jack Moss's parents had divorced and neither accepted his remains. Moss was the tail gunner. On one of the ir missions, Jack shot down a German jet that was approaching very fast. It was going so fast that when the jet exploded, the cockpit went right by the B-24 so close that the pilot looked at Jack and saluted. Jack apparently was so rattled by the incident that he didn't speak for three days, and never reported his having shot down the jet so that it could be validated and credit given to him for it.

Some Notes

Jimmy Stewart flew with Bob and Dad on a mission, as a Command Pilot, to an oil storage field. One of the planes dropped right on a big oil tank that exploded with a lot of smoke. Bob and Dad's plane went right through it and they were blinded. Bob recalled hearing Jimmy Stewart over the intercom, with his typical slow cantor say, "Let's get out of here."

The crew never had just one plane they used. They used what was available and which ever plane they were assigned.

Bob showed me his memorabilia, including some old photos that looked like they were taken at the same time as several photos that Dad has, of the crew and the plane.

Bob couldn't identify anyone in two of the photos Dad had marked in the 389th Blue Book. Bob also didn't know what the occasion was, in one of the Blue Book photos, with so many guys standing around the plane on the ground.

Harry Kasper

We talked about Harry Kasper, who was the bombardier in the crew list Dad and Bob have. Kasper wrote to Dad after the war. I wondered how, or if, he had survived the crash. Some of Kasper's notes and letters to Dad are among Dad's memorabilia. Apparently, Kasper decided not to fly after Dad's crew and plane decided to become a lead crew. Apparently Kasper thought it was too dangerous, so he requested another assignment. Bob identified Kasper in some of Dad's old photos.