

As time passes since the second Great War, memories fade, untouched shoeboxes of mementos in the attic get lost, forgotten or destroyed, families grow apart, and our heroes pass on. We are quickly losing our lifeline of communication to those of the greatest generation. Our mission of educating future generations is imperative to the lifeblood of the Commemorative Air Force, and imperative for keeping the memories and legacies of our heroes alive.

One such member of the future generation is a young boy named Wyatt. We met at his first air show at Wendover Airfield, a wonderful piece of history in the west Utah desert that saw the training of many WWII heavy bomber crews, including many B17 squadrons and even the Enola Gay before she headed west toward her most famous mission. Most of us shared the enthusiasm of this young man at some point in our lives: wide-eyed and amazed by the hulking WWII bombers, fighters and trainers, impressed by the aerobatic antics of the performers above, and intrigued by the men and women in tan flight suits eager to explain all the intricate details of their aircraft to any attendee willing to listen.

Young Wyatt has a special story that connects him to these airplanes, this airport and to these flyers: In his hand he clutches a faded and wrinkled photograph of a B17 crew from 1944. He approaches me under the nose of the Warbird Warrior Foundation's PV-2 Harpoon, *Attu Warrior*, where I am stationed as part of my duties today as a sponsor and pilot, and says, "Can you help me find out about my great uncle?"

Wyatt's grandmother, Katie, soon joins our conversation and begins to explain her fascinating story. By the time she was born in 1941, her older brother Joe had already signed up for the war effort.

She has little recollection of this man, but learns bits and pieces from her parents as she grows into adulthood. The memories of Joe would be tough for any parent to speak of, as they have to explain to young Katie that her brother Joe was killed in the skies over Europe fighting the Germans. As the years went by, Katie grew up without her older brother Joe, and any effort to learn more about him certainly stirred up unwelcome emotions in the family. Thus Joe was a memory, a picture on the wall and mementos in a shoe box, a fallen hero who gave his life for our country. Life went on and memories faded.

Researching this young hero was a fascinating project, the amount of information I found regarding

this crew, Bomb Group, mission, adversaries, and legacy was staggering. My research took me through Luxembourg, to France and Germany, and put me in contact with Keith Hastie, a relative of LT Harry Cook, the pilot of Joe's B 17. Mr. Hastie spent a considerable time researching this crew and I stand squarely on his shoulders writing this story, as he helped point me in the right direction to a great number of the facts herein. Keith

said to me during one of our conversations, "You know, of all the months and years I spent poking around and finding bits of information, I never did learn much about Joe."

More than seventy years after his death, for the first time, dedicated to his family and in honor of his memory, I present the story of **Staff Sergeant Joseph M. Slight**.



The firstborn child of Thomas and Pauline Slight, Joe was born on August 10, 1922 in Kansas City, Missouri. Followed two years later by a sister Jeanne, and then by another sister Molly in 1930. The Slight family stayed afloat by Thomas's work as a lithographer, and Pauline's support raising the family at home. Later, during the war, Pauline worked in a war plant, much like Rosie the Riveter. Like many families of the depression era, the Slights were forced to relocate a number of times during the 1930s, finding themselves in Southern California along with Thomas's brothers, searching for work.

By the early 1940s, things had improved for much of America and the Slight family had made their way back to Kansas City. Joe, at age 18, enlisted in the Army and left for boot camp just ten days before his youngest sister Katie was born on February 14, 1941. He began writing home the day after he arrived at Jefferson Barracks in St. Louis, Missouri, and wrote to his mother 12 times the first month away from home! Assigned to the 28th School Squadron, the young man quickly adapted to army life, drilling, scrubbing, and complaining about "KP," Kitchen Patrol. He consoled his mother in every letter, assuring her that he was safe, and not to cry when she read his letters. This may have been futile, as his second letter home mentioned a fellow cadet's issued overcoat had "a hole in it and bloodstains around it."

Joe was getting along fine, working hard and making friends at Jefferson Barracks (JB). "There's one boy here, he's a pal of mine," he said, "We call him Tiny. He's 6'4" and 210, and one of those blonde football players." He asked for stamps in almost every letter, and once signed off "Got to go, can't miss chow (even though it is rotten.) Loads of Love, Joe."

Private Joe Slight was shipped to Lowry Technical School, outside of Denver, Colorado on April 9, 1941. He was quite pleased with his new assignment, noting the "mountains are beautiful. This place is 400 times better than JB!" He was entertained by a trip to the pistol range at Fort Logan, scoring a 92 "the 2nd highest score," and a dance that weekend, "the music was awful." He and his friend Harris would attend their Mormon church together, and Joe would often mention the Chaplain on base, and asked his mother to send his Bible.

Still the young man at 18, Joe mentioned feeling homesick in a few letters from Lowry. Then, true to the spirit of an adult teenager, on May 12, half way through his letter to Mom, he included a note in



the margin, "Let Dad read! : I went to a dealership, they have a swell '31 Chevy, brand new tires and motor, \$140, \$35 down, but requires a co-signer." Three weeks later he admitted "Well I finally got paid but I spent it all before I knew what happened." Joe was bitten by the aviation bug at an airshow there in July, where he described "this new Army plane called the P-38, zoomed by at 450 mph, went straight up in the air and was out of sight in 30 seconds!" Joe was now an assistant section leader, drilling recruits in addition to his mechanic training. "Better go, the Major is coming for inspection!" he signed off one of his letters.

Early September 1941 brought Joe to Moffett Field, California, to join the 4th Photography Squadron as a mechanic on the F-2, a reconnaissance version Beechcraft Model 18. "I am doing fine on my present job on the plane, but

it isn't as simple as just grabbing a wrench and tightening a bolt not on an airplane. I am really working hard and trying to make good," he wrote to his mother Pauline. By November he had earned his first promotion to Private First Class, an "extra six dollars!" a month- He was truly enjoying his time at Moffett and began flying with pilot Lt Thurman. "This sure is a swell Squadron!" he wrote home.

Shortly after the attack on Pearl Harbor, Joe transferred along with the 4th Photography Squadron to March Army Airfield near Los Angeles, California. "We're at war now, don't worry Mom," he said. He had planned a trip home on furlough for Christmas, but understandably all furloughs and passes had been cancelled. "I would sure like to see Kate!" The squadron had upgraded the fleet with six new Lockheed Hudsons, and upgraded Joe to Crew Chief and Corporal. A young man who took his job very seriously, he expressed reservations in his newfound responsibilities, "I am afraid something will go wrong and I won't know what to do or do the wrong thing."



4th Photography Squadron Insignia

On Valentine's Day 1942, Joe began getting some experience on the Army's largest bomber to date. "Did I tell you we got some new planes in our squadron? They are B-17 Flying Fortresses some call them. I am crew chief in one of them and it sure is a job. The ships have 4 engines and we found a dead cylinder in no1 engine so we had to pull it. That is the first time I ever pulled a cylinder and I sure learned a lot.... I don't hardly know about my plane, I think I got a lemon but you can't hardly tell until there are a few more hours on it."

Joe spent much of 1942 with the 4th Photography Squadron wrenching on various aircraft including light, fabric covered planes in Laredo, Texas, then B-17s and B-25s at Peterson Field in Colorado Springs with the 10th Photo Reconnaissance Squadron. "I wish something would happen around here," he said. That August, he was demoted to Private after being busted for being late to return from his pass, "Post Commander decided to make an example out of me," but Joe remained dedicated and proud of his craft as an Army Air Corps Mechanic- "We have the best ship on the field!"

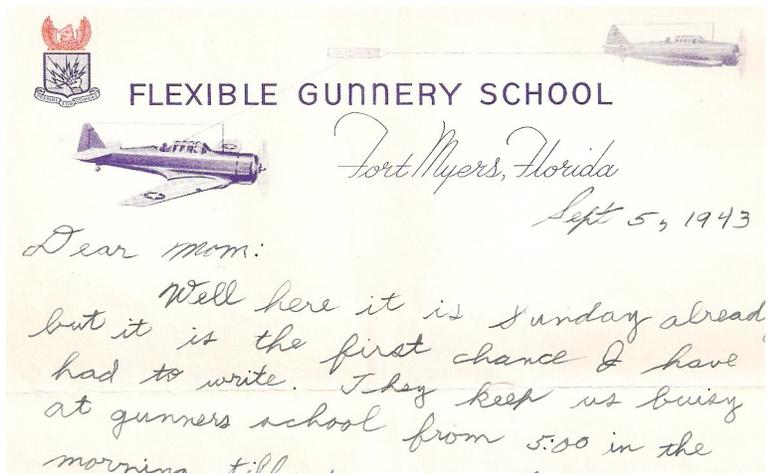
In March 1943, Joe wrote home he was not a crew chief anymore, but a flight chief in charge of six Flying Fortresses. On a photo mission to Wichita Falls, "they let a Colonel fly our B-17 and he rode the brakes too much and he blew out one of them and we changed both of them and that took us all night. By the way that Colonel that blew out the brake used to be a Brig. General but he got busted because he was in Pearl Harbor when that sneak attack came off on Dec 7. Did Kate get the chicken pox? I hope not yet."



Signing Off a Letter Home, February 1942

Two months later, Joe wrote from Seattle, "...attending the school of B-17s here. Isn't it awful what the army will waste their money on? After working on 17's for months and running into every possible difficulty and malfunction and fixing them, why I'll bet the instructors will learn things from us they never dreamed could go wrong with a 17." A few weeks later he added, "This is a good school and I'm learning a lot!" He expressed interest in becoming an engineer-gunner, "they are very much in demand right now," so he could get back into flying.

Joe would soon get his wish at the Flexible Gunnery School in Fort Meyers, Florida in August 1943. "We haven't started school yet, we have been taking the low pressure chamber + a lot of physical experimentations, drill, gas chamber and all of our recruit training all over again." A few weeks later, school got more interesting, and Joe was excited to explain it all to his worrisome mother: "They teach you all about the 50 cal. Machine gun. Taken to the range and given a gun with a defective part, you have to be able to tell right off the bat what is wrong and why the gun is malfunctioning. After you learn about the 50 cal. you are taken to the skeet range



and shoot skeet till you learn how to lead and follow moving targets. When you git skeet down pat you are put on what you call the jeep range where you shoot skeet from a moving vehicle. When you graduate from the jeeps you do the same thing again but instead of holding your gun in your own hands you shoot from a truck with a turret on it. Then comes what they call air to air firing in which you shoot from one airplane at a target towed by another airplane, notice the picture at the top of the page."

After gunnery school, Joe spent the latter part of 1943 with the 11th Combat Mapping Squadron in Will Rogers Field, Oklahoma. Flying all the time and working on B-25s, Joe's easy days as an Army Air Corps Mechanic would soon come to close, as the reality set in that he would be needed as an air crewman in combat. To his mother on December 10, 1943, "I thought I better drop you a line even though we got orders not to. I don't know where we are going but we are. I don't know how long we will be in the States but I don't think for long. We are leaving here in about a half hour.... Don't worry I'll be all right." Leaves were granted for anyone who had not had a furlough in the last seven months, and Joe was allowed one final visit home to Kansas City for fifteen days before reporting to his next assignment. This visit home would be the only memory that his baby sister, Kate, has of her older brother.



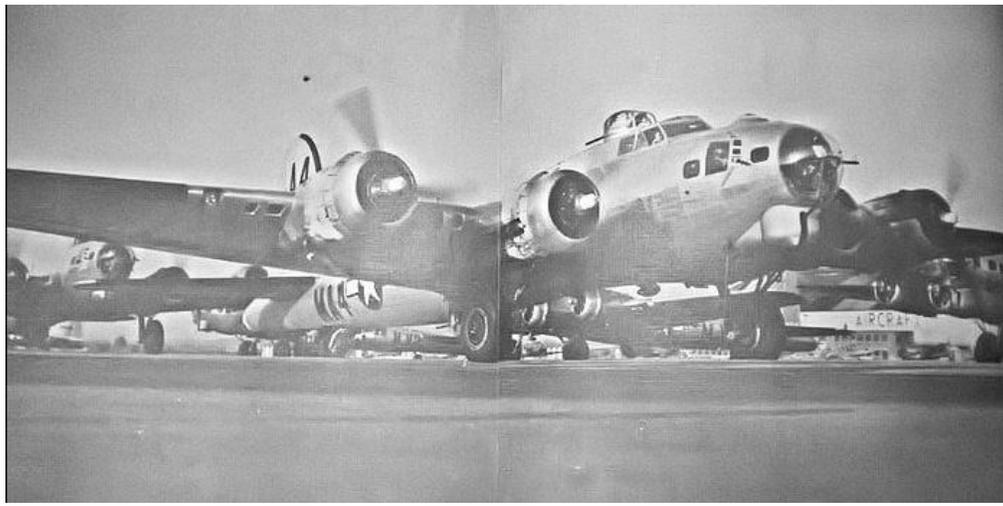
Joe's final visit home with Jeanne, Molly and Kate, January 1944

Joe Slight reported to the 488th Bomb Group at MacDill Airfield in Tampa in February 1944, one of the final training facilities used for heavy bomber crews before deploying to Europe. "Overseas training...Learning everything about the B-17 (laugh)," he

said, "My position is the top turret." Here he met Lt. Harry Cook, pilot of their B-17, and the rest of the crew who would fight together in combat over Europe. The crew flew "thousand mile" training flights around the Caribbean and the Gulf of Mexico. Pilot Harry Cook became known as an excellent pilot, a "very nice man...who never swore or used harsh words to anyone," according to gunner Robert Eaglehouse. Navigator Ralph Page was even more complimentary, "He could land a B-17 and you wouldn't even feel a bump...probably the best pilot in the Eighth Air Force." A great leader and mentor, Cook taught some of the other crew to perform some touch and goes at the controls of the bomber, just in case! It was recommended, in case of a mishap, that the crew normally stationed in the nose to move to the radio room for takeoff and landing, but in the Cook crew they never bothered- "There was no need with Harry flying the plane."

As the crew trained, Harry and Joe formed a close bond. Joe, who was recognized as a "very competent" engineer, was recruited by other pilots, but he would not fly unless it was with Harry Cook. "We have a swell crew the officers are swell fellows and the pilot + co-pilot will make good fliers I am sure," said Joe.

At six feet tall and 196 pounds, S. Sgt Robert Eaglehouse was an unusually large airman for 1944, with an equally large heart. The cramped ball turret position was the least popular of all assignments on the B-17, and lacking any willing airmen for the job, Eaglehouse volunteered for the



B-17G with training markings, MacDill Airbase, 1944.

Below: 1st Lt. Harry S. Cook, Pilot



Gunnery Training at MacDill Airbase

position. "I couldn't wear my chute or flak jacket down there," he said, but he never complained to the rest of the crew.

The Lt. Cook crew were known to be a tight-knit group; if there was a party at the O-club, the Officers would loan the

NCO's their extra uniforms, and if there was a party at the NCO club, vice-versa. Co-Pilot Fred Mason was a pro-

fessional upright bass player and vocalist before joining the Army. One night off in April 1944, he sat in with the all-girl band at the Tampa Terrace Hotel, and entertained the crew all night long. "He slapped that bass until he had blisters on his hand," said Page. "The whole crew was treated like royalty that night!"

In late April 1944, the Cook crew was selected to ferry a new B-17 to England. "There is some news but I am afraid you will think it is bad," Joe wrote his mother, "We will finish here on the 29th or 30th...then off to a port of embarkation... then most

likely to England." The crew flew from MacDill, to Savannah, Georgia, then to Ft. Dix, New Jersey. Before leaving Savannah, Co-Pilot Fred Mason phoned his family in Belleville, New Jersey, informing them that "cockier and dingle," his childhood imaginary bird friends, would be flying over. As they flew over the Mason house in their B-17G bomber, tail gunner John Smalley was dropping paper

cups from the rear with good-bye messages on them. "It was a sight I'll never forget," said Fred's youngest sister, Audrey.

From Ft. Dix the crew flew on to Bangor, Maine, and then to Newfoundland before crossing the Atlantic. The crew realized that their ship needed a name- #42-102432 doesn't have much of a ring to it. In homage to their well respected pilot and leader, the name "Tiny" was proposed, the nickname of pilot Lt. Cook's wife Ruth. The crew quickly agreed.

The young fliers did not learn to which bomb group they would be assigned until they arrived in England. They were assigned to the 427th Bomb Squadron of the 303rd Bomb Group, the "Hells Angels." Their aircraft, *Tiny*, then became *Tiny Angel*, and was soon taken to the depot for upgrades and modifications. The Cook crew accustomed themselves to life on base in England, learned the ways of a combat squadron in many additional training flights prior to their first combat assignment. Being intentionally vague, as



"Little Tush" Nose Art

any details of combat missions or unit locations were strictly classified, Joe wrote, "I have been going to school since I got here. I will soon be going to some bomb group to start combat missions. The quicker I git them done, the quicker I come home, we have to complete 30 missions. What do you think of the invasion, and the B-29s bombing Japan, isn't that swell?"

The inevitable first combat mission would come soon enough, and on June 30 1944 the Lt. Cook crew was tasked with bombing an enemy airfield near LeCulot, Belgium.



The Lt. Cook Crew, June 1944.

Back Row L-R: Warmuth, Page, Mason, Cook

Front Row L-R: Duggan, Howell, Eaglehouse, Fisher,

Slight, Smalley

The aircraft they were assigned that day was B-17G #42-102595, *Little Tush*. *Little Tush* took off and rendezvoused over England with thirty five other aircraft from the 303rd, including *Tiny Angel* ahead off their right wing, piloted by 2nd Lt. Walstein Wallace. The formation made its way over the English Channel and into enemy territory, escorted by a group of little friends in anticipation of interception by the Luftwaffe.

Joe Slight and the rest of the crew got their first taste of enemy resistance as they approached Brussels. Anti-Aircraft *Flak* from the German 88's was reported as moderate and accurate; four aircraft sustained major damage, and eighteen sustained minor damage. Luckily, the Luftwaffe was a no-show that day, and the menacing flak was unable to stop the bombers from delivering their explosives to Nazi military installations. What did stop them, however, were clouds.

Cloud cover over the target was observed to be 8/10 obscured. Thankfully, the lead aircraft of the three elements of the bomb group were fitted with the British GEE(H), or GH navigation system. The GH system used an airborne interrogator to interpret radar beam stations from the ground, which could guide the aircraft to the target, the bombs away point, and even back to landing in dense fog. Crews said this method was as accurate as visual bombing, but only had a usable range of about 300 miles before

becoming susceptible to jamming.

Two elements of bombers- twenty four aircraft- were able to release their bombs over the target of Le Culot. The twelve bombers of the high element of the formation had issues with their GH system and did not release their bombs. Luckily, on the way back to England, the weather cleared and they were able to bomb an enemy airfield near Coxyde, Belgium as a target of opportunity. During the five hours and fifty-one minutes of flight time, no enemy fighters were observed, and

132,000 pounds of explosives were delivered to Luftwaffe airfields.

Lt Cook's crew were now combat veterans, but had yet to fire a round of ammunition from the Fortress's guns in

anger. That opportunity would come on July 19, on their eighth mission, an attack on industrial targets near Hollreigelskreuth, Germany. Moderate to intense and accurate flak was encountered at the target area, and on the turn back home after bombs away, the group was attacked by five to fifteen Bf-109's. This mission sadly also had its first combat casualties witnessed by the Cook crew. Flak over the target had taken the lives of two tail gunners from the 360th BS. During the enemy fighter attack, a Bf-109 engaged the B-17 *Clover Leaf*, piloted by 1st Lt. Marvin S. Boyce, which had been damaged by flak during the bomb run. The crew bailed out of the aircraft but unfortunately four airmen were KIA.

For the next eight missions the crew would fly over Europe with minimal harassment from German fighters. These missions, however,

were no milk runs. They attacked Munich thrice, Ludwigshafen, Merseburg, Genshagen and Pirmasens, Germany, as well as targets in France, Belgium and Holland. Joe wrote, "I am fine so far we have been over enemy territory and that is all I can tell you...just listen to the radio to find out where." "I don't know for sure whether your letters are censored or not, but I don't think they are, did you ever find anything cut out of my letters? The weather here is nice and the food is fair. They say they have two seasons here, Winter and August. ... We have an early mission (*hole cut out of letter*) in the morning." After the 18th of July, waist gunner Clifford Fisher was removed and they flew with nine men on the Fortress from this date forward.



B-17s from the 427 Bomb Squadron in action over Europe

On Tuesday, August 15, 1944 at approximately 0800 hours, the Lt Cook crew lifted off from Molesworth on their 17th mission, having flown 114 hours and 33 minutes of combat time to date. Their ship, *Tiny Angel*, was now battle-tested, having flown 40 missions, including bombing Nazi gun emplacements in France prior to D-Day and on D-day itself. Their usual waist gunner, Sgt. Bill Duggan, was on leave visiting family in Wales and, unable to return in time for the mission, was replaced by S. Sgt. Jess Joyce. The 303rd's target today was the Luftwaffe airfield in Wiesbaden, Germany, approximately twenty miles west of Frankfurt. This was part of a massive operation including hundreds of B-17s, B-24s, RAF heavy bombers and Mosquitos to bomb Nazi airfields in Germany, Belgium and the Netherlands. *Tiny Angel* formed up with 38 other 303rd aircraft as the lead plane of the high element in group C, and at 0857 the Flying Fortresses climbed through 15,000 feet as they crossed the English coastline eastbound for the lowlands south of Rotterdam.

After crossing the coast of mainland Europe, the bomber group turned south toward Paris at 0928, climbing through an altitude of 20,500 feet. Per procedure, a number of course changes were

made on the way to the target so as not to reveal the true destination of the bombers and to avoid anti-aircraft flak strongpoints. The 303rd BG enjoyed good friendly fighter support to the target, but experienced moderate to intense and accurate flak from Frankfurt which resulted in eleven aircraft damaged and two crews injured. At 1122, the thirty nine Fortresses each dropped 4 1000lb G.P. M43 bombs and 4 500lb M17 incendiary bombs from altitudes of 24,900, 25,500 and 25,600 feet. The enemy airfield sustained damage to the landing runway, a hangar received a direct hit, three hits were made on a railway line, and the field was blanketed by incendiary bombs. A descent was initiated to 20,000 feet as the aircraft maneuvered to return to Molesworth, England.

By the summer of 1944, the Allied Air Forces had established superiority over the skies of western continental Europe. The Germans, who had continually made improvements to the Fw-190, Bf-109 and began operating the world's first jet fighter, the Me-262, were no match against the waves of the latest P-51's, P-47's, P-38s and Spitfires coming from England, and the soon-to-be re-captured airfields in France. The Luftwaffe was spread thin on two fronts, and desperate.

An experimental new fighter wing was established by the Germans in early 1944, entitled *Sturmstaffel 1*, who retrofitted Fw-190's with increased armament, and reinforced armor around the cockpit. These *Sturm* aircraft's purpose was solely to engage bomber formations that lacked fighter escort. The new squadron's tactic would be to attack from above and from the rear, in a tight arrowhead formation, opening fire only when the kill was certain. As a last resort, these pilots were instructed to take down a bomber by ramming. Pilots of the *Sturmstaffel* were wary of the modified 190's, with their weight increased by about 25%, they became slower, less maneuverable, and had reduced forward visibility due to the thickened armored glass windscreen. Any *Sturm* "heavy fighter" aircraft caught in a tangle with an allied fighter would surely be out maneuvered, and thus they began flying with their own fighter escort, usually Bf-109's.

The *Sturmstaffel* aircraft enjoyed some success with the new tactic, and in the coming months, entire *Sturmgruppen* were formed.



FW-190A8 Sturm

Taking the idea a step further, high explosive 30mm MK 108 cannons were installed in the wings to form the *Sturmbock*, or "battering ram" version of the Fw-190. The motto of *Jagdeschwader 3*, a squadron of these newly equipped aircraft read: "We undertake that, on every sortie resulting in contact with four engine bombers, we shall press home the attack to the shortest range and- if unsuccessful in shooting down the enemy by gunfire- we will destroy him by ramming."

In April 1944, Luftwaffe ace Major Walther Dahl had taken command of *Jagdeschwader 300*, whose inventory included the newly configured *Sturmbock* Fw-190's. Dahl had become an ace on the Eastern Front, racking up 71 kills to date, including 16 heavy bombers. He would later fly the Me-262, and survived the war claiming 128 total victories, including 36 heavy bombers, which tied the record of most heavy bombers claimed by any Luftwaffe pilot. One of his heavy bomber kills was accomplished by ramming on September 13, 1944.

On the morning of August 15, Dahl's *Sturmgruppen* had taken off at 0945 to intercept the American bomber formations heading for Frankfurt. Escorted by Bf-109's, they followed vectors from their ground controller attempting to steer them towards the attacking bomb groups. They had been on patrol for ninety minutes, close to the limits of the fuel endurance of the overloaded Fw-190's, and the pilots had begun to worry about exhausting their fuel supply when they finally sighted the B-17s

England-bound west of Mosel. Dahl gave the order to attack on their remaining fumes of fuel, and radioed ahead to all the Luftwaffe fields in the area to prepare for the possibility of a number of dead-stick Focke-Wulf arrivals.

The 303rd's escort, 47 P-51Ds from the 364th Fighter Wing, had spotted the enemy fighter formations. They began closing in, and were engaged by the escorting Bf-109's and some Fw-190's. 364th Fighter Wing P-51D Mustang pilot Lt. Coates said, "We turned to



Walther Dahl

meet them head-on and all I could see were Fw-190's all over the sky and we were flying right into the middle of them. In seconds we had met and passed through them...I didn't see any of them shooting at us and I have to assume they were only interested in saving their ammunition for the bombers." From 20,000 feet to the treetops, the Mustangs tangled with the Jerry's, resulting in the destruction of 7 Bf-109's and 4 Fw-190's.

The Luftwaffe tactic worked. Distracting the American fighters had left Walther Dahl's *Sturm* aircraft alone to attack the bombers. At 1148, Staff Sergeant Joe Slight, in the top turret of *Tiny Angel*, said his last known words over the interphone: "They're coming in."

Diving to the bomber formation, the *Sturmgruppen* quickly closed in, focusing on the low group of aircraft. Aboard *Tiny Angel*, Sgt. Robert Eaglehouse, in the cramped, near-fetal position of the ball turret was among the first hit. The shells from the enemy fighter "...knocked my turret out of commission. I got hit

with 20mm's in the right leg." Eaglehouse passed out in his crippled ball turret due to a loss of blood and oxygen. In the tail of the aircraft, Sgt. John Smalley fought to defend the Fortress from the onslaught of Fw-190's. German cannon shells tore through his position, severing his right leg.

Radio operator Forrest Howells described the scene in his 1954 book *Whispers of Death*:



Photo taken at 1124 on the return from Wiesbaden from the aircraft

"*Earthquake McGoon*." According to formation records, the aircraft visible in the upper right above the wing is "*Tiny Angel*."

The big plane staggered in the sky, fatally wounded. It rocked and tossed

out of control, shaking violently. Fires burst out. It pulled up into a wobbly stall, hung nose high for an instant, shivered and vibrated, giving its death rattle. Slowly, it rolled over and dropped crazily toward the ground twenty seven thousand feet below.

Forward of the bomb bay, the situation was dire. Co-Pilot Lt. Mason had suffered a concussion, and Bombardier Lt. Warmuth had leg injuries. Lt. Cook was sure the ship would not be returning to Molesworth, so he ordered the crew to bail out. After a brief strug-

gle to get the forward hatch open, Mason, Page and finally Warmuth bailed out of the front of the aircraft through the downward facing escape hatch. Joe Slight began to climb out of the top turret.

In the rear of the doomed B-17, the severely wounded Eaglehouse came to and began to make his way out of the ball turret. Radioman Howell opened the hatch on the right side of the fuselage for waist gunner Jess Joyce.

Joyce appeared uninjured, and bailed out of the B-17, followed by Howell and Smalley. Eaglehouse was now alone in the rear of the aircraft, and miraculously retained consciousness for long enough to strap on his parachute and bail out of the escape hatch. He passed out again after clearing the aircraft, and hit the ground unconscious, but alive.

Lt. Cook remained at the controls of the stricken B-17, fighting for control of the aircraft for long enough to give his men the opportunity for survival. Co-pilot Mason's last view of his pilot and engineer was Lt. Cook fighting the controls of the bomber, with S Sgt Slight standing behind him between the pilot seats.

Shortly after 2nd Lt. Warmuth bailed out and was clear of the aircraft, there was an explosion, and *Tiny Angel* fell to the earth in two pieces, with Lt. Cook and S Sgt. Slight in the cockpit.

The carnage of the battle that day did not end in the air. After five years of war, the civilian population had understandably become quite weary. While targeting the Nazi industrial complex to slow the war machine, collateral damage from wayward bombs, crashing aircraft, falling bullets and incendiary bombs had taken civilians' homes, food and water, families, cathedrals and churches, cherished landmarks, and livelihoods. Tempers often flared when civilians encountered the enemy "*luftgangsters*" on the ground of their homeland after an air battle or as POW's.

Six days earlier, on Aug 9, American bombs struck the town of Speicher, Germany, approximately 10 miles from the eventual final resting place of *Tiny Angel*. Over 60 civilians, including women, children, and the elderly were killed, and the town was nearly destroyed. Nazi propaganda, claiming there was no military target in the area, had whipped the civilian population into a frenzy, declaring



Rauhbautz, Marie, Special Delivery and Bonnie B. by Keith Ferris, depicting the Luftwaffe attack on the 303rd BG, August 15, 1944

American airmen to be murderers, and deserving to be treated as such. Soon, the locals would get their revenge on the airmen lucky enough to survive the fall from above.

The burning wing of one of the nine downed bombers from the 303rd that had just bombed Wiesbaden, *Bad Penny*, crashed into a barn and farmhouses in Seinsfeld, catching them on fire. Navigator 2nd Lt. Lester Reuss was able to bail out, but his parachute caught in a tree, leaving him hanging. As he tried

to unbuckle himself, two unarmed German soldiers arrived and tried to help, until a local Nazi party man arrived and shot him. He was soon beaten to death by two civilians with a club and hammer.

Bad Penny Radioman Sgt. Patsy Rocco bailed out successfully, and was taken prisoner. The next day, while being transported with another surrendered airman, they encountered an angry mob of civilians in the town of Groß-Gerau and were beaten with "fists, sticks, and other objects." The Chief of the Security Police, Nicolaus Fachinger, soon arrived and asked "Why haven't they been beaten to death?" He then led the men to the courtyard of the city hall, and along with a German soldier, ended their lives with an iron rod.

Tiny Angel's waist gunner, Jess Joyce, was last seen alive by Forrest Howell, who opened the door for him to bail out. Howell remarked in the Missing Air Crew Report, "He may have been one of the flyers who were murdered in the area," but a war crimes investigation later found no evidence. It is also known that one of *Tiny Angel's* crew-member's parachutes did not open. Locals who witnessed the burning plane initially thought the crew had thrown out a large package but this was later found to be a member of the crew. Navigator Ralph Page also lost some teeth that day "due to civilian action."

August 15, 1944 was one of the worst days of losses that the 303rd experienced during the hostilities of WWII. Of the thirty-nine aircraft dispatched by the 303rd BG to bomb the airfield near Wiesbaden, Germany on August 15, 1944, nine aircraft did not return. Twenty-four airmen were killed in action, and 48 became prisoners of war.

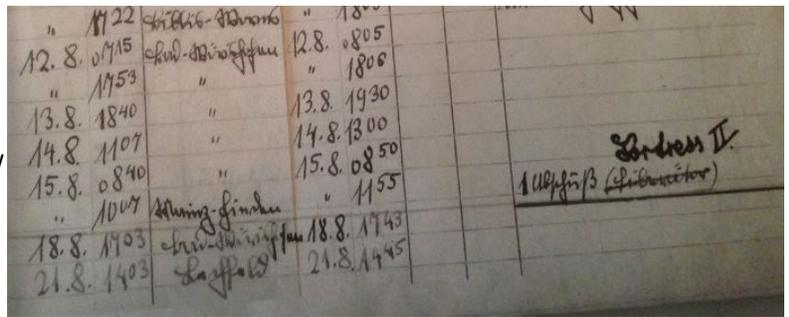
Walther Dahl himself was credited for two bomber kills before landing in a glider field due to fuel exhaustion with twelve other *Sturm* aircraft from JG 300. Luftwaffe ace Walther Loos was also credited

for a B-17 kill that day. A local man commented "there were so many parachutes, we thought it was an airborne operation," assuming an infiltration by paratroopers.

Among the surviving crew of *Tiny Angel*, all were held in various POW camps until the end of the war, except for tailgunner Smalley, who was repatriated after the amputation of his leg. Because of his injuries, Co-pilot Mason developed amnesia and a debilitating stutter from the attack, but eventually recovered. His story was dramatized in a radio series "the Treasury Salutes," where he recovered his singing voice while being compelled by a psychiatrist to perform in a Special Services Show. Radioman Forrest Howells wrote two books focusing on his survival in the German POW camps, after a severe infection and loss of an eye.

Engineer and Top Turret Gunner S Sgt. Joseph Slight was buried by German locals in a small cemetery plot in Wilsecker, Germany, near the crash site, in a grave mis-marked with a small wooden cross bearing the name "Joseph Leist". The Bürgermeister of Wilsecker, Jacob Fischbach, in stark contrast to the violence perpetrated in the air and on the ground, took great care with Joe's body, including folding his flight jacket under his head for a dignified burial. When the American Quartermasters disinterred his body for transfer to France, Herr Fischbach was rewarded with a bottle of whiskey and cigarettes thanks to his respect for this fallen airman.

Back home in Kansas City, the Slight family had little information on Joe's fate. He was originally declared missing by the war department- the fog of war had still obscured the true nature of his loss, even after being reinterred to the Lorainne American Cemetery in St. Avold, France on February 15, 1946. Joe's family would often talk about him, wishfully hoping for his safe return. After the liberation of Europe, it became increasingly clear that Joe might never return home, though Katie maintained faith that she would see her older brother again. On July 22, 1946, almost two years after his death, his mother Pauline wrote to the Quartermaster General, "...I am very anxious to learn the details you might have: Just what happened? How he died? The condition of his body? And where he is buried?"



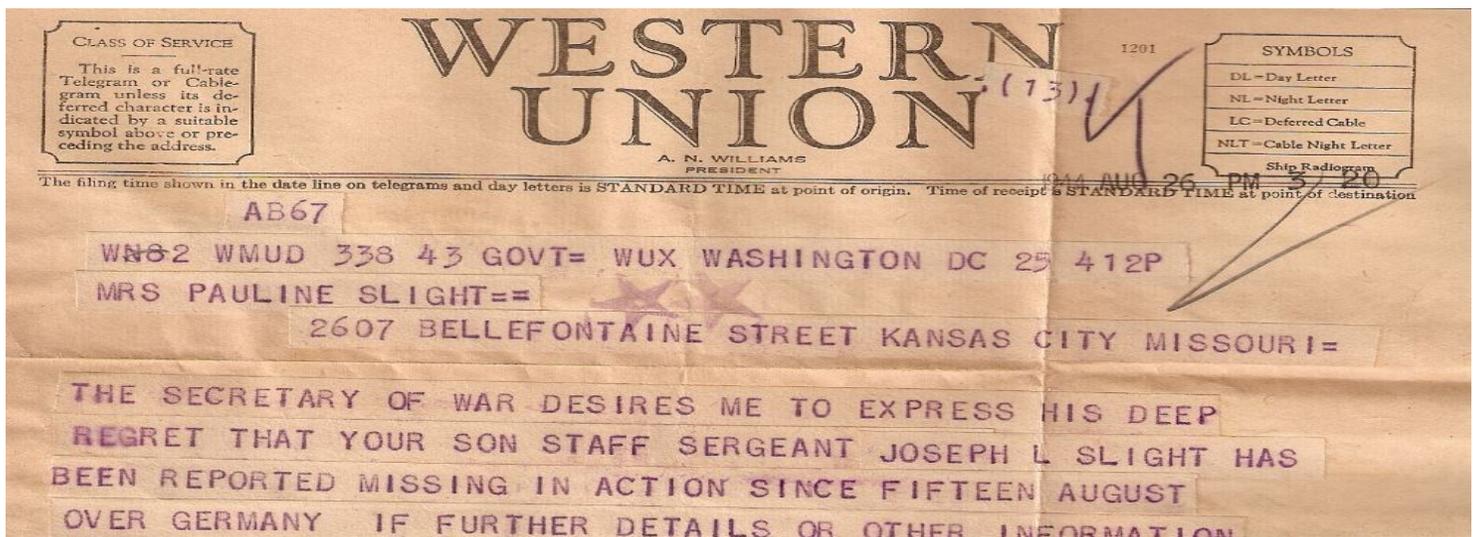
Pilot Logbook entry of Walther Loos from August 15, 1944
Initially claiming a Liberator, corrected to Fortress.

Below: Up the steps and to the left, the original resting place of Joseph Slight.



Do you suppose the time will come when parents will be privileged to visit the military cemeteries overseas?"

On a cold morning in January 2015 I was able to visit Joseph Slight and Jess Joyce's graves in St. Avold, France. They rest alongside thousands of their fellow fallen brothers in a land they helped liberate. Being the grandson of a B-17 pilot in WWII, I am keenly aware that these are the men who sacrificed their lives for a great cause and country, and that I might not be here today without their sacri-



How is everyone at home?
Molly; tell her to write to me
a note and put in some of your
letters and tell me about what
she is doing and how is school
and everything like that. How is
Kate? I would like to see the little
tyke again, she hasn't forgotten
me has she?

One of Joe Slight's last letters to Mom, August 1944.

vice. The same gratitude is expressed in the cemetery's guestbook, as the message "Thank you for our freedom" is signed in French, Dutch, German, Italian, English, and many other languages from thousands of visitors from all over the world.

Later that day I traveled to Malberg, Germany, near the final resting place of *Tiny Angel*. A local historian explained that the crash site had been a popular place for the townspeople to salvage aluminum that could be sold to the nearby factory, and that over the years, most salvageable parts, as big as an engine in the 1960s, were brought out of the woods and sold. This historian began combing the area in the early 1990s, and assisted by his metal detector, recovered many of the remaining identifiable parts of *Tiny Angel*, including the aircraft data plate, three .50 caliber machine guns, an oxygen bottle, the copilot seat armor plate, the copilot's control wheel, pieces of the instrument panel, and many spent .50 caliber casings. It is indescribable the emotion I felt as I handled some of the shell casings, possibly fired in defense of the bomber by Joe Slight himself, as I packaged them to mail home to deliver to Katie, Joe's sister, and Keith, Lt. Cook's nephew in-law.

During my first conversation with Katie at the Wendover Airshow many months previous, it became clear that even though she had all of Joe's letters home tucked away in the basement, untouched for many years, she was still unaware of the full story of this tragedy, even seventy years later. Within a few days of our original conversation, I was able to tell her for the first time about the recovery of Joe's body and the location of his grave in France. Then, a few weeks after my visit to France and Germany, I was able to present Katie and Wyatt a display case including a rubbing from Joe's headstone, a .50 caliber casing from *Tiny Angel* and a picture of Joe. It was an honor to finally tell Joe's family, for the first time ever, the full story of how Joe lost his life fighting for our country.

The story of this tragic mission lives on to this day. In the WWII Gallery of the Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum in Washington D.C. hangs a 75'x25' mural entitled "Fortresses Under Fire", painted by Keith Ferris. The mural depicts the 303rd Bomb Group's

return from Wiesbaden on that fateful day in August 1944, with the famous 303rd's B-17G "Thunderbird" being engaged by a Fw-190. One of the few surviving airworthy B-17's belongs to the Lone Star Flight Museum in Galveston, Texas, is painted to replicate and honor the original "Thunderbird" flown by the 303rd BG on the August 15, 1944 mission to Wiesbaden. She is still available for rides, tours and airshows.

The legacy and memory of heroes like Joe Slight depends on us here at the Commemorative Air Force, and all authors, historians and movie makers who tell these great stories of bravery, honor, heroism, and sacrifice. Let us keep the stories of these men and women alive in our hearts and minds so that their sacrifices are forever honored, and never forgotten.



Tiny Angel Artifacts Recovered From Crash Site



Bail-out Bell, lower left



Trim Wheel

