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SPOTSYLVANIA, VIRGINIA 22553-0127

April 2, 1993

John N. Hackney, Jr.
John Hackney Agency, Inc.
Post Office Box 998
Wilson, North Carolina 27894-0998

Dear Mr. Hackney:

I sincerely appreciate your taking the effort to copy and mail the information on the Zete House and Uncle John. I spent quite some time this afternoon looking through the names and faces.

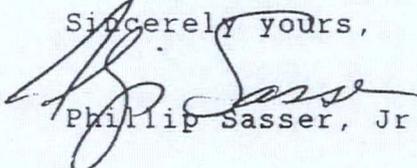
It's funny how life moves in cycles. In looking at the picture of the Zetes, I recognize several friends - Bert Walston, Syd White, Tom Nash (who was my roommate at Woodberry Forest and the first year at Carolina), Rick McElroy and, of course, Jimmy James. No, I did not have any of the information you sent except the 1941 picture.

By the way, I think I have talked to Tom Ellis in the past either on Zete business or legal business. I did not realize he was a close friend of Uncle John and will try to contact him in the near future.

Again, thanks for all of the information. I hope we can get together at Atlantic Beach this summer.

Best wishes.

Sincerely yours,


Phillip Sasser, Jr.

PSJR:ph

Ken Decker
410 Cloverdale Road
Chenango Forks, NY 13746-1130
Phone (607) 648-2366

Nov. 8, 1999

Mr. John Hackney, Jr.
Box 998
Wilson, NC 27894

Hello John,

I was pleased to hear from you as always. Thank you for your check and please disregard your reminder card mailed from here this morning. I have finally found a way to print the standard post card.

Enclosed are some copies of the picture you asked about. The original is a laser copy and they are not well reproduced. I scan them into my computer and have to fool with them to get them acceptable, and sometimes it is just not possible. That one was better than some.

Today, I also received a letter from Phillip Sasser, Jr. He said he had heard from you and appreciated it very much. He asked for a copy of the issue with the photo and I will send him one. He also mentioned another relative of his who was shot down in a B-17 and survived being shot point blank by a German. He ended the war in a POW camp and died a few years ago. I'll do a write up about this.

Thank you once again for your continued support.

Sincerely,

Ken Decker

Ken Decker

Memories

The Flight Community Forum  Dedicated To Those Who Served

No known A/C assigned to this crew at this time at Wendover Field.	
P	F/O Clayton R. Wilson (POW)
CP	2 nd Lt. Dewey C. Browne (Evaded)
N	2 nd Lt. Fred E. Bloesch (POW)
B	2 nd Lt. Herman D. Stevens (POW)
TT	S/Sgt. Herbert E. May (Not aboard)
WG	S/Sgt. Vern P. Long (Evaded)
BT	S/Sgt. John M. Derochers (?)
R	Sgt. Ellis H. Klein (Evaded)
TG	S/Sgt. George J. Kendal (POW)
WG	S/Sgt. Jack F. Hook (?)

The Wilson plane was 42-30147, "M'Honey". Six members of the crew were taken prisoner and 4 evaded. It is too bad that Sgt. May was not among the crew members this day. All of the original crew listed above may not have been with F/O Wilson when he went down.

This coincidentally is the same mission in which Sgt. Lavoie who was the subject of our feature story went down on. Other losses on the mission were "Vertical Shaft" piloted by Jesse D. Hausenfluck: "Deuces Wild" piloted by Frank G. Mattes: "Snuffy" piloted by Oliver Sweningsen: and the two aircraft described in this issue ("Yankee Pow-house II" and "M' Honey").

The Schweinfurt mission was only the 17th Mission of the 384th Bomb Group, and they had already lost 28 B-17's and crews by this time. The group had lost about 170 crew members and approximately 80 of these men had been killed.

The B-17's up to this time were not equipped with chin turrets. Advancement was also made on tactics as experience was gained. This was true for both the Americans as well as the Luftwaffe. Head-on attacks were not as refined or as often as they soon would be.

Nine of the 17 missions were into France and Belgium. German gunners were plentiful in these countries and there was no Allied occupation of the area until D-Day on June 6, 1944. Chances of being aided by the French were somewhat encouraging if you were shot down. In Germany, you stood the chance of being killed by the civilians. The Gestapo was in charge in France to keep the people under their watchful eye. They would kill downed airmen and those who aided them, without hesitation.

CORRECTION

Vol. 4 # 5 May 1999, Page 93.

In comments made by me in the diary of Jules Levison, concerning the mission of the 17th of March 1945, I made an error common to the loss of the "Dark Angel". This aircraft (42-10748) was lost near Oschatz, Germany, and was not ditched in the Channel by pilot William Schaver.

Not Again!?

Yup, it's happened again. First, MCI sold the internet and e-mail service to Cable Wireless company. Now a few short months later Cable Wireless has sold the e-mail

service to Prodigy. Therefore I have a new e-mail address. Though it is already in effect, they will forward e-mail with the old address for a limited time.

NEW E-MAIL ADDRESS
memories-2@prodigy.net

And this has happened again too !

In a conversation with a member of the 92nd Bomb Group, I learned he had donated his WW-II flying jacket to the Elmira - Corning Air Museum. Later he inquired as to its whereabouts to be told that the paperwork and the jacket was lost. I am not aware of the wording of the paperwork, but it would seem this happens all too often. Maybe an agreement should be drafted where a person who donates these jackets should be reimbursed the sum of \$500 if a loss occurs.

With the air show nearing, I wonder if they are still charging additionally to see the single engine war birds, after charging admission to get on the grounds ?

ANOTHER COINCIDENCE ?

From John Hackney, who has been a very helpful subscriber, I have received the following letter and photo copies.

Dear Ken, Your Vol. 4 No. 6 arrived this week and when I reached the last page, I found myself staring at # 4 in your group picture. I think this John William Sasser, a fraternity brother at UNC-CH, Class of 42. He flew B-17's and died in a German POW camp from wounds.

His closest kin known to me now is a nephew, Phillip Sasser, Jr., who is an attorney in Spotsylvania, VA., near Fredericksburg. John was a heavy weight wrestler on the UNC team in 1940 - 41, a big man. Maybe 6'2" and 200 + pounds. His frat brothers thought he was a dead ringer for Joe Lewis. Let me know if my guess proves to be a fit.

Best regards, John.

John Hackney has a sharp eye. It sure does look like a



match. In checking records here I came up with a Captain John W. Sasser, assigned to the 306th Bomb Group, 368th Bomb Squadron. He was assigned to B-17 number 42-97368 named "Tailwind" Call letters BO-O. Shot down by fighters and flak at Feyensein, Ger. On Sept. 12, 1944. There were 5 KIA and 4 POW's listed.

The 306th Bomb Group was part of the 1st Combat Wing and it is not surprising that George Cathey of the 384th BG would have this photo as the 384th was part of the 1st Wing as well. I found no record of Sasser being in the 384th.

Thanks John for writing. Maybe someone else from the 306th will appear in the photo. There is no clue as to the B-17 in the picture in Memories as to where the photo was taken or when. K. Decker

ONE OF THE FIRST

Les Aufmuth passed away on August 23, 1999 at Tucson, AZ. He was a member and volunteer at the 390th Memorial Museum, though he was a pilot in the 384th Bomb Group during WW-II.

On September 6, 1943, the B-17 piloted by Les was damaged and crash landed near Gisors, France (35 miles NW of Paris). He apparently was aided to the Spanish Pyrenees border by the French Resistance where he was caught by German border guards and sent to Stalag Luft I at Barth. He remained a POW there until the end of the war.

W. C. Knecht. 402 Payne Hill Rd.
Jefferson Hills, PA 15025-4012

Wilbert C. or "Bud" has written two letters in the past weeks. I will take parts from each as I did publish his diary and some other information in Vol. 3 # 4, page 77.

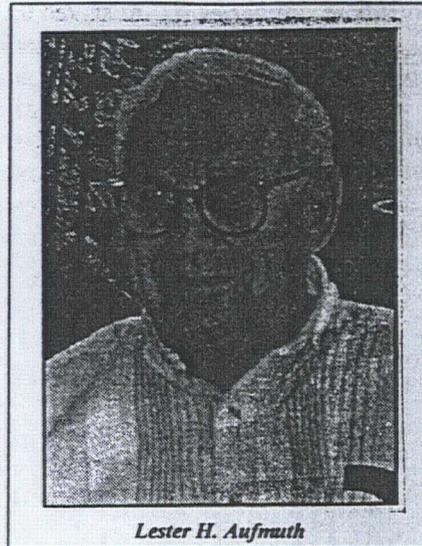
Our crew flew 8 missions with the 384th BG, 547th BS. Then we were transferred to the 15th Air Force, 2nd BG, 96th BS. Our 8th AF crew was;

A/C Unknown		
P	Verlyn Tollison	Killed 4/13/44
CP	Eldridge Huber	
Nav.	W. T. Devine	Transf. to 2 nd BG 4/44
B	C.M. Pearson	Transf. to 2 nd BG 4/44
TT	Urban Westrick	Transf. to 2 nd BG 4/44
R	J. Cammarano	Transf. to 2 nd BG 4/44
BT	Wm. P. Schmit	Transf. to 2 nd BG 4/44
RW	Regens Patton	Transf. to 2 nd BG 4/44
LW	W. C. Knecht	Transf. to 2 nd BG 4/44
TG	Joe Murawski	Transf. to 2 nd BG 4/44

When we were at Quay, England we heard that Tollison got killed on 4/4/44, on a Schweinfurt Raid. We left Eldridge Huber with Tollison, but I've never been able to get any information on what happened to him. I'd really like to find out.

The raids we were on in the 8th AF were:

3/16/44 Augsburg, Ger.
3/18/44 Oberpfaffenhofen, Ger.
3/20/44 Frankfurt, Ger.



Lester H. Aufmuth

3/22/44 Berlin, Ger.
3/23/44 Munster, Ger.
3/26/44 Legrismont, France,
3/28/44 DiJon, France.
3/29/44 Tours, France

This is when they took Tollison and Huber, our pilot and copilot and gave us Pilot Capt. Bob Kravet and copilot Greely Gay. They shipped us to the 15th AF in Italy.

Counting the 8th and 15th, we got credit for 50 missions. Not counting Tollison and Huber, the rest of us made it.

Letter No. 2

I've written before and sent you some stuff, short diary and a few other things.

Your "Memories" edition Vol. 4 # 6, June 99 with the "Mean Machine" on the cover reminded me of another idea that didn't work.

In the 15th AF we were in the 2nd BG, 96th BS. at Amendola Arena. I don't remember the exact date or mission, but late June (maybe) they put us on a plane that had a 50 cal. gun in the tail replaced by a 20mm cannon. The tail gunner would have one 50 cal and one 20mm instead of two 50's. They told us to pick a spot, drift out of the squadron and test fire. We tried it as soon as the plane was over the water. You couldn't control the plane. The recoil was too much. If we hadn't left the formation to test it we would have run into every plane in the squadron. So much for another bright idea.

I've gotten more information from you than I get from the Air Force. When I write to them, they tell me my records were burnt.

I read in one of your issues that Tollison got killed 4/13/44 on a Schweinfurt Raid. While we were at New Quay, England waiting on a plane to N. Africa we heard that on 4/4/44 his plane was last seen heading for Switzerland. That was the last I heard of him. Do you have anything on Eldridge Huber?

Thanks again, W.C.K.

In looking into this, I find that there was no mission on 4/4/44. On the 4/13/44 mission to Schweinfurt the Tollison crew was made up of the men listed below.

42-97231 SO-D No name		
P	2 ND Lt. Verlyn C. Tollison	KIA
CP	2 nd Lt. Dana C. White	KIA
N	2 nd Lt. Willis R. Fitzsimmons	KIA
B	2 nd Lt. Roy (NMI) McGinnis	KIA
R	T/Sgt. Beryl Coffman	POW
TT	T/Sgt. Robert A. Patterson	POW
BT	S/Sgt. Simon C. Valasquez	POW
TG	S/Sgt. Hubert M. Davis	POW
RW	Sgt. Elmer E. Treet, Jr.	POW
LW	S/Sgt. Earl H. Friess	POW

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of Counsel
RONALD L. HICKS

November 4, 1999

John N. Hackney, Jr.
P.O. Box 998
Wilson, North Carolina 27894-0998

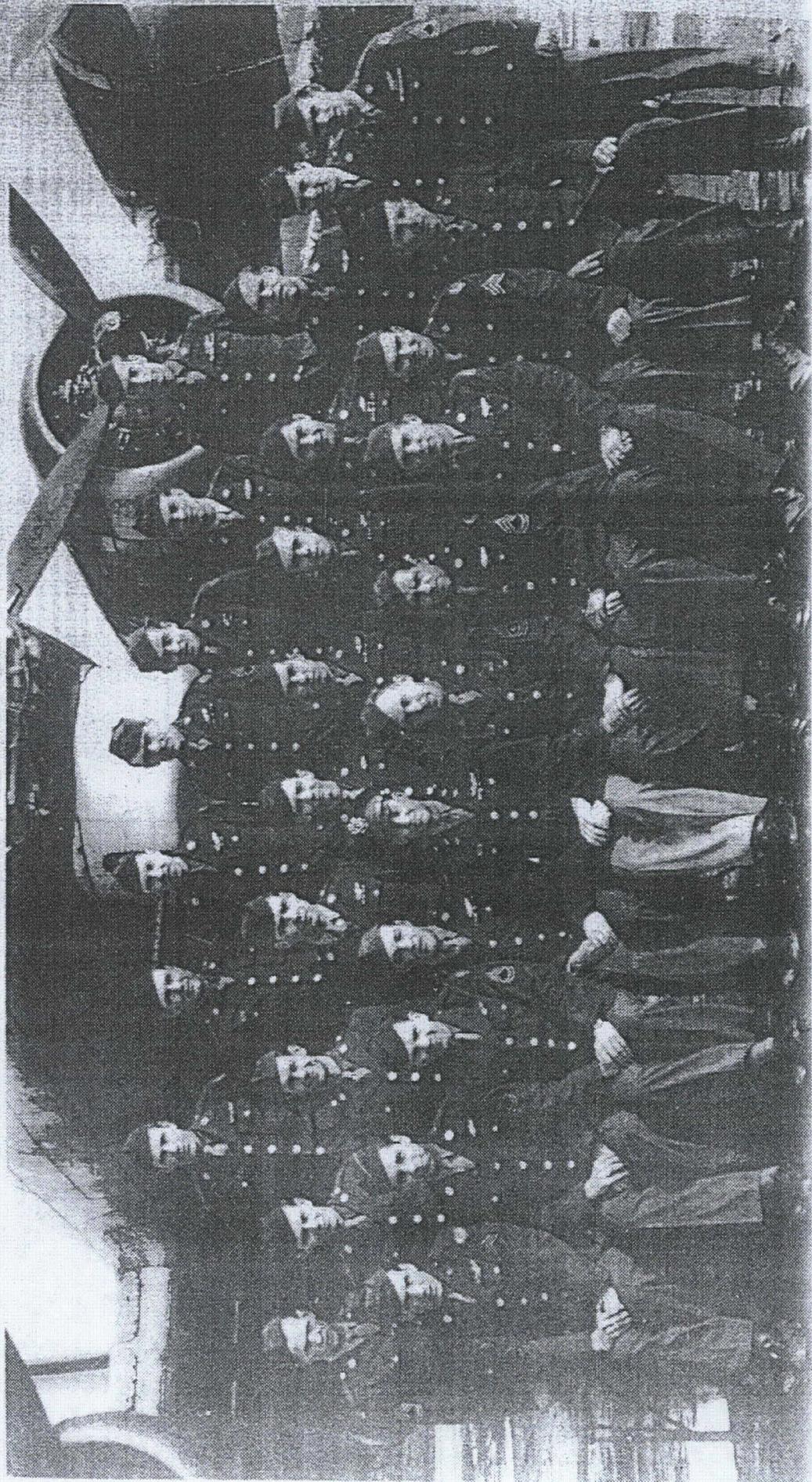
Dear Mr. Hackney:

I can't tell you how much your September 23rd note meant to me. Thank you. I have always been fascinated by John's war service. His older sister, Nancy, published a hardback collection of his letters to commemorate the birth of my older brother, John William Sasser. The book deals with his training experiences, his life in England, and includes letters from the POW Hospital prior to his death. They also include letters from buddies who were interned with him up to the time of his death, just days before the Allies liberated the Camp. I enclose some excerpts from the book

I dusted off my "John W, Sasser" file on receipt of your letter. Once again, thank you for all of your help in my efforts to discover a little more about Uncle John. I received a note from Dick McElroy, and had made contact with Harry Weyher before that. I never did contact Jack Miller. Is he still in Potomac, Maryland? I am in that neighborhood often, as my two daughters attend the Madeira School just across the river near Great Falls, Virginia. I have not heard from any other "Old Zetes", but would be happy to renew my efforts acquiring John Sasser stories.

I would especially love to correspond with Harry Weyher. The last address I had for him was 551 Fifth Avenue, Twenty-seventh floor, New York, N.Y. I would love to see him if he is travelling through this area on trips to and from North Carolina. In fact, I may just mail a copy of this letter to that address to see whether it reaches him.

I sincerely hope that you all did not suffer any damage as a result of the storms and the high water. I have been thinking about all of my Eastern North Carolina contacts, and praying that everyone is safe and sound.



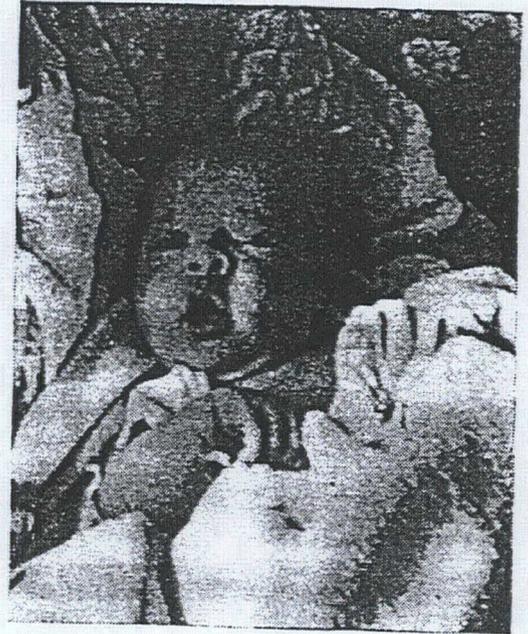
Christmas 1947...

*The people which sat in darkness saw great light:
and to them which sat in the region and shadow of
death, light is sprung up.*

Matthew IV, 16



Captain John William Sasser
January 5, 1921 March 20, 1945



John William Sasser (Two days old)
December 2, 1947

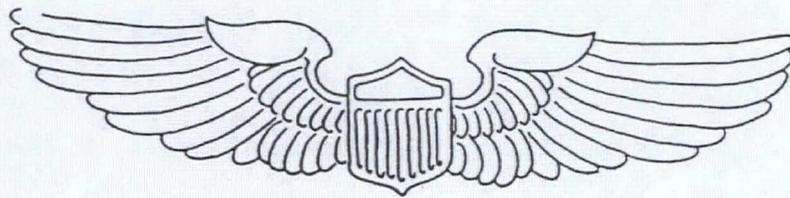
A

Pair

of

Silver

Wings



Captain John W. Sasser

1st Lt. James T. McStap

1st Lt. Robert E. Banta

2nd Lt. Anthony J. Carlino

T/Sgt. Eugene T. Carroll

S/Sgt. Arthur C. Schultz

S/Sgt. David R. Rebolti

S/Sgt. Raymond M. Wilson

Sgt. Virgil S. Mitchelson

CREW OF "TAILWIND" . . . B-17 FLYING FORTRESS
368th SQUADRON—306th BOMBER GROUP
UNITED STATES ARMY AIR FORCES



John William Sasser was accepted as an Aviation Cadet in the Army Air Forces in June 1942, just after graduating from the University of North Carolina. On January 4th, 1943, he was inducted into service at Nashville, Tennessee and was sent to Blythe, California, Marana, New Mexico and Marfa, Texas for training. After receiving his pilot's wings and his commission as Second Lieutenant on November 3rd, 1943 in Class 43-J of Marfa Army Air Field, he was ordered to Sioux City Army Air Field to train with the crew of a B-17 Flying Fortress. On May 15th he was promoted to First Lieutenant and flew his ship and crew overseas on May 25th, 1944. His overseas letters follow . . . unedited and unabridged.

A.P.O. 16095-CJ-35

c/o Postmaster, New York
5/26/44.

Dear Mither and Sis,

Can't say when I arrived here or when I'll leave or how the weather is or much of anything! However, I can say that "Flop"* came from a beautiful home! When I'll arrive at my final destination, I don't know, as that old "bugaboo" that gave me so much trouble at Sioux City after you left the first time is still detaining me. By the way, I probably won't be able to cable you from my final destination but I'll write a V-Mail letter immediately upon arrival.

As you probably know, I am very disappointed about being left by all the boys from Sioux City—they've been gone from here now about four days but I still hope we'll catch them later. I don't think there was much wrong with Evans† ears as he was just grounded for *observation* for a couple of days! Certainly wish it hadn't happened but maybe it was for the best. We are now with a bunch from Dyersburg, Tenn. (same as Sioux City) and it so happens I have previously known quite a few of them, either at Hobbs or Marfa or somewhere.

I'm in a big hurry, will write you another letter later—God bless you and keep you always and always.

Love,
John

*Reference to "Flop," a Newfoundland dog at his home, tells he flew via New Foundland . . . "bugaboo" is low-ceiling weather.
† Navigator's ear trouble delayed flying overseas with group of bombers from Sioux City Army Air Field.

your letters help so much. Yes, I received Nancy's beautiful telegram and will write her—glad you received the \$50.00 allotment, Mither—did you receive the \$1000.00? By the way, I thought of what Frank* said the other day when I was on a mission and I often think of many things you and Sis say. Hope you had a nice trip to Boston, Sis. Thank Harry Weyher for the planned party and I thank you both for having him in for the week-end. I'm so, so glad and happy that you're feeling stronger, Mither—Keep up the good work! God bless and keep you both always and always. I love you and miss you.

John

P.S. You spoke of the weather there being brisk—I never sleep under less than four or five blankets at night.

Saturday night: 6/24/44

Dear Mither and Sis,

Just happened to think of what a different Saturday night this one is from many I've spent before. I'm now sitting on my bunk listening to another program from Calais and thinking about you all—thought I'd take out a few minutes to chat with you but I must hurry to sleep as I'm pretty tired; only a matter of a very few hours ago, *I landed after completing my fourth mission*—guess you'll read about the raid in the papers. So far, my crew is working out very well and everything in general is fine.

You asked if we had been re-united with the old Sioux City bunch—well, no I haven't, but never expect to, anyway, as everybody was split up—in other words, a few crews going to different Groups all over England. However, this is a doggone good Group with a heck of a fine bunch of boys and I'm well satisfied—just wish I could have gotten into action by around June 1st.—I would almost be an “old-timer” by now!

The news just came in and was all pretty good. By the way, Sis, we're listening to my radio—the one you brought me and it works fine. Just began thinking about Sioux City again—didn't we have a wonderful time together?

Hope you all have received some of my letters—by the way, did you receive the \$1000.00 I sent from my last station? I guess I owe you, Nancy, just about this amount so you take this to pay yourself.

You all asked if I needed anything. Well here are a few things I'd like: One large bottle of Wildroot Cream Oil (Hair oil); about 2 good quality (Gabardine preferred) medium weight officer's Green Shirts (size 17-35); a box of candy bars with a couple of small cans of sardines or fruit juice also; a Zippo cigarette Lighter (Zippo Mfg. Co.—Bradford, Pa.); a picture of you two; a couple of medium size sheets and a pillow case; a subscription to the N.C.U. “Alumnae Review.” (By the way, I think you'll have to write to the two cigarette companies requesting their prices and

* Frank Faison Sasser, the brother who served in Merchant Marine, was wounded and hospitalized in Scotland and died Feb. 3rd, 1943.



LETTERS FROM ENGLAND



telling them of my request, giving them my address—they then send me the lighter direct and you pay for it). I want the Zippo lighter cause it's good to use in the wind—then I want the Ronson cause it'll be a good lighter. You'll have to find out about the size package you can send me and how often. Was just thinking about how much you all are to me—you're my sweetheart or girl that I write to plus my Mother and my sister! So there! God bless and keep you both always and always. I love you—

John

P.S. Have you heard anything from the Devil?* I'll write him. Write when you can.

Monday night—6/26/44

Dear Mither and Sis,

Well, another day has passed with nothing exceptional happening. *I went on my fifth mission* yesterday—would have liked to have gone to church, but couldn't make it. Life *here* is pretty quiet—nothing to do except eat and sleep when we're not flying; however, this doesn't leave time for much else!

By the way, I'll add two things you all can send me if you will—a couple of good heavy wash cloths and a large package of air mail stationery.

Right now, I'm a little cool but comfortable while lying in my bunk listening to a re-broadcast of a U. S. program, by the American Forces Network (U.S.A.—E.T.O. Network), with Lena Horne, Frances Langford, and Dinah Shore. We all sure enjoy the radio.

As I said before, life is pretty quiet and simple over here. You have no idea how all the boys here are—any little thing is so appreciated and there isn't a lot of griping here as everywhere else in the Army; I believe you get to feel closer to one another over here also; however, naturally your nerves get a little “edgy” once in a while.

Mither, thank you for writing to Martin and trying to find out where Ol' Mammy† is so you can tell her about me. I'm so happy that you are so much stronger and can walk so well; I've read this part of your letter over several times and it always makes *me* feel better—Keep up the good work!

Incidentally, I'd say the reason you all haven't heard from Phillip is that he's probably stationed in China now instead of India and mail is probably much slower. I better say Good-night now and sleep tight my little Mither and sweet Sis. God bless and keep you both always and always.

Love,

John

P.S. How is Buy-Lines?‡—Could you send me the complete address of Sam, George, and Frank Mordecai?

* His pet name for his brother Phillip . . . flying with B-29 Bombers from India to raid Japan.

† John's Negro nurse when he was little.

‡ His sister's newspaper advertising column in which John was intensely interested.



LETTERS FROM ENGLAND



I'd take ten minutes out and drop you a note. I came in town by myself tonight and have just been wandering around looking at different things. I guess I'm a little lonely and would love for you and Sis to be here with me—wouldn't we have fun! By the way, ask Sis if she remembers one time about 8 years ago about this time of the year when she and I were bicycling out towards the cemetery on Main Street in Princeton and we talked of how much fun it would be to go cycling through England!

I arrived at my Group Friday the 16th and have been attending classes since then. However, these are about over, so hope to get started pretty soon.

I believe I'm going to like my Group fine—it's supposed to be one of the top ones over here and is one of the oldest. So far I'm getting along fine and feel fine. God bless and keep you always and always.

Love,

John

P.S. Haven't received but three letters from you all since I've been here in the E.T.O. (European Theatre of Operations). Write when you can. I love you both very much.

John

Friday night: 6/23/44

Dear Mither and Sis,

Guess you've both despaired about hearing from me—not because I haven't written for about five days either; I just heard today that all of our mail over here has been kept in the U.K. since "D-Day"! Hope this isn't true as I've written quite a few notes. As you know from my last letter, I arrived here exactly a week ago. *I went on my 1st Mission on the 19th, my second on the 20th, and my third on the 21st*—guess you read in the newspapers about the raids on the 20th and 21st. These are all I've gotten in so far. Our missions aren't at all easy but I'm happy and now feel like I'm doing something.

I like this place O.K. and honestly believe I'm in the best Squadron of the best Group in the E.T.O. All the boys over here are *damn* nice guys; I believe combat makes people better. The food here is pretty good and the barracks aren't too bad. I'm now writing this letter while lying in bed and while all of us are listening to and laughing at the regular program we listen to every night—the German propaganda program, broadcast in English from Calais, France! We get a lot of laughs from it and rarely miss it.

We're kept very busy here as we fly a great deal—you can guess this! This is about all we have time to do and find a lot of trouble getting the correct amount of sleep. I'm not doing any drinking whatsoever and rarely have time to go to town—there's nothing much to do in town anyway. In other words, about all I do is fly missions and eat and sleep. Besides, the three letters I wrote you I'd received, I now have received two more—dated June 6th and June 9th from you, Mither—thank you very much for both of these wonderful letters. Both of you write as often as you can—

Prisoner

of

War



Kriegsgefangenenpost
Mit Luftpost
Par Avion

An
Taxe perçue
RM. 40 Pf.
Gebührentreff

Mit Luft Post
Bis Nord America

17.10.41

MISS. NANCY SASSER

Absender:
Vor- und Zuname: John W. SASSER - 1st Lt.
Gefangenenummer: 53629
Lager-Bezeichnung: St. 1 of Luft III
Deutschland (Allemagne)

Empfangsort: 271 Madison Ave.,
New York, 16, N. Y.
Land: U.S.A.

U.S. Census

On September 28th, the War Department notified John's family that he was missing in action, as of September 12th, 1944. The events between then and January 4th, 1945 have been learned from crew members returned from overseas, and from John's letters written from Prisoner-of-War hospitals in Germany. The following is a summary:

On September 12th, 1944, at about five o'clock in the morning, the B-17 "Tailwind" took off from its base near Bedford, England. The crew had been briefed to bomb the Ruhrland in Czechoslovakia. Their plane was the lead ship of the upper flight formation of B-17's of which John was the commander.

Those on the flight said entire bombing mission was off about ten miles in navigation, which brought the B-17's within range of flak from Berlin. The "Tailwind" was hit by flak and they had to pull out of formation because they couldn't continue to lead their mission when their super chargers and two engines were shot out.

Suddenly German fighter ships came out of the sun. Sgt. Revolti said that ships were exploding all over the sky, but that none of the fighter shots got the "Tailwind" before they were able to drop bombs. The ship was badly injured by fighter attacks, but eight or ten fighters were shot down by them.

John asked if any of the boys were injured and several of them had been shot in the arms and legs by fighter bullets. They decided not to bail out because of the injured and because they had two engines which were still operating.

They turned back in an effort to make it to neutral country for crash landing. Fighters again attacked them and their gas line and the third engine was shot out. They flew West for about twenty to twenty-five minutes, looking for a safe place to crash land. All this time their No. 1 engine was pulling only 60, which Sgt. Revolti said was hardly enough to keep the plane in the air. But the ship continued on an even keel and they thought they were going to make it.

They found an open field for the crash landing and threw away or destroyed everything possible (guns, radio, bombsight, equipment, seats, etc.) to lighten the ship.

When they found a field to land they were eight or ten thousand feet in the air, coming in with the ship trimmed up for a good landing at about 120 miles per hour. Sgt. Mitchelson was calling out the air speed and all boys were at their crash landing stations. They were wounded, but none of them were dead.

Suddenly, when they were about 100' to 150' off the ground, the last engine cut out and they dropped into a big oak tree on the edge of the field. It cracked the plane all to pieces and threw all of the boys out of the plane except Sgt. Schultz. Five were killed instantly.

Sgt. Revolti said that everything was perfectly quiet after the crash, that he was semi-conscious but was able to see that Lt. Carlino, Lt. McStay, Sgt. Carroll, Sgt. Wilson and Lt. Banta were dead. He did not see the others, as they were hurled to the other side of the plane. He thought that he was the only one living.

He said that in about four hours German civilians came and put him in a truck which they had lined with parachute silk. Later they put in Sgt. Schultz, Sgt. Mitchelson and Captain Sasser. They were all wounded, but Captain Sasser worse than any of them. Sgt. Revolti said that the place where they landed had not been bombed by our Armies and for that reason the German civilians who picked them up and turned them over to the soldiers were not cruel to them. He feels that the boys who were dead were buried properly by the Germans.

The crew members who were still living were semi-conscious for about four hours. Then the Germans came and picked them up and took them to a first aid barracks. From accounts received after the war was over, John was so badly wounded that he was not expected to live.

Within three weeks he had survived the crisis and was separated from Sgt. Revolti, Sgt. Schultz and Sgt. Mitchelson and taken to a prison hospital for officers near Berlin. Due to malnutrition and neglect he did not progress well, but in spite of this was taken to the German prison camp where they interrogated American Air Forces officers.

Later he was sent to Obermassfeld, Germany, to a prison hospital for English and Americans. He gradually began to improve and was seemingly on the road to recovery.

On Thanksgiving night, 1944, the War Department wired that John was a prisoner of war in Germany. In December 1944 the first letter came through from Germany . . . written by boys John had asked to write for him. New prisoners of war were not permitted to write until assigned to a permanent camp . . . and these acquaintances, who had been longer in internment, performed a great service in so disguising their letters that they came through enemy censorship so quickly.

His Comrades

Finish The Story



Captain John William Sasser
United States Army Air Force

Norfolk, Virginia
January 5, 1921

Obermassfeld Germany
March 20, 1945

“God bless and keep you
always and always”

5/10/44

Dear Nancy,

There is not much new to tell you since I last wrote. I am getting along pretty good. I only hope this war will soon be over and then you and your Mother can again come to see us in Ireland and maybe I can come to the States for a visit. You know cousins should get together more often. Mother writes that little Mike is a lot better. I guess she wrote you about his accident* on the 12th of March when he broke his leg and jaw. It happened on Mother's birthday and Mike had sent a check home to buy a small present. By the way, Nancy, I have seen your brother John and he is getting along fine. I must close now. Best wishes to you. God bless and keep you always and always.

J. Porter

20/10/44

Dear Mrs. Sasser,

When I met John a short time ago, I promised him I would send you a few lines. He is an old friend of mine, whom I had not seen for a very long time, and was very surprised to meet him in the last camp I was in. He was doing fairly well, and was hoping to get news through to you as soon as possible. When you do hear from him, let me have a line or two as to how he is getting on, as I would not like to lose touch with him; we are not allowed to write from one camp to another. Let him know that I have written, and please give him my best wishes for a speedy recovery. Best wishes and good luck from your friend, Michael J. D.

Michael J. Doran
11950
Stalag 111A

10/11/44

Dear Mrs. Sasser,

No doubt you will be surprised to hear from me, especially from this distant land. I have been here for some time and am not doing so bad considering that a major war is being fought. Of course life is rather boring at times but we are eagerly awaiting our release sometime in the near future. The other day I heard from your son John W. and according to his note he is doing pretty well. He told me that he had an accident recently from which he is favorably recovering. I am very glad to learn that his accident is not a serious one, so there is no need for undue alarm. Trusting you all are enjoying the best of health. I am, yours sincerely

Timothy Ronan

*These letters written by acquaintances of John's in various prison camps. First letter is a masterpiece of unstated information . . . the crash on Sept. 12th when John had sent money to buy mother a birthday gift. Also "God bless and keep you always and always", which was John's regular ending to his letters.



December 24, 1944

Dear Nancy,

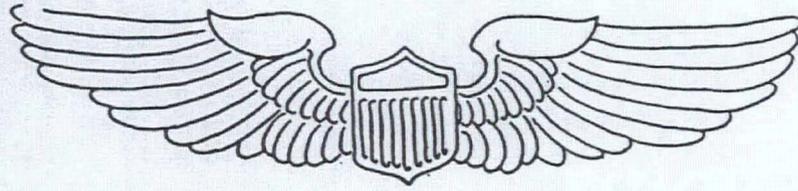
I love you, Sis. Christmas Gift, Sis! Ah ha, I got you this time! As I wrote Mither, your two naughty brothers won't come home this year, so you and Mith should have a high time! Oh, Sis, how we'll all miss each other—remember how you came and got me out of the bathroom when I was thinking about Daddy on the morning of Christmas '42—and all our other Christmases, especially the wonderful one you all fixed for me last year with the many packages and also the little bells and Santa Clauses! However, no barb-wire, no amount of miles, and no anything could separate our love, so we'll all be together anyway in spirit. Wonder whether you all will be in Raleigh or N. Y. and how the Aunts are and how Willy is? Also, how is Buy-Lines? And are you and Mith having fun and not working too hard and are you getting enough exercise? Sis, I think of you all the time—think of you as we talked when I was in N.Y. Spring of '42 for week-end, as we talked in Chapel Hill, and of the times we all had together in N.Y. and in Sioux City. I'm getting along fine—am doing nothing but eating, resting, thinking, and a lot of reading (know you've read "The Robe." How about Fosdick's "Being a Real Person"?). The moon is beautiful on the snow tonight. I have cigarettes, candy, etc., and maybe turkey for Christmas. God bless and keep you always and always. Love you much, Sis. John

Jan. 4, 1945*

Dear Mither and Sis,

Happy New Year to you both! I thank God for last year and all it meant to us in every way and just pray this year will be as good. Here at the hospital, we received a good many Christmas Red Cross parcels and ate turkey and pudding and candy and nuts. We had plenty left over and had the same on New Year's day. We also had a play and a concert, provided by our local talent, and they were both good. The only reason I'm still in the hospital is merely convalescence. My case is just a few simple breaks in my jaw and one leg and a couple of missing teeth and all are just about fixed up as good as ever. I'm still getting plenty of sleep, food, and good care, and am doing plenty of reading. I wonder how the Devil is and if he's still at his job and how you all are and how Buy-Lines is? I know all is fine. Mither, I'm sorry I had to choose your birthday for my "visit" here! Hope it will be possible to see you all soon. Love to all of my sweet Aunts and to "Grimmy"! God bless and keep you both always and always. I love you both so very much. Good luck. Love, John.

* January 5th, 1945, was John's 24th birthday.



With this final "God bless and keep you always and always" to his letter of January 4th, John's tender and faithful communications ended. This last letter was written on the last night of his 23rd year. Other letters must have been written, but they were probably lost in the upheaval caused by the American Army advances toward Obermassfeld. On April 2nd, the men interned at Obermassfeld Prison Hospital were at last liberated . . . and each started on his separate and longed-for homecoming. But John had already been freed. Two weeks before this day of deliverance, his spirit slipped quietly back whence it had come. On March 20th, 1945, he died on the operating table . . . and in the words of a comrade, "dressed in a white gown and made as nice as we men knew how, he was carried in a simple casket up the steep slope of the cemetery in Meiningen. The Chaplain read the service as the company of men from the hospital stood reverently around. An English soldier played Taps on his bugle. Then Reveille. A quiet, brotherly funeral."

Those who were with John during the last few months of his journey on earth finish his story in letters of simple dignity and compassion. Lacing through them are those precious moments of humor and the gaiety of gallant fortitude which transform the grief and tragedy momentarily into warm laughter and happiness. John would have been comforted to know that his friends and comrades had so beautifully solaced his family in their sorrow. The painstaking remembrance which these letters give of John's day-by-day living, and the careful reporting of how he met his death, brings a peace beyond understanding. They finish the story of John William Sasser . . . a man whose brightness of spirit and gallant courage was at high-tide even as his physical being was slipping so quickly to its last low ebb.



LETTERS FROM COMRADES



We argued about the Air Corps vs. the Infantry (and that's what I'm in) and the North vs. the South and advertising's place in mass production.

I'm enclosing the addresses of two of his doctors who I had also and the names of several of the men in our ward. Perhaps, they can help in some direction in which I can't.

Believe me, I've done my best, because my Mother went thru this almost and I know what news and "little" details can mean.

If I can be of any further service, please feel free to call on me any time, any place. I want to do it for John's sake as a personal friend.

Much success in your efforts and you can continue to write me here for about two months, then use my home address.

Sincerely,

(Signed) Phil Hutchins

From: Lt. Orlyn D. Chumat

O-77076

Wauzeka, Wisconsin

July 31, 1945

Dear Miss Sasser,

I will try to tell you all that I can about John's life from the time we met until his untimely death. When I came to the hospital in January, 1945, he was up and about on crutches, making wisecracks and in general doing his best to keep everyone in good spirits. It is for this that everyone in the ward will remember him, because not one person there had time to feel sorry for himself. As soon as a pathetic story started in the making, you just waited for a crack from John and every person there joined in or just listened. Most of the time he worked it so as to start an argument and the saddest war story was forgotten. I think it was that factor which kept the morale of all of us at its peak. No one received any sympathy and pretty soon the worst injuries were forgotten or being joked about.

Sass, as everyone called him, led all the Air Corps fellows in the battle against the Infantry which went on every day. The way he could twist those ground officers' statements around was something to hear. It was due to these word battles that the days seemed to pass more rapidly than one would expect.

John was also an excellent chess player and spent quite a lot of his time playing against bed patients in our ward and the other two wards on the same floor. For a while, the German doctor we had used to come up and play a couple of games. As he was about the only person who always won from John, we used to kid him about getting in the doctors good graces so he would send him home on a repatriation shipment.



LETTERS FROM COMRADES



From: Lt. John P. Hutchins 0-524382
Birmingham Gen. Hosp.
Ward C1-N
Van Nuys, Calif.
June 25th '45

Dear Miss Sasser,

I wanted to write you this letter in answer to your inquiry as to your brother, Capt. John W. Sasser, as soon as possible.

I realize how anxious to learn of any details you are.

I was sent by German hospital train from an allied Prisoner Hospital at Bad Sooden to the hospital at Obermassfeld on Jan. 12th.

I was put into a small ward of 17 British and American officers, including your brother. He was only two beds away from me and so we often talked, as that was our main source of diversion.

After you've been in an Allied Prisoner Hospital, especially in a small ward like that, you soon learn of the other fellow's wounds and of his background.

As I remember, John was the pilot of a B-17 Flying Fortress and was shot down on a raid over Germany the previous August or September. I do know fairly certain that he arrived at Obermassfeld around the middle of December, because he was one of the oldest men in that particular ward. He had told me of his injuries and that he was unconscious for 10 days after the crash. In all probability it was due to his heroic attempt to save the plane and save the wounded members of his crew.

He had been in a previous hospital where he told me he had received good treatment by the Germans. He had a "special" diet and they tended to his wounds.

Please remember that these details grow hazy now that considerable time has passed. But you are fortunate in that John and I were quite close friends as prisoners become and so I took a special interest in his story. He was very likable and the most popular flyer among our group.

In the crash he suffered a broken left leg above the knee and it had been placed by the Germans in traction, but had healed incorrectly and necessitated another operation in the States (to be rebroken and placed in another cast).

In addition to this, he suffered head injuries. I remember he had one or two scars on and about his jaw. I believe his jaw was broken and several teeth knocked out, and at the previous hospital he had been fortunate in having a young German doctor who specialized in those cases and who had wired his jaw and it had healed properly. I believe he had also acquired pneumonia from exposure, but it had likewise been cleared up at the other hospital.

At Obermassfeld he had a bridge put in his mouth and was so proud of it. It was in front where he had lost teeth in the crash.

When I arrived, Miss Sasser, he was the gayest and happiest man in our whole ward and we

all tried to emulate his spirits to keep our minds off our wounds, which weren't or hadn't been as serious as his.

He had a cold and sinus trouble and went almost every day to have it drained and alleviated. He seemed to improve and was up on crutches and playing chess and checkers and going to the Horse Racing Game we had there every week.

Then came a series of up's and down's. He'd be up one week and down the next with his cold and sinus.

I know he had one operation sometime before the fatal one. I can't remember what it was for, probably to remove some of the infection. Dr. Leake, an Australian eye, ear and nose doctor, a Capt., was very good we all thought and took a special interest in John. We all called him by his nickname—"Sass".

Anyway, the infection got worse and worse and was very tender about his nostrils and behind his ears and there was swelling and redness. Along about this time Dr. Leake gave him penicillin—40 shots over a period of 5 days, but it didn't help and they decided to operate.

It seemed it had gone into a mastoid and they were quite common at the hospital. The poor diet of German food wouldn't allow the boys to throw the infection off (all wounds took twice as long to heal).

I don't know whether it was Dr. Leake who operated for same, but in all probability it was. That was about March 20th, somewhere there.

He went to the operation feeling not too good, but talking and kidding all of us. We all said it was due to that long drawn out fight (on a weak diet) against all his infections. It came as a great shock to all of us. Dr. Weston, a British Major, who in consultation with Dr. Leake, decided an operation necessary, solemnly announced John's death in the afternoon in our ward. Believe me, Miss Sasser, you could have heard a pin drop—it was that unexpected and such a shock. He went down about 3 p.m. to the operating room and when he didn't come back at five, we began to worry.

He was buried a few days later at Meiningen, as you probably know. It was a fine military funeral we heard. We couldn't attend, but sent our representatives who could.

He had known his Captaincy was coming thru, but never received notification of the fact.

Lt. Coss was next to me, as he told you, and we were all liberated on Apr. 2nd and flown to Rheims, France, on April 11th from Frankfort. He, at Meiningen, was liberated a few days later.

On "Sass'" previous operation, we had to kid him because he came back on the stretcher kicking his feet and singing "Dixie". We all almost loved him—we had been drawn together by our "poor circumstances."

He had read all the material from the library on advertising and spoke of you and his chance for a job with your company. He said "hold it" one afternoon as a checker game was in progress, as an advertising "idea" had come to him and he went and wrote it down. He died under the ether anaesthetic.