

## War Era Story Project 2012

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Age: 56

Mr. Herman shares the story of his father, Robert B. Herman, originally of Chillicothe and now deceased, written in his father's own words.

### There I Was

We were coming off the bomb run when we were hit by A.A. fire and the number three engine was set on fire. We were leading the 306th Bomb Group. About 40 miles out to sea, the extinguishers would not kill the fire. Our cowling was falling off and the hub was white hot. We made a turn to return to France; some of our planes continued to fly with us until they saw that we were not going to return to England on that day. I had to knock out the lower escape door. I waited until I saw land below us and out I went in a tuck position. After I jumped, all the rest of the crew followed. The Germans were shooting at us from the ground, as we were probably only at 3,000 feet of altitude when I left the plane. No one was hit by the rifle fire, but it was some new experience to hear the bullets whizzing by.

When I hit the ground, I did a football roll block and let the parachute blow away. I had an English chute that day, which gave you an immediate release after you turned the release and hit it with your fist. I was on my feet very quickly and started looking for the best way to go. There was a very young German soldier pointing his rifle at me. Up went my hands; for me the war was over.

Eventually, seven of us were taken to a nearby fighter aircraft field via a school bus. The French people looked so sad as they watched us leave; I was pretty happy myself. The German officer at the air base told me in halting English "You no try to escape – we shoot you." He then apologized for his poor English. I said "You speak very good English to me; I understand every word you said."

On the train to Paris the next day, Jim Laine and I were in a compartment with two German guards when a German Oberleutenant (1st Lt) from a fighter group gave us a bottle of water from Germany and told us not to drink any water in France but this bottled water. From this German pilot, I learned that Gerald Simmons, our co-pilot had been killed. He told us that they had yelled at him to halt (not his group, but from the infantry division), but he kept running away. He was killed by a rifle bullet to the back of his head.

The capture was really non-eventful. It seems that I had been prepared for this since my early youth. Maybe because of all previous military training – two years R.O.T.C. and one year C.M.T.C. – I knew that someday this could happen. The real shocker was solitary confinement at Dulag Luft III interrogation center, north of Frankfurt. We got no cigarettes and limited amounts of food so that the interrogation officer would have it easier to get whatever information we had.

I definitely remember when the interrogation officer took me to the main office and showed me an organization chart of the whole Eighth Air Force. He wanted to know if any of the names they had were incorrect. This question was easy; I told him I didn't know a single person on that chart and I could stay in solitary until the end of the war because I did not know any name on that chart. I am sure that he knew I was just a dumb 1st Lt. and he took me back to my cell and said a group of us would be leaving in a day or two. He was correct!

**Missions on which I flew, in order:**

10-9-42 Lille  
11-7-42 Brest  
11-8-42 Lille  
11-9-42 St. Nazaire  
11-14-42 St. Nazaire  
11-18-42 LaPallice  
11-22-42 Lorient  
12-10-42 Rouen  
12-24-42 Romilly-sur-seine  
1-27-43 Wilhelmshaven  
2-2-43 Hamm  
2-27-43 Brest  
3-6-43 Lorient  
End of Line - 12-1/2 missions

**Group and Squadron**

306 <sup>th</sup> Bomb Group	367 <sup>th</sup> Bomb Squadron
Stationed:	Thurleigh, England - Station 114
Aircraft type:	B-17
Crew Position:	Navigator
Combat Missions:	12-1/2
Targets:	See above