

## War Era Story Project 2012

Submitted by: Wilbert Keller

Current home town: Grove City, Ohio

Age: 88

Wilbert Keller, a New Bedford, PA resident, joined the Army Air Force in Youngstown, OH in early 1942. He was sent to St Louis for basic training. He was at Reno Air Base in 1943. From April until June of 1944 he was trained on the C-46 as an airplane mechanic. In July of 1944, he was sent to Miami.

On August 9, 1944, he went from Miami to Calcutta to begin his service in the China-Burma-India Theater, known as the CBI. He flew on "The Hump" as a crew chief. Their mission was to carry supplies (gas, bombs, ammunition, medical supplies, etc.) to a number of bases in China over Japanese enemy lines. "The Hump" was a high altitude military aerial supply route in northeastern India, across northern Burma, to southwestern China. This operation was the first sustained, long range, 24-hour, all weather, military aerial supply line in history. It was a start-from-scratch operation. There was no precedent for it

After the war, Sgt. Keller served as a crew chief of the European Air Transport Services, flying from Germany to Moscow. The CBI was called the forgotten theater of World War II. Please, let us not forget all the men and women who served in this war.

### Crew Chief Winner First In Moscow 1947

RHEIN/MAIN — The first man to step out of the aircraft at Moscow's Vnukovo Airport, on one of the first of the European Air Transport Service's flights there, was crew chief, Staff Sergeant Wilbert E. Keller, March winner of Rhein/Main's Crew Chief contest.

"We drank eight bottles of beer before we found out it was costing us \$5.00 a bottle," said Sgt. Keller with a serious smile as he related the details of his trip, "but the beer was good."

Crew Chief winners are awarded expense-paid furloughs each month for having maintained the best personal appearance, the cleanest, best polished aircraft and for having given top mechanical maintenance and passenger service. Sgt. Keller will take his furlough to Garmish-Partenkirchen where he is prepared, with a new \$40.00 Rod-and-reel, to engage in his favorite sport, that of pulling flapping, full sized trout out of mountain streams.

Sgt. Keller who plans to make the Army his career, says that without a particle of doubt his ship, No. 5348 is the best of all EATS aircraft and his job as crew chief is the best one in the ET.

Before arriving at Rhein/Main last January, Sgt. Keller served 18 months in the C. B. I. as crew chief on one of the huge C-46's, flying the hump. He calls New Bedford, Penna., his home.