James Lee Hutchinson general Order 47

# general Order 47 - 1944

## Arriving in Eye

The drivers of the canvas covered trucks waiting for the replacement air crews told us to toss our duffle bags in the back and crawl in behind them for a short ride to the 490th Bomb Group (H) base, station 134, (code name Hangstrap) in East Anglia. I still have a copy of General Order # 47 listing the enlisted men by rank, name, duty and serial numbers. The gist of the order said, “These men are assigned to the 490th Bomb group to participate in combat flights and operate planes or equipment until this order is cancelled.”

We arrived at Eye on November 14, 1944 and each man (boy) had completed the required Army Air Force training programs to prepare him as a B-17 aircrew member flying bombing missions. We were the rookies sent to replace 490th Bomb Group crews who had completed their tour of duty, been wounded or shot down.

As the replacement air crews of Lt. William Templeton, Lt. Robert Tennenberg and Lt. Darrell Roufs we had crossed the North Atlantic on the Queen Mary and traveled across the United Kingdom by train. We were beginning to wonder if would ever see a B-17 again.  Winter was setting in when our crews got off the train at the little town of Diss in East Anglia late that cold murky November day.

We three crews were assigned to the in 848th squadron. As I think back, I recall thirty tired young airmen standing in the cold damp evening waiting to be assigned to our barracks. The overcast sky wasn’t fit for flying and the fog reminded me of a Sherlock Holmes movie. The squadron clerk, a feisty little Corporal, came out to guide gunners to their assigned huts. We picked up our duffle bags and followed him through a group of steel huts to our huts.

We knew we would soon be flying combat missions, but had no premonition that two of our thirty would be wounded and thirteen would die in the next six months

Hut #29 – The Brome Dome"

"Our base was one of the 43 heavy bomber bases built among the farms and parishes of East Anglia. They were concentrated in an area less than half the area of the state of Vermont. The 490th base provided living quarters for 420 officers and over 2,500 enlisted men, the majority were housed in steel Quonset huts on the east side of the field. Crew chiefs and mechanics usually chose to live in shacks near the flight line to be near their bombers."

"Our 848th huts actually extended into the community of Brome. We named our enlisted men’s hut Brome Dome # 29. The hut was a sixteen by thirty foot steel Quonset hut with a concrete floor and brick walls with a door and window on each end. It looked like a giant grey trash can half buried in the ground with a brick wall in each end containing a door and two windows with blackout curtains. The furniture included foot lockers, clothes racks and metal double bunks for twelve men."

"We soon discovered that the most important piece of equipment was a very small stove sitting in the centre of the hut with a small chimney through the roof which was smoking most of our winter days at Eye. The gunners already living in the hut had taken the bunks nearest the stove to soak up what little heat that dinky stove put out. I soon discovered that top bunk very near the steel ceiling, was a little warmer from the rising heat. I kept that top bunk two months, but moved down to a lower bunk next to the stove when that crew completed their thirty-five missions and went home. By that time our crew had been named a ‘lead crew’ and a new replacement crew moved in to take the top bunks farthest from the stove and we shared our mission experiences with the new boys."

"We gunners of the Lt. Bill Templeton crew spent many cold winter nights huddled around the stove or “sacked out” in our cots to keep warm. Coke, a coal product for the stove was rationed. It was stored in a fenced area and each hut was allowed only one small bucket per day unless more was delivered to the squadron. This meant very small fires in a very small stove and lots of extra clothing all winter unless someone in the hut sneaked out in the middle of the night to steal an extra supply of coke. Needless to say we made many of those ‘night missions’ during that cold winter! Keeping warm was a challenge, you almost had to sit on the stove to feel the heat. We flew missions at forty below zero and were determined we weren’t going to freeze our butt in our hut!"

"A second fly in the ointment was the fact our bunks had three sofa cushions instead of a mattress! The British called them ‘biscuits.’ The trick was to pull them together and cover them tightly with a sheet. However, they often separated in the dead of night and believe me, nothing wakes you quicker than a blast of cold air on your rear! They eventually solved the ‘shifting biscuit’ problem by giving us toasty warm sleeping bags."

"Fish and Chips was the favourite finger food. Everyone liked the deep fried chunks of fish and French fried potatoes. The fries were much bigger, softer and thicker than we were used to at home, but the English called them chips. We often ordered Fish and Chips in the evenings while resting in the hut, especially if the mess hall chow hadn’t been too satisfying. A local farm boy, Russell Etheridge, would go get them. Russell who was fourteen years old couldn’t wait until he was old enough to join the Royal Navy. His mother did our laundry each week for a small fee and he was our pick-up and delivery boy and available to run errands for a small fee."

"Fish and Chips were most delicious when sprinkled with vinegar, and we had many fine feasts in hut # 29. On a cold winter night, Yank crewmen and Russell could make a large package disappear quickly. I remember the cook at the White Swan pub down the road always wrapped the order in newspapers and Russell would make it back to the hut while it was still warm. One night, he announced that his sister was getting married, so one of the guys managed to obtain a damaged parachute from the supply room to be made into a wedding dress."

"A latrine (showers and toilets) was located in the middle of the huts. It was not heated and hot water for showers was available for only short periods. Otherwise the latrine was as cold as the outside temperature and a guy never tarried when answering nature’s call. If we missed the hot water period, we used a steel helmet to heat shaving water on the barracks stove."

"Our base was a nice area in the agricultural area of eastern England. I could step out our back door and peer across the road at a red brick English manor house with a huge barnyard. A small pond just behind our hut and on our side of the road was a playground for farm ducks. I enjoyed watching their aquatic antics. It was another peaceful scene in contrast to the war. The Brome Dome was our home for the nine months we were stationed in England---from November 1944 through July 8, 1945."

 