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Bob Warren's World War II plane, (above), Bob in uniform (right)

photos provided by Bob Warren



## A War Story

By Bob Warren

**WHAT DO OLD WORLD WAR II VETERANS DO** when they get together? They eat, visit, tour and tell war stories. I just returned from a reunion of my WW II squadron and want to share one of those stories with you.

My unit, the 94<sup>th</sup> Airborne Troop Carrier Squadron, met in Washington, DC where we toured the White House, the Pentagon, Air-Space Museum, Tomb of The Unknowns, war memorials, etc. All of that was great, but the best times came when we were just visiting, talking about old times and “remembering when” – sixty years ago when we were fighting the war in Europe. Our ranks are thinning rapidly. We counted 152 who have died since the war’s end. Of the 40 who attended this reunion, only 14 were veterans. The others were family members and friends who came along to take care of us old timers.

Our primary job as Troop Carriers was to drop airborne personnel behind enemy lines during invasions such as D-Day in Normandy. Flying unarmed C-47 aircraft we went in at low altitudes, around 800 feet, and dropped paratroopers or towed one or two cargo gliders to their landing zone. Each glider, flown by a pilot and co-pilot, carried as many as 15 heavily armed

airborne troops.

This “war story” is about a mission in which our planes towed two gliders each to be released over enemy territory across the Rhine River. The action took place near the end of the war as Allied ground troops were having trouble getting a foothold on the German side of the Rhine. At the reunion we were discussing this particular mission, and I remarked that I had watched two of the crew members bail out of the plane in front of me. One of our veterans, Bill Kline, looked surprised and said, “I was one of those who bailed out of that plane, and for 60 years I have wanted to find someone who witnessed it. Tell me what you saw.”

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“...I looked up and saw that the entire right side of the plane was on fire. I noticed bullet holes in my chute – they were shooting at me!”

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I told him I saw the crippled plane losing altitude before the first parachute opened, then, as the plane got to about 400 feet the second chute came out.

Bill nodded and said, “That one was me! What else did you see?” I recalled seeing a third person come to the plane’s door and jump just before the plane hit the ground. His chute never had time to open. Bill said, “That had to be the co-pilot, Lt. Becker.”

We then asked Bill to tell us of his experience that fateful day. Here is a condensed version of what he told us:

*Soon after crossing the Rhine, we saw flak ahead and in a moment we took a direct hit in the left wing. Before we had time to assess the damage, the right engine was hit. It was afire in an instant. When the pilots of our two gliders saw we were in trouble they released immediately.*

*As our pilot, Lt. Greib, struggled to keep the plane upright, he gave the order to bail out. The crew chief, Charles Holt, jumped first, and as I got to the door I glanced back to see the co-pilot, Lt. Becker, putting on his chest chute. By then we were so low I didn’t wait for the normal ten-count to pull my ripcord. As soon as my chute opened I looked up and saw that the entire right side of the plane was on fire. I noticed bullet holes in my chute – they were shooting at me! I realized I was drifting toward a river, so I unfastened the chute’s buckles and hung from the harness until I was almost down, then released the chute and landed with*

one foot in the water. My chute landed in the river.

I hopped into the nearest empty bomb crater, peeked out and saw six or eight German soldiers approaching. Knowing the situation was hopeless, I surrendered.

Bill told of being put in a cellar, searched, interrogated and roughed up. He could sense that the Germans did not want him there, and were not sure what to do with him. Twice he was led to a wall where he faced a small group of soldiers in firing squad formation. Each time the Germans argued among themselves before backing down. (Intelligence reports later explained the Germans' dilemma. Hitler, after hearing about the Rhine crossing, issued an order that all captive Allied airmen be put to death).

On the second day of captivity, Bill was, once again, led to the firing squad wall, but this time he saw approximately 60 men standing at attention facing him. The officer in charge stepped forward, saluted Bill and placed his pistol and gun belt on the ground. Bill suddenly realized that the tide had turned -- he had prisoners! He ordered them to file out with their hands held high. They marched until Bill found an American unit to take charge of the prisoners.

Our "prisoner-turned-captor" then made his way back across the Rhine, was de-briefed as an ex-POW and sent to Paris where he was reunited with Charles Holt, the crewmember who bailed out ahead of him.

Bill told his story. So many remain untold, dying with their tellers, but that's the way it is 60 years after the "big war."



**Frisco native  
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is a humorist,  
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