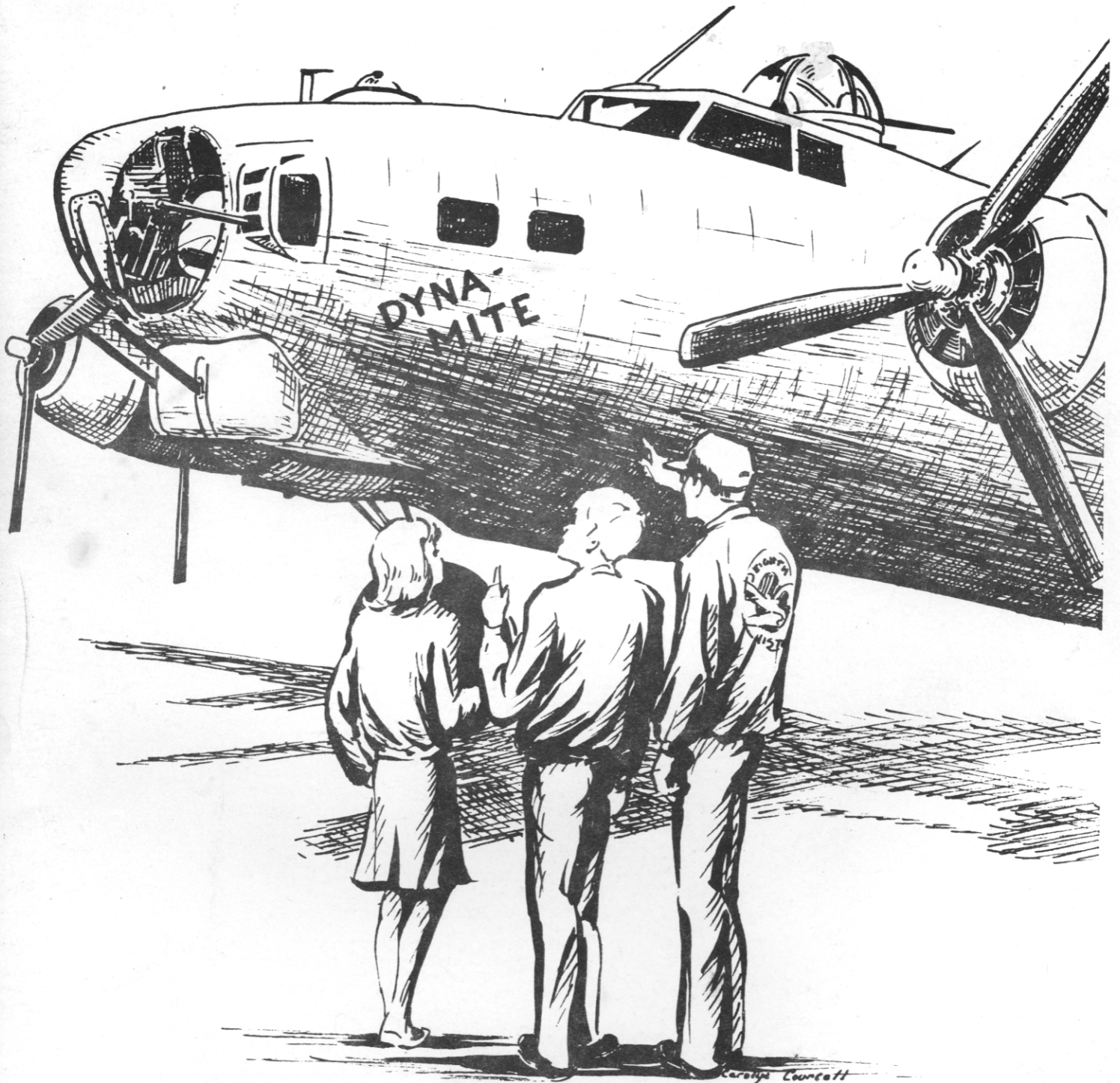




# *“When Grandpa Flew In World War Two”*



*By: Robert E. Doherty  
Illustrated by: Carolyn Councell*

To Greg Hatten in honor of your dad, Hyman,  
who was a war case casualty during the  
"Evacuation of Heydekrug." with my appreciation  
and respect  
Bob Doherty

**WHEN GRANDPA FLEW IN WORLD WAR II**  
*Poems of*  
**Training, Combat, Captivity and Liberation**

**By Robert E. Doherty**  
**Illustrated by Carolyn Councill**

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#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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My thanks to Carolyn Councill, distinguished Maryland artist, for taking time from her own career to provide "Grandpa" with such appropriate illustrations.

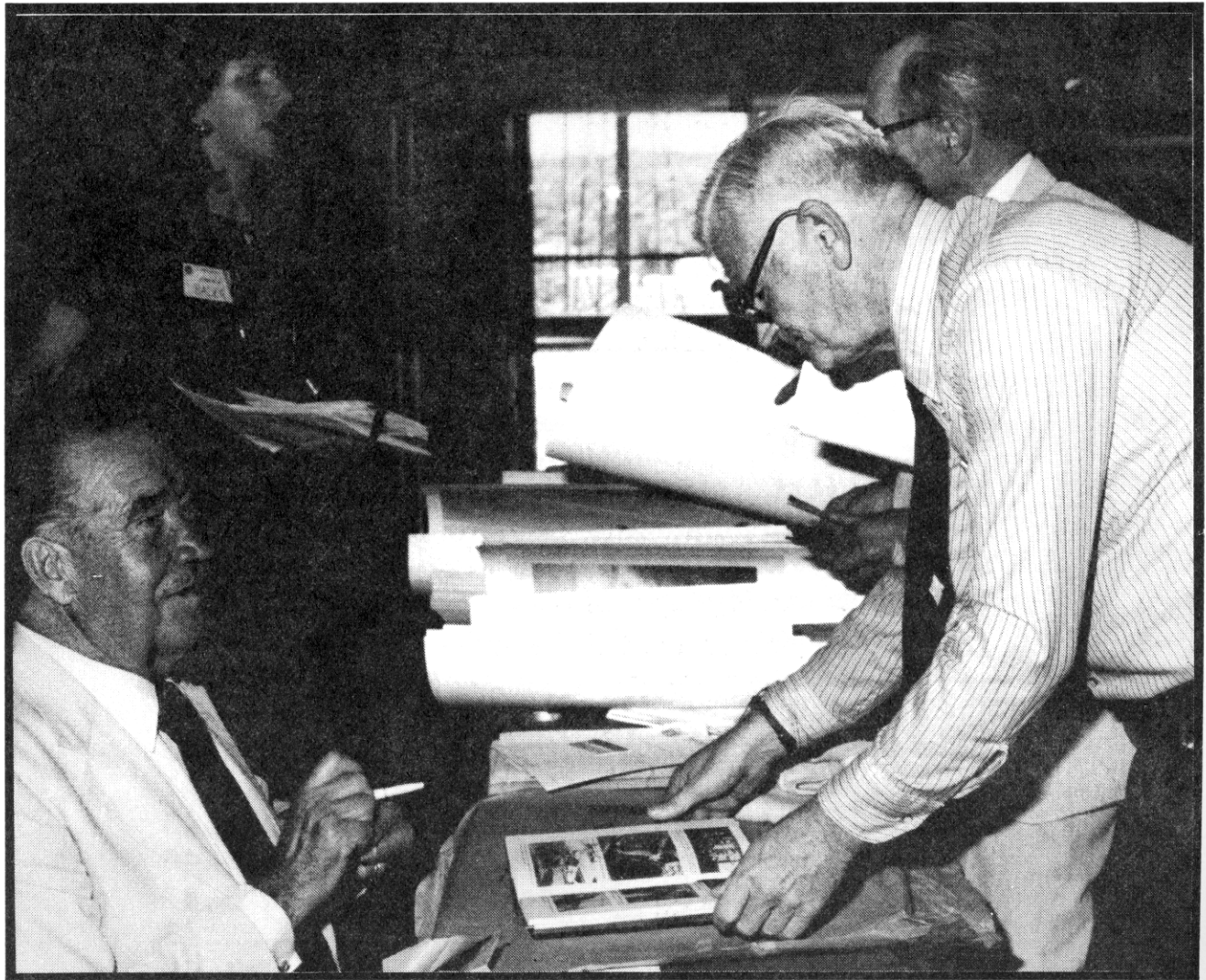
Collectively these poems have been extracted from an unpublished manuscript, *THE MEMORABLE MEANS OF KEVIN DUNNE*. However, many have appeared individually in *The Creative Review*, *Midwest*, *The Legionnaire* and *The American Ex-POW Bulletin* and in fellow Kriegie-historian Joe O'Donnell's treasured trilogy, *The Shoe Leather Express*.

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Luftwaffe General Adolf Galland and the author.

## I PROLOGUE

### WHEN GRANDPA FLEW IN WORLD WAR II

1

#### WHEN GRANDPA FLEW IN WORLD WAR II ?

*Well, times were simple then:  
The enemies were Japanese  
Or Nazi Supermen.*

*I'd say that things were cut and dried;  
We knew our cause was right.  
THE ARIZONA fashioned all  
Our values overnight.*

*We had no moral quandaries;  
The farthest left we went  
Was learning Roosevelt's alphabets  
And guessing what they meant.*

2

*This country wasn't split at all.  
In fact, it fought as one.  
We had a man behind the man  
Who really fired the gun.*

*We had a "kid in upper four"  
In all our magazines  
And knew for sure the girl next door  
Was queen of all his dreams.*

*By War Bond Drives and ration stamps  
We knew what "home front" meant.  
Why, U.S.O.'s with star-cast shows  
Were sent right where we'd tent.*

1

## **I PROLOGUE (Continued)**

### **WHEN GRANDPA FLEW IN WORLD WAR II . . . 2**

3

*We had no stupid parallel  
We couldn't cross to fight;  
No doubtful qualm like Viet Nam  
To dissipate our might.  
America was so unified  
Before the atom's blast -  
We never had the slightest clue  
How brief it had to last.  
If Grandpa's view of World War II  
Seems corny as can be,  
You ain't heard nothing 'till you've heard  
His view on World War III.*

4

*Grandpa's mad at World War II.  
He thinks of you and yours;  
Because, you see, his legacy  
Was supposed to be - NO WARS:  
Kids, Grandpa's sad and mad as hell,  
He's troubled to the soul  
By silos, subs and satellites  
That bring remote control.  
When Grandpa dwells on World War III  
What makes him so bereft  
Is it could have no history -  
There might be no one left!*

5

*Well, let's go back to World War II  
And the initial training spot:  
I started doing "monkey drills"  
In a hotel parking lot.*

3

## II COMBAT

"Most everything that I have said happened: But it's memory now, the shadow of things. The truth lives in its own time; recall is not the reality of the past. When friends depart one remembers them, but they are changed . . . we hold only the fragment of them that touched us and our idea of them is now a part of us. Their reality is gone, intact but irretrievable; in another place through which we passed and can never enter again. I cannot go back nor can I bring them to me. So I must pursue the shadows to some middle ground for I am strangely bound to all that happened then. We broke hard bread together and I cannot forget Kiel, Schweinfurt, Regensburg, Rostock, Poznan, Zwickau, Berlin and all the others . . . not cities but battlegrounds five miles above where we made our brotherhood. It's gone and long ago; swept clean by the wind. Only some stayed. Part of me lives there still tracing a course through all the names. I don't know why. What is it that memory wants that it goes through it all over again? Was there something I should have recognized? Some terrible wisdom? The kind of awful knowledge that stares out of the eyes of a dying man? I was at the edge then and almost grasped the meaning. But I lived and failed the final lesson and came home. I linger now, looking back for them - the best ones who stayed and learned it all."

### AUTHOR'S NOTE

*The wonderfully lyrical sentiment expressed above can only be attributed to an anonymous airman. He had listed 15th Air Force targets; I changed them to reflect those of the 8th. Other than that, the words are all his. No one could say it better. My thanks to the first lady of the 466th Bomb Group, Mrs. Barkev Housepian, who heard this passage read at a memorial in England and passed it on to me.*



## **OVER KIEL**

*Crinkle, crinkle, flaming Fort!  
Jesus, please don't flop to port!  
It seems that screams fill up the sky  
When ten men spiral down to die!*

*Ten who shared our tents and huts:  
Ten who shared their booze and butts.  
Ten who now in burst of smoke  
Spill from where their coffin broke.*

*Twinkle, twinkle, they were hit  
By flak and not a Messerschmitt.*

*When flak explodes in a full bomb-bay  
You come apart - then blow away.*

Jan. '44

# A MENTAL BLOCK WHILE BAILING-OUT

That that head-banded, desert marauding,  
Reservation-jumper's name  
Should flood the mind  
And try to drain to mouth  
As I consider leaping into Eternity  
Is a God-damned, military training,  
Son-of-a-bitch non sequitur!

Hail Mary, full of grace . . .

I am swathed in cloud;  
Standing bloody-legged  
On the wind-whipped threshold  
To the Land Of Unknowing.  
I have no horizons, no visibility.  
I am the fright-filled owner of NOW!

Above this storm-cloud cover,  
Messerschmitt buzzards  
Wheel and dive to seek and destroy.  
And below? God, not the seal

For certain only  
Is that this turbulent coffin  
Descends fast and inevitably.

Our Father, who art in heaven . . .

Jesus Christ! What have images  
Of burning stockades, cactus,  
Pinto ponies, mesas, arroyos  
And a cantering U.S. Calvary  
In common with this crisis?

Dear God,  
Let not the horizontal stabilizer  
Become my guillotine  
And let Errol Flynn or David Niven  
See to that incongruous Apache  
Whose name is

G  
E  
R  
O  
N  
I  
M  
O  
!

**INTERROGATIONS**

*Jackboots!*

*Bootfalls snap-sounding  
As though Gothic ghosts,  
Ball-and-chain legged,  
Were waltzing and whirling  
Glass-slipped skeletons  
Down the corridor  
To my womb cell.*

*It is time again.*

*Key rattles in lock.  
Metal door grates on constipated hinges.  
Luger beckons.  
Trolls observe amenities:  
"Raus:" "Schnell:"*

*It is time again.*

*The cervix to my cubicle  
Closes with ringing clangor.  
My umbilical cord is cut.  
I am delivered  
And jostled to ordeal  
By gruff midwives  
Who disdain my survival.  
I am Don Sturdy in the Temples of Fear.  
I am Jack on the way to the ogre's kitchen.*

*It is time again.*

*Who is this dapper Hauptman,  
This svelte martinet  
That he dazzles me with excerpts  
From my own biography?  
It is his grey hair,  
His pleated trousers,  
His manicure,  
His sibilant English  
Oozing from snake-jaws  
And his proximity to omniscience  
Which tempts me to overact  
My sterile role  
Or ad-lib beyond the restrictions  
Of my sworn-to bit-line script.*

*I surely perceive  
The oscillations of his head.  
There is treachery here.*

*There is a slitheriness  
To the poised master  
Of this windowless room,  
This shadowy pit,  
I see scales on his brow  
And his nostrils are pinholes,*

*Again he uncoils and upspirals  
Between glossy boots,  
With lidless eyes  
He frustrates, angers,  
Neck-puffs, arcs,  
Strikes and spits.*

*It is time again.*

*With feet far behind me,  
Body-weight on index fingers only,  
I lean against the pit-wall  
And shiver to the staccato questions.*

*This head, this thought-sieve,  
Becomes a mental tumbler  
And sifts three thoughts,  
Routine retorts:*

*My name.  
My rank.  
My number.*

*The last time it was a gorilla.  
This time it is a cobra.  
When will the next time be?  
And who will hold court then...a tiger?*

March '44

### **ROLL CALL IN PRUSSIA**

*Far through the squares of this fanged-fenced restriction,  
Far to the west over ice-crackling pines,  
Nestles the source of our lonesome affliction -  
Our country and memories of far better times.*

*Here in a clearing not far from the Baltic,  
Unshaven, in tatters, we stand for appel; (1)  
Too proud for this moment to falter or fall sick -  
Showing how well we can soldier in hell.*

*Snow caps our shoulders while wind flaps our dressings.  
And, though we are grieving our lost liberty  
We challenge the Nazi by counting our blessings  
Each grumbling, "The bastards can still count on me."*

April '44

(1) roll-call

## THE WEAPONS OF PEENEMUNDE

*East*

*of where Heydekrug's stove-pipe-like chimneys  
Are smoking in forests of fir and blue spruce,  
This guarded enclosure of a Luftwaffe prison  
Deters allied airmen from trying to break loose.*

*West*

*of where Heydekrug's ginger-bread houses  
Are smuggled in forests of blue spruce and pine,  
The heavens are marred by the scars of the rockets  
The Germans are frantically trying to design.*

*West*

*(like the forest where Hansel and Gretel  
Were saved at the end of a cute fairy tale),  
The freighters are loading cigar-shapes in Danzig  
Which came in tarpaulins by Konigsberg rail.*

*Slow*

*down the Baltic they steam past Gydnia  
with the Navy beside them, behind and before;  
And head for a launch-site nearby The Atlantic  
To add the dimension of pilotless war.*

*East*

*of where Heydekrug's thatched roofs are slanting,  
We prisoners hear Luftwaffe Jets whistle-call;  
And, having not heard them nor seen them in coming,  
We wonder who's winning the war after all.*

May '44

**THE EVACUATION HEYDEKRUG**

(From Stalag VI, East Prussia to Stalag IV, Pommerania July 14-18, '44)

I

**Die Russki kommen! Die Russki kommen! \***  
Shhh! Hear that thunder resound in the East?  
The Germans are blowing up bridges or else  
It's a Russian artillery piece.

**Die Russki kommen! Die Russki kommen!**  
Hey! Look at the sneaky SS:  
They're dressing in Luftwaffe uniforms:  
In case they get captured, I guess,

**Die Russki kommen! Die Russki kommen!**  
The guards are betraying the signs;  
they've fired the warehouse and all of our food;  
They've severed the teletype lines.

**Die Russki kommen! Die Russki kommen!**  
Evacuate old Heydekrug,  
A spear-head is driving on Konigsberg:  
It's rumored they've ferried The Bug: \*\*

**Die Russki kommen! Die Russki kommen!**  
Pack up your ditty bags, men,  
In order to get us to Memel's port,  
They'll jam us in boxcars again.

\* The Russians are coming!

\*\* The Bug River

II

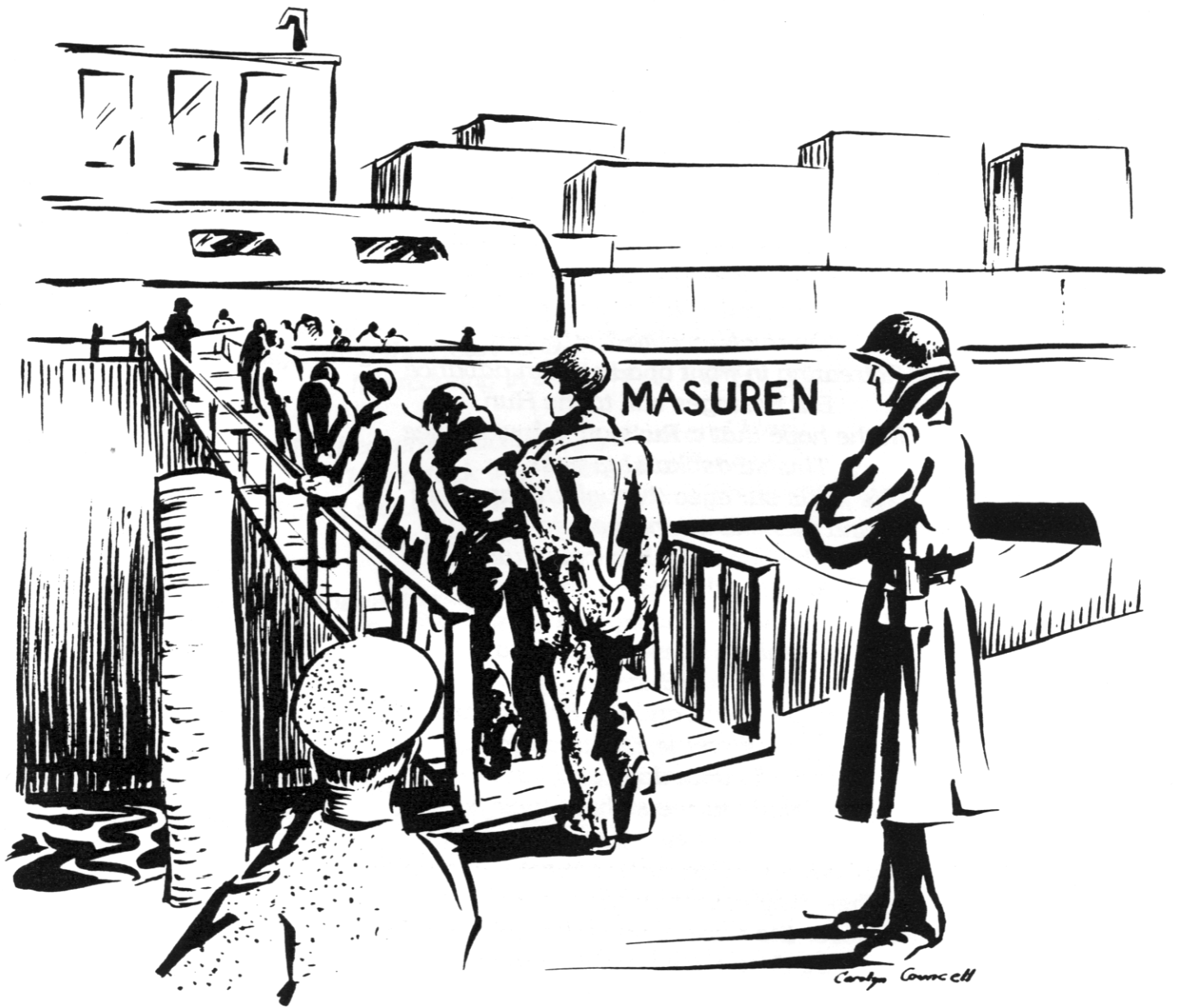
*In the hold of a Nazi cargo ship  
With nothing to drink or eat;  
Where the temperature reaches one hundred degrees  
And you feel like you're shriveled-up meat.  
Where the sun slants down through a hole in the deck  
When the tarp is drawn back overhead;  
Where you whisper and move only to prove  
To yourself that you're really not dead.  
In the hold of a filthy cargo ship  
On the Memel-to-Stettin run,  
Retreating in front of a Russian advance  
But hostages still to the Hun.  
In the hope that a Russian sub won't see  
This swastika-ship pass by,  
We focus our eyes through the aperture  
And mumble our prayers to the sky.  
In the hope of a Biblical miracle,  
Counting the nights and days,  
Praying that God will give us a chance  
To behold His wondrous ways.*

*But:*

*The Hitler Youth and the Kriegsmarine  
Await on the Stettin dock;  
Shepherds with dogs and bayonets  
Who delight at the sight of their flock.*

*Oh God, dear God, why are men so cruel  
When their countries cannot get along?  
Whatever the reason, no matter which side,  
By Jesus, it's horribly wrong.*





III

*OK, God, don't make me bawl  
I know war's war, but this takes all.*

*Who could ever be so vile  
To make a cripple trot a mile  
Handcuffed to a man who's blind  
So he won't be left behind?*

*Who could ever be so vile  
To prod with bayonets the while  
And threaten any rebel sound  
With fury of Alsatian hounds?  
Who could ever be so cruel?  
Kids who ought to be in school.  
Brats who take their sport of us  
As we make our exodus  
From one plateau of Dante's Hell  
To this new Silesian cell.*

*These blue-eyed blonds, so clean and neat  
Lunge with sticks and trip our feet.*

IV

***Die Russki kamen: Durch Polen Sie kamften.  
Aber Sie kamen nicht weit genug \*\*\*  
And while they were stopping for re-supply  
We were herded from Heydekrug.***

*So much for the Russians who started us dreaming.  
It didn't end up any good:  
We're lousier, leaner, the Kommandant's meaner  
And it's worse than the old neighborhood.*

**\*\*\*** *The Russians came. They fought through Poland,  
But they didn't come far enough.*



## THE MOLE

*With his nose to the face of the tunnel,  
Breathing dirt when he has to inhale,  
He claws like a mole with fingers and tin  
In his drive to escape from his jail.*

*Where the air is supplied by a bellows  
And the dirt is hauled back on a rope,  
He sees by the light of an oleo'd wick  
While he digs on the dregs of a hope,*

*Where the shoring is old it will weaken.  
He can hear the slow trickle of stones.  
And his hips are always infected  
From the chafe on the sides to his bones.*

*Then he swaps with his Caliban brothers  
And backs to the mouth of the shaft  
Where he rows like a slave in a galley  
In order to maintain the draught.*

*When the dirt's hoisted up to the barracks  
Its emptied in pockets that wait  
To be sprinkled as draw-strings are loosened  
In a walk that's away from the gate.*

*Like the love of his life, he is buried  
Like the death of his love, he is sad.  
If the tunnel weren't there for an outlet  
His thoughts would be driving him mad.*

*Let Job, he says keep all the Patience.  
Let me, he prays, try to break free.  
And down in the hole like a mole without soul  
He burns with conspiracy.*

October '44

**BAH HUMBUG**

***Froliche Wiehnachten! Froliche Wiehnachten!*** (1)

*In spite of the hunger and chill.  
Admire the choir inside the barbed-wire  
That sings about men of good will.*

***Froliche Wiehnachten! Froliche Wiehnachten!***

*The guards in those towers must freeze.  
Even the spruce could do with a truce,  
Hear the ice rapid-fire in the trees.*

***Froliche Wiehnachten! Froliche Wiehnachten!***

*It's not easy spreading good cheer,  
Santa Claus put a frost-bitten foot  
In our stockings for Christmas this year.*

***Froliche Wiehnachten! Froliche Wiehnachten!***

*Like Jesus we sleep in the straw.  
With lice in our seams to tickle our dreams  
And fleas that we cannot ignore.*

***Froliche Wiehnachten! Froliche Wiehnachten!***

*Though our world this season's a mess.  
Donner and Blitz now champ at their bits  
To haul for the Waffen S.S.*

***Froliche Wiehnachten! Froliche Wiehnachten!***

*Both inside and outside the fence.  
May God hear our plea that we will be free  
This evening another year hence.*

(1) Merry Christmas!

December '44



**LULLABY IN A BOXCAR**

*Yo ho, yo ho, we are embryos  
In the womb of a forty and eight.  
We are seventy-five and hardly alive  
But lively enough to hate  
The ceiling, the floor, the walls, the door  
The memory of hygiene and pride;  
The strafing, the corps, the goddam war  
And even the world outside.*

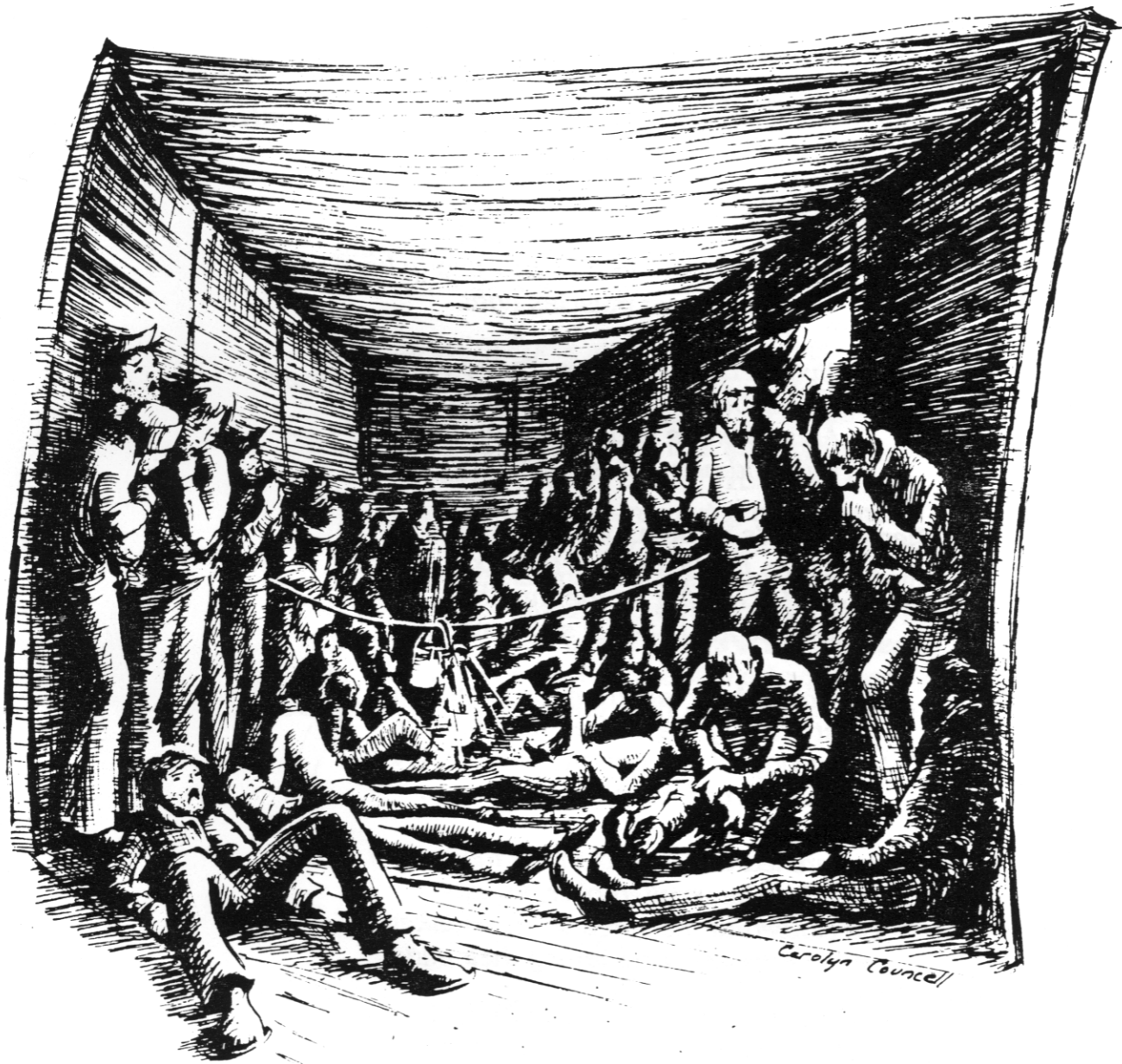
*We can't abide this mystery ride  
In freezing unknown lands.  
We thirst and hunger, incessantly wonder  
What God has done with His hands.  
When comes an end to this train-cortege?  
When can we breathe the fresh air?  
When will our trainers open our cage  
Delivering us up from despair?*

*Yo ho, yo ho, we are **hommes et cheveux**.  
We are pawns in the foes' game of chess.  
For more than a week we've travelled to seek  
Another barbed-wire address.  
Where is the end of this enemy track;  
This freezing, this vomit, these feces,  
Will Humanity want to take us all back  
When we try to return to our species?*

*Yo ho, yo ho, it's twenty below  
And each G.I. Joe is a cramp  
Clutching his knees, praying his pleas  
For the length of a new prison camp.  
Embryos of Eskimos  
In the womb of a forty and eight,  
Playing the game the Army knows  
Called, "Hurry up and wait."*

March '45

## LULLABY IN A BOXCAR



*"Yo ho, yo ho, it's twenty below  
And each G.I. Joe is a cramp  
Clutching his knees and praying his pleas  
For the length of a new prison camp."*



## VI EPILOGUE

To My Grandchildren:

Andy Warhol's fifteen-minute ration of fame came to me late in my eighteenth year when I was a buck private at the Air Corps radio school in Sioux Falls. For the most part, we were all in our late teens or early twenties. Wide eyed and tousled-haired we were eager beavers steeped in innocence and looking forward to adventure. But the military, in all its wisdom, had specified tarpaper barracks in spite of the fact that South Dakota winters always featured magnificent blizzards and sub-zero temperatures. (Ink and milk turned to ice when left on our windowsills.) This prompted some griping i.e. "What the hell did we enlist for?" or "I'd like to grenade that draft board." If only to formulate answers for myself, I wrote AN AMERICAN SOLDIER'S LITANY and mailed it home to your great-grandmother. "This", I wrote her, "is why my generation is willing to fight." I was her only child. At least it would make her feel good. Unknown to me, my uncle who was an officer in the local Legion, copied it and sent it on to headquarters. It was immediately published in The National Legionnaire and I became poet laureate of my training squad. The Litany was reprinted in my hometown paper and several others including The Providence Journal, my former employer. And I was besieged with requests from announcers from all over America for permission to read it over their radio stations. WOW!

Viewed through America's "house-divided" phenomenon - the Korea-Vietnam syndrome - or through the distorted prisms of today's political correctness, multiculturalism and outright historical revisionism, my once patriotic Litany has the false ring of jingoism. These lines can sound corny.

They didn't back then.

They shouldn't now.

### AN AMERICAN SOLDIER'S LITANY

*A soldier has no definite knowledge of his future; it is the memory of a thousand and one little incidents of his past which generates that unequalled energy - American energy - which helps him to cope with the hardships and uncertainty of the present. I cannot describe such memories on behalf of my service brethren for theirs is a difference of race, color and creed. Therefore, it is my purpose to speak for myself in the fervent hope that this bit of writing might offer consolation and give pride to parents, relatives, sweethearts and friends back home.*

*Because my eyes have seen the purple splendor of sunset at the departure of an autumn day;*

*Because at cider time in New England I have seen God's forests in variegated beauty;*

*Because on a crisp winter's eve I have heard the crack of distant ice and the crunch of snow undertread;*

*Because I have silently worshipped the glory of the evening star;*

*Because I have watched the oceans of earth ripple in liquid melody while silvered by  
moonglow;*

*Because I have listened in the hush of night to the tormenting protests of surf;*

*Because on a summer's day I have marvelled at a lethargic parade of fleece-woven  
clouds;*

*Because I have seen the spirit of Christmas from without the window of a Dakota  
farm;*

*Because I have not forgotten the many adventures and friends of my childhood;*

*Because I have heard the lulling rhythm of rain;*

*Because I have breathed the fragrance of spring;*

*Because the beauty of the moon, trees, stars and all God's gifts, though common to  
man, are conceived as mine alone;*

*Because someone waits for me; \**

*Because I have a firm faith in her and in the God of my religion;*

*Because I have been blest with the best parents and family in God's universe;*

*Because I believe that they and myself will rejoice in the promised eternity of God's  
kingdom;*

*Because of Faith, I fear not Death;*

*Because in this world totalitarianisms are destined to defeat;*

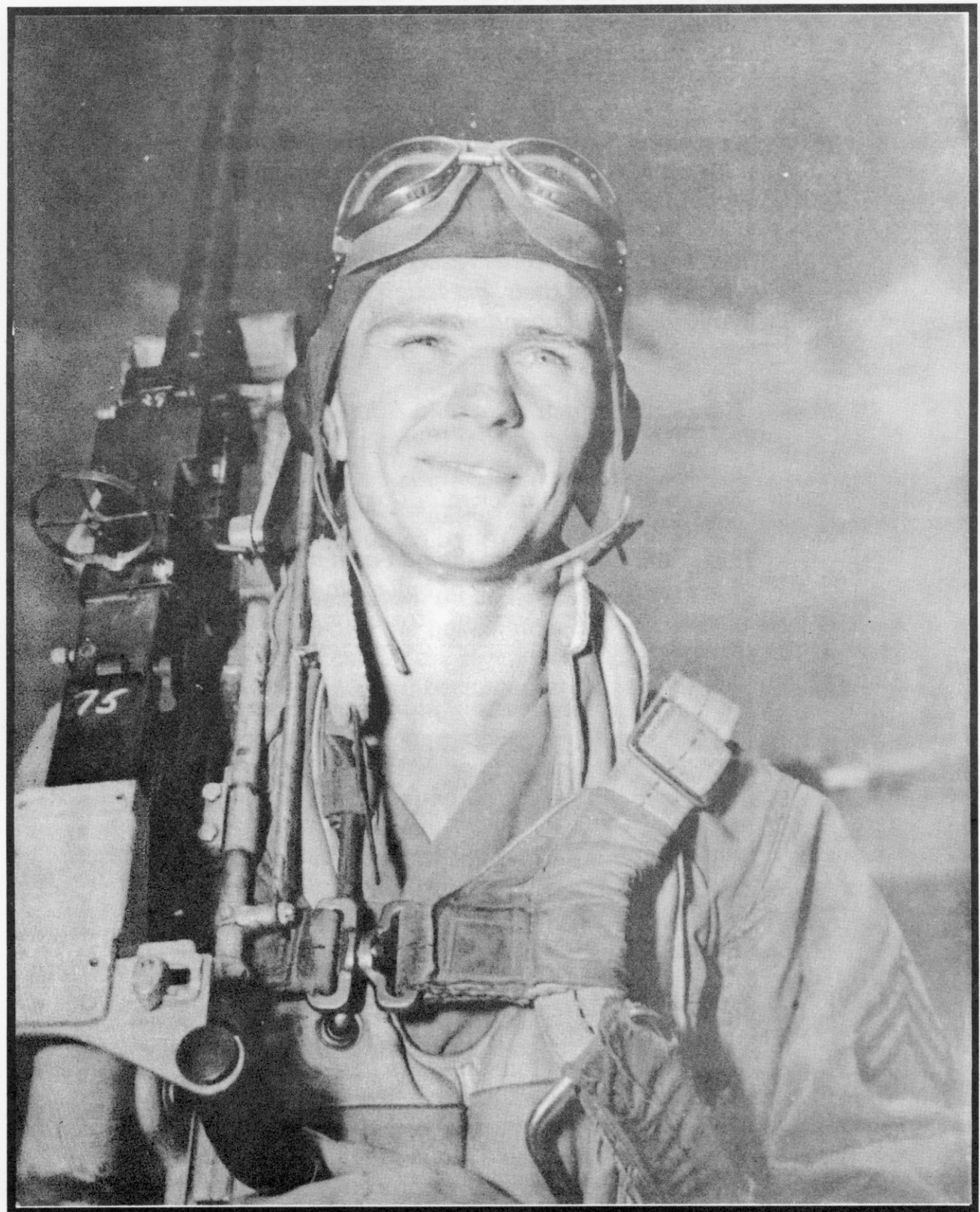
*Because of these knowledges, remembrances and beliefs I shall be a true soldier,  
bringing neither sin nor shame to my God and country.*

Sioux Falls, December '42

\* Yes, gang, she was and is Nana.

WITH THE GUNNER BOYS ON THE BORDER

This is the land joined by Rolston ...  
When Tom ... and ... were ... on the land



Buy one of the ... from the West