

## Sgt Dick Baskin Writes of Bombing Mission Over Alps

The following is a very interesting letter written by Sgt. Dick Baskin to his sister, Miss Norvelle Baskin, a student at Limestone College, Gaffney. The letter was dated March 14, 1945; changes have taken place in the European war theater. Nevertheless, the letter will prove interesting in that "Dick" gives a very graphic, picture of a bomber on a mission. The letter reads:

Somewhere in Italy, March 14, 1945

Hi Pink,

Want to go on a mission with me? Okay, we better start with the night before, though, and go to bed early. The time will come when you will be thankful you did. It's the morning of the mission now and the loudspeaker is waking everybody scheduled for today's mission. The tent is rather cold, in comparison to your rack, and you hate to crawl out, but you know you have to so that you can sign in at operations. With that accomplished, we grab our mess kit and go to chow. It may be a little early to care for much breakfast, but knowing what's ahead you eat anyhow.

The trucks are about ready to take us to briefing now, so we load up. We happened to be early this morning or we wouldn't have a seat. It's about as bad as standing though, because these guys won't keep off my toes. We are at briefing now, but it still isn't daylight. We go to the radio briefing room and pick up our log. There we are told a few routine things for the mission. After that we go to the main briefing room where the rest of the crew are being briefed. There we pick up some more details, but most of it doesn't affect the part we are to play as radio operators. All of this has taken quite some time so it is daylight when we get on the trucks that will take us to the personnel equipment building. It is going to be pretty cold up there so let's take a lot of clothing. We have a bag full but that may not be enough. We had better check our heated shoes and gloves, because without them we may get a bad case of frostbite. Now grab a Mae West from the rack, and we will go over and check out a forty-five.

We walk out to the plane carrying all of this equipment, and it gains about twice its weight on the way. There isn't a great deal of room inside the Plane so we had better dress outside. Feels pretty awkward with all this clothing on doesn't it. We forgot to put our gun together, but that's taken care of now. We have a few minutes before time to start engines so how about a smoke. Of course, this is the time we get all of the jokes and nonsense over with, because it won't be long before everybody is dead serious. We see the lead plane is starting his engines now so we scrambled aboard. Number one is turning over now. Pretty soon all four are running smoothly, and it is time to take out.

We are at the end of the runway now and ready for takeoff. You can hear the pilot push the throttle forward and the engines straining, because we have quite a load. Pretty soon we are in the air, and you breathe a sigh of relief and then settle down for a long ride! Let's check to see if our chute is handy because there is always the possibility that we may have to use it.

It's time for a weather report to come over so we tune the receiver and copy it. We can listen to the radio compass for awhile because we are still over the field getting into formation. It's not time for a message so we enjoy a little jive or what have you while we can. All the time we have been gaining altitude and seemingly from nowhere ships have joined in formations that almost fill the sky. We are at oxygen level now, so we are told to put on our mask. It's also beginning to get cold, but so far we have on enough clothing to compensate.

Every thousand feet we have an oxygen check on every man because this lack of oxygen up here requires a lot of respect. Later we will have checks every ten minutes. We are headed for the target now, and at the present time are over the sea. Nothing much happens along here, but it is getting colder so we better plug in our heated suits. It is pretty cloudy today and we are now above a solid layer of clouds. It's quite a sight, isn't

it? Hundreds of planes above a blanket of white. We are over the Alps now so let's get rid of some of those clouds and look at them. They are all snow covered and make a very colorful picture. Although we are a couple of miles up, it doesn't seem like it, does it? Maybe their height has something to do with it.

You feel a little strange about now, don't you? That's right, we are over enemy territory, and let's hope the lead navigator can take us around the flak areas. Well, the navigator must have been on the ball because we are on the bomb run now—and so far, no flak. These flak suits and helmets are getting heavier by the minute, aren't they? You feel that blast of cold air? That means that the bomb bay doors are open now. It won't be long now before we see some flak, because we can't evade it now that we are on the bomb run.

Yep, there it is! Looks like harmless little puffs of smoke. Don't let that fool you though. There is death in every one if you happen to be in the right place at the wrong time. Some of them are pretty close, aren't they? You are wondering now why the heck they don't drop those bombs and get out of here! "Bombs away" by the bombardier at this time sounds better than "Soup's on" when Spam is not on the menu. The bomb bay doors are closed now and we are getting out of the flag area. We are clear now and on the way home.

Do you want to see how lucky you were! Look back over the target at the other planes coming over. Yes, there are quite a few back there, even though you can't see very many. Yes, we flew right thru that a few minutes ago. You can remove your horseshoe, four-leaf clovers, rabbit's foot or whatever you had—we are going home now! There is still the possibility of enemy fighters coming up to attack us, though. Those escort planes out there give a lot of comfort, though. Nevertheless, let's keep our eyes open.

It was quite a relief to get that flak suit off, wasn't it? The thing must weigh a ton. You know now what they mean when they say you can get your knees in your flak helmet. Bet we looked like turtles when that flak was bursting.

Did you ever see vapor trails? Just look right, left or above. Pretty, aren't they? Look at twelve o'clock high! Those are some of our escort planes on the prowl for Focke-Wolfes, etc. In a few seconds you won't be able to see anything but a lengthened vapor trail. The plane will be invisible to the naked eye, but its vapor trail points toward it at all times.

Feel your ears popping? I thought so! We are letting down to a more comfortable altitude now. We have had a good tail wind all the way from the target, and home is in sight. You can relax now and chalk <sup>p</sup> one more. We have landed now, and your guns have to be cleaned, but that want take long because chow, is waiting for us.

The ship has been cleaned, and we have checked" our gun in and put our clothing away. We missed the truck so we will have to walk back which is a nice long walk to the Squadron. After chow we feel a little better, and then we go for the morale builder. That's right—mail! Well, it missed the boat; we will get it tomorrow, maybe. You did write, didn't you? I thought so.

I think I will crawl in bed now, because I am pretty tired. Bed, did I say? A GI cot with five wool blankets, but that doesn't keep me awake. I'm too tired to care. Maybe my dreams will take me across the ocean to the ones I love.

Take care of yourself, study hard, and write if you will. I promise to answer promptly.

All my love,  
Dick.

I can't waste this side of the page —so, hello again. Want to go with me again? I will tell you what our target was when I get home. Think you can stand the suspense? In the meantime, I will go on my other thirty-four so that I can come home. Keep your fingers crossed for me.