

## Emmett A. Harter, Army Air Force

Emmett Harter was born 28-MAR 1924 in St. Louis Missouri. His civilian occupation was aircraft assembler. He enlisted in the Army 5-DEC 1942 at Jefferson Barracks. Emmett attended aircraft armorer school at Lowry Field in Colorado. He would later attend aerial gunnery training at Wendover Utah.

In World War II, the 8<sup>th</sup> American Bomber Command based in England lost more killed in action over occupied Europe than the Marines did in the Pacific. Losses were so high that consideration was given to stopping the daylight bombing because replacements couldn't keep up with losses. Late in 1943, a capable fighter escort – the P-51 Mustang arrived to save the day.

On 29-APR 1944 another bombing run was planned. Bud was the right waist gunner on a B-17 Flying Fortress bomber. The day started badly for Emmett “Bud” Harter. The crews' wakeup call was 0300.

Bud couldn't find his lucky shirt. It wasn't where it had been for the last five months! The fear of going on another mission was bad enough, but not going wearing your lucky shirt was chilling. Bud assumed some SOB in one of the new crews probably took it.

The briefing was at 0500; at this time all the crewman's valuables are typically put in an envelope to pick up after they got back...if they came back. Their target today was Berlin and it will be well defended.

The Berlin mission would be Bud's 23<sup>rd</sup> mission. (Early in the war, after 25 missions, an airman was finished with his tour and could return home. Later in the war, the number of missions was raised.) Bud, with 22 missions completed, was an experienced airman and like most seasoned airmen, he knew staying alive required a fair dose of luck. Lucky charms - in Bud's case the lucky shirt - became part of the preflight ritual and a way to prepare one's mind to face another mission. The loss of a lucky charm would prey on a young airman's mind far from home and in harm's way. Bud's plane was named the “Spirit of Chicago” with nose art depicting Chicago's colorful reputation. So far, the “Spirit” had been very lucky.

Bud's trouble continued when he found that his heated shoes were out for repair. The only shoes available were two sizes too big. Two beat up, mismatched boots were found, but Bud was now behind schedule and scrambling with issues affecting his focus. Then a new major showed up and demanded to know where his plane was parked. After being shown to his plane, the major refused to drive Bud back to his own plane. The major claimed he couldn't find his way back. So Bud had to walk a mile across the muddy field, carrying his duffle bag and parachute, and almost missed his flight. He had to put on his flight clothes in the plane, in the dark. A bad start for a dangerous mission!

The weatherman predicted poor visibility and he was right. The haze was so bad that the group was late forming up and heading over the English Channel. Bud test-fired his waist gun to check its



operation. Each of the ten men reported to the pilot every 10 minutes for the rest of the mission. With the cold and lack of oxygen at 25,000 feet, everyone needed to keep in touch and be alert.



The primary target on this day was Berlin, with Magdeburg as the alternate if Berlin could not be bombed for any reason. Berlin was heavily defended by the Luftwaffe, the German Air Force. Reich Marshall Herman Goring was the commander of the Luftwaffe. Goring once boasted, “no allied plane will ever be seen over German skies!” Now they were plentiful as clouds. Allied experts were divided on why Berlin was a “good” target. Berlin contained several important factories. And because it was the capital the skies above Berlin were heavily defended by the Luftwaffe. To defend the capital, the German planes could easily be coaxed into coming up for a fight on every mission instead of waiting for opportune conditions to attack American planes. This caused the Luftwaffe to lose more planes than they could replace. America would eventually win a war of attrition.

Unfortunately, on this mission, because of a poor job of coordination by the lead ship radar operator, Bud’s group discovered they were alone in the sky. Bud’s group had strayed about 40 miles from the main bomber stream. All of a sudden Bud’s plane ran into heavy flak. Shells ripped into the wing shooting off the flap and wing tip. Fuel started to leak out of one fuel tank. Then the lead plane saw a landmark, changed direction deciding to hit the alternative target Magdeburg, as it was too late to hit the assigned target in Berlin.

Damaged, but still flying, the group started its bomb run on Magdeburg. With open bomb bay doors, Bud’s bombardier called out “flak at 12 o’clock! Oh shit, that ain’t flak; it’s German fighters! There are hundreds of them!” At best guess, there was a mix of at least 200 Focke Wulf 190’s (the Nazi’s best fighter) and Messerschmitt 109’s. Bud’s group, comprised of thirty B-17’s, and two hundred Nazi fighters were on a collision course. The B-17’s fired their guns and took evasive actions. The enemy attack was deadly. One fighter collided with a B-17 and both exploded instantly into a fireball. Debris was flung out in all directions. The first pass had hurt the 385<sup>th</sup> badly. Several B-17’s were gone, along with their ten-man crews.

Then Bud’s ship shuddered as bullets tore into the plane. The chin turret was shot away and a 20 mm shell exploded near Bud knocking the oxygen regulator off the wall and knocking Bud’s goggles off. Bud got a solid hit on an FW 190 as it streaked by. Bud’s plane was hit again. All four engines were now out. With its engines shot up, wing and tail control damaged, Bud’s plane immediately pitched nose up. It slid off toward the right wing and headed down. It then went into a deadly spin, pinning everyone where they were. Somehow the plane flattened out for just a moment. It could have been the pilot fighting the controls or more likely the weight of the still-loaded bombs that helped stop the spin. The pilot was yelling “bail out, bail out” over and over. Bud grabbed a parachute, snapped it in place, and kicked out a small emergency door in the waist of the bomber and jumped before the spin could restart. Everything was still happening too fast, but training aided his survival instincts.

As soon as Bud was in the clear, he pulled his ripcord. He wished he would have waited until he had lost some altitude. He was too near the continuing attack on the 385<sup>th</sup>. A Nazi fighter flashed by and

wreckage rained down around him. Bud saw several smoking fighters go by and one was burning. Two B-17's were spinning down to earth. Another B-17 exploded above Bud.

Later it was reported that 25% of the 385<sup>th</sup> was shot down that day. Sixteen made it back to England only to crash land. Only six B-17's were still in formation eight hours after take-off. Over 70 Nazi fighter claims were made by the returning B-17's but kill estimates are often inaccurate.

Bud drifted slowly toward a small German town and landed in a plowed field. Unfortunately, he was not alone. Townspeople had seen the parachute and were rushing across the field in a mob. Bomber pilots were particularly hated in Germany. They bombed their city and most citizens knew of at least one relative killed by the bombs. With pitch forks and old shotguns they faced the dazed airman. They questioned Bud. "Deutscher?" asked one. Bud shook his head no. "Englander?" again no. "Amerikanisch?" screamed one man. Bud didn't have to answer as it was obvious by now, he was an American. Another man speaking English said, "so you are an American gangster! You are sent to murder our people and Gott damit, we hang murderers!" With lots of shouts and arm waving the townspeople marched Bud into the town square.

In the town square was an old horse trough with a lamp post in the middle. As Bud was marched up to the lamp post, he noticed someone had found a long rope. A citizen started to tie the rope into a noose, and they urged Bud to get up on the rim of the horse trough. As they were fighting to get the rope over the top of the lamp post, a Nazi officer walked into the square. The SS Major started to lecture the crowd, but the crowd started yelling back. Finally the Major pulled his luger and aimed it at the loudest citizen. All became quiet. The noose was taken off of Bud's neck and the Major pushed him down the street.

Being rescued by an SS officer was a mixed blessing. The SS, in their black uniforms and crossbones insignia, was Hitler's private army of fanatics who often raped, tortured and executed those Hitler found annoying. Bud was taken to a nearby building, strip searched, and thrown into a solitary cell. After he ate a meal of potato soup, black bread and ginger ale, a couple of Luftwaffe soldiers came and put him in a truck. The truck also picked up the plane's left waist gunner Smitty and tail gunner "The Greek" among others.



CREW I WAS SHOT DOWN WITH

ENG.	TAIL GUNNER	BALL GUNNER	LEFT WAIST GUNNER	RADIO OPERATOR
RICHARD M. HOFFMAN	ALFRED M. FRATESI	WALLACE J. WIDEN	WALTER F. SMITH	HARRY B. LYNN
BOMBARDIER		PILOT		NAVIGATOR
STACY JOHNSON	X	HECTOR J. GARZA		ALBERT HARMSON
	↓			
	LI. POWERS WAS NOT WITH US			CO PILOT (NOT IN PICTURE) GEO. W. BECKNER

*On 16 MAY 1944, Bud's father received the following telegram:*

**ALBERT A. HARTER  
9803 ST CHAS LANE**

**THE SECRETARY OF WAR DESIRES ME TO EXPRESS HIS DEEP REGRET THAT YOUR SON STAFF SGT EMMETT A. HARTER HAS BEEN REPORTED MISSING IN ACTION SINCE 29 APRIL OVER GERMANY LETTER FOLLOWING.**

**DUNLOP  
ACT ADJ GENERAL**

*On 19 MAY 1944 they received the following letter:*

**Mr. Albert A. Harter  
9803 St. Charles Lane  
Overland, Missouri**

**Dear Mr. Harter,**

**This letter is to confirm my recent telegram in which you were regretfully informed that your son Staff Sergeant Emmett A. Harter, 17,161,658 Air Corp has been reported missing in action over Germany since 29 April 1944.**

**I know that added distress is caused is caused by failure to receive more information or details. Therefore I wish to assure you that at any time additional information is received it will be transmitted to you without delay, and, if in the meantime no additional information is received, I will again communicate with you at the expiration of three months. Also, it is the policy of the Commanding General of the Army Air Forces upon receipt of the "Missing Air Crew Report" to convey to you any details that might be contained in the report.**

**The term "missing in action" is only used to indicate that the whereabouts or status of an individual is not immediately known. It is not intended to convey the impression that the case is closed. I wish to emphasize that every effort is exerted continuously to clear up the status of our personnel. Under war conditions this is a difficult task as you must readily realize. Experience has shown that many persons reported missing in action are subsequently reported as prisoners of war, but as little information is furnished by countries with which we are at war, the War Department is helpless to expedite such reports. However in order to relieve financial worry, Congress has enacted legislation which continues in force the pay, allowances and allotments to dependents of personnel being carried in a missing status.**

**Permit me to extend to you my heartfelt sympathy during this period of uncertainty.**

**Sincerely yours,**

**Robert H. Dunlop  
Brigadier General, Acting Adjutant General**

For the next three weeks, Bud spent time in and out of solitary confinement. The Nazi's wanted to know about Bud's past flight history, but he would only tell them his name, rank and serial number. Twice a day, prisoners were given a potato and slice of black bread. One day Bud's interrogator said he didn't need any information as they already had everything they needed. The officer proceeded to tell Bud about his military history, including home address and next of kin. But there was a one month gap. The officer wanted to know where Bud was during that time. Bud didn't dare say. During that time Bud was assigned to the lead radar unit which the Nazi's would have liked to hear more about. Eventually the Nazi's gave up, allowed Bud to wash up for the first time since he was captured and transported him to a Luftwaffe prison camp in East Prussia (Lithuania), Stalag Luft 6 the latter part of May.

*On 4-JUN 1944, his family received the following telegram:*

**ALBERT A. HARTER  
9808 ST CHAS L**

**REPORT JUST RECEIVED THROUGH THE INTERNATIONAL RED CROSS THAT YOUR SON STAFF SGT EMMET A HARTER IS A PRISONER OF WAR OF THE GERMAN GOVERNMENT. LETTER OF INFORMATION FOLLOWS FROM PROVOST MARSHALL GENERAL.**

**ULIO THE ADJT GENERAL**

In June Luft 6 prisoners were given food rations of one Red Cross food box to split with 7 men for one month. Daily, each man got one slice of bread plus some boiled potatoes. Red Cross boxes contained 1 can of powdered milk, 1 package hard tack biscuits, 6 ounces of cheese, 4 ounces of instant cocoa, 1 chocolate bar, 1 tin of sardines, 1 pound of margarine, 1 can of spam, 25 cigarettes, 1 package of prunes, 4 ounces of coffee, 2 small bars of soap and one package of sugar. The package was intended to last one man, one week. Not seven men!

*On 7 JUN 1944 the family received the following letter:*

RE: S/Sgt Emmet A. Harter  
United States Prisoner of War  
Camp Unstated, Germany

**Mr. Albert A. Harter  
9803 Saint Charles Lane  
Overland, Missouri**

**Dear Mr. Harter**

**The Provost Marshal General has directed me to supplement the information you received concerning the above-named prisoner of war.**

**Information has been received which indicates that he is now interned as a prisoner of war as indicated above. The report received did not give the place of his internment. Past experience indicates that one to three months is the normal time for this office to receive that information.**

**Until the exact place of his interment is known, it is impossible to direct letters and parcels to him. Mailing instructions and parcel labels will be forwarded without application on your part, when his internment address is received.**

**Sincerely yours,**

**Howard F. Bresee  
Colonel, C.M.P, Assistant Director  
Prisoner of War Division**

Police dogs were turned loose in the compound at night and the guards harassed the airmen every chance they could. Once in a while, the guards would machine gun the barracks while the prisoners were locked inside. One day in early July, a new prisoner told them the faint rumbling they hear in the distance, that got louder every day, was the sound of the Russians getting closer. Then they learned that the front lines had cut the area off from Germany. Bud's joy didn't last long as they were quickly taken by rail to the Baltic Sea and shipped back into German occupied territory on an old coal steamer named The Masuren.

The steamer hold was so jammed with prisoners there was no room to sit. The hold had no toilets, no food, and no water. During the next 48 hours buckets of water were lowered twice for the prisoners to drink. The same buckets were used for toilets. But there wasn't enough water for everyone even when they shared drinks. Prisoners became sick, fell asleep leaning on each other, went to the toilet where they stood and even passed out. After more than two days, the ship docked with weak, tired, hungry, thirsty, and sick prisoners. They could be smelled from blocks away. At least they weren't torpedoed, bombed or strafed.

A failed attempt to kill Hitler in July 1944, resulted in a general command shake up. The Luftwaffe lost command of the POW camps and they were taken over by the SS and Gestapo with orders to stop coddling the prisoners. Fortunately, army guards were retained instead of being replaced by scarce SS men.

Once off the ship, the prisoners were shackled with iron cuffs and loaded on a train to Luft 4, a camp for non-commissioned officers (sergeants). Water was again a problem and everyone as everyone was again exhausted and thirsty. Bud pushed his way to side of the cattle car and stuck his spoon outside the slats. When it rained, he was able to get a trickle of water down the spoon and into his mouth. Bud lost track of time, but after some days they arrived, were unloaded, and marched through a thick pine forest. A large group of Nazi Marine guards with dogs accompanied them along with some black shirted SS men. A red headed Nazi Captain told the guards, "These are the men that bombed our country and killed your mothers, wives and children. Take your revenge now!" The Captain ordered the prisoners to "fast walk", then to double-time, and finally to run. Anyone that faltered was set upon

by the dogs or bayoneted by the guards. A man ahead of Bud wasn't moving fast enough and was jabbed repeatedly with a bayonet until his shirt was bloody. Another prisoner fell down. The Nazi officer ordered a guard to use the bayonet on the fallen man. When the soldier hesitated, the officer hit the soldier in the face with the luger pistol. In the confusion, the fallen man was helped up and resumed marching. No one knows how many prisoners died on the march.

The prisoners were halted just outside of Luft 4 and made to sit down. While waiting to be processed, a prisoner made a key out of wire and unlocked all the shackles. When everyone threw their shackles into the woods, the guards didn't know what to do. So the guards had the prisoners stand until their new home was ready to process them.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25			
<b>Personalkarte I: Personelle Angaben</b>																		Beschriftung der Erkennungsmarke Nr. <u>3644/6</u>									
Kriegsgefangenen-Stammlager:																		Lager:									
Name: <u>HARTER</u>																		Staatsangehörigkeit: <u>USA</u>									
Vorname: <u>Emmett, Albert</u>																		Dienstgrad: <u>S/Sgt.</u>									
Geburtstag und -ort: <u>28.3.24. St. Louis, Missouri</u>																		Truppenteil: <u>MSAAF</u> Komp. usw.:									
Religion: <u>Prot.</u>																		Zivilberuf: <u>Fluggeschwader</u> Berufs-Gr.:									
Vorname des Vaters: <u>Albert, Ambrose</u>																		Matrikel Nr. (Stammrolle des Heimatstaates): <u>17161658</u>									
Familienname der Mutter:																		Gefangennahme (Ort und Datum): <u>Pfeilm. 29.4.44.</u>									
Ob gesund, krank, verwundet eingeliefert:																											
<b>Lichtbild</b>																		<b>Nähere Personalbeschreibung</b>									
																		Größe: <u>6'1"</u>		Haarfarbe: <u>blond</u>		Besondere Kennzeichen:					
																		Name und Anschrift der zu benachrichtigenden Person in der Heimat des Kriegsgefangenen <u>Albert Harter, 9803, St. Charles Lane, Overland 14, Missouri.</u>									
3644 Harter																		<u>3644/6</u>									

The Prisoner of War (POW) area had dormitory type barracks; 10 sleeping rooms with 24 POW's and three tiered bunks. Some of the men slept on the floor. Each room had a small coal stove for heat that was only used at evening before lights out.

Each barracks had a two-hole latrine for 240 POW's to be used at night only, and each compound had two open air latrines with two 20-holders back-to-back with urinals. There were no facilities for bathing or delousing; and parasites, fleas, lice and bedbugs feasted on the prisoners.

The final camp where Bud was imprisoned was in Moosberg. He had been imprisoned for almost a year and was still hopeful the Russians or other liberators were approaching the camp.

## **Liberation**

Exactly one year from the date of his capture, Bud and the 10,000 other prisoners in the camp were liberated by General George Patton. Patton and his men exchanged fire with the Germans for several hours until American tanks knocked down the fences of the camp. Patton was driven through the camp while he stood in a recon vehicle. It was said that he rode past German soldiers who were firing at him. After the liberation, Bud thought of Patton as being rather gutsy!

*On 23 MAY 1945 the family received the following telegram:*

**ALBERT A. HARTER  
9803 ST CHARLES LANE**

**THE SECRETARY OF WAR DESIRES ME TO EXPRESS HIS PLEASURE THAT YOUR SON SGT HARTER  
EMMET A. RETURNED TO MILITARY CONTROL 29 APRIL 45.**

**JA ULIO  
THE ADJ GENERAL**

Bud was not immediately sent back to the United States. He would spend months in Europe before being sent home. While in Europe, he tried to recover from his devastating ordeal. *"I don't guess that I was ever the same afterwards,"* Bud would say. Almost all of the soldiers he was imprisoned with had plans of enjoying big, delicious meals once they got free. But the men had difficulty eating much food at all after eating so little food and irregularly while imprisoned. *"I ate very little and drank a lot. My nerves were bad,"* Bud said. While in France, Bud went with some other soldiers into town to run some errands. Bud asked another soldier that he lived with if there was anything he could pick up for him. The soldier, Willis Anderson, asked Bud to pick him up a Coca-Cola, something not easy to come by in France during the war. Bud and the other soldiers met with some American sailors while in town. The sailors took Bud and the soldiers back to their ship for a meal. On the ship, Bud was able to get Coca-Cola! When Anderson saw that Bud had managed to find him a soda, the two men became friends.

*On 28 MAY 1945 the family received the following telegram:*

**MR AND MRS A HARTER  
9803 ST CHARLES LANE  
OVERLAND MO**

**ARRIVED SAFELY EXPECT TO SEE YOU SOON. DO NOT ATTEMPT TO CONTACT ME OR WRITE ME HERE  
LOVE BUD.**

*On 30 MAY 1945 the Harter's received their last telegram from the Washington:*

**ALBERT HARTER  
9803 ST CHAS RD**

**THE CHIEF OF STAFF OF THE RMY DIRECTS ME TO INFORM YOU YOUR ON SGT HARTER EMMET A HAS  
ARRIVED IN THE UNITED STATES.  
ULIO THE ADJ GENERAL**

Emmett was discharged 15-OCT 1945, having achieved the rank of Staff Sergeant. Emmett was joined by 9 former POW's from Missouri who were processed at Jefferson Barracks before going home. Emmett earned the European–African–Middle Eastern Campaign Medal with 1 Bronze Star, the Air Medal with 3 Oak Leaf Clusters.

Once Bud and Anderson were back in the United States, Anderson invited Bud to attend a family anniversary party. It was at this party where Bud met Mary Lou, Anderson's niece. Mary Lou and Bud were married shortly after meeting and have been together for more than fifty years. The couple has two children and several grandchildren. The couple lived in Lake St. Louis and Bud was active in the local chapter of the VFW.

Emmett A. Harter died 12-OCT 2011.