



The big moment. As operations officer at a B-24 Liberator base in England, the then Major Stewart distributes the flight forms to heavy-bomber pilots for the all-important D-Day mission.

EUROPEAN

# Jimmy Stewart's Finest Performance

By COL. BEIRNE LAY, JR.

**A**LITTLE-KNOWN fact about the big bombing missions from England to Germany is that the chief obstacles to success were not German flak, fighters or unflyable English weather. The gravest threat to a successful bomber offensive lay in the inherent difficulty of the operations themselves.

A more complicated way to fight a war has never been devised. So high were the personal qualifications required of the air commanders who led the huge 8th Air Force formations, that success or failure of the air offensive against Europe hinged on the existence of, and the careful selection of, competent air commanders.

Yet in the spring of 1944 a Hollywood movie star named Jimmy Stewart sat in the lead ship of a procession of more than 1000 heavy bombers, a maximum effort of the 8th Air Force for that day, bound for a savagely defended target at Brunswick, Germany. Stewart was not there for the ride, nor was he a special observer. He was in command in the air.

Was Brig. Gen. Ted Timberlake, Stewart's wing commander, crazy? Was Maj. Gen. Jimmy Hodges, his air-division commander, impressed with having

Avoiding publicity and easy berths, Hollywood's "Mr. Smith" won rating as a "superior" air commander and found himself leading 1000 heavy bombers toward a German target. The refreshing story of a refreshing human being.

seen a lanky actor kiss Lana Turner? Was Lt. Gen. Jimmy Doolittle, behind his desk at Headquarters, 8th Air Force, ignorant of the fact that a Motion Picture Academy Award winner, sitting at 23,000 feet with a throat microphone around his neck, was broadcasting lines which had a bearing on the fate of 10,000 skilled men and on the destruction of a vital German war plant? What criticism, if any, was leveled at the judgment of Maj. James Maitland Stewart, 0-433210, when he called to the other formations as the task force approached the enemy coast, and told their leaders that he was aborting the mission

and returning to base? What the devil, in short, was Jimmy Stewart doing up there at all?

These questions would hardly be worth answering merely on the assumption that the war experience of a famous screen personality in uniform is automatically of interest. Other film figures have got their hands dirty in the fight too. Wayne Morris shot down his quota of Japs as a naval aviator; Director William Wyler stood in open bomb bays, with heavy flak coming up, to shoot motion pictures over the target for *The Memphis Belle*; Director John Huston shared bullets with doughboys to get the film for *San Pietro*; Stirling Hayden engaged in the dangerous pastime of filching downed Allied fliers out of Yugoslavia behind German lines; screen-writer Sy Bartlett flew every other mission to Japan as Intelligence Officer of a B-29 wing.

What makes Stewart's story worth examination relates to the single word "command." His story is merged with the bigger story of the emergence in our critical hour of a handful of Americans endowed with a peculiar combination of mental, nervous and physical assets, topped off with a rare attribute called good judgment. What the Army Air Forces did with Jimmy Stewart when he was tossed into the Army hopper is of a piece with the story of all the other young men with every conceivable background who



had to be sorted out of the mammoth grader and trained to explode the AAF to 100 times its prewar size.

The country was not at war in March, 1941, when Citizen James Stewart, age thirty-three, enlisted, but induction of eligible bachelors loomed in the offing. By voluntary enlistment, Stewart had forestalled the criticism that might have attended his continued enjoyment of a large salary in civilian clothes at a time when the sons of other families were learning their new Army serial numbers.

Like the other green soldiers unloading their bags in the barracks of the air-base squadron at Moffett Field, California, where they had been sent for basic foot-soldier training, Private Stewart had a problem. Only his problem was peculiar. The other boys had become numbers. He was still "Jimmy Stewart," actor. Simply being natural was no solution. He couldn't ignore the fact that when the guy on the next bunk looked at him he was thinking, "There's the reporter in Philadelphia Story. There's the patriot who fought the crooked politicians in Mr. Smith Goes to Washington. Just think, that buck private has kissed the most beautiful women in Hollywood on the screen and gotten paid for it."

Everything he said or did was observed, and with that curiosity with which we stare frankly at a freak or a strange animal in a cage. Stewart saw the only solution. He must make people forget that he'd ever been a movie actor or resign himself to limited usefulness. He had a talk with Col. George L. Usher, commanding officer of Moffett Field.

"How can I help you, Stewart," asked Usher, "to get off the spot you're in?"

"The biggest help, sir," said Stewart, "would be no publicity. No interviews. No publicity stunts. No radio appearances."

"I can fix that," said Usher. He was as good as his word, and better. Besides making Stewart unavailable to the press, he called him in for further chats, in which he drew on his store of service knowledge as a career Air Corps officer to build the interest of his "hot potato" in the Army Air Forces. He encouraged him to study Army extension courses and suggested that he build up enough flying hours to qualify for a commission in the Air Corps.

The going wasn't easy for the six-foot, three-inch hot potato. How could you discourage the fellow who wanted to snap your picture, without being thought a heel? But Jimmy stuck to his guns. He was willing to co-operate on any matter but public-



U. S. AAF PHOTO

"... no longer an actor in uniform." Just back from Germany, Stewart reports on the mission.

ity. Gradually he succeeded and people began to forget.

Colonel Usher's advice gestated in Stewart's mind during the weeks in which he advanced from student soldier to drill instructor and won his corporal's stripes. Before enlisting, he had compiled about 200 hours of flying in small planes, thanks to the contagious flying bug which infected his agent and friend, Leland Hayward. Jimmy decided to work in earnest toward the rating of an Air Corps pilot.

His civilian flying had been undertaken for no more serious purpose than relaxation, much as Bing Crosby played golf on afternoons off from the studio. The fact that he flew thirteen hours of dual instruction before soloing, although many apt students solo after eight hours, is less significant than a weird incident which occurred on a practice flight in 1936.

His instructor jerked back the throttle to give Stewart a simulated forced landing. Jimmy picked an emergency field and executed a power-off approach. As he glided toward a potato patch, he saw that he was going to hit it right on the button. He sat there grinning and waited for the instructor to give her the gun and climb. But the bi-plane continued to settle toward the ground. Finally Jimmy grabbed the throttle, but it wouldn't budge. He thought the other man was holding it back. They were skimming the grass, now, so Jimmy set her down in a normal landing on the rough furrows.

The instructor was furious at Stewart for holding the throttle back, until he discovered that it had jammed so that neither of them could move it. The simulated emergency had become a real emergency without either man realizing it until they were safe on the ground. The incident was small, but the implication was allegorical: from make-believe to reality without dropping a stitch.

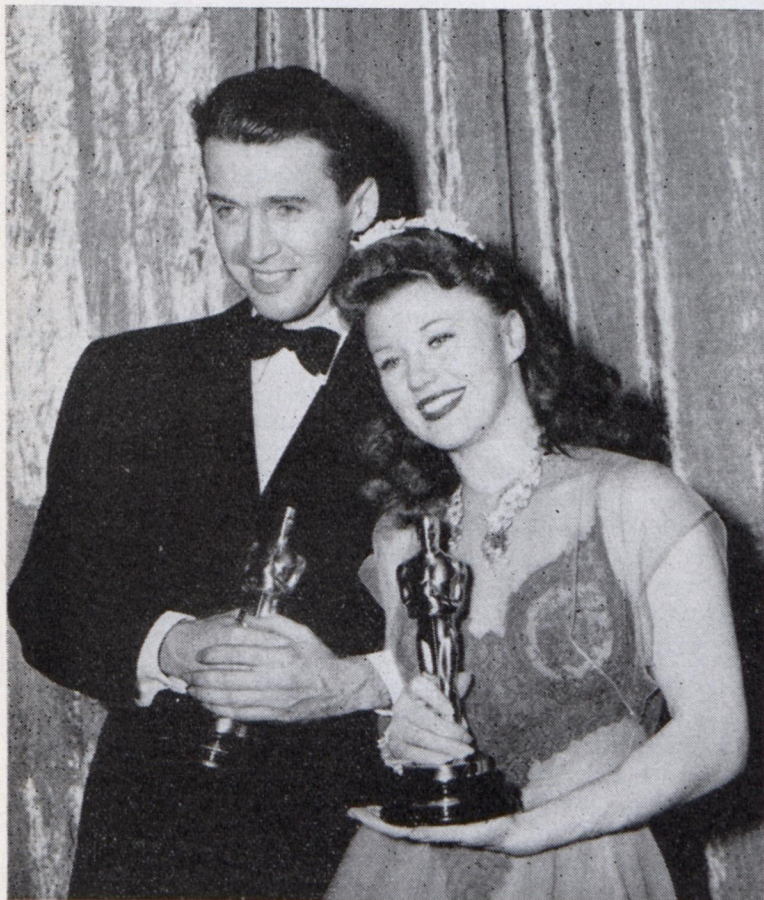
Corporal Stewart boned away doggedly at his extension courses, and built up his flying time at his own expense at the near-by Palo Alto airport. One month before Pearl Harbor he had logged the minimum 300 hours necessary to meet an Air Corps board of officers, who would pass on his proficiency as a pilot, and he had fulfilled the academic requirements for an Air Corps commission. His attitude, when he arrived at San Francisco to meet the flying board, was confident but worried. He knew how to fly an airplane, but he also knew that the Army standard was high and that he was unfamiliar with the 400-horsepower BT-14 basic trainer in which he had to take his test.

An instructor allowed the loose-limbed corporal a half hour of familiarization, and the check flight was on. It proved to be a short ride—a few take-offs and landings, some air work, and a simulated forced landing, which the corporal hit on the nose.

"Take me in to the line," said the instructor. "You're okay."

While the wheels of the military ground slowly, Corporal Stewart sweated out his wings and commission in the G. I. barracks back at Moffett Field. The black month of December steeled him and his mates with the realization that they were in a real war and that a lot of Americans were going to have to do some fighting before the Japs and Germans could be stopped. But standing guard to protect the big balloon hangar against sabotage was a far cry from the

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WIDE WORLD

Before he wanted wings. Jimmy and Ginger Rogers, clutching the Oscars they won for 1940's outstanding film performances.



U. S. AAF PHOTO

"Command" is the word for Stewart. Above: With four comrades of the 453rd Bombing Group, Old Buckingham, which he served as operations officer, then as commander.



fever, which is transmitted through raw milk or contracted by handling infected cows or goats. This is another ailment which has defied one therapeutic measure after another and which often drags down the patient's health and strength for months or years. While early response to streptomycin treatment in a few cases appears hopeful, it will take several years, because of the long and undulant or up-and-down course of the disease, before the final pronouncement can be made on the value of this therapeutic. Because of its striking results as an antiseptic in the urinary tract, streptomycin appears to offer great promise in the treatment of bladder and kidney infections.

Another antibiotic medicine, bacitracin, turned up recently as a beneficial by-product of a New York automobile accident, in which a Mrs. Tracy suffered a compound fracture of her shinbone. She came to the attention of Drs. Balbina A. Johnson, Herbert Anker and Frank L. Meleney, of Columbia University's College of Physicians and Surgeons, who were studying civilian street accidents that simulated war wounds and evaluating sulfa drugs in their treatment. The resemblance lay in the fact that both types of wounds were apt to be contaminated by the soil.

The doctors noticed that a number of severe compound fractures, including Mrs. Tracy's, healed more rapidly

than expected. Bacterial studies indicated that helpful antigens were at work in these instances, checking the growth of harmful infectious germs. From Mrs. Tracy's wound an unusually effective antigen was isolated, and by way of thanking the patient for her unwitting contribution to science, the physicians gave her name to the new variety of bacillus, "Tracy One," and incorporated it also into the name of the medicine, bacitracin.

Bacitracin has given encouraging results in the local treatment of strep and staph infections. It appears to be nontoxic, and has advantages over penicillin in that it is not destroyed by such common organisms as the colon bacillus, nor by stomach acids and digestive juices.

Experiments are continuing on these and many other soil medicines, with names equally strange—subtilin, clavacin, fumigacin, flavacin and gigantic acid.

These are only the beginnings in the search for new medicines in the soil. The prolific earth teems with microscopic populations, many of which are still unknown and unidentified. The microbiologists have hardly scratched the surface—and you may take that statement literally and figuratively. Their aim is to keep plowing this and related fields until they have an antibiotic chemical against every disease germ in the book.

THE END

## JIMMY STEWART'S FINEST PERFORMANCE

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opportunities that might unfold before an Army pilot. Stewart prayed for the larger chance.

On the nineteenth of January, 1942, he was still sweating about that second lieutenant's commission and those wings, and guarding the still-unmolested balloon hangar, when the lieutenant who commanded his guard company walked up to him with a broad smile and a long white envelope. The same day, after being sworn in, 2nd Lt. James Stewart paid a visit to the post tailor and ordered a uniform with wings on the chest.

He was ordered to immediate active duty, the first four weeks of which he spent at Moffett taking a refresher course in BT-13's—forty hours of formation, night and instrument flying. There was a noteworthy absence of envy on the part of his old buck-private friends, who knew that Corporal Stewart had won his commission not by pulling a string in Washington nor on the strength of civilian prominence, but by the unspectacular method of meeting the official requirements.

A new world opened up. A world of military flying in which, like other civilian pilots who had passed Air Corps boards, he was ignorant of those military fundamentals which are automatically assimilated by aviation cadets who start their training in Air Corps primary flying schools. Stewart studied with passionate purpose to lift his knowledge to his new responsibilities. He decided that the best way to learn fast was by instructing others. Orders came through sending him to the instructor's course at the advanced flying school at Mather Field, California.

Probably at no time before or since has Jimmy Stewart felt more on the spot than when he had completed the four weeks' instructor's course in ad-

vanced ground-school subjects and Curtiss AT-9's—twin engine—that qualified him to instruct advanced students. He was a target for skepticism not only as a former film star but as a mail-order pilot who had never undergone the regular Army course of pilot training.

The possibility of damaging a wing tip while taxiing, ground-looping on a landing or some other minor screw-up which would have excited little comment if committed by another instructor gave him nightmares. He couldn't afford to make a single mistake.

As the weeks slipped by, Lieutenant Stewart's hours in the air piled up fast. He never scratched an airplane. More important, he became an excellent instructor. A fundamental trait of character helped him. He was conscientious—deliberately and painfully conscientious. Putting himself in the place of a student was easy because his own frame of mind was that of a student. From his own difficulties with some subjects, like navigation, he sympathized with the fellow who had to learn the hard way. Stewart learned. But he never became the type who talks when he should be listening. Only a tiny nucleus of officers who had grown up with the Air Corps carried within them the sound air doctrine and military know-how with which the violently expanding AAF had to be inoculated in 1942. Stewart listened to these men and his attitude was humble.

One man to whom he listened was Gen. Kenneth McNaughton, who advised him to transfer to the newly activated bombardier school at Kirtland Field, Albuquerque, New Mexico, where valuable experience was to be had. His duties would consist primarily of flying bombardier students in twin-engine Beechcraft AT-11's, but he would have ample opportunity to learn plenty about the Norden bomb sight and bombing techniques. He received his transfer in August, after being promoted to first lieutenant, and entered on a period of grueling flying.

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Kirtland Field had been opened literally from scratch. Somebody had said, "Joe, you start a big bombardier school, fly day and night, and turn us out bombardiers—a cloud of them." Joe was doing it. Stewart saw and marveled. And he was part of the show. His work began to partake of the desperation of those around him who fought against time. The war in Europe was apparently being lost, and the war against the Japs seemed already lost.

First Lieutenant Stewart started thinking seriously about combat. The knowledge that instructors would be just as vital to the AAF as combat pilots didn't convince him that his best course was to fight the war on the home front, so that he could return someday with a whole skin to the big dough and brilliant career that he had left. Nobody had to tell him that lack of prominence didn't make it any easier for the other fellow to risk his neck. He made up his mind to get into the fight. Looking back, he gives his reason for that decision bashfully and reluctantly.

"It's too corny," he says, "but heck, what's wrong with wanting to fight for your country? Why are people embarrassed to use the word 'patriotism'?" He shrugs and gives up.

In December he went to see Colonel Hackett, his CO, who arranged for him to transfer to the B-17F transition school for four-engine pilots at Hobbs Field, New Mexico. Jimmy wanted big airplanes. The 100-hour course at Hobbs would qualify him to join a war-bound Flying Fortress outfit as an airplane commander. Falling in love with the big bombers at first sight, he checked out easily on the B-17 and graduated from the ground school and flying course in February, 1943.

He no longer needed to view himself as an actor in uniform. He was now a qualified B-17 airplane commander, with a lot more experience than some of his fellow graduates of the four-engine school who had entered fresh from advanced flying schools. The gap had been closed with margin to spare.

Fully processed for overseas service, in the matter of personal papers and equipment, Stewart left Hobbs Field with a group of thirty eager pilots for the distribution center at Salt Lake City, where they were to receive permanent assignments to newly activated bomb groups scheduled to move overseas in three months. All the thirty pilots received orders quickly except Stewart. Jimmy had hit a snag, and it proved to be a bad one.

His initial misgivings when orders failed to arrive increased under the handling of the local public-relations officer, who was treating the actor as something special. Jimmy began to feel, "This is where I came in." An interview with an officer from Headquarters, 2nd Air Force, turned out awkwardly. The officer was puzzled.

"I don't quite get why you were sent here for assignment," he said. "Do you fly?"

Stewart's Adam's apple bobbed. He controlled his amazement. "Yes, sir," he said. "I fly."

The officer stared uncertainly at the evidence on Stewart's papers, still puzzled. "Okay," he said, "you'll get orders."

Stewart was assigned to the 29th Group at Gowen Field, Boise, Idaho, as an airplane commander. The job lasted one week. His CO called him in.

"There must be some hitch about your going into combat," he said. "I've got instructions to classify you as 'static personnel.' From now on, you're an instructor in first-phase training."

It seemed obvious that someone at headquarters didn't want to take the responsibility for sending the hot potato into combat as an expendable B-17 pilot. Stewart absorbed this bitter pill and went to work as an instructor. The disappointment was heartbreaking, but he dispatched no telegrams and made no long-distance telephone calls.

Equally heartbreaking was the pace at which air crews were being trained at Gowen Field. Under the relentless pressure being brought to bear by Brig. Gen. R. F. ('Big Bob') Travis, wing commander, crews flew on a twenty-four-hour-a-day schedule during the frigid winter days and nights of February and March, 1943. Turn out the crews!

The Joint Chiefs of Staff in Washington, who established overseas air commitments, turned the heat on General Arnold, who put the heat on Gen. "Jam" Johnson, 2nd Air Force commander, who put the heat on Bob Travis, wing commander at Boise, who blowtorched Col. Pop Arnold in command of the 29th Group, who passed the heat on to the instructors and crews. It was at this lowest level, where Stewart flew around the clock as an instructor, and soon in the tougher role of squadron operations officer, that the heat really turned white.

Squadron Operations Officer Stewart's face grew grim and tired as winter merged with spring and summer came. This was war. His roommate was killed in an instrument take-off with a student at the controls. In one of the group's bad weeks, Jimmy's squadron alone sustained three fatal accidents. And bomber accidents, involving large crews, are messy. The hovering mountains took their toll during instrument-flying weather as students groped for the field in snow and haze.

Stewart's operations job was not a talking job only. Students had to be shown. Three-engine performance, two-engine performance, one-engine performance in a four-engine bomber. Emergency procedures in the air. It was physically exhausting work, and with students, dangerous work. One night Jimmy was up checking a new airplane commander. He had given his copilot's seat temporarily to the navigator, who wanted to see how things functioned in the cockpit. The navigator got an eyeful a minute later, when a blinding flash of light came from the No. 1 engine on the pilot's side, accompanied by a loud explosion. Somehow Jimmy got the navigator out of the co-

pilot's seat, so that he could reach the No.-1-fire-extinguisher selector valve, regained control and set the bomber down safely on the twinkling runway at Gowen.

It would be a disservice to Stewart to picture him during this period as an automaton before the altar of duty, who spent his spare time carrying baskets to the poor. A human sort of guy, he missed the bright lights and the beautiful gals of his old haunts, and he managed a short leave. But even on this brief holiday in Hollywood, he spent a whole day flying. Test Pilot Jimmy Mattern, at Chasen's Restaurant one evening, wondered pointedly if Stewart would care to fly the brand-new P-38 Lightning fighter which Lt. Col. Thomas G. Lanphier, also present, had parked down at Mines Field. Jimmy took the P-38 upstairs next day and wrung it out to the satisfaction of all concerned.

By August, after six months of the grind at Boise, Jimmy had accumulated enough experience for bigger things. He had earned his captaincy, and in the Manner of Performance column of his Form 66-1 was the rating "Superior"—the highest an officer can receive. Throughout the rest of his service, no commander was ever to rate him lower.

He became restless and uneasy. His past had begun to catch up with him. He heard rumors that plans were afoot to use him in an Air Force picture to boost recruiting, which would put him in wraps and keep him out of the war. He believed that this would be the worst possible use to which higher headquarters could put him; that such special treatment would hurt the morale of other men in the AAF; that his desire to get into combat was worth a dozen public-relations pictures. He took his problem to his group CO, Pop Arnold.

Arnold's reply was to pick up the phone and call Sioux City, Iowa, where he knew Col. Bob Terrill, CO of the 445th Bombardment Group (Heavy), equipped with B-24's. Terrill needed a squadron operations officer, and he needed a good one, because the 445th was scheduled for overseas movement in less than three months. He agreed to take Stewart.

When Captain Stewart reported to Col. Bob Terrill at Sioux City, he felt like a new man. Soon he would be out of the country, in combat, and beyond the reach of those who might try to cast him in a picture. Here with the 445th there was a terrible immediate purpose to everything a man learned. He acquired an enormous admiration for

Terrill—a man who never slept, who seemed to know everything there was to know about a heavy bomb group and precisely what was going on in every department of his own. Captain Stewart had learned a lot. But here was an officer who gave him the feeling of a novice. The idol of millions of picture fans took another long notch in the taut belt of humility he wore.

The humble attitude did not prevent Captain Stewart from demonstrating with confidence that he knew how to carry out the training of the 703rd Bombardment Squadron intelligently, handle a rugged gang of officers and enlisted men and put a B-24 through its paces. In exactly nineteen days, Colonel Terrill appointed the newcomer a squadron commander. Perhaps this assignment was more significant than any Stewart has received, when it is considered that no group commander, faced with departure for combat, would have promoted an officer to such a key position without cold-blooded appraisal.

An intangible change suffuses a man who has become a link in the chain of command. Jimmy Stewart was no longer an auxiliary, but as genuine a part of the striking power of the AAF as the 1000-pound demolition bombs exploding on German factories. Hollywood had lost an actor. The AAF had won a commander.

A few weeks later, in November, 1943, a heavily loaded B-24 groped at treetop level below the gray, drizzling clouds that pressed down on the eastern bulge of England. The pilot, haggard after the long flight from Florida to Brazil to Africa to England, strained his eyes through the haze for a glimpse of the airdrome at Tibenham, future home of the 445th Bomb Group. Swarms of B-24's, returning to base from a mission into Germany, congested the foggy air space above the ancient English villages, creating the continual hazard of midair collision. The landscape was one great rash of airdromes, all apparently identical. Jimmy Stewart heaved a sigh of resignation and landed on the nearest runway. In his blood was the tingle that exhilarates all who come for the first time upon the arena of war. For a bomber crew this was the front line.

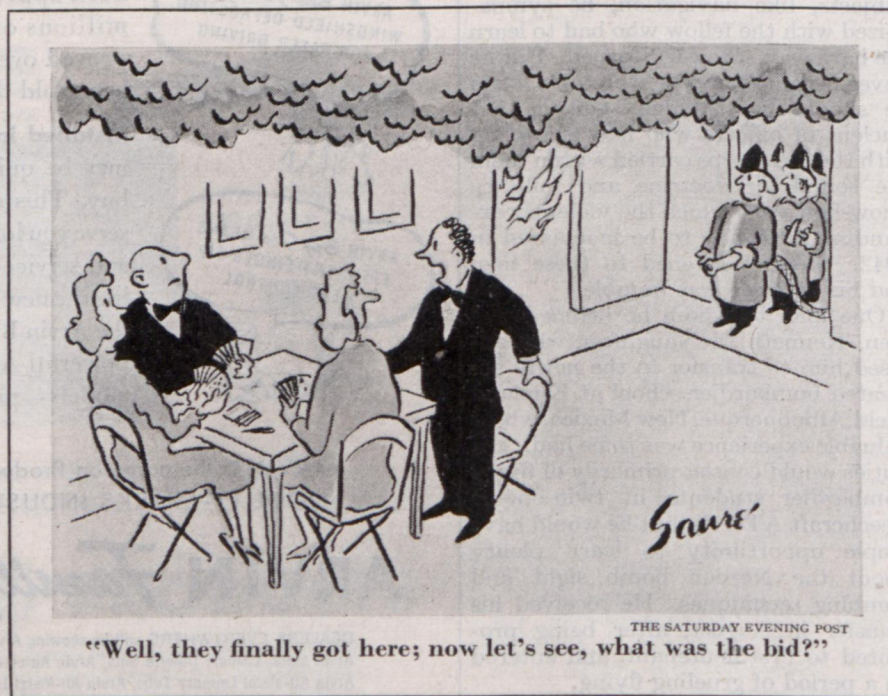
He called up Tibenham, only six miles away, and was told to remain overnight where he was, on account of weather. That evening he sat with his crew in a Nissen hut and listened to a foreign broadcast. Lord Haw-Haw came on.

"Good evening," said the politely sarcastic voice, "and allow me to be the first to welcome the Four Hundred and Forty-fifth Bomb Group to England." The ten mouths of Stewart's crew fell open simultaneously. What kind of racket were they getting into, anyway?

A gunner finally spoke. "Rough," he said.

Probably that gunner didn't know how rough it was really going to be. For in that bloody winter of 1943-44 the growing 8th Air Force was finally locked in a death embrace with the Luftwaffe. On the Regensburg-Schweinfurt strike three months previous, fifty-nine heavy bombers had gone down, and on the more recent second Schweinfurt assault, German rocket-firing fighters and dense flak concentrations had shot down sixty bombers. Friendly fighters still lacked the range to go all the way in to the target with the bombers. German fighter production was increasing and the deadly jet fighter was taking its bow. No man could predict the outcome.

Editors' Note—This is the first of two articles by Colonel Lay. The second will appear next week.



THE SATURDAY EVENING POST