A NAVIGATOR'S DIARY

Samuel D. Sayers joined the USAAF as an Aviation Cadet on July 31, 1941. He was called up to active duty and sent to the Santa Ana Army Air Base Aviation Classification Center for pre-navigation training. Although qualified to be a pilot, he was assigned for navigation training.

Class 42-H was the last class to graduate from the Aviation Classification Center. Sayers, then, would be underwent training Class 43-1H the next four months. He was graduated on October 7, 1941, and commissioned as a Second Lieutenant.

In mid-October he was sent to Tonopah, Nevada where he joined the 408th Bombardment Group (Heavy) and was assigned to the 372nd Bombardment Squadron. The 408th Flew B-17s. Sayers flew navigation and said of the B-17s, "Great aircraft."

Unfortunately, he did not remain long enough to Tonopah. His diary picks up with the crew's first combat mission on March 5, 1944.

Towards the end of the combat tour and the radio on the mission count throughout May and early June 1944, the crew was flown either the time or every-by-when days for just complete missions as he and their throughout most of his tour. The crews for his last several missions are not known to survive.

In July 1944, having completed his tour, he was sent back to the States. He was assigned to the Navigator's Training Unit assigned to an Administrative Officer in Miami, Florida until the end of the war.

In his Switzerland were two diaries. The first with a cover title of My Hotch In The Service, Sayers's wife, Ruth, typed the entire diary and added a few comments. The second diary was a typed transcription, with no comments, of the first diary. Unmentioned, however, was Sayers's diary when I was growing up, trying to imagine what it was like to be him and do the things he described.

I have added images where relevant. Commentaries in [Italics] are mine.

Training

LEADING HEADON FOR HAZES

THE CHASES FROM A CITADEL TO AN AVIATION CADET

July 6, 1942

In Chicago's downtown old post office building, total Aviation Cadet qualifying examination. Completed the examination in 1 hour and 15 minutes instead of 1 hour 45 was sufficient for passing. Was first highest in a group of 200 applicants.

July 8, 1942

The second step in qualifying required a thorough physical examination, which took from 8:00 A.M. to noon. Passed the physical. Then came the oath of allegiance to the United States of America and the oath of office. Then came the recommendation or character reference were separated WM. ROCHTER CITIES SERVICE CO. CO. ROCHTER CHEMICAL CO. CO. LIBLAND CHEMICAL CO.

July 21, 1942

In a simple ceremony held in the old post office building, I was sworn into the Army as a private, awaiting assignment as an Aviation Cadet.

January 14, 1943

Left on morning train. Finally received my appointment as an Aviation Cadet on January 8th. Sworning ceremonies with the Class Service Oil Co. as assistant credit manager, and Mr. Rochter, president of the company, in attendance. Left on morning train for Santa Ana, San Antonio, Texas. A number of friends came to the station before we boarded the special train to travel more than a thousand miles weekend. An empty and strange feeling was within me as we shuffled further and further into Texas.

January 16, 1942

Arrived at Santa Ana early this morning in San Antonio, Texas at the San Antonio Aviation Classification Center [A.A.C.]. Our trip was comfortable – good food and air support. Well, the trip was over, and we were in the Army. Our first day was spent at the base with critical "Sad'Sack-ers" from the local schools at the base. I was sent

January 16 – March 10, 1942
A.A.C. – San Antonio, Texas

Orientating myself in forty ways was a difficult, trying task, my nature rebelled and caused me some trouble with them in charge. I never did the segregation, and never will. My first experiences consisted of getting acquainted with the usual new recruits, and getting to know the "new" lesson of the morning in the tone of a high pitched and trying to drive and meet the requirements of the instructors in the mission. Our tables we shined with and hard of the usual order of the day.

During the day we made many formations, which usually consisted of mess, P.T., announcements, and drill. Our drill was very, very, very,

crossed the coast of Holland at 1239 and proceeded on course. Heavy flak was coming up from Quakenbrück, Osnabrück, Hannover and other towns along the route. Then as we approached the wing I.F. enemy fighters + ME-109's by the hundreds were seen attacking our ships. As many as four LIV's at a time were seen to go down – which made us all sick. Our own fighter support wasn't enough to take care of the Germans as they weren't in the vicinity of the target when we received the bomb run. All our bombs were dropped on the airfield at 1530 and we really hit and smashed the airfield – but good.

We had to battle our way all the way home as excessive heavy flak was being shot at us coming too close for comfort. MIS-109's kept picking off one ship at a time, jumping on those that were easiest to get. The enemy fighters followed us all the way to the channel. Many dogfights could be seen with our own P-38's, P-47's, and P-51's with the ME-109's. Many nice ships could also be seen flying over the channel back home. It was surprising to see our own fighters come seemingly out of nowhere in trying to aid a distress signal from one LB. The English coast never looked better as we crossed it and proceeded for Hethel and landed at 1700. The colonel left the plane immediately and went a-par after me. The rest of the crew went back together on track. I felt quite important riding in the command car alone and thankful to the colonel for thinking about me.

We were interrogated by Hethel's intelligence officers and we were picked up by our car and driven back to Horsham. The boys in the Pathfinder ship parted me on the back and complimented me many times on the nice job of navigating. They wanted me to join their crew. It was a good job of navigating for we were always on course and hit our target dead on. Of course the weather was good, which was a helpful factor. Battle damage to our ship was mainly a large hole in the wing and numerous small holes in the fuselage. After all the missions we have been on without seeing a single German fighter – it was surprising to see the LuftwaffE up in such great numbers. We weren't prepared for it and I believe our own fighter support was outnumbered. The German radio claimed they stopped us from going to Berlin. That's a lot of "poppycock", we went to our target with no deviation or altering of our briefed mission.

I can't help but feel somewhat proud of the fact that I had so important of a part to play as lead navigator in the lead ship – leading some 500 or more airplanes to the target. The responsibility was resting heavily on my shoulders, but I trusted in the Lord for help and I know He was with me. It's a wonderful feeling of accomplishment to fill so important a position. At least we didn't take them to Switzerland like they did last Saturday. This was my 25th for the toughest and overall mission so far. We were fortunate in our group. Out of thirty ships we lost only one. **Sievers** crew. Lt. Sievers, Lt. Driver, Lt. Dayson, and Lt. Slaughter were in that crew. One boy from another ship [Sgt. John W. Kirby, 752nd] was shot up in his legs and died late tonight in the hospital.

Monday April 10, 1944

Today's mission was to bomb an aircraft factory near Bourges, France and we did just that. I had a good view of the target area before bombs fell – then I saw the bombs hit their marks – buildings, planes, everything was going up. Before the usual hazy flak appeared, I counted 17 planes dispersed on the ground – some which were four engine jobs. The smoke towering some 5000 feet could be seen for 65 miles. Mission otherwise was uneventful, little or no flak and no fighters came close enough for us to see them.

Tuesday April 11, 1944

Feeling low and weak today's mission was a hard one physically. For the first time I was ready to drop my cookies. But I fought it off. It's a tough job when you're under oxygen and your stomach is all topsy-turvy. Our 3000lb bombs fell squarely on the aircraft factory at Oschersleben. Flak was extremely heavy. We took one shell into a few bits and light damage to our ship. I watched many boys going down in chutes today. I especially had a good view of one and followed him down to base 1000 feet then. Our bombs open fire on him with machine guns probably. I was praying for the poor helpless guy floating slowly to earth. Then as he passed over another place he was fired at again. I was enraged and angry – I was wishing we had more bombs left to go over and bomb them to Kingdom Come.

We lost an engine while still over Germany and slowly fell from the formation. When we reached Holland and the channel we were alone, except for another LB that wanted to stay with us in case of attack or going down in the water. We were all set for ditching the plane. I had the radio operator break radio silence and send SOS messages every ten minutes in the left, but our only navigation and stood by on the flight deck near the radio operator. I navigated in my head – we were just a little south of the field when we made landfall. I felt good about that. Land was beautiful to see – we cancelled our SOS and shot red distress signal flares and landed immediately. Really sweated this one out – thought it was our last.

Thursday April 13, 1944

Long one today – eight hours in the air. we went deep into southern Germany. As for a sight-seeing trip, saw many large cities and countries such as, Belgium, France, Luxembourg, Germany and the town of Konstaug and the Lake Constance could be seen of Switzerland. Saw Brussels in Belgium, the Rhine River and many other geographic points. Our load of bombs was 13 X 500lb demos. Not much flak was encountered nor any enemy fighters came close, but the towering cumulus clouds made our mission flying more dangerous than the enemy fighters. The weather was clear over the target and again I had a good view of the area before bombs even fell. Some fifty planes were on the field and the first group bombed from 12000 feet and some to the left, but our sections bombs fell directly at the buildings, which was our M.P.I. – a beautiful job. The field and buildings must have been completely destroyed. We left the airfield (Leipfheim A.P.) was enroute south of Augsburg, Germany. We landed short on gas. We had about a twenty minute supply left.

Wednesday April 19, 1944

After spending a two-day leave in London, I returned late last night to find I was on the alert. Went to bed at 0200 and was awakened at 0500. During those two hours of sleep we had two air raid alerts, which interrupted what little sleep I could have had. Our mission today was to bomb an airfield at Paderborn, Germany. Our group hit the division. Again, fighters chase not to come near our formation and flak was very meager. With a clear day and all possible conditions – the bombardier missed the target. A perfect mission, if only we had hit that target.

Thursday April 20, 1944

We operated on a different schedule today, taking off at 1600 and returning to base at 2030. Our target was a military installation near Pas, France in the Pas de Calais area. We entered the coast of France about three miles north of Dieppe where we received our first flak – one of our ships piloted by **Mauker** was hit and he returned to England and crash landed. Three bailed out – it is believed the crew is all okay.
[This crew actually landed at RAF West Malling]

Our greatest barrage of flak and rocket fire was received from Abbeville while we were on the bomb run. A plane was hit square in front of us and blew up. Five men were seen to bail out. We made our way to Belgium and then to Holland. The Germans got the jitters with 1000 of our planes raiding the invasion coast until dark. They sent reconnaissance bombers over every hour last night as they thought the invasion was taking place. It sure looks like everything is pointing to the invasion, but it will in all probability be several weeks yet.

Saturday April 22, 1944

Our 15th mission, and our most unusual mission thus far. We get a seven day rest leave after this mission and we really need it. We took off at 1645 with 30 X 500lb demo bombs to bomb our target at Hamm, Germany – railroad yards – which is the largest RR yards in Germany – carrying all manufacturing goods from the Ruhr. We met with very heavy flak, but no enemy fighters. We planned our bombs "smack-dab" on the target and noticed other targets that were really hit too. Such cities as Muenster and others. We got off course coming home and it was getting dark while reaching the coast of Belgium. We received a display of fireworks from rocket guns below, which was quite a scene to see. It became dark before we reached the English coast.

We proceeded to our base when I noticed what I at first thought to be an English Mosquito flying through our formation. He was shooting at us and missed by a few yards. A.I. could have shot him down had he known it was a ferry. After a few seconds, he was shooting at another plane and his engine exploded and the plane was bursting earthward, a mass of flames. Somehow the signals were crossed and an alert was given on the ground and we were immediately under fire from English ack-ack and we at low altitude. We took off for the North Sea and tried to make contact with the field, which was under attack by German fighters who followed us home. After a hectic time we finally made our way back to the field and by God's grace and mercy we found it and landed at 2330.

We were all nervous wrecks. Interrogation was brief. We ate and saw a movie rather than go to bed as we were too excited to sleep. Finally went to bed at 0330. It was discovered the next day that some gunners from another crew that wasn't flying held an English ack-ack battery from firing at the point of pinkels. It never to be forgotten mission. Our division lost ten planes over Germany and seventeen planes ever our own bases.

[One German Me410, flown by **Oberleutnant Klaus Kruger** was credited destroyed by Sgt **Lewis Brumble** 750th]

Thursday May 4, 1944

Took off at 0700 with 6 X 500lb demos to be dropped on Waggum airfield, Brunswick, Germany. The mission was recalled just as we crossed over Holland and into Germany. No flak, no fighters, no bombs dropped.

Sunday May 7, 1944

Took off at 0700 for Chemnitz, Germany with 12 X 500lb demos to be dropped on the marshaling yards. Complete under cast, bombs were dropped by P.F.F. Heavy flak, but no fighters. Very cold, -50C. Landed at 1530.

Monday May 8, 1944

Before we even took off we were scared stiff. About four planes crashed on takeoff due to heavy frost on the wings. The sky was filled with smoke towering several thousand feet. We shot off a red flare on take off, turned around and cleared our wings off again. Took off and returned again because a gas cap was loose and the gas was siphoning off. We filled up with gas and took off a second time and tried to catch up with the formation. We noted one plane that crashed – several homes were demolished – nothing left of the plane. Our target was the airfield three miles north of Brunswick. Fighters were fighting up in the target area. I watched numerous dogfights and saw three planes go down in flames. Our tail gunner saw eleven B-17s go down. About forty ME-109's headed for our formation, but turned suddenly and made an attack on the B-17 formation. Three fighters made a pass at us on the bomb run, one hit in the nose turret – no one hurt. The Grace of God is what brought us back from this mission. It was really rough.

[While planes from nearby group's may have crashed, only one plane from the 458th crashed shortly after take off: **Lt Paul Kingsley** and crew from the 754th]

Tuesday May 9, 1944

Very good bombing today, hit an airfield at St. Trond, Belgium right on the button. A GEE box was just installed in our ship, so I amused myself with it and the mission seemed to go faster. This was a good mission, not too cold, flak meager and inaccurate, fighters, but not near us.

[GEE was a radio navigation system used by the Royal Air Force during World War II. It measured the time delay between two radio impulse to produce a fix, with accuracy on the order of a few hundred metres at ranges up to about 350 miles (560 km). It was the first hyperbolic navigation system to be used operationally, entering service with RAF Bomber Command in 1941.]

Friday May 12, 1944

Oil refinery – Leipzig, Germany. Lost two engines via Frankfurt. Returned.

[This is actually one of the more interesting, if cryptic, entries in the whole diary. It was on this date that the crew was lucky to have made it back. The pointing by Mike Bailey, pictures B-24D-15-CF 41-29362 21 S Rough Riders turning back with two engines feathered and a third losing power. When asked by the pilot, which was closer, Switzerland or England, the navigator told them England. After jettisoning all excess weight into the Channel, the crew made an emergency landing at Manston. The rest of the crew assumed my father of having a date that night as the reason for not going to Switzerland. Co-pilot Al Hilbers related to me that he did indeed have a date and that he kept it.]

Saturday May 13, 1944

Airfield, Denmlein, Germany. Saw attack.

Sunday May 21, 1944

Airfield near Bourges, France

Tuesday May 23, 1944

St. Pol, France

Wednesday May 24, 1944

Paris, France

Wednesday May 31, 1944

Bertrix, Belgium [Marshalling Yards]

Friday June 2, 1944

Invasion coast. Le Tourquet, France

Sunday June 4, 1944

Airfield, Bourges. Sin hours. Take off 1550 Landed 2250.

Cracked up on landing. Left formation at coast, chutes over channel, bad weather, night landing.

27th mission.

[B-24D-20-CF 42-50203 34 Nose wheel collapsed on landing. Full **Accident Report** 44-6-4-[illegible]]

Monday June 5, 1944

No entry.

[Target was Stella Plague, France – Coastal areas. Crew 34 completes their 30-mission tour, my dad has two to go.]

Standing:
Kl Sam Scorsa – Navigator
Capt Curt Vogel – Pilot
1Lt Al Hilbers – Co-pilot
S1.s.t. Testa – Bombardier

Kneeling:
S/Sgt Al Walczak – Waist Gunner
T/Sgt Bernie Doyle – Radio Operator
T/Sgt Joe Brown – Flight Engineer
T/Sgt Ray Petty – Ball Turret Gunner
S/Sgt Lowell West – Tail Turret Gunner

Tuesday June 6, 1944

No entry.

Pilot: Lt. Frank Curtis

Target was Lisieux, France

30th mission

Wednesday June 7, 1944

No entry.

Pilot: Lt. Frank Curtis

Target was Lisieux, France

30th mission

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