

Salt Lick resident John A. Wright enlisted three times for the U.S. Army Air Corps, three times at the age of seventeen before his mother would agree to sign his papers. "I hitchhiked to Lexington three times to enlist before my mother finally signed my papers to let me join. I guess she got tired of telling me no." laughs Wright.

It was May of 1943 when Wright finally got his wish and became a member of the U.S. Army Air Corps at the tender age of seventeen. After a short trip north to Fort Thomas, Ky., he was sent to Biloxi, Miss., for Basic Training at Keesler Field for sixteen weeks.

Once through with his basic training Wright was then sent to Sioux Falls, S.D., for extensive radio operators training to prepare for his duties on a B-24 Bomber. From there he traveled to Gowen Field in Boise, Idaho for OTU (Overseas Training Unit) getting matched up with the men he would eventually fly his missions with. He finished up at Yuma, Ariz., for his gunnery school training.

After completing all of his training, the crew would wind up in Topeka, Kan. where "they gave us a brand new B-24 to fly" recalls Wright. He was a radio operator/top turret gunner with his new crew achieving the rank of Tech Sergeant with the 801st Bomb Group 492nd Squadron.

In June of 1944, the crew landed first in order at Newfoundland, Greenland, Iceland, Scotland then to a base in Southern England. After arriving they were given their orders as Wright's crew was disappointed a bit "they took our brand new plane and gave us an old B-24 that was painted solid black so when we flew our night missions we would blend in with the surroundings it was named "Lucky Gremlin II." said Wright.

His crew was a member of the famous "Carpetbaggers," a group of bombers that flew top secret missions at low altitudes, crossing the English Channel at altitudes of around three hundred feet during moonlit nights and high altitude bombing missions during the dark of the nights. Oaths were taken by every member of the crew to keep silent about the details about their missions and the mail that they did send home was censored.

The low altitude missions flown during the moonlit nights were used to drop supplies, ammunition and spies that worked with the French Underground Freedom Fighters. Wright recalled some of their missions, "One time we dropped a spy that was dressed in a full German Officers uniform at about five hundred feet and we also dropped a beautiful young lady in her twenties one time, I often think about what happened to those people, if they survived or what, but they were trained to take care of themselves."

The low altitude flights were made with the help of the French who had four people involved on the ground. At the sound of an incoming bomber, three would form a straight line about two hundred feet apart and the fourth would go to the left or right to form a L shape to let the pilot know which direction to drop if there were no lights. This was a sign the Germans were close and no drop would be made.

After a successful drop, planes would often fly into enemy air space for several miles to throw off the enemy in case they were seen, thus creating more danger for the crew. "We flew thirty,

eight to ten hour missions and at one point during the war we hauled cans of fuel to General Patton just behind enemy lines because they were running low. On one of our missions we blew a tire on landing and sat there for two days until we could get back up again.” said Wright.

At the end of his time overseas, Wright returned home on a troop transport ship arriving in New Port News, Va. thinking that their days in the Army Air Corp were almost over, but a transfer to Selman Field in Monroe, La. stalled that thought and according to Wright, “we were being prepared to go to the South Pacific but Truman dropped the bomb and that made us a happy bunch of guys.”

A short time later he arrived in Camp Aterbury, Ind. where he received his discharge papers in October of 1945. As for his remaining thoughts, Wright told of a story as they had returned from overseas and he was in Louisville waiting on a train, “I had my duffle bag full of all my things including my flight jacket and I sat it down and went to buy a beer, came back and my bag was gone, left me with the clothes on my back.”

When asked about his decision to join at seventeen Wright said, “ you think that your invincible at that age and do some stupid things, but I am glad that I chose to serve my country and feel fortunate to have made it back home.”