

# A Soldier's story of defying death in WWII new part of AHEC collection

## A Soldier's story of defying death in WWII new part of AHEC collection

by Gregory Clark, USAHEC



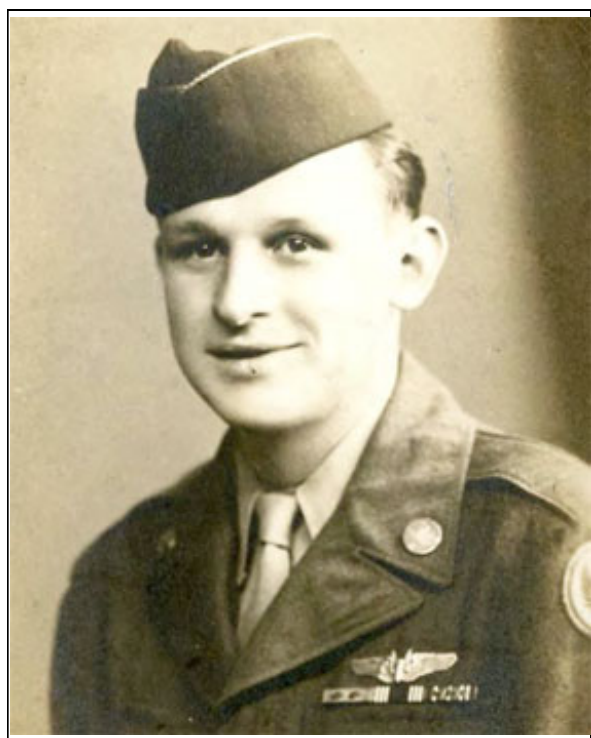
As the new class arrives at the U.S. Army War College, the U.S. Army Heritage and Education Center wants to introduce them to our facility and our resources and services available to them and the public. Our motto is “Telling the Army story, one Soldier at a time” and we live this motto by preserving the U.S. Army’s heritage and sharing the stories of

Soldiers from Privates through Five Star Generals-- exciting stories like Staff Sergeant Lashinsky’s experiences as a tail gunner in WWII.

Staff Sergeant Lashinsky served as a tail gunner on a Consolidated B-24 Liberator and not only had to bail out of his plane twice, but he and his fellow crew flew four different planes during the war. They lost the first on the runway in Tunisia in January 1944, when the landing gear fell off while landing, destroying the plane beyond repair. On an October 1944 bombing mission of an oil refinery in Poland, an engine failed mid-flight. They reached their destination and completed the mission, but couldn’t maintain altitude on the return trip. Forced to bail out before reaching the mountain ranges of the Alps, they landed in Bosnia. Partisan forces led by Marshal Tito picked the men up and safely brought the crew back to their airbase in Italy.

The crew lost another B-24 on a mission to Vienna, Austria in February 1945 to bomb a railroad marshaling yard. After successfully dropping their bombs, the plane took anti-aircraft fire and was directly hit by enemy flak. The flak, thought to be an unexploded German 88 shell, ripped the Plexiglas dome off the top turret and left a gaping hole behind the pilot. The B-24 struggled, but successfully made its way back to Italy, though it was eventually scrapped.

Staff Sergeant Lashinsky's final mission nearly killed him. Sent to bomb the Floridsdorf oil refinery in Vienna, Austria on March 12, 1945, the crew successfully dropped their payload before taking intense enemy anti-aircraft fire. This time the enemy was successful in critically damaging the plane's No. 4 engine. Continuing to take enemy fire from German fighters, the pilot determined returning to Italy was not feasible for the B-24 crew. They jettisoned weight, including their guns, to stay at altitude and set course towards a Soviet airfield in Pecs, Hungary. Unfortunately, a piece of equipment tossed from the plane hit the radar and made navigation impossible. Once the navigators determined they had likely reached Pecs, the pilot started a spiral descent but found the runway nowhere in sight. Unarmed and still taking fire from enemy fighters, the pilot ordered a bail out. Taking fire while parachuting down, Lashinsky and the crew members separated in the air. Soviets recovered two of the crewmen unscathed, and brought a third back from near-death, but three others did not survive the jump. Staff Sergeant Lashinsky and five other crewmembers landed behind German lines. Quickly captured, they became POW's of the retreating German army. After a rough train ride, the POW's remained in a marshalling yard in Regensburg, Germany until Patton's Third Army liberated them on April 29, 1945.



***Staff Sergeant Lashinsky shortly after his return home during World War II***

Recently donated, Staff Sergeant Lashinsky's materials and story now reside in the USAHEC's protective care. The USAHEC's collection, which includes thousands of Soldiers' stories such as Staff Sergeant Lashinsky's, is open to students, scholars, and the public for research. Additionally, the USAHEC highlights these Soldiers stories throughout its displays inside the building and in exhibits along the Army Heritage Trail.