The personal narrative of Ralph Freund, who flew 32 missions during World War II as a B-17 flight engineer and top turret gunner and member of the 379th Bomb Group.
A Wing

Crew 6-J-6 before a mission.
and a Prayer

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April 9, 2008
I have been privileged to help Ralph tell the story of his War experiences. Working with Ralph also has provided the opportunity to expand my knowledge, through his eyes, of World War II.

Carol Zuckert, Personal Historian
Remember and Record
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Reprinted in color for Ralph’s 90th birthday, and edited to update content.

Betsy & Michael Feinberg, Ralph’s Friends

Cover Art
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I was born on the Fourth of July, 1924 at 122 Broome Street on the lower eastside of Manhattan. We lived in a third floor walk-up apartment with a pot-belly stove heated by coal that we bought by the bucketful, one bucket of coal at a time. Three or four families shared the bathroom, but we did have our own kitchen. We were typical of newly immigrated families and did not have any money to spare.

Both of my parents were born in Austria. My momma was born Sarah Feingold in 1896 and came to the United States through Ellis Island in 1910 at age 15 or 16. My pop, Morris, was born in 1895. As was common in the early part of the twentieth century, a relative, in this case, my mother’s great uncle, brought everyone over from Austria. Two of Momma’s brothers
ended up in New York; another brother went to Canada. My father, of course, ended up in Manhattan. To support the family, Pop drove a taxi, while Momma stayed at home. I was the fourth of five sons and had younger twin sisters. I always thought that there needed to be at least two sisters in order to balance so many brothers. My parents were Orthodox Jews, and we went to services and honored all the religious holidays.

When my parents met, Pop was a foreman in a shirt factory. He hired Momma as a needleworker. She was a beautiful blonde but she was considered a botcher (Yiddish for someone who makes mistakes). She was paid on a piecework basis, so she worked very fast and not very accurately. He loved her anyway.

As I grew up, I was close to my uncles, aunts, and cousins who lived in the Bronx. Early in 1925, my family moved to 547 Fox Street in the Bronx and subsequently moved to three other houses on Fox Street. I attended P.S. 62, and then went to P.S. 52 for junior high. I went on to Bronx Vocational High School but decided to drop out of school at age 17 to go to work. I first worked as a machinist, and then as a tool and die maker, an advanced machinist.

Before I went into the service, I had large group of friends, close friends, and we hung around quite a bit. We went to Juvenile House to dance, and to Saint Mary’s Park to hang out. We looked forward to just getting together --- no “hanky-
panky” with our group! Believe me, we were all clean-cut kids.

Three of my old girlfriends, Sylvia, Nora and Adele, they’re my age now, we call each other pretty regularly. We really like to talk about old times. But I haven’t seen them for a long time.

High school friends.
When I got my “Greetings” letter from President Roosevelt, I was expecting it; I was ready to go into service. I didn’t want to be different than anyone else; I had no obligations other than to serve my country. I was drafted and inducted on March 9, 1943 and sent to Camp Upton, New Jersey. I did basic training in Miami Beach, Florida and then was sent to Sheppard Field, Texas (Wichita Falls). I began by learning engineering on B-25 and B-26 airplanes. However, I became the engineer on B-17s because I was needed to replace a shicker (Yiddish for drunkard) who never showed up for duty. My classification was 748, representing an engineer.

Afterwards, for one month, I trained to be a gunner in Panama City, Florida. Together with
my crew, I went to Drew Field in Tampa, Florida. As a part of flight training, the crew flew together around Florida. We went to Atlanta in April, 1944 and picked up a brand new B-17G. My crew was thrilled at the prospect of flying the new B-17G model. It had a chin turret with two .50 caliber machine guns in the nose. We then flew our new B-17 to Fort Dix, New Jersey.

While we were in Fort Dix, my parents and future wife Belle Cohen visited to see me off. Belle and I had met in the Catskill Mountains of New York when I was 17 and she was 16. Our families were spending the summer in the Catskills in a bungalow community, often known as a kochalein (Yiddish for “cook alone” where
each family had their own cooking facilities rather than eating in a restaurant-type setting). We saw each other a lot, but after the summer, I returned to my home in the Bronx, and she to Brooklyn. I had girlfriends, but no one was a steady then.

In Fort Dix, Belle asked if she could write to me, and I agreed. I told Belle that I would fly over her house between 9 and 11 in the morning when I left Fort Dix on the way overseas. The pilot, a good buddy, dropped the plane down from the usual 10,000 feet to 3,000 feet over Belle’s house as a farewell gesture.
We were stopping over in Bangor, Maine on our way to England and the war in the European Theatre of Operations. From Bangor, we went on to Newfoundland, and then at about midnight, we took off for the eleven-hour flight to Prestwick, Scotland. Cruising speed for the B-17 was usually 150 miles per hour (mph). When we were flying over the mid-Atlantic Ocean, the speed indicator dropped to 120 mph. I, the flight engineer, tried to increase the engine power to pick up speed, but the plane did not seem to
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