



NOTES: JOE LASSER/CRAIG MCDUGAL



PHOTO: JOE LASSER

PAPER MONEY

My Short Snorter

All too often, the stories surrounding these wartime souvenirs are lost, and with them the notes' true value.

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TODAY, AIR TRAVEL is an everyday occurrence, triggering routine thoughts of packed suitcases, flight schedules, airport security, etc. But in the years prior to World War II, flying was far from a run-of-the-mill experience. In the early 1930s, only a small number of wealthy and adventurous travelers could say they had reached their destinations by air.

However, in the second half of the decade, significant advances pushed aside the barriers to long-distance flight. In 1936 Douglas Aircraft introduced the first true passenger plane, the DC-3, and placed it in commercial service. Transcontinental flights were inaugurated, with 15 hours and 3 stops required to fly from the West to the East Coast, and 17½ hours from East to West. But transoceanic flights remained extremely uncommon. Pan American World Airways introduced Boeing-314 “Yankee Clipper” service to Ireland in June 1939, but discontinued it less than six months later because of the erupting world conflict. Boeing’s unarmed and unprotected “flying boats” were too valuable to expose to the risks of war.

Nevertheless, aircraft and navigational technology continued to push ahead at an exceptional pace, stimulated by the needs of the military. Even before the United States entered the European conflict in 1942, Boeing B-17 Flying Fortresses and Consolidated Aircraft B-24 Lib-

erators were crossing the Atlantic, initially to provide the British Royal Air Force (RAF) with heavy bombers and later to support our own 8th Air Force in Britain and other bases abroad.

Because these transoceanic flights were so new and distinctive, pilots, crew and passengers wanted to commemorate the experience. That’s how the “short snorter” was born. Anyone who had flown across an ocean would ask fellow travelers to autograph a dollar bill, the pilot’s signature being the most desirable. If and when the holder traveled to another country, a note of that nation was taped to the first bill, and more autographs were added.

Short snorters quickly were adapted by virtually all military personnel, with ground troops, seamen and even high-ranking diplomats creating their own versions of these very personal mementos. No longer was it necessary to fly over an ocean; the holder needed merely to travel to a new country or place.

And, yes, short snorters also served a more colorful purpose—they helped their owners avoid footing the bill at a pub, tavern, bar, bistro or anywhere else liquor was served. If a serviceman held the shortest snorter in a group of drinking companions who had traveled farther and longer and visited more countries, the bar bill was “Shorty’s” burden. So, short snorters were a meaningful part of military gear, a unique type of “liquid” insurance. ◀

◀ **First Lieutenant Joe Lasser (that’s me), photographed in 1944 or ‘45. My 14-note short snorter—shown in order with the faces above and backs below—likely was tucked in one of my pockets. The notes now are separated, although they show evidence of the cellophane tape that held them together.**





▲ Although its left wing and engine nacelle were riddled with holes from anti-aircraft fire, this B-26 Marauder made a safe belly landing after a bombing raid in Tunisia.

Because short snorters are highly personal mementos, they sometimes list the cities, airfields, people and places of specific interest to their owners. Air crewmen's short snorters almost universally carry the signatures of their respective pilots, navigators, bombardiers and gunners, plus other members of their Bomb Group and related units.

This brings me to the short snorter I assembled when I was a bombardier/navigator in the 391st Bomb Group of the 9th Air Force, which initially flew Martin Marauder B-26s and then Douglas Aircraft A-26C Invaders in the European Theater in 1944-45. It is composed of

14 notes, beginning with a \$1 Silver Certificate, followed by Scottish, English and European notes, supplemented by Allied Military Currency for Germany and Italy, and ending with African and South American bills added after the war as we flew our planes home from France to Savannah, Georgia, via Algeria, Morocco, East Africa and British Guiana.

Signing that initial dollar were Ken Brown, a bombardier who trained with me; Al Sertl, a fellow Lehigh University alumnus; and Warren Campo, a pilot. I remember them well. But, to me, the English £1 note is the most significant, for it carries the signature of my brother, Arnold Lasser, a lead radar navigator in the famous 8th Air Force; and that of his first pilot, Philip Hester. Fewer than a dozen lead radar navigators in the 8th Air Force B-17 groups were accredited by Air Force Command to lead bomber fleets over Germany. Only a very limited number of men received electronic navigation training. By today's standards, it was complicated and very crude, but it enabled officers to lead bombing missions in previously unflyable weather conditions. Ultimately, my brother was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross.

The French 100 francs bears the signature of LeRoy Gresham, one of my pilots, while the Belgian bill was autographed by Ernest C. Petersen, another pilot with whom I flew; and Bill Dundon, a bombardier and good friend who added the inscription "B-50," the designation for our home field at the time, Roye/Amy in Picardy.

Listed on the back of the dollar bill are the 13





U.S. airfields where I trained or landed prior to going overseas. A total of 25 foreign air bases are listed on subsequent notes, with 7 in England and 11 in France. Recorded are successful flights and some that weren't completed because of weather, flak, enemy fighters or simply low fuel.

Probably the most unconventional episode of my service is memorialized on the French 100 francs. Within 10 minutes of dropping our bombs on Düren, Germany—my very first combat mission—my pilot lost visual contact with our flight leader and wingships because of impenetrable clouds. We had no sophisticated electronic navigation equipment on board, so we had to rely on the most basic of all directional instruments—a compass. As we headed west, I attempted to calculate our plane's ground speed to estimate when we might cross the "bomb line," where our military forces had taken ground control from the Germans. If we reached Allied territory, it might

be safe to drop below the clouds and navigate by visual ground references.

But then, a further complication developed. We were rapidly running out of gas. When we thought we had passed the bomb line by a modest margin, we took our chances and got lucky. As we broke out of the clouds, an airstrip ☉

▼ My crew in July 1944 at Barksdale Field near Bossier City, Louisiana. I'm the third from the left.



PHOTO: JOE LASSER





PHOTO: © BETTMAN/CORBIS



▲ V-E Day celebration in New York's Times Square, May 7, 1945.





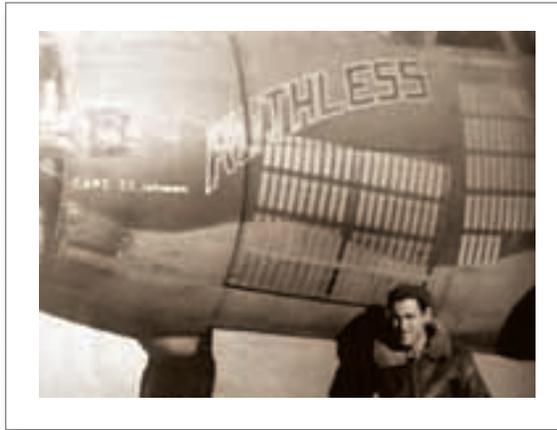
PHOTO: WWW.B-26MARAUDERARCHIVE.ORG

appeared, and we went for it. However, landing was not as easy as we had hoped, for the runway was pocked with bomb damage, an obvious threat to our landing gear.

But through skill—and more luck—we found ourselves at Cambrai/Épinoy, about 7 miles inside Allied lines. So it became the first French airfield recorded on my short snorter. It took about three weeks before we could get back to our base at Matching Green in England. We had to wait for Army engineers to repair the airstrip and supply transport to bring aviation gas across the English Channel to get our B-26 home.

Another ten airports in France followed, with five in Belgium, one in the Netherlands and one in Germany. The Italian Allied Military Currency represented a mere “flyover,” while the subsequent, non-European notes were added when we flew our planes back to the United States after Victory in Europe (V-E) Day, May 7, 1945. In an A-26C, we couldn’t carry enough gas to cross the North Atlantic, even with supplemental bomb-bay gas tanks, so we went south to Marseilles, then down to Dakar, French West Africa, crossing the southern Atlantic to Fortaleza, Brazil. We stopped for fuel at three important, French colonial, aviation hubs in Africa: Algiers, Marrakech and Dakar.

Somewhat similarly, after leaving Fortaleza, we flew to British Guiana (today the independent nation of Guyana), and from an airfield on the coast (located at present-day Mabaruma), we



◀ This photo shows the nose section of the *Ruthless*, the B-26B in which I flew many of my combat missions. Her last 157 missions had not one engine failure.

went on to our ultimate destination—Savannah, Georgia. Upon landing, I unlatched the navigator’s seat in the nose of our plane, where I had sat during the entire sequence of flights from France, and the seat assembly—supports, skin shell and ladder—fell out of the plane onto the tarmac! I got the message. My combat flying days were over, and there would be no further additions to my short snorter.

From a numismatic point of view, the bills in my short snorter are not pristine or rare. They’re folded and soiled, with the ends showing obvious discoloration from the cellophane tape. But they are valuable to me, holding a store of memories more than 60 years old. So when you see a short snorter, remember that it uniquely summarizes a sliver of military and personal history! ©

