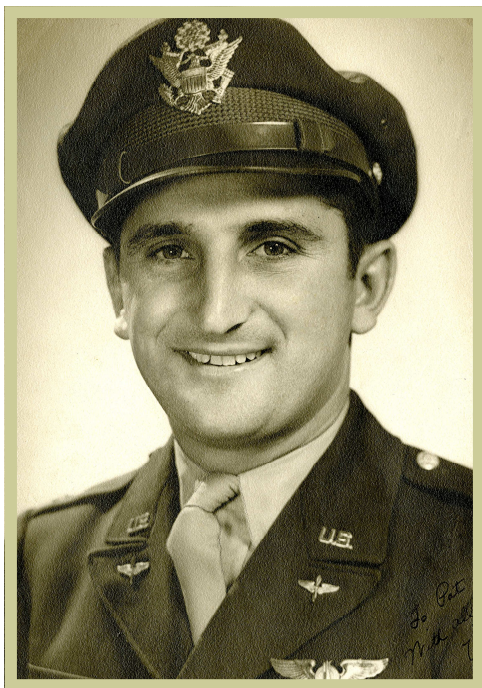


Victor P Ranalletta

U.S. Army Air Corps 32 Missions-Italy, Balkans



Victor P. Ranalletta
U.S. Army Air Corps

On August 27, 1942, I was inducted into Military service at Scott Field in Belleville, Illinois, where we took IQ tests, were given shots and a wardrobe. For basic training, I was assigned to Camp Callan in California, located near San Diego. After approximately 10 months of training, I was retained pending transfer to the US Army Air Corps. While awaiting assignment, I assisted the Staff Sergeant of our barracks in the training of new recruits. Several weeks later I was selected for Aviation Cadet Training in San Antonio, Texas, where we were given numerous tests to determine if we would be sent to pilot, Navigator or Bombardier training. We were told that there were no selections for pilots, so I was assigned to bombardier training.

On July 5, 1943, I completed training at the Cadet Center in Childres, Texas, and received my Second Lieutenant Commission. After spending time at home on leave at Ellington Field (now Johnson Space Center), I was sent to Wendover Base

near Salt Lake City, Utah, for assignment to a B-24 bomber crew. The officer making the assignment was then Captain Jimmy Stewart, the noted actor. I was then sent to Boise, Idaho, to join the rest of the crew, which was then sent to Pocatello, Idaho, for combat training. This training was to last 10 weeks but was extended to more than 20 weeks. During that period of time, our regular navigator (John Sullivan) taught me his procedures and I in turn taught him my procedures in case either of us became incapacitated. When we were ordered to do pattern bombing, the bombardier in the lead would sight the target and release his bombs. The other planes would then follow his lead. Our experience on these procedures proved very helpful in actual combat.

On completion of training at Pocatello, we were sent to Harvard, Nebraska, in preparation for overseas service. During one of the coldest winters in Nebraska history, temperatures were as high as 40 degrees below zero at an altitude of 20,000 feet. We left Harvard for Lincoln, Nebraska, and on March 26, 1944, we flew to Miami, Florida, Trinidad, Belem, Brazil, South America, across the ocean to Dakar, Marakeech and Tunis in North Africa. We were stationed in Tunis pending the construction of air bases in Italy. In April of 1944, we flew to a new field located in Cerignola, Italy. Our crew flew 32 missions over the Balkan countries, including the Ploesti oil fields. Our crew was part of the 15th Air Force, 484th Bomb Group, 827th Bomb Squadron and flew in a B-24H.

We had one close call when we were running out of fuel over the Adriatic Sea on our way back to the base. The flight engineer advised the pilot that we would not get back to the base. We were prepared to ditch the plane in the sea but past experience had proven that the B-24 does not fair well trying to land on water. We were getting near land when I noticed what looked like a landing strip. The planes were covered with camouflage so we were not sure whether the combatants were friends or foe. Our pilot, Joe Simmons, who was an aeronautical engi-

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neer, opted to land on the small strip, suitable for smaller craft only. As we got closer, we recognized the planes as British RAF Spitfire planes. Joe did a great job landing the plane, stopping just yards short of a wire fence surrounding the base. The fuel tanks were almost empty. After refueling, our plane barely missed the fence on takeoff.

In another incident, a malfunction prevented the release of the bombs over the target. It was dangerous to land with bombs still on board so they had to be released, preferably over water. I volunteered to release the bombs manually, but when the bomb bay doors opened and I was standing on a foot-wide crosswalk the thousand feet in the air clutching the bomb rack as tight as I could, I had seconds thoughts. But I released the bombs one by one, and then drew a big sigh of relief when the bomb bay doors closed.

My decorations include the Air Medal with three bronze oak leaf clusters, Distinguished Unit Badge with one bronze leaf cluster, and the Europe, Africa, Middle East Medal with four bronze stars. During my service I was raised to rank of First Lieutenant. I have learned in the last few years that all of my former crew members are now deceased. Our original Co-pilot Eddie Silvan, who got his own plane, was killed when his plane was shot down on his 2nd mission. I returned to the States on September 26, 1944 (my 24th birthday) aboard the Thomas A. Edison Liner, which was converted to a troop car-



Ranalletta Crew with Bomb.

Victor Ranalletta and 2 unidentified men.

rier. It took 4 days but most of the storms were raging in the Atlantic and German U-boats were still active, forcing the need for evacuation drills. When we arrived in New York, we were taken to Fort Riley where we were allowed to call home, arrange travel to Fort Sheridan in Chicago, learn future assignments and then spend two weeks at home.

My next assignment sent me to Miami, Florida for R&R for one week before going to Midland, Texas, for an instructors' course, which later was cancelled. I was then sent to Selman Field in Monroe, Louisiana. The base had a number of amenities, especially the sport activities. My request to transfer to the Physical Training Department was accepted and allowed me to work with navigation cadets. As the war was abating, discharges were being processed based on the number of service points. I was not eligible until September 1945. At which time, I was discharged on September 14, 1945 at Fort Sheridan, Illinois with one month terminal pay to October 15, 1945.

I received a degree in Accounting and Finance from St. Louis University in August of 1947. I practiced in the public and private business fields for 49 years, retiring in August of 1996. My wife, Pat (who died in 1996) and I are the parents of six children and have 13 grandchildren.

Victor P. Ranalletta
Springfield, Illinois

Marie Hartman submitted the following:

My Dad, Victor Ranalletta, died on Saturday, March 24, 2012. He was buried with full military honors and guard in Camp Butler National Cemetery, outside his native Springfield, Illinois. Dad was very proud of his service in the AAC, and all his children and grandchildren took great interest in his war stories and his service. .

Very often, when I was with Dad somewhere and we encountered a service person in uniform, he would buy their lunch or give them money, and a kind word of appreciation about their service. Many were shocked or surprised, but I believe they were all genuinely touched by his effort.

He lived his life as he served his country, with pride and honor. We miss him greatly.

Victor P Ranalletta

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Photo with all the servicemen (taken by Fox Studios, 146 N. Main St., Pocatello, Idaho)

1st Row:

Lt. Victor Ranalletta (Navigator & Bombardier)

Lt. Edward Silvan (Co-Pilot) – later flew his own plane and was killed on his second mission

Lt. Oren J. Roys (Pilot) – transferred to a fighter plane unit

Lt. John L. Mulligan (Navigator)

2nd Row:

Sgt. Thomas Kelly (Belly Gunner)

Sgt. Laurence Link (Waist Gunner)

Sgt. Richard Koepke (Waist Gunner)

Sgt. Graham Stafford (Tail Gunner) – Canadian volunteer who did not go overseas, was replaced by Gil Neher

Sgt. Herbert Bucknall (Engineer)

Sgt. J. Maillard (Radio Man)

Photo with bomb –