



FRANK SUVLA VICKERS

1944

Frank Vickers entered the Second Form in 1939. In his Fifth Form year he rowed No. 2 on the Halcyon crew and the following autumn he played in the line of the Delphian football team and won his S.P.S. His good humor and his soundness of judgment caused him to be greatly liked and respected. He was Secretary of the Missionary Society, a Supervisor in a Third Form house and a member of the council. Having volunteered for service in the Air Force at Manchester, N. H. in June, 1943, he studied at the Exeter Summer School, graduated from St. Paul's in January, 1944, and was admitted to Harvard.

Called to active duty in February, he received gunnery training at Harlington Field, Texas, was assigned to a B-24, and after further training at Westover Field, Massachusetts, went overseas late in September, 1944. In England, he was assigned to the Second Division, Eighth Air Force, 445th Bomb. Group (H), 702nd Bomb. Squadron, based near the coast of Norfolk. He was a ball gunner at first, because no other gunner in his crew could squeeze into that turret. Later, when the Sperry ball was removed from the Liberator, he was a waist gunner.

On the return trip from their first mission, Vickers and the rest of his crew narrowly escaped death when their B-24 crash-landed in Belgium. They sold the silk of their parachutes on the streets of Brussels for food and were three weeks getting back to their base. During the winter of 1944 they survived a second crash-landing. In the spring began the wave of saturation bombing that spread over every part of Germany. In one five-day period they took part in four long missions,

to Berlin on the north and to targets on the Danube, in the South. Late in March they were bombing nearer targets, munitions centers and railheads on the western fringe of Germany, in support of the drive across the Rhine. Vickers wrote home: "I'm sending you a copy of the *Stars and Stripes* which has quite a write-up on the airborne landings in Germany. If you will read closely you will see some mention of the Liberators who usually take a back seat in news compared to the Forts. For once the old Libs were right there carrying the ball."

After that, the crew were sent to a Rest Home for a week. They took off again the morning after their return. "It was the most beautiful spring day you ever saw," wrote the nose gunner, "not a cloud. At 22,000 feet we were flying the left element of the lead squadron and the last ship on that wing. The bullets from the Jet who got us, coming up from behind, racked through our ship from the tail clear through the bomb bay, hit the tail gunner, killed both waist gunners instantly and started a fire in the gas tank. In a few seconds the ship went out of control and exploded. The concussion blew the men free, their parachutes opened and they floated down. . . ." From another plane, a friend of Vickers'—also in the Form of '44 at the School—seeing the attack and the parachutes opening, thought the men had been saved. But only the nose and tail gunners were alive.