



Newsletter of the Air Force Historical Foundation, preserving
the history & traditions of American air & space power.

Spring 2026



3,672 followers

March 22, 2026

Feature Article: Angelo Bianchi's Last Milk Run

By John Norvell

Milk Run: Definition -- World War II Army Air Corps and RAF aircrews--a mission with little danger, i.e., a regular trip that nothing happens.

Author's Note: Much of Angelo Bianchi's story originated from his family's oral traditions. Upon hearing it, I was struck by two aspects: first, the narrative possessed the excitement and drama characteristic of a Hollywood film; second, my own experiences in flight training, survival school, and in the prisoner of war training camp at Fairchild Air Force Base in 1972 closely

paralleled those of Bianchi. I recognized that, even in the early 1970s, the training and experiences of World War II veterans continued to shape Air Force practices. This case illustrates the enduring influence of historical precedent on military thought and operations.



Angelo Bianchi as a B-24 tail gunner. Photo courtesy the Bianchi family.

Angelo J. Bianchi (1920-2008) received his draft notice in 1942. He entered the army, initially believing he would serve in the medical corps. However, he was assigned as a tail gunner on a B-24 “Liberator” bomber. By early July 1944, he was stationed at Castelluccio Airfield in Italy, a heavy bomber airfield used by Fifteenth Air Force. He had completed 50 combat missions and was scheduled to return home but a bomber crew was shorthanded, so he volunteered for one more mission as a gunner on July 3, 1944.

That day, the target was the Mogasaia oil storage facility in the central part of Bucharest, Romania. A mission report from that day indicated that cloud cover partially obscured the target. The mission was intended to be a routine or “Milk Run” operation. Twenty-seven B-24 bombers in the 451st Group attacked the target. However, only half the P-51 fighter support arrived to provide air cover. The daily report indicated that while the anti-aircraft fire over the target was heavy, it caused only minor damage. By the end of the mission, one B-24 was reported missing. Three of the four engines on Bianchi's plane had been destroyed, and his aircraft went down over the mountains near Dubrovnik, Croatia, as it returned to Italy.

Bianchi parachuted from the doomed aircraft and was captured by German soldiers who transferred him to the Croatian forces. He refused to provide information and was placed in solitary confinement in Mostar for approximately 35 days before being sent to a prisoner of war camp. As no large POW camps were located in this area, it is likely that he was detained in one of the smaller camps operated possibly by the Ustaše, a Croatian fascist and ultranationalist

organization. He was subsequently transferred to Stalag Luft IV, located near Pomerania, Prussia, Germany.

Although documentation of his experiences in the camp is limited, records maintained by fellow prisoners indicate that he was held in C-Lager, a designated section of the Stalag. An account of conditions in C-Lager is provided in *Stalag Luft IV & the 86-Day Hunger March* by Sergeant Donald D. Dorfmeier, who describes the hardships endured by Allied prisoners of war. It is reasonable to infer that Bianchi experienced similar treatment. As the war concluded, Bianchi was transferred to Wöbbelin camp near Ludwigslust. The relocation of these prisoners is documented in *The Last Escape: The Untold Story of Allied Prisoners of War in Europe 1944-45* by John Nichol and Tony Rennell.

In 1945, as Allied forces advanced, German guards confined the inmates in a holding area before abandoning them, locking Bianchi and approximately 500 others in a barn. The British forces liberated the prisoners and instructed them to proceed west toward Allied lines, initiating a lengthy journey on foot. During this trek, the group acquired an ambulance and bicycles, solicited food, and employed various means to reach safety. Bianchi was repatriated in May 1945.

Retired Air Force Lt. Col. John E. Norvell is a former assistant professor history at the Air Force Academy. He is a veteran of Vietnam F-4 bombing missions and his flying memoir *Fighter 'Gator'* is available on Amazon. While working on a history project at Hobart and William Smith Colleges, he researched numerous experiences of men who served during World War II, including that of Angelo Bianchi. Much of Bianchi's compelling story was initially provided by his daughters, and Norvell uncovered additional details from various sources. He is currently working on a more detailed article.

Historical Spotlight: Maj Gen (ret) Jeanne M. Holm



Official photo of Maj Gen Jeanne Holm. Photo courtesy U.S. Air Force

Jeanne M. Holm was the first woman in the U.S. Air Force promoted to the rank of brigadier general. Born in Portland, Oregon in 1921, she enlisted in the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (later Women's Army Corps) in July 1942 and received her commission in January 1943. While attending Lewis and Clark College after the war, she was offered the opportunity to return to active service. In 1948 she was assigned as a captain to the newly minted U.S. Air Force.

In 1952, she was the first woman to attend Air Command and Staff College. After numerous staff assignments, in 1965 she was promoted to full colonel and became the Director of Women in the Air Force (WAF). During her tenure as director, she worked tirelessly to open more career fields to women, including pilots and other flying positions, and successfully campaigned to allow women to serve in Southeast Asia.

She was promoted to brigadier general on 16 July 1971 and to major general on 1 June 1973. She retired in 1975 and continued to advocate for women in the military during the time when women began entering the military in large numbers. She also wrote what many consider the seminal work on women in the military, *Women in the Military: An Unfinished Revolution*. She authored a new edition after the First Persian Gulf war.

Holm was thrilled for each milestone women achieved after she left the service, in particular attending military academies, the opening of U.S. Air Force pilot and navigator training to women, and the repeal of the combat exclusion law in 1991 and subsequent policy change that allowed women to fly combat aircraft in combat.

Holm died in 2010 and is buried in Arlington National Cemetery.

Quiz

On 10 February 1994, 1st Lt Jeannie Flynn became the first woman in the United States qualified to fly a combat aircraft in combat. What aircraft did she fly?

- a. A-10C
- b. F-15C
- c. F-15E
- d. F-16C

(Answer at the bottom of the newsletter)

Fun/First Photo of the Month

(A section dedicated to photos of first flights of aircraft/spacecraft and fun air and space events)



On 15 April 1952, the YB-52 made its first flight from Boeing Field in Seattle. Note the prototype's B-58 cockpit style. Photo courtesy U.S. Air Force.

Please submit feedback or ideas for quizzes, photos, or articles to newslettereditor@afhistory.org

Quiz answer: c. F-15E