

# 44th Bomb Group Veterans Association



8 BALL TAILS

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## HEAVEN CAN WAIT PETE THE POM INSPECTOR A/K/A HEAVEN CAN WAIT II

*Heaven Can Wait* arrived to Shipdham in October 1943, and was assigned to the 68th Squadron. She flew 37 missions.

Ill fortune befell her on the Ploesti mission. **Charles Whitlock**, pilot, first encountered the problem of a



defective fuel cell in engine #1, so they feathered that engine. Soon after, while flying over Turkey, #4 engine had to be feathered, forcing Whitlock to find a place to land. He dumped six 500 pound bombs in the Danube River, incendiaries over Bulgaria, then turned the plane to a British airfield in Cyprus.

The crew returned to Benina Main; the plane was repaired and returned to the ETO, assigned to the 389th and later to the 467th BG. That's when it was re-named *Pete the Pom Inspector*. It became an Assembly Plane, then was salvaged in October 1944.

*Heaven Can Wait II* first came to the 392nd Bomb Group, but flew no missions with them. She came to the 44th BG in early October 1943 and was assigned to the 506 Squadron.

On her 12th mission, returning from Siracourt, France, she crash landed 12 March 1944 and caught fire at Friston, near Beachy Head, Sussex. She was salvaged four days later. The **Sam H. Bowman** crew bailed out to safety, and sustained only minor injuries.

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## THE CHARLES WHITLOCK CREW & HEAVEN CAN WAIT

The Whitlock crew joined the group that flew to Africa, in preparation for the Ploesti raid. They flew six missions in *Heaven Can Wait*. The sixth was to Ploesti, which they had to abandon and land in Cyprus. The seventh was in *Timba-a-ah* on 16 August 1943; the mission was to Foggia

*The 44th BG Historian, Will Lundy, managed to get individual stories from the survivors of this crash. Every crew member's experience is totally unique.*

**POW/Escapee Ralph Knox, Well Gunner, remembered this:**

Whitlock had four new members on his crew that day, as four regular crewmen were ill with dysentery. S/Sgt. **Ralph Knox** reported that "Flak started the minute we hit the coast, and continued all the way to the target. We hit the target at 1315 and got our bombs away without much trouble.

"We were away from the target about five or ten minutes when it happened. The Group flying off to our left was hit by about 20 to 30 fighters, and a few seconds later, we were jumped by about the same number – and all Hell broke loose. We were flying 'Tail-end Charley' and caught almost everything they had to throw at us. Their first pass didn't do any damage, and I don't think we got any of them. The second time was different! A 20 mm shell came in and set my ammunition cans on fire and nicked me in a couple of places, but not badly. I got the burning cans out before they exploded. One of our waist gunners had been hit also, but he managed to stick to his guns.

"In the meantime, I had seen the plane flying on our left wing (**Southern Comfort**) catch fire and then go out of control. I saw six chutes come out of this plane, but things got so hot again

that I didn't have time to watch it any longer. The fighters were coming in on their third pass, and it proved disastrous for us. Two more 20 mm shells came into the back and blew up. Many flying flak fragments got me behind the right knee and above the left ankle – and that laid me out over the hatch door. This burst also killed the wounded waist gunner (**Hugo Dunajecz, Jr.**)

"The other waist gunner (**Emil Kosch**) didn't look wounded as far as I could see, but there was a look of terror in his eyes, and he was trying to kick the plexiglas out of the well door where I was still lying. It wouldn't have done him any good to get the plexiglas out, as we couldn't possibly crawl through the opening. We couldn't open the door because of the gun that was stuck through it. I didn't have the strength to pull the gun out, and he didn't have the presence of mind to do it either.

"I finally got to my feet and got him to the waist window and practically threw him out of the ship. I watched him until he disappeared from sight, but I didn't see him open his chute. Unfortunately, he did not survive.

"I took one long last look around and saw that the Tail Gunner (**Robert Bonham**) was slumped over his guns, and his turret was swung completely around to the side. I couldn't have gotten back to him if I tried. The waist gunner was dead, the two left engines were on fire, the area over the wing and above the bomb bay was a mass of flames, and there was not a single gun on the ship firing, so I figured it was time that I left. It was quite a struggle to get out on the window, as my legs were practically paralyzed by then, and it took all of the strength in my arms to pull myself up, over and out.

## THE CHARLES WHITLOCK CREW & HEAVEN CAN WAIT

"I estimate that we were about 18,000 feet when I jumped. I delayed opening the chute until I could almost see the leaves on the trees below. When I pulled the cord on my chute, it came loose so easily, I thought that maybe the line had been shot through, and it wasn't going to open. But in a few seconds I felt a gentle tug, and when I looked up, I was very relieved to see the white umbrella was opening as it should.

"It was only about 30 seconds between the time that my chute opened and the time I hit the ground. Luckily, I came down through some tree branches, which broke my fall; and I didn't hit the ground very hard. It was only a matter of a few seconds until I had my chute off and had destroyed all papers that I had in my possession. I couldn't walk, so I crawled and rolled down the mountain until I reached the bottom. I started crawling again up the next hill a few feet at a time. It was quite a job, and I quickly tired. When I was about half way up the hill, I spotted a chute on the side of another hill, and I called over there. I found out that my Navigator, **Robert Ricks** and Bombardier, **John Waite** were there.

"They weren't hurt, but had been already captured by Italian soldiers. It wasn't very long after that I was picked up and carried to a farm house where I met our other two crewmen, **Robert Mundell** (Radio Operator) and **Lt. Charles Whitlock** (Pilot).

"When they finally got me to a hospital, they removed most of the shell fragments without any anesthesia, which was really rough to take. Then they put me to bed without any food, and I was very hungry."

*Recollections of Lt. Whitlock,*

### *Pilot(POW)*

Lt. Whitlock later wrote to Sgt. **Ralph Knox** (Well Gunner), "You probably never did know what happened on the flight deck. You see, after we caught fire, I sent the Co-pilot **Edward Wilson** back with **Edwin Stewart** (Engineer), to try to put it out. As you probably know, the interphone and alarm system burned out immediately, as well as the controls. Since the bomb bay doors would not open, the Co-pilot jumped into the bomb bay onto one door.

"Although he succeeded in knocking a door off, he was burned to death, and his chute did not open. Stewart went back to his turret and kept right on shooting. Then the fire got so bad, I couldn't see a thing in the cockpit. The radio man, **Mundell**, left by the top hatch, and then I could see enough to find that the flames were coming through the radio compartment and up the top turret. Stewart stayed with his guns and was burned to death, also. After that, I got out by the top hatch, as the plane had no controls and was going down fast.

"I want to apologize to you and those who are living for our formation that was too erratic to allow good marksmanship for the gunners. However, I do know that you boys shot down several enemy fighters."

### *Navigator Lt. Robert Ricks's recollections. (POW)*

Robert Ricks told Ralph Knox much later, "Whitlock and I were prisoners of the Italians until they surrendered. Then the Germans took us over, and we were prisoners in the Reich until the end of the war. Whitlock and I lived together and got along fairly well. At the end, we had so little to eat that we were too weak to walk around.

**THE CHARLES WHITLOCK CREW  
& HEAVEN CAN WAIT*****T/Sgt. Robert Mundell reported...  
(POW/Escapee/Returned)***

The Radio Operator Mundell told the following account. "The top hatch was already open. The hatch is located directly in front of the top turret – which the engineer operates – so Stewart, the Engineer, had to open it. But he hadn't bailed out. He had left the top turret and was now standing on the flight deck – directly opposite the radio operator's station. He was looking at me with a very calm, dispassionate expression on his face – an expression so out of place, considering the situation we were in, that it lent a certain surrealism to the scene. Then he looked down at the bomb bay – by now a roaring inferno – as if he was considering going out that way. But he didn't move. He must have intended on going out through the top hatch when he opened it, but for some reason he had changed his mind. I pointed toward the open hatch, motioning that we should leave. Stewart watched me as I started up the steps, but made no move to follow me.

"I reached the top hatch and was halfway out when I got hung up. The top half of me was outside the plane, and the blast from the ice-cold wind was numbing. (The air temperature at 20,000 feet was close to zero). The wind had caught my belly pack (parachute, and it was now floating four feet from me – I don't know where all the slack in the harness came from – and the straps felt like they were going to pull through me. I was praying the chute wouldn't open before I got clear of the plane. I kept struggling to free myself, but I could feel my strength ebbing in the cold wind. Then I felt a hand push me.

"Whitlock had followed me to the steps, and had reached up and given

me a shove. It was enough to free me, and out I went. I hit something that skinned my knee, and I remember thinking for a second that I was hung up on something. The next thing I knew, my chute was open. I don't remember pulling the ripcord – the chute must have opened on its own, or maybe the ripcord snagged on something and caused the chute to open. Whitlock, who was about 5' 11" and between 155 and 160 pounds told me later that he came right out behind me and didn't have any trouble, that he dropped down right of the wind.

"I remember that it took a long time to get down (I had jumped at 18,000 feet, and I had a front row seat to an air battle for quite a while. At one point a saw a German fighter heading my way, and I remembered the stories we had heard about some of our men getting staffed in their chutes. Talk about being a sitting duck – there's not a more helpless feeling in the world! But as he drew closer, he banked his wings and went by.

"I hit the ground pretty hard, but wasn't hurt. I had landed next to some trees on a small farm. A farmer and a bunch of kids came running up and started examining my silk parachute. They looked thrilled with it and started jabbering (in Italian) and pointing to a donkey under a shed. I thought they might want to make a trade, and I could get on the donkey and get the hell out of there. I don't know to where, but it seemed like a good idea at the time.

Then an Italian policeman arrived and put a pistol to the back of my head. I raised my hands to shoulder level – I didn't hike my arms over my head like the bank tellers in the westerns did, when told to 'reach for the stars'. With my hands lowered, I might be able to

## THE CHARLES WHITLOCK CREW & HEAVEN CAN WAIT

spin around and grab the gun before he could shoot. I was trying to get a better look at him out of the corner of my eye, when I noticed an old farmer standing 30 feet away with a shotgun leveled at me. He looked like he was reading my mind. I reached for the stars. But a truck showed up, and Whitlock and I were taken into a nearby town of Potenza. I'll never know what the mob had planned for us.

"Word of our capture had spread. As the truck brought us through the middle of town, a large crowd of people had gathered along the 'parade route' and were applauding. There were also a lot of people applauding from the balconies. Somehow I got the feeling they were applauding us instead of our Italian captors.

A little later they brought in Ricks and Waite, who had dropped out through the nose wheel doors – an emergency exit for the two men in the nose of the plane. Ricks had seen Knox, who had been injured. Bonham and Kosch had been killed in the attack. Dunajecz had died when his chute didn't open. Wilson had burned to death, trying to get out through the bomb bay, and Stewart had remained on the plane all the way to the ground. We had lost five of our ten-man crew.

"Waite had been drinking some wine with one of the Italian guards and was half drunk. He had found out that the guard had lived in Texas, and was saying, 'He's okay – he's from Texas!' Waite tried to get the rest of us to have a drink with them, but none of us did.

"I was put into a small dungeon by myself that night. There was a concrete slab about a foot off the floor that I tried to sleep on, but it sloped toward the floor so much that I couldn't relax

on it without rolling off. I didn't get any sleep at all. There was hole in the center of the floor full of excrement, and there were brown finger marks all over the walls (without going into a lot of detail, there was no toilet paper". The stench was awful.

"Three days ago I was drinking wine with a friend in Oran. Now I was in a dungeon staring at brown finger marks.

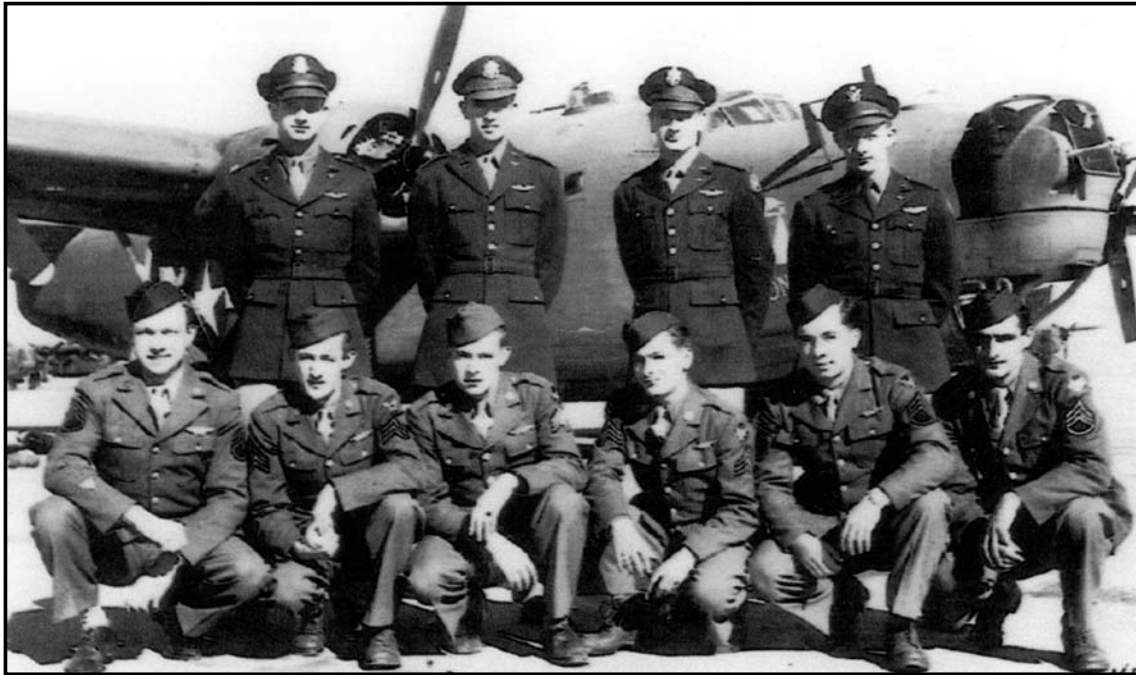
"The next day the Italians put us on trucks (except for Knox, who was taken to a hospital), and we departed – to more applause—to Bari, where we met the other downed airmen from the same raid. There were about 30 of us. The 44th had lost a total of seven planes in the Foggia mission; two were from the 506th. The pilot of the other 506 plane – **Southern Comfort** – was named **Horace Austin**, and he and his surviving crewmen were there.

"The guy in Benghazi had been right – there had been a raid coming up, and they now had plenty of cots. Seven crews were lost meant 70 empty cots.

The Navigator on the Austin crew, a guy named **Paul Singer** had tried to get out of going on the mission – he said he was afraid of flying today. But they made him go anyway. He bailed out when the plane was shot down, but his chute didn't open. Austin had lost one of his shoes getting out of the plane, so when he came across the body of the navigator, he took of the dead man's shoes."

*Besides the two 506 planes that were lost, the 66th Squadron lost **Lady Luck**; the 67th lost **Suzy-Q, Black Sheep and Buzzin' Bear**; the 68th lost **Natchez Belle**. 506thSq. A/C **Baldy And His Brood** was badly damaged, had two wounded aboard, but landed safely in Malta.*

## HEAVEN CAN WAIT II



The Bowman Crew: *Front Row L-R: Kenneth Dropek (Engineer), Thomas Gurrey (Gunner), Bernard Creeden (Radio Operator), Patrick Commisa (Ball Turret Gunner), Donald Ennis (Tail Gunner), Michael Tarzia (Gunner)*

*Back Row: Sam Bowman (Pilot), James Rossman (Co-Pilot), Art Young (Navigator), Charles Gordon (Bombardier).*

**Sam H. Bowman** was piloting this aircraft that had bombed military installations at Siracourt, France. When they returned to England, Shipdham's weather was very bad, so the pilot was advised to find an 'open field' someplace in southern England. However, they were not fortunate enough to find an open field, and fuel was running low. Bowman attempted an emergency landing at an RAF fighter field in Friston. The situation became more grim when a fire erupted and the plane was completely destroyed, but the crew managed to escape with no serious injuries.

**Kenneth Dropek**, Engineer and Top Turret Gunner, reported the problems of trying to land. "After leaving the target, we had to feather #2 engine. We flew back to England okay, but there were solid clouds at all bases. After flying

around for several hours, we were notified that we were again over France, and to put the machine guns back in place. After milling around for a while, we were back over England, and by then we were told to land wherever we could. They suggested Ford Field.

"As the fickle finger of fate would have it, we found a small hole in the clouds. With our engines cutting out, we set down as land appeared. We barely cleared some high voltage power lines by lowering the flaps about 10 degrees. The crash caused the plane to burn up, but we were able to get out with only minor injuries.

This was Pilot Bowman's second mission. Unfortunately, he had crash landed another plane only a few weeks previously. He was reduced to Second Pilot for the remainder of his tour.

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



Time is flying by!!! Seems like I just did a message, and Ruth is now ready for another one.

Our faithful Editor is hard to keep up with!!

Our past president , Jerry Folsom, has arranged with the University of Utah Library to have them scan and digitize some 35 copies of the 8 Ball Tails that are not on our Web-site. Arlo Bartsch, our Web Master will then put them on the web site. Thanks to Jerry for his efforts.

This is a major accomplishment, as now all the 8 Ball Tails from 1994 to date will be available.

Updated CD's of the Data base program will contain all of these as well.

We have just returned from a visit to England , but were unable to get up to Shipdham. We did, of course, watch the wedding on TV. That provoked some memories. They told that Prince William was based at RAF Valley Wales. Valley,Wales is where I landed in 1944 on a C-54 transport. That flight took some 20 flying hours from LaGuardia Field in New York with stops at Presque Isle, Maine –Gander and Iceland. It was somewhat different from our 8 hour non stop from Tampa!!!

Hope to see many of you in October at Savannah.

*George Washburn*

*It has come to our attention that **Harold Davis** was reported to have **Folded Wings** in 2009. This is erroneous. We have no record of the source of this information; but with great sorrow and many apologies, we report this error. Davis's grandson discovered the error on the web site, and contacted **Arlo Bartsch**. The web site received that improper message from the only possible source, the 8 Ball Tails.*

*Please forgive this serious mistake.*

## MARY ASTON'S BOUTIQUE

For Sale: lapel pins of WWII Medals: 8th Air Force, DFC, Air Medal, Purple Heart, POW, European-African Mediterranean Theater and WWII Victory Medal. The price of each is \$9 + 44 cents postage. (Specify pin name and number of each type.)

A large Suncatcher depicting the Flying 8 Ball; a 67th Squadron Pelican or 8th Air Force Logo is available at \$120 each + \$25 UPS (a total of \$145) A small Flying 8 Ball sells for \$65 + \$18 UPS (a total of \$83) Proceeds go to the 44th BGVA. Contact Mary at 830 Cardinal Drive, Elberton, GA 30635.



## LETTER FROM SHIPDHAM

By Peter Bodle



Hello again from your old ETO base in England, Station 115, Shipdham. I make no apologies for starting this letter as I did the last one, and commenting on the weather. For those of you with long memories, I'm sure you will find it hard to believe when I tell you that we have had almost six straight weeks of fantastically brilliant sunny spring weather. This is a great rarity, and I'm assured that it is the best spring we have ever had in this part of the UK for decades, even when we look back in the records to before the days you guys were actually here in Norfolk to witness an English Spring.

On a wider front than local and light aircraft flying, I am amazed with all the talk of recessions, that the world of aviation appears to be alive and well and getting stronger by the month. I'm told that the Boeing order lists for some models of plane is at about 5 years, and climbing, and also that some of the Airbus order lists are only a year or so behind those in Seattle.

No doubt some of you will have had the opportunity to see the recent Royal Wedding of Prince William and Kate Middleton, a state event that we Brits tend to take great pride in doing and getting right. As a witness to many such splendid occasions, it reminded me of the wartime parade when some of the guys from the 44<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group, and several other nearby USAF bases paraded through the nearby Port Town of King's Lynn, in front of the then King and Queen. I can still visualise those old black and white photos and the pride in the step, and on the faces of the American G.I.'s carrying the Stars and Stripes down main street Norfolk, in front of King George and The Queen.

Our flying season has just about got underway as I write this, but as the latter part of the winter was rather fierce, it is a little slow getting under way and spring sunshine tends to attract rather breezy weather this close to the sea. Also strange to relate, good weather tends to have a negative effect on flying and most of our pilots have families, and good weather means seaside trips and days out with the children. (They believe that dad can go be a pilot on the days when the weather is not so warm, clear, dry, calm etc...)

The 44<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group Memorial Garden is looking a tad stronger these last few weeks and the grass has a lush spring green hue to it. Mike Artherton and his gardening team have spent their first hours this month looking at, and after it, and it will only be a few weeks and it will be back to it's summer radiance, ready for this year's visitors.

Best regards to you all from a glorious, sun drenched East Anglia.  
(Wow...I haven't been able to say that for many a long time ...)

Peter

*Speaking of William & Kate's wedding, we must agree: no group can put on a spectacular event more impressive than the Brits! (Opinion of Perry Morse)*

**L/COL. ROBERT LEHNHAUSEN  
(COMMANDER 68TH SQUADRON)  
REMEMBERS HIS FRIEND  
RAYMOND HAMLYN**

Ray Hamlyn was a very fine friend. He came to the Squadron, and Group, as the Co-Pilot of the **Robert E. Peterson** crew. They arrived shortly before we left for Africa, June 16, 1943.

On our first mission out of Benghazi, his crew was scheduled to fly the Leece mission of July 2, 1943. **Tom Cramer**, the 68th CO, decided to fly this mission as the Co-Pilot of the crew. That 'bumped' Hamlyn. In the target area enemy fighters shot down the Peterson crew. The entire crew was KIA.

Ray then became the Co-Pilot for the crew of **Bill Hughes**. Several members of my original crew were also on the Hughes crew. We got to know "Ham" very well.

After Bill Hughes finished up, Ray was made a first pilot and was given his own crew. As a young man, he was a very handsome person – always well groomed and attentive to task. He and my Navigator, **Robert C. Peterson** became very close. **George Hulpiau**, our Bombardier, and Ray were also life long friends. Ray, despite his fragile health, attended the services of both Peterson in Ogden, Utah, and Hulpiau, in Sun City West, AZ, when these two war time pals folded their wings.

Ray was badly wounded on a mission to one of the Buzz Bomb targets on February 8, 1944. He took a piece of shrapnel in the cheek – a very nasty wound that only delayed the completion of his tour. He became one of my lead pilots, completing his tour as one of our flight leaders, as a Captain.

Ray and Bob Peterson lived together while attending classes at Stanford, after the conflict and before they were married. Both had retained their reserve status, and were both recalled for the Korean conflict. Both chose to make the Air Force a career, and both did very well.

It is my recollection that Ray rose to be a B-47 Wing CO. He retired as a full Colonel.

He married his Reno, NV high school sweetheart, Dorothy. My recall is that they had Tom and a daughter.

Tom is a graduate of the Air Force Academy, but left the military some time ago. The family was very close.

Ray and Dorothy were regulars at reunions until her death. Ray was at Salt Lake City for the Ploesti Reunion in 2003.

The last time I talked to him was shortly before Christmas of 2009. I tried to get him a few weeks ago, but got the recorded message that his phone number was no longer in service.

Ray Hamlyn was the 'best of men'.

## **SAD TO REPORT: OUR ENGLISH BOARD MEMBER STEVE ADAMS HAS SUFFERED A STROKE**

Steve was appointed to the 44th BG Board by President **Roy Owen**, and he has reached into the heart and provided the history for everyone in the 44th BGVA. A high school student when WWII was going on, Steve grew interested in the historical aspects of what was occurring in his homeland. He collected pictures and memorabilia, and he wrote "*The 44th Bomb Group in WWII*", an incomparable book featuring the heroes and the valor of our airmen.

Steve bought and presents the wreath, honoring the 44th BG, at the annual Remembrance Celebration at the Cambridge Cemetery. He has corresponded with all Americans seeking information, assisted in providing memorabilia and photos to the Shipdham Aero Club Museum & Library, led a tour of Americans to a crash site in a large body of water, (then helped the tour bus get out of a tight spot.) His service has been immeasurable; particularly to this editor, who uses his photos and research material in every issue of the Tails.

Rehabilitation is putting Steve back on his feet. Right now he is beginning to type his e-mails, and is determined to have a complete recovery. Pray for Steve and his wife Jan. He is one of our treasures. His mailing address and phone number are on the inside cover of the Tails.



## **FRANK SCHAEFFER COMPLAINS: "I NEVER GOT TO PARIS...BUT OUR B-24 DID"**

An active member of the Air Forces Escape and Evasion Society, Schaeffer sees that many of the Evasion Helpers are diminishing in number, as are the veterans.

Schaeffer was the Engineer on *My Peach*. The mission was to La Perth Airfield, Romilly France on 8 August 1944. When # 1 and 4 engines on the plane were out and then #2 caught fire, **Bernard Komasinski** put the plane in auto-pilot, and the crew bailed out. With the help of the French Underground, eight successfully evaded, one became POW; one was wounded and evacuated.

Schaeffer gave a dog tag to a member of the family with whom he was staying. It was returned 59 years later by Jean-Pierre Benier, who was four years old at the time.

Years after the war, Schaeffer learned that the abandoned plane had been shot down over Paris by the Germans, about 60 miles from the target of Romilly.



## **LYNDON S. ALLEN, TAIL GUNNER ON THE JOHN MILLIKEN CREW WROTE ABOUT ONE OF HIS FONDEST MEMORIES**

"Leaving the English coast was a significant aspect, to me, on our first mission. Ever since I had geography back in Elementary School, I have heard of, and have seen pictures of, the White Cliffs of Dover – and there they were, directly below me! How beautiful; how magnificent; just as they had been shown."

## MEMORIES OF AWESOME EXPERIENCES

### ROBERT W. PADGETT, JR (ENGINEER/GUNNER) 68TH SQUADRON)

**MISSION #4, 5/30/44 6:45 Hours**  
(Flying in *Wendy W*)

"Charles Clark, Gunner, couldn't make the mission, it's over for him, (combat is not for men in their 30's). Flight over North Sea, it's very cold, having to wear an oxygen mask is bad enough, but when your breath freezes in it, and the ice falls down inside your clothes, it's miserable. You are warm on neck in back, and ice falling down the front, then in the top turret. Fighters in area, flak was light to heavy – a few hits. I wished those steel helmets were larger so you could hide inside them when the flak starts, but they did give you some feeling of protection." (*Will Lundy's book reports no losses on this mission.*)

#### MISSION #7 WAS ON D-DAY

Target: Invasion Coast Guns. Caen (Vire) (Flying in *Patsy Ann II*)

"Did not drop; no clear target. During climb out to assembly altitude following the plane signal light ahead, I always stood between the pilots. I caught sight of a B-24 coming up underneath us. I shouted out 'Pull UP' and all three of us were scrambling to pull back on the yoke, and reaching for throttles. The other plane's right rudder struck and tore a hole in the front lower left side of our plane. We lost some altitude and then recovered and joined the formation. The damage was a hole, causing loss of air speed, tube, nose gear system seemed OK. I did not know where the plane came from until an article a couple of years ago by **Tom Parsons** stated that another plane and his had hit that morning!! (Parsons, Left Waist Gunner, was flying in *Battlin Baby*, piloted by **Ted Weaver**. The A/C

suffered damage to the fin and right rudder, but was able to stay in the formation.

#### MISSION #8, ALSO ON D-DAY

Target: Invasion Support. Colleville & St. Laurent (Flying in *Wendy W*)  
Climbed to 24,000 over cloud cover; did not drop. On the return over Channel in the flight path that was designated to return by, we had to hold altitude a few minutes, so one member of the crew could clear his ears. Then returning as a lone plane, at that moment to the English coast, we got a burst of flak ahead. The pilot (**Charles Gayman**) turned back, and we fired another burst. We repeated the identification and turned back. This time we loosely joined another formation, they had guns on us, but did not fire, we kept our gun positions still and they let us in. When we arrived at the base 2315 hours, in fog and dark, lights in the fog illuminated the area for landing. The Navigator had received the wrong ID packet. **What a flight. Even the British shot at us!!**

#### MISSION #28 – 4 August 1944 - KIEL SUBMARINE PENS & DOCKS FLYING IN *JOSE CARIOCA*

The flights are getting tougher again, another flight to Kiel. It's still very cold over the North Sea. (In South Carolina, we don't have thermometers that go this low.) We were not over land very much, but they had the 88's firing all the way in and out – lots of holes I saw, where they came in – some through the plane. I don't see how the men in the waist, **Alonzo Collins** and **Joseph Wawerna**, kept from getting hit. One piece of shrapnel entered the top between Lt. **Charles Gayman** and **Clair Hill** (Co-

Pilot), hit some wiring and stopped just before the top turret where I was! I still have that piece of flak!

**MISSION #32 – 14 August 1944 – Lyons, France**

Target: Airfield; Flying in an unnamed plane

This was the start of the second invasion into lower France. Clear weather, flak was light, tracking was fairly accurate. Our P-51 escort was good and no fighters were seen in our area. Compared to some missions, this was a long milk run, if that was possible with some flak, flying with all the other planes, and flying with a new pilot, Lt. Ster-

ling Dobbs. No problem. We got back safely. When we got to the briefing, they told us – **Alonzo Collins** (Waist Gunner), **Richard Breon** (Radio Operator), **Joseph Woodlock** (Navigator) and I, that the missions had been cut back to "31", so we made an extra one!

*I was relieved it's over. I didn't have the time to think about the danger so much then, and I wondered what was next and where it would be. Memories keep coming back all the time. Even with age you don't forget those events. Ask my wife. Over the years she has had to wake me up to stop the nightmares.*

**THE PLOESTI RAIDERS WILL BE MEETING AT TWO DIFFERENT SITES:**

**BARKSDALE AFB AND TUCSON, ARIZONA,**

These are held in conjunction with the 98th & 93rd Bomb Groups. All five bomb groups are invited.

**The Place: Holiday Inn Downtown Shreveport, LA**  
98th Bomb Group/ Wing Veterans Association

**Dates: October 17 through October 21, 2011**  
Annual Meeting will be hosting The Ploesti Raiders  
Regardless of Unit or Job!!!  
Contact: Dennis Posey, Reunion Coordinator  
770 509-7734 [dennis\\_posey@att.net](mailto:dennis_posey@att.net)

**The 93rd Reunion is October 20th through October 24th in Tucson, Arizona**  
A special program is being prepared for the Ploesti veterans  
Complete with memorabilia, photos and hospitality

Veterans from all five bomb groups are invited, flyers and ground crew all welcome

Details can be found at [www.93rdbombgroup.com](http://www.93rdbombgroup.com)  
Or contact Blain Duxford [bdux@aol.com](mailto:bdux@aol.com)

**FROM THE DIARY OF WILLIAM UVANNI  
RADIO OPERATOR, 506 SQUADRON  
FLYING IN CONSOLIDATED MESS  
BEIBER CREW**

**July 7, 1944:** *The target was Bernberg, Germany.* They woke us up for our first mission at 1:00 A.M. We knew we were going last night, and I doubt if any of our crew got any sleep. Trucks took us to the mess hall and then to briefing.

On the wall-map of Europe a red line (tape) was stretched all the way from England to Bernberg, deep in Germany. We were briefed to expect fighters as this is in a fighter region, and also to expect heavy flak.

We were pretty tense on the way to the target. About 5 minutes before target time, we were hit by fighters. We flew in the lead element and were right up front. Approximately 60 fighters lined up 15 abreast and came in at us from 1 o'clock and slightly high. They fired as they came in, and you could see orange 20 millimeter shells as they came through the air. None of the planes from our squadron were hit, but an entire squadron (12 aircraft) were knocked out on the first pass. Some blew up and others went into dives and never came out.

Some of the crew saw several chutes come out of these planes and a few minutes later the report came over VHF radio that the Germans were strafing the airmen hanging in their chutes. We had been warned to delay our chute openings until a lower altitude to avoid this, but under tension we don't always do the proper thing.

We were in heavy flak all of this time, and I watched through the open bomb bays. We had

P-38 fighter escorts, and they gathered where the German fighters were in a few minutes and really paid them

off. The ones that hit us were ME-410s (Germany's latest), and the interphone rang out with "There's a 38 on a 410 – he blew up"!! "There's another 410 on fire!" "Hey, did you see that B-24 burning on our right?" "Another B-24 blew up behind us!" "Look at that P-38 after that German – there he goes – look at him – he's coming apart"!

I saw Bernberg below, and it looked rather small. Our target was a bomber assembly plant right on the edge of town. It was easily identified, because of the large runways in front of the plant. Our bombing was excellent. All the bomb explosions I saw were on the plant area and a few minutes after Bombs Away, the whole place was nothing but smoke and flames.

We were about 7 to 10 minutes in the flak and when we broke away from it, all the enemy fighters had disappeared. We had no further trouble on the way home.

At interrogation the Intelligence Officer told us that missions didn't come any rougher than today's, and we were relieved to know that they would not all be like this one.

The mission lasted 7 hours, and we were on oxygen for 4 hours. Our bombing altitude was 19,000 feet, and the temperature was a minus 7 degrees.

*Losses: 3 Planes (68 Sq.), KIA – 11; POW – 17 (3 of whom were badly wounded; Injured, evaded and returned – 1.*

**July 21st, 1944** *The target was Munich German. (This crew had bombed there ten days previously)*

Flying in **Consolidated Mess**: When they briefed us for Munich again, we

began to wonder. A good way to get rid of a fellow is to keep sending him back to Munich!

We never saw the ground after take-off until we reached the target. There was an opening over Munich, and it was the only one we saw over 3 countries: England, France and Germany! We were up to 25,000 feet, trying to find an opening between cloud layers, so the dangers of flying formation would not be so great.

As we started our bomb run, we saw coming head-on a formation of B-17s making their run exactly opposite our!!! We withdrew to one side and passed over the city again, catching all the flak they threw up, and having our bombs all of this time. (We never really knew what worry was until then.)

We skirted the city and came back to try our run again. We flew over the break through once more, and caught the flak all over again. Several bombers had been hit and were going down. We finished this second run and still did not drop our bombs. We were all scared to death after making that second run, and when the report came over VHF (radio) that we were going to try once more, I think everyone's heart stood still. Mine did; and after the mission, all of our crew admitted the same thing.

About this time we flew into a cloud bank, and when we broke through we were the only bomber around!!!! We had become separated from the 8th Air Force! We had been cruising around Munich for over half an hour, and Woodie (**Nathan Woodruff**, Engineer) told Lt. **George Beiber** that our gas was getting low, and if we didn't head for home – we'd never make it. (He didn't know whether or not we could as it was.)

I had opened and closed the bomb

bay doors twice already, and Lt. Beiber told me to open them again. As soon as they were opened – we dropped our bombs and Lt. Beiber told our Navigator, Lt. **Willis Edgcomb** to plot the straightest route home. We were deep in Germany; all alone and fighters had been reported around Munich. If they spotted us now, we'd be lucky to make "Stalag Luft" – Airman's prison camp in Germany.

The Good Lord smiled on us; we crossed Germany on the way out without seeing anything other than clouds, which were all over.

About 15 minutes after we crossed the French-German border, we saw a formation of about 18 American bombers. A B-17 was leading it, and there were both 17s and 24s in it. We headed for them, and as we did, we saw flak start to break around them. As much as we wanted to join them for protection against the fighters, our pilot decided we'd stick it out alone, rather than fly through the flak with them.

About 20 minutes later I made a terrible mistake. I looked out my window and saw flak climbing to meet us. I was listening to my radio. (I was assigned the channel at briefing.) and didn't know what was being said on interphone through the plane. I took it for granted that one of our crew had reported it.

It climbed steadily to our altitude, looking for all the world like a great big staircase. One burst exploded right under our right wing and threw it high into the air. I couldn't wait any longer and switched to interphone and reported anti-aircraft batteries were tracking us.

By this time Lt. Beiber had taken evasive action, and soon the flak stopped. He replied back over the interphone,

that he knew they were shooting at us, but no one except myself had noticed it. (I made a solemn oath to myself, that from now on, when I see flak, I'll switch interphone; and unless I hear it called out – I'll call it myself.)

Our Navigator Lt. Edgcomb did a beautiful job plotting our course home, and we landed at our base with 15 gallons of gas left for each engine. Woodie called it right. We were one of the few crews who landed at their own field. A large number of planes that came back crash-landed on the English Coast, and almost every other plane landed in Southern England, not having enough gas to reach home!!!

The next day I found out that the Lead Plane in our formation had its bomb sight destroyed by flak, preventing the Bombardier from dropping his

bombs. His interphone was also shot out, making it impossible for him to tell the Deputy Lead Bombardier to take over and drop the bombs.

I also found out that a friend named John Dowd, who had trained with me, was shot down over Munich. Several chutes got out, and I hope he was one of them, and is a POW. It was his 3rd mission, and he had been with our group for about a week.

*(John Dowd was interned in Switzerland and returned.)*

Lt. **Myron Butler's** crew had its left rear vertical stabilizer shot off over the target and were leaking gasoline badly. We heard them say they were trying to make Switzerland. (Over the VHF radio) *(They did not make it. The entire crew became POW)*

**ATTY. ROBERT LEE ASTON**

**RECOGNIZED FOR HIS DETERMINED EFFORTS OF ACQUIRING BELATED AWARDS FOR VETERANS**

Lee recently was awarded the Gold Good Citizen Medal from the Sons of the American Revolution.

The Golden Kiwanis Club honored him; and the Mayor of Elberton, Georgia, Larry Quest, proclaimed a day in his honor. When President **Bob Lehnhausen** assigned Lee to the job of Director of Decorations and Awards, he became unstoppable! He has acquired more than 100 belated awards for 44th BG veterans and many other veterans also.



Mayor Larry Quest proclaims Dr. Lee Aston Day



## MUCH MORE TO BE SAID ABOUT THE MISSION TO MUNICH

The target was an armament center at Oberpfaffenhofen, Germany, near Munich. The 68th Squadron lost two planes, as did the 506th. 19 were interned in Switzerland; 2 were KIA; 29 became POW.

**Jerry Folsom**, Co-Pilot on *Consolidated Mess* reported, "This plane (*Mary Harriet*) was flying on our left wing. They had contacted us to look for damage via radio. They reported that their controls were not working well. In conversation it was discussed as to whether they should try to make it home or go to Switzerland. I had suggested that we were quite a ways from home, and if controls were not working, well, it might be a good idea. A while later they called and said that they were going to Switzerland. I wished them well, and they left the formation.

About a month later I was in the latrine shaving when a voice behind me asked the usual question of a new crew: How are the missions? I probably gave the usual reply. Rough, lots of flak, cold, not many enemy fighters, etc. Then the voice said, "You don't know who you are talking to, do you?" I turned around, and there was the fellow I had been talking to in the plane (**John Anderson**)... (Pilot of *Mary Harriet*). He recounted their trip to Switzerland, how they had bailed out, and one chute did not open. The Swiss had given that crew member (**Leo Hoffman**, Gunner) a nice funeral, and put a cross near the rock where he fell. He told about being interned, and that conditions were quite good – lots of freedom. He was interned in a building near a security fence that had a locked gate. One evening he was advised that the gate would be open sometime that evening, and to look for a fellow in a white shirt. He later recounted how

the French Underground got him to the coast and back to England. He did comment, 'Do as the Underground tells you.' He did not once, and almost got shot and captured by the Germans. The Underground reprimanded him severely, and almost kicked him out."

*Uvanni continued: July 29, 1944 – Bremen, Germany.*

We weren't scheduled to fly this mission, but one of the pilots got into a fight in town (from another squadron), and is riding the sick book, so we were elected.

We **would** draw one like Bremen on a deal like this!!! The older men in the barracks had told us that Bremen was second to none, and they were not wrong. We flew in *D-Bar* with another Squadron. There wasn't any seat at my desk, so I spent most of the time on the floor.

Bremen was covered completely with clouds when we arrived, and thank heaven for that!! We dropped our bombs PFF, and they shot flak by radar. There was a solid flak barrage the length of the city, and you couldn't see through it! They were off slightly to the right; however, and we flew in the middle element. We made it OK.

The bombing results were perfect – Bremen was "pin-pointed" through 10/10 overcast, and that is remarkable. Our Group lost 5 heavies; however, and that is not remarkable.

At interrogation they told us about Lt. **William Green**, and another plane from our Squadron colliding over the Channel during assembly. **Red Favors** was the only member of either plane to get out. He was in the bomb bay and had his chute on when it happened. It was his 6th mission. His chute opened as he hit the Channel, and a Dutch rescue boat picked him up.

The Radio Operator on his crew slept next to me. His name was **Johnny Raniello**, and he had a picture of his baby he had never seen tacked to the ceiling over his bed, so he could look at it as he lay on his bunk. He was killed instantly in the Martin upper turret. The Pilot and Co-pilot were KIA also, as the propellers from Lt. Greene's plane chewed right through the flight deck.

Someone had taken Johnny's picture of his baby down before we got back. I don't know who.

Our crew was awfully tired after this mission, we couldn't sleep. We just

talked occasionally and rested as well as possible.

*Ed. Note: According to Will Lundy's book, 34 planes were dispatched, but only 32 hit the target, due to the collision of #42-95309, piloted by **Bernard Eberhardt** and **The Wasp Nest**, piloted by **William Green**. **Alva Favors**, the single survivor of this crash was the Engineer on Eberhardt's crew. **Bill Uvanni** reported that the Beiber crew was flying in **D-Bar**; the Database indicates that they flew in **My Peach**.*



**LARRY HERPEL IS ON A SEARCH FOR PICTURES OF THE ORIGINAL 506 SQUADRON THAT FLEW THE SOUTHERN ROUTE TO ENGLAND IN FEBRUARY 1943**

Larry's uncle, **Virgil Fouts**, Pilot of Cactus, was lost on his first mission, which was to Wilhelmshaven, Germany. It was also the first loss of the 506 Squadron.

Larry has been told that this new squadron was flying the southern route, and they stopped to refuel at Marrakech. From the late **Norman Kiefer** and the late **Dick Butler**, he learned that lots of the men were carrying cameras. At

this late date, 68 years later, Larry hopes that somebody snapped his uncle and members of his crew, and even a picture of the plane.

If you or your parent were part of that original group, and if you have pictures taken on that flight, please contact Larry at P.O. Box 478, Lockhart, Texas 78644. Phone 512 376-7780. E-mail [lherpel1@ev1.net](mailto:lherpel1@ev1.net)

*A filing cabinet is a place where things can get lost alphabetically.*

-Adam Yankee

**MURPHY'S LAWS**

Whatever you want to do, you have to do something else first.

If you try to please everybody, somebody is not going to like it.

It's easier to get into a thing than out of it.

## REPORTING ON THE CAT DILEMMA IN STALAG LUFT IN EUGENE VICKERY'S MEMOIRS

On 23 March 1944, Vickery recorded that there were many bets placed on the birth date of the POW cat's kittens, and also the number she would produce.

About that time, **the cat disappeared**. Prisoners searched everywhere – even rain barrels. Vickery suspected there was something rotten in Sagan! Did an unscrupulous person arrange for the cat's disappearance?

On a more serious note, he recorded that they were aware of the advance of the Russians on the eastern front. Somehow he learned that the air war kept growing in intensity – over 4,000 sorties by the RAF and USAAF in 48 hours.

Every Saturday night between 8:00 and 9:00, the prisoners have presentations of poetry, book reports, etc. He pressed his shirt and pants for the event with a home made flat heated on the stove.

**27 March:** The cat showed up with 5 kittens. He guessed the right date but voted only for four, so he lost his bet.

There was a break in the North Camp, and 81 prisoners escaped. Now the guards are tightening up their rules and inspections.

**7 April:** The guards told them that 41 of the escapees had been killed. It was

Easter, and prisoners dressed in clothing they had received from home. They held church and prayed for the souls of those who were killed in their escape efforts.

**24 April:** A Lt. got a letter from his girl friend, saying she had found someone else, and would he please return her picture. The Lt. felt quite bad about it, so his buddies decided to pay his girl back in kind. They gathered up a dozen photos of various girls and sent them to her with the explanation that she should pick out the one that was her, because he couldn't recall which it was, and then return the rest.

*While the POWs at Stalag Luft were making the most of their tragic circumstances, in the month of May the Soviets recaptured Sevastopol; Germans withdrew from Monte Cassino in Italy, and Allies broke out of the Anzio beachhead.*

6 June 1944 – D-Day The prisoners knew it as it was happening. When the word reached them, many were playing cards. A General really cussed a blue streak, because the good news came just when he had been dealt his only good hand in days, and everybody threw down their cards and left the game to listen to the news.

### DO YOU WANT TO BUY A BRICK?

The Soldier's Walk at the Army Heritage Education Center at Carlisle displays the names of many of your leaders and friends. The slogan is: ***Voices of the Past Speak to the Future***. You can't walk to the Museum without seeing the ***Flying 8 Ball logo***, proudly displayed.

An Infantryman once said to **Robert Lehnhausen**, "Your group was no help to us on D-Day." Bob had the right answer: "We did it all ahead of time." And so you did—taking out airdromes, bridges and railway stations—to keep the enemy away from the action at Normandy. That must never be forgotten, when WWII history is studied.

\$150 will buy an 8" x 8" brick with the logo, your name, rank and Squadron; and of course, the 44th Bomb Group. Call me: I'll help you design it. (717 846-8948)

**Reunion Schedule**  
**44TH BOMB GROUP VETERANS ASSOCIATION**  
**OCTOBER 13-16, 2011**  
**INN AT ELLIS SQUARE**  
**SAVANNAH, GEORGIA**

**Thursday, October 13,**

Board Meeting	10:00 AM
Registration	1:00 to 5:00 PM
Hospitality Suite opens	7:00 PM

**Friday, October 14**

Breakfast	
Load Trolley for Ft. Jackson Tour And Lunch at the Crab Shack	9:00 AM
Return to Hotel, Afternoon Free	1:30 PM
Welcome Reception	7:00 PM

**Saturday, October 15**

Breakfast	
General Membership Meeting	9:00 AM
Load Trolley for Mighty 8th Museum Tour & Lunch	10:15 AM
Return to Hotel	3:00 PM
Cash Bar	6:00 PM
Squadron Dinners	7:00 PM

**Sunday, October 16**

Breakfast	
Load Trolley for Savannah Tour, Riverboat Tour And Lunch,	
Afternoon on/off Trolley Tour of Savannah	9:45 AM
Cash Bar	6:00 PM
Banquet	7:00 PM

**Monday, October 17**

Breakfast & Farewells



**REGISTRATION**  
**44TH BOMB GROUP VETERANS ASSOCIATION**  
 201 WEST BAY STREET  
 SAVANNAH, GEORGIA 31401  
 OCTOBER 13-16, 2011

Please print or type. All information must be complete.

Last Name \_\_\_\_\_ First Name \_\_\_\_\_  
 Spouse/Guest \_\_\_\_\_ Squadron \_\_\_\_\_  
 Address \_\_\_\_\_  
 City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip Code \_\_\_\_\_

**PRICING – 4 HOTEL NIGHTS**

Single \$700.00      Double \$957.00      Triple \$1214.00      Quad \$1471.00  
 Please indicate bed preference: King \_\_\_\_\_ Queen \_\_\_\_\_ Single \_\_\_\_\_

**ALL ROOMS ARE NON-SMOKING**

Includes: Welcome Reception, Four Breakfasts, Hospitality Room,  
 Transportation and Lunch on all tours, Squadron Dinners, Banquet.

**HOTEL PARKING AND AIRPORT TRANSPORTATION ON YOUR OWN.**

\$10 Per Day      \$25 Per Person each way. (Please include Arrival &  
 Departure Times. I am  
 Arrival Time \_\_\_\_\_ trying to work a deal  
 with a Cab Co. for a  
 Departure Time \_\_\_\_\_ combination rate.

**SQUADRON DINNERS ARE A BUFFET WITH TWO ENTREES**  
**BANQUET DINNER HAS TWO ENTREES, STEAK AND CHICKEN**  
**CHOOSE THE ONE YOU LIKE.**

**PAYMENT**

Number of Registrants (See Prices Above)

Single \$ \_\_\_\_\_ Double \$ \_\_\_\_\_  
 Triple \$ \_\_\_\_\_ Quad \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Please send checks to 44th Bomb Group Treasurer  
 Jackie Roberts, 11910 S. E. 44th Street, Oklahoma City, OK 73150

**MUST BE RECEIVED BY Sept. 7, 2011**



## **WALTER PATRICK, TAIL GUNNER REPORTS THE EARLIEST DAYS IN THE UK**

We arrived aboard *Eldon Johnson* in convoy, and landed at Southampton. We got separated from the convoy for two days, and were dang lucky we didn't get submarined, because they were out there...

"The 15th Bombardment Squadron (A-20 Boston bombers) was the first combat organization to arrive in England...We were first assigned to Grafton Underwood at Kettering, and then moved to Poddington...We flew our first combat mission on July 4, 1942 against an airfield in Holland – six USAF planes and six RAF. Our Squadron Commander, Maj. Keggelman was awarded the DFC in the European theater on that mission when his right wing hit the ground, and he regained control of the aircraft, and flew it back to home base. In September the Squadron was sent to North Africa to participate in that campaign... I and fifteen other gunners were reassigned to the 44th BG at Shipdham, who had just arrived in the theater.

"Upon arriving at Shipdham, I was immediately promoted to Buck Sergeant

and assigned to the crew of Lt. James Kahl. (Walter was delighted that he skipped two grades – Pfc. & Cpl.) because no one was allowed to fly with a lower rank than Sergeant.)

Coming back from their one mission (he is not certain which), the A/C was badly damaged, and Kahl was forced to crash land, but there were no injuries.

"Fighters had been heavy, and I was credited with a 1/4 FW 90 kill (big deal), and I got my first decoration of an air medal... The rest of my tour was rather usual...

"As far as I know, only three of the gunners from the 15 who were re-assigned from the 15th BS completed a full tour. Several were POW's and a couple dropped out of combat flying for a number of reasons.

*Ed. Note: Patrick completed his tour after the Naples flight. He was flying with the **Thomas Scrivner** crew, which was lost on the Ploesti mission.*

### **WISDOM FROM THE MANUAL**

*A navigator's definition of Latitude & Longitude: Latitude is where we are lost, & Longitude is how long we've been lost.*

*Airspeed, altitude and brains: Two out of three are needed to successfully complete the flight.*

*Flying the airplane is more important than radioing your plight to a person on the ground, who is incapable of understanding or doing anything about it.*

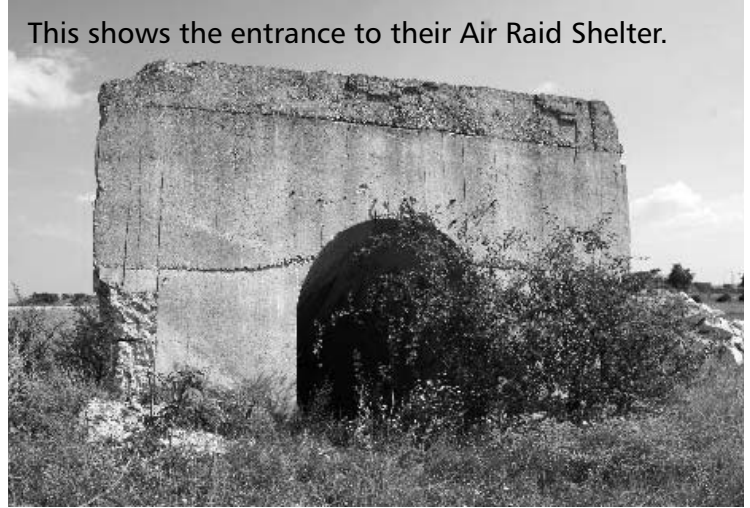
## THE WIENER-NEUSTADT STORY NEVER STOPS ECHOING

Charles Runion, Historian and Museum Specialist, recently returned to Wiener Neustadt, scene of one of the 44th BG's most horrific missions. The Messerschmidt plant was undoubtedly in ruins, but one of the original hangars is still standing. During the war, it was used as a repair facility. Inside the hangar, Runion could still see the scars of bomb damage; and on some of the walls, original painted German signs are still visible.

Maintenance Building



This shows the entrance to their Air Raid Shelter.



Although he probably does not remember this, **Robert Reasoner** would have entered through these hospital gates for care of his burns when *Black Jack* went down.

This picture was taken at the site of the Messerschmidt factory. It is one of the original structures that is still standing.



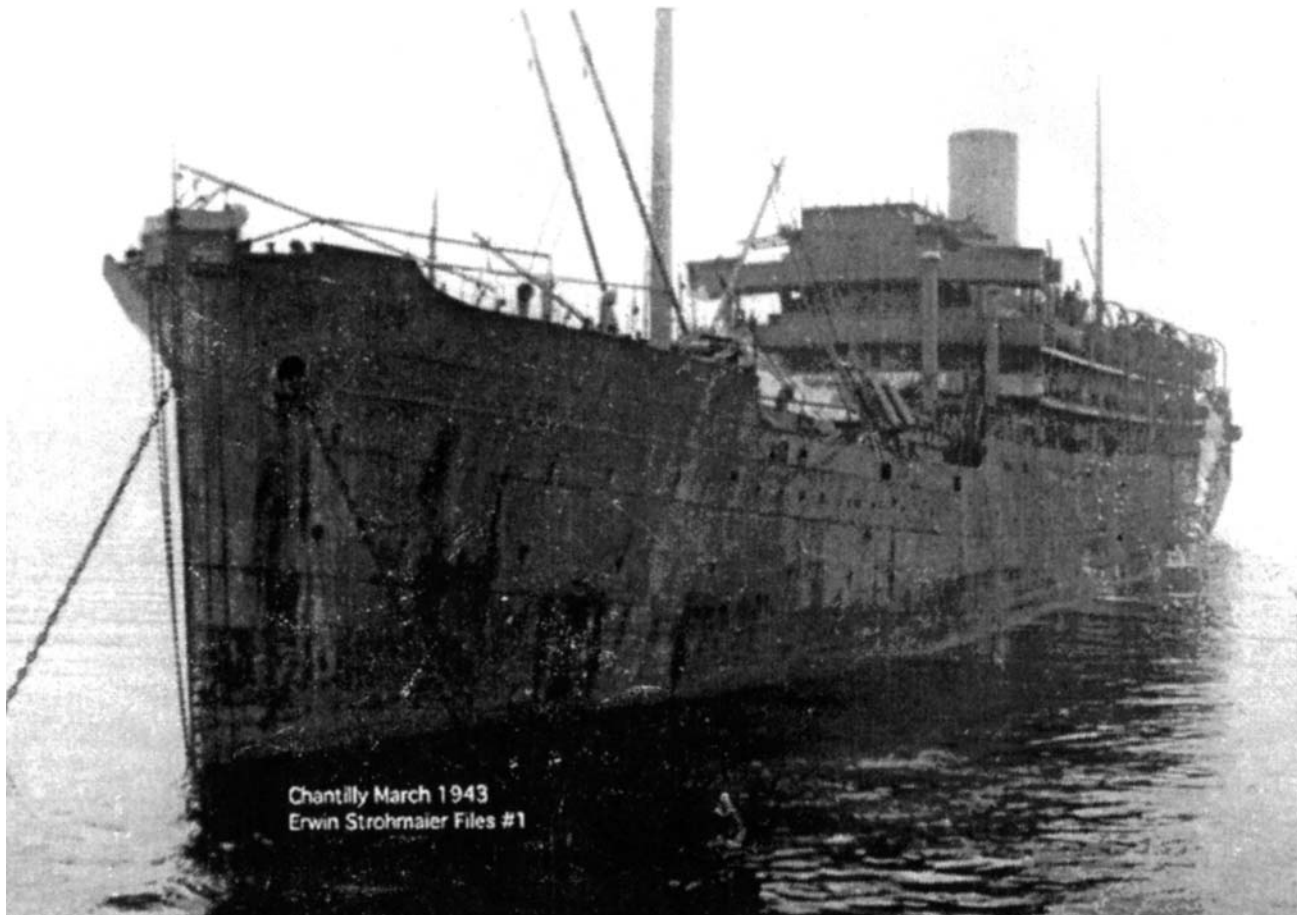
An elderly man led Runion to the crash site. 65 years later, it is a beautiful wooded area. Mother Nature compensated for the tragedy of the 44th Bomb Group's mission which took place 1 October 1943.



*Ed. Note: Charles Runion, a historian and owner of an historical museum, brought the left vertical stabilizer of **Black Jack** to the Branson Reunion.*



## ERWIN STROHMAIER'S VOYAGE TO ENGLAND ON THAT INFAMOUS CHANTILLY



From Camp Kilmer... We lined up and started marching to the mess hall in formation, but the formation broke up about three quarters of the way over to the mess hall, and many started to run. The result was that some fell on the ice, and there was a big pile up. One fellow had several ribs broken...

After breakfast we put on our full packs, got our rifles, A bags, and got in line by the trucks that were there to take us to the train. There was snow on the ground from the night before, and there was a light snow falling. After the trucks were loaded, we marched down to the railroad siding in a snow storm where our A bags were unloaded. We fell out of formation and got our A bags and fell back into our platoons. We then marched in a single line into the

railroad cars that were assigned to us, carrying our A bag and rifle. We were packed in, two to a seat with all our junk, like sardines in a can. As there was so little room, we kept our field bags on our backs. With all the straps that made up our pack and ammunition belt, it would have taken a long time to get our packs on again. We arrived in New York, and were told to get off the train. When I started down the steps, I slipped and fell out of the car. My steel helmet hit the side of the car, so I did not get hurt. I got my junk and got in line with the rest of the GIs.

Our train stopped about three or four blocks from the pier, so we had to pack our A bags to the pier. The two or three blocks seemed like three miles, packing the heavy A bag and rifle with

a full pack on my back. Everyone was having a hard time packing their bags. About half of them dragged their bags on the snow. By the time they got to the dock, many of the bottoms were worn through from the rough pavement where there wasn't any snow.

We waited on the pier for a long time, and finally a ferry boat or army boat of some sort came to take us to the part of the harbor where our transport was waiting for us. It was not long before we landed alongside of the pier and then marched onto the long dock building. Someone found out that it was not the right place, so we had to march to the other end. After marching all over the place for an hour or more, we finally marched to the ship. To get on board we had to walk up a narrow steep gangplank with A bag and equipment, which was no easy job. Some of the A bags were worn out from dragging over the rough pier, and all of their contents fell in the water!! Our platoon was to go to B deck aft, so we had to walk the full length of the ship, and then down two decks.

We had quite a shock when we saw where we had to stay. We were crowded in a small space with a low ceiling, and the only light was from a few electric lights of low wattage. There were three or four portholes, but they were painted black so no light could get in or out. It was not long before some of the boys had them open, and we all took a look outside.

The Chantilly was a freight and passenger ship when new. Our part was separated by the cargo hatchway. The space on each side of the hatch to the hold was about twenty feet.

There were long tables with linoleum tops, seating twelve to fourteen men each with benches attached to the tables. There were about ten tables on

each side of the part where we were, and we sat about twelve men at the table.

When I first got on board, I thought we were to sleep in another part of the ship, but I was wrong. We were to sleep in hammocks above the tables. The hammocks were so close together that they would touch. The GI's thought it was great fun when they first put up their hammocks. I found a space in an aisle between the port and starboard sides and put up my hammock, and went to sleep with all my clothes on, as it was cold. Some time during the night our ship moved out of the harbor.

All the hammocks had to be taken down before we could eat. I got down and rolled up my hammock and looked at the breakfast. I took one look and decided I was not hungry. We had to go up to C deck to the galley to get our food. We got the food in dirty tin pans about four inches deep and twelve inches wide and twenty inches long with a bail handle. They were oval in shape. We had three of these pans, a large coffee pot and a tin bucket with a cover. The next thing was 'who should get the food and wash the dishes'. We decided we would take turns, but there were only a few that could even look at the food, let alone eat it, so our troubles were just beginning.

I felt sick the first day out, so I made a bed on the racks where the hammocks were kept along with some barracks bags, and lay there the next two days.

On the second day they called all of us on deck for lifeboat drill, but I was too sick to get up....We were in a large convoy, and at the back end of it. There were ships on all sides and lots in front, but I can't remember if any were in the back of our ship. It was cold on deck, and I did not stay long...

I think the food was picked up in South Africa or India, as the Chantilly was a British ship. The eggs were hard boiled and had a bad smell, like they were rotten. The meat was old mutton and goat. They would cook the meat the day before, then put it in a slicing machine and serve it cold.

... A British officer would look over our life preservers or jackets to see if we had the ties on right. There were only a few good life jackets, and I got hold of one. If I ever put it down, it would be taken by the first person that saw it, so I wore it day and night. Most were two little pillows front and back that had to be tied on real tight, or they would knock a person out if it was necessary to jump in the water. Mine was worn like a coat and much better. It also kept me warm and was flatter, so I could sleep with it on. It took me a long time to find this one.

The poor food and dirty conditions of the galley caused a lot of bitching. The cooks were all Indians from Calcutta, and looked as though they never had a bath in their lives. Their habits were filthy. They would spit on the floor and did not wear shoes. One day when we were getting our ration of food, we saw one of the Indians urinating in the fire box with one hand and stirring with the other. If it were not for the canteen that the ship ran, we would have been walking skeletons when we got to England. We could buy boxes of cookies and candy bars at the price of ten cents for a five cent box. With most of the fellows living off the canteen, the supplies were soon gone. The British canteen man then put out cans of fruit for 30 cents for a size 2 1/5 can. There were peaches, pineapple and apricots, all of poor quality.

One of the American boys could bake bread and was allowed to bake us some



*Lt. Ursel Harvell*

raisin bread. This was the best thing we ate since we came on board. When the British found out we liked the bread, they would not allow him to bake any more, as they said that there were no more raisins. One day when it was my turn to get the food, I brought two loaves of this raisin bread to the table, and both were eaten up before I could sit down. I never got a taste of them.

... *Strohmeyer described in detail, the problems of dealing with undesirable food, quarters that were cold, bathrooms that were overcrowded and British officers who did not understand enlisted men who constantly complained.*

He described the ship, itself: "The whole ship was a pile of rusty iron. There had been a lot of work done on her at New York before she sailed with us. The ship had broken down three times and had to be towed back to New York before we got her. The crew said it broke down many times on her trip from Africa to South America and up to

New York. They said the trip we made on her was the only one that she did not break down.

The crew was made up of British merchant seamen and Hindus from India. Most of the British seamen had been on her for two years, and were anxious to get home and off her. There were also some British sailors that came off an airplane carrier the U.S. wanted back on the lend-lease deal.

With the crew and our bunch, there were a thousand men on board. In addition to our bunch, there were some American sailors going on hospital duty, some American Marines, and about two hundred infantry men. The infantry men were a sad looking lot. They were mostly of Polish decent, and were dressed in their gas impregnated clothing, as they had no others.

One of the most interesting characters on board was a Hindu barber. He was a dirty little fellow, but was an expert shaver. He carried a little coffee pot with water and a small satchel with his equipment. He could shave a man with just about five strokes of his razor. No matter how much the ship rocked, he would go about his work, and I never saw him cut anyone. He had a different razor for every kind of beard.

The Hindu crew caused us a lot of trouble at night. Our men were selected to guard the ship day and night. The night guard was posted to see that no lights would be turned on outside on deck. These little Hindus would use flashlights on deck and light their cigarettes. Our guards were told that in case of a sub attack, these Hindus would rush for the life boats and take off. The guards had orders to shoot any Indian that got in a life boat.

... For about nine days now, we have been going to our stations at the ten

o'clock boat drill when the bell told us to do so. One ring told us to get ready to leave the ship. We posted the guards and had men at all the guns day and night. They told us we were getting into the real danger zone now, and no one was to go on deck at night. Our flashlights had been taken away from us, but were now given back, to be used only if we were attacked and the lighting system failed.

On the evening of March 10th we had the best dinner of the whole trip, and were all happy at my table. The ship did not rock too much, but there was enough rocking to slam the doors that were not hooked.

### **SUBMARINES & TORPEDOES!**

After eating I went to the sergeants wash room and was talking with four of our gang, when I heard a noise like a door slamming in the hospital. I said laughingly, "Fire one"; there were four such noises, and each time I said, Fire one, Fire two, Fire three, and then remarked that we sure could take it. On the third bang, one of the fellows thought it was a torpedo and ran out on deck.

A few days before sailing we saw a movie about subs, and every time they fired a torpedo, the sub captain would say fire one, fire two, etc. When I heard the noise, I was thinking of the Germans firing torpedoes at us, and I said the above in fun. A few seconds later, the bell rang to get ready to leave the ship. This was at 6:45 PM. I looked out the door of the washroom and saw all the fellows putting on their equipment. I went over to my place and got my overcoat, canteen and a little canvas bag. The Red Cross had given one to all of us. It was an escape kit. I put a box of 24 chocolate bars and a box of 24 bags

of Planters Peanuts in mine, in addition to the things the Red Cross had in the bag. The candy bars and peanuts were bought at the PX at Camp Kilmer. I also had two or three packages of cigarettes, playing cards and candy in mine. The reason I had the cards and cigarettes was to keep the fellows happy in the lifeboat, if I was in one. I got my kit and walked out to the well deck.

There was no rushing or pushing. We took our time as if nothing had happened. When I got outside, the well deck and hatch cover was full of men, all standing and trying to see something. We did not stay there long when we were told we could go back inside. We had traveled at full speed and were away from the sub area. Most of us at that time were not sure that it was a sub attack, as the ship that was hit was to our starboard rear and a long way off.

Our officers came down and said there had been nothing wrong, and we were not to talk about subs or what we saw when on deck.

It was not long, however, before the Red Cross Officers who were with us passed out all the cigarettes and candy that was on board.

We were told not to put up our hammocks, as it would be too hard to get out if the subs attacked again. Now we all knew for sure, that our convoy was attacked when the Red Cross passed out the candy and cigarettes.

We kept escape kits and life jackets near and talked. Some of the fellows tried to play cards, but most of them were in no mood for anything but to wait and be quiet. I put the cigarettes in my bag and ate the candy. The candy really tasted good, as I had none for a long time. I did not want to open the box of twenty-four bars, as I had

bought them in the U.S. in case we got sunk, and there would be nothing to eat in the life boat.

We did not have long before the second attack came. This time I could hear the bells plainly. All of us walked out to the well deck, and the hatch cover was full of men. It was not long before we were told to get off the hatch cover, as it would be too dangerous if a torpedo hit below. We crowded between the cargo hatch, and the guard rail. We were not out there very long when the ship began to rock and roll, and the deck under us was at an angle of 45 degrees, with waves breaking over the side. With the wet deck, we lost our footing and slid in a great pile against the guardrail with water pouring over us.

With the next roll of the ship, we all piled up against the cargo hatch and then back again to the rail. A few of the fellows got hold of the cargo hatch and held on, and bracing their feet the best they could by holding onto the ones that had a good grip on the hatch, and putting all our weight against them with our feet braced against the railing, we managed to hold together. The ones closest to the stairs to the deck above made their way there, and the rest of us followed. Some went in the opposite direction, and went to the deck above the forecastle and held on to the anchor lifting machinery.

I made my way to D Deck and found a place by the cargo lifting winch and the orderly room. I did not feel very safe there, as the ship was rocking and listing to such a degree, I was afraid the orderly room, which was a wooden structure added for war use only, would tear loose and fall on me.

Crowded around me were five or six British sailors who were on their way home to England after leaving a lease

lend aircraft carrier in New York.

I did not have a dry piece of clothing on me after the wetting I got, rolling around the well deck with wave pouring over me. I was now noticing the cold, as there was a wind blowing.

Between the cabin and the orderly room were a number of life rafts crashing around, and the ship's crew was trying to lash them down.

I was getting so cold that I decided to make my way to the cabin on D deck and try to get warm. I made my way around the life rafts and to the narrow deck alongside the cabin. I got hold of the rail next to the cabin and worked my way to the first door and went inside.

There were men on the floor and in all the aisles between the state rooms. I picked myself a place in the aisle on the port side and laid down and went to sleep. It was about twelve o'clock.

### ANOTHER RAID

It seemed I was not sleeping long when I was awakened by a loud explosion and the ringing of bells. I thought for sure we got hit this time, as I heard an order to hurry and get ready to abandon ship. I groped my way down the narrow aisle to the door leading to the outside, in the middle of a bunch of human cargo. To get outside I had to go through a curtain and double doors that kept the light from showing outside.

It was not an easy job going through the light lock, as it was pitch dark outside, and there was very little room between the inner and outer door. But I was squeezed outside with the rest of the crowd. I thought our ship had been hit, and was settling down as in my excitement, I thought I was on a deck higher. The ship was rocking from side

to side, and the rail was almost touching the water. I thought the ship was about to roll over. I was thinking that all the heavy armament around the captain's cabin, the gun emplacements and other places had changed the center of gravity and made the ship top heavy. I was more scared of the ship rolling over than sinking by torpedo. I was too scared to think of two things at once!

I remember being really scared, my knees knocking against each other and shivering with cold. I was still wet from the second attack when the waves came over the ship. There was an infantry man standing next to me, and I said to him, that I was shaking from being scared or from the cold. I could hear my knees knocking. He had some blankets, and he put one over my shoulders and legs. It was a hard job, as the wind was blowing and the ship was rocking. I warmed up with the blankets over me, and my knees stopped knocking.

We were not hit, but the ship that was hit was an ammunition ship on the starboard side. It was two a.m., and there was quite a bit of light from the moon.

I was not on deck long before all hell broke loose, and ships were being hit on all sides. A large oil tanker was hit on the starboard side, and it lit up the whole area as light as day. The light endangered the whole convoy, so a corvette or destroyer shelled it to make it explode and sink. It blew up in a column of flame that seemed a mile high. By this time there were ships being hit on all sides, and it seemed as if we were to be next on the list.

I kept moving from port to starboard sides to get the best view, but after the tanker blew up, I made my way back to the first doorway on the port side forward. I was still wet and getting colder. The ship was rocking and turning, and I

was afraid it would capsize at any minute. The ship listed to over 43 degrees, and it seemed as if I could touch the water from D Deck.

I got in the doorway and held onto the rail with my right hand and spread my feet apart for bracing and trying to stand erect. I stayed in the doorway for a long time, but I was not getting any warmer, so I slipped inside and went down to the sergeants wash room on C Deck. I got a hammock and put it on the floor with blankets, and laid down on them. I used one to cover me. I did not wake up until five or six thirty the next morning. I think someone woke me up and told me to get on deck, as the subs strike at that time. There were no more sub attacks, however.

### A BIG MESS

When I looked around C deck, it was a mass of wreckage from the ship moving around during the storm. There were dishes, gas masks, lodging and steel helmets on the floor. Everything that had been placed in the racks in the ceiling had fallen to the floor. We had to clean it all up before we could eat breakfast.

The Chantilly lost one lifeboat during the attack, so the Germans thought the ship had sunk. They announced on the radio, that they had sunk the Chantilly with 1000 men on board! As it happened, the captain reported that the ship was missed by only ten yards by a torpedo. The Captain, a veteran of the first World War, saw it coming and swung the ship so the torpedo missed us and hit a tanker next to us.

One of the crew said he had been to sea for four years; and never saw a trip like this one. He said the ship listed to a

42 degree angle, and if we would have hit 45 degrees, we would have capsized.

After the first torpedo that hit near by, the Indians in the boiler room wanted to quit and come up and out of the boiler room, but one of the ship's officers sat in the gangway with a 45 pistol. He told them that the first one to come up would be shot.

*Strohmaier's saga describes an ongoing fear of submarine attacks, sleeping on deck covered with a hammock to keep dry, and enduring the pervasive cold as the voyage continued.*

On March 15th we came to the Firth of Clyde and saw land at close range for the first time. We got up real early that morning, and all were eager to set foot on dry land again. It took us all morning to get our equipment together and to load our B Bags on the barge that came alongside of the ship. We carried our A bags and rifle as well as our packs on to a ferry boat that took us to the train.

... We arrived at Thuxton station at four a.m. in a dense fog. We got off the train and lined up along the cars, and then marched to trucks that were waiting for us. The truck that I got in had a hard time finding the site in the fog, so we did not get there until 5:30. We were shown to our barracks, and by the time we got there, it was 6:00 a.m. The mess hall opened at six a.m., so all of us made a dash for it, as we were all very hungry. We had our first good meal since we left the states on February 27th...

Strohmaier went first to the 44th BG, then to the 492, then to the 1st SAD station 595, where he repaired cameras.



## MAIL & E-MAIL

To **Will Lundy** from **Keith H. Nutter**, Gunner, 67th Squadron. "In your previous letter you mentioned Lt. **James R. Perry** missing the Berlin mission on March 6, 1944 because of a sick gunner. I flew that mission as a replacement, and was awarded a DFC for clearing the bomb bay of some 500 pounders that got wedged together in the bomb bay. The Radio Operator on that mission I believe was **Ray**

**Scott** of Kansas City, Missouri.

I flew one other mission with Ray in February to Tours, France. Lt. Perry was pilot and Lt. **Robert Weatherwax** was Navigator. We were hit by a 20 mm, which wounded Weatherwax and the Co-Pilot, **Richard Gasperoni**. We had an emergency landing at a Spitfire base at East Walling, Kent. We were flying on three engines, and one wind

milled. On this mission I was never credited as having flown, although it put us in the rest home for a week. I finished with 31 missions on May 28, 1944. Flying with my own crew was uneventful, no excitement, just routine.

(In the mission to Berlin, Nutter was flying in *D-Barfly*; in the mission to Tours, France, he was flying in *Raggedy Ann II*.)

To **Ruth Morse** from **Elizabeth & William Mills, Southampton, UK:**

*The courage of those brave young men never ceases to amaze us, and we owe so much to them all.*



In answer to the question of who was Crew Chief on Puritanical Witch/Puritanical Bitch, the answer came by e-mail. It was Alan F. Oberlin. Previous to that assignment, he was working in the Control Tower.



From David Webster, Historian & Traveling Exhibitor of Historical Memorabilia: "On page three of the Spring issue, you

asked the weight of the bomb the men were carrying in the photo. That bomb is a practice bomb and would have been made of metal, but hollow inside. They do not weigh very much – maybe 20 pounds. When used, they would fill them with sand to get the correct weight of a real bomb. These practice bombs were very popular to make signs for different shops and areas of the base. The bomb in the photo might be just that, as it has some writing on it. I can't read it, so I can't tell if it's identifying something, or if it's a message, which was sometimes written on the bombs. Being a practice bomb, I would think the first."

### **Apology from the Editor:**

*The gentleman who first sent me the pictures of Puritanical W & B, called & named the armorer kneeling on page 3. I lost your note. Call me again. Thanks.*





From **Vern Brenn** to **Will Lundy** (In response to request for information about a crash landing on 16 March 1944) Brenn was the Tail Gunner.

"I just want to say that the memory of that day has been a very painful one for me. I sort of think that I've intentionally tried to forget it and block it out. I've always carried a sense of guilt about being one of the three who lived through it. All of the other seven were far more deserving to live than me.

We were a new crew in the 67th Squadron. Lt. **John Scarborough** and I had flown our first mission as spares on another crew. Lt. Scarborough flew that first mission as a Co-pilot, and I flew on the same crew as a Ball Gunner. That mission was to Berlin.

"The plane we were flying the day we crashed, trying to make it home, was **The Shark**. I'll bet you will remember this plane with the Shark's face and teeth. It had a lot of missions to its credit.

"The day we went down was mission number three for Lt. Scarborough and me. We had gone to Fredrickshafen, Germany, near the Swiss border. If I remember correctly, the target was a ball bearing factory. Flak was heavy; and on our way to the target, we had to feather one engine due to oil pressure. We were still able to stay in formation and did complete the bomb run.

"On our way back to our home base, we lost another engine. We could no longer keep up with our group, and the P-38 fighters took turns escorting us back to the English Channel.

"By this time our fuel supply was about gone. I remember the pilot asking all of us on the crew, if we wanted to ditch in the Channel or try to make it to the English shore. We all said 'Go for the English shore'.

"Somewhere over the Channel we lost another engine, and started losing altitude real fast. The crew in front of the plane spotted a farmer's field, and we headed for it. At this time we were only about five hundred feet above the ground. The pilot and co-pilot were struggling to keep the plane in a position to crash, when I heard the last engine cough and die.

"I seem to remember a large bump and very loud crashing noises, then it must have knocked me out. When I came to and realized I was still alive, I tried to get out and run. **Jerry (Silverman)** and **Charlie (Landells)** carried me to a grassy place away from the wreckage, and went back to check on the rest of the crew. All were dead except **Bob Stickel**, and he was hurt so badly that I do not think they moved him. Some English farmers were the first to arrive on the scene. They called an English hospital for an ambulance, and they took Bob, Jerry, Charlie and me to the hospital. We were several days until they transferred all of us except Bob to an American Hospital in Southampton.

"We were told that Bob was too badly hurt to try to move him. A short time later, we heard he had died. All of this seemed so tragic, because Bob was a crew member on one of the planes that survived the Ploesti raid.

Ed. Note; Robert Stickel, Waist Gunner, flew no more missions after the crash; Charles Landells flew 3 more; Vern Brenn flew three more – one of which was the low level mission to Wesel, Germany. Will Lundy had a special interest in **THE SHARK**, having once served as Crew Chief on the plane.)



From **Tommy Shepherd**, a copy of a clandestine publication: **POW WOW**, issued in Stalag Luft1, Barth Germany, a POW camp.

*"... Germany accepted Unconditional Surrender last night, and although the official Allied announcements were delayed until today, The United Nations went wild with joy. Truman and Churchill will broadcast this afternoon, and the King of England will speak this evening. In a congratulatory message to Eisenhower, the King said, "Many months ago you led the Allied Expeditionary Force across the English Channel, carrying with you, the hopes and prayers of many peoples. All the world now knows that this force has accomplished its mission with a finality never achieved before..."*

*"The race to surrender began with the mysterious death of Adolph Hitler and the fall of Berlin.*

*...Admiral Donitz became ersatz Fuhrer. He established Headquarters in Copenhagen because Germany was no longer in German hands... The momentous news which thrilled the outside world was taken in stride by Stalag Luft I, for Naziism's death throes were almost anti-climatic to the frenzied excitement of liberation by our Russian Brothers-in-Arms. Crowds were dancing in the streets of London and Paris, and America was mad with excitement, but life picked up its pulse - best for us again on April 30th when our seedy, disillusioned Volksturm guards fled for their lives toward the Allied lines...*

.....  
**GEORGE W. FRAGA: THE MECHANIC THAT BECAME A RADIO OPERATOR BY DEFAULT!**

"When one of the men that had trained at the factory on B-24's flew into our base at West Palm Beach to give their ship a thorough check up before leaving the country for India, the Tail Gunner got a pretty good idea of what he was getting into, so disappeared "over the hill".

"I was on duty at the hanger, servicing departing aircraft, so as soon as I learned that there was a vacancy on that ship, I asked to join their crew in the Tail Gunner's position.

"Since I had been a mechanic (steam and diesel) before entering service, he forwarded my request to the pilot. He checked up on me, paper work was put through, and I was accepted on the crew. I had enlisted in Maine, and was sent to West Palm Beach to be sworn in. As that base was still being built, I had no desire to put in my time in service doing yard work, planting trees and

shrubs. So getting on that crew was a Godsend.

"We were the first crew to reach India...assigned permanently to the 7th BG...Served in many way, such as hauling gas over the 'hump in' bomb bay tanks...going on several missions from the base at Cheng Tu...served a full tour under General Conrad Necrasson...returned to the ZOI to be reassigned.

I was then sent to Savannah, GA, and reassigned to a new crew, headed for the 8th AF, and was stationed at Shipdham.

***T/Sgt. Kelly(68th Sq.) flew 31 missions from 6 August to 11 December 1944 with the William Kelly crew. They went to Kiel, Hamburg, Kassel, Koblenz, Cologne and many more in the post-D-Day operations. He reported to Will Lundy that it was very interesting, but there was nothing heroic! Imagine that!***



## **TAIL GUNNER FORREST S. CLARK REMEMBERS FLYING INTO GREENLAND, ENROUTE TO SHIPDHAM WITH THE ROCKFORD GRIFFITH CREW**

It had been bad weather much of the way from Goose Bay, and we had to pinpoint our approach and landing to the BW1 runway that was backed by a glacier. There was thick fog, and it had been snowing as we approached. For what seemed like a very long time, we searched for the correct opening to find the airfield.

We had been briefed about the extreme hazards of flying on approach to BW1, but no briefing could have prepared us for what we saw – or did not see – as we groped in the Greenland fog for the runway.

**Abe Sofferman** (Radio Operator) and I had reeled out the training wire antenna to tune in to the Greenland frequency, and Abe was taking it easy in the rear while I was up front in the small radio compartment, and had earphones on listening to the ground station at BW1. Suddenly there was a tap on my shoulder, and **William Weatherwax** (Co-Pilot) said, "We're coming in." Immediately I glanced through the small window and saw towering icy cliffs all around us. I flicked the reel-in switch to

retrieve the trailing wire, but it was too late, and the next thing I felt was the bump as we hit the runway. The trailing wire snapped off, sending the metal fish flying. All at once I had a shock, as the antenna wire hit the pavement of the runway. I pulled off my hand and reported, "We just lost the antenna."

When we taxied in to our assigned space, Griffith and Weatherwax said nothing, but someone on the ground must have reported it, because an officer came over and asked who was responsible for the accident – having the trailing wire out. I had to admit it was I. Then I caught hell from the ground crew

The next day **Harold Hammon (LWG)** gave me a firm lecture about teamwork. Then we all tried to climb the glacier, along with **Jim McMahon** of the crew following us. So much for BW1, a cold place in nowhere. The Eskimos were off limits, although there was a native village near the base. All I could think of 'what was I doing in this God-forsaken place in the middle of snow and winter coming?



## FOLDED WINGS

*There is no death! The stars go down to rise upon some other shore,  
And bright in heaven's jeweled crown they shine forevermore.*

**Del Grande, Leon #19975** 68th Squadron 2 May 2010 Lt. Del Grande was a Co-Pilot on five different crews. He flew in four different A/C, the first of eighteen missions on 20 April 1944. Like many missions at that time, striking Marshalling Yards and Airfields, most of Del Grande's raids were on oil refineries, which created a major problem for Germans, who could afford only limited training for the young flyers of Messerschmidts, as well as drivers of tanks and other vehicles. Del Grande flew with **Forest Havens, Joseph W. Parks, Jr., Jack Liebrich, Elmer Kohler and Joseph Parks**. He also flew with three different Command Pilots: **J. L. Henderson, H. Sather and Addison Davis**. The planes in which he flew were: **Pappy's Chillun, Hellza Droppin, Corky and Gipsy Queen**.

On 21 April 1944, flying in **Pappy's Chillun**, on a mission to Zwickau, Germany, which was recalled because of severe icy conditions, the planes in the formation encountered severe icy conditions. When the plane reached 14,000 feet, it lurched violently and started swerving to the right. The pilots had no control over the ship as it swerved back to the left, and then started to spin tightly toward the ground. The plane then turned onto its back, and the right wing and tail were torn off by the violent maneuvers. The pilot and co-pilot were thrown into the top of the cockpit, and when the cabin ripped apart, they were thrown clear of the wreckage. The pilot, Havens, was seriously injured, and was transferred to the 70 RCD for transfer back to the States. **Will Lundy's** account of the events as-

sumed that Del Grande, whose injuries were less serious, was transferred to the 93rd BG, and completed his tour with them. All other members of the crew were KIA.

Fifty seven years later, the owner of the property where the plane went down conducted a ceremony to honor the eight airmen who died there. A memorial was dedicated at that site, with family members of the eight lost members of the crew invited to attend.

*(Del Grande received no credit for this mission because it had been recalled. He was left with a lot of pain from the crash and a memory of flying out of Pappy's Chillun. The original name of this plane was Turnip Termite, and had originally been assigned to the 486th Bomb Group. It was transferred to Shipdham before the artist could paint the name.)*

**Hamlyn, Raymond #20523** 68th Squadron 14 April 2011 Lt. Hamlyn was a Co-pilot for a number of his missions; the first of 25 was 12 July 1943 to Reggio Di Calabria, as part of the group who flew to Africa. Most of his missions were with the **W. D. Hughes** crew, but one mission with the crew of **Robert Lehnhausen**. As a Co-Pilot, he flew in **Avenger, Margaret Ann II/ Satan's Hell Cats, and Pistol Packin' Mama**.

On 24 December 1943 he moved to the Pilot's seat and flew in **Victory Ship, Queen Marlene, Heaven Can Wait II, Northern Lass, Pizz and Moan/ Tootie Belle, D-Barfly, Full House and V for Victory**. His last mission was 12 April 1944.



## FOLDED WINGS

After the War, Hamlyn was engaged in Journalism for several years; then in 1947 he returned to active duty and stayed for 27 years. His rank on discharge was Colonel. His last venture was in the field of Real Estate.

Hamlyn and his late wife Dorothy had two children, a son and daughter. At the time of his death, he was living in Reno, Nevada. Information of his passing came from his son Tom.

**Nablo, Paul David #21474** 66th Squadron 3 May 2011 T/Sgt. Nablo was a Radio Operator/Gunner on the **Harold Etheridge** crew. He flew six missions, the first on 30 January 1944. On one mission he flew with the **Walter Milliner** crew, serving in the position of Belly Gunner. Nablo flew in **Myrtle the Fertile Turtle** and **Ice Cold Kady**, plus other unnamed A/C.

On 24 February 1944, the Etheridge crew flew to Gotha, France – the target, an A/C Assembly Plant. They were attacked by anti-aircraft before the target, knocking out number 2 & 4 engines, and damaging the bomb bay so that the bombs could not be released. After the target, they were beset by German fighters. The plane was rapidly losing altitude, so Etheridge gave the order to Bail Out. The Navigator was KIA. All others became POW.

**Overhultz, William #21575** 68th Squadron 20 March 2011 Lt. Overhultz was a Co-Pilot on the **Harry Garbade** crew. He flew 20 missions, the first on 29 November, 1944. This crew flew many times as Lead Plane or Deputy Lead. He flew two missions as Co-Pilot with the **Jack Liebrich** crew. On one occasion he flew with **David Hurley**, Command Pilot.

Overhultz flew in **T S Tessie/Beck's Bad Boy, Lili Marlene, Corky, I'll Get By, Lady Geraldine**, and many unnamed planes. (The war was moving so rapidly at that time, there was no time to paint pictures on the planes. His last mission was 18 April 1945.

He received his belated award DFC/OLC for the Lead Plane assignments in 2005, pinned by Brig. Gen. Collier, Commander of the North Carolina National Guard.

After the war, Overhultz attended the University of Kentucky where he received a BS degree in Commerce. He became an agent for the Kentucky Department of Revenue. In 1951 he was recalled to active duty, and assigned to Communications Officer, later to the Missile Test Center at Cape Canaveral, Florida

News of his passing came to **Lee Aston** from Overhultz's daughter, Judy. His last address was in Charlotte, North Carolina.

**Parrish, Milton #21603** 506 Squadron 3 April 2011 Lt. Parrish was a Co-Pilot on many crews, his first mission was 6 November 1944 with the **Robert Schaper** crew. He also flew with **Harold Koven; Louis Confer; Clyde Horsley; Ray Ciesielski; George Brown, Jr.; Ellsworth Zitzman; James Whittle, Jr. and Eugene Cunningham**. On 23 March 1945 he moved to the pilot's seat and flew his last eight missions with his own crew. His last mission was to Hallein, Austria on 25 April 1944, the last mission that the 44th flew in WWII.

With his many crews, he flew in many different A/C: **Big Time Operator, Jail Bait, King Pin, Sabrina III, Down De Hatch, Clean Sweep/Dragon Nose, Joplin Jalopy, Myrtle the Fertile Turtle and Southern Comfort III**.



## FOLDED WINGS

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Parrish enlisted in the Army and became an Air Cadet. Upon completion of his training, he became a flight instructor, serving in various bases in the USA. In the fall of 1944 he was sent to Shipdham where he completed eighteen missions until the end of the war.

After completing his military service, he moved to Bogata, Columbia where he worked as a pilot for a passenger airline. Later, in different countries in South America, he flew for the Shell Oil Company and Colombian Petroleum Company. He returned to the States and bought a farm, but continued to have an interest in flying. He bought a second farm in Florida and set up a crop dusting enterprise. In addition, he was actively engaged in raising crops, cattle, hogs and sheep on his two farms.

Parrish and his late wife Mary Winifred (Batton) had two children, three grandchildren and four great-grandchildren. His last address was in a self-built house at Lake Rachel in Florida. News of his passing came to Roger Fenton from Parrish's son Michael Parrish.

It is noteworthy that Parrish flew his last eight missions in a beloved plane, *Joplin Jalopy*, and later flew it back to the ZOI. The plane's history has been followed by Rob Smith, a *Joplin Jalopy* blogger.

**Whitby, Ray Leo "Wiff" #22537**  
506 Squadron 14 August 2010 S/Sgt. Whitby was a Radio Operator/Gunner on the Dale Lee crew. Whitby's first and only flight was to Foggia 16 August 1943. Coincidentally, the Left Wing Gunner was also named **Dale Lee**. Flying in *Southern Comfort*, the plane was attacked by enemy fighters. Three engines were not operating when the 'Bail Out' signal was sounded. Two members

of the crew were KIA; one escaped and evaded, Five became POW, but escaped and returned.

*Timba-a-ah*, flown by **Charles A. Whitlock**, (506 Sq.) was also lost on that mission. *Baldy and His Brood* (506 Sq.) was attacked, but was able to make it to Malta.

**DiSalvio, Robert L. #20015** 66th Squadron 19 May 2010 T/Sgt. DiSalvio was the Engineer/Top Turret Gunner on the **Richard W. Bridges** crew. He flew eight missions, all on *Fascinatin' Witch*. On one mission he flew with **James Kahl** as Command Pilot.

The crew's eighth mission was to Wiener-Neustadt, October 1, 1943. The pilot reported later that he was suffering a sudden and severe loss of power on the two onboard engines. He was separated from the formation, but continued to the target at a lower altitude. Shortly after 'Bombs Away', the plane was attacked by four Me 109's, which knocked out the two inboard engines and started a fire in the bomb bay.

The crew was able to bail out. 3 members of the crew were KIA; 6 became POW; the pilot became POW, was able to escape, and returned to Shipdham. Among the POW's was DiSalvio, who with other enlisted men, sat out the rest of the war at Stalag 17 in Krems, Austria.

After the War, DiSalvio became a chemist for Eastman Kodak. He and his late wife Marjorie had two daughters, Lauren and Barbara. In later years he lived with his daughter, Lauen Francatti and her husband Paul. His Last address was at Victor, New York.

Information of DiSalvio's death came from Donald Bridges, son of T/Sgt. Donald Bridges. Radio Operator on the Richard Bridges crew.



## FOLDED WINGS

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**Wells, Vernon (a/k/a Bud) #22875**  
68th Squadron 8 June 2011 S/Sgt.  
Wells was a gunner with twelve crews and in fifteen different A/C. He filled every gunner position – Left & Right Waist, Tail and Belly. The database lists him as a Radio Operator on one mission. His first of 32 missions was on 3 September 1943.

Wells flew with the crews of **W. D. Hughes, Arthur Marcoullier, Arthur Anderson, George P. Martin, Raymond Hamlyn, Harold Slaughter, Homer Gentry, Robert Lee, Charles Kuch, Ben Gildart, Myron Sesit**, and with **Robert Lehnhausen**, first as pilot, later as Command Pilot. Other Command Pilots were William Cameron and John Gibson.

He flew in *Margaret Ann II/Satan's Hell Cat, Avenger, Pistol Packin' Mama, Heaven Can Wait II, Victory Ship, Queen Marlene, Flak Alley, Paper Doll/Lady Dot, The Exterminator, Flak Alley II, T. S. Tessie/Beck's Bad Boys, Wendy W, Any Gum Chum, Full House* and *Lone Ranger*.

According to **Robert Lehnhausen**, Wells had a longtime friendship with another of his former pilots, **Ray Hamlyn**, whose obituary is also in this issue. Until ill health prevented traveling, Wells and his wife Doris were regular attendees to the 44th BG Reunions.

**Zielenkiewicz, Adolph (a/k/a Alex) #23785** 5 May 2011 66th Squadron Lt. Zielenkiewicz (called 'Zink' by his fellow crewmen) was a Bombardier on four different crews in 15 missions, **Richard Harleman, Kent F. Miller**, but most with **Donald Heskett**.

According to the Database, he flew in **Holiday Mess II, Bull o' the Woods,**

**and Scourge of the Skies.**

On 30 December 1945, when flying with the Heskett crew in **Bull o' the Woods** on a mission to Ludwigshafen, the plane was attacked by fighters, and went down. Zielenkiewicz and seven other members of the crew were able to evade and return to Shipdham. Two were KIA.

Zielenkiewicz was born in Chicago, IL, the son of Polish immigrants. He grew up in a house where Polish was the spoken language. This became a great advantage when he bailed out and landed near a Nazi antiaircraft battery in France, near the German border. He was able to make contact with the Polish Underground, then the French Underground. With the aid of the Polish, French and Basque Undergrounds, he and 12 other men escaped to freedom by way of Paris, Pyrenees Mountains, Andorra, Barcelona, Madrid, Casablanca & London.

After the War, he chose to make the USAF his career. He became a Navigator, flying aboard B-52s before retiring after 21 years of service, having attained the rank of Lt. Colonel. After retiring from the Air Force, he pursued his lifelong interest in photography. He established a second career as a professional photographer. He completed specialized training at Brooks Institute of Photography in Montecito, California, after which he moved his family to Eugene Oregon. There he operated a photographic studio for a number of years, specializing in weddings and portraits.

He is survived by his wife of 35 years, Thelma, three children, several grandchildren and two great grandchildren.

**44th Bomb Group  
Veterans Association**

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*General Henry H. Arnold's  
Final report on the war  
in Europe included these  
figures of American Aircraft  
during the campaign:*

<i>Total sorties flown.....</i>	<i>1,700,000</i>
<i>Total Tonnage of Bombs Dropped .....</i>	<i>1,500,000</i>
<i>Enemy Aircraft Destroyed.....</i>	<i>32,921</i>
<i>AAF Aircraft Lost.....</i>	<i>18,418</i>
<i>Casualties in the AAF, including Killed, Wounded and Prisoners.....</i>	<i>91,000</i>

**LOOK BACKWARD FOR A  
MOMENT TO THESE YOUNG MEN  
THEY LOOK LIKE GOING  
TO WAR IS FUN**



Arrival of 506 Squadron



66th Squadron Party

**IF YOU RECOGNIZE YOURSELF  
IN A PICTURE, POINT IT  
OUT IN SAVANNAH**