

# 44th Bomb Group Veterans Association



# WQ

8 BALL TAILS

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Journal of the  
44th Bomb Group  
Veterans Association

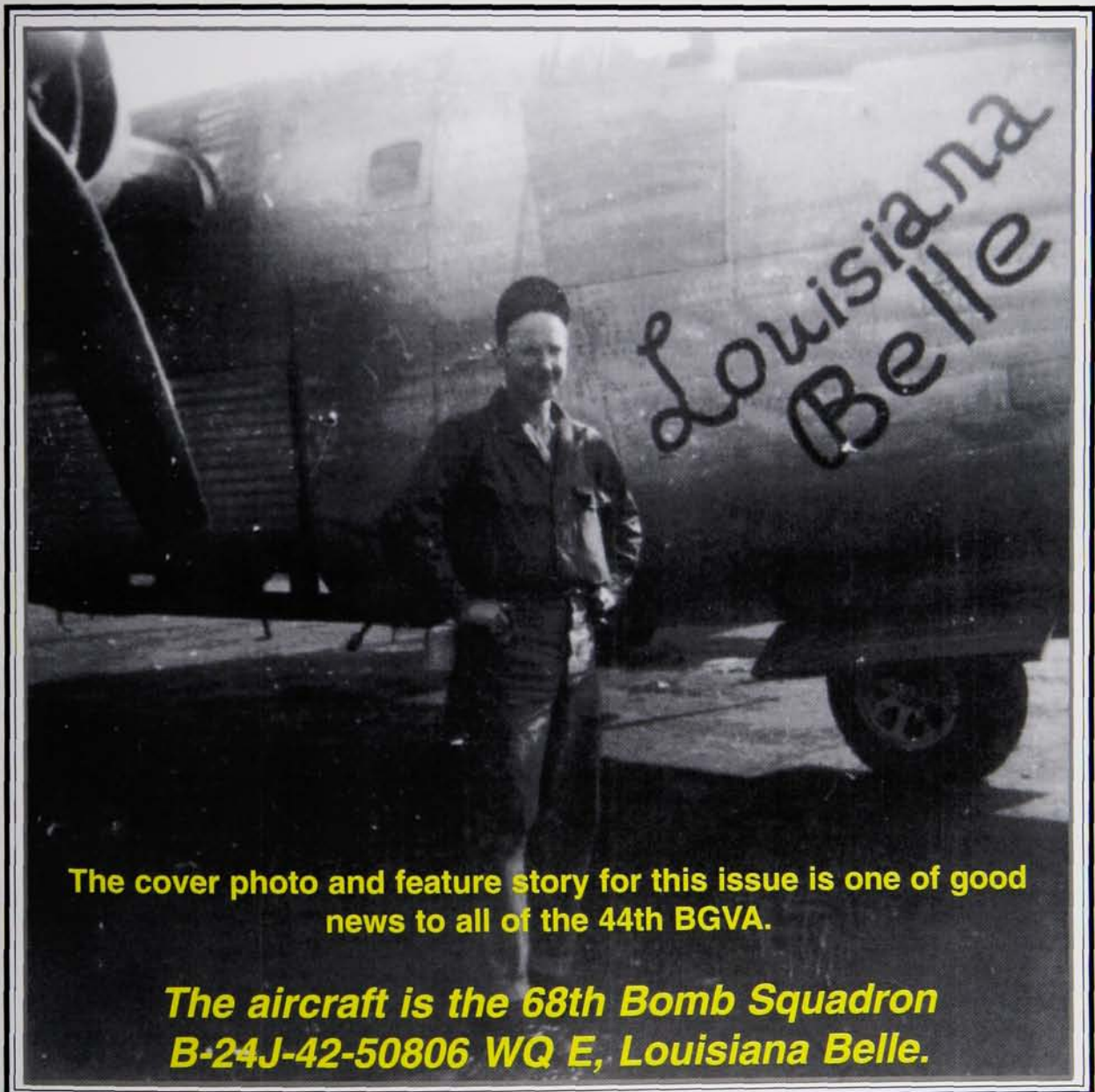
Spring, 2001

Non Profit Veterans Organization

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## LOUISIANA BELLE

Sgt. Romie C. Vaughn, Assistant Crew Chief, *Louisiana Belle*.



The cover photo and feature story for this issue is one of good news to all of the 44th BGVA.

The aircraft is the 68th Bomb Squadron  
B-24J-42-50806 WQ E, Louisiana Belle.

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# LOUISIANA BELLE

By Roy Owen

In preceding issues we have described our negotiations with the 8th Air Force Museum to change the 466th Bomb Group B-24J *Laden Maiden* identifying markings to that of a 44th BG aircraft. The name of the aircraft, so appropriately chosen was our *Louisiana Belle*; the rationale being, the 466th was never stationed at Barksdale, while the 44th, after being activated at MacDill Field, Florida on 15 January 1941, was the first B-24 Bomb Group assigned to Barksdale on 7 February 1941. The 44th remained at Barksdale until 26 July 1942 during which time it trained the 90th, 93rd and 98th Bomb Groups before it 'graduated' to combat-ready and left for England to join the 8th Air Force.

The change of markings was totally supported by the 8th Air Force museum staff, the civic leaders of Shreveport and Bossier City and their Chambers of Commerce. It was approved by the Commander of the 8th AF and forwarded to HQ USAF for final approval, which it recently gave. Thus, the *Louisiana Belle* will bring to Barksdale and the 8th AF Museum all the glorious heritage of one of the most illustrious combat histories in the annals of air combat, 'The Flying 8 Balls.'

The answer to the question of who named the 44th BG "The Flying Eightballs," was found in Will Todd's book, *History of the 68th Bomb Squadron*. The story goes that the 44th picked up the name at Will Rogers Field. Col. Frank W. Robison, the CO was talking with Captain Goodman C. Griffin regarding the upcoming shipment to an overseas base. Robinson said he could not understand how this Air Force could even think that he could go into combat with this group of misfits, ninety day wonders and odd balls. He has never seen such a bunch of eightballs in his entire military career.

By the time the combat crews landed at Shipdham a few weeks



FRANCIS M Wood

later with twenty seven new B24-D Liberators, the paint was on hand and the artist was assigned his most important assignment to date, "Put the insignia on each of our planes."

The echoing cry from the 44th was, "The FLYING EIGHTBALLS of the 44th Bomb Group were ready to give the Jerries a go."

Now about the airplane: B-24J 42-50806-SH came off the Ford Willow Run plant assembly line in September, 1944 in the serial group 42-50760 to 42-51076. These were the first to be equipped with H2X AN/APS-15 which operated on X band for radar bombing. H2X was the American development of the British H2S, known as 'Mickey' APS-15A. Thus what was to be 42-50806 EA WQ when she reached Shipdham and the 68th Bomb Squadron of the 44th was, it could be said, born to lead!

WOOD AND DELLA ON THEIR wedding day, MARCH 18, 1944 in FINSBURY PARK, N. LONDON.

Still happily MARRIED, WOODY AND DEL RESIDE IN NATCHEZ, MS.



When she arrived at Shipdham, she was assigned to veteran Crew Chief M/Sgt.

**Francis M. 'Woody' Wood** and his assistant, '**Romie' Vaughn** on September 26, 1944. We rightfully associate the word veteran with M/Sgt. Wood, since in his total of 33 months overseas he crewed four different B-24s before getting 806 E, and had been awarded the Bronze Star by Col. Leon Johnson for his launch of 96 missions without a mechanical abort. He remained with 806 E until war's end, and flew home aboard her. His most precious acquisition during his tour in England was his lovely British-born wife Della.



When 806 arrived at AF 115, she was unnamed and with no regular combat crew assigned. Wood took advantage of this opportunity to name 'his' plane. He was proud to title her after his birthplace, a 2,000 acre pre-Civil War plantation named Belle, located on the banks of the Tensas Northeast River in Louisiana. The newly named *Louisiana Belle* flew 57 combat missions, sustaining only one abort after losing an engine well before target, forcing the crew to return. She flew 52 of her missions as lead aircraft. Among the targets she struck were tough, heavily defended sites, such as the Kiel Sub-Pens, Dortmund, Magdeburg, Berlin (twice) and Bottrop, where over the target she took an 88 mm burst directly under the plane. Her determined crew pressed on to the target, and she returned with over 200 flak holes to patch and two fuel cell changes in the left wing for Wood and his crew to repair. *Louisiana Belle* flew as lead aircraft for all three Bomb Groups in the 14th Combat Wing. Being a lead aircraft, Wood and his ground crew were required, if possible, to have her combat ready every day. Her record shows several stretches of three and four back-to-back missions.

ON THE RAMP AT Willow Run ARE THE displayed B-24s. SECOND IN LINE IS 806 E *LOUISIANA BELLE*



In late May, 1945 *Louisiana Belle* departed Shipdham for the U.S. Ironically she was flown by 1st Lt. **Russell G. Erickson** and his crew of

nine, plus ten passengers; the same crew who had flown her over in September '44. After arrival back in the U.S., *Louisiana Belle* had

*LOUISIANA BELLE*  
CALL LETTER "E"




one more duty to perform: the Ford Willow Run plant, in a gesture of thanks to their work force, had a family day and arranged to have several of the Ford built aircraft on display.

Four of these aircraft were from the 44th.

The refurbished and re-painted B-24 we will see and dedicate during the Reunion in October is the result of the hard work and determination of Mr. 'Buck' Rigg and his assistant, C/M Sgt. Grillo, working with the Air Force side; and our overall Project Officer, **Clem Haulman**. Clem orchestrated all the various efforts, working with **Dick Butler**, who, after acquiring the drawings of the B-24-J engine cowlings and other parts of the airplane which were in need of repair, herded through re-manufacture and shipment to Barksdale. On arrival, Mr. Rigg arranged for volunteer active duty Air Force personnel to make the repairs and do the re-painting. Certainly, not the least of the contributions necessary to the success of this project was done by **Mike Yuspeh**. By virtue of his own community service contributions in the region, Mike has been able to solicit funding through a number of sources: the city governments and Chambers of Commerce of Shreveport and Bossier City, the Louisiana state government, and our hotel, the Isle of Capri Hotel. Through Mike's efforts and contacts, the entire *Louisiana Belle* was made possible.

Every member of the 44th BGVA can stand proud of the placement of the *Louisiana Belle* at Barksdale AFB. She will not only serve as a commemorative of the glorious combat record established by the 44th Bomb Group as a WWII part of the Mighty 8th Air Force, but will also embody the history of our service to the mission of this historic base in its wartime role.



## From the Desk of our President

Even though we celebrated it last year, the new millennium more accurately began THIS YEAR on January 1. It is my fondest wish that each and every one of you, and your loved ones, are blessed with a healthy, prosperous, and joyful year in this new millennium.

And, as is our custom, all new years are ushered in with toasts and resolutions. My toast therefore, though belated, is "May the hinges of friendship never rust and may the wings of love never lose a feather. May your right hand always be stretched out in friendship; but, never in want." My resolution is to increase my donations to our MASTER DATA BASE FUND (MDBF) throughout this year simply by adopting the age-old theorem of "CHARITY BEGINS AT HOME" We are all literally deluged weekly, if not daily, by mail, phone, TV, e-mail, etc. for donations to hundreds of charitable, medical, organizational, educational, political, international and myriad of other worthy causes that are too numerous to mention. We all have our favorite charities, and rightly have supported them over the many years of our lives because we are a caring generous and giving generation - truly the greatest. But, NOW, TO-DAY we have a need to support a noble and worthy cause in the MDBF, conceived and designed to preserve for posterity the illustrious history of the 44th BG and the heroic contributions and sacrifices of the men and women, many of whom made the SUPREME SACRIFICE for the causes of freedom and liberty.

To date, the archival information (344 Missions and the 8085 sorties including the names of the aircrews and the aircraft they flew) is already entered into the computer system. Currently, we are in the process of inserting the personal biographies of our air, ground and support personnel, as well as much of the information Will Lundy has assembled. But, the more difficult and costly phase of the MDB is to search, locate and contact the wives,

children, relatives, friends, neighbors and/or public record centers to solicit information on our deceased colleagues so that their gallant service and sacrifices may be included in the computerized data base. This phase of the MDB Project will require much time, hard work, many volunteers and the assistance of professional researchers and/or historians, public officials, governmental agencies, veterans organizations and other record-keeping institutions. And, it is this Phase that will require the expenditure of funds that are not available from our operating budget.

Last year your Board and I embarked on the MDB FUND DRIVE Through your kind and generous response to my letter of January 31, 2000, we raised \$16,000.00 with donations still coming in, but slowing. We must integrate our efforts. To those who contributed, you have my compliments and deepest gratitude and hope for your continued support with this campaign.


Now, it is my sincere hope that all members will be enjoined/inspired to build on this auspicious start by also making a new year's resolution to donate, to our own MDBF DRIVE, funds that you normally and regularly would contribute to other fund drives this year. This being consistent with the aforementioned principle of "CHARITY BEGINS AT HOME" I hasten to point out here that none of my remarks/suggestions are applicable to the support you provide your respective church, synagogue, mosque or any other place of worship. This support should continue under any and all circumstances.

You are reminded that all contributions to our MDBF DRIVE are tax deductible; hence, both you and the Fund benefit by your donation. All donations should be made out to "44th BGVA MDB FUND" and mailed to 44th BGVA, P.O. Box 712287, Salt Lake City, Utah 84171-2287.

### CLOSING THOUGHT FOR THE DAY ON GIVING.

"Some give their might; Others give with their mite;  
And, some don't give who might."

Let's all of us give a mite.



*Edward K. Mikoloski*  
Edward K. Mikoloski, President



# ALGENE KEY

## COMMANDING OFFICER OF THE 66TH SQ.; AVIATION PIONEER

Early flights out of Shipdham did not enjoy the luxury of accompaniment by the 'Little Friends,' and the Luftwaffe took full advantage. Life always hung on the expertise of every crew member. The courage of those who flew, despite overwhelming odds, can never be overstated.

From **Will Lundy's** record of the 66th Sq. comes a memory of the late **Algene Key**, C.O. of the 66th Squadron, early pioneer in aviation, and valorous participant in WWII.



Long before the Japanese undertook to start the War at Pearl Harbor, Algene and his brother Fred set an endurance record, flying 653 hours and 27 minutes on a noisy trip around their hometown that took 27 days. *(That record was never beaten until the Astronauts took off.)* The people of Meridian, Mississippi were strongly supportive of their first attempt, but their enthusiasm waned with continued efforts. On the third attempt, the droning sounds of the overhead plane that continued through the nights became a real irritant; and their air-to-air refueling was a novelty at first, but less impressive as 'Ole Miss' rattled on.

Their friend, James Keeton, brought fuel and supplies to the brothers, early proof that air-to-air refueling was possible. Fred sometimes dazzled the spectators by walking on the wing, and straddling the engine to inspect gas lines—with no parachute.

When the record was broken and the plane came down, it was the biggest celebration Meridian ever held. 30,000 people gathered at the airport to watch the plane come in, and reporters from all over the country flocked to the tiny airport which had just been renamed Key Field.

Those barnstorming pioneers and others like them ignited the spirit of aviation in the youth of America. When WWII began, adventurous young men were eager to fling themselves into that colorful sphere. Among those whose goals were shaped by those early airmen was **Bob Lehnhausen**. "As a new pilot, when I found myself in the same Squadron and in the same room with my boyhood hero, Algene Key, it was unbelievable to me," he recalled.

Even before the war began, both Key brothers engaged in training airmen in the National Guard. The move from barnstormers to military was not a difficult transition, and when the Guard was activated, Fred and Al went to Langley Field, Virginia for B-17 training. They distinguished themselves in the Pacific Theatre in bomb runs and Zero kills. When McArthur departed from Java, the Key brothers assisted in evacuating him, troops and many civilians to Australia. Fred's mission numbers were completed, and he assumed administrative and teaching positions in this country. Later, when Al was assigned to B-29's, it was his brother who checked him out.

According to historian Stephen Owen, when WWII came, Fred and Algene had more flying time than any two pilots on earth. Despite that, they were almost rejected from the service, as both were colorblind! Interestingly, their bombing skill was heightened because of this disadvantage. When they were over enemy territory, shapes of objects stood out, uncluttered by colored objects around them. Honoring the plane that brought them world recognition, Fred called his plane *Ole Miss II*, Al's was *Ole Miss III*.

Among the early ones at Barksdale Field, Louisiana was Al Key. He was assigned to fly antisubmarine patrol in the Gulf of Mexico, mostly at night, from Florida to Texas. Captain Key was Commander of the 66th Squadron. He was promoted to Major about the time the 44th was transferred to Will Rogers Field, Oklahoma.

Continuing his loyalty to his first plane, his B-24 became *Ole Miss III*. He arrived in England during a time when missions were scrubbed because of bad weather and mechanical failures. Nevertheless, opportunity came, and his skill and courage were exemplified on his fourth mission. In his book *A FLIGHT TO REMEMBER*, Steven Owens described the event:

"On a sortie in a joint raid with Flying Fortresses on January 20, 1942 on Romilly-Sur-Seine while attacking German positions in France, he encountered a direct enemy attack by two German fighters. They nose dived his ship coming from the sun. A writer said of the incident: Machine gun bullets and cannon shell poured into Major Key's ship like hailstones, mortally wounding his right waist gunner (S/Sgt. **Wilmer G. Lund**). At the first glimpse of the fighters straight ahead, Key took a quick survey of the other Liberators around him and saw that he had

maneuvering room; then did something only the most skilled and courageous pilot would and could do: He threw his huge bomber directly into the path of the fighters and forced them off their course of attack and into position where scores of Liberator guns were able to get direct hits.' Though the bullet-riddled airplane was nearly uncontrollable, Al and his crew managed to salvo their bombs over the target and limp the crippled plane, *Princess Charlotte/Sure Shot*, back over the Channel to England."

Algene's last mission was January 3, 1943 to St. Nazaire on the *Avenger*. Apparently the dangers of his four missions became a wake-up call to higher authorities. Algene was too important to the war effort to place him in further danger, so he was taken off combat and transferred out of the group. He was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross (the first member of the 44th to receive this honor), Distinguished Service Cross, British Distinguished Flying Cross and seven Bronze Stars. Despite Key's aggressive spirit in the air, President Mike remembers him as a shy and humble man on the ground, with genuine consideration for those under his command.



The *Avenger*, piloted by Algene Key, was the last mission of S/Sgt. Wilmer Lund, Engr/Top Turret Gunner, who was KIA. It was his third mission.

While under attack from enemy fighters, a 20 mm shell penetrated the waist position area and exploded, seriously wounding Sgt. **Frank B. Steers**, Waist Gunner and S/Sgt. **Charles E. Cunningham**, Radio Operator/Gunner.

S/Sgt. Wilmer Lund was killed instantly. He was the first man in the 44th BG to lose his life to enemy action. His parents received word of his death just before Christmas.



If you haven't signed up for the European trip, DO IT NOW. You will see those places that ring so clearly in your memory. You will be traveling with that great bunch of guys who joined you in slapping Nazi Germany into submission. Larry Herpel has laid out a fantastic itinerary. You will see the peaceful side of France and Germany, peaceful because of your courage and sacrifice. Peter Loncke in Belgium and Steve Adams in England are helping arrange meaningful events; and our European friends are waiting for the opportunity to thank you—once again—for helping them through the worst happening of the century.

The dates are September 11-26, leaving from New Jersey. From Newark, we fly into beautiful Paris, get a half day tour, then off to your choice of sights. The City of Lights has sights and structures that are unique in the world: the Eiffel Tower, Arc D'Triumphe, Notre Dame, WWII Museum, the Louvre... your choice of wonders.

By bus we will travel to Caen (the 'milkrun' that brought down the *Passion Pit*), Normandy (where Jackie Roberts can read her father's name on the Wall of Honor) and Rouen. On the 5th day we will leave for Luxembourg, (the safest city in the world from invasion, until airplanes were invented.) We will stop by Reims and Verdun. In Reims we will visit Eisenhower's SHAPE Headquarters. From there to Bastogne, where General McAuliffe uttered that famous word, "Nuts." (He held out until the weather cleared, then help came from the sky.)

In Wibrin, Peter Loncke has orchestrated a memorial service for the Pinder crew, whose plane crashed there January 29, 1944. This enthusiastic Belgium airman has become a self-appointed investigator of crash sites, and has been helpful to many American, English and Australian families, informing them of the circumstances of the crash.

From Belgium, we cross the Rhine River, near the most challenging engineering feat in history—building a bridge into Germany while under constant enemy fire. Here we visit Cologne, Wesel, Maastricht and Liege. In Wesel we will visit the graves of the

**Crandell and Chandler** crews. Crash sites for these two planes were located by our Belgian friend, Peter. **Louis DeBlasio** and **Bob Vance** are the lone survivors of those two crashes. **John Delaney**, a fighter pilot on a P-47 dived down to strafe the anti-aircraft guns which brought down the two Liberators, and he crashed. He shared the POW experience with Bob and Louis.

We will visit the Ardennes Cemetery, where Lois Cianci's father is memorialized on the Tablet of the Missing, then to Brussels, through Dunkirk to Calais, then across the Channel past the White Cliffs of Dover. By bus, we'll go to Norwich, where we have a day to explore before heading to Shipdham. Friends will be waiting for us: Steve Adams, our British Board Member, Brian Peel, an admirer of the 44th since boyhood,

Phyllis Dubois and others who have never been shy to express their gratitude to the Americans. We will visit the Memorial Library, the Aero Club, Shipdham Airfield and the 14th Combat Wing Hq. Then Steve Adams and Roy Owen have a reception and barbecue set up where we will visit and picnic with Andrew Doubleday, our friends and civic leaders of Shipdham and the members of the Shipdham Aero Club.

We will visit the magnificent Duxford Imperial War Museum where the B-52 dwarfs all other planes on display, even the B-24, which is still under repair. At Cambridge we will visit the American Cemetery and Memorial with its Wall of Honor a sight that is not easily forgotten. We have a day in London to browse; then filled with joyous memories, we leave the following day.

To get the best prices, we need a full bus. Don't pass up this opportunity to have the trip of a lifetime. Every happening on the trip has been orchestrated to give you the most for your money. Larry Herpel will assist everybody in getting the best price to Newark, the gateway city.

Reservations can still be made by calling Ascot Travel, at this toll free number: 1-888-317-7483.

E-Mail: [ascottravel@thrifty.net](mailto:ascottravel@thrifty.net)  
*Please note: The price for these 15 days is \$2,685. It includes 14 breakfasts, 10 dinners. Travel insurance is not included. If you wish to have that precaution, the price is an additional \$49.*



**EUROPE  
OR  
BUST**



# DISTINGUISHED FLYING CROSS SOCIETY



Going to the DFC Society meeting is an experience in humility. There are airmen from all plane positions (mostly pilots) and from every type of aircraft that flew in WWII, Korea, Viet Nam, Gulf War and Kosovo. A gab session is an invitation to hear wild adventure stories, providing new insight into the way WWII was won. Many commercial pilots had some hilarious accounts to relate.

We met one pilot from the 9th Air Corps who had flown to Ploesti on that awesome mission 8/1/43. Also, fighter pilots from the 15th Air Corps, who accompanied bombers on later missions. Les Howard, Past President of the Hump Pilots Society reminisced about the flights over the Himalayas from India to China, supplying Generalissimo Chiang Kai Chek with needed materials.

A PMB Navy Pilot remembered listening to Tokyo Rose, who played American music. She spoke directly to the men on his ship, concluding her broadcast with a promise to 'get your ship tomorrow.' They did. The Japanese planes struck it, but could not take it down. It limped into Pearl Harbor for repair.

A tour to Lackland Air Force Base brought memories of Basic Training to many of the members, Perry included, particularly a notorious hill between the two fields that they had to climb. They have a B-17, Mosquito and Blackbird on display there, and are looking for old photos to go into their Air Command Museum. The newer Kelly Field is alongside Lackland.

Perry heard a statement that he finds hard to believe: One flyer said that his plane went down in friendly territory, and a group of women went after his parachute. He claims he held them off at gunpoint; as if he had lost his chute, he would have had to pay \$300 for the loss, since he had gone down in friendly territory. (*Is this true?*)

The government gave away thousands of DFC's during and in later wars, for completing missions or flying on especially dangerous assignments. There is no list of who received them. Anyone who deserves a DFC, but did not receive it, may contact the Society at 6920 Miramar Road, Suite 207-D, San Diego, CA 92121-2642.

MIKE YUSPEH HAS  
**8 BALL T-SHIRTS,**  
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# 44th Bomb Group Veterans Assn. Reunion Agenda

Bossier City - Barksdale AFB - Shreveport, Louisiana  
October 15, 16, 17, 18, 2001 - Isle of Capri Hotel



## Monday, Oct. 15

9:00 AM to 12:00 PM

1:00 PM to 5:00 PM

1:00 PM to 5:00 PM

Registration

Registration

Board meeting

6:00 PM

7:00 PM

DELI BUFFET. Cash Bar.

Buffet (Cold Cuts, etc.)

## Tuesday, Oct. 16

7:30 AM to 9:00 AM

9:00 AM To 10:30 AM

11:15 AM

1:45 PM

3:30 PM

6:00 PM

7:00 PM

Breakfast Buffet

Registration

LUNCH Officers Club Barksdale Field - First bus leaves hotel. Speaker at lunch will be Colonel Steve DePyssler (Ret.) Two buses will shuttle from hotel to Barksdale Field. After lunch at approximately 1:45 we will walk over to museum where the dedication of the restored B-24 "Louisiana Belle," will take place. Military as well as local dignitaries will be introduced and make remarks. Approximately 3:30 first bus will leave for return to Hotel.

SQUADRON DINNERS (location to be posted). Cash Bar.

Sit down dinner.



## Wednesday, Oct. 17

7:30 AM to 9:00 AM

9:00 AM to 12:00 PM

1:00 PM

6:00 PM

7:00 PM.

Breakfast Buffet.

Annual Membership Meeting - (location to be posted)

Tour of the City of Shreveport

Leave hotel for those members who purchased tickets for Tour #1.

BANQUET. Cash bar.

Dinner will be served.

Candlelight Ceremony

Combo will play for dancing.

## Thursday, Oct. 18

7:30 AM to 9:00 AM

8:30 AM

6:00 PM

7:00 PM

Breakfast Buffet

Today is a free day

Tour of Natchitoches and Lunch.

Leave hotel for those members who purchased tickets for Tour #2.

BUFFET. Cash bar.

Dinner - barbecue with all the trimmings.

You can dance the night away with a big 17 piece band with the "Glenn Miller" sound.

Yes, you will have a room in which to meet and visit with your buddies every day from after breakfast until 5:00 PM.



# TOUR #1

**Wednesday, October 17:**

**1:30 PM** Depart hotel

**1:35 PM** City Tour of Shreveport

The tour begins with a look at where it all began, the Shreveport Riverfront, 1830s site of bustling trade, drunken brawls and steamy brothels at the head of the Old Texas Trail. It was through here that many thousands emigrated to settle

much of Texas and surrounding states. Today, new casinos and high rise hotels, night clubs and restaurants thrive on the riverfront. We take a look at the past and present of downtown Shreveport, including a look at the Confederate Memorial, erected by the United Daughters of the Confederacy. Shreveport, as the capital city of Confederate, Louisiana, was the last place to learn of the South's defeat in the War Between the States. As a result, the flag of the Confederate States of America flies on public property in front of the Caddo Parish Courthouse to this day.

## Ledbetter Heights Historic District

The city tour continues as we motor through the oldest of Shreveport's three historic districts. View the old Texas Avenue corridor where Louis Armstrong performed at the Cotton Club, and Austin Place with its renovated 19th century Queen Anne Victorian cottages and mansions. Visit Oakland Cemetery, where 15 Shreveport mayors, the mother of Davy Crockett, and hundreds of victims of Shreveport's Yellow Fever Epidemic of 1873 were buried in an open mass grave. Oakland also contains a feature unique to Louisiana; above ground tombs, which present an interesting albeit macabre story. We continue to see the Municipal Auditorium, where Elvis Presley, Johnny Cash, Hank Williams and many others' careers began on stage here on the Louisiana Hayride radio show.

Tour continues through the Fairfield and Highland Historic Districts. Savor in the richness of days gone by, as you view block after block of old Southern mansions framed by verdant live oaks, dogwood and azalea.

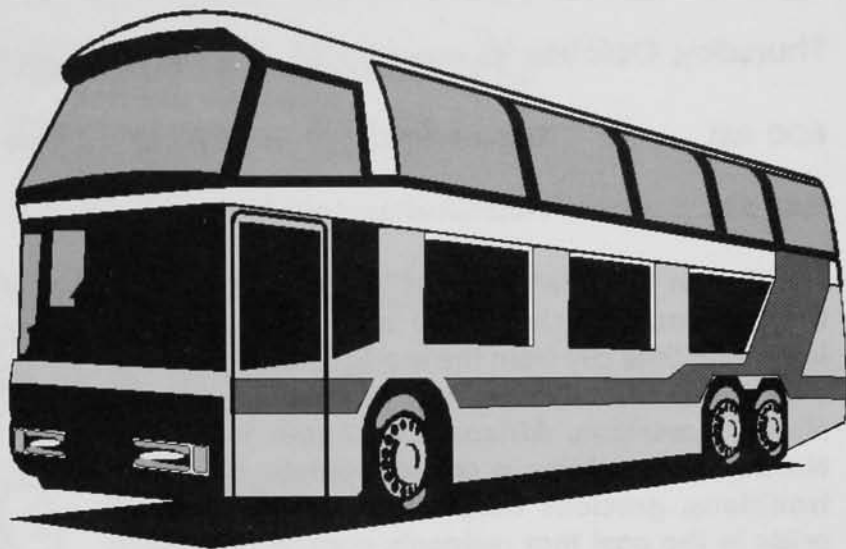
**2:45 PM** Libbey Glass Factory Outlet Store



The store offers to the public Libbey tableware, glass creations and canisters, Louisiana souvenirs, L.E Smith decorative items and assorted accessories at outlet prices.

**3:30 PM** Depart Libbey Glass

**3:45 PM** Return to hotel



**Thursday, October 18**

## **TOUR #2**

**8:30 AM** Depart hotel

**9:45 AM** Natchitoches, Louisiana

Founded in 1714, Natchitoches was settled before New Orleans and is the oldest settlement in the Louisiana Purchase. You may remember this intriguing little city from the movie *Steel Magnolias*, which was filmed here. Full of French, Spanish, Native American, African and Anglo influence, Natchitoches retains a colorful palette of ethnic traditions, gracious hospitality and tremendous pride in the past that residents eagerly share with visitors. Our eccentric step-on guide/actress clad in costume correct to the time of early Natchitoches entertains us with her assumption of the personalities of historical characters discussed in her unique presentation of fact and folklore



**10:30 AM** Cane River Country

Lined with the cotton fields and mansions of working antebellum plantations, oak alleys, churches and old cemeteries, scenic Cane River inspires a celebration of antebellum life like few areas in the South.

**11:00 AM** Beau Fort Plantation Tour and Luncheon

An avenue of Live Oaks guides us into the exquisite garden of this working cotton plantation on the site of historic Fort Charles, c.1760, where we will, weather permitting, revel in the splendor of an absolutely charming luncheon experience on the grounds. Before enjoying a fine meal served on china with crystal, we will tour the home. Our down to earth Creole cuisine lunch today will be two Natchitoches Meat Pies served with Dirty Rice Dressing, French Creole Beans, Apple-Raisin Slaw, Mini Buttered Biscuits, Tea and Coffee and Pecan Pie for dessert.

**12:30 PM** Depart Beau Fort

**12:45 PM** Melrose

A National Historic Landmark Plantation, Melrose is a unique complex of nine buildings dating back to c.1796. The plantation is rich in history and legends of courage and creativity that began with the legendary Marie Therese Coincoin. The South's foremost primitive artist, Clementine Hunter, created renowned paintings here of the life and times of Cane River Country. In African House on the plantation grounds, Hunter created with his brush what is called "the most colorful room in Louisiana." She died on New Year's Day, 1988, shortly before her 102nd birthday and is entombed in the mausoleum at St. Augustine. Guests will have the opportunity to purchase mementos of Natchitoches and Cane River Country here at the gift shop.

**2:15 PM** Depart Melrose

**3:45 PM** Return to hotel; tour ends.

# 44th Bomb Group Veterans Assn. Reunion - 2001

Register  
by September 10, 2001

**Isle of Capri Hotel - Bossier City, LA**  
Barksdale AFB  
October 15, 16, 17, & 18, 001

## Reunion Registration Form

Please print or type. All Information must be complete:

Last Name \_\_\_\_\_ First Name (Tag) \_\_\_\_\_

Spouse \_\_\_\_\_ Squadron # \_\_\_\_\_ Life Member \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip Code \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_ E-Mail \_\_\_\_\_

Guests & Relation \_\_\_\_\_

Number to Attend \_\_\_\_\_ @ \$215.00 Each Amount \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Tour #1- City Tour of Shreveport  
Number on Tour \_\_\_\_\_ @ \$25.00 Per Person Amount \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Tour # 2- Tour of Natchitoches & Lunch  
Number on Tour \_\_\_\_\_ @ \$55.00 Per Person Amount \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Total Amount Remitted Amount \$ \_\_\_\_\_  
Check # \_\_\_\_\_

Description of tours are in this issue of the 8 Ball Tails.

Registration Includes: Everything on agenda except tours as listed above.  
Registration must be received by September 10, 2001.

Hotel registration must be made directly with Isle Of Capri Hotel & Casino by phone only  
Toll free (800) 843-4753. See copy of hotel form in this issue.

Check Made Payable to: 44th Bomb Group Veterans Association (44th BGVA)  
Mail to: Mike Yuspeh - 7214 Sardonyx Street - New Orleans, LA 70124-3509  
Phone: (504)283-3424 Fax: (504) 283-3425 (Picks up on 6th ring)  
E-Mail: Mikeyuspeh@juno.com

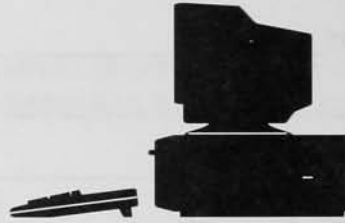




## **IT'S FINALLY HERE!**

**We now have our own Web Site**

**<http://www.44thbombgroup.com>**



When checking it out, remember...it is under construction, and changes and additions will be happening regularly.

Check it often!

We need to ask each of you to take a look at the 44th aircraft listed on the Web Page. We are asking people to click on any airplane name there is a line under. The line indicates there is a picture of the aircraft, possibly with crew members and maybe even a short story about that airplane. And now for your job...check your closets, boxes of photos and photo albums to see if you have any of the data for the listed aircraft. Let's get those planes underlined.

Also, while you're looking for those photos and going down memory lane...if you haven't already done so, send us your military biography and become a permanent part of the documented 44th history.

# BGVA 2001 Reunion Isle Of Capri Hotel

PHONE RESERVATIONS ONLY!

711 Isle Of Capri Blvd. (Exit 20 Off of I 20)  
Bossier City, LA 71171-5637  
Phone: (318) 678-7777 Fax: (318) 425-4617  
You must call (800) 843-4753 for reservation.  
Reservation can only be made by phone.



Reservation Method: Individual Call-In.

Reservations for this event will be made by individual attendees directly with the Hotel's Reservation Department by calling (800) 843-4753. To assure the Group Rate, attendees must identify the group name, 44th Bomb Group Veterans Assn, Inc., and their reservation will be accepted at the special group rate. Guests will be accommodated on a SPACE AND RATE AVAILABLE BASIS. The check in time is 4:00 PM and check out time is NOON. Hotel will accommodate any early arrivals on a space available basis.

**Guaranteed Reservations:** Guarantees are required for guest arriving after 4:00 PM. To guarantee a reservation, they require a deposit equal to one night's room and tax at the time reservation is made. The deposit is refundable only if reservation is canceled 48 hours prior to the day of arrival. Guarantee may be made with a check or credit card.

This is the information that you will need when making the call.

Date Of Call: \_\_\_\_\_ Confirmation #: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Arrival Date \_\_\_\_\_ Time Of Arrival \_\_\_\_\_

Departure Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Organization: 44th Bomb Group Veterans Association Inc.

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Fax#: \_\_\_\_\_ E Mail Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Additional Person in room:  Yes  No

Name Of Additional Person: \_\_\_\_\_

Rates: \$89.27 Including Tax (Single/Double Each Night)

Credit Card: American Express, Visa, MASTERCARD, Discover Card

Credit card Number - Expiration Date - Name On Card.

Reunion Dates: October 15, 16, 17, 18 Year 2001



## PASSION PIT CREW

FRONT L-R: JACK BARTOLI, NAVIGATOR;

IRWIN STOVROFF, BOMBARDIER;

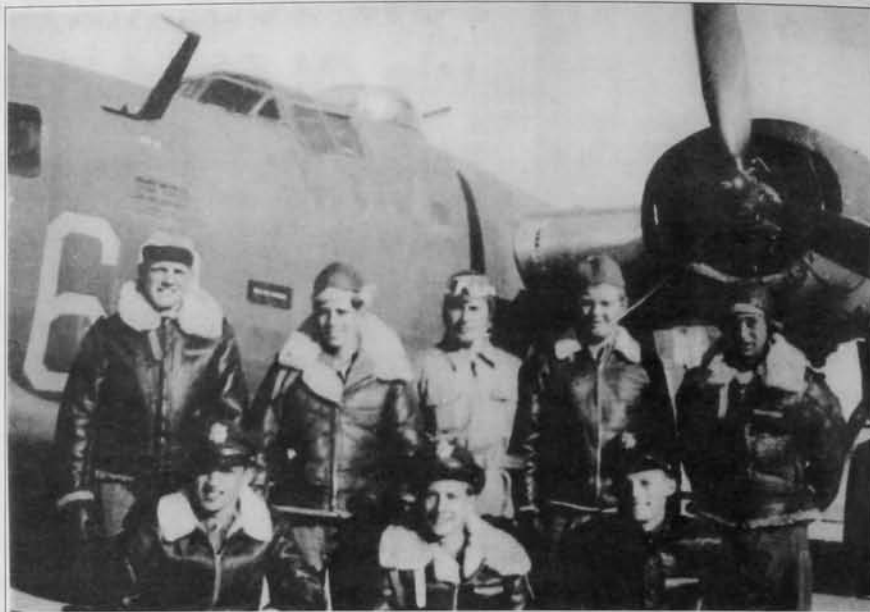
JOHN MILLIKEN, PILOT.

BACK: DARREL LARSEN, ENGINEER;

MARTIN RICHARD, RADIO OPERATOR;

WILLIAM MANIERRE, CO-PILOT; KENNETH BECKWITH, GUNNER; AND MORRIS LARKIN, TAIL GUNNER.

# THE PASSION PIT



The *Times-Picayune* in New Orleans highlighted the **John Milliken** crew for having seven members present at the 44th BG Reunion, and their story has resounded through a number of veteran publications. The *Passion Pit* went down at the Falais Pocket near Caen on August 13, 1944. Every member of the crew had an experience that was unique, none more so than that of Bombardier, **Irwin J. Stovroff**.



Stovroff recalls it thus: "It was to be our last scheduled mission; we were to complete our tour. Together we had flown very dangerous missions, many of which were deep into Germany. This trip was just over the Channel, the Falais Pocket in France, a 'milk run.'

"We were on a straight run, and were to drop our bombs on three sites, one third each time. Then BOOM! We got a direct hit at the first target. Numbers one and two engines were on fire. We all bailed out, right into the German front lines. On the way down I threw away my dog tags, not wanting them to know I was Jewish.

"Within a week's time we were taken to a major interrogation center outside of Frankfurt, Germany. I think it was called Wetzler. We were separated and placed in solitaire, and individually

taken out for continued interrogations. The German officer, my interrogator, asked me questions I could not and would not answer. I gave him the usual name, rank and serial number, and told him that was all I had to give, and knew very little else. On my third trip with him, he said, "I know who you are and what you are (meaning Jewish). He told me he could save my life, then proceeded to name my father, mother, brother, sister, the grammar and high school I had attended, even the name of a former girl friend. He then said he lived on Ashland Avenue, next to the girl I was dating, pre-war. He had lived on the next street-- Claremont Avenue in Buffalo, New York. He said he remembered being in class with my older sister, and had come to Germany to be with his grandmother, and stayed. He again said he would help me, and he put a question mark on my records next to religion.

Later in Stalag Luft #1, I was separated from the main compound of prisoners because I was Jewish. I know the reason we were not killed was because of the courageous speeches of Col. Zehmke and Col. Spicer, who warned the German commander that if any American officers were harmed, they would be held responsible. Col. Spicer was put in solitaire and sentenced to death for his speech. He survived until the end of the war.



When I finally got home after VE Day, I went to where this German traitor lived, but his parents had moved.

After this Dulag Luft (interrogation), I later found myself with my co-pilot **Bill Manierre** in a large room. Bill pointed out a beat up and dirty POW who was staring at us. Did I know who it was? I looked at the man and said 'no.' Bill said, 'he must know you,' and I replied, 'I can't figure out who he is.'

Suddenly Bill exclaimed, "My God! THAT'S MY BROTHER." His brother immediately recognized Bill, and they met and embraced.

The Germans were flabbergasted when they found out this was happening. Major Cy Manniere was a West Point graduate who had been dropped into France, and was working with the French Underground when captured and tortured. He told Bill and me to repeat his story, that he was a member of the Air Corps, had been shot down and picked up by the French Underground. If the Germans knew the truth, he could have been shot as a spy. They believed him, and he was sent to the same camp as Bill and I. Their mother received two telegrams on the same day, 1:00 AM, 1:00 PM on both sons—Missing in Action. "*Fact is greater than fiction.*"

Stovroff is now a volunteer National Service Officer at West Palm Beach VA Center, working only with ex-POWs to help get pensions and compensations. He has met six ex-POWs that were in his camp. And stranger than fiction, his next door neighbor in Florida was in the same barracks as Stovroff when he was in Stalag Luft #1 "segregated." This man's family owned KATZ DELICATESSEN in New York whose slogan was "Send a Salami to a Soldier in the Army."

## Milliken's Evasion

John Milliken, pilot, intended to get this 'milk run' over, then sign up again. He was captured, but fortunately, was able to escape. "The German army was trapped, and we were trying to

keep them pinned until Patton could get there from Cherbourg. The *Passion Pit* was flying on the right wing of the command ship. We had one long bomb run to reach three road intersections. We were at about 15,000 feet when anti-aircraft fire hit us. The flak came through the bomb bay doors, cutting the hydraulic lines. Our bombs would not drop, and the plane was on fire.



PASSION PIT going down.

"I gave the order to 'Bail Out', and when I thought everyone was out, I let go of the controls and jumped. At first I didn't pull the ripcord. I just lay on my back, counting 'chutes. When I finally pulled the cord, I was so close that I hit the ground in thirty seconds. I followed procedure--rolled up the chute and hid it, and I knew which way was north, so I started hiding and walking. But the Germans got me. First they put me and a British airman in a farm house with a concrete cellar. In one place it had soft cement, so I started digging. But they came for us before we could get out. They took us to a courtyard where I met up with the rest of my crew. Next they ushered us onto a German personnel truck with a canvas top."

At that point Americans had total command of the air, so the truck moved at night with no lights to avoid being strafed. Milliken was at the front of the truck, and he noticed a loose flap. He pointed it out to his crew, suggesting that he



go first, and they should follow. He bailed out and rolled into a ditch, but nobody followed. He considers it pure luck that he wasn't caught, as there were two armed guards on the tail gate.

Milliken walked to a farm house, and explained his circumstance in his best French. The woman who answered quickly ushered him to another site, as Germans were sleeping in her house. She provided him with a worker's shirt, cap and a loaf of bread.

Then, using his Boy Scout knowledge, he headed north, using the North Star as his guide, sleeping in the bushes by day. The next night was foggy, so he just laid low. On the third day, hiding under bushes alongside a stream, he woke to find a Tiger Tank headed toward him, cutting bushes for German soldiers to use as camouflage. So he ran again.

"By this time I was really hungry, and I saw something great—a cow with an udder full of milk. So I enjoyed that. Then a bullet whizzed by. I thought, 'four days of running, and they got me again.' But to my relief, it was the Canadian First Army. I ripped off my shirt; and with delight, showed them my uniform."

He spent a couple of days in their camp, then hitched a ride back to London. He ran into a bombardier from his group, who turned white when he saw him.. "I thought you were dead," he exclaimed. (Small wonder. The *Passion Pit* turned into a fireball, minutes after the crew had exited.) All ten members of Milliken's crew had made it safely to the ground.

In two weeks after meeting the Canadians, Milliken was back in the United States. He never saw many of his crew again until the 44th BGVA Reunion in New Orleans, 1999. Seven of the ten joined him: **Martin Richard**, Engineer/Gunner; **Darrel Larsen**, Gunner; **Kenneth Beckwith**, Radio Operator; **Jack Bertoli**, Navigator; **Morris Larkin**, Tail Gunner and Irwin Stovroff, Bombardier. One member of the crew is dead. Two others could not attend because of health problems.

*From Somewhere in England ...*



*the Flying Eight-Ball  
Brings You Best Wishes!*



From the Editor:

Where is your Database? You write me letters (for which I am so grateful), but when I try to find you in the Database, you are not there! Why? Your Database is the last thing you can fling into the future. Your children and grandchildren are asking questions about WWII. You have magnificent stories of an event that cannot ever be replicated. What will happen when you are not there to answer the questions?

DO IT FOR YOUR EDITOR.  
DO IT FOR YOUR CHILDREN.  
DO IT FOR YOUR GRANDCHILDREN.  
DO IT NOW!

# 44th Bomb Group Military Heritage Database



## Personnel Information Form



Check Enclosed \$ \_\_\_\_\_

No. of Pictures \_\_\_\_\_ No. of Audio Cassettes \_\_\_\_\_

Last Name: \_\_\_\_\_ First: \_\_\_\_\_ Initial \_\_\_\_\_ Nickname: \_\_\_\_\_

Present Address: \_\_\_\_\_ City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Home Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Birth: \_\_\_\_\_ City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Spouse: \_\_\_\_\_

Date enlisted/drafted: \_\_\_\_\_ City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_

Date Deceased: \_\_\_\_\_ Place of Interment/Burial \_\_\_\_\_ KIA

8th Air Force Group/s \_\_\_\_\_ Squadron/s or Unit/s \_\_\_\_\_

Special Military Training \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Graduating Class: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Location: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_

Group Rank \_\_\_\_\_ Group Duties \_\_\_\_\_ Ret. Rank \_\_\_\_\_

Your ASN (Serial Number/s) \_\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_

Occupation prior to Military \_\_\_\_\_

Occupation after Military and/or continued Military service: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



Special Status: Shot Down  POW  MIA  Evaded  Ditched  Crashed

Escaped  Parachuted  Wounded  Hospitalized  Disabled  Other

Where, When & How \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Ground Crew  Crew Chief  Assistant CC  A&E Mechanic  Armorer  Radio  Radar

Instrument  Sheet Metals  Bombsight  Quartermaster  Motor Pool  Ordinance

Fire Control  Control Tower  Other: \_\_\_\_\_

What were your duties: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Base Operations: Administration  Clerical  Communication  Medical  Security

Photo Lab  Engineering  Mess Hall  Supply  Intelligence  Personnel  Finance

Other Duties or Assignments: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

To complete your history it would be nice to list your descendants. Space is provided below.

Descendent	Relationship	Address	Phone
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____

Date Departed ETO: \_\_\_\_\_ How: \_\_\_\_\_ Destination: \_\_\_\_\_

Trip Details: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Military Honors & Decorations:

	<u>Stars or Clusters</u>		<u>Stars or Clusters</u>
Distinguished Service Cross	<input type="checkbox"/>	Air Medal	<input type="checkbox"/>
Distinguished Service Medal	<input type="checkbox"/>	Purple Heart	<input type="checkbox"/>
Silver Star	<input type="checkbox"/>	Presidential Unit Citation	<input type="checkbox"/>
Legion of Merit	<input type="checkbox"/>	Prisoner of War	<input type="checkbox"/>
Distinguished Flying Cross	<input type="checkbox"/>	Victory Medal WWII	<input type="checkbox"/>
Bronze Star	<input type="checkbox"/>	European Theater Ribbon	<input type="checkbox"/>

Other Awards: (Including Foreign) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Please include additional pages for other thoughts, memories or stories you may wish to contribute:

Prepared by: \_\_\_\_\_ Relationship: \_\_\_\_\_

Address & Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

# 44th Bomb Group Military Heritage Database

## Personal Information Data - Your "Living Monument"

It is our goal to assemble a complete record of all personnel who at one time served with the 8th Air Force during World War II in the 44th Bomb Group.

The records of those who were on flying status have been obtained from declassified group mission reports which have been stored in the National Archives. From this, a matrix has been developed which will allow for the search and retrieval of the following information: Who flew what mission, with whom, in what plane, to what target, on what date, enemy opposition, aircraft and personnel losses and hundreds of cross referenced bits of detailed information. We need information, biographies, and stories of Ground Crew and Personnel also.

**To make the database come "Alive", your stories, memories, photographs and voice recordings are essential.**

**Cassette recordings of your memories are welcome and should be limited to two (2) minutes per incident.**

**Please provide a "then and now" photo of yourself and a crew photo if available.**

A Master Copy of this multi-media database is now a part of the Eighth Air Force Heritage Museum in Savannah, Georgia. Other copies will be available to museums, libraries, universities, schools and on the World Wide Web Internet. You may also purchase your own copy of the full database on a CD to run on a home computer from the 44th BGVA (\$150.00 which includes 3 future updates).

Please fill out the form carefully so that the person entering your data into the database can interpret what you have written. It is important to include your special memories. These are an important part of the database, "your memories" saving them for posterity. Should enough space not be provided, please add additional pages.

Return completed form with \$10.00 donation\* if you have no photographs. If you have included photos, please submit \$15.00 donation\* with your form, and mail to:

**44th BGVA, P.O. Box 712287, Salt Lake City, UT 84171-2287**

Photos will be returned *on request*.

\*Donations are encouraged to help cover costs of processing. However, please donate what you can up to the suggested amount. Thank You.



# IT TOOK FIFTY SIX YEARS BUT SHE FOUND US



The story of Jackie Roberts's 56 year effort to trace her own heritage is a lesson in perseverance. This newly adopted daughter of the 44th BG, has finally unraveled the facts of her father's death. For years, the little she knew of S/Sgt. **Jack Ostenson**, she learned from her mother Wilberta: that he had red curly hair and had a true zest for life. Jackie was born nine days after his death.

Wilberta, Jackie's mother, tried to learn details of Jack's death, but government records were difficult to obtain. For a while she corresponded with Jack's sister, who was kind enough to send Jackie a birthday gift every year. When she died, there was no further connection to Jack's family until years later when Jackie resumed the search. She had assumed that there were no other family members.

**Gary Mathisen's** craft went down January 21, 1944 on a mission to Escalles sur Buchy, a low level bombing assignment against the V-1 missiles that were already leveling the buildings in London. From **Will Lundy's** *Roll of Honor*, Jackie learned that Jack flew with the 68th Squadron on this mission which had been considered relatively 'safe.' Bombing altitude was at 12,000 feet.

Seven B-24's left Shipdham, and only three returned. Enemy fighters were fierce in their attacks, and on their sixth onset, Mathisen's plane was reported to be burning at the waist.

Waist Gunner Ostenson and six other crewmen were killed; three became POW's.

The plane was flying alongside the one in which **Clair Sheaffer** (Lois Cianci's father) went down. (It has been speculated that the same burst of flak brought both planes to the ground.)

"Nobody can imagine what life is like when you don't know your own ancestry," Jackie explained. "I got tired of explaining to the medical professionals, that I knew nothing about my father. If one of my children became ill, the doctor would want to know the diseases that ran in our



JACKIE AND LOWELL ROBERTS AT THE  
BGVA SAN DIEGO REUNION.





family. It was difficult for them to imagine that I really didn't know ANYTHING about my father.

"Every time I would hear somebody say the words 'World War II', I would go up and question them," she continued. "Then when they started to question me, I had to admit that I knew nothing, and didn't know how to find anything out."

Knowing that Jack had come from St. George, Utah, Jackie and her husband Lowell decided to search the Mormon records to see what they could learn about his family. To her surprise, there were several brothers and a sister that could be tapped for knowledge. She called the sister, only to learn that the lady passed away the previous month. However, her husband, Jackie's uncle, brought the couple to his house, and she learned that she had lots of cousins, all of whom remembered her father. Her uncle had a big picture of Jack; and when she looked at it, she realized that he had a living replica, her daughter Kim. She had inherited his features, especially his eyes.

Next she found the daughter of the aunt who had remembered her birthday throughout her childhood years. This cousin's opening statement was, "Where have you been for the past fifty years?" She presented Jackie her father's picture, his Purple Heart and other memorabilia, adding, "We always knew that some day we would find you."

From her new-found family she learned that the Navigator, **John Cleary**, had been a POW, and was still

alive. Her grandson ran a search for Clearys on the Internet, finding 50 in the USA. Jackie wrote 50 letters, trying to locate John. Then a Mrs. Cleary from Florida called to say that although she was not the one being sought, that she could help her. She gave the number of a government agency, which ultimately led her to **Roy Owen**.

"It was so wonderful to find people who wanted to help me," she exclaimed. "It was a new world that opened to me. Roy and Will Lundy were eager to supply information about the mission and the plane. Sharing experiences with Lois Cianci was wonderful. The entire Bomb Group has been so kind—it's like I found a new family."

Jackie and her husband Lowell have been married 42 years. They raised two children, both adults. Lowell is a retired government employee, now in business as a security specialist for upscale homes.

Jackie studied Reflexology, Zone Therapy and Herbalology, and will soon have her PhD. degree.

*(Editor's Note: The value of 44th BGVA's mission to preserve history could not be better demonstrated than in the stories of Lois Cianci and Jackie Roberts.*

*It justifies all the of efforts of those who are working hard to see that the past is available to future generations.)*





MEMORIES OF  
T/SGT. JEAN BRESSLER  
ARMY INTELLIGENCE, 14<sup>TH</sup> WING



**Jean Bressler** didn't fly to Ploesti, but the memory of it still haunts him. He helped with the debriefing of those that returned. It was the most painful and unforgettable assignment of his war career.

"I was the only enlisted man from Intelligence that got sent to Benghazi," he recalled. "Ordinarily I never went to the debriefings, but this was so emotion-packed, Major Hart called and said, 'Grab your forms and get down here,' so with typewriter in my arms, I went. Those reports were absolutely awesome. I can only imagine that those crews had to be haunted by that memory for years.

"The Intelligence Building at Benina Main was metal. All other buildings were tents, white for officers, brown for NCOS. We were hot in the daytime, cold at night. They warned us to shake our shoes in the morning before we put them on, as centipedes climbed in to get warm. Those nasty creatures had two pinchers that could inject poison into your skin. Then there were the scorpions with the tail that could flip up and stab you with poison. The kangaroo rats weren't so bad; except that at night, you could step into one of their holes and twist your ankle.

"The Arab natives would hold up delicious-looking grapes and try to sell them to you. If you ate them, you were certain to get dysentery. There was a locust plague while we were there. The damn things would hide in the drums, and when you lifted the lid, out they would fly.

"We had an interesting contraption for a shower. The frame of an Italian plane was erected vertically, and a gas tank was placed over top. A garden hose with a stop valve gave you a good flow of water. A Tarpaulin around it provided privacy; but also, protection from the cold air, if you were showering at night. At noon the water was over 100 degrees, at night it cooled off. If you got there at the right time, you could have a nice warm shower.

"One night Col. **Leon Johnson** came into the building where I was working and sat down. I asked him, 'Colonel, are we ever going to get out of this place?' He answered, 'The 9th Air Corps wants to keep us.'

"After that Captain **Howard Moore** went



to the States to talk about our future. General Arnold decided to send us back to England. Then **Captain Hero**, our Weatherman saw the monsoon season coming. He told us to leave now or we wouldn't get out at all.

"Those B-24's were dusty and full of sand, barely able to squeak over the Marrakech Mountains of French Morocco. If we had waited one more day, the ground would have been so wet, the planes could not have taken off. When we got to England, we kissed the ground we landed on.

Bressler believes the fortunes of war were kind to him. He enlisted before Pearl Harbor in 1941 so he could choose the Air Corps, rather than be 'stuck' in the Infantry. He was stationed at Keesler Field in Biloxi, Mississippi, studying the mechanics of the B-24. When word came for him to be transferred, he was out of reach. His friends in the barracks packed his bags, and on his return he started out through a blackout to the loading area. The bags were so heavy, he could hardly drag them along.

All of a sudden a very large man, a total stranger, grabbed his bags, rushed him to the loading area and threw the bags on the truck. Bressler climbed aboard, and off they went to South Bend, Indiana where he was trained to repair Bendix Turrets. Bressler smiled, remembering his unbelievable fortune: those who missed the truck were sent to repair planes in Alaska.

Except for serious study and long hours, life in South Bend was luxurious. Being the first GI's to arrive for training, the town opened its doors and its heart. Everything was free—movies, food, even beer.

Despite his turret training, Bressler ended up in Intelligence, which he considered an ideal position. He was given a Tech Sergeant rating; and in the three years he was there, he developed close friendships with many of his English counterparts. Having musical skills, he became the organist for a local church.

The airmen left soon after VE day, but Bressler's group was the last to leave England. Leaving his friends and co-workers was truly an emotional experience. These friendships have continued for the past 56 years, with visits to and from both sides of the ocean.

# MEMORIES OF SHIPDHAM

From **Bob Lehnhausen** comes a picture and vivid memory of "Shipdham-in-the Mud." According to Lehnhausen, men and machines shared the misery of soft soil, lots of rain and the demands of military activity.



Pictured here are shoes, boots, galoshes outside barracks, evidence of the hellish aspects of early life on a newly occupied air base in England. Mud was everywhere.

"It was bad enough for the individual to navigate the ooze of the mud, but to get one of our big birds off the hard surface of a runway, taxi strip or a hardstand was truly trouble," he remembered.



*(Editor's Note: Despite the obstacles, the B-24s got airborne from airstrips that would be unthinkable in 2001.)*

## Alex Toth's Memory of a Lucky Day

Every airman can remember anxious moments, and S/Sgt. Alex Toth's (66th Sq.) story will bring 44thers memories of similar events.

"I was the Right Waist Gunner on **Ted Hoffiz's** plane. I can't even remember the mission. It must have been a long flight into Germany, as we were getting low on fuel. I heard Hoffiz ask the Engineer for a fuel reading. It was low. As Assistant Engineer, they asked me to verify his reading. It was low. We were over France.

"Next the pilot asked the Navigator to find the nearest airfield, and we set out for San Quenton in France. When we broke through the clouds to 2,000 feet and buzzed the airport, we found it was full of bomb craters. It was so bombed out, we couldn't possibly land.

"The next closest was across the Channel at Manston. Out the hatches we tossed all flak suits, ammo, guns, everything that was expendable; and then sat there silently, each with his own thoughts and prayers.

"Hoffiz gave the day's code word to the air tower,

declaring the need for an emergency landing because of low fuel. A WAAF told him to stand by, but Hoffiz replied, "We're coming in. Clear the runway."

When the plane touched the ground, we all gave a rousing cheer. A jeep led us to a resting place, and an American Captain gave us a shot of American whiskey. Earth never felt so good. The tank reading when we landed indicated we had only five minutes of fuel."

Low fuel has been the source of many anxious moments; sometimes causing ditching; other times bringing a crew to the brink of death then sparing them. Toth's crew was among the lucky ones.

When he goes to a bomb group reunion and shares stories with others who did not fare so well, he knows how lucky he was.



*Via Dick Butler: A message from England to the 2nd Air Division.*

## THE FREEDOM OF THE CITY OF NORWICH

I thought you would like to know that I have just returned home from the City Hall in Norwich, after having been invited by the Leader of The Council to attend the meeting at which the Freedom of the City was awarded to the 2nd Air Division USAAF Association. It was a very moving occasion that I will always remember.

The Lord Mayor was very gracious in his greeting, as were the many other Councillors with whom I had worked during my two years as Chairman of the neighbouring Authority in Broadland.

Your Award was the first item on the Agenda; and Nick Williams, the Leader of the Council made a deeply moving proposal. This was seconded by Councillor Ian Couzens, the Leader of the Liberal Democrats, who again made a very impressive speech. He was then followed by Councillor Martin Verran who spoke at length about your bravery and sacrifice and the great friendship that had been formed in the Forties and continued to the present day. The great debt that the City and County owe to the 2nd Air Division USAAF was stressed, as was the appreciation for your wonderful gift of the unique 2nd Air Division Memorial Library and the huge support given to the Library by the 2nd Air Division Association over many years. Also the joy of the Council that you will be returning to Norwich in November.

The proposal was then formally moved by The Lord Mayor and carried unanimously with acclamation. After the meeting ended, all the Councillors I spoke to expressed their delight at the award and how they look forward to meeting you later this year and their intention to make it a memorable visit. Brenda Ferris (The Lord Mayor at the VE Day Parade in 1995) in particular asked me to send you her best wishes and congratulations.

So the dream that we began in 1995, when we first discussed the possibility of obtaining the Freedom of the City for you at a VE Parade Committee Meeting at the City Hall, has now become a reality this evening and you will receive the Scroll in November at the Civic Reception on the Tuesday evening.

Well Done, you all deserve this rare award. Indeed you are the only members of the 8th Air Force to receive such a high honor. We are all so proud of you.

Best wishes for the New Year.

David J Hastings, Vice Chairman

## THE PINDER CRASH:

Lt. **HAROLD PINDER** 67th Sq., piloted the B-24 that went down in Wibrin, Belgium, January 29, 1944. PINDER gave this statement to Will Lundy for the *Roll of Honor*: "We were met on the coast on and in by both ME 109s and FW 190s. At about 1102 hours, we dropped out of control after about three separate enemy passes. We took 20mm hits under the flight deck that cut the control cables...."

"The aircraft dove out of control. I remember the wing afire, and at least the #4 engine knocked out. The following is a listing of the crew and what happened to each of them:

**Alvin Stubbs**, Bombardier, **Robert Laucamp**, Ball Turret Gunner; **Jack Robison**, RW Gunner and **William Paxton**, Tail Gunner were all KIA. Harold Pinder, Pilot, **Lawrence Grono**, Co-pilot, **Donald Boomer**, Navigator, T/Sgt. **Earl Hall**, Engineer; and **Milas Green**, LW Gunner became POWs. **Abe Sofferman**, Radio Operator, managed to evade, but was later shot by the Secret Police.

**Forest E. Clark** wrote this memorial to Sofferman: "He was my best friend in the 44th BG. He and I were on the same crew all through training and into the missions. I knew him as an energetic, studious young man, full of the love of life, of his family, and devoted to the cause of his nation." Upon his return to the States, Clark visited Sofferman's family, sharing the sorrow of their mutual loss.

Quoting the Belgian partisan resistance fighters, Clark said of Sofferman, "He had the appearance of an intelligent man, a student." Books have been donated to the 2 AD Memorial Library in honor of Sofferman and others in his crew who were lost.

The town of Wibrin has recently decided to place a memorial plaque at the crash site, an area where the 44th will be visiting in the upcoming tour in September, 2001.

Jack Payton (right) found this picture in his collection.

CAN ANYONE IDENTIFY THE TWO GENTLEMEN ON LEFT AND MIDDLE?



### CERTIFICATE OF APPRECIATION

The Government of France is awarding a Certificate of Appreciation TO all U.S. military personnel who served in France during the Normandy landing on June 6, 1944 and the following conflict until the liberation of France.

To obtain the certificate, one must prove that he was in France during WWII and supply a record of service and honorable separation. Certificates will not be issued posthumously. Send your request, along with a copy of your discharge and service record showing your service in Normandy and the ETO, to the nearest French Consulate Office in the U.S.



# WILL SEZ

February, 2001

Have any of you "visited" Arlo Bartsch's Web Site at <http://www.8thairforce.com> to view just how much 44th BG's history data can be found there? If you haven't tried it yet, set aside a little time to give it a try to learn more about it and see the possibilities there for a great deal of our history. However, do keep in mind that there are only samplings available at this time. In fact, that is all that is intended at this time. It is designed to offer only a taste of the great volume of data that actually could be placed there, not to show it all.

The reason for this type of sampling is to show the viewer what type of data is available and to what depth it can provide. Arlo has spent well over \$100,000 of his firm's money developing the program to make this type of information available. We, the 44th BGVA, have also spent an additional large sum for data entry of our history so far. For that reason, we cannot put all of our history out on the Internet as free. Like most Web Sites, they were set up to sell a product or service, not to give it away.

Having said that, Arlo has advised me that he intends to make all of our bio data available to the public, but only the first page. So anyone who wishes to view his bio or to see how many others have produced theirs, you can find them now at his Web Site. While you are on the Internet, you might also like to see what our Treasurer, Jerry Folsom, is developing on our own 44th BG Site at <http://www.44thbombgroup.com>. It is only in the developmental stage but should be quite interesting to everyone.

You may have noticed in the last issue of 8 Ball Tails that I not only did not write this column, but I also failed to produce the Folded Wings section. The cause for these omissions is that Irene and I have moved out of Southern California to the Northern portion of the state, east of Sacramento. This was our first move in 40 years, so it has been a labor intensive experience from which we are still suffering. There simply was no time to do the work and my equipment and records were not available.

As a consequence, the Folded Wings list has grown considerably, thanks to the efforts of our Treasurer Jerry and his aide, Lana Kopecky. They produced and mailed a large number of letters to the addresses of our members who had not renewed their membership for some time. As feared, many of these former members are deceased,

so many of these great people will not have an adequate story in the Folded Wings column this issue. Hopefully, I will be able to research more of them and have it ready for the next issue. I am not yet up to speed these days.

Also, I think you readers should know about the great efforts of one of our Associate Members, Pete Frizzell. Pete is one of the top researchers of the famous low level attack on Ploesti Oil Fields on 01 August 1943. He has helped us verify much data about the 44th BG's participation, both in text and photo; and has attended some of our reunions.

Pete found some 44th BG photos up for auction on the Internet from eBay and bid successfully on a few of them. He alerted Steve Adams, who also was a successful bidder on several. But when he learned from the seller that there were large quantities, more scheduled for bidding, he offered to purchase the lot. However, when the seller found that he was getting very high bids on some specific photos, he refused to honor a flat bid upon which he had agreed. When Pete learned that the photos were from the Harvell/Robertie collection, he contacted me to advise us of this great collection, wanted to help us save the great photos of our people and history.

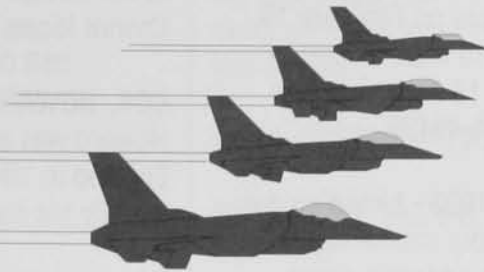
Our Prez, Ed Mikoloski, made arrangements to meet Pete at a nearby airport (Pete lives in Florida) and Ed drove them up to Maine. They contacted this dealer who permitted Pete to use his camera and film to make copies of those photos sold but not yet mailed, and successfully made a deal to purchase all remaining photos. Many of these photos are originals that Capt. Harvell used in his first book, "*44th BG Liberators Over Europe*" so the collection is priceless so far as our photo history is concerned.

When the copying and printing is completed by Pete, these photos will be added to the present collection of photos that I've gathered over the years. We will have a much more complete collection for our history and hopefully more crew photos to add to our data base. Had it not been for Pete and his strong desire to help, these photos would now be scattered all over the world. He most willingly spent his own money and many days of his time in this great effort. I can't say enough good things about him. We are greatly in debt to you, Pete. Our sincere thanks is not enough.

*Will Lundy*

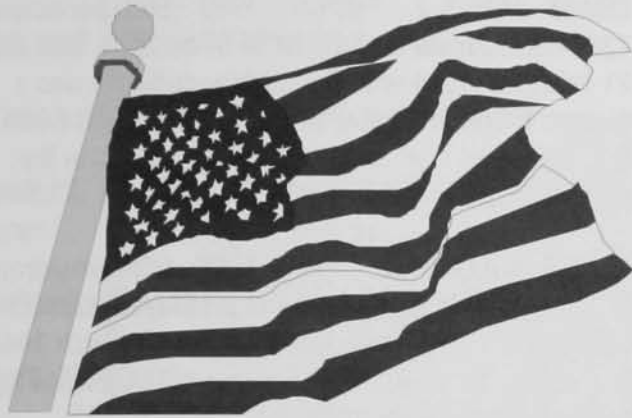


# FOLDED WINGS



February, 2001

Prepared by:  
*Will Lundy*



**AMBLER, JAMES C.** - 6 April 1989 - 39107032 T/Sgt. Engineer & Top Turret Gunner. 66th Squadron. James was a member of the H. E. Etheridge crew that flew their first mission on 30 January 1944. He was with this same crew and on his seventh mission when they were attacked and shot down on 24 February 1944, target Gotha, Germany. James was one of nine crewmen who successfully parachuted to become a POW.

**AMICK, KENNETH C.** - T/Sgt. Engineer Died 1950 or 1951. Stayed in Air Force. Was killed in crash in bad weather. Kenneth was the Engineer/Top Turret Gunner on the C.R. Roberts crew. They were assigned to the 68th Squadron on 19 February 1945, flew their first mission on 10 March 1945. Their 12th and last mission was dated 18 April 1945. Kenneth and this crew returned to the US in late May, flying home on A/C #4449425

**BALLA, WALLACE J.** - May, 2000 - 0-819292 1st Lt. Wallace joined the 68th Squadron on 6 July 44, flew his first mission with the Clair Hill crew. Following that, he flew with many 68th Sq. crews, including Sterling Dobbs, Kay, Dimpfl, etc. He completed his tour of 30 mission on 24 December 1944 as co-pilot for the Jack Liebrick crew.



**BARLOW, ARCHIE R.** - 23 April 2000 - 14151313 68th Squadron T/Sgt. Engineer and top turret gunner for the H. R. Howington crew. Archie joined the 68th Squadron on 5 October 1943, flew his first combat mission on 5 November 1943. While on his ninth mission, 21 January 1944 he and his crew were shot down over France. Four of this crew were KIA, two became POWs, and Archie was one of the five crewmen to successfully evade capture. He was with the French Underground until 23 April 1944, began his attempt to gain freedom through the Pyrenees. He was interned in Spain until 31 May 1944, made his way to London, England arriving there on 1 June 1944, back to Shipdham on the 4th and later returned to the US.

**BECTON, WENDELL R. SR.** - 1 March 2000 - Cannot locate any data for him.

**BENEDICT, ROBERT L.** - 29 August 1997 - 67th Sq. Gunner on the E. C. Yatkones crew that arrived in the 67th Squadron on 8 June 1944. This crew flew their first mission on 12 June. Robert flew various positions as Gunner for most of his mission until 16 August 1944. He flew but three more with them, ending with the one dated 5 November. His last of 19 mission was completed on 18 March 1945 with the R. E. Markle crew.

**BETZ, HENRY C.** - Henry was a member of the 464th Sub Depot but we have no specifics about his contributions except he was a Sergeant.

**BLACK, HARRY** - December, 1991 - No data can be located for this man.



**BOILEAU, JOHN 'JACK'** - May, 1993 - 68th Squadron 32951768 Sgt. Radio Operator on the C. Roberts crew. This crew joined the 68th Squadron on February 19, 1945, flew their first mission on 10 March. They completed their 12th mission on 18 April, and flew home on 21 May 1945 in A/C #44-49425.

**BOWE, DONOVAN K.** - Approx . 1993 - Listed on our current roster as 68th Squadron but cannot locate anything about him in the 68th Squadron records.


**BURRESS, WILLIE JOE** - 10 November 2000 - 67th Squadron M/Sgt. Crew Chief. "Tex" was the first assistant crew chief on the George Baccash ground crew back at Barksdale Field in early 1942. He was a member of the ground echelon that went to England on the HMS Queen Mary in Sept. 1942. Later he was promoted to Crew Chief, and held that position to the end of the war. His last assigned aircraft was #44-48821 A-Bar, unnamed. Tex refused to allow it to be named, citing it as bad luck.

**CAMPBELL, ROBERT P.** - 1992 - M/Sgt. No records can be located.

**CHAFFEE, THOMAS L.** - September, 1999 - 0-70417 1st Lt. Navigator. Thomas first served with the 492nd BG in 1944, was a member of the George B. Haag, Jr. crew. They had completed 19 missions with them prior to being transferred to the 44th BG in early August, 1944. They flew their first mission with the 44th on 14 August, quickly completing their 6th and last of their tour on 25 August 1945. They were rotated back to the U.S.

**CHAPMAN, WILLIAM A** - 28 July 1997 - Apparently not combat. Cannot locate this man on any squadron roster.

**CHRISTOPHER, ANTHONY J** - 20 December 1997 - 31037024 67th Squadron Engineer and Top Turret gunner for the H. Hess crew. They flew their first mission on 16 March 1944 and then four more quickly until the 27th March when they were interned in Spain. Several months later they returned to England and finally transferred to the 15th AF in Italy to complete their tour.

**COOMES, THOMAS L.** - 15 November 1999 - 506 and 66th. Apparently not combat and cannot locate any data.

**COSBY, EARL BELL** - February, 1997 - He served in the service for four years and nine months. Cannot locate records.



**COX, HOWARD D.** - 10 April 2000 - 67th Squadron. Howard was one of the ground echelon who went to England in 1942 on the HMS Queen Mary. Cannot identify his classification while in the 67th Sq.

**CRANE, JAMES J.** - February, 1992 - 66th Squadron. 12074922. James flew a total of 8 missions, first dated 21 February, 1944 with R.J. Comey crew. He was a gunner, S/Sgt. His last one was 27 March 1944 with the R.E. Harleman crew, was shot down, injured in the ditching and became a POW.

**CROSS, WILLIAM S.** - 5 April 1988 - 68th Squadron - S/Sgt. Left Waist gunner on Robert Clayton crew. Completed 12 missions beginning on 10 March 1945 and ending on 18 April 1945. Crew not scheduled again before the last group mission of 25 April 1945.

**DALTON, ROBERT J.** - 24 May 2000 - 67th Squadron. 111115102. Robert was the Radio Operator who flew six combat missions, two with R. C. Griffith, two with Dines, and his last one with Lt. Scarborough on 12 March 1944. There are no further missions or data covering this Sgt.

**DOMINO, JOSEPH S** - 17 September 1999 - No data can be found at this time.

**DEHANN, BEN F.** - 8 December 1996.

**DOEPKER, CHARLES L.** - 22 October 2000 - 66th Squadron S/Sgt. Gunner on the W. E. Ogden crew. This crew was originally assigned to the 492nd BG, flew approximately 24 missions with that group. This crew was transferred to the 44th Group in July, 1944, assigned to the 66th Squadron. They flew their first and only one with the 44th BG on 31 July 1944, which apparently completed their tour of operations. Charles was a Canadian, born in Ottawa on January 22, 1922, was 78 years old.

**DUNKERLEY, GAYLE** - No data found.

**DUNLAP, ROBERT L.** - No date found 68th Squadron.

**EDGEWORTH, WALTER** - 28 September 1999.



**EDMUNDS, EARL A.** - 19 March 1999 HQ. & 506th Squadron.

**ESPER, WILLIAM D. SR.** - 8 October 2000 68th Squadron.

**EYDENBERG, MONTE** - 22 January 1999.

**FAVIM, ROBERT A.** - No date given.

**FEINSTEIN (FENTON), MELTON S.** - 1991.

**FLESBER, ISSAC A.** - August 1998 68th Squadron.

**FLOWERS, EDGAR I. JR.** - 1988 S/Sgt. Right Waist Gunner.

**FOREHAND, CHARLES C.** - 14 February 2000.

**FRANK, ERNEST F.** - No date given.

**GENTILE, LEO T.** - 10 July 1990.

**GOODMAN, AUGUST T.** - 7 January 1987.

**GORHAK, JOHN D. Jr.** - 27 November 2000 - 66th Squadron.

**GOSSETT, ERNEST E.** - 16 November 2000 - 0-442695 Pilot. Captain Ernest Gossett and his crew flew most of their missions while assigned to the 492nd BG. When that group was taken off combat status, this crew was transferred to the 506 Squadron on 13 August 1944. They flew their 1st mission with the 44th BG the very next day. They flew eight more missions as lead crew, and completed their tour on 6 December, 1944.

**GRUEBER, ARNOLD H.** - October, 1998.

**HALL, FRED L.** - 26 May 2000 - 68th Squadron.

**HANDY, PAUL** - 27 February 1989.

**HANNUKSELA, WAINO W.** - 9 January 2001 - 506th Squadron Pilot Waino was the co-pilot for the Charles Conner crew that arrived in the 506th Squadron on 30 August 1943. He flew his first mission with the McAtee crew on 7 September and many others later. He also was co-pilot to other crews including

Laudig, Clements, and Money. He completed his tour of duty on 23 March 1944, changing seats with Lt. Money to fly as 1st pilot on that last mission.



**HESS, HOWARD** - 12 January 1988 - 66th Squadron.

**HICKERSON, GLEN C.** - 1 June 2000 - 506th Squadron.

**HIGGINS, WADE W.** - 506th Squadron with James Clements.

**HUFF, HERBERT A.** - 4 June 1997.

**INDORF, FRANK** - 9 May 2000.

**INDRI, VALERO** - 1 April 2000.

**IRISH, ARVIN L.** - 17 April 2000.

**JEDLOWSKI, HAROLD J.** - 19 January 1998. 67th Squadron.

**JEWELL, KENNETH** - No date given. 66th Squadron Pilot.

**JONES, JOHN T.** - 9 February 1978 - Age of 57 cancer. 506th Squadron Ordnance.

**JONES, PAUL A.** - 25 August 1998.

**KARAPIN, EDWARD F.** - No date given.

**MCCULLOUGH, HAL** - 14 February 1999.

**MCDONALD, ROBERT M.** - 1985.

**MCKENNA, THOMAS J.** - 17 November 2000 - Pilot 506th and 66th Squadrons.

**MARNELL, VERL** - 12 April 1998.

**MICKEY, COL. WILLIAM B.** - 23 August 1998 - 66th Squadron and HQ.

**MISER, VERNON** - November, 1996 - 404th and 464th Sub-Depot.

**MORAN, JOHN V.** - 1 April 2000.



**MORTON, SAM M.** - 8 June 1990.

**MULDOON, LEWIS J.** - No date given.

**NATHANSON, DAVID** - 31 October 2000. Captain 67th Squadron and HQ. Ordnance.

**NICHOLS, DERISE L.** - 21 March 2000.

**NEWBOLD, ELDRED** - 1995.

**PARSHALL, RAYMOND H.** - 26 Jan. or June 2000 of pneumonia.

**PETRIK, GEORGE A.** - 25 March 2000.

**PRICKETT, JOE W.** - No date given.

**REECE, CHARLES E.** - No date given. 506th Squadron ground crew.

**ROSCHIE, WILLIAM E.** - No date given. 67th and 506th Squadrons ground crew. Musician.

**RUMRILL, DEWLIN** - No date. 464th Sub-Depot.

**RUSSELL, GEORGE E.** - 14 April 1996 - 66th Squadron Combat Engineer.

**SAPORITO, SAM S.** - 4 September 2000 - 66th Squadron.

**SCHIMKE, ROBERT S.** - 27 December 1996.

**SIMMONS, HYLAN V.** - 25 September 1999 - T/Sgt. 66th Squadron Crew Chief on Lemon Drop.

**SLED, NOAH** - No date given.

**STERNBACK, LAWTON L.** - 11 November 1997.

**STEWART, JOSEPH** - December, 1993 - 0-2063204 Bombardier.

**STOKELUM, PAT P.** - No date given.

**STRANGE, WILLIAM S.** - Mid-June, 2000.

**STRUG, EMIL** - 1997.

**TAYLOR, LT. COL. JOHN B.** - 27 August 2000 - Age 79. Co-pilot for John Mueller.

**TERABERRY, PHILLIP F.** - 21 October 1999.

**TRUSLOW, WILLIAM B.** - 17 June 1999.

**TUTTLE, ROBERT M.** - 31 July 1991.

**WALSH, JAMES H.** - 7 November 2000 - Evadee in Spain 506th Squadron.

**WAWERNA, JOSEPH** - 25 December 1999 - Age 84.

**WEIHS, GORDON** - January, 1999.

**WHEATLEY, J. C.** - 12 August 2000.

**WILLIAMS, RICHARD** - 11 March 2000.

**WILKERSON, LESLIE A.** - 29 June 2000 - Bio.



### 44th Items for Sale

Item	Cost	Shipping
Shirts	\$25	\$3
Caps	\$15	\$2
Pins	\$5	\$1
Send to:	Sam Miceli 6398 Dawson Blvd. Mentor, OH 44060-3648	
Patches	\$15	\$1
Roster	\$20	\$2
4,000 names, addresses and phone numbers.		
8th AF Military Heritage Database	\$150	\$2
Past Issues of 8 Ball Tails	\$5	\$0
Send to:	44th BGVA PO Box 712287 Salt Lake City, UT 84171-2287	

From the Editor: Kevin Watson's book "Ruth-less" can be purchased through Amazon.co.uk. Signed copies are available through Kevin's website: KPWats7@aol.com (put in the key words hometown.aol.com/kpwats7).



## MAIL & E-MAIL

A new and eager member, William Ennis, son of **Donald E. Ennis**, Tail Gunner in the 68th Sq, has joined and is planning to bring his father to the Barksdale Reunion. Ennis's last seven missions were on the *Louisiana Belle*, so it will be an especially meaningful event. (*Editor's Note: If there are any of his crew reading this—come and have a Crew Reunion*).



From Col. and Mrs. Clem Haulman we received news that their son David R. Haulman, Director of Public Works at the U.S. Army Engineers Research and Development Center, has been selected for promotion to full Colonel is assigned to the U.S. Air Force Reserves.

Haulman is the commander of the 917th Civil Engineer Squadron at Barksdale Air Force Base, La. He has more than six years of active duty with the Air Force, during which he piloted supersonic trainers and KC-135 jet tankers, performing air-to-air refueling missions in Europe, Southeast Asia and over the North Pole. He has also served 15 years in the Reserves as an engineer officer.

He received his bachelor's degree in civil engineering from the University of Southwestern Louisiana, a master's in systems management from the University of Southern California and a master's in civil engineering from Mississippi State University. He is a registered professional engineer in Mississippi and Louisiana.

David's identical twin, Daniel, has a Ph.D. in History from Auburn University, and is a Research Historian at the USAF Historical Research Center at Maxwell AFB, Montgomery, Alabama. Both sons are Members of the 44th BGVA.



From the Pueblo Historic Aircraft Society, their publication, *B-24 Airscoop*: The city & county of Pueblo, and a number of foundations have come up with the funds, and a ground-breaking ceremony has been held for a new hangar to shelter the Aircraft

Museum. Although Pueblo is the home of many B-24 pilots, they do not have a B-24. We can be all the more grateful for the efforts being made to preserve the *Louisiana Belle*.



From **Jerry Folsom**, Treasurer of 44th BGVA: Many thanks for the cards and kind messages. (*Jerry is so overwhelmed with the 44th's business—getting out statements, checking on lost members and answering requests for information, he can only give a blanket 'Thank You' to all who have sent him greetings.*)

CAN ANYONE IDENTIFY THIS SERGEANT SEWING STRIPES?



From **Tommy Shepherd**: Can't we do something to urge everyone to do their Database? The War was such an amazing experience, and everybody has a story that should be told. I have memories of going with the flight surgeon on short arm inspections. I saw and smelled the men's experiences. I remember some of these men riding their bicycles from site to site, 115 to Shipdham, to East Dereham, from pub to pub, to fish and chips, falling off their bikes drunk as a skunk, writing letters for the Ole Man to send to the next of kin and helping pack up their personal effects. It should all be on record.





From **Francis J. Peck**, 67th Sq.: one of the most memorable missions of the 34 that I pulled was a low level supply drop to our paratroopers in Holland, September, 1944. Our drop was just beyond a city of which I cannot recall the name. Our load was ammunition. There were several wooden boxes strapped on the catwalk. My job as Radio Operator/Gunner was to cut the straps and kick the boxes off the catwalk. While flying over the city, I heard the nose gunner yell, "Pull 'er up, Pull 'er up, you're going to hit the church steeple. Holding on for dear life, I swear I could have reached down and touched that church steeple.

As I cut the straps holding the boxes of ammo and kicked them out, I saw ever so much ground fire from the Germans hiding in the brush. As we pulled up and banked to get out of there, we were being peppered by ground fire rifles. When I got to my radio seat, I noticed a hole in it, and the bullet had exited just behind the pilot. The next day we learned that the Germans recovered most of the supplies our group had dropped.

*(Editor's Note: But the bullet missed both Francis and his pilot, so it was a pretty good day.)*



**Joseph E. Milliner** wrote an interesting book, *The Angel and the Eagle*, in which he describes his experiences as Joe, protected by his Guardian Angel, JOSEPH. His accounts are colorful and dynamic--particularly about the Ploesti mission. (Sections of this chapter will be reported in another issue.)

Having survived the war, Milliner is living through the tragedy of knowing his co-pilot son, William, flying in a Cobra Helicopter into Laos, crashed. He believes the boy survived, but has never been repatriated. The injustice of that atrocious happening has turned the life of him and his wife Mary, into an ongoing effort to influence the U.S. Government to intervene. All members of the 44th BGVA can offer prayers in William's behalf.



From **Elwyn A. Meyer** 68th Squadron to Will Lundy This is meant to be a tribute to all World War II Bomber Crews, Army Air Corps, Marines, Navy and especially to pilots of the Big Birds of the Army Corps.

Almost all bomber combat crews trained as a team before entering the combat theatre. Each member learned their duty stations through special training prior to their assignment to crew training. They also knew their duty lay in putting their combat loads on the target regardless of the enemy defenses.

Much "to do" is made of the macho image of the fighter pilots "one on one" battles. However they always had the choice to engage or disengage at will. They never really had to fly into the flak shrouded targets. I don't mean to say the bomber crews didn't welcome their "little friends" presence. They saved many bombers and contributed much to the success of the European Air War.

Bomber crews had no choice, regardless of the enemy defenses, they had to bore in, enduring enemy flak and fighter attacks. I know of no bomber forces that were ever turned back from a specified target due to enemy defenses.

As a navigator, I was able to observe and note the actions of our combat crews and see our losses and successes.

I would like to talk about a special person who was the pilot and commander of our crew. His name was Rueban C. Ricketts from Danville, Virginia.

Rueban, or "Rick" as we called him, had been an Army Air Corps A&E mechanic before going to pilot training. He graduated, transitioned into B-17's and was assigned as a co-pilot in a B-17 group. Just prior to his group leaving for overseas, he was pulled out and sent to B-24 transition school. Upon completion of his training, he was made a first pilot and given a crew without a navigator and sent to a replacement training center.

I was assigned to Rueban's crew as the navigator just after my graduation from navigation training. They were starting the second phase of their training.

Rueban and I had our differences at times as to who should be the navigator--pilots always liked to be in command. We worked out our differences after going over long water flights and coming home alone in the clouds where no "railroad tracks" were around. You had to learn to trust your crew members. He did.

I had faith and trust in Rick's ability as a pilot. One reason was his attention to and use of the aircraft check off sheet. Because of his previous mechanic's background, he knew his aircraft and it's problems. The crew chiefs liked Rick to fly their "birds" because he could usually tell them where to look for a problem and its possible solution. This saved them much time in getting the ship ready for the next mission. If we had mechanical trouble in flight, he and the crew engineer could confer and try to solve the problem.

He was Mr. Safety First on the B-24. I always felt he was a disappointed B-17 pilot and never trusted the B-24. He believed that the B-24 was unforgiving of any mistakes.

He never made a takeoff or landing that he didn't sweat through his flight clothes. He would always carry an extra jacket to change into against the altitude cold. He said flying the B-24 was real work, especially on takeoffs and landings. He was an excellent formation flyer regardless of which side of the flight element we were on. He flew good tight smooth formations.

Our worst flight catastrophe occurred on the 6th of August, 1944 on the Hamburg mission. Our target was an oil refinery. As we approached the target, the flak cloud over the target just got blacker; probably the box barrage type. You could see the cloud from 50 miles away. We had been briefed that over 300 heavy guns could be on you at all times. The cloud cover was from about 18,000 feet to over 30,000 feet in altitude. I looked through the astro dome at Rick and could see the sweat running from his forehead onto his oxygen mask. As we flew deeper into the cloud, you could smell the exploding gases from the flak; the shrapnel sounded like hail as it fell causing minor damage. We bombed the target with good results. You could see the burning gas generator plant and other facilities. We lost one ship there (J.P. McKenna's).

The group turned off the target area and then flew out over the Cuxhaven German naval base. That's where they nailed us. I believe they were sighting individual aircraft as there was no heavy barrage fire flak. Navy gunners were good. We lost two engines; the vertical fin was shot off above the horizontal stabilizer and the elevator, and elevator trim tabs were damaged. A huge hole was blasted out of the left side between the window and tail. The damage was reported by the top turret and waist gunners.

Rick hit the bail out bell because he only had two engines and possible control damage. He thought at the time it was best. As navigator I called him on the intercom and asked for the exact condition of the ship and said, "If this bird is still flying, I would rather chance ditching than spend time in a P.W. camp." Almost instantly six other voices came on saying "ditto" or words to that effect.

Rick said, "okay, let's try it." We had already lost the formation, they couldn't wait for us. He took the course I gave him out over the North Sea, jockeyed the B-24 on to the course, and put it in a shallow descent slow enough to maintain flight speed. He sent the flight engineer to assess any control cable damage, he reported none. Ted Sassano, the radio operator, gave position reports to the British Air-Sea rescue people every 10 minutes until we crossed the coast. The co-pilot, Wm. Sims, was busy helping Rick maintain flight control of the aircraft. Porter Branfort, the flight engineer and Rick were in constant contact addressing problems as they arose. The gunners remained at their stations throughout. Everyone was busy, busy. We started at about 22,000 ft. altitude and crossed the English coast at Great Yarmouth at less than 1,000 ft. Rick called the field and was cleared straight in. Luckily the wind direction was right and our course was in line with the main runway. Rick had been continuously trying to restart one of the engines. Just before crossing the coast, it restarted. We were over an hour late in returning. He greased it in with "nary a bump," used all the runway, turned on to the taxi strip and all engines quit.

The airplane crew chief came out, climbed on top of the wing, opened the fuel ports, put his fuel dip stick in and pulled it out dry. All tanks were empty. Later



we learned there were over 300 holes in the tanks and flaps. The crew chief was ready to cry. It was his second ship he had lost. This was this B-24's first mission. Rick comforted him by saying, "don't cry, it's a damn fine airplane, it got us home." I believe that it was later junked. After looking at the damage, I wondered if I was wrong to want to fly back. I do not know how Rick flew that plane, but he did--he knew his job. It must have been "hell" on him both physically and mentally. He did it on pure grit and stubbornness, I guess. He was a top man with courage and strength to do what had to be done. I do think that day he really developed a love for the B-24 (he wouldn't admit it).

You can listen to people talk about the courage of "fighter jocks," but the bomber pilots and their crews had the real raw courage it took to fly into hell and out, and they did. The pilots were the glue that made the difference. They deserve some of the cheers and respect they never seemed to get. Without them, we may have lost the war.

I salute each of them, they were true leaders. Especially one 1st Lt. Reuban G. Ricketts from Danville, Virginia. My kind of pilot!



This confession from **John E. "Jack" Butler**, Navigator. Jack flew with the 67th until shortly after D-Day, then finished his 30 missions with the 66th. He flew in many different planes, but his favorites were the *Glory Bee* and *Southern Comfort*.

Low Level Raid on the Collinwood Locomotive Yards. This highly successful low level B-24 bombing raid in April, 1944 was one of the best kept stories of WW2. As a result, none of us participants received any of the usual medals, but better yet, none of us was court martialled either.

During April, 1944 a few of us were still young, dumb and enthusiastic. I understand there were several others besides me who were planning on winning the war single handed if necessary. At any rate, a bunch of us eager beavers had finally arrived at Topeka, Kansas for the purpose of picking up a bright, shiny, brand new B-24. Now our only problem was to pick out which rumor we liked best. Were we going to

the South Pacific to work on our tans, or were we going to the Aleutians and freeze our butts, or were we going to England to assist the Piccadilly Commandos.

Remember, all this was highly confidential rumors. But finally it dawned on someone that as confidential as this information was, they ought to at least confide in the navigator, which they did. Confiding in me probably was not the worst mistake our esteemed authorities ever made. Anyway, they had to tell me where I was supposed to go and hopefully how to get there. So they told me the day before we left Topeka. They said, "Okay, take this nice, new and shiny B-24 and try not to screw it up. When you leave Topeka, head sort of northeast until you find this here Air base in New England." This sounded good to me and they were also nice enough to give me some maps (charts?). Just out of curiosity I decided to look at these charts. You never can tell when you might learn something useful.

Boy, did I learn something useful! I discovered that I would be flying along the shores of Lake Erie from Toledo to Buffalo and would be over the New York Central Railroad in Cleveland, Ohio at noon. I had worked for the Railroad for over three years before I went into the Air Force. My father had worked there for over 40 years before he retired. And there were at least 2,000 other railroad employees there also. I felt that I could trust my sainted mother not to alert the German Luftwaffe that I would be flying over the Collinwood Locomotive Yard in Cleveland, Ohio at noon April 15, 1944. I have felt terrible for almost 55 years that I was unable to resist making that phone call alerting my Mother that if a shiny new B-24 circled the New York Central Railroad Yard at noon April 15, 1944, it would be me. I suspect that my mother must have told my old man, which would explain why at least 1,000 people were cheering us on as we roared by at a very low altitude.

Now about the Low Level Bombing of the Collinwood Locomotive Yards. There are two gigantic smoke stacks ideally located for a practice bomb run. We had made one run over the railroad shop at about 1,000 foot altitude. Since every one on the ground knew what was going on, we naturally had a terrific reception. Every one in the Air Force was by now familiar with the genuinely historic Low Level Raid

over Ploesti so we didn't have too much trouble convincing the crew that we probably would never have a better opportunity for a realistic practice run. So we made the bomb run with excellent results. So after congratulating the bombardier on his great job, I reminded him that there were two smokestacks and why not make a great day out of it. So we did. So far we were having a great day. Now we were cruising smoothly down the shores of Lake Erie, headed more or less toward Buffalo. At this point Knowles, our pilot calls me on the intercom and asks me, "Hey Butler, don't we go some where near Niagra Falls?" I was embarrassed to have to inform him that I was already a little off course, and that if I didn't make a correction soon, we would be right over Niagra Falls in about 12 minutes. He said, "How long will it take you to figure the new course?" About 12 minutes I said. When we circled Niagra Falls we didn't drop below 1,000 feet and only circled twice.

*(Editor's Note: Jack waited 54 years before he would release this tale.)*



From **Bob Vance** - this reprint of a editorial by Gordon Sinclair of Toronto, Canada.

"This Canadian thinks it is time to speak up for the Americans as the most generous and possibly the least appreciated people on all the earth. Germany, Japan and, to a lesser extent Britain and Italy, were lifted out of the debris of war by the Americans who poured in billions of dollars and forgave other billions in debts. None of these countries is today paying even the interest on its remaining debts to the United States.

When France was in danger of collapsing in 1956, it was the Americans who propped it up, and their reward was to be insulted and swindled on the streets of Paris. I was there. I saw it when earthquakes hit distant cities, it is the United States that hurries in to help. This spring, 59 American communities were flattened by tornadoes. Nobody helped.

The Marshall Plan and the Truman Policy pumped billions of dollars into discouraged countries. Now newspapers in those countries are writing about the decadent, warmongering Americans. I'd like to see just one of those countries that is gloating over the erosion of the United States dollar build its own airplane. Does any other country in the world have a plane to equal the Boeing Jumbo Jet, the Lockheed Tri-Star, or the Douglas DC10? Is so, why don't they fly them? Why do all the International lines except Russia fly American Planes?

Why does no other land on earth even consider putting a man or woman on the moon? You talk about Japanese technocracy, and you get radios. You talk about German technocracy, and you get automobiles. You talk about American technocracy, and you find men on the moon - not once, but several times - and safely home again.

You talk about scandals, and the Americas put theirs right in the store window for everybody to look at. Even their draft-dodgers are not pursued and hounded. They are here on our streets, and most of them, unless they are breaking Canadian laws, are getting American dollars from ma and pa at home to spend here.

When the railways of France, Germany and India were breaking down through age, it was the Americans who rebuilt them. When the Pennsylvanian Railroad and the New York Central went broke, nobody loaned them an old caboose. Both are still broke.

I can name you 5000 times when the Americans raced to the help of other people in trouble. Can you name me even one time when someone else raced to the Americans in trouble? I don't think there was outside help even during the San Francisco earthquake.

Our neighbors have faced it alone, and I'm one Canadian who is tired of hearing them get kicked around. They will come out of this thing with their flag high. And when they do, they are entitled to thumb their nose at the lands that are gloating over their present troubles. I hope Canada is not one of those."

Stand proud, America! Wear it proudly!

*Randy Howard* - California Institute of Technology



*Bossier City, Louisiana*

**JOIN US FOR  
THE  
2001 BGVA  
REUNION**

**October 15,  
16,  
17, & 18  
2001**



*Come see the Louisiana Belle, refurbished and re-painted B-24, at a dedication to be held during the Reunion.*

Photo: M/Sgt. Francis "Woody" Wood, Crew Chief and Sgt. Romie C. Vaughn, Assistant Crew Chief and their new aircraft waiting for the artist to paint the name Louisiana Belle and the Flying 8 Ball logo on the nose.

**44th Bomb Group  
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