

44th Bomb Group Veterans Association



8 BALL TAILS

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Earthquake McGoon #41-24235



Earthquake McGoon #41-24235 transported the crew of Lt. Walter I. Bunker through many perilous missions. One of the happiest was when they landed back at Shipdham from North Africa, with the crew from the Ploesti mission, along with the ground men who had serviced her. *Earthquake* was kept so busy; she never got her last name painted on the fuselage.

Pictured L- R: Walter Bunker, Pilot; Milos C. Strickland, 67th; William D. Middlebrooks, Rear Hatch Gunner; Richard D. Butler, Co-Pilot; Loy L. Neeper, Engineer & Top Turret Gunner; William P. Newbold, Navigator; Henry R. Zwicker, Bombardier; Winthrop S. Chamberlain, Left Waist Gunner; Gerald D. Mason; Michael A. Curtain (67th); B. C. Martin (67th); Kun D. Gong (67th); Clement C. Boulanger, Tail Gunner; Roland J. Dill (67th); Warren Kookan, Right Waist Gunner.

Walter S. Aldridge brought *Earthquake McGoon* to her final stop at Bari, Italy. She had been victimized by the ME 109s at Wiener Neustadt.



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Colonel Richard D. (Dick) Butler

506 & 67th Squadrons

One of the 44th's True Heroes

Dick Butler was 20 years old when he was sworn into the United States Air Force. WWII was only six weeks in progress, and Butler knew exactly what he wanted to do. He wanted to fly. He had already gotten his license as a civilian pilot, and he promptly signed up for aviation cadet training. He had studied at San Diego State College, University of Southern California; then after induction, Williams Field, Arizona; Lindbergh Field, Merced AAF, San Diego; then Luke Field, Arizona, where he received his pilot rating and commission as a Second Lieutenant. That same day, he married his high school sweetheart, Ardith Lundy.

With all the enthusiasm of a young aviator, Second Lieutenant Butler arrived in England as co-pilot on *Earthquake McGoon*, February 1943, flying via West Palm Beach, Puerto Rico, and Marrakech, French Morocco.

His skills were put to a test soon after arrival; the mission -- May 14 at the Krupp Submarine shipbuilding installations and German Navy submarine pens at Kiel, Germany. That memorable event was well documented by **Roy Owen** in the Summer 1999 issue of the *8 Ball Tails*. The plan had been for B-17s to drop 500 pound HD bombs; and Liberators were to follow with 100 pound incendiary clusters.

"I remember the sky we were flying through was full of junk," Butler remembers, "flak, plane parts and the incendiaries that came apart immediately. On-coming pilots had to



Second Lieutenant Richard D. Butler. Photo taken January, 1943 in West Palm Beach, Florida.

break from formation to avoid flying into the incendiaries, making them easy targets for the German fighter planes. Five B-24's were lost." (Ed. Note: *The Luftwaffe also paid a price, 23 fighters fell to the guns of the Liberators.*)

Along with the memories of flak and fighters, Butler remembers the difficulty of maintaining the formation at a high altitude. The temperature was 54-56 degrees below zero, certainly a shock to a young man born and raised in California. The entire crew made

it back safely, and could revel in the fact that this dangerous mission earned the 44th Bomb Group a Presidential Unit Citation. This was the first such award to a unit in World War II.

Wiping out the sub pens was crucial to the war effort. At that time, the U-Boats were persistently causing damage to the supply lines that stretched across miles of ocean. The Germans knew the importance of this operation, which is the reason they defended it with such ferocity.

Three days later, Liberators were off from southern England to the U-Boat pens and docks at Bordeaux, France. It was a twelve hour mission, the longest yet out of England. Flying low level over the Bay of Biscay, the Group successfully bombed their target and made it safely back home. This was considered to be a perfectly executed mission, credited to the extreme secrecy of the mission and the success in precisely hitting the target. They climbed to a bombing

altitude of 20,000 feet on approach to the French coast. (This was low level flying over water, unlike the Ploesti mission which came later.)

North Africa

Word came that the group was to fly to North Africa. When they set off to Benghazi, the *Earthquake McGoon* crew was sent first to an airfield near London for wooden crates. It was later learned that these crates contained models of the Ploesti oil refineries.

While Generals Patton and Montgomery were winding their way through south Sicily to Messina, the 44th was bombing marshaling yards in Italy; air dromes in Sicily and Foggia, Italy; marshaling yards in Naples and Rome. (Orders for bombing the Littoria Yards in Rome were, "Don't hit the Vatican"). Keeping the Germans on the defensive in Italy was part of the grand plan which had been

devised seven months previously by President Roosevelt and Prime Minister Churchill at Casablanca.

Dick remembers life in Africa. It was no picnic. The men dug their own trenches around their tents. It was hot; there were mosquitoes, flies, scorpions, huge locusts and other insects. The blowing sand was an unending problem, keeping it out of the engines and the food. The surrounding desert was littered with trashed equipment, a good hiding place for snipers. Despite all difficulties, low level flying was becoming a practiced art in the desert of Libya, flying over the models of the oil fields of Ploesti, in preparation for OPERATION TIDAL WAVE.

The Ploesti Mission

Finally, Sunday, August 1st arrived. The briefing was in an open air theater. The

importance of this mission was emphasized, in that 'even if every plane was lost, but the target was destroyed, it would be worth it', truly a sobering statement. Col. **Leon Johnson** made an offer, "Anyone who doesn't want to go on this mission can back out now, and there will be no recriminations." Nobody accepted his offer.



Earthquake McGoon crew

Back L to R: Henry R. Zwicker (Bombardier); Walter I Bunker (Pilot); Richard D. Butler (Co-Pilot);
William P. Newbold (Navigator)
Front L to R: Clement C. Boulanger (Tail Gunner); William Middlebrooks (Waist Gunner);
Gerald D. Mason (Radio Operator/Gunner); Loy L. Leeper (Engineer/Gunner);
Donald M. Chamberlain (Ass't Engineer/Gunner); Warren K. Kooken (Asst. Radio/Gunner).

The Ploesti story has been documented in many publications, but the valor of those who flew into that fiery cauldron can never be overstated. The men were up at 4:30 a.m., and took off at 7:30 from the dirt runway in a dust storm.

Dick and his pilot, **Lt. Walt Bunker**, took turns flying the thirteen hour mission, driving on through thick clouds, high mountain ranges and a thunderstorm; later encountering hay stacks and box cars that camouflaged anti-aircraft guns. Even a building that looked like a hospital, with a Red Cross on the roof, was a hidden gun emplacement. Despite all that, flying with the force led by Lt. Col. **Posey**, they plowed through and successfully bombed the Blue Target, (later recognized to be the fuel source for the Luftwaffe.).

The Blue target was the Creditul Minier Refinery, the only refinery that produced aviation gasoline. It was the only target on the mission that was completely destroyed and never re-built during the war. Its loss to the Germans severely limited Luftwaffe training and operation for the rest of the war. *(Note: Col. Johnson was on the White 5 target. Lt. Col. Posey, Deputy Group Guide, led the force on the Blue Target.)*

The planes flew at treetop level to maintain secrecy and later, to avoid flak. However, the Germans knew they were coming, and were ready. "At one point we were flying at an altitude of 100 feet," Butler remembered, "and a fighter flew straight at us. We expected him to rise to avoid a crash, but instead, he went under us. I never thought he could get through; but our tail gunner saw him climb skyward, after passing under our plane." Flying at the height of the cornfields to avoid fighters and flak towers, the 44th headed back to Benghazi. *(It was later noted that a B-24 was found to have a stalk of corn in the bomb bay.)*

"I could see that our #3 engine was knocked out, but the pilot thought it was #4. I

feathered #3, and he pushed the feathering button for #4. With both engines off on the same side of the plane, the right wing went down almost to the ground. I immediately unfeathered #4, it started right up and we evened off. Our flight engineer, **Loy Neeper** reported that our right wing came to within 20 feet of hitting the ground." Seeing that they were operating with three engines, other pilots slowed down and kept pace with the Bunker plane until they got back to Benghazi.

Immediately upon landing, someone checked Butler's dog tags; and since he had Type B blood, they rushed him into the hospital to give blood transfusions. By the time this was finished, debriefing was completed, and he didn't get to share the booze!!

Of the 178 planes dispatched that day, 163 made it to the target area. 446 men were killed or missing; 130 wounded; 108 became POWs and 79 were interned in Turkey. 88 returned to home base. It was a thirteen hour trip, with 2,300 miles to be covered. From then on, all missions were measured against Ploesti, the bloodiest mission in WWII. Col. Leon Johnson was one of five who received the Medal of Honor for leading the 44th. He considered the medal to be the property of the men who flew with him.

Given time to place his participation in historical perspective, Butler stated that he believes his greatest life contribution was engaging in the destruction of the Blue Target.

Although bombing the Rumanian oil fields was reaching into the heart of Hitler's war machine, there were more wasps' nests waiting. After a few days of R&R, and twelve days for the ground crew to repair the damages of the anti-aircraft and German fighters over Ploesti, Dick's crew's next assignment was to a Messerschmidt plant in Austria at Wiener-Neustadt, then Foggia, Italy.

The 44th Bomb Group then returned to Shipdham, its home base in England. The crew was transferred from the 506th Squadron to the 67th Squadron. Walt Bunker was promoted to 67th Operation Officer and Dick became pilot of the crew. After only about two weeks back in England, the 44th Bomb Group was ordered back to North Africa, this time to Oudna Airfield near Tunis. The reason for this return to North Africa was to support the allied landing at Salerno, Italy. By the time the Group arrived, however, its support of the allied troops at Salerno was not needed.

Back to Wiener-Neustadt

Therefore, the Group was assigned to some other bombing missions, the third of which was back to the Messerschmidt Factory at Wiener Neustadt, Austria. Flying Squadron Deputy Lead in *Miss Emma Lou*, # N-860, with six planes in his formation, he saw his leader's plane get hit and blow up. Soon all others went down. He moved into #4 position in another formation, a position he recognized as extremely vulnerable. That formation disintegrated, his #3 engine was hit, and he was low on gas. Returning to Tunis was not possible, so he made an emergency landing at the airfield near Catania, Sicily.

He had no hydraulic system, the right wing was damaged, with a cable shot out; his right flap went up, the left went down on the approach to landing at about 100 feet of altitude, causing the plane to skid. There were B-25s on one side of the runway, gallon drums of gasoline on the left, and at the end was a Sicilian on a bike, who Dick thought they were going to hit.

"With no brakes, we continued off the runway into a sand bank and the nose wheel collapsed," he continued. "I left the plane in Sicily. One member of my crew was wounded and placed in the hospital. On the second night, in a tent used as a night club, I ran into a high school friend. He was flying a C-47, carrying 55 gallon drums of gas to Sicily from North Africa."

Hitchhiking to Shipdham

The friend volunteered to take Dick's crew back to Tunis. When they arrived, they found that the 44th BG had departed for England, and no transportation was available for the crew. Dick's friend, Jim McColl, then offered to take the crew to Algiers to see if they could catch the 44th. When they got to Algiers, there was no sign of the 44th or any other possible airlift. Jim agreed to take the crew to Oran. When they got there, again no sign of the 44th. Jim said he just could not take them any farther, as he had been doing this all on his own, and his group did not know where he was. (Several years later, Jim McColl served under Dick as a B-29 pilot.) After two days at Oran, Dick got the crew a flight to Marrakech. There the crew got a MATS flight to Prestwich, Scotland, and then train rides back to Norwich, then on the Liberty truck back to Shipdham. Needless to say, everyone was surprised to see the crew, thinking they had been lost.

Explosion on a Training Mission

Flying with a new co-pilot on a test and training mission back in England, an explosion occurred in the #2 engine, and all other engines quit when the plane was at 800 feet, entering the traffic pattern. Dick had no choice but to go straight ahead for a crash-landing. The plane went through a tree into a Brussels sprout field, where it broke up and started to burn. Dick went out the demolished left side of the plane, and the co-pilot went out the right. Eleven of the men aboard were able to get out. **Loy Neeper**, Engineer, went back into the burning wreck and brought out the twelfth man, the bombardier. Dick and the co-pilot were the most seriously injured. General Johnson, who was in the control tower, saw the crash. He immediately got into his staff car and proceeded to the accident scene, where he helped move Dick to an ambulance. Dick had a broken left arm and broken left ankle. Dick, the co-pilot **Gerald Grell**, and the bombardier "**Nick**" **Nickolson**, went to the hospital. Nick was OK and left in a couple of days. Dick and Gerald returned to



Shipdham after about two weeks, where it was decided that they should be returned to the States as hospital patients.

Back to California

After a series of stays in various hospitals, they returned to the States on the ship, *Ile de France*. At Halloran General Hospital on Staten Island they were placed on a hospital train for the trip west. Dick eventually wound up at Hoff General Hospital in Santa Barbara, California. The General Hospital was close to his home in San Diego. There he was united with his wife Ardith, received a leave and preceded to San Diego for the first meeting with his daughter, Emily Louise (Emmy Lou), who had been born just prior to the Ploesti Mission.

After his bones were healed, Dick was assigned to Herrington AAF in Kansas, where he started flying B-29s. When the war ended, he decided to stay in the Air Force, where he spent the rest of his 30 year career in the Strategic Air Command. Besides the B-29, Dick flew B-50s, B-47s and B-52s. He flew combat missions in the Korean and Viet Nam wars.

He was promoted to Colonel in April, 1957, and had several very important assignments. He served as Base Commander at March Air

Force Base for three years, followed by three years as Commander of a B-52 wing. His final assignment, prior to retirement, was as Chief of Staff of the Fifteenth Air Force.

Of the original crew of *Earthquake McGoon*, one did not survive the war: **Henry Zwicker**, Bombardier, who was flying with the **Charles Henderson** crew at Wiener-Neustadt. Four members of his crew are still alive: in addition to Dick, **William P. Newbold**, Navigator; **Loy Neeper**, Engineer; **Warren K. Kooken**, Asst. Radio Operator/Gunner. **All four are Ploesti veterans, and are members of the 44th BGVA and the Second Air Division Association.**

Although extremely modest about his own experiences, Col. Butler has made major contributions in seeing that the sacrifices of the 44th BG and 2nd Air Division are not forgotten. He has been a major player in the support of the 2nd Air Division Memorial Library in Norwich, England. In the past year, he was elected Executive Vice President of the 2nd Air Division, and will move into the presidency later this year.

Ardith and Dick have been married 59 years (soon to be 60). They have six children, seven grandchildren, and one great granddaughter.

Celebrating in Norwich 2ADA Convention Banquet 8 November 2001



Foreground: James Wright L to R: Dick Butler, Ardith Butler, Dan Butler, Theresa Butler, Emily DeShazo, Kay Drake, Frank Drake, and Kevin Watson.

GERALD W. FOLSOM, PRESIDENT OF 44TH BOMB GROUP



Gerald 'Jerry' Folsom retired from his accounting and system design occupation to dedicate himself to becoming a full time treasurer of the 44th Bomb Group. Contacting all those buddies, working with Roy Owen to build the organization, was more fun than saving companies from bankruptcy or scandal. Enron was not the first to carry out secret deals, as Jerry rapidly learned when CEO's appealed to him for help.

He never dreamed that his new assignment would explode into a full time occupation, leaving little time for other things he likes to do -- gardening, hunting and fishing, or helping the 8th Air Force develop the Hill Air Force Museum. He married Beverly in 1997, who jumped into the chores of the 44th with great



In 1997, Jerry and Bev participated in tour of England and Europe with the 44th BGVA. Pictured: Guy Cressant handing Lois Shaeffer Cianci the box containing the Clair P. Shaeffer dog tag.

TREASURER

enthusiasm. At any reunion, you can see both of them registering, selling, managing, and now presiding. At Barksdale, Jerry moved into the presidential spotlight, succeeding 'Mike' Mikoloski, who stepped down from the top position.

When WWII broke out, Jerry was managing a grocery store; but long before that, he was reading about the flying Aces of WWI. He knew he needed two years of college to qualify for the Corps Cadet Program, but when they dropped that requirement in July '42, he applied. Before he could get to Manchester, NH to take

the test, his draft notice came. On August 26, 1942, he was sworn into the Air Corps. Six months later he reported to

Manchester, NH, at Fort Devens,

Mass overnight; then Camp Kilmer and overnight by train to Nashville, TN for Classification. After four weeks of tests, he was approved for pilot training and was on his way to Santa Anna, California, for pre-flight schooling; then to Primary at Morten



Air Academy, Blythe, California. He never got used to the poor food and temperatures of 130 every day, nor the metal on the PT 19s which were too hot to touch. Next he went to Bakersfield, California, for basic flight training; then to Stockton, California for advanced training. He graduated December '43, then flew AT for Bombardier training for a month, and then to Kingman, Arizona, where he flew B-17 transition as co-pilot for Aerial Gunnery. In February '44, he came to Salt Lake where crews were made up. On March 6th, they went to El



Crew Going Over

Front L to R: Nathan Woodruff, Carl Miller, Perry Morse, William Retham, Harold Maggard, William Uvanni. Back L to R: Paul Boensch, Willis Edgecomb, Gerald Folsom, George Bieber.

Paso, Tex-Biggs Field for transition in B-24s.

The Crew Gathers

In Salt Lake City, the members of the **George Bieber** crew trained together. Jerry was co-pilot. In May



they arrived in Topeka, Kansas, where they picked up a new plane. On June 1, they proceeded to Bangor Maine, Goose Bay Labrador, BW1, Greenland, then to Valley, Wales. "At BW1 Greenland, we had to fly up a fiord with mountains on each side. The landing strip has a glacier at the end, 10,000 feet high." he recalled, "No going around. You take off the opposite way from the landing. It was there that I first thought more about what might lay ahead than any other time.

"June 6, I went down to the mess hall for breakfast, and off to one side of the mess hall was an alcove where lots of men were listening to a radio. It was D-Day" and what I heard did not sound good. Then over the Tanoy P.A. System came, "All pilots, co-pilots, bombardiers and navigators report to the briefing room at 12:00 hours." Jerry remembers the questions that rose in his mind. "They have 80 planes with crews here. They are going to send us on our way. I could imagine landing, stopping on the taxi strip or other such place, gassing up, loading up with bombs and ammo, dumping off our baggage, and we would be on our way. Will we be able to recognize a German plane? A German ship? Will they be flying formation like we had done in training?"

At the Briefing Room, he learned that they just wanted officers to check their planes for pilferage. The wind was blowing 80 mph. Chained on the wing tips of each plane, they had big dump trucks loaded with gravel.

When we got to Ireland for a refresher class in aircraft and ship identification, we found out we were



19 Missions flown.
Many in Consolidated Mess.

assigned to the 44th BG, and would be flying out of Shipdham.

Meeting the Enemy

On July 9th the Bieber crew boarded *Consolidated Mess* for their first mission to an aircraft and ball bearing factory in Bernburg, Germany, the longest mission the 8th had flown at that time. "Here we learned about flak. Those black things - puffs - were not clouds. We soon came to realize that when you could see the red ball of fire in the exploding shell, it was close... and it left one of those black things... and it causes holes in your plane.

"As we approached the target, about 50 German ME 109s came at us from 12:00 high. There were two blinking lights on each wing, like strobe lights. Immediately we realized those were cannons on the wings, and they were shooting at us! Well, they missed. That was our first initiation of enemy fighters.

"As we turned to the left from the target, I counted 13 planes going down, one burning, and 97 parachutes. Was I scared?? My thoughts were - 'so this is combat.'

"Our plane had not been damaged. It was still flying. No one was hurt. However, our group did lose three

aircraft that day, probably from flak. This mission was the only one in which we encountered enemy fighters. It is our most memorable mission—our first, and the most enemy action of any of our 35 missions."

Fifty-eight years later, Jerry vividly remembers being wakened at 3:00 or 4:00 A.M., washing in cold water, eating powdered eggs, and going to the briefing where the target was unveiled, and a green string showed



8 Missions flown in Joplin Jalopy.

the pathway. Then by truck or jeep, they went to their planes, checked the equipment on the assigned plane, (usually *Consolidated Mess* or *Joplin' Jalopy*) and then climbed aboard. A flare, generally red, was a signal to start the engines. After an engine check, a signal flare would tell the pilots to prepare to taxi; at briefing they had learned which plane they were to follow.

"On take-off we held the plane with brakes while the engines revved up. When airborne we climbed to 7,000 feet, and then found the plane we were to form up on, that famous yellow and black striped *Lemon Drop*. If it were still dark, the formation plane would fire red flares, similar to Roman candles which are used for 4th of July celebrations. *Lemon Drop* would fly in circles, waiting for the

entire group to assemble in the formation. At a given time, they would head out for the mission on the pre-planned route.

"At this time we would climb to the designated altitude, 22-24,000 feet, then head for the enemy coast. At 14,000 feet, we put on our oxygen masks. Without oxygen, at 16,000 feet you would feel woozy; at 20,000 feet you would pass out in 30 seconds.

"The predictions of enemy action were not always accurate. Sometimes a lot of action was predicted, and there would be very little. Other times it was the opposite. Of course, we could see flak along the mission route or in the target area. We got nervous when they started bracketing us in. When the flak started getting bad, gunners would throw chaff out the waist windows. Chaff were strips of paper that looked like tinfoil on one side. It came in bundles, about the diameter of a Campbell's soup can. This was to foul up the German radar they were using to measure our altitude."



Gerald Folsom, Co-Pilot; Willis Edgecomb, Navigator; Paul Boensch, Bombardier; and George Bieber, Pilot.

Although Bernburg was the most unforgettable mission, the trip to Munich had its frightening moments. "We were ordered to make a frontal penetration, and assemble on top of the clouds. A frontal penetration is

where you spread the formation out and make a climbing 360-degree turn. When we got up on top, about 26,000 feet, we found ourselves alone! We circled for a while, still carrying a load of bombs and with bomb bay doors opened, consuming a lot of gas. No other planes showed up. We spotted an open area and dropped our bombs. We did not know where we were—just knew we were in the Munich area. *(Only later did they learn that the lead plane's bombsight had been destroyed by flak and his interphone was shot out, making it impossible to tell the deputy lead bombardier to take over and drop the bombs.)*

'Willis Edgecomb, navigator, determined, 'If we get flak in five minutes, we're here; in 15 minutes we're here; if no flak, I'll know where we are.' Bill Uvanni, radio operator got a radio 'fix' and we headed home. We didn't get any flak, so we kept on our northwest heading, and after a while, we got out of the clouds. There was a cloudbank running diagonally from the northwest to southeast France. As a lone plane, we knew we were not safe, so we skirted along the cloudbank. If we saw a plane, which could be a German fighter heading toward us, we slid over into the cloudbank. This happened several times, but none ever attacked. When we got back to Shipdham, we had five minutes of gas in the tank.

"On another mission deep into Germany with a heavy load, we were on our way home when our #3 engine quit. Nathan Woodruff, engineer, advised us that it had run out of gas, and that the other engines

were low on gas; and furthermore, we might not have enough gas to get home. We were at about 20-21,000 feet. I remembered a conversation I had several months previously with a cruise control engineer: 'You have a real good engine, but if you ever need to really save gas, you can use a setting, (if my memory serves me correctly) around 200 RPM and a manifold pressure of 2600. Keep the cowlings flaps closed, and if the cylinder head temperature doesn't get above 210 degrees, you will be OK. Open the cowlings flaps a little if it goes too high. Keep the engines running at this setting as long as they will.'

"With the plane on descent attitude and this setting, we headed home. Gas got so low, we did not think we would make it, so we alerted the English rescue service, in case we ditched in the English Channel. We crossed the channel at 4-5000 feet and made it to the base. Our crew chief told us the next day, 'Good thing you did not have to go around, or you would not have made it.' We came back with an unexploded shell in the wheel well. It turned out to be a dud."

Jerry remembers a mission where there were over 230 holes in the plane, and nobody was hurt. Bill Uvanni, radio operator, had a piece of flak miss his head by less than six inches, and later he looked at the quarter-size hole it made in the plane.

Some Sights Were Beautiful Some Had Hidden Danger Lurking

"One of the nicest missions was a flight down the Rhone River to Lyons, France to an airfield. One could readily see the Alps with the snow on top. With the sun shining on them, it was a beautiful sight, very



picturesque. This was a mission in which we were briefed for fighter activity. There was none, nor any flak.

Another time, heading home from a mission, we were approaching the coast. It was a nice sun shiny day - not a cloud in the sky. It was a very relaxed atmosphere. All of a sudden we lost power. It was like someone had turned off the keys on your car. At that instant there were four big bursts of shell fire - anti aircraft fire, and it was much bigger than anything we had ever seen, and it was right there in front of us. It seemed as though we could have reached out and touched it. If we had not lost power, we would have been there. It was meant for us, and they had us zeroed in.

Of course, we immediately dropped out of formation. I believe we were leading the upper element that day. We could not imagine why we lost power on all engines. The engineer had no idea - it had to be the supercharger, but why? I vaguely recalled in one of the engineering sessions, something about a fuse for the supercharger. While the engineer was checking the wiring, I went



Jerry and his tail gunner, Perry Morse at the American Cemetery for Airmen at Cambridge, England.

down to the supercharger under the flight deck. There was a small access cover. I slid it sideways and

there was a blown fuse and a spare one. I put the spare in, and things went operational again. What a relief! If that little fuse had not blown, we would have cashed in our chips. Of the many personnel I have told about this, none had ever heard of it.

"When I think of our crew's narrow escapes., **Perry Morse**, tail gunner, whose can of Spam and orange exploded from flak, also cutting his parachute harness; and Bill Uvanni's near miss, I can only believe in Divine intervention. Someone Else was riding with us that we couldn't see. We finished 35 missions with the same members we started with, except for one originally assigned to the ball turret, was later reassigned to another crew. At the time we finished, we were told that we were the first crew to complete 35 missions and no one getting hurt.

After the Missions

"I was offered the opportunity to go into Intelligence - interpreting bomb strike photos. They made it really appealing, promotion in a couple of weeks. Major in a month. I asked 'will I have to fly any more combat. Oh yes, four missions a month. I had orders in my hand, taking me off combat. After completing 35 missions with no problems, I thought it best to decline." Jerry was awarded the Air Medal with 3 Oak Leaf Clusters and the Distinguished Flying Cross.

From Shipdham, Jerry was sent to the 61st troop carrier command, near Grantham and Sherwood Forest, to instruct pilots to fly B-24's that had been fitted with a 500-gallon gas tank in each bomb bay. The concept was to ferry gas to Patton. But to his knowledge, it was never used. Each

plane would have been a flying bomb, if it was ever hit or crashed.

He left England in early January, 1945, on the ship Pasteur, originally built for the Mediterranean. They came home with no escort. The Captain said he hoped he didn't zig when he should zag. At that time, they had four U-boats around them, but the ship was fast enough to outrun them.

He spent the next 6 months in Victorville, California, flying navigators and bombardiers in training who were using the new top secret experimental radar. He was discharged August 25, 1945, 11 days after the Japanese surrender.

Post WWII

Jerry attended the University of Utah and received a degree in Accounting and Business Management. He spent about 40 years designing accounting systems and resolving business problems, both in accounting, financial and credits policy. As a lover of fishing, he became active in the Salt Lake County Fish & Game Association, serving as President for one year. Was Secretary/Treasurer for many years and a member since 1949, and was presented with a Lifetime Membership in 1991 of the Utah Wildlife Federation. He became Regional Director of the Utah Wildlife Federation 1961-63, and Vice President for two years. He was presented life membership in 1991. This group is an Affiliate of the National Wildlife Federation.

After semi-retiring in 1985, he set out to organize the Utah Chapter of the Eighth Air Force Historical Society in 1992, and was Secretary/Treasurer

until last year. He became Treasurer of the 44th BGVA in 1995, and has been influential in increasing membership from 575 to over 1000 at the present time. Ascending to the Presidency last year, he is seriously seeking a replacement for the position of Treasurer. Among his many goals are to perpetuate the 44th's history through the Database, and to entice the young family members of veterans to pick up the torch.

Jerry has three children, one son and two daughters, five grandsons, three granddaughters. The three oldest grandchildren are in college.

After fifteen years of being single, he met

Beverly, who had been single about eight years. Five years ago they married. 'Bev' had three



sons and two daughters. Although she has her own business as a successful professional men's tailor, she takes time to help out for our 44th BGVA Reunions. In the ballroom at Reunions, they can frequently be seen demonstrating they're freestyle dancing techniques.

Besides Jerry, only four other members of the Bieber Crew are still living. **Paul Boench**, bombardier; **Harold Maggard**, waist gunner; **Nathan Woodruff**, and **Perry Morse**.

Memorable Moments for Jerry

Right: Will Lundy and Roy Owen unveil the monument to Miss Dianne at Viller-Escales.

Below Right: The 44th Bomb Group Veterans were honored.



From the Editor:

Where is your database? You write me letters (for which I am 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 Now!



From the President's Note Pad

Just a few passing thoughts and comments, now that I have partially recovered from the 44th's European tour to France, Belgium, Germany and England... Details will be in the next issue of the *8 Ball Tails*.

It is with considerable appreciation that I participated in ceremonies honoring our missing men while in Europe. Those people, our European friends, are dedicated to placing markers and memorials at crash sites in recognition of the sacrifice we made to set them free.

One of my objectives and goals is to preserve our history before it is too late. Before there was a written language, the elders of the tribe passed information to the next generation by story-telling. You, as an individual, have lived and participated in a massive effort to free the world of an evil force, unlike anything that has happened before or since. You must become a story-teller. Ancients preserved their history on stone tablets; the Indians, with petroglyphs on canyon walls. With modern technology, we have a better way—by computer in our Database on a CD. Already the letters and diaries which many have sent are recorded and preserved in our Database. This is far better than stored in a box in some basement, attic or elsewhere. We created this history. Let's preserve it for the next generation, our children and their children.

As individuals, you can help preserve our memory by telling your story or stories at local schools and other organization meetings. This is your opportunity. They are looking for speakers. People, all ages, are interested in this information that they cannot get in a classroom.

Very recently when I was at the bank making a deposit, a young teller (in his mid twenties) asked, "What is this 44th Bomb Group? I told him, "The Bomb Group I flew with during WWII". "What was that?" he asked. Further conversation followed. He commented that he had never heard of any of this; didn't remember hearing of it in school. This is just a recent instance of people not knowing our past. Recently I spoke at a Memorial Day service. I told them what it was like, flying on missions; what was involved, etc. - nothing heroic. Several commented afterward—glad to hear my recollections, never having heard these things before. Two people involved with the planning of the service asked, "Why is it so hard to get one of you fellows to speak?" I am no speaker... I relate it as though I was telling a hunting or fishing story. Most of you have done that, and could tell your story the same way. There is no need to enhance it like some fish stories—the solid truth is powerful. (Do you know when a fish grows the most? After it is caught!!!)

It makes you feel good that it is appreciated, especially when they come up and say 'thank you,' ask questions and want you to tell more.

To go along with these thoughts, I remind you that many of you—too many— have not sent in your biographies. This is not just of your military service. We like to preserve a little information about you - what you did before the service, and what you did after, and about you and your family; and of course, what you did during the war. This will be preserved on a computer database disc called a CD. Help us out.

Time is running out.

Israel Jolson

Will Sez



Slowly, but surely, much work continues to be accomplished on completing our Military Heritage Master Database. As most of you know, it is my fondest dream to put as much of our history as possible into Arlo Bartsch's super program. For many years, **Art Hand, Webb Todd, Norman Kiefer** and I, as squadron historians, did our best to obtain as much of our respective squadron's records as possible. Much of it came from the official microfilm rolls obtained from Maxwell AFB. We then built on these basic records by searching for our long missing veterans to obtain more personal data from the combat men themselves. Art Hand was very important, as he did much of the searching for our "missing" members. Many of you not only gave us your personal recollections and experiences, but also your personal diaries. From all of this, we each produced our own Squadron history book, but got no support from the leader of the 44th BG HMG, and had to finance them ourselves. As a consequence, we could not afford to order more than a minimum of books, so only a very limited number were printed, and where soon were out of print.

When we reorganized in 1994, many conflicts and problems were resolved, but we had to begin anew. There was great cooperation and resolve, much interest but no money. Our previous leader disposed of nearly \$35,000, but nothing remained, not even equipment. Thanks to the leadership and hard work by our new President, **Roy Owen**, we quickly became solvent, and were getting many things done. However, as the Squadron Historians job was done so far as their books were concerned, interest moved on to other events. However, as I had always been designated Group Archivist, the keeper of our historical papers and memorabilia, that job continued. Letters, diaries, stories, articles, books, etc. continued to arrive and were filed away.

Tom Shepherd and I often discussed this continuing growth of priceless material, hoping that it would be utilized in some manner so that it could be made available to our members and the public in some readily available manner. Computer programs were investigated and found wanting. However, one day Tom learned about Mr. Arlo Bartsch and his self-designed and wonderful computer program. That was the answer! Here was a way to reduce all of these great stacks of papers to perhaps one CD disc! Not only reduce it to that tiny space, but make it all AVAILABLE with a few well-placed clicks of a mouse!

Yes, it was clearly possible to do all of this, but of course, it would be expensive. How much? No one knew, not even Arlo. Yes, Arlo had placed his own bomber group's sortie reports and associated data, into his program but had done it himself; for the most part, while he was refining his programs. So we had to learn by trial and error, give limited work to Arlo to process as our funds could provide.

The 44th BGVA Board resisted the process of going to the membership for additional funds, but eventually it was inevitable. Happily, many of you members were most generous and again there were funds available for additional work beyond the entering of mission sortie details. **Tony Mastradone** volunteered his time and efforts to visit the Archives near D.C. hundreds of times to copy over 8500 sorties and associated papers. Now, resources are again low, but there is much work still sitting here near my elbows. Much of this data is material not used in the Squadron books or my Roll of Honor book, but certainly related to our history. My ROH book was printed in 1987, as were the Squadron History books in this same period. However, there are so many new personal memories related to those events in files here that should be utilized by placing them into this database. This material cannot be added to books, but it surely could be entered into our database, wherever appropriate. When added to the bare sortie reports, it can bring to life the events that took place on that plane or that formation. They should be added to an existing diary and/or to a personal legacy portion. They belong wherever the information can enhance existing stories.

Why am I pushing for this expenditure so hard? Time is growing short for our generation. One of these years, it will be my time. I want to see these papers utilized to record your history, your many efforts to win, your sacrifices to become known, not forgotten. What about donating these records to a College, a museum, a military base, or whatever? Sure, better than into the paper shredder. However, these facilities can do little more than place it all into files where the public will never look. Only the dedicated scholars or future historians will find it and then make little use of it.

So, my plan is this: When we find it again necessary to ask financial assistance to continue this data entry work, could you again help us? Every little bit will help us move that much closer to being the ONLY bomber group in the 8th Air Force to have accomplished a near complete data based history.





44th Bomb Group 2002 Reunion

Wing/Strat. Missile Wing
October 7, 8, 9, 10 & 11, 2002



Holiday Inn, Omaha Central I-80 - Omaha, Nebraska

Hotel Reservation Form



Reservations may only be made by telephone directly with the Hotel's Reservation Department by calling (402) 393-3950. To receive the contract rate, the attendees should identify themselves as being with the 44th Bomb Group. All reservations should be made by September 6, 2002. After this date, the hotel will release the remainder of our room block. Additional reservation requests will be honored on a space and room available basis.

Guaranteed Reservations. Rooms can be guaranteed for late arrival to an individual's credit card or by advance deposit equal to one night's room and tax at the time of reservation. The deposit will be credited to the attendee's account. Check in time is 4:00 p.m. on reserved date, or refunds will be made only if the reservation is cancelled 48 hours prior to the scheduled day of arrival. Guarantee may be made by check or credit card.

Guaranteed Group Rates: \$90.00 tax included, Single or Double

Please fill out this information prior to making your reservation call. It will serve as your record and you will be given a confirmation number by the reservation person.

Confirmation #: _____ Name: _____

Arrival Date: _____ Organization: 44th Bomb Group Veterans Association

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip code: _____

Additional Person in Room: Yes No Name of additional person _____

Credit Cards: American Express, MasterCard, DiscoverCard, and VISA

Credit Card Number: _____ Expiration Date: _____

Name of Credit Card: _____

Your account is due upon conclusion of your stay and must be reviewed and paid at the front desk at departure.



The full story in the next issue.
Stay tuned!

The European Tour



Veterans and Dignitaries at the Winbrin Memorial Site of the Finder Crash Foreground: Norman Powell; Front Row L-R: Sydney Paul, Jack Schiffer, Russell Huntley, Charles Hughes, Perry Morse, Lee Aston & the Mayor of Winbrin in 1944 (donor of the property for the memorial); Second Row: Bill Kelly, Will Lundy, Louis DeBlasio; Jerry Folsom. Top Row: Peter Loncke, (Belgium Airman & Master of Ceremonies); Mayor's Representative of Houffalize.



Louis DeBlasio's family met Peter who found the crash site of Southern Comfort. L-R Ann Natelli, Peter Loncke, Louis DeBlasio, Carol & Frank Amato.



If the Queen is too busy to see you in London, you can be photographed with her at Madame Toussaud's Wax Museum. The red carpet is laid out for you.



Irene & Will Lundy meet Belgium friend Luc Dewez, longtime admirer of WWII airmen. Luc, a member of the 44th BGVA, is the author of *Cruel Skies*, a well researched account of the air war. Luc can be contacted at Lucdewez@skynet.be.



Norman Powell and Bill Kelly. Bill undertook the assignment of piloting Norman's wheelchair through most of Europe, up stair steps and hills, around monuments and onto buses.



When the 44th went to Cologne to bomb the bridge across the R, they were told, "If you hit the Cathedral, don't bother coming back." The spires of the cathedral are still there, and a new bridge has been built.



44th Bomb Group 2002 Reunion

October 7-11

Holiday Inn • Omaha, Nebraska • Schedule of Activities

Monday, October 7

9:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m. Registration
9:00 a.m. - 11:00 a.m. Board Meeting
1:00 p.m. - 3:00 p.m. Board Meeting
1:00 p.m. - 3:00 p.m. Guided Tour of Omaha (Optional)
12:00 noon - 5:00 p.m. Hospitality Room Open
6:00 p.m. - 8:00 p.m. Reception (Finger Food & Cash Bar)
8:30 p.m. - 11:00 p.m. Hospitality Room Open
8:30 p.m. - ? Hotel shuttle to Casino

Tuesday, October 8

7:00 a.m. - 9:00 a.m. Cornhusker Breakfast Buffet
9:00 a.m. - 11:00 a.m. Registration
11:00 a.m. Tour Buses to Strategic Air Command Museum,
Lunch on your own at Museum.
3:00 p.m. Buses return to hotel.
4:00 p.m. - 6:00 p.m. Hospitality Room Open
7:00 p.m. - 9:00 p.m. Squadron Dinners
9:00 p.m. - 11:00 p.m. Hospitality Room Open

Wednesday, October 9

7:00 a.m. - 9:00 a.m. Cornhusker Buffet Breakfast
10:00 a.m. Bus leaves for Joslyn Art Museum and Old Market
Area (Bus will shuttle between the Market area and the Museum).
2:30/3:00 p.m. Buses return to hotel.
11:00 a.m. 2 Buses leave for Offutt AFB (42 people each).
11:30 a.m. Bus #1 Group to O'Club for lunch.
11:30 a.m. Bus #2 Group to Strategic Command. Underground
Command Center tour.
1:00 p.m. Bus #1 Group to Strategic Command. Underground
Command Center tour.
1:00 p.m. Bus #2 Group to O'Club for lunch.
2:30 p.m. Buses leave for hotel.
3:00 p.m. - 5:00 p.m. Hospitality Room Open
6:00 p.m. - 7:00 p.m. Cash Bar at Banquet
7:00 p.m. - 7:30 p.m. Post Colors; Pledge of Allegiance, Candle Lighting
& present Awards.
8:00 p.m. - 9:00 p.m. Grand Banquet
9:00 p.m. - 11:00 p.m. Dance, Visit & Have Fun.

*We'll see you
there!!!*

Thursday, October 10

7:00 p.m. - 9:00 a.m. Cornhusker Breakfast Buffet
9:00 a.m. - 11:00 a.m. General Membership Meeting
12:00 noon Those not on tours, lunch on your own.
11:00 a.m. Bus #1 Group to O'Club for Lunch.
11:30 a.m. Bus #2 Group to Strategic Command Ctr Tour
1:00 p.m. Hospitality Room Open
1:00 p.m. Bus #1 Group to Strategic Command Ctr Tour.
1:00 p.m. Bus #2 Group to O'Club for Lunch.
2:30 p.m. Buses leave for hotel.
5:00 p.m. Hospitality Room Open
6:00 p.m. Cash Bar Cocktails
7:00 p.m. - 10:30 p.m. Dinner, Entertainment & Dancing in Hotel.

Friday, October 11

Check-Out, Farewell, Safe Journey Home, Be seeing you in 2003!



44th Bomb Group 2002 Reunion

October 7-11, 2002

Holiday Inn • 3321 South 72nd Street • Omaha, Nebraska



Registration Form

Please print or type. All information must be completed.

Last Name: _____ First Name (Tag): _____

Spouse: _____ Squadron (Circle one): 66th 67th 68th 506th Hq or _____

Address: _____ City: _____ State: _____ Zip code: _____

Phone: _____ Fax: _____ Email: _____

Guest(s) & Relation: _____

Number to attend Reunion _____ @ \$210.00/each Amount \$ _____

Tour #1: Monday, October 7 - Omaha Historical Tour \$ 19.00 per person

Time: Bus leaves hotel at 1:00 p.m. An exciting and informative escorted historical tour of Omaha.

Number to attend Tour _____ @ \$19.00/each Amount \$ _____

Tour #2: Tuesday, October 8 - Exit 426 Tour \$36.00 per person

Time: Buses leave hotel at 9:00 a.m. return at 3:00 p.m. First we will visit the Strategic Air and Space Museum. The newest and one of the largest military museums in the U.S. We will have an included buffet lunch at Mahoney State Park Lodge, which overlooks the scenic Platte River. After lunch we will visit the Lee Simmons Wildlife Safari Park. We will see a variety of wild animals in natural habitats.

Number to attend Tour _____ @ \$36.00/each Amount \$ _____

Tour #3: Wednesday, October 9 - Omaha Heritage and Art Tour \$ 23.00 per person

Time: Buses leave hotel at 10:00 a.m. A look at Omaha's glorious past! We'll split our day between the Druham Western Heritage Museum, former main terminal of the Union Pacific Railroad and then shuttle to the Grand Dame of Omaha's art galleries. You will have lunch on your own in the Old Market District, center of the restored original city center. Buses return to the hotel at 2:30 - 3:00 p.m.

Number to attend Tour _____ @ \$23.00/each Amount \$ _____

Tours #4 and #5: Wednesday, October 9 and Thursday, October 10 \$16 per person

Lunch at the Offutt AFB Officer's Club and tour of the Commander U.S. Strategic Forces Command Center.

Time: Both days, the buses will depart the hotel at 11:00 a.m. A rare opportunity to see where the planning for the application of our nuclear forces takes pace and the command center which would direct and control them. Whether you go on Wednesday or Thursday will be dependent on the earliest receipt of your Registration Form for the tour. The first 84 received go Wednesday and so on. See Reunion Schedule of Activities.

Number to attend Tour _____ @ \$16.00/each Amount \$ _____

Total of Registration and Tours enclosed by Check: Amount \$ _____

Registration must be received by August 1, 2002. No registrations will be taken after that date.

Mail a copy of this Registration with your check to:

Roy W. Owen • 6304 Meadowridge Drive • Santa Rosa, California 95409-5839

Phone (707) 538-4726 • Fax (707) 538-1212

BE PROMPT!



We've Lost a Friend

By Roy Owen

On April 25, Steve Adams, our UK Representative, called to inform us that our dear, enduring friend, Phyllis DuBois had lost her long battle with cancer and died the previous evening at the private BUPA Hospital in the suburbs of Norwich, England. We surely will miss this wonderful woman who had long displayed her particular love and devotion to our 44th Bomb Group.

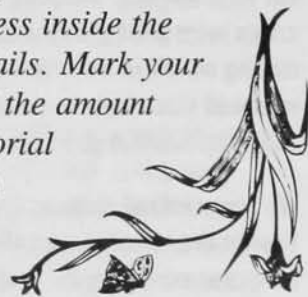
Phyllis first came to our attention when she was hired as Staff Librarian in the 2nd Air Division Memorial Wing of the Norwich Library. From her beginnings at the Library, she found a friend in Steve Adams who was willing to assist in her need to learn her way about the world of the 2nd Air Division B-24 Bomb Groups. She was an arduous student and, along with her association with Steve, became a fast friend of the 44th and the pre-eminent Research Librarian in the field of the B-24 history in the World War II Air War over Europe. When her employment contract was finished with the Memorial Library, it was our good fortune that Phyllis' family had left her financially secure. This enabled her to remain in her field as a Freelance Research Librarian, continuing to live both in Norwich and work in the area of history which she had come to love.

Among the many good deeds she selflessly accomplished for the 44th, one surely stands out in the minds of most 44th members. In the aftermath of the disastrous fire which destroyed the library, and particularly the 2nd

Air Division Memorial wing, it appeared that all the historical holdings of the Memorial Wing had been lost. Phyllis, assisting in the recovery efforts to see what might have survived, discovered the entire 2nd Air Division Bomb Groups histories that had been micro-filmed and which had survived the fire; they were stored in the basement. All of the groups were notified; but strangely, none showed any interest in preserving this treasure but the 44th. Through her good will and friendship with the Library staff, she was allowed to sequentially remove the film, which she took to Steve Adams. He tirelessly reviewed, carefully catalogued, indexed and replaced in the new fireproof library archives. Between the two, the 44th history in the 2nd Air Division will be available to historians for generations to come.

Phyllis' memory by the 44th will be embodied in a beautiful wreath at her Memorial Service at Horsham St. Faiths, England on May 8, 2002. It will say: To Phyllis, an Enduring Friend of the 44th Bomb Group. We Will Miss You. From Stephan and Janice Adams and The Members of the 44th Bomb Group Veterans Ass'n.

Additionally, the 44th BGVA will contribute \$100 to start a perpetual Phyllis DuBois Book fund within the 2nd AD Memorial Wing of the Library. Books purchased from the fund will bear a donation plate in the name of the Phyllis DuBois Memorial Fund. For anyone caring to donate any amount to her fund, please forward a check payable to the 44th BGVA to the mailing address inside the front cover of the 8 Ball Tails. Mark your check Phyllis DuBois, and the amount will be placed in her memorial account. Please give her a thought when you donate.





JOE MILLINER'S

MEMORY OF PLOESTI

AND THE GHOST OF

"LADY BE GOOD"



Ed. Note: In 1954, two oil men found a crashed B-24 in the desert in Libya. It solved the mystery of the lost plane that missed the airfield at Benina Main, and continued south until it ran out of gas. The bones of the last crew member of "Lady Be Good" were found in 1960.

Joseph Milliner read an article in a small California publication about the *Lady Be Good* and questioned the date of the plane's loss. He assumed it was merely an editorial error. Just recently he bought a copy of "The Lady's Men," and the same date 'jumped off the page like a shooting star.' The first magazine was correct! Years later, he still puzzles the difference in date, according to his personal recollections:

"Our crew was assigned B-17's and sent the northern route to England. Upon arrival in Scotland, our B-17s disappeared. Getting new orders, all the crews were relegated to travel by train to Bovington, a location just outside London, for reassignment. At Bovington the orders were misplaced, and my crew ended up as forgotten. We resided in a Quonset hut for about four weeks. The other crews were getting their orders daily and moving on. When the orders came, we reasoned that maybe we could finish their missions and go home.

We soon realized chances of finishing twenty-five missions was about as remote as swimming the English Channel. It could be done, but it was not probable.

Almost immediately, we began to train at low altitudes, but we had no idea why. The aircraft assigned to us had many problems. The reaction to the controls on turns to the right was slow, but left turns were okay. Always tailend Charlie. We all knew that most tailend Charlie's didn't return, especially against fighters.

After a short training period, orders came through on moving the group to North Africa. Our crew got as far as Southern England. We had to land at a very small air base. Due to engine problems, the B-24 was grounded. A few days later a C-54 came in, picked us up and carried us to Marrakech, French West Africa.

Again we were delayed.

I hitched a ride on a French Army Truck to Casablanca. Wow! What a town. I stopped briefly at a local watering hole for a drink. Everyone in the place was dressed in white robes and turbans, with a long curved knife sticking from a sash of various colors. The looks I got were more chilling than the drink in my hand.

Finally we moved on to Benghazi in Libya. Rommel had just departed rather hastily and left tri-motored aircraft, plus a lot of junk everywhere. The skeletal remains of the Italian Air Force littered the horizon for miles.

We pitched tents and tried to settle in, hoping to give Mussolini a little hell from the air. Everyone was gung ho. Losses

had been minimal. Most raids had been very successful. The biggest problem that was causing a lot of engine failure was the reddish sand that blew all the time. You ate this sand, drank this sand, and expelled sandy feces.

A shortage of flyable aircraft was becoming a big problem, with the flyable ones going to experienced crews. Poker, swimming naked in the Mediterranean Sea, and a little boozing at the Officer's Club (tent) occupied a lot of time. We watched the sky everyday for new arrivals, having been assured we were next in line.

At this time a target was being set up in the desert south of the airbase, which was known as Benina Main. Planes taking off to bomb this target formed at low altitudes and made the bomb run at an even lower altitude. No one except command knew what was going on. Everyone had his opinion, but no one knew for sure. Various rumors cropped up and circulated around the base. One rumor mentioned the oil refineries in Romania. This one turned out to be true.

Ploesti

Ploesti was where some of Hitler's largest oil producing refineries were located. A low flying aircraft could lob bombs into the well-protected cracking plant, boiler houses, stiles and pumping stations.



The briefing started.

Because of the lack of aircraft, my crew had been left out. Changes in crew members were taking place every day. Members of my crew were distributed to other crews.

I found little to do during this period other than bartering for eggs from the Arab tribes that passed through the area. Three cartons of cigarettes were too damn much for a dozen eggs. The Arabs always tried to barter for the blue duffel bags with drawstrings. They wore them as trousers. This had something to do with their religious belief that the next Christ would be born of man. From then on, I gave each of these men wearing a duffel bag a questionable look, but never questioned anyone's belief.

Early one morning in June 1943, I was outside the corner of my tent trying to start a fire with camel chips and anything else that would burn. The desert contains very few trees and fuel is scarce. I had just traded for two dozen eggs from one of the many Arabs that traveled through the area with their families. The men usually ride a small donkey, with the wife and kids following closely behind. The man always had his hand out. *Buchees*--alms.

After finally getting a fire started and placing the Jerry can over the fire, I was about to go back inside the tent when an Army truck (deuce and a half) pulled up in front of the tent. Nine men, in various military dress, were all riding atop duffel bags and other paraphernalia of the traveling Airman.

The Mystery Began Here

The ranking officer, a 1st Lieutenant, slid off the vehicle from just behind the cab. We shook hands as he introduced himself as **Bill Hatton**, then continued to introduce his crew members. He said

they had landed at the wrong airfield and wanted to know the location of the 376th Bomb Group, to which he had been assigned.

Since my crew was in line to receive the next replacement aircraft, I was hoping that maybe he was at the right base. So I asked him the name of his aircraft and he said it was "*Lady Be Good*." I planned to keep this name in mind in case he might be reassigned. I liked the name.

The 376th Bomb Group had recently moved from a base at Soluch, south of Benina Main, to a base west of our location near Benghazi. I pointed out the direction he had to take to reach the 376th Bomb Group.

After exchanging a couple of 'good lucks', he climbed aboard the vehicle and said, "Let's go."

I don't recall him giving the driver any directions. In fact, after they left, I don't remember seeing a driver. Besides, if the truck was sent from the motor pool, surely all the drivers would know the location of the five Bomb Groups in that area.

The truck and crew members continued to the end of the row of tents, then made a 90° turn to the left. This put them on a straight line south. This was in the direction of Soluch, the former location of the 376th Bomb Group. They just kept going south until they disappeared in a cloud of dust over the horizon.

Just what was happening here? They never deviated from the southern course toward the former location of the 376th. Had they misunderstood the directions? Did they have sand in their ears? Something seemed amiss here, but what? I did not see or hear a plane in that vicinity all morning. Maybe he had landed at the 389th group airfield. It just

seemed odd that they went south instead of west. I did not linger very long pondering these questions. I would probably never know. So what?

Over a month later, some time in July, I heard that a Lt. William Hatton, his crew and "*Lady Be Good*" had been shot down over Naples. I just assumed the date was recent and didn't inquire about the loss date or time. All I knew was, this was the crew that had visited my tent in June.

So goes the war. The British and the Americans had kicked Rommel out of North Africa; but the war was actually just beginning for the Army Air Force.

A couple of days before the Ploesti raid was scheduled, a friend of mine came by my tent and asked me if I would accompany him on this raid as his co-pilot. His own co-pilot had such a severe case of dysentery that the furthest he could get from the latrine barrels was about fifty feet.

This raid was estimated at about 2,400 miles. The plane commander, **Charlie P. Henderson**, got a positive YES. I was off for briefing in the nearby Quonset hut. It was a little late to absorb the information being passed on, especially reading the map provided by Charlie.

August 1, 1943, was a day some called Black Sunday. Others called it a Sunday in hell. People began to stir as early as 2:00 a.m. Some had not slept a wink. A few had walked part of the night, in T-shirt and boots, between tent and latrine barrels. (They had a war going on with dysentery). However, they still made the raid.

I awoke about 2:30 a.m., dressed and headed to the mess hall, which was already half full. I cannot recall if the breakfast consisted of eggs over sand or sand over eggs. It could have been SOS mixed with sand on toast. It didn't

matter. Most ate quietly and seemed well aware that this might be their last breakfast. I ate slowly and tried to observe the veterans at the meal. A lot of these guys had been at Alamogordo, Clovis, and Lincoln. Most of them had a few missions under their belt. Somehow I felt that a lot of these men would not return.

The final briefing ended. A very solemn group of men headed for their respective aircraft. I had flown with this crew before and knew all the crew members. After a brief inspection, all boarded and took their post. They checked and rechecked their equipment. I had gone over the checklist so many times that I knew it by heart. I had never failed to kick an engine in very quickly. A small puff of smoke from each engine and all four were buzzing, and checking all the gauges, everything read GO.

Charlie, the plane commander, better known as "Punchy" was a big rawboned man in his middle twenties. An outstanding football player at a western Texas college, he muscled the B-24 like a piper cub into the blue sky. Before we had reached 1000 feet, we passed over a B-24 burning fiercely on the ground. Later it was learned that two crew members survived that crash.

Forming at about 7000 feet, the 44th was off. It was too late to chicken out now. Out over the Mediterranean everyone was more relaxed. Some even tried to make jokes. Others tried to sleep. The formation was not very tight. Charlie and I took turns flying the big aircraft, which seemed to be a bit tail heavy and maybe somewhat sluggish. Maybe this was due to the throttle setting, having never flown a B-24 with this kind of load. However, we were able to maintain our position in the formation without any trouble.

Everything seemed to be going fine until the Isle of Corfu. A B-24, from the front of the lead group, went sliding to the right in a steep dive and hit the water, exploding instantly in a huge puff of black smoke. The plane had no sooner hit the water than another plane slid by. This B-24 also came from the same area of the formation, but did not seem to be in trouble. It disappeared to the rear and we could no longer see what happened. No one, except the lead group, knew that these two planes carried the Mission Navigator, the person responsible to lead these crews to the target. The second plane carried the Deputy Navigator.

Clouds were beginning to form and everyone was getting a bit upset. Formation flying in clouds was not my bag, especially over mountain terrain. So Charlie took over.

Breaking from an opening in the clouds, we saw a flat land of farms and small villages. This must have been a banner year. All the fields had yielded an abundance of corn, hay and wheat. Fat cattle were observed in the green pastures. This was a land of plenty. Their mode of travel was a bit behind, horses and wagons or two wheel carts. Our group had dropped to a lower altitude to keep from alerting the German radar system. So far this seemed to be working, as not a fighter was spotted.

Target White

Across the countryside, the B-24s drove ever closer to their targets. For my group, the target had been designated White V. By now the map of the target area and the last IP was beginning to clear in my mind and I began trying to read the area in the distance with my binoculars.

Suddenly, huge columns of dense black smoke began to rise into the sky.

Sighting the railroad leading into these explosions, I knew immediately that this was our target. I leaned over and pointed this out to Charlie.

Charlie maybe set his jaw a bit firmer, but otherwise he never changed expression. He made me put on the entire armor, the flak jacket, steel helmet and a pair of goggles that appeared out of nowhere. He explained that in case he got hit, I should grab the yoke immediately. I felt a bit silly being dressed in this monkey suit, but I realized it would help save my life. The final IP (identifying point) was Floresti, northeast of Ploesti, meaning the bomb run would be down the railroad track in a southwesterly run. The fighters had not shown up and the flak was non-existing.

Than all hell broke loose. The doors of the freight cars parked on the tracks opened, revealing a variety of arms. They lit up the area with a display of firepower that was very accurate and devastating. What a baptism of lead! You could see it coming, leaving circles of smoke in its wake. It was at that instant that I realized those bastards were trying to kill me. I was frightened, then angry. The battle lasted about two minutes. Suddenly I became very serious and calmer. I had regained my composure. It was a very warm day, but cold sweat was running down my back when we engaged the now burning tanks. Smoke had now reached about 10,000 feet and more tanks were blowing up. The target was totally obliterated by the smoke. The leader, **Col. Leon Johnson** never hesitated plunging into the burning inferno, black as night. I thought the leader had to be nuts. I wondered if Charlie was going to follow. Follow he did.

Passing over a burning oil tank with bomb bay doors open, the heat rushing from the burning tanks threw the B-24



into a much higher altitude. This didn't phase Charlie. Unable to see the ground, he pushed the nose down, then leveled off. What courage!

Reaching a clear area, we could see we were under another ship. The nose of our aircraft was almost in the bomb bay. If he dropped his bombs, there would be no way he would miss us.

Thinking that Charlie needed help, I grabbed the control and kicked the right rudder, moving us from under the leader to our #2 position. At this point, we were clearing the smoke and Charlie slapped my hands off the yoke. We were over our target.

I hardly had time to look out and see the fighters approaching at one o'clock at the same level. Their wings lit up like Christmas. Their aim was deadly. They were so close that the smoke from the bullets was hitting the aircraft. There was a sudden explosion and my pant legs flew up past my knees. This scared the hell out of me. Looking down I did not see any blood. The 20mm blew a large hole in the plane's nose and the rush of air was what hit my pant legs. When I looked up, an 88mm was pointed directly at the aircraft on the same level. Charlie had to pull up to avoid hitting it. The 88mm had to be out of order because the Germans in the tower seemed to be working on it.

Meeting the 98th

If an aircraft ever needed air brakes, this was one of those times. On leaving the target, Charlie encountered at least twelve aircraft, all pink (Col. Kaner's outfit from the 98th Bomb Group), crossing directly in front of us at the same ground zero altitudes. It was a beautiful job of kicking the big plane around to miss them. Again, Charlie was a hell of a pilot.

What a mess. All this had lasted less than four minutes. It seemed like hours. All was not over. Taking a deep breath, I became aware of someone over my left shoulder. Turning to take a look, there stood the bombardier. At a first glance, the bloody bandage on his right hand looked like he was holding his intestines to keep them from falling out. At this time of day, if there were any cookies left in my stomach, this would be the time to toss them. Turning away and regaining my wits, I looked back and was relieved to see it was a bloody bandage.

The battle was still going on and plenty of fighters, especially what looked like ME210s, were firing at aircraft ahead of ours. A B-24 flying at the same level about 200 yards ahead of Charlie, was burning fiercely from the bomb bay. At this point, I came out of my semi-shock and started calling the number on the aircraft, urging them to pull up, which they did. The pilot hung the plane on the four props and pulling up to about 1,000 feet, the big bomber flattened out. Two men came out of the waist windows. Both chutes opened. The B-24 then fell over on its left wing and started back to earth.

As it neared the ground, my heart jumped into my throat. The bomber was headed straight for us! It hit the ground not over a hundred feet away and burst into flames. I wrote down the number of the aircraft and watched as others plowed into the ground. Above, a ME210 appeared to be dropping something on the wildly scrambling aircraft. All of us surmised that what we saw were pieces falling off the fighter, reflecting in the sunlight as it fell to the ground. It was taking a pounding from the fifty caliber machine guns. It didn't take long for it to pull up and wing over out of range. A waist gunner reported that it crashed in a cornfield.

Things were quieting down, but the race was still on. At this point, saving fuel was of great importance and the flight engineer went to check ours. When he came back, Charlie and the engineer put their heads together and decided the gas and the injured were the #1 priority. The hospital at Malta had much better facilities than the base at Benina Main. Besides, what we had seen of the many battered aircraft, there had to be lots of wounded.

The trip over the Mediterranean was uneventful. Everyone relaxed. Soon, Malta was giving Charlie the okay to land. An ambulance was waiting to take the wounded to the hospital. Some of the crew members kissed the ground, in this case solid rock. Malta was nothing but a huge boulder sticking out of the sea. One of the crew members kept walking around the aircraft, observing the hundreds of holes and muttering, "We've had it." He must have repeated this at least 50 times. My legs felt weak and I headed for the officer's club immediately. After a couple of jiggers of good bourbon and some food, I visited the wounded men in the hospital. They had been taken care of and seemed in real good spirits."

The Enigma

Years later, in the fall of 1960, Milliner saw a picture on the cover of a magazine which caught his eye, a B-24 with the name "*Lady Be Good*" painted on the nose. "A chill developed in my spine. I quickly opened the magazine to the story and became more and more interested as I read about what had happened to William Hatton, his crew and the plane "*Lady Be Good*." What a fascinating story. This was the crew that had stopped at my tent in June, 1943, looking for the 376th Bomb Group.

As I reread the story, I realized the dates seemed different. The date to the story was over two months earlier than when the crew had been at my tent in 1943 asking for directions. April 4 was the date "Lady Be Good" went missing. I wasn't even in North Africa at that time! How could this be? There had to be two William Hatton crews. This was slowly blowing my mind. I reread the story very slowly trying to match the dates in the story with the dates in my memory. Nothing matched. Maybe I needed a rest and then things might begin to match up. That has not happened to this day.

Many unanswered questions concerning what happened that day in June, 1943, remain unanswered. Why did the truck carrying the crew of the "Lady Be Good"

head south when I clearly stated the base they were looking for was west? Why did the "Lady" go so far off course over Italy, winding up over the East Coast near the heel of the boot? Naples is on the West Coast. Was the navigator inebriated, confused in charting the course, incompetent? Why wasn't he able to contact anyone at the tower at Benina Main? How did they come to be 440 miles south of Benina Main, buried in a sea of sand?

Just recently I read the book "Lady's Men." There were no answers there. "Lady's Men" just verified the dates and other data concerning the loss.

I've tried to put this out of mind or treat it as a dream, but I can't shake the chill

that I get when the name "Lady Be Good" is mentioned.

The question remains who, or what, was the crew that visited my tent that day in June of 1943 looking for the 376th Bomb Group and flying an aircraft named "Lady Be Good?"

Ed. Note: Joseph Milliner is the author of "The Angel and The Eagle," a description of his personal experiences in WWII. On August 16, 1944, on a mission to the airfields and Marshalling Yards at Foggia, Italy, Milliner was co-pilot on Buzzin' Bear. Flak was heavy and fighters were persistent. The plane went down. Four members were KIA; two escaped and returned to England; four, Milliner included, were POWs for nearly two years.

44th BOMB GROUP VETERANS ASSOCIATION



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P.O. Box 712287
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Did you know that the 44th BGVA is not closed to veterans and wives? Any member or interested person may join as an Associate Member. Family members regularly request information about brothers, uncles, fathers or cousins. Any of these people are eligible to join and share the benefits of reunions, publications and camaraderie with WWII airmen whose awesome stories continue to unfold with each gathering.



THE FLAK HOUSES

It has been said that when a crew had been on a number of heavy missions, they became 'flak happy.' The treatment was to send them to a 'Flak Shack' for Rest and Rehabilitation. These houses were really military bases with a Commanding Officer, Adjutant and enlisted men. The Red Cross girls established the social events, trying to make it as home-like as they possibly could. (Ed. Note: After polling several veterans who went to a 'Flak Shack,' I learned that none remembered being 'flak happy,' but they certainly remembered the joy of being away from the War.)



These houses were run as a joint effort of the Army and Red Cross, and were renowned for the therapeutic benefits they could offer to the all-male-world of combat airmen. One of the most memorable was Roke Manor, a beautiful estate situated in a picturesque countryside. Many men from the 44th remember the luxurious clean white sheets, tasty food and plenty of soap and water. Former owners had decorated it in breathtakingly beautiful and comfortable furnishing, and only a bicycle ride away was The Dukes Head, a favorite 'watering hole'.

The activities offered at Roke Manor were myriad: golf at nearby Southampton, horseback riding through the beautiful countryside, softball, tennis, archery and much more. Railway service to London and other parts of England was easily available. Nicest of all, there were girls. The Red Cross workers planned special events, and young ladies who lived nearby came to the Manor to attend dances, play volleyball, tennis and golf.

Typical of the Red Cross worker was Betty Jane Thomas, (now living in York, Pennsylvania). A 28-year-old college graduate from Seattle, Washington. Betty saw the Red Cross as her opportunity to get into the War. The criteria for this assignment was to be over 25 years of age, in good health and with the maturity to take responsibility. Betty spent only a short time in England; and like everyone involved in the war, she accepted any assignment.

She flew across the Atlantic on Christmas Day, 1943, and stayed until the war was over. She served donuts and coffee from her 'Clubmobile', greeting the young men as they climbed off the troop ships, ready to go to war. This was during the build-up for D-Day, and as Captain of the Clubmobile, she served in Ireland, England and Scotland. When General Patton moved across the Channel, her unit was close by. They entered the Continent at Utah Beach, and followed the Third Army all the way to Aachen, Germany. When Patton ran out of fuel, so did the Clubmobile.

The 44th BG remembers the frustration of Bastogne, in that the weather was too prohibitive for flying. Betty Jane remembers it in Paris, where a flood of wounded soldiers filled the corridors of the American Hospital. She clearly remembers reaching Dachau, where the young girls were advised not to go look at the scene of death. However, she saw the starving survivors who were able to walk past the truck; and to this day, she can never erase them from her mind.



Just as the veterans cannot ever forget the War, neither can the Red Cross Workers, whose job was to make life a little easier for those who had the job of doing the fighting.

SGT. DALE V. LEE POW, ESCAPEE

"I was flight engineer and left waist gunner on the **Horace W. Austin** crew - B-24 F - *Southern Comfort*. I trained at Mechanic School, Keisler Field, Mississippi; B-24 School at Consolidated Aircraft plant. San Diego, California; Gunnery School at what is now know as Nellis Air Base, Las Vegas, Nevada. Crew training with Lt. Austin was at Tucson, Arizona; then Flight School at Almgordo and Clovis, New Mexico."

Lee flew 11 1/2 missions, each different, but each a solemn experience. "On one flight the #1 cylinder on our #2 engine was hit. Our instruments were reading okay, and we still had plenty of power; but we were losing oil like crazy. Although we were extremely concerned, the #2 engine was feathered, and we flew back on the other three. We came home late, but we made it back.

"The low level flight to Ploesti still stands out clearly in my mind. We had a super group commander and a great crew. I've always felt proud that our group hit our target, in spite of all the obstacles as we flew in. There was lots of fire and smoke, and airplanes on all sides being hit and going down. I distinctly recall one plane going down in the mass of black smoke. The wounded plane pulled straight up. Before stalling out, two airmen bailed out. Their chutes were so strikingly white in all that dark, black smoke. Two German fighters came in and got those guys. I could see their bodies slump in their chutes, a sight I'll never forget.

"During this flight, I saw a German Sergeant. He had three rows of troops lined up in formation. I just wanted to even the score, with them having wiped out so many of my good buddies. In my anger and frustration, I opened my 50 caliber gun and mowed right down their lines. That experience has come back to haunt me many times in my later years, but at that time it seemed so justifiable and right.

During the flight, our right wing was very low to the ground. The pilots had the control wheel against the stops, and the wing just stayed down. (We could have been in the slip stream of the lead aircraft.) **Andrew Fabiny**, co-pilot, reached over and got just a little bit more power out of #4 engine. The wing quivered and came up ever so slowly. It appeared to have had zero clearance between the wing and the ground. After our return to base, the first thing the three of us did was to go out and examine that wing. We hadn't previously voiced our anxiety, but when we had a chance to examine it, we just stood and looked at each other in amazement that the paint was not rubbed off.

"We had two boxes of incendiaries, and as we came over the oil tanks, we poured them out. I tried to pour a steady stream out my left waist window. **Glenn Hickerson**, tail gunner, kept shouting, 'You got another one. You got another one.' About that time, a big concussion from a large gun knocked **Thomas Purcell** on his butt. (He was manning the right waist window.) He spilled his box of incendiaries all over the floor of the plane. I made a mad scramble to pick them up and toss them out in a hurry.

"Another colorful event was this old lady that stood right out in the middle of this commotion. She was calmly pumping water into a bucket; and if there is any humor in all of this, it would have been this scene. (*Ed. Question: Was she thinking she could put out the fire at Ploesti?*) At the end of the mission run was a corn field. There were a number of high, two wheel carts pulled by a team of oxen. Carts were all over that cornfield, as those poor oxen were just going berserk. The excited farmers were in hot pursuit, trying to bring them under control.

"When we got back to home base, Col. Johnson met us at the Interrogation Shack. He shook my hand and said, 'One of those is enough in anybody's lifetime.'



Ploesti Veterans - General Johnson and Dale Lee.



Each mission had different problems. Most German fighters would attack from above and behind. Lt. Austin would carry two degree flaps on our ship. When the fighters came in, Glen Hickerson would yell, 'move', and Lt. Austin would pull the flaps up. The plane would drop about 20 feet, and the fighter's 20mms would burst overhead. In my position (LW), I could not see the fighters as they flew by so fast, but Hickerson would shoot his guns, and a half second after his guns stopped, I would lay on mine as the fighters came flying through and underneath. We got a lot of 'hits' using this sort of team work.

Our last trip was the Foggia mission, and this was probably the most successful mission you could ever want. There were three groups of us. Number One group got the first third of the airfield; Number Two picked up where the first left off and wiped out the second third. Our group, Number Three, picked up the last third of the field-mission accomplished.'

On our way out, we could see flashes of ack-ack guns, and just knew that a 'beast' was on its way. Approximately fifteen minutes after releasing our bombs, our group was covered by 50-150 fighters from Goering's Pet Squadron. We had a bomb hang-up, and I was trying frantically to pry it loose. About that time, our ship gave a big shudder. I finally managed to release the bomb by disconnecting the whole shackle. Then I could get the bomb bay doors closed. I looked out my window and saw a hole more than three feet long in the top side of the wing outboard #1 engine. It looked like a giant low torch. I marveled then, as I do now, why that wing did not fold. The fire was following the transfer hoses into the airplane, and it was one big inferno. The left rudder was completely shot off. Holes appeared in the fuselage. It looked like a newspaper with holes poked through with a pencil. One thing still puzzles me. On the curvature of the fuselage, over my head, there was split approximately 1/2 inch wide and a 1 1/2 feet long, and this split followed the curvature. Not only was the skin split, but the stringers as well. I thought, 'NOW how can they shoot like that?' By this time, 50% of my clothes were burned off. Our communications system was gone, so there was no way of knowing what was going on up front, but I knew it was time to do something. I poked **Charles J. Warth**, hatch gunner, and pointed to Hickerson in the tail."

With schrapnel wounds on his legs and clothes on fire, Lee bailed out the left waist window. "We were at approximately 25,000 feet, and the cold air felt good-so good. I free-fell as far as I thought I should. About that time, I fell through a bunch of German fighters. Remembering the image of the two airmen shot in their chutes at Ploesti, I delayed opening my chute. I remember floating on my back in what seemed a slow turn, watching our burning plane go down. Although it still seemed a long way to the ground, I finally pulled my rip cord. I hit the ground very hard, severely injuring my back. Next, eight or ten angry civilians attacked me, beating me on the head, shoulders, back and legs with guns, clubs and even pitch forks."

From there, he was placed in a civilian jail with at least six inches of human excrement on the floor. The next day, with eight other prisoners tied together with ropes, he was led down the street with civilians beating them, spitting and pelting them with rocks. "They had absolutely no compassion for the guys with broken bones, severe burns and wounds. Some had eyes so badly swollen and bruised, they couldn't see."

The captives were held in a jail at Bari, then moved to a railroad station, which was being bombed by the British. From there they were moved into a crowded railroad boxcar, moved to a prison where 2,500 British prisoners were being held. Food consisted to two half-inch-long macaronis in two cups of water, once a day.

Several of the prisoners managed to break a hole in a brick wall with a bed post and escape. They crawled through high tension wires and barbed wire entanglement. *(Ed. Note: It is unfortunate that this group could not know that the Italian military was sick of the war, had arrested Mussolini, and had begun opening doors for prisoners to escape.)*

Along with six other escapees, Lee walked more than 300 miles, hiding from the Germans, sleeping in the mud and on frozen ground. They had no food, clothes or water; and day and night were hunted by the Germans, who dropped flares and used search dogs to find them. Only two of the six escapees were capable of making decisions. The others followed along in shock.

“Heavily armed Nazi soldiers walked so close to our hiding place, I could have spit on their boots,” Lee recalled. “At one point, we planned to hide in an olive grove, only to discover it to be a large camouflaged German armored group camp. We reported this to the 47th Fighter Group, who did not believe it. However, they dropped a bomb and all hell broke loose. Then they went back and totally wiped it out.

“When we got back to Africa, we couldn’t convince anyone of who we were, as we had no uniforms, no dog-tags or any kind of identification.”


The war still had a long way to go. When the group got back to Washington, D.C., they were given Secret Orders, stating that they could reveal nothing to anybody about their experience, except the Commanding General or G-2. This restriction imposed an ongoing stress on Lee that has never completely gone away. In time, he found peace by buying dairy farms in Washington state and producing prize Holsteins.

Forty years later, with his wife Alice, Lee returned to the area where he had been imprisoned. He measured the distance the group had run the first night they escaped -- approximately eighteen kilometers, and had climbed about 4,000 feet.

Two members were lost on that fateful mission: **Paul Singer**, (Navigator) had a ripped chute, and did not survive. **Sheldon Finder**, Bombardier, was killed in the plane. The rest of the crew all made it to the ground. Lt. Austin; Lt. Fabiny; Sgt. **Joseph Jett**, Engineer, Sgt. **Ray Whitby**, radio operator; Sgt. Thomas Purcell; Sgt. Charles Warth; Sgt. Glenn Hickerson and Dale Lee all became POW, and later Escapees.

When his wartime wounds became too oppressive, Lee sold his farms and is now in retirement. In the past year, he lost his wife Alice. Alice was a Registered Nurse whose war experience gave her an understanding of the physical and mental pain of the events that Lee had undergone. She, too, had black memories. (*Ed. Note: Lee has documented the experiences of the six Escapees. More details will appear in a later issue.*)




**ALICE
NORE LEE,
R.N. (dec.)**

Very little has been written about the activities of nurses in WWII, but the survival of many American’s wounded can be attributed to their efforts. Only in the last years of her life, was Alice able to tell her story of working in a Field or General Hospital—the long, brutal hours, donating her own blood for transfusions, and bandaging the bloody and infected wounds of men who had lain for hours, unattended. Many of the men who were brought from the Nazi prison camps arrived so weak, they had to be spoon-fed. Mostly, she provided hope that they would not die, that they would recover and go home; unfortunately, many didn’t.

A farm girl from Nebraska, Alice always wanted to be a nurse. She received her education at the Lutheran Deaconess School of Nursing in Chicago. After graduation, at age 20, she enlisted in the Army Nurse Corp. She crossed the Atlantic on the U.S.S. Westpoint, along with 13,000 troops. They had no escort, and twice had a Submarine Alert. They slept fully clothed, life jackets in hand, and no lights allowed.

In Liverpool, England, October 13, 1944, church services were continuous in a room so packed, they had to wait until somebody left before others could enter. “I watched the young boys, so solemn, heads bowed in prayer and often tears streaming down their faces,” she recorded. “I knew many would never return; or if they did, possibly physically or mentally maimed.”

From Liverpool, the nurses traveled by troop train to Southampton, where they boarded an



English ship to cross the English Channel, arriving at Omaha Beach. Wearing dress uniforms, they descended the rope ladders onto landing crafts, which took them to the Beach. Next they were loaded into open military trucks, each truck guarded by four soldiers. "As we traveled along the road, we saw battle weary soldiers coming out of the woods, all shouting, 'American girls! Nurses!' They were so eager to talk to someone from back home, especially women, they were almost frantic."

The nursing team set up the 179th General Hospital in the badly bombed city of Rouen, France. In addition to mothers and little ragged children begging for food or scrounging in garbage cans, the endless supply of wounded were a heart breaking story. Over the next several months, she moved to several different hospital units, a Station Hospital and a Field Hospital. In Daggendorf, Germany, she helped set up an Occupational Hospital.

She remained in the service until March 22, 1946. When she returned home, her family knew, and she knew, that the farm girl from Nebraska could never be the same.

Alice and Dale celebrated their 51st wedding anniversary. They have five children. She passed away in the past year.

Dale and Alice's daughter, Kathy, R.N., realized the long-term effects of the war on those who could not or would not describe their feelings. She has done considerable research on Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome, a disorder that is only recently receiving serious attention in the medical community.

Ed. Note: It has been said that it takes 100 years for a country to get over a war. For Dale and Alice Lee, fifty-seven was not enough. Both have been loyal members of the 44th BGVA, happy to be with other veterans whose lives were carved by the war. Like so many nurses, Alice's story has never been recorded. However, her contribution to our fighting men was of immeasurable value.



Alice looks at her old dress apparel, now in a museum.

THERE HE WAS...

Lt. **James Tomblin**, 66th Sq. documented his war experiences in a book which he dedicated to the 150,000 allied airmen killed in the air war over Europe. 45,000 airmen were taken prisoner during that time. Because so many dramatic stories started out, There I was... "my guns jammed," or "I had three 109s on my tail", etc., he named his book, "*THERE I WAS, Story No. 45,001.*"

Inspired by a Jimmy Stewart appeal in 1942, the seventeen year old Tomblin found the concept of becoming a commission officer, silver wings and flight pay too irresistible to pass by. He entered the Aviation Cadet program.

Tomblin's book has many dramatic scenes, but none more so than October 30 when, as Navigator on the **Arthur Ledford** crew, they set out to bomb the Marshalling Yards in Hamm, Germany. Tomblin recalls how that day began.

"Meeting at the plane, climbing aboard with our gear, there was very little conversation. An unusually glum tail gunner, Hank Starr, muttered "we're going to have



to hit the silks today." The pilot was Arthur Ledford. Was I getting his final puffs on his cigar before take-off? I always wondered how he could smoke something so strong so early in the morning.

It takes a long time to get 20 bombers off the ground at 30 second intervals while it's still dark and somewhat foggy. Then the constant climbing and assembling until the whole wing of three groups are together.

As we ascended out over the Channel to our bombing altitude of 22,000 feet, bombardier Dick Pascal and I crawled through our little 10 foot long tunnel up to the nose. Dick got into the nose turret, his regular post, and I closed the access door, locking him in. I spread his flak suit on the floor (he couldn't wear it while in the turret of the plane between the two large .50 caliber ammo cases on each side of

me). Both the bombardier's parachute and mine lay there together. These were snap-on chest packs with two heavy metal rings that snapped into place on the parachute harness we always wore. The chest packs were too bulky for either the bombardier or myself to wear during flight.

We were flying on the wing of the leader of the high squadron. Lt. **Rasmessen** was the pilot leading that squadron - but he was at the same altitude of the group leader, not the required 100 feet above. We often wondered if this lower altitude of the high squadron caused our plane to be shot down. (The AAF employed pattern bombing at this time, which meant that one squadron would fly 100 feet above the lead squadron and the other squadron 100 feet lower. Bombardiers in each plane would release their bombs when the lead plane released theirs. This caused a wide "pattern" of bombs being dropped.)

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 30th

TOT (Time over the target) was 1:25. We received three direct hits in the tail, bomb bay and the nose, 30 seconds before the target. We fell out of formation. The No. 1 engine was completely disabled, the No. 2 engine losing power, the No. 3 was on fire, and No. 4 was OK. The hydraulics were



knocked out also and the bomb bay doors would not close. Had I occupied my usual position between the ammunition cases in the nose as I had on all previous missions, a piece of flak would have undoubtedly struck me.

As it was, I had decided to stand up on this mission for some reason, and I got the compass heading before we went over the target, instead of afterwards. I was standing when flak came through the nose and went between my legs and into an oxygen bottle under the navigator's table. I started to call the pilot about it, but decided there was too much excitement, anyhow.

The bombardier called up all the crew members. All of them answered but the tail gunner. He called the tail gunner three times, and then told the waist gunners to go back there and see about him. At first they balked because they were so afraid. They were scared stiff, but Dick then ordered both **Weiner** and **Bertollo** back to the tail. Then they reported back the situation: "Hank's done for," came the voice of Bertollo over the intercom. "Yeah, there's a big hole in his head," said Weiner.

The pilot came back on the intercom - he had been on command, trying to contact some fighters, without avail - and told the waist gunners to get Hank out of the turret;

put a static line on his rip cord and throw him out the camera hatch. They told him they couldn't get him out, but he ordered them and made them get him out. Hank was taken out of his turret.

The pilot called me and asked for an ETA (estimated time of arrival) to the Rhine River. Once across the Rhine, we would be over Allied held territory. I computed an ETA of 2:00 p.m., using the air speed and wind we had over the target. Since our air speed had dropped, I thought I should add 5 minutes more to the time. Instead I subtracted the 5 minutes and gave Ledford an ETA of 1:55. I'll never know why I did this silly thing. Ledford said later he would have given the order to bail out sooner, had he known.

The pilot then gave the order to prepare to bail out, and I took off my flak suit. The upper turret, Sharp, asked if he ought to get out of his turret, and Ledford said "yes." (He had forgotten about him.) So Dick Pascal said he thought he had better get out of his nose turret. It was now about 15 minutes to 2:00 o'clock.

Pascal unplugged his intercom, preparing to leave the turret. While I was helping him (it's very cramped in the nose and two doors must be opened and closed to get anyone out of the turret), I accidentally unplugged my own intercom.

It was just then that the pilot ordered everyone to bail out. Of course, neither Pascal nor I heard the order.

Pascal got out of the turret, and he had closed the turret doors and was just closing the back hatch doors when all four engines quit and the intercom went dead. The hydraulics were already gone; we lost them over the target. It became absolutely quiet.

Pascal didn't know the engines had quit. I tapped him on the shoulder and pointed to our parachutes, the snap-on chest packs laying under the navigator's table. He crouched down and I looked under the table back toward the bomb bay, and saw fire back there.

We decided we ought to leave. He still didn't know the engines were out. He handed me up my parachute and got his. I put mine on and looked up above the navigator's table to the pilot's rudder pedals and saw the cockpit, which was empty. A big tongue of flame went across it while I was looking. I made up my mind to leave the airplane then, and crouched down just behind the bombardier. Just as Dick reached for the emergency release handles, which were supposed to jettison the nose wheel doors, the flames came up into the nose and both of us were enveloped in flames. Then I saw Dick pull the release handles and saw one door disappear. The second

door did not release. Dick crawled out, laid on the door and began pounding it with his hand. So I sat back and waited (eyes closed) until I thought Dick had time to get out. I was in the fire all this time, and I could feel myself burning. Then, just as I started to move toward the door opening, I thought something had come between me and the fire because I was no longer on fire. I thought that it was the navigator's table, and that I was going to have to move it to get to the possible escape opening under the nose wheel.

Two seconds later, I found myself out in the air. Just as I left the ship, I felt my parachute leave me. I could not find it at first. Then I heard something flapping above my head and I looked up, and there it was, still attached. The static lines had been tacked on with thread to the parachute harness, and the thread had burned through, leaving the chest pack about 8 feet above my head. So I pulled it down to me and pulled the rip cord. The parachute opened. Looking across the way, I saw Dick in the air at the same level I was, and a part of a wing came fluttering by. Then I looked down below me and saw a large tree. Then I was on the ground, landing in a small ditch next to a barbed wire fence. I remembered to clear my ears on the way down. I also remember holding the rip cord in my

hand, wondering if I dropped it, if it might injure somebody. Strange thought! A rip cord is a 1/4" diameter steel rod curved to form a handle. It is pretty heavy.

The plane obviously had exploded, but I heard nothing and felt nothing. Both Pascal and myself were badly burned, and Dick's left hand was broken by some flying object. Strangely enough, my left hand was very badly burned, but the rayon glove I had on my right hand wasn't even singed.

I got out of my parachute harness and got out of the ditch. Over the fence, I saw a civilian farmer. He started talking to me in German. I could not understand him. So then he said, "*Parlez vous, France?*" Thinking I might be talking to a member of the underground, I got very excited. Remembering I had just completed two years of high school French, I said: "*Mais oui. J' etude pour deux ans dans l'ecole.*" He responded immediately, correcting my French, just like my French teacher. "*Non, Non, Non!. Deuxans, Deuxans!* (duzan - as though one word). Then he said "*Avez-vous le bon-bon?*" Hoping he might help me evade capture, I gave him my escape kit containing maps, money, and concentrated food, some of which was chocolate. I think he may have heard of escape kits before. Then he walked away. This was probably the

most bizarre thing that ever happened to me during the war.

Then a truck full of soldiers pulled up on a dirt road about 100 feet away. The leader of the group had a sub-machine gun. He gave me an order three times, without my understanding him. He then pointed the gun directly at me. That is scary, looking down that gun barrel. A soldier indicated that he wanted my parachute. Another soldier helped me get my parachute disentangled from the branches and I was taken to a haystack about two blocks away. The road I walked on was lined with women and children staring at us. The children didn't seem to be afraid, and I knew I looked pretty terrible with my face and hair so burned.

When I got to the haystack, I saw Pascal sitting there. The Germans had already captured him. He stood up and shook hands with me. We sat around the haystack, with a lot of civilians around us, who thought it was an interesting sight. Ledford came up about 15 minutes later. Just before Ledford came, a staff sergeant from a B-17 was brought to the same haystack. He had a flak wound on his left arm. We also saw another parachute at about 10,000 feet in the air.

One of the German soldiers put salve on Dick and myself - face, ears, my left



hand, and ankles. We were the enemy, had just bombed one of Germany's large cities, and this soldier was showing compassion! Dick had had on his helmet, but I had been bareheaded.

About 4 o'clock they moved us to a little old jail about 8x10 feet. We were put there for the night. There were seven of us from two different crews, four of us injured. Ledford tried to talk a doctor into letting him go to the plane, which had crashed close by, and get a first aid kit for some morphine, and also to get his fighter (service cap). They wouldn't let him. About 6 o'clock that evening, a doctor came in and gave us some morphine. Dick slept all night, but I woke up at 10, 12, 2, 4, 6 and 8 - every two hours. I drank some water during the night, but threw it right up.

About 9 o'clock the next morning (Sunday), the Germans came in with some kind of sandwich and a cup of coffee. My eyes were swollen shut, I couldn't see; but I took a bite from the sandwich and drank a sip of coffee because it was liquid. They took us out and put us on a truck and started us towards



The Ledford Crew

Top Row L-R: Arthur Ledford, Pilot; Harold Armstrong, Co-pilot; James Tomblin, Navigator; Richard Pascal, Bombardier.

Bottom Row L-R: Johnny Bertolio, Waist Gunner; Bruce Starr, Ball Turret Gunner; Henry Starr, Tail Gunner; William Wright, Engineer; F. Weiner, Waist Gunner; Eddie Shanx, Radio Operator.

Munster, about 45 kilometers away. The town we were captured in was Nordwilde, about 300 population. We got to Munster and stopped at an airport. The three able-bodied men took one dog tag from each of us, and took them inside a building at the field. Ledford saw some men walking away he identified as members of our crew:

Armstrong (co-pilot), **Wright** (engineer), **Weiner** (waist gunner), and he believed **Sharp** (radio operator) - he was not sure. He told the men who were going into the

building to tell these men we were OK.

We went on to the hospital. There, someone bandaged my hand with a cloth that felt somewhat wooden, as though it had wood particles in it. A gauze cloth was put on my face. We were taken to a room with a couple of other guys in it. We were put to bed, and stayed in that room for about seven days.

Tomblin's book, "*There I Was*" provides a vivid description of life as a badly burned and blinded veteran,

traveling by train when Allied planes were bombing, eating the meager foods the Germans supplied and many other discomforting events. More of his story will appear in a later issue.

1st. Lt. Ledford remembered four hits with flak. "Number 1 engine went out immediately, and #3 was hit, but still producing some power. However, it was burning, and burned through the side of the fuselage. We also took a hit around the waist and one near the tail, which got our tail gunner, **Henry P. Starr**.

"After being hit, we lost power and speed, rapidly dropped behind the formation. We were able to hold to approximately 300 feet per minute descent, and when we reached 17,000 feet, I told the waist gunners to go to the tail and check on Starr to see if he was alive. When they reported that the top of his head had been blown away, we decided to leave him with the plane.

"Approximately 35 minutes off the target, the fire burned into the plane, and everybody left, except the bombardier Lt. **Pascal**, navigator Tomblin, and myself. Those two could not get out due to a malfunction of one of the nose wheel doors. When the plane eventually blew up, they were standing on the doors and were blown out into the air, where they pulled their cords and landed OK."

The 44th Bomb Group's PX

Flying 8 Ball Patches \$14 + \$2 Postage
Back issues of 8 Ball Tails \$5
Write 44th BGVA, P.O. Box 712287, Salt Lake City, UT 84171-2287

Flying 8 Ball Shirts \$25 + \$3 Postage
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Write **Sam Misceli**, 6398 Dawson Blvd., Mentor, OH 44060-3648

Kevin Watson's book *Ruth-Less and Far From Home* is the story of the tragic crash of the A/C #41-24282, 506th Sq. It is available through Amazon.com; signed copies can be obtained through hometown.aol.com/kpwats7. The cost is \$20. His book is a tribute to the **James Bolin** crew of *Ruthless*. You may contact Kevin at 29 Downs Valley Road, Eastbourne BN 209QG, UK.

44th BOMB GROUP, The Flying Eightballs, a 115 page documentary of the 44th BG is available for \$55 from Turner Publishing Company, 412 Broadway, P.O. Box 3101, Paducah, KY 42002-3101. This hard-bound 9 x 11 book has 128 pages of historical material, and biographies of many veterans. A good reference book for new members seeking information.

THE WILD BLUE YONDER is a chronology of the **James N. Williams** crew, (66th BS) as recorded by **Warren F. McPherson**. McPherson's detailed report tells the story from induction to his last mission, concluded by a kiss on solid soil. The Tail Gunner who later became a minister presents a lively and accurate account of the life as an NCO in the maelstrom of war. Cost \$10 for a soft cover, 32 page ringed book. Write 1016 E. Rockwood Street, Springfield, MO 65807-5092.

PURSUIT IN THE PYRENEES, by **Archie Barlow, Jr.**, is an account of a three month effort of evading the enemy in German-occupied France, 1944. The price is \$20. Write L. B. Wright, 3911 Black Locust Drive, Houston, TX 77088-6904. Telephone: (281) 931-1932. Email: Wright@juno.com.

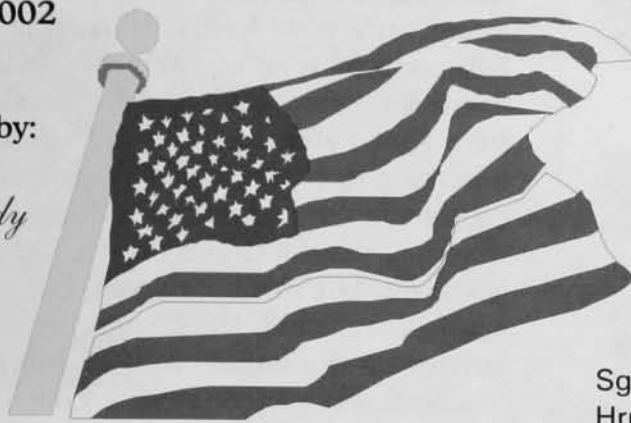
THE ANGEL AND THE EAGLE by **Joseph E. Milliner** is a personal story, written in 3rd person, of his experiences as a pilot, a family man and a distraught father whose son, a helicopter pilot, tragically disappeared in Laos during the Vietnam War. Milliner describes the fury of the Ploesti Raid, target White V in dramatic detail. Then there was Foggia, where *Buzzin Bear* crashed, and four of the crew were lost. According to Joe, his ever faithful Guardian Angel JOSEPH saved him from parachuting into the flaming plane. Milliner's signed hardcover book is available for \$11.95, (postage incl) Write 281 Fincastle Way, Shepherdsville, KY 40165. Email: Mackie0126@aol.com

FOLDED WINGS

May, 2002

Prepared by:

Will Lundy



ALEXANDER, DAVID W. 09/15/85
0-376286 68th Sq. Pilot
Lt. Alexander was one of the two first replacement crews to join the 68th Squadron in April, 1943. They had trained in B-17s, but the 44th as replacements; obviously because there were no new B-24 crews available. Lt. Alexander flew his first mission on March 31st as a co-pilot for R.B. Houston crew. He flew both the Ploesti and second Weiner-Neustadt raids from Africa. On 10 August 1944, he completed his tour of duty with 26 missions. Then he transferred to the 93 CBW effective 28 April 1944.

BARTLEY, FOUNT BOYD 03/20/02
38274336 506th Sq.
Sgt. Bartley, along with his twin brother, served with the R. J. Hruby crew. Time period was from mid April 1944 to 12 July 44, while completing 30 missions. Both brothers were aboard when Lt. Hruby was forced to ditch in the North Sea on 29 April, their fifth mission. All of the crew survived with no serious injuries. Fount lived only a few months after Art Hand had located him, and received his records and much data.

**BERGMANN
HAROLD F.**

2001?

..... 67th Sq.

Sgt. Bergmann served as the Engineer on the Lt. W. D. Carter crew that arrived in the 67th Squadron in June 1944. This crew completed 30 missions during the summer of that year, ending their tour of 30 missions by the end of August.

CLARK, CLETUS C. 02/09/02

17157054 506th Sq.

Sgt. Clark was the Engineer on the R. J. Hruby crew, the same crew as Fount B. Bartley (listed previously). Both served the same missions and the same experiences in that most amazing ditching on 29 April 1944. Both completed their tour of 30 missions on 12 July 1944.

DABNEY, WILLIAM C. Jr. 03/17/02

0-2044418 67th Sq.

Lt. Dabney joined the 67th Sq. in early April 1943, a transfer from the RAF, and was assigned to 1st Lt. W. R. Cameron's crew as co-pilot. He flew his first mission on 4 May, as co-pilot to Capt. Phillips, but with Lt. Cameron's crew. After two more missions from Shipdham, the 44th BG was placed on Detached Service in North Africa in preparation for the famous low-level Ploesti mission. He flew ten missions from Africa, including Ploesti with 1st Lt. Cameron's crew, and one final mission with Lt. Carpenter's crew on 13 August 1943. He was then transferred back to the U.S.

IDEN, DONALD B. No date

0-767814 506th Sq.

Co-pilot for Lt. W.S. Salfen. This crew flew their first mission on 24 August 1944; then two more on consecutive days. They were on their unlucky 13th mission, 7 October, when, near the target, they were hit by two

flak bursts, and had to abandon ship. Lt. Iden and seven others from his crew parachuted successfully to become POWs.

KERR, JESS L. 07/6/90
0-699073

Lt. Kerr was the Bombardier on the W. D. Carter crew, that joined the 67th Squadron 27 May 1944. Their initial mission was flown on 6 June, "D-Day;" with their 30th and final mission completed on 30 August 1944. Tragedy nearly occurred on 27 June, when their aircraft was severely damaged; their co-pilot lost three fingers to flak; and one main landing gear tire punctured by flak. With great skill, the pilot made an excellent and safe landing in "Glory Bee." Lt. Kerr was awarded the D.F.C. and Air Medal with three Oak Leaf Clusters.

NOWAK, JOHN C. 12/01/01
The only information found for John is that he served with the 18th Weather Station. Time served is unknown.

SEEVER, ROBERT G. 01/25/02
0-700554 67th Sq.

Captain Seever was a pilot in the 68th Sq. Lt. Seever and crew arrived at Shipdham on 15 August 1944, and he quickly completed his first mission on the 25th, as a co-pilot with T.C. Kay crew. He completed his tour of duty with 30 missions on 24 March 1945. Lt. Seever flew his first four missions in succession to get off to a very fast start. He and his crew also flew both of the 44ths two low-level supply missions. The second of which was also his 30th and final mission. His crew was also promoted to lead crew status; flew their first PFF lead on 28 December 1944, as well as all of their remaining missions. Capt. Seever was awarded a D.F.C. and Air Medal with four Oak Leaf Clusters. *On a personal note, Bob*

loaned all of his personal COLOR photos to us to copy for our records.

To my knowledge these are the only color photos found for our 44th BG. Extremely rare.



STIEFEL, MAX A.

06/01

0-801102 66th Sq.
Lt. Max A. Stiefel was the Navigator on the R. W. Bridges crew. They joined the 66th Squadron in Africa, too late for the Ploesti mission. Max flew his first mission as Navigator on the R.E. Felber crew for the first attack on Weiner Neustadt, Austria. Following that, he rejoined his regular crew and quickly flew several more missions, first from Africa and then from Shipdham. Returning to North Africa in mid-September, he completed three more in Sept. On October 1st, the Group returned to Weiner Neustadt, but this time against fierce opposition. The R. W. Bridges crew was shot down near the target, with Lt. Stiefel being captured and a POW while on his ninth mission.

THORN, GEORGE J. 07/12/01
0-742628 67th Sq.

Lt. Thorn was a pilot in the 67th Squadron, after he and his crew joined that Sq., in January 1944. He and his crew flew their first attempt for a mission on 3 February, but it was recalled. The first mission, then, was 6 February to Siracourt, France. Among the very tough missions were those to Helmstadt, Gotha, and Furth during "Big Week" in February, plus two more to Berlin. His 17th, and last mission, was to Langenhagen, Germany on 8 April. The 44th BG lost 11 aircraft and crews that included Lt. Thorn's. All ten crewmen survived to become POWs, but it was a miracle that Lt. Thorn lived. For reason still unknown, Lt. Thorn was not wearing a parachute when he left his airplane. He explained that he was most fortunate to come down into a large tree that broke his fall, and also broke many of the bones in his body, including his back. He was, and is, a large man. Several years ago, at a reunion, he told his story, but never followed up with his offer to get it into print. At the time that he retired from Service, he was a Colonel, and had worked in the Pentagon for many years.





MAIL & E-MAIL



Mrs. Charlotte Paterson, owner of the Shipdham Aero Club was a member of the RAF during WWII. She worked on Catalinas, which were used for submarine surveillance.



From **Julian Ertz**, 44th BG representative to the 2nd Air Division Association: The location of the 2nd ADA Convention, August 28 - September 3, 2002, has been changed to the Hyatt Harbor Hotel in Baltimore, Maryland is not finished, due to construction problems. *Ed Note: The 44th's own Dick Butler will be moving into the presidency of this esteemed organization. Let's all show our support by coming to honor him in this prestigious post.*



From the Embassy of France: Any veteran who served on French territory, in French territorial waters or French air space from June 6, 1944 to May 8, 1945 is eligible to receive a "Thank-You-America Certificate" from the French government. Along with your application, include copies of documents, showing you served during that period. Applications can be obtained at your local VA. If that is not accessible, contact your Editor, Ruth Davis Morse or **George Insley**, 865 Little Valley Road, Roseburg, OR 97470, and we will make one available.



General **John Gibson** recently celebrated his 92nd birthday. He is recovering from a series of health problems; but with grit, is going forward. He would appreciate a card from his friends: 7008 Gateridge Drive, Dallas, TX 75254.



Among the unexpected surprises at the 2 AD Reunion in Norwich, coupled with the Grand Opening of the Memorial Library, was a beautiful medallion. On one side was the image of the Forum, home of the Library; on the reverse side was a B-24. These mementos were the gift of Bud and Mike Chamberlain (489 BG) and the Butlers, Dick and Ardith.



Reginald Carpenter, Pilot of *Horsefly*, remembers his engineer, the late **Vincent Huenerberg**:

"Vincent and I had a very special relationship, both friendly and technical. He was well mannered and friendly, a marvelous Engineer who always did his best to see that the aircraft was kept in tip top condition. On the low level Ploesti mission, August 1, 1943, when we were forced to ditch in the Mediterranean Sea, Vincent was the first crewman to go out the top hatch. The aircraft's tail was torn off, and it was sinking nose down very rapidly. Vincent swam to the left dingy hatch, which was now under water, and attempted to deploy it; but the door was jammed, and he could not open it. Rapidly, he swam over to the right dingy hatch; and fortunately he was able to open it and deploy the dingy. When I finally got free off the cockpit and came to the surface, the first thing I saw was Vincent standing in our one and only dingy, pulling all the survivors into it. If it were not for his strength and

determination to deploy that remaining dingy, we would have all perished. All who survived owe their lives to Vincent, the best engineer a pilot could have.

Regrettable, S/Sgts. **Walter Brown** and **Edward Durrand** were crushed on the flight deck when the top turret tore loose from the fuselage, and they were unable to escape.



I have very happy memories about my association with Vincent, and they shall go with me forever.”



From England: Elizabeth Mills of Southampton would like to know the

whereabouts of Lt. **Jack Holtzman**, a longtime friend of her sweetheart, the late Lt. **Edward J. Ackerman**.

Ackerman was the Navigator on the *Ruthless* #41-24282 Bar Y, which crashed in Eastbourne, England.

Elizabeth's mother frequently shared the family home with both Holtzman and Ackerman.

When the *Ruthless* crashed, it was a severe loss to

Elizabeth and her brother William, who still frequently climb Butts Brow to visit the Memorial site.

Her last knowledge of Holtzman, former native of Chicago, is that he flew 30 missions, the last being May 9th, 1944.

She acquired his picture from a negative he gave her long ago. She is also inquiring about Lt. Ackerman's younger brother Arthur. Does anybody have any knowledge of him?

Among her treasures is this picture of the Lt. **Charles Connor** crew, which she wants to share. Perhaps someone can identify some of these men:

Top row L-R : (Name not recognized), co-pilot; Lt. Edward J. Ackerman, navigator; **Hansen**, tail gunner, who later became POW; Lt. Charles Connor, pilot.

Bottom Row: The only one she could identify is (center) **James Bales**, engineer/top turret gunner, who later crashed in Eastbourne. *Can anyone fill in the missing names? Or the name of the plane?*



From **Frank Stegbauer**, Navigator, 67th Sq.: "We were flying to England on a B-17, Kansas to Labrador, then across to Scotland. The bomb bay was loaded with

cigarettes, gifts for our fighting men. It was December and the weather was bad in Goose Bay, so we were delayed several days. Then over the North Atlantic, five planes were lost, supposedly due to ice on the wings.

"When we got to Scotland, the pilot contacted the Tower, and they told him to go around. He said, I can't. I'm too low on fuel.' He made a right turn and landed. When he hit the hard runway, the engine quit. We got out and kissed the ground. Then we went to the B-24s.

"The death of my tail gunner, **Charles Ray**, made me think again of our times together, during and after the War. Ray got shot twice when he was overseas. Then he went quail hunting with a friend, and the fellow accidentally shot him. I don't know why he was so unlucky, he kept getting shot!!!" In his southern vernacular, Frank remembered his friend as a 'good ole boy.' *Ed. Note: Frank became a Captain on his 20th birthday, the youngest Captain over there at the time. My conversation with him led to a great gift which he presented to me: a copy of Will Lundy's book. The History of the 67th Squadron. This is a true treasure that is scarcer than Tom Dewey or Alf Landon badges!!!*



Check the Web Sites

Check out:

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

We are asking veterans to check your boxes of photos and albums for pictures of planes, old diaries, and any information which can expand the available knowledge of the 44th's history.

Have you checked out the Military Heritage Database?

Find: **EighthAirForce.com**.

This site is undergoing many changes. Check it out! A disc for the available

history is available through Computer Generated Data Ltd. at a price of \$150. Send check to:



44th BGVA
P.O. Box 718277
Salt Lake City, UT 84171-2287

One third of the purchase price will go into the 44th BG Treasury.



A Moment of Glory **General Theodore R. Milton**, USAF (Ret) wrote this: "We didn't know it then, but we were living at the peak moment of America's glory.

There was no questioning the rightness of what we were doing, no hostile media types nosing around for a story. The reporters who did visit us were almost wistfully eager to be helpful, and so were the occasional visiting politicians who asked nothing more than a picture, taken with some of the boys. As we look back from this great distance, those seem splendid days. The mud and the cold are scarcely remembered, and our lost comrades remain forever young, their faces unchanged, unlike the rest of us.

We have all learned long since, you can never go back. ...there will never again be such a group, united in purpose, young and free of the plagues that mark much of today's society.



The Lied Jungle at the Henry Doorly Zoo.

WILD KINGDOMS

Omaha's Henry Doorly Zoo was voted the #1 family attraction in America by *Disney's Family Fun Magazine*, and for good reason. With the world's largest indoor rainforest,

America's largest big cat complex and the giant walk-through salt water aquarium, things around here can definitely get wild.

44th Bomb Group

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