

44th Bomb Group Veterans Association



8 BALL TAILS

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Veterans Association

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Flying in formation are Suzy Q (top), Black Jack (Left) and Hitler's Nightmare (Bottom)

The most famous airplane in the 44th Bomb Group is Suzy Q, mainly because it led the longest low-level mission ever attempted, to Ploesti, Romania. With Col. Leon Johnson in the lead, Suzy Q plunged into the fiery caldron, dodging planes from another squadron which had mistakenly moved to the wrong target. The scene was so unbelievably awesome, it was later reported that many civilians who were watching, believed it was a planned air show.

Piloting Suzy Q was one of the most modest men who ever took a plane into the 'Wild Blue Yonder', William Brandon. Long overdue for recognition of his many accomplishments, Brandon's story is finally recorded by Roy Owen. According to Steve Adams in his book, "The 44th Bomb Group in WWII", Suzy Q crashed on August 16, 1943 on an Italian beach, believed to be Cape Stilo. It had been on the mission to Foggia, piloted by 1st Lt. Walter R. Bateman. All crew members were KIA.

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The 8-Ball Tails[©]

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WILLIAM H. "Bill" BRANDON – THE QUIET MAN By Roy Owen



Meet Major General **William H. Brandon** USAF (Ret), a Life Member of the 44th Bomb Group Veterans Association and the most senior living member in our ranks. He is here, photographed at Shipdham AB during what he describes as one of the most satisfying assignment in his military career, a captain, B-24 pilot, in the 66th Bomb Group Squadron with the 44th Bomb Group. In a recent photo, he is shown in his current role as commander of his Den and Computer, where he creates pithy letters to the editor. For those members who, like myself, came to the 44th in the post-Ploesti years, were not likely to have become either acquainted with him or been aware that he had flown the Ploesti mission (Tidal Wave) as Colonel Leon Johnson's pilot in his lead aircraft, "*Suzy Q*." The General has, by nature, an effacing personality. Example, in an interview with him, he (haltingly) shared with me the scene after landing at Benina Airfield, returning from Ploesti. After parking *Suzy Q* facing the General Staff, the Press Corps and crowd of ground support people, Brandon saw to Colonel Johnson being properly deplaned. Then, as he was being greeted, Brandon exited through the Bomb Bay, avoided the crowd and went to the Drying Room to remove his flying gear and dress. He then skipped the Ops/Intelligence debriefing and went directly to his tent.

As I opened my mouth to say "Why?", he said: "Before you ask, I did that because I did not, in any way, wish to detract from or share any of the praise, congratulations and admiration being so deservedly directed to our Mission Commander, Colonel Johnson. Now, we don't have to talk any further about that."

He did, however, later show another insight into his feelings about the Tidal Wave mission when he was discussing his leading the November 18, 1943 Kjeller, Norway raid after the 44th returned to England.

After hitting the target, his aircraft did not have sufficient fuel to return to England, causing him to seek safe recovery in Sweden. He was interned there for 2 months, while arrangements were being made for his return to the 44th. During his interment, he had neither been informed of his promotion to Lt. Colonel, or having (on Col. Johnson's recommendation) been approved to receive the Distinguished Service Cross.

Upon his return, these events were performed by then Brigadier General Johnson, before a formal awards formation. Brandon relates: "As General Johnson pinned the DSC ribbon on my blouse and was saluting, he said: 'Your award brings me the highest pride and

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respect, for it is you who is responsible for me wearing the blue and white.' As I returned his salute, I replied: 'Sir, your remarks are my award. Thank you.'"

Typically, my queries of other Ploesti veterans about him would bring replies such as: "A really good man," or "damn good pilot," and most often, "a pretty quiet guy," or "a great leader, but doesn't waste any words."

In November 2002, I accompanied Col. **Edward "Mike" Mikoloski** to Shipdham to attend the local Remembrance Day ceremonies (and represent the 44th BGVA) as guests of the Shipdham Aero Club. On the train to Norwich we somehow got into a conversation about the Ploesti mission. During our discussion, Mike mentioned his friendship with Bill Brandon, maintained by periodic phone calls. This prompted me to ask if there was any substance to his reputation for being withdrawn and rather difficult to share much of himself in an interview. Mike replied, "Yes, Bill has those characteristics. Some take this behavior as being blunt and a bit grumpy. This is simply not so; stoic, yes. In fact I've heard him respectfully called "'The Quiet Man,' the only aversion I've ever heard him express is to being called heroic for having done his job." He then went on, "We talked recently, and he sounds fine. He suffered the loss of his wife Virginia a few years back; and he really went into a slump. He recently married again - a lovely Air Force widow, he tells me, and his life has really taken an upturn. How about if I call and sound him out on you getting together for an interview?"

That came to pass, followed with my call. When the General answered the phone, and I introduced myself, he said, "Of course. I already know you for your

work in our Association, and for the articles you've authored in the 8 Ball Tails, especially your view of the Ploesti mission. I admire your work. Mike tells me you'd like to come down and have a talk with me. When would it be convenient for you? (No doubt in my mind, I had the "man of few words".)

I flew to San Antonio on June 3. He met me, drove me to a near airport hotel where he had made reservations for me. He dropped me off, saying, "Get freshened up, Roy. I'll be back to get you at 6:00 p.m. We wish for you to join us for dinner at the Towers where we live." That, Dear Readers, was the beginning of my meeting with "The Quiet Man" and his precious wife and buddy, Babette.

At this point, suffice to say, as the conversation progressed, likewise the understanding of one another grew. Once settled, he at the computer desk and me in an upholstered chair, his first admonishment was, "Now Roy, last evening we got through the protocol, titles and courtesies. Today we shed that stuff and meet and converse man to man, so you can ask me the straightforward questions that you want straightforward answers to. I can answer in kind, and trust you not to transcribe what I say into something that makes me appear as a hero. That's it! I'm Bill and you are Roy. Let's get on with it. This is going to be fun."

This began with a review of his military and academic career, which for the purpose of this introduction to Bill (see how easy he made this) I am going to highlight to the point one can see the high level of talent, flexibility and determination Bill Brandon demonstrated in his varied career.



Born, Nashville, TN July 24, 1917
Grad. Duncan Prep 1936
Vanderbilt Univ. 1938-40
Entered Army Air Corps Flying School June 1940
Grad. 2nd Lt. Pilot Feb. 1941
Instructor, Basic Flying School, Moffett Field, CA Feb. 1941-Mar. 42
Entered first class of Air Corps four-engine bombardment school, Sebring, Florida
Upon completion, July 1942 transferred to Barksdale Field, LA, Ass'd to 66th Bomb Sq., 44th
Bomb Group, B-24 Instructor Pilot.
Sept. 1942 Transferred with 44th to England Sept. 1942 - 45 Pilot - B-24, Group Ops Off.,
Deputy Grp. Cmdr., A-3, 2nd Air Div.
Sept. 1945 Returned to AI and assigned to Personnel, Washington, DC
May 1946 - 8 Completed BA U of Texas
Dec. 1948 Grad Air Command & Staff Sch.
Dec. 1948 June 1953 DCS Personnel, Hq. 15th AF March AFB
June 1954 Grad Air War College
Aug. 1954 - July 1957 Dep. Cmdr. And Cmdr. 1503rd Air Transp. Wing, Tokyo
Aug. 1957 - June 1960 Chief, Promotions & Separations & AFPMP, Washington D.C.
June 1960 - June 1963 DCS/P Hq. MAC, Scott AFB, IL
June 1963 - Sept. 1965 Vice Cmdr. Western Transport AF, Travis AFB, CA
Oct. 1965 - July 1967 Cmdr. U. S. Forces Azores and Cmdr. 1605th ABW Lakes Fld.
July 1967 - July 1969 Cmdr. , 21st AF (MAC) McGuire AFB, NJ

This brief review of the Brandon career illustrates the determination and flexibility which brought him steady promotion in rank, responsibility and decoration. It has been an admirable career for "The Quiet Man" who has preferred anonymity over glory throughout his Red, White and Blue life.

Happily, he and his lovely wife have survived the personal sorrow which befell each after the loss of a loving spouse and have found new love.

We of the 44th rejoice that they plan to meet with us in San Antonio over our Labor Day reunion. They will find they are meeting the love, respect and happiness that flows from this, their 44th Family.





A MESSAGE FROM OUR PRESIDENT



Greetings:

At the most recent 44th BGVA Reunion in Arlington, VA I was honored by being elected your president for the current year.

While I know many of the members of the 44th Family, there are more of you that I do not know, nor do you know me. I want you to know that I have great affection and respect for the 44th Bomb Group (H), its veterans and its large family of supporters.

I joined the 44th as the pilot of a replacement crew, assigned to the 68th Squadron. Together with my very talented crew, we flew almost all of our combat with the 68th. I flew as a Co-pilot, Pilot and Command Pilot. I was on combat status for the 28 months of my tour. I was privileged to have commanded the 68th in the final 14 months of our duty in England.

I offer you no lengthy agenda. I have a keen desire to pursue the goals of the 44th BGVA as honorably and as well as Jerry Folsom, Ed Mikoloski, Roy Owen and Joe Warth.

I am determined that we accomplish the completion of the Master Database Program. This unique and remarkable historical documentation of the amazing success of our 44th has to be finished. We who survived owe that to the marvelous band of young patriots with whom we served in WWII. We are close. Please help.

The 44th had superb leaders as commanders, combat crews of uncommon courage, and a ground echelon who carried out their respective tasks with excellence and dedication.

Each of you veterans—without regard to the task assigned to you, or your rank or position—was important to the fulfillment of our mission. Please know I have always believed this; otherwise, we would never have enjoyed the success that was ours.

Additionally, I will work to “Keep the gang together”. What a joy it is to be with our old comrades. To do that, I need your continuing interest in the 44th BGVA. The “Eight Ball Tails” will continue to be our primary means of communicating with you. We make every effort to keep it interesting and informative. Share it with your family members.

For those of you who served in the 68th, I hope that your recollections of our service together are more favorable than your recall of spam, powdered milk and powdered eggs.

Bob Lehnhausen

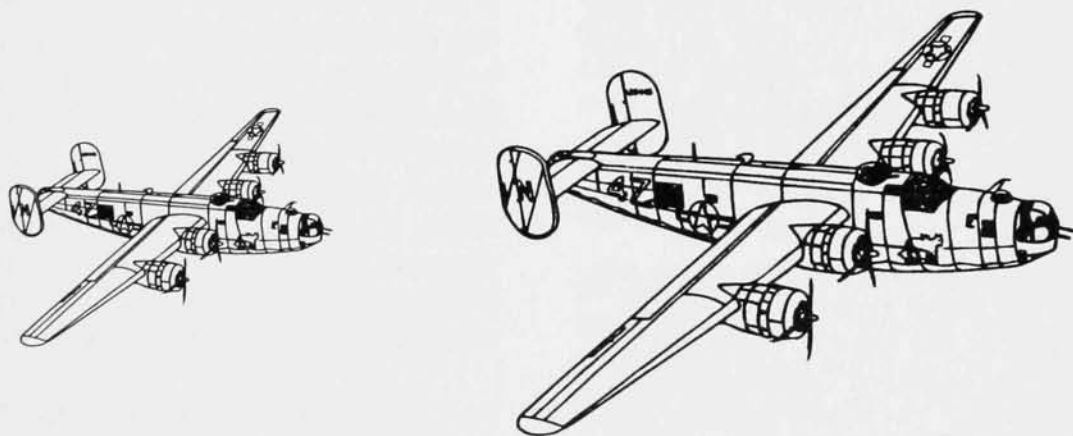


Past President **Edward "Mike" Mikoloski** completed his service to the Board of the 44th BGVA. He silently slipped from Board Member into the membership category, the first time he has not served on the Board since the BGVA was reformed.

"Mike" assumed the Presidency in Austin, Texas in 1999, having served as Director the previous four years. His leadership skills are unparalleled, as are his dramatic presentations each year at the Candle Lighting Ceremonies.

On behalf of the entire membership of the BGVA, the *8 Ball Tails* salutes this dedicated member who served his country valiantly, and is fiercely devoted to the men who flew with him.

Robert Lee Aston filled the Director position for two years, lending his legal wisdom to the Board whenever called upon. He has moved into a new slot on the Board. Lee is genuinely concerned for men who earned the DFC, but never received it. (Fifty-six years late, he was awarded his DFC at the Barksdale Reunion.) President Robert Lehnhausen has appointed Lee to the Chairmanship of the Decorations and Awards Committee. Anyone in need of Lee's help can reach him at 830 Cardinal Drive, Elberton, GA 30635; e-mail leaston@elberton.net



Our list of members grows smaller as the *Folded Wings* pages grow lengthier. We also believe that some former members have not paid their dues because of economic difficulties. If the cost of membership is prohibitive to you, but you would like to continue receiving the *8 Ball Tails*, please let us know. We will keep you on the mailing list. This information will be confidential.

Write: Ruth Morse, 2041 Village Circle East, York, PA 17404

Telephone: 717 846-8948

**FIFTY-EIGHT YEARS LATER
THE SURVIVORS OF WESEL MEET
ALONG WITH THE BELGIUM AIRMAN
WHO CONNECTED THEM**



**Peter Loncke, Robert Vance,
John Delaney, Louis DeBlasio**

Fifty-eight years passed before the three POWs from the Wesel Mission met and reminisced about a shared ten day experience that they can never forget. **John Delaney** (the only fighter pilot who is a member in the 44th Bomb Group Veterans Association) shook hands with **Bob Vance** and **Louis DeBlasio** at the Doubletree Hotel.

"You wouldn't talk to us when you first saw us," DeBlasio accused. "I thought you were Germans," Delaney replied. Actually, both Vance and DeBlasio were bloodied beyond recognition, after the pounding they took when *Southern Comfort* crashed, wrapped around an electric pole and split at the waist. The two gunners rolled to safety seconds before the plane exploded, killing all other members of the **Max E. Chandler** crew. Nearby the **Leonard Crandell** crew was lost in *Kay Bar*. On board another B-24 was Captain **Ursel Harvell**, who captured much of the activity on film. The low level Wesel mission is one of the most photographed missions in WWII.

Delaney, piloted a (P-47), a red nose Thunderbolt from the 406 Fighter Group, 512 Squadron 9th Air Force, a group recognized to be so aggressive, when General Patton needed fighter help, he requested the 'Red Nosed Bastards' be sent. The Germans had another name—they called them Jabos.

When the Rhine crossing was under planning, the 512 Squadron was stationed at Asch, Belgium. Many of the fighter groups flew three missions on March 24th, while the British 6th and U.S. 17th Airborne Divisions made a close-in drop north and northeast of Wesel.

"We were told never to return with any ammunition," Delaney recalled. "We strafed streets, and when we couldn't use our ammo any other way, we turned our 50 mm guns on roofs. It knocked the tiles in all directions, some coming up as high as our planes. No wonder the civilians hated us."

March 24, 1945 was a singular moment in history. It was the day the Allies would cross the Rhine River, bringing the war onto the German homeland. P-47s and P-51s had strafed the area the previous day, supposedly knocking out German gun installations; but nevertheless, the Germans had rallied. 240 Liberators from the 8th Air Force, 27 from the 44th BG, set forth with the goal of dropping supplies to the troops on the Eastern side of the river. The anti-aircraft and small arms fire was murderous.

In a studied report, written later, Bob Vance described the events. "From dawn to dusk, Thunderbolts and Mustangs patrolled the battle area, riddling troop concentrations, supply columns, rail yards and airfields. Only 66 Nazi fighters were met, an indication of the results of the bombers' relentless attacks on Luftwaffe fields. Fifty-three of these were shot down. The 8th lost 22 bombers and four fighters during that day. Among the lost fighters was Delaney's Commanding Officer, Lt. Col. **Gordon Fowler**. He led the squadron, whose

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assignment was to protect the bombers. When Fowler's plane went down, he parachuted to safety, only to have his throat slit by his captors.

Delaney saw the B-24s, flying at 1000 feet, dropping supplies, and immediately becoming targets of the anti-aircraft and small arms weapons. All others of his group had used up their ammunition and were returning to their base. They radioed that they were turning back, but Delaney's radio did not pick up the message. His fellow flyers could hear him, but he could not hear them.

"I still had some armament, and I got so mad, seeing those '24s going down, I dived down and dropped hot phosphorus on the Germans who were firing the guns."

When Delaney turned skyward, the plane suddenly lurched violently. "The canopy was shot off, and I was thrown forward against the cockpit, then immediately dashed backwards. The plane was totally out of control. Somehow I managed to crawl to the outside of the craft. The slipstream was blowing against me fiercely; and the next thing I knew, I was coming down in my parachute. I don't even remember pulling the ripcord.

Immediately the Germans grabbed me. The straps on my parachute cut into my groin, and one of the bones in my right leg was broken. Regardless, the Germans ordered me to walk. So I hobbled. I was positive that they were going to kill me. About that time, parachutes started coming down everywhere. I think the Germans knew the war was lost. Maybe that was the only thing that saved me. Later I learned that the anti-aircraft men were former flyers, and I guess they understood that I was just doing my duty. An older man said, 'We will not kill you.' I found that hard to believe."

Before long he was joined by Vance and DeBlasio, two stumbling and badly injured gunners. The three prisoners were moved east to a hospital in Ahlen. Eight days later the 2nd U. S. Armored Division came through and liberated them, along with English, French and other American combat men.

Throughout their captivity they were too weak from their injuries to establish personal relationships. Vance and DeBlasio had known each other through other missions, but neither could remember the name of Lt. John Delaney.



Photo of John Delaney

Delaney is proud of the accomplishments of the P-47 Thunderbolt, diving down on troop formations and strategic structures; strafing supply columns with its powerful 50 mm. guns that were strategically directed. He can cite several advantages it had over the P-51, even though the '51 had a longer range and was able to carry a bomb. Of the 5,000 Thunderbolts made, ten are still flying.

Ed. Note: After I wrote the article about the Wesel mission, Winter 1998, I spent the next three years hunting the unnamed fighter pilot who was a POW with Vance & DeBlasio. The answer came from a Belgium airman, Sgt. Peter Loncke, who made a hobby of finding crash sites and identifying the crews who had been lost.

*Among those who gathered at the Washington Reunion were the three airmen who had survived; Susan Alexander, niece of the late **Thomas Cordes**, (nose gunner on the Southern Comfort); Peter Loncke, the Belgium airman; Joe Crandell, brother of **Leonard Crandell** (pilot of Kay Bar); Joe's wife Barbara and daughter Connie.*

CELEBRATING IN WASHINGTON

An unexpected delight came to the attendees of the Reunion: an opportunity to visit the White House. **Lee Aston** took advantage of a longtime friendship, and arranged for the group to get through tight security and enter the inner chambers of the Blue Room, the Lincoln Room, the Rose Room, and all other areas available for public viewing. (Neither President Bush or Laura stayed home that day—too busy.) Totally unexpectedly, when the bus pulled up for the tour, 44thers were greeted with a big banner featuring the Flying 8 Ball, courtesy of Chris Clark.

In every one of the great reception areas, guides could point out historic gatherings which occurred there. On one wall was a huge picture of George Washington, saved by Dolly Madison in 1814 when the British set the President's home on fire. When we walked the hallways, we saw pictures of every great person we had studied about in grade school.



Walter Patrick Lit The Candle for the 66th Squadron

In gratitude for service to the 44th BG, medallions were presented to Beverly Folsom, Betty Lynch, Mary Aston, **Julian Ertz** and **Sterling L. Dobbs**.

Will Lundy, first recipient of the Leon W. Johnson Distinguished Service Award, had the honor of presenting it to the third recipient, **Tony Mastrodone**. Tony, a former Board

Member, was recognized for his longtime efforts to collect 44th Bomb Group data from the National Archives. This information is now being preserved in the Master Data Base.



Tony Mastrodone

Newly elected President Robert Lehnhausen presented an 8 Ball etched into glass to outgoing President Gerald Folsom and his wife Beverly. Lehnhausen expressed the genuine gratitude of the 44th BGVA to Folsom for his nine dedicated years of service to the organization.



Beverly & Outgoing President Gerald Folsom with President Lehnhausen



Lowell Roberts demonstrated an unsuspected skill: auctioneering. **Jerry Folsom** stood by as he auctioned off two wooden models of B-24s, 'his' and 'her' decorative watches and a set of coins, won by the daughter of the late Ruth Dobbs, in honor of her mother. The niece of Clay Roberts honored his crew by a sizable contribution to the project. John and Margaret Delaney each won an 8th Air Force watch, festooned with B-24s.

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Irwin Stovroff displays his B-24 model



Milton Rosenblatt & Lois Cianci sing together



Beth & Bera Ertz

The Ertz sisters, Beth and Bera, provided a most memorable program on Sunday night. With Beth at the keyboard and Bera providing vocal entertainment, the daughters of Julian Ertz, provided a tear-jerking rendition of "You Are the Wind Beneath My Wings." All second and third generation members of the 44th gathered at the microphone to sing "The White Cliffs of Dover"; and from there on, it became a Sing-Along and a Karaoke, with anyone brave enough to step forward could perform. It was fantastic.



Bartenders Perry Morse and Tony Cianci peer through the window to watch the show



Roy Owen announced, "The 2004 Reunion Will Be In San Antonio on Labor Day Weekend."

CHARLES "WOODY" STAPLES (68)

TAIL GUNNER, EXTERMINATOR AND HOMESPUN PHILOSOPHER

A good way to brighten a blue day is to hold a conversation with Woody Staples. Woody has dealt with life in interesting ways, from the days when he flew his 37 missions with such colorful pilots as **Clair W. Hill**, **George Washburn** and **Thurston Van Dyke**. He fired guns from *Flak Magnet*, *Corky*, *Louisiana Belle*, *Down De Hatch*, *Gypsy Queen* and *Scotty Mac*, and came home without a scratch. Coming home from Kiel on August 4, 1944 was a challenge. They threw everything out the window to lighten the plane, and made it back to Shipdham, only to find that the landing wheels were stuck. However, with the pilot's skill and a lot of prayers, they all survived.

Woody believes that his faith in God carried him through the War. He carried a Bible throughout the war, and continues to carry it everywhere he goes. At one point he pondered that his job was to kill his enemies, but their job was to kill him. So once when they were headed to Berlin, he put God on the spot. He asked, "Whose side are you on?" Since he made it back safely, he is convinced that God was sticking by him.

This Tail Gunner could give lessons in longevity. He never drank nor smoked, and is apparently enjoying the rewards. He reads without glasses, and still excels at target shooting. He started shooting early in life, and stuck with it to this day. He single handedly raised his son, a young man of whom he is genuinely proud.

Once Woody and his family went to a Skeet Shooting Match. A stranger took a look at Woody and whispered to Woody's daughter-in-law, "They shouldn't let a man that age have a gun." When the match got under way, the gentleman missed all three of his targets, and Woody hit all three of his. (Ed. Note: *I hope somebody pointed out to the*

complaining gentleman, that you can't judge a book by its cover nor a gunner by the color of his hair.)

A collector of guns, he has one that he truly treasures, a Winchester 21, of which only three were made. One was owned by President Eisenhower, another by General George Patton. Woody has the third.

After graduating from college, Woody started an exterminator business. Apparently beyond skill, some psychology was necessary to keep his customers happy. He recalls an elderly lady calling him to get rid of the rat that had invaded her home. He looked the situation over, but found no sign of a rat. Still she insisted, so he went back and looked again. He made some loud pounding noises, bunched up some newspapers and went back to show her that he had caught the varmint, but it was too distasteful for her to view. He assured her, she would have no problems in the future, and left the lady in an intense state of relief.

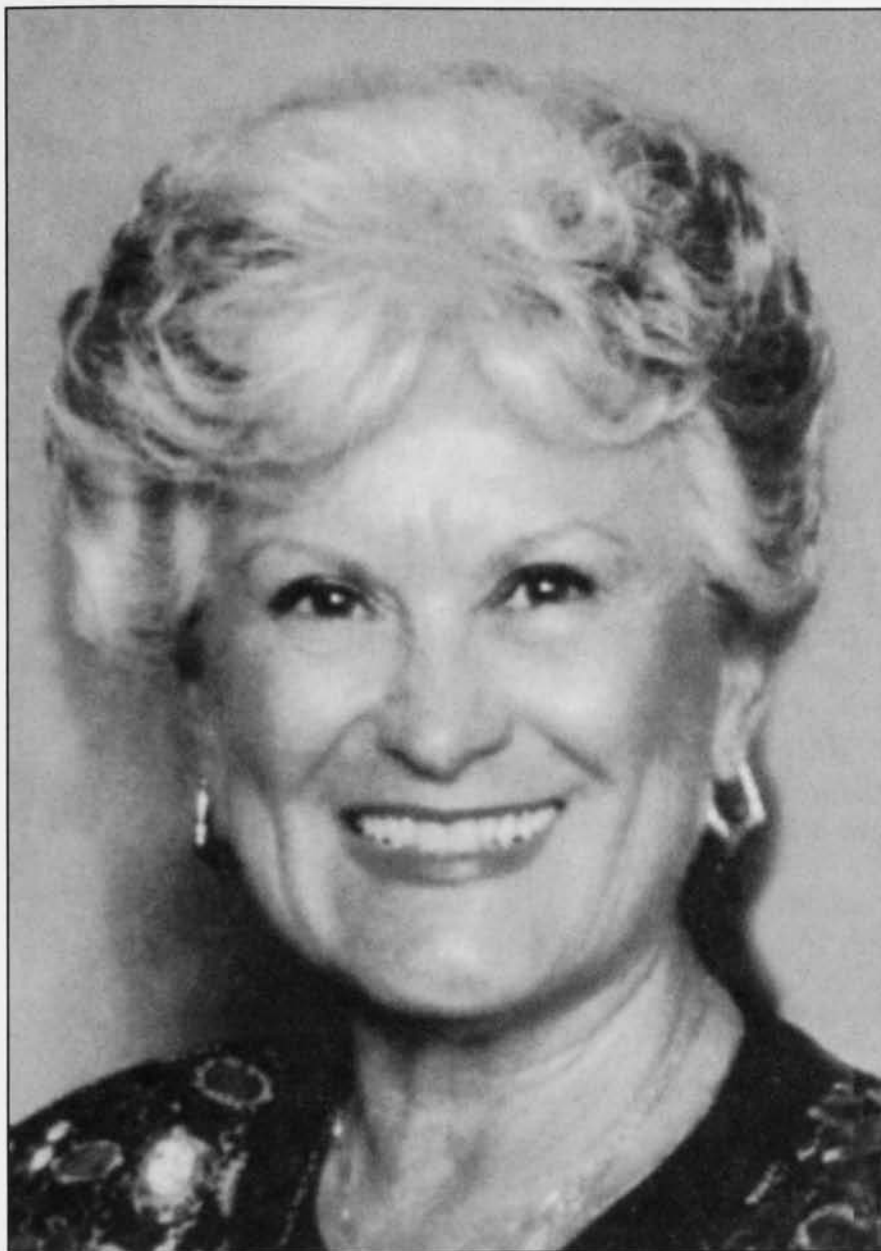
His favorite customer was President Harry S. Truman at his home in Independence, Missouri. Woody had the unique experience of sharing a glass of lemonade with the president, after completing an inspection of his house. When potential customers questioned his credentials, he could always use Harry for a reference.

Breakfast with Bob Lehnhausen was a renewal of an old acquaintance. Lt. Col. Robert Lehnhausen presented him with his Distinguished Flying Cross, 59 years ago.



THE SHOCK HEARD ROUND THE WORLD

We lost our First 'First Lady'



Charlene LaVoice (Lolly) Owen passed away unexpectedly on January 24, 2004, a tragedy that reached the core of the 44th BGVA. Lolly's devoted loyalty and assistance to her husband Roy made it possible for the 44th to rise from the ashes of a failing organization, and proceed to become one of the 8th Air Force's most successful bomb groups.

Who can forget her graciousness in helping with Reunions—managing the funds, stuffing the 'welcome' envelopes, smiling when unexpected events required revisions in schedule or sites? On a personal level, Lolly was extremely modest. She always directed the conversation to the other person, taking little credit for the great things she had accomplished.

Some of us traveled to Europe with her, Roy and their grandson 'JR' in 1997. Although Roy was the tour leader, Lolly's 'behind the scenes' efforts were very apparent. Nobody ever had a better grandmother than JR. She compiled a book, detailing the trip, which became a notable educational tool that projected JR to celebrity status.

Colonel Roy Owen and Lolly were married in the Base Chapel at Beale AFB in 1970, blending children from two families. In her departure she leaves a large extended family, their three children plus spouses; six grandchildren plus spouses, three step grandchildren and six great grandchildren.

In recognition of the immense contribution that Lolly Owen has made in California and beyond, on February 5, 2004, the California legislature adjourned in her memory. It was reported in the Assembly Journal: Assembly Member Berg was granted unanimous consent that when the Assembly adjourns on this day, it do so out of respect to the memory of Charlene LaVoice "Lolly" Owen, of Santa Rosa.

When the news of her sudden passing became known to their friends in many parts of the world, Roy's phone, e-mail, cards and flowers burgeoned with messages of sorrow, most from the 44th BGVA family. These condolences spoke of pride and love for this gracious lady who made the world a warmer and more beautiful place wherever she passed. We, who were fortunate to have known and felt her love, will feel the contentment of remembering this beautiful woman who came our way.

THE RUSSIANS BLINKED

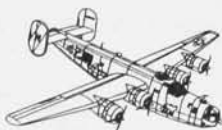
By Col. Clay Roberts (Ret.)
Author of "The Adventure Continues"

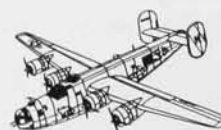
For over 50 years I have wondered how many Americans knew that we were on the verge of war with Russia in the late forties. It was in December 1947 to be exact!

It was a warm and sunny early December afternoon in Tampa, Florida. I was assigned to the 371st Bomb Squadron, 307th Bomb Group, flying B-29s out of MacDill Air Force Base. I had been scheduled for transition – touch and go landings – and airspeed calibration of the aircraft. While in the local area, all aircraft are required to stay tuned to tower frequency. I had been listening to the routine chatter when it was interrupted by "all 371 aircraft return to base immediately." Upon getting out of 4072 I was met by the squadron operations officer who informed me that I was to keep those crew members necessary for the loading of fly-away kits, release all others, and for the entire crew to be back in five and a half hours for two weeks deployment to a cold environment. Crew members I released were to be back in three hours, so I, my flight engineer and the ground crew would have two and a half hours to get home and get our winter uniforms. At our pre-departure briefing we were informed our destination was Furstenfeldbruk, Germany, which was just outside of Munich. We were told our mission was classified, and that we would receive details of our mission upon arrival at our destination.

At our first briefing in Germany, we were informed that the State Department had called for a display of force; and since the 307th was the only bomb group directly under Headquarters Strategic Air Command (SAC), and not one of the numbered air forces (8th, 25th or 2nd) the Group was given the mission; and we in the 371st were given the job. Our questions as to why a display of force was needed, and what happened to get the State Department to ask for one was never answered. The only thing we were told was that circumstances surrounding our mission were top secret, and that our two weeks deployment had been extended to 30 days, which included Xmas and New Year's.

We had one mission: to daily fly the Berlin Airlift corridors, Frankfurt to Berlin to Hamburg and return to Frankfurt for another "round robin". We were combat configured. Bulletproof glass was installed in front of the pilot's and copilot's positions, all guns had full ammo, and both bomb bays had as many 500 pound general purpose bombs as they could hold. What we were to do with these bombs we never knew. Our target instructions were to come by message via the radio operator, which much to our relief, never came. Our orders were to patrol the corridors, and if Russian fighters made hostile moves, we were to open fire. Fortunately, neither side provoked the other; and there were no incidents. We just ended up getting a lot of flying time in bad weather. To this day, I have no ideas as to what caused the State Department to ask for a display of force; and I doubt that I ever will.





Ed. Note: President Robert Lehnhausen, then Commander of the 68th Squadron, remembered that the Lt. Clayton Roberts crew joined the 68th Squadron in February 1945. The War was drawing to a close. Their last mission was to the Marshalling Yards at Passau, Germany on April 18, 1945 on the beloved Louisiana Belle.

THE GATHERING OF THE GUNNERS



The Air Force Aerial Gunnery Association met in Tucson, Arizona, the ninth biennial gathering of this specialized group of airmen. Most of the adventures of this group took place decades behind the WWII warriors, and the dramatic moments they described involved bigger planes than the flyers in the 44th Bomb Group could have imagined in 1942.

They had a roll call of planes, and each gunner stood to honor his. A half dozen gunners rose in honor of the B-24, and fewer for the B-17. Most populous groups were the gunners of B-36; and B-52. The consensus was that the '52 was the greatest plane ever built.

Lt. General Schmidt, C.O. of the 12th Air Force, paid tribute to the WWII warriors present. A history enthusiast, he gave a splendid dissertation on the advance of aviation in the hundred years since Kitty Hawk. He noted that the distance Orville Wright flew in his first flight could have been accomplished inside a C-47.

He ended his presentation by video, demonstrating the skill of an aerial drone. Guided by an operator in the U.S., the unpiloted machine wiped out a large gathering of Al Quida members and their meeting house in Afghanistan. A fighter pilot, General Schmidt noted that not only gunners, but also pilots were becoming replaced by sophisticated equipment.

The highlight of the event was a trip to the PIMA Air Force Air & Space Museum where, lovingly protected in a large hangar, is a B-24. The next day, the destination was the Davis-Monthan AFB. Planes of every vintage were on display, some for storage, some to be recycled, others to be stripped for parts. The Navy uses this base as its maintenance base—bringing planes in and picking others

up on a regular basis. Representatives of foreign governments go 'plane-shopping' on a regular basis.

Gunners got to go down into the silo to view the last existing Titan Missile. Stripped of its nuclear warhead, and sliced through to make it permanently inoperable, it sits in its deep silo, a reminder of the Cold War, which became the next assignment for the members of the 44th BG, who chose to make aviation their career. To preserve it as a historical relic, the Russian government had to approve; they inspected the warhead to verify it was clean. Then the missile was laid on its side and sliced open several places. By satellite, the Russians determined it was not a recoverable weapon. Then it went back into the silo.

The gunners' publication, *Short Bursts*, noted the passing of Robert Caron, Tail Gunner on the *Enola Gay*. Caron is credited with snapping the awesome pictures of the first atomic blast at Hiroshima. The Aerial Gunnery Association are preserving their history on a Database, knowing that technology has made their work obsolete. They have a Web Page: www.gunners.net. Their next reunion will be in Charleston, South Carolina.

Joseph Kennedy, a member of the Aerial Gunnery Association, has dedicated his life to learning the fate of MIAs and POWs from the recent wars. His e-mail address is: pownetwork.org With great determination, he also exposes people who deceitfully claim fame for combat experiences in which they were not involved. For information about anyone, he can be reached at info@pownetwork.org.

SONG OF THE GUNNERS

by an unknown author

I wished to be a pilot, and you along with me,
But if we were all pilots, where would the Air Force be?
It takes guts to be a gunner, to sit out in the tail
When the S.W. 190's are coming, and slugs begin to wail.
The pilot's just a chauffeur, it's his job to fly the plane,
But it's we who do the fighting, tho we never get the fame.
But if we must be gunners, then let us make this bet,
We'll be the best damn gunners that have left the station yet.

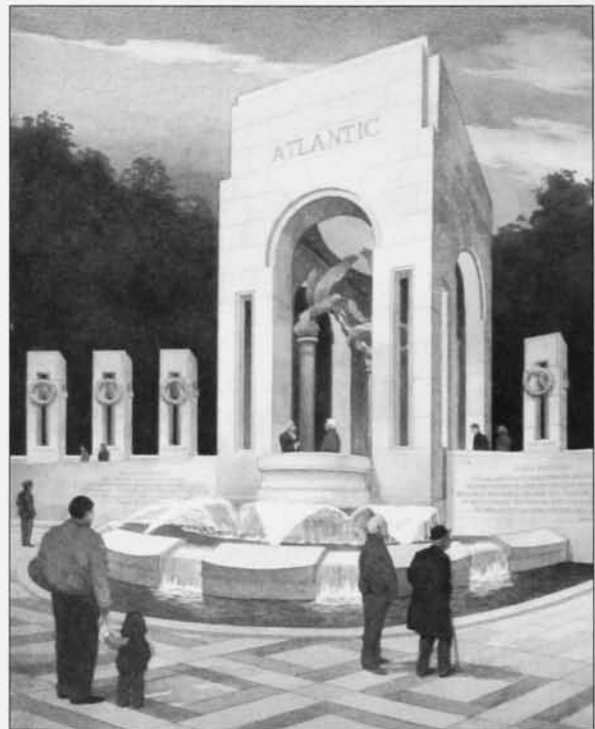
SECOND AIR DIVISION REUNION

The 2nd Air Division Convention will be at the Hyatt Regency Hotel at Penn's Landing in Philadelphia, May 27-30, 2004. **Dick Butler** from the 44th BGVA will preside. Tours include: a tour of historic Philadelphia and a trip to Atlantic City. If you are not a member of the 2 AD, and wish to register, call Evelyn Cohen, 215 632-3992. Dick is deserving of your support, having served on the Board of the 44th BGVA for many years, and is a valiant defender of the rights of all veterans who ask his help.

WWII MEMORIAL GRAND OPENING

Fifty nine years after victory in Europe and the Pacific, a monument to honor WWII veterans has been erected in Washington, DC. The grand opening for the event is scheduled for May 29, 2004, but celebrations begin May 27, and continue throughout the Memorial Day Weekend. Events will include wartime reminiscences, WWII memorabilia and military equipment displays, ceremonial military units, a religious service, swing music and WWII educational activities for all ages. President Bush will be present to receive the Memorial on behalf of the nation.

Veterans can register their names by
E-Mail (www.wwiimemorial.com)
or call 1-800-639-4992 for an application.



MAIL & E-MAIL

From: **Jack Butler**, Navigator on the Craig crew, remembers Mission #8, June 29, 1944 to Magdeburg, Germany.

On D-Day, June 6, 1944 the 8th Air Force flew over 2,000 four engine bombers, concentrated on the beaches at Normandy. After that, the total bombers averaged around 1,000 per day, but were dispatched all over Germany, in order to keep the Germans guessing about where our actual target was.

So, on June 29, 81 B-24s were dispatched to bomb the Krupp Aircraft Factory at Magdeburg. The 82 B-24s consisted of four Groups: the 44th, the 392nd, the 492nd and the 491st.

June 29 was the first time I began to have serious doubt about the next 22 missions. Up until then, I thought I was the reincarnation of John Wayne, and actually carried my 45 pistol with me on my missions. But while on the bomb run that day, about three minutes before we were to drop our bombs, the Germans scored a direct hit on our Norden Bomb Sight. The Bomb Sight actually acted as an armored flight jacket, and saved the life of **John Davies**, the bombardier. I was looking over Davies' shoulder when all this was happening, and I had to explain to Captain **Raymond Craig**, our pilot, why he should turn the ship over to Captain **Charles Handwright**, who had Deputy Lead that day, and whose plane had not yet been hit. (Handwright was hit later, but made it back to England before crash landing.)

Of the three planes in our immediate formation, two crash landed in England; and we, in the third plane, were so badly damaged, we did not think we could make it across the North Sea, so we detoured by way of Calais and did not have to crash land.

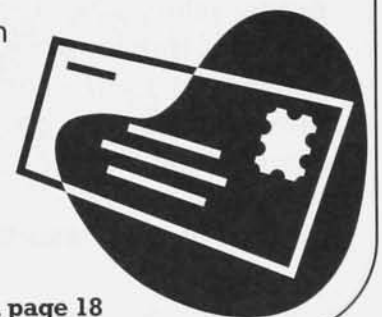


From Chris Clark, a tribute to Uncle Frank: Uncle Frank didn't talk about WWII very much, but I will never forget when he

showed me the medals he won in the 8th AF. He had the Air Medal with three Oak Leaf Clusters and the Distinguished Flying Cross. Before S/Sgt. Charles F. Clark died in August 1987, all I knew was that he had flown the War; and my father's other brother, PFC Donald R. Clark was taken prisoner in some remote forest in Germany; a small forest, nice for hiking or a picnic, a place called Hurtgen Forest. Uncle Bob was in the Bloody Bucket, the 28th Infantry Division. The Russians freed him in May 1945.

While driving with Uncle Frank to Baltimore to see the Orioles play, I asked him what kind of bombs he dropped on Germany. Well, the question was out of the blue, but he shot back a reply real fast, "Ah, Crissy, every mission was different. Some were GPs, some were incendiaries – do you know what that means? I didn't, but I learned real fast. He quickly changed the subject to his memories of a TDY and a visit to London. The TDY was to the 8th AF Rest Home at the Palace Hotel in Southport, in November 1944. He was then on the Lt. **Louis Confer's** crew....

"Uncertainty!" Still driving to Baltimore, Uncle Frank said that was always on one's mind. Never knowing when a German anti-aircraft shell would hit your plane, or someone else's; never knowing if you would come back or not. He said when he did get a visit to London, he made the most of it. It seems he was having such a good time in London, they had to take a crew picture without him. He could not be found. In his letter home, all he could mention was that he had a close call with a buzz bomb. Well, 35 or 40 years after the fact, I guess he finally could tell someone what really happened, and I was that someone. He was in a hotel, but not alone. He had met an English woman. When the buzz bomb went off, both of them landed on the floor, still embraced. It was only when they



...continued on page 18

were ready that they got dressed to go and look at the damage the bomb had caused!!!
Ed. Note: This is an interesting confession for S/Sgt. C.F.Clark He flew nine missions as a Bombardier on Sabrina III, the first November 26, 1944; the last to Koblenz, January 1, 1945. His nephew, Chris, has truly gotten into serious WWII research. He and Tony Mastradone are regular visitors to the National Archives.

Chris sent the following note after the Washington Reunion: "I want to thank the 44th Bomb Group for not only giving me the chance to welcome them to Washington, D.C., but for the once-in-a-lifetime chance to welcome them to the White House. The day we went, I took my son out of school. My wife Katie, son Joseph and I got up early to beat the Washington traffic. I had a sign made here in Manassas of the 8 Ball."

Chris did not travel by bus, as he had to hurriedly return to Joseph's school, so the boy would keep his perfect attendance, arriving a little bit late.

"That is something the three of us will never forget. I hope my 4th grade son's memory of this day last a long time, as he can honestly say, he helped welcome THE 44th BOMB GROUP to the WHITE HOUSE." For this family experience, Chris thanks all of us.

From an unknown source comes this tribute to the pilots of "The Little Friends"

Say what you will about him: arrogant, cocky, boisterous, and a fun-loving fool to boot—he has earned his place in the sun. Across the span of fifty years he has given this country some of its proudest moments and most cherished military traditions. But fame is short-lived and little the world remembers. Almost forgotten are the 1400 fighter pilots who stood alone against the might of Hitler's Germany during the dark summer of 1940—and in the words of Sir Winston Churchill, gave England "Its Finest Hour. Gone from the hardstands of Duxford are the '47s and '51s with their checkerboard noses that terrorized the finest fighter

squadrons the Luftwaffe had. Dimly remembered – the 4th Fighter Group that gave Americans some of their few proud moments in the skies over Korea. How fresh in recall are the Air Commandos who valiantly struck the VC with their aging "Skyraiders" in the rain and blood-soaked valley called A. Shau? And how long will be remembered the "Thuds" over "Route Pack Six" and the flak-filled skies above Hanoi?

So here's a "nickel on the grass" to you, my friend, for your spirit, enthusiasm, sacrifice and courage—but most of all, to your friendship. Yours is a dying breed, and when you are gone—the world will be a lesser place.

The B-24 Liberator Club and the Veterans Memorial Center in Museum are raising money for a B-24 bronze model to be erected in San Diego, California. The model is a replica of the one in the Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs. If you wish to contribute, mail check to B-24 Liberator Club, 1672 Main Street, Suite E, PBM-124, Ramona, CA 92065.

From the Diary of **Frank Stebbing**:

I wish they'd make the Army a little more co-ed,

I want a blue-eyed buddy to share my lonely bed.

A guy's all right for marching, and swell for fighting too,

But oh, I wish my buddy was blonde with eyes of blue.

They give me GI clothing, and feed me GI chow

But gen'ral, gen'ral, gen'ral! I want a GI gal.

I wish they'd give a ration of concentrated love,

Oh Johnny, Johnny, Johnny—what am I thinking of?

The *8 Ball Tails* is sad to note the passing of

Olga Toth. **Alex Toth**, her husband, reported his great loss on 23 September, 2003. Alex and his daughter attended the reunion in Washington, DC this past October.



Patricia Williams, wife of **Donald J. Williams**, passed away, also. Donald served as Adjutant in the 67th Squadron in 1942-43, then was transferred to the 44th Headquarters as Group Adjutant.



Did you know that the famous "Eisenhower Jacket" which became popular in WWII was originally designed for **Ira Eaker**. He gave it to Ike when he went to Gibraltar to direct Operation Torch in Africa. Eaker said that it was uncomfortable to wear when he was flying the plane.



THE 44TH BOMB GROUP PX

Sam and **Edith Miceli** are still on duty with the 44th BGVA's wares:

- 44th BGVA shirts \$25.00
- Pins \$5.00
- Caps \$5.00
- Bumper Stickers \$2.00
- Liberator Shirts \$30.00

This new and popular item features your favorite plane on a sky blue background, replete with fluffy clouds. This shirt is a fashionable way to proclaim your noble history. Check the Legacy pages for a preview. Place orders to: Sam Miceli, 6398 Dawson Blvd., Mentor, Ohio 44060-3648



To: Director/Historian Roger D. Fenton: I am William McCart 702067 44th BG 506 Sq. I was the Radio Operator on the Don Ackerman crew. In the last issue of 44th BGVA, the Folded Wings Dept., Norman Chown was honored. Norman was a special friend, and I'm sorry I was never able to get in touch with him after the war. Norman & I would entertain the Barracks between mis-

sions. I'd play my guitar, and Norman would tap dance. Then he'd give his rendition of "Casey at the Bat", and I would recite the "French Canadian Skunk Hunt". We had some other adventures together. Norm was a dandy buddy, and I miss him. Bill McCart, 1435 Wilbur Rd., Roseburg, OR 97470 (541) 673-1667.



From Will Lundy: The Turner Publishing Company is closing out their books, "The 44th Bomb Group." We agreed to purchase the last of their inventory. The book is leather-bound: the price; \$50.00 Anyone wishing to place an order, contact Richard Lynch, Treasurer.



Betty Olewiler, the Red Cross Girl featured in a previous publication, has written a book, "A WOMAN IN A MAN'S WAR. Reflections of a Red Cross Donut Girl of WWII." Betty followed Patton's Army across the Continent, and when his Army ran out of gas, so did the Red Cross Donut Truck. Her book comes in both soft (\$17.84) and hard cover (\$27.89), and is available through Amazon, Borders and Barnes & Noble.



Congratulations are in order for another international union, Belgium & American. Several weeks after the Washington Reunion, Connie Crandell, daughter of Joe & Barbara Crandell, married Peter Loncke, a retiree from the Belgium Air Force. Peter endeared himself to the 44th BG, (and other organizations) long before any of us met him. He researched crash sites and contacted families, supplying information to them that was previously unavailable. Peter is applying for dual citizenship. If you wish to send congratulations, write Peter & Connie Loncke, 19343 Springfield Road, Groveland, IL 61535. E-Mail address: b24kaybar@insightbb.com



From David Hastings to **Dick Butler**, President of the 2nd Air Division. For Remembrance Sunday, David arranged for Dick to lay a wreath on behalf of our fallen airmen. With all the grandeur of English ceremonies, events were planned at City Hall, the Cathedral and at the Forum, home of the 2 A.D. Memorial Library. When Dick and Ardith slow down, we will be sure to get a report.



From the EAST OF ENGLAND TOURIST BUREAU: Along with the initial cultural clashes between the locals and the "Friendly Invaders" problems arose when the subject of food came up. For the Americans... wartime British cuisine was not considered a culinary treat! A particular turn-off was the constant sight of Brussels sprouts...a regular hot dish served throughout the winter months. ...One commander advised that 'if pilots had to crash land on return to England, to do so in a Brussels sprouts field!'



From Roy Owen, reporting to the Board regarding Ploesti diorama at the Mighty 8th Museum in Savannah: The B-24s are now hanging low over the burning wells, a more accurate depiction of the never-to-be-forgotten low level raid Aug. 1, '43. The voice-overlay will soon be completed. It has been reported that the Ploesti mission is one of the most popular displays in the Museum.



From Lee Aston: Lee & Mary went on a 6,200 mile tour, visiting geysers, Mt. Rushmore and a long time buddy from 58 years ago—Ernest F. Rommelfanger, 67th Squadron Navigator. Lee had served as Capt. Rommelfanger's Deputy Squadron Navigator in the winter of 1944-45. Rommelfanger was originally assigned as Navigator on the **Lewis J. Vance** crew. After flying a new B-24 overseas by the Southern route, Ernie fell sick and was hospitalized in Belfast, Ireland. His crew went on to Shipdham and began flying combat missions

without him. He arrived at Shipdham on the day before his crew was shot down on their 5th mission. All the crew except the Bombardier, **Edward Davidowitz**, survived and were taken POW. Ernie eventually completed 33 missions as lead navigator, flying with various crews. He served as 67th Squadron Navigator from October '44 to early '45. He has one daughter following in his footsteps, a daughter that been a Captain in the Air Force.

While visiting Bev & Jerry Folsom in Salt Lake City, they were able to set up the White House Tour for the 44 members of the 44th BGVA. Heading east, they visited Dick & Betty Lynch; attended a Bar Association meeting, visited Jefferson Davis's birthplace, then 'crashed' to rest up for Washington. Aston's evaluation: "God has truly blessed the United States."



Ray Ward, author of **THOSE BRAVE CREWS**, in recognition that very little about the heroism of the Liberator crews has reached the shelves of WWII literature, he has created a "Books for Free" program. A donation of **THOSE BRAVE CREWS** to a local library of institution, service academies and trips overseas will cost \$14.95/each plus \$5 shipping and handling. Every gift is tax deductible. the donor's name will be on the inside cover. In order o make such an arrangement, ward has established the publishing house Weldon Publications with its 'Books for Free' program. For website click: www.bravecrews-rayward.com or contact the author at 432 Pennsylvania avenue, Waverly, NY 14892 or e-mail: Weldo@sg23.com.



Lee Aston and Ernest Rommelfanger

THE NEWS FROM SHIPDHAM

By Peter Bodle, President of the Shipdham Aero Club

The Norfolk Winter is upon us as I write to you for the Spring edition of Eight Ball Tails. Twice already this winter we have had to put all the aircraft into the hangar, as the wind speeds have exceeded 35 to 40 MPH across the airfield. But as you did under similar circumstances, we look forward to the spring and some fine clear European flying weather. Like you, we kid ourselves it only a few weeks away!!!

To round off the end of the last flying season, we had several good social events. We combined our rocket launch competition in November with the traditional November 5th Bonfire Night celebrations. Over 100 members and their families and friends turned out to watch the displays. Following soon after came the Formal Christmas Dinner and Dance; and soon after, the less formal Xmas Party in the Clubhouse. Both events were very well attended, and both helped raise more much needed funds toward Club expenses.

We now have over one hundred and twenty members, one hundred and five of whom are pilots. Not as many as you had in your day, but still a pretty impressive number for a club of our size.

More work continues around your old home. There is quite a lot of maintenance occurring on the grass areas, and our glider trailers are having a separate parking area prepared to house them. By the end of this week we hope to have an extra building con-

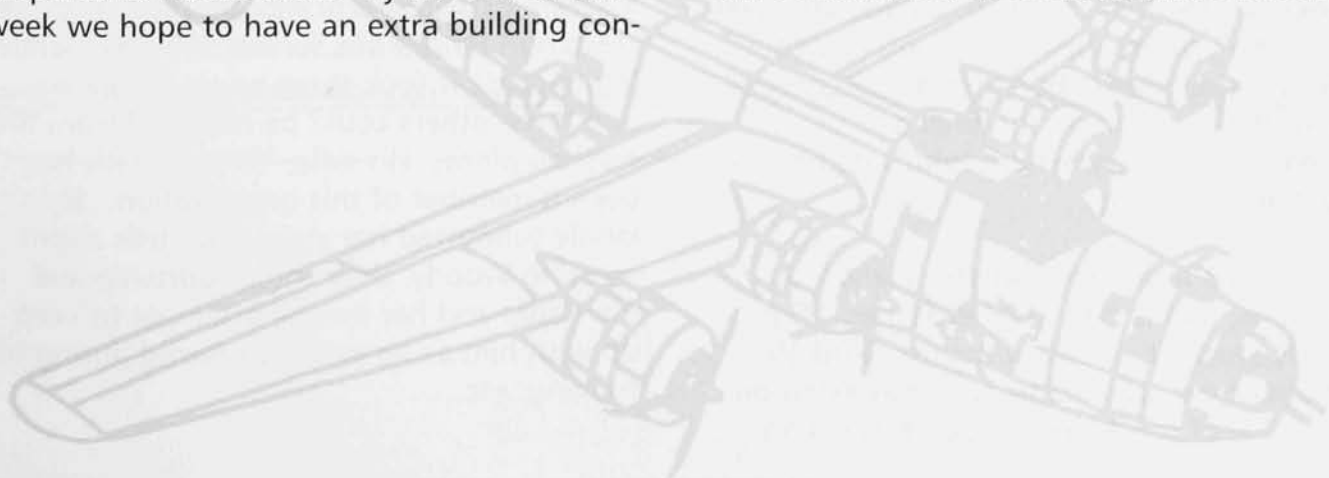
structed. This will allow us to expand some of our existing operations, and also expand into some new areas. We are hoping to make room for a troop of young Air Cadets, so they too may come and share the facilities and atmosphere of Station 115.

As you know, Steve Adams' new book is now published, and makes a fabulous read; and is crammed with a small selection of his fabulous collection. Not one for resting on his laurels, he is now co-operating with me on a second book, covering activities on the Station, and some of its personnel. We are at present working on the research covering the activities of USAAF aircrews who took A.T.C. Cadets and Army cadets with them on test and training flights, and have amassed quite a lot of information; but if any of you out there have anything that can help Steve and I add further to the Shipdham's history, please let us know about it.

I guess I have to close now and get this off to the editor. Keep looking after yourselves. Our love to you all from your friends at Station 115.

Peter

Ed. Note: Any stories or photos that any member of the 44th can contribute to this collection of historical events at Shipdham related to teaching these Cadets can be directed to Steve Adams, whose address is on the inside cover of the 'Tails. Peter Bodle can be contacted at Bodle@btinternet.com





WILL SEZ

First of all, I'd like to welcome Bob Lehnhausen back to the Board, congratulate him and thank him for accepting the leadership of the Board. We missed you, Bob.

It continues to amaze me, just how much history and so many different stories that have come to light from just one mission, that of 21 January 1944. On that fateful day, the 68th Squadron lost four aircraft and crews, while the 67th Squadron suffered one crew that crash-landed just inland from the Channel.

My first involvement with these events took place back in the 1990s when Mrs. Mary Hoke, wife of T/Sgt. John L. Dickinson, Engineer, asked for assistance. She had hoped to determine where his remains might be located, as his body could not be identified in the wreckage. The remains of three men from this Lt. Gary M. Mathisen crew could not be identified, were buried first temporarily in the French cemetery of Poix. Later, all of these men's remains were moved to another temporary American Cemetery, including those classified as "unknown".

As Mrs. Hoke wanted to have closure by visiting John's burial site, I contacted a French historian, Claude Helias, who lived in western France, asking him for help. Claude worked for over a year, searching through and for official data. He identified the three cemeteries involved, including the final one of Ardennes Cemetery, where John's name is on the Wall of Missing.

A few years later, Lois Shaeffer Cianci contacted us, as she had lost her father, T/Sgt. Clair P. Shaeffer, Engineer for the Frank W. Sobotka crew. His name, too, was listed on the WOM of the Ardennes Cemetery. Lois

and Tony accompanied the 44th BG on their tour of the Continent, where we all experienced a very emotional visit to the crash site, as well as to the American Ardennes Cemetery.

A few years later, Jackie O. Roberts found us, having lost her father, S/Sgt. Jack N. Ostenson on this same date. Jack had been a waist gunner on the same Lt. Mathisen crew, and was also one of the three men on that crew, whose remains had not been identified.

About a year ago, the daughter of Lt. H. R. Howington, a pilot on his own crew, had been KIA, was also buried temporarily at Poix. Linda was seeking more specifics about the loss of her father and his crew; and in addition, had considerable specifics about her father and his crew – five of them evaded and returned to duty, as well as some unusual contacts. Her story has been completed, and it is hoped that it can be included in a later issue of 8 Ball Tails.

The 67th Squadron aircraft and crew that crash-landed on the coast of England that same afternoon, was piloted by Lt. Keith Cookus. It had a crew of twelve, with three taken POW. The bombardier, Lt. Woodrow W. Cole was badly wounded by flak, but somehow managed to clear the bombs from a severely damaged bomb bay, shortly before crashing. He did not survive the crash landing because it took three hours before he and three others could be removed from the crashed plane. His wife, "Meg" Smith has been a member of this organization. She kindly submitted her story. She tells about meeting Woody, their short courtship and marriage; and her several attempts to keep up with him as he was transferred during his training, etc.

Meg Smith's most interesting story is available for printing in a future issue of our newsletter.

About two weeks ago I happened to be going through my file of Formation Sketches, and decided to check out this 'famous' date to see what it looked like. It immediately became very interesting, due to the fact that all four of the lost 68th Squadron planes were flying close together. In between these four lost planes was another, single plane piloted by Lt. A. A. Anderson. It showed a 'two, one and two' sequence.

Upon checking this 'lucky' crew, I found that the 1st pilot was A. A. Anderson, and that two of the gunners on board that day were active members of the 44th BGVA. Upon contacting them both, they wrote that they had little or no damage on board, and they both credited that to the skill of their pilot for bringing them back unscathed.

The tail gunner was S/Sgt. Edward E. 'Dutch' Kopko, and the waist gunner was S/Sgt. Clyde F. Gordon, with both of them sending a short story. Then, when I 'pulled' up Kopko's records from our Master Data Base, I discovered that he had a long and distinguished record with the 68th Squadron. He joined them down in Africa two days after Ploesti in 1943, completed his tour on 24 February 1944, shortly after being credited with the destruction of a ME 262. He then

worked with the 50th Station Complement; transferred to the 467th BG for a short period, then transferred back to the 68th Squadron, as he wanted to continue to fly missions.

S/Sgt. Kopko began his second 'tour' in early February 1945, this time as an Engineer; and had at least 17 additional missions completed when the war ended. His last one was dated 16 April 1945. So his total number completed was 40 or more, having flown most of them during the very tough period. What a remarkable record!

At the end of the War, S/Sgt. Kopko and other crewmen flew home on the same plane with General Spaatz. They made several stops along the East Coast. Then at Selfredge Field, Michigan, General Spaatz asked Kopko, "Tell me what you would like to do now?" Kopko answered, "I would like to go home and see my mother." The very next day he was enroute to his home.

Will Lundy

Ed. Note: It constantly amazes me, how each story overlaps a previous one. I am grateful that we have the means to save and record these events. Two generations later, the effect of each mission is still resounding. The trip to Escalles Sur Buchy was to wipe out the V-2 launch sites.



In keeping with his grandfather's tradition of sharing his Medal of Honor with all those he credits with earning it, Leon Johnson Abbott shares it with Chris Clark, young devotee and follower of the 44th BGVA. The Medal was presented to General Johnson by General Devers of York, Pennsylvania.

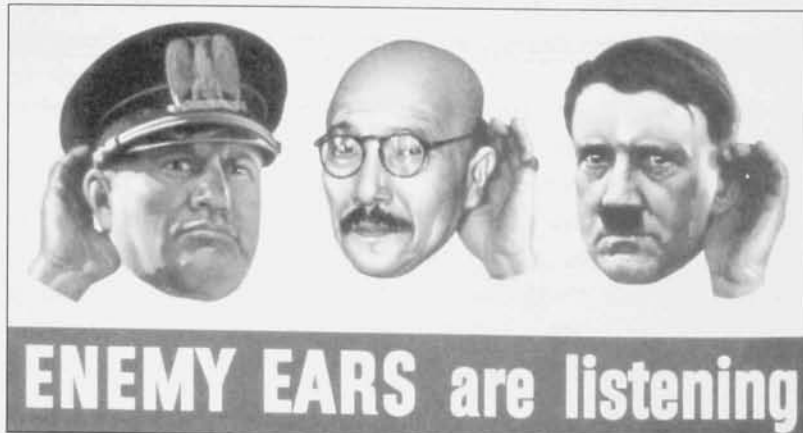


FRESH MEMORIES OF A DISTANT WAR

**YOU'VE GOT WHAT
IT TAKES SOLDIER.**



**NOW TAKE CARE OF
WHAT YOU'VE GOT!**



ENEMY EARS are listening



FOLDED WINGS

Agerton, James A. He was reported as deceased by his family, but with no details. The e-mail address given to contact the family was incorrect. I could not locate them to verify and obtain data.

DeGroat, Hobart Clark. January 2, 2004 #12050963 (68) Reported deceased by his longtime friend, Ivo Dipiero. DeGroat served in Armaments. He was part of the original 68th BS, sailing on the Queen Mary to England Sept. 5, 1942. There is a notation in his record that he accompanied the 44th to Africa. On returning to England, he continued his service until June 6, 1945, sailing home on the Queen Mary.

Duerksen, Oliver E. January 2003 66th Squadron; Co pilot for the John J. Muldoon crew. See Lt. Muldoon's text below for his data details.

Fowler, Frederick W. 12 November 2003 0-814283 Lt. Fowler joined the 66th Sq. during the early summer of 1944, was then transferred to the 68th Sq. in late August. His job classification was shown as Navigator, Radar. In this category, Lt. Fowler apparently was never assigned to any one crew; but instead, flew with most of the PFF crews during his 30 plus tour. His first mission was dated 7 October 1944, and his last on 20 April 1945. This last mission was the next to last mission flown by the 44th BG during the war.

Hand, Arthur A. 12/10/03 36364539 66th Squadron. Arthur Allen (Red) Hand served as a gunner, mostly with the Captain Armstrong crew. His first mission was one of the toughest of the war, that of the low level attack on the oil fields of Ploesti. He was a last minute substitute on a crew other than the 44th BG, but the crew cannot be identified. Twenty-eight were recorded, but the total was at least 33.

The Charles Armstrong crew was assigned to

the 66th BS on 21 July 1943, arrived in North Africa 30 July, one day before Ploesti. Two more missions were flown with different crews, not returning to Capt. Armstrong's until 13 November 1943. Most of his missions were in the positions of Waist Gunner, left or right, but he also flew as Nose Turret gunner and in the Ball turret.

This crew was the first one from the 44th BG assigned to train for PFF, was temporarily transferred to the 482nd BG after their mission of 12 March '44. Then, on to the 389th BG where, on 21 March, they flew their first PFF leads for various Groups in the 2nd Air Division. Art flew four of those missions, but apparently, his sorties are filed with that Group's records. They appear only on his Individual Flight Record.

Six more sorties were flown with Capt. Armstrong in May and June, including two on D-Day, when they were the first aircraft to bomb on D-Day. When Capt. Armstrong was promoted to Operations Officer, Art continued to fly missions whenever a spare gunner was required. His last recorded mission was dated 14 February, 1945, but he was still in the Squadron into March 1945.

Art's contributions include his talented painting of at least two B-24 nose art, starting with "Trouble" and later "Henry" for Capt. Howard "Pete" Henry. He also loved working with wood, building many different types of furniture. His work was always in demand. He was active as a Ham Radio, along with many other B-24 men.

His major contributions to this organization was his ceaseless searches for former member for the 44th HMG in the 1980s. He was instrumental in providing the roster to notify the prior members when we initiated the startup of the 44th BGVA in 1994. From then on until his passing, Art continued to maintain his many successful searches for our long 'lost' 44thers. He was one of the best, honored by being selected to receive the sec-



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ond award of the General Leon W. Johnson Distinguished Service trophy this past year. Bless him!

Hightower, Powell. 6 October, 2001, #20661 68th Squadron. S/Sgt. Hightower was a Tail Gunner on the Ted Williams crew. He flew eighteen missions, his first on February 22, 1945, finishing April 14, 1945. (Two of his missions are not recorded in the Database, as those official documents were lost.) The Williams crew flew on such note worthy planes as *Louisiana Belle*, *Black Sheep*, *T.S. Tessie* and many more. After the war, Hightower moved to Santa Barbara, California. He leaves his wife Mona, and two children, a boy and a girl.

Hill, George R. 8 November 2003 16067339 67th Squadron. M/Sgt. Hill was in charge of the 67th Radio Maintenance Shop, having rapidly worked his way to the top from the Private classification he had as a member of the 67th Sq. personnel that arrived in England on the Queen Mary in September 1942. George was one of the few Ground Personnel that flew to North Africa in late June 1943 in preparation for the low-level Ploesti mission. Even though his expertise was with radio equipment, George often assisted the seriously over-worked ground crew personnel to keep the planes flying.

George enlisted in Chicago, January 26, 1942, had basic training at Jefferson Barracks, Missouri; then to Radio School where he knew more than the instructors, as he had worked in a radio shop for years, prior to Service, and it was his hobby most of his life. He joined the 67th Sq. at Will Rogers in August 1942, and made the crossing to England on the Queen Mary, like most of the Ground Personnel. At Shipdham he worked as a radio mechanic

under M/Sgt. Hale of the 68th Sq., and was rapidly awarded promotions until he reached M/Sgt. Shortly after his return from Africa. He also returned to the U.S. after the War like most of the Ground Personnel, in June 1945.

Following the War, George returned to his work at the radio shop, took over the business in 1956, and retired in 1983.

Messer, David C. 25 May 1954 14165959 David was a gunner on the Lt. Musgrave crew that was shot down while making a practice "bombing" run on Great Yarmouth. This crew had served with the 466th BG and the 785th B. Sq. at Attlebridge, England. They had flown their first missions in March 1944. The crew was then temporarily assigned to the 389th BG for PFF training. When completed, they were assigned to the 44th BG. A "skeleton" crew was on board for a practice flight only, were checking their new equipment when they were shot down by a lone German fighter near the coast, close to Great Yarmouth.

David was not on board that day; but his pilot, Lt. Forest Musgrave and the radio operator were killed. The crew was broken up, with David flying but one mission before he was transferred to the 15th AF in Italy in October, 1944. He finished his tour there. David was killed on 25 May, 1954 when a B-36 in which he was flying crashed near Midland, Texas. He was survived by his six year old daughter.

Muldoon, John J. March 2003 1st Pilot in the 66th Squadron, whose crew was assigned to the 66th Sq. from the 70th RCD on 16 December 1944. As both he and his co-pilot O.E. Duerksen had the same records, they are being combined here to avoid the duplications. This crew flew their first mission on 7 January 1945. On their fourth mission, 28

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January, the entire crew was forced to abandon their aircraft over Belgium due to flak damage, low on gas and icing conditions. One crewman broke his leg, but no serious injuries. After a week on R & R (Rest and Recuperation) they resumed their missions, closing out their tour on 20 April 1945 with a total of 20. On 6 March 1945 Lt.

Muldoon was awarded a DFC medal for his heroic actions, and for the safe return of his full crew during the events of 28 January 1945.

Olive, Alfred, June 22, 2002, 67 Sq. # 21558. S/Sgt. He served as Radio Operator for the Milton Swartz crew that was assigned to the 67th Sq. on 25 February 1945 from the 70th Replacement Depot. They flew their first mission as a crew on 22 March, followed quickly by the second one on the 25th. He 'filled in' on two other crews on 4 and 8 April. He was back with his regular crew on the 14th and 16th. His final mission of the war was on the 20th April 1945; finished out his tour with two missions with his regular crew. They were flying Old Iron Corset in her second to last mission on her historic run of over 100 missions and completing the war.

Reasons, John W. 34194483 67th Squadron. Right Waist Gunner on the E. T. Johnson crew. He was Killed in Action on 18 November 1943 when his crew was forced to ditch in the North Sea – no survivors. (The 44th BGVA received a letter from his daughter, Nancy Reasons Bass, who recently became a Life member).

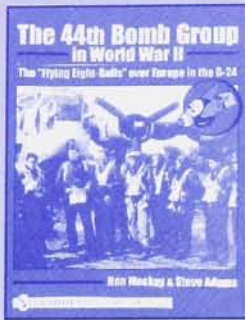
Russo, Santo September 9, 2003 #12041543 68th Squadron Cpl. Russo served as the 68th Squadron Sheet Metal man. Like most of the Ground Crew, went to England in September 1942 on board the

Queen Mary, and was with them when the war in Europe ended in May, 1945. However, he did not return to the U.S. on the Queen Mary, as did most Ground Personnel, but was a passenger on A/C #42-52643, piloted by Captain Roy M. Boggs and his crew, 28 May 1945.

Stoffel, William M. February 2003 #0-2071488 66th Squadron 1st Lt. Stoffel was the Navigator on the A.C. Graham crew. His first mission was flown on 21 February 1945, and his last on 20 April 1945. Records show that he flew all of his missions with the same crew, 18 in all; but the number was actually higher (19) due to the missing official records in early April. His last mission of the war was flown on 20 April 1945. He was a Life member of the 44th BGVA.

Ed. Note: Tragically, our list of Folded Wings grows longer each year. Most have not recorded their personal experiences of the War. Have you done yours? If not, don't put it off any longer. Call me. I'll send you an application. 717 846-8948





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