

44th Bomb Group Veterans Association



8 BALL TAILS

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JUDY'S BUGGY



Judy's Buggy first flew with the 458th Bomb Group, and was transferred to the 44th BG sometime between January or February 1944. She apparently got rugged wear, having been repaired at Beccles, Suffolk on April 8 1944 after a mission to Langenhagen. Next she was repaired at Heston, Middlesex on 31 May, having a nose gear collapse and a replacement of #1 engine. On 14 July there was a request to declare her war weary, so back she went to the 458th and used in a trucking operation, still wearing the 44th BG markings. She flew one more mission to Dresden on 16 January with the **Howard Hinman** crew, and crashed at the Orly/Paris airport after the crew bailed out. She was salvaged in February, having flown a total of 38 missions.

Flying with members of the 67th Squadron, this plucky B-24 carried no less than nineteen crews safely through all missions: **Rockford Griffith, Jack Thames, J. R. Jefferson, William Wahler, Richard Thornton, Paul Durett, Stephen Harris, Wilbur Carter, Oliver Hurst, Christopher Spagnola, Russell Pellow, Ernest Holmer, James Bledsoe, Joseph Kuklewicz, O. Collins, Howard Hinman, James Bledsoe, Thompson Daily and Robert Chaille.**

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THE SPAGLOLA CREW (67TH SQUADRON) & JUDY'S BUGGY



L-R Top Row: Robert Keyes, Co-Pilot; Christopher Spagnola, Pilot; Vincent Silverthorne, Bombardier; Robert Lee Aston, Navigator.

Front: Harry Selkirk, Radio Operator; Thomas Curde, Engineer; George Chigaris, Waist Gunner; John Pondfield, Waist Gunner; Norman Sutherland, Tail Gunner. Absent from the picture is John Gately, who replaced Pondfield after the 5th mission. (Pondfield was wounded by flak on the mission to Misburg.)

The Spagnola Crew flew four of their thirty one missions in *Judy's Buggy*, also in *Phyllis, Limpin' Ole Sadie/San Antonio Rose, Mi Akin Ass* and many unnamed planes.

Spagnola's first mission was with **William Meyerriecks**, after which he moved to the left seat with his own crew. All of their missions were into Germany at the time when Allied Armies were pushing forward, and the planes were clearing the way. Eleven of their missions were hitting Marshalling Yards, keeping German troops from moving west to help their comrades.

The Spagnola's crew's first mission was 5 September 1944, three months after D-Day. Once Normandy was taken, and the troops were moving inland, the Americans and British sent a motley bunch of ships to Omaha Beach and Gold Beach and sunk them. They

became the foundation for two huge artificial harbors that would serve as ports until Cherbourg and Brest could be captured and put into operation. Code-named "Mulberries", these artificial ports handled 25 divisions and their mountain of supplies in the next 20 days, plus 6,000 tons of supplies daily.

While all these activities were going on under them, planes from Shipdham were flying overhead, headed for oil fields and railroad bridges. B-24's were paving the way for the battles ahead. By the time the Spagnola crew had completed their final mission 26 February 1945, the Americans had defeated the Germans at Bastogne, ending the Battle of the Bulge; Churchill, Stalin and Roosevelt had met at Yalta; and the Allies were launching a major offense to cross the Rhine River.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



News from Norfolk- We are all very well aware of the untold number of monuments in Norfolk honoring our presence there during the war. The English people have never forgotten our contributions to the war effort and the many losses that were incurred. One has only to visit the area and receive the warm welcomes and thanks for our efforts. They really make us feel at home. Well, their work still goes on.

In a recent issue of the 2nd Air division Heritage League publication, there appeared an article describing the plans of a group of people to erect a monument to twelve Americans who were killed in a crash of a Liberator in the village of Garveston which is about three miles from Shipdham. Cynthia, whose home was in Garveston, remembered that crash and made contact with one of the organizers. As a result we have received formal invitations to attend the dedication ceremony on June 6, which we have accepted.

On June 4, 1944, a 492nd group B-24 spun in while assembling for a mission killing the entire 10 man crew two firemen from our base, Sgt. Monroe Atchley and Pvt. Ted Bunalski went to the scene and were also killed by the exploding bombs. Our Tony Mastradone and another 44th medic crawled up a ditch to retrieve these men.. Tony was at the Savannah reunion last October and vividly recalled that day. The full story of this crash is on Page 304 of Will Lundy's Roll of Honor and Casualties book.

It promises to be quite an affair with several relatives of those men travelling over for the ceremony. If all goes well and I don't forget the camera we will give a report in the next issue.

I hope everyone had a great 4th of July. Just remember that we have many British friends as they remember us.

George Washburn

IF SOMEONE WITH MULTIPLE PERSONALITIES THREATENS TO KILL HIMSELF, IS IT CONSIDERED A HOSTAGE SITUATION?

IF A TURTLE DOESN'T HAVE A SHELL, IS HE HOMELESS OR NAKED?

WHERE DO FOREST RANGERS GO TO 'GET AWAY FROM IT ALL?'

LETTER FROM SHIPDHAM

By Peter Bodle



Last time I wrote to you guys, the weather had not been particularly good to the flyers amongst us...sadly nothing much has changed very much in the past few months, and no one is setting any great records for flying at the moment...except of course the fuel companies and the extortionate price they now charge for aviation fuel. At Shipdham we have spent most of the time since your departure trying to make flying affordable for 'the man in the street', and by and large, we think we have managed it. Sadly, somehow I can't see that lasting for too much longer. Fuel prices and government taxes really are turning General Aviation

back into a rich man's sport...and that is definitely not what the club is about, and I'm sure it was not what you guys would have wanted. For once I am starting to think that Governments might have to look at intervention in the supply of fuel...the word profiteering springs to mind.

A slowdown in flying gives everyone time to reflect, and one of the questions that has repeatedly come up in post flight natters round a coffee in the Shipdham Club House, is ..."after a rough mission, how did you guys wind yourselves up to climb aboard your plane for the next one???" ... Sorry if it seems a bit of a blunt way to put it, but it is meant as a serious, respectful and thoughtful (thought provoking?) question. If we amateur pilots have a bad day, we can turn round and come back to Shipdham, we can go home and relax, we can take a few weeks away from flying...all options that were not open to you. Not having been with you at the time, we can but try to imagine your situation. If any of you guys feel able to put your thoughts into words to enlighten me and others in the club who share an interest in what you guys did, and what you had to go through to achieve that, I'd love to hear it.

The ability to 'hitch a ride' on the Colling's B-24 has to be one of the best experiences money can buy. I did rather like George's view that 'Witchcraft' was in somewhat better shape than the planes you were given by the 44th B.G. to do the 8 hour delivery run to Germany. I bet the guys in the Collings ground crew have better working conditions and a longer time scale to get their aircraft into shape...I guess it also helps not having an angry enemy firing at you every flight...

The snow is pretty deep across the country as I write this, but it is officially Spring, so let's hope some decent flying weather is just round the corner and the season can get started soon.

In the meantime, keep well and look after yourselves.

All the best from Shipdham.

Peter

DONALD JOHNSON, NAVIGATOR IN THE 66TH SQUADRON TO THE EDITOR OF THE 8 BALL TAILS: YOU GOOFED!!!

Johnson was correct: The Editor recorded the loss of **CORKY** on the cover page of the Spring issue of the Tails as 28 June 1945. By that time, the war was over!!! The correct date was 28 January 1945.

My apologies to my readers for the error, but especially to the crews of **Maurice Corwine**, flying in **Corky** – 68th Squadron; **Roblee Perrault**, flying in **Tally Ho II** – 66th; and **John Muldoon** – 66th flying in **Chief Wapello**. Eight members of the Corky crew were KIA, two became POW. The crews of both **Tally Ho** and **Chief Wapello** crashed in Allied territory, but all returned safely to Shipdham.

For that same mission, **Vincent Allmonia**, pilot of **Flak Magnet**, attempted to take off, but ice had built up on the wings and it crashed a few miles east of the field. It caught fire and burned completely. One member of the crew, **Layton Scott, Nose Gunner**, died from burns; all others survived.

*From the Editor: **Robert Lehnhausen** and **George Washburn** also noted the error. Would anyone else like to speak up? I do not mind being told of errors in the Tails. I take all the blame, and thank you that you are a careful reader.*

Donald Johnson, Navigator on the **Charles P. Norris's** crew was on the mission to wipe out the Chemical Works at Leverkusen, Germany, which had been described in the Spring 2012 edition of the 8 Ball Tails. A/C #42-51234 lost manifold pressure on #3 engine. It dropped to 30 inches and remained that way. #4 had fluctuating power. They returned with the formation, coming back over Belgium. When they made a check of the fuel level, they found only about 50 gallons remaining

in each tank. After calling the Group's formation leader, they did a 180 degree turn, let down 21,000 feet through dark clouds – and iced up. They utilized instruments to finally break out of clouds at 2,000 feet and over Brussels, Belgium. Heading northeast, they missed the field, did another 180 degree turn and over Brussels, Belgium. Heading northeast, they missed the field, did another 180 degree turn to get back.

The engines started to spit and sputter from lack of fuel, so they headed for an open field; bombs were salvoed, which blew out all windows in the aircraft, damaged the elevators so they failed to operate. #3 engine began burning and #2 smoked. The pilots used throttles to maneuver the nose up and down – they had rudders and ailerons. They went into a grassy meadow about 30 miles northeast of Brussels (Hentje Westerloo). The nose wheel collapsed, the main gear held up, but the ship split apart. The dashboard was shoved back into the pilots' laps, but only minor bruises and cuts from flying plexiglass resulted. The aircraft was wiped out.

In 1998 a Belgian, Chris Van Kerckhoven from Westerloo, Belgium, sent these pictures of the damaged plane to Donald Johnson. (Obviously, Belgians are forever grateful.)

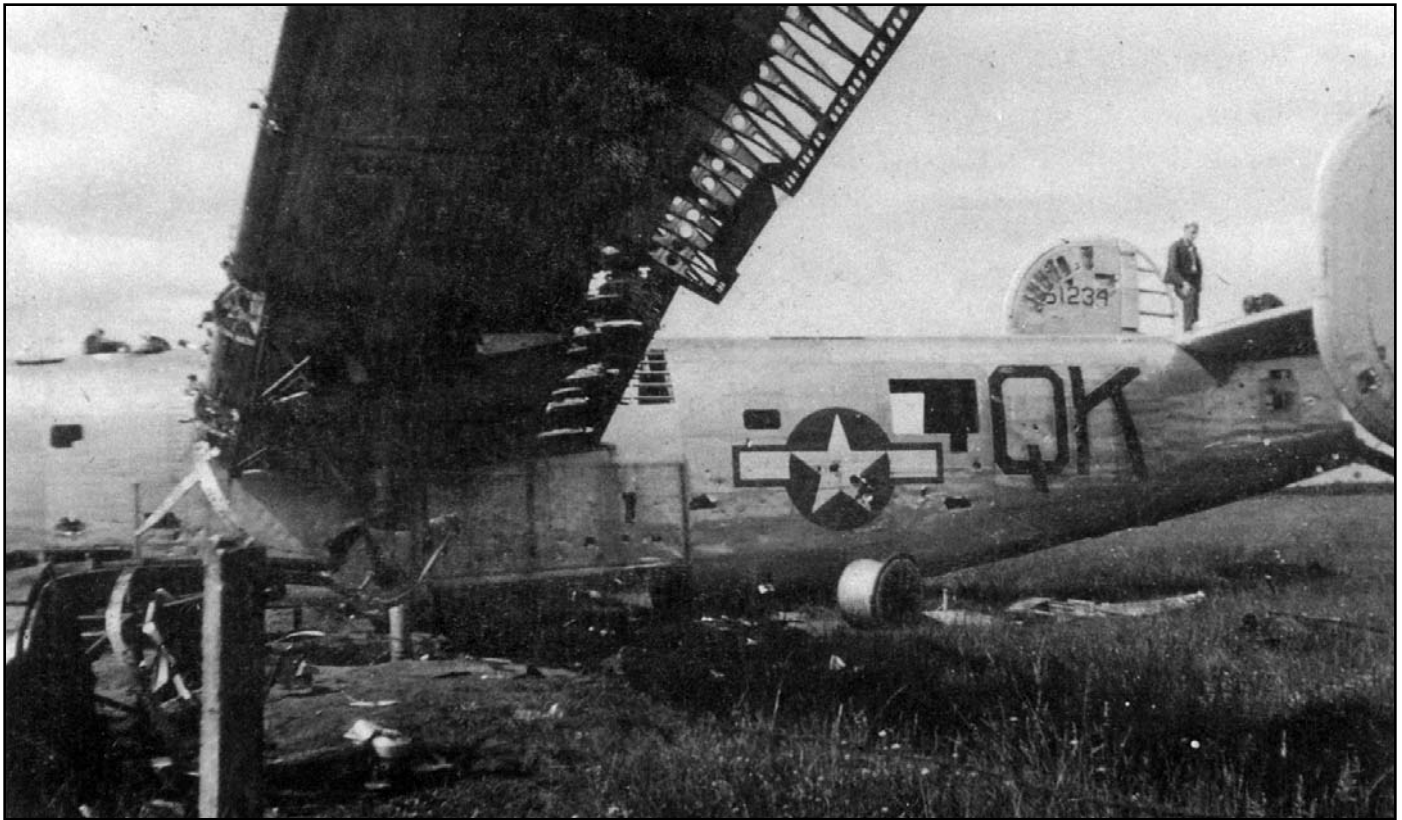
#42-51234



**DONALD JOHNSON, NAVIGATOR IN THE 66TH SQUADRON
TO THE EDITOR OF THE 8 BALL TAILS: YOU GOOFED!!!**

CONTINUED

Johnson's Unnamed Plane #42-51234



Will Lundy reported the losses on the mission to Leverkusen, Germany: **FLYING GINNY** (67th Squadron); **FLAK MAGNET** (68th Squadron); and #42-51234 (66th Squadron). KIA - 18; WIA - 2; Returned safely - 9.

CHRIS CLARK AND THE HERITAGE LEAGUE

Chris was recently appointed to the Board of the Heritage League, an organization of 2nd & 3rd generation of Air Corps Veterans. His assignment is to help recruit members, and to provide ideas for the growth of this organization. As a volunteer at the National Archives, Chris has provided a great deal of information to the 44th BG, about missions which were flown. The League is also concerned about long time storage of bomb group history.

*The Tails at one time reported that Chris's grandfather was in the AAC, but this is an error. It was his Uncle Frank, S/Sgt. **Charles Franklin Clark**. Clark had a full tour with the 459th Bomb Group, then transferred to the 44th in November 1944. He flew nine missions with the 506 Squadron, the first on November 26, 1944; the last on 1 January 1945.*

The members of the Board of the 44th BG are urging young members to consider membership in the Heritage League. They have developed a great comradeship, have worked on preserving history, plan great overseas events, and help in the preservation of monuments to the different Bomb Groups.

Chris can be reached at clarkhistory@aol.com and www.heritageleague.org

JACKIE ROBERTS TELLS OF HER RIDE ON A LIBERATOR

I had one of the best things happen to me that could ever happen. Lowell and I went in a B-24.

I was so excited I thought I died and went to heaven. It put everything into perspective for me. It was the B-24 Liberator Collings Foundation's plane, **WITCHCRAFT**. We flew out of Wiley Post Airport, Okla. City, Ok. I told the Flight Engineer Dan Wallan that my Dad was a Waist Gunner. So he sat me on the floor and strapped me in where my Dad would have sat. The Flight Engineer showed us all 10 places in the plane. I ended up behind the pilot and co-pilot. This was my first reality check. There were no plush padded seats!

Every young man had his spot. I could see in my mind each and every one of you that I know in your places. **Perry Morse** - he was sitting with me on the floor until he got up and took the Tail Gunner's spot. **Bob Lehnhausen, George Washburn, Lee Aston, Roy Owens, Richard Lynch, Will Lundy.** Lois Cianci's Dad and my Dad were by my side through the whole flight. And my wonderful pilot in life, my husband

Lowell. He showed me where each and every one of you sat. What a very brave job you young men did. The one thing we didn't have was the flak coming at us. Nor the bombs on board. Little did you young men know you would be giving us FREEDOM and would go down in HISTORY.

Well men that's my story. I will never forget my ride in the B-24. And I know you will never forget your ride.

Thank You All for sharing your stories.

You will never be forgotten.

We Hug Each of You with Our Love,
Jackie and Lowell Roberts

Jackie Roberts, 44th BGVA Treasurer, is the daughter of Jack Ostenson, Waist Gunner on the Gary Mathisen crew. They were flying in Valiant Lady. Lois Cianci's father was Clair Shaeffer, Engineer on the Frank Sobotka crew, flying in #42-7501. According to the research of the late Roy Owen, both planes were flying side by side, possibly brought down by the same burst of flak. The date was 21 January 1944; the mission was to Escalles Sur Buchy, France, to bomb the missile sites of the V-1 rockets.

ATTENTION 44TH BGVA MEMBERS

THOSE ABLE AND WISHING TO ATTEND A CONTINUED SMALL GATHERING OF THE 44TH BG AROUND LATE SEPTEMBER 2012, PLEASE CONTACT R. LEE ASTON FOR A "HEAD COUNT" AS EARLY AS POSSIBLE, BEFORE JUNE 30, 2012 TO MAKE ARRANGEMENTS. SUGGESTED PLANNED LOCATION IS CARLISLE, PA. (ARMY HERITAGE EDUCATION CENTER.) IF YOU HAVEN'T SEEN THE BG MONUMENT, THIS WOULD BE A GREAT OPPORTUNITY. ALSO, IF YOU WALK ON THE SOLDIER'S WALK, YOU WILL FIND YOURSELF AMONG FRIENDS. THERE ARE ROWS OF 44TH BG MEMBERS' BRICKS.

CONTACT LEE ASTON: TEL. 706-283-1337; U.S. MAIL: 830 Cardinal Drive, Elberton, GA 30635. E-mail leeaston@elberton.net

SALUTING OUR CO-TREASURER, LOWELL ROBERTS

Lowell Roberts is the silent partner of Treasurer Jackie; in fact, the only time he speaks up is at the Board Meeting when he gives the Finance Report and later, the Budget for the coming year. Otherwise, he operates silently.

He and Jackie are specialists at planning Reunions, and why not: he has planned many for the organization, Oklahoma and Texas Master Locksmith Association, of which he is President. He negotiates with hotels for the best prices, arranges for Color Guards, and gets members on the bus on time for tours. He handles wheel chairs and walkers and is ever-present to see that everybody finds their way to seats at Squadron Dinners and Banquets.

Lowell has his own history with the Air Force:

In January 1947, I was bored with college, and a friend had joined the Air Force, so I did too. My first duty station - as was with all new troops - I was sent to Lackland AFB, San Antonio, Texas for six weeks. Then off to Amarillo AFB, Amarillo, Texas for five months of Tech School on B-47 Bombers. It seemed General Curtis LeMay needed a lot of us in SAC, as my whole outfit was shipped to Mountain Home AFB, Idaho in June 1957.

After getting my Security Clearance, I was given an A/C to crew on; come October 1957, the whole wing went to Anderson AFB on the lovely island of Guam, (by way of Hawaii and Wake Island). It was monsoon season, and after getting the airplane unloaded and midnight chow out of the way, I lit up a smoke and knew this was the time to stop, before they started to taste good again. It was the First Good Thing the Air Force did for me!

In January 1958, we all came back to Mtn. Home and on a trip to Boise, Idaho to see a friend, I met the love of my life, although it took me until February 1959 to talk Miss Jackie into marrying me, (the Second Good; no, the Best Thing the Air Force did for me.)

In later years I learned that General LeMay ran his Air Force differently from the rest of the Air Force, when they took an Airman Second Class and placed him on a Senior Master Sergeant position - with all the authority and responsibility as a Supervisor in an Alert Compound, without the pay! I did this until I got out. In July 1962 I ended up at Tinker AFB, Oklahoma City, OK as a WG5, A/C Electrician, and retired there in November 1987 as a GS 11 Engineer.

Jackie & I had a Security business from 1970, so I went into it full time after leaving Tinker. We still live in Oklahoma City. We have 2 children, 4 grandchildren and 2 great grandchildren. Finding the 44th Bomb Group and becoming part of it in 2000 is the Third Best Thing the Air Force ever did for both Jackie and me.

**“To all the WWII Veterans,
you will be forever in our hearts.
Thank you for being there when
the nation needed you.”**

Lowell Roberts

Jackie & Lowell accepted the Treasurer's office, following Richard Lynch and his Co-Treasurer, Betty. They followed Jerry Folsom. All have been great stewards of the 44th BG funds, which is the reason the 44th BGVA has been able to leave their history in many different places.

THE B-24 MEMORIAL IN SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA



Aircraft Company, some two miles away. Powerful lights in the water shine up at the statue at night. The large flag is also lit up at night.

A large plaque, listing participants in this beautiful venture is part of the exhibit. It includes Cardenas, the late Col. Richard Butler (Ret), both from the 44th BG and Col 'Bud' Chamberlain. Both Butler and Chamberlain were Past Presidents of the 2nd AD, both of whom were present for the dedication ceremony.

Other accomplishments of this Memorial Committee included the Miramar National Cemetery where veterans rest in peace in beautiful, well manicured surroundings.

Cardenas was a 44th BG pilot, an internee and escapee from Switzerland, test pilot for Wright Paterson Air Base, and veteran of both Korea & Viet Nam. After retirement, he dedicated his life to helping veterans. When he learned of homeless, tragic veterans who may have been without a family, he made certain they were buried with military dignity.

ROBERT G. WRIGHT, FOUNDER

★US NAVY★
RDML & MRS. R. C. MELENDEZ
RICHARD M. ROGERS, MCPO, (WHITE HOUSE MIL. OFF)

★FAMILIES★
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ALYCE V. EVANS (WIFE); JOHN SCOTT EVANS (SON);
DAVID NEWELL EVANS (SON); JAMES DAVID EVANS
(GRANDSON); TIFFANY LYNN EVANS
(GRANDDAUGHTER); LAUREN ELISSA EVANS
(GRANDDAUGHTER)

IN LOVING RECOGNITION OF:
ISAAC MACHLIN "MAC" LADDON, CHIEF DESIGNER OF
THE B-24 LIBERATOR
REMEMBERED BY HIS CHILDREN AND THE FAMILIES OF
MARCELLA LADDON HEINTZ, MACHLIN BAUER LADDON
AND ROBERT LESLIE LADDON

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THE FAMILY OF ARDITH AND JOE FAMME
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EMIL AND CORNELL ILIESCU (PLOESTI SURVIVORS)
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MAJ. JAMES KIERNAN, USAF (RET)
RICHARD AND PEGGY LEARMAN
TOM SPLITGERBER

AVIATION 101:

1. IT'S BEST TO KEEP THE POINTED END GOING FORWARD AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE.
2. TRUST YOUR CAPTAIN...BUT KEEP YOUR SEAT BELT SECURELY FASTENED.
3. GOOD JUDGMENT COMES FROM EXPERIENCE, AND EXPERIENCE COMES FROM BAD JUDGMENT.
4. GRAVITY NEVER LOSES! THE BEST YOU CAN HOPE FOR IS A DRAW.

LOY NEEPER, ENGINEER & TOP TURRET GUNNER, 67TH SQ. REMEMBERS SOME REALLY ROUGH MOMENTS

By the time I made my first mission on 14 May 1943, there were two groups of B-24's in England, the 93rd and the 44th. The combined groups were able to get 19 planes in the air. The target was a German Navy Submarine base at Kiel, Germany. We lost seven of those 19 planes. It was then that I decided, "Three missions and my odds will be up!!"

By July 1943, we had our forces built up to large numbers, with several more planes per Group and several more Groups. Our group was transferred to North Africa, but our crew was left in England when the rest of our group flew to Southern England, and as soon as we landed, an armored truck and a jeep with a 50 caliber machine gun on it arrived. They started loading boxes onto our plane, and a Major got in with us. He told us to load all of our guns, including rifles and side arms, and to have two men on guard **all the time** when the plane was on the ground!! We thought our cargo must be something really special but we did not know what it was until the briefing for the low altitude bombing mission of the oil refineries of Ploesti, Romania. In the briefing they told us we were going in low because they had so many anti-aircraft guns there. Their guns would not come down to a horizontal position, so we could go **BELOW** where they could get a good shot with their 88 MM guns. They had lots of fighter planes with machine guns, though!! Expected losses were fifty percent, but it made us feel better about going (??) when they said if we got the target and lost 100%, it would be worth it to the war effort!

We left Bengasi early the morning of 1 August 1943, with delayed action fuse bombs. Acid fuse bombs were dangerous

because they had a glass with acid in it, and if the glass got broken or cracked, the acid leaked and caused the bomb to explode.

As we approached our target, there was a B-24 on the ground with the crew lined up beside it. (They waved as we passed.) As we got to our target, it was on fire with lots of smoke. There was lots of machine gun fire. We pulled up to 150 feet to get over the towers of the refinery. As we were going over the top, the #3 engine quit. The Co-Pilot reached to hit the feathering button, but hit the #4 instead at about the same time. It was a lucky mistake. It raced before it caught, or before the governor caught it, causing lots of vibration, then the #3 engine started. It was found later that a barrage balloon cable had cut into the wing, grounding the #3 magneto wire. The vibration shook it loose!!!

It looked like one of every three planes was on fire as we left the target. One plane, on fire from wing-tip to wing-tip, pulled straight up. We passed under it. Two people bailed out as it nosed back into the ground. Shortly after that a fighter plane attacked from the rear. He didn't want to pull up because too many guns would be able to shoot at him. He passed by our right wing close enough I could see his face, but could not get a shot because he was between us and other planes. When he was a little ahead of us, he hit the ground in a ball of flames. We pulled up to get over the fire.

This trip lasted 14 hours. Of the 25 missions that I flew, the most famous one was this 'Tidal-Wave' low level raid on Ploesti. Some of the planes came back with corn stalks in the bomb bay area...we were flying that low!! There were 179 B-24's carrying 1600 men that

**LOY NEEPER, ENGINEER & TOP TURRET GUNNER, 67TH SQ.
REMEMBERS SOME REALLY ROUGH MOMENTS**

CONTINUED

flew from the five air bases around Bengasi, Libya to bomb Ploesti. 54 planes and 310 men did not make it back!! We wrecked the refinery, but the Germans built it back in a matter of months, and it had to be bombed again, but from a higher level.

During the bombing raid on Wiener-Neustadt, our plane was shot up with 157 bullet and shrapnel holes, but only one man on our plane was hit. We then crash-landed in Sicily, nose-dived into the sand.

On another occasion, we crash landed in England when #2 engine caught on fire, then all four engines quit at about 500 feet. The plane burned, but we got everybody out. My leg was injured, and I could not walk for six weeks. I went to flying again to finish my tour, around March 1944. I was then sent to another place in England as Gunnery Instructor for seven months.

*Editor's Note: The unknown baggage that the crew picked up in Southern England were the models of Ploesti, used by pilots in practicing low level flying. Neeper was first assigned to the **Walter Bunker** crew, later with **Richard Butler**, who had been Bunker's Co-Pilot. The target at Ploesti was Creditul Minier Refinery, led by Lt. Col. **Posey**. It was totally destroyed,*

and not re-opened until the Russians took over. This deprived the Nazis of aviation fuel, severely limiting the amount of training they gave to young aviators.

*Flying in **Miss Emmy Lou**, on the mission to Wiener-Neustadt, the #3 engine was hit, they were low on gas, and pilot Butler chose to land in Sicily. The plane had no brakes, the plane skidded and crashed, and the crew hitch-hiked back to Shipdham.*

*On 21 December 1943, on a training flight in **Miss Emmy Lou II**, an explosion in #2 engine caused the other engines to quit; the plane crashed in West Bradenham, England. **Richard Butler** and **Robert Nicholos**, Bombardier, were carried off on stretchers. Neeper had an injured leg, but he distinguished himself by returning to the burning plane and carrying Nichols to safety. He was awarded the **Soldier's Medal**.*

From the 2nd Air Division: The *Eight Ball Tails* notes the passing of Maxine Mackey, wife of Oak Mackey, Vice President of Membership and noted leader of the 2AD. Maxine will always be remembered for her assistance in all 2 AD reunions, and her work with Oak in all of his historic achievements for the 2 AD.

JAMES BAKER (68TH SQUADRON) WAS STILL LEARNING

On our first mission, we were told at school, to call pilot on sighting flak. I called the pilot 3 times to advise him of heavy flak @ 12-2; 3 and 4, with no answer. Upon landing, I told the pilot that my mike was inoperable; his reply was "Father Time". (I was the youngster on the crew.) "If you would have looked out the other waist window, you would have seen flak there also."

FROM THE DIARY OF JOHN MCCLANE, NAVIGATOR, 68TH SQUADRON MISSION #3 TO BERLIN – 29 APRIL 1944

Today was my third combat mission. The first two were not too rough, and we were a little too complacent. At this time, I was not a lead navigator, therefore not privileged to advance reports as to what the day's mission was for the 8th Air Force's heavy bombers.

After stumbling through the blackout to the breakfast that morning, the usual question was on everyone's lips, "Where are we going today?" Was it going to be a 'milk run' over the coast of France or a deep penetration to the heart of Germany? As we filed into the large Nissen hut used for briefing, the men gathered together, as crews, sitting facing a stage with a huge map of western Europe above it. However, this map was securely covered with dark draw curtains. Suddenly the command, "Attention" was sounded. In unison, all snapped to their feet, and in walked the Commanding Officer, Col. **John H. Gibson**, and his staff. The Briefing Officer stepped forward with a long pointer, and the map curtains were quickly drawn open. At this movement, we all knew that was our target for the day; the ribbons pinned to the map led straight to the heart of Hitler's Germany, the "Big B", Berlin. The howl and commotion could have been heard a mile away.

Finally, everyone settled down, and the Briefing Officers proceeded to detail our objectives. The predicted weather, the expected fighter opposition and flak concentrations were outlined. The various pilots were assigned positions in each section of each squadron of the group. Some were to lead, others were to be wing men; some were assigned high and others low positions in the

formation. And of course, someone had to fly coffin corner, the low left rear with the least protection from the guns of the fellow planes in the formation.

The pilots, bombardiers, navigators, flight engineers, radio men and gunners all went to their own briefing for further details and instructions pertaining to their specific duties. The pilot was in command of the ship, but the success of every mission depended upon close teamwork. No one man, crew, flight squadron, group or Division did it all. In total, we were a powerful Air Force, out to do battle with a determined enemy. Our objective was to do maximum damage to today's target. There was to prevent us from reaching the target, or to inflict such painful punishment that we would cease trying. The stage was set, the battle would soon begin. Hundreds of men would be either killed, wounded or missing this day, but nothing could stop the mission, once it had been set in motion.

Briefing over, we gathered as crews to be taken by truck out to our plane. At this time, our crew flew whatever plane was assigned. (Later, after we became a lead crew and I, a lead navigator, we were assigned a special plane with special navigation equipment, 260 P *Lili Marlene*. Now began an extremely tense period before each mission. We would busy ourselves preparing for flight, each man checking what pertained to him. At the same time, we kept an eye on the tower, the reason being that if the mission for the day were aborted, a certain colored flare would be sent aloft; but if it were 'Go', a different flare color was used. I think it was red, but it may have been

white, as my memory fails me after 40 years. Today the mission was go; the engines were started, and we mounted the plane. The moment of truth was at hand; there was no option but to go, and only God knew who would return.

On both takeoff and landing, I vacated my forward navigation compartment to stand behind the pilot. I would hold on to a steel protection plate at his back. This gave me an excellent view of takeoff and landing. If a crash situation were to develop, I was to sit on the floor with my back to the steel plate, my knees pulled up and my hands behind my head, which I would brace also against the steel plate. (Fortunately, I only needed to use this once when coming back from Berlin on my 21st mission, our hydraulic system to the nose wheel was shot out, and we skidded nose first down the runway, badly damaging the bomb sight and navigation compartment.)

The 44th sent 21 planes up this day with no aborts. Now came one of the most frightening parts of every sortie. As I stood behind the Pilot, Lt. **Charles Peretti**, he would work our way down a long line of bombers until it was our turn to take off. He would go through his check list, and he and Co-Pilot **Burr Palmer** would shove all four throttles full forward. Ever so slowly, we would accelerate, but at the same time, eating up runway. The plane would be loaded with 2700 gallons of hi-octane gasoline and 6 to 8000 pounds of high explosives and incendiaries. At lift off speed, Peretti would pull back on the stick, and we would be airborne, but just barely. Still just off the ground and gaining altitude slowly, I could see the trees at the end of the runway getting closer

and closer. At no time did I ever learn not to be apprehensive and actually frightened. Somehow we always made it by inches over the trees, I believe by defying all laws of physics and gravity.

Assembly was an exacting and demanding task, both in piloting and navigation. First, by two and threes, and finally by squadrons, all the planes came together to form a group of approximately 21 to 36 planes. The Lead Navigators' job was to have us over a designated spot at a specific zero time, headed in the right direction. In this manner we formed Squadrons into Groups, Groups into Wings, Wings into Air Divisions and Air Divisions into the Mighty Eighth Air Force. From beginning to end, we would extend over 100 miles in a straight line through the sky. With the contrails forming at the wing tip of hundreds of planes, the beauty of the sight would have to be seen to comprehend.

It was 0730 hours, and we were off to Berlin. According to "Stars and Stripes," our ETO newspaper, this was the heaviest daylight assault in history on any one target. The Force was made up of 600 four motor bombers carrying almost 1500 tons of explosives and incendiaries. We were escorted by another 814 fighters, P-51 Mustangs, P-47 Thunderbolts and P-38 Lightnings. But the Germans were ready with some of the heaviest opposition encountered to date on daylight operations. One Wing alone reported being attacked by at least 200 Nazi fighters. The Germans used ME 109's and FW 190's as their principle fighters, sometimes ME 210's.

The resistance met by the various elements of the massive bomber fleet

varied widely. Fortunately the 44th Bomb Group was well known by the Luftwaffe pilots as being a seasoned combat outfit and best left alone, as long as there were less experienced groups that would be an easier target. A number of German interceptors did test us however, approximately 30 on the way to Berlin and 40 to 50 on the way out. My most vivid memory of the war was burned on my mind when we were approximately halfway to Berlin. I can still close my eyes and after forty years, see it again, and until death takes the last light from my sight.

What I am about to record sounds so incredible that I blame no one who wishes to disbelieve. As God is my witness, I tell the truth. Over my earphones came the voice of **Paul Corlew**, our Engineer and Top Turret Gunner, "Fighters high at One O'Clock". I looked out of my astro-dome and saw three German fighters circling. One could almost hear the lead Nazi pilot say, "Watch my boys, I'll show you how it's done." He peeled off into a wide arc, so he was at an altitude headed straight for our formation. At this I switched positions so I could look out of my right bubble window, which afforded an excellent view forward, down and to the whole right of our line of flight. As the interceptor flew towards us, he began a slow roll. I became very fearful, as I was looking down his two 20 mm wing cannons; and with each burst, I saw the orange-red flash of the guns. He appeared to be aimed directly at me, and I could not help but wonder where the shells were going. I fully expected the next one to explode in my navigation compartment. I was extremely fearful and yet spellbound at the same time.

But what happened the next second or so really put fear into me. As the scoundrel slow rolled toward us, closing at rapid speed, I really became upset. It appeared to me that he was going to crash into our plane with a head on collision. I was petrified with fear. Then suddenly the pilot lifted his wings in a vertical position, so he could slice between our right wing tip and the left side of the plane on which we were flying wing. I jerked my head as he flashed by, at which time I could see the German pilot at our wing tip; he just missed it by inches.

An awesome sight caught my attention. At the base of the wing of the adjacent plane, right at the inboard motor and fuselage, a large ball of orange flame exploded before my eyes. The whole left wing peeled off; and to me, it seemed like an eternity that the plane stood there as if it were flying. I knew it could have only been a few micro-seconds, but the vision is burned in my memory like a still photograph. Then in a flash, the plane flipped over on its back as the right wing was still flying. It was a violent motion that skewered the whole axis of flight. At this point, I hesitate to record what I saw next, as it is too bizarre to be believable. Try to accept my version as the truth. Believe what you will, but I'll tell it exactly as I remember what I saw.

As the plane flipped, the force of the action catapulted the waist gunner on the right side out of the gun opening and towards our plane. The arc of his flight through the air put him toward our right wing and he fell between where I was standing at my bubble window and our right inboard motor. He had no parachute. He wore only a

harness with two nipples. (I also had on the same type chest pac parachute harness. My parachute was on the floor by my feet. We had been instructed that if, for any reason you did not have time to snap the chest pac on the nipples of the harness, then just grab your chute, jump out with it in your hand and snap it on as you fell through the air.

Needless to say, this unfortunate waist gunner had no such opportunity to grab his parachute before he was thrown through the window. As he passed me, at most, only a few feet away, he was kicking both feet and grabbing the air with his hands in desperation. Maybe he thought he could grasp our plane in some way to hold on. I watched his plummet toward the ground until my attention went to the wreck of the one winged B-24 Liberator falling through the sky. It was cartwheeling nose over tail, over the one wing in a huge windmill spinning motion. All of the other nine men were trapped due to centrifugal force in the plane, with no help whatsoever of getting out, I thought. (**Will Lundy** reported the plane was A/C #42-29471X, piloted by 2nd. Lt. **G. H. Sweigart**, and that three men did survive to become POW's. My eyes were glued to this action as I watched the wreck tumble end over end for at least 10,000 feet.

I had lost all track of time of anything else that was going on around me when I heard on my helmet earphones, "Second fighter coming in". I looked up and saw a second enemy craft repeating what his leader had done. At this point, my mind went blank. I cannot remember anything about the second or third fighters as they attacked the formation.

I suspect I was too absorbed in my own thoughts and fears.

At some point in time, I again came back to reality as I remember our approach to the city of Berlin. The flak was intense. The Nazi defenders had 320 anti-aircraft guns trained in a 20 mile arc on us. The sky was one huge black cloud of exploding metal. The guns fired in batteries of four, or so it seemed to me. When it was bursting at some altitude other than our own, we had little to fear; but as soon as she zeroed in, trouble was at hand. I never did get over the fright of seeing a flak burst right in front of us, then a second a little closer, and a third closer yet. With each burst, the plane would almost instantly fly through the black cloud. One could easily sense the cordite smell. At this point, you knew the next burst would be inside your plane, but with God's help, the burst would be directly behind the tail.

You note, I said "With God's help". This mission was the first time I can remember praying out loud for God to let me live through the battle. I asked him to let me survive the day. I promised I'd do anything he asked of me, if only he would spare me. Here I am forty years later, and I must admit, I have a bit of a guilty conscience when I think back on my promises. Like all men, the flesh is weak when the danger is past. Yet, somehow, I feel I have been a better person for having experienced these strong emotions.

More planes went down. I can especially remember one of our planes sliding off to the side of a rather steep dive. I heard later it was because they had lost their oxygen supply, and had

flown low level back to base. We did survive the flak barrage somehow and headed back to England, but our troubles were not over by a long shot. We turned into a 100 knot headwind. Our indicated air speed was about 165 mph, and at 25,000 feet and as cold as it was (60 degrees F below zero) our true air speed was over 200 mph. However with a headwind, our ground speed was something just over 100 mph. Talk about eternity, this was it. We had 600 miles to go, and it would take hours at the ground speed we were flying. Our fighter escort had turned back due to fuel consumption.

Many planes were damaged and just would have made it home under the best of conditions, but with the delay caused by this strong head wind, some just could not make it. I don't know how many planes I saw go down that day on the way to target, over the city and on the way home. I know it was a great many. I saw some explode, others trailing smoke, others with wings on fire and many more parachutes open as the crews bailed out. But one sight stands out above all others on the way home. As we crossed the North Sea, I began to see planes ditching in the water. It was like watching a motion picture... I was so detached from the action! Some of the planes would glide to the most gentle stop, and the men would climb onto the wings, but others would hit a swell in the water and seem to dive nose first in a crumpled heap. It was obvious that almost no one could survive the shock. British PT boats were on hand to pick up survivors.

This was one of the worst days ever for the Eighth Air Force, as we had lost

63 four engine bombers and 13 fighters on this mission to "Big B", as we often called Berlin. When we reached base and landed at 1730 hours (5:30 p.m.), I actually bent over and kissed the ground, I was so pleased to be back. I had been in the air 8 hours and 15 minutes. This was my third mission. Now I knew why we were told if we flew 25 missions at an average of 4% loss per mission, that we had a 100% chance of being shot down. (They raised it to 30 missions before I completed my tour, just to be sure none of us made it; and then I volunteered for a 31st, against all current wisdom to never volunteer for anything). I did survive the 31 missions and 'GOD WAS WITH ME!'

After my experience of seeing the man come out of the plane without a parachute, I had immediately reached down and snapped on my chest pac, even though it was considerably in my way to work at my desk. When I turned in my parachute after the mission, I asked to be issued a back pac chute. The orderly behind the desk asked what position I flew. When I responded that I was a navigator, he said that navigators wore chest pacs. I had news for him, and I cannot remember what or how I said it, but he issued me a back-pac without an argument. Never again did I ever take off without my parachute on my back. I even would flip up the corners to be sure the nylon was in place. The story had it, that some guys found it would influence their girlfriends if they gave them the nylon. I don't know how much truth was in the rumor, but you can be sure I was not going to take the chance.

**FROM THE DIARY OF JOHN MCCLANE, NAVIGATOR,
68TH SQUADRON MISSION #3 TO BERLIN – 29 APRIL 1944**

CONTINUED

According to the "Mighty Eighth War Diary" by Roger A. Freeman, a day to day operational record of the 8th Air Force, 679 B-17s and B-24's were dispatched, of which 618 were effective. We dropped 1498 tons of bombs, 63 bombers were MIA, three from the 44th Bomb Group, 2 interned, 432 damaged, 18 men were KIA, 38 WIA and 606 MIA. Of 814 fighters dispatched, 13 were MIA.

This amounts to over 10% of the bomber-fleet and over 77% of all the effective bombers lost or damaged on this one mission. I, for one, shall never forget that day and like every mission I ever had in combat; I flew it twice – once in reality and again that night in my dreams. I relived in vivid detail,

every event and emotion that I had experienced. One of our enlisted men actually "bailed out" of his top bunk several times while dreaming.

Editor's Note: Will Lundy inspired John McClane to write his book of all his missions. After much research, Will was able to determine that the A/C that exploded and threw out the gunner to his demise was one of four planes from the 392nd Bomb Squadron, flying with the 44th BG. The 44th lost three on that mission: TUFFY, flown by Keith Schuyler; #41-29471X, flown by Glenn Sweigart, and #41-29513 Z Bar, flown by Richard Hruby. Losses were: POW -13; KIA – 7. Hruby was able to successfully ditch in the English Channel, the crew was picked up by a British mine-sweeper, and all members of the crew survived.

**THE 'GOOD' MEMORIES OF BILLIE ROSSER, PILOT,
66TH SQUADRON (WRITTEN 2 OCTOBER 1995)**

I've been to England a number of times, but I've never visited Hingham or Shipdham. Perhaps I'm afraid I'll destroy the good memories – I long ago chose to wipe out the bad ones. Here are some of my good ones:

On our first night in England (Stone) after having flown a B-24 over, when we sneaked out a hole in the fence for our first visit to an English pub. Of not caring for the warm beer, and deciding the best way to handle it was to "chug-a-lug" it – and the man who slid over next to me said, "I say Matey, if ye're going out to meet Jerry tomorrow, ye'd best stick to the wee ones."

Another memory - the party which followed with our new English friends teaching us better pub manners; and the local semantics (both sorely needed

by a young Texan on his first trip abroad).

Of the developing comradeship of brave young men totally dedicated to a cause in which they believed.

Of being known as a 'lucky' crew. Nothing bad ever happened to us, and we were proud that other airmen who had to fly make-up missions, wanted to fly with Rosser's crew.

Of my admiration for, almost idolatry, of Winston Churchill and his marvelous voice and his mastery of the language, as well as his indomitable spirit.

Of the day we bought bicycles in Norwich and riding them back to base that night, and the air raid as we rode with search lights sweeping the ground, as well as the skies – and wondering if

**THE 'GOOD' MEMORIES OF BILLIE ROSSER, PILOT,
66TH SQUADRON (WRITTEN 2 OCTOBER 1995)**

CONTINUED

we would be thought to be parachuted agents if the lights picked us up. We hid in ditches.

Of the 200 mission party on our first day at the 44th, with beer kegs and tin cups on strings at every intersection on the base; and wondering if this could be the way wars are fought.

Of the day that General Johnson gave two of us a lift in his staff car, and our astonishment that a General with a Medal of Honor could be so considerate of two junior members of his command.

Of the one-eyed man sent to repair the broken gate on our coke and coal compound, who had been an able-bodied seaman all his life, but due to the insanity of wartime rules, he was no longer allowed to sail – and understanding his bitterness. And the awakening of us of the plight of the civilian population when he would not eat the orange we gave him because he wanted to take it to his granddaughter, who had never tasted one. We gave him several to take to her.

Of the very young farm boy, dressed in his Sunday best, who would (quite illegally, I'm sure) bring boiled eggs to our Quonset huts to sell for six pence each.

Of the memorable week between Christmas and New Year's Day, which we spent in Coom House at Salisbury, which had been turned into a rest and recuperation place.

And of course, of the too many nights of too many drinks at the little pub near the base (Ethan Green??) , and pub-crawling in Norwich and London, and the girls and the after-hours clubs, and the girls, and Soho, and the girls, the Regent Palace Hotel,

V-1s and V-2s, the taxis, the Windmill Theater and Dixie Lee...

Then there was this memory, which Will Lundy included in his book, Roll of Honor & Casualties: On 16 January 1945 we landed at Orly after a mission to Dresden. Had fields on the continent not been available, it is doubtful that the mission could have been completed as flown, because a great many planes were low on fuel. I don't remember how many landed at Orly, but there were a whole lot of them. Someone ran off the taxi strip into deep mud, and stranded several planes. Since there was no equipment available to free him, we were "stuck" in Paris for three days. I told you we were lucky!

According to Will Lundy, the mission on 16 January 1945 was to the Marshalling Yards at Dresden, Germany. This was a secondary target. John Testa was pilot of #42-50660, a 66th Squadron crew flying in a 68th Squadron plane. Eugene Snavely was Command Pilot. The plane was lost in northern France, but all of the crew parachuted to safety. JUDY'S BUGGY, 67th Squadron, went down over Rimmely, France. There were injuries, but all returned. HELLZA DROPPIN' was piloted by Gerald Lindsay. Shipdham was fogged in; Lindsay could not find the airfield so the crew bailed out and the plane went down in the North Sea. Seven of the crew were injured.

Lee Aston says "Old 44th BG members never die. They just fold their wings."

PETER LONCKE, A GRATEFUL BELGIAN

The tragic news of the passing of Peter Loncke came from his wife, Connie, niece of **Leonard Crandell**. Peter can never be forgotten by the 44th BG members, who travelled to Belgium to see the monument erected in honor of the men who died or were captured on 24 March 1945 on the mission to Wesel, Germany. Crandell's plane, #42-1003, and **Max Chandler's** aircraft, ***Southern Comfort 1V***, were lost on the low level mission to Wesel, Germany.

The purpose of the Wesel mission was to drop supplies to the British soldiers who had crossed the Rhine, and were ready to carry the war to Berlin. Of the two planes that were lost, only two airmen escaped – **Louis DeBlasio** and **Robert Vance**. Also lost that day was a pilot of a P-47, John Delaney. For years, neither DeBlasio nor Vance knew the name of that pilot, but Peter Loncke found him. Delaney later became a member of the 44th BGVA. At the 2nd Air Division and 44th Bomb Group Reunion in Washington, DC, Peter, DeBlasio, Vance and Delaney met for the first time.

Loncke worked with local officials to see that a monument was built, so memory of those men would not be forgotten. When 44th BG members toured the area, they were honored by local officials, who expressed gratitude to the veterans for their help in liberating their country. Later the group was hosted to a luncheon by officials in Wesel.

They greeted the Americans warmly, and expressed gratitude that peace reigned between our two nations. We also met Peter Emerick, who tearfully explained that he had been assigned to carry the ammunition that brought down the two planes. He was sixteen years old at the time. Peter interpreted his words to the 44thers who were present.

Years later, Joe Crandell, brother of Leonard, along with his wife Barbara and daughter Connie, made several trips to Belgium to see the monument and Leonard's crash site. As it happened, Peter and Connie fell in love, and later married. Peter completed his 38 years with the Belgium Air Force, became an American citizen, and moved to America. He joined the 44th BGVA and many other WWII groups, wrote two books about WWII, and spread information about WWII to many local groups in his area of Illinois.

Until the end of his life, Peter Loncke expressed gratitude to America for liberating his homeland. Coincidentally, he died on the anniversary of the crash of the two planes – sixty six years ago.

*Found among old records, this thought from the late **Roy Owen**: The ultimate responsibility of the pilot is to fulfill the dreams of the countless millions of earthbound ancestors who could only stare skyward and wish.*

**EXPERIENCE IS SOMETHING YOU DON'T GET
UNTIL JUST AFTER YOU NEED IT!!**

MEMORIES OF CHARLES NORRIS, 506 BOMB SQUADRON MAINTENANCE CREW

We were up many hours after we left the Chantilly before we arrived at Shipdham. When we arrived at our barracks, the radio was broadcasting a message from Lord Ha Ha in Germany. He named some of our officers and welcomed them to the European war. He said that Goering's yellow nosed squadron was ready to do battle. We were amazed, and wondered how they had acquired this information. He said they would be over to welcome us. That night they bombed us!

The airfield was made up of sites that were scattered over 10 square miles; and at first it was a problem getting from your site to the flight line and to the mess hall. We solved this by moving into an air raid shelter on the flight line. This was with the approval of the CO. We installed a door on the entrance and a cover over the escape hatch. We made a stove from a 25 gallon drum and ran a stove pipe up the escape hatch. We burned used oil mixed with gas, which fed through a tube connected to a 25 gallon tank on top of the shelter. We could control the heat with a valve in the tube. We had a very warm place to live.

Five of us lived there for over 2 years - M/Sgt. Flight Chief **Herbert Huff**; Crew Chief, **August Goodman**; Crew Chief **Alexander Favero** and Electrician **Charles Higbee**.

In 1943 when some of the 506 went to Africa for the Ploesti raid, I was sent to Land's End to deliver six B-24s, equipped with Radar to hunt subs. Because of the 24's range, they could cover the Atlantic. The British took control of these planes, and they patrolled the Atlantic and ended the sub threat.

To Libya...

I was then sent on the mission to cover the invasion of Italy. We lost a number of planes, and some were damaged. When it was time to return to England, we had to make one plane from two. The Line Chief, **N. F. Jackson** and myself were left behind to do this. We changed the stabilizer and two engines, and patched a large hole with plywood. The work was being done in desert conditions. **McAtee** was the pilot in charge, and he told another pilot by the name of **Shaw**, who had a jeep, to keep us supplied with water, food and parts we needed. Shaw took off, and we never saw him all day. We needed parts for the repair and water. This delayed our return to England. When McAtee found out, he was furious. We finally test hopped the plane and were ready to depart; McAtee left Shaw stranded in Libya, and told him to get back to England the best way he could!

New Equipment...

In 1944 the Honeywell Company was to install the first flight indicator in four of our planes. It was a black box with a number of thin metal arms that made lines on a paper roll, like you would see on an earthquake seismograph. Each arm was hooked to different aircraft instruments – airspeed, oil pressure, rate of climb, manifold pressure, and a few others that I don't remember. We installed them on 3 planes, they were all lost. No one wanted the 4th box installed on their plane.

Meeting the General...

Before I had a bike, I was walking along the back road, going to chow, when **General Johnson** stopped his car

**MEMORIES OF CHARLES NORRIS,
506 BOMB SQUADRON MAINTENANCE CREW**

CONTINUED

and offered me a lift. I got in the car, but I failed to salute the General, and the driver balled the hell out of me. I was sitting in the front seat and looked in the rear vision mirror, and saw the General reading some papers. He looked up and saw me looking at him. He lowered his reading glasses and winked at me. When I got out of the car, I sure gave him a big salute. He was truly a great man.

Earthquake and El Champo

I acquired my bike from Lt. **John Money**, who was shot down in **SOUTHERN COMFORT 11**. The morning before the flight, he stopped by Tech Supply and left us with two thoroughbred Cocker Spaniels named Earthquake and El Champo, and said he would pick them up after the mission, from which he never returned. **John Weber**, who was in Tech Supply took

over the dogs, but they really belonged to all of us. Earthquake died from distemper. When it came time for us to return to the States, John went to the British Kennel Club, wanting to know how he could take El Champo with him. They would not allow John to take him out of England.

John gave El Champo to the farmer that was just behind Site 2. John was a school teacher in Portland, Oregon; he had free time in the summer, so he would visit El Champo each summer. Champo lived to a ripe old age. John also paid the farmer for taking care of Champo.

(Ed. Note: After the war, Norris was employed as a Fish & Poultry Dealer. Later he was employed by the City of Cincinnati for 13 years as a Food Inspector.)

**THE PICTURE OF CORKEY INSPIRED
SOME MEMORIES IN BOB LEHNHAUSEN**

"I first thought was **Frank Davido**, and how this plane got its name. My second thought was of the talented young airman who accomplished the art work. My third thought was of the marvelous crew chief responsible for the maintenance of this workhorse of a combat airplane.

Frank Davido came to the 44th as the co-pilot of the **Ben Gildart** crew. They arrived at Shipdham on June 19, 1943 and were assigned to the 68th Squadron. Their arrival preceded our movement to Benghazi by ten days.

The Gildart crew flew none of the African missions out of Benina Main prior to the Ploesti mission. While stationed at Benina Main, I shared a three man tent with Davido and **Jack Anderberg**, who was the radio operator of the Gilhart crew. Despite the rigors of desert living, we got along extremely well.

On the morning of the Ploesti mission, after briefing, **David Alexander's** assigned co-pilot, Homer S. Gentry, became ill. Alexander located Davido and asked him to fly as his co-pilot. He did not bother to go through the operations office personnel. (Alex handled it himself,

**THE PICTURE OF CORKEY INSPIRED
SOME MEMORIES IN BOB LEHNHAUSEN**

CONTINUED

so the ops folks were unaware of this happening.) Frank Davido agreed to, and did. The Form 1, the Board Document which records the crew members who fulfilled the requirements of the flight, was apparently never corrected. So **Webb Todd's** history of the 68th shows Gentry as the co-pilot, NOT Davido. The books that have been written about Ploesti that list the participants also list Gentry, NOT Davido. Officially this has apparently never been corrected. The error was discovered by Kent Jacquith shortly before the dazzling 60th reunion of the Ploesti mission that was staged in Salt Lake City.

Jacquith, who with Blaine Duxbury, conceived, planned and staged this elegant affair, had gotten to know Davido. They lived near each other in the state of Washington. Shortly before Frank's death, he had gotten a newspaper reporter to interview Davido. It was in that interview that Davido confirmed what I have stated above. Ploesti was Frank Davido's first combat mission.

When Col. **John Gibson** granted me the great privilege of commanding the 68th Squadron on April 12, 1943, I chose Frank Davido as my Operations Officer - the number two responsibility of the air echelon. We became very close as a result of these shared responsibilities. We lived together and dedicated ourselves to working closely with the very young men assigned to us. We were both insistent upon our men being well trained in their assigned tasks, assured that a better chance for surviving what the enemy arrayed against us.

When Frank Davido was sent overseas, he was married to Mildred, whom he

called "Mickey". At the time they parted, she was pregnant with their first child. They had decided that if that child was a boy, he would be named Frank, Jr. but they would call him "Corky". What they had hoped for happened. Corky arrived.

When the B-24 H, serial #42-51101 was delivered to the 68th, it was not difficult for the young Operations Officer to request the Engineering Staff, that the shiny new aircraft be named for his son "Corky" and it was.

It is my recall that **Bob Krueger**, an Assistant Crew Chief on one of the plane's crews was the talented young man who suggested the nose art to Davido, and with his approval, accomplished the art work that adorned the nose section of the fuselage. Krueger was also the artist that did most of the nose art for the squadron, except for **Flak Alley**, that was done by Sgt. **Robert Hamby**, who was an aerial engineer on one of the earlier crews.

Pictures of the nose art and the whole plane got broad publicity at some point in time, I am told. Several years ago, one of the nation's outstanding aviation artists did an oil painting of **Corky** that was widely reproduced. A young Canadian Doctor became enamored of the art and acquired the original art piece. Having gotten the art, he then became obsessed with finding out all he could about the history of the plane and the origin on the name. For a period of time he was a member of the Heritage Group of the 44th. I have no recollection of his name or location.

Now to a very part of the history of not only this fabled airplane, but of each of the many, many planes assigned to us. The Master Sergeant who babied

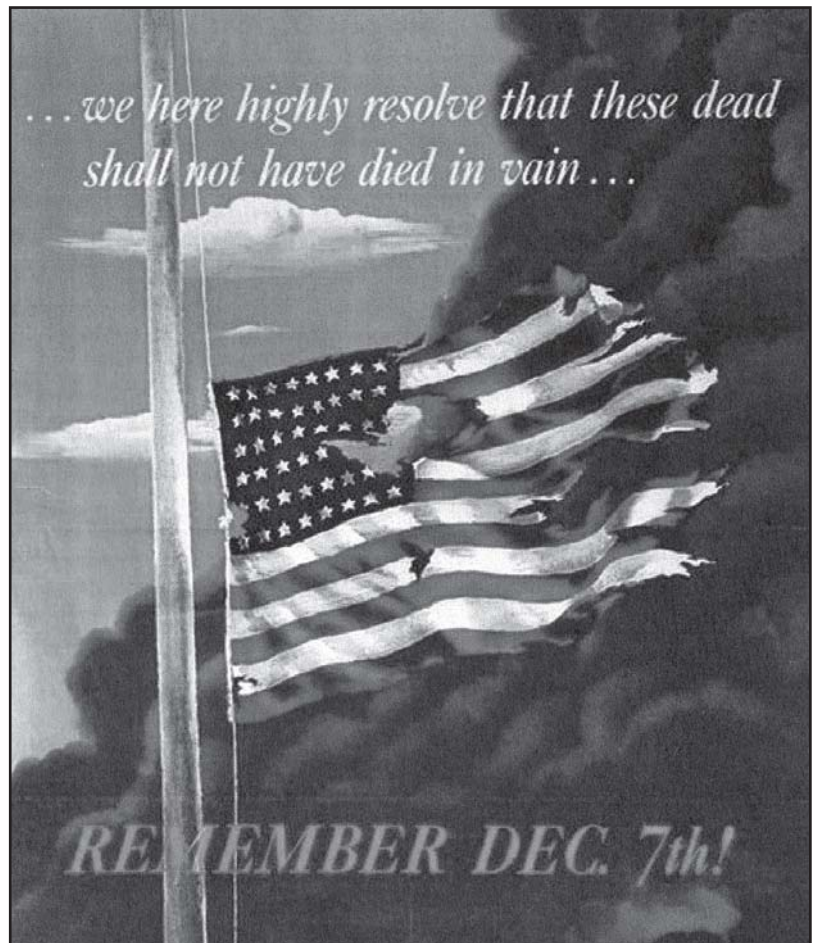
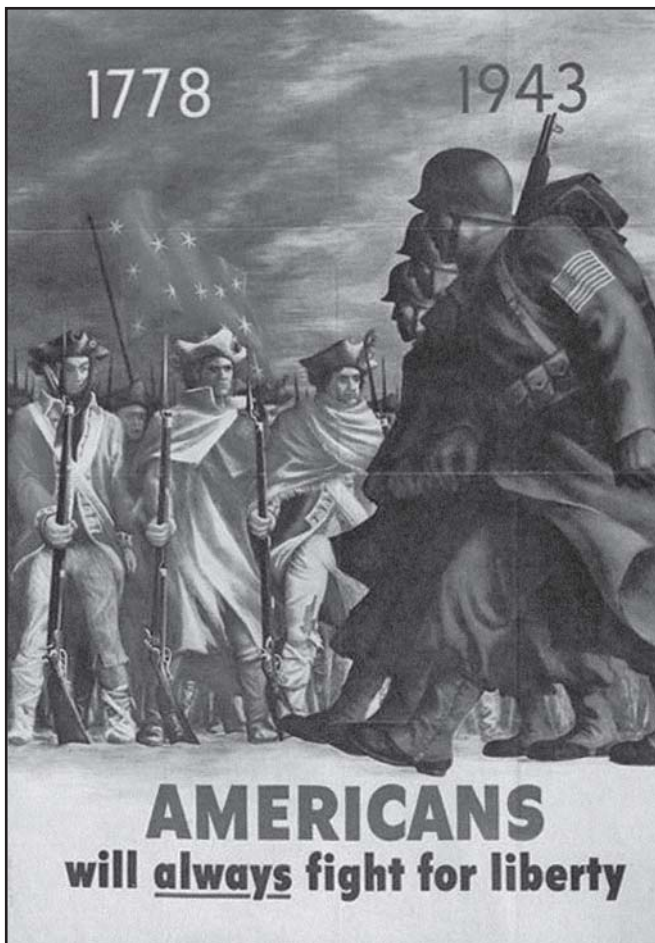
**THE PICTURE OF CORKEY INSPIRED
SOME MEMORIES IN BOB LEHNHAUSEN**

CONTINUED

Corky was a superb mechanic who had been an auto mechanic before joining the military. He was a few years senior in age to most of our personnel, so he became, with respect, "Pappy". I always felt that he cherished the moniker, and rightfully, for he was also a great instructor who was able and willing to impart his knowledge and skills to assist others in their professional development. The work that Sgt. Hill and his fellow engineering group accomplished in

our behalf has never truly been acknowledged. They were mechanical magicians, performing heroically in miserable circumstances, knowing that they would not get to 'go home' until the war was over. They were committed for the duration. Thank God for each of them and their combined talents.

The friendship between Lehnhausen and Davido continued until Davido's death, which is listed in the current Folded Wings.



**THE EARLY BIRD GETS THE WORM,
BUT THE SECOND MOUSE GETS THE CHEESE.**

SOME OF THE CREWS THAT WON THE WAR



The Dick Haynes crew



The Walter Bunker crew



FOLDED WINGS

*Life, we have been long together, through pleasant and through cloudy weather;
Say not goodnight - but in some brighter clime, bid me good morning.*

Unknown author

Croft, William M. #19876 68th Squadron 24 March 2012 S/Sgt. Croft was a gunner on the **William Dolan** crew. He flew 25 missions, the first on 6 November 1944. The Dolan crew flew in seven different aircraft: **Flak Magnet, Corky, Lili Marlene, Puritanical Bitch/Puritanical Witch, T. S. Tessie/Beck's Bad Boys, Lady Geraldine** and **Three Kisses for Luck**. One of Croft's memorable missions was to Zossen, Germany, in which the 68th was led by **James McAtee**, CO of the 506 Squadron.

After the war, Croft was employed at the Naval Supply Depot in Mechanicsburg, PA, where he was supervisor of the Electrical Parts Department.

Croft was survived by his wife of 57 years, Joanne C. Marshman Croft, one son, William A. Croft, two daughters, Joyce Randall and Diane Wesche. The Crofts had three grandchildren.

Croft was living in Carlisle, Pennsylvania at the time of his passing. News of his death came to **Robert Lee Aston** from Croft's son-in law, Brian Randall. Aston had been able to attain an AM/OLC for Croft. This drew Randall's attention, as he was in the Military Science Department at the College of William & Mary, Aston's Alma Mater.

Davido, Frank #19930 68th Squadron 27 December 2011 Captain Davido was a pilot, later a Command Pilot, having flown 25 missions, starting with the most awesome mission - to Ploesti.

Davido flew with many different pilots as Co-Pilot: **Robert Lehnhouse** (Command Pilot), **Ben Gilhart, Samuel**

Williams, George Jancen, William Brandon (Command Pilot), **George Martin**. In a number of those missions, he flew in different positions on the plane, once as a Tail Gunner; in some instances, he was listed as 'Other'.

In 12 March 1944 he moved over to the left seat and flew the next 4 missions as First Pilot, later rose to the rank of Captain and flew as Command Pilot, flying with the crews of **Ben Gilhart, Saul Fineman, Harold Morrison, Howard McCormick, Harry Yoder** (with whom he flew two missions on D-Day), **J. W. Grow, Paulino Ugarte, Robert Guntor, Oscar Leonard, James Ward, Harold Stanhope, Quinton Torell, Dale Benadom, Richard Keller** and **Harry Orthman**.

He flew in **Wing and a Prayer, Eve/Hag Mag/The Mothball O--- Avenger, Margaret Ann, Flak Alley, Pizz and Moan, V for Victory, Northern Lass, My Peach, I'll Get By** and **My Akin Ass**. Davido's last of 25 missions was 17 October 1943.

After the war, Davido worked in the field of agriculture for Stadelman Fruit Company in Zillah, Washington as foreman and manager. Later he was employed with FMC, Niagra Chemical Division until his retirement in 1966. According to his wife Mildred, he took many young people under his arm and into his home, to help them re-organize their lives in the right direction.

Davido leaves Mildred, his wife of 57 years, two sons, a daughter and seven grandchildren. They resided in Toppenish, Washington.



FOLDED WINGS

Ed. Note: The Database does not credit Davido with 25 missions, but it is recognized that his personal records were correct.

Heyburn, William H. #20648 506 Squadron 2012 T/Sgt. Heyburn was a Radio Operator/Top Turret Gunner on the Milton Parrish crew. He also flew with **William Edkins**. The war was almost over when he flew his first mission on 14 April 1945; his last, four days later on 18 April 1945. In his four missions, Heyburn flew in two different planes: *Joplin Jalopy* and *The Big Headed Kid*.

After the war, Heyburn became a salesman, first with farm equipment, later for Mutual of New York.

His last known address was in Louisville, Kentucky. Information of his passing came from the Second Air Division Journal.

Landrum, Thomas W. #21031 68th Squadron 2012 The Database has no information of his activities, so it is assumed that he was part of the auxiliary services that aided the combat

men. Information of his passing came from the 2nd Air Division Journal.

Picardo, Eddie #21677 67th Squadron 2011 S/Sgt. Picardo was a gunner on the **Edgar Spencer** crew: on one mission, they flew with **John Edwards** who was a Command Pilot.

Their first of 27 missions was 4 August 1944 to Kiel. They flew in six different aircrafts: *Fifinella*, *Limpin Ole Sadie/San Antonio Rose*, *Myrtle the Fertile Turtle*, *Old Iron Corset*, *Sultry Sue* and *Phyllis*.

On 8 September 1944, when returning from a bombing of the Marshaling Yards at Karlsruhe, Germany, their pilot reported that their plane ran out of gas, and they were forced to land in a British airfield in France for refueling.

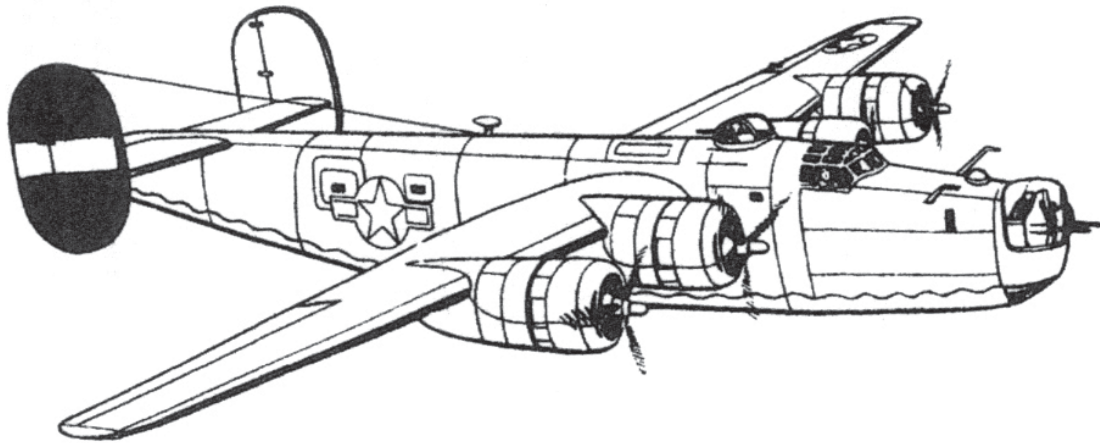
In the last year of his life, Picardo was living in a nursing home in Seattle, Washington. News of his passing came from a volunteer in the home who had befriended him in his last days.



**44th Bomb Group
Veterans Association**

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Oh beware a singing nation with a banjo on the knee,
And beware the sons of fighting men, who died to make them free.
For music is a dangerous thing, with anger in its beat,
With memory of flying planes, above the marching feet.

The first B-24 Bomber was built by Consolidated Aircraft in 1939. Named the Liberator, it was used in every theater of operations in WWII: Western Europe, Africa, the Pacific and in China-Burma operations. Ford Motor Company at Willow Run could produce one Liberator every 59 minutes!