



The 461st

Liberaider



Vol. 10, No. 2

December 1993

SOMEWHERE IN THE USA

50TH Anniversary Reunion Fresno, California Sept. 30 - Oct. 3, 1993



Frank and Millie are honored for their leadership of the Association for the past 13 years. Millie looks a little “shaken up”. Hope the wine helped.

The seventh “present day” reunion of the 461st Bomb Group Association (H) was held in Fresno, California September 30th through October 3, 1993. The primary mission of this occasion, and the 385 veterans in attendance, was to dedicate a memorial to the 16 airmen who made the supreme sacrifice while in training with the 461st at Hammer Field. We also gathered to observe the 50th anniversary of the 461st Bomb Group (H) which was activated on July 1, 1943 and trained at Hammer Field from November 1 through December 31, 1943.

Fresno and the surrounding area, including what was Hammer Field, had changed so much in 50 years that the only thing recognizable was an aircraft hanger which now serves as an Air National Guard facility. Fresno has grown from a population of about 80,000

in 1943 to more than 350,000 today.

Tuesday, September 28, 1993

President Frank and co-pilot Millie O’Bannon arrived at the Holiday Inn Centre Plaza to prepare for the major units which started landing Wednesday, September 29th. Treasurer Gail “Pete” Peterson and his wife Verna were also part of the point group as were Marimac’s Marietta and Phil. Everyone was pleased with the hotel and especially the facilities in the Atrium.

461st Bomb Group Association people arrived throughout the day. First mission was to report to the registration table to pick up a reunion packet and 50th anniversary T-shirts which displayed a flight of 461st Bomb Group B-24’s. The remainder of the

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The 461st LIBERAIDER
461st Bombardment Group (H)
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Inactivated: 27 August 1945
Incorporated: 25 November 1985

CORPORATE HDQRS: 1407 W. 4th St. P.O. Box 5160, Spencer, IA 51301

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OFFICERS

Frank C. O'Bannon, President, PO Box 36600, Tucson, AZ 84740-6600
Edward N. Chan, Vice-President, 1065 N. 5th St., New Hyde Park, NY 11040
G. "Pete" Peterson, Treasurer, 1407 W 4th St., P.O. Box 5160, Spencer, IA 51301

DIRECTORS—1993-1995

Leonard D. Cole	Hdqrs Sqdn Rt #1 Box 495, Osage Beach, MO 65065
John Young	764th Sqdn 1049 Jamaica Ct., Aurora, CO 80010
Gino Pishione	765th Sqdn 850 Temperana, Clovis, CA 93612
Robert V. Hayes	766th Sqdn 31 Grand St., New City, NY 10956
Denothy R. Perkins	767th Sqdn 7128 Salizar St, San Diego, CA 92111

ALTERNATE DIRECTORS

	Hdqrs Sqdn
Thomas Javaruski	764th Sqdn 951 N. Railroad Ave., Staten Island, NY 10306
John A. Lewandowski	765th Sqdn 112 Mckee, Houghton Lake, MI 48629
	766th Sqdn
	767th Sqdn

COMMITTEE CHAIRMEN

Memorial: Edward Izzo, 296 Huntridge Way, Winter Springs, FL 32708
Membership: Ed Chan, 1065 N 5th St, New Hyde Park, NY 11040
Post Exchange: Wally Robinson, 3 E. Cardott, Ridgeway, PA 15853
Publicity: Looking for a volunteer!

1994 Reunion: The Marimac Corporation, 6790 E. Calle Dorado, Tucson, AZ 85715

LIBERAIDER

George D. Dickie—Editor—PO Box 615, East Sandwich, MA 02537
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day was spent renewing old acquaintances, reminiscing and watching the video tapes of World War II and previous reunions.

Headquarters and Squadron mementos were on display in the reception room. Coffee and a cash bar were available. Many old memories were retold, and they get better each time. The most amusing was that of Art Currier of Presque Isle, Maine and the 765th Bomb Squadron. He tried to find the store or shop in Fresno where he bought a dress for his wife. This was mailed to her in Maine, but it didn't fit so she mailed it back to Art at Hammer Field. In the meantime, he had left Fresno with the squadron for Italy. He finally received the dress in Italy four or five months later. Art mailed the dress back to Mrs. Currier, and surprisingly it fit this time! He said he was careful to keep this information from the other fellows in his tent.

Thursday, September 30, 1993

Early breakfast was in order for the 3 busloads of 461st'ers who left at 7:00 a.m. for the 2 ½ hour drive to Yosemite National Park. We went from city freeway through fruit orchards, grazing country to oak covered

hills, then up into high country with its twisting roads, tall trees and steep overlooks. We descended onto the valley floor where we joined a tour group on a tractor drawn open-air tram for a picturesque trip through the valley. It was a bit chilly after the 90 degree weather in Fresno but we shared nice green wool blankets. Our guide kept us apprised of all the history and beautiful features of the park. We saw the famous Yosemite Falls and Bridal Veil Falls (both just trickles at this time of year). We also had a picture taking stop at Tunnel View to have the best view of El Capitan, the largest solid piece of granite in the world.

We, who were scheduled to go to the dinner theater that night, had a shortened tour and ate a delicious box lunch at the Lodge with many other tourists from all over the world. Departure time was 1:15 p.m. Our trip back to Fresno was uneventful except for the bus being stopped by the State Patrol and the loud snores from the sleeping 461st'ers.

That evening a large number of us were pleasantly entertained at the Music Hall dinner theater where we enjoyed a 3-entrée buffet dinner. The program included several numbers by a singing and dancing group. The Junior Company, and the comedy *Rumors* by Neil Simon which was ably performed by the Good Company Players. Most of the audience that evening were 461st people.

Those members that chose not to go to Yosemite National Park had the option of going on a "taste and sample tour". All About Grapes; that's just what it was. Leaving the hotel at 8:30 a.m., we traveled through Fresno County until we came to a place called "Simonian Farms", which dated back to 1901. Antique farm equipment, the largest collection in the San Joaquin Valley, was on display along with memorabilia of yesteryear. Fruits, nuts and vegetables were on sale from the local farms. Having been born and raised on a farm, it brought back many memories to me and a lot of us.

As we continued on our way through the valley, the vineyards were being harvested for raisins. Periodically the bus would slow down for a better look at how the process for sun-drying raisins is done. They are dried on brown paper which is laid on the ground that has been tilted to face the sun. They are turned over during the process, then folded in a paper to continue to dry and then picked up for harvest. One stop at the Sun-Maid raisin plant gave us more details during the showing of a

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film. We also saw how raisins are packaged for market. We tasted raisins and candy in the gift shop. By the way, the grapes grown for raisins are called "Thompson Seedless".

Lunch time found us at Wolf Lakes Park, a private family owned park. We had an excellent lunch prepared by the staff. Homemade cookies too. We were given a tour of the grounds including a lecture on almond trees.

Our last stop was at the Bianchi Winery. We were given a talk on the process of wine making. We were informed about the variety of grapes that are used to make the different wines. We learned about harvesting methods, what a wine master is (he's not the guy who can drink the most wine), and procedures for fermentation and bottling. On departing, each of us received a small bottle of Bianchi—California "Chardonnay".

By 4:30 we returned to our hotel, more knowledgeable than when we left; a most enjoyable day.

Friday, October 1, 1993

Over 150 reunion visitors traveled in 4 busses to the Castle Air Force Museum which is located next to Castle Air Force Base. Our guide explained that the museum was opened in 1980 and had grown to about 40 aircraft including a B-24. This ship had never been in combat but was converted for cargo purposes and flown in South America for several years before being brought to Castle. It carried a "Shady Lady" nose art logo similar to that of one of the 461st bombers.

The Castle Museum display also included an SR-71 Reconnaissance Plane. This was the very famous "Secret Weapon" that was retired from service several years ago. Other planes were a "Haunted B-29" which security personnel report seeing lights in it occasionally although it has no electrical system. There also was a modified version of a B-52 which was capable of carrying a 70,000 pound bomb load. The display included an F-111 model which was very effective in Desert Storm with no losses and a high number of kills. A KC-135 tanker was there. They are still being used by the Air National Guard and other Air Force units.

We saw a British Vulcan high altitude (100,000 feet at Mach 3) bomber in the exhibit. Also a B-36 was being

reassembled and restored. This plane was used to carry R-34 Reconnaissance planes (called parasites) to target areas.

The Castle Museum display was very well designed, and the climate (temperature and humidity) is very favorable for the preservation of these planes. There is a minimum amount of deterioration even though they are stored outside.

The only snafus of the tour were the location of the luncheon site and the lack of air conditioning in Bus #204 on the return trip.

Late in the afternoon the annual business meeting was called to order by President Frank O'Bannon. Various facets of the groups activities were discussed. Frank praised Ed Chan and Jim Hardee for their work in locating former 461st personnel. Less than 900 of the 5,000 plus troops have not been found. Ed and Jim are searching all the telephone directories which are available on computer disks.

The chairman of the nominating committee presented the names of the current officers for re-election. President Frank O'Bannon, Vice-President Ed Chan and Secretary/Treasurer Gail Peterson were unanimously re-elected.

The individual squadrons held a short meeting to elect new alternate directors. The current alternate directors automatically assume directorships for the next two years. Three retiring directors Ted Ahlberg, Denothy Perkins and Bill Wilkins received plaques for their service from President O'Bannon.

Saturday, October 2, 1993

A memorial dedication ceremony was held at the Fresno Metropolitan Museum by the 4th and 5th grade classes of the Big Creek School. Big Creek is a small town about 70 miles up in the mountains from Fresno. About ninety percent of the population work for either Southern California Edison (SCE) or the Big Creek school system. Huntington Lake is a ten minute drive from the Big Creek School. It was here that the B-24 "Exterminator" crashed on December 6, 1943 and remained undiscovered until the mid 1950's when SCE lowered the water level in the lake to work on the dam (see the article on page 1 of the June 1992 issue of the

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"Liberaider" for more information on the crash. Again in 1990 the level of the lake was lowered exposing the B-24. A newspaper article regarding the plane crash was brought to school by one of the students and read to the class by Bob Crider, the 4th grade teacher.

The students eagerly asked questions and were anxious to learn about the fate of the crew. In February, 1991, under the tutelage of Mr. Crider, the 4th grade class took on the project of researching the crash and the 16 airmen that lost their lives in 1943. They worked in pairs and each pair was assigned a crew member to research. This turned into a two year project, laden with disappointments, unanswered letters and rejected requests. In spite of this, every student persevered. They knew where they were going but had no idea how to get there. They contacted the State Department and the War Department only to be met with government bureaucracy. No information would be released. They wrote to every source available to them. The first break came with a reply from a member of the 461st Bomb Group. Then another, and another. Finally, after many months of disappointments, the project was truly underway. After installing a plaque at Huntington Lake and writing a booklet on the life and death of the 16 men of the 461st Bomb Group who died while in training at Hammer Field, Fresno, California, the project was completed. The 4th grade class of 1991, aided by the 4th grade class of 1992, culminated the project by jointly holding a memorial dedication ceremony.

They unveiled an oil painting of the B-24 "Exterminator" which will hang in the Fresno Metropolitan Museum honoring the 16 airmen who gave their lives.

The reunion banquet and dance were held in the hotel ballroom. Honored guests included the students of the Big Creek School, their parents and families and Bob Crider. The invocation was given by Chaplain, Major Leslie R. Hyder. The highlight of the evening was the surprise presentation of an engraved silver wine cooler to Frank and Millie O'Bannon for their many years of work and devoted service in organizing and overseeing the operation of the 461st Bomb Group Association. The presentation was made by George Dickie with the assistance of Ed Chan and Pete Peterson. John and Lee Trommershauser of the 764th Squadron were responsible for obtaining the gift but could not attend the reunion. During intermission the Big Creek students and everyone else enjoyed George Dickie's rendition of "Rindercella".

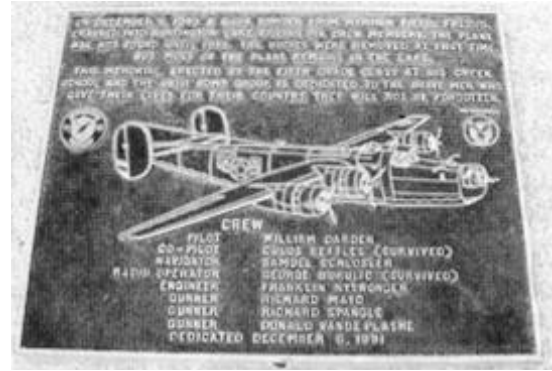
The oldest veteran in attendance was 81 year old Art Currier of Presque Isle, Maine. Art also won an award for having come the longest distance to attend the reunion.



The Big Creek students at the memorial dedication



**The “Exterminator” will hang in
The Fresno Metropolitan Museum**



The Plaque at Huntington Lake

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Sunday, October 3, 1993

The memorial service to honor those killed in active service and those deceased in the later years was conducted by the Chaplain, Major Leslie R. Hyder. This is always the most solemn and cherished time during each reunion.

Following the service, a breakfast buffet was enjoyed by everyone before saying their final goodbyes to fellow crew members, comrades, spouses, and friends.

Four couples who were staying until the next day rented a van and journeyed about 70 miles to Huntington Lake near the Big Creek School and where the B-24 bomber, lost December 6, 1943, went down. We stopped at a nearby service station to ask directions and were cordially greeted by the operator. He brought out the life-raft compartment door or hatch which was found about 35 feet from the rest of the plane. This and a small window frame were the only parts of the bomber that were removed from the lake. Those making this Sunday trip were Marjorie and Wally Robinson, George and Barbara Dickie, Gail and Verna Peterson and Bill and Muriel Wilkins.

Editor’s note:

Many thanks to Bill and Muriel Wilkins, Jim Van Nostrand, Elaine Shevin, Alvina Bella, and other members of the 765th Bomb Squadron for preparing this reunion summary for the “Liberaider”.



**Pete Peterson, George Dickie, Bill Wilkins
And Wally Robinson at Huntington Lake**

Reunion Aftermath

Thank you one and all!!!! The highlight of the Fresno Reunion for Millie and I was the presentation of a wine cooler from the Group. I always felt that I had ESP regarding the goings on within the outfit—wrong again!!! I do know that George Dickie and John Trommer-shauser had a great deal to do with the gift but George seems to have suffered an almost total memory loss about the background of this project. Anyway, to all the members, please accept our thanks for an item that will always provide us with fond and pleasant memories of the 461st Bombardment Group.

Frank and Millie

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Editor's note: I heard through the grapevine that Frank had mentioned that they had no idea how much the Group appreciated their efforts and they were very touched and moved by their recognition. Wow, Frank! You really lost your ESP. If it weren't for you and your sidekick, we would not exist. The recognition is long overdue! Enjoy.

* * * * *

Two 8 x 10 black and white photos were left in the Hospitality Room of the Holiday Inn. One is of a group of four men in a restaurant. The other appears to be an entire crew by a plane or something with the number 455 on it. If the pictures belong to you, call Marimac Corp. at 1-800-292-1490 and we will send them to you.

Marietta McCause

* * * * *

If anyone wants to order a copy of the group picture of the members of their squadron that attended the Fresno Reunion—contact "Kach A Memory" Photography at: P.O. Box 8397, Fresno, CA 93747, (209) 224-8384.

PX News

There are a few T-shirts left over from the reunion. They are multi-colored showing a formation of B-24's and the caption "50th Anniversary Reunion of the 461st BG, Fresno, CA". The price is \$11.50 including postage.

Junior size	10-12 (medium) 14-16 (large)
Men's size	46-48 (X-Large)

The 15th AF and B-24 pins were sold out at the reunion but will be back in stock by 1 December.

We found out, after selling some, that the plastic license plate frames for the 461st Bomb Group were printed on the top instead of the bottom. Anyone having one that they can't use, drop a line to the PX and we will refund your money (if you insist).

Wally Robinson

REUNION 1994

HAMPTON, VIRGINIA

The Hampton Roads area has been selected for our 1994 Reunion because most of the ground crews sailed out of Norfolk on Victory Ships and many of us returned through that area.

In addition, there is so much to see and do in the area, that we strongly urge you to extend your stay and see some of the things we won't have time for.

For example, there is Yorktown: The story of the American Revolution, from the Boston Tea Party to the British surrender at Yorktown is told through sight and sound exhibits, art and artifact displays, film, and a living history encampment where costumed interpreters portray the lives of the Continental Army soldiers.

The Jamestown Settlement, America's first English settlement, is brought to life with full size reproductions of the 3 ships which arrived in 1607, triangular James Fort, and an Indian Village representing the native American culture encountered by the colonists. Costumed staff members in each area interpret early 17th century life.

Colonial Williamsburg is nearby. We plan to spend a day there. There is considerable walking involved in all of the above, so bear that in mind.

We are planning a 3-hour tour aboard the Miss Hampton II, departing from downtown Hampton. We will sail out of the Hampton River into Hampton Roads Harbor, the largest natural harbor in the world, and cruise along the coast of Old Point Comfort, originally fortified by the Jamestown settlers. This location is now occupied by Fort Monroe, the only moat-enclosed, active duty military installation in the U.S. We will make a stop at Fort Wool, another pre-Civil War fort on a fifteen acre man-made island. We will have a guided walking tour of this fort which was active during the battle of the Merrimac and the Monitor. To highlight our cruise, we will slowly pass the entire waterfront of the world's largest naval installation, the Norfolk Naval Base. Our narrator will provide detailed descriptions of each mighty warship, including aircraft carriers, battleships, guided missile cruisers, destroyers, etc.

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In addition, there is Casemate Museum, which depicts the history of Fort Monroe. Robert E. Lee was second in command during the time of construction—Edgar Allen Poe was stationed there in 1827—Jefferson Davis was imprisoned there and his cell is a focal point within the museum.

There is also a Mariners' Museum, containing an outstanding collection of small craft including a Venetian gondola, a Chinese sampan, a primitive dugout canoe and an internationally renowned collection of handcrafted ship models, scrimshaw, intricately carved figureheads and working models of classic steam engines. In addition, there are beautiful miniature boats carved by a local artist. Some of the display cases have magnifiers so you can see the intricate carving on the tiny figures.

In the same area where the boat departs, is the Virginia Air and Space Museum, which is quite interesting. Hampton was the training ground for the original 7 astronauts. Be sure you walk across the street from the Air and Space Museum to the beautiful old restored carousel. Recapture your youth with a ride on this old "merry-go-round". Bet you haven't done that for a long time. There are also great restaurants in the area—especially seafood.

We are also looking into a shopping tour for the ladies to the Williamsburg Pottery Factory, the world's most bizarre bazaar. You can buy all sorts of handcrafted local items plus items from around the world. Who cares that it has self-service, un-fancy surroundings, and newspaper wrappings. What counts is the price is right and it's fun.

Busch Gardens is nearby and you will need a day for that experience.

We are planning a day at Langley AFB with lunch at the NCO Club and a tour of the flight line.

This year we are trying something new—Squadron Dinners, so you will have some special time for socializing with old friends from your squadron.

Now you know why we recommend that you extend your stay. We will offer as much as we can, but in this article, we are hitting the highlights—**THERE'S MORE!!! See you there!!!!**

MAIL CALL

Editor's note: The following is the second half of the letter I received from Ben Haller. See page 28 of the June 1993 issue of the "Liberaider" for the first half.

My three missions with the 461st all were against marshalling yards in Austria in an effort to prevent retreating German troops from fleeing to Berlin through Linz, the northern point of a triangle with Munich and Vienna. My diary shows the following:

Mission #17. Date: 4/21/45. Position: #9. Target: Attnang-Puschiem M/Y. I've never made a 360 over a target yet, but today we went over four times, then dropped our bombs one-half mile right of the marshalling yards, which could be seen for miles because of the flame and smoke in them. Such a lousy display of bombing I've never seen. Besides, we had ship #68, an airplane that just wasn't meant to fly. It wore Joe (Ballinger, our pilot, now deceased) to a frazzle. We were certainly disgusted.

Mission #18. Date: 4/25/45. Position #4. Target: Linz M/Y. Such a bunch of turnbacks! (Not directed at 461st for this included many ships in various bomb groups of the 15th, they were visible en route to the target and immediately prior to turning on the IP and who were turning back with "malfunctions"). I flew with another crew piloted by Yauger. One Squadron had so many turnbacks only two ships remained and had to tack on to another box. We lost two ships that way.

Went past Munich, Salzburg, Berchtesgaden and saw plenty of M/Y's full up. We were briefed for about 187 guns, plenty to go around. As I recall, it was estimated there were actually 350 guns or more around Linz at target time because the Germans had rushed mobile flak guns in on flatbed rail cars and by truck from Munich and Vienna areas to protect the troops and trains en route north. In your December, 1991, Vol. 8, No. 2 issue of *The 461st Liberaider*, John C. Haberman states in his article, starting on page 16, "Linz, if my memory serves, boasted something like 600 heavy anti-aircraft guns, in the hands of sharpshooters." I have no reason to doubt his report and, in fact, often thought the estimate of 350 guns was light in view of the damage inflicted on all of us.

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Our bombs (the 767th Squadron) walked across the briefed A.P. with a nice pattern. I had one bomb—500#ers—hang up, so salvoed it on the rally. Found out from photos shown me by our S-2 officer that it hit a vital part of the benzol plant (strictly by accident!) that this Group had been trying to hit for months. (It was protected by very high, extremely thick walls, so my bomb was a freak that flipped out in a lucky arc before plunging straight down. S-2 gave me a copy of this photo, which I have in my files and is now yellowed with age.)

One plane from our Group went down in a flat spin over the target, no chutes seen. A total of six ships from other groups blew up out in front of us on a sea of flak—it was quite a bad day. On our field we had four crash landings. One man had his left gear shot off so came in with nose wheel only and made one of the finest landings to be seen anywhere.

Your article from John Haberman, see above, tells the story firsthand, for that must have been his plane and pilot. There was one interesting addition, if that was the same crash landing. I didn't write this one in my diary, but I distinctly recall the crash on that field using nose wheel only. It seemed like everyone on the base was out there praying that guy in. Just at the touchdown, someone in the plane—presumably the engineer—popped parachutes out the waist windows, attached to the 50 caliber gun mountings there. It was a spectacular sight and the first time I had ever seen that technique used.

Mission #19. Date: 4/26/45. Position: #1 box. #7. Target: Lienz M/Y. The armies on all fronts have been driving ahead so fast we have few targets left. (We were allowed to bomb only primary targets or assigned secondary targets; absolutely no bombing on a target of opportunity.) This is a small yard just south of the Austrian border in the Alps. Our primary, and ordnance depot, couldn't be seen because of low clouds. Lienz had a cloud cover, too, so Col. Rogers, Group C.O., took us around three times, losing altitude until we could get underneath and bomb. In the second pass we were going down through clouds on the bomb run in formation. Result was a nice dispersal all over the sky. On the third time around we had a long bomb run at 12,000 feet, but the lead bombardier (name deleted) missed by 800 feet and all our bombs fell into the river wasted. We wound up bombing from #5 spot because of the

break-up when we hit the clouds.

My May 2, 1945 entry tells how the 5th and 8th Armies (U.S. and British) raced up both sides of Italy until they had the Germans cut off at the Brenner Pass. Part of that entry says, "The Po Valley was overrun in a week once the big Spring offensive started. In addition, Partisan troops took Fiume and forged along the coast to Trieste. In the meantime, the Russians went all out and after fierce street battling captured all of Berlin. The forces of General Bradley's 3rd Army met and linked with Russian armies to completely sever German lines. Mussolini was captured while escaping through Italy to Switzerland and was summarily shot by Italian Partisans who had captured Milan. Hitler's death is now reported but at the same time is being taken with a grain of salt, despite authorization of the report coming from Himmler through Admiral Doenitz. All the world is now waiting for the great words that the German army in the homeland has decided to surrender."

"Rumors are floating roof high as to our immediate disposition but the only thing definite is a letter from General Arnold that all the 15th Air Force, with the exception of an occupational Air Force, will be returned as soon as possible to the States for leaves and furloughs, then sent, after proper training, to the Pacific War against Japan. My fingers are crossed."

My diary entry of May 8, 1945 says, "Admiral Doenitz, succeeding Hitler, who is supposed to have died in Berlin, unconditionally surrendered all German Army, Navy and Air Force units still in action as of 0001, May 9. Some German troops in front of the Russian machine in Czechoslovakia pulled a sneak air raid on Prague after the surrender was in effect. Russians have identified Hitler's body. Goering and Field Marshall Kesselring have been taken into custody."

On May 9, there was a call for volunteers to fly cargo missions to drop supplies to Allied POW camps in Austria. The purpose was not only to get food and medical supplies to these people as fast as possible, but also to arm them so they (both British and American soldiers) could officially be in charge of their camps and adjoining towns before the Russians could race in and claim they had "liberated" our people. My diary shows I flew on 5/9 to the Americans held in the German prison camp at Spittal, Austria, northwest of Villach. Dropped twelve 350# cans of supplies from 1,000 feet. Flew over the

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most beautiful country, mountains and lakes I've ever seen. Went over Klagenfurt where nothing is left intact. What a mess. The POW's waved wildly from barracks roofs and out in the roads.

On May 10 or 11 I flew another one to Wolfsberg POW camp where the English fellows are. Saw streams of German trucks, guns and carts for miles pouring in to surrender to the Allied troops in this area. Dropped from 800 feet.

I failed to make an entry for May 16 for my third and final cargo mission, which was excusable because when I returned to my tent in the 767th Squadron area there was a cablegram on my bunk informing me that our first child, Benjamin III, had been born at 12:15 a. m. May 9, just 14 minutes after the official surrender took place! I can't recall the name of the POW camp but it was again in southern Austria, near the Villach and Klagenfurt area. The volunteer crews carried no gunners, of course, although I think a few guys were allowed to ride strictly as passengers to see from low level the landscape we'd been bombing from high altitude and to be able to say they took part in those historic flights that meant little to anyone else, but everything to the POW's on the ground.

Within two weeks, our Group had been processed and sent to Gioia, Italy as the staging area for flying our planes home via Africa and South America. Gioia had been the staging area where we had been processed when entering Italy, and it was from there we were sent to the 376th Bomb Group at San Pancrazio down in the heel of Italy. The batch of planes we were assigned with departed on May 31 and we flew singly across the Sahara to Dakar on the west coast, then across the south Atlantic to Natal, Brazil, around the coast line of Brazil until we hit Georgetown, British Guiana, (where the infamous massacre of religious followers took place about ten years ago), up to Borinquen Field in Puerto Rico, then to Charleston, S.C. After two days there we were sent home by broken down trains for 30-day leaves before reporting to Sioux Falls Air Force Base in Sioux Falls, S.D., where we stayed until being separated in October 1945.

Ben Haller, Jr.
Bombardier

Do You Remember?

S/Sgt. Lenard Johnson



**766th Squadron
Lt. Richard Fawcett's Crew
Killed in Action at Nimes, France
July 12, 1944**

**His family would like to talk to
anyone who knew Lenard. Contact:
Tim Lundgren
905 Washington Ave.
Albany, CA 94706
Tel: (510) 527-2664**

* * * * *

Help Wanted!!!

Frank O'Bannon reports that during the reunion he made a plea for copies of military orders pertaining to men in the Group. As a result he received several copies on which he found 16 men that did not show up on any of our rosters. He is hot on the trail of two of them. He is most interested in orders issued during the period from June 1944 to the end of the war. Please check your files and send him copies of any orders you might have. There have proven to be of great value in locating lost Group members.

* * * * *

MAIL CALL (Continued)

Dear George,

I read the article from Johnson Miller in the June 1993 "Liberaider", page 34.

Our arrival in Italy, experiences, etc. were very much the same. His nose gunner, Worth Barber, was a twin brother to our ball gunner, John Barber. The army would keep twins close to each other but not allow them to fly in the same airplane. We picked up our B-24L at Topeka, Kansas on December 1, 1944. On our test hop #4 engine ran hot and the latch on the landing gear had not been painted in the locked position.

Upon our arrival in Italy the weather was bad. We were sent to the 461st Bomb Group, 767 Bomb Squadron. They said we were needed along with the plane. I called Geioia (Italy) and they came to the 767th to make modifications on the plane. It became #77, "Double Lucky".

We flew #77 on our first mission. The target was Vienna. We could not get a clear shot so we went to the alternate target Graz. Our tail section and rudder were badly damaged. Repair was questionable but they did finally do so, thanks to the ground crew and others. One the next three missions, #77 was aborted by other crews. After that she was thought to be jinxed. However, we flew #77 on our next 11 missions. On one occasion, with #77, we were the fifth plane off and had to go instruments at about 500 feet. We climbed to 8,000 feet and broke out on top. We heard the commander call on the radio telling the Group to abort the mission and it was "every man for himself" to get on the ground. I called and told him where we were. He asked if we could see Mt. Vesuvius. I answered in the affirmative. So we formed up over the old mountain with a hole in her belly.

On our 13th mission, we were told #77 was the only ship with a working bomb sight. So she was used as the lead ship. Just short of the target they aborted with #1 engine out. After the mission, engine numbers 1, 2, & 3 were changed. #77 continued her career in the front row. We did not fly #77 again until our 19th and last bombing mission. We did fly her again to drop food and supplies to those in a prisoner of war camp.

On June 2, 1945, we started home to the USA with old #77 "Double Lucky". We left her at Hunter Field, GA. There was a skeleton crew waiting. She was gassed up and flown away as we watched. #4 engine was still running hot and the only original engine left.



767th Bomb Squadron—Crew 7831
Standing L to R: Bomb Heath, Co-Pilot; Harlow Huchzermeier, Pilot; George Dace, Navigator; Elbert McClung, Bombardier.
Kneeling L to R: Tom Dearnell, Engineer; Denver Hamm, Tail Gun; John Barber, Ball Gun; Jack Costley, Radio Operator; Chick Walters, Armorer; John Avedisian, Nose Gun.

Harlow Huchzermeier
 206 Fremont Road
 East Syracuse, NY 13057

Dear George,

Immediately, I recognized the B-24J "fuel tanker" and I suppose many other 461st Bomb Group crews also remembered.

In September 1944, General Patton's armored division was racing toward Nancy in France and his supply support couldn't keep up with his rapid advance.

Many B-24 bombers from the 461st Bomb Group were stripped of their turrets and converted into temporary "fuel tankers". Many supply missions were flown into Lyon, France in support of General Patton's armored division. I flew a couple of these mis-

(Continued on page 11)



The 461st Bomb Group was unloading ferried gasoline in southern France when a spark ignited a load of fuel and flames consumed this aircraft. Crewmen strain to swing another Liberator around and out of danger.

(Continued from page 10)

sions, one on September 13, 1944 and another one on September 17, 1944.

I remember vaguely about one of our bombers catching on fire from a spark but I don't recall if it occurred on one of the missions I flew or if the fire occurred on another mission and was related to me by another crewmember.

Also, I recalled I had seen this same picture, taken at a different angle, in my 1973 copy of the "Log of the Liberators" by Steve Birdsall. I'm enclosing a copy of that picture.

These missions were very interesting and eventful.

Don Seiler
766th Squadron

Dear George,

The 50th Anniversary issue of the "Liberator" is outstanding—it brings back many memories and I think I'll share a couple of them.

Regarding the history of the 461st by Col. O'Bannon, I can add the following pertinent details. On

page 4, the mission to Linz, Austria was my crews 17th. We were tail-end Charlie, 765th Squadron, in our "Upstairs Maid". The "All American" and my plane were the only 2 survivors of the Squadron and we crash landed at Foggia Air Base with injured crewmen, me included. The single gunner who shot down 4 enemy fighters was Don Naish, Tail Gunner of my crew. I was credited with 1 destroyed ME-109 and my plane commander and I received the DFC for this mission—also the Purple Heart for me as well as 3 others on the plane. If memory serves me, our Group lost 12 out of 21 planes that terrible day.

At this writing, only 4 of our crew are still among the living—the Navigator, Bombardier, Ball Turret Gunner and myself, Radio Operator/Gunner.

On page 35 of the "Liberator" 50th issue is a picture I can readily identify for you. When the 461st flew supply missions to Lyons, France, my crew and I made 3 trips. Upon landing at the fighter strip at Lyons, our stripped down B-24's were lined up nose to tail on very narrow taxi ways, with no room to maneuver. We then unloaded bombs, empty gas drums, fuses, ammo and proceeded to fill the drums with our extra fuel. Suddenly, the plane at the head of the line caught fire because the auxiliary putput on the fight deck had exploded. Heroic crews and ground personnel could do

(Continued on page 12)

(Continued from page 11)

nothing but shove a couple of B-24's off the taxi strip, into the soft earth, so that other planes could be saved. While that planes burned (I think 2 were destroyed) many of us took off for the shelter we could find, fearing explosions of bombs, fuses, gas or ammo. It was a scary situation.

I am healthy, retired, play golf at least 3 times a week and my wife and I travel as much as the bank account will allow.

My best to you. Keep up the good work.

George R. Fraser, 765th B.S.
185 Biscayne Drive
San Rafael, CA 94901-1508

Dear George,

I will give you a few notes on the burning B-24 on page 35 of the June 1993 "Liberaider". I am sure you will get other information on this. The site would be the Bron Airport south of Lyons, France in September of 1944.

After the invasion of Southern France, bomb bay tanks were installed in B-24's to bring in fuel for the RAF Spitfires that were shooting up retreating German troops. Bombs were also brought in. The fuel was transferred to drums and the drums along with the bombs were alongside the B-24's that were parked nose to tail. One plane caught fire when the auxiliary generator was started up. I believe no one was hurt except the pilot who jumped off a wing.

It took about 3 minutes for the plane to completely burn. In the meantime everyone got out of the area because of all the fuel and bombs nearby. There were a lot of old bomb craters to jump in for protection. In the meantime, pilots started engines to get some space between the planes. We had a group bombardier with our crew and for whatever reason, the right wing tip ended up in the edge of a hanger while he was directing the plane. We went into Lyons for the night while we awaited the new wing tip section that was to be flown in the next day. Since the Germans had just left, there were celebrations all over the city including street dances. Also there was shooting all night which we were told was the Resistance doing their work. We rode into town on an Army truck.

The bridge over the river in the city was temporary with one way traffic and we got priority to cross. The people in the city were very friendly. The next day we ate in the RAF mess and had real English tea. Two men were left to guard the plane and when we got back we found our flight engineer had taken good care of himself by finding an army motorcycle to travel around with. I remember there was a wrecked FW-190 in one of the hangers. For lunch each plane was given Vienna sausage and a gallon of fruit cocktail. We found some wood and had a roast of the sausages.

There is another thing that is interesting. There was a shallow grave on the airport where, we were told, the Germans had shot prisoners. Forty some years later I was in New York reading the book "An Uncertain Hour" by Ted Morgan about the war in Lyons. There was a description of the reason for the grave (p308 & 309). The Germans had, just before leaving the city, taken all the Jews they had in prison out to the airport and shot them and buried them in the grave. I have some dates that might be of interest: Aug. 16 the airport massacre of the Jews; Aug. 24 the Germans leave the airport area south of Lyons; Sept. 2 the Germans leave Lyons; Sept. 15 DeGaulle visits the airport; Sept. 10 to 15th the supplies were flown in by our people.

The British Spitfires were interesting. We were told that because of their short range and their need to get down fast, they did not mind landing on the same runway in the opposite direction and at the same time as our B-24's. They must have been early planes since, if I remember right, they had fabric covered wings and wooden propellers. The ground crew would ride on the wing while taxiing and then get off and pick up a wing if the plane had trouble on the rough ground, which included bomb craters.

Ray Grew, 764th B.S.
28124 Hamden Lane
Escondido, CA 92026

Dear George,

Enclosed are two pictures of Crew 7828. One was taken in front of our B-24 at Topeka, Kansas, 1944, and the other taken August 20, 1993 at our only, so far reunion.

While putting the plans for the reunion together, I re-

(Continued on page 13)

(Continued from page 12)

grettably learned that our Co-Pilot, Harry F. Butofsky, passed away in early August of 1993. We do not know where the Navigator, Robb C. Johnson, is or if he is alive.

The reunion was held in my hometown, Elkhart, Indiana. It was a great time for all present. I had not seen four of them since leaving Italy in '45.

Editor's note: Sorry to inform you that Robb Johnson died in 1979. No details.

Ronald F. Hansing
Crew 7828 Bombardier

The Way We Were



**Standing L to R: R. F. Hansing, Bombardier;
R. C. Johnson, Navigator; H. F. Butofsky, Co-Pilot;
R. Yauger, Pilot.
Kneeling L to R: A. Frederick, Engineer;
G. Diebold, Tail Gun; J. Navis, Waist Gun;
O. Eaton, Radio; J. Dwyer, Ball Gun;
R. Hayden, Waist Gun.**

*Have a Happy
&
Holy Holiday
Season*

The Way We Are



**L to R: Arnold Frederick, Ron Hansing,
George Diebold, Jim Navis, Otho Eaton,
Joe Dwyer, Robert Hayden**

Dear George,

When our group went overseas, I was among those that went by ship, 1 75 ship convoy as I recall. The convoy passed through the Straits of Gibraltar about sunset. After we got into the Mediterranean Sea and the convoy was strung out for miles we were attacked. The sky lit up like the 4th of July with anti-aircraft fire. I never saw any aircraft attacking us but apparently something did because according to the 461st history record, we lost one ship and another was damaged. The record does not say WHAT or WHO the attackers were.

Perhaps if you mention this in the "Liber Raider", the next time you go to press, someone in the outfit will have some knowledge on this matter. In any event it would make an interesting little story for the group, one that a lot of the members are not aware of.

Bill Harrison, 764th B.S.
6681 NW 6th Ct.
Margate, FL 33063

Editor's Note: Anyone remember this incident? Send in the story as you remember it.

TAPS
MAY THEY REST IN PEACE FOREVER

GENERAL DOOLITTLE DEAD AT 96

Doolittle did a lot

**Who was this skylarking, exuberant
Young eagle who raced across the sky
And into the hearts of people everywhere?**

**His name, a big contradiction, was
DOOLITTLE. He did a lot:**

Stunt flyer

Raving King

First to cross the country

In less than 12 hours

First to make an instrument flight

Leader of the daring Tokyo raid

Master strategist who helped bring down Hitler

Business executive

Family man

Advisor to presidents

Holder of the Medal of Honor

Truly America's Mr. Aviation!

**In June of 1985, he was promoted
to Four Star General**

**We salute General James H. Doolittle for a
Lifetime of doing everything he could do to make
The earth a better place to live.**

Editor's note: This was borrowed from "Wing Power" a publication of the 7th Photo Recon Group Assoc. and reprinted by permission of United Technologies.

I recommend that you read "I Could Never Be So Lucky Again", the autobiography of General James H. Doolittle.



THEY WILL BE MISSED

**The Toll
American Ware Dead**



Civil War	497,000
World War II	406,000
World War I	116,000
Vietnam	58,000
Korea	54,000
Mexican War	13,000
Revolutionary War	4,000
Spanish American War	2,400
War of 1812	2,000
Indian Wars	1,000
Persian Gulf	141

The toll as compiled by the Department of Defense and Veterans Affairs.

The federal government maintains 129 military burial ground in 39 states and Puerto Rico and 24 others in 12 foreign countries.

Abroad 124,912 soldiers and sailors and airmen lie in alien soil, from a hillside overlooking ancient Carthage in North Africa to high plateau near Manila in the Philippines.

Nations have been burying their dead with solemn ceremony since the ancient Greeks interred heroes of Athens after the defeat of the Persians. It was then that Pericles delivered an epic funeral oration perhaps unmatched in eloquence until Abraham Lincoln brought forth his 371 word Gettysburg Address.

It was under Lincoln that the federal government made itself responsible for the proper burial of men it sent off to be killed. The search took eight years in hundreds of battlefields, where Union skeletons still lay before Confederate lines, in churchyards, farms, plantations, railroad sidings and frontier garrisons.

Within five years after Appomattox, the remains of nearly 300,000 Union dead had been reinterred in national cemeteries. Little more than half had been identified. Except for some 15,000 who died in Union prisons, most of the South's 130,000 dead are in private cemeteries.

Of all of them, public or private, foreign or domestic, Arlington remains a special place, a rich mosaic of a nation's pride and pain. Here, on 612 graceful acres of Virginia, on a quiet shore opposite the capital, is the greatest assemblage of Americans ever gathered in one place.

Copied from the Air Force Gunners Association newsletter, August, 1993.

TAPS
MAY THEY REST IN PEACE FOREVER

<u>SQD</u>	<u>NAME</u>	<u>DECEASED</u>	<u>HOMETOWN</u>	<u>DUTY</u>	
461	Buie, Wilson R.	1993	Alington, VA	Operations Off	
	Dunham, Harry M.	1989	Upper Lisle, NY	Radar	
	Reister, William A.	1953	Klamath Falls, OR	Unk	
	Tintinger, Lyle	1969	Hardin, MT	A/C Armor/Gunner	
764	Arrington, Alfred W. Jr.	1983	Unk	Cook's Helper	
	Arthur, Alex M.	1988	Chicago, IL	A/C Armor/Gunner	
	Craig, Alonzo M.	1976	Unk	A/C & Eng Mech	
	Dagle, Paul A.	1983	Cleveland, OH	A/C Eng/Gunner	
	Eitel, Ray	1992	Florence, AL	A/C Radio/Gunner	
	Farley, George D.	1967	Wellsville, NY	A/C Armor/Gunner	
	Feeney, James B.	1970	Somerville, MA	A/C Radio/Gunner	
	Funk, Anderson A. J.	1993	Ozark, MO	A/C Eng/Gunner	
	Hall, William R.	1990	W. Paducah, KY	A/C Eng/Gunner	
	Johnson, James R.	1993	San Antonio, TX	Pilot	
	Jones, Lawton M. Jr.	1944	Bainbridge, GA	Pilot	
	Landers, Elmer L.	1976	Detroit, MI	Radar	
	Lund, Howard O.	Unk	Unk	Intell Off	
	Mattingly, Garland J.	1993	Indianapolis, IN	A/C Eng/Gunner	
	McCann, Thomas W.	1969	Freehold, NJ	Munition Worker	
	Meredith, Norman R.	1989	Dallas, TX	A/C Armor/Gunner	
	Nutter, Carmen D.	1987	TX	Pilot	
	Overdorff, William H.	1980	Detroit, MI	Pilot	
	Rakow, Martin A.	1979	Valley Stream, NY	A/C Armor/Gunner	
	Roedel Earl F.	1959	Unk	A/C Prop Mech	
	Ross, Harold C.	1992	Unk	Teletype Oper	
	Seedle, Thomas A.	1988	New York, NY	Clerk Typist	
	Smith, Harry B.	1967	Baltimore, MD	A/C Armor/Gunner	
	White, Robert W.	1986	Sharon, PA	Navigator	
	765	Berstein, Joseph	1988	Bronx, NY	A/C Instrument Mech
		Colavito, James J. Jr.	1992	Tucson, AZ	Bombardier
Coolbroth, Dana L. Jr.		1981	Coaldale, PA	A/C Armor/Gunner	
Groom, Otis G.		1991	Edmond, OK	Bombardier	
Handley, James D.		KLOD	Coshocton, OH	A/C Armor/Gunner	
James, Chester		KLOD	Washington, DC	Navigator	
Kastenber, Max		1989	Brooklyn, NY	Munition Worker	
Knapp, John J.		1972	Atlanta, GA	Radio Mech	
Luckey, Edwin A.		1981	Irvington, NJ	A/C Armorer	
Mathers, George W.		1986	Tidioute, PA	Munition Worker	
Millard, Lynn S.		1960	NY	A/C Armor/Gunner	
Miller, Edward Jr.		1983	Bergenfield, NJ	A/C Armor/Gunner	
Miller, Robert J.		1970	Philadelphia, PA	A/C Armor/Gunner	
Miracola, Lawrence P.		1985	Unk	Decon Equip Oper	

TAPS
MAY THEY REST IN PEACE FOREVER

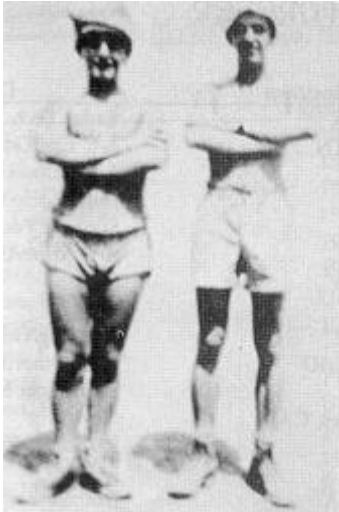
<u>SQD</u>	<u>NAME</u>	<u>DECEASED</u>	<u>HOMETOWN</u>	<u>DUTY</u>
765	Morris, James J.	1986	Unk	A/C Armorer
	Myers, Calvin	1987	Miami, FL	A/C & Eng Mech
	Myers, James	1972	Fredericksburg, VA	A/C & Eng Mech
	Nagy, Louis W.	1982	Carteret, NJ	Radio Oper/Gunner
	Neagle, Ovid	1989	Palatine, IL	A/C Prop Mech
	Newman, Paul A.	1978	Santa Fe, NM	A/C Armor/Gunner
	Norman, Gene	Unk	Marion, IL	A/C Armor/Gunner
	Puglia, Santo L.	1976	Bronx, NY	A/C Armor/Gunner
	Roberts, Kenneth L.	1986	Ft. Lee, NJ	A/C Armor/Gunner
	Rothberg, Chester	1986	Brooklyn, NY	Bombardier
	Ruppert, Robert J.	Unk	Unk	A/C Armorer
	Sandall, John C.	1944	Unk	Sqdn CO
	Slayton, Leonard E.	1980	Wills Point, TX	A/C Eng/Gunner
	Smith, John H.	KLOD	Carleton, MI	Pilot
	Spencer, William R.	1983	Vinton, VA	Radio Oper/Gunner
	Stinson, Gordon E.	1986	Unk	Surgical Tech
	Tidd, Charles A.	1977	Almon, AR	A/C Armor/Gunner
	Tinkham, Elmer N.	1986	Wellesley Hills, MA	Radio Oper/Gunner
	Treadway, Charles V.	1975	IN	A/C Armor/Gunner
	Turner, Robert M.	KIA	Oswego, NY	A/C Armor/Gunner
	Vice, Bud E.	1970	Unk	A/C Armorer
	Walker, Lloyd O.	1980	Denver, CO	Radar Observer
	Ward, Edward P.	1974	Bayonne, NJ	A/C Eng/Gunner
	Watkins, Leonard O.	1970	Unk	Radar Mech
	Watt, Frank P.	1991	Fosters, MI	Decon Equip Oper
	Westfall, Louis A.	1980	Oakland, PA	Supply Clerk
	Wheeler, Edgar B.	1992	Caldwell, PA	Adm Spec NCO
	Wilbanks, Charles E. Jr.	1987	Sulphur, OK	Pilot
	Wilks, Thomas	1967	Denver, CO	Cook's Helper
	Wilson, John M. Jr.	1989	Houston, TX	Pilot
	Wise, Elwood B.	1981	Morrisville, NC	A/C Refuel Oper
	Wisler, Donald B.	1975	Unk	A/C Armorer
766	Blake, Homer M.	1990	Unk	A/C Refuel Oper
	Broussard, George E.	1985	Unk	Pilot
	Campbell, James H. Jr.	1992	Candor, NC	A/C Eng/Gunner
	Coughlan, Gerald M.	1964	Richmond Hill, NY	A/C & Eng Mech
	Glover, William E.	1973	Rocky Mountain, NC	A/C Armor/Gunner
	Hains, John J.	1983	Bookeelia, FL	A/C & Eng Mech
	Hennon, Ervin R.	1993	Apopka, FL	A/C Armor/Gunner
	Jensen, Joseph A.	1965	MN	Munition Worker
	Lawson, Roy G.	1993	Flat River MO	Parachute Rigger
	McComb, Arthur E.	1956	Unk	Decon Equip Oper
	Moore, James B.	1981	OK	A/C Armor/Gunner

TAPS
MAY THEY REST IN PEACE FOREVER

<u>SQD</u>	<u>NAME</u>	<u>DECEASED</u>	<u>HOMETOWN</u>	<u>DUTY</u>
766	Pitts, John C.	1993	Tipton, OK	Radar Tech
	Pugh, Charles M.	1980	Pikeville, TN	A/C Eng/Gunner
	Pugh Ulysses S. Jr.	1980	Unk	A/C Armor/Gunner
	Reath, John C.	1980	Unk	Auto Equip Oper
	Schmidt, Edward J.	1974	Unk	Surgical Tech
	Scott, James V.	1993	Mundelein	A/C Armor/Gunner
	Sherlock, John P.	1987	Coram, NY	Pilot
	Soderberg, Donald L.	1984	Unk	Pilot
	Tessier, Oliver L.	1993	Gonic, NH	A/C Eng/Gunner
	Tims, William K.	1963	St. Louis, MO	A/C Armorer
	Wallen, Albert	1985	Unk	Bombsight Mech
	Warren, Calvin S.	1945	Los Angeles, CA	Navigator
	Winstead, James D.	1986	Unk	Parachute Rigger
767	Amos, Miles E.	1992	Orange, CA	Bombardier
	Austin, William F.	1993	Greenville, SC	Pilot
	Brown, Frazer F.	1968	Unk	A/C Armorer
	Butler, Wilson W.	1992	Poughkeepsie, NY	Clerk Adm & Tech
	Ferguson, Paul W.	1993	Lakewood, CO	Bombardier
	Goller, Jacob O.	1974	Unk	A/C Armorer
	Hamilton, Paul L.	1975	IN	A/C Armor/Gunner
	Hebert, LeRoy J.	1976	Houma, LA	A/C Radio/Gunner
	Hollis, Robert F.	1986	Cleveland, OH	A/C & Eng Mech
	Johnson, Elmer E.	1988	New York Mills, MN	A/C & Eng Mech
	Kidd, James E.	1971	Unk	A/C Refuel Oper
	McNarney, Frank T.	1966	Unk	A/C Armor/Gunner
	Memie, Harold F.	1979	Detroit, MI	Armorer
	Moore, Lianton T.	Unk	Unk	Auto Equip Oper
	Redden, Joseph J.	1970	Unk	Unk
	Samensansky, Jack	1992	Brooklyn, NY	A/C Armor/Gunner
	Sharver, Alonzo M. Jr.	1967	Newton, TX	A/C Armor/Gunner
	Shelton, Hubert F.	1983	Unk	Radio Oper
	Shipman, James N.	1975	Jal, NM	A/C Armor/Gunner
	Smith, William J.	1965	Brooklyn, NY	A/C Eng/Gunner
	Swartz, James H.	1981	Unk	A/C Elect Mech
	Sweeney, James K.	1993	Haverhill, MA	A/C Radio/Gunner
	Taylor, Joel W.	1987	Houston, TX	Gunnery Instr
	Tribby, John F.	1985	Coraopolis, PA	A/C Armor/Gunner
	Wilson, Arthur B.	1991	Unk	Pilot
	Windish, Conrad Jr.	1964	Nutley, NJ	A/C & Eng Mech

Editor's note: This list was gathered between June 1, 1993 and October 31, 1993. Please provide any additional information you may have regarding any "Unknowns" (Unk) you may have known and/or have listed in your records to Frank O'Bannon, P.O. Box 36600, Tucson, AZ 85740-6600. Thanks!!!!

Do You Remember?



Who were these two officers that went around the 764th Squadron area in the Spring of 1945 looking like this?

The Caterpillar Club

Ray Grew, 764th Squadron, who bailed out when their plane was shot down sent a note saying he wrote the club a couple of years ago and got a nice gold pin.

The Caterpillar Club
c/o Switlik Parachute Company
P.O. Box 1328
Trenton, NJ 08607

* * * * *

Minds, like parachutes, work only when open.

*Merry
Christmas*



“They’ve Never Forgotten Us”

By Barry Courter

Chattanooga News—Free Press

July 4, 1993

**Almost 50 years later, two
Czechoslovakian towns still honor
10 American soldiers shot down nearby**

Tom Qualman doesn't think of himself as a hero. In fact, he winces at the mere mention of the word.

“A lot of guys had it worse,” he said.

To the people of Liptal and Troubky, Czechoslovakia, Mr. Qualman and the nine other crewmembers of the B-24 Liberator shot down nearby are heroes of the tallest order. In fact, Mr. Qualman didn't know exactly how highly he was thought of until he re-visited the towns after almost 50 years.

Though a burning quest for more than four decades, it was supposed to have been a relatively quiet and simple family vacation when the Qualmans and their two sons began planning the trip to Troubky. Tom had told Charlotte, Roger and Bill of the night his plane crashed, killing six crewmembers, and the subsequent weeks spent on the run and then in prison camps.

The family was well aware of the details of his adventures through a 19-page recounting of the events written while Mr. Qualman was a prisoner in a German camp. He told them of his week of hiding out and the people who helped him.

He told them of how he, a 19-year-old soldier, and his co-pilot, Lt. Ed Kasold, slept in barns and dense forests in the freezing cold before their eventual surrender to the Germans.

They knew of the poor farmers who risked their lives to help them along the way.

The family knew all about the young niece, her English-speaking aunt and the sister and husband who helped young Tom and Ed, giving them food and clothing that they could not afford to spare. Mr. Qualman's recounting included the plentiful Christmas Eve meal and warm bath and wonderful feeling

(Continued on page 19)

(Continued from page 18)

of soaking his feet in warm water in the Czech family's farmhouse.

Mr. Qualman himself was aware that the citizens of Troubky had erected a graveside monument to the six soldiers who died in the crash.

It was, in fact, this monument that he very much wanted to visit during the trip. He figured he would take the family over, maybe see one or two of the people he had corresponded with following the war, pay his respects to his fallen friends and return home.

The last thing he expected was to be welcomed as a returning hero.

For 20 years following the war, Mr. Qualman kept in touch with Fan Mrnustikova, the aunt he referred to in his writings as "my Czech mother".

He also received letters from the Rev. Jan Valis, the man who convinced the two soldiers to surrender to the Germans rather than risk trying to survive the harsh winter on the run. The Rev. Valentin Nepistil, the man who fought hard to give the six dead soldiers a "decent burial", also had sent correspondences, as well as returned Tom's and Ed's belongings through family members of the fallen soldiers.

However, he hadn't heard from any of them since 1964.

After returning to his family home in Saginaw, Mich., Mr. Qualman met his current wife and they married shortly after. His job brought the family to the Chattanooga area and he worked with Rossville Mills until his retirement in '92.

Earlier this year, the current mayor of Troubky printed a letter Mr. Qualman had sent requesting help in finding any of the above people. Within days, the niece had contacted Mr. Qualman and plans were set into motion for the family to make the trip over in early May.

"She said she would take care of everything," he says. "All these years I wanted to go and when I retired in '92, my wife encouraged me to go."

All of the years remembering, dreaming, hoping and playing our scenarios of what he would do upon his return did not come close to preparing him for the reception he received.

"The whole town turned out," he says. "The mayor spoke. It was very emotional and there was a lot of crying. The fellow who cut me out of the tree when I landed with the parachute was there. The old farmer who let us sleep in his hayloft the first night was there."

"We went to his house. The same stove and the same table were there. This is almost 50 years later. His wife came up and told me, 'I have been saving this for you.' She handed me a silk blouse she had made from the parachute I gave her. Then she turns around and gives me two beautiful vases."

"Why did she go and do that?" he asks.

"The kids and grandchildren knew every step I took there better than I did. It's unbelievable. They would say, 'You stopped at this house and they gave you bread and milk and then you walked here.' They passed it down two or three generations."

"There were only a couple of people who had actually seen us, but they all knew us."

Saluting the beautiful marble monument which had been purchased a year after the way by poor farmers who had very little was an overpowering feeling for Mr. Qualman, but visiting his "Czech mother" in the nursing home where she now lives was "very emotional".

"She is alive and doesn't see or talk so well, but she did recognize me. She kept holding my face. There were no dry eyes in the room. I don't cry, but I was very choked up."

"That woman saved my life and gave us so much when she didn't have it."

During the visit, the Qualmans visited the sites where Tom and Ed stopped, including the prison where they were eventually taken. All along the way, they were treated as visiting celebrities. It seemed everyone wanted to see and talk to the visiting American who had snuck through their towns and fields 47 years ago.

The same people who had risked their lives to share a new pair of shoes, and only pair of gloves or food and shelter were once again opening their homes and cupboards for an American soldier.

(Continued on page 20)

(Continued from page 19)

"It's their way of thanking us for coming over. That's why they keep up the monument. They've never forgotten us, that's why it's so refreshing." Mr. Qualman said.

"They feel like we've done more for them than they did for us. It is nice to see people who still look at America that way."



Tom Qualman salutes his lost crewmen at the monument to them in Troubky, Czechoslovakia.

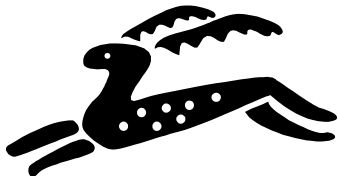
Those killed in the crash were:

Thomas E. Diebert, Armor Gunner
Roy L. Doe, Armor Gunner
Frederick H. Gaul, A/C Mech/Gunner
Joseph G. Mergo, Armor Gunner
Thomas K. West, Pilot
Frank C. Yesia Jr., A/C Mech/Gunner

The survivors included:

Edward A. Kasold, Co-Pilot
Thomas M. Noesges, Bombardier
Thomas W. Qualman, Navigator
Trefrey A. Ross, Radio Oper/Gunner

Editor's note: See articles about Trefrey Ross and Tom Noesges which just happened to be printed on pages 15 and 33 of the June 1993 issue of the "Liberaider".



Film Planned to Tell Story of Ploesti Low Level Battle

The story of the greatest air-ground battle of World War II, the daring low-level mission of August 1, 1943 when 177 B-24 Liberator bombers attempted to knock out Germany's main source of aviation fuel, will be the subject of a major motion picture production expected to be shown in theaters nationwide in the fall of 1994.

"The Guns of Ploesti" will be the first of its kind film production by USA-Russian-Romanian collaboration to employ the technical award-winning Russian Stereo-Lino 70mm 3-D system. It will be modified to be compatible for American theatrical release and for hi-definition television.

Arrangements have been made to film the elaborate special aviation effects in the USA, and the military ground action in Russia and Romania, using large numbers of authentic German military equipment.

Script co-writers are Leroy "Ted" Newby and Romanian screenwriter Ioan Grigorescu. Newby, who flew the low-level raid with the 376th Bomb Group, is the author of the recently published book entitled "Into The Guns of Ploesti".

Surviving members of the five bomb groups that participated in the "Title Wave" operation will be honored in the debut screening in various parts of the country. Premier showings, set for August 1994, will be held simultaneously at the Air Force Academy, Colorado, The Air & Space Museum, Washington, DC, as well as cities where the Liberator bombers were built.

Editor's note: I have a copy of Ted Newby's book. It is a great story. His personalized/inscribed book is available for \$14.45. Write:

Leroy W. Newby
 346 Pineview Dr.
 Venice, FL 34293

* * * * *

Happiness is when you find your glasses soon enough to remember what you wanted them for.

Support merit pay for politicians!

**Men Returning From Detached Service
From 6-1-93 to 11-1-93**

HDQ	Robins, Alexander	Slobody, Sheldon	
764	Anderson, Andrew J. Campbell, Marvin Edmonds, Eugene G. Follansbee, John G. Green, Arnold A. Grossberg, Milton Gruber, Albert P.	Haddaway, Stephen W. Kieman, Robert Martinez, Frank A. McMonagle, John J. Miszewski, Stanley Neff, Darrell W. Page, Frederick S. Speliades, George A.	Steer, Harry B. Stevens, Harvey A. Telger, Fred W. Todd, Eldon C. Valadez, Manuel S. Wedlock, John W. White, Robert W.
765	Cornish, James F. Everly, Charles A. Hinkebien, Louis J. Lightstone, Harry L. Lishin, William	Maher, Dwight W. Morin, Ray D. Muth, Charles J. Peterson, Frederick M. Pratt, Robert P.	Schwartz, Abraham E. St. John, Earl R. Tallant, Robert L. Jr. Terrell, John H.
766	Andrews, Glenn R. Clark, Bevins Cullari, Frank J. Dean, Harry	Edwards, Robert F. Garrison, Clarence E. Horwath, William Krippel, Joseph F. Maloney, Alfred	Tobertson, Douglas L. Rogers, Cecil N. Jr. Stella, Fred D. Wood, Robert D.
767	Berg, Armond Carter, Richard F. Chernoff, Irving E. Dominguez, Moses V. Dowell, Raymond E.	Fann, Charles D. Frederickson, Robert Gray, Ernest M. Johnson, Roy E. Millard, Gerald G.	Miller, Darwin D. Murray, John E. Olson, Wallace D. Shellenberger, David E. Thorne, Robert

Do You Remember?



Does anyone know the origin of our Squadron insignias?

Who designed them? When/Where?

**The picture was taken during the wine cooler
presentation to Frank and Millie but the insignia
beg the question, "What is our origin?"**

**Let's hear from some of you early staff members
involved with this kind of detail.**

Mission #34

29 May 1944

Target: Wiener Neustadt Werke 1, Austria

Wiener Neustadt again. This was Lt. Colonel Hawes's second trip to this target as Group Leader, and Lt. Strong's second trip as lead pilot. The field order dispatched thirteen Groups of the Air Force to the airplane manufacturing and servicing installations on both the Nord and Wollersdorf Airdromes. Our target was Werke 1 on the Nord Field. The 461st Group was one of the last groups to arrive over the target. After the Group was on its bomb run, it was necessary to change course because of the possibility of being dropped through by another group flying directly overhead. As Lt. Strong pulled the formation to the right, the lead bombardier, Lt. King, released his bombs on the four large buildings nearest the line on Wollersdorf Field.

As a result of the bombing done by the thirteen groups, Wiener Neustadt really burned. As combat crewmembers looked back when leaving the target area, they were convinced it would be a long time before they would have to return to the target they disliked more than any other target to which they had been assigned. Again flak was intense, accurate, and heavy over a large area, and the enemy fighters were aggressive. Our gunners claimed three enemy airplanes destroyed without any losses to our Group. The combat crews flying the mission were enthusiastic about the coverage given by our fighter escort.

Mission #35

30 May 1944

Target: Wels A/C Factory, Austria

At Wels, Austria, the Group had the new and pleasant experience of attacking an aircraft factory at which there was no flak. Neither were fighters seen on this mission. The lead navigator, Lt. Dusenberry, carefully kept the Group out of range of the heavily defended areas close to the target. The lead bombardier, Lt. Murphy, completely sprayed the target with incendiaries to give the lead pilots, Major Applegate and Lt. Specht, a superior mission.

“From: Lee, CO, 49th Bomb Wing (H), APO 520.

“To: Commanding Officer, 451st, 461st, 484th Bomb Group (H), APO 520.

“The following Teletype is quoted for your information. ‘Cite FAF Baker 27 the terrific destruction inflicted on the enemy by units of the Fifteenth Air Force on 29 and 30 May is a record without precedence anywhere. Let us keep this high standard of attainment as our goal. The Hun can't take it.’”

Mission #36

31 May 1944

Target: Concordia Vega Oil Refinery, Ploesti, Romania

On the last day of the month the Group made its second trip of the month to Ploesti. In defense of the target, the enemy added smoke screens to his aggressive fighter resistance and flak concentration. Despite this resistance Captain Leffler got a score of 27 percent for the mission.

2nd Lt. Samuel N. Norris got his damaged plane back to the Island of Brac, where he and his crew were forced to bail out. 2nd Lt. George N. Ryder, Jr. attempted to bail his crew out on the Island of Vis, but they missed the Island. The crewmembers landed in the water and all of them are believed to be lost.

Commendations

“From: Lee, CO, 49th Bomb Wing (H), APO 520.

“To: Commanding Officer, 451st, 461st, 484th Bomb Group (H), APO 520.

“The following Teletype is quoted for your information. Recognition of your accomplishment by the Commander in Chief of the United States Strategic Air Forces in Europe, Lieutenant General Spaatz, is passed to you with my most sincere congratulations added thereto. ‘Weight and effectiveness of your attacks during the past month represent full exploitation of the power within your force. These attacks have not only continued the excellent operations of previous months in wearing down the German air strength, which stands guard over their war machine, but have struck heavily at its heart. Particularly successful have been the attacks on the enemy's limited oil resources, both against Ploesti refineries and the synthetic oil plants in Germany. Please extend my

(Continued on page 23)

(Continued from page 22)

commendations to the air crews and all other of your command responsible for these operations.””

Mission #37
2 June 1944

Target: Szolnok M/Y, Hungary

The month of June began auspiciously with an excellent mission against the marshalling yards at Szolnok, Hungary. Captain Dooley led the Group with Colonel Glantzberg leading the second section. Good weather but little flak, and no enemy fighters.

Mission #38
4 June 1944

Target: Orelle R.R. Bridge and Viaduct, Italy

The target for this mission was a pinpoint target in the Alps Mountains, a railroad bridge and viaduct at Orelle, Italy. The Group maintained its poor record against bridges by missing the target because of the failure of the formation leaders to properly identify the target.

Mission #39
5 June 1944

Target: Fornovo di Taro R.R. Bridge, Italy

On this mission Lt. Colonel Hawes took his turn at missing a railroad bridge. The primary target was a railroad bridge at Borgo Val di Taro on the east side of the Apennines. This target was obscured by built-up cumulus clouds. After making three unsuccessful attempts to locate the target, the Group flew across to the west side of the Apennines to attack the first alternate target, the Fornovo di Taro Railroad Bridge. Here the weather was CAVU, but the target was missed by a thousand feet.

Mission #40
6 June 1944

Target: Ploesti on ETA, Romania

On this day, while our ground forces were invading

the coast of France from England, the bombers of the Fifteenth Air Force struck again at the German's source of oil at Ploesti. Captain Goree led this mission, the only one flown to that target area during the month of June. He was especially successful in keeping the Group out of much of the flak. All the targets in the Ploesti area were completely covered by most effective smoke screens. The city, which was the first alternate target, was bombed on ETA with unobserved results. Several enemy aircraft were seen and one was destroyed. All out planes returned to base, nineteen of them with flak holes.

Mission #41
7 June 1944

Target: Antheor Railroad Viaduct, France.

Major Dooley celebrated his promotion by leading the first successful Group mission ever flown by this Group against a railroad viaduct. The target was at Antheor, France. A high overcast made it necessary to drop the bomb run to 18,000 feet. Using 1,000 pounders the bombardiers turned in a score of 49 percent in placing several hits directly on the viaduct. All planes returned from the mission, but eighteen of them were damaged by flak, and six combat crewmembers were wounded.

Mission #42
9 June 1942

Target: Munich West M/Y, Germany

The 9th day of June was a big one for the 461st Group. During the day Colonel Glantzberg left for a trip to England. Lt. Colonel Hawes took over the duties of commanding officer and led the Wing on its first mission to Munich. Flight Leader pilot Strong celebrated his promotion to captaincy in the lead airplane.

The primary target was the Neuaubing Aircraft Factory at Munich. Because the primary target was obscured by complete cloud coverage, the Group swung to its first alternate target, the West Marshalling Yard. Although radar navigator operators had been riding in the nose of pathfinder planes on the past several missions, this was the first time that the field order specified the bombing of the target by the pathfinder method. Radar navigator-operator Gizelba, Captain Leffler, and Captain Pruitt did a splendid job in hitting the extreme end of the mar-

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shalling yard. In accordance with the Fifteenth Air Force policy, this mission was not scored, but the Group was fortunate in getting photo coverage of the bombing despite the undercast. Our gunners damaged one of three enemy airplanes encountered. Fourteen bombers were hit by flak.

Mission #43

10 June 1944

Target: Porto Marghera Refinery, Italy

On the 6th of June many of the groups in the Fifteenth Air Force had gone to Ploesti. On the 10th of June, the Air Force resumed its policy of bombing the enemy sources of oil supply. Our mission was against the oil refinery of Porto Marghera, Italy. The 765th Squadron bombardier, Lt. Murphy, found the target for the other bombardiers who turned in an excellent score of 44 percent on this important target. Not too much flak was encountered and no enemy aircraft were seen.

Mission #44

11 June 1944

Target: Giurgiu Oil Storage, Romania

Again, this time on its forty-fourth mission, the Group got a score of 44 percent on an oil installation. This time the Giurgiu Oil Storage in Romania was the target. Not too much flak was encountered at the target. The results of the encounter were: six enemy planes destroyed, four probably destroyed, and one damaged. Two bombers were lost to the combination of flak and fighters, and one man was injured. The crews lost were those of 1st Lt. Hefling and 1st Lt. Heald.

Mission #45

13 June 1944

Target: Porto Marghera Aluminum Plant and Storage Facilities, Italy

This mission led to many complications which several people had difficulties in explaining. The trouble began when the lead plane in which Lt. Colonel Hawes was flying as co-pilot and Group Leader was forced to turn back from near the head of the Adriatic. Major Dooley, who had been flying in the dep-

uty lead position, took over the lead. The abortion of the original lead plane must have caught the deputy lead navigator, Lt. Slusing, unprepared to take over the lead. When the Group finally oriented itself it was inland in the Po Valley instead of inland at the head of the Adriatic. By this time eleven planes had aborted from the formation and the time for fighter rendezvous had passed. Because of these circumstances Major Dooley elected to bomb the last resort target at Porto Maghera instead of going on to the highly important primary target, the Neusubing Aircraft Factory at Munich.

In preparing the briefing for the last resort target, the Group bombardier, Captain Leffler, had selected two aiming points on the same axis of attack which were located in line with each other along the axis of attack. One of the aiming points was an oil dump; the other was an aluminum plant. Nineteen planes which bombed this target hit it on an axis of attack different from the one which had been briefed. As a result they hit only the aluminum plant.

* * * * *

Here's a classic from a copy of WWII's **Yank**—courtesy of the Liberator Club:



*Have a
Happy and Healthy
New Year!!!!!!!*

News From Other Organizations

The pilot class 44-G from Marianna, Florida will hold its 50th year reunion in August, 1944 at Colorado Springs, Colorado. Contact Lt. Colonel Charles L. Brown, USAF Ret., 3018 Shady Knoll Lane, Bedford, TX 76021-4120. Telephone: (817) 498-7334.

He flew in the 721st Bomb Squadron, 450th Bomb Group out of Manduria, Italy from February 1945 to the end of the war.

* * * * *

Anyone interested in joining or getting information on the Order of Combat Wounded Veterans, send a legal size self-addressed stamped envelope to: Jack M. Norwine, RR3, Box 40, Calvert City, KY 42029-9505.

* * * * *

Bombardiers, Inc.

BOMBARDIERS, INC MOVES REUNION TO ALABAMA

The IXth annual reunion of **BOMBARDIERS, Inc.**, Has been changed to a new date and place:
 27 Feb—4 Mar 1994 on the shores of Mobile Bay. Contact Ned Humphreys
 500 Jackson St., Apt 1407
 Daphne, AL 36526-7029
 Telephone: (205) 626-3920
Rush reply!!

Bombardiers History Book as published by Turner Publishing Co. is now available
 Send \$49.95 plus \$5.00 for S&H to:
BOMBARDIERS, Inc.
 500 Jackson Street, #1407
 Daphne, AL 36526-7029

Merry

Christmas to

Everyone

Air Force Gunners Association (AFGA)

A non-profit association composed of enlisted arial gunners including flight engineers and radio operators. It was organized in 1986 and now has about 1,300 members. They have biennial reunions alternating between the east, central and western U.S.

If interested contact:

Jay E. Ingle, Membership
35469 Colossians Way
Shingletown, CA 96088

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WANTED: Stories about Stalag VIIA, the March, and Liberation

Der Klarion is looking for stories about life at Stalag VIIA, liberation, or the evacuation of Stalag Luft III to Moosburg. A selection of the stories will be used for publication and publicity purposes in connection with the 50th anniversaries of the events.

Wanted are accounts of personal experiences, anecdotes, and memoirs associated with the march, liberation, or daily life at Stalag VIIA. Previously published material is acceptable if accompanied by the author's release. Stories can be of whatever length that it takes to relate them. Submissions should be typewritten on one side of the pager. Computer disks, 3 1/2 inch Mac or IBM format, are welcome.

Stories should be sent to Klarion editor Joe Consolmagno, 751 Carla Drive, Englewood, FL 34223.

* * * * *

The Army Air Corps was in being from July 2, 1926 to June 20, 1941

The Army Air Forces succeeded it from June 21, 1941 to September 17, 1947

The U.S. Air Force took the reins from September 18, 1947 to the present.

* * * * *

From the History of the 461st Bomb Group (H)

May 1944

Chapter VIII To the Top of the Fifteenth Air Force

(A) Narrative History.

The month of May proved to be one of excellent weather. Not many missions were stood down. With the combat crews improving with every mission, spirits in the Group as a whole were high.

The Group Navigator, Captain Marion M. Pruitt, became the first individual in the Group to go to rest camp when he left for the Isle of Capri on 8 May 1944. Following his return, an average of two crews and several members of the ground personnel were sent each week to Capri. Before the end of the month other personnel of the Group were sent to various rest camps in Italy.

On May 8th the name "Liberaiders" was selected for the Group. This name was submitted in a contest by Co-Pilot, 2nd Lt. Paavo A. Koistinen of the 767th Squadron. Presently this name appeared in large yellow letters on a blue background centrally located at the top of the map of Europe in the Briefing Room. Still later it appeared on highway signs leading to Group Headquarters and on all of the motor vehicles of the Group.

A Special Courts Martial was appointed on May 20th. The personnel of the court is as follows:

Major R. Foster Scott
Major Leigh M. Lott
Major Morris J. Drobeck
Major John P. Joyce
Major Sidney Rainen
Major Herald D. Bennett
Captain Walter G. Mitton
Captain William F. Foster
1st Lt. Robert A. Preciado
1st Lt. Roy E. Huber
2nd Lt. Harold Q. Danforth
1st Lt. Raymond L. Wilcovitz, Trial Judge Advocate
2nd Lt. Robert F. Thorne, Assistant Trial Judge Advocate
1st Lt. Fred F. Hill, Defense Counsel
2nd Lt. Karl A. Pfister, Assistant Defense Counsel

Colonel Glantzberg returned from a trip to Headquarters of the Fifteenth Air Force on May 20th highly elated by the fact that for the past week the 461st had led the Air Force in the percentage of bombing accuracy and had carried the 49th Wing into second place in the Wing ratings. The following evening he conducted a big rally in the Group Theater. There he revealed to the flying and ground personnel what he had learned at Air Force Headquarters. In his remarks he expressed a firm belief in the ability of the Group to maintain its place at the top of the pile.

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(B) Operations.

During the month of May the 461st Group's "Country Club Kids", who had first spread their wings over Europe in April, soared to the top of the Fifteenth Air Force in bombing accuracy. A total of twenty missions were flown. The major targets were Bucharest, Ploesti, and Wiener Neustadt.

On its missions the Group flew 742 sorties for a total of 8,753 combat hours. Early returns totaled 67 planes. Briefed targets were hit with a total of 1,477 tons of bombs. The Group lost seven planes and crews, had one officer and one enlisted man killed by flak, and had a total of fourteen officers and men wounded. Twelve enemy airplanes were destroyed, eight were probably destroyed and six were damaged.

June 1944

Chapter IX Target: German Oil

(A) Narrative History.

On the 4th of June, Miss Betsy Workman of Los Angeles, California, first came to the Group as a Clubmobile Staff Assistant of the American Red Cross stationed in Cerignola. Prior to her arrival the American Red Cross had furnished a worker to the Group sporadically. Most of the time during the months of April and May, the doughnuts and coffee or cold drinks had been served to returning combat crews under the supervision of Mr. Boggs, the American Red Cross Field Representative with the Group (see page 7, June 1991 issue of the "LiberAider"), and the Chaplain, Lt. Rasmussen.

When Betsy arrived she completely took over the responsibility of rendering this service to returning combat crewmembers. What is more, she immediately began to practice coming every day to the Base at Torretta. When no mission was flown, she commandeered a vehicle and personally distributed the doughnuts and drink to the ground crews on the line. She frequently ate in the various officers' messes as well as in the messes for enlisted men. She habitually made it her practice to attend all social functions provided by the enlisted men and some of those provided by officers. By her tact, aggressiveness, resourcefulness, and democratic manner she eventually established herself as a one-woman outfit in this organization.

(B) Operations.

The Group passed the fifty missions mark during the month of June. Geographic locations of the target areas of the first fifty missions are presented in this chapter in photographic form.

Despite a long stand-down which extended from June 15th through June 24th, the Group flew sixteen missions during the month. Nine of the targets were oil installations, four were marshalling yards, and three were railroad bridges and viaducts. Germany was added to the list of countries in which targets had been bombarded by this Group.

The Group flew 468 sorties with 65 early returns for a total of 4,308 combat hours. Of

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the 1,369 tons of bombs dropped, 1,063 tons were dropped on briefed targets. Ten enemy planes were destroyed, seven probably destroyed, and three were damaged. A total of thirty-one officers and men on three crews were lost. Twelve officers and men were wounded.

For the first half of the month of June the bombing was excellent. During the last half of the month, however, the Group experienced a series of comparatively poor missions. This falling off in bombing accuracy was attributed to several factors. Combat missions were no longer a new and thrilling experience. Attacking rough targets had become a fatiguing and disconcerting job. By the middle of the month most of the crewmembers had credit for approximately thirty-five sorties. They were becoming tired. Only six newly arrived replacement crews were in training. With some crews at rest camp each week, the remaining crews were compelled to fly almost every mission. A decision, which was made as an experiment, to have all bombardiers drop on the Group leader instead of on each flight leader, did not improve the situation. Probably the most damaging blow to the morale of the combat crewmembers was the announcement of an Air Force policy of returning personnel to the United States on a rotation basis upon the recommendation of the Flight Surgeon instead of permanently grounding them in this Theatre of Operations upon the completion of fifty sorties.

In May a bombing percentage of 34.2 had carried the Group to first place in the Air Force. In June bombing accuracy of the Group was improved to 38.8 percent. Despite this improvement, however, the 461st was fourth in the Air Force in the percentage of bombing accuracy. The bombing ability of the Groups in the Fifteenth Air Force was steadily improving.

* * * * *

Jim Van Nostrand would like people to know about this club. It is a ham radio network that he and some friends began about five years ago. Members are past and present members of the U.S. Air Forces who are ham operators. There are over 300 members that check in on weekends to relive the old days, talk of new aero developments as well as their gardening efforts, etc. Jim was in the 765th Squadron.

Contact Jim at: P.O. Box 1121, Jackson Hole, WY 83001—Call Letters—WA71FX

* * * * *

The following story was written by John Bybee, Vermont, Illinois. He is an Associate Member of the 461st Bomb Group. His war was Vietnam, but as a youngster he was interested in World War II aircraft and built many models of them. He saw an article in the newspaper about a B-24 crew that had a reunion nearby. He wrote to them and visited with Bob Trumpy who lived in the area. This led John to research Mission #151 of the 461st Bomb Group and focus in on Ken Smith's crew who were shot down. The following is the result of his research. The story will be serialized in the next few issues of the "Liberaider".

ANGELS UNKNOWN

by
John Bybee

PROLOGUE

Since May 1944 15th Air Force heavy bombers had hammered at fuel plants and oil refineries located at Ploesti, Vienna, Silesia, Poland, Sudetenland, and Budapest. In July, overcoming some of the most potent resistance encountered over Europe had cost the 15th Air Force 318 heavies. By the end of August the Italian-based B-24's and B-17's had sent 1.8 million tons of crude oil up in flames, and reduced 90% of the Ploesti complex to rubble. On August 24, 1944 what Winston S. Churchill called, "The taproot of German might," - - Ploesti closed down. The cost was high, 350 heavy bombers had been lost in the Ploesti campaign alone.

Combating the 15th's oil offensive cost the Third Reich 400 fighter aircraft a week. The average life span of the brave, young Luftwaffe pilots was seven missions—their attrition rate—14% per mission.

At dawn, August 7, the Germans counterattacked at Mortain and advanced towards Auranches on the Sea. To protect the Allied drive across France, Eisenhower ordered maximum support from the heavy bomber force. Strategic bombers were pulled off oil targets and sent out to destroy bridges, railroads, air fields, and carry emergency supplies.

On August 23, 1944, 9 out of 24 451st Bomb Group Liberators attacking Markersdorf airdrome at Vienna were shot down by waves of German fighters. This was one of the last major concentrated attacks by the Luftwaffe fighters on the 15th Air Force bombers.

During September, Allied forces pushed back the wedge of German forces and sealed the gap at Palaise-Argenton. General Patton and his 3rd Army had outrun his supply lines. The combined bomber offensive stalled as heavy bombers were used as transports to haul supplies to Patton's army.

German aircraft production had shifted entirely to fighters. From September to November fighter pro-

duction almost doubled. In November 4,000 new fighters were produced. The number of twin engine fighters rose from 675 to 855. Until the 15th's heavy bombers returned, ammo production trebled.

General Adolf Galland, head of the Luftwaffe Fighter Command hoarded gas and pilots and decided to commit them only against specific Allied bomber missions.

Ken Smith's stateside bomber crew number 6757 was assigned as replacement crew number 2-3 to the 461st Bomb Group, 764th Bomb Squadron on Wednesday, November 29, 1944. On Sunday, December 17, 1944 Ken's crew took off on mission number 151 with 30 other 461st B-24's to bomb the Odertal Refinery.

December 17, 1944: After a pronounced absence, the decimated but undefeated Luftwaffe rallied and surged into the winter skies over Czechoslovakia and Poland to deliver Der Grosse Schlag—The Great Blow.

Ken's bomber disabled by a mechanical failure was brought down by flak near Trencin, Czechoslovakia.

Eight miles to the northeast, near Muglitz, Germany, 100 plus ME-109's, FW-190's pounced on the 461st Bomb Group. In fifteen minutes, 8 of the remaining 25 B-24's were shot down. Five bombers were damaged, and only 15 of the original 31 B-24's made it to the target. Losses were lighter in the 484th Group/824th Squadron, but not less tragic. 1st Lt. Charles A. Himmler's B-24J, "Little Joe" burst into flames and entered a spin. Tragedy also struck the lead group of the 451st Group/726th Squadron—Flight leader Captain William T. Shelton's B-24 collided with his deputy leader 1st Lt. Theodore C. King flying B-24 number 47 shortly after the rally off the target.

Returning to Italy, while still north of Vienna, Captain Mixson of the 461st Group/764th Squadron was startled when a German voice using the correct call sign broke in on Mixson's radio and asked, "Where is the rest of your formation?", laughed and signed off. 1st Lt. Eugene F. Ford was the last casualty of mission number 151. Ford ditched his damaged Liberator off the Island of Vis. Ford, 1st Lt. R. Landry, and T/Sgt. C. Priest were unable to escape from their sinking bomber.

ANGELS UNKNOWN

by
John Bybee

Unbloodied heavy bomber crew number 6757 had trained for and anticipated the day of their first combat mission since the ten men meddled themselves into a combat family back in Topeka, Kansas during September 1944.

That day arrived Sunday, December 17, 1944.

At 3:30 a.m. ground grippers carrying hook-necked flashlights swarmed like fireflies through the forest of dark tents huddled behind the white farmhouse which served as the headquarters of the 764th Bomb Squadron, 461st Bomb Group, Cerignola, Italy. A wake-up orderly's flashlight beam broke the fitful sleep of 21-year-old first pilot, Kenneth Butler Smith. The orderly abruptly announced, "Briefing at 0530, Lieutenant," and withdrew into the predawn darkness.

Ken Smith peeled back his three wool blankets and swung his feet to the frigid floor. Goose bumps dotted his skin as the tent shuddered in the icy wind.

Robert T. Trumpy, Ken's upper turret gunner recalled, "The coldest I have been in my life was in Italy. One night I was in the replacement depot at Naples, I got up and put on all my clothes, dress uniform, overcoat, flying boots, gloves—and I was still cold."

Ken and the other officers of his crew: 2nd Lt. Harry D. Edmiston (Bombardier); 2nd Lt. Edward J. Chojnowski (Co-Pilot); and 2nd Lt. Frank V. Hokr (Navigator) tugged on olive drab flight suits over their heavy underwear and uniforms. Wool socks and fur lined boots were wrestled on and laced.

Ken strapped on his shoulder holster with the Colt .45 automatic pistol, and grabbed his sunglasses. Before pulling on his fleece-lined flight jacket, Ken gathered up several cigars, lighter, pocket watch, fountain pen, pocket knife and a red comb and handkerchief. Ken stuffed 755 lire and a \$10 dollar gold piece into his flyers purse. He tucked letters from his wife Virginia into the vest pocket of his flight suit.

At 4:30 a.m. the squadron mess hall began serving to officers on one end and enlisted men on the other, the same fare—chipped beef on toast or powdered scrambled eggs and thick toast. Strong coffee was in abundance and crew 6757 refilled their heavy white mugs several times.

Shortly before 5:30 a.m., a truck delivered Ken's crew to the day's briefing at Group Headquarters. Ken's enlisted crewmen, Cpl. Roland W. Morin (Ball Gunner); Staff/Sgt Urban "Bud" Granger (Tail Gunner); Cpl. Charles E. Foss (Nose Gunner); Cpl. Robert T. Trumpy (Upper Turret Gunner); and Cpl. Homer E. Hymbaugh (Flight Engineer), attended a separate briefing.

At the officer's briefing, the Assistant Operations Officer accompanied by a stranger came up to Ken Smith and told that for this mission his regular copilot, Ed Chojnowski, would be replaced by a combat experienced first pilot, 1st Lt. Chester "Chet" Rudel. Ken and Chet chatted until the briefing began.

The curtain covering the operational and intelligence maps of Germany was pulled back. The Group Operations Officer intoned, "Gentlemen, this is the moment of decision. This is where you'll be flying today." He tapped a spot on the map with the rubber tip of his pointer—the synthetic oil refinery at Odertal, Germany.

The Odertal refinery complex was located in upper Silesia about 180 miles southwest of Warsaw, Poland. Cracking towers, storage tanks, and hundreds of miles of gas, oil, water, and compression pipes sprawled like a steel web across the conquered Polish countryside just north of Kozle, Poland.

The Operations Officer informed the crews that Zuckmantel would be the IP (Initial Point). Bombing altitude would be 26,000 feet. Escorts would be P-38's, P-51a, call sign "Pixie".

The Intelligence Officer took over the briefing. He informed the crews that the refineries were defended with 75mm and 155mm guns. Flak over Odertal could range from light to severe. The briefed course would skirt the known flak concentrations. However, they might pick up random flak anywhere. The

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Germans had mounted flak guns on flat cars and were switching them over various routes. Luftwaffe fighter opposition would be non-existent or minimal. Enemy fighters had not aggressively opposed 15th Air Force operations since August. A lack of fuel and skilled pilots would keep the enemy tethered to the ground—the mission was a “milk run”.

A clanging of tailgates announced the arrival of the trucks that would carry the crews to their planes. Outside the briefing room 6757 reassembled as a crew. Officers and enlisted men piled into the back of a truck and sat down on the damp wooden slat benches. The truck growled and lurched through the frozen mud and delivered them to a dull silver B-24J-5-DT.

Ken's charge for mission 151 was AAF S/N 42-51324, squadron number 12, nicknamed “Paulette” for the crew chief's wife, Paulette Bowers. “Paulette” had taken 1st Lt. Edward “Tony” Nakhus and his crew number 2-13 safely to Brux, Germany and back on December 16, 1944.

Today, the bird belonged to Ken's crew. Frank Hokr had come up with the name, “Ten Men Bak” for their plane.

Ken scanned the engineering report handed him by crew chief Bowers. The B-24 had been built by Douglas at Tulsa six months ago. Minor discrepancies had been flagged—but nothing serious enough to keep the bomber on the ground.

Ken and Homer made a walk-a-round inspection of their thirty ton bomber. At the tail they made an extra check of the B-24's twin rudders.

....Back at Davis-Monthan Field, Ken and Homer had preflighted a B-24 just back from Maintenance. Their inspection revealed nothing unusual, but a hunch of something not being right nagged at Ken. Ken and Homer returned to the tail and together shoved on the broad left rudder—it came loose in their hands....

Ken and Homer drained gas tank filters, checked shock struts, superchargers, generators and hydraulic pressures. Ken, a former flight instructor in B-24's, who had volunteered for combat duty, made doubly certain the Pilot covers had been removed from the Pilot heads. The Liberator was too large an aircraft

to be safely operated by guessing air speeds. Satisfied, Ken bent over and entered the bomber through the knee-high bomb bay. Chet followed and Homer entered next.

Homer stopped just forward of the main spar, reached up and turned the four fuel valves. He also checked the two visual fuel gages on the left forward face of the bomb bay bulkhead behind the flight deck. Harry, Frank and Ed ducked down and crawled through the narrow tunnel under the flight deck to their positions in the nose. Bud, Charlie and Warren fanned rearward. Bob squeezed his muscular shoulders into the narrow confines of the top turret.

Ken settled into the left seat and adjusted the seat and rudder pedals to fit his 6-foot, 1-inch, 190 pound frame. Homer stationed himself between the two pilots.

Chet reviewed the 29 items on the before starting engines checklist: “Ignition and master switches on... auxiliary hydraulic pump on... intercoolers open... cowl flaps open... superchargers off... props high RPM... mixture idle cut off...”

“Start number three,” ordered Ken.

Chet primed the number three engine with short shots of fuel and with his other hand held the number three starter switch to “Accel”. Chet waited 12 seconds then threw the meshing switch to “Crank”. The starter's whine was drowned out by a deep moan. Number three coughed, belched blue smoke, then surged into a steady rumble. Engine four, two, one followed in sequence.

Ken set the mixtures to auto lean and warmed up the engines at 1,000 RPM's. Chet read off the 17 items on the before taxi checklist. Ken signaled for the ground crew to pull the chocks.

Homer clambered up to his taxi position. Mindful of the whirling propellers on either side, he slipped his head and shoulders out the pilot's escape hatch to act as Ken's lookout and guide.

Ken used a burst of power to get the B-24 moving, then steered the plane from its hardstand with the outboard engines. Number 12 was seventh in line, with twenty-four more behind her.

Thirty seconds after the bomber ahead of him lifted

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off, Ken swung number 12 onto the 6,000 foot runway. The Liberator nodded on her nosewheel as Ken pushed the throttles forward and cranked up the superchargers. "Cowl flaps closed", Ken ordered.

Homer repositioned himself behind Ken's right shoulder to call out the airspeeds so that the pilot could keep his full attention on the runway. "60...70...75...80...", Homer shouted into Ken's right ear.

With a full 2,700 gallons of fuel, and a four ton bomb load aboard, "Ten Men Bak" gathered speed slowly on the uneven steel mat and gravel runway. "90...", Homer said with emphasis, they were committed. "100...110..." Two-thirds of the runway gone. The main struts extended as the slim Davis wing began to take the load. "130...", Homer shouted above the din of the four Pratt and Whitney radials.

Ken eased back on the wheel, and the "Ten Men Bak" staggered into the unheeding sky. Ken held the nose down until the airspeed reached 135. At 150 he signaled Chet to raise the landing gear. Ken braked the wheels twice before they retracted into the wing wells. 300 feet, throttles back to climb power, propellers to 2550 RPMs. Ken began to milk up the Fowler flaps.

Positive rate of climb established, Homer headed for

the waist. He checked in on the intercom, "Wheels are up, flaps fully retracted. No oil or tell tale white ribbons of leaking gasoline are visible."

Ken climbed out at 500 feet per minute and circled for squadron rendezvous.

Forty-five minutes later, the 31 B-24's led by Captain Mixson leveled out at 9,000 feet over Bovino, Italy. Rendezvous was effected with the 484th, 451st Bomb Groups. At 9:12 a.m. the force of 93 heavy bombers turned in wing formation towards the Adriatic Sea. The 484th was the low group and lead the formation, the 451st was the middle group, the 461st trailed in the high slot. Five B-24's aborted with mechanical troubles.

The coast line of eastern Italy went by unseen as the heavy laden B-24's continued their steady slow climbs on instruments through the overcast. Out over the Adriatic the overcast thickened to 10/10 and stratocumulus clouds reared up to 15,000 feet.

A minute early, the 484th arrived at the KP (Key Point, Split, Yugoslavia) at 10.03 a.m. at 16,000 feet. The 451st arrived two minutes later at 17,000. The 461st arrived at 10:08 a.m. at 17,500 feet.

Note: Hold onto this copy of the "Liberaider" since this story will have to be continued next time.

461st BOMB Group (H) 1943-1945, Inc.

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