

FOR THE MEN WHO FLY 'EM • FOR THE MEN WHO KEEP 'EM FLYING

MARENGO, IL 60152

AUGUST 1981

## PLANS UNDERWAY FOR 1982 REUNION

**SITE: Colorado Springs, Colorado**  
**DATE: August 6-7-8, 1982**

Preparations and planning for our 2nd National Reunion are "on line" and "revving up." In an early April meeting of the "Chicago Committee," held at Champaign, Illinois, certain decisions were initiated as to location and dates for one of the biggest and finest reunions that any WW-II outfit has ever conducted.

The Colorado Springs area was selected, primarily, for the United States Air Force Academy, located nearby. But, also in consideration, was the beauty of the area. Colorado Springs lies at the base of the Rocky Mountains and within hours of some of the most scenic parks and drives west of the Mississippi. Some may wish to take advantage of Rental Cars or to use the services of the Grey Line Tours to explore these marvels of nature. There are many features, within the area, that would warrant your consideration to make this a part of your annual vacation.

Of major importance, for our Reunion, will be our August 7th visit to the U. S. Air Force Academy. We have been pledged the limits of cooperation that can be afforded us. The graduating class of 1986 will be undergoing their earliest encounters with discipline and military procedures, such as many of us engaged in years before. Our acceptance, by the Academy, has been strengthened by the fact that, within its faculty ranks, we have an ally and compadre, that has willingly offered to assist us towards our goals. This ally, Lt. Colonel Thomas Kullgren, Deputy Department Head, Department of Engineering Mechanics, and a cousin to Roger and Bea Johnston (724th), "Chicago Committee-persons," was kind enough, at the time of my visit to the Academy, to escort and to introduce me to some of the people that would be involved with our plans.

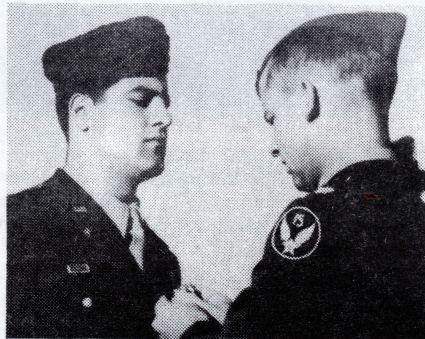
At the time of my visit, to Colorado Springs, I had the pleasure to meet with, and to "brief" some of our "Colorado Comrades," and to receive their input regarding the area. Those that were in attendance on May 1st were; Robert J. Buckley (724th), Andrew & Joan Clark (724th), Walter & June Downing (724th), Paul E. Harden (725th), Reverend Paul & Marky Johnshoy (724th), John & Marie McKibbin (726th) and Charles and & Ev Wells (726th). We have, from this meeting, been able to delegate some of the committee duties to those present. I'm sure with the cooperation and interest shown, this will be a REUNION to match any REUNION.

Further information, as to cost and hotel accommodations, will be in the next newsletter.

But let's not allow this year's advance notice to slip by without a little pressure from all you guys to get new members involved and to alert your buddies that...YOU WILL BE THERE!



Bob Karstensen (Pres. 451st Bomb Group Ltd.) and M/General James B. Knapp USAF (Ret.) (former Group Commander) June 20, 1981, Chanute AFB Open House.



Lt. Peter A. Massare receives 2nd D.F.C. from Colonel James B. Knapp.

### CHANCE ENCOUNTER

During a recent meeting of the Illini Chapter of the Air Force Association, conducted at the Chanute Air Force Base, Urbana, IL on June 20, 1981, yours truly had the pleasure to encounter, and to visit with, Major General and Mrs. James B. Knapp USAF Retired.

General Knapp, and his charming wife, Mary Emma, were enroute to one of our southeastern states for a bit of spring golf. Their being "on base" on that particular day, and the fact that they encountered a "ready made" party, was almost more than a coincidence for all concerned.

General Knapp, previous to his retirement, had been the Base Commander of Chanute Air Force Base. His entry into the Banquet Hall (Officers Club) created quite a stir, as his attendance was totally unexpected. General Knapp was a popular commander, and for a time was completely enveloped among his friends and former associates.

General Knapp, for those of you unaware of our Group's history, was our second Group Commander. Serving from General Eaton's "completion of tour" to the installation of Colonel Stefan as our third Group Commander. Although Colonel Knapp served with the Group for a bare three months, his tenure was filled with tension and excitement. I think General Knapp reflects back to his command with the 451st as a rugged but interesting part of his military career. I was proud to have not only served with him then, but to have the chance to visit with the General and his lady on two separate occasions since those hectic days of 1944.

General Knapp, upon hearing of plans for our 1982 Reunion, stated that he and Mary Emma will look forward to another encounter with the 451st Bomb Group...without combat missions.

### HELP NEEDED

I dislike having to ask this of our membership, but are any of you aware of the deaths of any of our ENROLLED members? It is regrettable that such information has to be sought in this manner. If it were not for the increased cost of production and mailings, of these newsletters, we would be glad to offer, to the families of these deceased members, our contribution to their loved ones past. If such families would express their desire for continued mailings, I'm sure we could work something out.

## WORDS FROM THE FLIGHT DECK (Editorial Comments)

I'm sure that each of you members, be you new to our organization or one of our "golden oldies," are aware of the effort that Peter Massare and I have put into the area of locating and enlisting new applicants. We are constantly reviewing old "orders," running ads in military publications, checking YOUR mailings for hints on your buddies and just plain making a nuisance of ourselves when it comes to "seeking and finding." Pete and I realize, that to many, the fact that we have located more than 750 former members speaks well of our efforts.

But for each one that we have brought into the organization, we have perhaps another two or three that have failed to respond to our overtures. Whatever may be their reason, Pete and I have pondered for as long as we have been an organization. Could it be, total disinterest? Is there a fear that they may be involved in some clandestine operation, promoted by some underhanded, squint-eyed, shady characters seeking monetary gains? Perhaps they are cautious, lest they end up with a set of unwanted encyclopedias. Well, for whatever reason, there are still a lot of our buddies that are, as of now, not signed up.

At this point in our history, in preparation for our 2nd National Reunion, we wish to offer, and make aware to our non-enrolled buddies that we, the 451st, are active and growing. And it's for their benefit, as well as ours, that this upcoming reunion is being held.

Now, Pete and I would like to "put the ball in your court" to increase our enrollment, prior to the reunion. If you had submitted a name to us and you have not found it in the roster, or you have recently run across a current address, but have done nothing with it...you give it a try, LORD only knows, we have. "Rattle the guy's cage," see if you can't induce him to become a member so he will qualify for our reunion. When it comes to "reunion time" we want to have a good idea on how many we can expect. And with a strong contact, over a period of time, the guy will know where we are coming from as we will know how strong his commitment is.

So "fire up" the old pen or "crank up" the old telephone...these buddies have got to get the message.

## MORE FUNDS NEEDED

I'm sorry to put the heavy hand of NEED upon you. I realize that there are many groups and organizations trying to get their hands upon your cash supply, even our great Uncle Sam. And I know it's not fair to continue to call upon those that have given so generously in the past, but the funds we need to continue to perform for the betterment of our organization, are slowly diminishing.

We are constantly seeking new members and advertising our Group through all military publications that will accept our ads. When new members are located, after acceptance into our Group, we mail the current newsletter, plus all the other information, such you have all accumulated over the years. All of this amounts to some \$\$\$ per member. I'm sure that our current membership would not deny, any 451st candidate the opportunity, no matter what his financial status, the chance to reinvolve himself with the "old 451st."

Inasmuch as Peter Massare and I got the "ball a'rolling," back in 1977, with the first outlay of cash and a fair amount of enthusiasm, we now offer you the chance to accept the challenge of funding this adventure, while Pete and I maintain the enthusiasm.

Remember, while "big brother" may be watching you, as to how you spend your monies, he has promised to keep "hands off" in regards to the contributions you make to the 451st Bomb Group, Ltd. He has granted any contribution, to the 451st, as TAX DEDUCTIBLE. Checks can be made payable to the:

451st BOMB GROUP, LTD.

## LIBERATOR CLUB MAGAZINE FEATURES 451st STORY

In the most recent issue (Spring 1981, No. 24) the B-24 Liberator Club, of San Diego, CA, ran two articles about the 451st Bomb Group in their popular magazine called "Briefing."

The articles, authored by myself, were offered to aid the magazine in putting together an issue primarily oriented to the efforts of the 15th Air Force.

One article was in regards to the "fate of the Extra Joker." It dealt, in some detail, to the facts as recorded by the Department of the Air Force. It listed the crew and gave an account of the incident, as witnessed by the lead crew of the 725th Squadron.

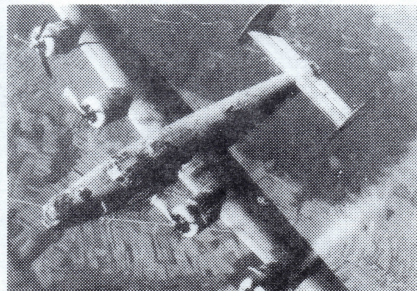
The second article gave a "thumbnail" history of the 451st Bomb Group, from its activation through its combat history and right up to its disbandment at Dow Field, Bangor, Maine.

I related the events that gave the 451st its three Distinguished Unit Citations, and noted some of the crews that had a hand in the missions.

I offered the readers some facts about our recently revived organization, and gave some of the organized GROUPS a membership goal that they can take "a shot at." (At the time of printing we had a membership of 700...now we boast of more than 750.)

The Liberator Club, an organization dedicated to the preservation and memory of the B-24, has a vast membership among the crews that flew them as well as to the "buffs" that wished they had flown them.

For those that may be interested in joining the "Liberator Club," their address is: Liberator Club, Box 841, San Diego, CA 92112. The fee is \$7.00 for membership and \$3.50 for renewal. They also offer a catalog of books and mementos...all about B-24's.



### FINAL FLIGHT

BY: Bob K.

*I sometimes sit and wonder,  
as the years go speeding by,  
if our lives are shaped and guided  
by our comrades from a'high.*

*We had learned to do together,  
and to share our dreams and plans.  
We had learned a bit of all the things,  
that it took to be a man.*

*But life was not so kind, it seems,  
war takes a heavy toll.  
We saw our comrades leave our ranks,  
and join the HONORED ROLL.*

*They died in simple silence,  
or in anguish and despair.  
They've blazed a route for all of us,  
that we may meet "up there."*

*Some day we'll hear their voice again,  
when our bodies cease to roam.  
The call will come through LOUD and CLEAR,  
"BOX THE STRAGGLER IN, BOYS,  
LET'S TAKE THIS FLYER HOME."*

## FORTHCOMING BOOK TO TELL FACTS REGARDING 451ST ONLY D.S.C. AWARD

Throughout my researching of the history of the 451st Bomb Group, I was forever coming across the name of Francis M. (Mike) Boyle. Peter Massare (co-founder of our organization), in his comments regarding some of the original Group pilots, always referred to "Mike" as a super pilot, excellent companion and a man devoted to duty. As a pilot, Mike was well respected by his peers within the 727th Bomb Squadron.

In my research I became aware that Mike Boyle was the recipient of the highest award that any individual had had bestowed throughout the history of the 451st Bomb Group. In December 1944, Mike was awarded, posthumously, the DISTINGUISHED SERVICE CROSS (second only to the Medal of Honor).

I had planned, in time, to put what information I had on the subject, into a readable form and offer it to our membership. But, alas, I was beaten to the task, not only by a very prolific author, but by a member of the crew that was deeply involved on that fateful day. Julius A. (Al) Altwater, 2nd Lt., Bombardier was onboard the 727th aircraft called "Shilay-Lee" (#41-29239) that participated on the Pleosti mission on May 5, 1944.

The ten officers and enlisted men that made up the crew were: Mike Boyle, pilot; Fredrick (Sam) Moore, co-pilot; Robert Barker, navigator; James (Moose) Bernardini, engineer; Ova Simmons, radio operator; Vernon MacNeil, ball gunner; Hugh Moore, tail gunner; Allen Christianson and Bob Blumh, waist gunners; and of course Al Altwater, bombardier.

The following eleven paragraphs are excerpts from a forthcoming book authored by Al, with his permission, for us, to reprint same.

*We were approaching the target. The flak was even heavier. Our plane staggered and tossed from the concussion of the exploding shells as I looked through the bombsight and prepared to drop our bombs. I could hear the "whump" of the exploding flak like somebody shaking out a GI blanket — but much louder.*

*Below, through the bombsight, the ground was littered with billows of white from the smoke generators, the flash of exploding bombs and black smoke from burning gasoline and oil storage tanks. As long as we were on the bomb run we had to fly as straight and level as possible. We couldn't weave or take other evasive action. The flak guns could zero in on us. Finally I released the bombs and looked up with relief from the bombsight.*

*The Plexiglas nose was holed in many places, and the wind rushed past me. The plane was shaking badly. The navigator and nose turret gunner who shared the nose with me had disappeared. The interphone was dead. I was alone.*

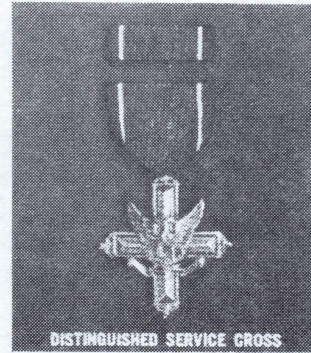
*I made my way up to the pilots' compartment on the flight deck. On the way I passed through the freightcar-sized bomb bay. The bomb bay doors were torn and jammed open. A shell had exploded where the right wing joined the fuselage. The ship was on fire. The landing gear dangled uselessly. Our right inboard prop was feathered, and the outboard was at reduced RPMs.*

*The flight deck was a shambles. Both Mike and Sam had been hit. Air was whistling through the plane from holes in the Plexiglas and fuselage. Sam was slumped forward in the right, or co-pilot's seat. There was a small deep hole in the nape of his neck. Mike indicated to me to turn Sam's oxygen to "Emergency." I freed Sam's feet and arms from the plane's controls. There was nothing else that I could do for him. He was unconscious or dead. I never did know for sure. The extreme cold, the tremendous wind blowing through the plane, my own confusion, and the rapidly sinking aircraft all added to the crisis.*

*Mike told me to check the damage on the radio deck and try to put out the fire. He also said that he was trying to get back to Partisan-held territory in Yugoslavia. Just before I left the flight deck a Ger-*



Lt. Francis M. Boyle (pilot, recipient of the D.S.C.) with his co-pilot Lt. Fredrick S. Moore. Both men killed in action over Ploesti, Rumania, May 5, 1944.



DISTINGUISHED SERVICE CROSS

man fighter came alongside. Our hydraulic system had been shot out fortunately, and the landing gear had fallen into the down position. The extended landing gear was an accepted signal of distress and surrender, and no aircraft would fire upon another in this circumstance. The German fighter was barely able to go as slowly as we. But in the glimpse we had of him he pointed down. We were to crashland or jump. He would never let us leave Rumania, and he might not tell us again.

Before going to the rear I had to unhook my chest chute and wear only the harness, because the catwalk through the center of the bomb bay was very narrow, and even I, thin as I was, had to edge through sideways. Through the open bomb bay doors I could see green fields below. We were at about 8000 feet. Looking up I saw the fire burning above me. Only Chris and Hugh were still in the rear. They looked at me questioningly. I went up on the radio deck and turned the fire extinguisher against the fire. It was hopeless. The oxygen was feeding the fuel which was leaking onto the fire, and the whole mess was molten with white heat. The wind blowing through the plane blew the extinguisher fluid back in my face. I threw the entire extinguisher at the fire and got down into the waist of the plane.

I hollered at Chris and Hugh, "Get out! Jump!"

When I got back to the flight deck Moose was there also. I knew the fire would soon reach the large fuel tank. As I started putting my chute back on, I leaned past Moose and screamed in Mike's ear, "Let's get the hell out of here. It's no good!"

My next impression was that of whirling and tumbling through a fire. The fire had reached the tank, and the plane had exploded. The heat was intense but there was no pain. I remember thinking that I was being burned alive and that I wouldn't be able to tell my mother or sister what had happened or how it had happened. It was a feeling of great disappointment rather than fear that I was dying.

Suddenly, I was falling though cool air. I was alive! I frantically searched for the ripcord handle. It wasn't where it should have been. I located it finally and pulled it with all my might. The chute opened and jerked me to a stop right there in mid-air — or so it felt. There were two buckles which held the chute pack to the harness. In turn, the harness had two leg straps. I hadn't finished putting on the chute; only one leg strap and one of the two snaps for the chute itself were fastened. It held although I hung a little lopsided.

Once I had stopped falling I felt the heat where I had been burnt on my hands and head. Pieces of the plane fell slowly and quietly past me, and the forward section seemed to be flying by itself as it drifted by. After that, because of the intense quiet and the lack of any feeling of motion I had the fantasy that I was caught on a piece of the plane and would be stranded there in the sky forever.



Standing (L to R)

Lt. Fredrick "Sam" Moore (KIA); Sgt. Bob Bluhm; S/Sgt. Ova Simmons (Dec.); Sgt. Hugh Moore; Sgt. Allen Christianson; Sgt. Vernon McNeil.

Kneeling (L to R)

Lt. Francis "Mike" Boyle (KIA); Lt. Robert Barker (Dec.); Lt. Julius "Al" Altwater (author); S/Sgt. James "Moose" Benardini.

This excellent writing, puts into capsule form the courage and dedication of the airmen of the 451st. In all too many cases the valor, as shown by Mike and his crew, are forever lost to history, when in the blink of an eyelash, an airplane and its crew are consumed in one blinding flash. It was through Mike's effort, in keeping the aircraft stable, that the crew was able to evacuate the plane, and except for Mike and Sam, give everyone a chance.

All the surviving crew members were captured and interned in POW camps in Rumania. Our thanks to Al for his permission to include his writings in this newsletter.

(photo at right)  
S/Sgt. Neil E. Weiberg (photo section) preparing the "Shilay-Lee," with camera for its May 5th mission. Archive picture was dated May 4, 1944.





**HIT HARD BUT STILL HOLDING FORMATION**