



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

ISSUE 14

MARENGO (AAFB), IL

1986 MEMORIES OF SAN ANTONIO REUNION

A LOOK BACK

"And when does the fun begin?"

At NO time, NO where, and from NO one, did I hear that comment made. Even before the Thursday Registration started, our people were busily engaged in looking up friends from previous reunions, or trying to run down a tentmate that had promised to make this reunion. It seemed that everyone was at a fever pitch, trying to fit a lost 40 years into our brief 4 day addenda.

Credit for our success goes without saying to the San Antonio Committee (SAC, as I shall refer to them). Through their savvy, dedication and hard work we saw numerous innovations that were used in our overall strategy. I doff my hat to the following SAC members: Ralph & Helen McBeth (725th), Frank & Betty McQuaid (725th), Ed & Janet Rasmussen (Hdq), Rudy & Roma Hamborsky (725th), Ryan & Jeffa Taylor (726th), and Paul Siler (726th). All these people made physical, as well as mental, contribution to the reunion.

Two other unheralded members that spent hours in giving our attendees "something for their money," were Art and Carol Morin (727th), and Tom Rotello (724th). Art and Carol Morin sold chances for five beautifully decoupage lithographs of Paul Jones's "High Road to Victory," a hit at our Dayton Reunion. The winners were, from the 724th - Jack Whisler; 725th - Marvin Resnick; 726th - David Moore; 727th - Herb Schrader; Headquarters - Bill Bennett. Art and Carol donated all the proceeds to the 451st for its financial use.

Tom Rotello (Mr. Post eXchange), at his own expense, had T-shirts, Jackets & Caps (colored and printed to our respective Squadrons), Key Chain Ornaments, Plastic License Plates (all with our LOGO), made up and available for purchase. Again, the intent is to make all profits available for the continuation of our 451st effort.

This reunion, unlike those in the past, we counted on the services of Peggy Hood & Associates (professional tour and convention guides). Fiesta Night (Thursday) saw 430 of our attendees in the sectioned off part of La Villita, partaking in specially prepared Mexican Cuisine. Spanish Troubadours and Flamenco Dancers entertained us till we departed.

Friday morning had us boarding buses for our Lackland Air Force Base Ceremonial Graduation Parade and tour. Perfect timing on this exercise brought us to the parade grounds minutes before it was to start. With a reminder to Ms. Hood, and some serious "arm twisting" on her part, we had our M/Gen. Bob Eaton installed on the Reviewing Stand. I was later to hear, from those in attendance, how pleased they were to see our original Group Commander, acting in our behalf, accepting the salute of our young Air Corps. It was a moving ceremony, as we could all recall the hours we spent in youthful eagerness to display our



TOGETHER AGAIN, 724th
(John Burton, Bob K. Bob Macey, Stan Jackson)

marching ability (if only to ourselves) on the different parade grounds during our WW-II era. Now we were relegated to watch the new generation that will take our place; as they have been doing since we left the Parade Field.

The B-24, that was on static display, drew the attention of most of our people while we await our buses. There was a lot of deep, loud inhaling to "SUCK IN OUR GUT;" then the clicking of cameras; and with the final relief of the exhale, we took leave of our old war buddy. (As a side note, explained by Col Ed Rasmussen (Hdq), the B-24 on display was once part of our 49th Wing. As part of the 461st Bomb Group it was redesignated [by tail markings] to the 93rd Bomb Group, in honor of General George S. Brown, Air Force Chief of Staff and Low Level Ploesti pilot. "Rass" remembers well, as he and Col Stefen were instrumental in creating the tail markings of all the 49th Wing. Remember?: 451st, Red Ball; 461st, Red Bar; 484th, Red Bow Tie.)

With the parade over we adjourned for Frenchies Restaurant. Then with lunch over we bused our way back to Kelly AFB. Due to the heavy rain, that had started just after our parade ceremony, we toured the ground facilities by bus only.

Friday evening found the 5th U S Army Band in concert. To the many that sat in anticipation, it was really something to experience. With the Presentation of the Colors (by the Randolph AFB Color Guard), our program got underway. Harvey Carpenter (724th) introduced the Color Guard and Army Band, and the Band carried it from there. Lively Military Airs stirred our memories and the playing of our Air Force Song rekindled our patriotism.

(continued next page)

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(Reunion continued)

Had this been all that we were to expect from the Army Band, it surely would have been enough. But to the enjoyment of all assembled, Colonel John A. O'Connor (724th, our resident trumpeter) was called upon to lend his talent to the occasion. John joined the band in playing two numbers. The first tune featured John as soloist, and in the second, he joined with two other trumpeters in a very intricate, but lovely LeRoy Anderson's composition, which became the hit of the concert. I was pleased to note, how receptive everyone was to this part of our program. It was like everyone was in a trance as the Band ran through their musical selections. We may consider ourselves AIR FORCE now, but we were ARMY back then, and we didn't forget it.

Our second event of the evening was the involvement of the Confederate Air Force. Through the cooperation, and persistence of Jack Whatley (Col. CAF), we were able to requisition the fuselage skin of our 727th aircraft, "SLOPPY BUT SAFE," that hung in the CAF Museum. It was a battle that Jack felt was almost as hopeless as any he had ever encountered. But with his persistence, the work of the SAC members, and a note from Gordon Snyder, 727th Gunner and creator of the art work, it came to pass.

Jack, in lieu of reward, asked only that he be allowed to discuss the merits of the CAF and show a film relevant to the Harlingen, Texas (Rebel Field) Base.

At the conclusion of his presentation we merged into our dance program. During the performance of the Dance Band, we again had the good fortune to hear one of our 451st musicians. This came in the body of one William Jackson (726th), a "par excellence" clarinetist. It is hoped that from this introduction of still active 451st musicians we can find more that are willing to take part in our future reunions. Drop a line to this headquarters, telling of your background and the instrument you play. T'would be appreciated. For those that stayed till the very

last, we were privileged to hear Mrs. E.D. Rasmesser (Janet) "belt" out an old Sophie Tucker type song. Janet has performed professionally with many of the BIG BANDS, Ted Weems, as a for instance. She was a jewel to take part.

Saturday, though raining throughout most of the day, called for 2 different Tours. Both went off with joviality and merriment. Though dampened by the Texas Sky, everyone was on time for our Banquet that evening. After taking our seats we were feted to the Presentation of Colors by the young ladies of the Holmes High School Junior ROTCs. These young ladies carried out their duties and bore themselves in a manner that pays tribute to their generation.

Col. Rasmessen acted as MC for the evening. It was his pleasure to read a letter, received at the hotel, from our Commander in Chief, President Ronald Reagan.

It read as follows:

I am pleased to send warm greetings to all the former members of the 451st Bombardment Group (H) as you gather in San Antonio for your Fourth Biennial Reunion.

You can all be proud of your Group's distinguished record of service in the European Theater of Operations during World War II. The 451st's three Distinguished Unit Citations demonstrate the bravery and skill with which you carried out your missions.

It's a special pleasure to salute you on your record and to wish all your members and guests a memorable reunion. God bless you.

Ronald Reagan

How can you top that?

Well, we can't ... but we continued to try.

With the start of the Dinner we were greeted by a true Strolling Mariachi Band. In their colorful dress and traditional instruments they individually, and en masse serenaded our members. George Tudor (725th) was singled out for a Birthday Salute, as were others in our assemblage.



Robert D. Gaylor
CMSAF (Ret.)
Guest Speaker

Our Guest Speaker, CMSAF Bob Gaylor USAF (Ret.), really took our audience by storm. His remarks were receptive to all our members. No numerical figures to ponder; No political attitudes to judge; and NO worrying about the weaknesses, or strength, of our military structure. He just gave us mental food in the area of HIGH TECH -HIGH TOUCH. A speech that warranted your being there to get its full message. Of our four biennial reunions, I have never received so much favorable "feed back" as I have from those of you that experienced "CMSAF Bob Gaylor."

The evening ended with a presentation of Country Western Music. Probably enjoyed by many, but in my case I was on an euphoria binge and realized little after the conclusion of our Head Table Presentations.

Sunday Church Services, conducted by our own Reverend John C. Pafford, brought me back to reality. Our regulars (musically); Bill Bihn (726th Vocal Soloist); Lois McNerney (725th Pianist); and John O'Connor (724th Trumpeter), made up our cadre of Sunday resident artists. Reverend Pafford, as usual,

offered us our spiritual guidance as we headed for home.

I felt extremely proud of the accomplishments that the SAC members had achieved in what they offered to our attendees.

- (a.) Our choice in using the Marriott Hotel as our base of operations proved very satisfactory to our working SAC members ... very cooperative.
- (b.) We secured the services of an established and competent Tour Service, Peggy Hood & Assoc.
- (c.) We were invited to be present for Graduation Ceremonies at Lackland AFB on Friday Morning.
- (d.) Representation of our Group, by General Eaton from the Reviewing Stand, was accorded.
- (e.) We were granted the privilege of having the 5th United States Army Band in Concert.
- (f.) They worked closely with us and allowed us to integrate our musician within their format.
- (g.) The CAF granted us the distinct, and seldom granted, privilege of having OUR "Sloppy But Safe" fuselage skin during our reunion.



SLOPPY BUT SAFE
(Loaned from the CAF)

- (h.) The colorful and talented Mariachi Los Parientes were available for our Dining entertainment.
- (i.) President Ronald Reagan honored us on this occasion with a personal message of appreciation for our past achievements, and wished us well.
- (j.) We found, induced, and "conned" one of the best speakers in Texas, Bob Gaylor, to take part in our Saturday Evening Festivities.

FAVORABLE COMMENTS

Major General Robert E.L. Eaton ; I would like to express to you, again, my congratulations on the outstanding job you did in our most recent Reunion at San Antonio. As always, everything worked out perfectly, and it came out that way due to your hard work. I thoroughly enjoyed the occasion! **George E. Tudor (725th)**; The reunions have seemed to me just to get better and better. The Guest Speaker, Bob Gaylor was top-notch; certainly one of the best after dinner speakers I've ever heard .. His theme "High Tech-High Touch" was so appropriate to our Group. (Editor's note: George had 6 of his 8 remaining crew members at this Reunion) **John G. Doedyns (727th)**; My wife and I had a very good time at our San Antonio Reunion. I want to commend you for a job well done ... Please send me two copies of President Reagan's letter of commendation of the 451st Reunion. **DeWitt G. (Bob) Macey (724th)**; ... the glow of the reunion still remains ... Another job well done by the 451st ... San Antonio was a charming place for the reunion. **Lindley G. Miller (725th)**; ... It was a great show, and I can only begin to appreciate the tremendous effort that had to be put into it ... We are all

looking forward to getting together again, I guess in two years time. **Richard H. Hayford (724th)** I'm sure that hundreds of guys have already told you what a GREAT Biennial the San Antonio one was, but I'd be remiss if I, too, didn't echo that statement ... IT WAS SUPERB ... Thank you and the crew for a job done "above and beyond." **Harry H. Fox (724th)**; Can't express my appreciation and admiration on the way you guys handled the Reunion. Old Buddy, that's the greatest thing that has happened to old Foxy for one hell of a time ... Saw lots of old buddies and damned near cried when we left San Antonio ... it got to me. **Jack M. Garrison (726th)**; Seems like just yesterday that we all met at San Antonio. Rita and I want to thank you for a most enjoyable reunion.



724th BUDDIES AND WIVES
(Rog & Bea Johnston -- Ginny & Ernie Louvar)

Ernest J. Louvar (724th); Except for a slight hitch in baggage handling, we got home O.K ... Again, thanks for putting on such a great show. **Frank M. Moreland (726th)**; The reunion was great. Everyone had a great time. We did have the weather in our favor! HA! Thanks for all your effort. **Paul L. McMillen (724th)**; This was Janet and my first reunion and we want you to know that the memories of seeing all those ol' buddies, and talking over the events of so many years ago will live with us for all times.

* * *

(Editorial comment: I apologize for the lack of pictorial variety. It seems that those taking pictures forgot to consider the needs of this office in offering photographic evidence of what was enjoyed.



RICK ZEPF (726TH): I enclosed copy of photo of Meryll M. Frost with President Truman, Doolittle, Lanphier, and Jimmy Stewart. Frost and others were the initial officers of Air Force Association. I received letter from Frost stating he was a member of 726th. and in flight crew on "Ozark Upstart." Frost is in process of moving to East Coast and will contact you later about 451st....(editor ... Thanks Rick - S/Sgt Meryll Frost was on original crew #51, piloted by James N. Hunt.) **Roland D. Samuel (724th)**: As you know, we all had leather A-2 jackets that we guarded jealously ... Wandering around an Army Surplus Store in Greensboro, NC, I located a real "find," AN A-2 JACKET. The owners ID number was H-8517, and his ship was "AMERICAN BEAUTY." If you can find out who the owner is I'd be glad to give it back to him....(editor ... The A-2 jacket was the property of S/Sgt Francis L. Holland, Ball turret gunner on Chas. W. McCutchen's,
(continued next page)

(Shortburst continued)

(451st original) crew. They were POW'ed on 23 June 44. A search, among family members, has uncovered the fact that F.L. Holland died while on a camping trip some years back.) **NELSON E. EBERSPACHER (724th)** Have you any contact with more of my crew? I believe Jack Engle, Nose Gunner, is signed up, but I have never found any of the others on the roster and we have long ago lost contact. They are: Robert E. Innerst (pilot), Laurence McCreary (co-pilot), Max Geller (Nav.), Albert DiCicco (Bomb.), Walter Janas (AEG), Frank Mussicha (?), John Nicastre (ROMG), and Vincent Villela (UG). I would appreciate addresses, if you have any of them... (editor ... Other than Innerst (with whom I had "spare gunner" experience) and DiCicco, both I had spoken to on the phone (and they both declined joining), none of the other names have crossed my desk. But believe me, our search goes on!) **ALBERT J. BOSTNER (726th)**: (in describing the mission in which the Nose Gunner, S/Sgt Andrew D. Wirtzenberger met his demise) ... His death resulted from persistent attacks of ME 109s employing twenty millimeter cannon during 30 March 1944. The attack originated from 9 o'clock high, bearing down on our aircraft and on through the formation. Our right wing sustained a gaping hole as did other parts of the fuselage. Fires in the waist compartment, resulting from exploding ammunition, were instantly neutralized by crew members at their stations. If I recall correctly, the battle intensity was extremely high and unusually long in duration. Our aircraft was so severely damaged during the encounters that we had to drop from the formation descending to lower altitudes. That we managed to fend off further attacks was reflected in the consummate skills applied by each crew member during his duty to the utmost. A realization existed then, and to this day that we were not alone in our dire predicament. There were many tell-tale plumes of billowing black smoke and of fires of downed aircraft sighted to, from, and in the vicinity of the target area. In retrospect, words concerning our near catastrophic flight can be viewed as being somewhat extraneous to the finality of S/Sgt Andrew D. Wirtzenberger's fate and many others who had gone down in flames. That these brave and dedicated men went well before their time will never be forgotten... (editor .. Al Bostner was Bombardier on Crew #54, Wilfred L. Bias (pilot); another original crew. Thank, Al, for this excellent and moving report on a mission that can hardly be challenged, certainly not forgotten. To all those that perished, including Andy ... they shall be remembered.) **WALTER P. LEE (725th)**: My wife, Joan, passed away last year, and this past winter has been very lonely. Because of this, I don't plan to attend the reunion. I'm going to spend that time with my boys in Colorado, and possibly go to Pueblo and see the aircraft the Pueblo AAB Historical Society has restored. In memory of my wife, please accept this small donation... (editor .. Walt, we all wish our condolences to you and your family. It would have been nice to have seen you in San Antonio, but under the circumstances we truly understand.) **DONALD V. KELLY (724th)**: (in reference to 23 August 1944 mission in which he became a guest of Germany) I knew Bob Beach (pilot) well, I think, and he was cool and reliable, a tough, competent man. He had been a Michigan State Trooper as a civilian. At any rate, he took a last run through the plane after the bail out bell rang, to make sure all had gotten out; then he sat on the bomb bay cat walk and waited for the plane to fall off on one wing. He bailed out the opposite side. So - I believe everyone got out of the plane. Some years later I learned, it must have been from Herb Klossner (navigator), that Bob Beach, tragically, had been electrocuted while doing some wiring around his house... (editor... Thanks, Don, more clarification

on our infamous Markersdorf mission, in which crew mates Phil Pratt (co-pilot) and Mike Callahan (nose gunner) were listed as KIA. And it comes from one that was there!) **Joseph J. Strauss (HDQ)**: I can remember a certain Captain named Arnold who wrote a book on the actions of crews, etc, during the war; and wrote it mostly with information gathered at the 451st. Do you remember him? He also assisted at some briefings and interrogations, as that was good material for him. If I remember correctly, his book was published before the war in Europe ended, and it became a best seller in the U.S... (editor ... Joe, the Captains name was Elliott Arnold, Intelligence Officer in the 725th Squadron. His time with the 725th was slightly abbreviated when B/General William Lee (49th Wing Commander) wished to utilize his ability by commandeering him for free-lance writing. His main MIO book "Mediterranean Sweep," with another collaborating author, did become a big seller. It related experiences from different (and classified) areas of the theater we served in. He was married to the movie actress, Glynns Johns, and I have earlier discovered, he has passed away.) **George C. McCleary (725th)**: (in beefing up the facts of our historical documentation, being offered in SERIAL FORM with each AD-LIB) Reference Chapter VI of history, Page 12. I was flying co-pilot for Frank Hamer on May 10th and brought the ship back with help of Jim Stritch, bombardier, and Ed Friedman, navigator. It was I believe my 8th mission and for Frank's crew, their 25th. I took over the crew and finished them up. I joined the 725th at Manduria in early April 44. I was pilot of the first (I think) replacement crew for the 725th. They broke up the crew and put me, my navigator and one gunner, with Frank's crew. They gave my airplane to Lt. Cotton (?) and he blew up on take of (history page 11, April 5, Manduria... (editor ... Thanks, George, these feed-backs of information are helpful in filling in the blanks.)



WORDS FROM THE FLIGHT DECK

Bob Karstensen

OUR THINNING RANKS

There comes a time when we all experience the loss of a dear and personal friend ... especially a close war time buddy. By close I mean one that served in the same Squadron, ate in the same mess hall, flew on occasion in the same plane, and dropped by your tent to visit and "bat the breeze," as a matter of course. Some of you have already undergone such experiences when that type buddy, living in your hometown, or some nearby city, dies.

The passing of a friend, under any condition, is devastating, but it becomes more so when you are given the chance to attend his final commemoration and to recall some of your past remembrances.

The friend of whom I write is **Eldred E. Alcorn**, T/Sgt Radio Operator on Stan Jackson's crew (724th). Ellie was born, lived, and died in the city of Aurora, Illinois, some 45 miles from my home. You may wonder why I put so much emphasis on the passing of one certain individual. Really I have no reason, other than he was a close personal friend, and he represents the fact that our ranks are becoming more decimated by the passing of time.

It could be said that Eldred epitomized the caliber of post war people that once made up our 451st ranks. He returned to his home town, married his hometown sweetheart (IdaMae), continued his education and worked in the community as teacher, counselor, and school superintendent, all within the Aurora school system. He raised a loving family of seven children, and was a credit to our goals as a worthwhile human being.

I was notified of his passing on 2 July 1986, by his crewmate, Robert Mochamer. Bob informed me that Ellie had succumb to a heart attack, a continuation of an earlier problems. He had wanted, so badly, to attend our San Antonio Reunion, knowing that a good number of his crew would be there, but due to his heart problem had aborted any attempt. I attended the Memorial Services on the 5th of July, joining his family and many friends in a final tribute to his full and noble life.



CAPTAIN STANLEY JACKSON'S CREW, 724th
Standing: Alcorn-RO, Mochamer-NG, Macey-AEG, Ziener-UG, Brashear-TG, Mahon-BG - Kneeling: Jackson-Pilot, Winner-CP, Williams-N, Cash-B.

Alcorn and I met, for the first time, while we both served in the 724th, attracted by the fact that our home towns were within an hours travel. We managed, after the war, to maintain a semblance of contact, primarily on the initiative of Ellie. Once he invited me to join him in a pilgrimage to Indiana to see his crew mate, Bob Mochamer, "tie the knot." Later we would all get together, always by his invitation, to just "bat the breeze." It was no wonder, when our organization got underway, that I recruited Alcorn and he became our 6th official member. He was a loyal friend; a good member of the 451st; and a truly decent human being.

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The names of two other deceased members has recently crossed my desk. One that joined our organization some time ago was COL **Hubert E. Anderson** (Ret) of the 727th. Membership number 638. Andy passed away on the 9th of January 1986. He had shown his appreciation towards our endeavor by striving to have as many of his crewmembers attend our reunions, as he could muster. Including his invitation to the wife of his late bombardier (Lloyd Trussell), Rexa Trussell, and son Bill, to join us at these reunions. Andy, for all his efforts, set a precedent, that



Hubert E. Anderson
(d. 9 Jan 86)

was followed in our San Antonio when many of his crew attended, just in his honor.

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Wilford A. Bryde
(d. 25 Oct 85)

Another 727th man (more recently recruited) that has since passed away was **Wilford A. Bryde**. Bill passed away on 25th October 1985. Bill's membership number was 1065. The fact that Bill had not been recruited sooner did not lessen the interest he had in our organization. Bill, in his capacity as Flight Engineer for McDonnell Douglas Corp, attempted to secure some aviation type amenities for our Dayton, Ohio Reunion. Though what he was seeking never came to pass, he showed his interest in trying to help the organization. Bill left a wife Harriet; two sons, Robert and Philip to mourn his passing.

To the families, and to the crewmates, of these three departed comrades may I offer the combined condolences of those of us that are left to carry on.

May we always remember;

"Grief like love, is timeless."



REUNIONS AND RECRUITMENTS

15th Air Force Association:

Communications from the 15th AFA reveals the dates and locations of their 3rd biennial reunion. Dates are; Registration on 14 October and ending on Sunday 18 October 1987. Location of event; Colorado Springs, Colorado.

Our attendance at these functions is steadily increasing. We had, considering this was not OUR scheduled reunion year, a fair showing at Seattle, Wash., in 1985. If we detect enough interest by our members for this upcoming event, perhaps we can plan something along with the 15th AFA. We sure can't go wrong, as they really do it up in style.

Those not listed as 15th AF Association members can "re-up" by contacting: 15th Air Force Association, PO Box 6325, March AFB, CA 92518. Membership is \$15 per year.

BOMBARDIERS:

Another group that goes with biennial get togethers. These BOMB-AIMERS are going with 26 March to 29 March 1987 in San Antonio, Texas as their reunion dates and site. This will be their second "bash," with their first one taking place in Midland, Texas with a good turnout. BOMBARDIERS, INC. contact is; E.C. "Ned" Humphreys, Jr., Star Rt 1 - Box 254, Eagle Harbor, MI 49951. A minimum donation of \$10 a year will entitle you to the privileges of the group.

B-24 LIBERATOR REUNION:

Way off in the future ... 1989 ... plans are in the works to give our old ally, the B-24, a 50th Anniversary Party. I have been contacted, as "flight leader" for the 451st, to "take the pulse" of our membership, as to their individual interests.

The event is to take place in Fort Worth, Texas, May 19 through 21 1989. It is being supported by General Dynamics (formerly Consolidated-Vultee Aircraft), the Fort Worth Community and Military Supporters, and the International B-24 Liberator Club.

A tentative PLANNED CALENDAR of events has already been drawn up by an industrious, and very
(continued next page)

hyperopic committee, headed up by Bob Vickers of Albuquerque, NM. As more information is received by this office, you will be updated.

AVIATION CADET ALUMNI ASSOCIATION:

A truly ambitious effort is being undertaken for the benefit of all former Aviation Cadets. This is in a way of relocating former cadet friends. Robert C. White (44-I Brooks) - (that's a very special code they use, unknown to us Gunner types) - is compiling all the names available to him into his computer. Through his efforts, individual names can be pulled if someone is searching for a particular friend from his cadet class. It sounds like a great idea and Bob pledges not to use this information in any commercial venture.

The organization would welcome, from Pilot Cadets, such information as your Flight Class; Preflight, Primary, Basic and Advanced locations.

Since this is a no-dues, non-profit effort, and should you be seeking someone that may be in the 2000 names already compiled, a STAMPED, RETURN ADDRESSED ENVELOPE would make their effort a great deal more affordable.

For more info, and to get your named into the computer roster, write to: Robert C. White, 54 Seton Trail, Ormond Beach, FL 32074.

LIBERAL ARMY AIRFIELD REUNION:

For those that went through B-24 transitional flight training at this former airbase, or for those in the proximity of Liberal, Kansas, you could do no better than to take part in this rekindling of long past memories. The dates of the reunion are; 19 to 21 October 1986. For further information contact: Phyllis Windle, P.O. Box 676, Liberal, KS 67901.

EX-POW's - STALAG LUFT IV:

Leonard E. Rose, 8103 E. 50th Street, Indianapolis, IN 46226, is seeking to increase his roster of viable Stalag Luft IV EX-Prisoners of War from WW-Two. Of the 10,000 known, he has located some 2,000. Here's another chance to "find your roots."

HERMAN GORING TANK WORKS - MISSION VETERANS:

Contact the below mentioned author if you participated in any capacity in the 15th Air Force attack on the Goring Tank Works at Linz, Austria on July 25, 1944, or if you have any information at all about it. Research is being done for a book about this mission and the researcher would be interested in letters, mission orders, diaries, first-hand or even second-hand accounts about it from air crews, ground crews mission planners, briefers, debriefers, etc, etc. Contact: Milton Radovsky, Major, USAF (Ret.), 10710 Lockridge Drive, Silver Springs, MD, 20901, or call (301) 593-4428.

JACK MARTIN (724TH, PILOT) SEEKS ILLUSIVE CHECK-OUT CO-PILOT

I am looking for a man who flew check-out co-pilot on a mission our crew made to Lyons, France, on May 26, 1944.

Military organizations, such as our 451st Bomb Group, Ltd., have brought many old friends and comrades together, and I'm hoping this true story will produce the desired result of learning the whereabouts of the co-pilot. I would truly like to meet him again and thank him from the bottom of my heart for his trust and cooperation on that eventful mission so many years ago.

As I sit down to relate this exciting episode, it seems like yesterday, I can hear the roar of the engines, smell the burned oil and exhaust fumes as they blew into the cockpit along with dust and sand

that the propellers were picking up from the dirt surface. The aircraft was shaking and jumping -- anxious to roll. We were about to make a locked brake, short runway takeoff and had to clear a twenty five foot strafing abutment at the end of the runway. I had told the co-pilot that this was going to be "a piece of cake." (If so, they why this strange hard lump in the pit of my stomach, this clammy feeling to the palm of my hands, and a funny shaky feeling inside of me?)

When I looked down the runway strip and saw that big concrete wall at the end, I realized it was now or never, lest I lose my courage. I supplicated to the Lord and released the locked brakes. The events leading up to this critical situation had flashed through my mind during the time before takeoff.



(Lt. Jack Martin - with his earlier crew)
(Jack is 2nd from right, top row)

Our crew had trained in Tonopah, Nevada, with the 458th Bomb Group, which was a B-24 Heavy Bomb Group. The Group joined the Eight Air Force in England. After flying a number of missions with the 458th Group, I was told that I was to be transferred to the Fifteenth Air Force. My crew was given the privilege of staying with the Group or transferring with me. They all opted to volunteer and go with me. We subsequently received orders, and in early May, 1944, proceeded to Bari, Italy, where the reception depot had been set up for replacement crews that would be assigned to various bomb groups in the 15th Air Force. We drew the 451st Bomb Group, located near Foggia, Italy. Upon arrival, we were assigned to the 724th Squadron. After two days of "settling in," I was told to report to Squadron Headquarters for instructions about flying with the Group the following day. Group regulations were such that any new or replacement crews, that would be flying for the first time with the Group, would have a check-riding experienced co-pilot along on the first mission (more of a proficiency test than anything else). The next day the mission was Lyons, France. We were told that due to the distance involved, if we required fuel after the bomb drop, we were to land at Corsica and refuel. My check-riding co-pilot joined the crew at the flight line prior to that morning takeoff, and off we went. We presently joined the Group and headed for our destination. Very soon after joining the formation I noticed that the aircraft was drifting astern, and I had to increase my throttle settings. The Group did not seem to be increasing speed, so I called to the flight engineer and told him to check the aircraft for any wind drag. He reported back that we had one main wheel of our undercart hanging down. I immediately attempted to raise it by pulling up on the landing gear handle with no results. I then pushed the lever down and lowered all of the gear; and when this was accomplished I pulled the lever back to the "up" position, and the entire gear raised. The lowering of the entire gear caused extreme wind drag, and I had to apply more throttle in order to keep up with the Group while this procedure was

accomplished. I was puzzled at the time why this one wheel didn't lock in the up position, and also when I had put the gear down, I didn't see the "locked down" position indicator light; and when I cut the throttle momentarily, with the undercarriage in the up position, I didn't hear the warning horn blow.

We settled down to formation flying and presently the aircraft started to lose speed; once again the flight engineer said that the faulty wheel and strut had come down. We had to go through the same procedure as before and once more had to use extra throttle to keep up during the lowering and raising of the gear. At this point, my co-pilot and I discussed the problem, and the possibility that we should abort the mission and return to the base. It was decided that we should go on with the mission as everything else mechanically was operating in good order. We continued lowering and raising the wheels, increasing the throttle setting during each procedure. We completed the bombing run with the Group and headed for home. As we neared the island of Corsica, I requested a fuel reading. The flight engineer told me that we had over a thousand gallons of fuel, so I felt secure that we could continue without refueling at Corsica. From Corsica the Group flew parallel to the coast about ten miles out over the water and at approximately 8,000 feet. It was about 45 minutes away from Corsica, and flying in formation, that I noticed once again we were losing air speed; but this time the Group was pulling away from us very rapidly. I pushed the throttles forward and was about to reach down for the landing gear lever when the flight engineer told me, "We're out of fuel!" I immediately realized that I had lost engines on both wings as there wasn't any yaw to the aircraft. It was determined that we had lost power on the two outboard engines due to fuel starvation. We promptly feathered the outboard engines and headed for shore. I throttled back on the two inboard engines to conserve what was left of the fuel, and started to let down gradually keeping our airspeed, hopeful that we could gain as much distance as possible. I asked the navigator, Bob Wohl, for an exact position and told the crew to prepare for possible ditching. I then told the radio operator to send the distress signal. The navigator told me we were opposite Anzio Beach but couldn't tell me if it were in Allied hands as it had been constantly contested over the past weeks. He also said that there was a short fighter plane landing strip there. I told him to come up on the flight deck and fire off the identification color code for the day with the Very Pistol. We anxiously awaited the response from the landing strip. Presently, we received their welcome answer and continued to head for shore. We had been losing altitude, and at about two or so miles from shore and at about 5,000 feet, I told the crew I was going to lower the gear, but I wasn't at all sure whether it would lock or not, and hastened to add that they were free to bail out and assured them that those at Anzio Beach would pick them up. They said they would take their chances with me. As soon as the gear was lowered, we lost altitude rapidly, but I felt that we could get lined up with the runway and still be at 1,200 feet to 1,500 feet. As it turned out, the landing strip was a short temporary perforated steel mat Royal Air Force fighter strip with a strafing abutment at the end of the runway. On our final approach, we lost all power. The inboard engines were windmilling, and we were dropping like a stone. I put down full flaps taking advantage of the inboard windmilling #3 engines to give me hydraulic pressure. It was by the Grace of God that we touched down at the very beginning of the landing strip; the undercarriage was down and locked. I applied the brakes and somehow brought the aircraft to a stop before we ran into the strafing wall at the end of the runway.



Lt. Jonathan S. (Jack) Martin
(A more relaxed moment in his "office")

After collecting my thoughts and aplomb, I looked over at the co-pilot; we both laughed nervously and shook hands. My legs were a bit wobbly as I got out of the aircraft and walked over to the tower shack. The landing strip was in British hands; and, of course, they were in complete charge of the base and its fuel facilities. I asked about the possibility of refueling; the two pilot officers at the desk looked at one another, and one said to me with a chuckle, "Did we hear you correctly, that you wanted fuel?" I asked him to let me in on the joke. Their immediate answer was, in unison, "We don't have any to spare, chum."

They must have taken pity on my pathetic appearance as I pled for fuel, because one of them decided to call the area commander and see what he could do. After a long conversation on the field telephone, the pilot officer turned to me and said that they could give up 500 gallons. I told them that I appreciated their generosity, but I needed much more than that if I were to reach Naples for refueling. I explained that a short field takeoff from a locked brake position would use up a tremendous amount of fuel; also, I might not be able to land at Naples. After more haggling, it was decided that they could let me have 800 gallons of fuel - take it or leave it. I said I would take it, and they hastened to add that we would have to load it ourselves. They didn't say anything about the fuel being in five gallon Jerry cans, however.

While the crew loaded the fuel, I decided to pace off the runway as the British pilot officers were not quite sure whether the strip was 1,000 feet or 1,200 feet long; but they were sure of the height of the strafing abutment which they said was 25 feet high, and as firm as the Rock of Gibraltar.

I found the runway to be a little over 1,500 feet and also noted that there was a cleared field at the head of the runway which added another 300 feet of surface; but it had a lot of loose stones and turf on it, just the way the bulldozer had left it. Normally, a B-24, loaded with a full complement of fuel and bomb load, required from 5,000 feet to 6,000 feet for takeoff; without the bomb load, from 3,000 to 3,500 feet. But we had 1,800 feet and had to get over a 25 foot high strafing wall as well. I had noted a burned out truck by the side of the runway, halfway down the strip, and I decided this would be my point of commitment. If we weren't buoyant at that point I would cut the power and try to brake to

(continued next page)

a stop. I walked back to the crew and told them of my plans for a short field takeoff procedure and said I wanted to get as much power out of the engines as possible. The engineer said he would adjust the engine turbos for full power output and then said an odd thing, "Do you see all those G.I.'s sitting on ammo boxes, jeeps, trucks and so forth, along side the runway?" I acknowledged I did. "Well," he said, "they are taking bets on the probability of our successful takeoff." I couldn't help but ask what were the odds. He replied, "Five to one against a successful takeoff." My comment was, "They're real sports." At this point I asked the Engineer how come the fuel reading was false. He said that an air lock undoubtedly had caused the error.

I was responsible for the aircraft, and knew that if I didn't fly it off, it would undoubtedly be cannibalized for parts, or worse yet, just be demolished for scrap and bulldozed out of the way. It was a good aircraft, and the Group was short of equipment, which became the deciding factor in favor of chancing the takeoff.

We had landed at approximately 1300 hours, and by now it was getting on late in the afternoon. I went over to the tower shack and asked if they could give me the identifying night color code of the day in order to make a Naples landing. They said that they didn't have it. Could they call and get it? They said that due to security reasons they couldn't get the code over the telephone. I said, "Well, maybe we should stay over until the following day." They said it was chancy as the strip might fall back into enemy hands. They also said that if I wished to make a late evening takeoff, the wind would come up about 2200 hours. This was too risky at best to make a short field takeoff without worsening the situation by making it at night. One of the people in the tower said that I was to turn to the right sharply in a 180 degree turn after clearing the strafing wall; to turn to the left would take us directly over enemy guns that were mounted on the beach north of Anzio. Another tower operator said, "You won't have to worry about that; the trick is to get over the strafing abutment." His remark brought me up short! As I was walking back to the aircraft, two fighter planes came in and presently took off again - they just cleared the abutment! This demonstration certainly didn't boost my spirits at all. Here I was about to try it with a large four engine bomber.

The fueling was completed by 1900 hours. I gathered all the crew for a takeoff briefing and explained to them once again that it was hazardous, and that I wanted volunteers. I needed the services of a co-pilot, navigator, flight engineer and radio operator. They agreed to go. I then told the four gunners, and the bombardier, that they could go back to our base at Castelluccia by motor truck. I fully realized that we could be jumped by an enemy fighter, and wouldn't have any defense if the gunners didn't come along. The weight factor would be approximately 700 pounds more if they came along. Considering the odds, I left it up to them. They chose to go with us.

I told the crew about pacing off the runway and about the open field at the head of the runway, and feeling that if we took off, starting from that open field we could do it. I didn't mention to them about my marker truck along the runway that I was going to use as my reference point. I was afraid that the co-pilot might not think we were buoyant at this point and might apply the brakes. So often it is the case where two people are left to make a decision, many times an unnecessary choice is made, and it was for this reason that I kept the marker truck to myself. I then told the crew to gather all the movable gear from the waist and tail sections and bring that gear up to the flight deck. I also informed them that I would zigzag the ship out on the open field in order

to loosen stones and turf that might otherwise be caught in the propellers, and that they (the crew) had to pick up the loosened debris from our takeoff path. They would then get back into the aircraft and prepare for takeoff. After the zigzagging and debris clearing, they returned to the aircraft. I then told everyone to ride up on the flight deck, and not to move under any circumstances. I locked the brakes and turned around in my seat to face the bombardier, Lt. Ascencio, who rode on the flight bench on take-off. I said to him, "Ace, it may be embarrassing to you to say your Rosary in front of all the rest, back on the flight deck, but as a personal favor to me, I would appreciate it if you said it." I told him we needed all the help we could get. He was a religious man and I respected him for it. As I turned back in the seat the co-pilot looked at me and said, "Lt. Martin, do you really feel confident that we can make this takeoff?" I told him that I had made many locked brake takeoffs (but to myself - I didn't have to clear a 25 foot wall.) He said he had five little daughters at home, and they hoped they would see their papa at the end of the war. This statement hit me like a hammer, as I had never before, nor since, been placed in such a predicament. Most of my crew were single, except for Paul McMillen, one of our gunners. I looked at this man, and I was filled with compassion. I recklessly said to him that under the circumstances, he was free to disembark then and there, and that my flight engineer would sit in for him. He said that it had just struck him, as he looked down the runway and saw that big ominous wall, this was going to be a dangerous takeoff. He said, "Well, if your crew has this much confidence in your ability, far be it from me to get off." I then explained to him and the flight engineer the "drill."

We would go down the runway and at the buoyancy point, I would attempt to "leap-frog." They knew what I meant: I would pull back on the stick at the right moment, get the aircraft stalled in the air, then force the stick forward and bounce the aircraft back on the ground, thus forcing the hydraulic fluid and entrapped air, in the wheel struts to compress (much the same as a shock absorber), then immediately pull back again on the stick. The wheel struts, when compressed would act like a spring and when elongated, giving me the extra thrust upward, similar to a bad "circuit and bumps landing." Only, in this case I would purposely effect a hard bounce, but would be practically stalled. Upon the final pull up the engineer was to lift the landing gear. If the aircraft failed to stay in the air, we would slide to a stop on its belly, and hopefully, stop as quickly as if the wheels were down and we were applying the brakes. We then went through the check list, and when it came to the flaps, I told the co-pilot to give me 20 degrees; this would give the aircraft a steadying effect in a stalled condition, as I had to balloon this takeoff, and, hopefully, not drop a wing. Just before I received the green signal from the tower Aldis Lamp, I noted that a strong head wind had sprung up, and this being only 2000 hours, I figured it could be a fluke, but felt that it was a good omen.

I opened up all throttles until I thought pistons and rods would fly out. I got the Aldis signal and said to myself, "Dear God, I've committed my life and nine others into your care. I hope it isn't to Valhalla." The roar of the engines putting out full power, the exhaust fumes, burned oil, and dust pouring into the aircraft, from a dirt field, didn't make me wish to linger. I knew that the longer we stayed, the greater the possibility of injuring a propeller by its sucking up a stone or chunk of hard sod. I released the brakes, and with a "swoosh" we started from the field toward the strip. As we crossed onto the strip, we were picking up speed rapidly. When we passed beside my buoyancy truck point, the aircraft felt light. I also noticed a sea of faces alongside

the strip. I pulled back on the controls and felt the aircraft rise. I then pushed the stick forward and slammed the aircraft back down onto the runway. I immediately pulled back on the stick and felt the ballooning effect. We must have gone twenty feet into the air. It seemed like an eternity that we hung on the props, but it was only seconds. The flight engineer pulled gear lever, and I eased the nose slightly downward in order to gather more speed and kept it close to the strip and at the last moment, as I approached the wall, I pulled back on the stick and over the wall we went. It was much the same as one would do hedge hopping, except, in this case, I wasn't travelling at much more than stalling speed. My judgment in having all the crew and loose gear up on the flight deck paid off, as I was told later that the tail just cleared the abutment. I was too intent on keeping the aircraft flying in a tight 180 degree turn to notice much of the airstrip, or the big bettors left behind.

As soon as we were straight, level, and back on course, I throttled back and milked the flaps back up to 5 degrees and cut back on the prop pitch to 1600 RPM. This, I had found in the past, gave me the best economical "slow-fly" attitude. I then told the gunners to take their positions as we might encounter some enemy oppositions. By now it was getting quite dark, and I didn't have any illusions about being allowed to land at Naples. It was total darkness when we approached Naples airport, and immediately the searchlights picked us up. The cockpit lighted up in an eerie manner, making it difficult to read the instruments. I called the tower and asked for permission to land. Their reply was: "Who are you? What are you? What is the identity night color code?" I responded straight off that I didn't have the code and explained the particulars of why I had to land. They told me to move on to our own base and be prompt about it or they would shoot me down. I knew better than to try to reason with them, so I straight away headed for Castelluccia air base. I asked the flight engineer for a fuel reading and his reply was that he thought that we had about 300 gallons. I guess we all held our breaths until we were in sight of our own airstrip. We called "Hic-cup tower" and told them who we were and gave them our day color code, my name and Squadron number. They said we could land, but all they could offer us in the way of landing lights was a jeep's head lamps. I didn't bother to make any approach pattern, but just headed it down and in. I turned the landing lights on momentarily before we touched down, then turned them off, (I had no intentions of being tracked by an enemy night fighter) by which time the jeep had gotten into position. I brought the aircraft to a complete stop, said a prayer of thanks, and waited for the jeep to approach. The men in the jeep came up with machine guns pointed and asked us to kindly get out and identify ourselves. This we readily complied with, and after they were satisfied, we got back into the aircraft and followed them to the hard stand where the aircraft is normally parked. We checked the fuel reading, and it registered empty! It was a weary tired crew that left the aircraft, and we didn't bother to have our normal "bull session." We had had a very hard, harrowing day.

The next day I turned in my report, but failed to get in touch with the co-pilot to adequately thank him for his cooperation in the blind trust that he had placed in my ability. Here was a man who had taken my word on face value - from a total stranger. That took courage.

I shortly afterwards tried to get in touch with him, but he had gone off on Rest and Recuperation (R&R) to the Isle of Capri. I envied him, as I was not due to go until July. The trick was now to stay alive until July.

Some years ago I lost all my records and log

books in a robbery, and with that theft went much of my past identity. Over the years I have frequently thought of this mission and after considering all the ponderables, I can only come to one conclusion - that the Good Lord was lending a hand:

1. We could have run out of fuel in any number of places other than Anzio and would have had to ditch .. we didn't!
2. Anzio was in Allied hands and had a landing strip, however small .. we used it!
3. The British could have given us more fuel, and we might not have been able to clear the strafing abutment .. the balance was right!
4. The unprecedented early evening head wind sprang up at the propitious moment before takeoff .. a premium gift!
5. The fact that this takeoff was successful .. was another pair of hands on the controls?"
6. We arrived back at our Castelluccia base with just enough fuel .. another bit of irony?

All of the above were just too pat; the pieces of the puzzle fit together too well for me to say it was just luck. I am convinced that God had a hand in it. He must have had big plans for someone aboard that aircraft, and I was merely the steward to bring those plans to fruition.

I was later awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross for accomplishing this mission, and to this day I still feel surrogate to the Real Pilot.

Members of the May 26, 1944 crew were:

Pilot - Jonathan S. Martin, "Jack"
 Co-Pilot - "?"
 Navigator - Robert Wohl, "Bob"
 Bombardier - Felix Ascencio, "Ace"
 Flight Engineer - Charles Jackson, "Charley"
 Radio Operator - Marion Moorehead, "Buzz"
 Nose Gunner - Meron Landon, "Shorty"
 Top Gunner - Robert Martin, "Dilly"
 Waist Gunner - Andrew McGowan, "Red"
 Tail Gunner - Paul McMillen, "Mack"

I am now in the twilight of life and in looking back down those years, the most gratifying period was the time spent with the 451st. I do not believe any pilot could have asked for a better flying crew than the one I had. We received no dollars for the bombs dropped, nor did we throw our arms around each other when a special fete was accomplished. It was expected of each of us to do his best and hang in there together. I might add, that feeling epitomized the whole 451st, as the records show.

If any of you readers have been told of this flight by someone - perhaps by the co-pilot, by his daughters, or by someone who heard the story from him; would they please write to:

Jonathan S. Martin
 Care of: 451st Bomb Group (H), Ltd.
 1032 S. State Street
 Marengo, IL 60152

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AN EDITORS PRIVILEGE: ADDED BYLINE

Perhaps the reader, after reading the proceeding saga of a mission that came within a "hair's breath" of ending at the base of a strafing wall, would like to turn his attention to the following narrative (almost comical, except for the enemy involvement). This concerns the same pilot, 1st Lt. Jonathan S. (Jack) Martin, and most of the same crew; with the exception of the co-pilot, which was in this case was, 2nd Lt. Willard B. Becker.

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I, Bob Karstensen, was cast in the roll of spare gunner, flying the nose turret. The date was 30 July 1944 and the target was located in the Budapest area. This was to be my first experience flying as a replacement gunner. My crew's pilot, Captain Henry G. Rollins, had been tapped for duty as Operations Officer in the 724th, and from that time on our crew, that had trained together at Gowen Field, saw limited duty as the unit. Though apprehensive about someone else being at the controls on this mission, I felt that Capt. Rollins would make sure that I was flying with the best. This idiom, true or not, stuck with me throughout all my missions, for during my tour I flew with no less than 13 different Aircraft Commanders. Had I not maintained this attitude, I don't think I could have completed my missions, and still felt at ease with all these different pilots.



CAPTAIN H.G. ROLLINS'S CREW

Standing: Rollins, Pilot - Dilks, N - Snow, CP - Miller, B. Kneeling: Morrill, BG - Gardner, AEG - Paonessa, RO - Cegla, TG - Bob K, NG - Kalik, UG.

This mission started out in normal fashion; the CO trying to locate one man out of a tent full of six, and waking all six in the process. Breakfast by the dawn's earliest light; briefing with its big map, pins and yarn, and noting above all else, the number of anti aircraft guns that were aimed in our general direction. Adding an asterisk to all of Captain Morris Manoogian's (Intelligence Officer) briefing information, was the fact that enemy aircraft could be expected. Out on the flight line and getting our flying gear checked out of the "line supply shack." Then on truck to the revetment where our ship was being readied by the Crew Chief. A quick "look-see" to make sure my turret was ammo'ed, electrical and oxygen systems in working order, and our flak suits and helmets were strategically at hand, should we wish to don them quickly. All this in order, we waited for the TOWER to give us the green flare.

At approximately 0700 hours we got the "shot seen around the field," and took our positions for takeoff. Standing in the waist section and feeling the surge, and the vibration, of those four Pratt & Whitneys, comes back to me even 40 plus years later. The roll down the matted runway, and sensing the pilots touch when it came to getting her in the air. I shutter still, thinking that what we had then was the "best of modern technology," and comparing it by today's standards, we were "flying by the seat of our pants!"

We took our positions, me stepping on the Bombardiers bombsight to get into the nose turret, and he, slamming my doors and vowing never to let me out. Test firing over the Adriatic, and then showing our noses over Yugoslavian coastline in search of our Hungarian target. Along about this time, even after scanning the skies with a neck that is weary and

tired, and eyes that were becoming drowsy from the monotony and cold, a fear grabbed me when I heard, either Lt. Martin or Becker say, "Fighters in the area, keep alert." Boy, when those words register, the thoughts of any discomfort disappear fast. The head swivels twice as fast and the eyes cover more sky than you can imagine. Then they came, suddenly out of the sun, at about 11 o'clock high roars four ME 109s. Before I had a chance to "draw a RAD and a half bead on 'em," they had passed through our formation and settled in on a formation low and way behind us. How they had penetrated our Group and passed within hammer throwing distance from our #4 position, I couldn't imagine. Looking at the rest of our formation I could see that no other turrets were tracking them, so they must have eluded the rest of the gunners as easily as they did me. It was just a "quick in and out," with no harm to our Group.

We reached the IP and took a course for the target. It was about then that "things" began to happen. Flak quickly found our elevation, as we steadied in on our bomb-run, and you could hear (and see) what the Germans were offering us. The krr-uump of the flak making a sound like gravel hitting a tin roof. This could be heard, even though our leather helmet which was strapped so tight for fear of missing some interphone conversation; especially if it was pertinent to our immediate safety. Through this maelstrom we continued, holding our #4 slot against all adversities. Suddenly, from my nose position (and the pilot and co-pilot had the same view) we saw the lead ship take a hit. Not having flown with Lt. Martin before, I had marveled at the tight formation flying he was performing in the #4 slot. He had me and the tail gunner on the lead ship swapping hand signals (mostly "get away"). Now with the #1 ship in distress, I was hoping our pilot hadn't been quite so good in his formation flying. But being that we were about to call "bombs away," Lt. Martin continued to hang with him. For what seemed an eternity we clung to the leader in our #4 slot, paying little attention to anything else. The fascination of seeing a ship emitting bomb bay smoke, wondering just how long he could hold on, and realizing the frenzy that must be going on aboard - plus the calmness of the command pilot - just left you mesmerized. Whoever was in command had the presence of mind to continue the bomb run and drop on target. All the time we were clinging to our position like a terrier dog, and dropped our bombs in unison to his drop. Now our main duty was done, and Lt. Martin had a moment to shift his eyes, noting that no evasive action was being done, and wondered why? One sweep of the horizon revealed our situation ... we, and the lead ship were all alone! It seems that when the lead ship caught the flak the rest of the formation had departed, leaving Lt. Martin with his eyes "riveted" on the #1. The two of us now made up the total of the original formation. It didn't take long to appraise our situation, and pull the hell away. Now a new problem confronted us; would a different formation accept us? There had been a rumor that the Germans were sending captured B-24s up to join in our formations, and then, from a close up position, shooting down our unsuspecting aircraft. Too, the German fighters were still in the area, and were hungry for straggling B-24 bombers.

We left our unsafe position, perhaps to involve ourselves in another untenable situation, but one that had to be attempted. Over the intercom I could hear Lts. Martin and Becker discussing the merits of trying for one formation or the other as they passed our view. It was a decision that had to be made, and made fast. To hesitate too long was to give the German fighters a situation they were looking for. And from my vantage point, I could see several B-24s "going down" ahead of us, and was hoping that Martin and Becker would come to a decision, and soon! They

did ... for off to our left (and a bit below our altitude) I saw a homeward bound formation of about 10 to 12 B-24s, which we headed for. From here on out it seemed like a "chinese fire drill." For before we gained the safety of the formation (by the way they accepted us without challenge) about 5 other errant B-24s had tacked on. If there was safety in numbers, we surely had it. Our new found formation had about 17 ships before we had left the target area. Some of them were our earlier dispersed 724th boys. No sign of the lead ship, though.

Again, on the way home we were to encounter more ME 109s. This time they were easily spotted and were subjected to a maelstrom of 50 caliber machine gun fire. Six of them made a half-hearted pass at our formation, more out of curiosity than of vengeance. Probably never saw so many B-24s flying in one bunch, and wanted to see if we were doing it with mirrors.

When we hit the coastline of Italy the formation separated and went to their respective bases. We landed without incident at about 1430 hours. We then looked over the ship for flak damage ... noted none of importance ... just holes for the sheetmetal men to fool around with.



SURVIVING ENLISTED MEMBERS OF CREW 20

L. to R. - Leo Cegla, Andy Kalik, Fred Gardner, Eldon Morrill, Bob K. (Anthony Paonessa KIA 29 December 44)

Thus ended my first experience as a spare gunner. I was glad it was with pilots as good as Lts. Jack Martin and Will Becker. It made me appreciate the fact that Captain Rollins, though an excellent pilot, could in some situations and emergencies, be equaled. Of course, almost each mission that has its fighters and flak, and in my humble estimation, each can be considered an emergency. At least from then on out, I never had to be led blindfolded to the ship and carried aboard. Jack gave me that much more confidence.

Like Jack, in his final plea for the name of his 26 May 1944 co-pilot, I too, would like to find out the crew that manned the lead ship on that infamous mission. I'm pretty sure they survived - perhaps by making it to Russia, or by gaining control over their situation, they got back to the base.

CONGRESS WORKING ON POW ENTITLEMENTS

A few months ago I ran across a small "item" in one of the military magazine that I subscribe to. It read, in part, that Congress was studying the feasibility of issuing a POW MEDAL for all qualified veterans. In my interest to champion this cause for our POWs, both living and dead, I wrote to some of our members regarding this find. The response I received showed that some of those written to were more versed on the subject than I.

Apparently the MEDAL has been authorized, and it just awaits sketching and layout by the Institute of Heraldry, Washington, D.C.

Two letters, of great detail, came to my office as a result of my initial mail out. John L. Anderson (727th, POW) briefed me thoroughly on the progress of the initial Bill (granting of the Medal), and another Bill (HR 864 & S 1446) which would, when passed, be a step closer to having a disability related compensation granted to eligible POWs.

I realize that there may be some hostility to any effort to open another "money faucet" in Veteran benefits when, already, some of the other Veterans amenities are being cut to the bone. But it is our job, to all our brother members, to see that none of these appropriations are cut, altered, or eliminated.

So, it may be worth your while, next time you have your Congressman or Senator over for dinner, to get his support in these POW, and VETERAN, matters.

The second letter I received in regards to the POW situation came from Charles C. Haltom (726th, CO & POW'er). His thoughts on the subject drifted from the immediate need of his fellow POW, to the plight of the airmen that were continuing to fly combat missions -- while his flying was virtually over. It was his feeling that those that flew were the ones in more imminent danger than was he in the POW compound. In a way Charles may have been right, but he faced another enemy that was more stark and harder to define than what we, who were left to fly, had to face. His enemy was the constant RUMORS, LONELINESS, STRESS, and ANXIETY, faced every day. His enemy was in a way, the struggle with ones own thoughts.

No, Colonel Haltom may try to convince me of his point of view, but "from my side of the fence" I only had one enemy to face. And as bad as he was, I still had the thought that I would be headed for home when my tour of missions was done. Charles could only hope that I would get my job done - FAST - and be through in its doing.

But - to the job at hand - POW ACCREDITATION, with possible future BENEFITS. Let's see if we, as a collective group, can make an impact on our Legislators. I've already made my overtures to both my Senators and my local Congressman in behalf of our organization. Why don't you, on an individual taxpayer basis, do the same. Just tell them that John, Charles, and Bob sent you. Two EX-POWs and one that was glad he wasn't.

G.I. INSURANCE DIVIDEND REBATE PROVES FRAUDULENT

Some time ago Roger Johnston (724th) came across and application for rebate to monies held by the Veterans Administration to former policy holders, whether currently held or not.

As a follow-up Roger phoned the Veterans Administration in Chicago, Illinois, and found that there is NO such entitlement in effect.

Though the form, as Roger received it, looks authentic and business like, it is apparently a fraud

meant to create some pressures on the VA, for whatever reason. It could be a cruel hoax on anyone that would be counting on the money, and find out that it is not available ... plus an inconvenience on the VA as they attempt to respond to these applications. If any of you have already been "nipped" by this sham, let me know. I'd like to know just how far this has gone.

(Reprinted from 1986 Reunion Program)

I AM THE FOUR FIFTY FIRST

*I am the 451st Bomb Group --- Challenger of the sky!
I fought to keep our Nation safe, buying that freedom with my blood. To our enemy, I
was the day of reckoning; to our people, the hope of our future. Where the fighting
was the thickest, I was there ...*

I am the 451st!

*Hardship and glory I have known. At Regensburg, I fought beyond the limits of
man's ability, and showed the fury of my anger ... and I came of age ...*

I am the 451st!

*In the battle of Ploesti, I fought and bled. Showing the enemy that my will to
win was stronger than my wish to survive. I engaged the enemies fighters and defied
his deadly flak as part of my price to invade his skies. I traded the lives and
freedom of good men for the chance to destroy his critical supplies ...*

I am the 451st!

*I was there when our Air Force struck the airdrome at Markersdorf ... leaving my
message in twisted metal and destroyed aircraft. I suffered my losses and maintained
my strength for future battles ...*

I am the 451st!

*The enemy skies, with flak and fighters, could not hold me ... I broke through
walls of flak to bomb my targets. I did not seek out; but was never halted by enemy
fighters ... I found my target and dropped my bombs ...*

I am the 451st!

*I lost brave and loyal men from my ranks ... I attest to their courage in
epitaphs from my past ... For where brave men fight, in a cause that is true, my
heroes measure up to the best ...*

I am the 451st!

*Though I no longer exist as an instrument of war, I remain in the hearts of men
that bore my colours, flew my aircraft, and carried on my pursuit for freedom. From
the coastline of Greece to the heartlands of Germany, my crews have showed how brave
men fight and endure ...*

I am the 451st!

*I bring my troops together; the men that flew, and the men that kept them flying
-- in this year of our Lord, Nineteen Hundred and Eighty Six -- to cherish and review
their worth ... then, now and forever.*

WE WERE THE 451st!

(by Bob Karstensen)