



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

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MAJOR GENERAL EATON: HIS LIFE AND TIMES

451st FIRST GROUP COMMANDER'S CAREER DISCLOSED IN FEATURE ARTICLE OF THE AMERICAN LEGION MAGAZINE

For those of us that will always have fond memories of our 1st Group Commander, Colonel Robert E.L. Eaton, I have uncovered an article published by The American Legion Magazine (Circa October 1973) that documents his life history up until the time that he became the National Commander of the American Legion. It was authored by R.B. Pitkin, writer for the American Legion Magazine. It is presented in such detail that no one, after reading it, should ever again wonder about our Colonel's earlier life.

To those of us that have been long time "Legionnaires," this will be old news. But to newer, non-Legionnaires, or those that joined our overseas Group late, it should make interesting reading.

Securing of this document came about when Robert Cox, Assistant Librarian for the American Legion Library and Museum, contacted me relevant to material I had on the 451st. An exchange of communications brought about the following article and privilege to reissue it in total.

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Robert E. Lee Eaton, a Mississippi-born Marylander,



Major General Robert E.L. Eaton USAF
Director of Legislative Liaison
Pentagon, Washington, DC - 1952

was elected National Commander of The American Legion for 1973-74 on Thursday, Aug. 23, 1973, at the final session of the Legion's 1973 National Convention in the Coral Ballroom of the Hilton Hawaiian Village, Honolulu, Hawaii.

Eaton is the only career military officer ever to head The American Legion. A West Pointer of the Class of 1931, he spent 31 years on active duty in the Army and Air Force. Immediately on being commissioned a second lieutenant in 1931, he went into flying in the early days of the Army Air Corps. He retired from the Air Force in 1962, after 15 years as a Major General.

Eaton was a pioneer in military aviation weather forecasting, and was chief of the Weather Central divi-

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"AD-LIB"**451st BOMB GROUP (H), LTD.
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sion of the Army Air Forces in 1942-43. Then for 17 months he commanded the 451st Bomb Group in WW2, flying 50 missions in B-24s from Italy. He was next the Paris-based deputy director of all U.S. strategic bombing operations in Europe, during the months when they reached their wartime peak.

He helped give birth to a separate U.S. Air Force and the merging of our military into one Department of Defense in the Pentagon after the war, serving in Washington as a top military liaison officer with Congress, and with national organizations to unify the armed forces.

In this work he first became intimately familiar with The American Legion. Part of his assignment was to help enlist the Legion's support for the creation of a single Defense Department, and the Legion had reservations about it. In the end, the Legion supported the Pentagon concept, while Eaton joined Post 105 in Bethesda, MD, in 1946 and has been one of Maryland's Legion leaders ever since.

For eight years after WW2, Eaton served in various high legislative, information and liaison capacities in the Pentagon. Then from 1953 to 1955 he commanded the 6th Allied Tactical Air Force in Izmir, Turkey -- which is another way of saying he was the NATO air commander in the eastern Mediterranean. For the next four years he commanded the 10th Air Force at Selfridge Air Force Base, Michigan. When he retired in 1962 he was assistant chief of staff for reserve forces.

Bob Eaton's high military rank and career as a professional soldier are bound to stir up discussion about the amount of military rank held by Legion Commanders over the years.

Wearer of stars are a rare breed in the office.

There have been no admirals.

One previous Commander had been a wartime general when he led the Legion (James A. Drain, Washington, 1924-25).

One who had been a WW1 lieutenant colonel was a WW2 general in the Pacific 20 years after he served as Legion Commander (Hanford MacNider, Iowa, 1921-22).

Two served in lesser ranks in WW2, but were generals in their state Guard units when elected to head the Legion (John S. Gleason, Jr., Illinois, 1957-58 and William C. Doyle, New Jersey, 1967-68).

Two generals never served as National Commanders, but were given the title of Past National Commander posthumously in recognition of their services in founding the Legion (Milton A. Foreman, Illinois, and Theodore Roosevelt, Jr., New York).

That completes the list, seven generals in all - including Eaton - out of 61 National Commanders, five of whom filled the office, four of whom were generals at the time. All but Eaton were one-star (brigadier) generals in the National Guard or Reserves, with lifetime civilian careers, though Gleason has since gotten his second star in the Army Reserve.

Lower commissioned and enlisted ranks have been the rule among Legion Commanders. As a two-star West Pointer, Eaton succeeds Joe L. Matthews, of Texas, who was a chief petty officer in the Seabees in WW2. Undoubtedly the lowest military rank held by a National Commander was that of W.C. "Dan" Daniel (1956-57), now a Congressman from Virginia, who was separated for physical reasons from WW2 Navy amphibious training before he had time to strike for a rating.

All of this is only for the record and to satisfy idle curiosity. One of the first rules established by the Legion was that military rank means nothing within it.

In the 11 years since his retirement from the Air Force, Bob Eaton has run his own public relations and management consulting firm in Washington, D.C. - Eaton Associates, Inc. - while continuing such a valuable Legion role that the Maryland Legion nominated him, and he was elected, to the office of National Vice Commander in 1970.

Last August, Eaton was elected National Commander not 12 miles from the scene of his first duty as a flying army officer 40 years earlier. After pilot training at Kelly and Randolph fields as a young lieutenant, he was assigned to Hawaii. From 1932 to 1935 he flew off of Ford Island in Pearl Harbor, then a rocky, bush-covered bit of ground with a grass airstrip called Luke Field. It was later that the Army built Hickam Field and turned Ford Island over to the Navy, and Eaton was long gone when the Japanese carrier planes came over the mountains on Dec. 7, 1941.

One might suppose that Robert Edward Lee Eaton was named by his parents in honor of the Confederate general Robert E. Lee. That's not exactly true, though as a boy born in 1909 in Hattiesburg, Miss., and raised on a cotton farm ten miles south of Greenville, Miss., it might have been. He was named for a respected second cousin of his father - and one time sheriff of Perry County, Miss. - who had been named for General Lee.

The Eatons were old English and Irish stock who settled in the Carolina in early colonial times. About 1819 a branch of the family moved out of South Carolina to Mobile Bay, then into Mississippi. They settled in Smith

County, near Laurel, before the Civil War. Bob Eaton's father, Malcolm Eaton, went to Mississippi College in Jackson. He married Sallie Huff, member of another early Mississippi family that had settled in Jones County, and they were living in Hattiesburg when Bob Eaton was born on Dec. 22, 1909. They soon moved to a rural area south of Greenville, Miss., and operated a cotton farm that was neither impoverished nor prosperous.

Bob Eaton grew up as a "typical farm boy." It was a happy life, with hunting and fishing as well as farm work. There was no town at all short of Greenville. He went to Riverside Consolidated High School at Pettit. "All there was to Pettit was the school," he says, and "no reason" not to call it just Riverside or just Pettit.

He ranked high in high school, competing in oratorical competitions and had academic ambitions that were in for a rude awakening.

Graduating from Riverside regional at 16, in 1926, he enrolled in Ole Miss (the University of Mississippi) and found that he was in for a terrible struggle. His high school background was weak, for all that he was high in his class. Freshman year at Ole Miss was almost over his head, especially in English and math.

"But the year at Ole Miss saved me," he says. "At some early date and for reasons I cannot now recall, I had wanted to go to West Point. At 16 I was too young, so I went to Ole Miss for a year. Without that year at college, I'd never have made it at the Point on my high school education. It was all right for farm boys, I suppose."

His chief personal memories of West Point are his struggles to keep up in his studies in competition with cadets whose public schooling had put them several rungs above him on the academic ladder.

A college classmate of his father, Will Whittington, was the Congressman from Eatons' district in Mississippi. Rep. Whittington got Bob Eaton an appointment to West Point, starting in July 1927. His four years at the U.S. Military Academy were dominated by his academic struggle.

To hear him tell it you'd think he just squeaked through at the bottom of the class. Actually, he beat out 101 others, finishing 196th in a class of 297. For two years he tried out for the lacrosse team. Having only made the B squad in that time, he dropped lacrosse. But he was the basketball manager in his senior year as well as battalion sergeant major, which made him a big figure in cadet parade formations. Aside from that it was grind, grind, grind to keep his nose above water.

On graduation he was assigned to the infantry, but he put in a request for flight training. By October of 1932, at age 22, he had his pilot's wings--one of 43 to earn them in a pilot training class of 102. He was sent to Ford Island's Luke Field in Pearl Harbor. There he flew off of grass as a pilot and observer in O-19s and served sundry collateral duties as supply officer, etc., until 1935.

He was transferred to Mitchell Field in New York in May 1935, where for a year he was operations officer of the 5th Bombardment Squadron with the temporary rank of captain.

In July 1936, he started seven years as a weather officer for the Army Air Corps when he was sent to M.I.T. for a concentrated ten-week course in advanced mathematics, followed by nine months training in instruments and meteorology. From M.I.T. he went to Belleville, Ill., as weather officer at Scott Field, headquarters of the 7th Air Base Group. There he met Jo Kathryn Rheim, a member of an old Belleville family and a graduate of Washington University. They were married on Jan. 1, 1939. In 1941, Eaton was briefly the commanding officer of his Scott Field air base group, the same year he became control officer of the 2nd U.S. Weather Region, comprising of northeast quadrant of the nation. He operated out of Patterson Field in Ohio, and was by now a lieutenant colonel.

The same month he took the job, the Japanese raided Pearl Harbor, and flight weather forecasting was not the best place to be for ambitious Air Corps officers. If Eaton was locked in it a little longer while his buddies were heading up flight groups, at least he rose to the top.

He continued to head up the 2nd Weather Region until Sept. 1942, when he took a ten-week command and general staff course at Ft. Leavenworth, Kan. From December 1942 to April 1943, he was the head of the Weather Central Division at the Army Air Forces Hq in Washington, D.C.--and a little bit desperate to get a combat command as the war ground on.

Weather Central was involved in flight forecasting for military operations on a worldwide scale, and had the problem of making large numbers of flight forecasters from inexperienced wartime personnel.

Scientists like to predict the weather from an analysis of all the forces at work in all levels of the atmosphere. They don't know all the forces today, and back then they knew far fewer.

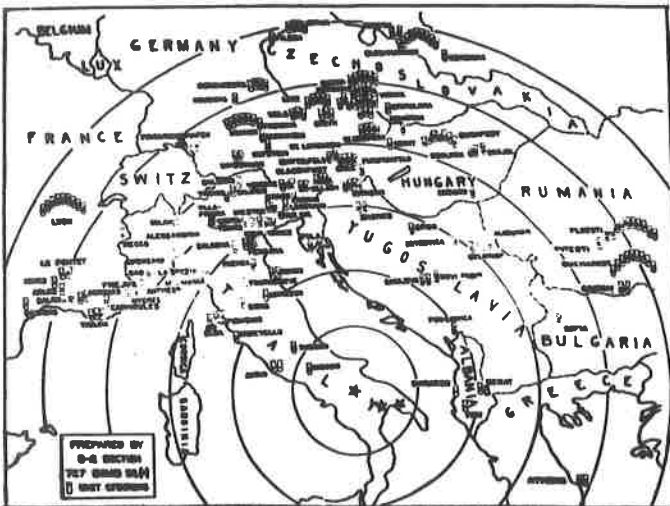
Standard weather maps, made from barometer and temperature readings showing the highs and lows, were the best the Army had to go by. At M.I.T., Eaton had learned that weather maps could be put to better use if only there were quick access to all continental weather patterns in the past, which nobody had. At Weather Central, all of the Weather Bureau maps and all the Signal Corps weather data--some going back as far as 100 years--were dug up. Eaton approached I.B.M. and asked if it could classify all past data and make any former weather patterns quickly available in a data processing setup. It could and did. Soon, Weather Central could press a button and see those five maps in the past that most closely resembled the day's map. A fairly reliable prediction could then be made for tomorrow, based on how the maps of the past had developed. It wasn't fool-proof, but it was a sound basis of forecasting that could be learned fast by men with limited experience and little more current data than the barometric patterns and temperature gradients.

Forecasters who have worked in one locality for years do this by the seat-of-the-pants. They get to know the most likely development of the local weather from various high-low patterns. But Weather Central forecast the flying weather for the entire western hemisphere with a pretty good batting average--a far more complex

problem.

Eaton was happy to get out of his seven years in the weather business, for all its fascination, when, in April, 1943, he was offered command of the 451st Bomb Group, then being set up on a skeleton basis in Tennessee and Florida, the Group was built up to strength in Utah and then Nebraska and released for combat in November 1943. It flew to Algiers, then joined the 15th Air Force in Italy and started combat operations there in January 1944.

Eaton was commander of the 451st until October 1944, when he had flown the limit of 50 bombing missions (42 actual, eight of which were counted as two each when Italian-based planes bombed north of the Alps). Group commanders were not supposed to fly more than 4 missions a month, but Eaton had a yen to join the B-29s in the Pacific. He got his 50 missions in ahead of schedule in hopes of getting a B-29 assignment.



The group's targets were scattered all over Nazi-land, from northern Italy and southern France to Munich, Regensburg, Vienna, Budapest and Ploesti. Of 21 U.S. high-level raids on the Ploesti oil complex in Romania, the 451st flew 19. It had 90 bombers at its peak and could put up to 40 in the air at any one time.



General Twining, 15th Air Force Commander, & Colonel Eaton, 451st Bombardment Group Commander

By the time Eaton had completed his limit of flying missions in October, the 451st had won three Presidential Unit Citations. Eaton was not to be a B-29 commander. He was ordered first to London, then Paris, as deputy director of operations for the whole European strategic bombing show.

The round-the-clock bombing of German-held areas in Europe was conducted by the U.S. 8th Air Force in England and the U.S. 15th in Italy by daylight, and at night by the British Royal Air Force. Gen. Carl Spaatz headed the American air campaign. In command of the British operations was Air Marshal Sir Norman H. Bottomley.

By late 1944, the weekly operations were planned in Paris and London. They covered a heavily defended area roughly comparable to the United States from Maine to Omaha and south to Miami.

The total planning and assessment of operations and targets was a matter of such inconceivable complexity that when, in March 1944, General Spaatz started to set up a top-level assessment board within the air forces themselves, the project not only overflowed the air forces but ended up by reporting directly to the Allied governments.

Short of detailing what was involved (which would fill books) it might suffice to note that this was the first international attempt to use strategic bombing as a major arm in the winning of a war. And though previous experience was lacking, it was on a scale that nobody had ever imagined. It embraced industrial, raw material, transportation and military targets against desperate opposition from France to Poland, from Italy to Belgium, from the Black Sea to the Adriatic, Mediterranean, North Sea and the Baltic.

Bob Eaton became number three in the operational planning. Overall commander of the U.S. operations under Spaatz was the late Gen. Frederick Anderson. His operations director was Gen A.R. Maxwell, and Eaton became Maxwell's deputy.

One day each week, at a meeting in London which included the operations officers of the British and two American air forces, the targets and missions for the next week were set up. Opinion was by no means unanimous. Each air force had its own pressures, desires and problems that were paramount in its own eyes, while the overall operational planners (Eaton, Maxwell and their British equivalents) were bound more to the grand strategic plan. Yet decisions could not be endlessly delayed while points were argued. In the end, if necessary, Maxwell or Eaton and their British counterparts would retire and firm up the final orders. They almost never had any difficulties working together. If they couldn't agree, they'd shoot their differences to Bottomley and Spaatz. There could be no delay.

Thus were the weekly plans drawn that saw the bombing of Hitler's empire rise to a mighty crescendo in the late winter of 1945. By mid-March, so many strategic targets had been eliminated that more and more of the bombers were being detached on tactical missions in support of the ground troops.

In one of the greatest tactical support missions ever carried out by strategic bombers, some 1,200 15th Air

Force planes made a massive assault on German ground troops and artillery opposing our forces in front of Bologna, Italy.

On April 1, Bob Eaton was sent from Paris to Spaatz' hq in Rheims to help plan tactical missions that would speed the advance of the Allied armies. On April 7, the British air chief of staff, Sir Charles Portal, warned that any further strategic bombing of German cities would only make the problem of the occupying forces greater. On that day Portal called off any further general area strikes by British bombers.

On April 16, General Spaatz announced that the strategic air war in Europe was over, though it turned out that the armies still had three weeks of fighting ahead of them. There were no more strategic targets.

For what remained of the war, Spaatz said, the 8th and 15th Air Forces would collaborate with our regular tactical air arm, the 9th Air Force, in support of troop movements. In the tactical missions that Bob Eaton was planning, the planes went out to hit small targets or "anything that moved" in front of the advancing armies. The European war moved swiftly to a close. By the time of the surrender on May 7, the bombers were largely dropping supplies and carrying out liberated prisoners of war. Eaton's job in Europe was done, but there was new and different work in the United States.

Today, a generation has grown up which does not recall that up to the end of WW2 there was no Defense Department, and no U.S. Air Force.

The Army had its own agency--the War Department--with a cabinet Secretary of War. The Navy had its cabinet-rank Navy Department. They were separate entities, all the way up to the President. What we call the Air Force today was the Army Air Corps before WW2, then the Army Air Forces.

It was in the cards by the end of WW2 that the Army and Navy should come under a single civilian officer, the Secretary of Defense. Meanwhile, the Army Air Forces had grown to such stature that they wanted to be separated from the Army and given equal status as a third military branch under the proposed Secretary of Defense.

Bob Eaton's operations boss, Gen. Frederick Anderson, picked a handful of his top officers to come to Washington immediately the war was over, to help hasten the unification of the armed forces under one government department, with an Air Force as one of three equal branches under it. Among this small group was Eaton. Technically, General Anderson returned to Washington as head of Army Air Forces personnel, and Bob Eaton--still a colonel--was his executive officer. (No office existed for the specific job at hand.) To Eaton there soon fell the good deal of the representation in Congress in support of unification, and the responsibility to get support from Veterans, farm, labor, church and business groups. In this capacity, Eaton was moved to the office of Army Air Forces Public Relations under Gen. Rosy O'Donnell, where he headed up a section called "Community Relations."

Of course, all that they worked for came to pass. The congress created the Defense Department and a separate Air Force. Eaton personally wrote the plans for the Air

Force Association. Today, he notes that "you might not remember the difficulties we had getting the Legion's strong support. It wasn't easy to get."

He got it. And the Legion got him, once he had worked closely enough with it to have a grasp of the Legion and its workings and objectives. Meanwhile, his work with Congress had been so effective that when the U.S. Air Force was set up, he became its first deputy director of legislative liaison in September 1947. A few years later he moved up from deputy to director.

There he remained until 1953, the day to day contact man between the Air Force and Congress. By then he had spent twice as long in Washington as an officer was supposed to, and had been promoted to brigadier and then major general.

In September 1953, the Secretary of the Air Force decided that even though Eaton was "Bob" to virtually the entire Congress, there was a limit, and eight years was the limit. The possibly difficult job of getting Turks and Greeks to work together in NATO seemed a natural job for him. So he was named the first NATO air commander in Turkey, which encompassed setting up the NATO air forces there, and welding into it both the Turkish and Greek air commands.



General Eaton with Turkish Brigadier General Izmir, Turkey - (NATO)

According to Eaton there was nothing to it. "We got on famously," he says. My chief of staff was a Turkish brigadier. Our job was not to command them in peacetime, but only in training for joint operations with NATO in the event of war."

Starting with 25 people, they set up a 300-man NATO headquarters, about half of them Americans, and conducted air exercises involving one Greek and three Turkish air forces, sometimes running joint maneuvers with the U.S. sixth Fleet. The NATO headquarters Eaton organized at Izmir, Turkey, remains today the eastern Mediterranean tactical air command for NATO.

In August 1955, Eaton was transferred to Michigan to head up the 10th U.S. Air Force. It then supervised the training of the Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve for 13 states. While Bob Eaton was there it was expanded to 18 states. The 10th had had an unsatisfactory fighter plane accident record of 55 accidents per

100,000 hours of flying time. The accident rate is a general reflection of the tightness of the entire operation, and under Eaton's command it was brought down to nine per 100,000 hours in the air. Shortly before he retired, he was brought back to Washington as Assistant Chief of Staff for Reserve Forces. In 1962 he retired, settled down in Maryland and started his own consulting and public relations firm in Washington.



**General Eaton, 10th AF Commander
Inspection of Guard & Reserve Units in Wyoming**

His return to Washington and his retirement signaled a return to Legion activities in Maryland, in which he had rendered good service before being sent to Turkey and Michigan.

Eaton had joined Post 105 in Bethesda, Md., in Feb. 1946. It was then known as Bethesda-Chevy Chase Post, since renaming Fitzgerald-Cantrel Post. He regularly attended his Post meetings and was soon lending his considerable executive talents to the problems of the Post--and before long to the Maryland state Legion. He has been elected a delegate to every Legion National Convention since 1948.

"I learned by working with it on unification of the Armed Forces that the Legion is a great stabilizing force in the United States," he said recently. "This is not readily apparent from its social organization. But if you have been exposed to the breadth and depth of its policy-making and programs and to its underlying philosophy--as I was in 1946 and 1947--you almost feel a compulsion, if you are a veteran, to contribute what you can to its entirely voluntary operation."

Six years after he joined, Marylanders asked him to run for state commander. As he was still an active duty major general, he requested Air Force permission. The answer was no to any position of political leadership in the Legion, but there was no objection to his holding Legion committee positions. Maryland promptly elected him its alternate on the Legion's National Executive Committee for 1952-54.

His assignments to Turkey and Michigan interrupted his Legion activities for five years, but on his return to Washington he picked up the threads again. At the 1961 National Convention in Denver he was chairman of the convention finance committee and was its secretary at

the next two conventions. He was a natural for both his state and national committees dealing with the military and national security. Maryland put him to work on its aeronautics, defense and military advisory committees and he has served on the Legion's national security training committee. Because of his administrative talents, both his state and the national Legion have used him in positions having nothing to do with the military, including the organization of conventions and the guidance of financial policies.

On his retirement from the Air Force, Legion political office was open to him. Maryland promptly ran him "up the ladder" of junior and senior state vice commanderships and elected him state commander for 1965-66, then made him its National Executive Committeeman for two successive two-year terms, running from 1967 to 1970. It then nominated him for one of the Legion's five National Vice Commanderships, to which he was elected at the 1970 national convention. There was only one higher office left. In 1971, the Maryland Legion pushed its favorite retired general and workhorse for the National Commandership, and on Aug. 23, 1973, he was it.



The Maryland American Legion is one of the strong Legion state organizations. It is bristling with active programs and hard workers and produces a remarkable output of energy and imagination. It is one of a small group of state Legion organizations that conduct international programs of their own. It has built a school in Mexico, and it has Mexican and Canadian youths as its guests at its Boys State. It has run goodwill programs of a substantial nature in the Philippines Vietnam and in Europe. In Maryland it is a civic giant. Many state Legion organizations would be hard put to match its record of inventiveness in discovering new ground to plow in wholesome and helpful community, state and inter-

national projects on top of cornucopia of standard Legion programs. This is all reflected in its membership growth, in which it is one of the national leaders.

Maryland is one of 20 Legion Departments whose all-time membership record does not date back to the great influx of WW2 veterans in 1946-47-48. Maryland surpassed its 1946 record (38,737) in 1967, and by July of this year has set its seventh consecutive record. In the last 10 1/2 years it has grown by 46.3%, from 35,286 (1963 Year-end) to 51,634 by July 12, 1973.

The Department's modern resurgence coincides with Eaton's increased activity in it since his retirement from the Air Force. He is hardly personally responsible for it all, but Maryland Legionnaires point to certain "far-sighted" things that he did that were instrumental in their decade of sudden growth.

Eaton has a calm, friendly, factual way about him. His speech is unhurried and to the point. His personal manner is so unprepossessing that it gives no hint of a man who has been thrust into positions of high responsibility, several of which were at the center of the stage of permanent landmarks in national history.

It is not in his nature to try to make a splash by putting on a front. This writer asked several Maryland Legionnaires how it happened that for more than 20 years they had been pushing a man who didn't seem to be pushing himself very hard.

Said one: "Bob has been a first-rate doer. Here's a busy and able man who has been pushing the Legion for two decades. We'd be fools not to push him. The more we gave him to do, the more he has done for us."

Said another: "I come from the western end of the state. I wasn't aware of him very much until he was state commander in 1965-66. Then all of a sudden things that were long overdue started to happen. In this air-conditioned age our Department still had been suffering in the Baltimore summers without air conditioning. It was beastly to go there on business in the summer. All of a sudden Eaton had it air-conditioned. We needed a state Legion newspaper for years, but nobody before him could quite take the responsibility to authorize one and all the headaches that go with it. In January of this year as state commander the first issue of Free State Warrior appeared. It is readable, interesting, informative--a top-notch organization publication. The communications it has provided with every member have been a big factor in the growth of our department. When you go on for years and see things that ought to be done suddenly happen, you sit up and say 'Hey, somebody's on the ball!' I've been an Eaton man ever since."

Said a third: "Bob Eaton accepted every job we ever have him. He measured it, studied it, worked at it. He was always there, always willing. After a while he knew as much about all our programs as any man, because he worked on them all. He already knew more about national security than any man in the Legion--and we have experts. He seems to know everyone in Congress and all of the staffs on Capitol Hill, and they all seem to know and respect him. I think he can measure up to any job anyone gives him."

Said a fourth: "Why ask me? Go ask the Air Force why they jumped him from group commander to deputy

chief of the whole bombing show in Europe. Group commanders were a dime a dozen at the time. Ask them why they put him on the small team to create the Air Force and the Defense Department, why they kept him as their man in congress for twice the normal tour of duty in Washington, why they picked him to get the Greeks and Turks to work together in NATO. The guy will take on the toughest assignment, do a good job and make it look easy."



Bob Eaton - 451st Reunion Speaker
(As we knew him - THEN)

Such enthusiasm could be embarrassing to Bob Eaton by seeming to promise miracles. It does confirm again that he is a proven capable administrator with a generous capacity for dedicating forward-looking volunteer service.

Marylanders are as enthusiastic about Mrs. Eaton, whom this writer has not met. "Jo is a wonderfully outgoing woman," I was told. "You are going to see that the Eatons are a team."



Bob and Kathryn Jo Eaton
Home Christmas Eve - 1991



The Eaton Family

L to R: Carolyn & Bob Eaton, Jr.; Seated Earle & Sallie (Eaton) Elliott; Standing Katie Eaton with parents, Henry & Bonnie Eaton

The Eatons have three grown children. Robert, Sallie and Charles. Bob Eaton is an Episcopalian and a Mason. In his military career he has been decorated with the Silver Star with oak leaf clusters, Legion of Merit, the Distinguished Flying Cross with oak leaf cluster, Bronze Star, Air Medal with four oak leaf clusters, the Distinguished Service Medal and the French Croix de Guerre. He is a member of the Columbia Country Club, the Army-Navy Club and Burning Tree (Washington) and the Pine Valley Club. The Eatons live in Chevy Chase, Md.

(Editorial Comment; My thanks goes out to the American Legion for the opportunity to use this article for the benefit of our readers. My thanks, also, to the Eaton Family; Sallie, Robert, Jr. and Charles for the photos that they so willingly offered.

Bob Eaton passed away on 3 April 1993. His wife, Kathryn Jo on 29 July 1995, just 2 years later.

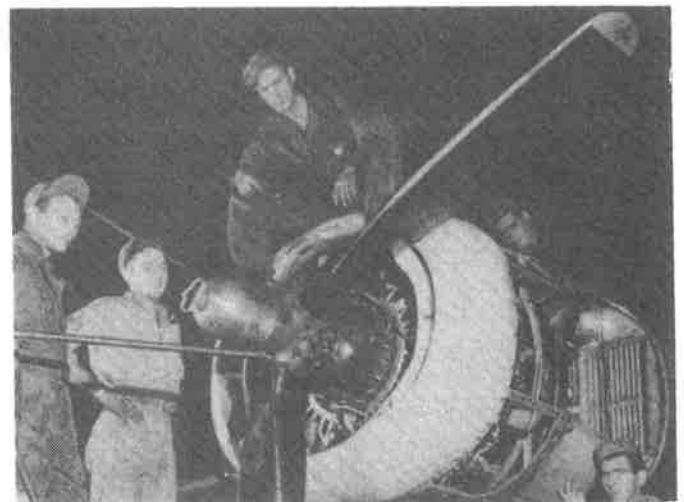


Bob Eaton, as you can well imagine, was not only my Commanding Officer back then, but a friend that I could call upon when it came to helping out at our reunions. I have missed his counsel, but from the men he trained I can always count on someone from the ranks to give support and credence to what we're all about. Having flown with the Colonel, on several occasions in combat, I always carried a strong respect for his judgement and coolness. And whenever I can, I like to pass on to the readers these various tributes to him that I come across in the course of my studies.)

JIM DRUMM'S TRIBUTE TO ANOTHER GREAT AMERICAN

IN MEMORY OF "IKE"

Many, many items of interest come across this desk, in the intervening time between newsletters, in the form of newspaper articles, combat records, journals/diaries, newsletters, etcetera. All are read with deep interest and held for further reference. Not all data fits into the domain of what can be used in the Ad-Lib. It's a judgement call on my part, which most of you accept and condone. In the same vein as the feelings I have for our late Group Commander, Colonel Robert E.L. Eaton, Jim Drumm (724th Crew Chief) relates his feelings to the loss of General Dwight D. Eisenhower (1890--1969). He wrote of his feelings in the following article, submitted it to his local paper and it was printed on the front page. It was then read into the Congressional Record in the House of Representatives by his local Congressman. He also got a nice response from "Mamie" Eisenhower,



Late night Engine Change - Jim Drumm Far Left; Others Unknown

after she'd read it. Jim had almost forgotten about it until he started going through some of his mementos of his past. He sent it to me, not as a prompt, but as an excuse for his forgetfulness. I thought you guys would like to see it, as it is a definite reminder of our history, as done by one of us ... from the ranks.

To the Editor: Yesterday at work a friend who is also a veteran said to me, "Do you know that Ike is dead?" Twice more I heard practically the same words expressed and I thought, "What a ridiculous idea, Ike losing a battle." My thoughts drifted back to the dark days at the start of World War II when each succeeding day brought only defeat and despair. The leaders of the Allied Nations finally decided that we needed a Supreme Allied Commander to unite all of the troops of all the nations. They

picked the right man, Dwight D. Eisenhower. Very soon things started looking a little brighter. The tide of battle turned our way. It was a long, hard road back, paved with broken bodies and shattered equipment, ending eventually in final victory. To me Ike's leadership was decisive. His quiet confidence, grim determination and superior judgement was an inspiration to all of the Allied Nations and the more you think of it, the more ridiculous it sounds. Ike lost a battle. Not to me he didn't, rather he gained a final promotion. Now he is as high as he can go.

Jim Drumm -- March 1969 American Legion Post 170.

NEPHEW SEARCHES FOR HIS UNCLES PAST

In Issue 26 of the Ad-Lib I placed, into the "Short Bursts & Hangfire" section, a letter from Sedge Hill that contained a plea from Jim Cunningham requesting information about his uncle, Sergeant James F. Curtin. It seems that Jim is trying to patch together the events of his uncle's military career. At that time I put together what information I had on the crash that took the life of his uncle and sent it to Jim, a policeman in Petaluma, California. Since then Jim has continued his pursuit from other sources, including the Air Force Historical Research Agency at Maxwell Air Force Base in Alabama. He has also canvassed his relatives to garner any written material that may have been exchanged by his family, with families of the crew. Jim has been more than kind by allowing me the privilege of being kept up to speed on what he's uncovered. And in the uncovering of information on his uncle, I can not be excluded for not wanting to know more about the incident .. even more than I already have.



Jim Curtin - Gunner, 726th - KIA 8 February 1944

The incident I'm referring to is probably the first fatal crash that the 451st suffered under combat conditions. It was the crash (on take-off) that happened on 8 February 1944 while the Group was based at Gioia del Colle. (The next most costly mission was on 25 February 1944 when we lost 6 aircraft over Regensburg Germany and a total of 22 men were listed as KIA.) Lieutenant James N. Hunt, flying "Old Tub" with a full crew of 10, was scheduled to bomb the marshalling yards and steel mills at Piombino, Italy. With new material discovered by Jim Cunningham from the Air Force archives we now know the cause of the crash. The official report on the incident reads as follows:



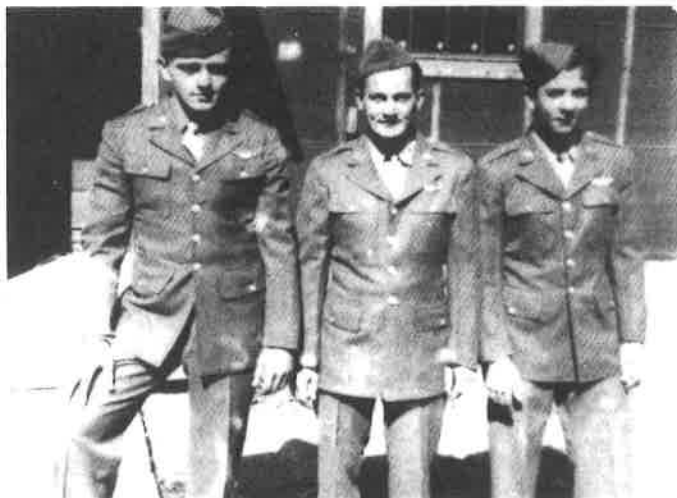
"OLD TUB" Original A/C Crewed by Lt. Grant Sturman's Crew

Army Airplane B-24H, 42-52151, took-off to North at 0800, 8 February 1944, on assigned operational mission. The plane was observed to turn to the left about two miles North of Northrup Air Base completing a 60 degree turn. The airplane attempted to straighten out and proceed at the new heading but stalled and crashed.

There was no evidence that any attempt was made to jettison the bomb load. Some of the bombs detonated at the time of the crash, others at intervals extending over a period of twenty minutes.

The accident is believed to be the result of carburetor icing.

The report was signed by an Examining Board consisting of Group Commander Colonel Robert Eaton, Captain William McManus and Captain (Flight Surgeon) Marshall Kremer. Captain Leland Younkin was the Board Recorder.



L to R - James Curtin, Herbert Suereth (Both KIA) Matthew Diocca (Still Unfound)

Other information Jim came up with, became a revelation to me as I looked into my files and was forced to make certain corrections. I had it that Gunner Matthew P. Diocca (an original member of the crew) as being on part of the ship's crew that day. But in reality he had been hospitalized in Africa, while enroute over to Italy and did not join the 726th until sometime after May. His place was taken, on 8 February, by Gunner Donald Dobry. What information I had, did not come from a Missing Air Crew Report (MACR), since this was considered "an accident," not directly attributable to enemy action.

Also verified was the names of the three surviving crewmen; Lt Ed Niederkorn, Copilot; Meryll M. Frost, Ball Gunner; Ola D. Thaxton, Gunner. Of these three survivors this office has found that Meryll Frost had died (17 March 1992), as has Ola Thaxton (15 May 1995). This gives Ed Niederkorn the dubious distinction of being the only living survivor of that incident.

But being a survivor isn't the only way a legacy can be left to the future generations. Meryll Frost, a former Dartmouth graduate, star football player and one of the founders of the Air Force Association, was interviewed by a small New Hampshire camp paper. Meryll had been a consular there and the kids he had worked with, prior to entering service, wanted to know of his wartime experience. Meryll's wife, Pauline, sent this to Jim, and he to me. It reads:

CAMP WALLULA NEWS

Now back in this country is S/Sgt Meryll M. Frost, USAAF, former consular at Wallula in '41 and '42, recovering from severe burns received in a crash of a Liberator last February in Italy. He has received the Purple Heart and is now recovering here in the States. He writes the following:

"I was a ball turret gunner in a Liberator bomber stationed in Italy. We made several successful raids before the accident.

On the morning of February 8th, we were called out at an early hour to prepare for a raid. Every man went through the routine check-up of guns, ammunition, turrets, bombs and airplane. With that complete, we started down the runway. It was a damp cold morning, but evidently those in the know thought it was suitable for flying. No sooner had we taken to the air when the plane started acting very peculiarly. The tail was bouncing up and down like a rubber ball. I called the pilot and asked what the problem was and was told to investigate. Going back to the tail turret I examined the whole tail surface but could find nothing wrong. I returned to my position in the waist just in time to hear the pilot calling for emergency landing instructions. By this time we had about 500 feet of altitude and with full power settings were making about 160 miles per hour. From then on it was like a bad dream. In less than a minute we had crashed and the plane burst into flames. Evidently I was dazed by the crash because the next thing I knew was that I was under a pile of wreckage and was all aflame. After fighting my way clear of the plane, I rolled on the ground so as to put out the fire. It took me several seconds to gather my senses and realize what had happened. The air was heavy with smoke and fire and 50 caliber shells were exploding like fire crackers. My left eye was completely closed and only a thin slit remained through which I could see with my right eye. The next impulse was to try to help some of the other fellows out, so I started towards the plane. When I reached about 10 feet from the plane the two and a half tons of bombs exploded. Luck was with me as I was uninjured from the shrapnel, although the concussion threw me quite a distance. It was then that an Italian took my arm and led me to his home where I waited for the ambulance. Since then I have been under the care of the Army Medical Corps, and believe me, there is none finer."



Officers of Crew 51

Fountain Lovejoy, Bombardier; Edward Neiderkorn, Copilot; James Hunt, Pilot; Vearl Maple, Navigator

Meryll's recovery from his burns was similar to what Ed Niederkorn experienced. Numerous operations and months of rehabilitation before they were separated out of the military. Ola Derrald Thaxton was much more fortunate as he only suffered minor injuries and was reported to have been able to evacuate the aircraft and remove himself from the fire and detonation of the bombs.

This editor is most grateful to Jim Cunningham for all the information he offered me. He gave much more than what I could put into this article. Several personal letters that went between families of the deceased and Jim's grandmother, Mrs. Hannah M. Curtin. These letters only "fleshed out" the narrative and would have little purpose by being included.



Full Original Crew- Minus Bombardier Lovejoy

POIGNANT STORY COMES BACK TO LIFE

AD-LIB Vol. 1, No. 13 - Thursday May 3, 1945 - Printed in Italy

725 HAS CINDERELLA WAIF HAPPY WITH GI

With a few revisions, the story of Carmelina Castiline, a five year old Italian lass who has been literally adopted by one of the combat crews of the 451st Bomb Group, could well pass for a modern version of Cinderella. S/Sgt. Harold Todd, Rt. #2, Box 73, Orange, California, had been walking on the rocky Italian countryside near the base, reveling in the New Years Day snow that still hugged the ground. A little way down a hill, he saw a little girl, shivering with cold. As he came nearer he could see that she wore no shoes. Her only clothing was a ragged piece of sheepskin tied around her waist. He walked up to her, asked in his pidgin Italian, "Dove Casa." The chilled little girl burst into tears, partly because of the cold, partly because she was afraid of the strange soldier. Todd reached into his pocket, pulled out an orange he had salvaged from breakfast, held it out to her. She stopped crying.



Carmelina Castiline with Harold Todd

That was the beginning of the strange relationship between the five year old Italian girl and the bachelor gunner who could scarcely speak a word of her language. Todd would tell the boys on his crew about his visits at the child's home expecting them to laugh. The crew never did laugh. The two fathers on the crew would give Todd long dissertations on "The care and feeding of Carmelina." It was almost a month later when a "Wardrobe" arrived from Todd's mother. He went back to the farmhouse. By now he was a familiar figure to the family. He could take Carmelina anywhere, anytime. The family was too busy scratching enough food from the rocky

ground to be bothered with worries over her whereabouts. So Carmelina lived at the squadron with the approval of family and her new found friends. She was shy at first, just as she had been with Todd.

In a few hours she was at ease with the whole crew and eventually set at the head of the table. The Pilot, Lt. Edward J. Shimanski, 5014 42nd Street, Long Island, N.Y., was "Eddy"; co-pilot 2nd Lt. Arthur Eckstein, 284 Fountain Ave., Brooklyn, N.Y. was "Arturo"; the bombardier, 2nd Lt. Thaddeus Kumer, 349 Fay Ave., Elizabeth, N.J., was "Teddy." Todd had always been "Haraldo." At times Carmelina was a lot of bother to the crew, but she was good for them. She made the stand-down days move more quickly, and made the missions come and go more rapidly. New things always thrilled "Lena," and everything was new to her. She liked the movies at the base theater, especially the musicals. She like the volleyball games and the baseball games. Meanwhile church folks back in Orange, Calif. kept a steady stream of clothes flowing to Todd. In a short time the rest of Lena's family had clothing too. A few weeks ago, Carmelina had her fifth birthday. Todd was not flying, so he took her into Foggia. It was the first time she had ever seen a city. She was a wide eyed little kid, seeing everything, enjoying everything. The Red Cross building was her hall of wonders. She had her first ice cream. With V-E Day drawing near, Todd and his officers are trying to wade through the legal red tape necessary to adopt Carmelina. Her family would be only too glad to see her go back to the States with Todd. The boys who know the story of Lena and Todd are all sweating out the verdict on the adoption. If all goes well, perhaps in a few years Carmelina will be reading the story of Cinderella in Orange, Calif., believing it to be a slightly disguised biography of a little Italian girl.

---Written by: Cpl Richard Krause---

(Editors note .. There must have been some gigantic error in the publishing of this original story. The title, which starts out under the heading "725," has to be wrong. The Shimanski Crew swear that they were part of the 726th; the author Richard Krause [although my records show it spelled "Kraus"] was a 726th writer. The one detail that evades me is Harold Todd's reference [later in this article] to David Henshell, Supply, later Engineering Officer. Dave was a 725th member, unless he transferred, as was often the case - the whole thing is a puzzlement!!)

It never came to pass - the adoption of little Carmelina. It's hard to say just where the system broke down; whether the US government frowned upon these overseas adoptions, or the crew failed to push hard enough to "make things happen."

All we know is that she may still be over there, wondering the same as "Haroldo;" Is she, as in the case of Todd thinking of Carmelina - there, and Carmelina looking at it from another angle, is Haroldo still alive? It has to be concluded that overseas communication between the two of them was completely out of question back then. Carmelina being just 5 years old and not having attended school, as yet. And the family caring for her, probably illiterate. It could have only been that if the government had sanctioned the adoption, THEY would have located her.

And too, we all knew that the trauma of getting home, was in itself, something strange (for some) to adjust to. We can all remember the promises we made to our closest buddies that we'd get together - real soon. But the adjustment to civilian life had many twists and turns. To some it was going off to college for that degree. To others it was entering the work force and perfecting skills that would carry us through to retirement. Along with that, there was marriage and starting families. Many, many things enter into promises made, and not fulfilled.

Since Harold Todd joined us in late 1994, I have brought up the subject of Carmelina to him. He has responded that he too, wishes there had been a more fulfilling end to the story. He could only add that what I had previously said, school, marriage and family, caused him to "put on hold" any plans he had to relocate her. Now he is making overtures to try and find her once more - being she's still alive. If she was 5 years old in 1944, she must be close to 58 now; this being 1997.

But aside from the fine write-up he got in the "original Ad-Lib" he has dredged his memory for a generous and more detailed summary on what transpired along the cold lonely road near Castelluccia di Sauri.

In between missions I use to walk around the countryside near the base. It had been snowing one winter evening while I was out walking. Along the way I noticed something in the distance that I first thought to be an animal of some sort. As I approached it I was surprised to find it was a small child wrapped in a piece of old sheepskin. I saw no evidence of any homes or dwellings of any kind in the area. She was blue with cold, shivering and badly in need of medical attention. I wrapped my flight jacket around her, put my gloves on her feet and carried her back to the Medic tent at the base. We found an orange for her and a few other things from the mess hall as she seemed to be hungry. She seemed frightened, but we all tried to be quiet and reassure her that we were friends trying to help her. She finally went to sleep and the Medics said they would care for her the rest of that night.

The next morning she seemed better and was eating. I had an English/Italian dictionary and I tried to get across to her where she was and to comfort her. She was suffering from exposure, but fortunately didn't seem to have frost-bite. The Medics weren't too busy that day

and suggested we leave her there the rest of that day, plus another night while I tried to find where she belonged.

I took my dictionary and walked for a distance of about five miles near where I found her. In the distance I thought I saw some buildings, but it was getting late and I needed to be back before dark. Arriving back at camp I went and checked on her. She was responding a little better and I got across to her that I was trying to find her family. I leaned down to kiss her forehead and she grabbed me around the neck real tight and wouldn't let go. She finally quieted down and fell back asleep.

The next morning I checked on her and told the Medics that the crew felt it would be OK with them if we made a bed for her in one corner of our tent until we found her family.

I went out again and found some old shacks along a small river. I noticed activity of a few adults and several children living in extreme poverty conditions. They were cooking in one basic large pot which they all shared. Through my dictionary we were able to understand basically that I had found this little girl and that she was suffering from exposure, but was being taken care of. I asked who her parents were and they raised their hands to the sky and said "Germana Bomba." It was clear to me that her parents had been killed by German bombings. These people evidently were friends or relatives and were taking care of her along with the own children. I told them I would bring her down when she was feeling better. They seemed relieved that she was OK, so I went back to camp and fixed up a comfortable bed for her in our tent. I had already sent a letter home to my parents to send packages of clothing and basic toilet articles, not only for her but for the other kids, too.

She seemed to bond almost immediately with the whole Squadron, as she gradually started putting on weight and gaining in health. Even the cooks and Mess Sgt set aside special goodies for her. The Officers from our crew learned to love her, also. They would quite often come by to pick her up for a trip to the Officers Mess, or special things that they thought would interest her.

Soon packages started arriving from home, and from different churches, filled with clothes and special things, not only for Lena (as we called her), but for the others down by the river. I took her down on my back, dressed in her new clothes, beads and her hair all braided up, plus another bag of clothes of various sizes for the other children, with a promise of more.

Sometimes Lena would stay with her friends at the "river," but most times she'd want to go back to sleep in her own little bed in our tent. She had her own special wardrobe of dresses, pants and sweaters and was probably the best dressed little girl in Italy.

By the end of a few months I was clothing and helping with hygienic needs of about fifteen children and several adults.

Lena spent most of the time in the tent with us, but when we were flying I quite often took her down to stay with her people. She and the families even started counting the planes as they left, and again when they returned. They seemed generally quite concerned for our



Shimanski's Crew, 726th

welfare. As time went by she became more and more attached to the crew and others from the 726th Squadron. I remember the Supply Officer from our Squadron (Dave Henshell) who used to come by in his Jeep and take her for rides. Another time I took her to Foggia with me. I don't think she'd ever been to a town before, as everything seemed to keep her wide-eyed and truly surprised. I bought her a few trinkets, including a few things to take to her little friends at the river. We stopped at the Red Cross Canteen where they gave her a big dish of ice cream. From the reaction I'm certain this was also another first for her. Needless to say, I know she made quite an impression on the Red Cross gals.

Later, when we were near the town center and were crossing the street, an Italian policeman stopped us and accused me of kidnapping her. I tried to explain to him, but wasn't getting anywhere with my limited language abilities. He was to the point of taking me to the police station when a couple women came over waving their hands at him and shouting at him to let me go. They had evidently heard of the work I had been doing with the children by the river.

The rest of the trip went well and she had a real great time. When we went down to the river the next day, she had plenty to talk about with the other kids and with the family.

Up to that point in Harold's life, things had been pretty hectic. He was in the National Guards at 17, opted for the Navy right after Pearl Harbor, served aboard the Cruiser USS Brooklyn, was given a medical discharge; enlisted in the Air Corps for cadet training; washed-out (as many of us did) and ended up as a gunner on Ed Shimanski's (AKA Sherman) crew.

Thus was Harold Todd's saga, of both his military career and the involvement of the little waif called Carmelina. I'm sure as Harold finds out more about his wartime ward, we'll hear about it.

Something to Remember:

Rocks may crumble, but the 451st will live on forever in the hearts of those that served within its ranks.

WES NELSON'S TRIBUTE AND PLEDGES

I'm going to preface the following story with a bit about the author, Wesley F. Nelson. Wes was born about the time some of us were finishing high school, or in early military training: 1942. Since joining us in 1996 he has pledged his interest in what happened to the EXTRA JOKER. Pledged to the degree that he has contributed funds to the organization in order to eulogize the crew, and to the many people effected by their deaths. He has fulfilled his commitment, but just so the record is straight, offered the following article.

This months check is for \$100, because it is for many people. This is for the families that got those dreaded telegrams some time after August 23, 1944, that stated, "The War Department regrets to inform you"

When I first saw that remarkable picture of the beginning of the end of the Extra Joker, I don't know what my exact thoughts were. Just another Lib going down, like so many others, probably.

Then I noticed that you could see the white fur collar and dark sleeve of the pilot's flight jacket. The book where I first saw the picture identified that pilot as Lt. Ken Whiting. Key words here: "Lt. Ken Whiting." This isn't "just another Lib going down." Ten men are about to die! Some are probably already dead, but those who survived the 20mm cannon rounds are about to face a minute or so of more sheer terror than most people can even imagine. A minute or so of knowing that the plane was going to hit the ground and explode, but not being able to get out. Trapped by twisted metal. Trapped by centrifugal force. Trapped by injuries. Who will ever know what desperate actions they were going through? Who will ever know what thoughts were going through their minds?

The unalterable fact is that shortly after that picture was taken, ten humans were violently killed when that bomber impacted the earth. No mercy. No reprieves. No apologies. No going back. Twisting metal that has no conscience rending flesh and bone.

Now the war was over for Kenneth Whiting, Alvin Moore, Joseph Bednarek, Edward Waneski, Peter Breda, Harry Bates, Joseph Garbacz, Milton Nitsch, Elmer Anderson, and Oscar Bateman. Yes, their war was over. No more dried eggs and powdered milk. No more cold

showers. No more climbing into the belly of a B-24, sweating out the flak and the Messerschmitts.

But that's really only part of this grim tale. Back in the States, there were fathers and mothers, wives and sweethearts, sons and daughters, brothers and sisters. Their ordeal was about to start. The rest of their lives would have to take place with an important part missing. All the plans that they'd made, all the dreams that they'd shared, were never to be.

An empty bunk in Italy. An empty room in Utah. Shattered bodies. Shattered dreams.

Every Liberator that went down had ten men on board. Many survived. Many didn't. Thousands of empty bunks. Thousands of empty rooms. Thousands of shattered bodies. Thousands of shattered dreams.

Why? What made those men go over there in the first place?

They took an oath to defend "with my life, if necessary" the Constitution of the United States of America, that's why. They were doing their duty. Their Nation called, and they answered. The Axis powers were trying to take over the world. They were doing their part to prevent that from happening. And they succeeded.

The Constitution they were defending gives me the right to vote. And I do vote. And every vote I cast is my way of saying "Thank you" to those who are in Valhalla, and also those who survived the horrors of war. Those whose bodies are maimed and crippled. Those whose minds are forever branded with the memories of the terror, the trauma, the grisly realities of death. Of destruction. Of war.

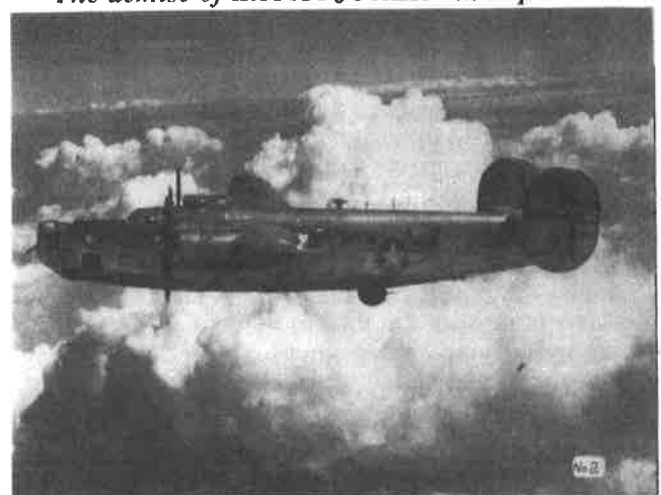
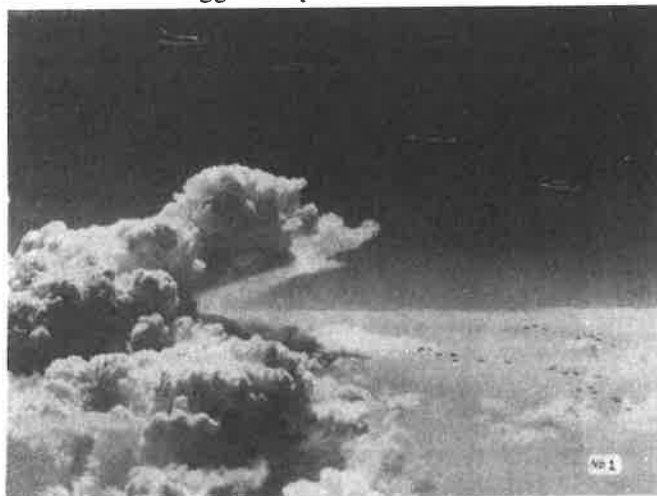
I think that sums up the way that photo of Extra Joker's last moments struck me. I hope it makes sense.

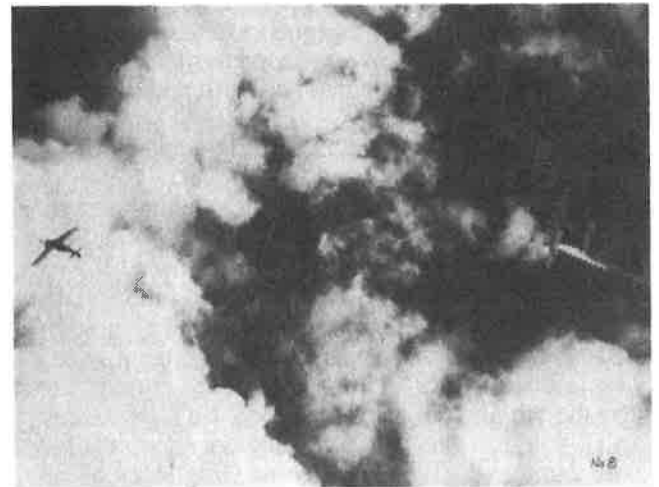
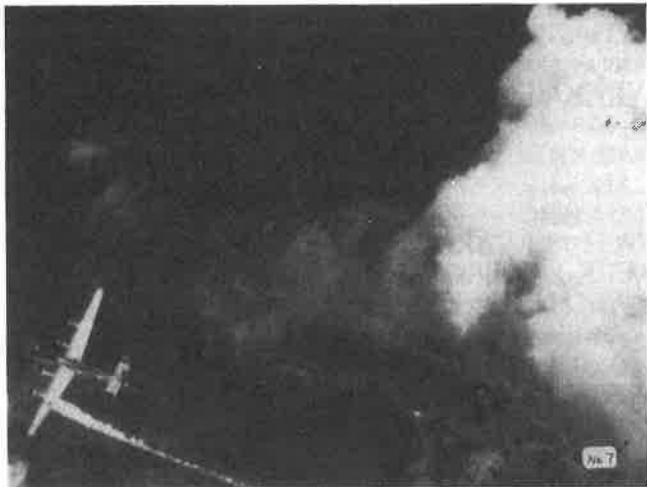
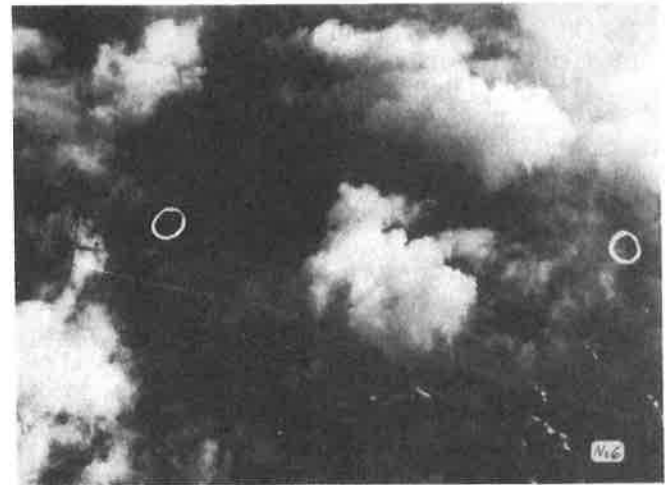
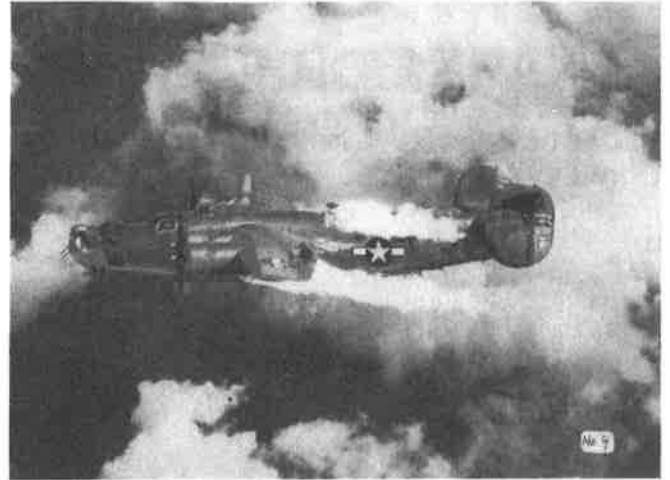
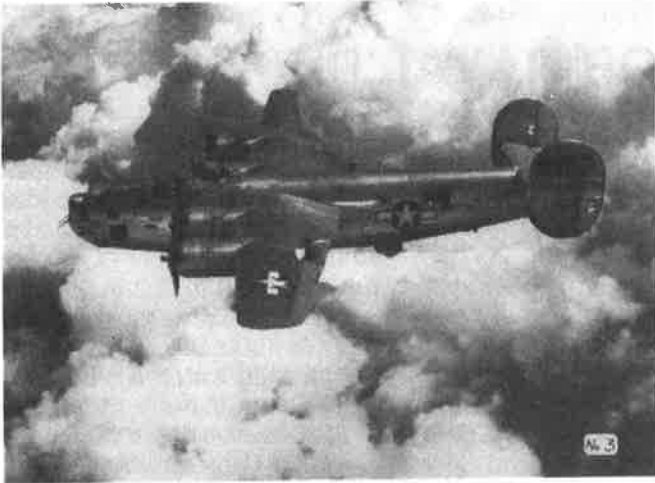
I've always been pretty patriotic, but I was backsliding. I even refused to vote in the 1994 election, due to a mistaken perception that "My vote doesn't even count." I can promise one thing now, though: I will never willingly miss another election, no matter how small the issues may seem, because thousands of men went through sheer hell to defend my right to vote!

Bless you all.

And thank you.

The demise of EXTRA JOKER - in sequence:





All these photos were taken by Leo Stoutsenberger, Combat Photographer, flying with the crew that brought the EXTRA JOKER overseas and so named it. EXTRA JOKER was substituted as lead ship and flew as deputy lead because it carried the wrong bombsight for that particular mission. Its initial crew was that of Lt. George Tudor.



KARL EICHHORN GOES FOR NAVAL RESEARCH

A PLAGUING QUESTION ANSWERED

Always interested in some trivial little thing that concerned the 451st, I (your editor) was interested to know about the sea transportation that some of the 451st personnel endured. I knew that a lot of our personnel were brought BACK to the "Zone of Interior" aboard the General M.C. Meigs. (I, on the USS Mount Vernon, May 1945) Others from the original cadre would write about their voyage OYER to Italy, some (725th & 726th) via North Africa. This, according to Karl Eichhorn, was aboard several ships; which I'll let him tell you about with his own words.



SS John S. Pillsbury
(Liberty Ship Class)

HISTORY OF CONVOY UGS-26

GENERAL: Our convoy originally sailed from New York harbor as the "N.Y. Section" under Commander C.B. Platt, USN. At that point the convoy consisted of 21 ships with an escort of four Destroyers -DD-: FISKE, POOLE, PETERSON and FESSENDEN. The convoy departed at 1556Q (I do not know the significance of the time designator "Q") on 2 December '43 and arrived without incident off Cape Henry at 2000Q on 3 December. The remaining ships assigned to the convoy originated at Hampton Roads. We boarded our Liberty Ships on the morning of 3 December. The 725th and 726th were assigned to the SS JOHN S. PILLSBURY, which carried a total of 539 troops plus shells, trailers and acid (I have no idea what acid she carried, or why). The 724th Squadron (I assume along with Headquarters personnel boarded SS GEORGE W. McCRARY, carrying 390 troops plus general cargo, grenades, matches (??) 70 bags of mail. The 727th Squadron sailed on SS JOHN HARVARD, carrying 514 troops plus more "acid." Besides our troops there was also a contingent of infantry replacements for the Fifth Army. The convoy formed up on the 4th and departed on 0855Z on 5 December with Gibraltar as the stated destination. (Z stands for "Zulu" time, which is the same as Greenwich Mean Time, now called Universal Coordinated Time. With the wintertime difference of five hours, this would have been 0355 EST.) The convoy Commodore was Capt. G.L. Woodruff, USN (Ret.) sailing on a refrigerated vessel, ZACAPA. Vice Commodore was the above Commander C.B. Platt, USN, sailing on the GULF HAWK. Average convoy speed across the Atlantic was nine knots. The convoy consisted of 80 or 81 ships (take your choice; see my comments later with respect to numerical discrepancies) and it's course was generally a direct route between Cape Henry and a point southwest of

Gibraltar, lying between the 32nd and 35th parallels, passing south of the Azores. There were five major course changes enroute.

ESCORT: The main armed escort group was designated as Task Force 65, which remained with the convoy until 21 December when it departed at a location about 20 miles east of Gibraltar. This force consisted of eleven Destroyers - DD -:

EBERLE, LIVERMORE, ERICSSON, FARQUHAR, D.L. HOWARD, HILL, FISKE, FESSENDEN, PETERSON, JOYCE and the J.R.Y. BLAKLEY

Three Patrol Craft -PC-: Numbers 1226, 1227 and 1235.

One Sub Chaser -SC-: Number 1337

In addition, a Submarine "Killer Group," designated Task Group 21.15 was assigned to the convoy until it passed Gibraltar, where it was detached. It reached Gibraltar on 25 December. That Group consisted of four vessels:

Destroyer KEARNY; Seaplane Tender -ADV-: GOLDSBOROUGH, BELKNAP and GREENE.

Finally three other vessels were assigned to the convoy: Aircraft Carrier Escort -CVE-: CORE, Fleet Oiler WINOOSKI and Salvage Vessel RESTORER.

MAKEUP OF THE CONVOY: The convoy was made up of the following categories of vessels: U.S. CARGO ----- 47 U.S. TANKERS ----- 4 BRITISH CARGO ----- 14 BRITISH TANKERS ----- 5 SWEDISH CARGO ----- 1 NORWEGIAN TANKERS ---- 4 FRENCH TANKERS ----- 1 PANAMANIAN TANKER ---- 1

This makes a total of 77 ships to which must be added CORE, WINOOSKI and RESTORER, or 80 in all. (In his final report Capt. Woodruff states there were 81 ships.)

PASSAGE OF CONVOY UGS 26: The following information is taken directly from Capt. Woodruff's final report to Commander, 10th Fleet Convoy & Routing, Commander, Eastern Sea Frontier and Norfolk Port Director.

USS CORE departed the convoy four days out of Norfolk, but continued to provide air cover to near mid-ocean. At 0560Z on 20 December five ships, escorted by USS WINOOSKI, were detached from convoy to proceed to Casablanca. At 1300Z the same day, 13 ships from Convoy KMS 35, which had sailed from the U.K. on 8 December, joined Convoy UGS 26. At 1800Z on

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21 December two ships were detached to proceed to Gibraltar. On this day also, a new Mediterranean Escort took over the duty of Task Force 65. Capt. Woodruff reported that at 0800Z on 22 December 12 ships were detached and ordered to Oran Harbor (This included the JOHN S. PILLSBURY. Again, I believe there is an error in this number, as the Port Director at Oran reported the arrival of 11 vessels. However, on the same day the Harbor Master at Gibraltar reported the arrival of GULF HAWK. This was probably the twelfth ship.) At the same time, off Oran, 18 additional ships joined the convoy, making a total of 90 vessels. At this point the convoy came under British command - Commodore Brody. Capt. Woodruff continued with the convoy, which arrived at Bizerte on 24 December. There, a special convoy made up for the a final destination of Napoli, with a stop at Augusta, Sicily. This convoy included the Liberty Ships SS JOHN HARVARD and SS GEORGE W. McCRARY, carrying the 727th and 724th Squadrons. The remainder of the convoy sailed to various destinations, including Algiers, Alexandria, Brindisi, Malta, Phillippeville and Port Said. Having disembarked at Oran on 23 December, the 725th and 726th Squadrons spent a happy Christmas leave on "Goat Hill," then on 27 December boarded a dutchman, the JOHANN DE WITT, under British command and control, for Napoli where they landed on 2 January 1944.

COMMODORE'S EVALUATION: In general, Capt. Woodruff seemed pleased with the trip, stating that the convoy "ran off like clockwork." He did note the following problems; SS BRITISH ENGINEER, a tanker, was a continuous smoker, and seemed unable to correct the problem during the voyage. The Commodore urged that this vessel be barred from further convoy duty until the owners corrected the problem. Steering gear problems were reported by; G.W. PRENTICE, WILLIAM EATON, WARD HUNT, JOHN B. HOOD, D.L. HARPER and JOHN BIDWELL. Because of their problems, and for convoy safety, G.W. PRENTISS and JOHN B. HOOD were placed in stern positions. The DELHI and GULF OF VENEZUELA experienced engine breakdowns. THOMAS JOHNSON, BENITO JUAREZ and FREDERICK L. DAU continuously exhibited poor station-keeping ability and were sent to the rear of the convoy. (I assume this was a case of "If you can't sail where you belong, go to the rear and serve as submarine bait?") It is significant that Commodore Woodruff did not mention any submarine attack or similar activity. This conflicts with what many of us were told, or believed. For instance, See "Crossing the Pond" by Sedge Hill of the 727th on Page 69 of our "Fighting 451st" book. One night I myself saw a ruddy glow on the southwest horizon, which I took to be a burning ship. A Destroyer near us took off at flank speed in that direction with it's siren blaring. So what was that!? Perhaps just a stack flame-up on some ship. I guess we'll never know! But what about those two "Cruise Ships" which took us (725th & 726th) to the War and then back home?

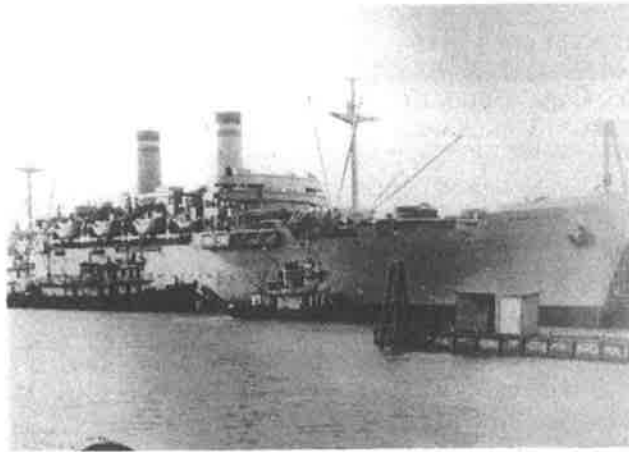
SS JOHN S. PILLSBURY: She was a typical Liberty Ship - 441 feet in length, 7,100 gross tons with a cargo capacity of 11,000 tons and a top speed of 11 knots. Constructed at San Pedro, CA, she entered her service

on 15 April 1943. Her first voyage took her to Colombia, Peru and Chile, then through the Panama Canal to the Caribbean Sea. After stops at Kingston and Guantanamo, she went on to New York. Her first Atlantic crossing was in July to the U.K., with port calls at Liverpool and Glasgow. After returning to New York, she sailed down the east coast, arriving in Norfolk in early September. She departed Norfolk via convoy on 15 September bound for Bizerte. Returning to Baltimore and Cape Henry she arrived at Hampton Roads on 1 December and was assigned to our convoy for the trip to Oran. From Oran, early 1944, she sailed to Augusta, back to Oran, back to Augusta, then to Napoli, back to Augusta, then to Bizerte, finally returning to the U.S. in early March. Sailing from Norfolk again on 24 March she returned for an extensive Mediterranean tour: Gibraltar, Oran, Algiers, Oran, Augusta, Napoli, Augusta, Oran, Bone, Oran, Algiers, Oran, Toulon, Oran and finally back to New York on 6 November. On her next convoy she departed Norfolk on 1 December 1944 for Gibraltar, Oran, Marseilles, Oran, Gibraltar, Oran then back to New York, arriving 20 January 1945. Departing New York 7 February she made port calls in the U.K. and France, returning to Philadelphia on 7 July. July '45 found PILLSBURY back in the U.K. - Solent and Ramsgate - then LeHavre, returning to New York on 27 August. On 15 September she sailed to Ramsgate and Antwerp, and back to New York on 19 October. Additional crossings were to LeHavre in November, Napoli and Marseilles in December, the U.K. and LeHavre in March and April of '46, LeHavre in June, LeHavre and Bordeaux in July and August, with various ports of call on the U.S. East Coast between Atlantic crossings. Now the Navy records become murky. August 1946 found JOHN S. PILLSBURY in New Brunswick, Quebec, Gaspe, the St. Lawrence River and Great Lakes under British registry!! Apparently she was sold to Great Britain. She survived the War and had a remarkable record of service, but the last chapter remains unknown (to me, at least). I would like to know what became of her? - Broken up for scrap in the 50's, I suppose.

USS GENERAL M.C. MEIGS: Fortunately, I did not have to research old sailing records for the history of this ship, since I have two documents which contain excellent history of the GENERAL MEIGS. They were taken from two different books: "Dictionary of American Fighting Ships," Volume III, published by Naval History Division, USN and "Troopships of World War II," published by the Army Transportation Association. Alas, this ship suffered a final fate she did not deserve! After service in the Korean war the GENERAL MEIGS was transferred to the "Mothball Fleet" in Puget Sound in 1958. Early in 1972 it was decided that she should be towed to San Francisco to be broken up for scrap. While under tow, along the Washington coast, her tow line parted and she crashed against a rock pinnacle, broke in two and went to the bottom on 9 January 1972. I will add one final comment: Several of our air crews who had been first to complete their 50 missions were the first troops to sail home on the maiden voyage of GENERAL MEIGS in late July 1944.

At the time I requested information from the Naval Historical Center, I did not have the names of the ships

to which the 724th and 727th Squadrons were assigned. I am sure the histories of these two ship are available, should anyone care to write to the Naval Historical Center at the Washington Naval Yard and ask for it. I wish to express my appreciation to the following members for their most valuable contributions. First to Bob Karstensen, who's interest I peaked with my efforts and who gave me addresses and phone numbers of members that were transported via these vessels. Secondly to Paul Brumbach, 724th; James Mooney, 725th; Harold McWilliams, 727th; Ralph McBeth, 725th; Sam Miller, 725th; and finally Herb Schrader, 727th who was invaluable in my efforts to nail down the ship that the 727th sailed to war in.



USS General M.C. Meigs
(AP 116)

(Editor's Note .. Running on a parallel course to Karl Eichhorn in searching out something about these ships, but not to the detail nor intensity that Karl showed, I discovered that the USS GENERAL M.C. MEIGS also has an alumni society. It is headed up by Avner Dare out of Charleston, SC. Later my interest gained momentum when someone sent me a newspaper article/photograph of the "MEIGS" floundering off Puget Sound after it had struck rocks and run aground. This happened on 9 January 1972. I wrote to the AP

repository that controlled the rights to the picture, begging for a true photograph that I could use. I guess because of "royalty rights," and my (freeloading) quest to obtain said photo, they failed to respond.)

WALT CUTCHIN "RECALLS"

The following article was sent in by Walt to see if he could stir up a bit of nostalgia among the earliest members of the 724th. His first line, with the inclusion of the word "Cheebosco," doesn't mean a thing to me as I arrived overseas in late June of '44, not having served at Wendover during any of my early training. Nor does all the sand and downed tents (Stateside); other than my reading it from our Group history. Walt has offered articles for publication from time to time. His most recent offering was "Never Alone" printed back in Issue 19 of 1990. For you 724th'ers; try this on for size:

I remember "Cheebosco" well. Whereas, lots of mornings you would wake up with two to three inches of sand over you, this was different. I can't remember seeing any tents still standing. But what I remember most is seeing James "Blackie" Plarenos sitting on his cot playing his accordion.

It was at Wendover that as a member of Crew #4 we gave transition training to all new crews assigned to the 724th Squadron. We flew night and day up to 18 hours in a single 24 hour period many times. It was at this time, as I was washing up after a flight in the latrine that the 1st Sgt Palmer Gums asked me what I was doing up at 6:00 o'clock. I told him that I had just returned from a flight. Then he told me that I had been grounded for two weeks. It seems that some member of the crew thought that the occasional air sickness that I was having would not permit me to function properly in combat, so they asked that I be relieved. Which I was, but no one informed me until Sgt Gums did.

He told me to report to Captain Beane at 0800 hours. I objected that I might get some sleep as I had not been to bed for 18 hours. He insisted, so I said O.K. and went to my tent and went to bed. I woke up at about 10, got dressed and went in and "high balled" the Captain. He

told me why I was grounded and asked me to report to the flight line for duty. I went to the flight line where I found that there were 48 mechanics to service four B-24's.

I said to myself that they did not need me, so I went to the NCO Club. The Club was off base and all you needed to get off base was your NCO Club card. I had met some of the local girls at the dances held at the club. One I found was fond of horseback riding and since I was also, we rented some horses from the local stable which we used to explore the nearby mountains. This went on for about two weeks then the group moved to Fairmont Nebraska. I was still very angry at them for not notifying me that I was grounded for those two weeks of flying.

At Fairmont I would have to have a pass to leave the Base. I would go in to the 1st Sgt and ask for a pass. Palmer would say, "We can only give passes to married personnel." I would say, "I want to get married, so doesn't that count?" He would then give me a pass. He knew I deserved something for the hard low-level, hot, suffocating flying I had done that I wasn't suppose to do. This went on for about two weeks, then one day he said, "Walter, they need you out there on the line, so I think you'd better be out there." So I went. The very next day I was standing by the taxi strip when Captain Beane taxied by, stuck his head out from the cockpit and said, "Well Cutchin, I see you are back where you are suppose to be." He knew as well as the 1st Sgt that I had been goofing off, but deserved it. A short time later I was assigned as Crew chief to a/c #41-2953 (Lt. John L. Kearney's assigned aircraft). The crew accepted my suggestion to name it "EASY DOES IT."

The blizzard of November 8th prevented most flight-line activity. As Crew Chief of "EASY DOES IT," I was required to operate our four engines every four



Lt John Kearney's Crew #13 - (724th)
Walt Cutchin (Not Pictured) Crew Chief

hours in an attempt to keep systems operating and batteries charged. I stayed in the plane for almost three days. Food was delivered by cleatrack and I kept warm by lying by the APU (Auxiliary Power Unit) when not actually running the engines. The fuel for the APU only lasted two days so I fudged a little and would run the engines a little longer to warm up the plane. It was so cold that I never had to worry about being awake every four hours.

After the blizzard Captain Beane went up for a practice flight. He had no more than gotten off the runway when he called the tower and informed them he was coming in on "any runway." It seems he discovered very low manifold pressure and had very little power.

He came in safely and called me, the Engineering Officer and Line Chief to see if we could figure out what was causing this condition. After some discussion it was thought that due to the many dilutions that were made to the oil supply after each engine warmup, that the thinning of the oil could have been the culprit. And so it was. The engines were all started and run for an extended time. This cleared up the problem and no further problems were ever apparent.

"EASY DOES IT" took off from Morrison Field shortly after Lt. Vail (flying #42-7725, "ADOLPH AND TOJO"). However, as we landed in Boykin Field in Puerto Rico the tail skid was damaged so we spent a number of days waiting for a replacement. From there we flew to Trinidad. We took-off for Brazil but were turned back by bad weather. We flew on to Belem, then to Natal. We were detained at Natal for about ten days due to bad weather over the Atlantic. When we did get off it was still a very rough ride. We could not fly around the storm due to limited fuel and a heavy load. At times we would drop two thousand feet like falling off a mountain and flying just a few thousand feet above the water. It was an 11 hour 20 minute flight and I must tell you I kissed the soil of Africa when I got off the

plane.

A number of our planes went to Marrakech. We were there for Thanksgiving and Christmas. It was here, and at that time, we were told that President Roosevelt met with Prime Minister Churchill. The food was the best we had eaten as it was prepared in a regular mess hall and served inside. The living quarters were something different. Originally the tents had wooden sides but they had been used as firewood in an attempt to keep warm. We were issued seven blankets and you rolled up in them like a cocoon so you would benefit from every square inch. But you still got cold. When you had to leave the mess hall to go to bed you looked for someone with a fire. Then heating some water in your mess cup, adding a few bouillon cubes, we made a start towards keeping warm. You would then get into your cocoon and try to sleep. Eventually, after an hour or two, you would be so cold that you would make another try at finding someone with a fire going and go through the bouillon thing again and back to the sack. All the tents were located in an olive grove which lost some of its branches to firewood.

We spent as much time as possible at the Service Club in town. There was a big Christmas party where we sang Christmas carols in French, English and "American." It was here that a place called Madina, a walled city near Marrakech, that we, and friend and I, had a close call, I THINK? We met a young widow of a French Naval Officer at the Service Club and her young teenage daughter. She invited us to her home in Madina where there was a party. We did not know that Madina was off limits until we approached the gate where someone informed us. The ladies, who wore large full-cut dresses, solved the problem by sitting on our laps and covering us with their clothes. We were in a buggy-like carriage and were able to pass the guards without being noticed.

Inside we joined the party, but by the time we were to leave Madina the gate was closed. The driver said we would have to pay the gate keeper to get him to open up. I spoke some French then and we had quite an argument before we agreed to a price. Finally we left and ducked down into the carriage as we passed the guard post. They had no idea any G.I.'s would be leaving at that hour.

When our planes came to Gioia del Colle a higher ranking NCO came into the Squadron and took over as Crew Chief of "EASY DOES IT." I became a member of the Ground Crew of "GASHOUSE," which blew up on 8 May 1944. I was in Foggia on a pass that day and heard the blast 15 miles away. It was determined that there was an oxygen leak and when the power system was turned on a spark caused the explosion.

In June 1944 I informed the Squadron that I wanted to go back on flying status. They looked at my records and could find nothing to indicate why I had been grounded. During the Flight Surgeon's check he asked me why? I told him that I could not get enough oxygen. He stated that there had been improvements made on oxygen masks and he would give me a test to see if I met the requirements. I passed the test, was assigned to Crew #6, and flew my first mission to Vienna on July 8,



**GASHOUSE - #41-29195 - Lt Robert Stone, Pilot
(Walter Flannelly - Crew Chief)**

1944.

A mission to Blechhammer Germany on 7 August

was something. We had taken some flak but saw no real damage. However, sometime after leaving the target I noticed that the pilot's pedestal was flapping around. I asked the pilot, Bill Heath, "Who was flying?" He said that Bob White, the copilot, was. I said that Bob was asleep. The plane was on auto pilot, but since Bill had no control we woke Bob up. In checking I found that flak had cut the bicycle-like chain that goes over the sprockets for elevator control. By using safety wire, and always with one hand at a time (it was so cold I had to switch back and forth), I was able to connect the chain back together just as we had to prepare for landing. Heath was sure glad to have his controls back for that. When the Ground Crew saw what I had accomplished they came to tell me they didn't see how it could have been done. You just do what you have to do.

2 BOOKS: ONE NEW & ONE OLD (REISSUE)

If you would be so kind as to give me a moment of your time I'd like to draw your attention to a couple books that may be of interest to you: one new and one old.

The new edition is called, "How to Survive Hospital Care," or, humorously subtitled, "Why They Keep Bed-pans In The Freezer." It would be hard for me to explain the mental processes that the author went through to write this book. I laughed, almost uncontrollable, at his manner of addressing the subject of being hospitalized. Having recently been through it, I know of what he speaks; as was he, in order to gain material for the tome.

The HE of whom I speak is our "resident author and screen-writer," William C. Anderson (Pilot, 725th). "Andy" has done some 18 books on a whole variety of subjects. All the way from "Home Sweet Home Has Wheels - Please Don't Tailgate The Real Estate" (a memorable cross country vacation); to "Bat-21" (true tale of an "on-foot" airman's walk out of enemy territory in Vietnam); to his novel "Bomber Crew 369" (fictional, but plausible, tale of aerial warfare while serving in the 451st).

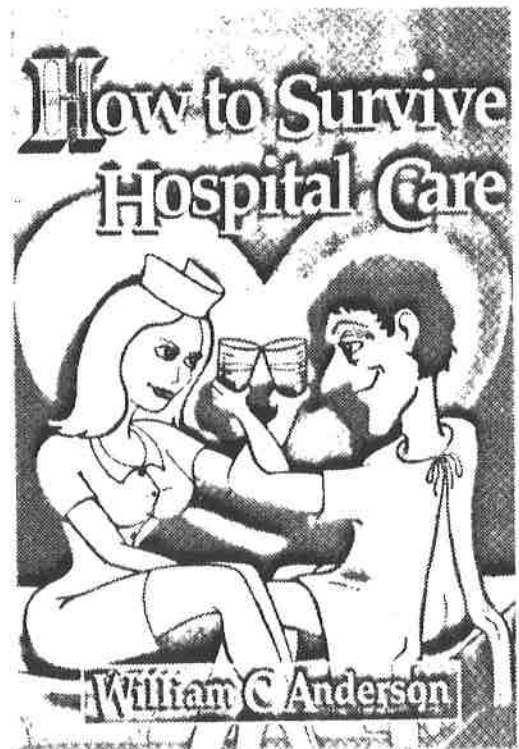
Now he has come out with this newest paperback book that he is willing to share with his 451st geritol friends. Andy tells me that he will donate 10% of the profits to the 451st treasury, should you wish to take him up on the \$6.95 (plus \$2 P&H) cost. [\$6.95 + \$2.00 = \$8.95 -- Its worth it]

So if you are contemplating a hospital stay, or have undergone such, this book will either prepare you for the ordeal, or, remind you of what it was like when you were there. Just skip the chapter "Should You Have Sex During Surgery," it will just disturb you.

After reading the whole book you will wonder how this demented old man (tongue in cheek, Andy) conjures up what he comes up with. It's a BLAST!

To order your book you can call 800.358-1929 (Have your credit card handy), or send \$8.95 (\$0.35 sales tax

for Idaho residence only) to Legendary Publishing Company, P.O. Box 7706, Boise, ID 83707-1706. *Be sure that you mention that your are/were part of the 451st Bomb Group and it will be entered, thusly.*



The other book of which I speak is a "reissue." Most of you will recall an earlier ad I ran about the book, "Target Ploesti: View From a Bombsight," by author, LeRoy "Ted" Newby. It went out of print in 1986, but by popular demand the Military Book Club is carrying it again. If you are interested in more information about the book, or how to order one, call toll-free (800) 321-7323. It is not necessary that you belong to the Military Book Club in order to obtain a copy.

"LITTLE FRIENDS:" THE 49TH FIGHTER SQUADRON (Continued) - 4th Installment By Dr. Royal C. Gilkey

The Squadron mounted a north-bound mission on July 24, 1944. It was supposed to string "window bombs" from the I(nitial) P(oint) to the target for 5th Wing bombers briefed to attack the sole remaining ball-bearing plant at Turin (Torino) in northwest Italy, just short of the Alps. After dropping the "window" as flares calculated to disrupt anti-aircraft fire aimed at the bombers, the forty-niners were to meet up with planes from the 1st Fighter Group, with both outfits escorting the bombers over the target and upon withdrawal. It was not in the cards for these plans to work out because the bombers arrived and bombed early. The idea had been conceived by the Eighth Air Force in Britain and had worked out successfully in raids over the Continent. It remained to test the technique in the Mediterranean Theater of Operations. The 49th Fighter Squadron was to be the Guinea-pig in the experiment. Its pilots regarded it as an honor. The trouble was the project didn't work out because the bombers arrived over the target early.

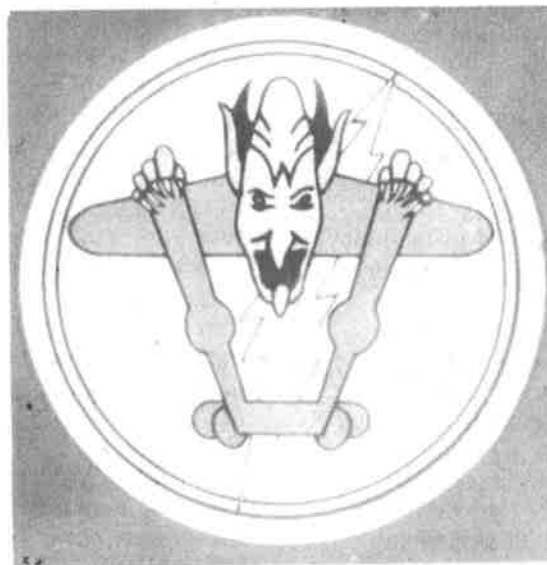
..... (Editor: The 49th Wing (451st, 461st & 484th) did not participate in this mission. We had a stand-down that day.)

Just because the plan to release radio-interference "window" bombs in front of the bombers from I.P. to their target did not work out the first time by no means precluded follow-up attempts. The next day provided another opportunity for the 49th Squadron fighters to try this again. On July 25, 1944, a mission was directed at the Hermann Goring Steel Works in Linz, Austria was mounted. Two flights of P-38s were to fly ahead of the 49th Wing bombers dropping "window bombs" from the I.P. (initial point) to the target. This they did from 30,000 feet. To describe the action, the eight "Lightnings" found 49th Wing bombers nearing Branska Lake from the south. They flew past B-17 bombers until they came to the leading group of LIBERATORS in the 49th Wing at coordinates 4647 North 1535 East. That was at 1025 hours just over two hours from an 8:29 a.m. take-off. Flying at 27,000 feet, the "Lightnings" reached the I.P. at 11:05 a.m., three minutes ahead of the B-24s. From 30,000 feet above the I.P., they released "window bombs" all the way to the target. Thirty-one of them were dropped within a four-and-a-half minute period. Corrections were made where wind direction warranted. When the formation of fighters reached target Linz, a

180-degree turn was made and a home-bound course set. Evidently, the effort paid off because flak aimed at the leading bombers appeared to be irregular and at varying altitudes. The flak barrage did not develop its usual intensity. Enroute to the target, the fighters noted that Vienna, Austria lay under a protective smoke screen generated by smoke-pots. They also noticed smoke-pots being put into operation at Stryr and Linz, west of the Austrian capital. The weather was fairly clear over the target area. Noticeable cumulus lay over the western Alps and haze over the Adriatic Sea. Four 49th Squadron P-38s were sent on the mission, along with 37th Squadron planes, to provide top-cover for the 8 "window" dispensing "Lightnings." This arrangement seemed to work out well, although a couple of the 49ers among the original dozen taking off early, one of them for engine trouble and the other as an escort. Such was the first successful mission of its kind to be flown by fighter-escort in the Mediterranean theater. The eight P-38s carrying "flare bombs" crammed with "window" performed a valuable service to lead-bombers by thus shielding them from devastating flak from the ground. The pilots concerned had every right to be pleased with themselves. They had "pioneered" in a new technique for their theater of war. Fortunately, no enemy aircraft showed up to spoil the experiment; but plenty of flak was aimed at our fighters, with no tangible effects.

..... (Editor: It should be noted that on this auspicious occasion of the 49 Fighter Squadron carrying out its first successful "window bombing," by laying a carpet of chaff; we, the 49th Bomber Wing, were also deeply involved. Our Wing, led by the 484th, 461st and the 451st, were to lead the rest of the bombers over the target. Other Wings that took part were the 304th, 55th and the 5th. We lost no aircraft over the target, but returned to base with two that had incurred flak damage. And we, too, threw out plenty of chaff.)

Another "window" bomb mission took place on July 26, 1944. This time, 49th Squadron planes were to fly top-cover for "window" dropping planes from the 37th, the latter being briefed to proceed 5th Wing B-17s flying to attack Wiener Neustadt's Daimler-Benz 602 Engine Works (Werke) directly south of Austria's capital. A lot happened on this mission. Take-off time for 17 Squadron P-38s was at 0845 hours. They were in the target area from 10:45 to 11:45 a.m., flying at an altitude of 30,000



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feet. Bombers were initially sighted east of Maribor in Yugoslavia near the border with Austria. The "Lightnings" had been on time crossing the Yugoslavian coast and passing the next checkpoint, Zagreb in Croatia. At 1045 hours, they reached the I.P. and the target area five minutes later. The 49ers stayed there until 1145 hours, flying between 25,000 and 32,000 feet.

During the mission enemy aircraft put in an appearance. In fact, shortly before our escorting pilots arrived at the I.P., they saw a solitary Me-109 launch an attack from behind the 37th Fighter Squadron. This caused the 37th's pilots to dump their belly tanks and "window bombs," a result of which was to split up their formation. Right then, the 49ers were passing the I.P.; and alert for trouble, observed contrails at a higher altitude (between 35-37,000 feet). They then climbed to take on the menacing aircraft consisting of about a dozen Me-109s. Actually, more enemy planes were in the air. A rough count was 30, half being Me-109s. The rest were silver-colored FW-190s. All seemed to have set up a high ambush from the east and to have been awaiting the "Lightnings." The enemy planes were flying in three groups, with a dozen in the first group, eight in the second, and six in the third. In addition, four lone Me-109s were scattered behind. Our P-38s tried to climb above the enemy to gain an advantage in altitude for combat; the their antagonists would go into dives just beyond fighting range. The P-38s refrained from diving after them because some of the enemy were staying above as ever-present threat. Several met with trouble by stalling out, which was pleasing to observe. Climbing to challenge the adversary sufficed to break up his formations and so achieved a useful purpose, even if no damage was done to either side. It could be called an inconclusive confrontation as far as our pilots were concerned.

As to that, a P-38 was seen to explode at 30,000 feet north of Wiener Neustadt about 1110 hours. Twenty-five minutes earlier, near the I.P., a "Lightning" had been observed in a spin with one engine afire at 28,000 feet. It was a risky mission, to say the least.

The ditching of a bomber in the Adriatic Sea took place at half past 12. It could not be identified because of smoke and fire obscuring it. A couple of bombers were seen circling over the crippled craft. Our fighters were flying at 18,000 feet when they noticed this and began circling over the site. In it were three men, one of whom appeared burned badly. A fix (4317N 1600E) was given to "Top Sail," which had not been able to communicate with the circling bombers, in order to facilitate air-sea rescue efforts. Our fighters dropped to a lower altitude after giving the fix.

The mission ran into a lot of flak, encountering it over a fork in the Murs and Schwarza rivers (pinpointed at 4841N 1554E) as well as over the target. Our pilots commented on flak bursts were noticed about 1,000 feet below them. Cirro-stratus accounted for 7/10 cloud cover from Yugoslavia's coast to the target area and beyond. Under such conditions, results of the bombing could not be observed. The mission lasted almost six and a half hours over a 900 mile route.

..... (Editor: As was sometimes the case with the

451st Bomb Group, we were sent alone on a mission to Baret Albania to draw off enemy fighters from the main force headed towards Wiener Neustadt. We lost one and aircraft over the target. The confirmed loss was aircraft #42-78178, piloted by William Schaidt (725th). All nine crewmen became POW's. The other aircraft (ID # unknown) lost an engine while enroute over the Adriatic and two crewmen bailed out before pilot Maurice Beaucond (726th) could assess the damage. He managed to bring the distressed aircraft back to Castelluccia. The two crewmen, bombardier and nose gunner, became POWs.)

Budapest, Hungary, was the destination of a mission flown on July 27, 1944. Squadron pilots were to escort eight "window bomb" dispensers from an I.P. at Bische to target at Budapest's Steel Armament, Aero-Engine, and Tank Works. Bombers attacking the target were to be covered during penetration and to prudent withdrawal. Take-off by 10 Squadron pilots occurred at 7 a.m. Three returned early because of mechanical and cockpit trouble. The round trip amounted to 950 miles for the seven Squadron P-38s flying all the way. The Squadron occupied 2nd position in the Group. Our pilots were to fly as cover for the 48th Fighter Squadron, whose planes were to release the "window" bombs. The formation flew over Drevnik Island along Yugoslavia's coast and then headed inland. Lake Balaton in Hungary was crossed enroute to the target. Having set course late, the formation could not reach the lead bombers and had to settle for dropping "window" bombs after a second wave of B-17s in the target area. Thus, bombing had begun before the "window" was released. The 49th Squadron's planes stayed in the target area from about 9:32 to 9:50 a.m. Their entering altitude was 29,000 feet, which was 3,000 feet higher than when they left the area. B-24s followed the B-17s into the target. Our Squadron covered the withdrawal of the bombers, leaving them at 10:10 a.m., the altitude being between 25,000 and 26,000 feet. Flak was encountered at the target. It was heavy and intense, but there was a noticeable dispersion because of the "window" bombs. A lot of dust and smoke lay over the target area. A violation of radio security was reported near Lake Balaton on the way in, someone being heard to ask, "Who's carrying the chaff ['window']?" There was little interference by radar at the target. An early return by one of the pilots in a flight led the remaining two to assimilate themselves into the other 2 flights. The adjustment went smoothly. Seven sortie credits were earned, the three early returns receiving none. The important thing was there were no losses to report.

..... (Editor: On this mission it was the 461st that was sent out as a decoy, leaving the 451st and 484th to be the first to follow the B-17s over the target. Nearing the target we lost one aircraft; (#42-52153) THUNDERMUG II being piloted by Harold C. Schauer (726th). 9 POWed and 1 KIA. Reading from what we had in our "OPERATIONS ORDER," concerning fighter escort; "Escort: Fighters will provide penetration, target and withdrawal cover for bombers and will provide WINDOW DISPENSING EFFORT to proceed the first bomb group to target.")

It seems that by this time the fighters were making

this "window" dispensing a part of their regular mission activity.)

All did not return from a mission flown the next day, but let's not get ahead of the story. On July 28, 1944, a "window"-dispensing and escort mission headed for Ploiesti in Rumania. Bombers were to attack oil refineries there. Eight fighters from the 49th and a like number from the 48th were to drop "window" for the bombing force, while the 37th Fighter Squadron flew top cover. The 49ers flew second in the 14th Fighter Group. Once the chaff was dispensed, the fighters were to protect the bombers at the target and upon withdrawal. Early returns meant that only a dozen P-38s reached the target area. They were over the target from 0955 to 1025 hours, several hours after takeoff at 0652 hours. Southeast of Bucuresti (Bucharest), a rendezvous was effected at Hotarale, the time being 0850 hours and the altitude 25,000 feet. Our Squadron's pilots released their "window" a little beyond the I.P. and then stayed in the target area. They covered the bombers upon withdrawal, taking departure from them at 1035 hours in the Neighborhood of Pitesti, which lies northwest of Bucuresti (Bucharest) and west of Ploiesti (Ploesti). Flak was encountered but seemed to be disrupted. Pilots reported what looked like an active smelter a few miles to the north of Nis in Yugoslavia. They saw a quarter of tall stacks. The construction seemed new, but there were no piles of excavation-debris surrounding the project, whatever it was. A lone but wide dirt road connected with a main highway leading north of Nis. This place might well bear watching. It is posed a problem, it could be nipped in the bud.

One pilot on the mission ran into real trouble and turned up missing. He was 2nd Lt David W. Reid, Jr., whose left engine burst into flame. He finally succeeded in extinguishing the blaze. Flying above him, a fellow-pilot named Lt Turner noticed the right wing of Reid's plane vibrating. All this happened near a place called Miksic next to a little lake, which was located somewhat short of the target area. Turner's plane circled the crippled craft to protect it from enemy attack. They were at about 15,000 feet, a thousand feet above the cumulus cloud bank. Suddenly, Reid vanished. Turner thought Reid might have gone into a spin. He dove beneath the clouds below him, but Reid was nowhere to be found. Turner then circled in vain for about 20 minutes, but his search turned up nothing. It was a sobering thought that the two flying lieutenants could not finish their missions by a return to base together. The announcement of 2nd Lt James L. Turner's transfer to weather reconnaissance squadron on August 1, 1944 may have helped him put the tragedy out of his mind.

..... (Editor: A disastrous day for the 451st as well. We lost 4 aircraft on that mission: Lt Robert Duncan (724th) flying 41-28950, all were reported as POWs ... Lt Frank Vernon (724th) flying 42-52378, all evaded capture and lived to fight another day ... Lt Glen Kerres (725th) flying 42-28933 (FERPS FINESCO), with 7 evading and 3 POWs ... Lt Jack Holtz (726th) flying 41-29541 (ICE COLD KATIE II), with 10 evadees and 1 POW.)

(To be Continued)

AUSTRIAN RESEARCHER AIDS 451st

Most fortunately, this office has been in contact with several overseas historians that have given this office much in the nature of unknown facts. Recently a citizen of Austria, Felix RAMEDER, has given us nuggets of information relevant to the Vienna and the Markersdorf Airdrome mission. (Mission of 22nd and 23rd August) His most recent interest is in the crash-sites of the 13 aircraft we lost on those two days. He believes he has located, with the aid of other interested citizens, 3 sites. With some assistance from this office, he hopes to locate more. Two of the three were, "HARD TO GET" (724th), "EXTRA JOKER" (725th), and the third one was an unnamed 727th A/C that bore the number #44-40196. But of special importance was his comments about our opposition; the FIGHTERS on the 23rd of August. His letter reads as follows:

"Interesting is that the 55th BW on 23 Aug 1944 had the same target, Markersdorf AF with target time of 1210 hour, actual 1243 hour; the 451st BG 1200 hour, actual 1226 hour. The 55th BW had no fighter attacks, or flak. All dispatched planes landed at the base. The attackers against your Group were the IV STURMGRUPPE JG 3 (Fighter Group 3) lead by Kauptmann MORITZ. In the two attacks to/against your Group the Germans lost 6 planes and pilots. In all the German Fighter Groups II JG 27, II JG 300 and IV JG 3 (Storm) lost on this day 13 killed pilots and 14 crashed planes. I

hope all I wrote is new and interesting for you."

Thanks to Felix for this valuable information. Seems that we beat the 55th BW by some 17 minutes and siphoned off the aggressive attacks of the fighters, leaving the 55th Wing (460th, 464th, 465th and 485th Groups) virtually without opposition. Even the flak seems to have abated from the pulverizing accuracy of our bombing of their air field. And, along with our accuracy, their ancillary protective FLAK emplacements. I will be anxious to hear from the 55th's Group's historian as to the viability of that statement. And in the future to hear if Felix RAMEDER has uncovered any more artifacts from those remaining 451st bombers that lay unmarked and uncharted.

HARD TO GET
NOT Lost on either 22 or 23 August Mission. But rather was shot down by Fighters on 25 February 1944 (Regensburg, Germany) Pilot was Lt. Richard D. Coleman, 726th.



ERNIE CUMMINS' 60th AIR SERVICE SQUADRON JOURNAL (Alias: Ernie's Journey)

Con't from Issue 26
10 March 1944

Dear Mabel: Honey, I've been on the go every day this week, sometimes way after dark, and what with getting food at odd hours instead of regular chow times, I haven't written any letters at all. Last night I got to camp for supper, turkey it was too, but after that I had to run into town to pick up the tray I had made for my foot locker. The cabinet shop promised it for a week ago and I had to wait two hours while they finished it. I felt a cold coming on, swallowed a couple of aspirins and slept like a log all night. Then, due to the lousy gasoline stove going haywire in our kitchen tent, our breakfast went up in smoke about five A.M. (War is Hell). In fact the whole kitchen disappeared in five or ten minutes, plus the food supply. So Ernie ate "C rations" twice today. The Mess Sgt got together enough equipment to put out a good meal this evening however, bless his soul, and I made a special point to arrive "home" in time to eat it too! Two drivers who were following me got lost in one city that I buzzed through like a homing pigeon, so you know how fast I was traveling, hi.. They got here two hours later.

The night before that I tried to find a place to stay in a city along about midnight. But there are just no hotels. And neither the English or American Military Police had any beds to spare, so I had to return to camp just a dawn. Tried to sleep in the truck cab (with John Keefer, my relief driver) but it was too darned cold for any rest. We hit the road after an hour, hi. Ate one restaurant meal, and in order to do that I had to ignore an "Off Limits" sign posted on the door. If every G.I. did that the civilians couldn't find a seat, or bite to eat, but I was hungry as the devil and a long ways from base so I just had to do it.

Enough of my activities; now for the mail! I got two swell packages, one from my Mom and the other from your Mom. The book by Ernie Pyle and the chess lessons in the first - bullion cubes, soap and probably other very useful other items in Dede's, which I haven't had time to unpack yet.

12 March 1944 (Excerpt)

Back to the present - we have Sgt Ray Brackney (Gabe's successor) living in tent #56 now, instead of the little odd acting Mexican. While Carl was away working and living in another camp, I made sure his place was taken by somebody I liked. Two weeks of living alone with a guy who talks to himself was enough for me!

Also, Toots, I don't live where I use to. The tent isn't sitting in a sea of mud, but moved to higher ground. Ruben, Ray and I all play pinochle, as Harold will too (when he gets back on duty), so we should have some great games during our leisure time.

Sgt Kratzer was sent a film viewer from home, using



"Mudville" Home of the 60th A Service Squadron

black and white film that comes on a roll, so he and I swapped the viewer and films for a "look-see." One of his sets show scenes from the Ice Follies. Do you remember the first one we saw in 1940? Kratzer likes the colored ones, and especially the flat way they are mounted, since his takes more room when packed up for carrying.

Peanut, my late snack of soup is boiling away on the stove, so I'd better get busy and inhale those calories and vitamins. Gotta follow my wife's instructions to build myself up so she can tear me down! All my love baby, I'm just passing time until we are happy little love bugs together again - no foolin'. Snuggles, Ernie

SAN PANCRAZIO

COMMENT

As soon as a couple of fields were bulldozed out and runways and hardstands metal planked, one of the old Bomb Groups (the 376th) from Libya flew in and our Service Squadron once again had some real work to do. I was sent on detached service to San Pancrazio with about 35 others, including a medic and two cooks. The senior rank was only a Warrant Officer, making a rather "loose" camp. Although the mechanics and truck drivers worked hard, it beat hell out of having Stars and Bars looking over your shoulder!

Our Warrant Officer supplied us with a lot of laughs, unintentionally. The 60th camp was across a road from the landing strip, with one big wall tent for the kitchen, a smaller one for the Officer and eight or ten 14 foot pyramid tents for the troops. We used "home built" gasoline burning stoves for heat and the Officer had a commercial kerosene stove, the kind with a wick. It

being winter and fairly cold, these were used each night. There came a time when the W.O. was away to a nearby city on some business, and when he navigated his jeep into camp, he was bombed on vino. The guard on duty saw him enter his tent, staggering, and assumed he went to bed. An hour or so later a dull "BANG: from within the tent cause the guard to investigate and he found a real mess, with the W.O. sound asleep and not aware of the commotion. He had cranked up his stove, placed a can of C rations on the top, and turned the wick so high that it started to smoke. When he "passed out," the soot from the flame made a heavy coating over the interior of the tent and all its contents. Then the can got so hot it exploded, scattering meat and beans everywhere, to mix with the black soot. God, did we have a Sad Sack to clean up the next morning; hangover and all.

The gasoline heaters sometimes malfunction, and one evening before dark my tent caught afire. A little G.I. named Kistler happened to be the first to spot the fire while standing in chow line at the mess tent some distance away. Kistler weighed in at about 110 pounds, just a bundle of nerves and nothing much else, and he knew that the gas tanker parked across the road had a CO2 fire extinguisher. Dropping his mess kit he sprinted over, unstrapped a large bottle and holding it in his arms, ran back to the tent and succeeded in dousing the flames. When the cheering stopped he found that the fire extinguisher was so heavy he couldn't carry it back to the truck. He found it hard to believe he had carried it ten feet, let alone 35 yards. When the juices flow, the human body can do wondrous things.

16 March 1944

Dear Mabel: Mail call for Ernie again, it was right at supper time when I had to choose between reading all the letters or just a few, rush over to eat and finish reading after chow. The solution: all seven our your before - the rest after.

Gosh Peanut, I've been wanting to write for several days, but with moving and setting up tents, packing again and remaking camp twice in four days, I never get the time. Have lots to tell you, too. Guess I'll make it in two letters, hi.

Well Peanut, your hubby is now living in style again, with a big tent for his home and four new tentmates. New to bunk with, I mean, not new to the outfit. One of them is Ralph Wallior (one of the twins), married to a local San Anselmo girl who is working at Marin City making doughnuts, I believe.

In just one afternoon this camp sprang up. Stoves made from gas drums, stove pipe put together by cutting the ends out of empty cans and welding them together, lumber floors laid, drainage ditches dug, gravel sprinkled here and there, latrines put into operation, mess tent set up and cooking, even electric lights wired up. Now that beats anything in the way of speed, but the men all worked hard and the weather was fine for once!

The reason we are using new U.S. Army tents is that most of the 60th men are still back where our regular desert tents are pitched. And as only one or two men are picked to come here from any one tent, we couldn't

bring the darned thing with us. However this big one has more floor space and head room so five of us are very comfortably set up in each tent.

Being a small gang we don't have to sweat out long chow lines either. Our two cooks are able to season their dishes better, having a smaller quantity to prepare, hi. This morning, for instance, we crowded inside the kitchen and ate while it rained. Had pork chops AND steak, both in the same day. Too good to be true! Heated a pail of water and took a bath, shampoo, etc.. Feel so clean now it isn't natural! I have a big bag of laundry to get washed, and tomorrow I aim to scout around here to find a place that won't be too far away.

Well baby, I spent so much time reading all those delicious love letters over and over, the hour to turn lights out has arrived. Will close now and send off a continuation in the A.M.. Here I go, dreaming about my Mabel, and how I love her - Kisses to you darling Ernie.

19 March 1944 (Excerpt)

Honey, I entertained a bunch of fellows with the ViewMaster last night. Those new films are swell - they all say, "Boy, I'd like to be there right now!" And those that had been to the World's Fair loved the night lighting scenes. I have been of a mind to sketch some little scenes of camp life and this country. Nothing ambitions, just a sample of what we see. The pictures in Ernie Pyle's book are very good and true to life; fellows bathing in oil drums, etc..

Saw a pretty good movie last night, one of those musical shows with a lot of singing, etc.. In our new camp we run a truck to the show every night and I drive it sometimes. So far the ones I've been to have had no trouble getting seats. Nothing else to report, honey, except I had a hot shower and what a treat that was! I think I'll take another tonight - a glutton for bathing, huh?

Chalmer Wayne Kistler, otherwise known as "Hollywood," "Smiley," "Barrelhead," "Junior," "Horizontal," or "Kiss" has told me to give you this message: Quote - "To 'ell with you, sis, it's chow time" Unquote. That is the kind of encouragement I get when writing to my Peanut, Hi, hi.

It was roast beef!

Troubles have arisen. The other twin (Ray Wallior) has joined us. Now how in the devil am I going to tell them apart? Ralph lives in my tent, but I can't see any distinguishing feature to tell him from his brother. Two things happened today which almost caused us to have hysterics. First, I threw a helmet full of soapy water out the door of the tent just in time to catch Steve Hatt entering with a mess kit full of grub.. P.S.: He saved the food but his jacket and trousers took a beating. Secondly, one of the guys put a heaping spoonful of salt in his coffee, mistaking it for sugar. Then asked in such a puzzled voice, "Blankety blank, fellows, what the blank blank hell is this blank blank stuff?"

Well sugar plum, be a good girl a little longer and the guy who loves you like the dickens will be home again to squeeze and kiss and hug ... guess who?

23 March 1944

Dear Mabel: Here it is Thursday, ration day again with two candy bars this week, hi. When I returned to camp last night from a pass I found your box containing soap boxes, flints, penpoints, figs, pencils and the deck of cards! Thanks honey, they all came through in great shape, the heavy box wasn't even dented.

Had one filling replaced by our G.I. dentist early in the morning, and then thumbed my way into town for a day of window shopping. Found the Red Cross Club had a fine snack barn and even a music room where a small orchestra was playing for the soldiers. Also located a pretty fair restaurant; cabbage soup, pasta, bread & wine for one buck and a quarter. Went for a cab ride around the town and looked through several stores with no success. The souvenirs are not worth much and there are too many guys paying high prices for them.

Rode back home on a train and had a lot of fun with a couple of students. One talked French and the other English, so we had quite a conversation using their textbooks and my pencil drawings of things I wanted to say. One of the boys is going to be a lawyer, the other an

engineer. The chemistry books had formulas similar to ours and they seemed surprised when I names some of those compounds. Their literature books had stories such as Robinson Caruso (spelling?) and other familiar tales.

Walked from the train station to the G.I. movies, which were already started, and saw the end of a funny picture. Rode back to camp in our "show truck," and then opened up that swell package. Had two "V Mails" and a post card from old Georgie Klein. Seems he is having a great time down at Rio.

Drizzling again today. I was lucky to have nice fair weather yesterday when I was out in my best uniform, hi. Everyone is snoozing in this tent because the rain eliminates work. A couple of our boys were half finished painting insignia on some unmentionable, when lo and behold! During chow time a miscalculation on the part of another G.I. finished the job for them. But completely! Can you guess what I'm inferring?

Well Peanut darling, I think I'll get some bunk fatigue along with the rest - love and stuff to my dearest ... Ernie.

OUR DIMINISHING RANKS -- THEIR FINAL FLY-BY

SINCE OUR LAST NEWSLETTER

McManus, William H., HDQ 14 Dec. 1994
Libbert, Murl, 60th 17 July 1996

724th

Allison, Clyde R. 25 May 1997
Blue, William W. 16 Dec 1996
Fox, Harry H. 18 Jan 1997
Hotchkiss, Olin E. 21 Oct 1996
Kalinka, Alfred R. 18 Apr 1997

725th

Burkett, Melvin L. 7 Feb 1997
Cameron, John L. 20 Sep 1993
Elston, Darrel O. 23 Sep 1996
Gunderson, Gordon S. 31 Jan 1995
Hill, Charles E. 12 Apr 1997
Jack, Charles C. 13 Mar 1997
Melton, Mark E. 1996
Numrich, Earl H. 10 Feb 1996
Obier, Earl T. 1996
Shrader, Thomas L. 30 Dec 1996
Yarbrough, Lloyd E. 3 Oct 1996

726th

Fontana, Leno J. 4 Nov 1996
Naylor, Gerald W. 5 Dec 1996
Sanchez, Manuel R. 25 Mar 1997
Stough, Raymond W. Unknown

727th

Morosi, Edward M. 28 May 1996
Prewitt, Terrell G. Dec 1996
Ryan, Joseph F. 17 Mar 1997
Tarman, Oliver J. 26 May 1996
Taub, Sidney 13 Feb 1996
Wessman, Wayne A. Jul 1996
Zraick, Edward A. 23 Mar 1996

*Soldier, rest! thy warfare o'er,
Sleep the sleep that knows not breaking;
Dream of battled fields no more,
Days of danger, nights of waking.
In our isle's enchanted hall,
Hands unseen thy couch are strewing,
Fairy strains of music fall,
Every sense in slumber dewing.
Soldier, rest! thy warefare o'er,
Dream of fighting fields no more;
Sleep the sleep that knows not breaking,
Morn of toil, nor night of waking.
Sir Walter Scott*

Special Monetary Consideration to the Memory of:

Joe Hattersley, 726 - by Henry F. Durham
Manuel Sanchez, 726th - by Chester Ennis.
Leno J. Fontana, 726th - by wife, Polly
Pete Massare, 727th - William R. Glynn
Pete Massare & Al Kalinka, 724th - by Jack Garrison
Richard Fulmer, 725th - by Paul Harden
Edward Morosi, 727th - by Lewis Jeaudoin
Cortland Read, 727th - by Donald Keister
Murl Libbert, 60th - by wife, Ruth
Pete Massare, 727th - by Quincey Tucker
Charles E. Hill, 725th - by Charles Waller
Palmer Gums, 724th - by Joe Wood
Alvin W. Moore, 725th - by P.E. Woods

Special Tribute to the Crew of the EXTRA JOKER;
Peter Brenda, Gunner; Edward Waneski, Bombardier;
Joseph Bednarek, Navigator; Alvin W. Moore, Copilot;
TO all the families of the Crew - And to the EXTRA
JOKER itself by Wes Nelson, of the SMW

*A donation of \$50 to the 451st Bomb Group in
memory of a deceased comrade, or family member, as
an alternative to flowers and other memorials, is an
option for all members to consider.*



CHATTER FROM THE FLIGHT DECK

Bob Karstensen

EDITORIAL REFLECTIONS - AH, tis time for me to pontificate (Webster's definition - "To speak or behave pompously"). As if I haven't already been doing that throughout the newsletter. You will note that I've added my comments to most every articles. In some cases its a clarification of something that needed amplification; or something that may have evaded your memory since we trod the plains of Italy more than 50 years ago.

As always, I've had some very good material to work with. In fact there is still a lot of good stuff on the shelf that I'll have to "dust off" for later Ad-Libs. Right now, though, I hope you are being fulfilled with the variety of articles that I've put together for this one.

And, of course, I'm always open for more stories. If I find an unintentional discrepancy in your original tale (dates, targets and/or personnel), I'll do my best to clarify it from the history that I have in this office and make it easier for the readers to understand.

SOME CLARIFICATIONS - Prior to the mailing of the last Ad-Lib (Issue 27) I had sent letters to members that were of long standing, but that I hadn't heard from in years. To those that responded, many with checks to bolster our treasury, I figured they were more than interested in what we're all about. To those that did not respond, I did not send them our Issue 27 newsletter. Not as punishment, but more as an economy gesture. Right at that time the treasury did not have enough funds for printing and mailing to the almost 1,900 we have on our mailing list. Since then I have been blessed with enough funds to offer them another chance at becoming part of our organization. But, should I NOT hear from them in any meaningful way after this newsletter, I will have to purge them from further mailings.

To some it won't mean all that much; they are probably indifferent members at best, and what we're doing isn't all that important in their lives. And there may be some that have passed away, but the family hasn't alerted me to the fact. But to the others who read this and realize that they missed one edition of the Ad-Lib, they are going to know that we mean to take steps to get them back into the association.

However, I should add, should you send me information and/or a donation, please don't expect an immediate answer, or maybe even a reply. Be assured, though, I will get you that special address you requested, or some other immediate info, should you make a point of it. With the number of interested members we have, I can only handle a certain amount of daily correspondence. More, if I wasn't searching for new members, making Change of Addresses, updating our membership ROSTER, working on the Ad-Lib and researching parts of our history.

As to the contents of the newsletter, most of the real

interesting stuff I try to incorporate into the Ad-Lib. My staff of one [1]--ME, gets hard pressed at times. I'm trying to get my Congressman to make into law - a 26 hour day.

COA - Regarding the "Changes of Address" I get from the Post Office. A lot of them are due to those of you that spend winters in the southern clime. If you had a single address that you could count on for our mail; one that would forward your mail to wherever you may be at that time of year, I would sure appreciate it. Right now I'm counting on the Post Office to forward our mailings from your northern location; except it you have taken up permanent residence in the South, and so informed me. Otherwise I have to remail it back at our expense.

PLACES I'VE BEEN - THINGS I'VE DONE - On a spring break (R & R), through the South West in mid March, I managed to squeeze in a visit to several museums and related points of interest to our wartime entity. Here's my review of what I noted.

LIBERAL AIR MUSEUM - Liberal KS. First noted was the new curator the Museum has. Ms. Ronda Maxwell greeted me when I introduced myself. To those not privy to Liberal AAF, it was once a prominent B-24 Transitional Training Base where some of our pilots

received their final instructions in B-24s before heading up a crew.

Ms. Maxwell told me that the museum is on a list of recipients for one of the newly found B-24s. Seems that some B-24s are being recovered off the sea bottom along the coast of Alaska.

Although the old airfield still remains intact as a commercial air field, the museum is housed in a spacious hanger-like building next to the runway.



Liberal's New Curator
Ms Ronda Maxwell

I was a bit chagrin when I entered the display area. Where once there had been a prominent display of WW-II artifacts, I found the area empty. It had been replaced and moved to a rear part of the building; moved and decreased in size and importance. I hope the next time I venture there, more discretion will be used to emphasize WHAT it was that made the old air base so important. If any of you guys happen by, let them know that we'd appreciate more priority given to our era.

FILLMORE COUNTY MUSEUM - Fairmont, NE. Due to my need to cover ground, I only had a chance to visit with the President of the Fillmore Historical Society, Don West. He told me that everything was going along quite well. He pointed out that after their 50th Anniversary of the closing of the Fairmont AAF Base, they (Fillmore County) were getting a lot of good

publicity in various travel and trade journals throughout the State, as well as Nationwide. They are still indebted to the 451st for showing them that the old air field still has potential to attract people as a result of our invasion in 1990.



PIMA AIR MUSEUM - Tucson, AZ The very first time I visited the Museum, in 1976, none of the exhibits were housed. They sat on the desert floor suffering the elements of sun, sand and wind. The old B-24 was in



1976 - Bob K & B-24

deplorable shape. To a hungry-eyed gunner (who hadn't laid eyes on one since 1945) it was still a treat to look it over. The next time I came to the museum, 1989, there was a semblance of a museum. They had a gift shop, several hangers to house, what they thought, the more important aircraft (like the B-17

- UGH!), but still nothing for our beloved B-24. At about that time Virgil Falkner took over the restoration and challenge of sheltering the "Lib" and willingly showed me through it. I wrote of his determination to get the Liberator under cover in one of our past Ad-Libs.



1997 - Housed, Restored & Ready For Viewing

In the meanwhile he was diligently working on restoration; from nose turret to tail guns. Now, as of 1997, he has it housed in a hanger shared by several other aircraft. Don't ask me what else is in there; I only had eyes for the B-24. Virg Falkner has that ship (named; "BUNGAY BUCKAROO") so polished you could shave yourself from the reflection. All the desert blasted plexi-glass has been replaced with new and the struts pumped up so it isn't hugging the ground as it did when I came by in 1976. There is always a knowledgeable volunteer on hand to answer questions that the uninformed may pose. My hat's off to Virg; he's done a remarkable job of restoration and his corps of volunteers are top-drawer.



Nose Turret in Pristine Condition

MEDICARE 7, 8 or 9 - Tucson, AZ While in Arizona I invited 2 members that reside in the Tucson area, William Womack [724th, Flight Chief/AEG] and Larry Broadwater [726th, AEG] to join me for a concert being performed by the "MediCare 7, 8 or 9, Dixieland Jazz Band" out of the University of Illinois.

To those that attended our first reunion (1980 in Chicago) they were the better/best part of our entertainment. Among those 7, 8, or 9 is our talented trumpet player, John O'Connor [724th Pilot].

They were on tour and one of their "gigs" was in Tucson. John O'Connor and Bill Womack had a chance to "catch up," as Womack was one of O'Connor's original passengers when they flew over to Italy in the "Fairmont cadre." (REMEMBER? - Crew of 10, plus 4 passengers)



L to R: John O'Connor, William Womack, Bob K, Larry Broadwater

Larry Broadwater and I just kinda hung-out watching the two of them do their catching up. Both made a career of the military. Broadwater and I made a career of just being good civilians. At least Larry did!

15th AF & AF ASSOCIATION 50th REUNION - April 22 to 26 1997 saw 9 stalwart 451st members in attendance for the Las Vegas convention of the 15th AF Association and the Air Force Association's 50th anniversary of the AFA's conception.

Those in attendance were: Charles & Dorothy Brown [727th]; Charles & Jane Cronis [HDQ]; Nate & Mildred Firestone [725th]; Robert Henbest [727th] plus 2 sons - Tim & David; Achilles Kozakis [725th] plus 2 sons - Perry & Tom; Joe & Rita Ladoue [725th]; Archie Piirainen [727th]; Hector & Marina Sapien [727th] and yours truly, Bob Karstensen.

Between the two entities (15th and the AF Association) a bevy of events were merged so the attendees weren't overlapped by too tight a schedule. The 15th outdid themselves in elegance and honors. From honoring the individual GROUPS in attendance with a "Pass in Review" indoor parade, to a most befitting Memorial Service on closing day.

The AF Association outdid themselves in size and precision. The Nellis Flight Line was amassed with all sorts of aircraft flown in for this important occasion. Even the Collings Foundation, with the B-24 and B-17, were there to celebrate the event.



Collings Foundation B-24 on Display

The Association's GALA Program had many of the past and current Air Force "Higher Echelon" there.

We had the chance to greet many of the people that were prominent at our past reunions. Even got the chance to introduce ourselves to General Fogleman, our champion for the Ploesti Picture from our 1996 Minnesota Reunion.

Bob Gaylor, Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force, Retired, (Guest Speaker at our San Antonio Reunion) remembered the 451st with fond memories. All in all, our activities, on behalf of the 451st, were more than memorable. I only hope we left a good (451st) impression with those that we came in contact with.

YOUR ORDERS FOR THE DAY - I haven't been getting those replacement crews shipping orders (copies preferred) that I was hoping for. I was looking for those dated from early to mid 1944 into 1945 that would show your overseas crew makeup.

My one file in the computer has listings of everyone I can find, through orders, that served in the 451st. These are with a Army Serial Number attached; close to

4,500. The other file, which is our current mailing ROSTER of those actually located, does not go into detail with such things as ASN's. In the last newsletter I asked that you place your ASN on your correspondence, whether on letter or check, so I could include it with my "Total Roster" file.

Oddly though, I'm finding a lot of crews (from what orders I DID get) that were transferred from other Groups (376th, 461st, etc) into the 451st so's to go home with us. Seem there were a lot of crew shuffling between Groups, trying to decide on who goes to the Pacific - or who goes straight home. As it ended up, none of the Groups that I knew of, went directly to the Pacific theater.

AIR vs. GROUND STORIES - I occasionally get letters from some of the Ground Crewmen wondering why the newsletter carries so many stories of the Combat Crews. I could say that it's simply because the Air Crews personnel outnumber the Ground Crews, by quite a number, or, that there is more drama and danger in what the Air Crews endured during a few minutes, per mission, against all the hard work, long hours and sweating-out of missions, that was the destiny of the Ground Crews.

But, is there really a conscious effort to NOT include stories by the Ground personnel, and lean more to combat stories? I try not to make it so. Over the years I've written on what has been offered from the Ground Crews, using much of what has been sent. But it seems that no matter how much I put in, air or ground stories, there is always someone that thinks it's not quite enough.

If it's a combat crewman, then he think that I should write more about Ploesti, or Vienna, or similarly difficult targets. Some want me to expound on the POWs and what they endured.

Of all the stories I think that I've made a conscious effort to get a cross-section of everyone's experiences. I'm bound to offend some with the contents of the newsletter, simply by omission. I know from the feedback that most of you recognize the spot this editor is in. "Damned if I do, damned if I don't."

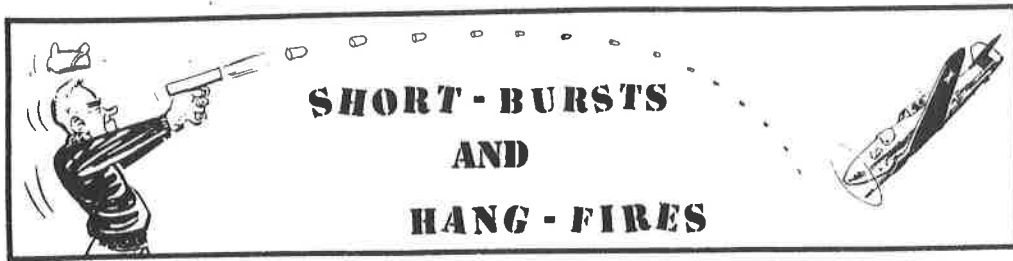
But you accept the fact that the main purpose of my effort is to keep us all together. A story or two about "this and that" makes for cohesion between the ranks, and sometimes a bit of honest questioning. And until the day they play the "Dead March" over my grave, I'll try and keep this GREAT Bomb Group in the battle. You hang in there with me, too. For it's by your effort; great stories and generous contributions, that we can keep the spirit alive. Just remember, I can't do it all alone; even though I try!

On the following page (Page 30) you will find a series of photos that you "old timers" can easily relate to. Doug Rung, former school teacher (retired) - now a devoted historian to Fillmore County Historical Society, offered these photos so we can give our readers another view of the old base - as it was at the end of its career.

I hope you early 451st'ers can identify something from your training days spent there.

PANORAMIC VIEW OF FAIRMONT ARMY AIR FIELD (CIRCA; APPROXIMATELY 1945)





General Ronald R. Fogelman [USAF Chief of Staff] ... Many thanks for your letter of 28 September. I'm very pleased to know that Colonel Kacena's speech and "Ploesti Picture" presentation helped contribute to the success of your reunion. Thank you for taking the time to write. I very much appreciate your kind words and continued support.

(Editor ... My thanks to the General, as well. But meeting, face to face, at the Air Force Association's 50th Anniversary in Las Vegas, and having a brief visit with the General, was also the thrill of a lifetime for this old gunner.)

William R. Glynn, 727th [NAVIGATOR] ... I received the fall '96 issue of the "AD-LIB." It was fun to be reminded of the good times in Minneapolis; again - a superbly organized reunion. Bob, the picture of Pete on page 24 brought tears to my eyes. You remember Pete was copilot on the Anderson crew's first raid in "Little Butch." His picture brought back memories of other fallen comrade-in-arms. I wonder today if we were ever THAT young. Enclosed is a small contribution in Pete's memory.

(Editor ... I too feel the sorrow of Pete's passing. I'm reminded each day when I enter my office that he's not here to guide and direct me. Your words will help comfort his wife, Clara; and their four sons, John, Frank, Peter and Mark - and their families.)

Audrey Wood, 727th [COMPLIMENTARY MEMBER] ... I read every word of the Fall 1996 issue of Ad-Lib -- you are still doing a great job. I wish I could have attended the reunion in Minneapolis, as my Wally (Lt Walter E. Ross) is buried at Fort Snelling Cemetery and I have only been there once. No matter how many years go by, he is still loved and thought about every day. The story by Wes Nelson was great. Keep up the good work.

(Editor ... It's great to hear from you, Audrey. Sorry, too, that you couldn't attend the reunion and see the beautiful Fort Snelling Cemetery just across the Interstate from the Hilton Hotel. I have strolled through the grounds several times and paid my respects to those that I know.



Lt Walter E. Ross & Son, David
b. 16 April 1917 d. 14 February 1945

Next time, I'll pause at your late husbands grave and tell him that he isn't forgotten ... nor are any of those that are laid to rest there. - I didn't forget Audrey; I did it)



GRAVESITE OF WALTER E. ROSS

*No more the bugle calls the weary one.
Rest noble spirit in thy grave unknown.
I'll find you and know you among the good and true,
When the rose of white is given for the faded coat of blue.*

(Taken from the song "The Faded Coat Of Blue")

Quincey Tucker, 727th [SQUADRON NAVIGATOR] ... I was glad to get the latest edition of Ad-Lib, but was saddened by the news of Pete Massare's recent death. I had feared that Pete might not be doing well as I had not heard from him in some time. We seem to have lost a considerable number of members lately. Please consider my contribution as a



Bill Early, Pete Massare, John Pafford

memorial to Pete Massare.

(Editor ... In this issue you will also note the loss of Ed Zraick, 727th Squadron Intelligence Officer. It seems like some of the upper echelon of the 727th (Massare, Ass't Ops O.; Zraick, Intelligence O.; Voisich, Supply O., are leaving us for a better haven on high. Mrs Ed (Lorraine) Zraick was kind enough, when she informed me of Ed's passing, to offer me what pictures Ed had from his days in North Africa and Italy. Our picture library was greatly enriched by this generous donation.)

Roy L. Connor, 725th [PILOT] ... On page 22 (Issue 27), Gretchen Black, daughter of S/Sgt John Howe, seeks to hear from anyone who might have known her dad. I knew him indeed! My 80 year old memory has dimmed considerably but I seem to remember John Howe flew as my tail gunner for 50 missions over Europe. He was a member of the 451st cadre which formed up and trained at Fairmont, Nebraska. Together we flew the southern route from Natal to West Dakar, Africa and ultimately to our base in Italy. I just passed my 80th birthday and in the years between now and the end of WWII, all contact with my crew members has been lost. Thus you can understand my delight at the prospect of communicating with John Howe's daughter. I owe this opportunity to you and your untiring effort to keep track of the 451st personnel, acting as a medium through which surviving members and their kin can communicate. Please accept the enclosed donation as a token of my appreciation for the many issues of the Ad-Lib and the pleasure they have afforded me in filling in so many empty spots in my 80 year old memory.

(Editor ... Many thanks Roy, for the accolades you bestow on this wrinkled old brow and for your very generous donation. You may think that what I do is a chore, but in reality it is a joy to find a guy and to link him together with his buddies. I'm sending you a list of your crew (5 tried and true) that I have in my computer. These contacts should keep you active until you are in your late 90's.)

Henry F. Durham, 726th [BOMBARDIER] ... To Whom it may concern: In Issue 27 of Ad-Lib, I was surprised to find that I had died and that I had been remembered by Joe Hattersley (Page 16, "Special Monetary Consideration to the Memory of ...") Obviously, I sent my contribution in Memory of Joe Hattersley, a damned good gunner, crewmember and friend. I hope some of my old friends don't think me gone.

(Editor ... Sorry about that Henry! I guess, in my haste, I had a momentary mental relapse. (Sometimes smoking the front lawn isn't the best thing to do while writing and editing the Ad-Lib) I will make appropriate alterations in this issue and give you credit for remembering Joe by your offering. Again, this humble editor admits to the error and hopes to do better.)

James Hulderman, 727th [GUNNER] ... Popping your chute in the bomb-bay?? You had a tough day in the nose turret. We had electric suits under our flight suits and were suppose to wear flight boots and carry GI shoes with us. I wore my GI's and at about the I.P. I saw smoke -- my suit was on fire! I pulled the plug and got the fire out, but before we got back my heels were frozen. I walked on my toes for about two weeks so I wouldn't get behind the crew in missions and could go

home with them.

(Editor ... Jim, that happened to me also, but on my first combat mission to Nimes, France. It became a choice of "freeze or fricassee." I chose neither as I alternated between the two by plugging back in every once in a while. My greatest claim to fame was not for shooting down fighters; but in just surviving under those extreme elements. Sorry to hear that you are battling the dreaded "Big 'C'")

Harold A. Ginsberg, 726th [NAVIGATOR] ... Sadly, I wish to inform you of the passing of William Sullwold of Metairie, LA. Willie was the nose gunner on Bob Zimmerman's and my crew. He died on June 1, 1995. I haven't seen him since 1945, but when I think about him, I don't think I've ever seen him without a smile on his face. That's a nice way to think of someone.

(Editor ... Indeed, remembering someone with a smile (from back in 1945) reminds you that they will always stay young in your mind. Thanks for giving me that info on Sullwold. I didn't have him listed, other than just being a member of your crew and part of the 451st. Now his file is complete.)

Norman Mochel, 724th [ADJUTANT] ... I was saddened to see the name of Palmer Gums in the obituary column. He was truly dedicated to doing his job in the best way it could be done. The 724th Squadron owes him a debt of gratitude, and so do I.

(Editor ... 1st Sergeant Gums was truly a special person. I can remember him in so many ways. Overseeing the pay day ritual on that once a month spectacular; clearing a soldier for a 1 or 3 day pass; hearing the woes of someone with a "Dear John" type letter, and so many other things that buffered the common soldier - from himself, and trouble.)



724th ORDERLY ROOM

L TO R: Sgt Harry Fox, Cpl William Saye, Cpl Sanford Beck, 1st Sgt Palmer Gums, Sgt Alvin Laich, Captain Norman Mochel

Sallie (Eaton) Elliott, [Complimentary Member] ... We received the last issue of AD-LIB (Issue 27) and we enjoyed reading about the successful Reunion and the remarks made about Dad relaying stories while in the goose blind on the Eastern Shore of Maryland. Believe me, he was famous for that! Too bad we never had a tape recorder going.

(Editor ... Like all good men; they leave something behind that endows them to their fellow man. Colonel Neil Kacena spoke more than favorably about your Dad, even beyond the microphone and the podium. You should have heard him and Le Younkin going at it about the past, present and future Air Force that your father helped establish.)



Colonel Neil Kacena USAF - Lt Colonel Robert Kacena USAF (Ret.)
[Featured Speaker] and [Master of Ceremonies]
(The Son & Father)

John Racinowski, 727th [GUNNER] ... Did Jim Park give you a list of our crew? We would like to know what happened to James Piasecki (I think that's the right spelling). When we finished our missions he was asked to stay in because of being a lead navigator. Which he did. He looked about 14 when I first met him in Wyoming with the rest of the crew. By the way, February's American Legion Magazine finally had the 451st listed in it.

(Editor ... No luck with Piasecki. That's a difficult name to get correct. As to the AL Magazine and their way of making reunion announcements; it finally ran our notice months after the event. That system is a lousy way to entice potential members. First off, they don't run the Group's name often enough; Secondly, they charge too much for what they give. In our case we have to try everyone and anyone that will give us a "blurb.")

Ruth Libbert, [Complimentary 60th Service Squadron Member] ... My husband, Muri Libbert, was a member of the 60th Air Service Squadron, however he passed away on July 17th, 1996. He thoroughly enjoyed reading the AD-LIB. And I did, too. Please accept my donation in his memory for your continuing operations in printing this wonderful booklet of memories. May you be able to keep up the good work for the great guys who gave their time and effort in the service of their country during World War II. My thanks to you for the good reading you gave to my husband.

(Editor ... Ruth, you said it so well. They all served their country well .. now it's my turn to serve them.)

Leo Stoutsenberger, HDQ [COMBAT PHOTO-

GRAPHER] ... While going through some of my old archives a few days ago, I came upon a clipping of the "EXTRA JOKER" picture I took during the Markersdorf Mission on August 23, 1944. It was in the Roto-Gravure section of our Washington, DC newspaper, "The Washington Star." It appeared in the Sunday morning edition and gave my parents a shock when they first saw it with my name and address included. My reason for sending this zerox copy of it is because I've felt badly since there were reports a few years ago that somebody else took the shot. I've enjoyed the issues of the Ad-Lib very much. I was surprised to learn of the late Major Dwyer's family profiting from the photos his aerial photographers took.

(Editor ... As to the taking of the "EXTRA JOKER" picture; no one in our Group is going to dispute the fact that "YOUR THE MAN!" Like the Ploesti Picture that I've been touting for recognition, I'll bear those crosses (EXTRA JOKER & Ploesti Raid pictures) till we are no longer around to do battle. As far as the Dwyer conundrum is concerned, I've run my string out on that. I just hope that they (the Dwyer family) realize that it was guys like yourself that put your life on the line ... only, now, for them to profit from them. We lost some good combat photographers along the way ... but why should they care. Sorry I'm so sour on the subject, but it hurts.)

Thomas E. Davis, 727th [GUNNER] ... Sorry to read about Pete Massare. I hardly knew him, except I flew with him on his last two missions; October 12th & 13th. They were my first two. We had lost our pilot the week before - he was on his first mission. Name: Robert D. Mack.

(Editor ... With the passing of 50+ years since the dates mentioned, Pete could not remember who exactly was on his "finishing-up crew." He remembers Bombardier Bob Kimball being on that final mission, since it was Kimball's last mission, also.)

Ted W. Wengert, 726th [NAVIGATOR] ... As usual, another great Ad-Lib issue on the Minneapolis reunion. For the sake of the organization; may you be the last one to be shot down.

Ed Lynott, 726th [AEG] ...

Re: CAN-NON FOD-DER. CAN-NON FOD-DER was my second plane. We flew three missions in it. It was shot up so bad we thought they had junked it! I was surprised to read about it flying again. P.S. It had over 300 holes in it.



(Editor ... I'm bringing it back one more time, Ed. Just for you, and a few others that may be reading this. It sure looks peaceful in this photo, doesn't it? Hard to imagine that anyone would take shots at it - HUH?)

Leroy Stefen, HDQ [3rd GROUP COMMANDER] ... As usual your recent edition of Ad-Lib was a work of art. Just collecting data, formatting it and getting printed and mailed must be a task for Hercules. It makes me wonder how many people you have on your staff helping you. I am appreciative of the fact that you printed the story of Old Glory. It is worth keeping.



Colonel Leroy L. Stefanowicz
(anglicized Stefen)

(Editor ... My "staff" has always felt that they were over-worked and underpaid. But, what the HEY, that's the way I get things done. By the way, my staff (of 1) appreciates the donation you sent.)

George Tudor, 725th [PILOT] ... Lindley Miller's letter tell it all - Finally the Greek government has sent the recognition to Lin and to our deceased crewmate, Ray Fisher. (Letter in Reference: to Mildred Fisher) .. I am delighted that finally, after about three years, I am enclosing the medal and citation awarded to Ray for the mission in September 1944 when we both flew to Greece. It has been a long time in coming - the fruit of many letters, telephone calls and contacts, but at long last we finally have the award.

(Editor ... It seems that those Greek medals, that were easily obtained at first, are now becoming more and more guarded by the Greek government. Roy Ferguson, pilot in the 727th, recently called me to say that he, too, had received his medal, via Federal Express. Now he's wondering what the citation says, since it is all in Greek. He's promised to get it translated and fill me in.)

Edward Shirk, 725th [AEG] ... Thanks for all the literature of the 451st. I sent Gretchen Black, John Howe's daughter, (Ad-Lib, Issue 27, Page 22) a picture of her father I had taken on the Isle of Capri.

(Editor ... Nicely done, Ed. I have to imagine that there was a close friendship developed between you and John Howe, although he was on Roy Connor's crew and you from Bill Mattes'. I'm sure Gretchen appreciates your concern.)

George C. McCleary, 725th [PILOT] ... We were one of the first replacement crews assigned to the 451st. We were used as fillers and Ed Friedman and I were assigned to the 725. I, as copilot for Frank Hamer and Ed as navigator. I am not sure at this point in time about the assignments of the rest of my crew as they were spread around, but I do know that my copilot, Alvin Moore, was Whiting's copilot on EXTRA JOKER when it went down. My a/c was assigned to another crew and Lt. Cotton was pilot on the plane's second mission April 5, 1944 and he crashed and burned on take-off. Frank Hamer was killed on my 8th mission, May 10, 1944, Weiner Neustadt. You mentioned (Ad-Lib ?) talking to Jim Stritch, our bombardier, who along with Ed Friedman helped me get the ship back to base. Sqdn CO, Ed Bowen, assigned me as pilot to take over Frank's crew and sent us off to Capri the next day. (They had already

been scheduled to go so Ed and I went with them) On our return we picked up Russ Stadel as copilot and continued our missions. I was in and out of the 725th so quickly that I don't remember many people; 1st mission on April 15 and the last August 24th 1944. I do remember leaving for the ZI with Bill Tuney.

(Editor ... Nice recap George on your tour of combat duty. If I may add to your post-war retrospect: Your original crew is in my computer as follows. Found: David Matthews, Angelo Bianchi and Marvin Gordon. Deceased: George Hulten - 1984 and, of course, Alvin Moore - 1944. Still to be located: Dickinson, Friedman, Jensen and Stevens.)

William C. Owens, 726th [PILOT] ... Enclosed find a picture of the Commander of a British gun boat that picked up me and my crew on the island of Krk on the shores of the Adriatic Sea on March 1st 1945, and carried us to Zara, Yugoslavia, where the Air Force had an emergency landing strip. We were on a mission to Northern Italy, near Balzano and was shot up with flak causing us to bail out on the Island of Krk. I flew 32 missions from November until the war ended. I would appreciate anyone who flew with me during this time, or was with me when we were shot down, to get in touch with me. Also, would like to get in touch with the British Officer shown on the enclosed photo, if you have any ideas on locating him, I'd appreciate the help.

(Editor ... Our long arm of investigation hasn't gotten much into 8th AAF territory; that is with British authors and periodicals related to the air/sea/ground war. Just how to go about it has me buffaloes. As to your crewmembers on that fateful 28 February 1945 mission; I've sent you what I have to date. The list contained the other three officers and one gunner. I have found that two EM of that crew have already passed on: Fred Blackburn and Mike Westrich. The rest I'm still looking for.)



Unknown British Skipper
In Adriatic Waters

Joe Arsenault, 725th [ROMG] ... I was pleasantly surprised at the reunion in Minnesota to see that the nose gunner of our crew, Harvey Metsger, was there. We hadn't heard from him in 52 years, so it was quite a reunion. Metsger was a go-getter of the crew. If it was available, Metsger could get it. A most valuable man to have on a crew. I remember one incident in North Africa, while we were waiting for Italy to open up. The mess lines were quite long and you had to slosh through the mud to get there, so what does Metsger do but borrow a jeep, write a few lines on a piece of paper and drive up to the supply depot which was guarded by a

Frenchman that couldn't speak English. Metsger handed him the paper, walked in and picked up two cases of C rations and walked out. Many a day we fixed our own meals in the tent rather than sweat out the line and slosh through the mud. If you have room in your next newsletter, you might consider printing Harvey Brown and my e-mail addresses to see what kind of response we get from other members. My e-mail address is : jonorment@juno.com - Harvey Brown is: hbrowne@aol.com.

(Editor ... As to Metsger and the two cases of "C Rations," I'm sure the Imhoff Crew would accept a "Statement of Charges" and reimburse the government for said incident. With "tongue in cheek" I could tell all you guys to make the check out to 451st Bomb Group. As to being on the internet; I tried it for a while but found it very time consuming. My daughter has it and is under the handle of: alk57@aol.com. I can be reached through her. I may go back on it later, if the 451st treasury can afford it. My tag was: bobk451@aol.com. Until then keep me abreast, Joe, of what input you get from surfing the internet.)

Bob Gaylord, 5th Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force ... One of many high points of the Las Vegas AFA reunion was the opportunity to renew acquaintances with friends from the past. What a nice surprise to see you again! The 451st Bombardment Group treated us very hospitable a few years back and we have NOT forgotten the event and the heroes we met. I know you thrilled when the B-24 made passes at the air show. So did I. Hope to see you again, Bob.



Bob Gaylord CMSAF

(Editor ... To those that weren't privy to our San Antonio reunion in 1986, Bob Gaylord was our Guest Speaker. His message was so profound that some of us attendees were looking around for the Recruiting Sergeant so's we could re-enlist, again. It was great to see Bob, and his alumni corps of Air Force Chiefs, being recognized at the AFA Gala Program.)

Sedge Hill, 727th [MECHANIC] ...

Verbatim over the phone; "Mike, my writer son, has signed a contract to do another book on the 451st. This time it will be a picture book on 451st aircraft in various aspects of flight; and whatever."

(Editor ... Later in the month Mike called me to let me know that he has most all the photos he requires. It seems that while doing our "Fight'n Four Fifty First" book, Bill Dwyer had entrusted Mike with most all his original pictures. Since there were too many for THAT book, he has surplus others he can use. He didn't ask for more - but should he need them I think we may be able to augment his current library.

****BULLETIN** From Art Gallagher, 726th [ORDANANCE]** Just received word that Allan "Woody" Woodman passed away on 11 May 1997. He will be missed. Woody was Combat Photographer.

Paul M. Gilbert, 727th [SHEET METAL SECT.]

I know it has been a long time since you have heard from me, but here I am again. The reason I have not written or contributed is that I sort of lost interest because it was so seldom that I found anything about anyone I knew in the ground crews. I don't know if this was because the ground crew felt they weren't recognized, or because you were more familiar with the flight crews and had more access to their deeds than you did the ground crews. After all the things of interest were done by the flight crews and that makes more interesting reading.

Probably the most contact you had with the ground men was with those who took care of your plane. I am not complaining about your writing or your subject matter. You have done a great job without help from a great many of us.

I can tell you about a couple of things that might give you a chuckle and let you know about some of the things we did on the ground.

I remember one cold day when the planes came back with a lot of damage; flak holes everywhere. I was a sheet metal man so I got to work patching holes. It was getting dark and beginning to rain, but we were told that the planes MUST be ready for the next days mission. It was getting colder and I still had several holes left to patch on top of the fuselage. I went up through the top hatch and found ice was beginning to cover the wings and top of the fuselage. I worked as fast as I could, but the ice was gaining on me. When I finally finished it was so slick that I was afraid to try to walk the fuselage to the top hatch. I took off my shoes and very carefully made my way to the hatch in my stocking feet.

The mission was scrubbed the next day because of bad weather!

Another thing that comes to mind is one day when, I had nothing in particular to do, I decided to walk all the way around the base. I don't remember exactly where I was, I think it was in the 724th area, when I saw two guys sitting on the wing of a plane. They were looking a little perplexed so I asked them what was going on. They explained that one of the rubber gas tanks had caught some flak and had to be replaced. The problem was that they were too big to work their way through the wing, collapse the tank and pull it (or push it) through the wing and replace it.

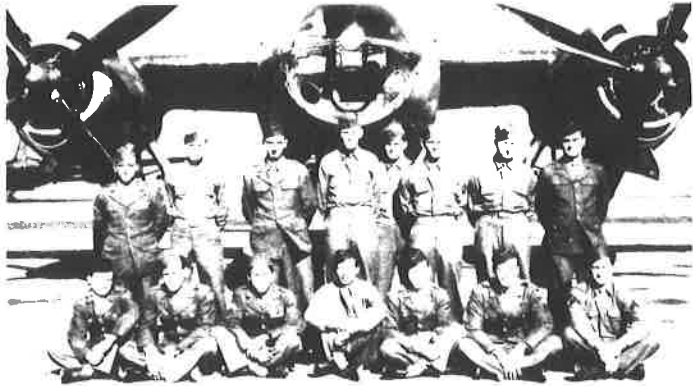
Now everyone knows that you never volunteer for anything, but my mind wasn't working that day and I found myself saying that I could help them. I was about forty pounds lighter then and I was sure I could work my way through the wing to the tank and get it out. It was pretty hot and the gasoline fumes were almost more than I could take, but after a lot of sweat I got the tank out. The guys had the courtesy to say thanks, but then strongly hinted that they would like me to help get the new tank in place. I told them I would really like to help, but I had to get back to my own squadron. I lied.

I can't end this without putting a little "drop in the bucket" so I hope this small contribution will help just a bit. I'll try to do better in the future. Keep your feathers dry and don't fly into a headwind.

Editor ... Seems that your first paragraph coincides with the comments that I expressed earlier (Chatter from

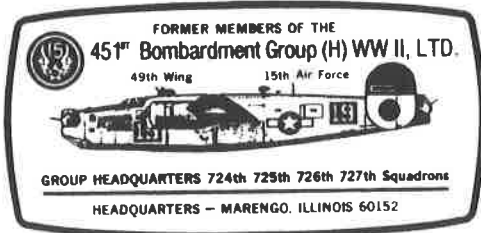
the Flight Deck). Trying to hit all the areas of involvement; both in incidents and personnel, becomes a real challenge. What you just wrote about (weather conditions & dangerous work done) is something that ONLY YOU hardworking ground guys can offered me. There must be a zillion stories that you and your cohorts can supply me with .. give it a try.

Walter R. Cienski, 725th [AEG] ... Thought you'd get a kick out of the enclosed picture. I dug it out of my Tyndall Field Gunners School graduation class book.



(Editor ... Talk about being surprised! I never knew the book even existed. I sat for hours studying faces of all the classmates and trying to recall the experiences we shared (classroom studies, rifle target qualification, skeet/trap shooting and finally the flying 'air to air & air to ground' target practice.) By the way, I'm the tall one in the very middle - back row. -- would you believe it!)

Donald Schaffner, 727th [Pilot] ... The lower picture came to me via Don Schaffner. It is of particular interest to both Don and myself to identify the people in it. For Don, it's the person standing 2nd from the left, for he was a flying school classmate (whose name escapes him) that he'd like to get in contact with. To me it is the person standing 3rd from the left who I can remember (but not his name) from my days in the 724th Squadron. I think he was a Flight Engineer (AEG). Don thinks that his "ole-what's-his-name" was, for sure, in the 724th as a pilot, or copilot, and was from Wisconsin. Don said that he took the picture with an old box camera; thus the poor quality of the print. But the circumstances of the crashed plane and positioning of the people may be a clue. If any of you 724th'ers have any idea as to who these Officers and EM's are, and can shed some light on the incident that brought them together; drop me a line. (note the deep snow on the ground.)



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ADDRESS CORRECTION
REQUESTED

1185