



# 451<sup>st</sup> Bomb Group Newsletter No. 1 January 2013



Published by Winson Jones for the preservation of our 451<sup>st</sup> heritage. Printing and mailing of the Newsletter is funded solely by donation which should be mailed to:

451<sup>st</sup> Bomb Group  
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## 2013 REUNION UPDATE

As you know, we will be holding our 2013 Reunion October 17-19, 2013 at the Embassy Suites Hotel in Tempe, Arizona. At this time, it appears that we may be joined by possibly three other Bomb Groups of the 15<sup>th</sup> Air Force. Also the Arizona Liberator Group has expressed interest in participating. All in all, this should help on attaining the attendance numbers necessary to fund and provide a very good program.

For those that have already sent in your Registrations, do promptly call the Embassy Suites for your sleeping room reservations (480-897-7444). When reserving your rooms, be sure to mention that you are part of the 15<sup>th</sup> Air Force Reunion to obtain the greatly reduced \$89.00 per night room rate.

## 451<sup>st</sup> Bomb Group Reunion Chicago---October 2010 Group Picture of Survivor's Present



Row 1 (L to R): 1. Gus Margaritas 2. Alex Kuras 3. Achi Kozakis 4. Vic Klopfenstein 5. Louie Lopez 6. Winson Jones 7. Jack Jones 8. Paul V. Anderson 9. Herb Guinness 10. Bob Anderson 11. Henry Wurthmann  
Row 2 (L to R): 1. Larry Berns 2. Peter Polmen 3. Rex Ridenour 4. Milo Sanchez 5. Don Schaffner 6. A. Mike Stauth 7. C.E. Thompson 8. Roy Ferguson 9. Wayne Vorpahl 10. Bill Wagner 11. Jake Wiest  
Row 3 (L to R): 1. Ralph Helmericks 2. Sedge Hill 3. Bill Hipple 4. Fred Kuhn 5. Bill Macomber 6. Verne Mason 7. Vic Melnick 8. Jack Miller 9. Richard Minor 10. Seabert Nelson 11. Alex Garcia 12. Linn Newman  
Row 4(L to R): 1. George Atkinson 2. Leslie Brue 3. Ed Longenecker 4. Jake Early 5. Dean Eckersley 6. Al Epeptine 7. Nathan Firestone 8. Earl Van Benschoten 9. James Martin 10. Louis Head (not pictured)

For others who plan to attend, please send in your Registration papers and also make your hotel reservations by no later than March 31, 2013. This will permit proper planning of meeting space requirements and of course, sleeping room accommodations. Yes, everyone involved is getting older, and travel for some may become more difficult. Fortunately, in many instances arranging to have a son or daughter accompany a Bomb Group survivor will facilitate your attending our Tempe Reunion.

The revised Registration Forms included with this Newsletter request that new registrations be mailed to the winter home of Win Jones in Arizona. Thank you for your consideration and best wishes for the period ahead.

### **INTERTWINED WITH THE LUCK OF THE DRAW**

The individuals in the picture on page 3 share many factors. Also, a description of their relationships serves to explain how the pure "luck of the draw" permitted the gunners of the 451<sup>st</sup> Replacement Crew 89 to survive 35 missions with only one crew member being injured by flak.

The individual gunners separately were sent to Charleston, South Carolina for crew assignment and training. Little did they know that by a stroke of good fortune they were to become crew members with nine other exceptionally qualified personnel. The pilot, Captain Gerald W. Hopkins, age 34 or so, had extensive experience both in flying and in training other fliers. His daughter Jeanette Laxton, is show in the picture on the next page.

In a similar manner, Ernest W. Atkins, our flight engineer, together with our radio operator, were several years older than our other four 18 to 19 year old gunners. The maturity and skill level of these individuals along with other crew members proved invaluable incident to our crew training as well as getting us safely overseas to our 451<sup>st</sup> base in Italy.

At Charleston, at the time of our crew training, three other B-24's and the crew members disappeared during a training flight over the Atlantic ocean. No trace of these aircraft was ever found. Whether the planes were involved in mid-air collisions, just ran out of fuel due to navigational errors or perhaps were somehow the victims of the Bermuda Triangle remains a mystery to this day. Of course, during training and putting the air crews together, literally hundreds of aircraft were lost and thousands of crew members were killed or injured.

Following crew training, another challenging phase of operations involved flying the B-24's and crew personnel to the combat bases in either England or Italy. This brought into play the skills of the plane



Gerald W. Hopkins, original Pilot Crew 89

navigator since little radar or other directional aids were available. Here too quite a number of planes were lost. In the case of Crew 89, we arrived late one afternoon over the Tunisia Air Base in North Africa. Despite a heavy storm with strong cross winds, we had to land with only low fuel remaining. Our plane damage was limited to a broken nose wheel. Our co-pilot, Lt Dufault, stressed that only the exceptional skill of our Pilot, Captain Hopkins, averted our crashing under the circumstances. Our first combat outing, August 23, 1944 saw our 727<sup>th</sup> Squadron fortuitously leading the 451<sup>st</sup> B.G. on the famed Markersdorf Airdrome Mission. The placement of our plane off the right wing of the lead plane proved to reduce our exposure to attack by approximately 60 German fighter aircraft. Our two rear squadrons lost about one-half of their aircraft at Markersdorf—our 727<sup>th</sup> squadron saw only Robert Anderson's plane go down. Incident to this, our Ball turret gunner, Paul V. Anderson is confident that he shot down the enemy airplane that had attacked Robert Anderson's B-24.

After flying about ten missions, our pilot, Gerald Hopkins was transferred to Wing (and later advanced to Major). He was replaced by a very seasoned pilot, Peter Massare (his widow is shown in the adjacent picture). Most of you know that after the war, Massare teamed up with Bob Karstensen (pictured right) in forming our present 451<sup>st</sup> B.G. Alumni Association.



Front Row: Seated L to R Jeannette Laxton (Daughter of the late Gerald W. Hopkins, the original pilot of Crew 89), Jack "Little" Jones (Nose gunner Crew 89), Clara Massare (Widow of Pete Massare who served as the second pilot for Crew 89)

Back Row: Winson "Big" Jones (Top turret gunner Crew 89) and Bob Karstensen (Co-founder with Pete Massare of the 451<sup>st</sup> Bomb Group Alumni Association)

With the heavy loss of planes and personnel on August 22<sup>nd</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1944, the gunners on Crew 89 were required to fly virtually every mission. During this interval, the extreme stress factor associated with the combat missions took its toll on our original 18 year old tail gunner. He had to be transferred to ground duties. His replacement was very shortly injured by flak and he was returned to the States. Our third tail gunner replacement was transported to Italy all the way from the Eighth Air Force in England. While his background and story were largely untold, he apparently had missed flying a mission that saw the loss of his crewmates in the Eighth Air Force.

Flight activity with Massare at the controls involved many stressful missions. On one mission the dome on the top turret was shattered by flak fragments. Also a large piece of shrapnel flew past the co-pilot and knocked the flak helmet off of Peter Massare. Ruptured hydraulic lines in the Bomb Bay were repaired in mid-air by our flight engineer—he received a Distinguished Flying Cross for this action.

On or about October 11, 1944, the six gunners of Crew 89 were sent to the Isle of Capri for a few days of rest and relaxation. While we were away from the airbase, seven B-24's from our 727<sup>th</sup> Squadron were dispatched on Friday, October 13<sup>th</sup>, 1944 to Vienna, a heavily defended target. Our pilot, Massare, was more or less breaking in a new crew under flight commander Lt. Dayton. Unfortunately, only two of the original seven B-24's returned to base. Just another "Luck of the Draw" that sheltered Crew 89.

On earlier and subsequent missions, the following occurred:

1. Our ball turret gunner, Paul V. Anderson had a piece of flak pass through one of his pants legs (under his bent knees) without wounding him.
2. "Little" Jones in the nose turret saw Lt. Robinette's plane flying in No. 3 position take a major flak hit, lose power, stall, tilt to the right and head straight at our B-24 flying in the No. 4 position. Little Jones thought for sure that our luck had finally run out. Fortunately, Massare saw the danger just in time to raise our plane enough for Lt. Robinette's B-24 to pass under us with only what seemed like inches to spare.
3. On a mission to Austria, our co-pilot, Lt. Peter Dufault, recalls that we lost two engines coming off the target and started to fall like a rock. Once the pilot finally regained control of the B-24, we were all alone and a sitting duck for German fighters. Big Jones in the top turret was greatly relieved when we were picked up by two red tailed P-51's manned by the now famous Tuskegee pilots and escorted out of enemy air space.
4. Incident to making repairs to his machine guns, in the nose turret, Little Jones had failed to don his oxygen mask when told to do so by the Navigator at 10,000 ft. altitude. Jack was on the verge of passing out when at the last minute he recognized the Dalmatia Yugoslavia coast line. He somehow was able to contact the Navigator and quickly put his oxygen mask on at about 16,000 feet!
5. On a mission to Linz Austria, a large piece of flak tore through the side of the plane, hit the ring gear of the top turret, manned by Big Jones and fell harmlessly to the floor of the B-24. Had the shrapnel been deflected by only a fraction of an inch, it no doubt would have posed major problems for Big Jones.
6. Later with Lt. Tedesco now our pilot, we were returning from a mission near Vienna and it was necessary to make an emergency landing at the Island of Vis, off the coast of Yugoslavia. The airfield had a short runway sited between two small mountains. Lt. Tedesco remembers the British control tower operator yelling "Get her down Yank, get her down."
7. On a number of missions, upon landing our planes reflected one to two hundred or more flak holes. The fact that so many of these pieces of shrapnel missed both our crew members as well as vital aircraft controls was in itself something of a miracle. Big Jones recalls that at times the large number of flak fragments hitting our plane sounded as though someone was throwing rice at the side of our B-24.

No doubt there many other "near miss" events and other flight emergencies known only to the pilot and the flight engineer during the gunners of Crew 89 completing 35 missions. The exceptional skills of Captain Hopkins, Lt. Massare, Lt. Brockett, Lt. Tedesco and Lt. Dufault, our pilots, contributed greatly to our survival.

While only one crew member suffered a physical injury from flak, the traumatic scenes and happenings of that period of combat are etched indelibly in the minds and memories of the survivors. It's pretty much been downhill since then—the subsequent trials and tribulations of life pale in

comparison to those events that transpired nearly 70 years ago. It seems likely that the above outlined happenings may parallel to a large degree the experiences of other 451<sup>st</sup> crews flying during 1944-45. One truly had to be there to begin to comprehend the WWII Air Operations in Europe that involved our losing more than 8,000 heavy bombers and 3,000 or so fighter aircraft.

At our Reunions, the three surviving gunners of Crew 89, Little Jones, Big Jones and Paul Anderson continue to share the closeness and camaraderie that contributed to their completing 35 missions mostly at the age of eighteen. Each realize the blessing's that accompany the passing days while possessing inner feelings that they are pretty much living on borrowed time.

## YOUR HELP WANTED

As you know Randy Jones (our historian friend) has quite a collection of murals and other artifacts related to the history of our 451<sup>st</sup> BG. We all have benefited from Randy sharing his collection at recent Reunions. Here in Phoenix last year, Randy also exhibited at two well attended military type functions. His long term objective is to contribute this 451<sup>st</sup> collection to an appropriate Museum.

It is believed that adding an authentic leather flight jacket used by a member of the 451<sup>st</sup> in WWII would greatly add to Randy's collection, especially making it more appealing for Museums. This note is being provided with the hope that one of our readers may have such a jacket largely forgotten just hanging in a closet. The needed jacket can be any size and only in fair condition with one or more patches or paintings

Should someone elect to contribute such a jacket, the action will be appropriately noted in our Newsletter, as well as at all future exhibits. It would serve beautifully as a lasting memorial to the 451<sup>st</sup> member involved. Also, we would welcome the contributions of pictures showing our B-24's flying in combat or through exploding flak shells.

## LAST FLY-BY

The following represents the passing of survivors reported to date. Please keep us posted on a current basis regarding this.

Bachus, Ralph E.	Navigator	01-08-2012
Berns, Lawrence L.	Tail Gunner	04-15-2012
Disanto, Henry R, Jr.	Radio Operator-Gunner	04-20-2012
Finehout, Robert M.	Pilot	07-31-2012
Markel, "Bud"	Flight Engineer, Top Turret Gunner	11-05-2012
Martin, James R.	Control Tower Operator	
Reise, Vincent R.	Radio Operator – Waist Gunner	04-01-2012
Slotta, George		09-09-2010
Smith, George E.		

All of us will especially miss Jim Martin who had attended all of our Reunions through 2010. Jim shared many interesting happenings covering the take offs and landings of our planes. In one instance he had two B-24s (both out of fuel) land at the same time! Mike Stauth, flight engineer of one of the planes, states that it was something of a "hair raising" experience to accelerate over the B-24 that landed "short" and then touched down with the second plane about half-way down the landing strip.

## **DITCHING THE B-24**

Incident to flying combat missions, our 15<sup>th</sup> Air Force planes experienced many factors that served to prevent a safe return to base. This would include damage caused by flak or attack by enemy aircraft as well as mechanical breakdowns. Our pilot flight commanders always had the difficult job of quickly assessing the situation and proceeding with actions that could involve orders to bail out, possibly attempting to make an emergency landing at Vis or perhaps proceeding over the Adriatic toward Southern Italy. In some instances, the “back to base” route could find the crippled plane over open water with perhaps additional loss of power or flight control developments. This happened to a 451<sup>st</sup> B-24 being piloted by Herbert A. Guinness who proceeded with ditching the plane in the Adriatic. Over the target, one crew member already had been killed. Amazingly, eight of the remaining nine fliers survived this most difficult operation and were able to stay afloat in a raft until rescued.

The Eighth Air Force compiled statistics covering the survival rates for ditching both the B-24 and B-17. For the B-24 only 25% of the crew members usually survived and the B-17 survival rate was slightly better at 35%.

## **DONATIONS**

You probably know that the out-of-pocket costs associated with the printing and mailing of each Newsletter totals several hundred dollars. Donations of \$50.00 can be in memory of a deceased 451<sup>st</sup> Bomb Group Member and of course donations of any amount are greatly appreciated.

Special memorial tributes are as follows:

James R. Martin..... From Georgia Lee Martin

George Tudor.....From Susan Tudor Prince

Oakley Waite.....From Nita Waite

Other donations were received from Arthur Kvorjak, Antoinette Petrovic, Rudolph J. Hamborsky, Irving Levine, Nathan McKinney, Ralph Helmericks, Robert Martin, Joseph R. Suffoletta, Constantine Margaritis and Arthur N. Morin.

## **HAPPENINGS – THEN AND NOW**

Our long-time friends, David and Audrey Eagles send their best wishes. Health factors will more than likely preclude their attending our October Reunion.

Linn W. Newman recalls that being “late” is not always bad. On his crew’s very first mission, their B-24 had suffered severe damage and both the ball turret and tail turret guns were not available to fend off German fighter aircraft. To avoid being shot down, the pilot put the plane in a steep dive to reach cloud cover some distance below. Evidently communication of this abrupt action failed to reach the personnel in the nose of the plane. Consequently, the navigator and the bombardier quickly bailed out. They became POW’S. Linn the nose gunner experienced some difficulty getting out of the turret

and fortunately stayed with the plane which by that time had leveled off. The pilot managed to reach Turkey and the remaining crew members eventually were returned to the States.

At the last reunion in Chicago, Gus Margaritis was seated at the head table next to Victor Klopfenstein, both being honored as POWS. They quickly realized that shortly following their being shot down, they had shared riding "standing up" in a German box car on a long railroad trip to the prison camp.

## **RECOMMENDED BOOKS**

At our Chicago Reunion in 2008, two of our speakers, Clare M. Musgrove and Robert Wilson, were key members of a large group of downed 15<sup>th</sup> Air Force fliers that were given refuge by the peasants in Yugoslavia. **THE FORGOTTEN 500** written by Gregory Freeman is a great narrative of these most significant events covering the eventual rescue of five hundred of our air crew members.

The book **UNBROKEN** written by Laura Hillenbrand captures the intensely interesting happenings of three B-24 fliers who survived ditching of their plane in the Pacific. Truly a must reading.



Joint Reunion of the  
451<sup>st</sup> Bombardment Group (H) WW II  
with other Fifteenth Air Force Units  
17<sup>th</sup> – 19<sup>th</sup>, October 2013



Tempe Embassy Suites Hotel, Phoenix, Arizona

**Planned Reunion Activities**

Thursday, 17<sup>th</sup> October

1:00 PM – 5:00 PM Early Registration

Friday, 18<sup>th</sup> October

Optional Bus Tour and Luncheon at Luke Air Force Base or Commemorative Air Force Museum

9:00 AM – 5:00 PM

Registration

6:00 PM – 9:00 PM

Evening Sit Down Dinner in honor of Bomb Group Members with informal speeches and entertainment.

- 6:00 PM - Cash Bar \*
- 7:00 PM - Sit Down Dinner

Saturday, 19<sup>th</sup> October

10:00 AM – 12:00 PM

Morning meeting about the 15th Air Force

2:00 PM – 4:00 PM

Afternoon meeting about the 15<sup>th</sup> Air Force

6:00 PM – 10:00 PM

Gala Banquet

*(Semi-formal attire requested; sport coat with or without tie)*

- 6:00 PM - Cash Bar \*
- 7:00 PM - Sit Down Dinner with planned Big Band music and dancing

**Registration Fee:** \$100 per person (\* Registration fee does not include the cash bar or the optional bus tour on 10/18)

**Attire:** Casual dress for all events with the exception of the Saturday Night Gala Banquet for which semi-formal attire is requested.

**Travel:** Phoenix is served by a number of airlines including Southwest, a carrier that generally offers quite favorable ticket prices. Embassy Suites provides a free airport shuttle service as well as free parking for guests traveling by automobile. The hotel service includes a free breakfast bar.

**Hotel:**

Embassy Suites Hotel  
4400 S. Rural Road, Tempe, AZ 85282  
Hotel Direct Line: 1-480-897-7444

Print your return address in the space provided on the right. Please print clearly in dark ink.

Return To:

From:

451<sup>st</sup> Bomb Group Reunion  
c/o Winson Jones  
2251 W. Stonewall Drive  
Anthem, AZ 85086

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Telephone No. \_\_\_\_\_  
E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

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## 451<sup>st</sup> Bombardment Group (H) WW II Phoenix Reunion: October 17<sup>th</sup> – 19th, 2013 Registration Form

<b>Basic Registration Fee:</b>	_____ X \$100.00 per person =	\$ _____
<b>Optional Bus Tour 10/18:</b>	_____ X \$20.00 per person =	\$ _____
	Total	

(Make Checks Payable to: 451<sup>st</sup> Bomb Group)

For the dinner entrees, I/we have selected the following: (Select one entrée for each attendee)

Friday Dinner: Chicken Breast \_\_\_\_\_ Salmon \_\_\_\_\_ Steak \_\_\_\_\_

Saturday Dinner: Chicken Breast \_\_\_\_\_ Salmon \_\_\_\_\_ Steak \_\_\_\_\_

Specify how name should be listed on name tag:

My Name Tag:	
Spouse's Name Tag:	
Guest's Name Tag:	

Staying at the Embassy Suites Hotel : Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

Arrival Date: Thursday 10/17 \_\_\_\_\_ Friday 10/18 \_\_\_\_\_

I plan to arrive by: Plane \_\_\_\_\_ Car \_\_\_\_\_ RV \_\_\_\_\_

If by plane, will you need transportation to/from Airport: Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

If you are a Survivor of the air war in World War II, what was your group number? \_\_\_\_\_

List your duty position (pilot, tail gunner, mechanic, etc.): \_\_\_\_\_

If air crew member: Were you shot down: Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

Were you a prisoner of war: Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

Number of Missions: \_\_\_\_\_

List Medals awarded: \_\_\_\_\_

Attach your Air Force history (write-up) if available.

If not a Survivor, describe your relationship to a Bomb Group Member: \_\_\_\_\_

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