



451st Bomb Group Newsletter No. 22 March 2023



Published for the preservation of our 451st heritage.

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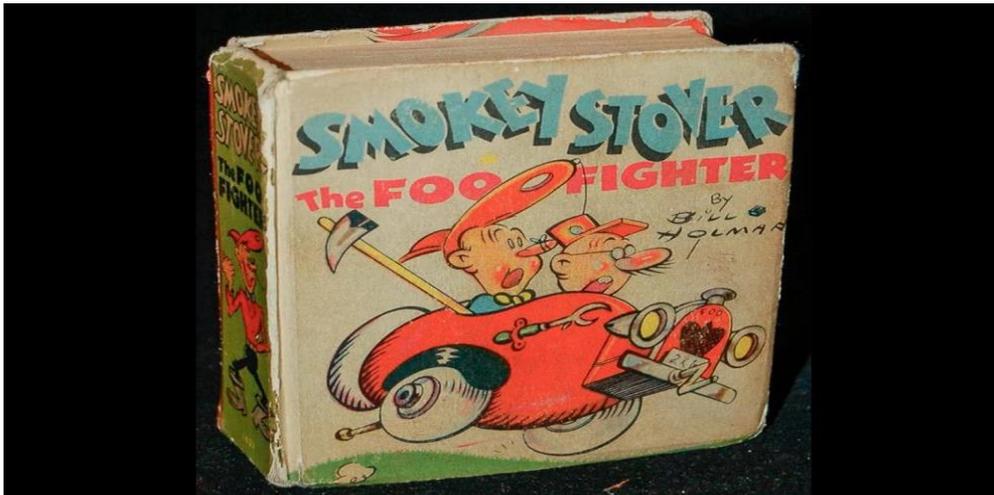
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Foo Fighters

The Foo Fighters are a popular band that have been around for over two decades. How did they come up with the unusual name for their band? “Foo Fighter” was a term first coined by the United States Army Air Corp during WWII. It referred to strange phenomena or unidentified flying objects in the sky. Frontman for the band Dave Grohl revealed on Jimmy Kimmel Live that he was in the midst of a UFO stage, and while researching, came across the term. ¹



The original name came from a nonsense word used by the characters in the popular “Smokey Stover” firefighter cartoon, in which Smokey (a firefighter) would often declare, “Where there’s foo, there’s fire.” In November, 1944 mission updates from the 415th Night Fighter Squadron began reporting inexplicable lights following their aircraft. Crewmembers described seeing eight to ten bright orange lights off the left wing. Neither the airborne radar nor ground control registered anything nearby. Reports kept coming in. The objects flew alongside the aircraft at 200 mph; they were red, or orange, or green; they appeared singly or with as many as ten others in formation; and they often out-maneuvered the airplanes they were chasing. Richard Ziebart, historian for the nearby 417th Night Fighter Squadron, heard many of the stories directly from the 415th crew members: “The pilots were very professional. They gave the report, talked about the lights, but didn’t speculate about them.” Still, the pilots found the sightings unnerving. “Scared shitless” was how a 415th pilot described feeling to Keith Chester, author of *Strange Company: Military Encounters With UFOs in World War II*. ²



An Associated Press reporter broke news of the foo-fighter sightings on January 1st, 1945, and theories about their origins quickly abounded: The sightings were flares, or weather balloons or St. Elmo's Fire—a phenomenon where a light appears on the tips of objects in stormy weather. But the members of the 415th rejected all those theories. Flares and weather balloons can't track planes like these objects could, and they'd seen St. Elmo's fire and could distinguish the two.

Then there were those who claimed that the airmen were suffering from "combat fatigue," a polite way of saying that war stress was driving them insane. But there was scant evidence to suggest collective psychosis: The 415th had an otherwise excellent record, and when a reporter for *American Legion Magazine* went to report on the squadron he described them as "very normal airmen, whose primary interest was combat, and after that came pin-up girls, poker, doughnuts and the derivatives of the grape."

Did Nazi Germany have a secret weapon? Nicholas Veronico, an author who has written several books on military aviation history, says that explanation comes up short. "The V-2 rocket doesn't have the maneuverability," he says. "It couldn't turn on a dime and change its acceleration pattern. Once it started burning, it burned and produced thrust at one rating." Nothing in Nazi Germany's military-aviation arsenal can explain the foo-fighter description, Veronico says. One airman's observation from the time—that the foo fighters follow the fighters so closely as to seem almost magnetized to them—is particularly confounding, given that "there just wasn't the propulsion or metallurgical technology that could enable something like that."³

And these sightings were not limited to the 415th NFS: By February of 1945 these sightings had spread from Belgium and France to the U.S. Night Fighter bases at Pontedera and Pisa, Italy. The 416th NFS stationed in Pisa also began to spot "Foo fighters" in February of 1945. Here is an excerpt from the 416th NFS' historical data:

17 February 1945: "Our crews are beginning to report mysterious orange-red lights in the sky near La Spezia and also inland. These 'foo fighters' have been pursued, but no one has been able to make contact. G.C.I. (Ground Control Intercept Radar) and intelligence profess to be mystified by these ghostly apparitions. The hypothesis that the foo-fighters are a post-cognac manifestation has been disproved. Even the teetotalers have observed the strange and mysterious foo fighters which have also been observed in France and in Belgium." (17 Feb. 1945, 416th historical data. U.S. Army.)⁴

Despite many speculations, no conclusive explanation of the foo fighters in WWII has ever been revealed.

¹ American Songwriter.com

² Smithsonianmag.com

³ History.com

⁴ Go.gale.com

Here are some YouTube videos you may find interesting:

[Was it illegal to shoot at parachuting airmen in WWII?](#)

[The devastating effect WWII German 20mm Auto Cannons had on US Bombers](#)

The 2023 15th Air Force Reunion is scheduled for October 12-15, 2023 in Fairfax County, VA. So far only the hotel accommodations have been finalized (link below):

[Book your group rate for Bomb Group Reunion](#)

Event Summary:

Bomb Group Reunion

Start Date: Monday, October 9, 2023

End Date: Wednesday, October 18, 2023

Last Day to Book: Friday, September 22, 2023

Hotel(s) offering your special group rate:

- The Westin Washington Dulles Airport for 112 USD per night

I'll update the website as more information becomes available: <https://451st.org/Reunion/Reunion.html>

I hope you enjoy the newsletter!

Jonathan

SHORT SNORTER – Dana Eagles

Note – Dana Eagles is the son of David H. Eagles, Tail Gunner. The following is an excerpt from a book Dana is writing.

“One day while going through items Dad had kept from World War II, I found a series of currency bills that had been taped together into a single string of bills. Below is an image of this string of currency bills. They consist of an American dollar bill, a Canadian dollar bill, a one-franc bill, a five-franc bill and a one hundred lire bill.



After some searching, I was able to determine that this string of currency bills is known as a “short snorter”. The following description of a short snorter was taken from the National Museum of the United States Air Force.

“Many Allied airmen in World War II made souvenirs of their travels by collecting currency from all the places they visited. A “short snorter” was a collection of bills taped together, often signed by friends. When buying drinks, an airman who could not produce his short snorter was expected to buy a round for those who had theirs. In some cases, the person with the shortest snorter or the fewest signatures would buy the drinks. “

Indeed, Dad’s short snorter was a collection of bills marking his journey from America to Italy in 1944 on board a B-24 bomber. On the front side of the American dollar bill, I was able to make out the following notations. I attempted to make out the signatures, but I did not believe I could record them without error, so I have left the signatures for someone else to determine in the future.

Short Snorter
Crossing of this Atlantic Ocean
on old 1587 August 14, 1944
Gander Newfoundland
Terceira Island Az.
Marrakech N. Africa
Gioia Italy
Foggia Italy

The next image is the front of the American dollar bill in Dad's short snorter.



On the backside of the American dollar bill there was a list of crewmembers. At one end of the bill appears the signature of Robert Ashba. Robert was the navigator on Dad's plane. Without doubt Robert's navigation skills had prevented Dad's B-24 from crashing into mountains in the Azores as the plane approached Terceira Island in bad weather. Robert had saved the B-24 crew from certain death.

Below Robert's name appears the phrase, "Lost in Action Aug 23rd" and below this phrase appear three names. August 23, 1944 marks the first mission for selected members of Dad's B-24 crew. Dad was not one of those selected to fly on the August 23rd mission. The three crewmembers that were lost in action are: John Morwood, Malcolm Hardesty and Richard E. Schulz.

Below the list of those lost in actions appears the phrase, "Crew 255 left" and below this phrase appears 9 names. Those names are: Bernard Schams, Robert Ashba, Robert Grieco, Edward Chess, John Bagwell, John Recchia, David H. Eagles, Paul Goodwin and Eldon Morrill. The back of the American Dollar bill is shown in the next image.



To the best of my knowledge Dad's plane flew from the United States to Italy in six legs. The first leg of the trip was from Mitchel Field on Long Island, New York to Grenier Field in Manchester, New Hampshire. The second leg of the trip was from Grenier Field to Gander Field in Newfoundland, Canada. Dad obtained his Canadian dollar in Gander. The front and back of the Canadian dollar bill are shown next.





The third leg of the trip was from Gander Field to Terceira Island in the Azores. The fourth leg of the journey was from Terceira Island to Marrakech in French Morocco. The fifth leg of the trip was from Marrakech to either Oran, Tunis or Algiers. Dad's notes are unclear on this destination, but Algiers is likely as it was used as a key staging area for Italy.

Dad probably obtained his one-franc bill in either Morocco or Algiers. The one-franc bill was issued by French West Africa. Marrakech and Tunis were not part of French West Africa, but were French possessions at the start of WWII. The front and back of the one-franc bill are shown next.



The five-franc note was likely obtained by Dad in Marrakech, Morocco as this bill was issued by Morocco. The front and back of the five-franc bill are shown next.



The sixth and final leg of the trip was from Algiers (possibly Tunis or Oran) to Gioia del Colle in Italy. Dad obtained his one hundred lire bill somewhere in Italy. The front and back of the bill are shown in the following images. Note that the front of the one hundred lire bill Dad wrote the following note. He knew that he was extremely lucky to have survived his service in the United States Army Air Force during World War II.

**35 MISSIONS FINISHED
FOGGIA ITALY
MARCH 12, 1945**



Managers note: The message "Lost in Action Aug 23" on the \$1 bill refers to the Markersdorf Mission. The 451st lost nine planes on the mission.

LAST FLYBY

Here are the death notifications since our October 2022 Newsletter:

451st Member	Squadron	Duty Position	DOD
Emery, Leo R.	726 th	Nose Gunner	02.22.2023
Geller, Max	724 th	Navigator	10.22.2022
Klopfenstein, Victor D.	727 th	Tail Gunner	01.18.2023

THANK YOU, DONORS!

Donor	In Tribute To
Benjamin, Alan	In memory of Victor ‘Vic’ Klopfenstein, 727 th Squadron, Tail Gunner
Fort, Jeff	In memory of Francis Fort, 726 th Squadron, Pilot
Hipple Jr, Bill	In memory of William F. Hipple, 726 th Squadron, Pilot
Jones, Arthur D.	In memory of Joseph Jones, 725 th Squadron, Nose Turret Gunner
Jones, Gene Joseph	In memory of Joseph Jones, 725 th Squadron, Nose Turret Gunner
Miller, Pamela	In memory of Samuel R. Miller, 725 th Squadron
Witherspoon, Bill	In memory of E.D. Witherspoon, 727 th Squadron, Gunner

Should you desire to honor a crew mate or family member, please send the full name and duty position of the person being honored. Please send to:

451st Bomb Group
 c/o Jonathan Tudor
 12605 Goldenrod Avenue
 Bradenton, FL 34212

OR

Zelle® to 207-730-0465

OR

Venmo to <https://account.venmo.com/u/jontudor>

OFFICERS of the CRAVIN' RAVEN – A REMEMBRANCE by Tracy L. (Prewitt) Andrew

This is a remembrance of the officers of the B-24 CRAVIN' RAVEN, of the 451st BG, 727th squadron, who flew from unimproved airfields in southern Italy during the fall of 1943 and the 1st half of 1944. Shown are the ship's officers, L-R:, Garrold "Gary" E. Wheeler, Co-pilot, Terrell "Pep" G. Prewitt, Pilot, Charles R. Ramsey, Navigator, and John D. Haldane, Bombardier. Their ages are 27, 25, 22 and 22, respectively.



This photo was probably taken in Fairmont, Nebraska just before they headed overseas. Fairmont Army Air Field ([Ad-Lib_35](#)) was where the crew came together and trained in the CRAVIN' RAVEN. I love the sense of confidence that my Dad, Pep Prewitt, shows in this photo. The following photo of the entire crew is also provided on the 451st organization web site [link](#); not sure of the location; but not taken with their original plane the CRAVIN' RAVEN.

CRAVIN' RAVEN CREW

Standing L-R: Pop Glaser, waist gun, James McKnight, crew chief & top turret gun, Garrold "Gary" Wheeler, co-pilot, Charles V. Williams, ball turret, Sidney Pinney, tail turret gun, John Haldane, bombardier. Front Row L-R Mario Rodriguez (waist gun), Lloyd L. Sprockett (nose turret gun), Charles Ramsey (navigator & waist gun), Terrell "Pep" Prewitt, pilot.

My Dad enlisted in the Army in November of 1940; he was training in an Engineering Corps unit when Pearl Harbor occurred. He later tested into the Army Air Corps aeronautical program, and completed an aeronautical rating in May of 1943. He and his crew flew the CRAVIN' RAVEN from Fairmont Nebraska to Brazil, then North Africa and then Gioia del Coll, Italy where they flew their first missions. Eventually they moved briefly to San Pancrazio and finally Castelluccio where he stayed until his 51 missions were finished (37 individual missions, since some counted twice). The CRAVIN' RAVEN with another crew was shot down April 5, 1944 after which Dad often commanded the ship DIRTY GIRTIE, including as part of the 1st Flight of the 1st Attack Unit of the 31May1944 mission, immortalized by the famous Ploesti photo ([Ad-Lib 18](#)). After the war, Pep settled in Steamboat Springs, CO where he

worked large coal mining equipment. He later married Joan Eubank and had four daughters. In ~1959, Pep completed an aeronautical engineering degree at Northrup Aero Institute, Inglewood, CA. He spent most of his working career in Huntsville, Alabama; first for space program subcontractors and later the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. He remained in the Air Force reserves until the early-seventies retiring as a Lt. Col. He loved hunting and fishing, and later in life beekeeping despite being anaphylactic to them. When asked why he attended only one 451st reunion, Pep only said "...my friends were killed". Generally though, he did not seem to mind talking about the war, at least when I was a young adult. He was a good storyteller and was proud of his service. He had an interesting story about how he was able to continue flying the plane when they were being attacked or flaked; he felt the presence of someone helping him, this allowed him calm down and do his job. Like many children of veterans, we wish we had asked him more questions.

Upon Co-pilot Gary Wheeler's death in February of 1995, Pep described his admiration for Gary in a letter to the Ad-Lib ([Ad-Lib 26](#)). He wrote about how Gary would have much preferred being a fighter pilot. In fact, after completion of his 50 missions with the 451st, Gary transferred to the 31st fighter group ([link](#)) and flew an additional 15 missions as a P-51 pilot before being shot-down, severely wounded and captured by the Germans near Vienna. After liberation by General Patton's Third Army, Gary spent two and a half years in Army hospitals recovering from his injuries. He later was active in horsemanship, and died in Texas.

John D. Haldane, Jr., the Bombardier, was a crew member that I am fortunate to have known personally. As described in his 2011 obituary ([link](#)), John enlisted in 1942 after graduating from the Eastman School of Music, and later returned to Eastman for a Master's Degree in 1946. I've always found it remarkable that, after surviving 51 missions in WWII, John was recalled to active duty with the United States Air Force in 1951, where he served as an Electronic Warfare Officer during the Korean War. John continued to serve in the Air Force Reserves until 1981. John was a nice person and an accomplished painter of landscapes around upstate New York; I am happy to own two of his paintings and several lovely water-colored Christmas cards that he sent us over the years. He never married and took care of his handicapped sister until her death.

I know less about Charles Ramsey and the other crew members of the CRAVIN' RAVEN. I do know my father visited several of them through the years, as I've found pictures of him with them when they were older; particularly Jim McKnight and Charles Ramsey. I also recall him talking to them on the phone; he was usually telling a story and laughing. Before and between the terror of the missions, they had some good times and funny occurrences. One of the crew sent my dad Omaha Steaks every Christmas. I also recall him often talking about what a good job the ground crew chief, Mike Thorrick, did keeping the CRAVIN' RAVEN in good condition. Pep also always spoke positively about the first Commander of the 451st, Col. Robert E. L. Eaton, whose life and times was well described in the 28th Issue of Ad-Lib ([Ad-Lib 28](#)).

The CRAVIN' RAVEN, S/N 42-52103, was an H model, manufactured by the Ford Motor Co. in Willow Run, MI., delivered to the US AAF on 4Oct43, and united with her crew at Fairmont AAF in November 1943. The ship and crew departed the US and was assigned to Fifteenth Air Force, Italy in December of 1943. Photographer Robert N. Hoffman sometimes employed the CRAVIN' RAVEN as a camera ship because she had special camera mountings ([Ad-Lib 18](#)). It is during their time at Fairmont that I believe the adjacent photo was taken of my Dad on the left, and whom I believe to be his good friend and fellow pilot Wilfred Brandon McAllister (Wil, also known as "Mac") during a pheasant hunt; note the A2 jackets. I mention Wil because he lost his life while piloting the CRAVIN' RAVEN on the 5April44 mission against Ploesti, Romania. According to MACR [42-52103 Combined.pdf](#) (451st.org), Wil piloted the plane until those who were able bailed out. Among those who did not get out were Wil and his waist gunner, Sgt. Robert J. Wood, co-pilot William L. Story, and Sgt's Joe Schemerhorn, and John Oprisko ([Ad-Lib 10](#)). McAllister and Wood were initially interred in Romania near the town of Bogasi. Six years later, in 1950, their remains were relocated to a common grave in Arlington National Cemetery ([34-4428](#)). Wil's brother, Melvin, deceased in 1945, is adjacently interred.



Department then confirmed Wood's death" ([Ad-Lib 21](#)). My understanding is that this informal means of communication was not uncommon during the war.

Notably, issue 21 of the Ad-Lib relates that Staff Segreant Wood's mother "...learned through communicating with the mother of pilot of the bomber on which Sgt. Wood flew that her son was killed.

In closing, I'll mention my recent visit to Castelluccio, Italy, in search of the airfield from which the CRAVIN' RAVEN and the other 451st B24s flew after ~ April 1944 ([Ad-Lib 21](#)). Castelluccio field is about 25km south of Foggia. What was an airfield is now under cultivation, and no runway nor marker is left to convey the historical significance of that place. In the photo below, the former runway was on the left, now outlined by a long row of trees. It's a lovely wide-open area, with low mountains in the distance.



A single remnant of the presence of the 451st in the form of the farmer's rock-picker, improvised from [PSP](#) (perforated steel planking), shown adjacently. The farmer was still bitter about rocks that the 451st had spread in areas of the airfield to mitigate copious mud. The rocks were brought from a nearby riverbed; he's still picking them up.



