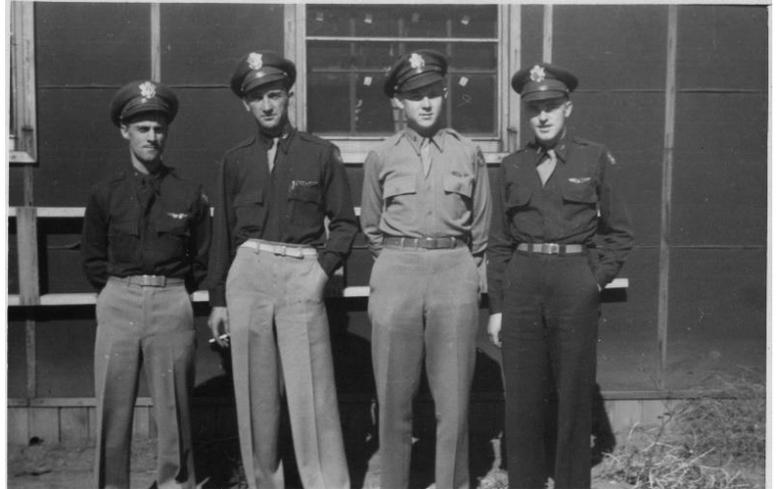


Officers of the CRAVIN' RAVEN – a Remembrance

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.



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), Loyd L. Sprockett (nose turret gun), Charles Ramsey (navigator & waist gun), Terrell "Pep" Prewitt, pilot.

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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 Colle, 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 31 May 1944 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 Masters 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](#)).

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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.



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

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 adjacent photo, 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.



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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.

